TOMISLAV ZELIĆ

Technological and Occult Media in Modern Mass Society: on Döblin's City Novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*[1]

Introduction

In recent media theory the meaning of the central concept "medium" was extended as far as to include at least the following five definitions.[2] First and foremost, technological apparatuses like telegraphs, gramophones, radios, telephones, cinemas etc. are called media. Below I will give a close textual reading of the scene in which Biberkopf goes to the movie theatre shortly after his release from prison. I will analyze his cinematic experience following Le Bon's theory of mass psychology.[3] Secondly, the human body, in general, can be understood as a technological medium of sense perception, and thirdly, the human body, in particular, can be understood as the occult medium of extraordinary and at times supernatural mental states such as mass experiences, sexual arousal, aggressiveness, dopey states, and delirium. Following Walter Benjamin and Georg Simmel,[4] I will discuss Biberkopf's shock experiences and traumatic states of panic in modern urban mass society after his release from prison in Berlin-Tegel, and particularly his delirium at the insane asylum in Berlin-Buch. I will argue that the literary

representation of these experiences does not only fulfil Döblin's self-proclaimed poetic program of a "cinematic style" (*Kinostil*)[5] in the *Berliner Programm* of 1913, but also that the novel internally reflects on the status and the function of technological and occult media, both visually and acoustically. Fourthly, following recent systems theoretical approaches to modern literature, the general theoretical distinction between medium and form,[6] I will argue that modern mass society serves as the medium for Döblin's novelistic form and that the average person Biberkopf, whose individual criminal, juridical, and psychiatric case history is stored at least fictitiously in the social network of discourses and disciplines, serves as the exemplary form of the individual in modern mass society. Last but not least, from an external perspective, the novel itself can be seen as a medium and as a medium in competition with emerging new media. In this context, I will discuss the contemporary cultural debate about the crisis of the novel.[7]

The Technological Medium Cinema and the Occult Medium…
…or Biberkopf goes to the movies

Biberkopf has just been released from prison in Berlin-Tegel, after having served a four year sentence for having murdered his girl-friend in affect. He has just gone through a series of shock experiences in the now unfamiliar urban environment of modern mass society. He has just suffered through traumatic states of panic in the dark backyard where the two Jews picked him up and brought him to their apartment. On his flight from urban modernity, Biberkopf returns to closed spaces reminiscent of the prison cell he just left: the dark urban backyards and apartments of Berlin, but also and not so incidentally the dark interior of a movie theatre. After pushing through the crowd in the rain, Biberkopf catches attention of a movie poster announcing a popular pornographic comedy of the time:

> Children under seventeen not allowed. On the huge poster a beet-red gentleman was standing on a staircase, while a peach of a young girl embraced his legs, she lay on the stairs, and he stood up above with a leering expression on his face. Underneath was written: Parentless, Fate of an Orphaned Child, in Six Reels.[8]

The following description of the location and the plot summary would certainly reinforce the bigot suspicions against and the moralistic rejection of the new medium cinema voiced by contemporary conservative cultural critics.

> The long room was packed full, 90 percent men with work-caps on, they don't take them off. The three lamps on the ceiling are covered with red. In front, a yellow piano with packages on top of it. The orchestrion makes a continuous racket. Then it gets dark and the film starts. A goose-girl is to be given culture, just why, is not made so clear, at least not right in the middle. She wiped her nose with her hand, she scratched her behind on the staircase, everybody in the movie laughed. Franz thought it was quite wonderful, when the tittering started up around him. Just folks, free folks, amusing themselves, nobody has the right to say anything to them, simply lovely, and I right here among 'em! It went on. The high-toned Baron had a sweetheart who lay in a hammock and stretched her legs vertically in the air. The girl had drawers on. That's something. Wonder why people get so excited about that dirty goose-girl and her licking the platters clean? Again the girl with the slim legs flashed by. The Baron had left her alone, now she toppled out of the hammock, and flopped onto the grass, lay there stretched out. Franz stared at the screen, there was already another picture, he still saw her toppling out laying there stretched out. He gnawed his tongue, hell's bell, what was that? But when finally the one who had been the goose-girl's lover embraced his fine lady, the skin of his chest felt hot as if he had been embracing her himself. It went all over him and made him weak. [9]

In his *Study of the Popular Mind* entitled *The Crowd* of 1895 Gustave Le Bon, a conservative cultural critic, specifies the alterations in the psychic constitution of the individual who is undergoing mass experience.[10] Although for the most part, Le Bon had the crowd of the French Revolution in mind when he designed his theory, there seems to

be a structural analogy between his mass psychological analysis and the functioning of the emerging new medium cinema, which coincidentally was invented by the Lumière brothers in the very same year, 1895, that Le Bon's study was published. In other words, cinema may be seen as the absent point of reference to early mass psychological theory. Therefore, the cinematic experience lends itself to be interpreted in terms of the socio-psychological analysis of mass experience, and the individual who is a member of the crowd, in fact, shares some of the psychosomatic features with the individual who is a member of the movie audience.

