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Spiel/Film: On play in Weimar cinema and culture.

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SPIEL/FILM:
ON PLAY IN WEIMAR CINEMA AND CULTURE

by

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In Memory of Patrick F. Brown

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Writing can be solitary, even isolating, but completing this dissertation would have been impossible without extensive support—in the first place, from my committee. My advisor Steve Choe has stuck with me despite his distance in space and my difficulty with time, continuing not only our work on my research, but the debates about *Star Trek* we once enjoyed in the hallways of AJB. Many of the ideas for this dissertation come out of distinct experiences I had while studying and teaching at the University of Iowa, among them an independent study on Weimar I took with Steve, Paula Amad's class on aerial vision in the Fall of 2012, Garrett Stewart's courses on mediation and surveillance, and Dave Wittenberg and Corey Creekmur's respective theory seminars. In addition to my committee, I am also indebted to the encouraging instructors and friends I found in the German department and in German studies: Bruce Nottingham-Spencer, Regina Range, and Sabine Gölz.

a break from my responsibilities, even if either activity can get a little contentious. My mother Laura—incidentally, among the world's best gift-givers—has been through a lot this decade, but I have been inspired by her determination to survive what must often feel like overwhelming conditions.

However much I owe to the people above for the particular shape and the (so far, relative) success of this dissertation, it is safe to say that without my partner Marina this dissertation would not exist at all. I like to think we support each other equally, but in truth the scales have always been tipped, weighed down by the 250 pages I had yet to write and/or the 100 extra pages I needed to delete. Throughout this process—which has comprised the entirety of our nearly six-year relationship—she has consistently and almost reflexively granted me superhuman levels of support, and, in my moments of doubt, has always been quick to express her unflagging belief that I would succeed. Every day she reminds me anew what it means to be a good person: to be effortlessly kind and responsive, to have the courage to act on your beliefs, to be understanding without letting yourself get bowled over. Plus, she loves board games. For reasons practical, emotional, and intellectual, there would be no *Spiel/Film* without Marina Kalinichev.

Finally, the man to whom this dissertation is dedicated: My father Pat was not a cinephile in the sense of being a serious-minded cinema connoisseur. But he did teach me how to love the movies. Sitting with him on weekend afternoons watching AMC or TCM in the days before IMdB, he would rattle off the filmographies of actors onscreen, gleaned from the broadcast-TV movie marathons of his baby-boomer childhood. He's the one who told me who Alfred Hitchcock was, who recommended movies I should check out from the library when I got my first library card, who indulged the teenaged critic he turned me into. Dad was an enthusiastic moviegoer, especially when it concerned big, loud films. I have the voicemail saved of his

embarrassedly enthusiastic reaction upon seeing *Fast and Furious 6* with Riley—on my ardent recommendation—just a week before we found out he was sick. Kyrsten, Riley, Dad, and I would continue seeing movies together even as he was suffering through a brutal chemotherapy regime.

Without my dad, no cinephilia, and probably no games, either: in the 1980s, that long-ago era of my birth, Dad worked at the fledgling Brøderbund, the early game developer that gave the world *Prince of Persia* and *Carmen San Diego*. In the '90s, he moved us to Illinois to establish a CD-ROM retail business, and our home was thenceforth full of games he brought home from work. I had my first experience playing strategy games in the online gaming nook in the store's vast retail floor, which, particularly to a ten year-old, was an incredible play-space, a world full of worlds.

As I turned my obsessions with movies and games into a profession—along a perhaps less practical path than expected—Dad was my bedrock. I talked to him constantly in my early years in graduate school; on leaving evening classes I'd be sure to have a voicemail waiting for me that began, "Hello, son of mine!" always in the most exaggerated version of his sonorous college-radio-host voice. It took me, of course, until after he was gone to fully appreciate that Dad was calling the moment he was finished with work, almost every day—that, always, the first thing he wanted to do with his free time was see what his kids were up to. He was demonstrative in his love for his grown children: he listened to us, respected us, and never missed an opportunity to share with us how incredible he found it to be our father. I think he would have been proud no matter what I did, but he got a genuine kick out of the idea that his son would soon be Doc Brown, movie expert. Truth be told, whatever pride or satisfaction I take in finally finishing my studies is far outmatched by the pain that he is not here to see their fruition.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that the cinema can be understood as a form of play, and that it was received as such in Germany's Weimar Republic (1918-1933). Cinema developed out of toys and playful diversions, and there were several attempts in its first decades in Germany—among them, Joe May's *Preisrätselfilme* (1913) and Guido Seeber's *Rebusfilme* (1925-27)—to reintroduce interactivity and the engagement of the hands. One can also look, as *Spiel/Film: On Play in Weimar Cinema and Culture* does, at the games played in film magazines, as a way that cinema was incorporated into modern subjects' lives through play. However, the dissertation also draws on media theory, a tradition of German philosophical thinking on play, and discourse within Weimar culture itself, to argue that there are also senses in which cinema can be considered play outside of the "interactivity" paradigm. Cinema "plays" in its deterritorialization of profilmic time and space, in its threading together of diverse elements through montage or superimposition, and in its construction of a virtual play-space (*Spielraum*) for its spectator's eye. But as it involves the spectator in this play, it also "plays" the spectator, entraining them in a new bodily schema that includes the technical extensions of recording media, and in new modes of perception that view a schematic space from an alienated distance. The Weimar Republic was primed to receive the cinema as a play-form, as it encapsulated the sense of flux and suspense of the historical moment, in which an old social organization had suddenly evaporated, its dispersed remnants waiting to be rearranged into a new order. Through readings of canonical Weimar films alongside contemporaneous art movements, media games, and the literature of flanerie, *Spiel/Film* proposes that with a look back at the mediated play of Weimar we might see the digital play-society we currently inhabit not as a radical break with the past, but as a phenomenon with its roots in modernity's mediatization of the world.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that the cinema can be understood as a form of play, and that it was received as such in Germany's Weimar Republic (1918-1933). Cinema developed out of toys and playful diversions, and there were several attempts in its first decades in Germany— among them, Joe May's *Preisrätselfilme* (1913) and Guido Seeber's *Rebusfilme* (1925-27)—to reintroduce interactivity and the engagement of the hands. One can also look, as *Spiel/Film: On Play in Weimar Cinema and Culture* does, at the games played in film magazines, as a way that cinema was incorporated into modern subjects' lives through play. However, the dissertation also draws on media theory, a tradition of German philosophical thinking on play, and discussions within Weimar culture itself, to argue that there are also senses in which cinema can be considered play with or without direct "interaction." Through readings of canonical films from the Weimar period alongside art movements, media games, and literature, *Spiel/Film* proposes that with a look back at the media games of Weimar we might see today's game-centric society not as a radical break with the past, but as having deep historical roots.

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INTRODUCTION

BECOMING CALIGARI:
WEIMAR CINEMA AND PLAY

In the fourth Act of Robert Wiene's *Das Kabinett des Dr Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,*

1920), the hero Francis (Friedrich Feher) has uncovered the story of how the director of the local

insane asylum (Werner Krauss) was himself driven mad by his discovery of a method for

controlling the behavior of somnambulists. In the director's office, Francis and the asylum staff

pore over the director's diaries, as well as a published account of the exploits of a hypnotist

named Caligari. In the late 18th century, the age of Mesmer and Galvini, the mysterious hypnotist

had toured northern Italy as a carnival act with his somnambulist Cesare. The historic tome

recounts that Cesare, under the cover of night, would perform murders at his master's behest, and

this strikes a chord of recognition with Francis. As he can now fully deduce, the director has of

late assumed Caligari's identity, and he and his Cesare (Conrad Veidt) have been wreaking

havoc in Francis's Alpine hometown, committing murders in the dead of night while during the

day they masquerade as an attraction at the local fairgrounds. Francis and the doctors read

through the volumes as the film irises in to black, and then out to a medium-shot of the director

hunched over the book that recounts the original Caligari's deeds. He greedily grips the pages as

he contemplates the power of commanding a man to kill through words alone. Overcome with

emotion, the doctor proclaims, through the silent film's distorted, stylized intertitles, "I must

know everything, I must penetrate his secrets—I must become Caligari."

Rushing out into the night, he wanders along the path that encircles the asylum, the book

tucked under his arm. When he appears briefly to regain his sanity and turn back, crudely

scrawled script appears in the sky, along the tops of gnarled, leafless trees: "DU MUSST

CALIGARI WERDEN" ("you must become Caligari"). Turning around again, he sees the same

words appear on the outside wall of the asylum, then again running along the branches of the

closest tree, and then directly above him, arching through the air. From the spectator's

perspective, the moving image is filled with graphic text that recalls the last intertitle, as if the

nondiegetic written word had invaded the diegesis. Impossibly, the asylum director perceives the

two-dimensional written text that appears above him; the words onscreen appear almost as an

interface between the viewer seated in the theater and the character, who both now read the same

supratextual text.

Anton Kaes notes that, in addition to the World War I, the advent of cinema constitutes

an important part of *Caligari*'s immediate historical backdrop, arguing that the film's allegory

can be seen as extending to the perceptual and cognitive effects of the cinema. The problematics

of past and present in the film, the desire to replay nightmarish events—manifest in the director's

absorption of the Caligari persona and in his nightly resurrection of Cesare—can be read as

symbolic representations of war neuroses, but also as reflexive evocations of the basic

mechanism of the cinema, the era's new media technology. Bringing still things and past

moments to life, the cinema appears to possess the power to make the dead live and breathe

again; similarly, like Caligari, the cinema was thought capable of achieving an almost hypnotic

sway over its viewers, of placing them in a trance between life and death.[1] As Kaes observes,

Caligari's fairgrounds show resembles the viewing conditions of early cinema in Germany,

where permanent theaters were slower to be established than in the United States.[2] When

Caligari was released in February of 1920, the cinema had fairly recently moved from its

[1] See: Steve Choe, *Afterlives: Allegories of Film and Mortality in Early Weimar Germany* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014); Raymond Bellour, "From Hypnosis to Animals," *Cinema Journal* 53, no. 3 (Spring 2014): 26-51.
[2] Anton Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 55-7, 62.

"circuslike" exhibition in traveling fairground shows to permanent theaters—first *Kientopp* nickelodeons and then grandiose picture palaces.[3] And if Caligari's "cabinet" of tricks that blur the line between life and death can be understood as an evocation of the cinema, then the film's mixture of text and image in the doctor's flight from sanity can be read as a self-reflexive figuration of written text as the medial "return of the repressed." Kaes describes the scene as an instance of "one sign system assaulting and invading the other," the zombified corpse of writing assaulting the cinema's new regime of signification.[4]

The imperative sentence in question ("You must become Caligari"), however, does not recall anything from one of the film's intradiegetic written texts: it is not that a writing figured as writing within the world of the film has invaded the moving image, the film's primary channel of signification. The text is rather an inflected repetition of an earlier intertitle, the doctor's mad pronouncement "I must become Caligari!" shifted to the second person. Certainly, as Kaes suggests, the text that invades the visual realm of the cinematic image suggests the collapse of the distinction between two different means of signification usually kept separate within the cinematic text. Carl Mayer, the credited screenwriter for *Caligari*, would become known for his efforts to eliminate the intertitle altogether, in *Kammerspielfilme* (chamber-play films) like *Scherben* (*Shattered*, 1921) and *Der letzte Mann* (*The Last Laugh*, 1924). But rather than eschewing the written word, this sequence in *Caligari* calls attention to the way cinema emphasizes the imagistic qualities of text. In the cinema, the written word becomes just another image to be mixed into the flux of passing frames: rather than replacing written language or setting it aside its illustration, the cinema incorporate word and image indiscriminately, combine

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[3] Stephen Brockmann, *A Cultural History of German Film* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), 14-18; Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 12-13.
[4] Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema*, 70.

heterogeneous elements onto its continuous, amorphous plane. This decisive moment in *Caligari* exploits the cinema's capacity to shatter distinctions by converting everything to animate image, the words moving and floating amidst the other elements in the film's virtual environment, as if they were objects suspended in a cinematic ether. It is an eminently cinematic moment: as Michel Chion writes, "the cinema is the place par excellence where letters are made to dance."[5]

The suspension of the customary difference between the moving images and the animated letters evokes the cinema as a form of play, or *Spiel*. The scene serves as an allegory for the process of decoding the images of the cinema, finding the words that might rationalize the uncanny juxtapositions on the flat screen. It speaks, therefore, to the common analogy between the cinematic image and the rebus puzzles then common in the popular press—to the cinema as a form of modern play.[6] Play creates a space in which the normative distinctions between signs or entities in the everyday world are momentarily crossed out and superseded by the openness of a zone of play, or the rules of a game. Play lends itself to both dissipation and discipline, willful choas and strict order. In his structural analysis of play, Roger Caillois would refer to it as the difference between *paidia,* childlike exuberance, and *ludus,* rule-bound action within the game; well before him, Friedrich Nietzsche had identified the dialectic of structure and chaos in art as Apollonian and Dionysian play.[7] While the game offers the player an Apollonian sovereignty over its proscribed space, free play edges toward a Dionysian dissolution of the self, a surrender to the primacy of the game-process.

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[5] Michel Chion, *Words on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 174.

[6] Michael Cowan, "Learning to Love the Movies: Puzzles, Participation, and Cinephilia in Interwar European Film Magazines," *Film History* 27, no. 4 (2015): 1-45.

[7] Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Glencoe, NY: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 28-29; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, eds. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 119-124.

In *Caligari*'s hallucinatory flashback, each reader of the "Caligari imperative"—the asylum director and the film's spectator—occupy these opposite poles of play. In the scene's breakdown of the conventional delineation between intertitle and image, the two-dimensional interface of the frame is revealed, as character and spectator now direct their eyes toward the same image-text dancing across the screen. The director, apprehending the living words sprouting from the world around him, believes he has decoded the hidden secret, the magical words that give him sovereignty over life. Like a rebus, the cinematic image could be looked at as having a distinct solution, as assimilable to a rational discourse encoded in language: out of the trees emerge the words "Du musst Caligari werden!" as if they were the magical, hidden code behind the images encountered in the physical world. For the director, these words are discovered, the puzzle is solved, and his character arc is complete. On the other side, for the spectator, the moving image's combination of disparate elements (language and image; miniatures and sets; close-ups and long shots) holds the potential of a play that, unlike a game with a solution, does not end just because it has constituted its object or been decoded into language. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud referred to such infinitely meaningful images as the dream's navel, "the place beneath which lies the Unknown"; the nightmarishly distorted imagery of *Caligari* evokes the unknown, but we might think of the enigmatic quality of this sequence as the residue of an open play with various signifying elements.[8]

Play is a key theoretical concept in the age of the postmodern pastiche and the interactive digital object. It suggests self-conscious and ironic performance, willful frivolity, fleeting formulations, arbitrary recombination, and, particularly since the 1990s, feedback between a user

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[8] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. Joyce Crick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 341.

and a system designed to receive and react to the user's input. In a digitally networked society, everyday life is suffused with forms of play, from our idle activities on our phones while we wait for the train to corporate team-building games that blur lines between labor and leisure. Much of what one thinks of as play today is conducted at interfaces with digital devices that provide fleeting sovereignty over virtual fields, miniature worlds comprised of procedurally generated images. In play today, the user enacts patterns of possible behaviors, selects predictable pathways, "learn[s], internaliz[es], and becom[es] intimate with a massive, multipart, global algorithm" that can be analyzed to predict future outcomes.[9] In the virtual worlds of digital play, the user is entrained in the timely execution of repetitive tasks, in the coordination of the aerial and ground view, in the understanding of themselves as the primary agents within the bounds of an exceptional zone delineated in advance. Play at the interface with technical media is the means by which sovereignty is created, relayed, and exercised across a dispersed network of control that makes us subjects of, and subjects us to, power.

However, the expansion of play-space (*Spielraum*) in the virtual spaces of the modern world is not a development sprung fully formed from the head of our digital society, but part of a longer process endemic to advanced technological media. Modern media replicate much of what had been theorized as organic human play or the "play-drive." If, as recent film and media theory have proposed, "cinema is the most phenomenological of media," the simulation of a relation to the world—or, as Gilles Deleuze has it, that cinema is thought, a "flickering brain, which relinks or creates loops"—I propose that, in a sense prior to either of these assertions, the cinema is

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[9] Alexander Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 90-91.

play.[10] I argue that we can see the understanding of modern media, and in particular the cinema, as a form of play emerging in the highly reflexive cinema and culture of the Weimar Republic. Filmmakers and artists in Weimar already had occasion to consider the ways in which play, held up in German thought since the Enlightenment as an essential faculty of the organic human, was altered by forms of media that created secluded, virtual worlds. The cinema and associated modern phenomena appeared to institute a new regime of omnipresent mediated play.

Caligari presents the cinematic image as a nightmare of ambivalent control: it leaves open the question of whether the world presented onscreen is the controlled game of an authoritarian mind, or the bottomless play of frightening imagery. While the asylum director reacts to the text as if it were revelatory, for the spectator, there is a leftover of ambiguous signification, due to the film's subversion of the accustomed order of text and image. Counterintuitively, or at least counter-conventionally, the text that invades the screen here lends not stability but uncertainty to the image. While the established function of an intertitle was to grant the cohesiveness of rational discourse to the images on either side of it, the writing suspended within the image itself is otherworldly, unassimilable to the expected order of things, the separation between the realm of writing and that of movement, of life. Rather than simple written signification, the words evoke the apect of the cinematic image Sean Cubitt calls the "vector"—the moment at which, "no longer pointing to an entity separate and opposed to us, but offering itself as medium, the image becomes cinematic sign." Cubitt's cinematic vector is "the line [that], like the written word, speaks to us simultaneously as the drawn/written and as the act

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[10] Alexander Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2012), 11 (In summarizing media theory this way, Galloway is actually expressing doubt about whether cinema "is a phenomenology or the absolute impossibility of one"); Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 215.

of drawing/writing, as iconic sign and as the incomplete, infinite process of signifying."[11] Like

the vector, the writing in this scene in *Caligari* is *mediate*, located at a moment between

cinema's "writing with movement" and the settling of this movement into stable signs.[12]

The scene is one of *Caligari*'s pointed moments of "excessive movement" that would

inspire the European avant-garde, a phenomenon artists and critics of the time referred to as

Caligarism.[13] The cinema's capacity to unite disparate elements through the mediating

movement of light can be, and often was, understood as a form of play: to the spectator, the

words that overflow on the screen do not merely comprise a grammatical sentence, but are

haunting evocations of the cinema's ineffability and unpredictability; their play within the frame

suggests the power of the image to shock us with its sensational irruptions and unexpected

combinations. The mad director, believes he has decoded the message secreted in the imagistic

reality he inhabits, to have found the solution and won the game; but from the perspective of the

cinematic spectator, the interposition of text into the realm of the image inaugurates a different

and perhaps deeper kind of play, a sphere of flux and becoming in which heterogeneous elements

are interfaced through the medium of light, and no forms are final. This moment in Caligari

points directly to the cinematic image as medium, the sentence as the point of connection, or

hesitation, between the director's reading and ours, two poles of cinematic play. On the one

hand, the game of the film image as a mediation of power; on the other, the cinema's potentially

infinite world of play.

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[11] Sean Cubitt, *The Cinema Effect* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), 91-92.
[12] Jean-François Lyotard, "Acinema," in *Acinemas: Lyotard's Philosophy of Film*, eds. Graham Jones and Ashley Woodward, trans. Paisley N. Livingstone, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 34.
[13] Ibid, 35, 41-42.

Considering the Role of Play in Weimar Culture

Caligari's multifold flashback structure expresses an uncertainty and even cynicism about truth

and its construction, typical of a society in the midst of social upheaval, economic collapse, and

revolutionary change. The film was released mere months after the official formation of the

Weimar Republic, barely a year after the 1919 Spartacist uprisings that had seen street fighting in

Berlin's wintry avenues, and just over 15 months after Kaiser Wilhelm II's German Empire had

lost a devastating war and collapsed. In February of 1920, Germany was already in the throes of

an inflation crisis that would peak in late 1923, when it would cost billions of marks to purchase

basic necessities like bread. Many of the anxieties and conflicts that marked the early years of

Weimar Republic, as well as the recent memories of its denizens, can be read in *Caligari*'s

allegory of hypnosis and imposed will. One that has often been pointed to is the film's distrust

of, but ultimate conciliation with, authority, as conveyed through the multiple reversals that first

expose the director as Caligari, and then the entire story as a psychotic delusion. Francis, the

conclusion of the frame narrative reveals, is actually an inmate at the asylum, whose ravings

about the director's invented misdeeds comprise the core story.

    Siegfried Kracauer's foundational study of Weimar cinema, *From Caligari to Hitler*,

reads this frame narrative—apparently contributed to the script by Fritz Lang, Wiene's colleague

at Erich Pommer's DECLA studio—as evidence of the lurking authoritarianism in the German

psyche, foretelling the fall of democracy.[14] Critiquing Kracauer's teleologism, Kaes has argued

that the film's ending is by no means unambiguous, and that the film should be contextualized in

relation to its immediate past rather than in relation to a future understood retrospectively as

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[14] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), 65-67.

inevitable. Kaes sees *Caligari* as "part of a larger postwar reckoning with those forces that had participated in and prolonged the madness of war," including the discipline of psychiatry.[15]

Kaes's argument that a film like *Caligari* should be read not against Weimar's future but against its present moment and historical backdrop is part of a broader shift in the historiography of the Weimar Republic, its culture, and its cinema in particular; Andreas Killen, for example argues that even cinema's connection to biopolitical discourses such as psychopathology should not be read as proto-fascist.[16] While canonical studies such as *From Caligari to Hitler* and Peter Gay's *The Weimar Republic: Outsider as Insider* interpreted Weimar culture against its tragic conclusion, especially from the mid-1980s, in recent years a new paradigm has dominated, in which the Weimar Republic is no longer viewed as an inevitably doomed society, but as a laboratory of modernity, a period of frenetic, often contradictory political and cultural activity whose end in fascism was not sealed until very late in its existence.[17] A wide range of modern thought and modernist art has its roots in the heady, often chaotic years that bridged the fall of the German Empire and the rise of the Nazi Party, and scholars now look to Weimar for its multifaceted confrontation with the modern, which includes everything from debates over the liberated figure of the New Woman, to the program of Bauhaus's functional design, to articulations of identity in Berlin's queer subculture, to Carl Schmitt's legal justification of fascism through the theory of the sovereign decision. Since Detlev Peukert nuanced treatment of the Weimar Republic as the "crisis of classical modernity," in which, he claimed, virtually every

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[15] Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema*, 48.

[16] Andreas Killen, *Homo Cinematicus: Science, Motion Pictures, and the Making of Modern Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 17.

[17] See: Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1968); Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Richard W. McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillon, 2001); Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).

modern artistic venture, political program, and social formation was at least debated, studies

treating the Weimar Republic as a particularly representative example of the ambivalent changes

wrought by modernity, and the modes of thought and life they facilitated, have proliferated.[18]

Similarly, film histories have branched out beyond Kracauer's gloomy diagnosis, as well

as Lotte Eisner's monolithic interpretation of German silent cinema under the rubric of German

Expressionism and Romanticism in *The Haunted Screen*.[19] A new consideration of Weimar

cinema focuses on a wider corpus of films, and on film readings that avoid what is now

considered to be Kracauer's oversimplified trajectory of a nation's collective psychology.[20] In

restoring contingency to this historical period, historians like Eric D. Weitz capture something of

the sense in the period itself that anything (modern) was possible, that the coordinates of the

previous world had been suspended and were awaiting arrangement into a new order. In one

sense the reading of Weimar culture I propose here follows these trends in scholarship on the

period. I look to Weimar to illuminate aspects of modernity that might help us better understand

both that specific period of German history and film history, and, in so doing, our own historical

moment. My emphasis is on play, its centrality to modern culture, and its shifting meaning in

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[18] Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 275-6. See, for example: David C. Durst, *Weimar Modernism: Philosophy, Politics and Culture in Germany 1918-1933* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2004); Andreas Killen, *Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006); Peter E. Gordon and John P. McCormick, eds., *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); Kate Sutton, *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011); Bernd Widdig, *Inflation and Culture in Weimar Germany* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

[19] Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973).

[20] See, for example: Killen, *Homo Cinematicus*; Corinne Betz, Karin Herbst-Meßlinger, Rainer Rother, and Annika Schaefer, eds., *Weimarer Kino: neu gesehen* (Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2018); Jennifer M. Kapczynski and Michael D. Richardson, eds., *A New History of German Cinema* (Rochester, NY: Cambden House, 2012); Christian Rogowski, ed., *The Many Faces of Weimar Cinema: Rediscovering Germany's Filmic Legacy* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010).

modernity. Unlike previous scholars, however, I do not view play as shorthand for freedom; indeed, the twentieth century, the century of cinema, is when offering space for play (*Spielraum*) becomes a tool of political control.

The kind of suspense experienced in the tumult of Weimar society, I argue, is typical of a state of play. Play institutes an order assumed as temporary or transitional; elements are unmoored from their customary use and put into action in a new, seemingly limited sphere. This also describes the cinematic image, particularly for those encountering it as a novel object: the moving images of the cinema suspend a slice of the real from its context, suggesting new orders of vision and reality. The precipitous rise of films as mass entertainment—along with the sudden centralization of the German film industry—coincided with the Weimar years, which helped make cinema an emblem of the era. The cinema was associated with urbanity, democracy, heterosociality, technology, leisure, and, paradoxically, the encroachment of both rationalization and absolute chaos: in short, virtually all of the socio-political and technical phenomena affiliated with modernity. Debates raged over its legitimacy as a form of aesethetic expression, its suitability for the young, its alleged regime of superficial visual stimulation.[21] What makes cinema an indenspensible topic of discussion in histories of Weimar, however, is the way the experience of the medium itself encapsulated that of being a German subject in the 1920s. The state of play imposed in the cinema, the sense of a world whose elements are suspended and in flux, also describes how many perceived life under the Weimar regime. The narrative of *Dr. Caligari,* in a sense the inaugural film of Weimar cinema, toys with the implications of this state of play, reflecting on how the visual spectacle represented by the Doctor's traveling show has the power to "play" both the somnambulist and the film viewer as if they were automatons or tin

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[21] See: Anton Kaes, ed., *Kino-Debatte: Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film, 1909-1929* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1978.

soldiers, only to reveal that he himself has been obsessed and inscribed by the play of magical words across his field of vision.

It is not at all atypical for scholars to mention play as in some way typical of Weimar culture.[22] Janet Ward's *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Visual Culture in the 1920s* takes this argument furthest, looking at the ambivalent attitudes toward Weimar's modernist culture of surface effects, seeing the seeds of postmodern play in the knowing experiments with superficiality in literature, art, and architecture, inspired by electric light and the cinema.[23] "What emerges" in her reading of the era's visual culture "is a tension in Weimar modernity—between the apparent ludic pleasure and liberation inherent in surface culture, and a new form of punishment or internalized self-reification if one buys into surface culture too completely."[24] The concept of play suggests the newfound latitude of cultural activity in the period, the spirit of experimentation and "anything goes" embodied in the period's art, music, nightlife, and, of course, cinema. Above all for Ward, the capital city of Berlin seems a place where Weimar's spirit of play reigned, both in terms of its vibrant cultural sphere that favored artifice and performance over authenticity and essence, and its status as the headquarters of a newly agonistic political structure. Ward's illuminating analysis of the primacy of the surface in the most influential cultural formations of the period, however, situates "ludic" as the purely positive side of this dialectic, associated with the liberatory aspects of mass culture. Given that, as Ward herself cites, play is also an important means by which the subject's participation in consumerism and mass culture is secured, my intervention is to broaden the understanding of play's function in Weimar cinema and culture, going beyond those aspects of play that speak to

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[22] See, for example, McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality*, 6.

[23] Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 15, 111, 176, 186.

[24] Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*, 37.

an implicit subject's freedom in a field of action, to include a consideration of how the more proscribed forms of play familiar from the 21st century were already prefigured in Weimar culture.[25]

Peter Sloterdijk is one of many contemporary thinkers who have looked to Weimar culture as a kind of ground zero of the social, cultural, and ideological formations of modernity. His *Critique of Cynical Consciousness* is, like much Weimar scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s, less positive than later studies such as Ward's. And yet, he finds play in the German 1920s as well. He describes the definitive disposition of the modern mindset—and the one that formulated in Germany after the First World War—as "enlightened false consciousness," a disposition in which, contrary to the expectations of Enlightenment thought, heightened awareness fails to bring about more etheical behavior. it bespeaks an acute awareness of the falsity of appearances but a desire to exploit, rather than challenge this falsity; it represents the flight from revolt and the embrace of a cynical disposition. As Sloterdijk explains,

> Cynically disposed … are the times of hollow gestures and artfully prearranged phraseology where, under very official word, private reservations, opposed worlds, and ironies are hidden and where, under public announcements, mute submonologues flow, about which only the initiated, the cocorrupted, codecadent, coironist knows something.[26]

Sloterdijk's cynicism is related to a sense of play: the cynic, like the player, apprehends a world in which elements previously rooted in the real have become uprooted, suspended from their essential relationships. Now recognized as mere signs or constructs, the cynic can manipulate these elements to suit themselves. As Sloterdijk writes, in Weimar "a dull feeling of the instability of things penetrated into souls, a feeling of lack of substance, of relativity, of

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[25] Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*, 194-196
[26] Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 384.

accelerated change, and of involuntary floating from transition to transition."[27] As a result,

Weimar initiated the "century of strategy," as "the conceptual models of tactics, of the estimation

of total situations, etc. trickled down as far as the shopkeeper."[28] Adopting the strategic mindset

of the cynical co-ironist was a means of achieving an illusion of sovereignty, of wholeness and

control, in splintered and chaotic times.

 Cinema and associated modern media, like the illustrated magazine and games of

simulation, constituted a significant part of this uprooting of reality felt so keenly in Weimar

society. As Sloterdijk evocatively suggests, the undoing or suspension of traditionally

hierarchical boundaries led to a state of play in Weimar society; in contemporary modernity

studies, however, this suspension of hierarchy is not seen as leading inexorably into

totalitarianism, but as an ambivalent phenomenon—or, as indicated by the word "play," as a

tentatively positive one, the activity of an open public sphere. Miriam Hansen has drawn on

Weimar thinkers like Benjamin and Kracauer in particular to rethink cinema as a Habermasian

public sphere, and to resituate popular cinema as a form of "vernacular modernism."[29] Moreover,

she has impressively unearthed a theory of mediated play running throughout Walter Benjamin's

critical theory that she interprets as a vital category through which Benjamin imagines the

collectively directed redemption of a technology developed by regressive forces.[30] But if the

recent tendency has been to use "play" as a redemptive category for cultural activity in Weimar,

my dissertation seeks rather to question the presumed positivity of play at the interface with

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  [27] Ibid, 483.
  [28] Ibid, 469.
  [29] Miriam Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," *Modernism/Modernity* 6, no. 2 (1999): 59-77.
  [30] Miriam Hansen, "Room-for-Play: Benjamin's Gamble with the Cinema," *October* 109 (Summer 2004): 3-45; and Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 80.

technological media, as well as the assumption that play is a matter of free will and frivolity—

the opposite of seriousness and the liberation from constrictions.

This dissertation draws from media studies, poshumanist theory, and the thought on play

that came out of Weimar and its aftermath, to point toward a theory, as well as a history, of

modern media as play. For Bernard Stiegler, advanced technological media represent "the

industrial exteriorization of memory": while technical memory supports have existed alongside

human beings for the entirety of the species' existence, modern technology has an increased

ability to bypass human consciousness entirely in its "remembering" of events—a phenomenon

Stiegler refers to as hypomnesia. Modern hypomnesic "technical milieus"—Gilbert Simondon's

term for an interconnected and mutually evolving network of technical objects—become

apparatuses of control, producing predictable subjects whose desires and actions are accounted

for within the system.[31] "Thus exteriorized, memory becomes the object of sociopolitical and

biopolitical channels of control," with the result that "human life is no longer simply biological:

it is a technical economy of desire sustained by hypomnesic technical milieus."[32] I propose,

however, that what Stiegler analyzes as the industrialization of memory through advanced

technical media can also be thought as the mediatization of play, even before the historical

moment at which practical interactivity with technically mediated texts emerges.

Media, to quote theorist Siegfried Zielinski, "are spaces of action for constructed attempts

to connect what is separated."[33] In the "in-between realm" constructed by the interface of a user

with a medium, "media process, model, standardize, symbolize, transform, structure, expand,

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[31] See Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, trans. Ninian Mellamphy (Paris: Aubier, Editions Montaigne, 1958), 52-55.

[32] Bernard Stiegler, "Memory," in *Critical Terms in Media Studies*, eds. W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 71, 73.

[33] Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*, trans. Gloria Custance (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), 10.

combine and link. This they perform with the aid of symbols that can be accessed by the human senses: numbers, images, texts, sounds, designs, and choreography. Media worlds are phenomena of the relational."[34] Like a medium, play creates a space that forges new relations; in his influential *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, Johan Huizinga veers rather close to Zielinski's later definition of a medium when he defines play as "a stepping out of 'real life' into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all its own."[35] Closer to Weimar—though, significantly, Huizinga had been a professor in Munich during the 1920s—is Walter Benjamin's use of the term *Spielraum* (literally play-space) to name cinema's "field of action." Central to Benjamin's theory of play articulated in the second version of his well-known 1928 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" is that it is not the organic activity of an individual subject, but a kind of collective action performed in conjunction with a machine; Benjamin even suggests that it is the "second physis" of modern techne—i.e., the machine—whose essence is in play.[36] With media that replicate human sense impressions, a process of play that figures like Huizinga imagines as organic—as rooted in the human sensorium—is increasingly incorporated into machines.

Given its historical circumstances and its intellectual heritage, Weimar culture was primed to recognize and reflect on the way technological media originate in and inflect play. In three brief articles Benjamin wrote in the mid-1920s, he contemplates the fascination of his era

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[34] Ibid, 33.

[35] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*: *a Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), 8.

[36] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writing*, vol. 3, *1935-1938*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 127, note 22. See also Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience,* 80-82.

with play and games, attributing it to a "desire to make light of an unbearable life."[37] Over the course of Benjamin's lifetime (he had been born in Berlin 1892), gaming had become an ever-increasing part of both children's and adult's lives. Mass-distributed board games, particularly those with vivid imagistic components, were still a relatively new innovation, with *Mensch, ärgere dich nicht,* the German version of parcheesi, becoming a consumer phenomenon during the war. Teen boys were targeted not only by tin soldiers, but by board games that thematized war and the lives of military heroes.

Contrary to Benjamin's initial claim, play was clearly more than just a way of making light of the world: it was a method of training and a way of experiencing a pocket of sovereignty within the artficial world-game of society that denied the individual any measure of control. Benjamin eventually concedes that play might be more relevant in adult life than serving as mere escapism: "in every habit, an element of play survives to the end," he writes.[38] The repetitious, habit-forming activity of play makes useful subjects out of children by building them into soldiers, or people with a militarist inclination.[39] Benjamin concludes in "The Cultural History of Toys" that play comprises not a wholly separate child's world, but an interface with a broader world in miniature, "a silent signifying dialogue between [children] and their nation."[40] However, it is not board games, tin soldiers, or dolls that Benjamin identifies as the paragon of play at the exhibit he visits at the Märkisches Museum in Berlin. Rather, he finds that it is "the

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[37] Walter Benjamin, "Old Toys," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings,* vol. 2, part 1, *1927-1930*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 100.

[38] Walter Benjamin, "Toys and Play," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings,* vol. 2, part 1*, 1927-1930*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Roy Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 120.

[39] Walter Benjamin, "Old Toys," 99.

[40] Walter Benjamin, "The Cultural History of Toys," *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings,* vol. 2, part 1: *1927-1930*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 116.

peep shows along with the dioramas, myrioramas, and panoramas … [that] lead the observer even more deeply into the mysteries of the world of play."[41] Interfacing with the visual devices that culminated in the advent of the cinematograph, the subject enters a realm of play, a transporting game. As Weimar thinkers knew, play—particularly at the interface with the cinema—is far more than shorthand for leisure, openness, and freedom. As Benjamin describes, play within the bounded spaces provided by mass-produced board games, planned urban spaces, and modern media is also an interface with power itself, a training for modes of action useful to power. With a look back at the media environment of Weimar we might see the digital play-society we currently inhabit not as a radical break with the past, but as a phenomenon with its roots in modernity's mediatization of the world—and the human.

The Reception of Cinema as a Play-Form in Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany

Both philosophy and criticism in Weimar had a long German tradition of thinking play to draw upon. Serious philosophical and anthropological inquiry into the meaning of play began in the early stages of German modernity, at the moment a form of human play retrospectively understood as organic is being eclipsed by complex technical objects that play *for* and *with* us. Even Friedrich Schiller's pronouncement that "man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man, and he is only completely a man when he plays" comes at a moment in the late 18th century when the early industrial revolution was creating new short circuits between human thought and action, intervening in a process of cognition and judgment the Enlightenment would hold to be the epitome of play.[42] Both Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* and Immanuel Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* grant a central role to play in human

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[41] Benjamin, "Old Toys, 100.
[42] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Hoboken, NJ: Generic NL Freebook Pubisher), 29.

cognitive abilities, most evidently manifest in the realm of aesthetics: for Kant, the very faculty

of judgment was the playful interaction of understanding and reason.[43] Play was for these

philosophers an aspect of the rational subject, but Friedrich Nietzsche's later embrace of the

concept in his *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Gay Science* eschews this purely cognitive

understanding for one that emphasizes the intuition and a pre-subjective Will: his "Appollonian"

art of forms and his "Dionysiac" art of intoxication are both driven by a will to play, but "the

subject, the willing individual in pursuit of his own, egotistical goals, can only be considered the

opponent of art and not its origin."[44] Play in Nietzsche is therefore elevated as the origin of art

but also precedes the rational subject, a position that would have to be accepted or rejected by

later aestheticians—the neo-Kantian art critic Wilhelm Worringer, in his influential *Abstraction*

and Empathy of 1908, would deny that all art is rooted in the kind of intuitive play-drive

proposed by figures like Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and the anthropologist Karl Groos.[45]

Responding to Schiller and Nietzsche's postulation of something akin to a play-drive also

became necessary outside the realm of aesthetics, or in arguments that tangentially took up the

question of aesthetics. Ernst Bloch helped commence 20th-century Germany's reconsideration of

orthodox Marxism by asserting in the opening pages of *The Spirit of Utopia* (1918) that "we are

poor, we have unlearned how to play. We have forgotten it, our hands have unlearned how to

dabble."[46] A few years later, at the end of the early Weimar period Georg Lukács's analysis of

reification as the overriding mechanism of capitalist reality in his *History and Class*

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[43] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 27.
[44] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 119-120; 32.
[45] Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, trans. Michael Bullock (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), 54; Karl Groos, *Die Spiele der Menschen* (Jena: G. Fischer, 1899), 503-510.
[46] Ernst Bloch, *The Spirt of Utopia*, trans. Anthony A. Nassar (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 10.

Consciousness (1923) critiques Schiller's reservation of play for the realm of thought as a specious avenue toward freedom dreamed up by the Englightenment. By suggesting the play-instinct as the basis of human freedom, "on the one hand, [Schiller] recognises that social life has destroyed man as man. On the other hand, he points to the principle whereby *man having been socially destroyed, fragmented and divided between different partial systems is to be made whole again in thought*."[47] Hands no longer dabble in a system where freedom is to be sought in contemplation—and the mechanization of labor and, eventually, of aesthetics, further alienates play from the human body. For Bloch, alienation under capitalism takes the play from our hands with the same stroke by which it takes nature away from our eyes: "one can even say that for anyone who would like the impression of nature without any deformations through the medium of the image, the cinematograph is the best portrait gallery, the substitute for all the world's great general art exhibitions."[48] If in modernity we have "unlearned how to play," machines have learned to play for us, even in the realm of aesthetics and contemplation. Bloch clearly understands cinema, as discussed further in Chapter One of this dissertation, as usurping human play—specifically that of the hands.

Given this intellectual tradition and trajectory, play was one of the categories through which many German critics would attempt to understand and explain the expanding cultural phenomenon of the cinema in the 1910s. As Katharina Loew writes, critics who evaluated the new medium positively, such as Gustav Melcher and Herbert Tannenbaum, were apt to receive the it according to the Kantian paradigm of "playful aesthetic semblance," an extension of the play of the imagination. But even the cinema's detractors, or those who like Worringer

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[47] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1968), 140. Italics in original.
[48] Bloch, *Spirit of Utopia*, 31.

discounted the role of play in aesthetics, could dismiss it as "*Spielerei*" (nonsense, or child's

play), its fleeting visions constituting making it more akin to a frivolous child's game than to

serious art.[49] Furthermore, the cinema compelled thought about play because in many corners it

was thought to be more interactive than previous mediated aesthetic experiences. If Caligari's

fairground show, with its wooden cabinet and "animate" content, recalls an early-cinema

spectatorship many viewers in 1920 would easily remember, then it also recalls a period in which

cinema and its effects were closely associated with interactive play, with a sense that the moving

picture was not merely an image presented to the spectator, but a process in which the viewer

was physically engaged. The cinema had emerged in part from toys that used a turning motion to

animate illustrations, like the phenakistoscope, and in early cinema spectatorship direct

interaction with the image and the apparatus were still encouraged. Early cinematic "peephole"

devices like the kinetoscope incorporated eye and hand, cognition and action, into the workings

of a technical apparatus well before personal media players and video games offered interfaces

with virtual realms of play. A reconsideration of this history has recently led Nicolas Dulac and

André Gaudreault to revise the latter's well-known "cinema of attractions" by adducing the

paradigm of a "player mode of attraction" present in early cinematic spectatorship.[50]

Late Wilhelmine cinema exploited the perceived playful nature of cinema. In 1913, the

Austrian director Joe May, later known for the Stuart Webb detective series as well as popular

Weimar films such as *The Indian Tomb* (1919) began experimenting with *Preisrätselfilme*

("prize-puzzle films"), mystery stories in which the final reel would be withheld for two weeks,

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[49] Katharina Loew, "The Spirit of Technology: Early German Thinking about Film," *New German Critique* 122, Vol. 41, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 138-139.

[50] Nicolas Dulac and André Gaudrealt, "Circularity and Repetition at the Heart of the Attraction: Optical Toys and the Emergence of a New Cultural Series," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2006), 239.

giving audiences an opportunity to submit their guesses as to the solution.[51] In March of 1914,

the Viennese film producer J. Handl released *Die Geschwister* ("the siblings"), a puzzle film in

which viewers could telegraph or phone in their solution (Figure 0.1). A century before smart

phones, such games depended on an interlocking of different media into a single game.

Spectators could participate in a game dispersed across an heterotopic, homeomorphic space of

play—a space defined by its mediated nodes of contact with the player: the cinemas, the

telegraph offices, the closest available phone lines.

The terminology for film in German preserved the sense of play inherent to its images: in

the decade before *Caligari*'s release, films were commonly referred to as *Lichtspiele*, or plays

with light. When, like the English "photoplay," *Lichtspiele* fell out of fashion, the word that

replaced it maintained the connection to *Spiel*: *Spielfilm*, or play-film, referred distinctly to

narrative cinema. Denotatively, the *Spiel* in *Spielfilm* referred to theater plays, but the flexibility

of the word, and the retention of it in the German words for film led to consideration of its other

implications. In 1913, the skeptical critic Walter Hasenclever would refer back to cinema's

fairground roots to insist that cinema stay in the realm of play, and keep away from the realm of

(theater) plays. Hasenclever compares the pure specularity of the cinema not to theater but to

circus spectacles (*Zirkusspiele*): "The meaning of the generous circus show stayed *visible*. One

had it like a flat projection before oneself, and experienced it—exactly as one experiences in the

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[51] Karen Pehla, "Joe May und seine Detektive: Der Serienfilm als Kinoerlebnis," in *Joe May: Regisseur und Produzent*, eds. Hans-Michael Bock and Claudia Leussen (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1991), 64-66.

cinema."[52] Hasenclever insists that films should not strive to be *Kinodramen* (Cine-dramas), but

Lichtspiele, the pure visuality of a play with light.

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[52] Walter Hasenclever, "Das Kintopp als Erzieher: eine Apologie," in *Kino-Debatte*: *Texte zum Verhältnis von Literature und Film*, ed. Anton Kaes (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1978), 52. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of German-language texts are my own.

Figure 0.1: Advertisement for "Puzzle Film" *Die Geschwister*, *Die Filmwoche* 1:51 (1 March 1914): 41.

Silbenrätsel.

a — ber — die — e — e — ej —
j — hand — hles — mar — ni —
mund — ne — ner — noed — on —
— pol — pe — ra — re — ja —
jche — jto — jei — ter — the —
ti — ti

Aus vorstehenden 28 Silben sind
7 Wörter zu bilden von folgender
Bedeutung: 1. uralte Handelsstadt
in Mittelasien; 2. Schülerbezeich-
nung; 3. Baum mit leuchtenden
Früchten; 4. Feldherr und Staats-
mann im alten Athen; 5. Gestalt
einer Wagner-Oper; 6. weiblicher
Vorname; 7. wissenschaftliches Unter-
nehmen. Sind die richtigen Wörter
gefunden, so bezeichnen die Anfangs-
buchstaben und die Endbuchstaben
zwei große deutsche Städte.

Kapselrätsel.

| Mittelmeer — Fremdling — |
| Orden — Brüllaffe — Hinder- |
| nis — Kanne — Mandarin — |
| Angesicht — Buschmühle — Eichen |
| — Marta — Berggeist — Ver- |
| nichtung — Flieder — Magenta |

Es ist ein Sinnspruch zu suchen,
dessen einzelne Silben der Reihe
nach versteckt sind in vorstehenden
Wörtern ohne Rücksicht auf deren
Silbenteilung.

Ergänzungsrätsel.

| —ze, —ck, —he, —ar, —te |

An Stelle der Striche sind jedesmal zwei
passende Buchstaben zu setzen, so daß Wörter
entstehen, die in anderer Reihenfolge bedeuten:
Wild, Schwimmvogel, Fluß in Bayern, Ver-
wandte, Teil des Schiffes. Sind die richtigen
Wörter gefunden, so bezeichnen die ergänzten
Buchstabenpaare im Zusammenhang, worüber
bei Frühlingswetter schon viele Leser und be-
sonders Leserinnen allerlei Pläne zu machen
pflegen.

Wechselgriph.

1 2 3 4 5 6 — 2 6 5 — 7 8 9 10 11 7
8 12 6 — 7 10 11 — 13 10 3 4 6 10 12
alter Sinnspruch.

Schlüssel: 1 2 3 4 5 10 Verwandte;
7 8 3 4 6 Raubtier; 10 12 2 8 6 biblischer
Prophet; 6 9 1, 7 8 2 1 6 10 12 1 große
Inselgruppe; 13 10 5 5 10 11 12 10 9 3 4 5
10 1 atmosphärische Erscheinung.

Stammtisch-Scherz.

Lehmann sagt: Ich will euch mal ein
Rätsel aufgeben und schreibt mit Kreide auf
den Tisch: K
        m n
Das bin ich, sagt er stolz.

Nachbar Huber nimmt auch die Kreide
und schreibt:
     1 P Q U
Nze, das sind Sie, Lehmann!
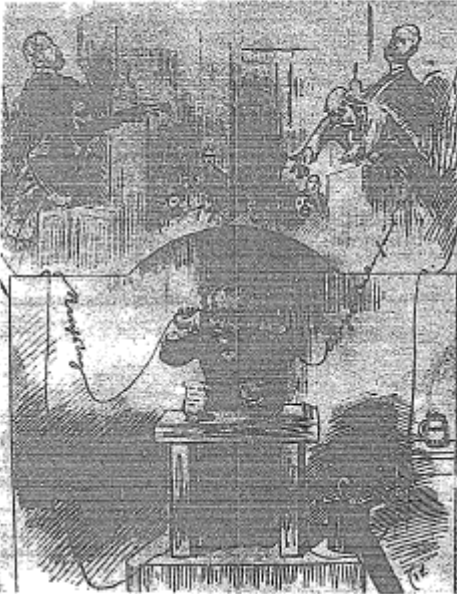
Kein anderer Ausweg.

Pflichtgetreue Inhaber von Doppelmandaten für Land- und
Reichstag können, um gleichzeitig in beiden Häusern zu tagen,
ihren Standpunkt nur noch in einem mitten in der Leipziger Straße
gelegenen Restaurant nehmen und wie oben verfahren.
(Aus dem „Ulk" 1891.)

Bilderrätsel.

Logogriph.

Mit i ist es erloschnes Leben.
Mit r sieht man's in Lüften schweben.
—u.

Rösselsprung.

		be	ver		
	re	ist	se	der	
ment	sie	die	das	nunft	die
bens	wo	gl	hält	gei	ru
	und	le	das	fühl	
		ge	schwellt		
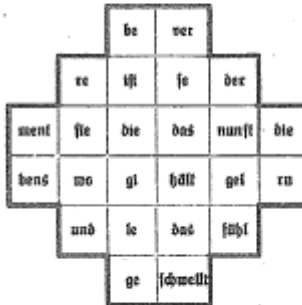
Zahlenrätsel.

1	2	3	8	wichtig für Diplomaten und Musiker
2	3	3	2	männlicher Vorname
3	2	9	10	Heizstoff
4	5	11	1	deutscher Fluß
5	6	7	3	Zahlwort
6	7	2	9	in Kirchen und in Opern
7	5	7	1	Bezeichnung beim Ge- flügel
3	7	2	9	alter nordischer Gott
8	7	9	8	hohes Gut
9	11	1	12	Haustier
10	5	9	4	landwirtschaftl. Betrieb
11	9	5	1	Land in Asien
1	8	11	12	Charakterzug
12	5	4	8	weibliches Wesen
8	1	3	8	schmackhafter Vogel
9	2	2	1	preußischer Staatsmann und Heerführer
11	9	4	5	weiblicher Vorname
13	2	7	1	Glied der Familie
6	2	12	8	bekannter juristischer Ausdruck
7	5	1	12	Körperteil

Sind die richtigen Wörter ge-
funden, ergeben die Anfangsbuch-
staben, im Zusammenhang gelesen,
ein bekanntes Sprichwort.

Tauschrätsel.

Es sind 9 Wortpaare zu suchen
von der unten angegebenen Bedeu-
tung. Jedes Wortpaar besteht aus
zwei Wörtern, die sich nur durch
den Anfangsbuchstaben unterscheiden,
wie Mauer — Bauer oder Eier —
Tier. Die Anfangsbuchstaben der
Wörter unter b bezeichnen im Zusammenhang
den schönsten Teil des Jahres.

	a	b
1.	Beförderungsmittel	— Körperteil
2.	Kirchenfest	— Blumen
3.	Altes Gewicht	— Land in Asien
4.	Getränk	— Nahrungsmittel
5.	Naturereignis	— Befestigungsmittel
6.	Teil des Gesichts	— Werkzeug
7.	Rückstand	— Baum
8.	Prophet	— altes Heldengedicht
9.	Körperteil	— Gefäß

(Auflösungen in nächster Nummer.)

Auflösungen
aus der vorigen Nummer.

Bilderrätsel: Spargelannahme.

Zifferkalkrätsel:
I II III IV V VI VII VIII IX X XI XII
B E I N S E L M A D E L
Bei, Bein, Eins, Insel, Selma, Made,
Adel, Elbe.

Entwicklungsrätsel: Beate, Blüte, Blitz, Fritz.

Akrostich:
Im Leben reichen sich die Hand
Gar oftmals Glück und Unverstand.
Das Glück, wie immer, sehr galant,
Macht Unverstand dann zum Verstand.

Vexierbild: Links querüber in der Mitte des
Bildes. Kopf am Gesicht des Mädchens.
Bild von links betrachten.

Sonderbare Sache: Kopfstück.

| 1924—54 |

Figure 0.2: "Rätselecke," Film Kurier 6:109 (8 May 1924): 7.

The cinema's detachment of the gaze from the eye of the spectator, its capacity to organize a virtual world through the interfacing of different slices of space-time in montage, its screen as a surface on which diverse elements could intermingle in surprising combinations: to German critics, these qualities underlay the cinema's close association with *Spiel* in German thought. The "absolute films" (*absolute Filme*) of the early 1920s also suit the German understanding of cinema as aesthetic play. In films such as *Rhythmus 21* (1921)*, Lichtspiel: Opus 1* (1921), *Symphony Diagonal* (1924), *Spiralen* (1926), animators Hans Richter, Walther Ruttmann, Viking Eggeling, and Oskar Fischinger captured the Dionysian dynamic of cinematic imagery, staging conflict between and transformation of abstract shapes. The absolute films are remarkable for their eschewing of a subject-centered world of play, imagining instead a distinct surface-world that does not privilege a singular spectator position through the use of perspective, or the camera as a tool for simulating three-dimensional space. In the films of the Dadaist Richter or the proto-contructivist Ruttmann, the cinema becomes its own realm of non-human— or at least pre-subjective—play. That such avant-garde animations are typical of Weimar experimental cinema itself speaks to the importance of *Spiel* in the reception of the cinema in modern Germany.

Spiel in the sense of performance took on new dimensions in the cinema's mute images. In a review of *Dr. Caligari*, the critic Herbert Jhering writes that precisely this quality makes the cinema and expressionism an ideal fit, "because for all heightened play that transcends its material—and this is what film should be—expressionism is both necessity and law. The good film is not that which, out of necessity, distracts from the absence of the word, but that whose

processes would be disturbed by the word."[53] The absence of the spoken word in the silent

cinema heightens the play of the body in ways paralleled, if not equaled, by the expressionist

theater from which *Caligari* appropriates the jagged, oblique lines of its set design and the

histrionic pantomime of its actors. Already in Jhering's remark we can see connotations of *Spiel*

beyond "performance" when it is applied to the cinema. Prior to performance, the cinema is a

shifting arrangement of light we observe on the surface of the screen: the play of features and

movements, the shifting relation between eyes and mouth or face and hands represents an

attunement of the actor's body to the play of the cinema. *Caligari* introduces Conrad Veidt as the

somnambulist Cesare via a close-up that emphasizes the distortions and movements of his face,

which is covered in heavy make-up that lends contrast and emphasis to his eyes and mouth as

they begin, almost independently of one another, to twitch to life. With his streamlined face

rested flat against the base of the film's titular cabinet, the image presented is strikingly two-

dimensional. It evokes almost mystic consolidation of the cinema's mechanically controlled play

of light into objects, persons, and places on a flat screen: before faces, the cinema is the

"lightplay" captured in the absolute film.

In addition to such cinematic experiments as absolute films and the avant-garde-adjacent

Caligari, visual games included in the film magazines that emerged in Wilhelmine and

proliferated in Weimar Germany made play an overt part of the broader cinematic experience.

Movie-themed versions of word searches, crosswords, scrambles, and rebuses became common

in the popular movie magazines, which offered filmgoers a sense of participation denied them in

the increasingly middle-class picture palaces of Weimar Germany. Games in the film press tested

film knowledge and recall and turned movie fandom into an extension of the cinematic

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[53] Herbert Jhering, "Ein expressionistischer Film," in *Kino-Debatte*: *Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film*, ed. Anton Kaes (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1978), 133.

apparatus. *Illustrierte Film-Woche* had published a *Rätselecke* ("puzzle corner") intermittently since its premiere as *Illustrierte Kino-Woche* in 1913, and would do so more regularly as the '20s progressed. The former trade journal *Der Filmspiegel* began publishing crossword puzzles in the shape of graphic representations of animals or objects beginning in 1925. By 1924, *Film-Kurier* had an extensive *Rätselecke* that often included a rebus, or *Bilderrätsel,* from which the player would have to decode a word, sometimes the name of an actor (Figure 0.2). As Michael Cowan has observed, through the games published in the film press, the enjoyment of cinema began to be tied closely to gameplay in this era of German history, prefiguring the kind of engagement typical of cine-clubs in the 1960s.[54] The scene in *Caligari* in which graphic letters appear within the cinematic frame might well have evoked such print games that had appeared in newspapers and magazines since the late 19th century. In particular, the *Caligari* scene suggests a comparison between the cinematic image and a rebus or *Bilderrätsel*, which had become intensely popular in the German press a few decades earlier.[55] Such games were part of an emergent culture of distraction and play in which the cinema became complicit, both in terms of the films themselves and in the increasingly prominent film press.

An awareness of the cinema's playfulness and its associating with games led German filmmakers like Joe May and, later, Guido Seeber to experiment with cinematic games, and led other filmmakers, writers, and philosophers toward a thinking-through of the changing contours of human space and experience in modernity, and in particular, the growth of secluded play-spaces such as the cinema. Seeber and Paul Leni's *Rebusfilme* (*Rebus Films*, 1925-1927) drew further on the analogy between the rebus and the cinema as forms of play. Despite the name,

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[54] Michael Cowan, "Learning to Love the Movies: Puzzles, Participation, and Cinephilia in Interwar Europe," *Film History* 27, no. 4 (2015): 1-45.
[55] Eva-Maria Schenck, *Das Bilderrätsel* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1973), 49.

which invited a comparison between the graphic puzzles and film, Seeber and Leni's gamified

cinema primarily exploited the more recent craze for crossword. At screenings for the *Rebus*

Films, blank crosswords would be distributed to cinemagoers, to be filled out during the

screening. The films were comprised of rapidly succeeding shots meant to provide clues for the

puzzle—for example, scenes of life in India provide the clue for the corresponding answer

("*Indien*"). Michael Cowan understands the *Rebus Films* as, in fact, quite distinct from actual

rebus puzzles: while the rebus encourages the suppression of visual information in favor of the

hidden, verbal meaning, the *Rebus Films* trained participants in the assimilation of visual

stimuli.[56] Regardless, what such experiments reveal is the a nexus of modern play-forms that

cinema was thought to be a part of. Attempts to introduce structured play into cinema may be

seen as a form of "cross-media exchange" already typical of its relationship with the stage—

here, combining a craze for gameplay in print with the visual spectacle of the cinema.[57] But, at a

time when a normative narrative paradigm was just emerging for cinema, they can also be

understood, along with the emergence of movie-themed puzzles in the papers, as attempts to

preserve and adapt the original playfulness of the cinema.

