The Unpastoral: Walter Ruttmann and the Politics of Symphonic Form

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ABSTRACT: The musical analogy that underpins Walter Ruttmann's Weimar-era city film *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* has generally been understood as a cipher for his uncritical, quietist political perspective—the idea being that Ruttmann aestheticizes rather than analyzes the formal harmonies of the modern capitalist metropolis. I argue here that the musical analogy has precisely the opposite function. The symphonic form has a longstanding tradition as the emblem of bourgeois humanist societal ideals: the symphonic "sounding together" of multiple, heterogeneous voices, together with the temporal development from harmony, through dissonance, back to higher-level harmony, combine to represent a particularly nineteenth century, geschichtsphilosophical understanding of humanity's inherent tendency to harmoniously commune. As both a classical musician and an educated member of the German bourgeoisie, Ruttmann would have been intimately familiar with this musico-political tradition, which makes the question of what he does to it inherently political as well—and what he does is subject it to the most deflationary of parodic inversions. The result is a radical critique of modernity that differs profoundly from the critiques of Ruttmann's Marxist contemporaries, and which may be all the more contemporarily relevant for this difference.

KEYWORDS: German modernism, Walter Ruttmann, Geschichtsphilosophie, city film, interwar period

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The musical analogy that underpins Walter Ruttmann's Weimar-era city film *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* has generally been understood as a cipher for his uncritical, quietist political perspective, the idea being that Ruttmann aestheticizes rather than analyzes the formal harmonies of the modern metropolis. I argue here that the musical analogy functions in precisely the

opposite way. The symphonic form has a long tradition as an emblem of bourgeois societal ideals: the symphonic "sounding together" of multiple, heterogeneous voices, together with the temporal development from harmony through dissonance back to higher-level harmony, combine to represent a particularly nineteenth century, *ge-schichts*philosophical understanding of humanity's inherent tendency to harmoniously commune. Ruttmann, as both a classical musician and an educated member of the German bourgeoisie, would have been intimately familiar with this musico-political tradition, which makes the question of what he *does* to it political as well. And what he does is subject it to the most deflationary of parodic inversions. The result is a radical critique of modernity that differs profoundly from the critiques of Ruttmann's Marxist contemporaries. The dominant tenor of Ruttmann's political perspective consists, on my reading, in its comprehensive rejection of modernist progress narratives as such.

The word "symphony" in the title of Walter Ruttmann's Weimar-era city film *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927) has seldom played a significant role in its reception. The more general idea of a "musical" dimension to the film's editing technique, however, has been of decisive importance from the beginning, and has nearly always gone hand in hand with a diagnosis of the film's political disengagement. According to a still-dominant interpretive tradition that goes back at least as far as Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler*, the "optical music" generated by Ruttmann's montage practice epitomizes his programmatically neutral, apolitical "surface approach," which "relies on the formal qualities of the objects rather than on their meanings."[1] Contemporary analyses of the film have tended to accept the basic terms of Kracauer's assessment while frequently rejecting its negative tenor. *Berlin* succeeds as a masterpiece of 1920's New Objectivity, on one commonly articulated view, precisely *because* Ruttmann refuses to impose on his footage the tendentious arc of any particular socio-historical meaning, opting instead to let the existing "rhythms" of the modern metropolis dictate his cuts.[2] The result is a filmic strategy that manages to be simultaneously formalist and mimetic: on the one hand, Ruttmann's editing technique treats the images of modern city life like so many tones to be arbitrarily arranged into pleasingly symmetrical, metrically regular constellations; on the other hand, in doing so, it mimics the procedures of the city itself, which imposes the forms of modern experience indiscriminately onto the "material" of its inhabitants' lives. The musical analogy thus operates, throughout this interpretive tradition, as a cipher for Ruttmann's political quietism.

Without at all intending to dispute Ruttmann's well-documented New Objectivist alignment—and, later, pro-Fascist leanings—I argue that the musical dimension of his film has precisely the opposite valence from the one usually ascribed to it, namely: an overtly critical, profoundly political thrust. The politics in question are not those of Ruttmann's Marxist filmmaking contemporaries, like Eisenstein and Vertov, to whom he is so often counterposed; nor are they recognizably liberal humanist. But Ruttmann's political perspective may be all the more relevant to our contemporary moment for being less easily specified, since its dominant tenor consists, on my reading, in its comprehensive rejection of modernist progress narratives. An analysis of the film that works to uncover the ideological commitments behind its approach to metropolitan

form-matter relations—an analysis that takes seriously the possibility that New Objective musical formalism might "mean" just as much, and just as pointedly, as the Soviets' Marxist materialisms—can thus provide insight into a mode of critique that is in some sense more radical, or at least more radically *critical*, than either of its better known interwar alternatives. Ruttmann's eventual fascist sympathies emerge out of his conviction that the (other) political paradigms of his time are outdated, since they rely on an inherited, nineteenth century model of history—and historical transformation—that the modern metropolis renders absurd.

This nineteenth century model of history finds one of its paradigmatic aesthetic expressions in the classical symphony. The temporal arc of the classical symphonic form, with its emphatically purposeful progression from a simple theme, to the development of that theme in all its dissonant potential, "back" to the "goal" of a higher-level, harmonic synthesis, reflects the classical, *geschichts*philosophical narrative of progressive human development or *Bildung*, as paradigmatically articulated by thinkers like Kant, Schiller, and Hegel.[3] The symphony exemplifies this narrative "directly," since it need not tell a particular story to symbolize its progress, and, more importantly, it also does so collectively, since a multitude of heterogeneous voices must work together, in periodically discordant tension, to realize the telos of a non-arbitrary, non-coercive, and hence truly "*sym* + phonic" organization of elements. Ruttmann's film, so my central thesis, scrupulously obeys the generic dictates of this classical form as a substitute for more conventional emplotment devices, while simultaneously aggressively perverting its classical meaning. The implied premise is that this perversion at the level of art corresponds to a prior, deeper perversion at the level of historical reality: where the classical symphony follows the trajectory of musical materials as they "organically" coalesce into a form of togetherness, *Berlin* traces the "mechanical" procedures by which urban form dictates the shape of all possible development from the start.

