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Embracing modern Berlin: representations of time and space in *Menschen am Sonntag*

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Introduction

'It is a *centre*. All the vital energies of its locus begin and end here…It's the heart of a world whose life is belt drive and clockwork, piston rhythm and siren scream. It is the heart of the world, which spins on its axis a thousand times faster than the alternation of day and night would have us believe; whose continuous and never-ending rotation looks like madness and is the product of mathematical calculation…'[1]

The above quote is taken from a 1924 article by Joseph Roth. The subject of Roth's lyricism is the triangular railway junction in central Berlin. The passage portrays the centre of Berlin as a mechanical, maniacal solar plexus where time speeds up to the extent that perfect clockwork can seem like chaos. Roth's reports from interwar Berlin paint a seemingly extraordinary picture. Berlin is described as an overload to the senses; technical precision and coldness meet erratic motion and sexual heat. But Roth's view was far from singular. Harold Nicolson asked 'What on earth is it which gives this town its charm?' His answer: 'Movement in the first place. There is no city in the world as restless as Berlin…The traffic lights change restlessly from red to gold and then to green.' Like Roth, Nicolson saw this movement as intrinsically linked to sexual desire: '[In] the night air, which makes even the spires of the Gedächtniskirche flicker with excitement, there is a throbbing sense of expectancy.'[2] Berlin, it seems, moved so attractively that even the stoic edifice of German Protestantism became aroused. But while, for Nicholson, this was the 'charm' of Berlin, it was not a pretty or dainty charm. Entrails are spoken of in the same sentence as tiaras, 'arsenic' whispered in the same breath as 'milk'.[3] Roth too, while sneering at 'backward-looking sentimentalists,' cannot hide his fear of being engulfed by the city's rhythm: 'Can little heartbeats still make themselves heard where a big booming one deafens a world?'[4]

Historians have been keen to explore texts which exhibit such ambivalence. Many

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[1] J. Roth, (trans. M. Hoffmann, German selection by M. Bienert) *What I Saw: Reports from Berlin 1920-1933* (London, 2003), p. 105.
[2] H., Nicolson, 'The Charm of Berlin' (1932, unpaginated version found at http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3870, accessed 13/12/10)
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] Roth, *What I Saw*, p. 107 For another example, see C. Zuckamayer, *Als Wär's ein Stück von mir* (1966), reprinted in translation in *A Part of Myself* (trans. R. and C. Wilson, New York 1970)

fascinating studies have intimated the relationships between aspects of these texts and the insecurities of the nascent Republic, namely war trauma, an uneasy relationship with democracy, perceive loosening of morals, women's visibility, and the rationalisation of labour. [5] (See Appendix 1) While these studies are for the most part very convincing in relation to their chosen sources, it remains true that the latter constitute a skewed sample of Weimar cultural output. Firstly, written sources are unrepresentative in terms of their maleness; women had restricted access to the worlds of journalism and novel-writing.[6] Furthermore - especially in terms of novels and memoirs - the very nature of the written source speaks of an author with free time to record their observations. As such, the viewpoint of the working person all but vanishes.[7] A similar observance is true of Weimar art histories. While the male-dominated canon has been somewhat challenged, notably by Dorothy Rowe's recent work, much remains to be done in this area.[8] Moreover, although artists were not necessarily - or even usually - wealthy, in terms of consumption art remains irretrievably elitist.[9] Films are relatively more representative of mass culture. However, in scholarship on Weimar cinema, a certain bias persists. Despite constituting only a minority of the filmic output of the era, 'Expressionist' films form the basis for most studies of Weimar cinema.[10] Canonisation seems, therefore, to have affected various types of study on Weimar Germany and is often unacknowledged by authors.