Most importantly, in his cinematic experience Biberkopf resembles occult human media who are hypnotized under the spell of a hypnotist who in this case is replaced by the technological apparatus of cinematography. Like a hypnotized medium, Biberkopf loses parts of his conscious personality, and his intellectual abilities are weakened, while his emotional excitability is intensified. He thinks associatively in the illogical rhythms of cinematic images.[11] Le Bon uses several medical, physiological, psychological, and occult concepts to describe the state of fascination, attentiveness, and expectation into which the individual enters when undergoing a mass experience: contagion, paralysis, suggestion, hypnotism, mesmerism, and automatism. In medico-psychological examinations for legal purposes, Judicial Assessor Dr. Albert Hellwig inquires into "the suggestive power of the cinematographic presentation" (*Suggestivkraft der kinematographischen Vorführung*)[12] and claims that the suggestive power could "cause illusions and hallucinations of other sense organs."[13] In an earlier essay he already proposed that cinematic images could "leave behind lasting impressions" and "inspire ruinous thoughts", which in some cases could even lead to the committal of crimes.[14]

Similarly, Biberkopf is exposed to the suggestive power of the hypnotic medium cinema. By staring on the movie screen he is caused to take instinctual actions in an altered state of mind. Although other images are already occurring on the movie screen, he mentally retains and perpetuates the images of the Baron's lover, a female who is wearing pants and vertically stretching her slim legs up until eventually falling out of the hammock into the grass. Not unlike the visual process of condensation and displacement (*Verschiebung und Verdichtung*) that Freud described in reference to dream work (*Traumarbeit*),[15] Biberkopf transposes these erotically charged movie images of the Baron's lover into mental images of a *Weibsstück* that he instinctually sets out to find in the city immediately after leaving the movie theatre. He remains anonymous in the metropolitan crowd at the movie theatre while being sexually aroused in public by both the cinematic images on screen and his private mental images. However, his rashness, vehemence, and spontaneity finally result in violence, atrocity, and ferocity against the prostitute, and his impotence, depression, and pursuit of more fundamental physiological exigencies like food, drink, and sleep.

The Human Being as Technological Medium of Sense Perception… …or Biberkopf's street car ride

From a methodologically anti-humanist perspective, the human body can be seen as both the technological and occult medium of sense perception. As we know from Walter Benjamin, sense perception as such is not an anthropological constant but historically conditioned. "During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only

by nature but by historical circumstances as well."[16] The meaning of "medium" here is ambiguous, for it certainly refers both to the human body or psyche and its environment. Hence the historical conditioning of the medium occurs in social and psychic terms on the one hand, and not only in phylogenetic but also ontogenetic terms, on the other hand.

After his release from the prison in Berlin-Tegel, Biberkopf's first challenge of re-integrating into society is a simple streetcar ride. Under the title "On Car 41 into Town" (*Mit der 41 in die Stadt*), which refers to the downtown-bound streetcar line number 41 departing from Berlin-Tegel, the intense psychosomatic effects and the visual or cinematic character of the metropolitan shock experience is captured by literary means.

> He shook himself and gulped. He stepped on his own feet. Then, with a run, took a seat in the car. Right among people. Go ahead. At first it was like being at the dentist's, when he has grabbed a root with a pair of forceps, and pulls; the pain grows, your head threatens to burst. He turned his head back towards the red wall, but the car raced on with him along the tracks, and only his head was left in the direction of the prison. The car took a bend; trees and houses intervened. Busy streets emerged, Seestrasse, people got on and off, it's going to start now. The tip of his nose turned to ice; something was whirring over his cheek.[17]

Witness the double movement of the streetcar and Biberkopf's head focusing on its object of sense perception as if Biberkopf took the position of the camera on top of the streetcar that is driving through the metropolis in Vertov's avant-garde experimental documentary film *Man with a Camera* (1929).[18] The fragmentation of the visual field induced by objects of sense perception covering up each other prefigures the traumatic states of panic, the vertigo, and the hallucinations in later passages. Amongst all of these, the fear of the roofs sliding from the buildings is used like a leitmotiv throughout the novel. The first time it is represented it is related to a sense perception coded in cinematic

terms. After disembarking from the streetcar Biberkopf is running through the city on Rosenthaler Straße.

> The cars roared and jangled on, house-fronts were rolling along one after the other without stopping. And there were roofs on the houses, they soared atop the houses, his eyes wandered straight upward: if only the roofs don't slide off, but the houses stood upright.[19]

With respect to Biberkopf's situation, it is clear that the mental and bodily deprivations in prison resulted in the atrophying of the "defensive organ" (*Schutzorgan*),[20] which makes the city-dweller indifferent to the shock experiences of the constant flux of discrepant stimuli from the urban environment. The development of "the protection against stimuli" (*Reizschutz*)[21] normally constitutes the rationalistic and blasé character typical for city-dwellers who respond to stimuli intellectually rather than emotionally.[22] In contrast, Biberkopf suffers psychosomatically from traumatic states of panic and sudden sexual or aggressive outburst, since he is deprived of most of his "defensive organ" and unable to rationalize the metropolitan shock experiences. As a helpless object, he is unable to distance himself rationally from the psychosomatic impacts of metropolitan dynamic automatisms on his body. His subjectivity is submerged in the functional discourse and discipline networks almost throughout – with some exceptional passages written in the style closer to the realist psychological novel. Thus Biberkopf's individuality constitutes a mere "intersection of social circles" (*Kreuzung sozialer Kreise*), to use Simmel's definition of individuality in modern mass society.[23]

The Delirious Body as Occult Medium…
…or Biberkopf's Symbolical Death and Rebirth

In connection with his visit to the cinema, we found that Biberkopf can be seen as an occult hypnotized medium or non-autonomous subject while the movie projector, a technological medium, functions like a hypnotist. Throughout, Döblin's novel establishes an interrelation between the technological medium cinema and the occult medium or hypnotized subject which suffers from extraordinary mental states like sexual or aggressive impulses, traumatic states of panic, and deliria. Repressed aggressive impulses issued by the id and military orders to keep one's head issued from the superego surface in the universal metropolitan mass discourse as "free indirect discourse" (*erlebte Rede*).[24] In the polyperspectival city novel, they cannot be assigned easily to the perspective of any particular character or one of the many narrator's voices. After the fare dodger Biberkopf escapes from the police, having taken a free ride on the streetcar, he submerges in the metropolitan crowd and makes an uncanny experience by looking at a shop window when he realizes that the metropolitan crowd, "it", or in German *es*, is exhausted in its functionality and represented in "the petrified style" (*steinerner Stil*).[25]

> *Zwölf Uhr Mittagszeitung, B.Z., Berliner Illustrierte, Die Funkstunde.* "Anybody else got on?" The coppers have blue uniforms now. He got off the car, without being noticed, and was back among people again. What happened? Nothing. Chest out, you starved sucker, you, pull yourself together, or I'll give you a crack in the jaw! Crowds, what a swarm of people! How they hustle and bustle! My brain needs oiling, it's probably dried up. What was all this? Shoe stores, hat stores, incandescent lamps, saloons. People got to have shoes to run around so much; didn't we have a cobbler's shop out there, let's bear that in mind! Hundreds of polished window-panes, let 'em blaze away, are they going to make you afraid or something, why, you can smash 'em up, can't you, what's the matter with 'em, they're polished clean, that's all.