     The shift from the play of absolute films to the game of rebus films is revealing of a

broader historical trajectory I wish to trace. If early Weimar culture is defined by the tumult of a

form of play no longer under the control of human agents, mid- and late Weimar culture (1924-

1933) evidences an acceptance that the world is a game. What many Germans saw as the triumph

of a society (*Gesellschaft*) of artificial relations over the natural bonds of community

(*Gemeinschaft*) gave rise to the self-deluding subject's cynical play with the superficial images

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[56] Michael Cowan, "Moving Picture Puzzles: Training Urban Perception in the Weimar 'Rebus Films'", *Screen* 51, no. 3 (Autumn 2010): 201.

[57] Cynthia Walk, "Cross-Media Exchange in Weimar Culture: Von morgens bis mitternachts," *Monatshefte* 99, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 177-193.

society had become. The structured world of gameplay offers the illusion of sovereignty to a population attempting to regain control of themselves, to feel they have transcended their social and historical context. In Cailloisian terms, early Weimar culture might be broadly understood as conforming to the outline of *alea,* games of chance, while mid- to late-Weimar culture resembles *agon*, the game of competition, of opposed forces and strategic maneuvers.[58]

As closely aligned with the socio-cultural upheavals of Weimar as cinema was, it was only one of a number of diversionary media play-forms suddenly on offer in modern society. The modern German subject was, it seemed, constantly invited to play along in an anomalous game-space that offered the excitement of being someone, somewhere, or sometime else. Kurt Tucholsky's 1930 short story "Crossword Puzzle By Force" satirizes the private realities created in gameplay.[59] The exclusive world maintained between a player and their game could fill out the empty space-time of a rationalized industrial work week, while also training subjects in forms of visual acuity, rational deduction, self-discipline, and timeliness crucial to "the technique of metropolitan life," as George Simmel described it.[60] On the other hand, gameplay gives rise to personal delusions of grandeur. Refusing to correct his errors in the crossword puzzle, Tucholsky's narrator decides to remake his reality according to his re-naming of the world: "LEBSCH: a European capital. Don't say it—why shouldn't one of the many, many capitals of Europe be named LEBSCH … And there merged positively exotic words: MIPPEL and FLUNZ and BAKIKEKE. In this way I built a completely new world for myself."[61] Tucholsky's narrator realizes the dream of a personal world, a remade Europe, on the page of a crossword puzzle, a

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[58] Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 18-20.
[59] Kurt Tucholsky, "Crossword Puzzle by Force," in *Germany? Germany! The Kurt Tucholsky Reader*, ed. and trans. Harry Zohn (London: Carcanet Press, 1990), 80-83.
[60] Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, ed. Richard Sennett (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 50.
[61] Tucholsky, "Crossword Puzzle," 83.

recent innovation in mass-distributed print formats such as newspapers and magazines. The story

concerns an advantage play offered the Weimar subject, the possibility of transcending the

confines of the socio-historical moment and escaping to a sphere over which one could establish

a modicum of control. In addition, the imperial dimension to the narrator's fantasy should not be

overlooked: even the crossword puzzle here becomes a way for the German subject to replay the

late war, to rename the capitals of Europe according to a sovereign German mindset. In Chapters

Two and Three of this dissertation, I illustrate how the games and cinema of Weimar's middle

periods fostered the logic of sovereignty useful to a planned and directed resurgence of Prussian

militarism. In this way, the masterful gaze of the gameplayer engages in the re-ordering of a

world become image from a top-down perspective.

As a result of the perceived artificiality of the modern world and the persistent appeals to

the individual to play—to lounge, to masquerade, to gamble, to strategize—Weimar would see

the development of numerous influential theories of play: Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer

would each understand play as typical of urban modernity, Sigmund Freud would radically

reformulate the psychoanalytic theory of play in the wake of the First World War, and the social

philosopher Hemut Plessner would outline a theory of society as play.[62] No discussion of the

topic had more wide-ranging future consequences, however, than John von Neumann's Game

Theory, as first laid out in his 1926 "Zur Theorie der Gesellschaftspiele" (On the Theory of

Social Games") when Neumann was on the faculty at the University of Berlin. Neumann's essay

sought "to investigate the repercussions of players on one another, the consequences of the

condition (so characteristic of all social events!) that every player has influence on the results of

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[62] See: Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Nortion & Company, 1961)*;* Helmut Plessner; *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism*, trans. Andrew Wallace (New York: Humanity Books, 1999).

all others, and is only interested on their own."[63] Neumann's essay "Gesellschaftspiele" presumes the world as always-already antagonistic, a universe of subjects with opposing interests meeting in any-(social-)space-whatever. Emergent here is the framing of the subject as in essence a player, its interface with the world defined by a play in which its sovereignty is at stake. Mathematical Game Theory would become the basis of modern economics, and, as a technique for predicting and simulating decision-making, would be vital to the development of modern computing.

In fact, Weimar culture's perception of a world gamified by modernity may underlie much of the theory of play and games that proliferated in the 20th century. We can trace a clear lineage of play theory from those who experienced the "suspense" of Weimar society to contemporary thought about the posthuman play of digital networks. The play theorists most well-known in Game Studies today are the midcentury scholars and philosophers Roger Caillois, Johan Huizinga, and Ludwig Wittgenstein—none of whom, it may be noted, were German. However, Huizinga, who gives play an expansive but paradoxically proscribed role in culture, spent much of the 1920s as a professor in Munich; and as an Austrian, Wittgenstein's understanding of language use as conditionted by contextually dependent "games" may have been influenced by the similar, even more dire postwar situation that obtained in Germany's First World War ally.[64]

Beyond these notable figures we find a number of further Weimar intellectuals who would end up writing about play after the end of Weimar. The psychoanalyst Gustav Bally's first book-length study after Weimar was *Vom Ursprung und von den Grenzen der Freiheit: Eine*

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[63] J. v. Neumann, "Zur Theorie der Gesellschaftspiele," *Mathematische Annalen* 100, no. 1 (December 1928): 298.

[64] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 5, 31-32.

Deuting des Spiels bei Tier und Mensch ("On the Origin and Limits of Freedom: An

Interpretation of Play among Animal and Man") interprets play via an impressive synthesis of

Freudian and Bergsonian thought, which I treat in more detail in Chapter Four of this

dissertation.[65] Elsewhere, the Frankfurt School, strongly influenced by the early work of Bloch

and Lukács, occasionally exhibited a typically serious approach to the function of play in late

capitalism and modern subjectivity. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of*

Enlightenment reads Odysseus as the stand-in for the modern bourgeois subject, proceeding

forward via his willful blindness (enlightened false consciousness) and cynical manipulation—

his play within a schematized world. Their trickster-Odysseus represents the inevitable distortion

of Kant's playful faculty of judgment, which, in Lukácsian fashion, administers an already-

administered reality, pretending to contemplate an unmediated world in order to reinforce its

own advantage.[66] For Adorno and Horkheimer, play has already become a part of the totalitarian

system of global capitalism: the aesthetics of the "culture industry" testify to this as much as the

closed systems of mathematical Game Theory and the necessity of the festival as an "outside" in

relation to civilization.[67] Odysseus's form of play is beholden to capitalist ideology, but Adorno

and Horkheimer's colleague Herbert Marcuse would turn to Freudian theory in order to root the

overcoming of capitalist oppression in the redemption of a genuine play-drive through,

paradoxically, progressive alienation: as the human is involved less in the realm of necessity,

"the expanding realm of freedom becomes truly a realm of play—of the free play of individual

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[65] Gustav Bally, *Vom Urpsrung und von den Grenzen der Freiheit: Eine Deuting des Spiels bei Tier und Mensch* (Basel: Benno Schwabe & Co. Verlag, 1945).

[66] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 64-66

[67] Ibid, 97-98; 82-83

faculties. Thus liberated, they will generate new forms of realization and of discovering the world, which in turn will reshape the realm of necessity, the struggle for existence."[68]

Perhaps more remarkable is an often overlooked debate over the nature of *Spiel* between two German philosophers who had been students of Martin Heidegger during the 1920s. In the late 1950s, Eugen Fink would develop an argument proposing play as a "symbol of the world," that is, the human's remediation of the worldly dialectic of day and night, life and death, in which it found itself: play "interprets a world-relation [*Weltbezug*] of human *Dasein*, a meaningful relation to to something that is not a thing and not a thingly occurrence [i.e., the world]."[69] Fink's Heideggerian existential phenomenology suggests *Spiel* may be an existentiale, an ontological component of human being. However, it did not go far enough for his fellow former Heidegger student, Hans-Georg Gadamer, who critiqued Fink's insistence on a division between *Menschenspiel* (human play) and world in a review for the *Philosophische Rundschau*.[70] Gadamer's own *Truth and Method*, published the same year as Fink's *Spiel als Weltsymbol*, proposed play as the ontology of the work of art. Gadamer saw this understanding of play as a means of overcoming the division between the artwork and the world, and suggested a model of play that de-prioritized the human subject. Play for Gadamer is not necessarily something initiated by a human, but "instead play merely reaches presentation through the players."[71] The influence of Gadamer's hermeneutics of play are evident in the subsequent claims of semiotics

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[68] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 222-3.

[69] Eugen Fink, *Spiel als Weltsymbol* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1960), 229-30. See also his earlier monograph *Oase des Glücks: Gedanken zu einer Ontologie des Spiels* (Freiburg/Munich: Karl Alber Verlag, 1957).

[70] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Eugen Fink: Spiel als Weltsymbol," *Philosophische Rundschau* 9, no. 1 (1961): 1-8.

[71] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Sheed and Ward, Ltd, eds. Garret Bandon and John Cumming (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1982), 92.

and poststructuralism, which in the 1960s and 1970s would discover the play of signifieds behind signs.

The play theory suspended in the air in the wake of Weimar would help shift how media and textuality are understood. The spectator or reader, redefined as player, is neither the free subject imagined by Enlightenment thought, nor the totally compromised subject of ideology analyzed by the Frankfurt School. Instead, the Gadamerian player most resembles the model of the new media user outlined by Mark B.N. Hansen four decades later. The artwork's image— intended in a Bergsonian sense to indicate any sensorial apprehension of the object—comes into being in concert with (the play reaches presentation through) the player, whose agency is both proscribed and facilitated by that work of art.[72] This is the model by which both artists and readers become players, two actants caught up in the flux of play mediated by the surface of the artwork. Play on digital devices is not a simple matter, in a traditional anthropological definition shared by Huizinga and Caillois, of a subject's willed activity in a consequence-free zone of free activity, but is necessarily dependent on digital "thinking machines" and a new virtual substrate that extends beyond the limited field of play. Play appears to have shifted meaning just as it became a focus of such theorizing: play now is the means by which the human is incorporated into the machine; it functions as "the thing that overcomes systemic contradiction but always via recourse to that special, ineffable thing that makes us most human. It is, as it were, *a melodrama of the rhizome*."[73] Play functions as the irreducible human element in the digital networks of today's society of control—more specifically, by inviting us to play, the machine reassures us that we are human subjects even as its incorporation of us into "algorithmic culture" has undermined the very notion of the sovereign, Cartesian individual. If the experience of textuality

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[72] Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media,* 98-100.

[73] Galloway, *Interface Effect*, 29.

has now become a matter of "technogenesis," a process of becoming in concert with technics in "constantly changing assemblages," then play is the technique of integrating the human into technological apparatuses.[74]

Cinema, although it lacks a directly interactive interface—the prospective "user" cannot directly impact the course or look of the text itself—is a forerunner to today's playful technologies, and was itself received as a form of play in Weimar Germany.While for Huizinga it is a human capacity to create a sphere of play, in modernity recording media mark off our zones of play for us: a camera or microphone has anticipated and replaced the human's presence at the site and marked off the boundaries. It is not just that a medium like the cinema remembers for us, but that it puts slices of the real (and the imagined) in relation to each other, conveying rational, irrational, and affective associations, building a play-space for vision, affect, and action. The cinema processes the world for us—it plays for us, and one could even say (as the Dadaist Raoul Hausmann said of gramophones), it simply plays us.[75]

Methodology and Chapter Breakdown

As a history of technological media as play, *Spiel/Film* addresses Weimar as a Benjaminian image that "flashes forth" at the present's perpetual moment of crisis, as viewed from the backwards-looking vantage point of Benjamin's "angel of history."[76] Weimar's confrontation with social change, economic crisis, and cultural innovation provide the keys to understanding our own era. In dialectically relating the contemporary domain of game studies with the theories

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[74] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2012), ebook location 377.

[75] Raoul Hausmann, "Dada in Europa," *Der Dada* 3 (April 1920): 6. See also Chapter One of this dissertation.

[76] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 257.

and aesthetics of Weimar-era writers, artists and filmmakers, my dissertation aims to create the

historiographic "image" that Benjamin himself writes of in *The Arcades Project*:

> It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.[77]

Fittingly, Benjaminian historiography is a kind of play, a sudden and almost provisional flashing

together of images that forms an elucidating constellation. The oftentimes implicit constellation

that *Spiel/Film* "flashes" together is that of the emergent forms of play in Weimar Berlin and our

contemporary digital play. In assembling evidence from film, fan magazines, literature, city

spaces, Dadaist artwork and magazines, and games, it aims to unearth a culture of play that

illuminates how mediated play has developed and functions today. The goal of this dissertation,

through its synthesis of historical and theoretical approaches, is precisely to "recognize today's

life, today's forms, in the life and in the apparently secondary, lost forms of that [past] epoch."[78]

Doing so means showing the films within a concrete artistic context that elucidates their relation

to our current historical moment: in my readings I relate expressionist cinema to the games of

specularity and bodily transformation in modern art; spectacular cinema to the war-games

interpolated, then and now, as leisure-time activities; and constructivist cinema to the production

of city-space via maps and reportage.

One claim of this dissertation is that modernity has reshaped what it means to play, and

that, furthermore, the omnipresence of new forms of play in our life has disclosed the meaning of

play in a new light. Today it seems evident that play and games are endemic to human culture. It

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[77] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 462.

[78] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 458.

may be possible to posit play as an ontological facet of human being—a Heideggerian

existentiale—but the possibility of doing so emerges within and is conditioned by given

historical and discursive conditions. In the terms of a Foucauldian archaeology of knowledge,

play is formulated as discursive object by the relations that enable it "to appear, to juxtapose

itself with other objects, to situate itself in relation to them, to define its difference, its

irreducibility, and even perhaps its heterogeneity."[79] Our idea of play is produced by the

conditions that allow it to appear as such. The semioticians' discovery of "play" in textuality, for

example, takes place within a significant historical context, in which the formation of a new

"technical milieu" was altering the contours of subjects' interaction with media. Umberto Eco

discovered the informatic game of modern literature the year after the first video game,

Spacewar! (1961) was written on an early M.I.T. computer; Julia Kristeva emphasized the

interdependency of texts in making meaning the year packet-switching technologies culminate in

the formation of the ARPANET computer network (1969); Roland Barthes's *S/Z* (1970)

proposes the reader as a writer at the beginning of the decade that saw the popularization of

choose-your-own-adventure novels and *Dungeons and Dragons*.[80] That critical theory would

develop a theory of textual play at the historical moment that play in the sense of "engagement

with interactive media" was emerging is more than mere coincidence; rather, such work registers

that the discourse of the 20th century had altered what it means to play, expanded the realms of

play in the modern world, and turned the theory of play into a vital area of inquiry.

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[79] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 45.

[80] See: Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1974), 16; Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 19, 33-36; Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 78-79, 84-85.

Although the focus of this dissertation will be on cinema as the dominant new medium of the Weimar era, it is therefore a history of modern media in a broader sense; it attempts through Weimar to compile a story about how the real became a matter of play. Zielinski's media-archaeological history *Deep Time of the Media* traces the ways in which the realms of the possible compiled in media action-spaces came to have precedence over the actual in the modern era. Focusing on forgotten pathways of media development as a means of opening contingency within the historical record, Zielinski also captures the ways in which recording, cataloguing, and simulating the real gave rise to universalizing theories and singular images of the world, the "world-picture" Martin Heidegger warns against in his well-known, eponymous essay.[81] For the most part, *Spiel/Film* focuses on familiar pathways of media development, although Chapter Two argues that the history of modernity's proliferation of simulation technologies should include the *Kriegsspiel* or war-game, the technical medium which perhaps most literally creates action-spaces. War games and maps, alongside the cinema, are tools for compositing a world-picture, for analyzing, laying out, and clearing a field for future action. I draw on media studies, posthumanism, and a distinctly German lineage of thought on play.

To recapitulate the assertion made earlier regarding the hallucinatory scene in *Caligari*, the play of the cinema might be seen in two ways: on the one hand, it is the open flux of elements, mediated by light, that only provisionally congeal into a set formation, a process that involves the spectator in games of transformation; on the other hand, it can be seen as offering its spectator a sense of sovereignty over the imaged space, which is laid out before them as on a game board—or the related technology of a lithographic map. These two possibilities of play

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[81] Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Perennial, 1977), 115-154.

guide the structure of this dissertation. Early Weimar was experienced a stochastic field, a

chaotic flow of elements unmoored from their traditional, essential roots. The sense of play in

early Weimar visual culture corresponded to *paidia*, the possibility and horror of what seemed a

permanent state of suspense or hovering (*Schwebe*). In the latter two periods of Weimar, the New

Objectivity reigned, an aesthetic and cultural modus that tended toward structured play or *ludus*,

offering sovereignty through the enframing of a world within the bounds of a game. The chapters

of *Spiel/Film* follow this shift from free play to the restricted but illusorily sovereign play of the

game.

The first chapter, "Cinema and the Dada-Spiel: Play and the Reconfigured Human in

Weimar Culture," focuses on the playful but often serious-minded explorations of the dispersed,

fragmented, and/or reassembled subject in Weimar cinema and Berlin Dada. The Berlin group of

Dadaists were the sect of the international art movement most associated with the practice of

photomontage, and whose approach to art as a game would influence avant-garde movements for

decades. Dada art-games such as photomontage are allegories for the effects of modern media on

the body of the subject; I read *Orlacs Hände* (*The Hands of Orlac*, 1924), the classic

Expressionist film by Robert Wiene, as addressing the same issue. Wiene's film and its approach

to a human embodiment that has been rearranged, "played" by advanced media technologies has

more in common with the Dadaists than it does with the expressionism whose aesthetics it wears

on its sleeves. I argue that this is typical of "expressionist" cinema of the early Weimar years,

interpreting, in kind, the postwar film *Nerven* (*Nerves*, 1918) as drawing a comparison between

the reorganization of the human sensorium in war and in the cinema, and arriving at much the

same aesthetic place as the Dadaists. However cynical the Dadaist assault on art and society

seems, I understand them as both warning about the changing shape of the human in the technical milieu of modernity, and as open to the possibilities of the same.

Chapter Two, "Flights of Fancy: The *Kriegsspiel* and the Cinema in Weimar Germany," on the other hand, focuses on the dissemination of strategic modes of thought and the logic of the sovereign decision in Weimar society, through both the *Kriegsspiel* (war game) and the cinema. The institution of the *Kriegsspiel*, a part of officers' training in the Prussian military since the 19th century, demands the detached, cynical view of a game-player whose goal is ultimately the overcoming of time and space through virtual reality and media implements. Not only did the cinema, already in use in both military propaganda campaigns, become a tool in the practice and simulation of war, but, particularly in its spectacular narrative form, it also reflected the mode of vision typical of the *Kriegsspiel* player. Likewise, civilian *Kriegsspiel* enthusiasts in the Weimar era made reference to the cinema to explain and promulgate their chosen hobby. This chapter argues that the *Kriegsspiel* should be understood as part of the media context in which cinema arose, particularly given that the interfaces of the cinema and the war game would eventually, in a sense, fuse, in the form of the strategic video game. I analyze three films' use of a top-down perspective and a mobile camera—the mountain film *Der heilige Berg* (*The Holy Mountain*, 1925), the fantasy *Faust* (1926), and the biographical portrait of Fredrick II *Der alte Fritz* ("Old Fritz," 1928-9)—in respect to their commonality with the war-game's demarcation of a sovereign sphere for the gaze of the player. Moreover, with this chapter I wish to reintroduce some healthy skepticism regarding the positivity of Weimar's "stabilized" middle-period. As the growing popularity of genres like the nostalgic, militarist "Prussian film" and the formation of groups like the nationalistically inclined war game enthusisasts show us, the middle period of Weimar was also one in which militarism rebounded in Germany.

The third chapter, "Cinema and the Magic Circle: Weimar Berlin and Play-space" rediscovers ambivalence in the games of New Objectivity, in a comparison of the proto-city symphony *Die Stadt der Millionen* (1925) and the city symphony *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt* with the discourse of flanerie, particularly Franz Hessel's *Spazieren in Berlin* (1929), Benjamin's "Berlin Chronicle" (1930) and Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (*The Artificial Silk Girl*, 1932). However, it also performs a critique of the gendered nature of the play discovered in the spaces of the city and its texts. I argue that the cinema's affinity with the modern city is rooted in their mutual identification with exceptional spaces of play—heterotopia—in modernity. The modern world was full of such hemmed off "magic circles," among the most prominent of which were film studios and shooting locations, such as Babelsberg Studios in Potsdam and Tempelhofer Feld in Berlin. The latter location in particular drew the eye of flaneurs like Franz Hessel, as it was host to a variety of heterotopic places over the course of Berlin's history—including serving as the legendary site of the city's founding. The chapter considers the eye of the film camera, according to which the flaneur attempted to mold his own visual perceptions, as capable of a form of play that would equal the arbitrary juxtapositions and surprising passageways of the city itself. This play offered the possessor of such a gaze agency within the spaces of the city, the ability to remake the map of the city they inhabited, but as I show through a reading of both *Sinfonie der Großstadt* and Benjamin's "Berlin Chronicle," access to this form of play was often explicitly gendered, an exercise of male privilege in the city. Flanerie is a form of play, then, that ultimately maintains sovereignty over the spaces imaged, and the female figures caught within them.

The final chapter of *Spiel/Film,* "The Player and the Game: Ernst Lubitsch and Fritz Lang in Germany and Beyond," focuses on two important directors from the Weimar era to

discuss the presence of play in cinematic discourse. Ernst Lubitsch and Fritz Lang, the two

Weimar figures whose legacies loom largest over contemporary cinema, embody two major

aspects of play. A central strategy in the cinematic discourse of Ernst Lubitsch is to open up

room for the play of meaning, and his early comedies with Ossi Oswalda consist in playful

redeployments of cultural tropes that make use of suspended or ambivalent meanings. Fritz

Lang, on the other hand, as a former artillery scout during World War I, frequently thematized

"the game" and its implications. In films such as *Die Spinnen* (*The Spiders*, 1919), *Dr. Mabuse,*

der Spieler (*Dr. Mabuse, The Gambler*, 1922), *Spione* (*Spies*, 1929), *M* (1931), and *Das*

Testament des Dr. Mabuse (*The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, 1933), Lang interrogates the re-

making of social space as a game overseen by a shady but all-powerful entity. Living in exile

after Hitler's seizure of power (although Lubitsch had been working in the US of his own accord

since 1923), both of these influential directors would bring their divergently playful aesthetics to

classical Hollywood.

Prophetic Play: Johannes Baader Greets a Mediated Age

Weimar cinema has often been seen as constituting an alternative to Hollywood classicism, from

Lotte Eisner's emphasis on the lineage of German Romanticism and Expressionism that directly

influence the cinema, to Thomas Elsaesser's understanding of Weimar cinema as almost

intrinsically modernist and self-reflexive beneath its oft-donned Expressionist cloak.[82] Even as

more recent scholarship has begun analyzing the kinds of popular genres neglected for decades

the sense that Weimar cinema represents a unique artifact in its confrontation with the modern,

and thus with cinema itself, persists. At the root of the experimentation and self-reflexivity

typical of Weimar cinema is the understanding of the new medium as a play-form, a powerful

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[82] Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 42-43.

form of *Spiel* with implications for the contours of political subjectivity and the future shape of human life. The state of play that the Weimar subject encountered in the cinema, in the modern artwork, over the game board, and in the urban street inspired fantasies of both control and the loss of control, both of which we see allegorized in *Caligari*. This dissertation proposes a re-interpretation of much of Weimar culture in terms of modernity's expanding regime of play—understood in terms of the expansion of leisure spaces, of the games of rational configuration played by artists and filmmakers, and of the feedback loop of chaos let loose by sensory overload, social crises, and the resulting cynicism. *Spiel/Film*: *On Play in Weimar Cinema and Culture* proposes that we see the history of modern media as a history of the changing contours of human play—both what it is and how it is understood.

Already in 1914, on the eve of the First World War, Johannes Baader, an architect of little repute residing in Berlin-Steglitz, began a series of public pranks in which he declared the coming of a new world of play. His short volume *Vierzehn Briefe Christi* ("Fourteen Letters of Christ") consisted of fourteen brief missives to German public figures—and one to the Emperor of China—proclaiming the dawning of a new religion, with the author at its head. Baader's letters evidence the impact of Nietzsche and vitalist schools of thought, but they also perform an embrace of modern technologies and the world of play they institute. In the final letter of the *Vierzehn Briefe*, he claims that the humanity of a new Earth "know that they themselves and everyone around them are an inseparable part of a single God, in whose game they play their own independent games."[83] The messianic narrator of Baader's letters has achieved sovereignty over the earth by accepting the revelation that everything is a game, and installing himself above it. In an addendum to the published volume of his fourteen letters, allegedly written while Baader

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[83] Johannes Baader, *Vierzehn Briefe Christi und andere Druckschriften*, ed. Helmut Kreuzer and Karl Riha (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988), 43.

was in the Haus Bethauen sanatarium, he claims that in the worlds opened up by scientific

knowledge,

> All social distinctions disappear and become mere child's play [*Spielerei*]; and it's left only to the fools to complain about or flee from need, misery, and all that, because these things have made the spectacle [*Schauspiel*] of humanity unenjoyable. The rational player, secure in his game-rules [*Spielregeln*], will observe them as the seriousness or jest of the game, and either remake or retain them with a well-considered lightness.[84]

The possibility of this playful, Nietzschean lightness even in the face of the most serious events,

which would later inform Baader's activities as a Dadaist, is born of an "outrageously new and

different" configuration of life on earth, facilitated by "electric lightbulbs, the telephone, and

other progress in technology," in which we might include the two-decade-old cinema.[85] Baader

here announces the effect of what Lewis Mumford would call the "neotechnic era" of Western

society, in which "technics, instead of benefiting from its abstraction from life, will benefit even

more greatly by its integration with it."[86] For Baader, this integration of human and machine

exposed the world *as* play, and it was the human transformed by this new world-game who

would be able to master it.

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[84] Ibid, 50.
[85] Ibid, 43.
[86] Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, 1934), 254.

CHAPTER 1

PHOTOPLAY:
THE RECONFIGURED HUMAN IN BERLIN DADA AND EARLY WEIMAR CINEMA

A woman (Alexandra Sorina) arrives at the train station to meet her husband, a master pianist

returning from tour. In a handwritten letter, he has made the erotic promise that upon his return

"I will embrace you … my hands will slide over your hair … and I will feel your body beneath

my hands." Upon reading the letter in bed, she had clasped it to her chest, staring longingly into

space. And at that moment the film, *The Hands of Orlac*, had cut to an insert shot of a newspaper

clipping announcing her husband Orlac's concert, and then to a shot of Orlac (Conrad Veidt)

playing at a piano, in a medium shot from the opposite side of the instrument. A cut-in showed

us just his hands, isolating—or we might say severing—the object of the wife's fantasy, to show

them masterfully manipulating the keys, the act of playing given an erotic tinge by the letter and

the wife's clear anticipation of his touch. But now, at the train station, the crowd is moving

frantically about. "*UN ACCIDENT*!" The words whip onto the screen as the crowd rushes by,

sharing image space with the wife's worried body language rather than adhering to the usual

divide in silent film between image and text. "*À MONTGERON*." It will turn out that Orlac's

beautiful hands, his metaphorical phallus and guarantor of his organic, masculine wholeness,

have been lost in an accident. He will be saved—or rather, repaired—by an experimental surgery

that replaces his hands with those of a recently executed murderer. And the new hands will come

with a new subjectivity, violent impulses that override Orlac's peaceful nature and plunge him

into doubt about his own abilities and desires.

     The Hands of Orlac is expressionist allegory, an anxiety-ridden *mise-en-scene* of the

experience of World War I for men on the front and women at home (particularly in these

opening minutes), as understood through the newly introduced Freudian model of male subjectivity based around the castration complex. Orlac's corporeal disintegration isn't tied only to the mechanical violence of the train wreck that evokes the violence of the recent war. The film is also about prostheses, and specifically about media as prostheses. The alteration of Orlac's hands will also alter his world, disclose it in a new light: he will discover that even before the accident, he was reliant on the sound of his hands on record albums, on the ego reflected back to him in illustrated newspapers reporting on his concerts. Even before his accident, he was a construct, assembled from the many apparatuses facilitating and underlying his sense of self. As the isolation of his hands by the cinematic splice in the opening scene suggests at a metatextual level, before the accident Orlac's body was already subject to the power of media to dis- and re-assemble him. *Orlac* allegorizes the subject in the age of mechanical reproduction, and it does so through the metaphor of hands—the basis of the human's industriousness, its creative faculties, its play—being replaced as if the human body were a machine with interchangeable, standardized parts. This replacement exposes an already mediated world in which the human's interiority is paradoxically dependent on exterior technology. The expressionist elements of *The Hands of Orlac*—Veidt's expressive pantomime and tortured poses, the high-contrast lighting that shrouds his sparsely decorated rooms in shadows—belie postwar, posthumanist themes more redolent of Berlin Dada than of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's expressionist paintings.

In this chapter, I argue that *Orlac* reflects discourses around media and subjectivity that circulated through early Weimar culture, specifically concerning the way technological media "play" the human subject by prostheticizing bodily and cognitive functions previously held to be organic. In the Enlightenment tradition of Friedrich Schiller and Immanuel Kant, play was a cognitive process, an activity of the contemplative mind assembling the empirical world; the

cinema displaces this supposedly purely cognitive facility by replicating this process. Montage would therefore be a form of cogitation, a processing of empirical data: in an era before computing, the cinema's mechanical processing of the real simulated the cognitive play thought to be essential to human subjectivity. Brewing in the culture of early Weimar was the recognition that as mechanization changed human embodiment, human play was also being relocated into mechanical apparatuses. Human hands therefore became a contested discursive site: a visual mechanism interrupting the process of human cogitation foregrounded and problematized the role of the hands in organic human play and, more broadly, the agency and freedom of the organic human subject.

For a Weimar film like *Orlac* to speak of the mechanization of play through the metaphor of the hands rather than that of the eye may seem counterintuitive, as cinema in the classical and silent is easily contrasted with today's digital media by its exclusive engagement of the eyes and ears. However, the hands have not always been as absent from cinema as one might imagine. Weimar filmgoers who had been around for the medium's earliest days could well remember a context in which moving pictures were closely linked to manipulation and play. As suggested by a brief scene in Gerhard Lamprecht's realist melodrama *Die Unehelichen* (*The Illegitimate Children*, 1926), a bored youngster of the Wilhelmine or Weimar era might be able to wander into a cheap *Spielhaus*, or gambling house, and encounter there a kinetoscope among other mechanical games. Given this history, Wanda Strauven has suggested that we might now consider cinema within the broader history of games, and consider a more fully embodied model of the cinematic spectator. She argues that "within the context of the emerging technical media at the turn of last century (and the appearance of wireless telegraphy operators and typists), the key

element of the human body is the hand, that congenital prosthesis distinguishing men from animals."[1]

Even when the cinema does not directly occupy the hand, tactility is evoked by effects in cinema such as composite images that remind us of the images' two-dimensionality, or by the cut to extreme close-up that brings things illusorily within our grasp. The hands are at stake in the cinema because, as Vivian Sobchack argues, "whether human or cinematic, vision is informed and charged by other modes of perception it always implicates a *sighted body* rather than merely transcendental eyes. What is seen on the screen by the seeing that is the film has a texture and a solidity."[2] Walter Benjamin asserts as much in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" when he insists on film, in its shock-effects, as a "tactile" medium. Benjamin roots cinema's tactility to our desire to grasp, to play with, what we see, and noting that "in film, the element of semblance has been entirely displaced by the element of play."[3] Nevertheless, the tactility of the cinema requires a habituation to the technical interface, an integration of the subject's body with that of the cinema.

The cultural force most cognizant of the centrality of play in this changing socio-cultural field was Dada, the Berlin sect of which was more politically radical and more reflective on the machine than its cousins in Paris, New York, and Zurich. Berlin Dada (1918-1923) was intensely conscious of the new regime of semi-mechanical, semi-organic play, and the reformulation of the subject in a mechanized milieu. Extrapolating a theory of media as play from the work of Berlin Dada gives us a new way of understanding early-Weimar films like *Orlac* that allegorize a crisis

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[1] Wanda Strauven, "The Observer's Dilemma: To Touch or Not to Touch," in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications,* ed. Jussi Parikka (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 152-153.

[2] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 133.

[3] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 120, 124 (note 22).

in subjectivity. An assemblage of parts operated by exterior forces, in early Weimar discourse the human being becomes analogous to a photomontage, cut to pieces and arbitrarily reassembled through the play of the media. In what follows I reconstruct a Dadaist theory of cinema as play, using support from the Dadaists and discourse on and around the cinema, and conclude with a reading of *Orlac* in this light.

The Emergence of the *Dada-Spiel* in the Wake of World War I

The years between the end of the First World War and the release of *Orlac* in late 1924 had been among the most tumultuous in German history. This early period of the Weimar Republic included the German Revolution in November of 1918, leftist uprisings and their violent suppression in 1919 and 1920, the Kapp Putsch of 1920, the assassination of Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau in 1922, and the inflation crisis that culminated with the French occupation of the Ruhr valley in 1923. Only in 1924, with the introduction of the Dawes Plan and of the new Reichsmark currency, had the German economy—and society—begun to stabilize. But meanwhile, cynicism had become the defining mood of Germany's young Republic. According to Peter Sloterdijk, the Weimar Republic was ground zero of "enlightened false consciousness," the cynical resignation that dominates in modern societies. For Sloterdijk, the Weimar Republic began with an act of cynicism: the Social Democrats' (SPD) use of the right-wing *Freikorps* (the "Free Corps" paramilitary) to smash rebellions by the left in late 1918 and early 1919. In doing so, the SPD assumed the monarchy's reaction to the Spartacists, using the tools of power they professed to oppose. Inflation, meanwhile, revealed the fraudulence of the abstract exchange value of modern currency: in 1923, paper money becomes mere *Spielgeld* (play-money), worthless papers to be given to your children so they can pretend, just as adults do, that it carries

value.[4] Hereafter, enlightened false consciousness—having the knowledge that reality is a façade, a construct, a fraud, but behaving in the same way as before—spread throughout the disillusioned republic. The real became *Spiel*: everything seemed a game, an illusionistic world governed by arbitrary rules, but one everyone plays along with anyway.

Berlin Dada's coherence as a group coincides almost precisely with the crisis years in the early Weimar Republic. To Sloterdijk the art movement revealed precisely "how modern ideology functions: to establish values and act as if one believed in them, and then to show that one has not the slightest intention of believing in them."[5] Despite the human stakes—and bloody outcomes—of these years, Dada, transplanted from Zurich to Berlin in April 1918 and more or less disbanded by the end of 1923, ventured the claim that everything was merely a game. Labeled "*Letzte Meldung*," or "Final Notice," Johannes Baader's piece "Dada-Spiel" in June 1919's first issue of *Der Dada* encapsulated the approach of Dada to the fiery political context of immediate postwar Germany:

> **Dada-Spiel**
> 'Not the World Revolution, but only the loving God can save us,' says Germania in the *Neu Berliner* of 6. VI. I. But the loving God is only a Dadaist fiction, which no one can deny who has observed and studied, in praxis and from all sides, this intangible fable-being that changes according to every taste; thus one would better hold, instead of to the fiction, to the creator *dada* itself. For dada is the creator of all things and God and the World Revolution and Judgement Day in one simultaneously. It is no fiction, but is tangible to people. And the game that is played in heaven between the stars is the dada game [*Dada-Spiel*], and all beings living and dead are its players.[6]

Baader's "final notice" to Germany's moral gatekeepers mocks religious attempts to diffuse the revolution by offering an opposing cosmology—that of the universe as a game. As discussed in

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[4] Bernd Widdig, *Inflation and Culture in Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 96.

[5] Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 401.

[6] Johannes Baader, "Dada-Spiel" in *Der Dada* 1 (June 1919): 3. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

the Introduction, it was an idea Baader had been toying with, in his pre-Dada and even pre-war days, for some time.[7] The advent of Dada gave Baader a name for the game: here as elsewhere the term refers not to a particular artistic style or group of thematic concerns, but to a fluid, ever-moving play of meaning.[8] It precedes God, Baader implies, because the Dada-Spiel is that to-and-fro play "between the stars" that must happen before a category such as "God" comes into being. Play is no longer a human facility, but a universal, mechanistic, distinctly non-human phenomenon.

Predicting *Orlac*, the uncertainty of postwar German society is often imaged in Dadaist work as a crisis of the body effected by new forms of technology, particularly new media forms. The *Dada-Spiel* was not merely a reflection of postwar cynicism, but was also a response to the mechanization of processes previously understood to be eminently organic. Factory machines that could perform human labor were mirrored by audio, visual, and tactile technologies in both white-collar labor and everyday life. The early-20th century "discourse network," Friedrich Kittler's term for the system of techniques and technologies that produce knowledge and subjectivity in a given epoch, was one in which machines had interposed themselves into the established feedback loops the previous "romantic" discourse network had understood as natural. While romanticism understood writing as an immediate expression of the soul, Kitller argues that the typewriter delinks the hand and eye at the crucial moment of inscription, emphasizing the arbitrariness of the letter as sign. "Instead of the play between Man the sign-setter and the

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[7] See *Johannes Baader, Vierzehn Briefe Christi und andere Druckschriften*, Vol 2 of *Trouvaillen: Editionen zur Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte*, eds. Helmut Kreuzer and Karl Riha (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988), 42, 43. Baader's *Acht Weltsätze* were also published with individual explications (*Erläuterungen*) in the December 1918 issue of *Die Freie Strasse*, which Baader guest-edited. Johannes Baader, "Neue Grundfaße," *Die Freie Strasse* 10 (December 1918): 3.

[8] Johanna Drucker, *The Visible World: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909-1923* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

writing surface … there is the play between type and its Other, completely removed from subjects."[9] Ironically, the originary *Dada-Spiel* that precedes the universe is discovered in the dissolution of body and consciousness in modern, mechanical play.

In Kittler's concept of the "flight of ideas" in modernity—which finds a correlate in Bernard Stiegler's "prostheticization of consciousness"—the human is detached from the production of discourse, and mental processes formerly conceived of as inherently internal become external.[10] Dada poetry is one manifestation of this flight of ideas for Kittler: it registers the splintering and scattering of the Romantic subject into technical media. The "*Ach*!" ("Oh!") of the Romantic poet becomes, in Raoul Hausmann's typewriter-mediated hands, ""OFFEAHBDC/BDQ[image of hand pointing downward],,qjyE!"—the text of Hausmann's *Phonetic Poem* (1918). Berlin Dada was reflective not only of the way in which political crises had turned German life into a cruel game waged by unseen forces, but also on the way in which concurrent advances in technical media had dislocated play from the human into the machine.

Photomontage also recorded this transfer of organic play into the machine. Hausmann's photomontage *Dada Siegt!* images a fictional Dada control room, which includes a profile photograph of Richard Huelsenbeck connected at the mouth to a typewriter by a excised strip of his manifesto, also entitle "*Dada Siegt!*" The text on strip reads "*feineren Naturkräfte*," or "dignified natural powers," but Huelsenbeck's words are not flowing from his mouth in the style of a speech bubble. Rather, the words proceed into his mouth, suggesting that even the words of Dadaist rebellion originate within the machine, rather than a human interior. The *feineren Naturkraft* that had been transplanted into the machines behind the new media was play,

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[9] Ibid, 195.
[10] Ibid, 238. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 3: Cinematic Time*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 4.

understood since Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) as essentially organic. The

philosopher's "third critique" unified the previously analyzed faculties of cognition

(understanding and imagination, or pure reason and practical reason) by posting a mediating

third term: the power of judgment, defined as the play of the two other faculties.[11] Similarly,

Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* pinpoints the free play between the

"formal and sensuous" instincts within man as the source of beauty and of "natural" human

freedom. Art itself arises for Schiller from an "instinct of play" or a play-impulse within the

human.[12] Play therefore exists apart from any particular medium or object—indeed, Kant argues

that for the purposes of the reflecting power of judgment, natural and technical objects are

treated by cognition as interchangeable. In other words, the nature of play and therefore of the

human remains unchanged no matter which object it takes up, a position that Dadaist

photomontage attempts to expose as untenable in an age in which machines absorb the human's

feinere Natürkräfte.[13] New forms of media—particularly photographs and the cinema—had

altered this relationship by virtue of their prosthetic relationship to the human sensorium, their

mechanization of perception and their simulation, through montage, of cognition.

  Although Dada in any of its incarnations would produce few films, the cinema was a

major reference point for the Berlin Dadaists. According to Peter Bürger, cinematic montage was

a crucial influence on the 20th-century avant-garde as a whole, allowing avant-garde artists to

defy classical notions of artistic unity using the very (new) tools of dominant society.[14] But

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[11] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26-27.
[12] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Hoboken, NJ: Generic NL Freebook Publisher), 25.
[13] See Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 21-24, 41-43.
[14] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 73, 78.

Dada, and particularly Berlin Dada, more directly incorporated cinematic aesthetics into their visual work than it had been for previous avante-gardists such as the Cubists and the Futurists. The title of George Grosz and John Heartfield's photomontage *Life and Activity in Universal City at 12.05 Midday* (1919) directly asserts the influence of the cinema on its form, aligning the photomontage's representation of a world of images in constant flux with giant film studios like Carl Laemmle's Universal City—so-called *Filmstädte*, or film-cities, which would soon be a prominent part of the German film industry as well. In a heap of photographs and text that almost resembles a landfill, *Life and Activity* combines portions of headlines and glamor shots appear alongside phrases in English from American entertainment magazines, folded-up film strips, a car tire, a telephone receiver, and part of the logo of Fox Film Corporation. Opposite the Fox logo on the upper left-hand side of the composition hovers the word "Dada," that flexible signifier coined by Tristan Tzara, seeming to brand the game being played with the photographic traces of the real—the *Dada-Spiel*.

As suggested by *Universal* City, the photographing—or filming—of the world and its re-composition in montage suspend the rational and coordinates of space and time, instituting a whirring world with no discernible order. Among the other legible words mingled with the images in the montage is "Photoplay," the name of an American film magazine and a term for the cinema that functions here as a punning description of the montage's form. Photoplay and, as in this example, wordplay, were hallmarks of Dadaist aesthetics because such puns place signifiers into a state of suspension. An element in a montage "could not be merely or completely reduced to a surrogate, a stand-in, or sign for the referred-to context or object," but rather hesitated between possible meanings, in the suspense of play.[15] The Dadaist and Surrealist

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[15] Drucker, *The Visible Word*, 84.

author Yvan Goll would write of cinema as "the suspension of time and space … a playing of possibilities that could sometime in the future, create the need for social change."[16] Unmoored from its prefilmic context, the photographic or cinematic signifier is up for grabs; Grosz and Heartfield's montage has more in common with a rebus puzzle than it does with a painting, the juxtaposed photos signifying partially or obscurely. *Universal City* reflects a world of play, composed entirely of images that may be re-ordered at will: it is an ambivalent cinematic world in suspended time-space, where not even the nature of the real is certain anymore.

There is some debate as to the origins of photomontage—Grosz and Heartfield claim to have come up with the concept while briefly working for Germany military's Bild-und-Film-Amt ("BuFA"), which would make photomontage a direct reflection upon cinematic principles.[17] Hausmann and Hannah Höch, on the other hand, maintained that they and Baader had been inspired to invent photomontage by homemade wartime postcards commemorating military service, in which the photographed face of the service member would be pasted into a lithographic illustration of the location of his service.[18] While only Grosz and Heartfield's version of events highlights cinema as a direct influence, this influence is already apparent in the agreed-upon appellate "photomontage." Moreover, taking the two origin stories together—it is quite possible that the two wings of Berlin Dada invented photomontage independently of each other—we gain an accurate picture of Dadaist aesthetics as responding both to the personal and cultural schisms caused by the war and the sensorial revolution effected by new media.

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[16] Yvan Goll, "The Cinedram," trans. Don Reneau, in *The Promise of Cinema: Germany Film Theory 1907-1933,* eds. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 52-54.

[17] Hanne Bergius, *"Dada Triumphs!" Dada Berlin, 1917-1923: Artistry of Polarities*, Vol 5 of *Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada*, ed. Stephen C. Foster, trans. Brigitte Pichon (New Haven: G.K. Hall & Co. 2003), 183.

[18] Raoul Hausmann, "Fotomontage," *Am Anfang war Dada*, eds. Karl Riha and Günter Kämpf (Giessen: Anabas, 1992), 49.

Photomontages such as Hannah Höch's *Cut with the Kitchen Knife DADA Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany* (*Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser DADA durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands,* 1919) suggest mobile, rapid, simultaneous, and shocking perceptions characteristic of the cinema, but they also image a body in crisis, cut to pieces and reassembled by politics, war, and technological media.

Wherever photomontage's origins, its emergence speaks to larger social concerns with the impact of industry, rationalization, and the media on the human body and sensorium, shared across cultural and political strata. The conservative Walther Rathenau, AEG Chairman and future Foreign Minister, understood turn-of-the century German society to be in the midst of a "second industrial revolution" that was reorganizing the human itself. Rathenau would write that in Berlin in particular, "technology and the human body were being fused into a single organism," thanks to advances in household, industrial, and entertainment technologies.[19] Cinema was, for many, a foremost concern in the domain of the effect of technology on the body. After the war, Berlin would become the uncontested capital of film production in Berlin, and for many cultural observers, the cinema was an aesthetic form precisely suited to times of accelerating socio-cultural, even bodily, disintegration. The well-known *Kinodebatte* ("cinema-debate") of Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany would never concern merely the superficiality of cinema's animated views, but also the new forms of subjectivity it helped institute as part of a new cultural field. "The cinematograph is a new visual organ: an expanded and improved eye," early film theorist Gustav Melcher wrote in 1909, and thanks to its capacity for sensory storage,

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[19] Quoted in Andreas Killen, *Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 26.

"Memory has ceased to be dependent on that off-white and fickle mass we call the brain. The modern man does not remember. He collects and uses "cinegrams."[20]

Without an interior, organic memory, the human becomes, particularly in the tradition of German thought, less human, as it depends on interface with the machine for the most basically human cognitive and physical activity—namely, play. In 1916, a short philosophical monograph posited that cinema had already created *Kinomenschheit*, or "cinema-humanity." According to its author, Richard Guttmann, cinema was a sign of a culture at the end of its "capability for development" and belonged "in its own way … within the frame of the World War," inasmuch as it constructs a human detached from the humans around it, turning that human into an "a-personal life-machine."[21] According to Guttmann, with its illusory play of presence and absence, film teaches its audience to judge by appearance, leading to the dominance of *Schein* (appearance) over *Sein* (being) and preventing even a fleeting insight beyond surface phenomena. His conclusions are prescient with regard to the Dadaists as well as future film theory, as he argues that such a confusion of appearance with essence gives rise to fantasies of total knowledge and superiority, a persistent belief in a subjective wholeness the *Kinomensch* no longer possesses: at the cinema, "one is stupefied but nevertheless has the feeling that he knew everything in advance. The look into strangers' fates is opened, and with the superiority of one who knows all, the *Kinomensch* allows the events to flicker by him."[22] The *Kinomensch* is thus the organic-mechanical subject who unquestioningly allows superficial traces, mere *Schein*, to be

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[20] Gustav Melcher, "On Living Photography and the Film Drama," trans. Alex H. Bush and Jon Cho-Polizzi, *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory 1907-1933*, eds. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 18.

[21] Richard Guttmann, *Die Kinomenschheit* (Wien-Leipzig: Anzengruber-Verlag Brüder Suschitzky, 1916), 18, 5, 8.

[22] Ibid, 28-29.

reorganized for him into an order he mistakes as essence, *Sein*. The cognitive play that should have allowed the human to process and organize its own perception of the world has been preempted; the elements of that world have been played with and arranged in advance of the human subject's arrival on the scene. Guttmann warns in all seriousness against allowing children into cinemas, as the child "should live in a small, sweet, un-besmirched world! It should play!"[23] In its status as false memory and *ersatz* imagination, film exteriorizes play, which is no longer allowed to exist within the mind but is activated and determined by the machine. For Guttmann, as later for Berlin Dada and *Orlac*, what the play of technical media suspends, above all else, is the human.

Among the media-theoretical arguments prefigured by Guttman's *Kinomenschheit* is that of Claus Pias, who in his essay "The Game Player's Duty: The User as Gestalt of the Ports" argues that computer games have changed, or at the very least revealed the limits of, this philosophical-anthropological definition of play. "Computer games … modify Schiller's paradigm … Specifically, something like an interface moves into this center and mediates the contradiction between machine and human, hardware and wetware, thereby both creating and formatting that which the human being as user actually is."[24] Play in the age of gaming now takes place at the interface, the "state of 'being on the boundary'" between human and medium, rather than in the mind of the rational subject.[25] Pias's evidence for this claim ranges from post-Second World War military simulation innovations to the video game *Pong* (1971), in which the user perceives itself as in control but is actually being trained to respond reflexively to the "ping"

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[23] Ibid, 12.

[24] Claus Pias, "The Game Player's Duty: The User as the Gestalt of the Ports," in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications,* ed. Jussi Parikka (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011) 166.

[25] Alexander Galloway, *The Interface Effect.* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2012), 33.

of a machine. But Guttmann's thesis, as well as the contemporaneous written and graphic work

by the Berlin Dadaists, compel one to wonder to what extent this discursive and material shift in

the meaning of play and the human is specific to computer games and the rise of digital

technologies; according to the Dadaists, at least, machines began playing us long before the

digital turn.

A 1920 article by the "Dadasoph" Raoul Hausmann resgisters this reversal. In "Dada in

Europa," published in the third issue of *Der Dada*, Hausmann ponders,

> Why have a mind [*Geist*] in a world that proceeds mechanically? What is man? A now-funny, now-sad affair, played and sung by its own production, by its milieu. See, you believe you're thinking and making decisions, you think you're original—and what happens? The milieu, your somewhat dusty atmosphere, has switched on the Soul-Motor and the thing runs solely on: murder, adultery, war, peace, death, swindling, *valuta*—everything slips from your hands, it is impossible for you to suppress something: you are simply played.[26]

The image of the human here is one that, rather than being defined by its capacity for cognitive

play, is played by its newly mechanical, "somewhat dusty" milieu; play has been relocated from

Kant and Schiller's reasoning mind into the machine. The German Romantic tradition of the

human soul and the original genius who gives expression to it have been subsumed by the

mechanical unoriginality of the "Soul-Motor," fueled by the interlocking phenomena, both

mechanical and organic (machine and body), both social and ontological (war and death), that

comprise the subject. The rhetorical questions that open this passage point to the powerlessness

of a human subject that has been thoroughly mechanized, determined and overdetermined by

outside forces, as Hausmann stages a reversal of the definition of the human in the German

Enlightenment. If for Schiller, "man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man,

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[26] Raoul Hausmann, "Dada in Europa," *Der Dada* 3 (April 1920): 6.

and he is only completely a man when he plays," for Hausmann and the Dadaists a human is modern because they are played.[27]

Although the primary metaphor in the passage refers to motors—one might presume engine motors—the human who is both "played and sung by its own production" in 1920 is at the mercy of a gramophone needle, as in German one also plays (*spielen* or *abspielen*) a recording. Playing a record is not playing a game, but there is play inherent in the action of a gramophone, if play is understood, as in Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, as as a "to-and-fro movement" that reaches only presentation through its players.[28] With the gramophone, the human no longer sings but is sung, does not quite play but is played. In Kittler's words, the gramophone seems to sing "to a listening ear, telling it to sing, as if the music were originating in the brain itself, rather than emanating from stereo speakers or headphones."[29] Play, formerly human's cognitive means of mediation between his sensuous and formal impulses, now has an interlocutor, technical media, which in its reproduction of the human sensorium plays the listening subject. Hausmann's "dusty milieu" sings itself into being through the subject, reaching its self-representation within, and by means of the interface with, that listener.

The formatting of the human being in Weimar Germany is played out in devices of mechanical reproduction rather than of digital simulation, as an interface—a soul-motor—begins to move to the center of human play. In his photomontage *Selbstbildnes als Dadasoph* (*Self-portrait of the Dada-soph*, 1920)*,* Hausmann depicts this soul-motor as a film camera. The composition depicts a reclining human figure whose face is a pressure gauge and whose brain

[27] Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 29.

[28] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (New York: Continuum, 2004), 92.

[29] Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone Film Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), 37.

appears to be a film projector or camera. Dadaist satire here reverses the already familiar paradigm of cinema as an extension of human vision, suggesting that when a human interfaces with a film, the technology is interiorized, creating a new human physiology. Here, we see more explicitly that what "plays" the human are new forms of recording technologies that extend or replace human capacities, and in doing so make the human play, run its soul-motor.

Such photomontages can be seen as an overt commentary on the reorganization of the body and of consciousness in the milieu of technical media. But Wilhelmine and early Weimar films—from which Dada derived much of their inspiration—were already highly reflective about the dissociative effects of modern technical developments, often in almost Dadaist fashion. German Expressionist cinema often features figures who "appear as metaphors for the screen and its aesthetic," from doppelgängers produced by double exposure in *Der Student von Prag* (*The Student from Prague,* 1913), to the nefarious Dr. Caligari and his surrogate Cesare in *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligaris* (1919), the *petit bourgeois* beset by hallucinations in *Phantom* (1922), and the projected cut-out figures animated by Lotte Reiniger for Arthur Robison's *Schatten* (*Shadows*, 1923).[30] These films are often about a crisis in subjectivity precipitated by the flight of memory or an overwhelming stimulus, represented by powerful visual sequences that defy rational assimilation. The drama *Nerven* (*Nerves*, 1919) illustrates how so-called German Expressionist film often relied on a Dada-esque aesthetic to achieve its effects. A film ostensibly about the dangers of nervous disorders, the film tells the story of the capitalist Roloff, who acquires a form of neurasthenia (now referred to as PTSD) when his factory collapses. Meanwhile, the radical leader Preacher Johannes gets his own case of "nerves" from his guilt over his love for Roloff's sister. Roloff's melancholia and paranoia, represented in visual

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[30] Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer with Chris Cullens (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990)*,* 246-247.

hallucinations that chaotically superimpose different spaces and time, is exacerbated by the persistent threat of revolt from workers whose ire has been stoked by Johannes. The film ends with the two opponents putting aside their differences as Roloff's radicalized sister, Marja, dies of injuries sustained in a fire—the relationship between labor and management healed via the sacrifice of the New Woman, a plot device that predicts *Metropolis* (1927).

Nerven's avant-garde method of representing Roloff's breakdown through double exposure and image compositing belies the conservative resolution of its plot. This contradiction is nowhere more clear than when Roloff, in his final delusional state, runs from his garden into his home, perceiving himself to be surrounded and pursued by crowds, the image of which is superimposed over his terrified face (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: *Nerven* (1919)

Such images speak to radical new methods of composition, an anti-rational montage of discrete

space-times, composed of cinema's indexical traces of the real world. The sequence recalls

Guttmann's argument about a world reduced to *Schein*, its images played with in the machine.

Even for Guttmann, a trick or animated sequence carries the possibility of the "mystical

animation of inanimate objects," which may bring closer to the level of observation a previously

invisible element of *Sein*.[31] In such an ambivalent flood of images, the spectator might be

allowed the room for sovereign cognitive play, instead of outsourcing that play to the montage.

In *Nerven,* however, the play that would bring this mystic meaning to the surface is undercut by

the images' coding as aberrations, as a problem to be transcended by recourse to religion and re-

establishment of the normative ego. The film's momentary play with rapidly alternating views,

simultaneous visions, and sensory overload, which at times clouds the spectator's ability to

establish the film's "exterior" reality from Roloff's "interior" hallucinations, is only a

momentary suspension of the normative order, re-establishing a stable subject position by the

film's conclusion.

A film like *Nerven* represents precisely the paradoxical moment of potential in the new

media on which the Dadaists would seize: although seeming to resolve itself into staid,

hierarchical forms, the dominant discourse avails itself of a medium that is in some ways

inherently modernist, inherently playful—the cinema. The cinema, as Thomas Elsaesser has

written, in its "bricolage of its mechanical, optical, chemical processes on the one hand, and the

homogeneity, unity, illusory cohesion of its effects on the other," might be considered a

"quintessentially Dada artifact."[32] That is, in what Elsaesser understands as a "discrepancy" in

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[31] Guttmann, *Kinomenschheit*, 30.
[32] Thomas Elsaesser, "Dada/Cinema?" in *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolf E.
Kuenzli (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 13-14.

the medium itself, cinema constructs a continuous experience or a narrative world based on ruptures and discontinuity, the very irony within modern experience to which Dadaist play sought to bring attention through their photomontages and disruptive events. Or, as Raoul Hausmann the "Dadasoph" put it more succinctly, "Our art is already today film! Equally process, plastic, and image!"[33] Dadaist art, literature, and cinema brought this intermedial tension to the foreground, emphasizing the arbitrary play of cinematic effects on reality, the body, and consciousness—thinking cinema (as the most quintessentially modern of modern media) *as* play.

The ambivalent, playful prostheticity of media is also a concern of *Orlac*, but rather than locate the threatening new prosthesis at the eye or ear, the film uses the hands as a metaphor for the ways technical media affect subjectivity, injecting unwanted desires, objectives, and actions. That *The Hands of Orlac* uses tools reminiscent of Dada's—portraying the body as subject to the effects of (photo)montage—to allegorize the media's reorganization of the human subject may testify to such tools' ultimate ineffectiveness in offering an unassimilable alternative to mainstream mass culture. Ultimately, after all, the normative order is restored to Orlac's world, and the spectator is able to assimilate the representation of Orlac's uncannily reorganized body into an unchanged schema of society. Dadaist images of disintegrating worlds and bodies remade through the interface with outside forces may constitute a warning, but not much of a challenge. As strange and unsettling as it remains, *Orlac* may be read as the beginning of a process in which the disintegrating play of the media has been ideologically recuperated. After all, as we might observe from the vantage point of 2019, there are few more traditionally Dadaist activities than the destructive energy, rattling shocks, and surprising spatial juxtapositions of *Grand Theft Auto*

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[33] Hausmann, "Presentismus gegen den Puffkeismus der teutschen Seele," in *Am Anfang war Dada*, eds. Karl Riha and Günter Kämpf, (Giessen: Anabas, 1992), 148.