On a more internal level, there can be a tendency – possibly fostered by the problems outlined above – to stray towards pre-determined assumptions in cultural readings of Weimar

[5] Von Ankum, *Women in the Metropolis*, D. Apel, '"Heroes" and "Whores": The Politics of Gender in Weimar Antiwar Imagery', *The Art Bulletin* Vol. 79, No. 3 (Sep., 1997), P. Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret* (Cambridge, 1993), Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema*, I. Marler, 'Threats of Others: Women, Modernity, and German Insecurity in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*' (unpublished manuscript, 2009), R. W. McCormick, 'Private Anxieties/Public Projections: "New Objectivity," Male Subjectivity, and Weimar Cinema', *Women in German Yearbook*, Vol. 10 (1994), pp. 1-18

[6] C. Schönfeld and C. Finnan (eds.) *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic* (London, 2006), pp. 1-8

[7] J. Czaplika, 'Pictures of a City at Work, Berlin c.1890-1930: Visual Reflections on Social Structures and Technology in the Modern Urban Construct', in C. W. Haxthausen and H. Suhr, *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis* (New York, 1990), p. 18

[8] D. Rowe, *Representing Berlin: sexuality and the city in Imperial and Weimar Germany* (Aldershot, 2003)

[9] For studies on Weimar art and its relationship to gender and modernity see D. Apel, '"Heroes" and "Whores"' Rowe, *Representing Berlin,* Von Ankum, *Women in the Metropolis.*

[10] Manvell and Fraenkel (eds.), *The German Cinema* (Letchworth, 1971). I use inverted commas due to the popularisation of the term to the point of dictating little more than stylisation. See, Manvell and Fraenkel, p13

Germany. Taking an example relating specifically to the urban space, Katarina von Ankum's *Women in the Metropolis* is at times limited in this way.[11] This compelling collection has added depth to the cultural studies of modern Berlin. Unfortunately, it falls short by giving the cultural tropes fear and anxiety too much explanatory weight. While these qualities are indubitably evident in texts examined in the collection, the essays would benefit from more of what is touched upon in Janet Lungstrum's contribution – that is, an ability to entertain the possibility that women's conflation with the city could offer 'new creative possibilities'.[12] There is a niggling sense that a feminist agenda has led the contributors to assume a general restriction of female activity and agency in the urban environment, when more examples of experience might well have revealed instances of the self-confidence in female Berliners, thus nuancing the study. [13]

This dissertation – premised on a realization of the shortcomings outlined above - will ask the following over-arching questions: Was the modern city always perceived as a negative, or at best ambivalent space? That is to say, was the spatiality and temporality of the urban environment always expressed in relation to the tropes of alienation, artificiality, poor health, and immorality, or were there more positive cultural representations of the urban environment?[14] In direct relation to this, was the metropolis invariably expressed in relation to a threatening sexuality? In exploring these questions, this work will address the following sub-questions: How does the film demarcate the urban landscape? Where does this specific image or map of the city fit within contemporary discourses regarding work and leisure?

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[11] Of course, this is just one of many influential works. For example, Tim Cole's *Holocaust Landscapes: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto* (London, 2003) is important to this dissertation because of its original approach to the space of the city.

[12] Von Ankum, *Women in the Metropolis*, p. 128.

[13] As Peter Fritzsche has pointed out, the dense human traffic of the city gave rise to Berlin's "*Strassenbekannstschaften"* and "*Strassenbahnbekanntschaften*"; the result of mutual flirtations in the bustle of the city.) P. Fritzsche, 'Review: [Von Ankum, *Women in the Metropolis*]', *Central European History*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (1999) pp.122.

[14] For an outline of the history of anti-urbanism, see C. S. Fischer, *The Urban Experience* (New York, 1976) For an example of how anti-urbanism has persisted in scholarship see L. Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and its Prospects* (London, 1966)

These questions will be tackled using the close analysis of one cultural text, the 1930 silent film, *Menschen Am Sonntag*.[15]