> The pavement on Rosenthaler Platz was being torn up; he walked on the wooden planks along with the others. Just go ahead and mix in with the people, then everything's going to clear up, and you won't notice anything, you fool. Wax figures stood in the show-windows, in suits, overcoats, with skirts, with shoes and stockings. Outside everything was moving, but—back of it—there was nothing! It—did not—live! It had happy faces, it laughed, waited in twos and threes on the newspapers. This it stood there like the street-lamps—and—became more and more rigid. They belonged with the houses, everything white, everything wooden.[26]

The interrelation between the technological medium cinema and the occult medium or hypnotized subject becomes clearer when the phenomenon is unambiguously represented from the character's perspective and coded in occult terms from the narrator's perspective as in Biberkopf's psychosomatic reaction to an altercation with some workers who had just sung the International. At the beginning of the episode, Biberkopf is in the position of the hypnotized moviegoer whose body is fixed to the seat but paradoxically in "numbness" (*Starre*) and in great psychosomatic distress or "frenzy" (*Tobsucht*) at the same time. After depersonalization sets in—Biberkopf hears his roaring and sees himself from the distance as a doppelganger—and the leitmotiv fear re-emerges, the episode culminates in a clairvoyant fantasy of naked violence.

> A frenzy, a numbness comes over Franz Biberkopf. Blindly he croaks in his throat, his eyes are glassy, his face blue, bloated, he spits, his hands burn, the man's out of his mind. His fingers claw the chair, but he manages to hold on to it. Soon he will take the chair and haul out.
>
> Danger ahead, clear the streets, load, fire, fire, fire. At the same time this roaring man hears his own voice, from far away, is looking at himself. The houses, the houses threaten to cave in again, the roofs to smash over him, this won't do, no, they can't get away with that, those criminals won't succeed, what we need is order.
>
> Something buzzes inside him: it's going to start soon and I'm going to do something, grab a throat, no, no, I'm about to topple over, fall down, another moment, just another moment more. And me thinking the world is quiet, there is law and order. In his twilight state he is frightened: something is out of gear with

> the world, the others seem so terrible to him, he experiences it with a sort of clairvoyance.[27]

Like resurfacing repressed aggressive impulses, repressed homosexual impulses and political resentment surface in a homophobic and anticommunist paranoiac discourse coded in terms of cinematic and occult media effects: "What do these people want anyway, first the fairies who don't concern me, and now the Reds? (…) Something flares and flickers in Franz's eyes, his forehead and nose become thick."[28] And yet at other times the combination of homosexuality and communist political attitudes in certain characters have occult, hypnotic, magnetic, or mesmerizing effects on Biberkopf which will finally prove to be fatal. "Franz feels powerfully attracted to him (Reinhold)."[29]

More importantly, Biberkopf's delirium or, as the narrator, it seems, would have it, symbolic death and rebirth at the insane asylum in Berlin-Buch is not only represented in terms of the Expressionist conception of the new human being based on the religious idea of re-embodiment or the Christian concept of the resurrection of the flesh but again also in psychiatric terms of acoustic and visual hallucinations, in mass psychological and occult terms of suggestibility and hypnotism, and finally in technological terms of cinematic effects. After having made a stance against the police during shootings and a consequent police round-up and at the *Alexanderquelle*, the authorities institutionalize Biberkopf at the insane asylum in Berlin-Buch where he enters into a state which the doctors and psychiatrist there quickly diagnose as "catatonic stupor."[30] Biberkopf's delirious body is a mere chassis (*Gehäuse*)[31] which is soulless, out of service, and disengaged from external social interpersonal communicative reality while producing an excessive flux of internal mental images.

At first Biberkopf receives an imaginary visitor, the allegorical figure of the harvester death who is the main member in the famous medieval dance of death, however, ironically speaking fluently in Berlin dialect. The subsequent "profane enlightenment,"[32] in fact, features stroboscopic light effects reminiscent of side and special effects of cinematographic representation. "And a luminous hatchet flashes through the air, it flashes and is extinguished."[33] The cinematic flux of stroboscopic light is paralleled with the allegorical dismemberment of the delirious human body featured as a gradually accelerated repetitive mechanistic process reciting earlier slaughterhouse scenes. "Swing up, fall down, hack in, swing up, crash down, hack in, swing, fall, hack, swing fall hack, swing hack, swing hack."[34] Biberkopf undergoes the "radical cure" (*Gewaltkur*) through which, at least according to the narrator's comment in the preface, he will be "bent straight again" (*zurechtgebogen*) before returning to Alexanderplatz looking "greatly changed and battered" (*verändert, ramponiert*).[35] The literary representation of and self-reflection on the status of the human being as technological and occult medium of extraordinary mental states such as delirious hallucinations mimetically constructs cinematic visual and poetic acoustic effects.

Excursus: *Poetics of Psychiatric Knowledge*

In a study about Döblin's *Poetics of Psychiatric Knowledge*, as the subtitle announces, Wolfgang Schäffner[36] argues that Döblin's professional experiences as an institutional doctor and office-based neurologist granted him access to the fields of knowledge such as the clinic, the insane asylum, and the prison, all of which in turn served as the material

for the novel.[37] In the *Berliner Programm* Döblin rejects all psychologizing and historicizing modes of literary representation and proposes "to learn from psychiatry."

