WEIMAR CINEMA

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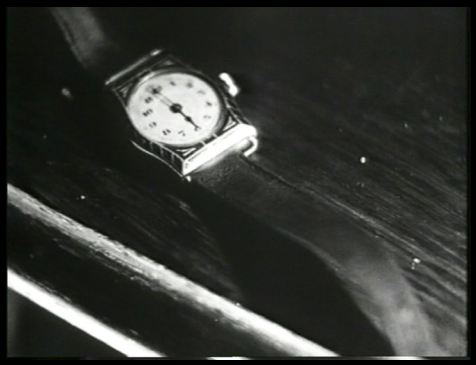




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For my grandmother Therese 'Resi' Spies.

Contents

Introduction

This study argues that accompanying Weimar cinema's self-conscious exploration of the aesthetic possibilities of film is a critical interest in ways of seeing and their consequences that is embedded in a range of films spanning the whole of the period from 1918 to 1933. Using a text-based approach, I shall argue that *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler / Dr Mabuse, the Gambler* (Fritz Lang, 1922), *Menschen am Sonntag / People on Sunday* (Robert Siodmak/ Edgar G Ulmer, 1929) and *Kuhle Wampe* (Slatan Dudow/ Bertolt Brecht, 1931), though differing widely in terms of style and narrative concerns, employ methods of narration that challenge the spectator to become aware of the potentially treacherous relationships between what is seen, the rhetorical context in which perception takes place, and the forms of understanding or knowledge that can be derived from the seen. These are processes that George M. Wilson (1986) has explored in terms of the various 'epistemic' dimensions of film narration; Wilson and others have analysed their operation in some of Fritz Lang's films but little work in these terms has been done on other Weimar films.

In the following chapters analysis will focus on each film's critical engagement with the relationship between seeing and knowing in a period when this relationship became increasingly ambivalent, not least because of cinema's impact on the audience's viewing habits. Each film, it will be argued, represents a critical engagement with particular ways of seeing but also sets its audience exercises in what Bertolt Brecht called 'complex seeing'.

In the essay, 'Notes to the *Threepenny Opera*' (first published in *Versuche 3*, 1931), Brecht discusses the use of theatrical devices such as titles and songs to force the audience into alert and critical ways of watching a play:

> The orthodox playwright's objection to the titles is that the dramatist ought to say everything that has to be said in the action, that the text must express everything within its own confines. The corresponding attitude for the spectator is that he should not think about a subject, but within the confines of the subject. But this way of subordinating everything to a single idea, this passion for propelling the spectator along a single track where he can look neither right nor left, up nor down, is something that the new school of playwriting must reject … Some exercise in complex seeing is needed – though it is perhaps more important to be able to think above the stream than to think in the stream. (1992a: 44)

Several years prior to Brecht's experimentation with anti-illusionist methods (his first play making use of parable and other distanciation devices, *A Man's a Man*, premiered in 1926) the dramatist's impact on theatre was recognised by Herbert Ihering, who as early as 1922 observed, 'with Bert Brecht, there's a new tone, a new melody, a new vision in these times' (1958: 273). What is 'new', then, is above all – in the case of the young Brecht – dissatisfaction with existing conventions and subsequently a radical change in terms of audience address. Ihering's use of the words 'tone', 'melody' and 'vision' further suggests a degree of aesthetic experimentation in the artwork that is not as yet explicit or part of a coherent programme which could be articulated by the critic in terms of a fully-fledged concept. Instead, Ihering expresses the sense of a new threshold in the cultural output of the early 1920s, of which Brecht was one of the most articulate and outspoken advocates.

The young dramatist was not the only Weimar artist experiencing the discrepancy between existing modes of representation and rapid social and cultural developments: a range of films produced at the time raise similar kinds of questions. Thomas Elsaesser observes that 'the films usually indexed as Weimar cinema have one thing in common: they are invariably constructed as picture puzzles: consistently, if not systematically, they refuse to be "tied down" to a single meaning' (2000: 4). This study attempts to 'unpick' specific pieces of the 'picture puzzle' through its focus on the chosen films' concerns with issues of perception and knowledge, analysing the complex systems of looking – whether as aspects of point of view, or unexpected variations in tone or mode of address – through close attention to choices in the construction of the films' narration.

Studies of narration and point of view by George M Wilson (1986) and Douglas Pye (2000) provide frameworks for analysing the ways in which film positions the spectator in relation to the narrative. Pye's distinctions between various 'dimensions' of point of view, namely spatial, temporal, cognitive, evaluative and ideological (2000a: 8) facilitate detailed discussion of the means available to a film to both present its world and to guide the audience's attention to detail within it. In particular, the ideological axis of point of view serves to 'denote a film's implicit or explicit relationships to the systems of thought and representation on which it relies and which are drawn on, or find expression in, the film's world' (2000a: 11). This relationship between a given film, its material and the audience is of particular interest to this study and my analysis will draw on Pye's distinctions in order to explore its complexities.

Chapter one, 'Postwar: *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler* – The 'Suggestion' of omniscience', questions the film's treatment of 'omniscient' ways of seeing both as a concern of the drama and a possible mode of narration. The film's spectacular images and fast paced narrative initially offer the audience a seemingly unrestricted access to the world of the film and its protagonist Dr Mabuse (Rudolf Klein Rogge), who is himself presented as an apparently omniscient and omnipotent character. Through Mabuse, the spectator gains access to disparate locations across the city, including the stock market and illegal gambling clubs, which creates the impression of the city and its people tightly in Mabuse's grip and unaware of their manipulation by the Doctor, whose real identity is only known to his henchmen and to the audience.

However, in Part 2 of the film the police finally catch up with the self-proclaimed master criminal and any sense of the audience sharing a vision of omniscience is revealed to be illusory. Film's ability to present fragmented spaces as whole, to mislead the audience and to expose the spectator as unthinkingly participating in his or her own deception are respectively linked to the propagandistic function of cinema during World War 1, a matter that – as *Dr Mabuse* indicates – becomes more pressing as cinema technology and narrational methods become increasingly sophisticated.

Chapter two, 'Stabilisation period: *Menschen am Sonntag*: 'Fleeting Days", examines a film that is generally regarded as a classic of the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) movement which dominated Weimar arts and culture during the mid- to late 1920s. I shall argue that the film's representation of five young white-collar workers — the social class most influenced by this new and ostensibly liberating lifestyle — is far from uncritical, raising implicit questions about the ways in which objective ways of seeing, inextricably linked to the ever increasing rationalisation and commodification of modern life, impact on the individual. Focussing on the representation of the film's female characters, this chapter seeks to draw attention to the film's awareness of the discrepancy between expectations about the emancipated social role and liberated sexual status of the salaried female and the young women's more traditional romantic ideals and self-conscious, rather than self-assured, articulation of desire.

Chapter three, entitled 'Pre-Fascist Period: To Think and To Want: *Kuhle Wampe*' re-evaluates existing criticism and the claims that have been made about the film's use of Brechtian aesthetics. The chapter examines the tension between the film's political function of raising the political awareness of a proletarian audience and its sometimes negative representation of the working class, which critics noted at the time but which has since been overlooked. By focusing on moments in the film where its material is politically less explicit, the chapter seeks to draw attention to questions raised by the filmmaking collective about the potential and limitations of film in addressing the audience, changing consciousness and producing new ways of viewing the world.

A brief note on recent currents in Weimar scholarship

The title of a recent collection of articles on Weimar cinema, *Diesseits der 'Dämonischen Leinwand'/On This Side of the 'Haunted Screen'* (Koebner 2003) signals a generational shift in critical perspective on filmmaking in Germany between 1919 and 1933: *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947) and *L'Écran démonaique/The Haunted Screen* (1952) by Weimar contemporaries Siegfried Kracauer and Lotte Eisner have finally been relegated to 'the other side' of debates in Weimar scholarship. Since Barry Salt's polemic 'From Caligari to Who?' (1979), writers

on Weimar cinema have repeatedly questioned Kracauer's post-World War Two thesis of a direct link between films produced in Germany in the early to mid- 1920s and the rise of fascism in the late 1920s. In current debates, critical attention is increasingly drawn to the various facets of Weimar modernism with a focus on cinematic representations of the city itself, as well as the impact of new technologies and the various phenomena of Berlin's mass communication culture. Yet despite the 'post'-Kracauer surge of fresh perspectives in recent years, there are still too few close readings of Weimar films outside the canon of 'classics' by Fritz Lang, Ernst Lubitsch, F. W. Murnau and G. W. Pabst. Notwithstanding the attention to textual detail in *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary*, Thomas Elsaesser himself observes that 'a study of Weimar cinema easily becomes a meta-critical discourse' (2000: 5). Holding the magnifying lens of the *Close-Up* rationale to the finer details of a small selection of Weimar films, this study seeks to contribute to the current broader revaluation of this unique period in film history with three detailed readings, falling back onto 'meta-critical discourse' only where the historical remove necessitates broader elaboration.

1. Postwar: *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler* – The 'Suggestion' of Omniscience

War of Ideals and Illusions

It is generally acknowledged that prior to the events of the First World War (1914-1918), Germany's film industry was dominated by French, American and Danish imports. The outbreak of the war led to increased domestic production and, in 1916, to the founding of the 'Bild- und Filmamt' (Bufa), a military film board responsible, amongst other things, for the provision of frontline footage for Germany's weekly newsreels. In his seminal world war 'documentary drama' (an insufficient term to describe the opus), *The Last Days of Mankind* (1974), Karl Kraus caustically documents the tone and ideological function of these 'frontline' productions. A scene in Act IV vividly portrays cinema's role in actively shaping public opinion about the war:

> Movie Theatre Manager (*stepping forward)*: There will now follow the first showing of the great film made of the Battle of the Somme. In this film you will get to see the heroes of the Somme, the flower of youth running forward, side by side with gray-haired men, weather beaten and steeled in battle, falling to the ground yet attacking fiercely, fighting between licking flames and the hail of bullets; over shaking ground pulverised by mines, in the all-crushing forge of this howling war. (…) In three parts, scenes of that fearsome battle of fall 1916 unroll before your eyes, that battle with which the enemy's great hope sank into its grave. (…) And then, thanks to the unique courage of brave cameramen, four of whom met a hero's death while loyally carrying out their duty during filming of this sequence, you shall behold in flickering moving pictures a sublime example of purposeful, precise efficiency (…) Over mine fields and obstacles, through byways of death pregnant with explosives, onward into the heat of close combat! Hand grenades are cutting them down! From trench to trench, onward into the enemy position! Our own artillery draws breath and sprays horror into the enemy reserves; trench after trench is taken. This film ranks with the most beautiful, among the most impressive of the present war. FEMALE VOICE: Emil, keep your hands to yourself! (Kraus 1974: 151-152)

The rhetoric of victoriously storming enemy trenches of course belies the reality of these trench offensives, in which the war 'assumed its murderous character and men were slaughtered in their tens of thousands' and young men 'could look forward to a high probability of being killed or wounded shortly after their eighteenth birthday' (Bessel 1993:6). Although Kraus' scene indicates that the audience may not have paid too much attention to this crass attempt at ideological positioning (having their eyes and hands elsewhere), the medium's potential for influencing public opinion at home was welcomed by the military. In a letter to the war ministry in Berlin in July 1917 General Erich Ludendorff emphasises that 'the war has shown the phenomenal power of photography and film as a means for explanation and persuasion' (NGBK 1977: 68). Yet the looked-for 'political and military manipulation' (ibid.) of films such as *Unsere Helden an der Somme/Our Heroes at the Somme* (1917), could not conceal the mounting number of deaths and casualties in a conflict that, far from being glorious and short-lived, had turned into a long drawn-out battle which left hardly a family in Germany unaffected. The nation's war of ideals, of soldiers 'fighting in the spirit of Goethe's *Faust*, of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, even of Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony' (Timms 1986: 307) had turned into a war of illusions, with lies and distorted views about the front propagated and reproduced by weekly newsreels and the printed press.

In *The Cinema's Third Machine* Sabine Hake comments on how the first German newsreels, Eiko-Woche and Messter-Woche, sought to capture the audience's attention by turning news about the war into a cinematic spectacle:

> Initially less than successful, these newsreels soon adopted a more narrative style, replacing monotonous long shots with dynamic editing and including comic episodes. One of their functions was to disperse rumours about the

> horrors of the war and to highlight the soldiers' discipline and morale. (1993: 17)

Increasingly elaborate systems of narration and the powerful grip of narrative thus turn footage of human carnage into stories about a 'hero's death'. The medium's potential to present a picture which, though ostensibly the most authentic representation of actual events, could nonetheless be distorted using the visual rhetoric of camera angle, movement and framing, as well as early and emerging editing techniques, comes to the fore.

The following analysis seeks to show that Lang's mastery of narrational techniques in the cinema of the early 1920s is matched by the director's awareness of the implications of film's impact on the audience's perception. I shall argue that elements of Lang's early films which, taken on their own, could be read as no more than a play with generic signifiers to produce responses of shock and surprise is revealed, in the wider context of his oeuvre, to offer a critical awareness of the impact of modes of visual representation on ways of seeing in a post-war society undergoing rapid modernisation and radical social and political change.

Analysis will focus on how systems of narration initially offer the audience a privileged access to the events and characters of the filmic world. Yet by the end our 'cognitive' point of view, which derives 'not from what the film spells out but from inferences we draw from the rhetoric of performance and from the image and sound context in which performance is presented' (Pye 2000a: 10) is exposed as surprisingly restricted, pointing to a gap between what we see and what we may claim to know. This thematic and conceptual movement from an 'all-seeing' perspective to moments of miscomprehension and 'blindness' points to the increasingly problematic relationship between seeing and knowing brought about by the emerging mass media in the early twentieth century, and to Lang's sophisticated grasp of what this might imply. In the context of post-war Germany's unstable social and political situation Lang's play on the audience's perception develops into a serious exercise in complex seeing at a time when people were coming to terms with the disillusionment and harrowing consequences of the 'war of ideals' and simultaneously experiencing, especially in the cities, rapid modernisation in all areas of life.

'With your permission: Dr Mabuse'

There's a moment one hour into part two of Fritz Lang's *Dr Mabuse, the Gambler* (Uco-Film/Decla- Bioscop, 1922) where, in the course of his investigation into suspected gambling fraud, State Attorney von Wenk (Bernhard Goetzke) returns to chambers and is told by his assistants that nothing of importance has happened in his absence. The men are on full alert given that a recent attempt to blow up the attorney's office was very nearly successful, resulting in the death of one of von Wenk's men. Sitting at his desk amidst the devastation, von Wenk is alerted by a noise and, to his and the audience's surprise, discovers that he has an unannounced visitor: rising from an arm chair in the far corner of the office, the stranger politely introduces himself as 'Dr Mabuse'. In fact, Mabuse is the man behind the gambling scam as well as other criminal activities, though this is unknown to von Wenk at this point. The Doctor, by profession a psychoanalyst, invites von Wenk to attend a public demonstration of mass hypnosis by a certain 'Sandor Weltmann' (subsequently revealed to be none other than Mabuse in disguise), then leaves. After Mabuse's departure a furious von Wenk reprimands his dumbfounded colleagues for letting a stranger walk into his office unnoticed.

Visual strategies of misperception

This brief moment in the film, consisting of seven shots and one intertitle, is characteristic of what has since become a recognised Langian 'trademark' – the director's devious delight in setting the audience 'traps for the mind and eye' (Elsaesser 1997: 28). Moreover, a closer look at this scene links the moment of von Wenk's and the audience's surprise to a wider system of calculated narrative and narrational strategies employed to (mis)guide the audience's attention. The spectator's experience of simultaneous seeing and blindness, of knowing but not knowing, not only plays a central part in the narrative, it also becomes central to our understanding of the

film's wider concerns with the function of cinema as an apparatus for perception and misperception.

There are several systems that guide our attention in this short scene. We also need to place this moment in the film in the context of the action which precedes it in order to shed light on Lang's cognitive play. Arguably, one could accuse Lang of cheating; after all, von Wenk's assistants reassure him – and by implication the audience – that nothing of significance has happened in his absence. We therefore don't expect Mabuse to be sitting in the office armchair. Indeed, the previous scene shows the Doctor's nervous-looking servant Spoerri (Robert Forster-Larrinaga) preventing von Wenk's entrance to Mabuse's house and the inference that can be drawn from Forster-Larrinaga's performance (he actively blocks the entrance and fiddles with a handkerchief in his breast pocket) is that Spoerri is preventing access to his master. We have no reason to question the reliability of the State Attorney's assistants, but every reason to mistrust the Doctor's cocaine-addicted manservant when he assures von Wenk that 'the doctor is out'.

But Lang does not cheat. He could manipulate the editing to produce Mabuse like a rabbit out of a hat. Instead he relies not on the selective revelation of space through editing but on the spectator's selective attention. As von Wenk enters his study, the establishing shot gives us the 'full picture' of the space in which the action is played out and close scrutiny reveals somebody sitting in the armchair holding a book: it's all there in front of our eyes. However, Lang can depend on the logic of narrative attention and the attractions of movement within the image. He works to keep our focus on the action – von Wenk traversing the space to his desk, sitting, then turning over the letter in his hands – evidently of more interest to him than the other messages – and then placing it back on the table. A letter at this moment could well imply a narrative development of a kind characteristic of the detective film – new information to propel the investigation forward. In addition, we may take note of the beam that dangles precariously from the ceiling not far from von Wenk's head. Both the desk area and the beams are well lit, ensuring that none of this detail escapes our attention, but we have no immediate reason to scan the rest of the set for hidden visitors.

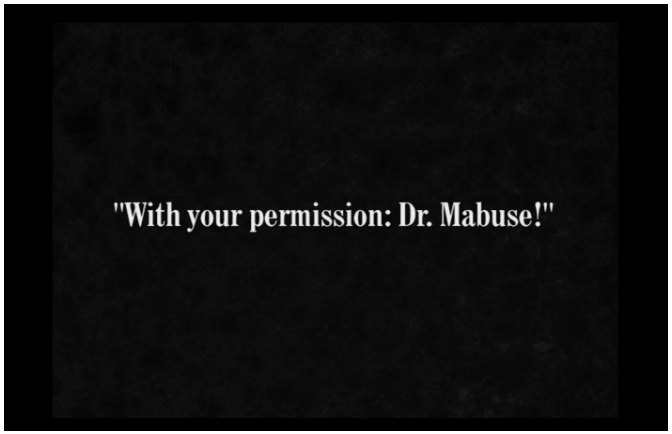
At this stage the two opponents literally sit back to back across a diagonal line and yet our gaze will almost certainly be directed to the front left of the frame. When the film cuts to him, Mabuse's actions are magnificently staged: we do not need sound to imagine the thud of a book snapped shut. The element of surprise is entirely in the hands of the Doctor: startled by the noise, von Wenk turns to look over his shoulder; Mabuse rises from his chair. The cut on action and the eye-line match along a diagonal line suggest that Mabuse and von Wenk share

the same space; Mabuse's greeting is directed off screen in what we conclude is the direction of von Wenk. Yet because we haven't noticed Mabuse in the establishing shot, the spatial relationship between the two men retains a degree of ambiguity.