Ruttmann's analysis of modern society's profoundly anti-symphonic perversity thus constitutes his generally overlooked contribution to avant-garde debates surrounding the fraught politics of form-bestowal. This contribution resituates him, in turn, within a context of Weimar-era thinking which, while incisively critical of the capitalist status quo, does not fit neatly into traditionally progressive categories.[4] Unlike many of Ruttmann's best-known European contemporaries, who remain committed to an essentially *geschichts*philosophical model of aesthetic and societal transformation, according to which complex unities like artworks and societies emerge dialectically from the productive tension between form and matter, Ruttmann uncompromisingly consigns the whole paradigm of generative dissonance to the past. He does not do so, however, from a perspective of cool indifference or neutral objectivity, but rather of crisis-driven critique.[5] His formalism is sociologically and philosophically motivated by his belief in the impotence of modern material to dialectically *resist*—whether physically, psychologically, aesthetically, or politically—the necessarily tyrannical determinations of modern form. The conclusions he will eventually draw from this perceived demise of the dialectic, which lead him to pin his hopes on an alternative model of top-down form-bestowal, are unambiguously abhorrent. But we do not need to follow

68   him into fascism in order to profit from the structural analysis of modernity that his film performs. The logic of his cynicism, once uncovered, should in fact feel disturbingly familiar, since the absence of viable candidates to replace *geschichts*philosophical models of progress is still an entirely contemporary problem.

The excavation of Ruttmann's cynical logic will require, at the outset, a brief overview of the nineteenth century symphonic paradigm because it is only against this historical backdrop that the political implications of the modernist "musical analogy"—for Ruttmann as for his Marxist contemporaries—can begin to come clear.[6]

I.

Claims for the philosophical, political, and media-theoretical significance of the symphony, as brought to fulfilment by its undisputed master Beethoven, begin early among reviewers of the very first performances. The most famous of these early responses stems from the German Romantic writer, E. T. A. Hoffmann, who argues with respect to the 1808 premiere of the Fifth ("Heroic") and Sixth ("Pastoral") symphonies that Beethoven's compositional style represents the pinnacle of what art in any medium can achieve, namely a direct, communal experience of spiritual transformation or *Bildung*. Hoffmann himself takes Beethoven's "heroic" Fifth Symphony as his privileged example of this transfigurational dynamic: "How irresistibly does this wondrous composition transport the listener onward, through a single, continuously crescendoing climax, into the spiritual empire [*Geisterreich*] of the infinite!"[7] The subsequent interpretive tradition, however, focuses with equal or greater justification on the "pastoral" Sixth, which doubles the impact of the transformative symphonic arc by associating it with the classical *geschichts*philosophical trope of a secularized salvation history. Beethoven's own movement titles (1. "Awakening of happy feelings on arrival in the countryside," 2. "Scene by the brook," 3. "Cheerful gathering of country folk," 4. "Thunder. Storm," and 5. "Shepherd's song. Happy and thankful feelings after the storm") make clear that he has in mind the triadic structure of an originary idyll first threatened and then, at a higher level, regained. The "gently flowing waters" of the early movements give way, in the fourth movement, to the cathartic crisis of the thunderstorm—operating here in its traditional biblical role as an encounter with the angry deity's punishing and purifying deluge—which in turn resolves, or rather gets sublimated, into a communal outpouring of gratitude and praise in the final fifth movement.

According to the many nineteenth century interpreters who emphasize the parallels to the classical *geschichts*philosophical model of paradise-fall-redemption, the point is precisely not that the *Pastorale* represents a return to the tradition of content-dependent program music (just as the point, for Hoffmann, is not that the *Eroica* represents a new turn toward content-free formalist abstraction).[8] The point is rather, on both accounts, that aesthetic form and worldly material come together, in this particular medium and at the hands of this particular composer, in a way they have never before been able to do. The symphonic genre requires no external referent or content—no sung text, as in pre-symphonic genres like the oratorio; no storyline, as in literature,

drama, or opera; no represented object, as in the plastic arts—on which to hang its temporal development. And what this means, within the context of contemporaneous, "organicist" theories about art, is that the rule or principle of symphonic unfolding must be presumed to stem from within rather than without. The trajectory of a Beethoven symphony, which binds the heterogeneous multiplicity of individual instruments and movements into a cohesive, musical whole, springs from the form-bestowing force of Beethoven's creative inspiration rather than the pre-existing plotlines of a given fictional scenario or historical event. It can therefore be understood to represent the trajectory of human spiritual transformation as such, in a far more general and univer- salizable way than other art forms. Beethoven sublates the classical musical structures of exposition-development-recapitulation and tonic-modulation-return, by driving the dynamic of thematic and tonal negation to unprecedented extremes of variation and dissonance, before spiraling back to reintegrate these extremes into a more capacious unity of unprecedented assimilatory reach. In the process, he elevates the individual spirits of his listeners, who follow him along this path, by propelling them toward the higher, "symphonic" unity of an organically-organized, harmoniously collaborating, community of equals. The result is an art form that does double duty as an emblem, throughout the entirety of the nineteenth century, for progressive socio-political ideals.

From the perspective of this interpretive tradition, the genre-transcending choral conclusion to Beethoven's Ninth and final symphony—which proclaims the arrival of universal brotherhood in the words of the classical *geschichts*philosophical thinker, Friedrich Schiller ("*Alle Menschen werden Brüder!*")—appears less as an aberration than a realization of the symphony's latent tendency to transgress its own limits. Rich- ard Wagner draws this conclusion explicitly, and influentially, in an essay he writes in order to position himself as Beethoven's rightful heir.[9] Wagnerian opera, on Wagner's own interpretation, actualizes the symphonic potential to synthesize by incorporating an ever-vaster array of heterogeneous audio, visual, and conceptual material. Wagner's "infinite melodies" are designed to be quite literally unbounded in their capacity to subsume every imaginable tonality and affect within the structure of a well-formed compositional whole, which means also that they are designed to stand in for—and point the way toward—the political ideal of a radically heterogeneous yet all-inclusive community. Neither slavishly mimetic nor hopelessly abstract in their relationship to the external reality they simultaneously model and transform, these profoundly un- conventional "melodies," with their defiantly unmetrical "rhythms," reveal something fundamental, for Wagner, about the underlying structure of history, namely: its pro- pensity to *flow* meaningfully toward the end goal of a totalizing harmony.