> We should learn from psychiatry, the only science that deals with the human soul as a whole: it recognized the naivety of psychology a long time ago; it limits itself to the notation of processes and movements—shaking its head and shrugging its shoulder at everything else, the question as to why and how. (…) It points us to a way out of psychological prose. (…) The subject of the novel is soulless reality. (…) In the face of the abundant materials the representation requires a cinematic style.[38]

In other words, Döblin's program calls for ignoring character's inner mental states in the classical style of the realistic psychological novel of the nineteenth century and instead recommends focusing on purely materialistic data from a mechanistic functionalistic point of view on the human being. And insofar as prognostic empirical sciences like criminal studies, demography, and statistics serve as the fundament of modern psychiatry, which is based on statistical probability and causality,[39] the modern novel uses media of mass culture and everyday materials such as phone books and meteorological reports.

Under these theoretical presupposition, Schäffner exposes the division of labour between psychiatry, law, and literature in support of the claim that although legal psychiatry was conceived in order to humanize the criminal law, it actually contributed to the aggravation and expansion of juridical techniques of disciplining and observing both criminals and the mentally ill. Secondly, Schäffner claims that a new type of insane asylum emerged out of this alliance between doctors and lawyers and that Berlin-Buch ranks amongst the first institutions of this kind, where according to Döblin's psychiatric reform program disturbed patients are to be healed, languishing paralyzed patients are to be accommodated, and degenerate patients are to be detained.[40]

Schäffner goes on to characterize the therapeutic optimism of the judicial system and psychiatry inherent in their hopes of achieving the goal of normalization by means of therapeutic disciplining. Precisely to this end, Biberkopf, whom the judicial and medical authorities deem to be a confirmed jailbird if not mentally ill alcoholic, is institutionalized in Berlin-Buch. There his hallucinatory states of panic are methodically intensified beyond any measure and the orthopaedic torture therapy and disciplining of the body follows the guidelines of a bio-political program according to which life must be preserved and penitentiary processes pursue improvement rather than punishment. Thus a contemporary legal expert could claim that the transformation of Biberkopf, the transportation worker who murdered his fiancée in affect, to Biberkopf, a functional, equally respected as respectable member of society, is the showpiece of winning back a criminal for the human society.[41] Döblin's novel, therefore, becomes the model of the successful improvement of a criminal personality and the confirmation for the therapeutic optimism shared by lawyers and psychiatrists alike.[42]

In the final analysis, at least Döblin's narrator in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* seems to suggest that the psychiatric cure was accomplished, for Biberkopf, in fact, ends up working as an assistant doorman in a medium-sized factory, that is to say, in a fixed and static position, and most probably medico-therapeutically immobilized by psychotropic agents, while around him everybody moves about dynamically and transiently, be it the personnel in the factory, be it the National-Socialists and Communists marching the streets of Berlin in 1929 competing for political power with each other. In contrast to both contemporary Marxist and present-day post-Marxist critics, who either bemoan that at the end of the novel the profanely enlightened gangster was elevated into the heavens

of novelistic characters by becoming a sage,[43] or who respectively see the ideal-typical German *Michel*, that is, the selfless, de-politicized, conformist petite bourgeois in Biberkopf,[44] the end result actually seems to be the best possible result beyond the classical idealistic program of the *Bildungsroman* that nonetheless remains the negative backdrop against which these critics judge Biberkopf's story.[45] After all, in reference to both the Communists and the National Socialists, Biberkopf or the narrator rhymes ironically: "Reason is the gift of man, jackasses replace it with a clan."[46]

The Metropolitan Masses and the Exemplary Average Person as the Medium and Form of Modern Society

In reference to Robert Musil's novel *Man Without Qualities*, Benno Wagner applies the systems theoretical distinction between medium/form to claim that, sociologically speaking, the human beings en mass are the medium of modern society, and that, culturally speaking, human beings en mass are the medium of modern city literature.[47] The systems theoretical distinction between medium/form extends the concept of the medium as far that, as a contemporary German media theorist ironically noted, "nothing is not a medium."[48] Now Wagner emphasizes the lose coupling of the medium, that is the human beings en mass, and the stable coupling of the form, that is society or the novel, on the one hand, and the homogeneity and substitutability of the elements of the medium, on the other hand. Since Döblin's novel has a title, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, and a subtitle, *The Story of Franz Biberkopf*, which, as a side note, Döblin's editor persisted in adding to the title, I would like to add that while its medium certainly is the lose coupling of individuals in modern mass society, the fictitious character Biberkopf as an exemplary average person (*Durchschnittsmensch*) is its form on the one hand. But on the other hand, the narrator sees Biberkopf as an occult medium of dark forces.[49]

From a systems theoretical standpoint, the social and the psychic system are environments to each other and yet there is "interpenetration"[50] between them, while from a psychoanalytic standpoint the average person stands in a double conflict against both external nature and culture on the one hand, and by virtue of sublimated renouncement of sexual and aggressive drives for civilizing purposes against repressed inner nature and culture on the other hand.[51] To put it following Simmel's terminology once again, Biberkopf is an "intersection of social circles,"[52] precisely to the extent that he resides in the interspaces between the metropolitan discourse and discipline networks which are ordered according to binary codes. Thus he is neither homosexual nor heterosexual,[53] he neither loves Mieze/Sonja nor Reinhold, in terms of the discourse of gender and sexuality, he is neither Nazi nor Communist in terms of the historico-political discourse, neither employed nor unemployed in terms of the economical discourse, neither respectable [*anständig*] nor criminal in terms of the legal discourse,[54] and one may add neither normal nor pathological in terms of the psychiatric discourse.