(1997-), a game-world that realizes the irreverence of the *Dada-Spiel* without any of its radical intent.

Orlac Plays Along: The Hands in the Cinema

The absurd plot of *The Hands of Orlac*—recounted at the outset of this chapter—about incomplete humans and their interchangeable body parts may well indeed evoked for Berlin viewers the Dadaists' sardonic representation of the inorganic human. One painting in particular, George Grosz's *Diabolo Spieler* (*Diabolo Player*, 1920) takes as its subject the replacement of a bourgeois's hands by technological implements. In it, a seated figure in a nondescript urban apartment plays the titular game, in which an hourglass-shaped object (a diabolo) is made to spin via its suspension on a string between two wooden rods held by the player. Imitating the style of Giorgio de Chirico's *Pittura Metafisica* paintings, Grosz uses an inconsistent perspectivalism to represent the space of the apartment surrounding the Diabolo-player, its walls and objects oriented toward slightly different vanishing points. The apartment is strewn with geometrical shapes that would seem to be its resident's possessions, but which remain abstract and featureless, signifying not particular objects but the images' status as illusory constructions. The humanoid figure itself, though implicitly male, is otherwise as indistinctive as the beige walls and drab orange carpet of his apartment. With no face whatsoever (his head a blank, white ovoid) and a body assembled out of discrete metal sections that only resemble a blue suit, the figure suggests a male automaton. Any doubt he is mechanical is settled by a glance at his chest, where a panel hangs open, giving us a glimpse at the interlocking gears in the interior of his torso.

Grosz's puppet resembles the later filmic portrait of Orlac in that his loss of agency is connected to the loss and replacement of limbs: he appears to be missing a part of his leg, below what would be, in an organic human, the left knee, evoking perhaps the image of the war-

wounded veteran. But he seems to be as indifferent to his missing part as is the painting's cool

gaze; he is the modern subject alienated from his own body. The automaton in the painting

predicts Grosz's later (1925) observations about "today's young merchant": "ice-cold, aloof, he

hangs the most radical things in his apartment," but, as we observe, is merely mechanically

playing a solipsistic game.[34] "The merchant plays along" might therefore be an appropriate

alternate title for Grosz's painting. The paintings suggests a dynamic model of human

embodiment that focuses on feedback loops between the subject and its technical milieu, rather

than imagining a human as fully formed and wholly organic before its contact with the alleged

exteriorizations of technology. It is, as Matthew Biro has suggested, the image of a "Dada

cyborg," a statement on the radical hybridity of organism and machine in modernity.[35]

In *Diabolo Spieler*, the Diabolo game is, in fact, incorporated into the bodily schema of

its subject: easy to miss on a first glance over the painting is that the automaton figure has no

hands. Instead, the two sticks of the Diabolo game interface directly with the ends of his arms—

we must revise our earlier assertion that he is "holding" the diabolo game. Here, six decades

before the popularization of computerized video games with their aptly named "controllers," a

game has replaced the player's hands in an artificial—with its contradictory perspectival lines, an

imperfectly simulated—world. The painting implies that the rotation of the diabolo on the string

is tied in some way to the rotation of the mechanical gears visible inside the automaton's chest.

For Grosz's idle diabolo player, recalls Gadamer's stance that "the movement of the

game is not simply the free area in which one 'plays onseself out,'" but instead is where the

"self-representation of the game involves the player's achieving, as it were, his own self-

[34] George Grosz and Wieland Herzfelde, *Art is in Danger - An Attempt at Orientation*, trans. Gabrielle Bennett, in *Dada*, ed. Rudolf Kuenzli (New York: Phaidon Press, 2006), 229.
[35] Matthew Biro, *The Dada Cyborg*: *Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

representation by playing, i.e., representing something."[36] The diabolo game is one in which the player is compelled to maintain the ball's two-and-fro movement, rather than determine where it goes, and for Grosz's automaton, this seems an existential necessity, as the automaton's interior motor might stop turning if the diabolo halts its motion. Dada's "attempt to represent a new human subject, in representations that were critical of the claim to interiority made by the bourgeoisie" is here routed through a depiction of play as a material process that shapes the techno-organic player, replacing the player's hands in order to have access to his soul.[37]

Orlac's drama of hand-replacement and personal disintegration is explicitly tied to industrial and media technologies—violent mechanical accidents, record players, and newspapers—whereas Grosz's painting concerns a toy. However, the diabolo can be read as a metonym for a number of other technologies of diversion in modern Germany. Although versions of the diabolo game have existed in China since the 12th century, in Western Europe and America it was a new toy, arriving in Germany in 1908, whose advent was facilitated by colonialism and industrial production. In the context of discussion about "Americanization" in modern Germany that would only grow more heated as the 1920s progressed, the toy was identified with the supposedly hypermodern society of America.[38] Given Dada's rebellious fascination with, appreciation for, and appropriation of all things discursively positioned as American, the diabolo game in Grosz's painting should be understood as a figure for other forms of culture allegedly imported from the US, the most prominent of which was undoubtedly the cinema. This metonymical replacement of toy for cinema, although quite the conceptual leap to a

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[36] *Ibid*, 96, 97.

[37] Martin Ignatius Gaughan, "The Prosthetic Body in Early Modernism: Dada's Anti-Humanist Humanism," in *Dada Culture: Critical Texts on the Avant-Garde*, ed. Dafydd Jones, (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 146.

[38] Bergius, *"Dada Triumphs!"*, 221.

modern mindset that views the movies as primarily a narrative medium, is more plausible in the context of the early 20th century, not long after cinema had developed out of the popular optical toys and fairground attractions of a couple of decades earlier.

Further establishing that relationship between hand and cinema was a frequent object of cinematic discourse will elucidates the self-reflexive, allegorical bent of *The Hands of Orlac*. *Diabolo-Spieler* and *Orlac* express a similar anxiety about human wholeness in the context of technological media that is routed not primarily through the eye, but through the hand. Undoubtedly, the hand is not employed in the same way in normative cinema as it is in later, interactive media, but this does not mean the hand is excluded from the ways in which the cinema affects the embodiment of the subject. Classic film theory—not without reason—is focused on the eye: in Jean-Louis Baudry's apparatus theory, the cinema isolates the gaze in order to prop up the normative bourgeois subject whose vision is equated with knowledge. With the apparatus made "invisible" to the eye, the subject misidentifies itself as one who has access to all relevant knowledge, which in the post-Renaissance model of the human subject, is implicitly equated with vision.[39] As Jonathan Crary has argued, however, visual technologies like the cinema arose with a society in which the post-Renaissance theory of the human had already ceded ground to one defined more overtly in its relationship to machines, and as itself an "equivalent to an amalgamation of adjacent apparatuses."[40] The hands as well as the eyes were among the "adjacent [human] apparatuses" engaged by modern technologies of entertainment and diversion.

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[39] Jean-Louis Baudry, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 299-318.

[40] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 88-89.

Following this theory, it can be argued that media intervene in play by mediating between the elements of what André Leroi-Gourhan calls the "anterior field" of the embodied human—that is, the circuit formed by eye and hand, perception and action. Human technics are rooted for Leroi-Gourhan in the exteriorizations of human capacities, particularly memory and reach or grasp. The human is born into prostheticity—the cultural-technical world built around it—and, through its hands, further extends its reach and its memory beyond the biological by means of further prostheses. Hands here are a fundamental part of the circuit between biology and the outside world that results in language, exteriorized memory, and the capacity to plan for the future, to reach farther—*techne*. The implication of Leroi-Gourhan's theory, however, is that the definition, the very being, of the human must always be routed through its other, technics, without which it could have neither a social life (inherited tradition) or an interior (intentionality, time). "The necessity of referring to technics in defining the human means that there can be no definition of the human that is not based in the paradox of being a complete being that nevertheless, in some sense, resides outside itself."[41]

Bernard Stiegler deconstructs Leroi-Gourhan's paradigm of "exteriorization" from this perspective, arguing that in the case of the human there can be no interior that precedes all exteriorization; instead "the interior is constituted in exteriorization … The interior and the exterior are the same thing, the inside is the outside, since man (the interior) is essentially defined by the tool (the exterior)."[42] In Stiegler's *Technics and Time,* the famous mirror of Jacques Lacan, in which the subject (mis)recognizes itself as a complete being with its own interior, actually refers to tools and their construction more broadly, but and necessarily includes

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[41] Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 50.
[42] Ibid, 141-142.

both ends of the anterior field: face *and* hands.[43] Thus, in Stiegler's reading of Leroi-Gourhan's

anthropological theory, the hands are the site of the impossible translation between an interior

that is constituted by its exteriorization, existing on the very boundary—the interface—between

physis (biological life) and *techne* that defines the human. But in technological modernity, the

body parts that make up the anterior field are scrutinized, analyzed, and divided by a variety of

discourses, the effect of which is to produce a "docile body" that is both inscribed by and relays

power, according to Michel Foucault.[44] One means by which this is accomplished is new means

of storing and interfacing with data that change precisely the relation between hand and eye:

"The production of the observer in the nineteenth century coincided with new procedures of

discipline and regulation … [I]t is a question of a body aligned with and operating an assemblage

of turning and regularly moving wheeled parts."[45] Beginning around the late 19th century, media

technologies that regulate time, space, and the capacities of the body intervene before the circuit

of interior-exterior that constitutes the human and defines its relation to its milieu is complete,

and the hand's activity is scripted in advance.

Film journals that offered interactive games for film fans suggested a means of finding a place

for the spectator's hands within the cinematic apparatus. In early 1919, as protests and open

fighting continued in the streets of Berlin, the film fan magazine *Illustrierte Filmwoche*

announced a contest for its readers, entitled "*Die schönsten Augen*" ("the most beautiful eyes",

Figure 1.2).[46] On the left side of a two-page spread, the announcement of the contest instructs

readers to write in with their guesses regarding the identity of six women whose eyes are

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[43] Ibid, 157.
[44] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 136.
[45] Crary, *Techniques*, 112.
[46] "Die Schönsten Augen," *Illustrierte Filmwoche* 7:11 (March 15, 1919): 78-79.

displayed on the opposite page. The six women are all well-known German actresses (among them Ossi Oswalda, Henny Porten, and Pola Negri), and the photographic image of their eyes has been collaged together with a flat, crudely sketched background. Against a pattern of question marks whose dots have been replaced with illustrated eyes, six, roughly head-shaped ovals underlie the excerpted photographs. Over the course of the next several weeks, six more women's eyes would be presented in collage format for the readers to pore over and deduce which eyes belong to which names. The eventual publication of the solution promises not only cash prizes for winners who are able to guess correctly and send in their written answers, but also the cathartic revelation of the full headshots from which these eyes were excised. The "beautiful eyes" reterritorialized by photographic and print media will be reconciled with their normative place in the symbolic order a month later, when the full photographs are published, accompanied by each actress's signature (Figure 1.3).[47]

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[47] "Die Schönsten Augen," *Illustrierte Filmwoche* 7:17 (April 26, 1919): 127-129.
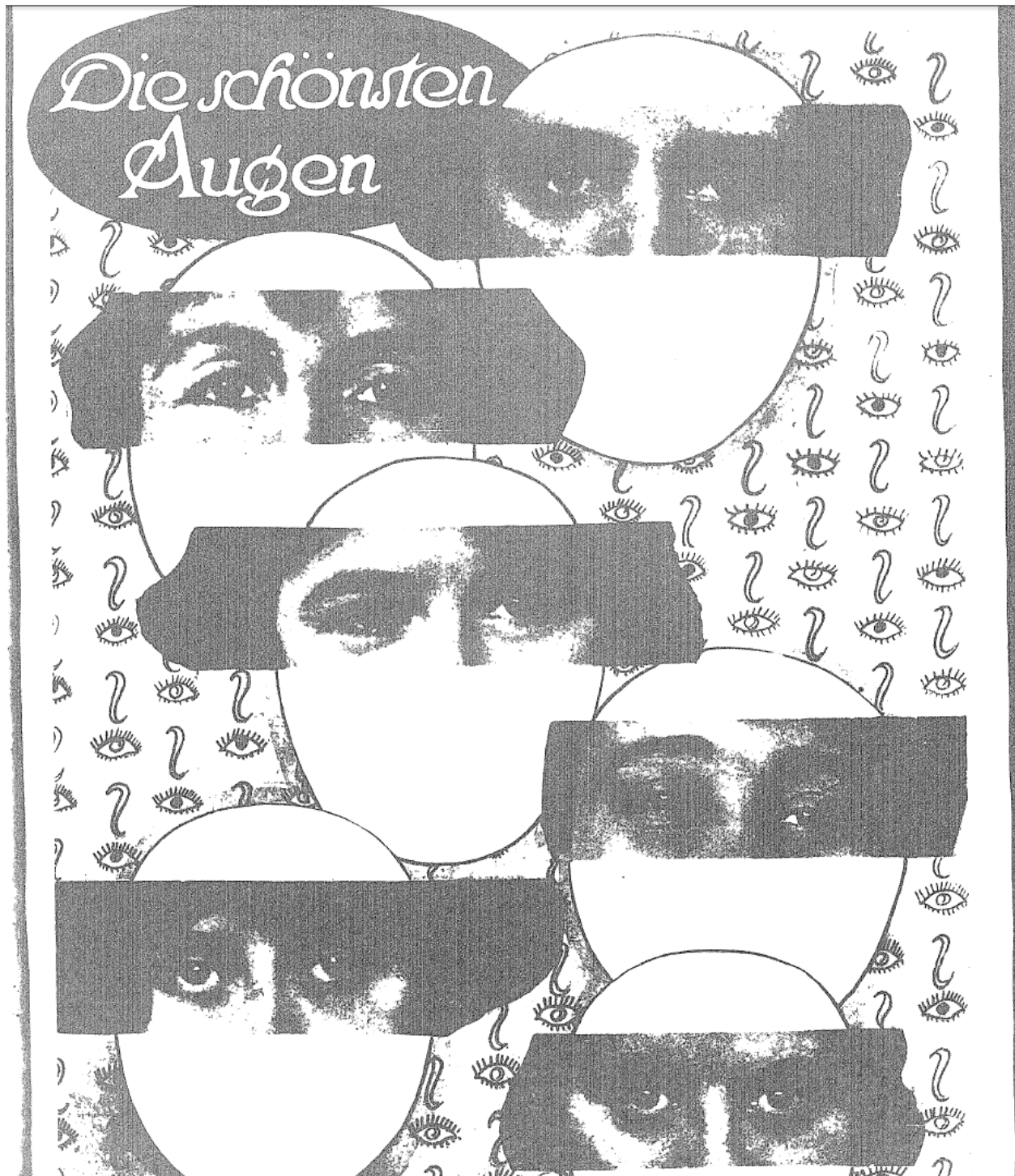
Figure 1.2: "Die Schönsten Augen," *Illustrierte Filmwoche* 7:11 (March 15, 1919): 78-79.

Figure 1.3: Die Schönsten Augen," *Illustrierte Filmwoche* 7:17 (April 26, 1919): 127-129.

The collage format of the *Die Schönsten Augen* is striking reminiscent of—and contemporaneous with—Dadaist photomontage. Unlike a composition like Höch's *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, however, the picture-puzzle is meant to be solved, rationalized, and given a meaning. From a dispersed field of fetishized female body parts, the player is to correctly re-assemble the human figure, integrating it back into the Symbolic by correctly identifying its name and having it confirmed by the indexical mark of the actress's own hands—her signature. Michael Cowan argues that such contests underline that film magazines, if not the entire industry, "understood the reader's film education as an *embodied* experience, one that implicated the hands, the body, and the senses in a performative acquisition of admission into a cinephilic community."[48] But despite the participatory and playful nature of the game, the gender dynamics here presume, as Patrice Petro has argued of the Weimar illustrated press more broadly, a male subject whose anxieties about female subjectivity are assuaged through the images' ultimate containment within a recuperative framework.[49] The picture-puzzle game integrates the hand into the apparatus of the cinema, but it does so on the condition that its user comport itself toward a particular, gendered way of coordinating the perception of the eye with the action of the hand. A letter back to the publisher of the magazines identifying the "beautiful eyes" constituted something like a "ping" back, verifying that the player was processing the information in the correct manner, which is to say that with the aid of the cinema and the illustrated press, the player's perception had become attuned to the isolation and fetishization of parts of the female body. Such contests would be repeated throughout the period—take, for example, *Mein Film*'s

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[48] Cowan, "Learning to Love the Movies", 29.
[49] Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 222.

Wessen Augen Sind Es? ("Whose eyes are those?") of 1926, which also published strips of

photographs of feminine eyes and asked its readers to identify the film star (Figure 1.4).[50]

WESSEN AUGEN SIND ES?

Wir veröffentlichen heute 10 Augenpaare berühmter Filmstars und richten an unsere Leser die Aufforderung, diese Augen zu agnoszieren und uns die Besitzer derselben namhaft zu machen.

Die Augenpartie ist der charakteristischeste Teil des menschlichen Antlitzes, und es dürfte deshalb unseren Leserinnen und Lesern nicht schwer fallen, die Augen ihres Lieblingsstars zu erkennen.

Wer alle zehn Augenpaare erkennt, erhält von uns eine **Anweisung auf eine Filmprobeaufnahme** in der Länge von **drei Metern.**

¡Wer weniger als sieben Augenpaare errät, erhält Künstlerpostkarten von Filmstars, und zwar so viele, als er richtige Lösungen

Wer mindestens sieben Augenpaare errät, erhält eine **Anweisung auf eine Filmprobeaufnahme** in der Länge von einem Meter.

eingesandt hat. Die Augenpaare sind zu bezeichnen: Oben: 1; links: 2, 3, 4, 5; rechts: 6, 7, 8, 9; unten: 10.

☆

Sollte kein Einsender sämtliche Augenpaare erraten, dann entscheidet das Los unter den am meisten Erratenden über Zuerkennung des ersten Preises.

Figure 1.4: "Wessen Augen Sind Es?" *Mein Film* 1:12 (19 March 1926): 3.

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[50] "Wessen Augen Sind Es?" *Mein Film* 1:12 (19 March 1926): 3.

To varying degrees, modern media demand that their subject interface with them: if they do not directly engage the subject's hands, they still rely on a particular bodily deportment, as indeed cinematic apparatus theory has insisted for some time. The cinematic viewer, in other words, becomes like Pias's digital game player—to a certain degree, "machine shaped," with new modes of perception and bodily deportment reliant on and derived from the cinematic apparatus. What the preponderance of games in the cinema tells us is that the entire anterior field was involved in the transformation of the subject into Dada's techno-organic played player. Furthermore, the paratexts of cinematic culture—the illustrated press—served to partially reintegrate the hands of the cinemagoer into the cinematic experience, providing a way of processing the visual information of the cinema into more directly embodied activity. By encouraging play, the apparatus of cinema involved both the hand and the eye in what Dada understood as the reformulation of the subject.

Mainstream cinema of the early Weimar period, such as *Orlac,* often allegorized the media's reordering of the subject's anterior field, although recently this allegory has been interpreted almost exclusively in relation to the First World War. In relation to *Orlac*, Anton Kaes has argued that, as Germany at the time lacked a genre that could overtly treat the topic of World War I, fantasies of bodily and psychical disintegration provided a means of displacing and addressing the trauma of a lost, costly war.[51] *The Hands of Orlac* can certainly be read along the lines that Kaes and others have suggested: at the time of its release, its dramatization of physical and mental trauma and its specific handling of amputation would undoubtedly evoke the presence of the nearly eight million war-wounded in Germany and Austria. Barbara Hales has argued that the film "echoes Germany's skepticism of the medical community's techniques for

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[51] Anton Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 50-53.

curing the mental illness of its turning soldiers," contextualizing its representation of a medical amputation gone wrong, and the resulting inability of the male subject to reintegrate into society.[52]

The trauma of the train collision at the opening of the film, represented in aftermath with long shots of mechanical wreckage, smoldering fires, and scrambling bodies, is particularly evocative of the kind of mechanized human catastrophe experienced in the scorched environment of the front. At the time of *Orlac*'s release, this extended contemplation of disaster was singled out for praise for its realism, perhaps because it replicated a scenario of bodily and mechanical conflagration all too familiar to 1920s audiences.[53] Moreover, in the film, the loss of limbs and a wife's affection "evokes a direct connection between the traumatic reality of war and a home front irrevocably changed, where previously stable hierarchies and social positions were no more."[54] But *Orlac* might also be understood as part of the intensely self-reflexive streak in early Weimar cinema, visionary fantasies such as Wiene's *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, *Der müde Tod* (*Destiny*, 1921), and *Schatten* (*Warning Shadows*, 1923) that at least in part reflect on the visual capacities of the cinema. As we have seen, the cultural discourse around a changing human relationship to technics revolved around new media forms and the ways in which they were remaking the human through play. Furthermore, the influence of Dada's modernist commentary on the disintegration of the human can be seen in this film, produced only a year after Dada's controversial activities in Berlin ceased. What does Orlac become in the film other

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[52] Barbara Hales, "Incurable Madness: War Trauma, Hypnosis, and Robert Wiene's *Orlacs Hände*," *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 47, no. 5 (Novermber 2011): 588.

[53] "Orlacs Hände," *Paimanns Filmlisten* 9, no. 441 (19 September 1924): 1.

[54] Anjeana Janse, "'These Hands are not My Hands: War, Trauma, and Masculinity in Crisis in Robert Wiene's *Orlacs Hände* (1924)," in *The Many Faces of Weimar Cinema: Rediscovering Germany's Filmic Legacy,* ed. Christian Rogowski (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), 102.

than a living photomontage, an assemblage of body parts redistributed as if they were mere images?

After the successful hand transplant that follows his injury, Orlac discovers, by way of an anonymous note and subsequent archival research, that his hand donor is the murderer Vasseur. After this revelation—and only after this revelation—Orlac will struggle to suppress the murderous and sexual urges he feels coming from his "evil" hands, while being blackmailed by the mysterious character Nera (Fritz Kortner) who seems to know all about the transplant, its origins, and Orlac's new secret desires. Meanwhile, Orlac struggles to cope with the loss of his wife's affection, his ability to play the piano, the tempting advances of his maid Regine (Carmen Cartellieri), and the most terrible secret: that he has secreted a dagger in his piano, and that his hands compel him irresistibly to use it. The surgeon who performed the operation is no help, insisting, despite Orlac's first-hand experience, that the head controls the hands. Eventually, finding the knife in the body of his estranged father, Orlac will become convinced that his new hands took it upon themselves to murder in recompense for the shame Orlac felt when his wife went to his father for money. This is when Nera, a mysterious figure lurking in the background of Orlac's life, makes contact with Orlac, demanding money in exchange for his silence.

Before he even knows about the origin of his transplanted hands, Orlac has a premonition of the forthcoming disintegration of his body and ego. From his hospital bed, he sees the man who will later turn out to be his blackmailer looking in from a window in the door. Later, this man will turn out to be Nera. "He's laughing," Orlac cries when he sees the blackmailer in the window, clearly feeling emasculated by the leering gaze that seems to know his secret of bodily insufficiency. Soon thereafter, Orlac has a nightmare in which this disembodied head is gazing at him from above. The image of the blackmailer's head is superimposed onto the upper-right

corner of a long shot of Orlac in bed. The head then fades out and is replaced by an enormous

arm and fist, which descends upon Orlac in bed, diagonally across the frame. This image is an

imagistic pun, literalizing the German for "blackmailer" (*Erpresser*, or "one who presses [out]"),

playing with the collapse of distinctions between verbal language, image, and gesture in a

manner typical of Weimar cinema and the discourse network of 1900. Just as, in the early scene

at the train station, the letters "un accident à Montgeron" entered the image plane, so here the

image suggests a verbal phrase. It recalls a rebus puzzle, in which a sequence of images is used

to signify an encoded verbal phrase. According to Kittler, the rebus structure typifies the

Freudian interpretation of dreams—as, for example, when Freud transcodes a patient's dream

concerning a "shiny nose" (*Glanz auf der Nase*) to a "look at the nose" (glance at the nose)—

because it is also typical of a discourse network that lacks a transcendental signifier such as

"Oh!", the romantic testament to the organic base of all language. As language is no longer

anchored in the word of God or originary orality, language can openly only refer back to itself,

or its schematized group of neighboring signifiers. "Interpretive techniques that treat texts as

charades or dreams as picture puzzles have nothing to do with hermeneutics, because they do not

translate. The translation of a rebus fails because letters do not occur in nature, the ultimate

reference of all translation."[55] What is left without the reference to a transcendental signifier, as

in a Dadaist photomontage, is the endless play of surface phenomena, as we saw in the "Caligari

imperative" staged by Wiene's earlier film.[56] Although the scene dramatizes a character's dream,

it is on a cinematic model of the dream that already is interpenetrated by the playful discourse

network of 1900.

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[55] Kittler, *Discourse Networks,* 274.
[56] See the Introduction of this dissertation. See also Ulrich Johannes Beil, "Der 'caligarische Imperativ' Schrift und Bild im Stummfilm" *Pandaemonium germanicum* 14 (2009): 4-5.

The surface of the film screen is thus foregrounded at the very moment that the viewer is meant to feel, along with Orlac, the anxiety of losing one's bodily wholeness, the dissociation of hand and face. For while presumably the hands belong to the blackmailer, the one who will be pressing Orlac for money, the atomization of the body actually reflects Orlac's current situation, already suggesting the conflation of identities the narrative will revolve around. As the image remains in some sense superficial, the cinematic image compositing technologies (masking, double exposure) that enlarge an arm and separate a head from its body are implicated in this bodily reorganization, the assembly of a body as if it were a picture puzzle. This scene illustrates the atomizing of the anterior field that Orlac feels, and does so in a two-dimensional composition evocative of Dadaist photomontage.

What *Orlac* plays out is the separation of hand and eye that Kittler describes—the disintegration of the anterior field through technics. This disintegration is the result of the intervention of technical media not only meta-textually through the splitting of Orlac's body in the cinematic apparatus, but also within the film's story, which turns out to be as much about recording media as it is about medical technology. Throughout the film, illustrated newspapers facilitate the breakdown of Orlac's sense of self. Midway through the film, Orlac is investigating the origin of his hands, to confirm the anonymous note indicating they have come from a murderer. He has procured a newspaper recounting Visseur's murders and secluded himself in an empty tavern. As he reads the newspaper's account of Visseur's murders, the film dissolves from the darkened long-shot of the bar to a blurry, high angle close-up of the back of a hand, which is holding Visseur's distinctive X-marked knife. The hand thrusts the knife into an adumbrated human figure in the background of the shot, and returns empty. A cut back to Orlac reading in the darkened bar shows him reacting with horror and recognition, as if he has just recalled this

first-person memory organically. Orlac takes the emergence of this memory as proof that the hands have transplanted the murderer's guilt with them. In fact, as we find out at the end of the film, Orlac's memory is impossible not only from a physiological perspective, but also because Visseur never committed the murders; this is a false memory, implanted by the newspaper. Orlac rushes home to discover Visseur's distinctive knife stuck in the wall—planted, as we will discover in due course, by Nera. Ashamed, he hides the knife in his piano (a clear metaphor for his new hidden identity) and, in one of the film's more well-known shots, considers his balled hands with horror in a centered close-up. The emphasis of this shot is on the relationship between his hands and eyes as he regards his curling digits in fright. The connection between perception and action symbolized by eyes and hands has been disturbed by the prosthetic props for the self that media, rather than medical science, interpose. Orlac's earlier nightmare foretells precisely this disintegration of the self into alienated hand and head. It is a disintegration that reveals media technologies as ego-prostheses that reorganize the human subject, forcing it to play.

    After his recuperation, Orlac discovers that he may not have ever been as whole as he thought. Soon after returning home from his post-operation rehabilitation, Orlac sits down at his piano and attempts to play. A close-up on his hands shows them arched awkwardly and moving limply, in stark contrast to the close-up of dexterous fingers from the opening minutes of the film. A cut to his wife's expression, and then his own, indicates to the viewer that what they hear does not measure up to his former standard. Later in the film, he listens with melancholy to a recording of his rendition of Chopin's "Nocturno." While he is listening, he attempts to mimic the motions of the piano playing with his fingers, but finds his body incapable of mimicking the motions of the machine. In contrast to the earlier scene at the piano, he becomes not merely

morose but enraged: he clenches his fists in frustration and destroys the record. The tragedy of

his loss of wholeness is undercut, however, by the fact that he relies on a record to testify to that

former wholeness: his frustration seems at this moment to be that he has become *less* machine-

shaped, unable to let his record player play him. Perhaps, the scene implies, his ego was always

founded on prosthetic equipment like the recording that propped up his ego by assuring him that

the actions of his hands were endlessly repeatable. Claudia Liebrand and Ines Steiner read the

film as presenting a broad scope of problems facing the modern individual, including the waning

model of the 19th-century artistic "genius."[57] Orlac experiences firsthand the loss of organic

genius, the immediate expression of the soul, and discovers in the process that the soul was

always already the product of a given discourse network.

Liebrand and Steiner, too, point to the use of newspapers in the film as part of its

deconstruction of the unified ego. The film introduces us to Orlac, before we even see him, via a

newspaper profile announcing his concert in Paris. "Orlac is therefore, from the beginning of the

film on, explicitly not shown as an 'original' person with a given identity *per se*, but established

as a product of various technical mediations: the film represents (or more purely media-

technical: it 'reproduces') the print-media reproduction (newspaper) of a photographic

reproduction (star-portrait) of a reproduced artist."[58] The film invites us to read the symbol of his

technologically grafted-on hands as reflecting upon the relationship between Orlac and the media

he uses to prop up his ego. Reconsidering the erotic note he sent his wife on his way home, a

distressed Orlac laments, "Once upon a time … that was … my handwriting," the note as a

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[57] Claudia Liebrand and Ines Steiner, "Monströse Moderne: zur Funktionsstelle der 'Manus Loquens' in Robert Wienes 'Orlacs Hände' (Österreich 1924)," in *Manus Loquens: Medium der Geste - Gesten der Medien*, ed. Matthia Bickenbach, Annina Klappert, and Hewig Pompe (Cologne: Dumont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, 2003), 269.
[58] Liebrand and Steiner, "Monströse Moderne," 278.

record of his former self only proving its perhaps inevitable evaporation, the obsolescence of the organic play between man and writing surface in the discourse network of 1900.

In Orlac media technologies are gradually exposed to have always underlain, and therefore now undermine, the main character's sense of self. According to Stiegler, recording technologies like the phonograph prove for the first time the impossibility of distinguishing perception from imagination, because they preserve repeatable sensory phenomena to which, upon repeated listenings, the subject can have varying reactions.[59] The advent of such media thus bring to the fore not only the instability of the subject as it changes through time, but also the way in which consciousness is not entirely distinct from its technical objects, the "tertiary retentions" that prostheticize memory. Rather, he depends on them in a feedback loop that reflects consciousness back to itself and allows the "play" of secondary and primary memories, of cognition itself. In listening to his own recording, Orlac discovers that it is not only the play between his body in time (primary retention) and his knowledge of the piece (secondary retention), but also between the latter two and the record (tertiary retention) that had facilitated his original sense of organic wholeness.

Cinema is implicated, however subtly, in this array of media technologies that are shown to have always interpenetrated Orlac's sense of self. The two-dimensional (de)composition in the nightmare sequence described above foregrounds the audience's handless interface with the cinema, but the film's stylized acting, too, calls attention to the surface play of the screen. Veidt plays Orlac as if he is led around by his hands, his body following behind his grotesquely arrayed fingers, generally depicted in long shot in empty, sparsely lit interiors (Figures 1.5, 1.6).

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[59] Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 3*: *Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 18.

Figure 1.5: *The Hands of Orlac* (1924)

Figure 1.6: *The Hands of Orlac* (1924)

At one point, after he has secreted the knife in his piano, Orlac walks as if in a trance directly toward the camera, his hands outstretched. Wiene holds the shot until the hands have entered the "dark zone" directly in front of the camera, as if they were about to cross over between the diegesis and the theater. At this moment, the already thin diegesis of the film, buoyed by the most ludicrous of plots, threatens to break down: Orlac's staggering path toward the camera is a direct address toward the absent cinematic spectator, and his failed attempt to breech the surface of the screen also reminds the spectator that Orlac is an image, an illusory presence in their field of vision. Like a Dadaist photomontage, he is in a state of suspension and flux, in-between identities and worlds; he has been remixed, played, and remains caught within the game.

This self-reflexive move from cinematic diegesis outward is the inverse of the movement that will later be accomplished with first-person video games, in which hands extend often *inward*, toward the diegetic world from the edges of the screen. The hands are here placed at the edge of the frame to evoke the uncanniness of a self remixed by technology and inhabited by inscrutable behavioral programs. To treat the device anachronistically, *The Hands of Orlac*'s inversion of the video gaming situation attests to the fact that the hands are a structuring absence in the audience's interaction with the cinematic medium. *Orlac* lacks the means of receiving feedback from the "machine-shaped" human, but the spectator must become one, like Orlac himself, nonetheless. Like him, the cinematic spectator can see what is happening, she can "move" along with the cuts and movements of the cinema and feel its "tactile" shocks, but she cannot intervene in the simulated world. To accept the cinematic illusion, the spectator must accede to the disembodied, dispersed vision it offers, and allow their hands, their ability to intervene in the world imaged, to lie dormant. Watching a film means adjusting the shape of

one's body to interface properly with the machine, to let it exercise control over one. In bringing

Orlac's hands to the very edge of the diegesis, Wiene makes the film a kind of mirror of the

(dis)embodied situation of the cinematic viewer, in which they might recognize their own

organic-technological hybridity.

As Orlac staggers around his apartments, trying but unable to resist wielding the knife

Nera has left behind for him, the spectator too is led around by the dictates of a prosthesis,

unable to stop the action of the camera, the film as it plays itself out, incorporating the

spectator's body and consciousness into its rhythms. Orlac himself, the actor Conrad Veidt,

described his acting method on the eve of *Orlac*'s German release in terms that invite us to see

parallels between the film and the model of subjectivity compelled by the medium of cinema.

This description is worth quoting at length, to illustrate its (intentional) overlap with the themes

of *The Hands of Orlac*:

> When I get a new role, I embrace the script and … infect my entire being with it … And very soon I feel with equally terrifying intensity, how the person that I am to play grows in me, as I myself change into them. Before long I can observe that—even before filming—in civilian life as well I move differently, speak differently, glance differently, above all relate differently than otherwise; that the Conrad Veidt in me has gradually become that other I have to 'represent,' into whom, however, it's much more that my ego has auto-suggestively morphed: possession would be the right word for my condition … Completely analogous is the manner in which I make my mask [i.e., put on make-up before acting]. Namely, I 'make' none at all. Instead, before the first shot is taken, I sit in front of the mirror for a half hour, an hour and stare—internally already fully infected by my 'role'—into my own eyes. I stare at myself fully passively—a superficial observer would probably say idiotically—in the eyes and *finally it happens that my hands have produced, basically unconsciously and through completely unmeditated, unwilled streaks of make-up, through a couple tosses of the hair, some 'mask' that then proves itself to be the only adequate physiognomical expression of the represented personality for me.*[60]

In both the content and in the fragmentary, almost hysterical prose, Veidt undoubtedly is

embellishing to promote the film, and intentionally channeling aspects of his star image,

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[60] Conrad Veidt, "Meine zwangsläufige Entwicklung," *Filmland: Deutsche Monatsschrift* 1, no. 2 (December 1924): 14. My emphasis.

associated with anxiety, hypnosis, and supernatural possession, thanks to films like *Dr. Caligari*. But this passage from the film fan magazine *Filmland*, from what is ostensibly a biographical sketch, also directs the audience to read *The Hands of Orlac* as a cinematic allegory. Acting in a film, much like viewing a film, means submitting to the will and movements of another, allowing an uncanny process to take place by which this other takes control of your hands. For the spectator, this means that the hands are hands are deadened, excluded; for an actor, they continue to act, but they now seem to follow the dictates of an-other. As he prepares to be recorded in front of the camera, the actor allows his body to be emptied, and as he stares at his own image hollowly—"idiotically"—in the mirror, he sees another force take control of his body. In this scenario, the Veidt has become both actor and spectator, allowing the *techne* of film acting to control his hands as he observes. Here, the actor, like the living photomontage that Orlac becomes, is "spliced," both machine and human.

While Veidt's essay is naked promotion for the film, it was replicated in more ostensibly disinterested articles. "It is an error to think that only pick-pockets have slender, beautiful hands," a review of *Orlac* in *Der Kinematograph* titled "The Speaking Hand" begins, "… as a rule, piano virtuosos and fine violinists also have them, and sometimes even actors."[61] The actor Veidt's hands are the star of this film, the review claims, as if Veidt, like his character, had had his agency displaced from his conscious mind, and was now led to commit acts of dazzling performance by his hands. Veidt's article and this review of the film can also be contextualized among popular discourse around the cinema that presented its role in the decomposition of the human in rather direct terms, and often in relation to the spectator's "missing" element of the anterior field, the hands. Echoing Veidt's earlier description of his methodology, American

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[61] "Die sprechende Hand," *Der Kinematograph* 18, no. 915 (31 August 1924): 33.

actress Lillian Rich attested in the popular German film press in 1926 that "first I concentrate my

thoughts on the feeling, that I need to bring to expression. Even during these thoughts my hands

by themselves already find the expressive movements."[62] But the "other" that inhabits the body of

the actor in Veidt's essay and in Rich's piece is more overtly shown to be, in popular film

magazines that dissect and inspect the disassembled body of the actor, the cinema itself, with its

"cuts" and "splices."

Next to a photographic collage of disembodied, feminine hands, the *Illustrierte*

Filmwoche wrote in 1920 that

> It is a specialty of the American films when it comes to the performance [*Spiel*] of the
> main actress, to show their hands in certain decisive moments, in order to make out of the
> play [*Spiel*] of the hands--—the nervous clenching, the folding in prayer, or out of the
> thousand other nuances that the play of the hands form--—in the same way as in the play
> of expressions, a valuable means of depicting affect.[63]

Because of this, the *Illustrierte Filmwoche* makes the dubious and borderline surreal claim that,

"The hands of Mary Pickford are as well known in America as her head."[64] Taking American

films and American film audiences as its model, the German film press insists that the silent—or

in the more appropriate German terminology, the "mute"—cinema forces hands to articulate.

German film audiences must too know how to "read" hands apart from their bodies—and

therefore *Illustrierte Filmwoche* announces its contest for its readers to guess the owners of the

hands depicted in the included stills from German films. In asking its readers to decode the

images of stars' dissociated body parts, *Illustrierte Filmwoche* proposes to train them for a

medium that disintegrates the anterior field, and in which the hands must compensate for the

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[62] Lillian Rich, "Die Sprache der Hände," *Mein Film* no 1, vol 12 (18 Mar 1926): 12. My
emphasis.
[63] "Die Schönen Hände," *Illustrierte Filmwoche* 8, no. 21 (22 May 1920): 187.
[64] Ibid.

face's inability to produce language. As Berlin Dada had observed, the playful prosthetic media of the 20th century re-order the human body, subjecting them to a state of suspension and flux.

This corporeal reorganization is reflected in the way that language migrates in the silent cinema from the face to the other end of the anterior field, the hands. For the German-American psychologist Hugo Münsterberg writing in 1915, the "art of the photoplay" begins with the hands; given the absence of the word, "our whole attention can now be focused on the play of the face and of the hands," the anterior field of the actor.[65] The notion that the silent screen should develop, or enabled one to develop, a "lexicon of gestures" was one developed by Dyk Rudenski in 1927. In his *Gestologie und Filmspielerei*, Rudenski embarks upon the paradoxical task of "putting the body through the school of naturalness, so that its gestures in film do not contradict the true and the believable."[66] Rudenski claims to model his method on Taylorism, constructing schema of hand movements and their allegedly inherent meanings in order to encourage "economy in the teaching of movement."[67] These schema are illustrated through series of photographs that are modeled "without the model having an idea what [the poses] represent," suggesting that in the cinema, the body can, or should, signify without conscious intent.[68] The disassembling of the human through by means of technological media is apparent here: the person who is emptied of conscious thought and ruled by his hands is the actor who, in Benjamin's terms, "star[es] down" the apparatus.[69] The mute cinema demands this emptying of

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[65] Hugo Münsterberg, *Hugo Munsterberg on Film: The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings,* ed. Allan Langdale (New York: Routledge, 2001) 87, 83.

[66] Dyk Rudenski, *Gestologie und Filmspielerei* (Berlin: Hokoken-Presse, 1927), 41.

[67] Ibid, 50.

[68] Ibid, 29.

[69] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writing,* vol. 3, *1935-1938*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 111.

the body in preparation for its dismantling into different signifying parts, all allegedly in the service of "naturalism." But the hand here becomes a kind of privileged medium that records and signifies universal meanings, rather than a part of a body directed by a distinct will and individual subjectivity. Rudenski's school of naturalness requires a rigorous technologization of the body, and a specific detachment of the hands from the conscious intentions of an actor, transforming the actor's hand into a linguistic tool, another prosthesis, but one detached from the consciousness of its operator and directed instead by the technology itself.

Veidt's performance in *Orlac* is not only of a piece with the later school of cinematic gestures; the film is also about the inhabitation of the subject by a technology that compels it to move, act, and gesture in unaccustomed ways, that distorts its comportment toward the world and replaces its means of relating to it—a technology like the one Rudensky conceived the cinema to be. After the shot in which Veidt nearly walks out of the film's diegesis, Orlac reaches his piano, removes the dagger within, and stabs furiously and repeatedly at the air. His hands seem to have exchanged playing the piano for playing with the knife, as he rhythmically mimics the act of murder. Veidt's facial and gestural contortions suggest a body of nervous energy and inner conflict: he both wants and does not want to use the dagger, and the origin of this desire is ambiguous. The film, with its dream sequence and clear depiction of castration anxiety, points toward a Freudian interpretation in which desire is rooted in the drives of the subject's (organic) unconscious, but the centrality of recording technologies to Orlac's breakdown also points toward an instability in the notion of a purely organic masculine id. The exterior tools of Orlac or Visseur do not merely reflect an *a-priori* interior that has chosen them as tools, but are co-determining in relation to that interior; the knife and the record shape the person that yields them. As such, the representation of technologies in *Orlac* recalls more the later "mirror-stage" of

Jacques Lacan—or, more appropriately, Bernard Steigler's aforementioned appropriation of this

theory to describe technology more broadly.

We can also look to the contemporaneous work of Sigmund Freud to interpret Orlac's

behavior. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1919), Freud revises his earlier rooting of the dream

in the wish fulfillment and the unconscious's drive for pleasure: because soldiers and others

affected by extreme mechanical violence—his initial example is "railway disasters and other

accidents involving a risk to life"—continuously relive experiences in ways from which they can

derive no pleasure, Freud ventures, there must be another drive in operation.[70] This drive, he

concludes, is the now-famous death drive, a tendency toward repetition and the stasis it

promises, a mechanical tendency in the unconscious reawakened by mechanical accidents. Freud

presents a speculative parable to illustrate the possible roots of such a drive: he asks us to

"picture a living organism in its most simplified possible form," a soft protoplasm exposed to

external stimuli. Such an organism, Freud argues, would have to evolve some kind of exterior

crust, a shield against an overwhelming world that would damage the protoplasm through

overstimulation. "This protective shield … must above all endeavour to preserve the special

modes of transformation of energy operating in it against the effects threatened by the enormous

energies at work in the external world—effects which tend towards a levelling out of them and

hence towards destruction."[71] The breaching of this anti-entropy shield through intense physical

violence, however, provokes the opposite reaction within the organism: it attempts to un-cathect

the intense memories through repetitive behavior, or, in Freud's observation, in child's play. It is

in this book that Freud describes the game of *Fort-Da* (there-here) played by his nephew, in

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[70] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 10-12.
[71] Ibid, 29-31.

which the boy repeated threw small objects into a corner and retrieved them, repeating the game's titular phrase.[72] Notably, the example of the child's game is distinguished from the traumatic neurotic's repetitive dreams in that it requires feedback from external technologies that facilitate repetitive behavior and thus format the child's ego boundaries. Orlac's repetitive thrusting of the knife should be seen as such an acclimatization to a new embodied situation, altered via the technology represented by his new hands, as well as that with which they interface. *The Hands of Orlac* indeed invites a psychoanalytical reading, but what it reveals is that the psychoanalytical model of the subject circa 1920 has become highly dependent on mechanical play.

Once the subject has been altered through the play of technical media upon his body and consciousness, there is no going back, as the film's ambivalent ending suggests. By the end of the film, Nera has convinced Orlac that he is responsible for the murder of his own father, as the knife found at the scene of Orlac Senior's death bears the distinctive "X" of the knife associated with Vasseur's hands. Meeting Orlac clandestinely at a tavern, Nera the blackmailer claims that he is Vasseur, standing to reveal his prosthetic arms. He claims, in a rather ludicrous reveal, that after his execution the doctor's assistant (his actual identity), "performed the same operation with my head as he did with your hands," and shows the scar on his neck to prove it. The false Vasseur reminds Orlac that the knife and the fingerprints that were found on the knife that killed the former's father belong to Vasseur, confirming what Orlac believes he already knows. At this Orlac recoils, curling his fingers, bringing his hands in front of his face, and sinking in his chair, emphasizing the way in which his technologically grafted-on hands have taken over the functions of his face, emoting in its place. The blackmailer demands one million francs to keep

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[72] Ibid, 33, 14-16.

the secret, but Orlac instead reports all of the events, including his purported guilt of the murder, to the authorities. Veidt's appeal to the city prosecutor is shot in a close-up in which he almost direct addresses the camera, yet another breach of the screen that suggests the appeal here is to an audience that relates to Orlac's predicament of being controlled by the play of outside, technological forces.

The police encourage Orlac to meet again with the blackmailer and when he does, they barge in and reveal that the scars and prosthetics are false, that the blackmailer *is*, in fact, Nera, and that he was guilty of Vasseur's crimes in addition to his manipulation of Orlac. This means the hands Orlac received are "innocent," and Orlac and his wife celebrate in a close-up that foregrounds his hands' caresses of her hair by focusing the key light on them. The question of where Orlac's urge to murder and philander originated, if not from his hands, remains unaddressed as the film fades to black. A Freudian interpretation is tempting, which might suggest that these urges originated in Orlac's masculine ego itself, but as we have already seen, the film's representation of the ego is more complex than this, showing it to be dependent on the way technology impacts its anterior field. Instead, I argue that at the end of the film Orlac's technological re-embodiment and the blackmailer's mediated manipulation of him remains the root of his changes. The revelation that his hands were not murderer's hands leaves open the possibility that Orlac's anxious condition is merely the state of modern subjectivity, cut up by a bodily montage, emptied of a knowable soul, and caught in the borderlands between organism and machine. The film's ambiguous illusion of a happy ending assures us that the subject is whole, even while this resolution is clearly just a superficial cover for the destabilization on which the movie has focused. *Orlac* can be understood as an allegory for the cinema's effects on

the human because such evidence points to the fact that the hands were also understood to be altered in impacted by the cinema's prostheticization of the human body.

The breakdown of Kittler's "so-called man" brought to bear by the advent of the discourse network of 1900 was registered in kind by Berlin Dada and the cinema: "In 1920, the offensive Dada exhibition and the outrageous film illuminated each other," Anton Kaes writes.[73] *Orlac* is certainly an outrageous film, one whose simple conceit is stretched beyond the semblance of rationality, exceeding the bounds of its narrative framework as well as, at times, the image's frame. More like a Dadaist photomontage than an Expressionist painting, it calls the spectator to consider the implication of a technology that can play with the human form. The specific trauma Orlac suffers—that not only of losing his hands and his masculine potency, but also his inability to control his new hands, the ambiguity of whose hands he actually has, the complete re-organization of the human this implies—can be read as an allegory for the subject in relationship to modern technological media. Like a Dadaist photomontage, the representation of Orlac's body and consciousness taps into anxieties in Weimar Germany around the relation between *techne* and *physis*—in particular, the way that the natural body now seems to be played by the fabricated, technical milieu in which it lives, integrated into the machine by that apparatus's intervention in its anterior field. The film reflects the cinema's own effects on the anterior field of the audience member and their doppelgänger, the actor with whom they identify, in its representation of a man who has been dis- and re-assembled by media-technological discourses.

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[73] Anton Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 73.

A Diabolo Player Dreams of Control

Orlac's central conceit turned out to be a successful metaphor for the loss of human agency in a world of technology run amok. Its cultural heirs include the remakes *Mad Love* (1935; directed by legendary German cinematographer Karl Freund) and *The Hands of Orlac* (1960), as well as the video game *Bioshock* (2007). The latter represents the fruition of the process foretold with great *Angst* in Wiene's film: the technological replacement of one's hands by those of an uncanny other. In this first-person video game, the player is an anonymous figure called Jack whose hands constantly occupy the foreground of the frame. Over the course of play, Jack's hands, the *ersatz* hands of the player, become modified in increasingly strange ways, via DNA augmentations that gift Jack with extraordinary—and murderous—capabilities. The game's meta-narrative twist reveals that Jack has been operating based on commands implanted by psychological programming, reflecting the player's own program-determined actions. Jack's hands, visual metonyms for the controllers that mediate the activity of the player's hands in the world of the game, are prosthetic extensions that carry with them their own dastardly programs—or rather, like the final twist in *Orlac*, they defy the ability to distinguish between the subject-player's intentions and the desires that have been implanted. Now interfacing with the spectacle via hand and eye, the player is disintegrated into the machine, playing only inasmuch as she is played.

To what end is the player in technical media disintegrated, its body and its desires indistinguishable from that of the machine? To answer this question, we might turn to an earlier example. At the same time that the automaton, the bourgeois subject of Grosz's painting *Diabolo Spieler* has in his form of play clearly ceded agency to outside forces, he might well be subject to the illusion that he is in control. Significant here is the player-puppet's choice of decoration on his apartment wall, the replacement of what would undoubtedly be a representational painting,

perhaps of a Romantic motif such as a waterfall or valley, with the absolutely abstracted spatial schema of a blueprint. The surprising replacement of naturalist painting with rationalized imaging suggests the abstract objectification of space, rather than the spiritual truth of nature, as the true content of modern desire. The highly abstract "aerial view" of the player's blueprint suggests a strategical mindset, a kind of split vision that sees both from a subjective point of view and in terms of the "bigger picture." In other words, the bourgeois subject's object of longing, as expressed through the cultural objects it hangs on its wall, is that of domination over a rationalized space produced as a static scenario for the subject's navigation.

Peter Sloterdijk, calling the 20th century "the century of strategy," pinpoints the German 1920s as the era in which "the conceptual models of tactics, of the estimation of total situations, etc. trickled down as far as the shopkeeper."[74] The dialectic of play represented by the diabolo game that turns the motors of the automaton—the player being played—is also present in this relationship to space. The subject-player takes subjective action based on its estimation of the "total," allegedly objective situation, strategically balancing one against the other. The splitting of vision facilitated by the flattening, aerial perspective of the blueprint allows the player to imagine him or herself in both positions at once: as the player with sovereignty over the surveyed field, and as the figure positioned on that field, being played. This paradoxical striving for an illusory sovereignty, the ability to occupy a position outside of the game even while being a figure within it, defines the world of Sloterdijk's Weimar cynic.[75] The material crux of this bid for sovereignty is the opening up of *Spielraum*—play-space—by media which give an illusuory total access to spaces and the subjects within them. As we will see in the next chapter, playful media also create positions from which to exercise power, as already suggested by the Dadaist

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[74] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 469-470.
[75] Ibid, 349, 384.

control center depicted in Hausmann's *Dada Siegt!*, and to fantasize about a sovereign, violent

agency, as depicted in *The Hands of Orlac*.

CHAPTER 2

FLIGHTS OF FANCY:
THE KRIEGSSPIEL AND THE CINEMA IN WEIMAR GERMANY

Beginning the year *The Hands of Orlac* was released (1924), thanks to a stabilized currency and a renegotiated war-reparations repayment schedule under the Dawes Plan, the Weimar Republic experienced a period of relative stability that would last until the global depression began in 1929. The term "New Objectivity" originally referred to painting from this period, but grew to describe a broader attitude in Germany, an engagement with modernity either out of enthusiasm or out of begrudging acceptance. The term was coined by the art curator Gustav Hartlaub, who for an exhibition in 1925 described the turn back toward reality in painting as a reflection of an avant-garde that felt "disillusioned, sobered, often resigned to the point of cynicism having nearly given up on themselves after a moment of unbounded, nearly apocalyptic hope."[1] Helmut Lethen's influential study of Weimar culture, *Cool Conduct: The Culture of Distance in Weimar Germany*, suggests that after the tumultuous early years of the Republic the culture settled into an almost performative resignation. Lethen argues that Weimar culture is marked by an "exaggerated affirmation of a culture of externality" that allowed the morally disengaged subject of the German 1920s to assume an "epic sovereignty that is wholly removed from the shock experienced by contemporary eyewitnesses," a position as an observer above the field of historical events.[2]

The apprehension of a totality from a disembodied perspective had utility for an increasingly nationalist Weimar right wing eager to transcend what it perceived as Germany's

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[1] Gustav Hartlaub, "Introduction to 'New Objectivity': German Painting since Expressionism," in *The Weimar Republic Source Book*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg, trans. Don Reneau, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 493.
[2] Helmut Lethen: *Cool Conduct: The Culture of Distance in Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 15, 4.

unjust burden of war guilt and the national catastrophe of losing the Reich, all caused by Jews

and disloyal subjects at home. The nationalist right, too, began to reconcile itself to the

technologization of vision in this period, in the cultural formation Jeffrey Herf has termed

"reactionary modernism."[3] Reactionary modernism shares with Lethen's "cool conduct" the

general desire to escape history by assuming a position abstracted from the embodied experience

of its disastrous progression, but in reactionary modernism this escape is specifically tied to the

redemption of the German spirit. Oswald Spengler's history of the development of the "Western

soul," *The Decline of the West* (1919), avowedly partakes of the fantasy of a transcendental

perspective over a spatialized history. Outlining his teleological, evolutionary theory of cultural

development, Spengler writes,

> this [inevitable transition from *Kultur* to *Zivilization*] is what has to be *viewed*, and not
> viewed with the eyes of the partisan, the ideologue, the up-to-date novelist, not from this
> or that 'standpoint,' but in a high, time-free perspective embracing whole millenniums of
> historical world-forms, if we are really to comprehend the great crisis of the present.[4]

Spengler's conservative nationalism imagined its perspective on history as super-political

(*überparteilich*), as being on the side of a German national spirit that transcended politics and

might grasp the totality of history. Reactionary modernism would accept technology as a means

of achieving Spengler's extended vision over national-historical space, revealing national

essence and bringing the world into the grasp of the sovereign subject.

In this period, the reactionary-modernist author Ernst Jünger, whose memoirs of World

War I attempted to reconcile the alienation experienced on the modern front with an idealistic

cult of heroism, would turn to photographic montage as a means of achieving this synthesis.

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[3] Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third* Reich (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[4] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality,* trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1926), 34.

Jünger understood the juxtaposition of photographs as possessing power to reveal spiritual truth

and a single, coherent view of the whole, reconciling the militarized subject with a point of view

which his early postwar writings laments the soldier on the front lacks.[5] Viewed from a

disembodied position removed from the image's context, the juxtaposition of photographs in the

photobook grants Jünger the gaze hovering above the field of the real he was unable to access as

an infantryman.[6]

The cinematic gaze is similarly identified with disembodiment and aeriality in Weimar

culture, in part because of its employment with zeppelins and airplanes in military surveillance

and propaganda during the war, but also because of the firm entrenchment of the omniscient

cinematic narrator by the middle Weimar period. In spectacular narrative films, middle-period

Weimar cinema indulged the fantasy of a gaze that transcended the film's world, redoubling the

omniscient gaze of the spectator in sequences that fly through space, look down from above, and

imagine sovereign figures that stand on the margins of the text to orchestrate the action. The

positioning of sovereign gaze over a homogeneous field of action (*Spielraum*) constructed by

visual media in this era is rooted not just in the experience of flying machines, but in gameplay—

specifically, in the media technology the *Kriegsspiel* (war game), the world's first functional

simulation, developed in 1824 and still being played by both military officers and civilians in the

Weimar Republic. If the prehistory of the cinema can be traced back not just to experiments in

photography, but also to the emerging regime of visuality manifest in 19th-century toys and

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[5] Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, trans. Michael Hofmann (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), first published as *In Stahlgewittern* in 1920. See also: Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, 70-108; Anton Kaes, "The Cold Gaze: Notes on Mobilization and Modernity," *New German Critique* 59 (Spring-Summer 1993): 105-117; Thomas Rohrkrämer, "Kult der Gewalt und der soldatische Nationalismus in der Weimarer Republik," *Sociologus* 51, no. 1/2 (2001): 28-48.

[6] Ernst Jünger and Edmund Schultz. *Die veränderte Welt: Eine Bildfibel unserer Zeit* (Breslau: Wilhelm Gottl. Korn Verlag, 1933), 5-10; Jünger, "War and Photography," trans. Anthony Nassar, *New German Critique* 59 (Spring-Summer 1993): 24-26.

games, the war-game may be counted among the cinema's most important predecessors. Like the cinema, the *Kriegsspiel* is a form of technical media that reconstructs a continuous experience of time and space by rationalizing them into discrete units, and positions its interfacing subject as sovereign over this space. Inherent in the narrative organization of the camera's gaze, and particularly in the spectacular narrative cinema's presentation of worlds fabricated on a grand scale, is a sovereign position pioneered in the *Kriegsspiel*.