Wagner's extraordinary significance for the European avant-garde, in general, and for the modernist artists of Germany and Russia, in particular, has been thoroughly documented, as has the widespread fascination, among the same groups, with the aesthetic and philosophical category of "rhythm."[10] Yet in part because the latter phe- nomenon is so seldom explored together with the former—and thus, also, together with the entire nineteenth century tradition of musical thought whose apotheosis Wagner so emphatically claims to represent—the media-historical implications of both have

70   often remained unnecessarily obscure. When, for instance, filmmakers like Eisenstein, Ruttmann, Hans Richter, and Fritz Lang, or cultural critics like Ludwig Klages and Georg Simmel, speak of rhythm in relation to the modern experience, they invariably have in mind, as Michael Cowan has pointed out in his study of Lang's *Metropolis*, an opposition between the "healthy," organic rhythms (*Rhythmus*) of volitional human activity—which is to say, of non-alienated work—and the "artificial," inorganic meters (*Takt*) of machines or mechanized labor (Cowan, "The Heart Machine"). This opposition, however, together with the various kinds of aesthetic valuations it can be called upon to support, is at heart a nineteenth century construct: one linked not only, or even primarily, to the Marxist critique of modernity, but rather to an entire epoch of *geschichts*philosophical thought concerning the fundamentally teleological character of historical time.[11]

An authentically rhythmic sequence, from this perspective, has the shape of a spiral unfurling, with each downbeat marking an additional turn along the path to the purpose or end (*Zweck*), such that the repetition of the accent, paradoxically, comes to represent progress rather than stasis. The time in question is punctuated organically from within, as the empty continuum of linear clock time is not, which means that the most appropriate medium for representing its flow will be the one that best lends itself to an analogous model of purposive self-articulation. E. T. A. Hoffmann's celebration of Beethoven's dynamically-motivated metrical liberties; Richard Wagner's rejection of conventional, beat-based measures in favor of poetico-musical periods tied to the arc of a linguistic phrase; Eisenstein's polemic against the purely metrical montage of his contemporary, Pudovkin (which reproduces quite precisely Wagner's earlier polemic against the proponents of fixed musical meters): all these valorizations have in common their commitment to the existence, or the potential for existence, of a temporality that tends inherently rather than accidentally toward non-coercive communal structure, and of an aesthetic medium that, in the right hands, can be expected to do the same.

A comprehensive account of the media-theoretical implications of the symphonic paradigm, and of the transformations it undergoes from the early nineteenth century through the early twentieth, clearly lies beyond the purview of this study. The development here sketched out, however, should suffice to make clear that a Kracauer-style critique of Ruttmann's *Berlin*, which censures it for operating "metrically" rather than "rhythmically" and "mechanically" rather than "organically," remains firmly within the very framework whose viability the film seeks, on my reading, to call into question. The polemical force of Ruttmann's *Berlin* derives from the premise that modern time *flows* differently from *geschichts*philosophical time, and that this fundamental difference in fluid dynamics renders the central categories of *geschichts*philosophical politics obsolete. The filmic argument proceeds in several stages, which broadly mirror the developmental stages of Beethoven's *Pastorale*: the introduction of the flow theme at the outset, which coincides with the journey from nature to city (as Beethoven's symphony moves from city to nature); the development of this theme, throughout the first three acts or movements; the "cathartic crisis" of the thunderstorm in the climactic fourth; and the restoration of harmonic-hydraulic order in the concluding fifth.

Theme. Ruttmann's symphony opens with the exposition of a theme, which, like all good musical themes, contains within itself the seeds of discord and dissonance to come. A stationary image of languidly rippling water—the camera hovers over it just long enough to recall other, far more ancient beginnings ("and the Spirit of God moved upon the surface of the waters . . . and God separated the light from the darkness")—gives way gradually, almost imperceptibly, to a sequence in which the ripples speed up and become more unidirectional, as though agitated (fig. 1).[12] The lines of the waves come ever faster until they are suddenly replaced by, or rather, morph into, a series of abstract, horizontal bars, sliding vertically downward in the same rhythm as the prior waves. Behind the bars, a white, two-dimensional disk glides around in a circular motion. The movements of these abstract, geometrical components continue to accelerate until they, too, are suddenly replaced, via match dissolve, by the horizontal bars of a railroad crossing signal (fig. 2).

It is not necessary to go all the way back to the Book of Genesis in order to see this opening theme as a rumination on the emergence of form from formlessness, which means also, as a meta-commentary on the conditions (symphonic, filmic, socio-political, cosmic) of organization per se.[13] The shift from waves to bars may indeed allude directly to such ancient, water-based models of order creation, together with the later, wave-based metaphorics of thinkers from Leibniz to Wagner and beyond. But this shift

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Fig. 1. Opening sequence, *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, directed by Walter Ruttmann (1927; Los Angeles, CA: Flicker Alley, 2015), DVD.

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Fig. 2. Opening sequence, *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, directed by Walter Ruttmann (1927; Los Angeles, CA: Flicker Alley, 2015), DVD.

certainly also alludes to Ruttmann's earlier work in abstract film—three of the four pieces in his "Opus" series begin or end with animated images of waves—and as such it also highlights the fraught relationship between photographic material and formal abstraction, index and construction, physical reality and art. The result is a deeply personal, and uniquely film-historical, reimagining of the primordial form-matter agon. Ruttmann's prelude gives visual expression to his battle for control over the slippery "stuff" of the city—his struggle to "channel" the continuous flow of urban life into the rectangular confines of the cinematic frame—a dynamic he elsewhere explicitly associates with the equally ancient metaphorics of an erotic coupling, or rather rape:

> This modern stone hydra was moodier during the filming process than any human diva . . . . Babylonian towers of film material piled up, it was necessary to sift, to order, so that a mosaic, a symphony of the metropolis could emerge from the chaos—a symphony of the city with which I lay for a whole year in battle. Whether she's been conquered [*bezwungen*] whether her chameleon-like face has been captured [*gebannt*] on the strips of celluloid, only the coming premier will show.[14]

As this passage from *Berlin*'s promotional materials implies, the remainder of the film will continue to develop the self-reflexive theme of a potentially recalcitrant, fundamentally unstable substrate—variously imagined both as water and as Woman—which needs to be trapped, dominated, and domesticated before it can be offered up for public enjoyment.