The City Novel as the Medium and the Form of Modern Mass Society

In face of the competition between old and new media (*Medienkonkurrenz*) "The Day of the Book" (*Tag des Buches*) was officially instituted in the Weimar Republic in 1929.[55] Unsurprisingly enough until today in the public discourse around the book fairs (*Buchmessen*), cultural conservative and pessimistic voices are heard bemoaning the asymmetry between the production and consumption of books and the overall damaging effects of the new media's superpower in modern mass society. In response to the predominantly economical crisis of the book as perceived by the publishing industry in

general, and the cultural crisis of the novel in particular,[56] Döblin increases self-reference in both his programmatic and poetic writings.[57] The preface of the novel begins with "This book […]" („*Dies Buch*…")[58] and gives a self-commentating summary of the story, exposing its banality by using war, boxing, and chess metaphors. In a later passage where the harvester death visits Biberkopf and sings the songs of death, the narrator ironically reflects on the novel as media as well as on songs, poetry, and music as other media.

> That certainly is a beautiful song. Franz hears it and wonders what it means: Death is singing? If it were printed in a book, or read aloud, it would be rather like poetry, Schubert composed such songs, Death and the Maiden, but what about it?[59]

Subsequently, the harvester death tells Biberkopf ironically reflecting on his own status as technological medium:

> I called you again and again, and you take me for a mere record player, for a gramophone to turn on, whenever you please, then I have to call you, and when you have enough, you simply stop the record. That's what you take me for, or that's whatcha take me for. Go ahead and take me for it, but I tell you you're wrong.[60]

To note on the margins, amongst other means of increasing self-reference in the novel are the use of rhetorical figures such as alliteration, assonance, rhythmic as well as melodic verses, and rhymes, all of which are sound effects highlighting the materiality and mediality of language,[61] and the intertextual parodying and derisive use of ancient Greek mythology (Orestes), the Bible (Apocalypse, Book of Hiob), and the allegorical figures (the whore Babylon, the harvester Death). Again wireless communication of the Erinnyes

from the ancient Greek myth of the Oresteia is contrasted with the means of communication in the modern technological age.

More importantly, however, the realistic external-referential (*fremdreferentiell*) observation of the functioning of the metropolitan discourse and discipline networks from a cold analytical point of view is enriched with equally realistic self-referential reflections, e.g., the narrator's commentary with overtones of a pitiless and ironical ballad-monger not unlike in Brecht's epic theatre, almost essayistic but instantaneous reflections about programmatic and poetic questions as to the status of the novel as a medium, the literary representability of the metropolitan crowd and the city itself, the usefulness of literature in general.

> There are men, women, and children, the latter mostly holding women's hands. To enumerate them all and to describe their destinies is hardly possible, and only in a few cases would this succeed. The wind scatters chaff over all of them alike. The faces of the eastward wanderers are in no way different from those of the wanderers to the west, south and north; moreover they exchange theirs roles, those who are now crossing square towards Aschinger's may be seen an hour later in front of the empty Hahn Department Store. Just as those who come from Brunnenstrasse on their way to Jannowitz Brücke mingle with those coming from the reverse direction. Yes, and many of them turn off to the side, from south to east, from south to west, form north to west, from north to east. They have the same equanimity as passengers in an omnibus or in street-cars. The latter all sit in different postures, making the weight of the car, as indicated outside, heavier still. Who could find out what is happening inside them, a tremendous chapter. And if anyone did write it, to whose advantage would it be? New books? Even the old ones don't sell, and in the year '27 book-sales as compared with '26 have declined so and so much per cent.[62]

In this passage, the question as to the literary representability of the metropolitan crowd and the city itself is raised and answered by mimicking film scripts and citing cinematic

modes of representation, e.g., the high-angle shots of the metropolitan crowd as they are used in Walter Ruttmann's *Sinfonie einer Großstadt* (1929). The novel also reflects on its own status as a medium with reference to the annual book market quotas, on the one hand, and on its own status as literature, on the other hand, with reference to and programmatic rejection of the outdated writing style of the realistic psychological novel of the nineteenth century which by the late twenties has been in crisis for quite some time. "Who could find out what is happening inside them, a tremendous chapter. And if anyone did write it, to whose advantage would it be?" Instead the characteristic features of the metropolitan crowd as the medium of the novel, i.e., the anonymity and homogeneity as well as the substitutability of elements and roles is made visible in the form of the novelistic representation. Or, if in other passages the representation of character's inner mental states is asked for, then it follows a notably modernist poetic program by using inner monologues and free indirect speech even if some passages may relapse into the traditional realistic psychological mode of writing. Döblin's modern city novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz—The Story of Franz Biberkopf* realistically represents and self-referentially reflects on the interrelation between human, technological, occult, and literary media such as the normally functioning and the delirious human body, cinema, the metropolitan masses, and the city novel itself.

Notes

I would like to thank Stefan Andriopoulos for inspiring me to write this essay.

[1] English edition: Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz—The Story of Franz Biberkopf,* trans. Eugene Jolas (London: Continuum, 2004). German original: Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz—Die Geschichte vom Franz Biberkopf* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 1996).
[2] Friedrich A. Kittler, *Auschreibesysteme 1800/1900* (Munich: Fink, 1987). Friedrich A. Kittler, *Grammophon Film Typewriter* (Berlin: Brinkmann und Bose, 1986). Friedrich A. Kittler, *Draculas*

Vermächtnis: Technische Schriften (Leipzig: Reclam, 1993). Peter Fuchs und Andreas Göbel, *Der Mensch, das Medium der Gesellschaft?* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1994). Stefan Rieger, *Die Individualität der Medien: Eine Geschichte der Wissenschaft vom Menschen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2002).

[3] Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: Dover, 2002).

[4] Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* in *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften 1*. (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), 136 ff. Georg Simmel, *Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben* in *Gesamtausgabe, Band 7: Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901-1908*, ed. Otthein Rammstedt, *et al*. (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1992), 116 ff.