The brief scene mirrors strategies employed in the opening shots of part one, *The Great Gambler – A Picture of the Times*. Noël Burch draws attention to a dialogue between Dr Mabuse and Spoerri, which is depicted 'in a series of cross-cut close shots which isolate each of the men in turn *in a setting we do not see*' (1980: 585; emphasis in original). Burch continues:

> As an opening gambit this was a dangerous move at the time; yet thanks to the perfect angular articulation between the direction of the secretary's eyes and the glances Mabuse casts at him over his shoulder, the spectator can be in no doubt as to the relative position of the two men in the surrounding – and as yet hypothetical – space of Mabuse's salon. (Ibid.)

For the opening shots of part one this means that *despite* the fragmentation of the space the spectator is able to place the two characters in relation to each other and make sense of what could potentially be a disorientating viewing experience. Burch identifies the perfect use of camera angle as the method that enables the viewer to place the men, though spatially separated, in relation to each other. We might, however, understand Lang's demonstration of the power of editing to articulate apparently coherent space as the first move in systems which across the film will unpick the security of spatial orientations (as well as wider securities of viewpoint) that the continuity system seems to provide. In the series of shots Burch describes, Lang withholds the establishing shot which would make the position of the two men plain in favour of an isolating treatment. In the sequence from part two, *despite* the establishing shot of the office space and the equally 'perfect angular articulation' between the direction of von Wenk's glance over his shoulder and Mabuse's gaze, it is momentarily difficult to make sense of the relative position of the characters. As a result, we are as astonished as von Wenk to find ourselves face to face with Mabuse.



There is, of course, a generic context here. The film belongs to a well-established tradition of serialised novels and serial films popular at the time. Audiences would have been familiar with master criminals such as Feuillade's *Fantômas*, or the enigmatic Lio Shah in Lang's *Die Spinnen* (1919; 1920). Mabuse's undetected entrance to the office can be associated with the uncanny powers of such figures. Based on the character in Norbert Jacques' serialised novel, Dr Mabuse is a skilled hypnotist and thus capable of manipulating his victims to see things that do not exist. Looked at in isolation, the sequence could thus be taken for a moment of shock and surprise characteristic of the genre.[2]

Yet this moment of perceptual and cognitive manipulation anticipates Mabuse exercising an act of mass hypnosis on a theatre audience in the following sequence, suggesting that hoodwinking von Wenk's assistants is just one in a series of acts of 'mass suggestion and sleepless hypnosis' (as the placard advertising 'Sandor Weltmann's' performance promises).

I will argue that Lang appropriates the crime serial's staples of shock and surprise to question the generally held idea that seeing equals knowing and to undermine the apparent security of the spectator's viewing position. Drawing on Douglas Pye's (2000b) observation that epistemic privilege and restriction are central to an understanding of Lang's concerns, the following sections will examine the careful choices that place the spectator in privileged as well as epistemically restricted positions

in relation to the action. In the discussion of both parts of the 1922 Mabuse series (*The Great Gambler: A Picture of the Times* and *Inferno*: *A Play about People of our Times*) particular attention will be drawn to moments where the audience's experience of 'omniscience' is deconstructed and revealed to be a mere 'suggestion', a way of influencing the audience to accept uncritically what they are shown.

Opening images – introducing the 'Great Unknown'

Part one, *The Great Gambler: A Picture of the Times,* opens with an intertitle ('HE and his day'), then cuts to a close-up of a set of portrait photographs being spread like playing cards in the hands of a person as yet unknown. The image then slowly dissolves to a medium shot of Dr Mabuse. Shuffling the cards and picking one, Mabuse chooses his first mask and costume. The act of selecting his first disguise – that of an elderly stockbroker – has led critics to identify Mabuse as the quasi dramaturge of the unfolding narrative. Tom Gunning notes that the 'image of a hand "holding all the cards" is, of course, an image of control and power' and that 'Mabuse's character as master of appearances and role playing, as controller of other people's destinies, works out an analogy with the film director or author' (2000: 100). Joachim Paech suggests that the film's opening moments 'present more than the exposition of a character or a plot, it is the film itself joining in the game' (1988: 132). Although the analogy of Mabuse with Lang is enticing, an examination of the opening moments in the context of the film as a whole undermines the view of Mabuse and Lang as equal 'metteurs en scène' and instead supports the possibility of a different understanding: namely of Lang's subtle play on the audience's susceptibility to visual rhetoric and the exaggerated sense of Mabuse's status that this kind of rhetoric powerfully – but falsely – evokes.

Significantly, in the serialised novel on which Thea von Harbou's screenplay is based, the true identity of Mabuse – a doctor of psychoanalysis and hypnotist – is not revealed to the reader until Chapter five. By 1922 the Mabuse series had gained great national popularity, however, and audiences would have been familiar with Mabuse from both the serial published in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* and the novel published by Ullstein. To introduce us to Mabuse and his facility for disguise in the opening shots could, therefore, be regarded as a directorial choice borne out of necessity. Whereas the novel greatly depends on the mystery surrounding its enigmatic protagonist ('he was always someone different, but fantasy collated the various pictures and made it into one' (Jacques1996: 22)), Lang chooses to open the film with a collation of the 'various pictures' that make up the character of Mabuse by superimposing the second onto the first shot in the film.

The audience is privileged in seeing the 'Great Unknown' in the totality of his disguises, and therefore will have a good chance of seeing the true identity hiding behind the mask, whereas this vision of Mabuse holding the cards is denied to the characters in the film. For instance, von Wenk does not recognise Mabuse until the Sandor Weltmann sequence in part two (and even at that stage von Wenk's point of recognition only occurs moments before he is rendered helpless under the spell of the hypnotic gaze).

In short, for the duration of the opening moments we share Mabuse's vision of himself 'holding the cards' and are party to the secret of his many disguises. Our powerful epistemic position is maintained in the following sequences through directorial choices that construct a sense of the audience's unrestricted access to a series of fast paced and spectacular events. The film creates the experience of spectatorial omniscience by firmly aligning our point of view with that of Mabuse.

Master of (narrational) techniques: the 'theft of commercial treaty' sequence

The sequence depicts four strands of simultaneous action: the theft of the treaty from a train compartment; a getaway car racing down a track to take away the stolen briefcase; a messenger on top of a telegraph pole relaying messages to Mabuse; and the Doctor himself, 'overseeing' the operation from his head quarters with the help of a telephone. The sequence opens with Mabuse in his study with his manservant Spoerri busy changing the Doctor's appearance into his first disguise.

During this process Mabuse keeps a close eye on his pocket watch. A cut takes us to the image of a train travelling at great speed. The shot of the train begins with an iris-out, linking the circle of the watch with the circular framing of the iris-out and creating the impression that, by looking at his watch, Mabuse can 'see' the carefully planned action unfolding. The audience shares the Doctor's ostensibly omniscient point of view through the film's use of crosscutting.

The combination of sophisticated editing methods and the use of the camera conveying the rapidly unfolding events offers the audience both an immediate access to the world of the film and a powerful encounter with modernity: we are invited to share the sense of Mabuse's control over his environment and modern technologies. A review in *Das Tage- Buch* (1922) by Kurt Pinthus (one of Lang's most ardent critics), entitled 'The World of Dr Mabuse', highlights the spectator's experience of a quasi omniscient access to the fictional reality and draws parallels between Lang's portrait of the time and the world outside the cinema:

> In our atomistically fragmented social order each individual secures only a shred of the fabric which now encloses us all on every side … yet each and every one of us wants to claim it all for himself. Unreeling temporally and spatially remote phenomena and events in rapid succession, the movie can restore the sense of community we have lost and yet continue to crave' (2001: 78).

Aligned with Mabuse, we are drawn into the spaces he frequents and are able to observe him claim them all for himself – from controlling the stock market to gaining entrance to exclusive gentlemen's clubs and an invitation to the villa of Count Told (Alfred Abel), Mabuse asserts his power. As Pinthus comments:

> Firstly, he [the spectator] sees an exciting tale of crime, the fanatic gangster of awesome format with a vital urge to play with human beings and fates, whose superb cunning and powers of suggestion shake off all attempts at prosecution and win anyone he wants over to his side. Secondly, the eye is charmed and enchanted by the highly skilled, exquisitely mature (I'll risk saying it) extremely artistic photography of Carl Hoffmann. The film's use of light and shadow; the lights of the city train racing, wavering and smoldering along the dark night street; the distorted blurred image of the group assuming clear contours as the wheel of the opera glasses is turned; the looming shadow of the villain captured on screen as an omen of dark deeds – these are photographic innovations never seen before. Thirdly, director Fritz Lang has fervently sought to capture the suicidal madness of our time in typical characters and milieus [sic]. (2001: 74)

When Mabuse's scheming causes a drastic slump on the stock market, the audience is firmly 'in the know' about the gang's plan: news of the theft of the commercial treaty causes a panic amongst the traders, which Mabuse uses to his own advantage. In scenes set at the 'Folies Bergères' variety theatre and the '17+4' gambling club we gain access to Berlin's post war *demi-monde*. As Mabuse casts his eyes on a new victim – millionaire's son Edgar Hull (Paul Richter) – we share the Doctor's optical point of view. As the narrative progresses, it clearly is Mabuse who is holding the cards.

At this stage, our apparently unrestricted access to the character of Mabuse enables us to observe his *modus operandi* as well as the 'milieu' in which he operates. The slow-paced and exhaustive depiction of the card game in the club sequence

and Hull's subsequent loss of a large sum of money establishes Mabuse's control over his victims and indicates his interest in 'playing with people and their destinies' (as he phrases it to Countess Told (Gertrude Welcker) during a séance they both attend). Significantly, Mabuse is presented not so much as part of the decadence surrounding him but as a 'stranger' and, at most, a 'guest' at the exclusive '17+4' club.

Once again, it is worth drawing attention to the combination of the elements at work and to highlight their effect on the viewer. Our unrestricted access to Mabuse is paired with a quasi-limitless access to the spaces depicted in the world of the film. On one level, the film's powerful images and speedy pace entice us into Mabuse's world, a world that – despite its fragmentation – Mabuse is seemingly able to control. This in turn gives the audience the experience of a 'totality' that – according to Pinthus – was no longer part of the audience's experience of the world outside the cinema. Lang's 'portrait of the times' effortlessly pieces the fragments together, offering the audience a glimpse of omniscience in the (fragmented) spaces of modernity.

The sophisticated use of narrational techniques in part one of *Dr Mabuse, the Gambler* can thus be regarded as the perfect example of what Sabine Hake describes as cinema's aesthetic function in the reproduction of the perceptual and cognitive experience of modern mass society 'within its own parameters' (1993: 90). The multifaceted opening sequence challenges the audience's perception and understanding of the events presented onscreen, yet at the same time signals the film's mastery in offering the audience images 'never seen before', safe in the knowledge that the spectator will be able to make sense of what is shown. The audience's visual and cognitive pleasure in experiencing both the sensational images and the narrative's racy pace is inextricably linked to the rhetoric surrounding Dr Mabuse's powers – his hypnotic skill as well as his apparent omniscience and omnipotence.

'Übermensch' rhetoric and 'zeitgeist': the 'Great Game' sequence

Part one draws to a close with an event at a social gathering in the house of aristocrat Count Told. During the party we observe Mabuse, now in his identity as psychoanalyst (which requires no make-up, wigs and false moustaches), standing by himself by a fireplace in the count's home. The room is dominated by a large painting on display above the fireplace; it depicts a demon with glaring eyes emitting light rays. The picture dwarfs the man, and belongs to the Count rather than the Doctor, but can be regarded as a reference to the Doctor's powerful hypnotic gaze.

Subsequently, in a conversation with Countess Told, Mabuse reveals his conviction that 'there is no happiness – there is only the will for power'. Mabuse then 'wills' Count Told to cheat in a game of cards and snatches the countess. The abduction of the countess and Mabuse's raucous celebration with his gang completes the first part of the film.

Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy of the 'will to power' and ideas surrounding the 'superhuman' qualities of Mabuse are expressed implicitly and – at this point – explicitly in the narrative. The concept of Mabuse's many disguises is reminiscent of the Nietzschean thought that truth consists only of metaphors and that 'truths are only illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions' (Kunzmann *et al*. 1993: 177). As spectators, we are consistently presented with the different layers of illusion and deception that govern the world of the film. Falsehood, not truths, are the order of the day in Lang's portrait of the time. Thomas Elsaesser argues:

> One of the most extended commentaries on these Nietzschean deconstructive impulses is *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler*, where more than anything, one is introduced, right in the heart of the modern metropolis, to several worlds that already look false even before they become real. (2000: 152)

A particularly cynical example depicts the rise of Emil Schramm (Julius E. Hermann) in a self-contained episode (a narrational device not repeated in the film) entitled 'Schramm's World'. It depicts the character's 'career' from street trader and incarceration during the Great War to his subsequent success as a war profiteer. Schramm's 'Grill' restaurant is merely a shop front for a hidden casino. Later on in the narrative, the opening of another gambling hall – the 'Petit Casino' – manifests the view of a world ruled by deceit and decadence hidden behind virtuous façades: in the 'Petit Casino' sequence, the drab entrance to the house at 11, Haydn Street conceals the glamour hidden inside; the casino is disguised as a cabaret promoting self-indulgent entertainment, governed by the maxim that 'Everything that pleases is allowed'. Aligned with the master criminal, we gain entrance to these exclusive and secret places whose promise of indulgence and debauchery hold no interest for Mabuse. His rejection of all moral values, true or false, as well as his crimes, seems motivated not by a desire for money, or luxury (like Schramm's) but solely by his lust for power.

Mabuse's vitality and ruthlessness stand in stark contrast to the feebleness and slavish adherence to the latest trend embodied by the count and the bored bourgeoisie frequenting the city's clubs and gambling halls. Mabuse's will to power sets him apart from the sluggish decadence around him, his gamble with materialist and moral values that have become relative and unstable is, in a nihilist sense, 'beyond good and evil'. Celebrating his capture of the countess, Mabuse is intoxicated by the idea of being all-powerful, a modern-day Zarathustra pitilessly leaving behind all that is weak and cowardly.

In post-World War One Germany, the indefatigable and invincible figure of Mabuse stands out, seemingly wholly unaffected by both the humiliation of defeat in the Great War and the oppressive economic conditions imposed by the Versailles Treaty. At a time of economic paralysis the figure of Mabuse taking control of the stock market and robbing the wealthy at the casino table takes on a role that exceeds that of the master criminal of the crime serial tradition. In a review of the film in *Das Blaue Heft*, (1922), critic Max Moritz (Roland Schacht) describes Mabuse as a 'superior' being in all aspects: 'There, in Thea von Harbou's script: psychological and mental collapse of a super-human, super-criminal, super-hypnotist' (Schacht 2001: 24). The film's engagement with ideas of the 'super human' further corresponds to a post-World War One Nietzsche revival in the popular culture of the Weimar Republic. However, the Nietzschean rhetoric surrounding Mabuse is not employed uncritically by the film. Instead, it functions to 'bait' the spectator. Narrative and narrational choices invite us to regard the Doctor as 'Übermensch', gradually turning our initial spatio-temporal alignment into a moral allegiance with the victorious Mabuse by the end of part one.

In the light of Pinthus's suggestion that *Dr Mabuse, the Gambler* both acknowledges the 'atomistically fragmented social order' of a postwar society in the process of radical change and modernisation but simultaneously 'synthesises' that fragmentation in order to recreate a 'whole' through specifically cinematic means, it is possible to argue that the film offers the spectator a seductive glimpse of the apparent omniscience enjoyed by its protagonist. In addition, the film initially encourages readings of Mabuse as a kind of metteur en scène with an all-powerful status within the narrative. Yet a closer look at part two, *Inferno: A Play about People of Our Time*, will demonstrate how specific choices drastically qualify some of the ideas about Mabuse's omniscience and omnipotence and can lead us to review our responses to and understanding of Lang's methods.

No longer in 'the know': moments of epistemic restriction

In the second part of the film the narrative focus gradually shifts from Mabuse to State Attorney von Wenk and his various attempts to track down the 'Great Unknown'. This shift has implications for the audience and our access to the world of the film changes from a privileged point of view in part one to a more restricted access to actions and characters in part two.

Visual strategies employed in part one to give the audience a sense of omniscience in relation to action and characters are now increasingly problematised.

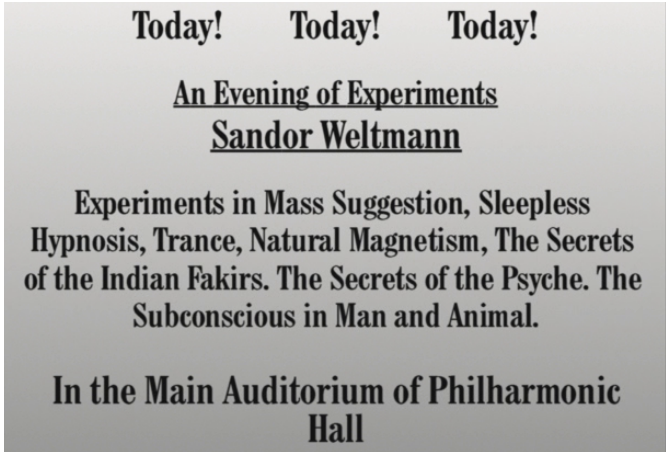
I have already discussed the film's use of eye-line match as one example of the film's ability to construct and deconstruct the spectator's coherent access to the world of the film. Another reversal of our epistemic position from omniscient to restricted occurs in a scene depicting Mabuse's assassination of his own henchman Pesch (Georg John) following Pesch's arrest.

In this scene, Mabuse takes on the role of a political *agent provocateur* who incites a crowd of workers in a bar to interfere with Pesch's transport from police station to prison. In the ensuing chaos (stirred by Mabuse dressed as a worker, the crowd believe the prisoner to be 'Johannes Gutter' – though who Gutter is remains unclear) Pesch is killed by a bullet. Significantly, although we recognise Mabuse's right-hand man Georg (Hans Adalbert Schlettow), we may not immediately recognise Mabuse in his proletarian disguise. As Mabuse incites the crowd, the camera remains at a distance and at the level of the mob in the bar. We only get the 'full picture' at the moment where Pesch – not the man called Gutter – emerges from the prison car and is instantly shot. Above all, the sequence signals that we are no longer complicit witnesses of Mabuse's plans.