Ruttmann's exposition, however, does not simply display this familiar philosophical problematic. Rather, it equivocates, and in equivocating, poses a question that the rest of the film will also have to work to answer, much like the conventional symphonic development responds to the harmonic ambiguity implicit in the symphonic theme. The ambiguity arises at the point of the two match cuts. On the one hand, the sudden appearance of a profoundly inorganic, purely formal rigidity, superimposed upon the ultimate in uncontainable matter, combines with the subsequent impression of the rounded form, circling restlessly on the other side of the moving lines, to convey a sense of imprisonment, of vital life trapped behind the bars of empty form. Viewed solely from this perspective, Ruttmann's position could appear to be a version of the one Sergei Eisenstein espouses when he asserts, in a roughly contemporaneous little essay called "The Dramaturgy of Film Form (The Dialectic Approach to Film Form)" (1929), that filmic structure emerges from the dialectical tension between nature and industry, woman and man, passivity and production, matter and form.[15] The first half of the film, in which a world of natural, dynamic flux displays itself repeatedly from behind the linear shapes imposed by modern urban technology (the vertical beams of a bridge, the slats of a railing, the skeletal frame of a partially-completed building, electrical wires against the sky), will further or at least further allow this interpretation.

On the other hand, the match cut between the regular diagonal movement of the waves and the equally regular vertical movement of the horizontal bars suggests that modern nature in its rawest, most apparently formless form, as the proverbial, primordial "stuff of life," may in fact already contain *within itself* the principle of its technological domestication, and that its mechanical confinement might therefore be a function of its own internal dynamic. Such a reading, which effectively turns the organic unity principle of the symphony against itself, would render the imprisonment of matter fundamentally inescapable because—dialectically speaking—fundamentally unproductive. Without the potential for a truly antithetical clash of opposites, no actual transformation toward higher synthesis can be expected to occur. The second half of Ruttmann's symphony unequivocally "resolves" the ambiguity of the thematic exposition in favor of this second, more sinister hypothesis.[16]

Development. Ruttmann's filmic preamble concludes with a train making its way from the countryside into Berlin proper, which allows for a virtuosic riff on the perceptual implications of both train travel and cinema. As the train pulls into the station, close-ups of engine parts decompressing (one lets out steam while the other drips with condensation) serve to remind the viewer that the journey just completed depended entirely on the hydraulic technology of channeling fluids, and that the fluid being so channeled is the same one with whose increasing "dynamization" the film began. The first three acts of the film develop this theme by repeatedly foregrounding various urban channeling mechanisms, in a sequence that progresses methodically from the literal to the metaphorical. A long close-up of a curbside grate, which recalls the horizontal bars of the opening animation, gives way to an underground shot of water flowing from pipes in a wall; a shot of two different many-windowed, rectangular facades is followed by the sinuously curving pipes and cylindrical tanks of two different boiler

rooms. The implication is that the camera has penetrated beneath the well-ordered, rectilinear surface of the city in order to offer a privileged glimpse of the various physical channeling mechanisms it conceals. Here, in the normally invisible bowels of these massive buildings, or others like them, water circulates and boils and bubbles endlessly through a series of highly pressurized paths, providing energy in its confinement for the functioning of the forms that keep it trapped. The sequence culminates in the image of an electrical transformer station, an intricate web of wires against the backdrop of a blank and featureless sky, which announces the complicity of channeling mechanism and linear form by collapsing them into a single figure.

With these early images of physical channeling, Ruttmann prepares the way for an extended reflection on the channeling of human movement. The subsequent sequence, which traces the paths of workers making their way to work, has the musical structure of a gradual crescendo, beginning with a solitary man leaving his house and ending with whole streets full of anonymous feet. Crucially, not one figure, in any of these scenes, opposes the streaming crowd, despite a presumable plurality of work destinations.[17] Ruttmann emphasizes this point, in the style of Eisenstein's intellectual montage, by alternating shots of workers entering a factory with shots of cattle being driven into a slaughterhouse. The steady buildup culminates, once the workers arrive at their places, in the "scherzo" of the famous factory montage: Act I concludes with a veritable dance of machines, over which the human agents that set the dance in motion (the scene begins with a close-up of a human hand flipping a large lever) no longer appear to have any real influence. Act II shifts the focus from the manufacturing to the communication sector, but otherwise proceeds in parallel. It, too, concludes with a dance of machines, which are this time shown to be quite literally spinning out of control. Ruttmann rotates the final shot of typewriter keys to produce a vortex-like visual effect, which then dissolves into a full-screen Duchampian spiral, an image that will come to operate as a kind of leitmotiv for the rest of the film.

Act III, finally, ups the ante on the exploration of urban channeling dynamics by taking as its metaphorical domain the hydraulics of human emotion—specifically, erotic desire—and with it, the life of the street. The pairing exploits the double meaning of the German word *Verkehr*, which refers simultaneously to sexual intercourse and traffic.[18] Crowds mill around street vendors and jostle each other while navigating the incessant flow of vehicles. Traffic policemen direct the current, interspersed with multiple full-screen closeups of a single traffic arrow, emblem of vehicular channeling (fig. 3). The corresponding erotic sequence begins with a well-dressed couple out for a stroll, interspersed with shots of two different shop window displays: the first a female mannequin holding a camera, a mechanical wind lifting her skirt suggestively, the second a male figure sharpening a giant pen (fig. 4). This jarring set of juxtapositions presents the first installment of Ruttmann's sustained exploration of sexual coupling, which will insist throughout on the anachronism (within the context of the modern city) of bourgeois romantic categories like subjectivity, intimacy, and love. Ruttmann's cross-cuts are designed to suggest the fungibility of his various images—a laughing couple for a prostitute and her customer, one strolling woman for another, shop window man-
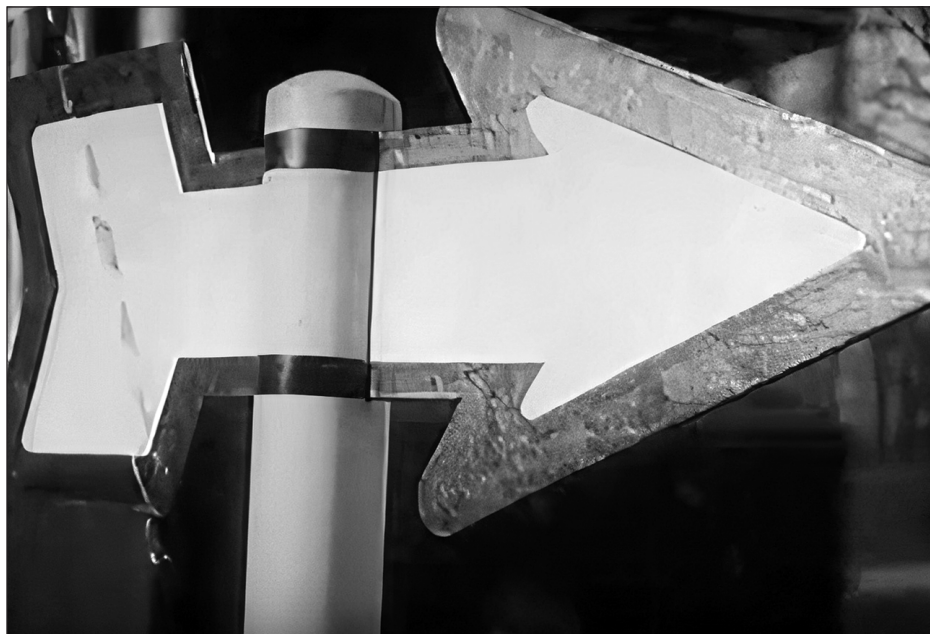
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Fig. 3. Act III, *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, directed by Walter Ruttmann (1927; Los Angeles, CA: Flicker Alley, 2015), DVD.