[5] Alfred Döblin, "An Romanautoren und ihre Kritiker: Berliner Programm" in *Aufsätze zur Literatur* (Freiburg i. B.: Walter, 1963), 15-19, trans. T. Z.

[6] Benno Wagner, "Von Massen und Menschen. Zum Verhältnis von Medium und Form in Musils *Mann ohne Eigenschaften*" in Fuchs und Göbel (Fn. 2, 264 ff.).

[7] Walter Benjamin, "Krisis des Romans" in *Angelus Novus: Ausgewählte Schriften 2* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), 437-43. Stefan Andriopoulos und Bernhard J. Dotzler, Hrsg., *1929: Beiträge zur Archäologie der Medien* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2002).

[8] Döblin (Fn. 1, 17-8, translation slightly altered, T. Z.). „Jugendlichen unter 17 Jahren ist der Eintritt verboten. Auf dem Riesenplakat stand knallrot ein Herr auf einer Treppe, und ein duftes junges Mädchen umfaßte seine Beine, sie lag auf der Treppe, und er schnitt oben ein kesses Gesicht. Darunter stand: Elternlos, Schicksal eines Waisenkindes in 6 Akten." Döblin (Fn. 1, 24).

[9] Döblin (Fn. 1, 17-8, translation slightly altered, T. Z.). „Der lange Raum war knüppeldick voll, 90 Prozent Männer in Mützen, die nehmen sie nicht ab. Drei Lampen an der Decke sind rot verhängt. Vorn ununterbrochen Krach. Dann wird es finster und der Film läuft. Einem Gänsemädchen soll Bildung beigebracht werden, warum wird einem so mittendrin nicht klar. Sie wischte sich die Nase mit der Hand, sie kratzte sich auf der Treppe den Hintern, alles im Kino lachte. Ganz wunderbar ergriff es Franz, als das Kichern um ihn losging. Lauter Menschen, freie Leute, amüsierten sich, hat ihnen keiner was zu sagen, wunderbar schön, und ich stehe mitten mang. Dann lief es weiter. Der feine Baron hatte eine Geliebte, die sich auf eine Hängematte legte und dabei ihre Beine senkrecht nach oben streckte. Die hatte Hosen an. Das ist eine Sache. Was sich die Leute bloß aus dem dreckigen Gänseliesel machten und daß die die Teller ausleckte. Wieder flimmerte die mit den schlanken Beinen auf. Der Baron hatte sie allein gelassen, jetzt kippte sie aus der Hängematte und flog ins Gras, lag lang da. Franz stierte auf die Wand, es gab schon ein anderes Bild, er sah sie noch immer herauskippen und lang da liegen. Er kaute an seiner Zunge, Donnerkiel, was war das. Als dann einer, der aber der Liebhaber der Gänsemagd war, diese Frau umarmte, lief es ihm heiß über die Brusthaut, als wenn er sie selbst umarmte. Das ging auf ihn über und machte ihn schwach.
Ein Weibsstück." Döblin (Fn. 1, 24).

[10] Le Bon (Fn. 3).

[11] "A crowd thinks in images, and the image itself immediately calls up a series of other images having no logical connection with the first." Le Bon (Fn. 3, 15).

[12] Albert Hellwig, "Zur Psychologie der kinematographischer Vorführungen" in *Zeitschrift für Psychotherapie und medizinische Psychologie mit Einschluss des Hypnotismus, der Suggestion und der Psychoanalyse*, Hrsg. von Albert Moll, vol. VI (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke, 1916), 95, trans. T. Z.

[13] Ibid., 94.

[14] Albert Hellwig, "Über die schädliche Suggestivkraft kinematographischer Vorführungen" in *Ärtzliche Sachversändigenzeitung* (vol. 20, no. 6, 1914), 119-24.

[15] Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* in *Studienausgabe. Bd. 2* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2000, 280 ff.).

[16] Benjamin (Fn. 4, 114).

[17] Döblin (Fn. 1, 3). „Er schüttelte sich, schluckte. Er trat sich auf den Fuß. Dann nahm er einen Anlauf und saß in der Elektrischen. Mitten unter den Leuten. Los. Das war zuerst, als wenn man beim Zahnarzt sitzt, der eine Wurzel mit der Zange gepackt hat und zieht, der Schmerz wächst, der Kopf will platzen. Er drehte den Kopf zurück nach der roten Mauer, aber die Elektrische sauste mit ihm auf den Schienen weg, dann stand nur noch sein Kopf in der Richtung des Gefängnisses. Der Wagen machte eine Biegung, Bäume, Häuser traten dazwischen. Lebhafte Straßen tauchten auf, die Seestraße, Leute stiegen ein und aus. In ihm schrie es entsetzt: Achtung, Achtung, es geht los. Seine Nasenspitze vereiste, über seinen Backen schwirrte es." Döblin (Fn. 1, 8).