In this chapter, I establish the correspondence between the *Kriegsspiel* and the cinema as technical media formats that constructed fantasies of sovereignty and identifications with an impossible aerial perspective that provided illusory agency over the stochastic field of German history. In addition to an analysis of the way the *Kriegsspiel* predicted and conditioned this gaze up into the Weimar era, I focus on the way this fantasy is presented in the mid-Weimar spectacular narrative films *Der heilige Berg* (*The Holy Mountain,* 1925) and *Der alte Fritz* (1927-8), and reflexively commented upon in F.W. Murnau's *Faust* (1926). This chapter, therefore, understands the montage ethos that gestured toward totality as deriving from military practices and institutions first established in the 19th century—from an apparatus that used play to produce strategically minded subjects. While not intending to discount the variety of cultural expression, and of uses and appropriations of the aerial perspective in Weimar and modernist culture more broadly, I hold that it is vital, particularly in today's age of omnipresent digital play, to recognize in the middle period of Weimar the pervasiveness of cultural elements that would contribute to the Republic's downfall, which included the implicitly militaristic games of cinema and the *Kriegsspiel*.

The stability of the Weimar's middle-period would prove to be a precarious one—enough so that Detlev Peukert's influential history of the Weimar Republic refers to it as "the illusion of

domestic stability." According to Peukert, "the unresolved contradictions which were to be the undoing of the Republic from 1930 to 1933 had actually been gathering strength during the years of 'stabilization.'"[7] Among these contradictions would prove to be the reliance of the young Republic on the deeply conservative Army, which by the middle period of Weimar was planning a resurgence, with or without the Republic. The middle years of Weimar, often referred to in Germany as *die goldene Twenties*, would also turn out to be the period in which "militarism in Germany reorganized itself," according to German film historians Knut Hickethier and Marcus Bier.[8] Hicketer and Bier focus on how military-themed film comedies began to re-normalize militarism in the minds of cinema-goers, but this reorganization of thought was also happening elsewhere on the cinema screen, as well as at the gaming table.

Der heilige Berg: Cinema's Panoramic Gaze

Cinema's dissociation of the material viewed from the perceiving subject has often been traced to a mode of spectatorship that emerged in the nineteenth century. Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* calls this mode "panoramic perception," in which the "effervescent reality" experienced via a machine came to be understood as a complete and objective reality.[9] "Panorama" has been a key concept in modernity studies since Walter Benjamin's essays on 19th-century Paris and his monumental *Passagenwerk* focused on media devices such as August Fuhrmann's *Kaiserpanorama* (patented in 1890) as part of a new regime of visuality. The word in 19th-century Europe came to mean "a

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[7] Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), 207.

[8] Hickethier, Knut and Marcus Bier. "Das Unterhaltungskino I: Militärschwänke der zwanziger Jahre," in *Die Perfektionierung des Scheins: das Kino der Weimarer Republik im Kontext der Künste*, ed. Harro Segeberg, (München, Fink, 2000), 70.

[9] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 64.

sweeping, comprehensive view (even if attained through a succession of different views)," and it

was applied to a variety of technical visual media, including the cinema.[10] For Jonathan Crary,

the *Kaiserpanorama*, which cycled through its multiple peephole stations a series of stereoscopic

slides, represented "a structuring of experience common to many precinematic devices in the

1880s, and then to cinematic ones in the 1890s, in which the fragmentation of perception

inherent to the apparatus is at the same time presented in terms of a mechanically produced

continuum that 'naturalizes' the disjunctions."[11] Early cinema experiments mimicked 19th-

century panoramic experiences, but in cinematic narrative, the naturalization of panoramic vision

would require the development of a central perspective, a spectator-position, from which

continuous action could be observed.[12]

No film genre from the Weimar Republic better manifests cinema's originary

"panoramicism"—including in Crary's sense of a naturalized perspective on virtual space—than

the *Bergfilme*, the mountain-climbing romances that constituted one of the most popular and

most distinctly German film genres in the silent and early sound era. Directly related to travel

films and nature photography that would have been described as "panoramic" in the late 19th

and early 20th centuries, the series of films fuses that earlier mode of panoramic gaze with the

stylistic and structural precepts of film narrative. Popularized by the geologist and passionate

mountaineer Arnold Fanck, the *Bergfilme* combined, oftentimes quite seamlessly, documentary

nature footage and stunt performances with stylized melodramas, in which the treacherous

ground of Alpine peaks symbolized the fraught tumultuous relations between characters. The

Romantic and Idealist motifs of the genre have often been interpreted as foreboding, suggesting

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[10] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999) 136.
[11] Ibid, 136, 138.
[12] Noël Burch, *Life to those Shadows,* trans. Ben Brewster (London: BFI: 1990), 39-40.

the same anti-rationalist mingling of mysticism and nationalist imagery typical of reactionary

modernism. Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* draws a connection between the

Bergfilme and fascism even as Kracauer admits an admiration for the on-location nature

photography: the films' cult of "heroic idealism" as well as their "idolatry of glaciers and rocks,"

for Kracauer, expose tendencies toward idealist abstraction in the "German mind" which the

Nazis would exploit.[13] While Kracauer's filmic lineage of the German authoritarian mindset is

often critiqued as excessively pat, the *Bergfilme* do evidence an embrace of a technological gaze

as a means of escaping or transcending modernity, naturalizing the fragmented-and-reassembled,

panoramic view from above.

　　　Der heilige Berg (*The Holy Mountain*, 1925), one of Fanck's earlier *Bergfilme*, opens

with imagery redolent of the imagery of the *Lebensreform*, a movement in early 20th-century

Germany that promoted physical health and spiritual ties to natural landscapes. In an anomalous

prologue, a scantily clad Leni Riefenstahl as the enigmatic dancer Diotima strikes active poses in

silhouette on a rocky shore, the sea gently lolling behind her. "The sea is her love -- wild,

boundless --- But her life – is dance – violent expressions of a stormy soul," read a pair of

intertitles, as her dance to the sea begins in overcranked slow motion. Cut-ins to the sudden,

grandiose movements of her dance, juxtaposed with the rhyming crashing of waves, serve to

naturalize her femininity, identifying it with the unpredictable tumult of the water. Presaging the

narrative to come, the sequence ends with Diotima's vision, composited into a shot of the sea, of

a mountain range on which is perched a stiffly standing masculine figure. "And so Diotima

dances … dances to satiate her longing for him – whom she has seen only in her dreams – atop

the highest mountain peak," an intertitle informs us. The silhouette atop the peak, to whom

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[13] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1947), 111, 112

Diotima bows down in a movement that also resembles a cower, will turn out to be the climber

Karl (Luis Trenker), who falls in love with Diotima as soon as he sees her photographs outside

the hotel ballroom where she performs her dance. Karl does not realize until much later that his

friend Vigo (Enrst Petersen) has also fallen in love with Diotima. In the film's climax, stranded

with Vigo on the peak of a mountain, Karl confronts his friend, who slips off the edge of the

mountain. Holding fast onto the rope from which Vigo is dangling but unable to pull him back to

safety, Karl freezes to death in place, fusing with the mountain and realizing Diotima's vision of

his silhouette adorning the peak as if it were part of the landscape.

Der heilige Berg constructs a binary symbolism that contrasts the solid, masculine stone

with the flowing, feminine water, and fixes heterosexuality as the manifestation of eternal

conflict between natural, super-rational forces. Such a system of symbols reflects the imagery

Kurt Theweleit finds in fascist German literature from the same period: the "flood" represented

by the feminine and by the feminized masses (in war and in modern urban life) must be

conquered by the man's becoming stiff: "Ultimately, the 'individual' who 'heaves himself out of

the mass' *becomes* the phallus. The final aspiration of the 'tirelessly forward-striving, restlessly

toiling German'—the man who strives to escape woman, the mass, and himself—is to embody

one part of the phallus-on-high."[14] Karl's death is a fusion with the eternal, the achievement of a

permanent position outside of the "rabble" with which he identifies his desire for Diotima. Karl's

disgust with his own, feminizing desire, which he identifies with the masses below, is exposed

when he interrogates Vigo atop the mountain, "Is there something you desire – down there –

among the rabble?" Karl's self-sacrifice is evidence not of his selflessness, but of his

transcendence of embodiment: destined to fuse with the stiff, inorganic mountain, he follows not

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[14] Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 2, *Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, trans. Erica Cater, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 50.

the pleasure principle but the mechanistic death drive, in Freud's then-recent reformulation of his theory of the psyche.[15] If in becoming inorganic Karl has achieved his position above the tumult of the feminized rabble below, so has the spectator, as the technological gaze of the camera has given them access to a panoramic view of Alpine adventure throughout the film.

This fantasy of transcending the rabble below via becoming-inorganic involves, for the spectator of *Der heilige Berg*, at least as much looking up at the mountains as looking down at valleys, but the eternal gaze of the mountains with which Karl ultimately fuses is also implicit in the film's thrilling scenes of mountain adventures. Remarkable indeed is an extended ski-race sequence in the middle of the film, captured with a variety of camera set-ups and utilizing views from above that show us the formations of the skiers as they cut lines in the white mountain snow. These are cut together with mobile shots taken by cameras on skis, to simulate continuity between the various stunts. "Racing through the forest," an intertitle reads midway through the race, "they no longer notice the fairy-tale beauty of the snow-covered firs." The film then cuts to an overhead perspective in which the line of skiers are framed on either side by those firs: while their experience of the space, determined by the relative speed of their bodies, blinds them to their incorporation into the natural landscape, the inorganic gaze of the camera provides a disembodied, classically panoramic gaze on the action that allows the spectator to place them within that landscape. We apprehend them from above as figures in a field below us—the Alpine foothills become the play-space not of the athletes, but of the mobile gaze of the camera, which can move between the "embodied" view of the skiers and the aerial, eternal gaze of the mountains, all while creating a false impression of the action's continuous time and space.

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[15] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1961).

Kracauer's unproblematized connection of the romanticism of the *Bergfilme* to Nazi

ideology has been critiqued in recent years, sometimes alongside Herf's "reactionary

modernism" thesis: as Katherine Loew has suggested, the kind of technoromanticism Fanck's

films evoke, the revelation of the spirit of nature in the technologically reproduced image,

extended far beyond right-wing circles in European modernity.[16] Similarly, while acknowledging

the overlap between conservative-nationalist politics and the imagery and plot devices of the

Bergfilme, scholars such as Eric Rentschler and Nicholas Baer have argued that the Fanck's

films actually engage their natural landscapes in a dialectic with the technological image,

positing in them a much more dynamic representation of nature than Kracauer's reading

allows.[17] Films such as *Der heilige Berg* evoke modernist aesthetics at least as much as they do

Romantic imagery, they claim, with its composition of in-frame montages through dissolves and

its use of slow-motion and ski-mounted cameras. Baer argues that Fanck's films are evidence of

a renegotiation of the relationship between socio-political history and mythical nature during the

Weimar period:

> scholarship that has associated ... mountain films with a flight from the contingencies of
> contemporary sociopolitical history into a timeless, mythical nature assumes an
> insufficiently dialectical conception of these terms, which—far from separate and
> discrete—were being jointly renegotiated during the interwar period ... Fanck's film
> rethought the relation between natural and historical elements, appealing to eternal forces
> while also suggesting the historical mutability of the Alpine landscape.[18]

Modern technology, according to Baer, is inherent not only in the means of imaging the Alps,

but also in Fanck's conception of their landscape. Perhaps the most aesthetically accomplished

[16] Katherine Loew, "The Spirit of Technology: Early German Thinking about Film," *New German Critique* 122, vol. 41, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 125-144.

[17] Eric Rentschler, "Mountains and Modernity: Relocating the Bergfilm," *New German Critique*, no. 51 (Autumn, 1990): 137-161; Nicholas Baer, "Natural History: Rethinking the *Bergfilm*," in *"Doch ist das Wirkliche auch vergessen, so ist es darum nicht getilgt": Beiträge zum Werk Siegfried Kracauers*, eds. Jörn Ahrens, Paul Fleming, Susanne Martin, and Ulrike Vedder, (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2017), 279-305.

[18] Baer, "Natural History," 297.

film of the genre, *Die weiße Hölle von Pitz Palü* (*The White Hell of Pitz Palu*, 1929), incorporates air flight into its vision of the Alps: the couple (half of which is again played by Riefenstahl) is rescued from the titular frozen crag by a mountaineer who parachutes in from their friend's airplane. Recent calls for nuance in our understanding of the politics of the *Bergfilme* such as Baer's seem to necessitate a problematization of Herf's "reactionary modernist" paradigm, as the *Bergfilme* are taken to expose Herf's presumption that mysticism and modernism were diametric opposites, united only by the paradoxical, cynical positioning of the right wing.

However, seeing the representation of the Alps in *Der heilige Berg* as a dialectic of nature and technology, of the physical world and technics, does not exempt it from the implications of its allegorical fusion of the male mountaineer with with the eternal gaze of the mountains. It is indeed a dialectical representation, but it is a dialectic that achieves the synthesis in the panoramic gaze achieved by transcending the entirety of the social field—indeed, transcending life itself and becoming an impossible, inorganic point of view. Kracauer's reading of the genre is not easily dismissed: the *Bergfilme* do indulge a fantasy of sovereignty, of a flight from the rabble below—a flight realized not only by the narrative arc but by the manner in which the camera captures and configures the space of the Alps. The *Bergfilme* were hugely popular across political lines because in their narrative and in their formal structure, they staged an escape to a position outside and above the crises of modern Germany, facilitated by a transformation into a non-organic gaze identified at once with the (German, masculine) mountains and the camera.

If the panoramic views of the *Bergfilme* were the outgrowth of the disembodiment of vision instituted by new visual media in the 19th century as described by Crary, it is vital to note

that, much as with computing technologies in the digital age, it was the militaries of Europe that

pioneered this mediated separation of spatial experience from the body, the formulation of an

impossible virtual position above and outside the field of action, in the *Kriegsspiel*. This

connection between modern, mediated experience and militarism was not lost on Walter

Benjamin. In his essay "The Storyteller" (1936), Benjamin argues that the modern author deals

in the instrumental genre of information rather than in the relayed experience of the story, and

that this alienation from direct experience is precipitated by warfare, "for never has experience

been more thoroughly belied than strategic experience was belied by tactical warfare, economic

experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in

power."[19] Detachment from embodied experience is rooted in the disjunctions of war, where

such a split, including the way tactics refute defy well-laid strategy, is necessary given the scale

of modern warfare. In the contradiction between the strategic view from above and the tactical

experience of the soldier, Benjamin has in mind the crises set loose by the First World War, but

the impasse he cites, the contradictions produced by the integration of top-down view with an

embodied one, predates that conflict by more than a century. That there was a conflict between

the levels of the strategic and the tactical was a problem discovered in the earliest modern

military theory—and the Prussian Army had attempted to manage that impasse by constructing

technologically simulated, panoramic experiences in play.

The Production of Space as Schematic *Spielraum* in The *Kriegsspiel*

In 1882, Friedrich Nietzsche's *Gay Science* had extolled the virtues of play as a "*freedom above

things*." Human thought need not always be fixed in static, serious forms, but should be open to

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[19] Walter Benjamin. "The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov." *Walter Benjamin: Selected* Writings, vol 3, *1935-1938*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, rrans. Harry Zohn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 144.

an ironic distance from itself, to play. "We should be *able* also to stand *above* morality—and not only to *stand* with the anxious stiffness of a man who is afraid of slipping and falling any moment, but also to *float* above it and *play*."[20] For Nietzsche, the potential of play is linked to the body—rather than, as in the Enlightenment mode of thought discussed in Chapter 1, the mind—and to play's creation of a space outside of the strictures of society, the "serious" life it stands outside and beyond. Even in 1882, however, the boundary between the sphere of play and the sphere of serious life was becoming murky, and Nietzsche's refuge of embodied play was being destabilized by an apparatus that incorporated into its interface—and by so doing, thereby delinked—eyes and hands. For nearly sixty years already, the Prussian Army had used a board game in officer training, versions of the *Kriegsspiel* developed by Lieutenant Georg Heinrich Rudolf von Reiswitz in 1824. In the 1860s and 70s, the Prussians had used variations of this war-game to plan the wars of German unification against Denmark, Austria, and France—and the world had taken note.[21] In Nietzsche's time, at least among schooled officers of Europe's militaries, play was no longer simply an escape from serious life, but also an integral part of preparing for and waging war.[22]

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[20] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1991), 164.

[21] Paul Schuurman, "Models of War 1770-1830: The Birth of Wargames and the Trade-Off between Realism and Simplicity," *History of European Ideas* 43, no. 5 (7 Sept. 2017): 445.

[22] The British War Ministry adapted a later version of the game, Captain Wilhelm von Tscischiwitz's *Anleitung zum Kriegsspiel* (1862), in 1872—just a year after the Franco-Prussian War resulted in German Unification. In the introduction to the English edition of the game, E. Baring writes, ""… it is only recently that [the game's] importance has been fully recognized outside of Germany; the increased importance which is now attached to it may be, in some measure, due to the feeling that the great tactical skill displayed by Prussian Officers in the late war has been, at least partially, acquired by means of the instruction which the game affords." E. Baring, *Rules for the Conduct of the War-Game* (London: Topographical and Statistical Department of the British War Office, 1872), iv. For more on the use of wargames across Europe's militaries, see Andrew Wilson, *Strategie und Moderne Führung*, trans. Wilhelm Höch (Munich: List, 1969).

Board games based around conflict, including many that might be broadly characterized as "war games," seem to have been with us since at least the beginning of agricultural civilization.[23] The table-top *Kriegsspiel* developed by Reiswitz—the culmination of decades of attempts to adapt chess rules into a more robust system of combat—was a divergence in that it was no longer a diversion. A groundbreaking media technology, among its innovations were two that decisively distanced wargaming from chess and transformed it into an effective training tool. First, Reiswitz tied any given action's success to a dice roll, using the emergent science of probability to simulate the element of uncertainty Carl von Clausewitz was soon to call the "fog of war."[24] The fog of war can be conceived of as the Benjamin's disconnect between strategic and tactical experience in modern warfare: tactics represent the level at which contingencies such as weather, troop morale, and mechanical malfunctions interfere with abstract strategy. Reiswitz's incorporation of contingency into the game gave strategists a means of experiencing and managing battlefield tactics, incorporating that embodied experience into the information seized by a mobile, disembodied gaze.

The incorporation of dice to simulate contingency provoked a reality effect unlike previous attempts at designing ludological simulations. But the ability of Reiswitz's game to predict and guide action depended on a second system, that of a continuous spatial and, crucially, temporal zone inherent to the game. The *Kriegsspiel* incorporated as the game "board" scientifically scaled topographical maps, which in the post-Napoleonic era were fiercely coveted

[23] H.J.R. Murray, *A History of Board Games Other Than Chess* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 236.

[24] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 89.

pieces of intelligence, the equivalent of aerial reconnaissance photography in a later era.[25]

Accurate maps produced in large numbers at a variety of scales were a recent innovation of great military import, owing to 18th-century innovations in cartography and the 1796 development of lithography by Aloys Senefelder. The maps that then flooded officers' rooms were a means of projecting military power onto a distant space, a technological extension of vision and therefore of the military's dominion of action. As a technologically produced representation whose rationalized space, with its precise coordinates and topographical codes, could be relied on to correspond to the real, the accurate map produced a virtual field of action, and Reiswitz exploited this quality of this new medium. He included a ruler with the game for the precise, scaled measurement of troop movements, and stipulated that each player's turn represented two minutes of elapsed time, so that different troops' movements in the game space corresponded to their actual duration in real time.[26] This spatio-temporal simulation radically altered the expectations of the relationship between gaming and the real. As Anders Engberg-Pedersen claims in his media history of the Napoleonic Wars, *Empire of Chance*, it is beginning around 1800 that "experience becomes increasingly artificial. This takes away nothing of its reality, but now it is created as a product of media. Maps, dice, and texts are transformed into technologies of experience that, through different simulations of the state of war, train the users to manage contingency."[27] Simulated panoramic vision, for which "evanescent reality had become the new reality," first emerges over the precise game-maps of the *Kriegsspiel*.[28]

[25] Norman J.W. Thrower, *Maps and Civilization: Cartography in Culture and Society*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007 [1972]), 154-55

[26] Georg Heinrich Rudolf von Reiswitz, *The von Reisswitz Kriegsspiel: The Prussian Army War Game,* ed. and trans. Bill Leeson (London: Two Fat Lardies, 2016), 23.

[27] Anders Engberg-Pederson, *Empire of Chance: The Napoleonic Wars and the Disorder of Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 144.

[28] Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*, 64.

As film historian Klaus Kreimeier writes, "in the 19th century the arming of the world was carried out on a great scale, and its 'mediatization' began—both on the basis of new technologies."[29] The *Kriegsspiel* is one of the many coincidences of these two phenomena, as it both "mediatizes" the world on the basis of a system of signification thought to objectively correspond to reality, and weaponizes the player-subject, entraining in them the ability to apprehend battlefield space from a disembodied position above it with their "mental eyes" [*geistige Augen*].[30] Unlike previous games like chess that broadly trained strategic capacities, the *Kriegsspiel* trained officers for concrete strategic and tactical situations because the events and processes that took place therein had correspondence to the real—it was "about reckoning with the Real and replacing game-events with the comparison to a measured outside world," according to media theorist Claus Pias.[31] The *Kriegsspiel* can be understood as part of a broader, Enlightenment-era effort to make war the object of a discrete science, an object of rational inquiry for which the mind is supplied with the correct categories of thought. Coming in the wake of the Napoleonic wars, the world's first reliable simulation also became, as it would for hobby war-gamers a century later, a means of emotionally conquering the embarrassment of recent German history. The game allowed players to witness war from the disinterested perspective of the spirit of history—at least one of the competing players, after all, would have to

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[29] Klaus Kreimeier, "Dispositiv Kino: Zur Industrialisierung der Wahrnehmung im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert," in *Die Perfektionierung des Scheins: das Kino der Weimarer Republik im Kontext der Künste*, eds. Harro Segeberg, Knut Hickethier, and Corinna Müller (Munich: Fink, 2000), 17-18.

[30] Eugen Bircher, *Die Schlacht bei Tannenberg als applikatorische Kriegsspiel-Übung in der Schweiz. Eine operative Studie* (Bern-Berlin: Varlage Hans Huber, 1931), 2.

[31] Claus Pias, *Computer Spiel Welten* (Dissertation: Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, 2002), 175. For detailed histories of the war game, see: Pias, 163-182; Philip von Hilgers, *War Games: A History of War on Paper*, trans. Ross Benjamin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012); and Jon Peterson, *Playing at the World: A History of Simulating Wars, People, and Fantastic Adventures, From Chess to Role-Playing Games* (San Diego: Unreason Press, 2012).

play and strategize as the French—and derive from it the principles that transcended national allegiance but would nevertheless reveal (by ultimately producing) the superiority of the German military intellect.

In more practical terms, the war game helped the Prussian Army overcome German history by being a method of hands-on training, as they deployed in the *Kriegsspiel* top-secret maps that would also be used in actual battle.[32] Within the real-world field designated by the *Kriegsspiel*, anything within the purview of the game is permitted. In the *Kriegsspiel*-trained German Army, according to military historian Isabell Hull, conquered territory—first German South West Africa, then Belgium—"maneuvers were held as if provisioning would take care of itself" and conquered ground was administered "as though it were a tabula rasa."[33] The *Kriegsspiel* opens up a frontier within which tactical forces can freely play, excluding from that field all that does not directly suit the game of the war—the lives in the occupied zone and the logistics that materially support a war effort. For the first time in the *Kriegsspiel*, looking forward to the "kill boxes" of drone warfare, play transforms the space of the battlefield in advance, into a homogeneous field of potential, preemptively justified military action—a new game of sovereignty in which media remake the world as the dominion of the sovereign decision, a dominion in which lives are derealized and precarious.[34]

Games, Eugen Fink would write in *Oase des Glücks*, his first monograph on the subject, "can be experienced as the summit of human sovereignty; the human enjoys therein an almost

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[32] Philip von Hilgers, "Anleitung zur Anleitung: Das taktische Kriegsspiel 1812-1824," *Board Game Studies* 3 (2000): 73.

[33] Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practice of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 141, 248.

[34] Grégoire Chamayou, *A Theory of the Drone*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: The New Press, 2013), 55; On precariousness, see Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2010).

unlimited status as creator, he builds productively and unrestrictedly, because he is not producing in the spaces of the real [*reellen*] reality."[35] The productions and destructions of the *Kriegsspiel*, however, corresponded to a real over which it endows a sovereign creator. A third innovation of Reiswitz's design was that the game requires a third player, an adjudicator called the *Führer* (leader) or *Unparteiende* (neutral party) who devises the scenario to be played out, adjusts the board according to the players' written orders, and decides on how the rules are to be implemented. Ruling over a real space remade into homogeneous *Spielraum*, the *Unparteiende* is a model, scholars such as Pias and Hilgers have argued, of the political sovereign, with the board-map itself representing the "state of exception" in which sovereign decisions can be directly implemented.[36]

The "state of exception" (*Ausnahmezustand*) as theorized by the fascist Weimar legal philosopher Carl Schmitt and elaborated upon more recently by Giorgio Agamben, suggests that the law can only truly be applied in the context of a sovereign decision. Liberal democracy, according to Schmitt, does not eliminate the question of a sovereign, but instead divides and distributes the control of such decisions among judges and other officials; the kernel of liberal law, therefore, remains the decision, rather than the written word. "For a legal order to make sense, a normal situation must exist"—a situation in which the norm assumed by the constitution applies—and "he is sovereign who definitely decides whether this normal situation actually exists," and applies or suspends the rule of law.[37] The state of exception, in which constitutional law is suspended in the case of an emergency, is actually the kernel of the law itself, according to

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[35] Eugen Fink, *Oase des Glücks: Gedanken zu einer Ontologie des Spiels* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1957), 35.
[36] Hilgers, *War Games*, 54, 80-84; Pias, "Computer-Spiel-Welten," 178.
[37] Carl Schmitt: *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Swab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 14.

Schmitt. For Agamben, a "sovereign sphere" is therefore at the core of the most basic political relationship, an arena in which the sovereign is permitted to make decisions on the lives of those caught in what he calls the "ban." Not merely an action that determines the law, "sovereign violence opens a zone of indistinction between law and nature, inside and outside, violence and law."[38] This zone is not dependent on the representations of the word as *techne* (law) and is not fully within the domain of *physis* (nature), but is in-between them, in a zone of suspension "in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice."[39] The anomalous zone cleared by the *Ausnahmezustand* catches "bare lives," paradoxically, in the force of a suspended law.

The *Kriegsspiel* designates zones of exception in advance, positing inhabited areas as the playing field for the strategic machinations of the commander's overseeing eye—opening zones of exception where lives are already subject to the sovereign decision. It is important to note that the sovereignty proffered by the war game is transcendence with an asterisk: the game, after all, was developed as a means of managing rather than totally dispelling the fog of war. Ultimately neither the players nor the *Unparteiende* can know in advance how the dice will roll. In relation to the game-world, the *Unparteiende* is not an omniscient presence, but the embodiment of the game's apparatus who implements the rules and commands. As discussed in Chapter 1, Friedrich Kittler argues that the transcendent presence supposedly guaranteed in language evaporated with the advent of the gramophone and typewriter, as machines proved capable of processes the Romantic discourse network had located in the human as a medium of the spirit.[40] Derridean

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[38] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Raozen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 64.
[39] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 83. See also Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 32-40
[40] Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 33.

deconstruction, in Kittler's estimation, is an articulation of this shift of the human into the machine: Jacques Derrida's trace that precedes all writing, he claims, "is simply a gramophone needle."[41] However, with its emphasis on play and strategy, deconstruction—a writing without a guarantee of a final, transcendent presence—is more a war game than a record player: Derrida writes that in deconstruction

> everything is strategic and adventurous. Strategic because no transcendent truth present outside the field of writing can govern theologically the totality of the field … The concept of *play* keeps itself beyond [the opposition between philosophical and empirical discourses], announcing, on the eve of philosophy and beyond it, the unity of chance and necessity in calculations without end.[42]

The presence that should secure meaning in language, an omniscient God or a world-spirit becoming conscious of itself through the human, would have no need for strategy; a non-transcendent language, on the other hand, is inherently strategic. The *différance* that precedes all discourse—the unsignifiable trace that presences presence—is "a bottomless chessboard on which Being is put into play."[43] The war game, rather than the record player, is the first place language becomes a play of signs unanchored by a presence that transcends time and place; players relay commands through impersonal missives that apply only within the spatio-temporal horizons of the given game. But the *Kriegsspiel* is simultaneously a model of how to hold together this play with a substitute presence, the *Unparteiende* as simulated and provisional transcendence.

In addition to implementing decisions in his adjudication of gameplay, the *Unparteiende* was in charge of devising the scenario for the game—when not based on past or prospective battles, then entirely invented, a fictional scenario. The *Unparteiende*, then, takes on the role of

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[41] Ibid

[42] Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 7.

[43] Ibid, 24.

author as well as narrator—the fabricator of war stories. He surveys the situation and makes his decision from the vantage of a frontier in-between the norm and the state of war.[44] In his analysis of the spatiality of written stories in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau connects the clearing of space for war in the ancient Roman ritual *fas*, which founds a "theater of war," to the basic operations of stories, which found a delimited space within which heterogeneous forces can play.[45] Telling a story can thus be, like waging a war, an opening of space for the letting-loose of national forces, a space of exception in which the nation is actually founded. De Certeau seeks moments of rupture and resistance within the field stories open up, as in the urban landscape, but he also emphasizes the spatio-ideological function of stories.

By the time of the Weimar Republic, the militarization of play and fiction via the *Kriegsspiel* had extended to a wide swath of culture. De Certeau's observations recall those of Hugo von Hofmannsthal in *Das Schrifttum als geistiger Raum der Nation* (*Writing as the Spiritual Space of the Nation*), a lecture given at the University of Munich in 1927 in which the poet coined the phrase "conservative revolution." For Hofmannsthal, too, literature "holds the nation together and … grants space within its game of conflicting tendencies [*innerhalb ihrer dem Spiel widerstreitenden Tendenzen … Raum gewährt*]."[46] Hofmannsthal understands stories as both spatial and ideological: it is in the clashing play of forces in the space cleared by literature, a martial metaphor, if it is a metaphor at all, that the spirit of the nation arises. In mid-Weimar society, a time of inner turmoil, in which the German "conscience of the nation" has been split into warring parties, Hofmannsthal calls for transcendent author figures he refers to as

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[44] Agamben, *State of Exception*, 41-51.

[45] Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), eBook Location 1852-1872.

[46] Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Das Schrifttum als geistiger Raum der Nation*, Speech, Universität München, Munich (Jan. 10, 1927) 11.

Suchenden (seekers) whose "great gestures … will tie themselves to necessity, the highest

necessity, which both is above all positions and is the geometrical place of all conceivable

positions."[47] This classically idealist—indeed, Cartesian—formulation of a geometrical space of

pure knowledge is simultaneously realized and dispelled in the war game, in which all possible

positions in a geometrized map are observed by an eye at once transcendent and reliant on

technical mediation. The modern authors who embody the German spirit, for whom the

conservative revolution is looking, do not write poems or novels—Hofmannsthal admits that

they may have an ambivalent relationship to classical forms of literature—but may in fact be

Unparteiende, the authors of war game scenarios. The sovereignty simulated by the *Kriegsspiel*

and longed for by Weimar's conservative revolution is no longer a pure transcendence on the

order of God or a world spirit, but an incomplete, technical, and *ersatz* transcendence.

The *Kriegsspiel* compelled a fusion with an inorganic, unfeeling gaze set above the

unfolding action; it announced the becoming-technical of the eye and mind of the subject and

thereby the evaporation of the organic Romantic subject and the spiritual armature that supported

it. In the 19th century, the Prussian, and later the German, officer became a "cartographic subject

… a person who, in the absence of actual maps, can read the terrain as he reads a map because he

is able to organize space using the methods of cartography."[48] It had been inconceivable, in

1824, that the word *Spiel* could be used to describe such an efficacious tool for capturing space

and shaping officers into subjects able to seize the totality of a situation. Looking back on its

invention in 1874, the Prussian General Dannhauer reflected that "even then the inventor [i.e.,

Reiswitz] did not like the word 'game' [*Spiel*]. But he could not find a better word, and left it to

his invention itself to prove that it does not stand in one and the same line with card and board

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[47] Ibid, 19-26, 27.
[48] Engberg-Pedersen, *Empire of Chance*, 166.

games, but is something completely different to these."[49] In German thought up to the Weimar Republic, the *Kriegsspiel* is more than a game for the same reason cinema would be less than an art: it is a technological tool of reproduction, product of and agent in the rationalization of life. But despite their discomfort with the term, Reiswitz and future proponents of the game would be stuck with *Spiel,* for what other word could you use to describe a fabricated scenario that gives its participant a "*freedom above things,*" the ability to "*float* above it and *play*"?

The War Game in the Weimar Republic

Hofmannthal's call for a conservative revolution whose figures could separate themselves from the petty squabbles of democracy and clear a new field for the formation of the nation was answered by the Weimar Army. Under its first post-Revolution leader, General Hans von Seekt, the *Reichsheer* (Germany Army) re-embraced the *Kriegsspiel* as part of their systematic defiance of the Treaty of Versailles.[50] That total effort would include clandestine measures to build an air force, a secret pact with Soviet Russia to train troops in excess of Treaty limits, and a propaganda campaign that aimed to reestablish the Army's position as the bearer of the national spirit.[51] Under Seekt's leadership, the *Reichsheer* (still referred to by most as the *Reichswehr*) asserted itself to be *überparteilich*: not merely neutral in party-political matters, the Army was

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[49] Dannhauer, "Das Reiswitz'sche Kriegsspiel von seinem Beginn bis zum Tode des Erfinders 1827," *Militär-Wochenblatt* 95, no. 56 (11 July 1874): 529.

[50] For details on the multifaceted plot to rebuild the German Army in defiance of the Treaty, see Harold J. Gordon, *The Reichswehr and the German Republic, 1919-1926* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 184-186; 308-309.

[51] Emre Sencer, "Fear and Loathing in Berlin: German Military Culture at the Turn of the 1930s." *German Studies Review* 37, no. 1 (February 2014): 21. See also Gordon, *The Reichswehr*, 297-299. In the words of military historian Ulrich Gundelach, the *Reichsheer* in the middle Weimar period aimed to "make the soldierly attitude into an element in the life of every single citizen." Ulrich Gundelach, *Der nationale Wehrgedanke in der Weimarer Republik: Ein Beitrag zum Militarisumusproblem in Deutschland zweischen 1918 und 1933* (Inaugural-Dissertation zur Doktorwürde der philosophischen Fakultät der Rheinischen Friedrichs-Wilhelms-Universität zu Bonn, 1977), 158.

meant to be the transcendent embodiment of German sovereignty—an *Unparteiende* floating

above the chaos of parliamentary democracy.[52]

The *Kriegsspiel* served the Army's postwar aims both ideologically and practically.

Ideologically, it encouraged identification with a sovereign commanding gaze that stood above

and outside the transpiring of history, that promised the redemption of the German nation, and

identified this position with the German military. Practically, it had gained even more efficacy as

a training tool because as a result of the strictures of the Treaty. While Versailles limited the

number of officers Germany could formally educate, promoting the game among lesser officers

would allowed the *Reichsheer* to build a base of soldiers who could step into leadership roles

when the first limits on its size expired in 1934—creating a kind of shadow officer corps.[53]

Private presses published *Kriegsspiel* manuals and reports by officers like Major Kurt

Haase, who rather directly states the purpose of the Weimar-era war game: current low-ranking

officers must "be so thoroughly tactically educated that in cases of emergency they can, in

places, function as leaders of the troops."[54] Oberst Eugen Bircher argues in his *Kriegsspiel*

manual that, given the context of postwar Germany, "the leader [Führer], today more than ever,

must be able to make an image of the events while remote from the scene of warlike events,

often based on only the slightest reports. He must be able to have before his mental eyes

[*geistigen Augen*] troops passing by in the area denoted by the map, taking action and

fighting."[55] Indeed, the greatest advantage of the *Kriegsspiel* is that one learns to see not from

what would be one's actual position on the field, "but instead looks over it with uninhibited eyes

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[52] This despite Seekt's numerous bids for public office. See Gundelach, 158. See also Gordon, *Reichswehr*, 308-309.

[53] Adolf Reinicke, *Das Reichsheer 1921-1934: Ziele, Methode der Ausbildung und Erziehung sowie der Dienstgestaltung* (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1986), 6.

[54] Kurt Haase, *Kriegsspiel-Planübung* (Berlin: F.G. Mittler & Sohn, 1926), 1.

[55] Bircher, *Die Schlacht bei Tannenberg,* 2.

from above, somewhat like a plane from a great height."[56] Young officers must be taught to think

of their eyes separately from their body, supported by visual prostheses that guarantee them

objective access to the battlefield: the game was to supply officers of a future reconstituted

Reichswehr with a prosthetic set of eyes within their mind, technical eyes they would need to

apprehend and make actionable the total battlefield from the impossible, disembodied

perspective of modern military strategy—the "geometric place containing all possible positions"

that had been produced in the *Kriegsspiel* in the first place.

Simulating a state of exception, the military institution of the *Kriegsspiel* itself became a

site of exception in the Weimar Republic, where illegal military exercises could continue

unabated and ultimately determine the course of German history. It was a war game, arranged by

Oberstleutnant Eugen Ott as the game's *Unparteiende* in November of 1932, that would

demonstrate to assembled representatives of the government, the police, and the military that

Chancellor Franz von Papen's government was insufficiently prepared for a Polish invasion of

East Prussia.[57] The obfuscations of Ott's scenario, including the extreme unlikeliness of the

Polish invasion and its overlooking of the paramilitaries sworn to defend the Republic, were

intentional, intended to break confidence in Papen's government and install Ott's co-conspirator

Kurt von Schleicher as Chancellor:

> All these one-sided assertions and politically colored procedures [in the conception and
> play of the Ott wargame] suggest the supposition that the *Kriegsspiel* was from the
> beginning arranged such that it would prove a specific thesis: a continuation of the Papen
> government would lead not only to heavy unrest, but also endanger the life's work of
> Seekt and Schleicher—the *überparteilich* role of the *Reichswehr*.[58]

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[56] A.D. von Hörauf, *Das Kriegsspiel: Seine Anlage und Leitung. Besprechungen im Gelände und Gefechtsübungen im Rahmen des verstärkten Infanterie-Regiments* (Berlin: Verlag von E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1930), 1.

[57] Francis L. Carsten, *Reichswehr und Politik 1918-1933* (Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsche, 1964), 431.

[58] Ibid, 434.

Ott's intentions were nefarious, but in mixing into the game's simulation of real events his own

fantastical constructions, he was following what was by then the prescribed method of

conducting a Kriegsspiel. While avoiding "forced" and "unnatural" images—for they would

betray to the players the mediacy of the medium, the constructedness of its spectacle—the

Unparteiende, or *Führer*, the scenarist of the Weimar-era *Kriegsspiel*, was to use narrative tropes

like *in media res* and heightened drama to "excite the fantasy of the gentlemen playing along."[59]

Thus the war game, Hilgers claims, "made use not of film's contents, but of its production

methods," the construction of spectacular scenarios through the simulation of an objective,

überparteilich real.[60] Ott's scenario for his war game certainly excited the fantasy of his

spectators: Papen was removed from the Chancellorship in favor of Schleicher, who a matter of

weeks later would facilitate his own succession by his ally Adolf Hitler. Rephrasing Clausewitz,

Hilgers claims that "the Weimar regime found in the war game a medium for the continuation of

its politics," adding that "the significant days of the end of the regime are the days on which war

games cleared the way for Hitler."[61]

Seekt, his shadow officers, and Ott were not the only gamers in the Weimar Republic. In

the nineteenth century, versions of the war game seeped into the popular sphere across Europe,

with notable proponents of war games including the British authors Robert Louis Stevenson and

H.G. Wells, who published a war-game manual of his own, *Little Wars,* in 1913.[62] In Germany,

given the steadily expanding dominance of Prussian militarism, war-gaming had entered the

popular sphere as early as the 1840s, and did so via much the same route that proto-cinematic

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[59] von Hörauf, *Das Kriegsspiel*, 18; Haase, *Kriegsspiel-Planübung*, 9-10.
[60] Hilgers, *War Games*, 63.
[61] Ibid, 70.
[62] Peterson, *Playing at the World*, eBook locations 5807, 7273.

devices did—the children's toy box.[63] In the late 1830s, a child's toy chest might well have held

both a zoetrope and a collection of tin soldiers in the new "Nuremberg scale" of 28 millimeters.

In *Kinderspielzeug aus alter Zeit* (*Children's Toys from the Old Days*), a history of German toys

widely read after its publication in 1923, folk historian Karl Grober notes the significance of the

standardization of size. After the introduction of the Nuremberg scale, "One could create entire

armies without it leading to a battle between giants and dwarves. Soon this little artwork [i.e., the

tin soldier], originally thought of as a mere child's toy, penetrated into the serious atmosphere of

studying officers and future battle-leaders."[64]

  As Jon Peterson would phrase it 90 years later in *Playing at the World*, "with a consistent

scale, a game ceases to be an abstraction like the game of chess, and begins to evolve toward

something entirely novel: a simulation."[65] In the mid-19th century, even popular play with tin

soldiers became more systematic, more inclined toward practical application. Grober, however,

gets the lineage backwards: it is not children's play that had penetrated the serious atmosphere of

German officers, but the serious atmosphere of militarism that had penetrated play.[66] In the lead-

up to the First World War, dozens of increasingly complex popular war-themed games were

published in Western Europe, and in Germany in particular. Medieval games such as *Fox and

Goose*, which laid out an abstract, topological field of nodes and vectors, were re-released with

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[63] Pias, *Computer Spiel Welten*, 181.

[64] Karl Grober, *Kinderspielzeug aus alter Zeit: Eine Geschichte des Spielzeugs* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1923), 35.

[65] Peterson, *Playing at the World*, ebook location 6164.

[66] While much attention has been paid to the role that militaristic video games, produced both in concert with the US Armed Forces and by independent private corporations, play in ideological interpellation in the digital age, the role that games play in normalizing ideology, conditioning perception, and disciplining subjects did not simply appear at the dawn of video games in the 1970s. See, for example, Ed Halter: *From Sun Tzu to Xbox: War and Video Games* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006); Tristan Donovan, *Replay: The History of Video Games* (East Sussex: Yellow Ant, 2010), 2-14; Roger Stahl, "Have You Played the War on Terror?" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23, no. 2, (June 1, 2006): 117.

or adapted to military themes, and the German siege game (*Belagerungsspiel*) gained popularity throughout Europe.[67] Many other games were simplified adaptations of the military's *Kriegsspiel*: in 1908, for example E. L. Böttcher released a popular game called *Soldaten Spiel* which utilized tin figures and a map-like board representing a village and pastures over which a coordinate grid was laid.[68]

Mass-distributed war-themed board games and tin soldiers led a militarization of children's play in the decades that preceded the Weimar Republic. As suggested by an article in the illustrated magazine *Uhu* in 1925, by 1925 the Weimar Republic the logic of regimentation and exact scale in the war game had seeped into a broader conception of the correct form and function of children's play. Claiming to follow a model laid out by Wells, "Die Welt auf dem Fußboden" ("The World on the Floor") prescribes moving children's play onto the floor, in order to create there a more complete, panoramic world in which to arrange figurines. The purpose of such an arrangement of a world is to make play pedagogical [*erzieherisch*], to "lead children into our life, into the life of our times." Namely, the article prescribes, given a child who loves bananas, "on the [model] island he has built, bananas should grow. The brown people pick them. Then they are loaded onto the ship. The ship makes a long journey, finally arriving in a haven, which is Hamburg," and continuesing on to a shop in Berlin.[69] What the child is introduced to through such games is not being in the world, but separating itself from it, disembodying his gaze and comprehending it from an impossible position above as an interconnected, colonized space laid out for his play.

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[67] Christopher George Lewin, *War Games and Their History* (Stroud, England: Fonthill Media, 2012), 75-106.
[68] Ibid, 112-13
[69] Ludwig Reve, "Die Welt auf dem Fußboden," *Uhu* 2, no. 4 (Jan. 1925): 103.

The magazine recommends toy soldiers for such arrangements of the world as panoramic

Spielraum:

> To avoid misunderstanding, we would like to emphasize that this does not concern inculcating in children a militaristic inclination. But we need indeed a lot of medium-scaled and equally scaled figures that one can set up, and for that one will find little else than, and certainly nothing cheaper than, soldiers. And besides that we can't really avoid organizing battles, and for that one will need solders: we also once built forts—why are forts there other than to be stormed?[70]

The article's disavowal of militarism falters and collapses after a single sentence. It is in any case clear that this desire to image a coherent totality in microcosm, distinct from the embodied space of the player, is a fantasy of sovereign power of a distant or vast space that through its miniaturization and mediazation is made manageable along with the "brown" lives within that space. The illustration for the article, on the page following the above paragraph, is a photograph of a miniature tropical space with small, dark figures frozen in a rush toward small huts set into the trees: "The world on the floor: Negro attack on a white plantation," reads the caption.[71]

Alongside a form of children's play clearly derived from the 19th century tradition of structured war games and dioramas, adult hobbyists in the Weimar Republic continued a form of popular war-gaming more closely derived from the military institution, in clubs that are direct predecessors to the war-gaming clubs out of which role-playing games (RPGs), and later video games, would develop. In the publications of the Berlin associations of tin-figure collectors, many of whom were passionate amateur war-gamers, the *Kriegsspiel* takes on the characteristics of a reactionary modernist technology, one in which the abstract, technical rationality of the *Kriegsspiel* on one hand, and authentic national feeling, the "German soul," are not at odds with each other, as in Ernst Jünger's theory of a photography that reveals the historical spirit to the

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[70] Ibid, 100.
[71] Ibid, 101.

German instinct. Through this synthesis of soulless, technologically produced semblance and national essence, the German Army and the nation it bore on its back could be redeemed.

In 1930, the satirist and former Dada fellow-traveler Kurt Tucholsky encountered the magazine *Der Standhafte Zinnsoldat: Nachrichten für Liebhaber der Zinnfiguren* ("The Steadfast Tin Soldier: News for Tin Soldier Enthusiasts"), published by the Association of Tin-Figure Collectors of Berlin and Leipzig. In a piece reflecting on his discovery, Tucholsky remarks with distaste upon the presence of a wargame in the issue:

> There is a real 'war game' in the magazine too: the French are before Greifswald, the Second Riflemen's Division is being transported out of Wittstock at twelve o'clock – I would have suggested *Tin*buktu – in short, there rages on a small scale that spirit of 'military valiance' which, on a large scale, would have the world believe it is only the evil enemies of Germany that produced such turmoil in the land.[72]

This fantasy of a position for the national spirit above politics was sustained by the experience of the war game. Hobbyist war gamers practiced a structured form of play, explicitly modeled on the games of the Army, with systems for simulating the elapsing of time, the efficacy of weapons, and so forth. Using tin soldiers, gamers would play through historical battles, becoming omniscient witnesses to and *post facto* redeemers of German history. The game outlined in the pages of the journal is set during the Napoleonic Wars, but Tucholsky recognizes this nostalgia for the successful, Prussia-led rebellion against Napoleon as a barely veiled attempt to re-play the more immediate past, to redeem the late German Empire from the discomfiting truths of its downfall.

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[72] Kurt Tucholsky, "Standhafte Zinnsoldat," in *Germany? Germany! The Kurt Tucholsky Reader*, ed. and trans. Harry Zohn (London: Carcanet Press, 1990), 61.
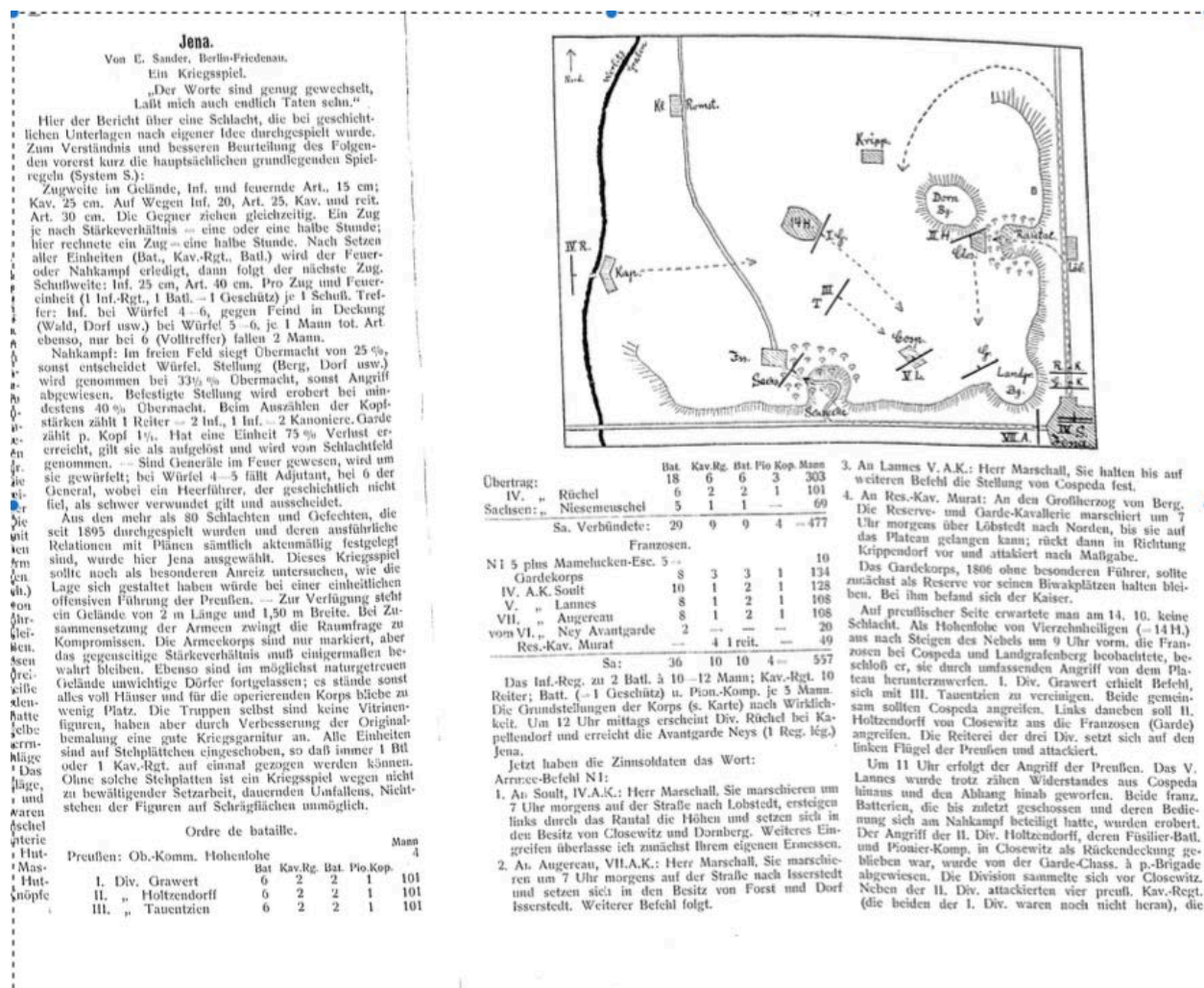
Figure 2.1: E. Sander, "Jena: Ein Kriegsspiel," *Der standhafte Zinnsoldat: Nachrichten für Liebhaber der Zinnfiguren* 3, no. 7 (Jul. 1930): 76-77.

It is hardly a surprise that in an issue published eight months before the one Tucholsky happened across, the editor Joachim Ritter had directly echoed the Army's official apolitical inclination, complete with its paradoxical embrace of a tendential position vis-a-vis the future of the state:

> … we want to assert that we tin-figure collectors are unpolitical. 'Unpolitical,' with regard to party politics – certainly that's what we are and what we'd like to stay. With regard to our beautiful German Fatherland, however, we have the obligation as collectors

to be active for it and to repudiate all that is harmful to it or to our national comrades [*Volksgenossen*].[73]

Repeatedly, the tin-figure war gamers insist on their own lack of politics, using the *Kriegsspiel* itself as evidence of their disinterest: "Only for outsiders is it once again said that our *Kriegsspiel* is widely separated from political fervor, that it merely represents a mental game [*Geistesspiel*], in which all figures, whichever uniform they may wear, are valued exactly the same."[74] The game is not merely objective, but is identified with a *Geist* that supersedes the material world below and synthesizes the lessons taught by this conflagration of historical forces. But at the same time they are allegedly transcended by the aerial eye of the player, these divisions are presumed as necessary in the very rules of the game: the history/the game could not progress if there were truly no distinction between the French and Prussian figures. This paradox speaks to the duality of the game: at the same time that the rules that structure the game-world apply, the player is situated in a position at the margins of this world, in possession of the total picture. While the player might well identify with the Prussian side, his "primary identification" is with the *Kriegsspiel* apparatus rather than with the figures themselves.[75]

   In their polemics defending their favorite hobby, the tin-figure war-gamers often compare the visual schema of the *Kriegsspiel* to the objective, mechanical gaze of the cinema. Proactively defending his hobby from detractors in an article extended across several issues of *Die Zinnfigur*,

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[73] *Volksgenossen* could be a fascist dog whistle here, as in May 1933 Ritter comes out avowedly in support of the Nazi regime. Joachim Ritter, "Wir Zinnfigurensammler und unser deutsches Volk: Zum Jahresbeginn 1930," *Der standhafte Zinnsoldat: Nachrichten für Liebhaber der Zinnfiguren* 3, no. 1 (Jan. 1930): 1. See also Ritter, "Unser Deutschland!" *Der standhafte Zinnsoldat: Nachrichten für Liebhaber der Zinnfiguren* 6, no. 5 (May 1933): 49.

[74] Bernhard Beyer, "Kriegsspiel," *Der standhafte Zinnsoldat: Nachrichten für Liebhaber der Zinnfiguren* 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1927): 4.

[75] Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), 49-52.

another magazine for tin-figure collectors, author O. Müller insists that the *Kriegsspiel* is more than a game, because while games like go or chess are abstract, it is a direct simulation of the real.[76] To emphasize this realism, Müller suggests a striking means of simulating movement:

> A … characteristic possibility of our games consists in—given the presence of a sufficient number of figures—switching out one and the same figure during the game in order to show the figure in the different phases of its movement and activity. So, for example, a cavalryman stops in front of a house … in the next 'turn' the cavalryman trots (he is replaced by an outwardly identical cavalryman-figure in 'trot'), in the next turn the cavalryman stops, climbs off (he is replaced by the figures of a saddled and standing horse and an infantryman in the same costume or uniform as the 'rider on horse'), etc.[77]

Müller proposes reconstituting a detailed movement through the juxtaposition of numerous still images at regular intervals, what Henri Bergson had described in 1911 as scientific rationality's "cinematic illusion of time."[78] At least according to the hobbyist wargamers of the Weimar Republic, the *Kriegsspiel* constructs an objective representation of the real through much the same means as cinema. Müller's position is that any process from the real world can be recreated within the bounds of the war game, that temporal flux is unproblematically reconstructed via its regularized segmentation of time. "Even fire can continue consuming turn by turn, even the water that thunders against the dykes can be battled turn by turn—with all the means of the

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[76] As opposed to the *Kriegsspiel*, in go and chess, "The 'battle' is stylized, and life and reality, from which ultimately the basic concept of the game is extracted, are only – unbeknownst to the player – completely distantly pointed to." O. Müller, "Das Spielproblem," *Die Zinnfigur: Monatshefte für Freund und Liebhaber von Zinnfiguren, Trachten, Geschichte, und Völkerkunde. Bundesblattdes deutschen Zinnfigurensammlersbundes ‚CLIO' 1*, no. 2 (Feb. 1926), 10-11.

[77] O. Müller, "Das Spielproblem", *Die Zinnfigur* 1, no. 3 (Mar 1926): 46-48

[78] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* trans. Arthur Mitchell. (London: Electric Book Co, 2001), 165-6.

miniature technology of our tin-figure-world, with which indeed everything can be represented."[79]

Sometimes the analogy to the cinema is more explicit in the war-gaming journals. In the second volume of *Standhafte Zinnsoldat*, Bernhard Beyer recommends breaking up longer campaigns into smaller episodes, and using multiple maps of different scales to string the events together. "These episodes," he writes, "relate to the larger game as in a film-drama the close-ups of single actors to the ongoing situation - they present a cut-out, enlarged, once again."[80] While Beyer may easily have drawn a parallel to the novel—each episode could instead function as a chapter in a larger narrative—it is significant that he instead understands the *Kriegsspiel* in relation to cinematic vision. The *Kriegsspiel* is implicitly more like the cinema because, in the rules that govern the mediation between the space-time of the player and that of the game, it facilitates a super-temporal, mobile vision through a representational space constituted through via a rationalized breakdown of space and time. The war-gamers see their adaptations of the military's *Kriegsspiel* as providing them with the "schooled eyes"—the cooled eyes—of the sovereign commander as well as of the cinema.

As alluded to above, in *Creative Evolution*, Henri Bergson had used the cinema as a metaphor for the way intellectualism and science schematize time and space into discrete segments and mistake this rationalized and reconstituted space-time, abstracted from the embodied experience of *durée*, for an immediate representation of the real. In fact, as we have seen, the cinema was preceded in this regard by the *Kriegsspiel*—the original "medium of

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[79] O. Müller, "Das Spielproblem," *Die Zinnfigur Monatsschrift für Freund und Liebhaber von Zinnfiguren, Trachten, Geschichte, und Völkerkunde. Bundesblatt des deutschen Zinnfigurensammlersbundes 'CLIO'* 1, no. 4 (Apr. 1927): 60.