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Fig. 4. Act III, *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, directed by Walter Ruttmann (1927; Los Angeles, CA: Flicker Alley, 2015), DVD.

nequins for humans—and by extension, the fungibility of the erotic relationships they depict. Modern sexual desire, so the implication, produces the same basic configurations regardless of how, precisely, it is packaged and consumed.[19] Thus constrained, the "metaphorical" flow of human psychic energy becomes one more "literal" material to be channeled through the city's hidden compression mechanisms, and the tension that arises from this channeling dynamic becomes one more source of power for the metaphor-deflating, difference-abolishing engine that drives the perpetual capitalist motion of the twentieth century metropolis.

Crisis. The question that thereby arises, however—the question that was first raised, in nuce, by the ambiguity of Ruttmann's opening imagery—is whether this material still possesses the power to revolt, and in revolting, to *trans*form the forms that constrain it. It is this question that the turning point of Ruttmann's fourth act, which revolves around his modernist reworking of Beethoven's "Thunder. Storm," will definitively answer in the negative.

The act appears at first glance to tell a classical, dialectical story about physical and psychic energies dissonantly "bursting forth" (antithesis) from their existing systemic bonds (thesis), in order to make room for new and more capacious structuring principles (synthesis). The crescendo toward crisis begins after the afternoon siesta, with images of daily newspapers being printed, folded, and distributed. As the information-disseminating icon of modernity, which gives legible yet disposable form to an otherwise shapeless mass of unassimilable data, the newspaper has already played a prominent role in the earlier traffic-and-channeling sequences. The distribution scenes, however, culminate in the close-up of a single reader, whose paper suddenly dissolves into a sequence of animated, one-word headlines that quite literally jump off the printed page: *Krise*, *Mord*, *Börse, Heirat*, *Geld* ("crisis," "murder," "stock exchange," "marriage," "money"). Ruttmann repeats the final word, "money," several times before finally cutting to a series of images that give overt symbolic expression to a generalized state of vertigo. A scene shot from a rollercoaster literalizes the dramatic ups and downs "experienced" in the act of reading about the mercurial money markets; a revolving door, the view from a spinning amusement park ride, and another full-screen shot of the Duchampian spiral work together to literalize, once again, the related phenomenon of "spinning out of control."[20] Ruttmann then shifts to the "natural" images of disquiet provided by the impending storm: leaves form spiraling patterns in the swirling winds, awnings flutter fitfully against a threatening sky, people run for shelter, the revolving door spins. A hat sans owner careens along the ground, recalling the opening lines of Jakob van Hoddis' Expressionist poem, "End of the World": "From the Bourgeois' pointy head the hat flies off; through the air it echoes like a scream."[21]

Interrupting this visual litany of epochal anxiety, the camera cuts to an image of a woman leaning over the barrier of a bridge. There follows immediately an image of rushing water that can only be understood, in accordance with established filmic conventions, as a point-of-view shot. A remarkable aberration in the context of Ruttmann's otherwise protagonist-free film, the shot prepares the way for a brief, almost hyperbolically plot-driven sequence, in which the vertiginous view from the roller-

coaster and the dizzying effect of the spinning camera now reappear—intercut with extreme close-ups of the woman's dilated, desperate eyes—as visual manifestations of her intensely subjective, interior experience (fig. 5). The "story" culminates in a final shot of the Duchampian spiral before coming to its "tragic" conclusion with a rather modest splash (fig. 6).

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Fig. 5. Act IV, *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, directed by Walter Ruttmann (1927; Los Angeles, CA: Flicker Alley, 2015), DVD.

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Fig. 6. Act IV, *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, directed by Walter Ruttmann (1927; Los Angeles, CA: Flicker Alley, 2015), DVD.

On the one hand, then: Ruttmann's fourth act is clearly designed to fit neatly into a long tradition of stormy climaxes, from biblical theophanies to pietist epiphanies to political revolutions.[22] The cathartic dynamic of tension coming to a head and released, which governs Beethoven's fourth movement at both the harmonic and thematic levels, gives the *Berlin* film its characteristically narrative shape, even in the absence of any overarching diegetic storyline. On the other hand: sensitive readers of the film have always noted that this crisis narrative is effectively defanged by its explicit subsumption into the realm of spectacle. Pointing in particular to the scenes directly following upon the suicide—several shots of bystanders pointing at the water plus an abrupt cut to fashion models on a runway—these readers frequently go on to criticize Ruttmann for trivializing and aestheticizing the misery he depicts.[23] Such critiques, which operate in the tradition of Eisenstein and Kracauer, implicitly presuppose a real potential for systemic destabilization via the liberating eruption of repressed, subjective energies (which Ruttmann can then be taken to task for undermining). In doing so, they overlook the crucial fact that Ruttmann himself never invests either the suicide scene, or the anarchic, anti-systemic energies the scene appears to represent, with a potentially redemptive capacity. Indeed, he does precisely the opposite: By foregrounding the domestication of trauma as spectacle—according to a logic so insistent and hyperbolic that the effect can only be parody—he instead asks his viewers to acknowledge the absolute power of the totalizing urban mechanism, which recuperates for its own purposes even such infrequent acts of apparent resistance. The trivialization of the dialectical dynamic, in other words, is here precisely the point of the storm.