Our cognitive ties with Mabuse thus severed, we increasingly share the restricted perspective of Mabuse's adversary. Our alignment (a perceptual process described by Murray Smith as 'two interlocking functions, *spatio-temporal attachment* and *subjective access*' (1995: 83; emphasis in original)) with von Wenk not only carries the loss of the 'all-seeing' perspective we shared with the doctor; in terms of characterisation, von Wenk is a much less charismatic figure than Mabuse. The introduction of von Wenk early on in the film is juxtaposed with images of Mabuse extracting poison from a snake. Whereas the snake-handling scenario portrays Mabuse as fearless and daring, von Wenk is presented as a formal and rigid character whose investigation has so far not yielded any satisfactory results. However, as the narrative progresses, von Wenk is getting closer to Mabuse, which forces the doctor to act, resulting in his aforementioned visitto von Wenk's office. The subsequent sequence of Mabuse in the disguise of hypnotist 'Sandor Weltmann' signals the film's most explicit engagement with seeing and blindness.

Sandor Weltmann: experiments in mass suggestion

The Sandor Weltmann sequence lasts nearly 14 minutes and portrays Mabuse's mesmeric skills, including the illusion of a North African desert and a caravan of travellers and horses emerging from the stage into the auditorium of the hall where the experiment is taking place. During the caravan illusion the camera is in a slightly elevated position at the back of the



auditorium, placing our view higher than that of the audience in the world of the film. We are therefore able simultaneously to enjoy the illusion, created through the use of cross fades and use of the theatrical space, and to observe the audience's response. Mabuse then proceeds to coerce von Wenk, who is in the audience with several of his men, into participating in a number of experiments, which eventually lead to von Wenk's complete hypnosis and near death in a car accident.

The sequence could thus be regarded as a self-conscious demonstration of film's ability to create images and visions, to blur the demarcation line between reality and illusion for both the audiences in the world of the film and in the cinema. The poster advertising the Weltmann experiments with 'Mass Suggestion, Sleepless Hypnosis, Trance' and other exotic and psychological phenomena draws attention to what Anton Kaes describes as the 'uncanny effect' (1994: 618) of the medium itself.

Yet despite this repeated demonstration of Mabuse's power of hypnosis and the calculated plan to eliminate his enemy, the sequence simultaneously questions the apparent 'suggestive' or 'hypnotic' powers of both Mabuse and the filmic medium by raising questions concerning the spectator's *own* role in relation to Weltmann's, or, on a wider level, the film's 'experiment'.

In the Sandor Weltmann sequence the 'theatrical' character of the spectacle, complete with the participation of a sensation-hungry urban audience, is foregrounded: Mabuse's 'mad professor' disguise and exaggerated gestures on stage, the proscenium arch and the 'planting' of Spoerri in the auditorium to 'assist' in the 'experiments', highlight the theatrical and fabricated quality of Mabuse's powers. This focus on the artificiality of the scenario has implications for the spectator, not least in guiding our attention to the obvious constructedness of the spectacle, from opening the sequence with a poster advertising the show *as* an example of 'Mass Suggestion', to the emphasis on the theatrical space and the presence of an audience to whose reactions the film returns throughout the scene.

This recognition in turn complicates our alignment with Mabuse, suggesting, arguably for the first time, that his 'omniscience' might in fact be partly rooted in our own partial perception of what is happening in the world of the film. In contrast to previous demonstrations of his hypnotic skills, the machinations behind Mabuse's powers are actively foregrounded during the Sandor Weltmann scene. Whereas earlier demonstrations of hypnosis turned us into immediate witnesses of Mabuse's powers, even at times sharing his optical point of view, we are now observing the reactions of an audience as stunned and delighted by what they see – or think they can see – as we may have been ourselves during such visually striking scenes as the initial hypnosis of von Wenk in the 'Andalusia' club, a scene I shall discuss in greater detail below. Following Pesch's assassination and Mabuse's surprise entrance to von Wenk's office, the Weltmann sequence continues to question the status of our perception, implying that we, like the audience of Sandor Weltmann's 'experiments', may in earlier scenes have fallen victim to a set of magic tricks, a sophisticated optical – and cognitive – illusion

In his analysis of the relationship between the film's narrative methods and Mabuse's controlling power Douglas Pye argues that although it 'is tempting, for instance, to say that the narrative strategies *express* Mabuse's power, as if they could be identified with the control he exerts … the opening sequences make clear that the film's narration and our access to the fictional world are developed in quite complex relationships to Mabuse's control' (Pye 2000b; emphasis in original). Drawing attention to moments early on in the film in which Mabuse cannot control the human weaknesses of his gang (Spoerri's cocaine addiction, Pesch's lateness) Pye argues that 'human failings begin, in other words, to qualify, however trivially in the early parts of the film, Mabuse's assertions of omnipotence and omniscience' (2000b). In part two of the film, the human weaknesses of Mabuse's gang become more obvious: for instance, Pesch fails to kill the state attorney by planting the bomb in his office and is captured by von Wenk's men.

Pye draws attention to the first appearances of von Wenk and Countess Told, two characters who initially 'are outside Mabuse's controlling web and the evolving narrative patterns which centre on him; their entrances are therefore *contingent* events which escape the apparent necessity of Mabuse's schemes and the narration mimes this contingency by their unannounced entrances' (2000b; emphasis in original). The characters' 'unexpected entrances challenge the idea that "omniscient" might be an appropriate way of describing the

spectator's view of the film's world and simultaneously suggest that the film's interests include questions of perceptual and cognitive restriction' (2000b).

There are other moments in the narrative which indicate that Mabuse's powers are in fact not limitless. As he hypnotises von Wenk on stage in the Weltmann sequence, Mabuse uses the phrase, 'Tsi Nan Fu', which triggers von Wenk's – and arguably the audience's – memory of his first encounter with Mabuse, in part one, during a card game in the Andalusia club. In the Andalusia episode von Wenk, also dressed in disguise, refused to be willed by Mabuse into taking another card during a game at the gambling table. This moment is the first instance in the narrative where von Wenk is on an 'equal footing' with Mabuse, as neither opponent recognises the other. However, the significance of von Wenk's achievement in refusing to succumb to Mabuse's powers of suggestion is overshadowed by a series of visually stunning special effects throughout the Andalusia scene, including dissolves, superimpositions and the use of trick photography, which creates the sudden appearance of the letters, 'Tsi Nan Fu', flashing up and vanishing on the surface of the gambling table. The surreal quality of the images in this scene (at one point, Mabuse's head appears to dislodge from his body and fills a blacked-out screen) diverts our attention from the narrative significance of von Wenk's first serious challenge of Mabuse's hypnotic powers to the enjoyment of its various optical illusions.

Although von Wenk does not yield to Mabuse's powers of suggestion during the Andalusia sequence, he fails to identify and catch the criminal. In the Weltmann sequence of part two, von Wenk is finally able to see Mabuse as the sum of his various parts and disguises: in a short montage sequence, the grotesque masks of 'Sandor Weltmann' and the sinister figure in the Andalusia club dissolve to reveal the Doctor's face. Thus unmasked, Mabuse can no longer hide from von Wenk and his men. A second attempt to kill von Wenk is unsuccessful and the state attorney's ability to see clearly spells the end of Mabuse's powers.

Finale: Seeing bracketed by blindness

The final sequences of part two comprise a car chase and a lengthy shoot-out in which Mabuse's men are either killed or captured and the countess is released from captivity. Mabuse escapes but becomes trapped in a cellar used by Hawasch (Karl Huszar), a gang member now dead, to produce counterfeit notes with the aid of a printing press and a group of blind slave workers. Mabuse loses his mind and is plagued by visions of his dead victims, who force him to play a game of cards. The thrill of 'playing with people and their destinies' is stripped of its Übermensch rhetoric to reveal the underlying disregard for human life and its loss.

The final images depict von Wenk and his colleagues leading the blind slave workers up the stairs. Heide Schönemann points out that this image is reminiscent of a painting entitled 'The Parable of the Blind' by Pieter Bruegel the Older. Schönemann argues that, whereas the painting shows the blind tumbling into a ditch, the film's final image shows them being led out of the cellar, thus presenting the audience with an image of hope amidst the despair (see 1992: 94-95). Significantly in this respect, the film's closing moments emphasise less von Wenk's victory over Mabuse than his part in releasing the blind from their prison. In addition, though, the decision to return to the blind slave workers at the end of the whole film brackets the narrative with the theme of blindness.

Mabuse's first visit to the cellar occurred shortly after his successful assault on the stock market near the beginning of part one, depicting the printing of forged banknotes (one more play on deceit and authenticity) as another part of the 'world of Dr. Mabuse'. The question I have wanted to probe is to what extent we have ourselves been 'deceived' by appearances and held 'captive' by the film's visual and narrative rhetoric, whether perhaps our enjoyment of fast-paced action and visual spectacle was not unlike the audience's enthusiastic response to Mabuse's 'mass suggestion' in the Sandor Weltmann scene.

The experience of omniscience, in the end, is reduced to a mere delusion of grandeur. The apparition of Mabuse's victims and the framing presence of the blind can thus be related to our own misguided spectatorial position. The blind prisoners are released but of course they will still be unable to see. We have to be careful of drawing too exact a parallel with the spectator but Lang's use of blind characters across his work was rarely without implicit reference to the less literal 'blindness' that the rhetoric of film can induce. As we, too, escape from Mabuse's world – our glimpse of 'omniscience' bracketed by the narrative presence of blindness – do we remain partially-sighted witnesses?

In *The Material Ghost: Films and their Medium*, Gilberto Perez observes that 'In *Spies* as in *Dr Mabuse the Gambler*, Lang associates omniscience with villainy, the commanding manifolds of the film's plot with the will to power of a criminal plot to take over the world' (1998: 132). The notion of linking omniscience to villainy has implications for the audience and their placing in an apparently omniscient position for large parts of the film.

Sharing a point of view with Mabuse need not, of course, imply that we share his (im)moral values – we are witnesses of, not partners in the crimes he commits. What seems at stake, though, is our ability to maintain a critical distance and not be enticed to see the world merely through Mabuse's seductively all-seeing eyes. To see the 'whole of the fabric' (to use Pinthus's metaphor) in 'atomistically fragmented' times may seem enticing, but is – as the film seeks to demonstrate – less a sign of omniscience than a complacent or even deluded point of view.

Conclusion

Looked at historically, *Dr Mabuse, the Gambler*, with its references to lawlessness, war profiteering and social instability, seems to be above all a commentary on the social and political chaos of Germany's immediate post war years. At the same time, there are no direct references to actual political events. Lang's own description of the film, 45 years after it was made, as 'a documentary of the post-war period' should be read with caution (2003: 93). Frieda Grafe, in her cornerstone essay 'Fritz Lang: a Place, Not a Monument', points out that throughout his career Lang never sought a purely mimetic representation of reality:

> Lang's films are not realistic. They never reflect their immediate environment. They proceed from a recognisable abstract form of reality, created by specifically cinematic means, a method whose claim for truth is based on the fact that it does better justice to the artificial, fabricated, historical character of social reality than any ideas about a simple reflection of reality. (1987: 22-23)

What Lang's 'document of the time' records and examines is less the social reality outside the cinema than the medium's own part in creating, in Pinthus's words, 'photographic

innovations never seen before' for an audience that had already been deceived once by spectacular images that appeared to promise victory but had only covered up defeat a few years earlier. After the 'Great War', which turned out to be but a war of illusions, spectators were now experiencing to an even greater extent the sensation of 'photographic innovations' provided by a rapidly expanding mass culture with only their senses and reason available to them to tell fact from fiction, the actual from the impossible.

In *Dr Mabuse, the Gambler* 'the eye is charmed' (as Pinthus said) by a quasi 'authentic' visual experience of modernity, only to reveal the medium's ability to deceive the eye. Lang's mastery of film, and his invitation to the audience to master modern ways of seeing – speedy, fragmented, simultaneous – is informed by his awareness of the implications of film's ability to guide the spectator's attention. The film's critical engagement with its own rhetoric can be understood in this context as an exercise in complex seeing, inviting us, as spectators, to be aware of film's potential to offer partial and misguided perceptions in the guise of 'totality'. As his movies opened in Berlin's splendid picture palaces, Lang, never openly didactic, would leave it up to the spectator to pay attention or be tricked.

2. Stabilisation Period: Menschen am Sonntag: 'Fleeting Days'

> In einer kleinen Konditorei, da sassen wir zwei bei Kuchen und Tee. Du sprachst kein Wort, kein einziges Wort und wusstest sofort, dass ich dich versteh! Und das elektrische Klavier, das klimpert leise eine Weise von Liebesleid und Weh! In einer kleinen Konditorei, da sassen wir zwei bei Kuchen und Tee.
>
> (In a small pastry shop, we both sat with cakes and tea. You did not say a word, not a single word, but you immediately knew that I understood you! And the electric piano quietly played a song of heartache and sorrow. In a small pastry shop, we both sat with cakes and tea.) ('In a small pastry shop', composed by Fred Raymond, a popular tune in Germany 1929)

'A group of unknowns'

Menschen am Sonntag / *People on Sunday* a late silent film, was shot during the rainy summer of 1929. Its directors, Robert Siodmak and Edgar Ulmer, belonged to 'Film-Studio 1929', a production team that included Robert's brother Kurt as well as Billy Wilder, Fred Zinnemann, Moritz Seeler and Eugen Schüfftan. Founded in June 1929, the group sought to produce experimental films in a collaborative manner. Reviewing the film a day after its premiere in February 1930, Herbert Ihering describes 'Film-Studio 1929' as a group of 'unknowns' (1961: 300), with the exception of Schüfftan, already a well-known expert in trick cinematography. Based on an idea by Kurt Siodmak, *Menschen am Sonntag* was conceived as a 'reportage', or 'Querschnittsfilm', a non-fiction mode conceptually similar to a newspaper report in terms of its factual style, objective narration and focus on the everyday. The term 'Querschnitt' (cross section) refers to the genre's objective of investigating particular strata (a 'slice') of society and its role and function in the working life of the city. Stylistically, 'Querschnitt' films are often linked to the aesthetics and themes of New Objectivity, which peaked in the visual arts, literature, theatre and cinema during Weimar Germany's economic and social 'stabilisation' period between the implementation of the Dawes plan in 1924 and the stock market crash in October 1929.

In the absence of a programme or unifying theory of New Objectivity's artistic intentions, various writers have attempted definitions encompassing its manifestations in 1920s literature and visual arts. Wieland Schmied argues that New Objectivity is:

> not so much a new style as a new way of seeing, corresponding to a changed attitude to the phenomena of life; it reflects a radicalcommitment to the modern environment and everyday life.(1979: 13).

Schmied lists 'visual sobriety and acuity, an unsentimental, largely emotionless way of seeing … concentration on everyday things, on banal, insignificant and unpretentious subjects …a new mental relationship with the world of objects' (ibid.) as amongst New Objectivity's key characteristics.

With its sober and impersonal focus on the everyday life of the city and the leisure activities of five ordinary young people, *Menschen am Sonntag* ostensibly adheres to New Objectivity's approach and the conceptual parameters of the cross-section film. Thematically, the film's focus on five young people employed at the lower scale of the city's service industry – respectively a taxi driver, a shop assistant, a salesman, a film extra and a shop model – demonstrates its awareness of the emerging class of 'Angestellten' ('salaried', or 'white collar' workers), whose lifestyle and leisure activities reflect processes of increasing commodification and consumption during the mid- to late 1920s period in Weimar Germany. *Menschen am Sonntag* could thus be regarded as firmly 'neusachlich' both stylistically and thematically.

The purpose of the following close reading of selected moments, however, is to reveal the film's surprisingly ambivalent relationship to the style it so demonstrably employs.

The analysis will focus on subtle shifts in the film's processes of narration, changing from a detached and sober observational style at the beginning to an increasingly subjective, gently ironic and empathetic depiction of the young people, particularly its female characters, as the narrative progresses.

The focus on the film's narrational nuances seeks to show its subtle critique of New Objectivity's 'largely emotionless ways of seeing' and the effects of the 'new way of seeing' (Schmied 1979: 13) on those sections of society most eager to embrace them – in the world of the film and, by implication, its audience. The film's exercise in complex seeing lies in its invitation to the spectator to balance the detached observation of the social transformation brought about by the modern, urban, but also increasingly isolating and consumerist lifestyle, with a more subjective grasp of the subtle imagery hinting at the emotional vulnerability of the young women and, ultimately, their confinement to insignificant, largely passive gender roles, despite their growing financial independence.

Saturday

The film's opening sequence introduces the 'cross-section' of five young people representative of the city's salaried class, whose lifestyle and leisure pursuits are at the centre of the film's inquiry. The last of the opening titles promises, 'These five people appeared before a camera for the first time in their lives. Today they are all back in their own jobs.' The first image we see is a close-up of a car registration number on the back of a vehicle. We are then introduced in a series of seven shots, to Erwin Splettstösser, who, an intertitle informs us, 'drives taxi 1A 10088'. The next intertitle reads: 'Last month Brigitte Borchert sold 150 copies of the record "In a Small Pastry Shop"' and we observe the shop assistant outside an Electrola record store in the city. Subsequently Wolfgang von Waltershausen, whose line of work includes 'officer, farmer, antique dealer, gigolo, [currently] wine trader' and Christl Ehlers, a film extra, are introduced in the same manner: with an intertitle and several shots of each character in their day job. Annie Schreyer, a 'model', is encountered in the crammed tenement flat she shares with Splettstösser. The sequence concludes with an introduction to the city of Berlin itself with mobile shots capturing the capital's traffic and pedestrians on their way home from work on a Saturday afternoon.

This sequence lasts just under three minutes. Its emphasis is on the authenticity of the four young people presented: 'Today they are all back in their own jobs', signals the film's apparent adherence to a documentary mode of representation, albeit one that involves 'experimentation'. From the start, the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction modes are blurred: the film employs real people to play 'themselves' in a 'matter-of-fact' romantic sketch written by Billy Wilder in the functional style of neusachliche prose and poetry.

Opening image: I A- 10088

Our epistemic access to the world of the film is tightly controlled in the first shot: the framing dictates that we gain narrative information only from the code on the plate, as its immediate surroundings are excluded. Stylistically, the image is characteristic of New Objectivity's focus on everyday objects and attention to detail. At the same time, it presents an image reduced to a sign system that is either instantly recognisable, or wholly inaccessible to the onlooker unfamiliar with the symbolic code.

We are historically at one remove from the image, but it can be assumed that the Berlin audience at the time would have been familiar with the code: according to Ludwig Bauer (1988) the Roman number I stands for the county of Prussia and the letter A signals that the car is registered in the district of greater Berlin. The numbers after the hyphen give the individual registration of the vehicle. Later in the film other objects, such as historical buildings, geographical landmarks and monuments in a park will become emblematic of the city, but none will be as *abstract* as the emblem depicted in the opening shot. Considering that the film could have opened with a range of images that would unmistakably – and perhaps more dramatically – disclose the location for viewers outside the capital (Reichstag, Brandenburg Gate, for example) this unusual choice by the filmmakers invites further deliberation.