[80] Bernhard Beyer, "Neues über Kriegsspiel und Gelände," *Der standhafte Zinnsoldat: Nachrichten für Liebhaber der Zinnfiguren* 2, no. 1 (Jan 1929): 11.

immediacy" whose technical intervention "between observer and 'fabric of life'" was actually an "indispensable condition for the overcoming of distance,"—scholar Tobias Wilke's description of how the cinema was conceived by Weimar film theorists such as Bela Balász.[81] Much as cinema's overcoming of the distance between humans and their milieu would be understood by "technoromatics" like Bela Balász as revealing hidden dimensions of life, the *Kriegsspiel* players understand its rationally schematized, divided and reconstituted, technologically simulated time as lending the tin soldiers an "ensouled" life unattainable in the usual board game. The simulation of lifelike movement in time is what endows the *Kriegsspiel* with its transcendent, nationalistic soul:

> Because the tin soldier is only animated [*beseelt*, ensouled] when it is no longer stuck fast to the ground of the [game] constructionset-up [*Aufbau*], but is summoned to action according to definite rules that carry calculations of every situation, it distinguishes itself in its total essence from the pieces of the board game.
>
> Incidentally, the *Kriegsspiel* player will also be intent on imagistic effects, in order not to pain his eyes that have been schooled in the construction [of the game]. Equally, however, some impossible formations which I have seen in the process of configuring setting up the game [*Aufbauten*] would have been avoided if the figures had been inserted into the site during play.[82]

In such writing, the game of the *Kriegsspiel* becomes an almost mystic technology, one whose rational division of space and time has resulted in the vivification of the figures imaged therein. The player, meanwhile, has had his eyes augmented by their technical extension in game-play: falsely composed images literally pain such eyes, and only images composed in movement (during play) can truly please such eyes. Training the eyes to treat space and time in this manner, *Kriegsspiel* and the cinema each presume and produce a particular notion of the subject, one

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[81] Tobias Wilke, *Medien der Unmittelbarkeit: Dingkonzepte und Wahrnehmungstechniken, 1918-1939* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2010), 59.

[82] Bernard Beyer, "Halmesteine," *Der Standhafte Zinnsoldat: Nachrichten für Liebhaber der Zinnfiguren* 4, no. 2 (Jan 1931): 20.

whose technically extended vision gives him sovereignty over the realm surveilled from a safe distance. The schooled eyes of the wargamer, trained to perceive and decode a panoramic field, are what create the seemingly unique sympathy between the tin figure collector and the defenders of German military valiance. Like his peers in the Prussian Army of yesterday and the German Army of the (shameful) Republic—the last bastion of the true German nation—the war gamer has become a sovereign player-subject with cinematic eyes.

Der alte Fritz: Narrative Cinema as Sovereign Play

On cinema screens, the *Kriegsspiel*'s reactionary-modernist fusion of "objective" technological reproduction with German national spirit had a complement, in the form of an allegorical return to the glory of the Prussian past. While the tin-soldier collectors of Berlin and Leipzig experienced the triumphs of Frederick the Great from the simulated aerial perspective facilitated by the map-based *Kriegsspiel*, audiences were offered a portrait of the legendary monarch on cinema screens that positioned him as an *überparteilich* sovereign in times of crisis. The cycle of nationalist "Prussian films" starring Otto Gebühr began in 1922 with the now-lost *Fredericus Rex* two-film series, and would last until the 1940s. In the Prussian films, particularly the *Der alte Fritz* films (1927 and 1928, respectively subtitled *Friede* and *Aufklang*), Frederick is represented as a super-political figure, an embodiment of enlightened rationality and the symbol of a German unity that would not take shape until a century after his death. Taking place in the final decades of Frederick's life after the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), the *alte Fritz* films present Frederick as a symbolic rallying point in the contemporary aftermath of the loss in the First World War, the German Revolution, and the recent prolonged financial crisis. In tThe Prussian films', identify Frederick as simultaneously the father of the military state and as a

figure above worldly politics, aligning him with the Weimar-era German Army's program for postwar revitalization.

The *alte Fritz* films were directed by Gerhard Lamprecht, whose "milieu films" *Menschen untereinander* and *Die Unehelichen* (*People to Each Other* and *Children of No Importance,* both 1926) soberly depicted the impact of economic and social crises on the poor and the young. Following on the heels of these realistic melodramas, *Der alte Fritz* would be celebrated, even in left-leaning circles—even by Siegfried Kracauer—as a triumph of the New-Objective presentation of history. According to contemporary critics, the two-part drama managed to de-politicize the Frederick legend, even if this triumph was tempered a bit by each film's tedious pace.[83] Critic Ernst Jäger, for example, claimed that the film series "places itself beyond 'left' and 'right,'" successfully presenting Frederick as a figure that transcends the petty squabbles of modern Germany.[84] But such claims ironically underline the extent to which the matter-of-fact *alte Fritz* films align themselves and their subject Frederick with the allegedly super-political position of the *Reichsheer* during the Weimar period. In Lamprecht's undeniably hagiographic films, Frederick, in many ways the founder of the modern German Army, is also situated as the origin of its contemporary claims to *Überparteilichkeit*. The two-part film emphasizes the exceptionality of the sovereign king, as the grandfatherly "Old Fritz" wisely exercises his power from a position outside of contentious, everyday politics—a position from which he, at some points, appears to playfully shape the text of *Der alte Fritz* itself.

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[83] See Siegfried Kracauer, "Der alte Fritz," in *Siegfried Kracauer: Werke*, vol 6.1, *Kleine Schriften zum Film, 1921-1927*, ed. Inka Mülder-Bach with Mirjam Wenzel and Sabine Biebl (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2004), 430.

[84] Ernst Jäger, "Der alte Fritz. Erster Teil: Frieden," *Film Kurier* 10, no. 4 (Jan. 4, 1928): 2.

Lamprecht self-reflexively posits cinema as the realist medium best suited to tell Frederick's story, aligning its objective apprehension of German history with the monarch's own. Both films in the series open with an implicit contrast between cinema and 18th-century means of information transmission: a street artist hawking illustrations of the aging king, and a play in Berlin gently mocking "Old Fritz," respectively. The opening of the second film in particular betrays a hint of winking reflexivity, excluding the presence of the stage in medium-long shot to momentarily fool the viewer into believing that the play is the continuation of the films' version of the Old Fritz legend. The camera pulls back, exposing the presence of the stage, and soon cuts to Gebühr as Frederick magnanimously dismissing aides' insistence that he ban the play. In this cut, Lamprecht asserts cinema's superiority as a medium for historical representation, with the set's more detailed interiors and costumes, its more subtly made-up Frederick. And in making what seems a self-effacing, objective decision not to ban the personally offensive play, Frederick is aligned with the neutral, rational gaze of the camera, able to abstract his vision from himself and view the situation from the perspective of the nation; through the dialectic of abstract strategy and embodied tactics, establishing shot and cut-in, he grasps a complete picture of the social totality. His decision, is of course, no less authoritarian, but it is his self-distanced perspective that qualifies him to make absolute decisions, according to the film's logic.

Frederick's pronouncement that the play be allowed to continue places him in a position we see him in often throughout the films: wisely orchestrating events from a perch somewhere just outside the unfolding of the rather loose narrative. Frederick is the sovereign of 18th-century Prussia but also, it will turn out, of Lamprecht's film: both *histoire* and *discours* become his playing-field in *Der alte Fritz*'s nostalgic imagining of the absolute sovereign. This is

particularly salient in a moment from the first film, in which the King observes his nieces and nephews, young royals from across the various principalities of divided Germany, playing rings in an open park. Although the scene is presented as if Frederick is observing the group while reclining nearby in the gardens, the editing leaves his precise spatial relation to them vague. The scene's first shot shows us the aristocratic youth frolicking in Park Sansouci on Frederick's eponymous estate. It is a long shot framed by tree branches, as if the camera has parted the foliage and is observing a candid moment of play. It then cuts to a medium-long shot of Frederick and an advisor sitting amidst hedges on a bench. Although Frederick points to screen right, as if to indicate the relationship between this space and the field where his nephews and nieces play, neither an eyeline match nor an establishing shot concretizes the spatial relations; instead, a rather anomalous shot of his wife, Queen Elisabeth Christine (Julia Serda), and other elder aristocrats standing and chatting follows. This is succeeded by a return to the candid long shot of the younger generation playing rings, and then a title card announces that this is where "the Crown Prince met the woman whom reasons of state had determined for him." In a panning medium-long shot, Crown Prince Frederick Wilhelm (Anton Pointner) strides toward his cousin Elisabeth von Braunschweig-Wolfbüttel (Charlotte Ander), and in medium close-up, tenderly kisses her hand. Now a cut to Old Fritz in close-up, now alone on the bench, shows him smiling eagerly while looking to screen left: thus, we are to presume, the group of frolickers is somewhere to Frederick's left and the prospective couple to his right. But the respective shots of these other spaces are totally unmoored from his perspective: he seems to perceive what the camera sees irrespective of his own position within the space of the diegesis, placing him in a kind of meta-space from which he accesses absolute, objective views of the adjacent spaces.

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When an errant ring lands next to him, a very primitive continuity of motion reiterates that the ring-players are somewhere to Frederick's left (screen right). He picks up the ring and mischievously hides it behind his back while, in a separate shot, the players look (rather illogically) directly upwards in search of the ring; they apparently are utterly unaware that Frederick is close by and observing, even as for his part he comprehends and intervenes in all events around him. Frederick throws the ring off screen left, and it lands, in close-up, on the linked hands of the Crown Prince and Elisabeth, the woman the King has chosen as his the Prince's bridal match. At this moment, unacknowledged by all other characters but not clearly hiding, King Frederick appears to be somewhere outside or above the text, not fully integrated into its spatial relations but placed in an ambivalent realm between the three other spaces in which this scene plays out. This position outside of the narrative events corresponds to his sovereignty over these events: in this scene, he arranges a marriage for his rakish nephew; elsewhere, he finds creates a position for a wounded veteran; and in what may count as the two rather languid films' major action, orchestrates a savvy diplomatic manipulation of Russia carried out by his representatives. Many of the major events of the films do not involve Frederick directly, but instead position him as an overriding, almost authorial presence. A review in the *Kinematograph* conjectured, "Later generations will perhaps believe, if one showed them the film and said nothing, that, *anno* 1770, Old Fritz created this work himself."[85] And indeed, as the reviewer may have forgotten, the final scene of the first film has Frederick stay up into the morning writing the memoirs that implicitly serve as the basis for the film—*Der alte Fritz* seals its *überparteilich* objectivity with the authorial and authoritative, sovereign seal of the legendary Prussian King.

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[85] "Der alte Fritz." *Kinematograph* 1090 (Mar. 26, 1928): 19.

This authority is the theme of the strangely constructed scene with the game of rings, and it should not be overlooked that the metaphor through which the film depicts this authority is that of *Spiel*. The scene stages the overlapping of three different games: the literal game of rings, the game of courtship for which the rings are a handy symbol, and the game of statecraft which Frederick plays with the pieces arrayed before him. The comparison of love and diplomacy to a game, each with their rules and time-limits, was well-worn even in Frederick's time, but as we have seen the playful metaphor comparing political sovereignty to a game would become more than a metaphor in the age of the world's mediatization. In *Der alte Fritz*, Frederick the monarch is a sovereign player, just as his victories in the field would serve as models for later war-gamers, and just as the tradition of intense military schooling he established laid the basis for future Prussian officers to become skilled gamers.[86] He seems to stand both inside and outside of his story—of history—and to exceed at playing it as a game.

Frederick's gamer-position is not unlike that of his films' spectator. *Der alte Fritz*'s loose, ambulatory narrative, rather than avoiding an authoritarian politics, actually situates the spectator as a sovereign subject who stands outside of or above the text and is able to assemble the narrative freely on their own from the "objectively" presented segments of historical material. Imagining a position outside the tumultuous field of democracy, shared by king and spectator alike, the films create a realm where the absolute, sovereign decision on the course of history is possible. While, at least as it was received by critics in the Weimar Republic, not overtly political, the film positions its spectator in an ideologically determined position that indulges one of the supreme fantasies of the narrative cinema: to remain a neutral, omniscient viewer moving unaffected through space and time. Although the two films feature no aerial shots

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[86] Schuurman, "Models of War," 444-445.

per se, they illustrate the sense in which cinema can be described as always implicitly aerial, the fantasy of a disembodied flight through a space whose mediated, contingent nature is at least momentarily disavowed.

In *Der alte Fritz*, Frederick is at once identified with the aerial gaze of the cinema, with the in-between of a form of montage that creates an omniscient gaze over the action, and with the playing of that imaged space as if it were a game. There are multiple senses in which narrative cinema can be thought of as a game. Roger Caillois's taxonomy of games suggests cinema can be placed on the game-spectrum as a combination of the game types *ilinx*—games of spectacle and aesthetic excitation like carnival rides, and *mimicry*—the representation of the real staged in a limited space and time, such as in a theater play.[87] The sensorial shocks of the cinema are one major ground for its identification with play in critical theory, and in the previous chapter, formed the basis of the claim that cinema "plays" a human. The narrative cinema, however, does more than provide a stage for mimicry or a format for overwhelming sensation: through a structured play of different perspectives, it turns the tendency of *ilinx* to "destroy the stability of perception" into an illusion of stable perception that facilitates its mimicry of the real, through a mechanism customarily called "suture" in film theory.[88] Psychoanalytic film theory understands the mechanism of suture as a compensation for the lack evoked by the lifelike object represented in a single shot: in exchange for the ability to directly intervene, to play with the object, the cinema proffers an omniscient gaze that allows the spectator to disavow that lack.[89] If, according to Hans-Georg Gadamer, "in order for there to be a game, there always has to be … something

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[87] Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Glencoe, NY: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 77-76.

[88] Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 33.

[89] Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 201-215.

else which the player plays and which automatically corresponds to his move with a counter move," cinematic suture is the medium's counter-move to the lack posited by the spectator.[90]

Not unlike a *Kriegsspiel* that lays out a visual field of potential action before its player, the system comprised by narrative cinema's rules of suture positions the subject as an omniscient gaze over a stable field. The subject's desire to manually intervene in this field is sublimated into an identification that slides between character and camera—one, a mobile agent within the field, and the other, an ideally "invisible" presence that hovers outside of it.[91] A board game manifests this duality as the difference between the player, who controls pieces from the margin of the field of play, and the pieces—referred to, in the medieval European board game Rithmomachy, as "caracteres."[92] The difference between a player and a character is that of the strategical and the tactical point of view in the *Kriegsspiel*. As in the narrative cinema, in a board game the player's primary identification is with this position from which the totality of the field is visible, while a secondary identification may be attributed to a "character" at a given moment. The episodic nature of *Der alte Fritz*, the way Frederick encounters figures whose own dramas he observers and intervenes in, represents him not just as sovereign, but places him in the position of a game-player.

That narrative cinema constituted a kind of game was not lost on Weimar-era critics. Siegfried Kracauer, in his essay "Calico World" (1926), which recounts the critic's visit to Ufa's enormous Babelsberg studios, describes the cinema as a game in which the suspended fragments

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[90] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, eds. Garret Bandon and John Cumming, trans. Sheed & Ward, Ltd (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1982), 95.
[91] Stephen Heath, "Narrative Space," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 397-398.
[92] Hilgers, *War Games*, 7.

of the real are "moved back and forth" to reconstitute an illusorily coherent world.[93] The play of

such a game, insofar as the spectator is concerned, consists in how they are implied in the

construction of that world as the seeming subject of those visions, positioned somewhere on its

margins. According to a 1928 essay by the theater critic Kurt Karl Eberlein, the capacity to

establish a distance that turns the world into a plaything is the one saving grace of the cinema: in

film, "the relief-map of the earth becomes a child's toy, the hometown [*Vaterstadt*] a trouser-

button."[94] The cinema reduces the total image of the world into a coherent picture, allowing it to

be managed like a toy (*Kinderspielzeug*)—like, say, a tin soldier, that most German of toys. In

this New-Objective estimation of cinema's value, it is conceived as a technology that provides a

position from which the world appears condensed into so much play-space. Accepting the

distancing gaze of the cinema is, then, something akin to a Faustian bargain, in which one gains

the power to shrink the world to the size of plaything in exchange for one's embodiment within

that world.

Problematizing the Flight of Fantasy: *Faust*

Like so many films from the German 1920s, F.W. Murnau's *Faust* (1926) is often grouped

among the "expressionist" films of the early Weimar period, along with *Das Cabinet des Dr.

Caligari* (1919) and Murnau's own *Nosferatu* (1922), perhaps the high points of that particular

moment in Weimar cinema. The expressionist theater of *Deutsches Theater* director Max

Reinhardt is often cited as the major influence on the stark lighting contrasts and stylized

performances of such films, and indeed Murnau had acted in Reinhardt's company under his

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[93] Siegfried Kracauer, "Calico-World," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 281, 283-4, 287.
[94] Kurt Karl Eberlein, "Januskopf und Maske," in *Medientheorie 1888-1933: Texte und Kommentare*, eds. Albert Kümmel and Petra Löffler, (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag 2002), 290. Originally published in *Das Nationaltheater 1* (1928/9), 12-22.

given name, Friedrich Pumpe. But Lotte Eisner's study *The Haunted Screen* notes that by the

time *Faust* was released*,* some of the excesses of cinematic expressionism had begun to ebb;

while *Faust* represents the "climax of the chiaroscuro," maintaining the stylized, high-contrast

lighting schema of earlier German films, it has an overall more sober tone, focused more on the

surface-play of film itself than on the expressionist confrontation between the subject and an

alienating world; its reliance on illusionary, spectacular special effects is a case in point.[95] Other,

more recent appraisal of Murnau's *Faust* moves even further from Eisner's ambivalent

connection of the film to the tradition of German Expressionism. Matt Erlin has argued that the

film is not truly interested in assembling the various Faust legends into an organic whole, in

probing the interiority of its characters, or, as in Expressionism, projecting this interiority

outwards; instead, it "grants [each segment of the legend] a kind of fragmentary autonomy" and

focuses on externality: special effects, the role of Faust as a myth, the cinema itself.[96] What is

lacking from Faust, as from *Faust*, is a sense of German *Innerlichkeit* (interiority), the central

component of Eisner's reading of Expressionist aesthetics in the cinema. The film is

Expressionist fantasy as imagined by the detached affect of the New Objectivity—its spectacular

effects appeal not to emotion and pathos, but to sensation and intellect.

Perhaps the most celebrated scene in *Faust* is a commentary on the intellectualization of

space, of the cinema's detached, panoramic gaze that turns the fragmented profilmic world into

Spielraum. Toward the end of the film's first act, the demon Mephisto (Emil Jannings) has

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[95] Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), 291-293.

[96] Matt Erlin, "Tradition as Intellectual Montage: F.W. Murnau's *Faust* (1926)," in *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era*, ed. Noah William Isenberg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 166. See also Liz Jones, "The Devil's in the Details: The Hidden Horror of *Faust*," in *The Silk Road of Adaptation: Transformations across Disciplines and Cultures*, ed. Lawrence Raw (London: Cambridge Scholars Published, 2013), 203.

revealed his true form, stepping out of his disguise as a beggar and into his silken cape—an

effect achieved by means of superimposed film frames—and has granted Doctor Faust (Gösta

Ekman) youth and virility. Mephisto awakens the sleeping, now-youthful Faust and waves his

hand extravagantly, conjuring into the room the image of a nude woman draped in diaphanous

linen. The woman walks toward the camera from the background, but she is clearly a cinematic

special effect, a superimposed image not occupying the same space as Faust—as if she is being

projected onto the walls and floors of the doctor's library. The image is coded as image, as a

fleeting, artificial visualization rather than flesh-and-blood conjuration, which points to *Faust*'s

identification of Mephisto's supernatural powers with cinematic effects. Mephisto has essentially

concocted a short erotic film for Faust's pleasure and, as cinema was supposedly wont to do, it

has excited the doctor into a sexual frenzy: he kneels and raises his arms to her in desperate

ecstasy (Figure 2.2).[97] Mephisto makes Faust the perpetually deferred promise of narrative

cinema, which is that via his powers the object, once viewed, is graspable: promising to take

Faust to the reality represented by this illusion, Mephisto whips off his cape and bids the doctor

step onto it.

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[97] The suggestive powers of the cinema in matters of sex and violence were a common concern. Albert Hellwig argued in 1914, for example, that the realistic content of arson and military maneuvers could compel children to violence and delinquency. Albert Hellwig, "Über die schädliche Suggestivkraft kinematographischer Vorführungen," in *Medien Theorie 1888-1933: Texte und Kommentare,* ed. Albert Kümmel and Petra Löffler (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2002), 117-118, 121.

Figure 2.2: *Faust* (1926)

Figure 2.3: *Faust* (1926)

The cape flies out of the window, doctor and demon aboard, and the camera takes the

perspective of the flying duo, swooping past a gothic spire as they exit Faust's city and enter the

German countryside. Looking down fromat an oblique aerial angle, the camera passes mountain

ranges, treetops, and country fields, swooping and turning to both draw near to and avoid these

formations. As Kracauer recounts in *From Caligari to Hitler*, this "celestial sensation" was

accomplished through the use of miniatures and a "roller coaster" for the camera designed by

cameraman Karl Freund.[98] Given this background, Kracauer sticks with the comparison to a

rollercoaster to describe the visual sensation of the sequence, but the analogy the scene wishes to

draw out is clearly between the world as imaged by Freund and Murnau's *entfasselte Kamera*

("unchained camera") and as apprehended from a speeding airplane. Murnau had served as a

reconnaissance pilot in the First World War, and the sequence's emphasis on speed and the

overcoming of impossible distance evokes the free mobility and panoramic perspective of the

airplane, rather than the 'railroaded' perspective of a rollercoaster. After a cut back to Faust and

Mephisto, who are positioned as diegetic spectators receiving these images in conjunction with

the film's spectator, a low-angle shot shows us dragons flying in a flock, silhouetted against the

sky, signifying that Faust has transitioned from his world of scientific and theological inquiry to

one of anti-rational mysticism.

Returning to its downward gaze, the camera dips closer to the ground, passing through a

forest and banking around classical city walls before espying through the clouds a brilliantly lit

tower in a classical city center. "The wedding ceremony of the Duchess of Parma: the most

beautiful woman in Italy," Mephisto proclaims in intertitle. In medium shot, the devil extends his

finger outward, and Faust leans forward, his eyes darting up and down, as if to take a better look

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[98] Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 148.

at the two-dimensional aerial image we have just been shown. The reverse shot tracks down the numerous levels of the tower and then enters it, as it seeks and eventually zeroes-in on the pair's target, ferreting her out from other revelers at the party. Announced abruptly as "strange guests," Faust and Mephisto appear suddenly in the scene we, the extradiegetic spectator, entered via the flying camera, as if they had stepped into this spectacular scene from the spectatorial position that, like Frederick in *Der alte Fritz*, they had almost seemed to share with us. They then hypnotize the bridal pair and steal the Duchess away, fulfilling Mephisto's promise that his powers can produce the world as Faust's *Spielraum*, a flattened field of possibilities.

Cinema, wrote Hofmannsthal in 1921, is "a journey through the air with the devil Asmodi, removing all roofs, uncovering all secrets."[99] Narrative cinema offers its spectator an invasive omniscience, an aerial perspective that grants unnatural powers. For the conservative Hofmannsthal, the cinema is therefore akin to a demon, the threatening spirit [*Geist*] of a technology that has detached itself from human control, and now possesses a nature independent of its use by the human. In *Faust*'s reflexive commentary, cinematic aeriality is associated with Mephisto's devilish exercise of power from a position outside of an observed world, but the film offers the possibility of a human negotiation with the demonic power of technology. Although it was roundly panned by critics at the time, and by Kracauer in his postwar analysis, for being outdated and stiff—critic Herbert Jhering lamented that it did not modernize the story, and Kracauer refers to the actors' "obsolete theatrical poses"—Murnau's film actually makes the

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[99] Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Die Ersatz für die Träume," in *Kein Tag ohne Kino: Schriftsteller über den Stummfilm*, ed. Fritz Güttinger (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutsches Filmmuseum Frankfurt, 1984), 448.

technologically achieved aerial perspective its central problematic.[100] Faust, the allegorical figure caught between devilish dominion over the world and human embodiment within that world, is confronted in the film adaptation with the temptation of Mephisto's peculiarly cinematic powers that, which remake the world into the devil's play-space. Not merely a frivolous spectacle, Murnau's version of *Faust* is about the power inherent in the transcendental gaze simulated by the aerial game of spectacular cinema.

Hofmannsthal's comment speaks to the association between cinema and the aerial perspective in the early-20th century discourse, one which *Faust* is both exploiting and commenting upon. As Paul Virilio has argued, "at the turn of the [twentieth] century, cinema and aviation seemed to form a single moment. By 1914, aviation was ceasing to be strictly a means of flying and breaking records … it was becoming one way, or perhaps even the ultimate way, of *seeing*."[101] For Virilio, cinema is therefore inextricably entangled with the military commander's representation of the battlefield, as like a tactical map the cinema "falsifies appearance by falsifying distance."[102] Like the view of the battlefield on the maps and in the mind of the modern military strategist, cinematic vision is always implicitly aerial, a vision that can move anywhere within its designated field of action. Distant spaces appear to be brought close by the speed of this detached vision, extending the viewing subject's field of agency at the cost of the reality of the objects and lives within that virtual field, as the views provided by the machine are trusted over faulty, embodied human perception.

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[100] Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 148; Herbert Jhering, "Der Faust-Film," in *Von Reinhardt bis Brecht: Vier Jahrzehnte Theater und Film, 1924-1929*, ed. Herbert Jhering (Berlin: Aufbau, 1959), 521-523.
[101] Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (New York: Verso, 1989), 22.
[102] Virilio, *War and Cinema,* 26, 32.

For Virilio, the illusionary quality of cinematic effects is of a kind with surveillance technologies that serve to substitute a militaristic mapping of space for reality: "with the interception of sight by the sighting device, a mechanism emerges that no longer has to do with simulation (as in the traditional arts) but with substitution. This will become the ultimate special effects of cinematic illusion."[103] *Faust*'s panoramic assemblage of diverse views, however, are not wholly illusory: unlike in the spectacular *Bergfilme* or *Der alte Fritz*, the spectator is invited to reflect upon the nature of visual trickery and temptation. Moreover, the power of flight, among the first of the devil's misleading temptations, is also overtly derived from the kind of visions produced by the military surveillance apparatus's objective "sighting devices." Faust's flight through the air with the devil Mephisto would have evoked, for German audiences who had visited cinemas during the war, aerial shorts distributed a decade earlier by the *Reichwehr*'s BuFA (*Bild- und Filmamt*), the immediate precursor to Ufa, *Faust*'s movie studio.[104]

Some of these propaganda films, Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus recounts, employed special effects to create "living maps" intended to "instruct the viewers in tactics, reliving such famous battles as Sedan or Austerlitz."[105] Others exhibited the superiority of zeppelin technology devised for battlefield surveillance and bombing campaigns. In *Mit L.35 über Berlin und Potsdam* (*With Z[eppelin]35 over Berlin and Potsdam*, 1918)*,* the titular zeppelin flies from the

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[103] Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, trans. Julie Rose (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 47.

[104] In the waning months of 1917, Ufa was founded in part with secret capital supplied by the Wilhelmine regime.The plan was outlined in the now-infamous "Ludendorff letter," a July 4, 1917 memo by General Erich Ludendorff proposing the formation of Ufa. See "The Ludendorff Letter," trans. Alex H. Bush, in *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory 1907-1933*, eds. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 275-277. See also John A. Leopold, *Alfred Hugenberg: The Radical Nationalist Campaign Against the Weimar Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 15-20.

[105] Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus, "Newsreel Images of the Military and War, 1914-1918," in *A Second Life: German Cinema's First Decades*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University 1996), 175.

historic royal residence city of Potsdam to the Berlin city center, creating for the spectator a

vivid map of the region that speaks metaphorically of the *Reich*'s continuity and the flow of

imperial power that binds the two spaces together. Similarly, *Lüttich* (1917) presents flyby

footage of the Belgian city of Liége, captured in the German invasion of Belgium and presented

by the film under its German name.[106] The mobile, aerial gaze encourages the spectator to

identify not as an embodied subject within the *Reich*, but as a disembodied gaze with dominion

over the space below—to identify with the military's implied sovereignty over that space.

The aerial views first supplied to the public by the military, and even those used by the

military to plan war, may not be so easily assimilated into a model of political dominance,

however. Against Virilio's emphasis on the domination implicit in the abstractions of the aerial

view, recent scholarship has pointed to the contingencies present in such images, observing that

the distortions of the aerial view require play to put back in order. Against Virilio, Paula Amad

and others have pointed to ways in which the advent of the aerial view compelled a number of

reactions across institutions and disciplines, and in which the military's own methods of

photographic collation—performed to force aerial photographs to resemble a map—suggest

instabilities in the absolute knowledge supposedly thereby produced.[107] "Far from exemplifying

abstract knowledge," Amad argues, "aerial image interpretation … involved the body and the

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[106] Both films cited here can be viewed online. See: *Mit L.35 über Berlin und Potsdam,*
Filmportal.de, <http://filmportal.de/video/mit-l35-ueber-berlin-und-potsdam>, accessed 20 May
2017; and *Lüttich*, Filmportal.de, <http://www.filmportal.de/video/luettich.>, accessed 20 May
2017.

[107] Paula Amad, "From God's-eye to Camera-eye: Aerial Photograph's Post-humanist
and Neo-humanist Visions," *History of Photography* 36, no. 1 (Feb 15, 2012): 66-86. See also
Paul K. Saint-Amour, "Photomosaics: Mapping the Front, Mapping the City," in *From Above:
War, Violence, and Verticality*, eds. Peter Adey, Mark Whitehead, and Alison J. Williams,
(London: Oxford University Press, 2013), 119-142.

hand in all sorts of interventions."[108] The interpreters of these images were not immediately in possession of an uncontested knowledge, but instead participating in a "visual game," in which the reality depicted was not at all unambiguous or unproblematic, but rather in a state of suspension that required a fair amount of play to put back in order.[109] The aerial image can reveal new dimensions of human fragility and historical contingency as well as derealized lives and abstract knowledge, depending on the play of this game.

Missing from this account, however, is the degree to which games had already conditioned expectations about the meaning and use of aerial perspectives. Playing games is indeed what the military expected to do with the information supplied by aerial photographs, which were collated (montaged) and doctored to resemble the maps they had been playing games on for a century—as discussed above, by 1900 gameplay was the default technique for making the aerial view actionable. Rather than a moment of rupture, play was a part of the military institution that determined how to apply tactics in strategic space. Indeed, the relation of gaming and the aerial view was no metaphor, as games had been crucial tools in entraining the military officer's mental representation of the battlefield: before "war and cinema," before cinema, there was war and *Spiel*. As we have seen, the grasping of space at a distance that Virilio sees operating in the cinema was first experienced in the *Spielräume* laid out on table-tops in Prussian military academies and conference rooms. The production of space as the sovereign sphere for a shielded subject who hovers over it was pioneered not in confined cockpits but in the *Kriegsspiel*.

While the character Faust is at various times identified with this detached gaze over a flattened space, as in the sequence of shots cited above in which he appears to lean forward to

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[108] Amad, "From God's-Eye," 81-82.
[109] Ibid.

get a better glimpse of a two-dimensional image, the mischievous Mephisto is the very

manifestation of it. Mephisto's powers tie all possible spaces together, they create surprising and

ephemeral juxtapositions, and above all, they fly through space. His conjurations resemble film

magic, but he also at times recalls a war-gamer. In another of the film's most iconic sequences,

before their meeting in Faust's study, Mephisto looms over Faust's city, spreading his wings as

releases the plague—imaged as a dark cloud that billows from his midsection—provoking chaos

within the streets. Below Mephisto, the city looks every bit like the miniature model it is, and

while we might see this transparent special effect as a fault in the coherence of the text, it also

suggests a comparison between Mephisto and a game-player controlling the fate of the figures in

his constructed terrain—the "World on the Floor" or Eberlein's world as a trouser-button. This is

emphasized a few minutes into the scene when a resident of the town recoils in horror from

Mephisto's face descending toward the city, presumably to more closely observe the process he

has set in motion in the miniature *Spielraum* before him, as if apprehending with his schooled

eyes the turn-by-turn progression of the fire he has let loose in his war game. The camera, for its

part, freely cuts between wide shots on Mephisto's scale, and more enclosed images from within

the town, combining the scale of the game-player with power over the life and death of the

"caracteres," the miniscule figures caught in field he oversees (Figures 2.4, 2.5).

Figure 2.4: *Faust* (1926)

Figure 2.5: *Faust* (1926)

Scenarist Hans Kyser invented the subplot of the plague for the film: it appears in none of the many retellings of the Faust legend, but was inserted here to give Faust a motivation for accepting Mephisto's powers beyond the self-interested lust for knowledge, supplying his character with a more conventional bourgeois morality.[110] The incorporation of this subplot also paints Mephisto, in the wake of his wager for Faust's soul with the archangel, not just as a gambler, but as a strategist: he deploys the plague attack in order to open Faust to temptation, to force him into a predictable maneuver. His chosen line of attack also recalls up-to-date military tactics: the representation of the plague as a poison cloud evokes a gas attack deployed on civilians, a persistent fear from the First World War up through the Second.

Faust himself, of course, begins the film as one of the unaware figures within Mephisto's playing field, but is granted a taste of the sovereign play over the world, spending much of the film caught between the demonic *Geist* of technology represented by Mephisto and a human, embodied experience of the world. Like Frederick in *Der alte Fritz*, Mephisto occupies the margins of the film's world, often observing it from outside but occasionally, at will, stepping into that world, as when he elects to seduce "Muhme Marthe," a fradulent village witch, while the youthful Faust courts Gretchen (Camilla Horn). Faust would seem to be in a similar position: in the early stages of his passion for Gretchen, Murnau creates spatial distinctions between Faust's position and the world he is observing, positioning Faust, for example, in the extreme foreground as he hugs the arched entryway to Gretchen's cathedral, while extending behind him, almost as a projected image, is the space of Gretchen's congregation (Figure 2.6). Faust eventually steps into Gretchen's innocent, fairy-tale-like space, the images of the two of them cavorting amidst the overtly artificial trees speaking to his embeddedness in a constructed world

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[110] Piotr Sadowski, *The Semiotics of Light and Shadows: Modern Visual Arts and Weimar Cinema* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 106.

that Mephisto slides in and out of effortlessly. Not similarly constrained by his his own coerced

lover Marthe, Mephisto still resides on the margins of the text: when the inevitable confrontation

between Faust and Gretchen's brother Valentin (William Dieterle) over Gretchen's honor arises,

Mephisto stabs Valentin from a darkened corner on the left side of the frame, as if emerging not

from an invisible diegetic space but from the filmstock itself. Although Faust is permitted to

partake of Mephisto's cinematic war-game, Mephisto is the true *Unparteiende*, the sovereign

subject of play. An emblematic image from earlier in the film is of Mephisto, in an impossible

position above Faust and the seduced Duchess of Parma, closing the curtain on their love scene,

establishing that Mephisto, the *Geist* of technology, is in control of the game—or, in the

metaphor the film is consciously drawing, the *Puppenspiel*, the puppet-play.

Figure 2.6: *Faust* (1926)

Framing Faust for Valentin's murder to avoid his being pulled back into the world by Gretchen's love, Mephisto speeds Faust away to a hellish non-space whose geographical emplacement is unclear, but whose design evokes verticality and top-down vision. When eventually we see the pair again, Faust sits on the edge of a cliff, a matte backdrop showing craggy peaks rising in the air behind him. Time has not seemed to pass here: while Gretchen has endured childbirth and many months of hardship in punishment for her sins, there is no allusion to the passage of time for Faust and Mephisto. From this anomalous position outside of the space and time of the world, Faust is able to receive Gretchen's cries for help, who has been convicted as a murderer for their child's death by exposure. Discovering that Mephisto misled him about Gretchen's well-being, Faust invokes their contract to demand he be delivered back to save Gretchen from burning at the stake, cursing that he ever accepted the devil's offer to become young again. Though he allows Faust to go to Gretchen, Mephisto seizes the opportunity to revoke Faust's youth, rendering a newly enfeebled Faust unable to save Gretchen in time. Both Faust and Gretchen perish in the flames, but before Mephisto can declare victory in his competitive game with the angel, the latter announces that love has redeemed their souls—a surprising and previously unannounced win-condition from Mephisto's as well as from the spectator's perspective.

We can see Faust's re-inhabiting of an aged body, embrace of Gretchen, and very corporeal death through fire as the aged doctor redeeming himself by re-embracing embodiment. Descending from Mephisto's aerial lair, where everything can be viewed as a mere game, he rejoins the "caracteres" within the world, becoming a part of spatio-temporal flux, rather than a presence in an impossible position, floating above it and playing. This is a somewhat regressive resolution to the problems opened up by *Faust*'s consideration of the dangers of viewing the

world as *Spielraum* from a disembodied perspective. Unlike *Der alte Fritz* or the *Bergfilme*,

however, *Faust* is notable for the way it problematizes the panoramic, *spielerisch* view of the

world. Contrary to contemporary observers, the film does modernize the story—by emphasizing

the danger of modern means of apprehending the world as an object distanced from the shielded

eye of the subject. The cool, New Objective subject it was addressing, according to Lethen,

"liked to take off the expressionistic garment of the new man in order to wrap itself in Lucifer's

cloak," assuming the position of an obscured observer.[111] Not wrapped in, but flying on the

devil's cloak, Dr. Faust allegorically represents the sovereignty conferred by the aerial gaze of

the camera. Indeed, if there is a unifying theme to a film many now understand as a pastiche, it is

in the dialectic between Faust's partaking of the transcendent, cinematic sovereignty of Mephisto

and being simultaneously a figure within the field that sovereign gaze surveys. It is, the

conundrum of the human in the context of the militarist derealization of lived space. *Faust*

exposes that if the spectacular narrative cinema in Weimar was "an intoxicating game for the

viewer, who can yield to the momentum of the images and the enchantment induced by the play

of illusion," then it was a war game, a training in the Mephistophelean gaze of the sovereign

subject.[112]

The Daemon Flies Forth

Faust's reflexive evocation of the aeriality of cinematic vision is an instance in which

Benjamin's "angel of history," viewing world history from an aerial vantage point that flattens

time into a "single catastrophe"—not unlike Hofmannsthal's demon—might recognize a

correspondence between historical phenomena that "flashes forth" at a moment of danger, i.e.,

[111] Lethen, *Cool Conduct*, 7.
[112] Klaus Kreimeier, *The Ufa Story: A History of Germany's Greatest Film Company, 1918-1945*, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 171.

the present.[113] The correspondence Benjamin's angel might see is between, on the one hand, this sequence in *Faust* and all it evidences about modes of perception in the culture that produced it, and, on the other, the experience of digital media in the 21st century, in which virtual spaces that gleefully re-mix and re-enact historical and mythological spaces are offered up to a player's omniscient and controlling gaze, particularly in popular war games such as *Civilization* (1991-2016), *WarCraft* (1994-2003), and *Total War* (2000-2016). Such games use a combination of war game mechanics and cinematic illusionism to craft simulations that are not first and foremost of actual military strategy, but of the total sovereignty of an imagined position above and outside the field on which history progresses, the surface on which time passes and lives are lived at a distance from the sovereign subject. In Weimar Germany, such surfaces also existed, and not only in the calico screen-world of the cinema, but already at the gaming table as well.

The turn-based strategy video game *Civilization IV* (2005) is directly descended from the same games played by Weimar hobbyists and military strategists. It is also a descendent of the cinematic gaze. In the game, the player controls the development of a civilization, largely driven by warfare and territorial conquest, waged on a gridded field represented from an aerial perspective. The game opens with a cinematic animation, however, beginning in outer space—implicitly, in the contemporary era of space exploration—before flying into Earth's atmosphere. As the camera passes through thick white clouds and zeros in on the Aegean Sea, we observe that we have entered the classical world, the camera rushing over Roman-style fortifications on the coast. Opposing masses of people charge at each other, but unconcerned with the result of individual battles, the (simulated) camera pushes forward, past the bay and toward the inland. It enters a more resplendent fortress, in which regiments of soldiers are gathered and facing a

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[113] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 257.

raised platform. A figure in Roman dress on the platform kneels to have a crown placed on his head as the camera continues its aerial rush forward, whipping around the figure as he stands up, and coming to a rest behind him as he turns to face the gathered masses, now their anointed sovereign. This, the shot implies, is also the position the game grants the player, the sovereign overseer of fields declared in advance as the site of war. By 2005, the mobile aerial vision of the cinema has been fully fused with the war game, but what this sequence reveals is how closely related the simulation of sovereignty created by the two media has always been. The trained eyes of the *Kriegsspieler* are the camera that transcends and rushes over the events unfolding in the homogeneous, contiguous below, standing in the present while mastering the lessons of the past.

While today's media scholars emphasize the ways in which video games like the *Civilization* series represent "in relatively unmediated form" the functioning of informatics in today's "control society," this chapter has proceeded from the principle that gaming was a tool of interpellation long before digital media, that forms of play in modernity have long replicated and reproduced structures of power.[114] I looked toward a moment in the single catastrophe that is the 20th century, focusing on a correspondence to our globalized control society that, from the Angel of History's own aerial perspective, is currently flashing forth. A video game like *Civilization IV*, is not merely using convenient cinematic tropes to remediate the structure of a war game but instead is exploiting a connection between two media that has long existed. Cinema and the war game each map the world as *Spielraum*, an open, homogeneous field presented to an all-seeing eye, a site for the exercise of the subject's sovereign gaze and action. Although I have not intended to project the model of a globalized "control society" and its flexible network of control backwards into the still-disciplinary society of the Weimar Republic, this chapter has

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[114] Alexander Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 91-92.

emphasized the continuity between a playful modernity and a playful postmodernity, pinpointing the emergence of forms that should be very familiar to denizens of the early 21st Century.[115]

The history of the *Kriegsspiel* underlies the development of such diverse 20th-century phenomena as military computer simulations, table-top role-playing games, video games, and much mid-century avant-garde art.[116] This history cuts right through Weimar Germany, when the cinema and the war game were already on a collision course that would culminate in today's gaming society. The Weimar-era war-gamer, surveying the totality of the battlefield from above, convinces himself he is possessed of the military genius, the very spirit, of Frederick the Great, forgetting the limitations and mediations that facilitate his play. Faust takes off into the air, apprehending his view of countryside below as the site of his "I can," the legitimate reach of his grasp, tempted to forget that it is the demon he has called forth who conjured this vision for him and determines how he uses it. The spectator becomes wrapped up in the image, pleasurably forgetting that the spectacle is an illusion. And further along this path, the demon in *Faust* becomes the daemon of computing, the background programs the user can neither see nor change, but which facilitate their every action.

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[115] Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 3-7.

[116] Situationist Guy Debord, for example, designed a *Kriegsspiel* that media scholar Alexander Galloway has helped make available in virtual form. See Galloway, et al., *Kriegspiel*, <http://r-s-g.org/kriegspiel/about.php> Accessed 7 June 2017.

CHAPTER 3

CINEMA AND THE "MAGIC CIRCLE":
WEIMAR BERLIN AS *SPIELRAUM*

"The enormous scale of the Ufa filming grounds shows us Berlin as the midpoint of the German

film industry: Tempelhof," reads a title card in the second act of the Ufa *Kulturfilm* ("cultural

film") *Stadt der Millionen: Ein Lebensbild Berlin* ("City of Millions: a Life-Image of Berlin).

The film cuts to a panning, overhead shot of a large complex nested within a wide field that

stretches out to the horizon. Human figures scurry along the lanes between buildings; we see

rows of automobiles parked at a garage, an open lot in the foreground that appears to be under

construction, and, behind it, the top two floors of a multi-story glass-sided building shaped

somewhat like an oversized shed. The scene is akin to the film glancing in the mirror, as the

studio grounds pictured are Ufa-Tempelhof, a 90,000 square-meter filming facility on the edge

of Tempelhof Field that constituted the principal filmmaking facilities of the German film

monopoly in the early Weimar years.[1] During the same period, the nearby open field also served

as a location for exterior shots and scenes whose scale exceeded the confines of the glass-roofed

studio. In the early Weimar Republic, Tempelhof became a site where historical strife could be

simulated while similar struggles were being played out on the actual streets of Berlin. It was

where the French Revolution was staged for *Madame Dubarry* (1919), where the courtship of

Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn had been acted out for *Anna Boleyn* (1920), and where the military

reviews of Frederick the Great were re-created on the exact site where they had taken place, for

the *Fridericus Rex* films (1922/23).[2]

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[1] "Berliner Ateliers: Ein kleines Lexicon," in *Film … Stadt … Kino … Berlin*, eds. Uta
Berg-Gasnchow and Wolfgang Jacobsen (Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1987), 197.
[2] Ibid, 186.

Tempelhof Field has been a strange, exceptional space since Berlin's very origins: situated between the medieval settlements of Berlin and Coelln, the field served as the meeting place for officials from each town to hash out their unification in 1351.[3] Incorporated into unified Berlin, the field was nevertheless a place outside of the urban order, ideal for extra-normal activities. During the Thirty Year's War, three centuries after Berlin and Coelln's unification, Swedish King Gustav Adolf staged a siege from the vantage point of the northern hills at the edge of the field (the largest of which, the Tempelhofer Berg, is now at the center of Viktoria Park), from which he could threaten the city with canon fire. The hastily settled reconciliation between Brandenburg and Sweden was celebrated with a raucous party on the field, attended by both sides of the conflict. The medieval carnival, Mikhail Bakhtin writes, represented a "second life of the people," a temporary suspension of the social order "on the borderline between life and art" that was "shaped according to a certain pattern of play."[4] The spatiality of play consists in this "borderline" quality: it is an activity that takes place in a space opened between life and a fixed order, mediating between the bare life of *physis* and the fixed order of *nomos*, or the law.[5] For Johan Huizinga, a defining characteristic of play is this peculiar spatial quality, which he describes as its "secludedness" or "limitedness."[6] The space of play is a "magic circle" which suspends the order of the outside world and implements its own, transitory order: "The temple, the stage, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc. are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e.,

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[3] The following history of Tempelhof is drawn from Günter Wollschlaeger, *Chronik Tempelhof, Teil 1: Das Tempelhofer Feld* (Berlin: Wort- & Bild-Specials, 1987), 8-42.

[4] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 8, 7.

[5] Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter, "The Space of Play: Towards a General Theory of Heterotopia," in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, eds. Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter (New York: Routledge: 2008), 95-6.

[6] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950), 10.

forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are

temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act part."[7] In

early modern Berlin, Tempelhof was the space-time of play between orders—Berlin and Coelln,

Roman Catholicism and Nordic Lutheranism.

And so Tempelhof remained a place for a peculiar manner of play, a space outside the

urban order: in the nearly three centuries between Gustav Adolf's siege and the advent of the

Weimar Republic, Tempelhof served as a military exercise and review field, as Berlin became

the center of an increasingly powerful military dynasty. Up until the construction of the famed

Tempelhof Airport in 1936, a map of Berlin published by the company Pharus would have

informed you that Tempelhof Field was an *Exerzier Platz*, a place reserved for the rehearsal of

military formations and maneuvers—used, that is, for large-scale war games.[8] The place, the

Platz, was comprised of space in which the state of war could be provisionally simulated, where

Spiel (play) could adopt the *Schein* (semblance) of warfare. Or, on occasion, warfare could adopt

the appearance of mere play: in 1813, the Prussian rebellion against Napoleon began at

Tempelhof Field, disguised as a field exercise. It was almost precisely a century later than

military deception gave way to cinematic illusion, as the film studios depicted in *Stadt der*

Millionen were constructed along the southern edge of the field.

A 1913 issue of *Lichtbildbühne* describes the two Tempeholf studios, which had been

built by the film production companies Literaria and Projections-Aktiengesellschaft earlier that

year:

> When one comes down Tempehof-Chausee Avenue, one sees, even from far off, two
> strange buildings rising up that look like enormous birdcages. It's two high-built, very

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[7] Ibid, 77.
[8] See, for example, the re-printed *Pharus-Plan Berlin: Große Ausgabe 1902* (Berlin:
Pharus, 2010).

large sheds, totally closed in by glass walls and with a glassy ceiling. The light can freely flood in from all sides, and one immediately thinks to oneself that these facilities are for that business for which the founding principle applies: 'Everything depends on lights, everything demands lights!': filmmaking![9]

The studios at Tempelhof had become representative of the new world of light emerging in modern cities like Berlin. In 1913 films were known as *Lichtspiele*, or plays of light—a term that in German suggests a broader connotation of "play" than its English equivalent "photoplay." In German, *Lichtspiele* evokes the *Spiel des Lichtes*, the play of light generated by electric lamps and illuminated advertisements. According to film scholar Anne Hoorman, "the [cinema's] light-effects have a distinct meaning—they are the signs of the metropolis. Film corresponds like no other medium of reproduction to the experience of the metropolis … Not only is kinetic light an essential factor, but movement, simultaneity, the montage of the disparate and the compiling of segments of perception are also elements that have their correlate in filmic structure."[10] The film studio as well as the film screen appeared to concentrate the luminous, scattershot world of urban modernity into a single, amorphous, playful microcosm. Like Tempelhof itself, it seemed to comprise an entire world—a distinctly modern one—unto itself.

Recounting his visit to those same Tempelhof studios in his book of Berlin flanerie, *Spazieren in Berlin* (1929), Franz Hessel ponders,

> All around [the studios] are dreary outskirts and the ends of the earth. But within is a wonderfully lively world. Are they huts or backdrops, is it a bivouac or nursery that appear in alternating brightness and darkness? We stumble over a pair of steps down into an alpine landscape, before which spas, train stations, and charming little railways are set up, as if for play [*wie zum Spielen*].

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[9] Quoted in "Berlin Ateliers," 198.

[10] Anne Hoorman, *Lichtspiele: Zur Medienreflexion der Avantgarde in der Weimarer Republik* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2003), 270. See also Frances Guerin, *A Culture of Light: Cinema and Technology in 1920s Germany* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) and Chris Dähne, *Die Stadtsinfonien der 1920er Jahre: Archiktektur zwischen Film, Fotograhie, und Literatur* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013), 15.

In the greater Berlin of 1929 (or today), Tempelhof constituted an anomalous borderline, situated

in a magic circle between districts (the working-class Kreuzberg and Neukölln, the former

suburbs Mariendorf and Steglitz) given over to play. It was the fitting place for film studios, the

microcosmic mirrors of a modern city cobbled together from the fragments of the world.

Flaneurs like Hessel, the idle strollers and observers of the modern city, were drawn to such

intermediate places, which Walter Benjamin referred to as "thresholds," spaces within the city

where the social order appeared momentarily suspended.[11] For Hessel's fellow flaneur Joseph

Roth, Berlin's new parks, spaces for healthy play whose construction had accelerated along with

Berlin's explosive growth, were such strange places between places: "Schiller Park opens itself

up, unsuspected, in the North of the city, a surprising treasure behind the everyday of northern

[cheap German beer brands] Schultheisses and Patzenhofs: a park in exile."[12]

Michel Foucault would later term such spaces "heterotopias"—"a kind of places that are

outside all places, even though they are actually localizable," whose function is "to suspend,

neutralize or invert" the relations that subtend the official places of the city.[13] Outlining several

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[11] See Walter Benjamin, "Berlin Chronicle," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 16-17, 25; Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 2002), 489, 494; Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 3, *1935-1938*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 39. See also Michael A. Rosenthal, "Benjamin's Wager on Modernity: Gambling and the Arcades Project," *The Germanic Review* 87, no 3 (July 1, 2012): 261-278.

[12] Joseph Roth, "Schillerpark," in *Joseph Roth: Werke*, vol. 1, *Das journalistische Werk, 1915-1923*, ed. Klaus Westermann (Frankfurt am Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1994), 664. See also Stefanie Hennecke, "German Ideologies of City and Nature: The Creation and Reception of Schiller Park in Berlin," in *Greening the City: Urban Landscapes in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Dorothee Brantz and Sonja Dümpelmann (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 75-94.

[13] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, eds. Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter, trans. Lieven De Cauter and Michiel Dehaene (New York: Routledge, 2008), 17.

types of heterotopia, Foucault suggests sites as diverse as prisons, cemeteries, theaters, and cinemas as examples of these "unemplaced places," places that, though they have existence within the normative order of things, are shot through with otherness: the sacred, the natural, the virtual. "The heterotopia has the power to juxtapose in a single real place several spaces, several emplacements that are themselves incompatible," Foucault writes. The heterotopia can function as a kind of microcosm, reflecting the world around it in paradoxical fashion; Foucault cites the garden as the oldest form of heterotopia, as it is "the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world."[14] Urban studies theorists Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter have posited heterotopia as a "third sphere" in the political order as theorized by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*, the sphere that mediates between *oikos* (home) and *agora* (forum). If, for Arendt, *oikos* is the sphere of work and labor and *agora* that of action, the "activity proper to the third sphere of heterotopia" is play. Dehaene and De Cauter do not offer much commentary on whether Foucault's carceral heterotopias belong to this third sphere, but it is important to note that play and discipline are not mutually exclusive in this reading: the play of the heterotopia may be with lives. Heterotopia is Huizinga's "magic circle" as a preordained space in the city, whose separation from the normative is a token of its incorporation. Heterotopia is a microcosm hemmed off from the rest and set aside *wie zum Spielen*.[15]

The magic circle of heterotopic play offers an illusory bid for sovereignty to the subject who plays there, arranging the suspended pieces. In the cinema, the spectator is proffered the position of identifying with this sovereign gaze that assembles a world out of fragments, arraying on a flat surface a space that condenses and makes manageable the shock-effects of urban reality.

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[14] Ibid, 19-20.

[15] Dehaene and De Cauter, "The Space of Play," 91; Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958).

The cinema—not just the material spaces of the studio or the theater, which could be found in

Berlin in abundance, but also the cinematic text itself—constituted a heterotopia within the space

of the city. The spectator, the cinema's interfacing subject, occupies a position at a Benjaminian

threshold, apprehending a magic circle of *Spielraum* opened up before them, in which a new

order is being formed. The flaneur, the allegorical figure of the urban walker who made a very

real return in Weimar Berlin in the literature of Benjamin, Franz Hessel, and Joseph Roth,

imitates the gaze of the camera, walking through the streets while fantasizing about transcending

them, cutting from place to place. The camera and the eye of the flaneur became powerful tools

of both liberation and domination in Weimar Berlin: city symphonies and texts of flanerie open

heterotopias that produce the city as a space open to play, but on the basis of the domination of a

gaze almost invariably coded as masculine and domineering. As Anke Gleber observes, the

female complement to the flaneur in texts of flanerie is not the flaneuse but the prostitute, not his

equal but the "image and object of his gaze."[16] In this chapter, I argue that the cinematic text as

well as the text of flanerie condenses the *Weltstadt* into so much play-material, a gamespace

offering bids for sovereignty to its players, but often at the expense of the figure of the woman,

who appears enframed within the playfully mapped city. The position of the woman in texts of

flanerie betrays the ambivalence of the game being played, which carries with it the threat of

domination.

     Male flaneurs could also be worried about getting caught in the play of a mediated city.

Writing in 1921 about the proposed Csrepey-Film-Gesellschaft *Filmstadt* ("Film-City," i.e., a

large film studio in the style of Carl Laemmle's Universal City in Hollywood), Roth observed,

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[16] Anke Gleber, "Women On the Screens and Streets of Modernity: In Search of the
Female Flaneur," in *The Image in Dispute: Art and Cinema in the Age of Photography*, ed.
Dudley Andrew (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 72.

"In this Film-City is everything that film could ever need, and as it … requires a tremendous lot, that means just about everything; so in the City *the whole world* is collected … Why is the world still necessary at all? As everything is so beautifully imitated, after all, one could make out of the rest of the world—Berlin."[17] At the conclusion of Roth's piece, the studio and the city mirror each other: Berlin itself appears to the flaneur as a *Filmstadt*, an assortment of artificial elements suspended within an empty space, waiting to be played.

In his visit to the Tempelhof and Neubabelsberg facilities in 1926, Siegfried Kracauer would echo Roth's doubt about the microcosms being fabricated in the studios, but Kracauer proves more dialectical in his understanding of the game being played there. In Neubabelsberg's store of props, waiting to be assembled into a flattened image of an illusory world on screen, Kracauer found a "regime of arbitrariness," the alienated items becoming pieces in a "game" in which "the objects that have been liberated from the larger context are now reinserted into it, their isolation effaced and their grimace smoothed over."[18] The film studio was an instance of the game that Kracauer saw being played out in the mass media, a game in which the world order was being assembled by the powers of a rationalist ideology embodied by technologies such as the film camera.

From Kracauer's perspective, the studio holds both the sacred and profane elements of a disintegrated world, elements indiscriminately lifted from their original contexts, waiting to be placed into a proper order by the apprehending rational subject. Foucault identifies heterotopia with an incomplete de-sacralization of space, but modernity's zones of play are not simply places

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[17] Joseph Roth, "Die Welt in der Stadt," in *Joseph Roth: Werke*, vol. 1, *Das journalistische Werk, 1915-1923*, ed. Klaus Westermann (Frankfurt am Main.: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1994), 583.

[18] Siegfried Kracauer, "Calico World," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 284, 287.

given over to pre-rational mysticism, a world captured before its disenchantment.[19] In heterotopia, sacred elements intermingle with worldly ones, as media theorist Mackenzie Wark writes of gamespace, "no space is sacred; no space is separate."[20] For Kracauer, the emergence of these modern gamespaces within the city is suffused with ambivalence, as the opportunity to coordinate all given elements within a single system speaks to both the promise of liberation in play and the threat of domination by the game.

Mapping Berlin: The Hotel Lobby and the Game of Ratio

A 1926 photomontage by Marianne Brandt, *Unsere irritierende Großstadt* (*Our Unnerving City*) resembles John Heartfield and George Grosz's *Universal City* or Höch's *Schnitt mit dem Messer*: it collates together diverse signs of modern life—crowded train stations, factories, modern apartment buildings—and human figures alternatingly dwarfing and dwarfed by these other images. Unlike the chaotic tumult of Höch's representation of Weimar society, however, there is a regular order to Brandt's representation of Berlin. The photographs appear to swirl centrifugally, creating a visual funnel that draws the eye to a central image, comprised of a rail line receding into the distance, mirrored several times over so that it resembles a cross-hatched tunnel. The image of society here is still one of incessant motion and overwhelming sensation, but the effect is regularized, arranged in a harmonious composition. At the top of the image, a diver seems to have sprung off of a skyscraper and is falling through the negative space of the canvas, but we can rest assured he is about to land back within the bounds of the composition. Retaining a spirit of a play and a two-dimensional aesthetic inspired by photographs and maps, *Unsere irritierende Großstadt* is nevertheless a clear departure from Dadaist photomontage

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[19] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 16; Max Weber, *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Routledge, 1992), 32, 61.