Consider, for starters, the thoroughly mediated character of the "experience" that sets the crisis imagery in motion: the words that spring off the page so frantically, preparing the way for the woman's frantic "response," do not qualify as precipitating causes or possible reasons for the crisis, since they themselves are nothing more than linguistic substitutes for real phenomena that may or may not exist. And they are substitutes, moreover, that have been channeled through a mechanism (the newspaper) designed only to dispense filtered, pre-digested information to a collective reading public. In the wake of these provocatively contentless signs, the images of crisis that follow—many of them deliberate citations of postwar filmic cliches—serve primarily to call into question the authenticity of the very category they represent. Amusement park rides, despite their capacity to temporarily destabilize, remain mere spectacles of movement, suggesting nothing more subversive than a fully domesticated experience of transgression, a socially acceptable outlet for anti-establishment, thrill-seeking energies. The disquieting power of the spinning Duchampian spiral, residing as it does in the optical illusion of three-dimensionality, makes it at best a supremely ironic vehicle for the expression of invisible psychic depths—a situation exacerbated by its prior appearance in Act III as an attention-grabbing gimmick in a shop window (fig. 7). On a more general level, the pronounced circularity of movement shared by the spinning ride, the Duchampian spiral, the revolving door, and the swirling leaves, which has been linked in other readings to a subjective and possibly feminized experience of vertigo (and thus to an alien power at odds with the linear, masculine forces of technological

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Fig. 7. Act III, *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, directed by Walter Ruttmann (1927; Los Angeles, CA: Flicker Alley, 2015), DVD.

repression) forcefully and disturbingly recalls the spinning wheels, disks, and platforms that form the visual foundation of the infamous factory sequence.[24] By incorporating such commodified cliches into the "consciousness" of the desperate woman, Ruttmann effectively undermines the whole idea of an uncontaminated interiority, and with it the necessary foundation for the bourgeois narrative practices whose conventions he is here exploiting and parodying. The woman, with her borrowed thoughts, becomes less a human being than a placeholder for the abstract, ultimately linguistic category of social anxiety, no more individual and particular than the amusement park rides and optical toys she apparently needs in order to "think."[25]

The images that follow the suicide scene continue this pattern of disambiguation far beyond the provocative cross-cutting between bridge-jumping and fashion show. The crisis sequence culminates in a brief disruption of normal traffic patterns, occasioned by the passing of emergency vehicles and accompanied by a montage of traffic arrows, all pointing in different directions to underline the momentary breakdown of the preeminent channeling mechanism. Once the fire trucks have passed, the image of a dog shaking himself dry makes clear that both storm and crisis are over, at which point the workday ends and the entertainment segment begins. As the last in a series of crisis images, the resolution of the traffic emergency stands in for the resolution of all the others. It is therefore particularly significant that the rupture it resolves never actually occurred. The entire "emergency" unfolds as an exemplary display of social organization, smoothly and competently directed by a traffic policeman, who holds up the perfectly obedient cars to make way for the equally law-abiding rescue vehicles.

80   Ruttmann even varies the camera perspectives on the passing trucks, providing several high-angle as well as street-level shots, which serve to expose the emergency in its spectacular essence, and thus to defang it on a purely visual level as well.[26] By framing the crisis segment in this fashion, the film implies that even the dramatic and defiantly human accumulation of tension alluded to by the suicide sequence must be understood from the first as an illusory, mechanical disruption that remains well within the norms and forms of the social structures it pretends to subvert. The entire episode thereby reveals itself as the last in a long line of similar, though in general far less intricate efforts to discredit all possible contenders for the title of uncommodified space—a category that includes religion (compare, for instance, Ruttmann's juxtaposition in Act III of a ludicrous procession of costumed men carrying advertising placards for medicinal tablets with a very similarly attired Buddhist monk), political activism (note the analogous presentation of street vendors and leftist orators, also in Act III), and, of course, romantic love (recall the mannequins and the interchangeable women).[27]

The result is a formally sophisticated experiment designed to probe and prod without pathos the utter lack of any potentially redemptive tension between the modern individual and the abstract, social structures that hold human particularity in permanent, hopeless check. Ruttmann's formidable formal and technical creativity allows him to simultaneously reflect and reflect *on* a reality from which materiality itself has all but disappeared as an autonomous domain for the exercise of artistic freedom. No amount of formal or thematic breathing room could coax the various images of the city into revealing an uncontaminated particularity they never, in fact, possessed. Ruttmann's insistence on a totalizing formal structure in which discordant elements get erased rather than resolved—and in which, consequently, the harmonious heterogeneity of the symphonic One-over-Many appears as its own negative mirror image—thus takes the shape of a political and epistemological decision rather than an aestheticizing one. He subordinates Berlin to the demands of a perfectly empty spectacle, not because he likes the way it looks when he does so, but because he believes this subordination to contain the truth of the modern, urban condition: artist and citizen alike, on his view, have access to the theophanic rupture of transcendence only in the parodic form of a mildly inconvenient thunderstorm, and to the spiralic energy of *geschichts*philosophical depths only as an optical illusion spinning two-dimensionally in a shop window.

Resolution. As the single most important new medium of modern self-representation, film is of course entirely complicit in this specifically modern condition, and Ruttmann openly acknowledges this fact by ending as he began, with a self-reflexive rumination on the inescapability of filmic forms. *Berlin*'s final shot is a searchlight tower at night, perched high on a dark hill, its far-reaching beam swinging from side to side like a pendulum (fig. 8). The image "speaks," in this context, primarily of the camera's omnipresent arc of light, which has the ability to capture simply by rendering visible and to render visible simply by being present. The form-bestowing agency that hovered invisibly over the waters in the opening frame of the film, like the holy spirit at the dawn of creation, reappears here at the end—in perfect obedience to the symphonic rule of recapitulation, which requires an explicit return to the origin—as the now-visible

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Fig. 8. Act V, *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, directed by Walter Ruttmann (1927; Los Angeles, CA: Flicker Alley, 2015), DVD.

medium of modernity's *post*-symphonic principle of organization. Like the opening sequence, the final sequence playfully alludes to Ruttmann's avant-garde filmmaking origins, since a similar searchlight pattern appears three times in the abstract animated short, *Opus 1*. It does so, however, according to an emphatically political logic that turns the aesthetic activity of "rendering abstract" into a figure for the historical process by which societal material disappears into societal forms: the searchlight of film operates here both as privileged symbol and as ideal vehicle for the inherently tyrannical deployment of modern society's (other) form-bestowing powers.