What is on 'display' for the audience to take note of in this 'establishing' shot is not so much an evocative location that summons up the city but a style: the shot of the number plate propagates a kind of visual representation that is factual, dispassionate and unambiguous. The number plate conjures up no sense of patriotic sentiment, historical knowledge or political association. Instead, it encourages – even prescribes – a wholly rational way of seeing: the obvious – and only – inference the primary audience could draw from this image is that this is a number plate for a vehicle registered in the city of Berlin. The cognitive process would be automatic, the answer precise and accurate: the Roman I reads 'Prussia', the letter A stands in for 'Berlin'. It is a purely mechanical way of making sense of what we see on screen, an instruction to apply a sober and non-subjective approach to reading the image. We are encouraged to take up the position of an objective, knowledgeable and analytical observer of events. In short, perceptual and cognitive processes initiated by the opening shot mirror a form of rationalisation commonly associated with the 'rapid industrial modernisation' (Durst 2004: xxx) between 1924 and 1929.

The number plate represents not only a specific place, but also a specific time: not Berlin's historical past but the infrastructure of a modern city with its asphalt streets, tramlines and busy boulevards. The wording of the intertitle introducing Erwin Splettstösser is factual in tone, and the detail, 'drives taxi 1A 10088' is characteristic of New Objectivity prose: the use of non-literary elements, such as numbers, statistics, or advertisement slogans, typified the movement's striving for authenticity and its focus on present-day life. In the opening seconds we are faced with a familiar facet of modern city life, a taxi pulling off a curb, 'pulled' into sharp focus by the camera, whose mechanical look firmly guides and enhances the viewer's attention to technical detail.

Little Shop girls…

The prose of the intertitle introducing Brigitte Borchert continues in the factual style and attention to detail of the previous intertitle. In contrast to Erwin, we do not actually see Brigitte selling a copy of the record 'In a Small Pastry Shop'; instead, a long take of the imposing glass fronted façade of the Electrola gramophone record shop foregrounds not the sales assistant, but the elaborately decorated shop windows of the company that employs Brigitte. Her introduction emphasises not only the young woman's marginal position in the company and her limited involvement with the product she sells but also points to processes of commodification and cultural consumption – in this instance, of human experience and feelings captured in popular tunes like the one Brigitte has sold to over a hundred customers.

In the film's Sunday section, Brigitte takes a portable gramophone to a rendezvous at the lake. Though love songs, such as 'In a Small Pastry Shop', or the popular tune 'On Sunday My Sweetheart Wants to Take Me Sailing' (which were played on a gramophone in the cinema auditorium during screenings, see 'E.L.' 1930: 5) can to some extent be expressive of Brigitte's feelings and desires, they simultaneously 'compartmentalise' notions of love and romance, stressing not the uniqueness of Brigitte's experience but the clearly defined rituals of the 'boy meet girl' scenario. Significantly, it is after Brigitte's hurried sexual intercourse with Wolfgang adjacent to a rubbish tip that one of the records gets broken and Brigitte is left – literally and figuratively – to pick up the pieces of her brittle romantic aspirations.

Wolfgang

Von Waltershausen is introduced by a mobile camera, which depicts an advertisement for wine and subsequently pans right to reframe on Wolfgang standing outside Lehmann's, a wine trading company. The movement draws attention to the character's itinerant occupational status as well as once again foregrounding processes of commodification and consumption. The advert, which depicts an idyllic rustic setting with a wine drinker composing the poetic slogan 'What is wine? Sunshine caught [in a glass] … it certainly will do no harm', stands in contrast to the urban environment and 'Lehmann's wines' wholesale business's interest in wine and its large-scale consumption.

Yet von Waltershausen not only trades in wine: his work as 'Eintänzer' ('paid dancer'/gigolo) refers to another novel phenomenon of modern urban living, whereby Berlin's Grand Hotels hired male dancing partners for the surplus of female guests attending the capital's popular 5 o'clock tea dances (see Haustedt 1999). Wolfgang's looks, charm and skills as a dancer become commodities that can be purchased, for a small fee, by (salaried) single women. All these considerations are made possible by the pan, introducing Wolfgang *after* the advertisement and enabling us to take a swift glance at two types of realism – one romantic/nostalgic, one sober/detached.

Yet both are present in one shot, capturing the fabric of a zeitgeist Ernst Bloch referred to as 'ungleichzeitig' (non-simultaneous): the process of capitalist modernisation in a society in transition from old to new (see Durst 2004: 1).

Christl and Annie

The occupations of Christl Ehlers and Annie Schreyer as film extra and model introduce notions of role-play and image construction to the socio-economic discourses discussed so far. There are various implicit parallels between the two characters, which are played out in the narrative. Both Christl and Annie are fashionable, young, independent women; crucially though, whereas the well-dressed Christl is depicted on the streets waiting, respectively, for an audition and shortly afterwards for a date (though the man she claims to be waiting for never appears), Annie is presented as dishevelled in appearance and confined to the flat she shares with her boyfriend Erwin. The introductory images emphasise the overt differences between the two women, juxtaposing Christl's zeal in gaining a part in a film with Annie's lethargy, Christl's groomed appearance with Annie's neglect of her beauty, and Christl's élan in meeting young men for a date with Annie's preference to savour romance (a film with Great Garbo) at the movies.

As the narrative progresses it becomes apparent that Christl and Annie are at different stages of the transformed social roles occupied by 'modern' urban women. Christl is presented as a young woman enjoying the city's streets and cafés for her own pleasure. Yet streets and cafés, rather than being the romantic

spaces serenaded in 'In a Small Pastry Shop', will be exposed as sites of potential deception and exploitation by the end of the film, inviting a surprising revaluation of Annie's self-elected confinement to, and isolation in, the fraught domestic space of the tenement flat.

Although ostensibly designed as random 'snapshots' of the five young men and women chosen to represent the 'people on Sunday', the detail of the shots of the opening sequence reveals that they are, in fact, tightly controlled and significantly organised. Narrational processes analysed so far foreground a number of characteristics that can be summarised as follows: first and foremost, the film stresses that the people we see are 'real', that they exist outside the world of the film, that they have real names and indeed work as taxi driver, shop assistant, wine dealer, film extra and model. As a 'cross section' of Berlin's citizens, all five are salaried workers, carrying out tasks brought about by the rationalisation and specialisation of modernist capitalist production. All five belong to the lower spectrum of this socio-economic group, working in the service and culture industry. They serve the city's growing consumer society, themselves human commodities in a market where low-skill workers can easily be substituted. The emphasis in the opening (their 'first time' in front of a camera,

now all back in their own jobs) on the supposed 'normality' of the chosen five is thus accompanied by an implicit commentary about the limited scope of the professional roles they perform on a day-to-day basis. As the sequence continues it becomes apparent that processes of commodification and consumption experienced in their work extend into the realms of their private lives.

Yet another intertitle introduces a sixth 'character': the city of Berlin itself. A series of shots filmed around the central Bahnhof Zoo area presents the city as a space dominated by movement and vision. Neither following nor anticipating any action in the conventional sense, the camera assumes the role of observer, with no fixed object of study, and images of traffic, pedestrians and a busy intersection are edited in a loose montage style. Another montage depicts trains leaving Zoo station and shows various advertisements posted on a railway arch. The representation of the city in terms of disconnected movements of people and traffic emphasises the mechanisation and fragmentation of the contemporary urban environment.

Jost Hermand argues that 'the central space for the *Neue Sachlichkeit* was the city, because city-dwellers had already achieved a positive alienation: the atomisation of an anonymous and impersonal society based on the homogenisation and standardisation of all forms of life' (1994: 61). From presenting

Berlin as the definitive visual expression of New Objectivity, the film progresses to scrutinise the modern, rational and pragmatic lifestyle associated with the movement.

In the sequence following the introduction of the characters and the city of Berlin, the narrative's focus on the social environment of the city is replaced by the study of the social behaviour of its citizens. The camera work continues in the same observational style employed to depict the city, linking the modern environment to emerging forms of transformed social behaviour. The passing of trams and the passing of strangers is depicted from the now familiar perspective of the detached, high angle camera.

Instead of witnessing the beginning of a romantic encounter, we are presented with a dispassionate dissection of social behaviour in the sequence depicting Christl's encounter with von Waltershausen on the forecourt of Zoo station. Framed by other familiar Saturday afternoon activities, such as finishing work and cleaning the city in readiness for the collective day off, Christl's and Wolfgang's attempts to find someone to spend their Sunday with are presented as merely another ritual in the wider social phenomenon of increasingly secular leisure pursuits on Sundays.

Cruising

The sequence depicts Wolfgang approaching Christl, who appears to be waiting for someone near a small kiosk outside the station. Eventually, they go to a café, flirt and arrange to meet up at Nikolaussee, a lake on the western outskirts of the city, on Sunday. At the beginning of this sequence, the considerable distance between camera and characters signals the camera's apparent non-intervention in the action, which on the surface is just one of the many things happening in this scene. Frequently, passing traffic obscures our view of the two young people at this busy traffic intersection.

Though the interaction between the two characters is by no means privileged by the camera, it is nonetheless a tightly choreographed piece of performance. What could be perceived as a casual encounter between two strangers is revealed, by the high angle, observational distance of the camera, as a calculated, almost predatory circling of the young

woman by Wolfgang. Eventually, the camera follows both characters as they cross the busy street between the traffic island and the pavement.

By mixing documentary modes with elements of fiction, the film creates a tension between the representative (documentary) and exceptional (fictional) character of what is shown. Because the camera observes from a distance, there is little sense of an active intervention into a chance event, which, it seems, would unfold regardless of the presence of the camera, in the same way that other events unfold – from people boarding trams to trains leaving the station on the overhead track. The camera purposefully blends the individual story into the wider social fabric of the city.

Before dissolving to a more conventional two-shot of the couple in a café, the vantage of the camera shows Christl and Wolfgang crossing the tramlines: narrational strategies situate the negotiation of sexual attraction in the context of the city's modern infrastructure, juxtaposing strangers standing and walking side by side, with modern rites of courtship that have to negotiate the urban phenomenon of the increasing anonymity of individuals amongst the masses.

In the café, Christl's confident assertion that she was not stood up by another man suggests that she may not simply be the passive victim of Wolfgang's advances but that she may have chosen to stand outside the kiosk on her own volition with the intention of attracting a suitor on a Saturday evening. During their conversation a caterpillar falls onto the coffee tray and we observe Wolfgang dripping water on the young insect. Briefly, the camera's focus on the couple's flirtation is replaced by a close-up of the caterpillar on the metal tray. Stylistically, the sudden focus on the insect amidst the quasi-still life of everyday objects – the tray, water glasses and cups on the table – is in line with the visual art of New Objectivity. The striking sharpness and precision of the image signals the camera's equal interest in the larva and the characters – they are all placed under the scrutiny of the photographic lens for the audience to study, like organisms under a microscope.

Additionally, by placing the courting ritual and the inspection of the insect side by side, the film introduces a motif of juxtaposing romance with objects that may produce a physical response of distaste (such as the caterpillar) and which is repeated later on in the film where lovemaking takes place near discarded rubbish. The tone of both scenes is distinctly unsentimental; instead, the film's interest in the flirting couple only lasts as long as the couple's interest in the caterpillar.

Comparing the opening of *Menschen am Sonntag* to Irmgard Keun's novel *Das kunstseidene Mädchen/The Artificial Silk Girl* (1932), Richard W. McCormick notes that in both

film and novel similar social processes take place: a young woman allows a man to speak to her on the street and then goes out with him. In both cases, the encounter turns out to be unsatisfactory for the woman. McCormick argues that both texts cite 'a common behaviour that alludes to other broader social and cultural discourses in late Weimar Germany about the supposedly emancipated sexual morals of young people, especially young single women of the white-collar work force.' (2001: 10)

However, in contrast to the novel, which is told in a first-person narration, *Menschen am Sonntag* consistently emphasises its observational, non-subjective stance and the film's unwillingness to prioritise the characters over their surroundings (great or small) complicates conventional methods of alignment. Instead of being invited to focus on the characters' subjectivity we are asked to place them in relation to their environment, from station forecourts to street cafés. These decisions thus firmly position the spectator at a distance to the characters, stressing the representative, or 'cross-section', nature of what is shown and the role of the spectator-as-observer. Soon after recording Christl's encounter with Wolfgang, the camera returns to capturing non-fiction images of road sweepers cleaning the city streets in preparation for Sunday.

Images and role play

The final Saturday section takes place at the flat Erwin shares with Annie in one of Berlin's working-class district tenement blocks. It depicts the couple's volatile relationship and less than harmonious home life, qualifying more traditional notions of the home as a safe haven from the dangers of the street. In the scene, Erwin returns home from work and before long he and Annie start arguing. As a result, instead of going to the movies, the couple stays in, where they are joined by Wolfgang. The men start playing cards and Annie retreats to bed.

As in the opening, the sequence opens with a close-up, this time of several postcard-sized pictures of actors Willy Fritsch and Greta Garbo attached to the wall of the flat. During their spat, Erwin intentionally splatters shaving foam onto the photo of Willy Fritsch, and Annie 'retaliates' by burning a picture of Greta Garbo. The narrative's foregrounding of the photos raises questions about the relationship between the pictures of the movie stars and the couple. They ironically illustrate the discrepancy between the actual and the fictional; the couple's home life differs greatly from the star vehicles and romantic comedies featuring the actors. The selective destruction of the

images suggests a considerable degree of sexual investment in the stars, which leads to Erwin and Annie acting on a jealous impulse. Dissatisfied with each other, it seems that Erwin and Annie project dreams and desires onto their favourite movie stars, whose pictures (plastered over the walls of their flat) they tear down and rip up at the climax of their quarrel.

However, the focus on the images also draws attention to the film's own devices and its objective of portraying the lives of five young people *through* the camera. The contrast between the non-professional status of Erwin, Annie and the others and the star status of Fritsch and Garbo only adds to the narration's self-conscious practice: it firmly propagates its objective of offering a snapshot of everyday 'people', not stars. Significantly, the film's modernist practice of making its own devices clear draws attention to the social function of cinema in Weimar Germany's visual culture.

Sabine Hake draws attention to the 'tremendous impact cinema had in constructing the uniform, seemingly classless subject of consumer society' (1987: 152), which Erwin, Annie and the others exemplify. The narration thus hints at its own status in constructing the kinds of images that influence the perception and social roles the young people in turn strive to adopt. Whereas on a narrative level the film claims merely to show what already exists outside the studio, specific choices of what to show foreground the medium's social function, which far exceeds its own claim of being merely the facilitator of a purely observational experience of reality, or, in this case, of a cross-section of society.

Sunday

In the second part of the film, the Sunday section, the narration shifts from presenting the five as a cross-section sample and begins to engage with the implications of new objective ways of seeing and with the New Objectivity lifestyle.

The Sunday section forms the main body of the film, focusing on the activities of Berlin's citizens on their day off. As in the opening sequences, there is an alternation between narrative strands involving the five young protagonists and extensive non-fiction material depicting different parts of the city and its outskirts on a Sunday in the summer of 1929. The non-fiction sequences omit more traditional Sunday pursuits such as Sunday service or lunch with the family; instead, families are depicted in parks, lidos and the city's Strandbäder, the public beaches along the shores of Berlin's lakes.

An extended montage sequence depicts a range of activities, including spectators at a hockey match, families playing and sunbathing in a park and a crowded lido. Other shots capture those remaining in the city enjoying the sun on balconies and benches placed along the city's tree-lined boulevards. Hausvogteiplatz, a usually busy square in the heart of the city centre, lies deserted as people rest in the afternoon sun. The flow of documentary images is ruptured by a shot of Annie in the flat, and the narrative then briefly turns to the other protagonists, depicting Brigitte and Christl snoozing in Wolfgang's arms by the lake, before reverting to views of shop windows advertising manicures and near deserted city streets and squares. By foregrounding various leisure activities and emphasising their mass appeal, the film portrays the modern, democratic lifestyle propagated by Neue Sachlichkeit values. Jost Hermand argues:

> From the beginning of the 1920s on, proponents of *Neue Sachlichkeit* believed that the most important of these new leisure-time opportunities were those offered by the rapidly expanding entertainment industry: sport such as soccer, boxing, cycling and auto rallies, new technological accomplishments such as automobiles, radio, film, and records; advertisements, shop windows, and household implements; the feeling of being constantly up-to-date and informed by newspapers and illustrated magazines; and the largely free satisfaction of sexual needs in the homosexual and lesbian scene, or in open and uncommitted heterosexual relationships. (1994:61)

Hybrid Forms

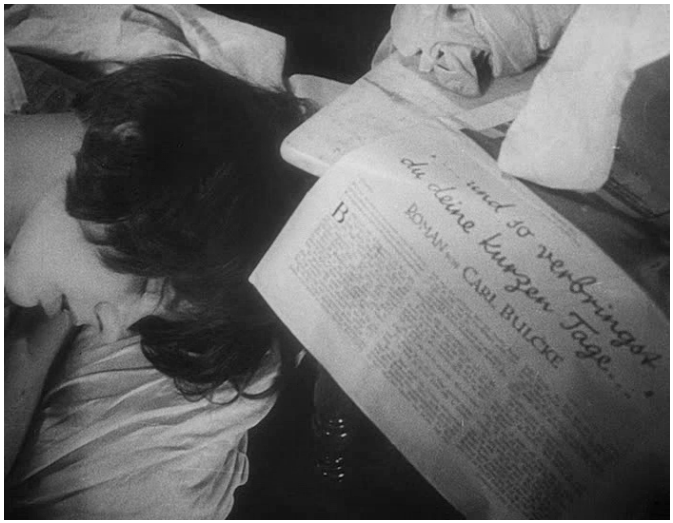
The blending of factual cross-section with methods of the avant-garde – such as the episodic, non-linear structure of the montage sections – is similar in style to the 'city symphony' mode produced across Europe in the mid- to late 1920s. Discussing the film which epitomises this sub genre, Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin- Die Sinfonie der Großstadt/Symphony of a Big City* (1927), Sabine Hake notes

> The principles of cross-section facilitate the displacement of social experience into spectatorial relations, thereby accomplishing the mixture of visual stimulation and critical detachment that is so typical of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and its conceptualisation of mass culture … Cross-section, it seems, involves an investigation of forms and structures, of appearances and essences. Yet both interests are articulated without regard for the object under investigation. (1994: 127- 128)

Although the extended montage sequence of parks, lidos and deserted city streets sweltering in the heat adheres in many ways to the cross-section ideal, the insert shot of Annie in the flat breaks the convention by developing a different kind of relationship to the character: more subjective than the disregarded 'object under investigation', as I shall argue below.