[20] McKenzie Wark, *Gamer Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 102.

because it establishes boundaries, a frame, for that play. The New Objective montage of the city is ordered and precise, a game whose purpose is the management of the city's sensorial overload and spatial contradictions. The effect of *Unsere irritierende Großstadt* is of a co-existing hetero- and homogeneity: the rambunctious modern city mapped according to a stable and rational aesthetic, within the heterotopic space of the work of art. Like a war game, New Objective montage reassembles the city upon a surface in order to facilitate the spectator's sovereignty over the tumult of the imaged space.

As Ben Singer writes, modernity represented to German thinkers of the early 20th century "a phenomenal world—a specifically urban one—that was more chaotic, fragmented, and disorienting than in previous phases of human culture."[21] Berlin was the emblem of this fragmentation and hyperstimulation; since German unification in 1871 it had not only become rather suddenly the epicenter of German industry, trade, and culture, but also had expanded at an almost unprecedented rate. Already in 1910, the art critic Karl Scheffler wrote disparagingly of the city as "an almost arbitrary juxtaposition [*Nebeneinander*] of parts," an artificial assemblage of disparate elements.[22] Oswald Spengler clearly has Berlin—and American cities—in mind when he refers to the "Late city" of modernity in his *Decline of the West* (1918-19). The Late city is a deviation from the organic urban development of antiquity, a denial of nature that mistakes itself as world *in toto*—a space assembled according to the rational ethos of modernity's "emancipated intellect" but which in its defiance of natural law becomes for

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[21] Ben Singer, "Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism," in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, eds. Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 73.

[22] Karl Scheffler, *Berlin: Ein Stadtschicksal* (Berlin: Erich Reiss Verlag, 1910), 45.

Spengler totally irrational.[23] The year after the second volume of Spengler's book was published,

Berlin expanded its borders, the Greater Berlin of 1920 now encompassing several former

suburban spaces, coordinating and consuming the spaces of the land in the service of the

Weltstadt. The modern city projected its homogenizing grid onto space, flattening and erasing

distinctions between different forms of life as it brought further spaces into its fold—emplacing

them upon its centrifugal grid.

Scheffler and Spengler's evident conservative, ethno-essentialist perspectives aside, their

concern about the homogenization of space that led to the juxtaposition of qualitatively different

spaces under the auspices of the emergent rational urban order was common: Henri Bergson, for

example, had made similar claims about the homogeneous space presumed by the scientific

method in 1898's *Matter and Memory*.[24] This concern is to be found, also, in later theories of

urban space: Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974) refers to the shift to a rationalist

ideology that posits space as a homogeneous plane as the moment when "the forces of history

smashed naturalness forever and upon its ruins established the space of accumulation."[25] For

Lefebvre, capitalism replaces the "absolute space" of the premodern world with an "abstract

space" that "erases distinctions" in order to facilitate the accumulation of time and capital.[26]

Foucault argues that in modernity space is understood as a zone of "emplacements," "defined by

relations of proximity between points or elements" as in "series, trees, or grids," rather than

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[23] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Perspectives of World History*, vol. 2, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1928), 94-99.

[24] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2004), 280.

[25] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991) 48.

[26] Ibid, 49. See also David Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

being conceived in terms of extension from an embodied perspective.[27] The modern city, with its institutions of urban planning and development, produces space as the empty realm of map-space: "space" in modernity constitutes the homogeneous background to the points emplaced upon it. In Berlin, as in many modern cities, there was a profound tension between the rationality of new systems of traffic control and of modern architecture on one hand, and the lived chaos of automobile traffic and new forms of social mixing on the other.[28] Space as conceived within the urban map, as a homogeneous ground which assembles heterogeneous places, gives rise to irrationality at the embodied level. Sabine Hake's *Topographies of Class* can therefore describe Weimar Berlin as a city that was at once "a unified, homogeneous cityscape" and, at the same time, crossed with "oppositions, contradictions, and non-synchronicities."[29]

Berlin, Weimar Germany's only true metropolis, was defined by new kinds of places in which heterogeneous elements were made proximate and exchangeable via the abstractions of capital. To the familiar examples of the consumerist spaces of the department store, the shop window, and the illuminated nighttime street, we can add Benjamin's amorphous "thresholds that mysteriously divide the districts of a town."[30] The system that produces the disparity between the working-class district of Moabit and the bourgeois Tiergarten district also emplaces these two zones adjacent to one another, and their proximity takes on a obscure quality that must be worked on, managed, played with. And as the city expands, the bureaucratic apparatus of urbanization, offices of city planning like that run by Martin Wagner from the mid-1920s, relies on techniques and technologies that produce space as blank, homogeneous plane subtending

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[27] Foucault, "Of Other Places," 15.
[28] Nadine Leann Roth, "Metamorphoses: Urban Space and Modern Identity, Berlin 1870-1933" (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2003), 15.
[29] Sabine Hake, *Topographies of Class: Modern Architecture and Mass Society in Weimar Berlin* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 19, 21.
[30] Benjamin, "Berlin Chronicle," 25.

these places. Such a representation of space requires a manipulable surface like a map, on which a future can be arranged, "propositions" for future emplacements forwarded.[31] Forming a space of virtual action with its interfacing subject, an accurate scientific map constitutes a heterotopia, with the capacity to "suspend, neutralize, or invert" the current order of the city.

Creating with their interfacing subject a magic circle hemmed off from the outside world, maps are, like film studios, heterotopic. They make a game of the real by reproducing it within a totalizing, scientific system of representation in which the contingency and variation of the real is made manageable. One might describe the interface between a subject and any text as in some sense heterotopic, but modern media's claims to simulate, via technical intervention, an objective reassemblage of reality make them particularly heterotopic, which is to say, gamelike. As Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno argue, in post-Enlightenment society "science … becomes aestheticism, a system of isolated signs devoid of any intention transcending the system; it becomes the game which mathematicians have long since proudly declared their activity to be."[32] The game Horkheimer and Adorno refer to here is that of *ratio* played at the interface with modern technical media—interfaces that produce a secluded space in which the spatial order exterior to the circuit of the interface can be reflected and reordered, "an unreal space that virtually opens up behind the surface."[33]

Maps—like, as I will show, the cinema and the gaze of the flaneur—turn the city into a space of play, proscribing limits and pathways. The cool modern subject uses media implements to make a game out of their mobility in real space. The implementation of this game, according

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[31] Denis Wood with John Fels and John Krygier, *Rethinking the Power of Maps* (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), 39-42.

[32] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 13.

[33] Foucault, "Of Other Places," 17.

to Siegfried Kracauer, had come at the expense of received notions of a common world and of the metaphysical distinctions that had undergirded pre-modern life. The dominance of a rationalist ideology which subjected reality to time tables and schematized space, Kracauer wrote in his *Der Detektive-Roman: Eine Deutung* ("The Detective Novel: An Interpretation," 1925), had resulted in the collapse of the two "spheres" between which human life had been lived: the lower sphere, representing the bare life of the community and things "as they just are," and the higher sphere, the sacred, transcendental realm that provided access to a totality.[34] Although they are not precisely coterminous, Kracauer's theory of the spheres evokes Arendt's later argument that the realms of *physis* and *nomos* have become entangled in modern socio-political structure— as well as Giorgio Agamben's understanding of biopolitics, in which the spheres of "bare" and political life have become indistinguishable, allowing discursive power to capture bare life.[35] For Agamben, the modern sovereign subject, produced through discourses of knowledge, actually occupies this indistinct zone where life has always-already been abandoned to the law.

At stake in Kracauer's argument is also the ambivalent nature of individual sovereignty as it is produced in modernity. Kracauer's most recent point of reference is undoubtedly Georg Lukács's then-recent theory of the "transcendental homelessness" expressed in the individualist novel, in which the unity between subject and world expressed in the epic is replaced by the narrative of a character seeking an ultimately alienated self-realization.[36] For Kracauer, however, the detective novel is an allegory of a historical shift, one he views dialectically as a crucial

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[34] Siegfried Kracauer, *Der Detektiv-Roman: Eine Deutung*, vol. 1 of *Siegfried Kracauer: Werke*, eds. Inka Mülder-Bach and Ingrid Belke (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2006), 111.

[35] See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Raozen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), esp. 187.

[36] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: The Merlin Press 1971), 60-62.

moment of danger or possible redemption. Kracauer suggests the detective novel reflects current

social reality in that it posits a dis-unified experience in which the "spheres" have had their

constituent elements strewn about and left to be reordered by the detective in his role as the

embodiment of the emancipated—or transcendentally homeless—intellect. In the disenchanted,

modern world, the *ratio* practiced by this intellect attempts to give us back the world in totality:

the higher-sphere entities of "sin," "secret," and "danger" are exploded and return, now

"uniformly represented in the lower regions via the embodiment of the illegal, which permeates

a single, empty (spirit- and sense-)space, boundlessly widened by *ratio*, and pursues its game

between the regularly moving atoms."[37] The detective makes the decision on the legality of the

elements thus scattered; he therefore operates in a sphere outside of—or in a sense, before—the

law, when the legal order of things is not yet known. For him, the fragmentation of traditional

life is coterminous with the gamification of space: the detective's ordering of meaning into the

rational categories of the legal and illegal is a form of play with elements suspended within a

space that has become an empty plane.

For Kracauer, the exemplary site of the detective's game was the hotel lobby, a place that

constituted a "gap" in, or we might say, a suspension of, everyday life.[38] As contrasted with the

gathering space of the church, where a community is gathered as a single entity with a unified

purpose, the secularized space of the hotel lobby represents a detached space in which "aimless

lounging … leads to the mere play that elevates the unserious everyday to the level of the

serious."[39] The characters assembled in the archetypical hotel lobby are mere "carbon-copy

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[37] Kracauer, *Detektiv-Roman*, 122.
[38] Kracauer, *Detektiv-Roman*, 131. See also Kracauer, "The Hotel Lobby," trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *Postcolonial Studies* 2, no. 3 (1999): 291, 293.
[39] Kracauer, *Detektiv-Roman*, 133.

images" (*Abziehbilder*), superficial, atomized bits of information.[40] The detective assembles this

atomized everydayness according to rational principles, playing a game of ordering with the

traces of everyday life. An anomalous space reserved for a timeless lounging, the hotel lobby is a

heterotopia where *ratio* has dispersed alienated elements into a suspended magic circle of play.

But the hotel lobby is simply a zone of enhanced visuality particularly attuned to the detective's

play. The detective carries heterotopia with him as he observes the city; his entire field of vision

is his *Spielraum* consisting of *Abziehbilder* to be reordered at will. For Kracauer, who "knows

full well that after the fall of religion there is no simple way back," the detective is therefore a

profoundly ambiguous figure, representing both the dangers and potential of a space

disenchanted and given over to play.[41] The game-player in the hotel lobby enacts and is beholden

to the rationalist ideology that has collapsed the sphere of existence, and the sovereignty thereby

achieved over reality is suspect and may, in any case, be temporary.

      As in Dehaene and De Cauter's model of heterotopia, the hotel lobby is a place situated

ambivalently between the home and the public, a crossing ground between the ostensibly public

space of the streets and the private realm of the hotel room. The hotel lobby's amorphous

mixture of public visibility and private secludedness is merely a synecdoche of the breakdown of

communal life Kracauer, and later Arendt, sees underway as society is rationalized. In his well-

known "Mass Ornament" essay, Kracauer would further develop the notion that rationalism as

the capitalist mode of thought "creates a space for the intervention of reason."[42] Like Kracauer,

in *The Human Condition*, Arendt also likens this to the remaking of the world into a game or

object of play, but for Arendt it is more explicitly a matter of technical mediation. For Arendt,

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      [40] Ibid, 125.
      [41] Gertrud Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer: An Introduction*, trans. Jeremy Gaines (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 16.
      [42] Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," 80.

any notion of a common world in modern societies is now reliant on the mediation of the

derealized spaces of maps and communication networks that alienate the emancipated intellect

from an objectified world.[43] The attitude of the intellect in the homogeneous field produced by

such media is one of solipsistic play: the "playing of the mind with itself" is for Arendt the

ultimate result of the human's alienation from the world around it.[44] The framework of rational

thought, extended further into space by technical prostheses, creates an "Archimedan point"

outside of human embodiment from which nature can be observed, replacing a shared, sensible

world with an individualized, abstract one. Accurate, indexical media turn the world into the

hotel lobby and entrain a detective's gaze in their interfacing subject. Elements therein become

Abziehbilder awaiting emplacement.

In a formulation consistent with his discussion of the detective novel, Siegfried Kracauer

would later describe the processing of reality into photographic material as a game being played

with the real, a game in which a detective-like ordering of alienated elements into a "true order"

might reveal a redemptive path for modernity; Miriam Hansen refers to this current of thought as

Kracauer's "eschatologically tinged idea that modernity could be overcome—and could

overcome itself—only by fully realizing all its disintegrating and destructive potential."[45] That is,

for Kracauer the ideal detective, or the ideal indexical medium, would bring together the

fragments in order to reveal the fragmentation in which they themselves are implicated, rather

than reassembling them into the old order: there is no re-assembling of the traditional spheres.

On Arendt's model, in the modern, post-industrial world, the detective's solipsistic play takes the

place of engagement in a common world, creating its own kind of in-between zone where the

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[43] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 50, 51-52, 115.
[44] Ibid, 250-51.
[45] Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 5.

subject can become the sovereign of dispersed emplacements in homogeneous space. This type

of space we have termed, along with De Cauter and Dehaene, "heterotopia," and Arendt takes us

toward an understanding of one way heterotopia is produced in modernity: via the alienation of

the subject from the immediate, common world of fellow humans, by means of technical media

that collapse and juxtapose diverse spaces. The city map alienates the subject from their

embodied relationship to the real-world space of the city, replacing it with a projected, virtual

relationship. The relationship between a media text and a subject is a magic circle, a space that

interweaves mental and material processes—in cinema, the perception and cognition of the

spectator, intercepted by the cinema's mechanical perceptual apparatus—that is hemmed off

from the world around it.

When media extend our gaze or reach over real space, that magic circle becomes a means

of contesting, inverting, reflecting, or controlling that real space. Walter Benjamin saw cinema as

an extension of what he terms *Spielraum*, which he implies is an essential human faculty

augmented by the technical prostheses of modernity.[46] Benjamin's term is usually translated as

"field of action," but his deployment of the concept of *Spiel* can hardly be read as incidental.

From his early essays on the origin of language in mimesis, Benjamin maintained that the human

capacity for mimesis was rooted in the twin faculties of play (*Spiel*) and semblance (*Schein*), and

in later essays like "Work of Art" he returns to the formulation to argue the notion that the

industrial "second technology" of modernity had foregrounded the faculty of play over that of

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[46] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 3, *1935-1938*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Sohn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 117.

semblance.[47] As opposed to the "once and for all" of pre-modern technology, industrial

technology depends on experimental conditions in which events become repeatable, and "once is

as good as never" (*Einmal ist keinmal*, as a popular German song put it). A footnote in the

second version of the "Work of Art" essay clarifies: "Because technology aims at liberating

human beings from drudgery, the individual suddenly sees his scope for play, his field of action,

immeasurably expanded. He does not yet know his way around this space, but he already

registers his demands on it."[48] Benjamin imagines this expansion of *Spelraum*, which occurs for

the masses above all in film, as an opportunity for a kind of appropriation of space through

technical prosthesis, extending the masses' grasp of space like a child who "stretches out its hand

for the moon as it would a ball."[49] While Benjamin implies that he intends something like a

"space of play" with this term, the *Spielraum* of cinema often functions much more a gamespace,

determining the limits of play from the outside.

The detective, as well as the Weimar subject, had many technical means of confronting

the city as heterotopic *Spielraum*. As Foucault might observe, the mental apparatus of the

detective relies on disciplined techniques—but also, in the modern world a proliferating set of

associated imaging and communication technologies aid the detective in his assembly of the

rationally ordered "truth." Relying on recording technologies, shortwave radio, and even

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[47] See: Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings*, vol. 1, *1913-1926*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 62-74; Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar," in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings*, vol. 2, part 2, *1931-1934*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 694-698; Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings*, vol. 2, part 2, *1931-1934*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott,(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 720-722; Benjamin, "Work of Art," 107, 127.
[48] Benjamin, "Work of Art," 124, note 10.
[49] Ibid, 124, note 10.

networks of informants—as well as that archetypical private-eye visual apparatus, the magnifying glass—the detective brings a number of physical media to bear on reality, to extend his grasp toward the *Abziehbilder* suspended in space. In a similar way, the surface-representations of city-space in modern visual media such as maps, photography, and the cinema function to, at least temporarily, open up the city to the play of the viewing subject. Newspapers, for example, were the means in late-19th-century Berlin by which the city was brought into its residents' virtual grasps: as the number of daily papers ballooned in Berlin around 1900, "it was the newspapers … which encouraged city people to explore the metropolitan perimeter" containing the city's many weekend-getaway lakes and green spaces.[50] The non-linear layout of a newspaper, containing more information than would easily be assimilated in a single sitting, encouraged a perambulatory gaze that simulated the urbanite's relationship to the city, and facilitated their detective-like collation of diverse spaces into a manageable order.[51] In turn-of-the-century Berlin, newspapers such as the *Morgenpost*, the *Lokal-Anzeiger*, and the *Berliner Tageblatt* provided the urban dweller with a sense of ownership and mobility—a sense of sovereignty facilitated by the newspaper's production of *Spielraum*.

The advent of the consumer urban map also gave the urbanite access to a heterotopia offering mastery over city-space. Pharus, Germany's staple brand of urban maps, began production only in 1902, but by later that decade was publishing a wide variety of themed maps with different, instrumentalized views of the city geared toward tourists, consumers, or motorists. The Pharus Plan was complement to and driver of the rationalization of Berlin's space in the minds of its residents. In the company's colorful maps, Berlin became " a city reduced to a web

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[50] Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 68.

[51] I am indebted to Pablo Rodriguez Balbontin for this observation.

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of coloured roads and railway lines … Berliners learned to navigate the modern city through the calculated fictions of these geometric patterns, and in so doing they absorbed a bit of the panoramic perspective of the urban planners who sought to knit the city together into a rational whole."[52] A mirror of the city, a surface reflecting back an urbanite's environment as a virtual space, the accurate topographical map processed the real and the diverse places of the city into *Abziehbilder* for the viewing subject to arrange and re-orient at will.

In his article "Alte Spiel- und Landkarten," Kracauer recounts his visit in April of 1931 an exhibition at the State Art Library in Berlin focused on historical maps and playing cards (*Land-* and *Spiel-karten* in German), recounting his observations in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.[53] In describing the twin exhibition, Kracauer dialectically inverts the reader's expectations, as the maps become a site of play, and the cards a means of re-ordering the world. The map, on one hand, is subject to the caprices of history and its makers—the 17th century maps on display at the exhibition emplace mythological images within the space imaged on the map, alongside real places. New York appears on one of the maps, a small, marginal settlement Kracauer describes as a "little toy-place" (*Spielzeugörtchen*).[54] He describes playing cards, on the other hand, as "*microcosms*. In them, a world is forced together in the smallest format … In the card game, the elements of the currently valid world are thoroughly mixed up and left to luck, and perhaps it is ultimately the crucial function of play to throw off [*aufheben*], again and again, the law of this our world and trust ourselves to another, unknown one."[55] The apprehension of real spaces through the flat surface of the map compels the transformation of real places and sacred symbols

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[52] Nadine Leann Roth, "Metamorphoses," 148.
[53] Siegfried Kracauer, "Alte Spiel- und Landkarten," in *Siegfried Kracauer: Werke,* vol. 5.3, *Essays*, *Feuilletons, Rezensionen, 1928-1931,* eds. Inka Mülder-Bach with Sabine Biebl, Andrea Erwig, Vera Bachmann, and Stephanie Manske (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 499-503.
[54] Ibid, 500.
[55] Ibid, 500-01.

into playthings, and the playing of card games compels the apprehension of the world order commuted provisionally into a new one. At the exhibit, "from the playing cards to the *old maps* it is not far, at least spatially," but one gets the sense from Kracauer that it is not far, theoretically, from maps to play, from play to maps.[56]

In 1919, Pharus began publishing a *Kino-Pharus-Plan* of Greater Berlin, which emplaced across the grid of the metropolitan order a number of black and red dots and crosses, demarking all of the cinemas in Berlin and its suburbs, the shape and color indicating the relative size of the theater.[57] The *Kino-Pharus-Plan* proposed cinema as a framework for navigating the city. Cinemas here take the place of landmarks like the Brandenburg Gate in the standard Pharus-Plan, and Berlin the *Filmstadt* opens itself to the virtual perambulations of the reader, who is invited to unfold, rotate, and trace the map, to play in the space opened up under the auspices of a cinematic network. Center of the German film industry and home to the most theaters per capita in Germany, Berlin becomes in the map the background space to paths between cinemas and studios. Advertised in popular film magazines, ads for the *Kino-Pharus-Plan* were followed by features such as *Der Film's Schutzmarken-Tafel* ("Trademark Table") showing the logos and addresses of Berlin's many film studios, arranged in a chessboard-like configuration.[58] Providing a guide to the distinctive icon of each studio, the *Tafel* also creates a rationalized, game-like alignment of the disparate centers of Berlin film production, inviting the reader to participate in a mapping of Berlin as the capital of the German film industry. In this way, it plays upon the same

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[56] Ibid, 502.
[57] The *Kino-Pharus-Plan* would be reprinted at least once more in the Weimar Republic, in 1925. A copy of the original is held in the *Kartensammlung* (Map Collection) at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz.
[58] "Shutzmarken-Tafel," *Der Film* 1, no. 47 (Nov 23 1918): [pg].

fascinations as the *Kino-Pharus-Plan*, offering its readers space to play in the network of cinema-spaces.

The City as Gamespace in the City Symphony and the Literature of Flanerie

If media like newspapers, urban maps, and games were heterotopic in their production of the city as *Spielraum*, the detective and the related figure of the flaneur were the model of the subject who brought heterotopia with them wherever they went, wherever their gaze fell. The Weimar flaneur, a self-conscious resurrection of a 19th-century Parisian archetype, did so by emulating the detached, mobile gaze of the cinema. By the late 1920s, the cinema and urbanization were phenomena so tightly interwoven that films were understood to have a privileged relationship to imaging city space, to capturing the play of the streets and ordering it into the game of *Ratio*. As Benjamin asserted in "Berlin Chronicle," his own prose-portrait of the city as a space of memories, "only film commands optical approaches to the essence of the city, such as conducting the motorist into the new center."[59] Explicitly, here, cinema has replaced the function of an urban map, a function which Benjamin's montage-like prose and his ideal flaneur expressly attempts to emulate.

One major German attempt to capture the essence of the city using distinctly cinematic means, to condense and make into visual *Spielraum* the hyperstimulating space of the city, was *Dynamik der Großstadt*, a film experiment proposed in 1921 by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. Moholy-Nagy's prospective film, which in many ways presaged the later city symphony, was to use documentary footage of the city, abstract animation, graphic symbols, block-letter text, superimposition, rhythmic montage, and time-lapse and slow-motion cinematography to capture the dynamics of the metropolis in film form. The "sketch for a film-manuscript" that Moholy-

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[59] Benjamin, "Berlin Chronicle," 8.

Nagy drew up attempts to imitate these effects on the flat surface of the page. To indicate

sequence breaks in the film, Moholy-Nagy divides the pages into rectangles of varying

dimensions and fills these rectangles variously with still photographs, shot descriptions, stylized

text, and cross-hatched designs that evoke the streamlined and yet simultaneously chaotic visual

and spatial codes of the city. *Dynamik der Großstadt* revels in the cinema's spatial contradictions

and intense variations in visual rhythm as a means of reflecting and distilling the spatial

otherness of the city. As Moholy-Nagy argued, the appearance of new technical media such as

the cinema had resulted in the "emergence of new realms of formation [*Gestaltungsbereiche*]."[60]

This "new realm" suggested not only a renewed model of the artwork, but also of perception,

experience, and space—in Moholy-Nagy's imagining, at least, a more participatory model that

created an active spectator.[61] *Dynamik der Großstadt* was to create a participatory space with the

spectator, one made up of parts that never resolved themselves into a whole.

Moholy-Nagy's manuscript proposes its rapid montage of images, words, and symbols as

a means of introducing the spectator to the "breathless running, the *Tohuwabohu* of the city."[62]

Kracauer would employ the same word, a vernacular Hebrew word for "chaos," to describe how

Karl Grune's later *Die Straße* ("The Street," 1923) captured the spirit of the modern city with

specifically cinematic means. The film, shot almost entirely inside the Efa-Gelände studio in the

former Berlin suburb Steglitz, narrates the temptation and redemption of a listless, middle-aged

petit bourgeois. In the opening of the film, the anonymous main character gets his first inkling of

the city's attraction while staring at the ceiling in his small flat. He sees, projected onto the

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[60] László Moholy-Nagy, "Die Statische und Kinetische Optische Gestaltung," in *Malerei, Fotografie, Film*, ed. László Moholy-Nagy (Munich: Albert Langen Verlag, 1925), 18.

[61] Ibid, 22.

[62] László Moholy-Nagy, *Dynamik der Großstadt*, in *Malerei, Fotografie, Film*, ed. László Moholy-Nagy (Munich: Albert Langen Verlag, 1925), 123.

ceiling by the street lights that stream through his top-floor window, the flickering shadows of the bustling city life below. A low, canted angle shows us these projected visions as the man reaches out to interact with them: the shadow of a man appears to approach and proposition that of a woman, jaunting away in pursuit after being rejected; the image then fades into the blinkering motion of abstract shapes. Drawn by these superficial visual attractions that overtly evoke the silent screen of the cinema—which he, in a reenactment of Plato's famous cave, mistakes as the "real life" he is missing—the man rushes to his window. The match-cut to the perspective of his gaze out the window begins with an irised, overhead shot of Berlin traffic, but other elements are soon lap-dissolved into the frame. Train tracks frame the irised shot of traffic, and the double-exposed image of a train rushes through the documentary footage itself, suggesting the ceaseless motion and simultaneity of the city, the *Lichtspiel* of the streets. This self-reflexive sequence calls attention the cinema as a mirror-surface of the city, which holds both attraction and danger. Venturing into the city, the man is pulled from place to place—from a shop window, to a desolate park, to a crowded dance hall—by the intense visuality of the city, its wild *Nebeneinander*.

Die Straße is not the proto-Constructivist game of assemblage *Dynamik der Großstadt* proposes; it is much more a morality play, in which the man's succumbing to gambling and vice lands him in a jail cell, wrongly accused of murder. The man's story develops in parallel to that of a young boy, also abandoned to the streets, who ultimately confesses to police that his father committed the crime of which the man is accused. Despite the film's ultimate return to safe domesticity and the re-establishment of law, to Kracauer its overt use of studio space and abrupt, vertiginous cinematic effects constituted an eminently cinematic reflection of the disintegration of life in the modern city. In his 1924 review of the film, Kracauer wrote that it

adds shot onto shot, and from these, reeling one after another, it mechanically assembles the world … The more the object represented can be rendered in the succession of mere images, the collection of simultaneous impressions, the more it corresponds to film's technique of association. Indeed, what would be more closely related to it than a life that exhausts itself purely in external occurrences? A life bereft of substance, empty like a tin can, which knows—instead of the inner relationality—only selective events that assemble kaleidoscopically in ever-new series of images?[63]

A fittingly filmic portrait of the city, in its evident artificiality and superficiality the film was also attuned, at least in Kracauer's mind, to the fragmented aspects of social reality. The studio settings, designed by the expressionist painter Ludwig Meidner and constructed by Karl Görge-Prochaska, capture the atmosphere of the city by emphasizing their artificiality and random agglomeration, as in painted skyline backdrop that abuts the park where the man attempts to seduce a prostitute early in the film. Later in his wild evening, as the man peers from a second-story balcony out over a dance hall, the footage of dancers rapidly spins in front of his silhouette, reflexively suggesting the connection between the visual frenzy of the dance hall and the game of "vertigo" that the cinema plays with perception.[64] In this shot, the man's reality becomes a two-dimensional image spinning in front of his shadow, emphasizing the cinema's transformation of the city into a flattened surface of play for the spectator.

Die Straße would initiate a series of "street films" focused on the temptations and dangers of urban life, dramatizing such topics as poverty, gambling, and prostitution. Films such as *Die freudlose Gasse* (*Joyless Street*, 1925) and *Dirnentragödie* (*Tragedy of the Street*, 1927) shifted away from *Die Straße*'s self-reflexive allegory of the *Lichtspiel* and even more toward melodrama—although a two-page photomontage splash advertisement for *Die freudlose Gasse*

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[63] Siegfried Kracauer, "A Film," in *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory 1907-1933*, eds. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 390.

[64] Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash, (Glencoe, NY: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 83.

in *Film Kurier* suggests, in its overcrowded surface of conflicting visual impressions, that such films were still understood as representing the city through modernist play.[65] Kracauer would eventually sour on the genre, however, particularly for its complaisant resolutions: in *From Caligari to Hitler*, he reads *Die Straße* as evidence that the German psyche was transitioning "from rebellion to submission," critiquing the way that, "instead of acknowledging the values of anarchical life, the film deprecates this life" by painting the streets unambiguously as a deleterious sphere of amorality, by glorifying the police, and by narrating the return to safe domesticity.[66] As Hake writes, "in Kracauer, writing the city means acknowledging the tension within mass society both as an emancipatory force and a site of oppression"; but as the development of the city symphony will show us, ultimately the tendency in both Weimar cinema and the literature of flanerie was to produce a space in which urban space's shock effects were not preserved and foregrounded, but contained and placed within an illusory order.[67]

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[65] Advertisement for *Die freudlose Gasse*, *Film-Kurier* 7, no 198 (19 Aug 1925): 12-13.
[66] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psycholgical History of the German Film* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1947), 122-23.
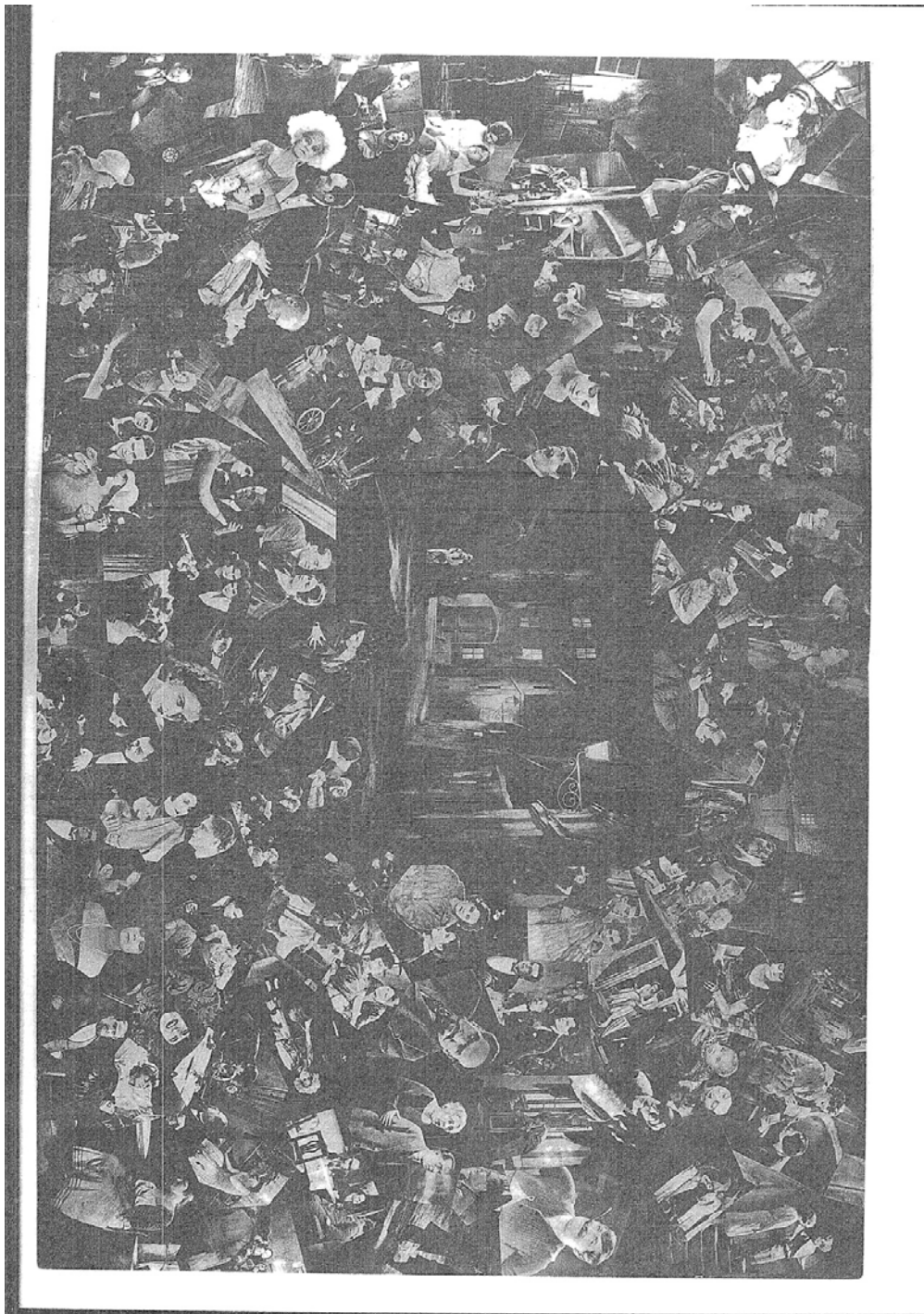[67] Hake, *Topographies of Class*, 136.

Figure 3.1: Advertisement for *Die freudlose Gasse*, *Film-Kurier* 7, no 198 (19 Aug 1925): 12-13

Emerging alongside the street films was the city symphony, a genre of urban "cross-section" films presaged in Moholy-Nagy's manuscript. The concept of cross-section

(*Querschnitt*) carried much cultural capital as the 1920s progressed and the sober affect of New Objectivity dominated German visual culture. Cross-sectional aesthetics in photography sought to apply a scientific gaze to phenomena observed by the camera, often through juxtaposing two unrelated images to elucidate hidden meanings and formal correspondences, as in the illustrated magazine *Der Querschnitt*. Michael Cowan understands *Querschnitt* aesthetics as a means of coping with "a rapidly expanding visual archive" of the world, the *Bilderflut* ("flood of images") in the mass media, by emplacing the images within sets of paradigmatic relations—rather than the syntagmatic structure of narrative. Cowan argues that montage in late Weimar culture "gesture[s] toward a totality—a 'total image of the world'—that would reduce the threat of contingency by locating elements within a paradigmatic system."[68] The cross-section montage of the city symphony played the detective's ambivalent game, assembling alienated elements into a comprehensible order. Walther Ruttmann's *Berlin: die Sinfonie der Großstadt* ("Berlin: Symphony of the Metropolis, 1927) would become the paragon of the *Querschnitt* aesthetic in the cinema, but among its notable predecessors is *Stadt der Millionen*, the Ufa *Kulturfilm* whose excursus to Tempelhof opened this chapter. Turning the camera on the city as if it were Kracauer's detective, the city symphony produced a stable, if still stimulating, perception of a city that "seemed to be—whether arechitectonic or filmic, whether material or immaterial—without firm points of connection, with alternating and fluctuating angles and excerpts of vision, in a state of change or dissolution," as film scholar Chris Dähne writes.[69]

Even before the generic form of the city symphony had fully emerged, contemporary critics found *Stadt der Millionen*'s representational strategies unequal to the task of conveying

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[68] Michael Cowan, "Cutting Through the Archive: *Querschnitt* Montage and Images of the World in Weimar Visual Culture," *New German Critique* 40, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 4, 18, 2.
[69] Dähne, *Stadtsinfonien*, 160.

the city's essence. As one contemporary review put it, the film is "not a mirror of Berlin, but rather a photograph album, perhaps. It is missing … the initiation into the spirit of the city … [there is] no connection from image to image, nothing of fluidity."[70] Nevertheless, *Stadt der Millionen* represents an early attempt to reflect Berlin as manageable *Spielraum*, a cross-section of an unruly city that laid it out as an ordered play-space for the spectator's eye. The film's first act, "Quer durch Berlin" ("Crosswise through Berlin") opens with aerial footage of the German capital, taken from a plane passing above it. These aerial views are introduced by a pair of shots that provide fictional motivation: a low-angle shot of a biplane in flight, followed by a cut-in to a clearly staged shot of the pilot and co-pilot in a fabricated cockpit. When the film then cuts to the aerial perspective, the plane-mounted camera is passing from Berlin's transit and commerce hub Alexanderplatz into the Nikolaiviertel, heading south along the eastern edge of the downtown district. A shot of the pilots shows one of them pointing downward with a gloved hand. He shouts to his companion, via intertitle, "*Das ist Berlin*!" The film cuts to another aerial view, this one passing the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, traveling westward parallel to the shopping avenue Kurfürstendamm. The camera is suddenly, in other words, across town, now traveling in a direction perpendicular to the one previously depicted, and there is no diegetic motivation for this change in direction: we are shown neither the pilot adjusting the controls nor the plane itself shifting momentum.

This continuity-defying leap exceeds the bounds of the fiction constructed by the two pilots because it defies the capability of an airplane—its jump through space is obviously accomplished not by an aerial maneuver, but by a cinematic one. From this point on, the sequence need not justify its jumps through space-time with the guidance of the pilot's finger: it

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[70] "Die Stadt der Millionen," *Kinematograph* 19, no. 955 (28 May 1925): 17.

simply cuts between different views without a proxy for the spectator. In this opening aerial sequence, there is no single referent for the "*Das*" that "*ist Berlin*": when the pilot points downward the film does not present a stretch of film that shows us the city in a single temporal slice, in the way that earlier, publicly distributed aerial views of the city had done. Instead, the "*das*" consists in the assemblage of views compiled in montage, the stillness of each image almost suggesting a collation of simultaneous views. This sequence emphasizes the camera's access to Belrin—its ability, via mobility and juxtaposition, to thread the various pieces of the city together into a composite whole viewed from above. Only in the juxtaposition of disparate, dispersed places does the filmic representation of the metropolis emerge; thus the geographically separated commerce hubs of Alexanderplatz, Kurfürstendamm, and Potsdamer Platz follow each other in sequence. Only afterwards comes the pass over the administrative center of Berlin—the *Rotes Rathaus*, the *Berliner Schloss*, and the Unter den Linden boulevard—an area much closer to Alexanderplatz than the previous three areas are to each other. Removed from their coordinates in geographic space, these places are placed into a new, associative order through montage, with the camera hovering above and floating through the space of the city. For the remainder of the film, the camera, rather than any diegetic agent of vision, is the primary mobile vision that directs the exploration and piecing-together of the city, even when the meaning of the images is inflected by intertitles.

An implicit analogy emerges in the film between city space and the paradigmatic order constructed in montage, drawn out in those moments when the form of the film deploys modernist techniques that warp the image of profilmic space. At several points in the film, clever composite images create in-camera montages that, like rebus puzzles, combine multiple images into singular concepts, such as an array of train tracks flowering out from Berlin's seal, or the

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shot of commuting workers superimposed into the center of a clock. These moments of

simultaneity and rapid succession, of multiple and disparate space-times crowded against and

into each other, position cinema as the singular perceptual mode capable of mapping the modern

city in its continually flowing assemblage of diverse elements. Such moments point toward the

city symphony and clearly had an influence on the later *Sinfonie der Großstadt*. *Stadt der*

Millionen features a sequence focused on the city's *Zeitungspaläste* ("newspaper palaces") that

uses a newspaper page as a graphic mask opening onto the streets of the city; *Sinfonie der*

Großstadt would animate the scrolling words of a newspaper to mirror the flood of information

on the streets. *Stadt der Millionen* revels in the stillness of the city viewed from an airplane, and

Sinfonie der Großstadt would also include sleepy, aerial views of the city captured from rooftops

early in its first act. Above all, what the films have in common is that, unlike *Dynamik der*

Großstadt, they seek to resolve the chaotic sensorium of the city into a rational order: *Stadt* by

encoding it, however playfully, within the discourse of didactic enlightenment, and *Sinfonie* by

emplacing the sights lifted from the city into a network of correspondences and analogies.

    This compositing of an ordered *Spielraum* out of slices of perception is the crucial link

between the city symphony and the flaneur. The literature of flanerie was concerned with

achieving, like the camera or the detective, sovereignty over the homogeneous-discontinuous

space of the city. By evoking montage in its collation of urban places, the flaneric text creates a

space in which urban experience might be mastered, the contradictory parts might again be made

legible. The reader, like the spectator, identifies with the flaneur's cool, masterful gaze that has

compiled a space out of suspended elements it re-arranged at will. Gleber describes the flaneur as

"at once a dreamer, a historian, and an artist of modernity, a character, and an author who

transforms his observations into literary, or more precisely, filmic texts."[71] Analogies proliferate

and eventually land, "more precisely" on cinema because the flaneur's paths through the city,

recorded as a series of visual encounters, resembled the roaming gaze of the camera. Like the

camera that coordinates overhead vista and embedded street-level view, the flaneur can occupy

two positions at once—the city "becomes a landscape that opens up to him and a parlor that

encloses him."[72] Benjamin would compare the gaze of the flaneur to that of the detective and,

later, to the camera: like a detective, Benjamin's flaneur is a detached observer of the city's

signs, tracing and assembling paths and images, cloaked—like the disguised camera

cinematographer Karl Freund would use for *Sinfonie der Großstadt*—within the anonymity of the

city.[73]

By appropriating the cinematic gaze, Weimar city literature attempted to solve the

problem facing writing in urban modernity: as Peter Brooker puts it, the sense of discontinuity

and simultaneity within the metropolis made it difficult for linear modes of narration "to

apprehend the city in a comprehensible form that would produce the parts and whole as an

integrated, legible text."[74] The new, cinematic city literature in Weimar Germany is perhaps most

readily identified with Alfred Döblin's novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929). Though, like the

literature of flanerie, Döblin's novel makes the cinema an important reference point, it differs

from Roth, Hessel, and Benjamin in crucial ways. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* de-centers the

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[71] Gleber, "Women on the Streets," 55.

[72] Walter Benjamin, "Return of the Flaneur," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 2, part 1, *1927-1930*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 263.

[73] Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 4, *1938-1940*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Harry Zohn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 19-22.

[74] Peter Brooker, *Modernity and Metropolis: Writing, Film, and Urban Formations* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), 24.

perspective of its nominal protagonist, Franz Biberkopf, to represent the city's visual, aural, and

spatial cacophony via an impersonal discourse that alternates between various modes and points

of reference, the cool tone of reportage mingling with Biblical and mythological references,

often interrupted by the language of advertisements or *Berlinerisch* slang. Döblin's depiction of

the titular *Platz* captures the simultaneity of activity in the open commercial square by adopting

one voice after another, often not even finishing lines of thought:

> Liquor shops, restaurants, fruit and vegetable stores, groceries and delicatessen, moving
> business, painting and decorating, manufacture of ladies' wear, flour and mill materials,
> automobile garage, extinguisher company: The superiority of the small motor syringe lies
> in its simple construction, easy service, small weight, small size. German fellow citizens,
> never has a people been deceived more ignominiously, never has a nation been betrayed
> more ignominiously and more unjustly than the German people.[75]

Döblin's exhaustive, often exhausting narration overloads the reader with information from

obscure sources, simulating the "intensification of modern stimuli" on the urban street.[76] But

while montage-like, Döblin's prose refrains from establishing a new, stable order. The narration

is broken apart, fragmented, by this flood of superficial images, just as the city itself appears as a

discontinuous space. The reader's sovereignty over the space of the text is contested by its utterly

unpredictable mélange of signs. Thus *Berlin Alexanderplatz* has more in common with *Dynamik*

der Großstadt than it does with *Stadt der Millionen* or *Sinfonie der Großstadt*—or with

Benjamin or Hessel's literature of flanerie—which attempt to smooth over the city's shock

effects by constructing a new, ordered gamespace in montage.

 Benjamin's literary "Berlin Chronicle" consists of fragments of recollection from his

youth set in distinct areas of the city, arranged in such a way that highlights the spatiality of the

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[75] Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: The Story of Franz Biberkopf*, trans. Eugene
Jolas (New York: Continuum, 2004), 92.
[76] Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *Classic Essays on the Culture of
Cities*, ed. Richard Sennett, trans. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Englewood Cliffs, NH:
Prentice Hall, 1969), 48.

texts itself. Many fragments self-reflexively point to his intention to develop a form of writing that, like the cinema, produces a heterotopic surface on which the discombobulating effects of urban modernity can be contained. In the first fragment, Benjamin writes, almost in the style of a confession,

> I have long, indeed for years, played with the idea of setting out the sphere of life—
> *bios*—graphically on a map. First I envisaged an ordinary map, but now I would incline
> to a general staff's map of a city center, if such a thing existed. Doubtless it does not,
> because of the ignorance of the theater of future wars. I have evolved a system of signs,
> and on the gray background of such maps they would make a colorful show if I clearly
> marked in the houses of my friends and girl friends…[77]

Benjamin here is likely alluding to a version of the "color sigla" system he had developed for his *Arcades Project*, which Benjamin scholar Willi Bolle likens to hypertext as a "playful form of inscription."[78] Benjamin visualizes his text of memoir-flanerie as a nonlinear—that is, non-syntagmatic—and strategic virtual surface ("a general staff's map"), a net of interconnections overlaid as visual symbols on a map. Rather than an open play-space, Benjamin is describing a closed-off sphere where the game is set in advance and, as he says, *bios* can be captured; the cinematic map-text of the flaneur is full of "mazes," "erring paths" and "labyrinths" that, like a camera, the flaneur both inhabits and transcends.[79] The city becomes a surface that offers the reader or spectator an illusory identification with the agency that has assembled the gamespace of the text.

Still in its first act, *Stadt der Millionen* visits the iconic Potsdamer Platz, a former gate in the city's medieval wall that had become Europe's busiest intersection. Unlike Döblin, the film does not use the overload of activity at the Platz to disconcert and estrange its spectator, instead

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[77] Benjamin, "Berlin Chronicle," 3.
[78] Willi Bolle, "Metropole als Hypertext: zur netzhaften Essayistik in Walter Benjamins 'Passagen-Projekt," *German Politics and Society* 74, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 91. See Benjamin, "Berlin Chronicle," 30-32, for another description of the system.
[79] Benjamin, "Berlin Chronicle," 9, 12, 3.

using cinematic techniques to place its ceaseless movement under control. The initial

documentary shot of the Platz's street sign is interrupted by an elliptical intertitle reading "*Einst*"

("once"), which introduces us to an animated flashback depicted carriages passing through the

sleepy, 18th-century gate. This animated sequence gives way to a matching long shot of the

intersection in 1925, and, with a cut to an elevated, shot perpendicular to the famous traffic-

control tower at the intersection, it aligns itself with the panoptic gaze of the officer inside. An

eyeline match-cut to an angled overhead view of the traffic below as a few cars begin to move

out of turn is followed by an intertitle commanding "*Halt! Zurück!*" ("Stop! Back!"). The

documentary footage comes to a standstill and then runs in reverse, the camera reversing the

flow of traffic, exercising authoritative control over the space it images. Here the still-new, often

dangerous phenomenon of fast-paced automobile traffic is made manageable by a distinctly

cinematic device, turning the unpredictability of the city into a playful space under the

controlling gaze of the camera.

Franz Hessel, writing about Potsdamer Platz some four years later, describes his flaneur's

gaze in a way that bears comparison with *Stadt der Millionen*'s representation of the square.

Describing how he can read the forms of the past in the current, renovated form of Potsdamer

Platz, Hessel compares the positioning of the flaneur to the perspective of the famous traffic

tower: "That once here were a city gate and the end of Berlin, and the country roads branched

off—one must have a very schooled topographical gaze to see this in the form of the street

crossing … And in the middle the famous traffic tower stands and watches over the play of the

streets like a judge's chair in tennis."[80] While the flaneur often presents himself as a man in the

streets, here we see that his position is split: he also has access to a totalizing, transhistorical,

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[80] Hessel, *Spazieren in Berlin*, 58.

aerial view of city space. While he walks within the streets, it is the flaneur's schooled "topographical gaze" that enables him to be the storyteller—or, much more, the mapmaker—of Berlin. This topographical gaze allows him, like the cinema that flashes back or reveals hidden forms in animation, to perform a transformation of the scene of Potsdamer Platz, revealing its encoded history, which is then emplaced in his map-text. Heterotopic play, then, becomes a means of establishing and exercising dominance within the space produced by the rational gaze.

The gaze of the flaneur that produces space as sovereign *Spielraum* was explicitly proffered as a game by the illustrated magazine *Uhu* in 1929, in its feature "The Great Uhu-Panoptikum: A Tour with the New Uhu-Magic-Wonder-Glasses Through Time."[81] *Uhu*'s "panoptic" tour consisted of a series of illustrations of well-known Berlin sites that, when covered with a detachable, translucent red paper included in the pages of the magazine, would reveal satirical meanings or the forms of the past hidden within the image. When covered with the red filter, the resplendent Reichstag building, "a construction with real pre-war gold on the roof," becomes an unremarkable train station; the memorial statues to Prussian heroes lining the walks in the bearby Tiergarten, detested by native Berliners, disappear; the ostentatious overabundance of paintings at Berlin's art museums are narrowed down to a more curated few.[82] This print-tour of Berlin, directed toward the city's natives, makes a game out of the perception of city space, involving the reader in the mapping of satirical meaning onto real places in their city. The perambulatory gaze of the "UHU-Magic-Wonder-Glasses" is also that of the flaneur—and of the film camera—which observes and assembles the sights/sites of the city into a text that transcends the confusion of the city.

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[81] "Das grosse UHU-Panoptikum: Ein Rundgang mit der neuen UHU-Zauber-Wunder-Brille durch die Zeit," *Uhu* 6, no. 8 (May 1929): 56-61.
[82] Ibid, 56.

The Potsdamer Platz sequence in *Stadt der Millionen* concludes by once again dislocating itself in time, transitioning to a dynamically animated depiction of Potsdamer Platz circa 2000, featuring commuter zeppelins zipping around high rises that have emerged on the square.[83] Potsdamer Platz in *Stadt der Millionen* is the intermediary point, the intercourse, between the forms of the past and those of a projected future. Placing the current Potsdamer Platz in the center of a stable timeline, the film uses montage and its "schooled, topographical gaze" to emplace the city within a narrative of development. Stories, Michel de Certeau writes, "carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places. They also organize the play of changing relationships between places and spaces."[84] *Stadt der Millionen* and Hessel each make the *Tohuwabohu* of the square manageable by emplacing it within a timeline of past and future, a surface on which is "collat[ed] on the same plane heterogeneous places, some *received* from a tradition and others *produced* by observation."[85] Like the flaneur, *Stadt der Millionen* revels in the camera's ability to transcend the street level and reach the purely observational perspective of the airplane, or the disciplining gaze of the traffic control tower: the city is opened up within the space of the text as the camera and the spectator's *Spielraum*.

The power inherent in determining the limits of the reader's space-for-play in the city-text is often expressed, in Hessel and Benjamin, in gendered terms. The flaneur's camera-like gaze, moving between embodied experience and Archimedian point, constructs for himself a position of power over the playing-field of the city. A simulation of the film camera, the

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[83] It is worth noting that the film is only a few years (and a few commuter zeppelins) off: its suggestion of a "Höhencafe" at the top of Potsdamer Platz from which bourgeois visitors can observed the city predicts post-reunification Berlin's Panorama Punkt, and the design of today's Sony Center is of a kind with the rounded lines of the animated sequence's futuristic architecture.

[84] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendell (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), ebook location 1773.

[85] Ibid, ebook location 1812.

flaneur's gaze is quasi-technological, distanced, but at the same time this gaze seeks out images

of women contained within the network it apprehends from both within and above the city.

Hessel identifies his gaze as at once cinematic and implicitly hetero-masculine in his book's

opening chapter, "*Der Verdächtige*" ("The Suspicious One"):

> The harried, uptight girls of the big city with the insatiably open mouths become indignant when my gaze sets itself own on their swaying shoulders and floating cheeks. Not as if they have anything at all against being looked at. But this slow-motion gaze of the harmless spectator enervates them. They notice that with me nothing is 'behind!' it.[86]

While the flaneur enjoys his mobility, flowing along and above the city streets, his cinematic

"slow-motion gaze" denies the women in his view the same mobility, emplacing them as static

images within the network of streets. The gaze is both sexually detached—there is nothing

"behind" it—and at the same time focuses on the "open mouths," the "swaying shoulders and

floating cheecks" of the women. Strikingly similar language is to be found in Joseph Roth's

"Spaziergang": as he walks, Roth observes "a café terrace planted with colorful ladies, who wait

until they're plucked."[87] The flaneur condenses the city into a surface for play in a bid for

sovereignty over the overwhelming sensory variety of the city, but in achieving this sovereignty

consigns female figures to the status of objects in the playing field. The mediated zone of play

props up individualist, masculine fantasies of power.

Benjamin in particular wrote of the flaneur as exercising a kind of play with the recorded

sights of the city, comparing the figure not only to the detective, but to a child. "The child, in his

solitary games," he writes in "Berlin Chronicle," "grows up at closest quarters to the city."[88]

Benjamin also evokes a child at play to describe the shifting, microcosmic worlds of modern

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[86] Hessel, *Spazieren in Berlin*, 19.

[87] Joseph Roth, "Spaziergang," in *Joseph Roth: Werke*, vol. 1, *Das journalistische Werk, 1915-1923*, ed. Klaus Westermann (Frankfurt am Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1994), 564.

[88] Benjamin, "Berlin Chronicle," 3.

Moscow in his *One Way Street*.[89] One passage in particular from Benjamin's "Berlin Chronicle"

is telling: the narrator describes his manner as a child of

> walking in the city, in the stubborn refusal under any circumstances to form a united
> front, be it even with my own mother. There is no doubt, at any rate, that a feeling of
> crossing the threshold of one's class for the first time had a part in the almost unequaled
> fascination of publicly accosting a whore in the street. At the beginning, however, this
> was a cross of frontiers not only social but topographical, in the sense that whole
> networks of streets were opened up under the auspices of prostitution.[90]

Here we see the opening up of the city, and of the text as well, as *Spielraum* on the basis that the

feminine, as mother and/or as prostitute, is disavowed and contained safely within the network

inscribed on the surface. Numerous times in the subsequent fragmentary passages that make up

"Berlin Chronicle," female figures appear in images of containment: as a madam "enthroned in

her bay window, as a prostitute wearing a "tight-fitting sailor suit," or as the "goal" of pubescent

wandering in the labyrinth of the red-light district.[91] On the other hand, the mysteriously un-

emplaced threshold spaces Benjamin identifies—parks, the invisible borders between districts,

the spaces of books—are occupied by the young Benjamin in the city, the proxy for the spectator

navigating the text.

      Irmgard Keun's novel *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* ("The Artificial Silk Girl", 1932)

narrates Berlin from the opposite perspective: not that of the masculine flaneur who gambles to

win a position of dominance over the city as *Spielraum*, but that of a woman who finds herself

within a Benjaminian urban labyrinth, where the pleasures of visual consumption and

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      [89] Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street*, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 1,
1913-1926, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Rodney Livingstone
(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 449-450.
      [90] Benjamin, "Berlin Chronicle," 11.
      [91] Ibid, 12, 39-40, 53.

transcendence are reserved for men.[92] Like Döblin, Keun develops a montage-like prose

technique for representing the city, but she captures her main character's lack of access to the

total network of the streets without discounting her subjectivity. Relocated to Berlin after

refusing the advances of her boss in the Rhineland, the financially struggling Doris relies on

attention and money from men, becoming a *de facto* prostitute. One of the men she is seeing late

in the novel, Herr Brenner, is a blind man who sends her out into the streets to "collect images"

for him.[93] It is acting as Brenner's prosthetic eyes that Doris is able to assume the male position

of the flaneur and consume the sights of the city for their own sake, placing them in a provisional

order of association. After her stroll on the Kurfürstendamm at Brenner's behest, Doris reports,

> I see – swirling lights with lightbulbs right next to each other – women without veils with
> hair blown into their faces. That's the new hairstyle – it's called 'windblown – and the
> corners of their mouths are like actresses before they take on a big role and black furs and
> fancy gowns underneath – and shiny eyes – and they are either a black drama or a blonde
> cinema. Cinemas are primarily blonde – I'm moving right along with my fur that is so
> gray and soft – and my feet are racing, my skin is turning pink, the air is chilly and the
> lights are hot – I'm looking, I'm looking – my eyes are expecting the impossible…[94]

Keun's novel problematizes the image of the liberated "New Woman" of the 1920s, whose

economic independence and participation in a culture of visual stimulation was still precarious.[95]

Doris has access to the carefree strolling and mapping of the flaneur—the one in which light

swirls around women who hardly suspect their own visibility—only when given access to a

masculine gaze. In a later montage-style jaunt through the city, Doris also identifies this city-

roaming gaze with the film camera. Finding herself with enough money to enjoy the city on her

own—"usually I get to take taxis only with men who want to smooch"—Doris decides to take in

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[92] Irmgard Keun, *The Artificial Silk Girl*, trans. Kathe von Ankum (New York: Other Press, 2011).
[93] Ibid, 83.
[94] Ibid, 88.
[95] See Patrizia McBride, "Learning to See in Irmgard Keun's 'Das kunstseidene Mädchen'," *The German Quarterly* 84, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 220-38.

the sights of the city. "I created a dream for myself and rode up and down the streets of Berlin

for hours on end, all by myself. I was a movie and a weekly newsreel all by myself," she

narrates.[96] The woman who becomes a movie unto herself is in a precarious position, as both

flaneurs and city symphonies locate the feminine within their gamespace.

As in Benjamin's "Berlin Chronicle," the spectator's identification with the camera's

jaunt through the city in Ruttman's *Sinfonie der Großstadt* is contingent upon the film's

consignment of the feminine to the city-network assembled through montage. Since Kracauer's

From Caligari to Hitler, critics have pointed to the conservatism of Ruttmann's impulse to turn

the city into a "symphony": for Hake, the film's *Querschnitt* aesthetics are "ideally suited to

gloss over the contradictions produced by economic growth, technological innovation, and social

change."[97] Ruttmann, unlike many avant-garde filmmakers in the Weimar Republic, would

continue working in the country after 1933, making a seamless transition to producing

documentary propaganda like *Altgermanische Bauernkultur* (1934) for the Nazi regime. Michael

Cowan has contextualized Ruttmann's film career, which began with *Lichtspiel* (1921-1925), his

series of abstract animations, within the discourse of "psychophysical testing," suggesting that

Ruttmann's belief in cinema as a new form of vision was never intended to disrupt or critique

mass, technological society.[98] Ruttman's advertisements as well as his avant-garde films sought

"to legitimate the medium as a means of managing the multiplicity of mass society: of training

and guiding perception, conceptualizing the city, winning audiences over for products, influence

public health and—after 1933—commanding audience allegiance to the new regime."[99] *Sinfonie*

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[96] Keun, *Silk Girl*, 111.
[97] Hake, *Topographies of Class*, 244.
[98] Michael Cowan, *Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity: Avant-Garde – Advertising – Modernity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 33, 49.
[99] Ibid, 19.

der Großstadt is a major achievement of New-Objective art, but it is at the same time a

dissimulating experience, a simulation of a mastery over a threateningly diverse and dispersed

city.