It would be hard to imagine a more explicit, and more explicitly critical, acknowledgement that filmic formalism offers no escape—not even a brief, aestheticizing respite—from the lived formalisms of the capitalist metropolis. One could think, in this context, of Ruttmann's contemporaneous work in film advertising, which Michael Cowan has convincingly argued should be considered an integral part of his artistic profile, and which overtly places the power of avant-garde filmic technique at the service of the urban consumption machine (Cowan, *Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity*). One could think, too, and perhaps with even greater legitimacy, of Ruttmann's later works of Nazi propaganda, which largely abandon formalist techniques in favor of an entirely different—and, from Ruttmann's own perspective, more hope-infused—model of form-bestowal.[28] But the fact that this stylistic shift occurs against the backdrop of a maximum rather than a minimum of critical reflection, as an outgrowth of the pessimistic analysis to which Ruttmann subjects the forms of modernity in *Berlin*, is precisely

what makes it still relevant. Before Ruttmann gave up on the analytic potential of art and opted instead for the messianic miracle of the *Führer*, he posed some difficult questions about the ostensibly liberatory potential of the repressed "materials" that subtend modern society—physically, psychologically, economically, politically—which we would do well to *re*pose with respect to our own, contemporary materialisms. There is nothing inherently revelatory or revolutionary, Ruttmann here suggests, about flows as opposed to static forms. The various continua that underpin so many contemporary attempts to envision the source of societal transformation, and which have so often been associated with the perceptual continuities of film—from the Lacanian Real to Deleuzian becoming to the fluxes and fluidities of new materialism—may ultimately be just as quantifiable, controllable, and consumable as the strictures they claim to burst.[29] Of course, Ruttmann's pessimism could be misplaced. But if we want to claim that it is, then the burden of proof will be on us.

Notes

1. See Siegried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), 184–89.

2. For a selection of representative approaches in this vein, see Sabine Hake, "Urban Spectacle in Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin, Symphony of the Big City*," in *Dancing on the Volcano: Essays on the Culture of the Weimar Republic*, ed. Thomas W. Kniesche and Stephen Brockmann (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994), 127–42; Anton Kaes, "Leaving Home: Film, Migration, and the Urban Experience," *New German Critique* 74 (1998): 179–92; and Derek Hillard, "Walter Ruttmann's Janus-Faced View of Modernity: the Ambivalence of Description in *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*," *Monatshefte* 96 (2004): 78–92. Kaes's revaluation of Ruttmann's film was of seminal importance in reopening the discussion of Ruttmann's relevance, and it remains one of the most interesting and original points of entry into the film. For two other approaches that push back against the Kracauerian interpretive tradition, see Michael Cowan, "The Heart Machine: Rhythm and Body in Weimar Film and Fritz Lang's Metropolis," *Modernism/modernity* 14, no. 2 (2007): 225–48; and David Macrae, "Ruttmann, Rhythm, and 'Reality': A Response to Siegfried Kracauer's Interpretation of *Berlin. The Symphony of a Great City*," in *Expressionist Film: New Perspectives*, ed. Dietrich Scheunemann (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003), 251–70. My own reading has profited in particular from Michael Cowan's sensitive analyses, both in the above-cited article and in his monograph, Michael Cowan, *Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity: Avant-Garde – Advertising – Modernity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014).

3. The adjective *geschichts*philosophical comes from the German noun *Geschichtsphilosophie*, meaning "philosophy of history." Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, its logic governed German thought in a multitude of creative and scholarly domains, including classical music composition and reception. The "narrative" progression in question is intimately associated with the sonata form as well as the symphonic one. In both cases, the exposition-development-resolution arc makes itself felt most explicitly in the first movement of the whole, although the same basic triadic structure can often be located, governing somewhat more loosely, at the global level. On the structure and significance of the classical symphonic form, see e.g., Richard Will, *The Characteristic Symphony in the Age of Haydn and Beethoven* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

4. On the increase of scholarly and curatorial attention to this political and critical dimension of New Objectivity as a whole, see Hal Foster, "The Real Thing: on 'New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic 1919–1933,'" *Artforum International* 54, no. 2 (2015):256–65. For a systematic investigation of the complex relationship between avant-garde formalism and modernist realism, which concentrates on progressive figures like Brecht and Eisenstein, but which draws conclu-

sions that suggest the need for a new, more critique-oriented approach to New Objectivist aesthetic practices as well, see Devin Fore, *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012). For a different but related reading of Fritz Lang's Weimar-era film production against the backdrop of nineteenth century theories of history, see Nicholas Baer, "Metaphysics of Finitude: Der müde Tod and the Crisis of Historicism," in *A Companion to Fritz Lang*, ed. Joe McElhaney (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell), 154–74.

5. See Helmuth Lethen, *Cool Conduct: The Culture of Distance in Weimar Germany*, trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

6. See David Bordwell, "The Musical Analogy," *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 141–56. Since my primary interest in this study is to uncover the historico-philosophical stakes of the musical analogy for a reading of Ruttmann's film, I have opted to focus exclusively on his transmutation of nineteenth century musical concepts into twentieth century filmic ones. For an analysis that directs interpretive attention to the actual orchestral score, composed by Edmund Meisel, see Hillard.

7. E. T. A. Hoffmann, "Beethovens Instrumentalmusik," in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 2, pt. 1 (Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985), 52–61, 55. English translation in Hoffmann, *Musical Writings*, ed. D. Charlton, trans. M. Clarke (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 96–103. While I have consulted the English edition, the translation here is my own.

8. On the relation of Beethoven's Pastoral symphony to the category of "program music," see Will, *The Characteristic Symphony*, 156–88.

9. Richard Wagner, *The Artwork of the Future*, trans. Emma Warner, in special issue, *The Wagner Journal* (2013): 13–86. See also Richard Wagner, *Beethoven*, trans. Roger Allen (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2014).

10. See, for instance, Rosamund Bartlett, *Wagner in Russia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), as well as my own treatment of Wagner's theory of rhythm and its domains of influence in "Wagner's Poetry of the Spheres" and "Pythagoras in the Laboratory," in *The Writing of Spirit: Soul, System, and the Roots of Language Science* (New York City: Fordham University Press, 2017), 139–59 and 160–88. For an extended meditation on the discourse of rhythm as it pertains to the history of philosophy and the theory of film, see Deleuze, *The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). On the Weimar context, see also Cowan, "The Heart Machine."

11. It is this larger conception of historical purpose and possibility—as well as of the corresponding aesthetic responsibility for accelerating the transformational process—to which Eisenstein is implicitly declaring his allegiance when he claims, for instance, that film should drive toward a strong Wagnerian conception of synthetic, symphonic unity. See e.g., Sergei Eisenstein, "The Embodiment of a Myth," in *Film Essays and a Lecture*, ed. Jay Leyda (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 84–91.