'Fleeting Days'

The shot begins with a close-up of a newspaper, displaying on its open page a serialised novel by Carl Bulcke entitled *Und so verbringst du deine kurzen Tage*, then pans left to reveal



Annie still asleep in bed. Her passivity stands in sharp contrast to the sports and leisure activities depicted up to this point and the title of the novel, *And This is How You Spend Your Fleeting Days*, implies a gentle admonishment of Annie for not making the most of a warm and sunny Sunday afternoon. This shift has implications for the position of the spectator in relation to the world of the film: framing decisions concerning Annie no longer keep us at an 'arm's length' from action and character, but bring us – both perceptively and cognitively – closer to the object of study.

Of all the 'people on Sunday', Annie's behaviour is the most distinct in its opposition to the uniform activities of her peers, which raises our interest in the character and her motivation (or, more precisely, lack of it). However, as the camera returns to the four other characters at the lake snoozing in the sun, it soon becomes apparent that the ways in which they spend their fleeting days may be equally at odds with certain expectations propagated by Neue Sachlichkeit's lifestyle.

Christl

The shot of Wolfgang holding both Christl and Brigitte in his arms is tightly controlled. It pans from Erwin snoring on his back to Christl lying in Wolfgang's arms and stroking his hand. Despite their physical proximity, Christl and Wolfgang's bodies never share a frame. The pan continues left to reveal Wolfgang playing with Brigitte's hair. The camera pauses as Wolfgang looks from one girl to the other, only to start playing with the torn shoulder strap of Brigitte's swimsuit. The camera reframes to include Brigitte with Wolfgang. After several attempts to gain her attention, Brigitte eventually responds to Wolfgang's advances by turning her face to him in a smile. Then follows a cut to a close-up of Christl with eyes closed and resting her head in Wolfgang's hand.

The mobile framing in the first shot firmly guides the spectator's attention to reveal, step-by-step, Christl's unrequited fondness of Wolfgang, the man's spurned, then successful, advances to Brigitte and her hesitant complicity in the flirtation, then the return to Christl on her own. The composition of this triangle of fickle emotions and erotic pangs has an awkward relationship to the modern liberated lifestyle associated with New Objectivity. As Hermand comments:

> 'In all these activities, participants were supposed to develop an attitude toward life based no longer on values like love of other human beings, time-consuming higher education, the capacity for intellectual criticism, high culture, and

> comradely solidarity – values increasingly seen as obsolete and therefore threatening the achievement of a completely free and open lifestyle – but rather on selfishness, entertainment, change, mobility, the avoidance of frustration, and the release of sexual and psychic pressure. (…) Even in the realm of love, the future lay not in spiritual union but in a sober eroticism carried out with sportsmanlike fairness. (1994:61)

Whereas the pan can be read as the visual expression of these forms of social interaction, the close-up of Christl conveys a different meaning. Conceptually, it differs from the sharpness of the preceding images: our view is slightly obscured by grass blades casting partial shadows across Christl's arm and face. In contrast to the depiction of Brigitte and Wolfgang in the harsh glare of the afternoon sun, the use of shade in the close-up of Christl gives the image a sense of depth and emotional resonance.

The image is both observational and expressive, revealing Christl's longing for tenderness as she moves Wolfgang's open palm closer to her face. Yet as she nestles her head more resolutely in his hand, she lies with her back to Wolfgang, who is fondling Brigitte's breasts with his other hand. The thin lines of shade on Christl's arms express the ephemeral quality of the moment, as she is holding on to Wolfgang before he will pull his hand away and reject her for Brigitte. Through all this, Christl's eyes are closed, shutting out her surroundings and – consciously or subconsciously – the activities behind her back.

Our view is privileged over Christl's in relation to Wolfgang's actions, which elicits our sympathy for the young woman, whose longing is so cruelly at odds with the actual situation. The image thus invites a kind of empathetic contemplation that differs from the more sober ways of seeing the film has – with the exception of the insert shot of Annie – encouraged us to adopt so far. The respective shots of Annie cooped up inside (when everyone else is not), and of Christl 'dreaming' of an intimacy with Wolfgang reserved for Brigitte, elicit curiosity and sympathy for their behaviours, with Annie oblivious and Christl vulnerable to their surroundings.

Nonetheless, this moment of expressiveness is only brief and the film reverts to non-fiction sections, once again depicting public spaces in the city and various leisure activities enjoyed by sunbathers on the sandy shores of Nikolaussee. When the narrative returns to the protagonists we observe them meandering through the woods surrounding the lake. A chase ensues, which separates Brigitte and Wolfgang from the others and they end up making love in a clearing.

Brigitte

During the couple's lovemaking the camera performs an extended pan, which traverses the surrounding ground and skyline of treetops. As mentioned earlier, it is at this point that the camera takes in the sight of discarded rubbish in the clearing. The camera breaks away from the story of the romance to consider other aspects of human activity, and to provide another kind of view. The decision to include the rubbish tip alters the tone of the scene, suggesting that the setting isn't as idyllic as it appears to be, and inviting us to view the budding romance in a different context to that which a simple evocation of nature would have provided.

When the camera returns to the couple Brigitte is still on the ground, her head turned away from Wolfgang and the

camera. A close up reveals that Brigitte's eyes are closed and the branches of overhanging pine trees cast a subtle layer of light and shade on her face. The bowtie fastening her dress around the neck has been ruffled, leaving us in no doubt about what happened to Brigitte while the camera 'looked away'.

Akin to the shot of Christl earlier the subtle pattern of light and shade of overhanging branches is reflected on Brigitte's face. Lying motionless, with eyes still closed, Brigitte, like Christl previously, wishes to prolong the moment. The tone is impressionistic, a composition of Brigitte's youth and vulnerability as well as a reflection on her introvert nature, preferring to linger in a state of reflection instead of getting ready to leave; in contrast, Wolfgang can be seen fastening his tie.

The camera rests on her face and after a short while Brigitte opens her eyes. As she rises, Brigitte becomes aware of a pinecone digging into her torso. As the couple inspect the cone in Brigitte's hand, the movement from two-shot to a close-up of the cone mirrors the earlier shot of Wolfgang and Christl studying the caterpillar in the café. Whereas for Brigitte the cone becomes a unique token of their lovemaking, it becomes apparent that Wolfgang seems less inclined to marvel at the beauty of nature. Moreover, the repeated use of the composition suggests that for Wolfgang locations, objects and girls are exchangeable, moments of intimacy replicable.

The strong sense of Brigitte and Wolfgang's opposed perceptions of the significance of their sexual encounter is strengthened in the scenes immediately following. Brigitte returns to the group to find that one of her records has been broken and others left carelessly scattered on the grass; as she

picks up the pieces, the sense of a greater loss than that of a prized commodity becomes palpable.

Reunited, the group returns to the lake shore to hire a paddling boat. As they cross the lake, the camera once more rests on Brigitte's face. As in the previous shot of Brigitte lying under the pine trees, the use of light and shade adds expressiveness to the image as the pattern of the boat safety net is visible across her face. We are invited to observe the young woman as she tenses and stretches her body across the edge of the boat, fervently enjoying the sensation of the water and the physical experience of her sexuality that afternoon. Yet despite this demonstration of Brigitte's vitality, the pattern of the net acts as reminder that Brigitte is unwittingly caught in a tacit agreement stipulating that the lovemaking will mean nothing more than a brief sexual encounter without any promise of an emotional commitment. The latter becomes obvious when Erwin and Wolfgang eagerly exchange contact details with two different young women in another vessel.

'Such a thing as desire'- a Berlin *Reigen*

This impressionistic representation of Christl and Brigitte differs perceptibly from the cross-section mode employed in previous sequences. This gradual shift from encouraging initially detached to subsequently more empathetic ways of seeing continues for the remainder of the film, and includes moments of social commentary: on their return to the city, Brigitte arranges to meet up with Wolfgang the following Sunday. After Brigitte has left, the camera stays with the men and we

witness them planning to go to a football match instead. In the end, it becomes clear that it is Brigitte who will be stood up the following weekend, taking over the role Christl occupied the week before.

The narrative structure thus alters from sober cross-section mode to a quasi-Berlin *Reigen* scenario, with Billy Wilder's script echoing the circular movement and theme of Schnitzler's rondo of unfulfilled desire. Although shots of Wolfgang and Brigitte back at work book-end the narrative, the last image before the final intertitles depicts the traffic island outside Bahnhof Zoo and more precisely the newsagent stall where Christl first stood awaiting a rendezvous that never materialised. Our last sight of Brigitte is once again outside the Electrola record shop, inviting us to wonder at what point the 'little shop girl' will realise that longing to spend Sunday afternoons sailing with sweethearts is a sentiment which may be in tension with the ways relationships are conducted in the modern city and which might be best confined to the kinds of records she sells.

Conclusion: 'Horror vacui'

Back in the city Erwin returns to the flat to find that Annie has slept through most of the day. Whereas the young man despairs at such seemingly decadent behaviour, a waste of youth's 'fleeting days', the audience has gained greater understanding of Annie's refusal to take part in modern weekend leisure activities and courting rituals. However, Annie's rejection of the limited options for expression available to a young woman of her social group confines her to the status of a sleeping beauty, unlikely ever to be woken by a kiss. Christl, in turn, will continue to chase after roles as 'film extra' during the week only to be similarly auditioned, cast and sidelined on Sundays. Similarly, it seems that Brigitte is unlikely to do anything too drastic in response to being stood up by Wolfgang. Rapture, passion and despair fit uncomfortably with the sober rationale – and rationalisation – governing all areas of modern city life.

The film thus begins to establish a link between New Objectivity's 'largely emotionless' ways of seeing and soulless human relationships rooted in the capitalist logic of means and interest. Though perhaps not as radical a critique of the petit bourgeoisie as a Franz Kafka novel, *Menschen am Sonntag* exposes the cross-section ideal of turning people into objects of inquiry as alienating and, essentially, inhumane. Significantly, the sober tone of early sequences and the use of techniques such as montage and freeze-frame, hint at the film's awareness of its own role in constructing mechanical ways of seeing. Close-ups of stylised photos of movie stars and the humorous juxtaposition of picture postcards with actual footage of sunbathers strengthens the inextricable link between seeing and perceiving – but also understanding and interpreting – the world through images.

The film's non-judgemental stance on the social processes it presents was heavily criticised by the left-wing press at the time of its release, who accused it of lacking the 'revolutionary ideology of the Russian films' and displaying 'petit bourgeois tendencies':

> Should Film- Studio 1929 remain attached to this petit bourgeois 'neutrality' and disregard the social reality of the revolutionary working class, this studio, destined for something better, will without fail end in a cul-de-sac, stranded in the inertia of bourgeois art. (Review in *Die Rote Fahne*, reprinted in NGBK 1977: 181)

Menschen am Sonntag certainly does not offer a political critique of New Objectivity comparable to other cultural outputs, such as Brecht's parable A *Man's a Man* (1926), in which the kindly packer Galy Gay is transformed, like a car, into the callous and cold-hearted fighting machine Jeraiah Jip. Whereas *A Man's a Man* relied on the use of props and masks to distance the audience from the action on stage, *Menschen am Sonntag* sets the spectator a different exercise in complex seeing. It invites the audience to refrain from adopting 'mechanical' ways of seeing, and to engage with action and characters compassionately, exceeding the purely observational experience of watching 'people on Sunday'. However, this is not to suggest that the film encourages sentiment, or a nostalgic romanticism for traditional social mores and morals; on the contrary, the everyday life of the city and its modernity are at the centre of the narrative.

The film's subtle critique of the social implications of alienated and alienating paradigms and the increased rationalisation

of public as well as personal aspects of city life corresponds to Siegfried Kracauer's notion of the 'horror vacui' (1995: 132) of modern city life, the 'emptying out of people's spiritual/intellectual space' (1995:129). Drawing attention to the emotional void in the lives of its characters, *Menschen am Sonntag* challenges the audience to engage with the everyday with reason *and* compassion. At a time when the left idealistically urged people to adopt ways of seeing rooted in reason and the scientific study of social relations, and the right sought to fill the 'horror vacui' with reactionary nostalgic rhetoric, finding a middle ground became increasingly difficult and opting for 'objective' perspectives progressively confined the onlooker to a state of inertia. For Film- Studio 1929's 'group of unknowns', the journey eventually led not into political concession and an artistic cul-de-sac, but into exile.

3. Pre-Fascist Period: To Think and To Want: *Kuhle Wampe*

> 'They weren't just paid workers, who did the work for the employers – those still exist today – but amongst these people there was a shared perception of their collective materialist conditions, and a desire to radically change those conditions.' (Decker & Hecker 2002: 1)

Introduction: Breaking with traditions… realist and real

On 4 May 1932, the German Communist Party paper, *Die Rote Fahne,* printed an invitation by Fichte, the umbrella organisation of Berlin's workers' athletics clubs, which read:

> Fichte's rambler section is breaking with the traditional men's outing on Ascension Day! Because Fichte's rambler section, the only revolutionary organisation of all working class ramblers, week-enders and excursionists, is organising a mass meeting at Kuhle Wampe under the motto 'Red Weekend in Kuhle Wampe'. No class conscious young worker, no class conscious proletarian, no employee should go on a traditional men's outing but should instead, on Thursday, 5th May, join the Fichte rambler's section for an outing to Kuhle Wampe. (In Gersch &Hecht 1973: 191)

The last third of the film *Kuhle Wampe* depicts just such a mass sports day organised by Berlin's communist athletic clubs, which brings together the city's young proletariat for a day of comradely sparring and political agitation. Due to financial difficulties at the time of production, the filmmakers even had to rely on the voluntary cooperation of 3000 Fichte sports club members when shooting the film's (fictional) sports day section. That events depicted in the film should so closely mirror the leisure pursuits of Berlin's class-conscious workers is hardly surprising considering the political stance of the production company and the collective of artists responsible for its creation.

Prometheus Film, the film's production company until its bankruptcy in January 1932, was founded by Willi Münzenberg, a publisher, whose pamphlet 'Let Us Conquer Film!' (1925) propagated a strong proletarian film culture in Germany to mount a left wing opposition to the reactionary tendencies of several of the republic's powerful media conglomerates. Münzenberg' s initiative brought together like-minded distribution and production companies in order to counteract the increased censorship of so-called 'Russenfilme' (Soviet montage films) and to meet the requirements of the 1925 'contingency' law, which stipulated that for every film imported into the country, a German film had to be exported to the country of the import's origin. Prometheus Film initially specialised in the production of so called 'contingency films', mostly political documentaries intended for Soviet audiences in exchange for Russian imports, but produced its first fiction film, *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*/*Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness* (directed by Piel Jutzi) in 1929, followed by its first and only sound film production, *Kuhle Wampe,* two years later.

The artistic collaboration between Slatan Dudow, Bertolt Brecht, Hanns Eisler and Ernst Ottwald equally ensured that *Kuhle Wampe* was firmly rooted in the revolutionary programme of communist cultural activity. Similar in theme to previous Prometheus productions, the film focuses on the representation of Berlin's proletariat in the face of growing unemployment and increased poverty in the city's working-class districts. Despite the convergence in content – both *Mother Krause* and *Kuhle Wampe* depict unemployment affecting two working-class families, leading to despair and suicide, as well as increased political activism amongst individual family members – they differ greatly in style. Whereas the form of realism employed in *Mother Krause* owes more to the overtly dramatic conventions of Weimar cinema's 'street film' genre than communist agitational propaganda ('agit-prop') methods, *Kuhle Wampe* is for the most part constructed around Brecht's emerging criticism of conventional realist aesthetics and his search for new realist models.

Rooted in theatrical practice, Brecht's concept of political realism developed during the 1930s and led to various definitions:

> *Realist* means: laying bare society's causal network / showing up the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators / writing from the standpoint of the class which has prepared the broadest solutions for the most pressing problems afflicting human society / emphasising the dynamics of development / concrete and so as to encourage abstraction'. (1992d: 109)

Brecht's concern with the social function of art needs to be placed in the context of the political situation at the time of the film's production. Against the background of an economic crisis and the political instability brought on by a democratically elected parliament unable to govern, the film's revolutionary intention was instantly recognised by the censor. This led to two complete bans and several cuts before the film's eventual release barely a year before the German National Socialist Workers' Party finally gained the majority in the republic's parliament and all communist political activity was henceforth banned.

Retrospective readings of *Kuhle Wampe* generally prioritise the film's social and political meaning, not least because its powerful appeal to solidarity resonates with the contemporary historical perspective that, whereas reactionary wings joined forces, the left ultimately failed to unite. Brecht's own writing on the film and the communist spirit of the Kuhle Wampe collective also support explicitly political interpretations. Discussions therefore tend to locate the relationship between film and audience in the framework of Brecht's political theatre, particularly the epic model, which defined the spectator as an active observer of the events happening on stage. As a result, readings of *Kuhle Wampe* frequently discuss moments where the filmic style is at its most innovatively 'Brechtian', engaging its audience in progressive political dialogue by means of distanciation.

The following reading will refer to established analyses of certain 'key' scenes in order to proceed to moments in the narrative which have, on the whole, been afforded less critical attention. Examination of these less 'telling', at times even puzzling, moments will suggest that they could be regarded as instances where the film momentarily suspends its didactic role in order to reflect self-consciously on the impact of its chosen style. Detailed study of certain decisions will illustrate the ways in which the film simultaneously creates and scrutinises the tightly controlled relationship between film and audience. The chapter further explores the tension between the film's didactic function as an explicitly political address to a proletarian audience and certain decisions made concerning the actual representation of the working class in the world of the film. Comments made by reviewers at the time of the film's release, especially left-wing writers, about its noticeably negative representation of some sections of the proletariat, suggest that *Kuhle Wampe's* engagement with the class it sought to address was possibly more complex than standard political readings would suggest. Discussion will focus on the ways in which the film seeks both to address a class and critically reflect on the extent to which art could affect ways of seeing and create political consciousness, especially when, as will be demonstrated, the characters in the world of the film repeatedly fail to ask questions about their situation. Stylistic decisions taken by the filmmakers can be seen as linked to the film's awareness that ways of seeing the world are neither natural nor simply available to be learned but are intimately bound with ways of life and with inferences characters draw from and about their situations. The film's incorporation of varied forms of rhetoric in its address to the audience (including the conventionally realist as well as overt agit-prop) suggests that its interest is not simply in making promises about a revolution but in stimulating this cognitive process: to think and to want.

Opening: 'One unemployed less'

Following the first chapter heading, 'One unemployed less', the opening shots of *Kuhle Wampe* depict a series of buildings: the Brandenburg Gate, instantly establishing Berlin as the film's location, factories and industrial areas in and around the city, as well as the facades and court yards of tenement blocks in Berlin's working-class districts. Another series of shots comprises a montage of newspaper headlines charting the relentless rise in mass unemployment in Germany. The final headline

informs us that there are now over five million unemployed in Germany with 315,000 unemployed in Berlin, of which 100,000 do not receive benefits.