For the animator Ruttmann, *Sinfonie* was in part a departure, but in many ways a

development, from his earlier interests. His abstract animations had explored cinema as a

specifically, ontologically temporal medium, or a "painting with time," as the director referred to

the medium.[100] Ruttmann's *Lichtspiel* is distinct from the work of contemporaries like Hans

Richter and Viking Eggeling in its emphasis on the movement and metamorphosis of fluid,

painterly shapes over more rigid, geometric forms. Indeed, at moments in *Lichtspiel: Opus II*

(1923), black, sharp-edged geometric shapes appear to threaten the softer splotches of color

whose arbitrary transformations we have been tracking with our eyes. These "plays of light"

were already meant to reflect the ceaseless motion, rapid changes, and intense illumination of the

modern city—they were already experiments in using cinema as a heterotopic mirror of the city

that might help the audience acclimatize to the sensory fragmentation of the city. *Sinfonie*

represents a spatial turn in Ruttmann's conceptualization of the cinema: whereas his animations

emphasize the space of the screen as a flat surface, it is not one on which the actual spaces of the

city might be emplaced and related to each other. Wolfgang Natter reads the spatialization of

Ruttmann's aesthetic as one of the film's redeeming qualities, arguing that later critics such as

Kracauer are merely reacting negatively to Ruttmann's decentering of the human figure in

space.[101] However, I would argue with Hake that in its condensation of Berlin into illusory

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[100] Walther Ruttmann, "Malerei mit Zeit," in *Film als Film: 1910 bis heute*, eds. Brigit
Helm and Wulf Herzogenrath (Cologne: Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1977), 64.
[101] Wolfgang Natter, "Modernism and Place in *Berlin, Symphony of a City*" in *Place,
Power, Situation, and Spectacle*, eds. Stuart C. Aitken and Leo E. Zoon (Lanham, MD: Rowman
& Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994), 220-223.

Spielraum, the film seeks to reconcile "all elements into a semblance of mimetic totality."[102]

Less the open-ended play with slices of the real proposed by *Dynamik der Großstadt, Sinfonie* is the constraining, phallocentric game of arrangement played by Benjamin's sovereign flaneur or Kracauer's detective, extending a deceptive invitation to the spectator to play in the order the film imposes on the city.

Sinfonie's first sequence, a kind of prologue, is intended to train the viewer in apprehending the rational spatial order the film constructs, by combining documentary footage with an animation representing abstracted, ideal forms. The first shots of the film dissolve a gently flowing body of water into an abstract animation in which black slits pass upward across the frame, as white, geometric shapes pass by underneath them, imitating the complexity of motion in the flowing water. Two thin rectangles collapse inward from opposite sides of the frame, a motion Ruttmann matches with a cut to documentary footage of boom barriers dropping as a speeding train passes. In the sequence that follows, depicting the train's voyage into Berlin's Anhalter Bahnhof, the speed of the train and the corresponding alacrity of the montage reduces the sights viewed into abstract shapes, recalling the opening animation: the subtly undulating horizontal lines of the telegraph wires against the sky, the perpetually extending vertical lines of the railroad, the rotating circles of the train's wheels.

Ruttmann combines animation and documentary footage to suggest that every shot contains what Bela Balász would refer to as a "latent drawing," an implicit analogy between the content viewed and its absolute form.[103] Analogy is a spatial device, requiring the spectator to hold both images in mind simultaneously, in order to tease out their correlation—"as in a picture

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[102] Hake, *Topographies of Class*, 254.
[103] Béla Balász, *Early Film Theory: The Spirit of Film and the Visible Man*, ed. and trans. Erica Carter (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 117.

puzzle," as Balász continues.[104] Although *Sinfonie* never returns to a similar exploitation of Ruttmann's experience in animation, this sequence is intended to train the viewer to perceive abstract, mobile forms implicit in the cinematic image. Later in the film, Ruttmann compels this perception through associative montage and analogy with other documentary images, rather than by processing the image into abstract, animated forms: industrial workers entering the factory are compared to cows being herded into pens, people at a lunch counter with lions being fed at the zoo, implicitly sexually available women strolling on the sidewalk with traffic (*Verkehr*, meaning traffic or intercourse)—a sly and crude visual pun. The film's frequent comparison of humans to animals can readily be recognized as a reactionary impulse to naturalize complex social formations, as if human behavior were unmediated by social constructs. Such a proliferation of analogies construct an enclosed network of signs and meanings, a gamified hotel lobby of signs which only the gaze seems able to transcend.

The film's interest in networks of emplacement extends to the content of its images, as well. The second act follows the film's broader temporal arc of "a day in the life" of the city, but focuses in particular on technologies of transport and communication. As laborers make their way to work, Ruttmann cuts together various transit technologies: the sequence of automobiles, street cars, elevated trains, and horse-drawn carriages culminates in workers taking elevators to their offices and interfacing with communication technologies. Typists whose fingers pound away at typewriters alternate with close-ups of the hammers striking paper as the montage accelerates; a series of rotating close-ups on typewriter keyboards are collaged together, creating a vertiginous overflow of discourse that becomes totally illegible as the letters fall out of focuses and lap-dissolve to a spinning spiral. The extreme rationality of technical media exchanging

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[104] Ibid.

information across the networked space of the city has produced illegibility, sensory overload, and irrationality. It is a *Tohuwabohu* that Ruttmann contains by again naturalizing it through analogy: as the sequence continues, images of the interchange between businessmen, female phone operators, and automated exchanges are intercut with screaming monkeys and fighting dogs. The two networks of cacophonous discourse figure as two terms in a paradigmatic comparison, emplaced there by a network that transcends them—cinematic discourse.

It is not insignificant that the female operators occupy a mediate position in the telecommunications network represented here: like Orlac, typists are reduced to and directed by their hands, transcribing messages that do not originate with them; female phone operators occupy the central node between male subjects and the technical base itself, the automated components of the network.[105] In *Sinfonie der Großstadt*, female figures are always "within" networked gamespace. This is most evident in the film's third act, much of which is comprised of footage of a busy midday in Berlin's crowded commercial districts; the rush of automobile traffic mirrors the counterposed flow of pedestrians, among whom the film proves particularly interested in unaccompanied women. Early in the act, a man is shown "picking up" a woman on the sidewalk in a voyeuristic close-up, perhaps shot through a storefront window. It is unclear whether the action is staged, but Ruttmann's editing comments upon it, cutting from the conversing pair to a female mannequin standing passively as wind whips at its skirts, and then to a male automaton in a store window operating a model grindstone with its foot.

The lascivious implication of the automaton greedily working at the grindstone will be used again a few minutes later in the Act, in a more clearly staged set of shots. The camera is stationed just beyond a street corner, facing the display window of a Stoewer automobile dealer

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[105] See Chapter Two of this dissertation.

on the corner, through which one can see another plate-glass window that looks out on the sidewalk around the corner. A man and a woman headed different directions pass each other in front of the camera, and then catch sight of each other through the double mediation of the two shop windows. A cut-in to a shot over the man's shoulder suggests he is looking unabashedly, not at the car on display, but at the woman now standing on the opposing sidewalk. For her part, the woman, knowing she is being looked at, coyly smiles, but directs her gaze downward, at the automobile on display. Here as in Benjamin's "Berlin Chronicle, the woman's place within the city-text is to be "enthroned in a window," an object in the regime of visuality represented by the storefront window.

The unaccompanied women depicted in the street sequence of *Sinfonie*'s third act are *Abziehbilder* apprehended by a mobile gaze coded as a technical extension of male vision, assembled into an order through montage. Or, to quote Roth, they are like flowers, ornamental objects "waiting to be plucked." Female figures in the film are never located at the threshold, the apprehending margin from which the camera threads together the city. Instead, they are specifically located within the network held together by montage and the analogous hidden mechanical controls the third act shows regulating the streets. Just before the montage of female strollers that culminates with the storefront scene, a traffic controller is shown throwing open a panel on a *Litfaßsäule* (advertising column) to reveal the switches hidden there for the control of traffic lights. This is followed by a series of dissolving shots depicting rows of wall-mounted dials and controls, which transitions to mechanisms on display in shop windows, and then to an elaborate espresso machine serving customers at a crowded café. It is from here that we are taken to the visual subject of single women on the sidewalks, the sequence suggesting an analogue

between the hidden electronic apparatus that controls and contains the play of the women

moving on the streets and the film's own system of ordering through montage.

Sinfonie offers its spectator mastery of the *Tohuwabohu* of the streets by transforming

city-space into a networked gamespace the gaze moves through and above, while feminized

figures are trapped within. The fourth act, which begins with the lassitude of a lunchtime

break—with shots taken from a slow-moving raft on the Landwehr Canal, long shots of children

playing in sand, and an idealized representation of street musicians performing in a typical Berlin

apartment courtyard—crescendos into a rapid-fire montage evoking the psychological toll of the

sights of the city on the human sensorium. A sequence depicting the overflow of information in

newspapers—in which words like "Murder," "Crisis," and "Money" fly off of scrolling pages—

is followed by a series of speeding, mobile shots. Footage from cameras mounted on a

rollercoaster and rotating swings in Berlin's Lunapark is spliced together with images of

revolving doors, speeding trains, and a hat being carried off by the wind. Suddenly, a woman in a

ragged dress leans over the railing of a bridge on the canal, a formerly serene place now taking

on a threatening character. She leans forward, a close-up showing us her crazed eyes, and the

film cuts to the Lunapark rollercoaster as it dips down a precipitous decline, mimicking the

woman's prospective plunge. Extreme close-ups on her eyes alternate with further footage of the

rollercoaster and a furiously rotating shot looking up through treetops, which fades into a

familiar black-and-white spiral. A cut back to the bridge shows the woman splashing into the

water below and a crowd gathering to spectate.

This is not the finale of the act; in fact, following a view of the now-placid water is a shot

of female models exhibiting fashionable clothing. The woman driven made by the *Tohuwabohu*

of the city has seemingly been resurrected as an object on display; it almost seems as though she

were doomed to remain within the city-text, not even death releasing her from the visual stress the spectator is allowed to master and transcend by displacing it onto her. The following shots show wind whipping at a woman's skirts, a train passing under a stormy sky, animals pacing in their cages, and conflicting traffic signals. The sequence dramatizes visually the heightened tensions and emotions at the end of the urban workday, a tension deadly for the anonymous woman driven to suicide, but that is ultimately released at the end of the Act with an escape into sport and leisure. Bathers, auto racers, tennis players, marathon runners, and members of the bourgeoisie enjoying Kurfürstendamm cafes all escape the fate of the woman on the canal. Her death has become one element in an arrangement illustrating the intensity of life in the city, another *Abziehbild* contributing to the camera's ordering of the city into *Spielraum*.

The film's celebrated, and abbreviated, final Act cuts between the slick, light-bathed streets of nighttime Berlin—the street's *Spiel des Lichtes*—and the various indoor entertainments of its nightlife, including the cinema—the exotic dances of Joesphine Baker and the *Lichtspiele* of Charlie Chaplin. The finale proves especially interested in the otherness of an indoor winter park—a heterotopia if ever there was one—focusing on workers raking the artificial snow and stunt skiers whizzing down constructed slops. It cuts from these wintry sports to indoor bicycle racing, creating in this juxtaposition a microcosm of the city's *Nebeneinander*. The *Spielraum* thus constructed out of Berlin's dispersed and varied spaces threads the city together for the spectator's visual ambulation, in a manner analogous to the networks of semi-automated communication and control the film depicts. While the tempo and visual chaos of the city is represented as intensely, even overwhelmingly stimulating, the film permits the spectator a distanced, playful bearing toward the hyper-stimulation of the images. The film is an "experiment in animation," as Getrud Koch describes cinema as a whole—an experiment that

offers its spectator the illusion of mastery in the magic circle of experimental gamespace.[106] The

spectator, like the flaneur, observes from the threshold along with the camera, but ultimately the

heterotopia of the city symphony is a medium of domination: the scope of play is determined in

advance by the montage and made dependent on an objectification of the women in the network.

The Atopia of Omnipresent Flanerie

Play has long been at issue in a consideration of urban space. In the form of the "dérive," Guy

Debord and the Situationists propose a spatial pratice that would defy the scientific precision and

dissimulating representations of the map and allow the subject to discover a "psychogeography"

of the city.[107] The dérive, in its own way a critique of flanerie, was meant to rip perception of the

city from the clutches of derealizing maps, which deceptively give their interfacing subject a

grasp of the totality, an illusorily immediate access to the city street. In opposition to this version

of space, the Situationists proposed a "unitary urbanism" which "recognized no boundaries" and

would "extend the terrain of play to all desirable constructions."[108] Play is here intended as an

activity opposed to static, boundary-hewn space, an enlivening of space that restores its material

reality and its diversity, and revels in discontinuity. For the Situationists, the space of play is the

space of life as actually lived, allowed to exist in its heterogeneity.

Much spatial theory since Lefebvre and the Situationists has been aimed toward this end:

contesting the representation of space as homogeneous, as a "surface on which we are placed,"

the empty, *a priori* ground of scientific rationality.[109] But does play by itself rescue space from

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[106] Gertrud Koch, "Film as Experiment in Animation: Are Films Experiments on Human Beings?" *New German Critique* 122, vol. 41. no. 2 (Summer 2014): 97-109.

[107] Guy Debord, "The Derive," in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. Kenn Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006) 62, 65.

[108] Guy Debord, "Situationist Theses on Traffic," in *Situationist International Anthology,* ed. and trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 68.

[109] Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 7.

science's homogenizing tools, from becoming the space of anything-whatever, the space of "*einmal ist keinmal*"? In the age of the virtual "open worlds" of *Grand Theft Auto* and the totalizing virtual field of Google Maps, we have grounds on which to doubt play's opposition to the totalizing power of *ratio* and the homogeneous space in which it operates. In the virtualized spaces of everyday life, we are given room to play: choosing an array of space on Google Maps, uploading videos with location tags to Snapchat, radically upending the regulations of urban space in *Grand Theft Auto V* (2013), playing *Pokémon Go* in the street—accompanied by media technologies at all hours, we take heterotopia with us like a detective or flaneur. What smartphone games and navigation tools make clear is that places become gamespaces not just when they have been built in advance for play, but also when media allow the interfacing subject to remake and master them as play, to understand them as open to their exceptional activities. Much of what we recognize as "play" today functions precisely by turning places into any-space-whatever, recapitulating real space as an empty field that can be reconstituted as a grounds for what we mistake as our freewheeling activity.

The heterotopias of Weimar Berlin prefigure what McKenzie Wark has called the "atopia" of the digital area, a world in which "gamespace seeps into everyday life."[110] Today, personal digital devices turn any given urban place into a space for play, but gamespace was already spreading throughout Berlin, its ascendance driven in large part by heterotopic media. If the ground between *physis* and *nomos*, a zone in which the law is "in force without significance" corresponds to that of play, then gamespace corresponds to Giorgio Agamben's analysis of political sovereignty in modernity.[111] Agamben's is an analysis very much in conversation with Arendt and Benjamin—and now, we might add their fellow Weimar veteran Johan Huizinga,

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[110] Wark, *Gamer Theory*, 117.
[111] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 55.

whose "magic circle" turns out to have much in common with Agamben's state of exception and Benjamin's thresholds. While play, as a facet of human and animal life, has the capacity to create new and unique space, play with the surface traces of a fragmented world is also the means by which one's participation in the logic of *ratio* is assured.

Today, Tempelhofer Airport, famous for the 1948 Berlin Air Lift, is closed, but an initiative from Berlin residents has kept it open as one of Berlin's many parks. At Tempelhof Field circa 2019, one can stroll along massive runways, watching children flying kites and playing soccer, dodging cyclists and in-line skaters. Meanwhile, behind a tall wire fence, the airport terminals seem to sit dormant, even as inside, the airport complex hosts one of the city's refugee camps, housing some of the thousands who have fled to Germany since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. Unlike many other refugee camps that form around the periphery of great cities, Berlin's most well-known refuge is located almost in the city center, just outside of the fashionable Kreuzberg district. The defunct international airport, the former anomic "duty-free" zone between nations, seems a logical place to station people whose legal status is indeterminate. Uncomfortably, the presence of a political camp here recalls that Tempelhof Field, in the early 1930s, was the site of the Nazis' first concentration camp for political prisoners, before Sachsenhausen and the now-retired airport were built.[112] With its movie studios, garden colonies, public parks, sport clubs, and camps, Tempelhof is neither here nor there, neither an urban area nor a natural one, neither a private nor a public space. It is both the place for Berliners to spend a lazy Sunday and a camp for people without a country, between norms.

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[112] Maria Theressia Starzman, "Excavating Tempelhof Airfield: Objects of Memory and the Politics of Absence," *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 18, no. 2 (Nov 2013): 214-215.

CHAPTER 4

PLAY AND THE GAME:
ERNST LUBITSCH AND FRITZ LANG

The adventurer Kay Hoog (Carl de Vogt) is racing to the purported location of an Incan

treasure—as well as an unexpectedly extant Incan community—against the international criminal

organization known as the Spiders. To this end, the wealthy man of leisure has employed the use

of a hot-air balloon, in which he plans to make the journey from the American West to Peru.

Happening across the Spiders at a local tavern, he has made off with a parcel of enigmatic

documents alluding to a "mysterious diamond ship." With the Spiders on horseback in hot

pursuit, he makes it to the balloon just as it is taking off, hanging off its mooring line as it

departs, in a thrilling escape. Now, as the Spiders travel across the continent on the ground, he

and his co-pilot pursue their goal from the air. Floating above Peru, Kay takes out a pair of

binoculars to survey the landscape; from his position far above the ground, he sees a tableau of

overgrown pyramids and temples in a clearing in the jungle. As his perspective moves with the

hot air balloon, the grounds below seem absolutely still. The silent image of these miniature

structures evinces no clear sign of life, apart from the tropical foliage beginning to retake the

clay buildings.

This, a scene from the first chapter in writer-director Fritz Lang's two-part adventure *Die

Spinnen* (*The Spiders,* 1919), subtitled *The Golden Lake*, shows us in advance the entirety of the

setting for the film's climax, in which, navigating through a series of underground caverns and

tunnels, Hoog will deal his enemies The Spiders a provisional defeat and save an Incan princess

from being sacrificed. The view of Hoog's projected sphere of action is presented via an irised

shot—mimicking Hoog's use of a sighting device—showing us the miniature models meant to

represent the hero's future arena of adventure. Hoog passes the binoculars to his co-pilot, and the

pair makes another pass over the same arrangement of models. This second pass suggests the strategic gaze, a mapping-out of the space by Hoog and his assistant that the spectator takes part in. Giving us a second look at the models, it also re-emphasizes their artificiality; it is difficult to avoid the impression that we are peering down at an arrangement of models on a table, a simulation of the space Hoog will later take action in. The image is a construct—one into which Hoog abruptly parachutes, landing unseen in the vicinity of the trekking Spiders. Landing in this pre-sighted, exotic space of action, it is also as if he has just jumped into the film text itself, realizing a virtual image after using it to determine the precisely correct point of intervention.
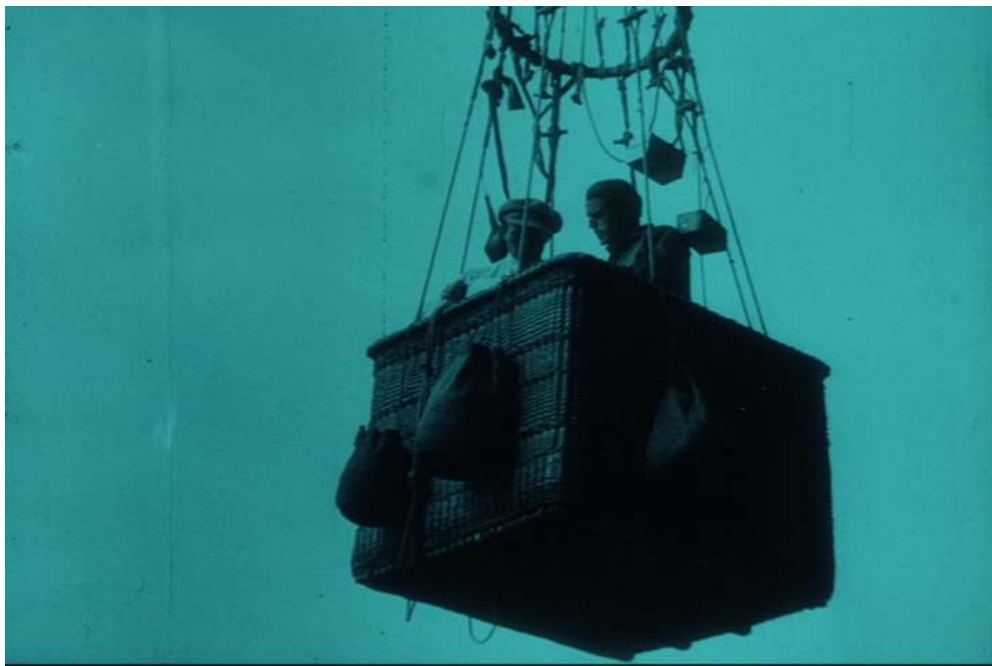

Figure 4.1: *Die Spinnen* (1919)

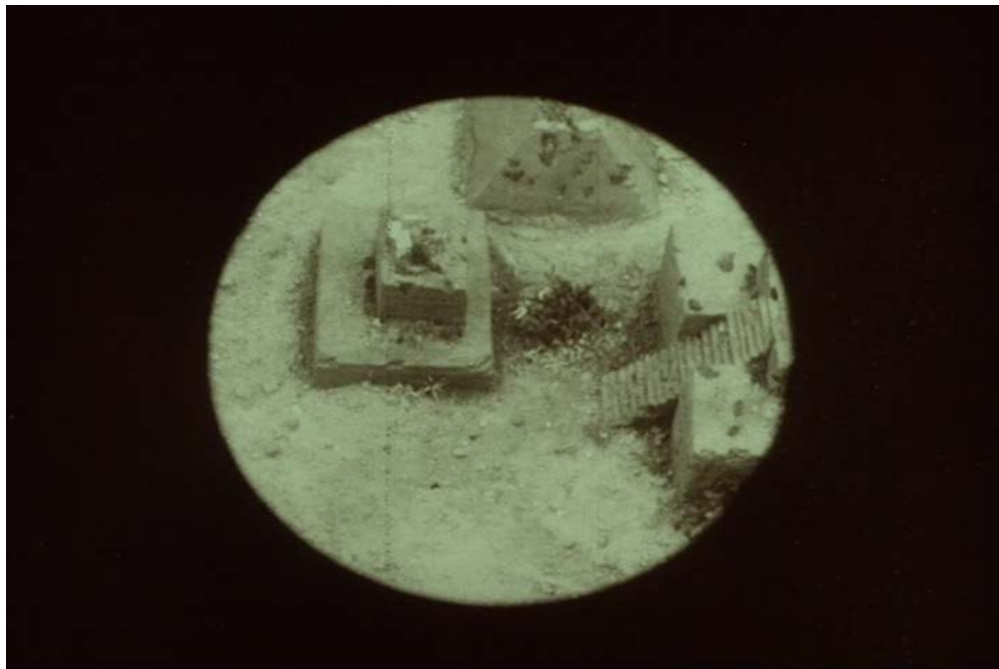Figure 4.2: *Die Spinnen* (1919)

Figure 4.3: *Die Spinnen* (1919)

Spiders was, as Tom Gunning puts it, Lang's emergence as a major sensation-filmmaker.[1] The budding director had long been interested in detective stories, selling scenarios for them even before he was finished with his service in the First World War. *Spiders* is the first of his realized scenarios that is identifiably Langian in its aesthetic and thematic interests, however: it is common to note, as Gunning does, the way the film evidences Lang's interest in networks of technological mediation and control, in particular the Spiders' use of telegraphy, telephony, and even a then-futuristic surveillance device comparable to closed-circuit television.[2] Recognizable, too, is Lang's characteristic interest in topography and spatial complexes: the thrilling opening to the second part of *The Spiders*, subtitled *The Diamond Ship* (1920) depicts a heist in an office building using an overhead shot that shows the choreographed movements of the criminals and guards between the subdivided spaces. However, the hot-air balloon scene may be the most intriguing of the *Spiders* series' foreshadowings of Lang's longstanding interests, as its use of an aerial perspective reflects the strategic gaze Lang had acquired as a child of the Viennese bourgeoisie, and honed in the Austrian Army.

In the autobiographical sketch that opens Lotte Eisner's *Fritz Lang*, written in 1967 toward the end of the director's life, Lang introduces himself with the programmatic declaration, "To begin with I should say that I am a visual person."[3] After specifying that what he means is that he is not an "aural" person (something of a surprising claim from the director of *M* [1931] and *Das Testament des Dr Mabuse* [1933]) he recalls an anecdote that appears to illustrate the importance to him of enticing visuals:

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[1] Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 90.
[2] Ibid, 92.
[3] Lotte Eisner, *Fritz Lang*, ed. David Robinson, trans. Gertrud Mander (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 9.

The most important of my childhood memories is the Christkindlmarket (Christmas Fair). This market is something very special. On a low wooden platform only a step or two higher than the cobbled pavement, there were simple wooden stalls filled with cheap Christmas stuff … There were wonderful things to buy: gay Christmas tree decorations, glass balls and stars and garlands of silvery tinsel and red-cheeked apples and golden oranges and dates; fantastic toys, rocking horses and puppets and Punch and Judy and tin soldiers; toy theatres with characters and scenes for many different plays. With these theatres one could stage real fairy-tale shows, with changing sets.[4]

For Lang, being a "visual person" means enjoying a construct of the world in miniature, viewing a fabricated world from above. Lang's origin story, as it were, evokes not only the 19th-century Vienna Christmas market, a secluded microcosm of consumerist visual spectacle on the order of Walter Benjamin's famed arcades, but also the toys with which a bourgeois child of the 1890s could construct entire worlds, including tin soldiers. The spectacle of the Incan model so fetishized in *The Spiders* recalls the "World on the Floor" of the bourgeois child playing at miniaturized colonial ventures, as discussed in Chapter 2. For Lang, cinema was essentially tied to the aerial apprehension of a miniature world.

Lang's work has always been noted for its intense compositional precision, the meticulous details that suggest everything has been fixed in advance, placed into order by the auteur Lang, the visual person.[5] The director's love for arranging things on a surface is likely deeply tied not only to his childhood love of the world of tin soldiers, but the way in which this love of a miniature, controlled world was augmented by his experience of modern warfare. Lang's penchant for spatial order and microcosmic arrangements has sometimes been tied to the fact that Lang's father was an urban architect, and that Lang was expected to follow his father into the profession, but little sustained attention has been given to the links between Lang's use of overhead views, or the impression of geometrical space his films create, to his time in the

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[4] Ibid, 9-11.
[5] Eisner, *Fritz Lang*, 144.

Austrian Army. When the First World War broke out in August of 1914, Lang was, of all places, in Paris, training as a painter. A patriot—at least for the time being—Lang returned home almost immediately, enlisting in the Army in January of 1915. Placed into the k.k. Landwehr-Feldkannon-Division 13 (13th Imperial Territorial Field Artillery Division) as an artillery scout, Lang was valued for the artists' skills he had been honing in Paris and around the world.[6] First seeing action in the late Autumn of 1915, Lang's job was to venture to the front lines and deliver sketches of the enemy's encampment, drawn from a top-down perspective—even though Cadet Lang would be observing from the ground. To make an actionable map of enemy emplacements, such as the extant ones contained in a field notebooks archived at the Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin, Lang would need to abstract his perspective from his body, viewing the field from an imaginary, aerial point of view.

Lang evidently excelled at reconciling the view from the ground with a topographic perspective. On March 27, 1916, serving in northwestern Ukraine, he ventured upon his own recognizance to within 600 meters of enemy lines, and delivered a sketch to his unit "that enabled his battery to bring hitherto unknown parts of the Russian position under effective fire," according to the commendation award him that Spring (one of three he would receive before war's end).[7] Lang would transfer these skills in managing space directly to his films, as evidenced not only by the sequences like those from *The Spiders*, but also by his working methods. Frederick Ott reports that Lang had blueprints of his sets drawn up, and "across the blueprints he maneuvered 'V'-shaped pieces of celluloid, each representing a different lens

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[6] Norbert Grob, *Fritz Lang: Ich bin ein Augenmensch* (Berlin: Ulstein, 2014), 31-55; Patrick McGilligan, *Fritz Lang: The Nature of the Beast* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 22-25.

[7] Quoted in Grob, *Fritz Lang*, 54.

size."[8] Lang's biographer Patrick McGilligan reports that the director planned the blocking of his actors using "figures on a kind of chess board."[9] The maneuvers of Lang's characters in the precisely laid out space his camera constructs for the spectator appear to be, and are often revealed to be, controlled by a figure who observes from the outside, the double for Lang himself. In Lang's allegorical mode, the camera constructs a gamespace for his characters, and his narrative also reflects on the characters' confinement, perpetrated by a master villain who is merely a diegetic embodiment of the camera's gamelike gaze.

That Lang may have seen the space of his scenes as a checkered gamespace—or at the very least, felt that game boards were the most effective way of replicating his vision for a given scene—may well have its roots in his experience in Army reconnaissance. There is no direct evidence that Lang encountered the *Kriegsspiel* as an officer in the Austrian Army, but Andrew Wilson's history of war gaming suggests the game may have been difficult to avoid over any six-month training period in that particular Army: "The Austro-Hungarian Army assumed that German war-games had effected their defeat in 1866, had sought since then to catch up, and by 1911 could boast three types of game for medics alone."[10] Although Lang was a non-commissioned officer, it stands to reason that he would be familiar with the established use of simulations to manage battlefield space, as the army he served in was suffused with the ideology of the *Kriegsspiel.* For years after the war, Lang would sport a monocle, a fashionable affectation derived from the military, in which the eye accessories were used to aid close inspection of battlefield maps. The space Kay Hoog surveys from above is militarized gamespace, the

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[8] Frederick Ott, *The Great German Films* (Seacaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1986), 169-70.
[9] McGilligan, *Fritz Lang*, 196-7.
[10] Andrew Wilson, *Strategie und Moderne Führung*, trans. Wilhelm Höch (Munich: List, 1969), 48.

schematic surface that contains all possible future moves, and which opens itself to a sovereign gaze that makes decisions on life and death.

If Lang's working method was dependent on visual projections such as games and the notebook of newspaper clippings, sketches and annotations he kept throughout his German career, this would appear to be one of several ways he differed from his contemporary Ernst Lubitsch.[11] Lubitsch, who would precede Lang in his uncontested position at the pinnacle of the German film industry by five years or so, needed physical space to work in. "I cannot work in a small room," the Berlin native is reported to have averred during his Hollywood years. "My office does not have to be elegant, but it has to be big."[12] Lang, to venture the risk of taking a notorious obfuscater at his word, was a visual person, and both his working method and common visual motifs from his work reflect his conceptual isolation of eyes and hands, the "anterior field," from the rest of the body. It would be absurd to claim that Lubitsch, whose nearly intertitle-less adaptation of Oscar Wilde (*Lady Windermere's Fan*, 1925) was to be a celebrated hit, was not a "visual person," and yet his working method evidently involved his entire body, just as the characters in his films are not only eyes and hands, but also mouths, bellies, and genitals—or at least the urges most identified with them.

1919 was also a breakout year for the twenty-seven year-old Lubitsch, who had been spared service in the War, as, his father being a Lithuanian Jew, he was not a full citizen under the laws of Wilhelm II's German Empire. When Lang was just arriving in Berlin, the younger Lubitsch already had six years' experience in Germany's fledgling film industry. In September of that year, the refurbished Ufa-Palast-am-Zoo opened with the premiere of his monumental

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[11] The notebook referred to is stored in the archives of the Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin.

[12] Quoted in Joseph McBride, *How Did Lubitsch Do It?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 15.

period costume drama *Madame Dubbary*, which would become a global sensation, including in the US under the title *Passion*. In December, he would also release *Die Puppe* (*The Doll*), one of a series of four-reel comedies he made with the rising comic performer Ossi Oswalda. In *Die Puppe*, Oswalda plays the daughter of an automaton maker who masquerades as her own simulacrum in order to protect her father's apprentice, who broke the doll modeled on her in a fit of amorous role-play. Pretending to be the automaton, she is married off to the local count's heir (Herman Thimig) as part of a ruse to be eligible for his ailing uncle's inheritance.

Die Puppe* could be described as an inverse of E.T.A. Hoffmann's romantic novella *Der Sandmann*, in which a love-starved young man mistakes a female automaton as a real woman, though it is based (without attribution) on Edmond Audran's operetta *La Poupée.* According to Barry Salt, the principal narrative contribution of Lubitsch and his principal collaborator, the screenwriter Hans Kräly, was the addition of a prologue in which Lubitsch himself is shown constructing the setting of the first scene in miniature.[13] Pulling the pieces out of a toy box and assembling them on a table in a frontal arrangement facing the camera, Lubitsch builds an idyllic setting of a small cottage and pond, with an all-white backdrop. An nearly imperceptible match-cut transfers the camera from this miniature scale to a full-scale set which looks none the less like a toy set construction, all lightweight woods and painted leaves. This is the "toy-box world" in which Lubitsch's comedy will play out—one that we enter not from above, dropping in with our hero and his all-seeing eye, but laterally, from the front.

Born and raised in Berlin, the city the Viennese Lang would adopt as his *de facto* hometown after the war, Lubitsch had, like Lang, a father who worked in a manual craft—ladies'

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[13] Barry Salt, "Die innere Welt von Ernst Lubitsch," in *Filmkultur zur Zeit der Weimarer Republik: Beitrage zu einer internationalen Konferenz vom 15. bis 18. Juni 1989 in Luexmbourg*, ed. Uli Jung and Walter Schatzberg (Munisch: K.G. Saur, 1992), 67.

tailoring—and expected Lubitsch to follow suit. Lubitsch, though, admired the stage, particularly

the operettas then fashionable in the Berlin theater scene, and by 1911 he was an apprentice in

the troupe of the renowned director of the Deutsches Theater, Max Reinhardt.[14] If the Langian

conceptualization of space was shaped by the way 19th-century bourgeois consumerist visuality

came full circle in the vision-machines devised for and produced on the Eastern Front, then

Lubitsch's sense of space begins with the body of the late-Victorian performer, commodified by

fashion and emplaced within the proscribed playspace of the stage. Reinhardt had outsized

influence on Lubitsch, a connection difficult to trace in part because Reinhardt was known for

his stylistic eclecticism, and in part because Reinhardt's influence on the cinema is too often

confined to the "German Expressionist" films of the early Weimar years that Lubitsch's popular

costume dramas stood distinctly apart from. However, Lubitsch's early effectiveness as a

director can be connected to the the famed stage director's revitalization of pantomime, his focus

on gesture, and his experiments with mass scenes and the depth of the stage.[15] But from early on

in his directorial career, Lubitsch proves himself adept at mixing stage and cinematic tropes.

Early in *Die Puppe*, the count's nephew is chased around the blatantly artificial village set by

women desperate to marry him. Lubitsch holds the shot for an extended period of time as the

crowd exits in one direction and enters from another, in a circular motion through a static space

that both recalls Reinhardt's mass scenes and represents an appropriation of the "chase film," an

internationally popular genre of the late "cinema of attractions" period.

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[14] Ibid, 66.
[15] See: Martin Esslin, "Max Reinhardt: High Priest of Theatricality" *The Drama Review* 21, no. 2 (June 1955): 3-24; Lirba Anne Ungurianu, *Georg Büchner in the German Cinematic Tradition: Film, Theater, an dthe Act of Adaptation*, dissertation, City University of New York, 2011, 18-22; Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947),   48.

Throughout their careers, Lang and Lubitsch would make very different types of films; but rather than simply viewing them as separate, I propose that the two auteurs' work is in a sense complementary. Indeed, there are certain senses in which their filmographies overlap: both, as will be detailed below, have often been cited by scholars as having a particular interest in nonhuman objects; both have narrational voices that have at various times been cited as cynical, ironic, or distanced; and each is fascinated in his own way by deception and disguise.[16] To take this latter example as a case in point, while for Lang the false appearance masks hidden identities and the obscure machinations of malicious forces, in Lubitsch role-play and the mutability of appearance opens up possibilities of pleasure and freedom. The mysterious Lio Sha (Ressel Orla), the leader of The Spiders, recalls the masculine panic about dissimulating "vamps" embodied in Irma Vep in Louis Feuillade's serial *Vampires* (1915); on the other hand, in its reversal of Hoffmann's *The Sandman, Die Puppe* also reverses the story's overwrought anxiety about feminine authenticity. Oswalda's masquerade as a doll facilitates her escape from her father's workshop—to the jovial atmosphere of a wedding, where she stuffs her face with cake and dances—and, as she is in possession of knowledge that her suitor lacks (namely, that she is a real woman and not a machine), enables her to get a few over on him (shocking him with a sudden angry retort, for example). According to Sabine Hake, in "embracing the artificiality of human existence, [*Die Puppe*] makes possible the playful investigation of sexual difference and, ultimately, of representation itself."[17]

In its final scene, *Die Puppe* restores an essentialist notion of the gendered self, through a joke: in the couple's improvised bridal chambers at an abbey, Oswalda catches sight of a

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[16] See: Eisner, *Fritz Lang*, 146; Leo Braudy, "The Double Detachment of Ernst Lubitsch," *MLN* 98, no. 5 (Dec 1983): 1071-1084.

[17] Sabine Hake, *Passions and Deceptions: The Early Films of Ernst Lubitsch* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 97-97.

mouse and shrieks, ending her masquerade as an automaton and exposing herself as a "real" woman. However, this punchline does not fully foreclose the possibility of play Lubitsch and screenwriter Hans Kräly have opened up, suffused as it is with ironies that entangle performance and essence. Firstly, it is paradoxically an automatic, unconscious mechanism that ends Ossi's performance as an automaton, which implies that the human—conflated with a specific gender identity—cannot be read from one's conscious ego or outward presentation, but only detected through uncontrollable reflexes.[18] Second, Lubitsch's toy-box world can be read almost as a premonitory retort to Lang's gloomy *Metropolis* (1927): while that film displaces anxieties about modernity, mass movements, and women's sexual agency onto the split figure of the saintly woman and her robotic double, *Die Puppe* imagines a positive becoming-artificial that grants its female lead character sexual agency and subversive power.[19] The play she is allowed on what is figured as Lubitsch's miniature stage holds a liberating potential, even if the comedy ends with the conventional heterosexual coupling. Rather than the closed gameworld of Lang's films, Lubitsch uses the artificiality of cinema and the construction of the game to imagine an open play of possibilities and pleasures.

I propose that the complementary nature of Lang and Lubitsch's styles represent two opposing poles of response to their shared historical moment. Confronted with and embedded within a culture in which everything had come to be seen as artificial play—and at the forefront of a still-new technical medium driving that phenomenon—the filmmakers adopted parallel approaches to the questions posed by that historical moment and the medium of cinema. These related but distinct approaches can be understood through the two aspects of the world *Spiel*:

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[18] Kittler, Killen

[19] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press), 72-75.

play and the game. Lang's films, with their non-psychological montage, tight compositions, and geometric-topographic spaces subject to a sovereign gaze, are self-reflexive and gamelike; they speak with both fear and fascination of a world become game via the power of technical media, and they are themselves puzzle-like constructs that seek to contain all possible meanings and arrangements within the image and the network of the film it comprises. Lubitsch, with his famed "touch," made films about play that were themselves playful, constantly acknowledging the limits of their own discourse and restoring the body to the image-space in which it plays. The cynicism each has been accused of is also a product of their historical context, which are as crucially similar in outline as they are divergent in particulars. In this chapter's introduction, I have not meant to root the meaning of their films solely in their respective biographies, but to demonstrate how their conditioning as historical subjects informed their response to the upheavals of German modernity, and therefore their films. The "cynicism" each inherited from Peter Sloterdijk's "Republic of Cynics" is distinct: whereas, with films like *M* and *Das Testament des Dr Mabuse,* Lang may have proved himself the most skilled portrayer of modern cynicism, with his irreverent, almost deconstructive approach to identity and sexuality, Lubitsch became a kind of negotiated modern *kynic*, defending the body and its pleasures against the onslaught of discourses that would seize hold of it.

Playthings and Game Pieces: The Object in Lubitsch and in Lang

If, as the first chapter of this dissertation established, it was common in Weimar society to perceive social structures and political discourses as mere play—artificial and transitory elements propped up by arbitrary rules, hollow signs behind whose abruptly shifting one might see the moves of nefarious manipulators—the Weimar subject could, broadly speaking, adopt one of two attitudes toward this play. In *The Critique of Cynical Reason*, Peter Sloterdijk posits

two possibilities of modern cynicism, which he also refers to as "enlightened false consciousness." The original cynicism he re-terms kynicism, associating it with the philosopher Diogenes, whose foregrounding of the body's materiality against the abstractions of idealism he takes as a model for rejecting the aporic subject-position of modernity. The cynic, on the other hand, does not change their behavior when confronted with its complicity in unethical or immoral structures; rather, the cynic continues behaving in the same fashion, or uses the knowledge of the inherent injustice of the social base as a wedge for attaining power. Prototypical modern cynics, for Sloterdijk, include the detective and spy—their modus operandi incorporate games and strategy—and he famously concludes that the Weimar Republic is the "republic of cynics," tying a host of modernist Weimar social phenomena to cynicism.[20] Hegemonic power in modernity for Sloterdijk is necessarily cynical, possessing a "cynical gaze" that sees behind social objects quotients of information and the force that brings them into being, "recognizing that behind everything that presents itself as law, a large portion of force and arrogance is hidden."[21] Sloterdijk's kynical gaze, alternatively, is a continuous look that "sees itself seeing," as in a mirror; it dispels the masks that cover the body: "Open, realistic, and generous, it is not embarrassed to look at what is naked."[22] Sloterdijk interprets virtually every cultural formation in the Weimar Republic as endemically cynical, but, as I argued in the Chapter One, we might see kynical potential in movements/moments such as Berlin Dada, which continually forced an open-gaze confrontation not with Sloterdijk's rather conservative understanding of the organic body, but with the organic-technological embodiment foregrounded by industrial technologies.

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[20] See Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 304, 310, 334, 458, 484.
[21] Ibid, 146.
[22] Ibid, 145.

These two reactions to a society of play—kynical and cynical—map approximately onto Roger Caillois's later distinction between *paidia* and *ludus*, respectively the "childlike, happy exuberance" in play and the rule-bound, disciplining game.[23] We might understand *paidia* as being, quite simply, the body at play, apart from any rule that may or may not be conditioning that play. *Ludus*, on the other hand, is play that is definitively within the game, fully conscious of a discrete set of rules, and more intellectual and less corporeal than *paidia*. Caillois's distinction is essentially psychoanalytic, with *paidia* serving as a "primary process" or id, which is conditioned by *ludus*: it is through play's interpellation by *ludus* that, in relation to the subject, instincts are disciplined and made socially assimilable, and that, in relation to society, institutions are actually formed and made permanent.[24] Solterdijk's kynic pierces through the institutions and rules of society's *ludus*, re-tapping the pure *paidia* of the body's play; the cynic, on the other hand, is the fully conscious *ludus*-player, seeing society's rule-bound nature not as a platform for an exploration and performance that tests and even exceeds society's limits, but as an opportunity to achieve mastery over a field of play.

The cynic recognizes the lack of a center of discourse—a true presence—that grounds the movement of systemic elements in play, but behaves, as in Derrida's critique of structuralism, as if that center still existed, or believes, as in the *Kriegsspiel*, that a new sovereign center must be installed, even if it is fleeting and artificial.[25] The demystification of the world is for the cynic at once troublesome and an opportunity to seize hold of the elements now in play. The kynic, on the other hand, embraces the endless, center-less play of elements within the system: kynicism is

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[23] Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Glencoe, NY: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 28-29.
[24] Ibid, 55.
[25] Jacues Derrida, "System, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978),

an affirmation that "determines the noncenter otherwise than as loss of the center."[26] When the

transcendent presence guaranteeing the sense of all signification evaporates into technical media

that apprehend the world in advance of the human, the kynic exploits the opportunity to invent

unruly new formations, whereas the cynic attempts to maintain a coherent universe, now

managed by the ersatz presence of the camera.

As alluded to above, Ernst Lubitsch and Fitz Lang have both often been accused of a

certain cynicism in the style and tone of their films despite the evident difference in their work. I

would specify that they tend toward opposite poles of the kynic/cynic distinction. While Lubitsch

is more akin to the kynic, for the body against the discourses that would incessantly inscribe it,

Lang is aware of these discourses and their danger, but is also fascinated by the sovereign figures

who control the technological discourse network imaged in and embodied by his films. Early on

in their respective careers, both filmmakers proved themselves masters not only of structuring

the cinematic gaze, but of incorporating reflection on the power of this gaze into the film

themselves, reflexively showing how a modern visual regime embodied by the cinema

transforms elements of the real into playthings. The crucial difference in the two auteur's

cinematic discourse is that while Lang uses cinema to self-reflexively show how modern

technological media arrange the world into schematized gamespace, Lubitsch self-reflexively

shows how recording media open the elements of the real to play.

According to Sabine Hake, Lubitsch's early comedies such as *Schuhpalast Pinkus* (1916)

speak to a female audience "as that group in society that is most open to, and in most need of, the

play with other identities"; his early Weimar films construct "equalizing spectatorial regimes"

that allow women a playful, vision-based agency that leads to the film's "systemic dismantling

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[26] Ibid, 292.

of humanist values like identity, authenticity, and self-determination."[27] Lang's work in Weimar, on the other hand, erects a world of signs that becomes a "trap for the eye," according to Thomas Elsaesser; both his characters and the viewers are pulled into a manipulative world of hidden forces and arcane connections between signs whose lack of reference to a stable, knowable reality is a source of tension: in the stock-market sequence in *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler* (discussed further below), "one sees how reality becomes image becomes sign, and sign a kind of hieroglyph. What is left is a rebus world, barely readable, apparently incoherent, but consisting of nothing but the most familiar elements."[28] The game metaphor suggested by Mabuse's sobriquet *der Spieler*, as Elsaesser argues, "describes the film's own formal operation."[29] Lang himself, via Eisner's biography, would repeatedly compare the narrative structure of his films to chess games.[30]

The difference between the two filmmakers as auteurs of play and of the game can be illuminated with a look at the role of non-human objects in their films, another frequently cited but under-theorized point of connection between the two auteurs. That Lubitsch and Lang both attend to the non-human object in different, or more significant, ways than their eventual Hollywood peers may well come from their shared filmmaking origins in Weimar Berlin. In an ontology of cinema shared by many Weimar-era film theorists (as well as with many of their contemporaries in France), the cinema was thought to be evidence and propagator of an ongoing reconfiguration of the relationship between the human and the non-human. Béla Balász, Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Rudolf Arnheim each had distinctive theories

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[27] Sabine Hake, *Passions*, 30, 48.
[28] Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 158
[29] Ibid, 180.
[30] Eisner, *Fritz Lang*, 95, 351, 369.

regarding cinema's peculiar relationship to nonhuman things or objects, finding in cinema's objects a physiognomy of the world, a confrontation with the fetishized ornament, or a double of human cognitive processing. However, we can broadly say that the three shared a theory of an object-oriented cinema, that is, cinema as a medium that was attuned to the world of the nonhuman with an intensity that distinguished it from previous media.[31] The cinema, according to Weimar theorists' object-oriented ontology of the medium, opens up the signifying power of the nonhuman object, capturing it apart from an embodied human subject, embedding it in new relations via mise-en-scene and montage, and even animating it through its simulation of motion—as in, to take one example from Weimar cinema, Hans Richter's *Vormittagsspuk* (*Ghosts Before Breakfast*, 1928), in which everyday objects rebel against their owners.

To adopt the terminology of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, we might say that in such object-oriented theories of cinema the cinema opens up the nonhuman object to an expanded range of "involvements"; that is, the cinema takes an entity (*Seiende*) defined ontologically by its network of involvements in the world of human being (*Dasein*) and opens it to new sets of relations or comportments within that world.[32] An ornate woman's fan in Lubitsch's *Lady Windermere's Fan*, through a series of close-ups throughout the narrative that embed it in new situations, is an entity at various moments involved in betokening love, exacting jealous revenge, and signifying sexual dalliance. What would seem unique about the cinema to Heidegger's Weimar contemporaries is the way in which these close-ups force the fan into our

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[31] See: Béla Balasz, 46, 100, 134; Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1957), 86, 84, 15; Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*: *Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 16, 93.
[32] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial 2008), 79-80, 123-127.

attention, highlighting the being of the fan itself as it circulates and shifts involvements within the world of humans.

This freeing up of the object for new involvements is a function of cinematic montage, but it is also a facet of *Spiel*, according to the definition of play articulated in psychoanalyst Gustav Bally's *Vom Ursprung und von den Grenzen der Freiheit: Eine Deutung des Spiels bei Tier und Mensch* ("On the Origin and the Boundaries of Freedom: An Interpretation of Play among Animal and Human," 1945). Bally proposes the existence of a play-drive rooted in the period of time in which a mammal's mother provides for its needs, which he refers to the *Brutschutz* (brooding-protection). In the zone of this protected and sated animal, the objects that would usually signify—in Jakob von Uexküll's phenomenological sense of meaning—"food," "danger," or "safety" lose their one-sidedness (*Einseitigkeit*) and become ambiguous play-objects.[33] Bally refers to this as a "loosening of the field-tension" (*Lockerung der Feldspannung*), and argues that, because the human has an extended *Brutschutz* period compared to all other animals, the human plays into adulthood, in a field of perception that is always more or less "loosened."[34] In play,

> to the degree that the things in the field [*Felddinge*], which have themselves become goals, lose their character as path-markers, as goal-defined vectors, they also lose their goal-defined 'one-sidedness.' Constantly new and different connections [*Bezüge*] emerge; features that may be without meaning for the achievement of instinct goals open themselves up to a handling that unfolds itself independent of goals, as if accidental, upon the thing.[35]

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[33] Gustav Bally, *Vom Ursprung und von den Grenzen der Freiheit: Eine Deutung des Spiels bei Tier und Munsch* (Basel: Benno Schwabe & Co. Verlag, 1945), 30; Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans, with a Theory of Meaning*, trans. Joseph D. O'Neil (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 92-98.

[34] Bally, *Vom Urpsrung*, 49.

[35] Ibid, 30.

Bally is not as careful with the distinction between "thing" and "object" as Heidegger later would be, but Bally's object in play would appear to be closer to Heidegger's thing (*Ding*), a manifold gathering momentarily freed from the instinct-driven instrumentality of the object (*Gegenstand*), and Bally's notion of "connections" (*Bezüge*) appears to be a reworking of Heidegger's "involvements" (*Bewandtnisse*, suggesting the state of being turned-to).[36]

The breaking of the object's *Einseitigkeit* leads to a permanent *Zweifältigkeit* in the human: as "in constantly different and new play the human race encounters a world opening itself up objectionally [*gegenständlich*]."[37] For Bally, the human's tendency toward play therefore precedes and determines technicality, *techne*: *Feldedinge* that have been opened up to new involvements may find new and permanent involvements once the magic circle of play has faded, becoming tools. This definition of technicality may help clarify what Walter Benjamin means when he refers to cinema as part of modernity's "second technology": the cinema is a technical object that is no longer merely the outgrowth of play, but is itself a playful relation to objects.[38] In rending the object from its place in the profilmic world and incorporating it into the loosened visual field constituted by a film, the cinema is a recapitulation of the opening of the world in play. Whenever the cinema, through its focus on an object almost as if it were a goal in itself, embeds that object within a new and dynamic relation (*Bezug*), it is performing the work of play.

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[36] Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstader (New York: Harper Perennial, 1971), 163-184.

[37] Bally, *Vom Ursprung,* 78.

[38] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 3: 1935-1938*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 124.

The focus on objects that scholars have detected in the films of both Lubitsch and Lang speaks to the way their divergent styles of narration incorporate what was conceived of as an ontological disposition of the cinema in Weimar. In telling ways, however, their approach to objects diverge—as captured by Leo Braudy in an essay on Lubitsch:

> the actor's sense of business, the way in which he uses the psycho-social valence of objects and gestures to build up a recognizable character, is turned into a device to signal irony and distance rather than one to induce empathy and connection … Unlike the significant objects in a more expressionistically inclined director like Lang, whose meaning seems almost always to point toward the God or fate in whose unyielding control the characters remain, Lubitsch's underlining or 'touching' on his objects represents a possible ideal for the audience as well.[39]

Lang emphasizes the configuration of objects to the extent that they exclude or dominate the human—in an oft-related anecdote, Henry Fonda found Lang's obsessive attendance to the arrangement of items on the set of *You Only Live Once* (1937) supremely irritating—whereas Lubitsch's objects are significant for the way characters project desire onto and through them.[40] Lubitsch's use of objects tends to defy the normative narrative film's "transparency" and calls ironic attention to the place of the object in an arbitrary economy of desire. I propose that in the different ways the two auteurs treat objects we can see the difference between a self-reflexive, cynical narration invested in the closed system of *ludus* and an equally ironic but more *kynical* narration open to non-systematic play.

As Brigitte Peucker observes, the object in a Lang film represents more an "ossification of life rather than the animation of the object"—this is arguably the case even in his *Das wandernde Bild* ("The Wandering Image," 1920), in which a statue of the Virgin that eventually

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[39] Braudy, "Double Detachment," 1078.
[40] Frieda Grafe, *Fritz Lang* (Munich: C. Hanser, 1976), 48; Brigitte Peucker, "Fritz Lang: Object and Thing in the German Films," in *A Companion to Fritz Lang*, ed. Joel McElhaney (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 293; McGilligan, *The Nature of the Beast*, 244; Scott Eyman, *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 11; Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 34.

moves actually represents Georg's (Hans Marr) stultification and self-imposed exile.[41] The static

object as a symbol in Lang is often intended as a revelation of fate or later—what amounts to the

same thing for him—a technical system of control. The new "involvement" revealed by the

camera is the object's involvement in the extra-human machinations of fate, glimpsed obliquely

through transportive visions: when Harry Yquem (Ludwig Hartau) purchases an opulent

necklace on the black market in another early film, *Vier um die Frau* ("Four Around the

Woman," 1920), an insert shot of the necklace is lap-dissolved into a medium close-up of

Yquem's wife Florence (Carole Toelle) wearing the necklace. In imaging Yquem's fantastical

projection into the future, the film actually foreshadows the impossibility of the intended

reconciliation: this necklace will sweep Florence and Harry up into a network of jealousy, shady

dealings, and illicit communication that leads to one death and near tragedy for their marriage.

Significant objects in Lang films tend to exceed their user's conscious intent, possessing

involvements within the system of the text unseen by the chararacters—or glimpsed only

momentarily, in what Tom Gunning calls a "visionary moment."[42]

Throughout his filmography, Lang's singular objects that symbolize an ossified—an

implacably emplaced—fate are increasingly accompanied by arrangements of objects intended as

microcosms of the larger system within which they are embedded. Particularly from *Die Spinnen*

on, Lang was interested in systems of control, or its mystic double, fate. Scholarship on the

Spinnen films tends to focus on the way the film represents the Spiders' criminal network, which

consists not only of the trap doors, hidden panels, and underground spaces familiar from Louis

Feuillade's serials, but also of telegraphs, telephones, wireless, trains, and even a futuristic form

of closed-circuit television. At one moment in the first film, to represent this criminal network

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[41] Peucker, "Object and Thing," 283.
[42] Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang*, 22, 32-33.

spatially, Lang uses in-camera montage, splitting the screen into five sections as information is relayed from one position in the network to another. This orderly use of the cinema's plastic two-dimensional image, the envelopment of an entire network of communication by the frame, captures in brief Lang's approach to the nonhuman relations that exceed human control. The focus on the particular array of elements on the surface of the screen will also be manifest in his approach to everyday objects later in his Weimar career: particularly well-known are the insert shots that picture arrangements of objects on desks and tables in later films like *M* and *Testament des Dr Mabuse*. In a scene in the latter film, Inspector Lohmann (Otto Wernicke) exhibits to a criminal that the bullets taken from his gun match one used in a recent assassination: in an insert close-up, dislocated from either character's perspective, we see among the assortment of objects on Lohmann's desk the two bullets placed in small boxes next to each other so that each mirrors the other. Lohmann's hand appears from frame left to hold a magnifying glass directly up to the camera, as if the spectator rather than the criminal was meant to find the match between the bullets.

Lohmann's act of holding up the magnifying glass, an invitation for the spectator to gaze closer into the highly composed image on the other side, points to the intention behind such Langian arrangements of objects on flat surfaces viewed from above. The relatively anomalous shots, rarely matched with the eyeline of a character, linger on tabletops, desktops, and nightstands as if the arrangement of items there itself held a key to the ongoing mystery: it is the image as ambiguous microcosm of the plot, with every element in a distinct position, but whose significance remains obscure. Shot from a subtly angled, sometimes mobile perspective, such shots recall the passing shot of the Incan-village model from the first part of *Die Spinnen,* as well as a later simulated aerial pass over the rocket-launching site in *Die Frau im Mond* (1929). It

could be observed that this meticulous arrangement of items in a top-down still-life recalls the sketches of a artillery scout reporting the array of enemy emplacements, sighting the battlefield via a virtual eye. Like Lohmann holding up a magnifying glass, Lang's object-images compel us to seek meaning within the frame: a hand may enter from offscreen, but the highly composed images are essentially insular, often dissociated from diegetic characters' perspectives and existing as excess in relation to the ongoing narrative action.