[18] Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 134 ff.
[19] Döblin (Fn. 1, 5). „Die Wagen tobten und klingelten weiter, er rann Häuserfront neben Häuserfront ohne Aufhören hin. Und Dächer waren auf den Häusern, die schwebten auf den Häusern, seine Augen irrten nach oben: wenn die Dächer nur nicht abrutschten, aber die Häuser standen gerade." Döblin (Fn. 1, 10).
[20] Simmel (Fn. 4, 116ff.).
[21] Andreas Huyssen, "Paris/Childhood: The Fragmented Body in Rilke's *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*" in David Bathrick and Andreas Huyssen, eds., *Modernity and the Text: Revisions of German Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 133. Huyssen makes reference to Walter Benjamin, "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire" in *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften 1.* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), 185-230; Sigmund Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips: Studienausgabe, Bd 3* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2000), 213-73; and Simmel (Fn. 4, 116ff.).
[22] Simmel (Fn. 4, 117).
[23] Georg Simmel: "Die Kreuzung sozialer Kreise" in *Gesamtausgabe, Bd. 11, Soziologie: Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung,* Hrsg. v. Otthein Rammstedt, *et al*. (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1992, 456 ff.).
[24] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University Press, 1997); Jochen Vogt, *Aspekte erzählender Prosa: Eine Einführung in die Erzähltechnik und Romantheorie.* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990).
[25] Döblin (Fn. 5, 18), trans. T. Z.
[26] Döblin (Fn. 1, 3-4) „'Zwölf Uhr Mittagszeitung', 'B.Z.', 'Die neueste Illustrierte', 'Die Funkstunde neu' 'Noch jemand zugestiegen?' Die Schupos haben jetzt blaue Uniformen. Er stieg unbeachtet wieder aus dem Wagen, war unter Menschen. Was war denn? Nichts. Haltung, ausgehungertes Schwein, reiß dich zusammen, kriegst meine Faust zu riechen. Gewimmel, welch Gewimmel. Wie sich das bewegte. Mein Brägen hat wohl keinen Schmalz mehr, der ist wohl ganz ausgetrocknet. Was war das alles. Schuhgeschäfte, Hutgeschäfte, Glühlampen, Destillen. Die Menschen müssen doch Schuhe haben, wenn sie so viel rumlaufen, wir hatten ja auch eine Schusterei, laß sie doch blitzern, die werden dir doch nicht bange machen, kannst sie ja kaputt schlagen, was ist denn mit die, sind eben blankgeputzt. Man riß das Pflaster am Rosenthaler Platz auf, er ging zwischen den anderen auf den Holzbohlen. Man mischt sich unter die anderen, da vergeht alles, dann merkst du nichts, Kerl. Figuren standen in den Schaufenstern in Anzügen, Mänteln, mit Röcken, mit Strümpfen und Schuhen. Draußen bewegte sich alles, aber – dahinter – war nichts! Es – lebte – nicht! Es hatte fröhliche Gesichter, es lachte, es wartete auf der Schutzinsel gegenüber Aschinger zu zweit oder zu dritt, rauchte Zigaretten, blätterte Zeitungen. So stand das da wie die Laternen – und – wurde immer starrer. Sie gehörten zusammen mit den Häusern, alles weiß, alles Holz." Döblin (Fn. 1, 10).
[27] Döblin (Fn. 1, 70). „Eine Tobsucht, Starre ist Franz Biberkopf. Er kräht blind aus seiner Kehle heraus, sein Blick ist gläsern, sein Gesicht ist blau, gedunsen, er spuckt, seine Hände glühen, der Mann ist nicht bei sich. Dabei krallen seine Finger in den Stuhl, aber er hält sich nur am Stuhl fest. Jetzt wird er gleich den Stuhl nehmen und losschlagen. Achtung, Gefahr im Verzug, Straße frei, Laden, Feuer, Feuer, Feuer. Dabei hört der Mann, der dasteht und brüllt, hört sich selbst, von weitem, sieht sich an. Die Häuser, die Häuser wollen einstürzen, die Dächer wollen über ihn her, das gibt es nicht, damit sollen die mir nicht kommen, es wird den Verbrechern nicht gelingen, wir brauchen Ruhe. Und es irrte durch ihn: es wird bald losgehen, ich werde etwas tun, eine Kehle fassen, nein, nein, ich werde bald umkippen, hinschlagen, einen Moment noch, einen Moment. Und da hab ich gedacht, die Welt ist ruhig, es ist Ordnung da. In seiner Dämmerung graute er sich: es ist etwas nicht in Ordnung in de Welt, die stehen da drüben so schrecklich, er erlebt es hellseherisch." Döblin (Fn. 1, 81).
[28] Döblin (Fn. 1, 72). „Was wollen die Leute von einem, erst die Schwulen, die einen nichts angehen, jetzt die Roten. (…) Es flackert wieder und pulsiert in Franzens Augen; seine Stirn und Nase wird dick." Döblin (Fn. 1, 83).
[29] Trans. T. Z. „Franz fühlt sich mächtig von ihm [Reinhold] angezogen." Döblin (Fn. 1, 155).
[30] Döblin (Fn. 1, 353). „Katatonischer Stupor" Döblin (Fn. 1, 385).
[31] Trans. T. Z. Döblin (Fn. 1, 385).
[32] Benjamin (Fn. 7, 437-43).
[33] Döblin (Fn. 1, 357) „Da blitzt ein Beil durch die Luft, es blitzt, es erlischt." Döblin, (Fn. 1, 389).