12. Gen. 1:2 and 1:4 (New American Standard Bible).

13. Several commentators have noted, in various ways, the centrality of the form-matter opposition in the opening sequence. For particularly useful discussions, see Cowan, "The Heart Machine," 229; Kaes, "Leaving Home," 180; and Hake, "Urban Spectacle in Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin*," 136. Hake reads the image as an allegory of film, and as a metaphor for the notion of city-as-organism she sees presented throughout the rest of the film. Cowan reads it in the context of his far-reaching reflections on the intellectual-historical significance of Weimar-era rhythm theories.

14. Walter Ruttmann, "Berlin als Filmstar," *Berliner Zeitung*, September 20, 1927. Included in *Walter Ruttmann: eine Dokumentation*, 79.

15. Sergei Eisenstein, "The Dramaturgy of Film Form (The Dialectic Approach to Film Form)," in *Writings 1922–1934*, trans. Richard Taylor (London: British Film Institute, 1988), 161–80, 161–62. Michael Cowan treats both Eisenstein's text and Ruttmann's film as part of his discussion of Weimar rhythm theories. See Cowan, "The Heart Machine," 234.

16. The ambivalence I have in mind here is thus quite different from the tension between nostalgia and technophilia, nature and machine that Hillard locates in the opening shift from waves to train. The match dissolve that transforms water seamlessly into geometric form functions to call into question the very possibility of a real tension between nature and its technological instrumentalization. See Hillard, "Walter Ruttmann's Janus-Faced View of Modernity," 82–83.

17. Hillard makes a similar point in the context of his argument for the central metaphorical role of wheels ("the metaphorical material of cyclical movement") and tracks ("the inevitability of movement toward a goal"), ("Walter Ruttmann's Janus-Faced View of Modernity," 83).

18. For a reflection on the broader socio-political stakes of the "traffic" topos during the Weimar period, see Helmut Lethen, *Cool Conduct*, trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 21–32, especially 26ff.

19. For a different reading of this sequence, see Katharina von Ankum, "The Cinematic Engendering of Urban Experience: Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin, die Symphonie einer Großstadt,*" *Colloquia Germanica: Internationale Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 29 (1996): 209–21, 217–18. Ruttmann appears in von Ankum's interpretation as a champion of the bourgeois institution of marriage, which provides a convenient way of defanging female sexual energy. While the structures of defanging and channeling clearly play an important role in my own reading of well, my view of their relevance to the film's attitude toward marriage is diametrically opposed to Ankum's.

20. The dizzying circle of commodities in general is the subject of the vignette that falls between these two series of emblematic images. Ruttmann cuts from a begging woman standing in front of a shoe shop, to a pair of disembodied hands lifting a jeweled necklace out of a window display, and then "back" to a different begging woman, receiving a handout. The sequence graphically depicts the circulation of currency through the various levels of society. The emphasis on circularity also recalls the almost aggressively callous depiction of the same, circulatory structure in the infamous midday meal sequence, where shots of diners in restaurants are followed by a sequence devoted to scavenging techniques among both animals and impoverished humans.

21. Jakob van Hoddis, "Weltende," in *Menschheitsdämmerung. Ein Dokument des* Expressionismus, ed. Kurt Pinthus (1919; rpt., Hamburg, Germany: Rowohlt, 1959), 39. One could also think here of Hans Richter's later, far more extensive use of the flying hat motif in his short film, *Ghosts before Breakfast* (1928), which treats the relationship between bourgeois conventions and rebellious objecthood.

22. The most significant pietist thunderstorm is doubtless the one depicted in Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's ode, "Die Frühlingsfeier" ("The Spring Festival," 1759), which was influential enough to have inspired a parodic response from Johann Wolfgang Goethe in *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), and perhaps also the arc of Beethoven's *Pastorale.*

23. Sabine Hake, for instance, concludes on the basis of her reading of this sequence that Ruttmann's film "offers . . . . an apologia for white-collar culture in light of the growing political reaction" (Hake, "Urban Spectacle in Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin,*" 133). Anton Kaes also connects Ruttmann's cavalier treatment of the desperate woman's predicament with a refusal to explore the culpability of the city; his argument culminates in the claim that "the Berlin film all but ignores class antagonism," for which he cites Kracauer (Kaes, "Leaving Home," 188).

24. See Hake, "Urban Spectacle in Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin,*" 137; and Hillard, "Walter Ruttmann's Janus-Faced View of Modernity," 83–84.

25. Seen from this perspective, Ruttmann's analysis of the modern urban psyche turns out to display important affinities with the notion of corporate bodies, and with the corresponding anxiety surrounding the category of personal agency, which has been documented and analyzed by Stefan Andriopoulos in his study of cinema and hypnotic crime. See Stefan Andriopoulos, *Possessed: Hypnotic Crimes, Corporate Fiction, and the Invention of Cinema* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

26. This perspectival variation would seem to suggest that the incident may actually have been staged.

27. In line with this tendency to insist on the contaminated emptiness of all potentially resistant spaces, one would perhaps also need to reverse the claim, made by Hake and others, that Ruttmann employs natural metaphors in order to naturalize urban mechanisms. It seems at least equally likely, given his demonstrable cynicism with regard to the possibility of "escape," that he employs natural metaphors in conjunction with urban phenomena in order to depict a supposedly elemental nature as an already recuperated, commodified space—one that could only be retroactively constructed in opposition to technology by a reified, urban consciousness. See Hake, "Urban Spectacle in Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin,*" 130 and 136.

28. In this respect, my reading of *Berlin's* philosophical underpinnings is intended as a kind of complementary corrective to Cowan's persuasive reconstruction of Ruttmann's aesthetic development. Cowan has demonstrated that Ruttmann's progression from avant-garde formalist to Nazi propagandist can be productively understood through the lens of Ruttmann's technological expertise, which was placed in the service of multiple different institutions over the course of a career defined largely by commissioned work. What I am suggesting here is that a profound philosophical continuity between Ruttmann's formalism and his fascism can also be discerned, with respect to which the latter becomes comprehensible as a plausible consequence (neither inevitable nor surprising) of the very same critical attitude that led him, in the former, to challenge the organicist conventions of nineteenth century bourgeois art.

29. For representative work in this vein, see Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020); and Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002). On the intersection of Deleuzian becoming, (nascent) new materialism, and film, see Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); and Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (Winchester, UK: O-Books, 2010), as well as Shaviro's nuanced, retrospective take on his earlier polemic in "The Cinematic Body REDUX," *Parallax* 14, no. 1 (2008): 48–54.