Lang often uses offscreen space within the image, ironically, to draw our attention to the framed image itself, rather than to offscreen space. As Joe McElhaney observes, the hand often serves in such Langian images as a "supplement," bringing to mind the Derridean structure of play in which a supplement sustains and limits the play of elements within a system despite the lack of a true center, i.e., the presence of a transcendent subject.[43] The hands doing the arranging in Lang's films often belong to anonymous individuals who are mere nodes in a criminal or police network. Another shot in *Testament* shows a criminal carefully arranging the goods from a jewel heist, but like all of Mabuse's functionaries in the film, this criminal is another extension of the master criminal's will, an hollow presence which pervades the spaces of the underground and the film itself in the form of audio transmissions and recording. The hand of the criminal thus does not direct us to the person of the criminal, but serves as an index pointing toward the rational arrangement of jewels as another extension of Mabuse's will. Another instance of a Langian hand, that of the contraband confiscated during the raid in *M*, shows the illegal items being arranged in rationalized rows. We see hands entering the frame to place additional knives or stolen goods on the table, but the meaning is in not in the hands but rather in the game of *ratio*

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[43] Joel McElhaney, "The Artist and the Killer: Fritz Lang's Cinema of the Hand," *16:9* 4, no. 17 (June 2006), https://www.16-9.dk/2006-06/side11_inenglish.htm, accessed March 21, 2019.

being played by the police—and by the narrative as well. In this way, such shots of rational arrangements upon a flat surface are directly analogous to the numerous shots of maps that take up screen-time in *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler*, *M*, and *Testament*: they "map" the hidden forces that put elements in play in the narrative game. A rhyming shot in *M* shows us beggars arranging their cigarette and cigar stubs in equally rational arrangements, the system of rationality having penetrated not only the forces of authority, but the underclasses—and the narration—as well. Such evocative arrangements of objects can be observed in early films such as *Der müde Tod* (1921) as well: in an early scene, Death (Bernhard Goetzke) arranges coins on a bar tabletop, placing each coin precisely in ordered rows.

Lang conceived of the frame of the cinematic image, and the larger narrative frame of the story, as an absolute limit. As Thomas Elsaesser observes of *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler*, Lang's stories and images are both self-reflexive and uncanny, as if the otherness implied by the uncanny image were an intratextual reference: Lang's films appear to lack a "ground" in any reality outside of his images.[44] Although his films play with unseen dimensions controlled by malicious forces, the narration implies that the signs of these forces can be detected within the image itself, if only the spectator looks closer, more intently. The frontal presentation of visual or written evidence, observable as early as *Vier um die Frau,* in which a bevy of photographs, newspaper articles, identity papers, and misbegotten messages propel the plot, functions as an insistence that all necessary meaning is somewhere within the broader frame of the narrative. The objects in his films, and the circulation thereof, constitute a closed system, represented synecdochally by those anomalous shots of objects in particular arrangements of desks and of maps on which criminals and police project their movements within the narrative/world. Lang's

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[44] Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After,* 167-8, 153.

treatment of the nonhuman object recapitulates this conceptualization of the frame as the limit of a play, an expansive but delineated field of action, a geometrical *Kriegsspiel*. The new and unaccustomed "involvement" of the Langian object within the narrative playing-field may not be immediately apparent, but they are accounted for by the narrative authority, the "destiny machine," as Gunning calls it. This authority is often doubled within the text by figures such as Death in *Der müde Tod* or Dr. Mabuse in the Mabuse films, whom Gunning refers to as "Grand Enunciators"—but who also, it must be observed, are prototypically game-players, as the title of the first Mabuse film indicates.[45]

If the nonhuman object appears in Lang as a node in the obscure network of power in which his characters find themselves caught—which is equally a node in the complex visual game of his narratives—as noted above, Lubitsch's renowned use of objects appears much more tied to his characters' psychology and the economy of desire as a form of interpersonal, psychosexual exchange. In the orientalist romance *Sumurun* (1920), the minstrel "hunchback" (played by Lubitsch himself) gifts the dancer Yannaia (Pola Negri) a bracelet, a token of his intense but hopeless desire. When Yannaia encounters the handsome women's tailor Nur-Al Din (Harry Liedtke), she absent-mindedly drops the bracelet as she caresses Din's silken cloths and becomes enraptured by his gaze. Two consecutive close-ups show her hand letting the bracelet go, and then the bracelet lying in the dirt, picked up after a significant pause by the recognizable hand of the hunchback. The bracelet, which Yannaia had enthusiastically received, has shifted meaning: unable to utilize the bracelet as a medium to transfer his desire onto Yannaia, the hunchback must now confront his own futile cathexis of this object, to deploy Freudian terminology. He takes the necklace into a solitary corner of the open market, contemplating it as

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[45] Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang*, 87-134.

a mere mirror of his own desires, rather than a medium of reciprocal transference. In the scene that follows, the hunchback's plight will be mirrored in Yannaia's own misrecognition of an object's significance: she pursues the handsome tailor back to his shop, unaware (as is the viewer) that Din is already in love with the Sheikh's favorite concubine Sumurun (Jenny Hasselqvist), who also came into contact with him via his extravagant cloths. Barging into his shop with the intent of seducing him, Yannaia insists on seeing (and touching) more examples of his handwork. A close-up shows her silk-laden hands reaching out for another piece of fabric; a rhyming close-up shows his hands, daintily holding another piece of dark cloth, retracting away from hers.

Thus, it bears stressing again, while the objects in Lang's films dominate, or represent the domination of, a rationalized, non-human system over the lives of humans, the new involvements revealed for objects in Lubitsch's films derive much more from the inner psyche of the characters. A later example from Lubitsch's American career also bears this out: in the opening scene of *Trouble in Paradise* (1932), the master thieves and con-artists Lily (Miriam Hopkins) and Gaston Monescu (Herbert Marshall) dine with each other under false aristocratic identities. Over the course of dinner, however, each reveals to the other not only their true identity, but their desire, through the dextrous theft of various personal items—including Monescu's rather inexplicable theft of Lily's garter. The scene plays out like equitable foreplay, ending with Lily jumping into Monescu's lap. Clearly, the most suggestive component of the scene is each party's searching hands, but the objects themselves are also clear signifiers to each party of the other's desire, and theft and exchange are means of mediating this desire. As Sabine Hake puts it in her *German National Cinema*, Lubitsch "relied heavily on objects in mediating between the inner

world of the characters and the visible world depicted on the screen."[46] The caustic, ironic tone

many detect in Lubitsch comes in large part from this becoming-objectified—fetishized in both a

Freudian and a Marxian sense—of the characters' "inner world," which exposes desire as an

(often narcissistic and pleasure-based) matter of trade and exchange.Much of the famed

"Lubitsch Touch" has to do with this displacement of otherwise un-imageable and -speakable

sexual desire onto objects.[47] In industry terms, this may be seen as a means of avoiding

censorship, though intriguingly, in psychoanalytic terms, it resembles the psychical faculty of

repression and displacement Freud often referred to as the "censorship," replicated by the

cinematic apparatus.[48] Lubitsch's strategy for avoiding government or industry censors

sometimes had a function beyond innuendo: in thus avoiding (or, paradoxically, enforcing a

meta-psychical) censorship, Lubitsch exploited the gaps in normative cinematic discourse and

thereby acknowledged that play that exceeds the limits of the game/frame.

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[46] Hake, *Passions and Deceptions*, 34.
[47] Michaele Naumann, *Ernst Lubitsch: Aspekte des Begehrens* (Marburg: Tectum-Verl, 2008), 15.
[48] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* trans. Joyce Crick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 353-354

Figure 4.4: *The Marriage Circle* (1924)

His second American film, *The Marriage Circle* (1924), features the familiar use of objects that are cathected—or mistaken as being cathected—with characters' inner desire. When a rose falls from the terrace of the young married couple Charlotte and Franz Braun (Florence Vidor and Monte Blue), for example, their friend Gustav (Creighton Hale) mistakes it as a token of Charlotte's love. However, the film also features a different but distinctly Lubitschean use of the nonhuman object, in an early-film breakfast between Charlotte and her husband Franz (Monte Blue). After the happily married Brauns sit down for breakfast together, a cut-in shows Franz's hands cracking open a hard-boiled egg with a spoon, and Charlotte's mixing sugar into her coffee. Franz's hands withdraw offscreen, and soon Charlotte's do as well; in the darkened,

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out-of-focus background, we see their bodies move closer together, but their evident kiss goes

unrepresented. A few seconds later in this extended take, Franz's hands re-enter the shot to move

the dishes farther away from the edge of the table, presumably so they are not disturbed. Here, a

scene that would probably not be censored by many American censorship boards circa 1924—a

kiss between a couple that is, after all, happily married—is replaced by an anomalous shot of

objects arranged on a table. At the same time, the offscreen is evoked: the meaning of the scene,

the kiss, is not to be sought within the frame, but outside of it. The egg and coffee cup are

arbitrary signs, their relationship to the amorous kiss constructed by the shot, only to be dispelled

by the end of it. Rather than functioning as direct symbols, they are foregrounded as inadequate

replacements for what is outside of the frame. Here Lubitsch at once exploits the flexibility of

the signifier within the cinema, and simultaneously undercuts any totalizing claim to meaning

made by the frame.

This distinction between Lubitsch and Lang is, in many ways, counter to their

accustomed places within the cinematic canon. Whereas Lubitsch was praised even in his day as

an early and perceptive adopter of the "classical" Hollywood style, mastering the normative

spatial relations developed in Hollywood faster than most other filmmakers in the German film

industry, Lang has often been noted for his almost avant-garde adherence to an impersonal

narrative voice and his attention to the graphical qualities of the image, a geometrical aesthetics

of the surface. A brief survey of their work in the mid-1920s shows Lubitsch thriving with a

string of hits in the United States (*Marriage Circle*, *Three Women* [1924], *Lady Windermere's

Fan*, *Kiss Me Again* [1925]) that exhibit a mastery of the subtleties of classical montage and

pacing, whereas Lang's increasingly grandiose films (*Die Nibelungen* [1924], *Metropolis* [1927])

retain an emphatic, presentational style that calls to mind early epics such as *Cabiria* (1914) and

Intolerance (1915) and mystery serials such as *Les vampires* (1914-15). That is, while Lubitsch would seem to be a director very much embedded within the normative system, Lang has long figured as an auteur distinguished by his inability or unwillingness to fully assimilate his style to hegemonic practices. This impression is verified by the historical reception of their films: particularly in their respective Hollywood heydays, Lubitsch was the more popular filmmaker, suggesting his mastery of the dominant form. Using the paradigm of play, however, I wish to illustrate how Lubitsch's *paidia* leaves open possibilities of interpretation and agency foreclosed by Lang's *ludus,* even, or especially, when the filmmakers' films overlap in their thematic concerns.

Rationalized Identity as Play: *Dr. Mabuse* and the Ossi Oswalda Comedies

In Weimar modernity, the unmooring of a social field that once seemed stable, a phenomenon both emblematized and driven forward by the lifelike but superficial moving images of the cinema, proffered opportunities for sovereignty: a sovereignty over space and the overwhelming diversity of reality, as in the *Kriegsspiel* and the New Objectivity. This state of play also provided opportunities for a sovereignty over the self. In 1924, the philosopher Helmuth Plessner would defend society (*Gesellschaft*) over the idealized notion of community (*Gemeinschaft*) precisely because society provides a framework of manipulable forms in which the human's "play drive" could be exercised.[49] For Plessner, the "game-like" character of society is the very basis of social freedom, "for the person can demonstrate his own freedom in nothing more purely than the distance of himself to himself."[50] Plessner's theory of social play does not extend to a Butlerian analysis of identity's performativity. Although the individual's agency over their

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[49] Helmuth Plessner, *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism*, trans. Andrew Wallace (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), 119, 146.
[50] Ibid, 146-7.

gender performance is one form of play in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, the primary notion of

"play" in her theory appears in a depersonalized, deconstructive sense: the fiction of stable

gender identity is exposed "by the deregulated play of attributes that resist assimilation."[51] For

Plessner, play is rooted in the conscious activity of a vulnerable subject, and the soul remains an

essence that social play serves to both shield and indirectly express. What Plessner's writing

reveals, however, is the extent to which play had come to be seen as a structuring factor of

Gesellschaft and even personal identity in Weimar. The unmooring of social signs from essence

was an opportunity for the individual to take agency over their own identity through play;

Plessner recognizes this as a means of shielding a fragile, war-and-inflation-battered ego, but it is

clear that in modern urban centers like Berlin, this form of play also presented new opportunities

for marginalized subjects to stake their own claims over their identities. Just as Sloterdijk credits

psychoanalysis as a kynical "unmasker of the body," we might see Plessner's socio-

philosophical embrace of play as a form of kynicism because it unmasks the role that *techne* has

in determining that body, at least insofar as it concerns the outside world.

But for many, the transformation of markers of identity into mere signs, suspended

somewhere in the ether, that could be remixed at will was an object of anxiety. If appearances

and behaviors were mere surface, then one's credulity could be used against them. Hence, for

example, the prominence in the Weimar period of the cynical idea that city beggars constituted

an organized network of men in disguise, deploying the signs of poverty to compel charity.

Bertolt Brecht includes a scene in his *Dreigroschenoper* (1927) in which a Beggar King runs a

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[51] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*: *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (*New York: Routledge, 2007), 33.

registry of beggars, and has them choose from an assortment of pre-determined identities.[52]

Brecht's wry point is that the rational logic of capitalist business practices has "trickled down" even to the dispossessed underclass. More paranoic than parodic is Dr. Mabuse (Rudolf Klein-Rogge), Fritz Lang's nefarious authoritarian villain who is both an expert in hypnosis and a master of disguise. Like Brecht's beggars, Mabuse deploys a low-class disguise in the two-part *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler*. In the second part, released a month after the first in the Spring of 1922, Mabuse facilitates the assassination of Pesch (Georg John), an agent of his that has been arrested, by convincing a mob that a police wagon is transporting a simultaneously arrested working-class activist named Johannes Gutter. Disguised in a tattered coat and an unruly wig, Mabuse emerges from the crowd in a working-class tavern, standing on a chair to rile the mass into action. The shot mirrors the haunting conclusion of the first film's opening scene, in which Mabuse, dressed as a wealthy gentlemen, climbs onto a podium on the stock-exchange trading floor, towering over the mass of traders. As in the stock-exchange sequence, in the tavern scene Lang's narration initially collaborates with Mabuse's disguise, not emphasizing his presence in the crowd until he rises above it, and not cutting in to decisively reveal his face until after begins inciting the crowd. In this medium shot, the spectator can now recognizes the face of the man under the false mustache and tattered flat cap, as he directs the bar patrons, now an angry mob, toward the wagon in transit. Lang's mistrust of mass action—also evident in later films such as *Metropolis* (1927)—is made clear in this scene: here, the crowd is not led by its own self-interest, but by a dissimulating hypocrite who uses disguise to incite them to an anarchy that serves his own ends. When the police are halted by the mass that now crowds the street, and take their prisoner out of

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[52] Bertolt Brecht, *Die Greigroschenoper*, in *Gesammelte Werke* vol. 2:2, ed. Elisabeth Hauptmann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967), 400-01.

the wagon to prove he is not Johannes Gutter, another Mabuse agent murders the exposed Pesch from a building's upper floor.

Eagle-eyed viewers would recall that Mabuse's beggar disguise was originally revealed in the first shot of *Ein Bild der Zeit* (An Image of the Times), the first part of *Der Spieler*. The film opens with with an early example of the Langian object-shot, a close-up of hands above a desk at work arranging objects: the hands belong to Mabuse, and the objects are head shots of the master criminal himself in his various disguises. The as-yet unseen Mabuse holds the photographs in his left hand, splayed out as if they were a poker hand, adding more cards with his right hand from a stack on his desk that resembles a draw pile (*Abziehstapel*) in a game of cards. We will see Mabuse use these exact disguises, the final of which presented to the camera is the aforementioned low-class tavern patron, throughout the two-part film in order to bend people and events to his will. This act of foreshadowing is as if the film has laid out its entire trajectory in its opening shot, and already points to the film's oft-remarked-upon collapse between the diegetic person of Mabuse and the narrating authority of the film itself. Furthermore, the shot already emphasizes that the *Spieler* in the title refers to the way Mabuse uses technical mediation to play a game with reality. Predicting an argument Siegfried Kracauer was in the midst of formulating at the time of the film's release, in Mabuse's hands identity has become a game played with literal *Abziehbilder* (carbon-copy images): superficial, reproduced images that he draws (*abziehen*) from a deck at will.[53] Mabuse dissembles through rational assembly, deriving his modus operandi from what Kracauer would propose as the ontology of the photographic image: like in an aging photograph, identity disintegrates into its component signs,

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[53] Siegfried Kracauer, *Der Detektiv-Roman: Eine Deutung*, volume 1 of *Siegfried Kracauer: Werke*, eds. Inka Mülder-Bach and Ingrid Belke (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2006), 125; see also Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

the person themselves becoming subordinate to the historical and social signs inscribed on and around their person.[54] Mabuse communicates professorial intelligence via a goatee and a pince-nez, aristocracy through a top hat and fur coat, playboy charm with pomade-flattened hair and evening suit. The Plessnerian social game that masks the ego is for Lang a photographic logic that produces anxiety, as it allows the social sign to be deployed strategically. In the film's cynical understanding of modernity, dress and demeanor are no longer valuable for their immediate reference to the identity of a knowable other, but for the way a manipulator of such signs can deploy them in a bid to construct an ordered field of which he is master.

The film's opening sequence, in which Mabuse's dispersed network of criminals pull off the heist of a secret Dutch commercial contract on board a train in order to artificially deflate the stock market, is a striking exhibition of Lang's peculiar use of cross-cutting, which here not only creates suspense and a sense of simultaneity, but emphasizes the depersonalized, technical nature of the links between spaces. Using Mabuse's in-office telephone and close-ups on the gang's synchronized pocket watches as a means of transition between the burglar who tosses the contract from the window of the train, the getaway car that collects the attaché case thrown at precisely the right moment, and the lookout on a telephone pole who relays the news to Mabuse directly, the sequence depicts a network of action coordinated by modern technical means within the diegesis, and realized extra-diegetically by the cut. Scholars have been drawn to the correspondence in the scene between Mabuse's extended control of actions in far-flung space and the cinema's capacity to collapse distance; it should also be noted, however, that another correspondence between narrative and narration here concerns the superiority of the control of information over the content of the information itself. The terms of the stolen contract are never

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[54] Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 48-52.

revealed, even as their disappearance and calculated reappearance causes, as Mabuse planned, a collapse and then a rebound of stock prices, earning him an untold fortune in the process.

What is illustrated by this sequence, from Mabuse's disguises to his manipulation of market prices, is how control over the transmission of information takes precedent over the information itself. Rather than stand-ins for their references, signs are now tools, significant in the impact of their deployment within a given system like the financial one rather than in their relation to a signified that exists outside of that system. Signs have, in other words, have become playthings, objects with involvements valid only within the gameworld. Mabuse's game is a totalitarian one, played out within the spaces constructed by technical media that substitute for the real. Lang's distinctive use of montage also performs this gamelike appropriation of things within the world, foregrounding the way in which the film comprises a field in which meaning is transmitted between shots, rather than emphasizing the meaning of the images themselves. Noel Burch argues Langian montage is structured by a metaleptic "transmission of meaning" rather than dramatic principles.[55]

In its narrative structure, too, the film recapitulates the Mabusian logic of individuals as exchangeable *Abziehbilder*. Elsaesser observes that the film is comprised of nested symmetries and recurring structures: it is a film, he argues, that demands to be viewed geometrically, as a set of paradigmatic situations are placed into recurring structures.[56] The first film introduces Edgar Hull (Paul Richter) as the strapping young playboy—reminiscent of *Die Spinnen*'s Kay Hoog— who becomes entangled in the machinations of Mabuse's dispersed field of control. Early in the film, Hull is enraptured by the crudely spectacular variety show performed by Cara Carozza

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[55] Noel Burch, "Notes on Fritz Lang's First Mabuse," *Cine-Tracts* 4, no 1 (Spring 1981): 9.

[56] Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After*, 171-2, 179

(Aud Egede-Nisssen). As he watches, the dance is interrupted by two giant papier-mâché heads with obtrusive, phallic noses that press in around her, a flamboyant, suggestive foreshadowing of the love triangle to come. Mabuse, also present at the show, seizes the opportunity to hypnotize Hull with the power of his gaze. Compelling him to join him at a high-end illegal gambling club, the disguised criminal cheats Hull out of a massive sum, then assigns Carozza, actually his agent, to keep watch over Hull. This triangular relationship, in which Mabuse manipulates Hull through the medium of Carozza, is gradually linked to and replaced by that between Mabuse, the prosecutor von Wenk (Bernhard Goetzke), and the Countess Told (Gertrude Wecker). Gradually, von Wenk takes over Hull's function in the narrative, embodying the investigative agency within the diegesis working to uncover Mabuse's underworld network (to which the camera grants the spectator total access). Likewise, the object of von Wenk's affection, Countess Told, becomes enamored of Dr. Mabuse, first encountering him at a high-class seance where he professes his passion for "*Das Spiel mit Menschen und Menschenschicksalen*" ("the game with people and their destinies"). In the fifth act of *Der Große Spieler*, Hull is dispatched with little fanfare, killed by Mabuse's gunman in an alley after the police raid of a different gambling club. It is already clear by this point that the triangle of von Wenk-Countess-Mabuse has superseded that of Mabuse-Carozza-Hull in structuring the narrative; and early in the second film, Carozza will be assassinated as well, completing the exchange of individuals occupying the nodes in Mabuse's network of control. Recalling Walter Benjamin's images of memories and relations emplaced onto an abstract, topological space in his "Berlin Chronicle" as analyzed in the previous chapter, the geometric, almost map-like structure of *Mabuse, Der Spieler* suggests the same exchangeability of individuals that Mabuse weaponizes within the film.

If identity in the high-end society in which much of *Mabuse* is set has become a matter of play, in Lang this is staged not as individuals becoming the subjects of their own desires, but the subjects *to* an obscure power's enunciation. The exchangeability of Hull for Wenk, of Carozza for the Countess, suggests the individual's loss of unique, organic integrity in the technological web of modernity. The character of Mabuse, for his part, is little more than the concept of control itself, the impersonal regulation of the game rather than a concrete personality. Behind his disguises and other means of extending his presence through mediated simulacra, Mabuse becomes more a technical-ethereal concept than an embodied being, his agency dispersed through space to such an extent that, by the sequel in 1933, he will have effectively evaporated into the airwaves, becoming an anomalous voice on a speaker. Already in the opening act of *Der Große Spieler*, Mabuse's "anterior field" of hands and eyes is metaphorically dispersed and disintegrated across the film: the act opens with the extended close-up of his hands, ironically, holding the photograph-cards of his disgused face; and it closes with his face, superimposed on the empty stock floor on which he has let loose his self-enriching chaos.[57] As his visage moves toward the camera and his gentleman-trader disguise is removed from his face via lap-dissolve, he stares coldly offscreen, an alienated gaze that evokes his willing submission to the machine.

Ultimately, this dispersion of the self into a far-flung apparatus, its breakdown into an assemblage of exchangeable signs, results in catastrophe, even for the sovereign enunciator at its head. The film's finale sees Mabuse trapped in the counterfeiting hideaway we were introduced to in the first film, where he escaped after a shoot-out with von Wenk and the police. Hallucinating, he encounters the figures of individuals his criminal enterprise has killed: Hull, Count Told, Pesch, and Carozza. A sallow-faced Hull invites Mabuse to deal cards at the

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[57] André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, trans. Anna Bostock Berger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 47, 27-35.

counterfeiting table as the four black-clad figures array themselves across the table from Mabuse in a medium-long shot split down the center by the rectangular table with Hull at its head. As soon as the doctor begins dealing, Count Told, seating facing Mabuse, accuses him of cheating: *"Falschspieler*!" the accusatory intertitle reads, its white letters disjointed and unevenly set, as if typed on a typewriter whose keys are out of alignment. The four ghosts fade out of the frame as Mabuse madly hurls false bills at them, which a match-cut shows us showering the blind counterfeiters cowering somewhere within the space with Mabuse. Forced into the cavernous underbelly of his operation, cut off from his position overseeing the rationalized space of his criminal enterprise, the technological subject Mabuse is driven mad. Rather than manipulating the breakdown in reality and image instituted by technologies of simulation—as he could by incorporating elements from each into his expansive game—he falls victim to this breakdown, and is no longer able to distinguish the real from mere image. Thrusting fake money toward a disembodied accuser to answer a debt that cannot be paid, Mabuse at the end underlines Lang and Harbou's cynical take on postwar Germany, its dreams of conquest dashed on the shores of a fragmented reality.

The truth of his submission to the machine now plays out, as he turns to see the three counterfeiting machines behind him take on the appearance of otherworldly faces, their shining electric eyes directed his way. The camera cuts to the side of the long table opposite Mabuse, the position the dead card-players had formerly occupied. The spectator assumes the dead trio's detached look as Mabuse hurls himself onto the table to avoid the gaze of the machines, assuming a submissive position, his belly to the sky. The scene represents an inversion of the film's opening sequence, in which a vast apparatus of technical media under Mabuse's control appeared to extend his agency across space. Here, Mabuse is re-embodied, stripped down to his

undershirt, and at the mercy of a machine that no longer needs his eyes to project the power of

the gaze. The hybridized, semi-anthropomorphized mechanical figures suddenly move, the face

on the right appearing to rise up from a crouching position, revealing long, imposing metal

pistons that resemble arms. Mabuse collapses onto the floor, curling into a fetal position amidst

discarded counterfeit Marks— an image that certainly evokes an "image of the times" in the

context of hyperinflation. Wenk and his deputies will find Mabuse seating on the floor,

distractedly counting his false currency. Having trusted in a machine-logic of identity, one in

which the individual is an assemblage of reproduced components, Mabuse is now no more real,

no less a hollow product, than the money he lies in; the machines around him are now infused

with a perversion of the humanity he has sacrificed in himself.

If for Lang modernity's destabilization of essential identity, the privileging of the play of

signs over the essence they should signify, results in the emptying of the human soul into the

machine-constructed game, in Lubitsch's early films with the comedienne Ossi Oswalda, it

represents a potential liberation. I have already pointed how the overtly fabricated world of *Die

Puppe* satirizes the artificiality of feminine and even heterosexual identity. The Oswalda-starring

Ich möchte kein Mann sein (*I Don't Want to Be a Man,* 1918) stages a more overt play with

gendered signifiers. In contrast to Lang's anxiety-ridden portrayal of the uses of disguise in an

age when rationality has processed individuals into *Abziehbilder*, Lubitsch's characters use the

mutability of their appearance to negotiate space for their own pleasure. In the film, a typically

irrepressible Ossi Oswalda is a young woman who bristles at the restrictions imposed upon her

as a woman—in particular, the expectations of moral virtue and delicate behavior applied to a

bourgeois woman—by her uncle (Ferry Sikla) and a governess (Margarete Kupfer). Deciding

one evening to masquerade as a man, she attends a cabaret, and there encounters her tutor (Kurt

Götz), who doesn't recognized the young woman behind her disguise of tuxedo, top hat, and monocle. Like *Die Puppe*, *Ich möchte kein Mann sein* ultimately recuperates stable gender identities: not only does it end with the pairing of Ossi and her social superior and educator, but Ossi also learns that it is not as easy being a man as she suspected. As in *Die Puppe*, it is paradoxically the subversive masquerade itself that allows Ossi to reintegrate herself into the normative performance of gender: it is only as a man that she can be approached by her tutor as an equal, and thus find a happy match. In the narrative's most risqué plot point, the drunken tutor and Ossi as a man share a tender kiss at the end of the night, with the tutor insisting that she tell no one.

The conclusion, in which the tutor is bowled over when he sees Ossi brushing out her hair out after they have returned home together, resolves both Ossi's gender identity and his sexuality. However, the comedy's stock romantic conclusion cannot paper over all the implications of gender disguise raised by the film. As in Lang's *Mabuse* film, the clever manipulation of signifiers of identity result in increased social power, but rather than granting power to the gamemaster, it allows a subject confined by bourgeois social expectations to win for herself a modicum of *Spielraum* in which to act freely, which she is shown to desire from the film's first shot. Its opening scene shows the rambunctious Ossi seated at a table playing poker with her uncle's gardening staff. Her governess and uncle appear at a window above the garden, shot from a low angle—though not from Ossi's perspective. The pair, looking down on Ossi and company from above, shout down and scare off her co-players. The truculent Ossi sits on the now-empty gaming table and begins smoking a cigarette, as if to illustrate the game of social signs that continues after the game of poker has been ended—openly continuing her play even after her observers, the embodiment of patrarchal authority, have called the game off.

In 1918, Lubitsch still tends to stage scenes frontally, with analytical editing at a minimum compared to films from just a year later like *Madame Dubarry*. However, the camera is also used comment on the power of the social gaze, and to refute the position of control whose perspective Lang's films often take. The rebellious Ossi gives free reign to her desires, not only smoking and drinking liquor, but inviting a crowd of men to serenade her from the street. In these early parts of the film, however, she is not identified with the gaze: although we see her looking with pleasure out of her window as the men gather to sing, the shot of the men on the sidewalk is not a reverse angle that matches her point of view. Later her lack of access to the gaze is more pointed, when she enters a tailor's shop as a woman, and the workers take immediate notice of her. Lubitsch gives us a series of shots of the men turning to leer at Ossi, distracted from their tasks moving garments and counting out yards of cloth, their mouths agape. They crowd around Ossi, each claiming a part of her body to measure, their trained tailors' gazes analyzing and dissecting her fetishized body.

After Ossi has her tails and top hat, however, she suddenly finds herself in possession of this gaze. Strolling down the Kurfürstendamm on her way to a night out as a man, she freely exchanges looks with women who pass by her, and turns to look at them from behind after they have passed, clearly enjoying the sexual privilege of being a man. The sight of the splendid Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in the distant background of this shot evokes the rarified economic milieu she has entered, as well as the patriarchal sphere she has accessed now that she reads as a man. Her control of the gaze is explicitly aligned with that of the camera in the nightclub, when she sights her tutor among the crowd. In one of the film's few true eyeline matches, she reacts with exuberant amusement to something off-screen, and the reverse shot picks out the tutor from the other revelers. The film emphasizes that it is primarily the most

outward, external social signifiers that condition access to the technique of the gaze: that is to say, that in the film it is fashion alone affects whether Ossi is treated as a delicate young woman or a subject invested with the masculine social gaze. Her physical performance as a man is fraught with faults: on the U-Bahn, she fails to relinquish her seat to a woman standing up, and is chastised by other finely attired gentlemen for neglecting to do so. After she stands up, a man steps on her foot and she lets out a shriek, but even after this the men on the train do not see through her masquerade: the male accoutrements themselves seem to guard against doubt about her true identity. Whereas the distilling of identity into a rational set of mutable attributes means, in Lang's cynical perspective, the triumph of a nefarious power, for Lubitsch, the tailor's son, the disconnection of outward social and gender signifiers from an essential person allows for an enriched social experience and the realization of personal agency.

Despite finally settling its play with gendered signifiers into something resembling their old structures, *Ich möchte kein Mann sein* addresses the "New Woman" and the reorganization of gender roles in moderity in almost utopian terms, as here, "in the place of the original, appearance emerges as a higher form of reality, a reality freed of false hierarchies and therefore free to strive toward a more perfect form."[58] The influence of the farce and operetta traditions on Lubitsch's penchant for disguise and mistaken identity cannot be overstated: the director's love of these genres is well documented.[59] But his willingness to destabilize masculine and feminine identity might draw not only from his experience as a tailor's apprentice, a lover of operetta, and a stage performer, but also from his experiences as a Jewish comic actor in Berlin. Scholars have often connected his ironic sense of humor both to the Berliner *Schnauze*, the knowing, world-

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[58] Hake, *Passions*, 52.
[59] See Ben Brewster, "The Circle: Lubitsch and the Theatrical Farce Tradition," *Film History* 13, no. 4 (2001): 372-389.

weary humor typical of the capital city, and to traditions of Jewish stage comedy.[60] Before the

comedies with Oswalda, Lubitsch was best known for his portrayal of stereotypical Jewish

characters in films like *Schuhpalast Pinkus* ("Pinkus Shoe Palace," 1916) and *Meyer aus Berlin*

(1918), portrayals certainly assimilable to anti-Semitic worldviews but recognizable as types

such as the *schlemiel* drawn from the Jewish comic stage. Valerie Weinstein refers to Lubitsch's

early caricatures as "Jewish camp," suggesting a double signification, a play in the suspense

between two possible meanings, in Lubitsch's performance of these characters.[61] In his *Jokes*

and Its Relation to the Unconscious, Freud sees such a double-voiced, ironic joke as typical of

cynical Jewish humor that understands the irreconcilability between two worlds. Such jokes

often take on a different meaning depending on whether one is within or outside of the intended

in-group—or, may seem to hesitate between these two meanings.[62] Lubitsch will consistently

return to this humor, to moments of ambivalence, extending and dwelling in the play opened up

when the connection between signifier and signified is suspended.

Lubitsch and Lang are both deeply ironic filmmakers, but the ironic distances they

assume in relation to their characters and their situations are of different types. Though often

realized through a rationalized associative montage, Lang's cynical irony will manifest also itself

as the memorable top-down views of Berlin streets in *M* as the criminal underground spreads out

to trap the murderer, with the use of maps by both the police and the criminals a hypermediation

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[60] Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973), 79-83; Hake, *Passions*, 30.

[61] Valerie Weinstein, "Anti-Semitism or Jewish 'Camp'? Ernst Lubitsch's *Schuhpalast Pinkus* (1916) and *Meyer aus Berlin* (1918)," *German Life and Letters* 59, no. 1 (January 2006): 112. See also Ofer Ashkenazi, "Rethinking the Role of Film in German History: The Jewish Comedies of the Weimar Republic," *Rethinking History* 14, no. 4 (December 2010): 569-585.

[62] Sigmund Freud, *The* Joke *and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. Joyce Crick (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 106-109.

of the camera's game-player's perspective on the maneuvering of pieces in a fabricated world.

Lang's irony consists in his awareness of the rationally constructed microcosms, the heterotopic

tools, that allow a network to seize control of irony. Lubitsch's sense of irony is kynical, rooted

in bodily experience, recognizing the dual reality of the body and the signs it is decomposed into

under a rational regime based in visual arrangement—specularity or dis-play. We see this in *Die*

Puppe and *Ich möchte kein Mann sein*, but perhaps even more playfully in *Die Austernprinzessin*

(*The Oyster Princess*, 1919). The film is a burlesque set in the United States, where an imperious

oyster baron named Mister Quaker (Victor Janson) is seeking a suitor for his daughter Ossi.

Parodying the rationalization of American society—an early example of the typical

Weimar discourse around the postwar "Americanization" of Germany and the world—the film

depicts Quaker's palatial home as thoroughly taylorized. He is introduced in an irised close-up,

smoking an oversized cigar ensconced in a metal holder attached to a ring on his finger. He

speaks, but the film withholds an intertitle; instead, it cuts to a reverse angle, which shows

dozens of female stenographers arranged in a schoolroom-like configuration of desks in rows,

who immediately bow their heads over their typewriters in response to Quaker's moving lips. A

cut back to an irised shot at a slightly longer angle shows us Quaker continuing to dictate alone

at his desk, but the iris mask expands out to reveal that he is surrounded by four black servants,

all dressed in kitschy replications of 18th-century waistcoats. Their labor, like that of the female

stenographers, has been thoroughly rationalized, divided into discrete tasks: one takes Quaker's

cigar away as the servant on screen left lifts a cup of coffee to his mouth; the servant farthest to

the right wipes Quaker's mouth as the stenographers continue to furiously transcribe his words.

This image of black servitude certainly does not constitute a thoroughgoing critique of racist

exploitation, but in concert with the superficial pretension to baroque-era wealth suggested by

the settings, and the machine-like array of female stenographers, the scene does offer a concise parody of American-style capitalism.

Styled somewhat differently, the scenario would be pure Lang, with the imposing figure behind a desk using an array of technical implements to replicate his voice a dozenfold, to mediately extend his presence in space from his secluded office, in part by mechanizing the humans under his control as well. *Austernprinzessin,* in fact, anticipates other Langian motifs as well, including the power of the visual archive Lang explores in *Mabuse* and later in *Spies* (1928). When Quaker offers the typically unruly Ossi that he will "buy [her] a prince," he employs the services of "Seligson, the Matchmaker" (Max Kronert), whose archive of European royalty is an office plastered with head shots of various men, rationally arrayed into rows and column by physical type. In a metatextual turn that implicates the film itself as a tool of rationalization, the head shots resemble the close-ups with which the main players are introduced at the beginning of the frame. Here, as in *Mabuse*, individuals have become flattened objects intended for exchange in rationalized space. And as in Lang, the rational ordering of the Quaker's reality corresponds to an increased specularity, the intensified visuality of the "mass ornament": the rows of stenographers move in synchronicity; later, Ossi's team of masseuses each take a part of her body in an assembly-line massage; at her wedding banquet, rows of servants coordinate their actions to serve each course; throughout the film, legions of servants trot through the mansion in regular formation.[63] Unlike the well-oiled machine imagined in Lang's films, however, the point of these images is the ironic, irrational inefficiency born of *Ratio*: an army of stenographers precisely but needlessly duplicating the mute pontifications of a oafish capitalist.

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[63] Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 68-70.

After Ossi is wed to Prince Nucki (or rather, to the Prince's assistant who is masquerading as the Prince), according to an intertitle, "a foxtrot epidemic breaks out." Wedding guests begin splaying out their limbs absurdly on the dance floor—a synchronized motion that nevertheless looks nothing like a foxtrot. Here Lubitsch chooses to foreground the spectacle as a flat surface of play, splitting the screen into three oblong close-ups of bouncing feet in separate spaces in the mansion, overlaid on a black background. Unlike Lang's in-frame montage from *The Spiders,* produced the same year, the composite here is unmotivated by story information: the screen becomes a surface not on which to realize an analogical map of the mediated relations between characters, but a pure display of the cinematic apparatus, in excess of the film's narrative. In these early films, Lubitsch's camera joins in his characters' play with the unanchored signifiers floating in modernity's rationalized space. This tripartite image again combines a rational, ordered aesthetic with the irrationality of motion of the bodies parts that have been deterritorialized by the camera. Rather than attached to a distinct meaning, these elements are simply suspended from the space in which the shots were taken, reassembled in the non-space of a darkened frame.

If in Lubitsch the alienated and re-assembled fragments of reality on display in the ornament now exist as the objects of free play, in Lang the ornament always has something behind it—the Langian spectacle both reveals a hidden world and masks the forces that assembled it. It is thus more dialectical than Lubitsch's conception of the ornament. One of the "visionary" moments in *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler* comes in the fifth act of the first film, in which Lang cuts between the seance attended by the Count and Countess Told, as well as Mabuse, and the Petit Casino, an underground gambling club where Carozza has taken Hull and von Wenk on Mabuse's request. Ushered into box seats in a strange, circular enclosure, they face out toward a

round stage indented with tracks that descend and converge around a hole at the stage's center. A man rises up from this hole and introduces himself as the game-runner for what remains throughout the scene an obscure betting game, in which players slide their bets to the man via small carts set in the stage's tracks. After the man appears, the camera first pans from his perspective across the gamblers seated around and above him; in a panoptic reversal of the gaze, the camera matches its own circular movement, tracking counterclockwise around the game-runner—or rather, with him, as he also mechanically rotates, always facing the camera.

In Lang, display is always both spectacle and surveillance: most famously, the vamp-robot version of Maria in *Metropolis* seduces a crowd of men with an erotic dance that reduces them to their sexually charged eyes, which proliferate around the space of the frame as they're excited into sexual frenzy—the eyes seeming to double back on their owners in a reflection of the gaze instantiated by the spectacular ornament. While the woman on display appears to be offered up to the consuming masculine gaze, the agency of the men is an illusion within the game of the machine, or, what amounts to the same thing for Lang, destiny. *Dr Mabuse* features an earlier iteration of this visual, highly gendered scenario: the casino's game-runner explains that if the police were to raid the club, a contingency plan is in place. He descends again, and as he does so, the chandelier and its armature descend onto the gaming table. A woman draped only in a sheer cloth rises from a crouched position, putting her body on display to the audience even as the gnarled decorations of the casino obscure parts of the scene for the spectator: Noel Burch observes that this sequence "could also be an emblem of the film itself: a game with serious stakes—sexual, mystical, and political—is disguised, by an ingenious mechanism, as an 'innocent diversion.'"[64]

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[64] Burch, "Notes," 13

In the Petit Casino, the hollow interactive aspect of the game is a disguise for the machinations of Gunning's "destiny-machine," a cover for the lack of agency these characters possess in the larger game laid out by Mabuse and his extra-textual double, Fritz Lang. From the perspective of the game-runner, who acts in this scene as another double for Mabuse and Lang, the point is in arranging the players in a predictable and exploitable order, their highly proscribed agency within the game merely the enticement for integrating them into the machine. In the cross-cuts to the seance in which the true agent of this fateful arrangement (Mabuse) is taking part, Lang emphasizes that this game is—particularly for Hull, who will be shot and killed upon leaving the club—a confrontation with destiny. The games staged within the heterotopia of modernity are true microcosms, both *Menschenspiel* and *Weltspiel* at once: that is, their often pleasurable simulations of life and death actually construct places in which power actually grabs hold of life. It is when he is arrested not just to the spectacle, but to the game that ties him to it, that Hull's fate is sealed, when Mabuse is able to confront him in the anomalous sphere cleared by technological mediation.

While Lubitsch's conception of the frame is drawn from the free play suggested by disguise and double-meaning, Lang's is drawn from the games of bourgeois youth and the Austrian Army. His films lay out spaces to be decoded for the strategic maneuvers latent within them. While the space of Berlin for Lubitsch's German films is one of consumerism, mobility, and the exchange of looks, for Lang it is a schematized space that hides pockets of illicit behavior and masked motives. As Klaus Kreimeier writes in an unfavorable look back at Lang's Berlin films, "Postwar Berlin, the Berlin of the inflation period, became to him—the well-paid bourgeois aesthete outfitted with a sensible nose—a playground of adventure

[*Abenteuerspielplatz*]."[65] For Lang, then, the rationalized world is one in which power circulates

and operates within exceptional spaces comprised of the fragments of the world; reality in the

age of modern media is a construct that masks hidden motives, that needs decoding. Mabuse

became Lang's ersatz, human-technological center in a world that would otherwise be given over

to the play of unanchored signifiers, the *Unparteiende* who oversees the array of forces placed

upon a schematized space. Although Lubitsch would address many of the same concerns around

modernity as Lang, particularly in their overlapping early years in Weimar, Lubitsch's films are

marked by a transferrable gaze, flexible meanings, and the freedom of play in defiance of the

game's limits.

Lubitsch and Lang against the Gestapo: The Politics of Play

Both Lang and Lubitsch proved conscious of the interweaving of politics and play in modernity,

and when each produced Hollywood anti-Nazi films during World War II, they would each

represent Nazism through their particular understandings of how modern power had become a

matter of play. The filmmakers were members of the same German emigre community in

Hollywood and undoubtedly encountered each other with some regularity, but were evidently not

friends. Different in outlook and artistic style, the pair's convergence in wartime Hollywood also

followed different paths. Somewhat ironically, Lang, icon of the German film industry, husband

to avowed Nazi supporter Thea von Harbou, sometimes-acquaintance of Joseph Goebbels, and

lifelong Catholic (although he had ethnic Jewish roots) would flee the Nazis soon after they

came to power, permanently leaving Germany by 1934. The precise circumstances of Lang's

flight from the Nazi regime are forever shrouded in mystery, as Lang's oft-repeated and long-

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[65] Klaus Kreimeier, "Der Schlafwandler: Fritz Land und seine deutschen Filme," in *Film, Stadt, Kino, Berlin* ed. Uta Berg-Ganschow and Wolfgang Jacobsen (Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1987), 90.

winded story concerning an offer from Goebbels to become head of the German film industry,

followed immediately by Lang's departure for Paris, is most likely a fabrication intended to

exaggerate the immediate threat the Nazi regime posed to him. Lubitsch, on the other hand, who

as the son of *Ostjuden* ("eastern Jews") would have faced fiercer persecution in early Nazi

Germany, had long since left Germany, taking up an invitation from Mary Pickford to direct her

in *Rosita* in 1923 and returning only twice before his citizenship was revoked in 1936.

Both Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be* (1942) and Lang's *Hangmen Also Die* (1943)

envision scenarios in which the outmatched resistance to Nazism in occupied central Europe

finds an exploit in the Nazis' system of control. For Lang, repurposing techniques from his early

sound films *M* and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, this means that the story world is threaded

together by technical media within the diegesis, with the camera in an overt relationship of

analogy with the radios that help both the Nazis and the Prague resistance network communicate

and surveil space. *Hangmen Also Die* is a fictionalization of the 1942 assassination of Reinhard

Heydrich, who as the Nazis' Deputy Protector of Bohemia and Moravia, was known as the

Hangman of Prague. In Lang's vision, Prague is a space threaded together by media implements

that create avenues of possible action. Fleeing from the Nazis early in the film, the film's

assassin, Dr. Franticek Svoboda (Brian Donlevy) ducks into a movie theater showing what seems

to be a random assortment of pleasantly banal documentary footage: a boat cruising along a

river, close-ups on blooming flowers. But while the scene initially suggests the cinema as a

technology of control, a hypnotic diversion from the pressing conflict exterior to it, this

heterotopic space becomes a field of confrontation between the people of Prague and Nazi

forces. Beneath the cover of the superficially attractive images on the screen, the citizens of

Prague spread word of Heydrich's assassination, and spontaneous applause breaks out. Suddenly,

a man's silhouette, his arms splayed out in a barring gesture, appears onscreen: a Nazi citizen has stood up at the back of the theater and demands to know who began the applause. The cinema is exposed here as another space of surveillance, a node in the Nazi network that turns the space of Prague into a *Kriegsspiel* for the surveying technological gaze. The resistance must operate within this gamespace, choosing avenues of action carefully in a regime of strategically deployed signifiers.

There is an insight common to both films, which they share with Hannah Arendt's analysis in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, that Nazism functions by constructing a spectacular, fictive world alongside the real one.[66] *To Be or Not To Be*, in typical Lubitsch fashion, understands Nazisms' constructed world through the metaphor of the stage, but it also implicates the camera in this blurring of the boundaries between fact and simulation, in which play, as the realm of seeming, can have life-and-death import. By this logic, the film suggests that the best agents of the resistance may be those with the most sophisticated understanding of how easy it is to manipulate people via false images and performance: actors. *To Be or Not to Be* opens with a scene introduced in voiceover as taking place within "Gestapo Headquarters, Berlin," which a track back will reveal to be in fact a stage on which a Warsaw troupe of actors is rehearsing an anti-Nazi farce. The content of the play we initially witness as the actual diegesis of the film already underlines the importance of performance, the body's deployment of the correct but arbitrary signs, in maintaining Nazi reality. When caught knowing the punchline to a derogatory joke about Hitler, a Gestapo lieutenant interrupts his superior's questions with a "Heil Hitler" that compels immediate repetition from the Gestapo chief (played within the fiction by the actor Joseph Tura, who is played by Jack Benny). When Hitler, played by Bronski (Tom Dugan),

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[66] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1977), 364-367.

enters and deadpans "Heil myself," the play's director interrupts, breaking what the spectator had taken as the film's diegesis. Bronski doesn't look anything like Hitler, he insists, gesturing toward the portrait of Hitler that hangs over the desk in the false Gestapo office. Bronski points out that the image is, in fact, not of the real Hitler but is an image of him in his current Hitler costume.

The power of Hitler is pure image, the film suggests: Nazi power is not inherent in the sovereign himself, but in the correct arrangement of signifiers in the image of the "Führer." Although audiences at the time found the film offensively frivolous, Gerd Gemünden argues that the film contains an essential insight in positing Hitler as the ultimate ham: paradoxically, "only someone who has not entered into the symbolic realm of Nazism will be able to distinguish between the real Hitler and his impersonators."[67] The implication that Nazism depends on a gamelike manipulation of reality is played out later in the film, as the troupe uses their sets to fool a Nazi spy, Professor Siletsky (Stanley Ridges) to turn over the list of resistance fighters he has obtained from the Polish government in exile. Tura effects a hammy, poorly improvised performance as Gestapo chief Ehrhardt that Siletsky eventually sees through—although later, when Tura meets Ehrhardt in disguise as Siletsky, the real Gestapo chief will repeat Tura's earlier improvised dialogue word for word—the real Gestapo chief turns out to be an even hammier actor than Tura. Lubitsch's interest in dual meanings and suspended difference is applied here to the tenuous distinction between reality and the sphere of play (or of plays), as actions in one sphere continually have impact the other. Eager to prove he is a sufficient Hitler, Bronski marches out onto the streets of pre-invasion Warsaw, where shocked citizens find the vegetarian German dictator peering into a butcher's shop window. When Siletsky figures out the

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[67] Gerd Gemünden, *Continental Strangers: German Exile Cinema, 1933-1951* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 88.

game and attempts to flee the false Gestapo office, he finds himself on a stage, where the troupe

of actors shoot and kill him. His death scene as dramatic as any Shakespearean expiration,

imaged in a self-reflexive shot taken from the back of the empty theater, which emphasizes that

the only witness to this fatal meeting of simulation and reality play is the camera, the same

implement that has been used time and again in the film to obscure the boundaries between

performance and reality in the diegesis. The cinema, Lubitsch and Lang both understood, is a

form of play, and in modernity, play is a matter of politics, an engagement with an apparatus that

increasingly undergirds our experience of reality.

CONCLUSION

THE LEGACY OF WEIMAR PLAY

Nostalgia for the culture of the Weimar Republic lives on in the online game world of *Second Life*. The social network-cum-virtual reality offers its users the choice to form groups and build spaces (provided they've earned enough money in the in-game economy), and to navigate the game's three-dimensional spaces with their self-designed avatars. One group of users has built a section of 1920s downtown Berlin dubbed "The 1920s Berlin Project." From the customary third-person perspective of *Second Life*, users can, provided their avatar meets the strict historically accurate dress code, go on peripatetic excursions through an approximation of the urban environment of Weimar-era Berlin. The simulation actually covers a relatively small (and condensed) part of the German metropolis: the Tiergarten and Alexanderplatz, respectively, serve as its western and eastern borders; its southern border does not extend as far as Potsdamer Platz; and although it goes as far north as Wedding, the trip on foot from Unter den Linden is surprisingly short. Within this space, however, users can go for a night out at the "(in)famous Eldorado gay club," dance the tango at the Hotel Adlon, or, of course, go to a cinema on Unter den Linden and watch G.W. Pabst's film of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*, 1931). Buildings are littered with advertisements for period-appropriate music, film, and products, as well as for game-specific weekly events—which are rendered in the style of Art Deco or the New Objectivity. In Wedding, whose slums the group's website invites you to explore, you might happen across "Joachim the Troubled War Veteran," an evidently homeless avatar who sits under an S-Bahn overpass plastered with advertisements for veterans' health.

Regardless of the somewhat dubious historical accuracy of The 1920s Berlin Project, this digital simulacrum of Weimar urban culture suggests linkages between 20th Century German modernity and contemporary digital culture. On the one hand, we might see here the postmodern fetish at work: taken from the social constellation in which they originally arose, the signifiers of Weimar modernity are emptied of their politics—of their very historicity—and redeployed as flattened images. In the .mov file of *The Three-Penny Opera* that continuously runs in the cinema or the posters for *Metropolis* (1927) and women's beauty products, "modernist styles" have literally "become postmodernist codes"—the computer codes that underlie the space of the game.[1] But the question remains worth asking: why simulate Berlin, and why that period? Why is it that the "fully rendered, actionable space" required by "gamic vision" finds as its mode of expression the emptied signifiers from this particular moment in German history?[2] The correspondences between the historical Weimar Berlin and its digital re-creation actually extend beyond visual signifiers and into the playful ordering of space and subjectivity typical of both. Before digital worlds opened up at our fingertips,

Play is a key theoretical concept in the age of the postmodern pastiche and the interactive digital object. It suggests self-conscious and ironic performance, willful frivolity, fleeting formulations, arbitrary recombination (as in *bricolage*), and, particularly since the 1990s, feedback between a user and a system designed to receive and react to the user's input. In a digitally networked society, everyday life is suffused with forms of play, from our idle activities on our phones while we wait for the train, to the format of corporate team-building exercises. Much of what one thinks of as play today is conducted at interfaces with digital devices that

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[1] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 18.

[2] Alexander R. Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 63.

provide fleeting sovereignty over virtual fields, miniature worlds comprised of procedurally generated images. Whether in an augmented reality game or on Google Maps, play with the order and arrangement of visual data is the means by which contemporary "subjectivation" is achieved. In play, the user enacts patterns of possible behaviors, selects predictable pathways that can be analyzed to predict future outcomes. In the virtual worlds of digital play, the user is entrained in the timely execution of repetitive tasks, in automatically coordinating the aerial and ground view, in viewing themselves as the primary agents within the bounds of an exceptional zone delineated in advance. Play at the interface with technical media is the means by which sovereignty is created, relayed, and exercised across a dispersed network of control that makes us subjects of, and subjects us to, power. As this dissertation has shown, the expansion of play-space began well before the development of virtual worlds, of an interface that could directly receive feedback from a user. Spliced apart and re-assembled within film, both German reality and the German subject was re-ordered within the play-space of the media during the Weimar Republic.

The role of play in modern life would be a subject of reflection for many artists and thinkers who lived through the Weimar Republic. In 1946, Herman Hesse would win the Nobel Prize, with the Nobel committee singling out his final novel *The Glass Bead Game* (*Das Glasperlenspiel*, 1943), which imagined a future utopian society organized around the play of an elliptically described game that requires a mastery of all schools of human thought.[3] The book is often viewed as Hesse's anti-fascist parable of a peaceful, enlightened society, but considering the author began the book in 1931, the germ of the novel likely lay in the Weimar Republic. Similarly, Thomas Mann's unfinished *Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull* (*Felix Krull,*

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[3] Herman Hesse, *The Glass Bead Game* (Bowdon, England: Stellar Books, 2013).

Confidence Man: The Early Years) was begun around 1911 but not published until 1954. The

novel is a forthright critique of a modern world become image, of the power won by a pretender

who abandons any singular identity when he recognizes the manipulability of a world dependent

on a schematic distribution of superficial imagery.[4] Mann's long-stewing book, unlike Hesse's,

sees modernity's play as an exploit for pretenders more than an opportunity for greater

enlightenment.

Vladimir Nabokov's *The Luzhin Defense*, written while the author was living as an exile

in Berlin-Charlottenburg in the late Weimar period, contemplates the way intense fascination

with gaming—with the allegedly closed sphere of play imagined by Huizinga and Caillois—

alters one's perception of the world outside that sphere. The titular chess master of Nabokov's

novel enters a solipsistic universe, in which the world becomes a game board and his opponent a

mirrored version of himself:

> All the games in the old magazine had been studied, all the problems solved, and he was
> forced to play with himself, but this ended inevitably in an exchange of all the pieces and
> a dull draw. And it was unbearably hot. The veranda cast a black triangular shadow on
> the bright sand. The avenue was paved with sunflecks, and these spots, if you slitted your
> eyes, took on the aspect of regular light and dark squares. An intense latticelike shadow
> lay flat beneath a garden bench. The urns that stood on stone pedestals at the four corners
> of the terrace threatened one another across their diagonals. Swallows soared: their flight
> recalled the motion of scissor swiftly cutting out some design.[5]

Cities, with their "regular rows of blurry lamps marching past and suddenly advancing and

encircling a stone horse in a square" are chessboard-like to Luzhin, "as much a habitual and

unnecessary integument as the wooden pieces and the black and white board." The modern

world in particular becomes a game to Luzhin, as it would later to the narrator of Stefan Zweig's

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[4] Thomas Mann, *Confessions of Felix Krull, Confidence Man (The Early Years)* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969).

[5] Vladimir Nabokov, *The Luzhin Defense* (New York: Vintage International, 2011), 59-60.

Schachnovelle (1942), a captive of the Nazis who attempts to maintain his sense of self in captivity by converting a bedspread into to an imaginary chessboard and competing with himself. The game becomes an escape to a different space "that shattered the nothingness around me; I possessed … a wondrous weapon against the oppressive montony of space and time."[6] Ironically, for both Luzhin and Zweig's narrator, the habituation to a game-world also shatters the stability of the subject, incurs a splitting that cannot be repaired. The world become game-board, mere image viewed as the field of the subject's sovereign activity, is ultimately unsustainable. Such work testifies to the problems of play and sovereignty being worked over by those who experience German modernity firsthand.

In thinking the meaning of play in modernity, in addition to writers readily identified with the Weimar period like Benjamin, Kracauer, Heidegger, and Freud, I have also repeatedly drawn on a group of German philosophers who lived through the Weimar Republic and began reflecting on play afterward: Eugen Fink, Hannah Arendt, and Hans-Georg Gadamer were all students in the German 1920s, while Gustav Bally and Johan Huizinga worked and taught in Berlin and Munich, respectively. To this list we might add Ludwig Wittgenstein, like Fritz Lang an artillery scout in World War I, whose *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) proposed an understanding of the construction of meaning in language as a game.[7] In the terms of a Foucauldian archaeology of knowledge, this proliferation of work on play in the wake of Weimar suggests that play may be understood as the very episteme of the modern epoch.

Whether anthropological, ontological, phenomenological, or deconstructive, fully fleshed theories of play begin emerging at that historical moment in which that apparently essential facet

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[6] Ibid, 35.
[7] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Malden, MA: Wiley and Blackwell, 2010).

of the human is being absorbed by the technical milieu of modernity, what Walter Benjamin would call its "second technology." Weimar Germany is the flashpoint, the moment at which a highly educated and self-reflexive culture tossed about by historical forces, weathering the arbitrary technological, social, and cultural effects of world war, world economy, and modernization, perceived acutely the "play element in culture"—the play element in the human's very being—that the machine, writ large, appeared to be replacing. The mechanical interface that appeared most cogently as a Benjaminian "play form of a second nature," within this historical context, was the cinema, the emblem of a technical milieu that, in appearing to absorb the human capacity to play, also made play an object of reflection.

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