[34] Döblin (Fn. 1, 358). „Schwing hoch, fall nieder, hack ein, schwing hoch, schlag nieder, hack ein, schwing, fall, hack, schwing fall hack, schwing hack, schwing. Döblin (Fn. 1, 389).
[35] Döblin (Fn. 1, 2, respectively 10).
[36] Wolfgang Schäffner, *Die Ordnung des Wahns: Zur Poetologie psychiatrischen Wissens bei Alfred Döblin* (Munich: Fink, 1995).
[37] In 1932 Döblin himself wrote in a short speech about his novel: "It would be a long story to explain how I arrived at the subject and the main theme of the book. Here I'd just like to say: in my job as a medical doctor I came across many criminals. Many years ago I had an observation ward for criminals. There I experienced many interesting things. And if I encountered these people and many other similar ones out there, I arrived at a very peculiar image of our society: the borderline between criminals and non-criminals cannot be drawn quite that clearly, just as society, or more precisely, that what I saw was undermined by criminality at various spots. That was already a very peculiar perspective" (trans. T. Z.). „Es wäre ein lange Geschichte zu erzählen, wie ich zum Stoff und zu dem Grundmotiv des Buches kam. Hier will ich nur sagen: mein ärztlicher Beruf hat mich mit vielen Kriminellen zusammengebracht. Ich hatte auch vor Jahren eine Beobachtungsstation für Kriminelle. Von da kam manches Interessante und Sagenswerte. Und wenn ich diesen Menschen und vielen ähnlichen da draußen begegnete, so hatte ich eine eigentümliches Bild von dieser unserer Gesellschaft: wie es da keine so straffe formulierbare Grenze zwischen Kriminellen und Nichtkriminellen gibt, wie an allen möglichen Stellen die Gesellschaft – oder besser das, was ich sah – von Kriminalität unterwühlt war. Schon das war eine eigentümliche Perspektive." Döblin (Fn. 1, 412). See Schäffner (Fn. 36, 166-7). Döblin, however, is aware that the perspectives of the doctor and the writer cannot be reduced to each other and makes ironical commentaries about this fact (Fn. 5, 361-7).
[38] Trans. T. Z. „Man lerne von der Psychiatrie, der einzigen Wissenschaft, die sich mit dem seelischen ganzen des Menschen befaßt: sie hat das Naive der Psychologie längst erkannt, beschränkt sich auf die Notierung der Abläufe, Bewegungen, – mit einem Kopfschütteln, Achselzucken für das Weitere und das ‚Warum' und ‚Wie'. […] Damit ist der Weg aus der psychologischen Prosa gewiesen. […] der Gegenstand des Romans ist die entseelte Realität. […] Die Darstellung erfordert bei der ungeheuren Menge des Geformten einen Kinostil. Döblin (Fn. 5, 16-17).
[39] Schäffner (Fn. 36, 166).
[40] Alfred Döblin, *Das Leben in der Irrenanstalt* (1914), cited Schäffner (Fn. 36, 163).
[41] Eugen Schmidt, *Das Verbrechen als Ausdruck sozialer Ermutigung* (Munich, 1931), cited Schäffner (Fn. 36, 169).
[42] Schäffner (Fn. 36, 162-9).
[43] Benjamin (Fn. 7, 437-43).
[44] Scherpe (Fn. 21, 162-79). Actually I heard Scherpe make this argument in his lecture about city literature held at Humboldt-University in Berlin during the summer semester 2002.
[45] Ibid.; see also Benjamin, (Fn. 7, 437-43).
[46] Döblin (Fn. 1, 377). „Dem Menschen ist gegeben die Vernunft, die Ochsen bilden stattdessen eine Zunft." Döblin (Fn. 1, 410).
[47] Wagner (Fn. 6, 264 ff.).
[48] Rieger (Fn. 2).
[49] Döblin (Fn. 1, 9).
[50] Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme: Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1996), 286-346.
[51] Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur: Studienausgabe, Bd. 9* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer 2000), 191-286.
[52] Simmel (Fn. 23, 456 ff.).
[53] Döblin (Fn. 1, 29) makes reference to the sexual scientist Magnus Hirschfeld, who was incidentally the editor of the *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*.
[54] Scherpe (Fn. 21, 174).
[55] Andriopoulos and Dotzler (Fn. 7, 292).
[56] Benjamin (Fn. 7, 437-43); Dietrich Scheunemann, *Romankrise: Die Entstehungsgeschichte der modernen Romanpoetik in Deutschland* (Heidelberg: Quelle und Meyer, 1978).
[57] Döblin (Fn. 5).
[58] Döblin (Fn. 1, 1, respectively 10).

[59] Döblin (Fn. 1, 356). „Das ist gewiß ein schöner Gesang, aber hört dieses Franz, und was soll das heißen: das singt der Tod? So gedruckt im Buch oder laut vorgelesen ist es etwas wie Poesie, Schubert hat ähnliche Lieder komponiert, der Tod und das Mädchen, aber was soll das hier?“ Döblin (Fn. 1, 388).
[60] Döblin (Fn. 1, 359, translation slightly altered, T. Z.). In the German original Death speaks in an inimitable Berlin dialect: „Hab dich gerufen immer wieder, hältst mich für einen Schallplattenapparat, fürn Grammophon, das man andreht, wenns einem Spaß macht, dann hab ich zu rufen, und wenn du genug hast, stellst du mich ab. Dafür hältst du mich, oder davor hältst du mir. Halt mir nur davor, aber jetzt siehste, det Ding is anders.“ Döblin (Fn. 1, 390).
[61] Scheunemann, Dietrich: “’Collecting Shells’ in the Age of Technological Reproductions. On Storytelling, Writing and the Film” in *Orality, Literacy, and Modern Media* (New York: Camden House, 1996), 79 ff. In this article the structural analogy between Homer’s collecting shells and Döblin’s use of mass culture is problematic since the socio-historical and technological status of the medium or material is very different.
[62] Döblin (Fn. 1, 131). „Es sind Männer, Frauen und Kinder, die letzteren zumeist an der Hand von Frauen. Sie alle aufzuzählen und ihr Schicksal zu beschreiben, ist schwer möglich, es könnte nur bei einigen gelingen. Der Wind wirft gleichmäßig Häcksel über alle. Das Gesicht der Ostwanderer ist in nichts unterschieden von dem der West-, Süd-, Nordwanderer, sie vertauschen auch ihre Rollen, und die jetzt über den Platz zu Aschinger gehen, kann man nach einer Stunde vor dem leeren Kaufhaus Hahn finden. Und ebenso mischen sich die, die von der Brunnenstraße kommen und zur Jannowitzbrücke wollen, mit den umgekehrt Gerichteten. Ja, viele biegen auch seitlich um, von Süden nach Osten, von Süden nach Westen, von Norden nach Osten. Sie sind so gleichmäßig wie die, die im Autobus, in der Elektrischen sitzen. Die sitzen alle in verschiedenen Haltungen da und machen so das außen angeschriebene Gewicht des Wagens schwerer. Was in ihnen vorgeht, wer kann das ermitteln, ein ungeheures Kapitel. Und wenn man es täte, wem diente es? Neue Bücher? Schon die alten gehen nicht, um im Jahr 27 ist der Buchabsatz gegen 26 um soundsoviel Prozent zurückgegangen.“ Döblin (Fn. 1, 147).