The first images we see are authentic, documentary shots of the city. The collage of statistics and newspaper headlines is presented in the detailed factual mode of the New Objectivity style. James Pettifer criticises the scene's mimetic style and collage method for producing an effect he describes as 'basically synthetic rather than analytic' (1974: 57). He proceeds: 'The conventional response – banal – would be horror at the mechanisms of capitalism – basically a liberal response that is exploited every week by the popular Sunday press' (ibid.). Pettifer further notes that there 'is no real *gest* [sic] or social attitude found here, by any criteria drawn from Brecht's writing.' (ibid.). Pettifer attributes the absence of 'gest' (now generally referred to as 'gestus', an epic theatre method, which emphasises the social and economic processes happening between people by means of parody, distanciation, or demonstrational acting) to the collaborative working method of the group, whereby Dudow, Brecht, Eisler and Oswald each were able to contribute to individual sections, with Oswald responsible for the opening.

For the purpose of this analysis, it is important to note that Pettifer's critique of the opening suggests that there are various, at times quasi-cognitively opposed, styles in play from the very beginning of the film. A closer look at this section reveals that not only does the style differ from subsequent scenes, but that individual elements within the scene are juxtaposed in conscious opposition.

Polyphonic styles and meanings

The stylistic 'clash' becomes apparent when taking into account the music accompanying the opening images. The fast staccato rhythm of Eisler's polyphonic prelude is set against sober images devoid of any such vitality. Eisler himself comments on the function of the music:

> The contrast of the music – in terms of form and tone – in relation to the mere montage of images achieves a kind of shock, with the intention of evoking resistance rather than empathetic sentimentality. (In Adank 1976: 35)

Eisler's suggestion that the intention is to 'shock' the audience, in order to stir opposition to the images of a Berlin 'slum district in all its despair and dirt' (ibid.) seems overstated, since the opening images of the city contain no visible evidence of 'despair and dirt'. But the lively tone of the composition clearly clashes with the drab images of industrial areas and tenement blocks and thus brings into question the relationship between images and sound. The images are bland and contain little additional narrative detail beyond establishing a location – Berlin's proletarian north. Where the opening sequence of *Mother Krause*, set in the same Wedding district, incorporates actual footage of people living in impoverished conditions in overcrowded tenement blocks, *Kuhle Wampe* denies the audience access to such images of want and neglect. In contrast to the music, which instantly seeks to address the audience, rousing the listener into critical opposition, the images refrain from drawing the audience into the social milieu in which the action will be played out.

This discrepancy between images and sound draws attention to the status of the image: whereas Eisler's music fits in with the wider programme of producing films for and about the working class, the images convey no such impetus and could, on the contrary, be grouped with the apolitical optical experience propagated by New Objectivity. This 'lack' of agitational enthusiasm in the opening minute suggests that the film's relationship to its imagery is complex. Indeed, what seems at stake is the image itself, in particular its status as representative of the socio-economic reality outside the studio.

In essays and notes written between 1930-32 (as a response to a failed lawsuit against Nero-Film productions) Brecht discusses the verisimilitude of the photographic image in a short paragraph entitled 'No insight through photography':

> You don't have to doubt whether the cinema is up-to-date! Photography is the possibility of a reproduction that masks the context … from the (carefully taken) photograph of a

> Ford factory no opinion about this factory can be deduced. (2000a: 144)

I want to argue that this issue of the spectator's process of cognitive 'deduction' informs wider questions of *how* to construct the film's (fictional) reality in opposition to forms of realism that strive towards authenticity and verisimilitude. Visually, the film opens with a representational approach, which is then gradually juxtaposed with methods of rupture and distanciation in subsequent sequences. The opening can thus be regarded as the first instance of the film's interest in how stylistic decisions position the audience in relation to the narrative in more or less habitual ways by juxtaposing conventional documentary-style footage with the avant-garde sound of Eisler's composition. The following sections continue to examine the cognitive positioning of the audience in relation to the narrative by focussing on the ways of seeing displayed by the characters in the world of the film.

Epic methods and meanings: the 'job hunt' sequence and young Bönike's return home

The abrupt ending of the overture music over the last headline, '315,000 unemployed in Berlin', concludes the prologue section. In contrast to the previous headlines, the following shot of the vacancy page in a local Berlin paper is without sound, signalling a temporary 'halt' – musically and cognitively – prior to the next section, in which another sharp and driven orchestral piece accompanies shots of a large group of unemployed workers 'chasing' after the few available vacancies advertised in the paper.

The fast pace of the music initially stands in contrast to the images, which depict workers gradually gathering in a street waiting to pick up a copy of the local advertiser. Amongst the crowd, though not foregrounded, is the son of the Bönike family. At this stage, the pace of the editing is slow and the mode observational. The editing pace gradually increases as the workers ride their bikes across the city in search of work and repeated shots of the front wheels and of legs pushing pedals foreground the 'race' that now develops between the men. Although Bönike is the first to arrive at one building,

the receptionist rebuffs him. When two more cyclists follow in close succession the receptionist places a sign in the window. A close-up depicts the sign, which reads, 'Workers not needed'. The scene continues in this mode, alternating abruptly between shots of the legs and the upper bodies of the cyclists racing along the streets.

The rhythmic montage pattern is broken by a longer take of another factory building. As the cyclists pass the entrance, the camera tilts up and down the height of the building, catching

the men as they reappear, already back on their bikes. Another brief montage section focussing on the wheels racing along the asphalt and a final unsuccessful bid for work at a glazing company concludes the section. The music rises to a crescendo, and then stops abruptly.

In this sequence, the familiar process of looking for work is made unfamiliar by the use of camera work, montage style editing and sound. Several writers stress the desperation and competitive character conveyed by the combination of the disharmonious music, accelerated editing pace and the repetition of images (see Happel 1978; Silberman 1995). Frequently, these techniques are linked to Brechtian theatre methods: Yvonne Leonard notes that the scene containsthree layers of epic distanciation, 'musically, through montage and structurally' (1977: 59) and Pettifer identifies theact of 'riding bicycles' as the scene's '*gest*' (1974: 57), though he stops short of defining *Kuhle Wampe* as an epic film. Mark Silberman argues:

> In contrast to the Epic Theatre, gestus in *Kuhle Wampe* shifts from the actor of the performance to the camera and editing, in particular to their functions of interrupting and citing reality. Breaking the illusion of total visibility, montage becomes a means of deconstructing everyday actions and expressions into their social determinants and inscribing in them the conditions of their construction … For Brecht reality is not what the spectator sees but what the spectator re-cognises [sic], that which is behind the visible. The 'epic cinema', then, results precisely from the control of vision and seeing produced by the montage. (1995: 43)

This use of cinematic means of deconstruction, drawing attention to the economic conditions which, for Brecht, essentially determine human behaviour, thus mirrors the function of distanciation and gestus in the epic theatre. The repetition of images firmly guides the spectator to perceive and become more critically aware of the process of competition and growing desperation amongst the work force. Although the audience would of course have been familiar with the situation, the aim of the distanciation is to bring to the fore the actual materialist position in which the proletariat finds itself in capitalism – their dependency on a weekly pay-check, the constant threat of poverty and homelessness when their labour is not needed, and the unresponsiveness of capitalist institutions. The shot taking in the whole of the factory front in an up and downward tilt of the camera seems to suggest that whereas the workers are competing and growing desperate, entering and exiting factory gates and forecourts, the foundations of private property and paid work are rock-solid, impervious to the needs and in opposition to the interests of the people who do the work.

Epic methods in Brecht's theatrical practice are closely linked to instruction and knowledge – processes, which in turn are rooted in observation: '[Epic theatre's] aim was less to moralise than to observe. That is to say it observed, and then the thick end of the wedge followed: the story's moral.' (1992c: 75) Yet despite the scene's use of epic methods and its strong didactic tone, there is no 'moral' at the end of the unsuccessful job hunt, no explanation as to the causes that foster competition, not solidarity, amongst the workers. The call for solidarity remains suspended until the final section of the film; meanwhile, the narrative focus shifts from the wider socio-economic complex to the particular situation of one family.

From addressing the audience as a class, the film now proceeds to examine the class it seeks to address, starting with the Bönike family. The sequence following the job hunt focuses on the ways in which individual family members perceive their financial situation. Critical analysis will focus on the juxtaposition between the ways in which the social and economic situation has been presented to the audience in the cinema and views held and expressed by the Bönikes. The young man's return home links the job hunt episode to the subsequent section of the family dinner.

The scene begins in silence: after the prolonged and harried race around the city, a group of cyclists now pushing their bikes comes to a halt outside the entrance of a tenement block. As the young man (uncredited) parts from the group and heads for the entrance, a piece of music becomes audible. In contrast to the disjointed previous piece, this music is melodic and jolly in tone. A cut takes us inside the courtyard, displaying the façade of a wing facing the inner courtyard. The shot is taken from a low angle, pointing up the façade displaying rows of windows facing the courtyard. The music gradually swells and the following shot reveals two street musicians sitting in the courtyard as the diegetic source of the sound, with one man playing the saw, the other a harmonium. The saw's swinging metal blade produces an unusual high pitch vibrating sound. The piece, 'In Rixdorf ist Musike' ('Music in Rixdorf') is a polka rooted in the folk music tradition. The musicians sit with their backs to the camera. Young Bönike enters the frame right and pauses to listen to the music. After a while, he moves on.

The shot continues for a few seconds after his exit and then there follows a cut to the family's living room. The street music can still be heard from the courtyard below, repeating the lively chorus of the tune. Bönike's father (Max Sablotzki) reads the paper, while the mother (Lilli Schönborn) is laying the table for the family meal.

Father: The boy won't get any more dole from now on.

When his wife fails to respond, he continues:

Father: You don't care any more, do you?

A cut to the entrance hall of the flat shows the bike suspended from the ceiling with the young man fastening the rope holding

the bike in place to the doorframe. The camera is positioned behind the wheel and the action is filmed through the spokes of the front wheel. The polka piece comes to an end.

The scene depicts the passage from street level to the private sphere of the Bönike household. The low-angle shot of the rows of windows facing the inner courtyard on one level confirms the typicality of the setting (tenement blocks built around small inner courtyards). The musicians are situated opposite the dilapidated façade of a basement flat, emphasising the very basic and utilitarian conditions of proletarian living quarters. The run-down courtyard environment stands in contrast to the tempo and vivacious melody of the polka music, which evokes associations of the merriment of communal dance in the more traditional setting of a Bohemian village fair. The presence of street musicians 'busking' in the inner courtyard is not too dissimilar from a scene following the documentary-style opening section of *Mother Krause*, in which the tenants of Mother Krause's flat merrily dance along to the 'sound' of an organ-grinder (implied by cross cutting between the musician and the characters in the flat) in the courtyard of their tenement block. However, whereas the organ grinder in Piel Jutzi's film is woven into the narrative to add to the proletarian 'milieu' of Berlin's 'Red' Wedding district, I want to argue that the musicians in *Kuhle Wampe* carry a more complex narrative function.

The music is the first instance of diegetic sound in the world of the film. The unusual swinging and gliding sound of the saw, produced by running a bow across a metal blade, works against the familiar polka sound and its more traditional instrumentation of a clarinet or fiddle. In contrast to the characters in *Mother Krause* young Bönike's response to the music is impassive; whilst clearly listening to the music he shows no obvious response to the dynamics of the polka, such as a tap of the foot, or a nod of the head. His reaction could be read as an expression of his disillusionment with the unsuccessful job hunt, yet as the film cuts to the Bönike family's flat, it becomes apparent that Father and Mother Bönike also ignore the music, which can be heard from outside their window. I want to argue that the music creates a noticeable disjunction between sound and spoken word.

The first lines of dialogue ('The boy won't get any more dole from now on') sixty shots into the film is significant in several ways: firstly, it introduces the topic that will dominate the dinner conversation and which will, ultimately, lead the son's decision to commit suicide. Secondly, it presents the film's overriding theme – the effects of a capitalist economy on its working class. Despite the gravity of the consequences of this piece of 'news' the actor articulates the line in a factual and bland manner. The jolly music underlining the dialogue opens a 'gap' between the joyful spirit evoked by the polka piece and the gravity of the situation, and creates a moment of cruel irony: the musicians may wish to earn a penny by playing a cheerful tune, but it clashes with the stark reality faced by thousands of men like Bönike. The initial low-angle shot of identical rows of windows indeed suggest that the Bönikes may not be the only tenements affected by the latest government decree.

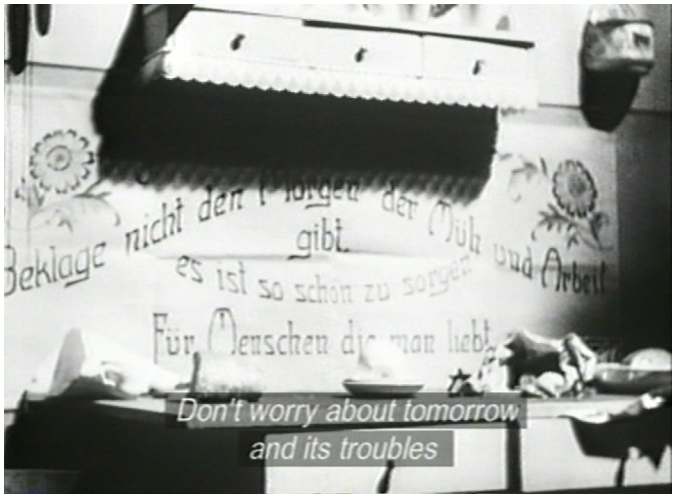
Significantly, the scene illustrates the first instance of the characters' reluctance to respond to what is happening around them: the son appears to be listening but remains unresponsive to the music and withdraws even further during the subsequent discussion at the dinner table; the father reads the latest news, but seems unaware of what is happening outside the window; the mother shows only indifference to the worsening situation. The final shot in this scene (also shot through the spokes of Bönike's bike) briefly but succinctly evokes a sense of the young man being 'trapped' by the economic situation the wheel of a bicycle (an object extensively utilised in the earlier montage sequence) represents. The choice of camera position thus provides a visual clue of the role economic conditions play in determining a character's behaviour; in the young man's case, the daily repetition of the unsuccessful job hunt has led to dejection and almost a sense of institutionalisation, represented by Bönike's unresponsiveness to the 'outside' world, and, in his parents' case, the world 'outside the window'.

Conversation over dinner

In this section the family gathers around the dining table for the main meal of the day, during which the parents both accuse the son of not trying hard enough in his efforts to find work. The sister (Herta Thiele) defends her brother and an argument ensues between father and daughter. The son remains silent throughout. The conversation evolves around the concepts of 'Tüchtigkeit' (efficiency) and 'Höflichkeit' (good manners), which the parents regard as essential qualities in finding work. In their view, the son is lacking in both and therefore to blame for being out of work.

Singled out by the camera, the mother recites a proverb, 'Initiative always brings its rewards', which the actor delivers in a stylised speech pattern which lacks expression, accent and intonation. The mother then turns to the son and continues speaking in a more conversational manner, with her noticeable Berlin accent now breaking through again. Her exclamation is followed by a cut to a previous shot of the unemployed workers riding their bikes. This method of inserting an unrelated image is repeated when the daughter's exclamation, 'There is no work', is juxtaposed with a previous shot of the workers pushing their pedals. The father's comments are noticeably generalised, suggesting that '*one* can be poor, *one* can be unlucky' rather than addressing the son directly. The section ends on a close-up of a tapestry hanging over the kitchen stove. Bordered by flowers, the inscription on the tapestry reads: 'Don't worry about tomorrow and its troubles / it is a joy to care for those we love'.

Truisms and proverbs thus dominate the conversation, but specific choices by the filmmakers, namely the use of stylisation, the juxtaposition of word and image and the camera's focus on the embroidered tapestry, invite us to



scrutinise the taken for granted meaning of what has been said. Bourgeois mannerisms and the parents' comments are presented as questionable beliefs in the present situation: the inserted shots of the unemployed looking for work challenge notions of 'efficiency' and 'good will'. Following the mother's recital of the proverb about the rewards of initiative, the insert shot of men on their bikes emphatically draws attention to the inherent contradictions in the parents' perception of the situation, demonstrating the discrepancy between what the parents think and believe to be true and the situation previously portrayed.

The earlier moment of the disjunction between the diegetic music and dialogue is followed by a clear contradiction between the parents' perception of the reasons for their son's unemployment and the economic causes presented in the earlier sequence. In *Brecht on Theatre* John Willett notes that this emphasis on contradictions, 'the conflicting elements in any person or situation' (in Brecht 1992b: 51) gained importance in Brecht's writing in the early 1930s (parallel to his study of Marxism). The reassuring inscription on the tapestry 'Don't worry about tomorrow and its troubles / it is a joy to care for those we love' offers a first glimpse at the various contradictions to which the characters are exposed: the inference which can be drawn from the inscription is that the family (those we care for and love) is regarded as a safe haven from the competition and strive ('troubles') of the world outside. The ideological function of the inscription is to suggest that the private sphere is unaffected by the outside world. As the film progresses the shortcoming of this flawed rationale is rendered visible as the family are forced out of their flat due to non-payment of rent.

After depicting the tapestry, the film's attention returns to the son. Still seated at the table he turns his head and looks to the left- the opposite direction of the kitchen and the tapestry. In addition to the lack of motivation in looking this way (rather, than, for example at the window, if the thought of jumping is already on his mind) the act of looking itself constitutes a conscious look at the camera, particularly in comparison to the young man's blank stare in previous scenes. He then averts his gaze and, after a brief moment, leaves the chair and walks over to the window.

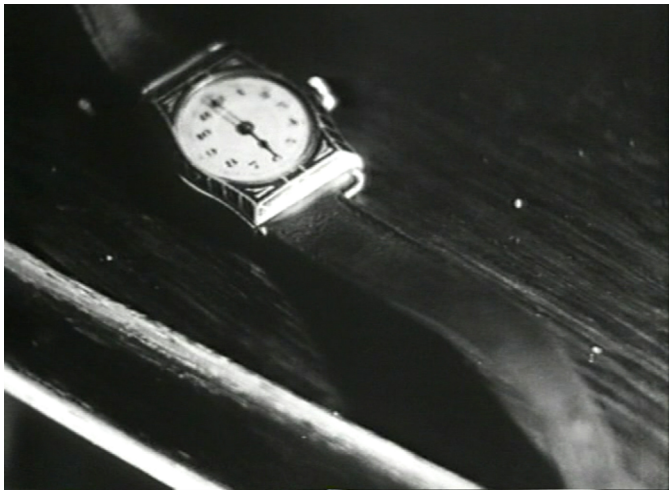
The effect of the look on the spectator momentarily creates a sense of being 'looked at' by the character. I want to argue that this is less an instance of the character stepping out of role, and more one of direct address: of us being confronted by Bönike with his predicament. The rest of the family are busying thvemselves in different activities, we are the only ones witness to Bönike's moment of decision.