FILM AS AN HISTORICAL SOURCE

Menschen presents itself as a *Querschnittsfilm* (cross-section film), following five white-collar Berliners spending a typical weekend. [16] The film is an interesting blend of feature and documentary, using 'real' Berliners in the lead roles as well as large amounts of un-staged footage of the city and its inhabitants. There is no narrative resolution as such, but the plot as it exists progresses as follows: Christl and Wolfgang meet for the first time, have coffee together and agree to take a day-trip together the next day. Christl and Wolfgang accompanied by their respective best friends, Brigitte and Erwin, spend the day by the lake, swimming and picnicking, while Erwin's spouse, Annie, sleeps at home. Wolfgang, having had his advances spurned by Christl, goes on to have a sexual liaison with Brigitte.[17] In the afternoon, they all return to central Berlin and go their separate ways, Wolfgang agreeing to meet with Brigitte the next Sunday. [18] The creators of *Menschen* were notably young, all bar Schüfftan being between 20 and 27. Only Schüfftan was old enough to have lived through the First World War as an adult and considering the democratic nature of the film's production, we might assume that any generational peculiarities were suppressed by the youthful majority.[19] The film premiered in Berlin in 1930, and although exact ticket-sales figures seem not to exist, reviews seem to suggest that *Menschen* was very popular.[20]

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[15] R. Siodmak and E. G. Ulmer, *Menschen am Sonntag* (filmed 1929, premiered 1930, DVD version from the British Film Institute's 'History of the Avant-Garde' series, 2005) From here on, (e.g.) 'tt. 00:00-00:01', relates to the point of the film as found in the cites DVD edition.

[16] L. Koepnick, 'The Bearable Lightness of Being: People on Sunday (1930)', in N. Isenberg, *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era,* p. 239.

[17] t. 32:12

[18] Other films, art of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* genre, and selected written commentaries on life in Berlin will be used to supplement this analysis. K. Grune, *Die Straße (premiered, 1923, footage taken from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfWJLh691OI, accessed 13/12/10),* W. Ruttmann, *Berlin*: *Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (premiered, 1927), H. Nicolson, 'The Charm of Berlin' (1932, found at http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3870, accessed 13/12/10), A. Kaes, et al., *Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (University of California Press, 1995). S. Rewald et al., *Glitter and Doom: German portraits from the 1920s* (New York, 2006), S. Plumb, *Neue Sachlichkeit: 1918-3: Unity and Diversity of an Art Movement* (Rodopi, 2003)

[19]The team recalled a 'collegial atmosphere of production', Koepnick, 'Bearable Lightness', p. 239. In the worlds of Siegfied Kracauer, collaborative creativity 'suppress[es] individual peculiarities in favour of trait common to many people', S. Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*

One shortcoming of using silent films is the absence of the original accompanying music.[21] However - as musical accompaniment varied between performances – viewers' experiences of the film would have been different. Furthermore, it is arguable that a person's experience of a film is always unique. This considered, the introduction of a new score to the film does not irreconcilably hinder a reading of *Menchen*. The music heard in conjunction with the film is just one of an infinite number of variables which the historian is not able to retrace. This leads on to the merits and limitation of using film in general as an historical source: if the historian cannot possibly recreate the idiosyncratic nature of film reception, what good is using films at all? Here, the work of Miriam Hansen is useful. Hansen criticises the prevailing film theory of the 1970s and 1980s for its reliance on a hypothetical ideal spectator; a 'unified/unifying position offered by the text' in her words. Hansen's concept is one of a 'social horizon of experience' grounded in the 'context of living' (*Lebenszusammenhang*) rather than a homogenous notion of the public. Seeing a film as a part of this 'horizon' allows some room for film studies methods, while maintaining a connection to the particularities of historical context. [22]

Although, as touched on above, using film has its shortcomings, the merits remain substantial. As a technical incarnation of the modernity it seeks to present, film has the ability to use motion to express motion, particularly in comparison with the static medium of art. As Erwin Panofsky has intimated, 'the spectator has a fixed seat, but only physically. Aesthetically, he is in permanent motion.'[23] Furthermore, film is more representative of Weimar culture than art. Sabine Hake's estimate that 3.5 million Germans went to the cinema

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(Princeton UP, 1947), p. 5. Also note that a synthetic production process allows the film to escape the unhelpful trappings of the author. See M. Foucault's 'What is an Author?' in P. Rabinow and N. Rose (eds.) *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984* (New York, 1994)

[20] Koepnick, 'Bearable Lightness', p. 239. See H. Wille's review in P. Kemp et al., booklet accompanying *Menschen* DVD

[21] The 2005 DVD edition of *Menschen* features a 2000 score composed by Elena Kats-Chernin.