The son's suicide

This scene is carefully choreographed: after leaving his seat by the table, Bönike walks over to the window, opens the right pane and looks out. Initially at a slight distance, the camera now pointedly tracks in to show him taking off his watch and carefully placing it on a sideboard. We then observe Bönike as he moves a pot plant out of the way and climbs onto the windowsill. Then follows an insert shot of the mother ascending the stairwell and a close-up of Bönike's hand letting go of the windowpane. This moment signals the jump, confirmed by the sound of a scream echoing from the courtyard. A brief montage section follows and contains these shots:

Shot 90	The windowsill with the flowerpot.
Shot 91	The wrist watch.
Shot 92	Previous shot of workers riding their bikes.
Shot 93	Bönike's bike suspended from the ceiling.

The narrative proceeds with a shot of Bönike's body, which is covered up with a sheet. The neighbours' reactions to the suicide



and a brief conversation between the young man's father and another worker in a pub conclude part one of the film.

Alongside the job hunt sequence, the suicide scene is one of the most frequently analysed parts of the film and there appears to be little disagreement about the meaning it conveys; readings (see Happel & Michaelis 1978, Leonard 1977) most commonly suggest that the scene strongly implies that social conditions, rather than personal reasons, are the cause of the

son's suicide. In his own analysis of the scene in 'A small contribution to the Theme of Realism' (written during the 1930s) Brecht argues that, rather than merely portraying an individual tragedy, the son's suicide represents the desperate situation of a class driven to extremes by bleak economic conditions. Brecht notes that the 'acute censor', whose argument he records as follows, instantly picked up on this important political point:

> You have not depicted a human being, but rather, let us admit it, a type. Your unemployed worker is not a real individual …He is superficially portrayed, as artists pardon me this strong expression for the fact that [sic] *we learn too little about him*, but the consequences are of a *political* nature ... Your film has the tendency to present suicide as typical, as a matter not of this or that (morbidly inclined) individual, but as the fate of a whole class. (1974: 46; emphasis in original)

Brecht further stresses the censor's awareness of the scene's 'decidedly demonstrative character' and his likening of the lack of emotion conveyed by the actor's performance to a demonstration of 'how to peel cucumbers'. Brecht describes his encounter with the censor as 'a little lecture on realism'. From the standpoint of the police' (ibid.), indicating that to link the worker's desperate act to the social situation of a whole class introduces a political argument which the state has to suppress. Ironically, Brecht's analysis amounts to a rather un-Brechtian 'preferred' reading of this scene.

Despite this authoritative analysis, some writers have questioned the methods employed to convey the scene's politically explicit meaning. For instance, James Pettifer argues that there is no clear evidence in the scene that the suicide has been caused by social causes:

> His [the son's] silence is anyway symbolic, and as such the social causes of his action become unrelated to the effect they created … What is at issue is not the simple fact of watch ownership, as some bourgeois critics have suggested, but that it is a token surrounded with mystery when the main *gest* of the young Bönike is in relation to it, not to any social being. The weakness of the pure montage method in concentrating on the reproduction and juxtaposition of appearances of objects is clear here. (1974: 58)

Pettifer's observation raises questions surrounding the construction of meaning in this scene. Above all, it suggests that there is a greater degree of ambivalence than is generally acknowledged. Perhaps, indeed, the very use of montage, with its focus here on objects – flowerpot, watch and bike – brings with it the possibility of variant readings. Pettifer himself draws attention to 'the puzzlement of the first Soviet audiences of *Kuhle Wampe*, many of whom could not understand the suicide of a worker who owned a watch' (ibid.)

Yet it seems important to ask whether other answers are available to the questions raised by the filmmakers' decisions in this scene. In particular, the choices made take on fresh significance if, rather than being interpreted as confusing the supposed political point, they are understood as attempting something more nuanced – an engagement with various methods through which the spectator's habitual ways of making sense of what they see onscreen can be challenged.

Same reality, different ways of seeing: the suicide scene in *Mother Krause*

An approach can begin by returning to Brecht's interest at this time in realism and discourses surrounding realism. In his

essay 'The *Threepenny* Lawsuit' (written 1931 and published in *Versuche* in 1932) Brecht examines the status of art and the culture industry under capitalism. Whilst discussing the lawsuit in detail and the role of the film industry in more general terms, the essay consistently returns to questions of the representation of reality. 'The *Threepenny* Lawsuit' begins with the observation that 'Everything said about culture from a more remote, general point of view that does not take account of practice can only be an idea and therefore must be tested in practice.' (2000b: 148).

The question of *how* to represent the reality of the working class in Weimar cinema's first proletarian sound film was of course paramount in relation to the debates about the artistic and social function of Weimar's proletarian film culture. Though *Kuhle Wampe* was Prometheus' first sound production, it was not the first film made for and about the republic's working class. Despite the convergence in themes mentioned above, *Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness* sought to address the audience's political consciousness through the use of a conventional mimetic realist style, a climactic dramatic structure and Aristotelian catharsis. The film emphasises the 'authenticity' of the social milieu and its characters, including the depiction of Berlin's 'Lumpenproletariat', a social underclass of pimps, prostitutes, thieves and alcoholics.

Mother Krause is broadly divided into two narrative strands, one depicting the mother's increasingly ineffectual struggle to support her grown up but unemployed children by delivering newspapers, the other focussing on the daughter's emerging relationship with a young class-conscious worker. The film includes scenarios which are also played out in *Kuhle Wampe*, including a wedding depicting the guests' insatiable appetites and, of particular interest here, a character's suicide as a way out of a financially desperate situation.

Mother Krause (Alexandra Schmidt) returns home from a socialist workers' garden party, (during which her daughter (Ilse Trautschold) announces her engagement to worker Max (Friedrich Gnass)), to find her wayward son (Holmes Zimmermann) has unexpectedly returned home. The arrival of two police officers and the young man's arrest for theft and the killing of a security guard thwart the happy reunion between mother and son. Alone again in her kitchen, Mother Krause looks confused. A point-of-view shot depicts her gazing around the room, then resting on a tapestry with the slogan, 'Don't despair. Every new day brings happiness.'

A series of shots depict Mother Krause making a pot of coffee, a ritual that involves several steps, from putting money in the gas meter, to boiling the water and measuring the exact amount of coffee for the pot. After ladling two spoons of coffee into the pot, she hesitates, adds two more scoops, then unexpectedly tips the whole jar of coffee into the pot. This action is depicted in medium shot, enabling the audience to study the mother's impassive face, devoid of emotion. A dissolve shows Mother Krause putting on her headscarf and taking a seat at the kitchen table, where a cup, saucer, spoon, milk and sugar are neatly laid out. Several close-ups depict her drinking the cup of coffee. Mother Krause then carries her pet, a caged bird, outside of the flat, returns and disconnects the gas lead from the cooker: she and the young daughter (Fee Wachsmuth) of her lodger are killed by the toxic fumes.

The scene is unbearably sad to watch even on repeated viewings with the mother's confusion, helplessness and loneliness at this moment made palpable not through tears, or the mother expressively lamenting her woes, but in her actions. A series of shots early on in the scene, which depict the kettle and the cooker, but also a shot of the gas main, provoke our concern about what the mother might be about to do. When we see her boil the water, our worries subside, but they return when the mother pours all the coffee into the pot on the table. As we observe the mother drinking the coffee the focus is on her impassive face framed by the headscarf she put on while the kettle boiled. The scene plays on the tension between the normality of putting money into the gas meter, boiling water, brewing the coffee and the extremity of the act of disconnecting the gas lead. The act of pouring the whole tin of coffee into the pot marks a point of recognition for Mother Krause, namely that all her prudence and efforts to make ends meet have not prevented her family's spiralling descent into destitution.

The intention to portray accurately the living conditions in the working-class districts enables the *Mother Krause* filmmaking collective (which included, among others, prominent socialist artists Otto Nagel and Käthe Kollwitz) to address the audience in a very immediate manner, arousing feelings of pity

and anger. At the same time, the character of Max (Fritz Gnass, an actor from Berlin's Piscator Stage ensemble) offers an idealised portrayal of a class conscious and politicised proletariat ready to demand social change. Yet although both this film and *Kuhle Wampe* share the intention to affect change, *Mother Krause* does not raise questions about the economic causes of the family's hardship; the mother's situation is presented not as the inevitable logic of capitalism, but as an individual tragedy. The gesture with the coffee could be framed as a powerful comment about the conditions of the working class under capitalism, though the film never makes explicit this link between the personal and the wider political perspective.

Kuhle Wampe rejects this kind of subjectivity in favour of montage and distanciation devices. According to Brecht, 'the means must be asked what the end is': even the most accurate description of the workers' inhumane social conditions under capitalism is in danger of perpetuating dominant ideologies if the causes behind the conditions are not exposed and adequately explained (1992d: 110). Brecht's observation in relation to questions of realist aesthetics, that 'there are many ways of suppressing truth and many ways of stating it', can in that sense be applied to *Mother Krause* (ibid.).

Methods employed in the representation of young Bönike's suicide can thus be considered as in conscious opposition to the ways in which the parallel scene in *Mother Krause* addresses the audience. The focus on objects rather than character places the audience at one remove from the action but emphasises the familiarity of the individual objects. The ordinariness of the window sill and pot plant stands in sharp contrast to the extraordinary character of the event, downplaying any expectation of spectacle, or any attempt to bring us close to Bönike's experience.

The close-up of the watch could be explained contextually, mirroring the actual case of a young unemployed man, who, before committing suicide, left his wristwatch on the kitchen table (see Leonard 1977: 58). Yet the montage works against any kind of subjectivity. In *Mother Krause*, the cup of coffee carries a symbolic function: to have the means to *afford* to offer visitors coffee (or have a cup oneself on special occasions) is understood to give Mother Krause a sense of pride and self-worth. The luxury of brewing a pot of (strong) coffee in *Mother Krause* is therefore presented as both representative of a class and specific to the mother (with detailed accounts of her counting an exact number of spoons for the pot). In contrast, the narrative texture linking Bönike to his watch is more sketchy. Though we can assume that the young man wants to preserve the watch (which would otherwise be damaged by the fall), it is not clear what – or whether – the watch means anything to him beyond its 'market value'.

Focus on the neighbours' reactions

Although Bönike's sister and her boyfriend Fritz (Ernst Busch) arrive at the scene shortly after, the narrative focuses on portraying the neighbours' response to the death, rather than the family's. The first three shots of the following sequence depict neighbours talking about the event:

> Shot 97: (Two women chatting on a staircase with a third ascending the stairs)
>
> Woman one: He put the wristwatch on the table first.
>
> Woman two: Of course, it would have been smashed falling off the fourth floor.
>
> Shot 98: (Three children in the courtyard pointing upwards at a row of windows)
>
> Child left: Which window was it?
>
> Child right: (pointing) This one!
>
> Child middle: (also pointing) No, not this one, that one!
>
> Shot 99: (Close up of a woman on a staircase)
>
> Woman: One unemployed less.

The camera positions differ greatly between the shots, varying from long shots 'capturing' snippets of dialogue from a distance to interview-style talking heads. This, coupled with the

decision to focus on the public rather than the private reaction to the death, gives the section a documentary feel. In shot 97, one woman's observation that a fall from the fourth floor would have naturally ('natürlich') smashed the watch acknowledges the impact of the fall but avoids talking about the suicide in a more direct manner. The tenor of the conversation, that it somehow stands to reason that a watch (a flowerpot / a person) falling from this height would be damaged, seems like a clumsy attempt to talk about the event in confined but safe terms, without having to address the question whether it, too, somehow stood to reason.

The dialogue of the three children in shot 98, concerned with the actual window, enhances the prevailing sense of 'child-like' incomprehension amongst the community. The woman's comment 'One unemployed less' in the following shot conveys an air of resignation, aligned with a certain acceptance of the inevitability of the event.

In his analysis of the same section James Pettifer argues:

> When another woman says 'One fewer unemployed' she only sketches a relation of young Bönike's death to the external conjuncture. Comment is weighted towards recognition of natural necessity, rather than clarification of the historical situation, as would be found in the mature Brecht. Young Bönike's death is a defeat for everyone present and living nearby. The bearing-witness at the scene of the martyr's death has many antecedents, perhaps the earliest being on a hill in Palestine. In few of them is there implied the possibility of the transformation of the social order that caused the death to take place. (1974: 59)]

Whereas I agree with Pettifer that the scene lacks any suggestion that there could have been an alternative to Bönike's desperate act, I want to argue that the resigned tone of this scene is wholly deliberate (and not a flaw in its politics as Pettifer seems to suggest). What the film precisely conveys is a continuation, from the dinner sequence, of certain ways of seeing amongst the community which naturalise, rather than question, incongruous actions and events affecting the tenants' lives. The film's sharp focus on the characters' ways of looking at events as given and determined continues in the shot depicting Bönike, as yet unaware of his son's death discussing politics with another man in the pub:

> Shot 101:
>
> Father Bönike: There are now seven million unemployed in America.
>
> Another man: Yes, they used to drive to work and now they are demonstrating against unemployment.
>
> Father Bönike: Yes, but on foot.

Once again, the topic of unemployment is raised and addressed by the characters in the world of the film. Old Bönike's observation could, at first sight, be regarded as a thoughtful observation on the fact that American workers – cars or no cars – are as much subject to the requirements of the market as their Berlin comrades. However, it is doubtful that the comment could be read as a sign of the father's awareness of the subjugation of a whole class to the requirements of the political economy of capitalism, as he certainly did not show this level of political insight with regards to his son's situation in the earlier scene.

On the contrary, the self-contained episodes in shots 97 to 101 give an insight into the characters' rather sketchy awareness of the economic conditions that affect their lives. The dinner table and suicide scenes equally draw attention to the gap between the actual situation and the kinds of inferences the Bönikes and their neighbours draw about their circumstances. Whereas the job hunt sequence illustrated the wider conflict of interest of a class with no other option than to partake in the competition for paid work, individual members of this class are shown to meekly accept the given condition even though they are clearly not in their own interests.

Setting epic methods utilised in the job hunt sequence – which invite the spectator to ask what all this racing across the city is good for, whose benefit it really serves – against the representation of a people in the world of the film who do *not* ask questions but tacitly accept dominant ideological viewpoints, a tension between the audience's and the characters' perception

and understanding of events begins to emerge. This strategy is developed further in part 2 and brought to conclusion in part 3.

Part Two: 'The best years..' : adjustment and compensation

In part two, 'The best years of a young person's life', the narrative continues to examine the family's behaviour in the light of their deteriorating financial situation. Being forced to leave their flat as a result of non-payment of rent, the family moves to Kuhle Wampe tent colony to reside with Annie's boyfriend, Fritz. A major strand of the narrative deals with Annie's pregnancy, her engagement to Fritz and, subsequently, Annie's decision to leave Fritz and seek an abortion. The problems both Annie and Fritz face due to the unwanted pregnancy stand in sharp contrast to the assumption that youth represents the 'best years of a … person's life', as the chapter title proposes.

Narrationally, the section is dominated by self-contained episodes, as well as the use of songs and montage sections. Whereas the couple's courtship and the sexual act leading to Annie falling pregnant are presented in a detached and rather abstract manner through the use of non-diegetic music (a song performed by Helene Weigel) and nature photography, the focus on the parents' adjustment to their new surroundings is studied meticulously in an extended sequence (the so called 'Mata Hari' sequence).

Don't worry about tomorrow…

The scene juxtaposes the mother's calculation of the household expenditure with the father reading aloud a lurid article about the trial of Mata Hari, the Dutch dancer accused of espionage for Germany and executed in France in 1917. The article contains titillating descriptions of Hari's figure and sexual affairs; a close-up of the calculation lists basic groceries, cigars and talcum powder. A series of insert shots depicts the goods on the list, ranging from liver sausage to bread and cheese; for each item, the cost is displayed. Between inserts, the camera depicts the mother's anxious expression as she adds up the cost of living whilst the father struggles to decipher more difficult words in the article.

The juxtaposition of the intimate details of the dancer's extravagant lifestyle with everyday goods such as fat and herring creates humour. The article's insinuation at a former Berlin police commissioner's 'visit to the dancer's changing rooms to ensure that the nude dance routine was in order' escapes the father, but is not lost on the audience. Yet despite these elements of comic relief the sequence does not show the parents' behaviour in an uncritical light. Sitting with her back to the tapestry which previously adorned the kitchen, we are encouraged to observe not the mother's joy but her increasing burden in 'caring for those' she 'loves'. The father still reads the paper but has swapped current affairs for the distraction of the *feuilleton*. Both characters are seen to compensate for the stark reality of their descent into homelessness by adjusting to, rather than challenging, the circumstances of their existence.

Cleanliness and listening to military marches played on the radio dominate the day-to-day routines at Kuhle Wampe tent colony, not protest against the lack of housing for workers living on the breadline. The colony's romantic setting amidst forests and fields loses its appeal when Fritz is forced into proposing to Annie due to petit bourgeois societal pressure. Part two ends with Annie leaving the tent colony after the couple's engagement party, determinedly abandoning her parents and Fritz.

In his review in the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* Herbert Ihering comments on the film's unflinching look at some sections of the proletariat:

> The workers are not idealised. On the contrary: it also shows the philistine sides, the petit bourgeois leanings (during an engagement party and in reading matters). It doesn't show the sentimentality, but the nasty bigotry of their crammed insularity. (1973: 143)

Whereas Ihering welcomes the film's 'unsentimental, therefore just' (ibid.) approach, Heinz Lüdecke in *Die Rote Fahne* criticises the 'at times unjust representation of the proletariat'. He comments:

> The producers themselves will have to admit the film's sharp focus on petit bourgeois mannerisms and yet the fighting proletariat is presented in a bland, sweeping and idealised manner. (1973: 155)

The film's critical engagement with various sections of the working class raises several issues. Considering the film's prominence as Weimar's first proletarian sound film, the presentation of workers so decidedly not embodying the socialist ideal of a class-conscious working class at first seems puzzling. Yet taking into account the film's interest in *how* to address its proletarian audience, the 'sharp focus' on class-unconscious workers seems apt. Throughout part two, systems established in the first part of the film continue to foreground the influence of commonly held beliefs surrounding work ethics and family values, typified by the enduring presence of the tapestry. Privileged over the characters, the spectator is encouraged to view critically the parents' actual and intellectual 'adjustment' to their circumstances.

Part Three: 'To whom does the world belong?' – reason over rhetoric

The film's final chapter, 'To whom does the world belong?', presents the workers as a class united by shared materialist conditions and interests. As already mentioned, it depicts a mass sports day organised by Berlin's communist athletics clubs. In clear contrast to the 'job hunt' sequence, however, we are invited to observe workers racing on this occasion *not* in competition but in the name of solidarity, as a motorbike rally (part of the Sports Day) from Berlin to Müggelsee gets underway. A series of shots depicts different groups of young communist athletes gathering in the city, singing and whistling Hanns Eisler's 'Solidarity song' as they march out of town on their way to the event. The song's forceful lyrics and dynamic melody celebrate the strength of a united body of workers no longer willing to accept their forced exclusion from the wealth they create, as the second verse ('Forward and don't forget/Our street and our field./Forward and don't forget: whose street is this street?/To whom does this world belong?') makes clear. Annie can be seen amongst a group of young people marching and singing the song.

The following section illustrates the variety of disciplines taking place on the day, and shots of the motorbike rally, rowing and swimming events are collated in a montage section. The show of speed and physical strength of both men and women is accompanied by Ernst Busch's rendition of the 'Sports Song' on the soundtrack. The song is an appeal to the working class to 'fight together and learn to win'. The pace of the montage gradually accelerates and concludes with motorcyclists, rowers and swimmers crossing respective finish lines.

Marc Silberman comments that these 'scenes of mass enthusiasm (marches, competitive sports, steaming crowds), which for the filmmakers represented a political aesthetics, became in just a few years the dominant aesthetics of fascist politics' (1995: 48), in essence suggesting that the filmmakers were somehow unaware of the unfortunate convergence in communist and fascist styles, or that, in the least, their use of this aesthetics of the masses was in some ways employed uncritically. Based on my analysis of earlier sequences, in which the film's relationship to its material and the strategies it employs to convey meaning is perhaps less clear-cut than one would expect of such a political piece of filmmaking, I want to argue that the various sections of Part 3 might carry an additional function to that of politicising its audience.

The images of the marching athletes and the various competitions undeniably convey a strong sense of the workers as a

physically powerful and united body. At the same time, Ernst Busch's recital of the 'Sports Song' which accompanies shots of athletes crossing the finish line, rather than taking victory for granted, emphasises the daily struggle of the workers to unite as a collective body: 'From the pennies of deprivation you have bought your boats/And the fares have been saved from your dinners'. Ernst Busch's recital of the chorus 'Learn to win! / Learn to win!' is sung with a sense of urgency which results in a pleading, rather than confident, tone.

In fact, the film seems as its most confident in conveying an unambiguous political message as it records another medium – the informal space and impromptu performance of agit prop theatre. The sporting competitions are followed by an afternoon of political activities, including an agit prop theatre performance by 'Das Rote Sprachrohr' ensemble. The ensemble's opening line 'We are the "Red Megaphone", the megaphone of the masses/We tell what oppresses you', delivered through big megaphones, grabs the crowd's attention. The theme of the performance is the eviction of a family in a Wedding district tenement block and an insert shot shows Annie and Fritz watching the action with interest. The focus is on the actual performance and the audience watching in equal measure so that even after the performance has finished the camera stays in place. Surrounding the now empty stage the workers start up the Solidarity song once again. An extended sequence shows workers joining in the song in a thousand-strong chorus.

(It is worth noting that this sequence was censored in parts: the final verse of the 'Song of the Red United Front', (sung by the actors on stage as part of their performance) which appeals to neighbours to unite and 'stand as one' against landlords, bailiffs and the police as to prevent the eviction of families from their homes had to be cut as a condition to the film's release (see Gersch and Hecht 1973: 79).)

The agitprop play's impact on the audience assembled around the stage is illustrated by the apparent unwillingness of the crowd to simply disperse after the performance has ended. The relevance of the topic presented and the vivid and easy-to-grasp methods of agit-prop have addressed the audience in a direct and unambiguous manner, advancing the kind of heightened political awareness (resulting in the rendition of the 'Solidarity Song') the film is concerned with. Political dialogue permeates the remaining activities of the day: a group of young men is trying to get to grips with a passage from Hegel and a man offers brochures on topics ranging from contraception to union rights.

Despite the explicit and imposing use of political rhetoric in part 3, *Kuhle Wampe*, unlike its predecessor *Mother*

Krause, does not end with shots of workers marching the city streets in a much needed demonstration of mass unity. As the workers make their way back to the city the Solidarity song can be heard on the soundtrack, but it is less amplified than in previous scenes. Instead of presenting the audience with a rousing finish, the final episode depicts a discussion between workers and other passengers on a train.

Talking, not marching- S-Bahn debate

The burning of coffee in Brazil and the capitalist logic of a free market economy are at the centre of a heated debate between several passengers in a train compartment. A passenger's (Gerhard Bienert) casual comment about the burning of 24 million pounds of coffee in a Brazilian port is initially met with incredulity by those standing within earshot: one passenger 'simply can't believe' the news, another dismisses the headline as 'lying propaganda' and a third passenger interjects that 'ordinary common sense tells you it can't be true'. None of these passengers are part of the group of communist athletes who have just boarded the train, but soon a debate ensues between them and the athletes, until, gradually, the discussion spreads and produces a range of opposed responses in the crowded space. Stylistically, the scene differs from the temporal ellipsis and episodic character of previous sequences: close-ups and continuity editing, as well as attention to detail in the performances (some bordering on parody, especially the more bourgeois characters) create an unusually conventional realist representation of the action compared to the rest of the film. The camera is positioned in close proximity to the actors, creating a sense of being amongst the passengers as they argue.

Although the film appears to present random snippets of conversations, including a small group of female passengers discussing the intricacies of brewing coffee, the overall development of the argument is tightly controlled: the topic of the world economy is introduced into the debate early on, which leads to the passenger with the most reactionary viewpoints to comment on what he believes to be Germany's disadvantaged position in world politics:

> Passenger (standing): If we had a fleet, we'd have colonies, too. If we had colonies, we'd have coffee. And if we had coffee…
>
> Passenger (seated): Then what? Would prices go down?
>
> Passenger (standing): Maybe not. But *we'd* make the profit.

It is at this point that Kurt (Adolf Fischer), the politically conscious worker, joins the debate.

> Kurt: You keep saying we. Who is this we? You and I? That gentleman, these ladies, that old man? We would make the profit? You don't even believe that yourself.

The film then cuts to another group of passengers trying to calculate the monetary loss of burning so much coffee and a debate about the price of a pound of coffee ensues. This scene is humorous in tone, but also draws attention to the difference in financial means, with some passengers being able to afford more expensive brands than others. As the argument between Kurt and the reactionary passenger is becoming increasingly heated, another passenger asks them to calm down: 'Gentlemen, you are not the only people in the carriage'. The debate ends with an extended speech by Kurt about the kinds of people in the carriage who will not attempt to do something about the economic crisis and who will not 'change the world'. To the provocative question by the reactionary character: 'And who will change it?' Gerda (Martha Wolter), Annie's friend, replies: 'Those who don't like it'.

On this cue the film cuts to the workers walking down a foot tunnel; on the soundtrack, Ernst Busch sings the 'Solidarity Song' with renewed vigour. The lyrics allude to the discrepancy between the actual and the possible, the world as it is and the world as it could be: 'We've seen the sun shining/on the street, in the fields/Yet we never did believe/this was our true world', and the film finishes on the song's final stanza: 'Whose street is the street? /To whom does the world belong?'.

The film's focus in the final episode is on discussion as a way to create political consciousness. It shows the multifaceted responses one topic – the world economy and its impact on people – can evoke in those from different classes and with different levels of political awareness. It presents progressive and reactionary perspectives, but also draws attention to those who remain 'apolitical' (in the scene one character continually switches between the viewpoints put forward and ends up shaking hands with the reactionary passenger). It soon becomes apparent that the final episode presents a political microcosm in which different class interests come to the fore.

However, the focus is on the social and the thought processes that happen between the characters, rather than on providing the audience in the cinema with an explicit answer to the question to 'whom the world belongs' (though implicitly the answer is clear). The episode thus differs in tone from the agit prop of the previous scene and only imitates agitational techniques in Gerda's final declaration that the world will be changed by those 'who don't like it'. Nonetheless, discussion replaces megaphones, and images of young communist workers give way to wider sections of society. The people in the carriage may be sharing the same space but they are far from united. For change to occur, people's thinking has to change drastically.

The film's final episode, with its focus on most people's limited grasp of political issues, once more engages with the question of how to address the audience as members of a social class, something previous proletarian film productions, such as *Mother Krause*, mostly took for granted or never raised. The episode illustrates that the very 'reasons' the passengers find to explain the actual causes of their economic circumstances are also the main obstacle in re-thinking, and possibly transforming an economic system which so fundamentally works against the interests of a whole class.

A major change between parts one and three, however, is the move from characters' silence to talking. The eloquent

worker Kurt replaces voiceless young Bönike, but people unable to comprehend their thoughts, actions and behaviour surround both. Marc Silberman argues that *Kuhle Wampe* 'does not aim at providing an answer for the spectator but at the spectator's recognition of the possibility of change' (1995: 46), thus centring the film's attention on its impact on the viewer. In this chapter I have attempted to show the film's interest in experimenting with different modes of address, exploring the use of diverse techniques to find different ways of producing meaning and to explore ways of enabling the spectator to draw inferences based not on habitual but on new ways of seeing.

If the film's curiosity in how ideas are formed and articulated is as important as their actual content it is inevitable that it cannot, like *Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness*, end on a kind of semiotic closure of workers, all differences resolved, (and all questions presumably answered by Hegel and the 'Red Megaphone'), marching as a uniform and united body. As *Kuhle Wampe* draws to a close the lyrics of the 'Solidarity Song' on the soundtrack call for workers to unite, but the imagery is understated, with workers back in the city walking down a foot tunnel, not marching in the streets.

Refusing to end Weimar's first (and only) proletarian sound film by resorting to emphatic agitational rhetoric, the filmmakers invite the audience to gain pleasure from its politically unambiguous scenes but also to engage with the complex relationship between image and sound. That *how* to address the audience as a class became pivotal at a time when paid workers were also targeted by another type of political rhetoric which, though diametrically opposed to Marxist principles, was nonetheless deceptively similar in its appeal to the republic's proletariat to join a national revolution, seem sadly self-evident in retrospect.

Conclusion

This study has examined the relationship between seeing and understanding in Weimar cinema, from the self-conscious use of visual rhetoric in Fritz Lang's post war film *Dr Mabuse, the Gambler*, to Film-Studio 1929's sceptical engagement with detached ways of seeing in *Menschen am Sonntag* and, finally, *Kuhle Wampe's* explicitly political focus on ways of seeing as a means to create political consciousness. Each film, I have argued, encourages the spectator to adopt a critical perspective in relation to what is shown and how it is presented onscreen, so that not only a film's content, but its systems of narration come under scrutiny.

The complex relationship between ways of seeing and the spectator's ability to reason has been the dominant theme in each chapter. In *Dr Mabuse, the Gambler*, stunning images deceive the eye, and the narrative drive offers few opportunities to pause and think about the implications of our ambivalent alignment with the Doctor. In *Menschen am Sonntag,* the initially detached perspectives on New Objectivity's modern urban lifestyle may fail to register the contradictions and constraints manifested in its assertion of social and personal liberation. It is only through a more attentive look at the young women of this new class of salaried workers that the limitations of 'neusachliche' ways of seeing, resulting from reducing people to the status of a simple object, becomes apparent. *Kuhle Wampe* examines the impact of preconceived and unquestioned ideas on people's understanding of the social and economic processes affecting their lives, and experiments with new forms of audience address to stimulate moments of recognition and more politicised ways of seeing.

Why do these issues of seeing clearly, of seeing for oneself and of making sense of what is shown, play such a significant role in films spanning the period? Henri R. Paucker identifies a significant 'tension between rationalism and irrationalism' (1991: 11) as representative of the Weimar era, which culminated in increasingly violent clashes between reactionary and progressive forces in the republic's unstable political arena. According to Paucker, opponents of National Socialism 'all sought to counteract the irrational, the intoxicating mythical, by applying reason and … to continue in the spirit of the European enlightenment, rather than the German romantic tradition' (ibid.). With nationalist factions intent on holding on to nostalgic and determinist paradigms and Marxist thinkers understanding history as a process which could and would be radically altered by the proletariat, the question of what to think and believe when faced with irreconcilable world views becomes a process of complex and potentially confusing negotiation between perception and knowledge.

Each film's engagement with different systems of looking can thus be regarded as an implicit or explicit response to radically different perspectives, vehemently vying for the public's attention in an age increasingly dominated by visual and mass culture. Where *Dr Mabuse, the Gambler* draws attention to the influencing power of visual rhetoric as a dangerous shortcut to more elaborate (and laborious) thought processes, *Menschen am Sonntag* warns of the danger of a depersonalised perception without an eye for the complexity of human experience, even at times of drastic rationalisation in all areas of public and private life. In *Kuhle Wampe* Slatan Dudow and Bertolt Brecht juxtapose irrational and rational thought in the critical awareness of how difficult it is to alter habitual ways of seeing and, crucially, conventional modes of audience address.

When the unpredictable circumstances of exile brought some of the artists discussed in this study together in Hollywood, collaboration between them (most famously Lang and Brecht's joint effort on *Hangmen also Die* (directed by Lang; 1942)) was both rare and fraught. Nonetheless, their concerns with the visual rhetoric of film and the ideological positioning of the audience would continue during and beyond exile.

Notes

1 See Douglas Pye (1988; 1992) for writings on point of view and epistemic dimensions in American Fritz Lang films.

2 *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler* was published in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* between 25 September 1921 and 29 January 1922.

3 See 'Demonstration and Disguise: Observations on Lang's style', unpublished manuscript. This is from a collection of critical essays on Fritz Lang, edited by Douglas Pye, originally intended for publication in 2000, which has regrettably not yet appeared. The essay is cited with the kind permission of Douglas Pye.

4 Following its serialisation in the newspaper, sales of the novel by the Ullstein publishing house topped the 100,000 mark in 1922. See Scholdt (1996: 372) and Kreimeier (1992: 105-107) for accounts on the popularity of the Mabuse series and the film release as an early example of a carefully crafted modern multi-media event.

5 See Tom Gunning (2000: 94-8) for an in-depth analysis of the use of modern technologies in the film.

6 In his essay 'Der Schlafwandler' Klaus Kreimeier draws attention to the novels of several Weimar authors whose stories were occupied by 'broken, addicted, fed up with civilisation, Nietzsche-obsessed heroes' (1987: 92).

7 See, for example, the significance of blind characters, or characters faking blindness, in other Lang films of the Weimar period, *Kämpfende Herzen/Four Men and a Woman* (1920), *Spione/Spies* (1927) and *M* (1931), as well as Lang's American films and the (fake) 'blind seer' Jordan (Wolfgang Preiß) in Lang's last film, *Die 1000 Augen des Dr Mabuse/The 1000 Eyes of Dr Mabuse* (1960).

8 See, for example, Kaes (1987: 23) and Sloterdijk (1988: 509-10) for discussions of the dominance of visual culture in urban areas of Weimar Germany.

9 Hervé Dumont asserts that Ulmer's contribution to the direction is fairly negligible, having left the shoot after only ten days due to arguments within the team. (1992: 143)

10 Berthold Viertel's *Die Abenteuer eines Zehnmarkschein* (1926) and *Wilfried Basse's Markt am Wittenbergplatz* (1929) are typical examples of the cross-section film (see Kappelhoff 2003)

11 The English intertitle omits the words 'zur Zeit' (meaning 'currently', or 'for the time being') in translation. However, the reference 'currently' hints at the probability that Wolfgang won't be working as a 'wine trader' for long, drawing attention to areas of instability and transience in his life.

12 Wilder's script is similar in themes and style to the detached, ironic and sober formal aspects of the so-called 'Gebrauchslyrik' ('functional poetry'), which emerged in Germany in the 1920s. Well-known Berlin authors of 'Gebrauchslyrik' are Brecht and, in particular, Erich Kästner, whose poems engage with the discrepancy between traditional ideals about romantic love and the reality of anonymity and casual sexual consumption in the modern city. Kästner's well-known poem 'Sachliche Romanze' ('Matter-of-fact Romance') takes a sober look at the uncertainty of loving relationships in modern times. Kästner's widely published Dr Erich Kästners Lyrische Hausapotheke, a collection of 'Gebrauchslyrik' written during the 1920s, perceptively responds to the isolation of individuals and their (unfulfilled) desires in the anonymity of the modern metropolis.

13 Discussing the link between radical industrialisation, New Objectivity and the new class of salaried workers during Weimar's stabilisation period, David Durst argues: 'In "new objectivity", the psychological dimension of intense subjectivity and uneasy angst of German expressionism yield to a more stabilised culture of impersonality and anti-individual sobriety of mass production and consumption. This new sobriety is concentrated especially in the urban centres of Weimar Germany, for it is there that the erasure of residual zones of "Irratio" resistant to the rationalisation of production and the dilation of capitalist commodification in the realm of culture and consumption are most advanced' (2004: xxxi)

14 An advertisement for such a '5 Uhr Tee' dance is visible in the shot of the trains passing through Bahnhof Zoo, prior to Wolfgang's encounter with Christl on the station forecourt.

15 A review by Andor Kraszna-Krausz stands out in drawing attention to the stylistic vacillation between sobriety and sentiment in the film: 'That there's such a thing as desire. Not just my own desire. That everything is much more confusing than we think, but also much simpler. One can hardly make sense of it, one can only see it. Especially on Sundays.' (1930:14)

16 The 1973 Suhrkamp edition *Bertolt Brecht: Kuhle Wampe: Protokoll des Films und Materialien*, edited by Wolfgang Gersch and Werner Hecht, has proved an inestimable source in writing this chapter. It contains not only the full script (with reference to the cuts and changes demanded by the censor) but also a comprehensive account of the battle to secure its release and a wide range of reviews after the film's eventual premiere in Moscow and Berlin in May 1932.

17 See Stoos (1977); Korte (1978) and Silberman (1995) for detailed historical accounts of Weimar's extensive proletarian film culture.

18 During Brecht's lifetime, his oeuvre spanning the years 1926-1932 was considered mostly as a transition phase from the early plays to the completion of his concept of the epic theatre. In contemporary Brecht scholarship this 'middle' phase is regarded as a time of creative

experimentation with a range of theatrical modes rather than merely as a 'precursor' to the epic model (see Payrhuber 1995: 45-46). This exploration of various theatrical forms included opera, the Lehrstück and the epic theatre in its earliest stages. It can, therefore, be regarded as a time of the dramatist's critical engagement with a range of political aesthetic strategies, ranging from the didactic intention of the Lehrstück to the more open ended methods of later works. Rooted in the dialectics of historical materialist thought, these overtly 'didactic' forms were intended as models for a new (that is, socialist) society which, though envisaged by the Left in the early 1930s, ultimately failed to materialise giving way to fascist rule instead. My use of the term 'didactic' in the context of this essay therefore refers to its explicit political function at this stage in Brecht's career, though I will argue in this chapter that the extent of the political function of certain methods were of interest to Brecht and Kuhle Wampe's filmmaking collective.

19 In the film's original version, the mother responds to the father's comment about the loss of state benefit by replying: 'Don't shove the emergency decree under his nose'. However, the producers cut this reference to the immediate political situation in order to appease the censor (see Gersch & Hecht 1973: 78), who considered the line an attack on the government.

20 Though we see the workers marching it can be assumed that they would not have walked the whole distance from the city to Müggelsee at its outskirts.

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