[22] M. Hansen, 'Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere in Williams' (ed.), *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film* (New Brunswick, 1997) p. 134. For examples of this psychoanalytic-semiotic approach critiqued by Hansen see L. Mulvey 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 6–18 (1975), C. Johnston (ed.), *The work of Dorothy Arzner: towards a feminist cinema*, (London, 1975). For elaboration on the shortcomings of this approach, see M. A. Doane, 'Misrecognition and Identity,' *Cine-Tracts*, Vol. 3, No. 3, (Autumn, 1980) p. 29. It should be noted that this application in adapted form of Hansen's work was used in one of my previous studies, 'Threats of Others: Women, Modernity, and German Insecurity in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*' (unpublished manuscript, 2009).

[23] E. Panofsky, 'Style and Medium in the Moving Pictures', *transition*, (1937) pp. 124-5.

every night goes some way to illustrating film's mass appeal.[24] Certainly, one should be wary of setting too much store by the popular character of Weimar cinema. Paul Monaco has assessed Weimar cinema in relation to a 'mass psyche', overlooking the idiosyncratic nature of film reception.[25] All the same, the popular character of Weimar cinema remains significant. As Joseph Garncarz has deftly illustrated, the German film industry was fiercely competitive, meaning companies were attuned to meeting audience demand. The preference of German audiences of German films over American imports also speaks of the cultural specificity of Weimar films.[26] These observations, while not supportive of a theory of 'mass psyche', can still be said to suggest that cinema reflected - to some extent - ubiquitous social mores. In rebuttal to the potential suggestion that using more sources would draw more representative conclusions, it can be said that - in a study of limited length - assessing more sources would produce a shallow reading, which is less preferable to an in-depth analysis of one rich source. It seems most profitable to take one under-studied text and try to work outwards from it to illuminate where it lies in a broader 'web of significance'.[27]

In terms of scholarship, *Menschen* has received relatively little attention. The film receives an interesting analysis from Lutz Koepnick, who reads the film as a primarily positive representation of life in Berlin. However, Koepnick's work, - remaining within the parameters of film study – only nods towards the historical context of the film, and features no engagement with discourses regarding work, leisure, or sex. Other than Koepnick's work, *Menschen* is largely omitted from studies of Weimar film, apart from fleeting mentions by Anton Kaes, Iris Luppa, and Lotte Eisner.[28] It seems likely that this is due to *Menschen*'s

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[24] S. Hake, *The Cinema's Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany, 1907-1933* (University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. 140.
[25] P. Monaco, *Cinema and Society: France and Germany during the Twenties* (New York, 1976), pp. 118-127. For an extended criticism of Monaco, see W. Wright's review, *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 83. No. 2 (Sep., 1977), pp. 507-510.
[26] J. Garncarz, 'Art and Industry: German Cinema of the 1920s', in L. Grieveson, and P. Krämer, (eds.), *The Silent Cinema Reader* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 389-91.
[27] 'This concept is, of course, taken from anthropologist Clifford Geertz. See C. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, (London, 1973)
[28] L. H. Eisner, *The haunted screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (University of California Press, 1973), I. Luppa, 'Weimar Cinema' in Gibbs, J. and Pye, D., *Close-Up 03* (London, 2009), A. Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of Wa*r, (Princeton Uniersity Press, 2009)

appearance as a bright anomaly among the wealth of fantastic, sinister, and largely studio-shot films. It might well be that other 'slice-of-life' films, particularly *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, have received more attention due to the fact that their tone is closer to that of these 'Expressionist' films.[29] In terms of Weimar cinema more generally there is a wealth of literature available. However, being written by film studies scholars, works tend to examine the film as a self-contained text; the techniques of the medium take precedence, and historical context is not sufficiently expanded upon. In terms of historians addressing Weimar cinema, Anton Kaes's compelling *Shell Shock Cinema* is perhaps the best example to date. Kaes' methodology of rooting detailed reading of films in their 'original "habitat"' – sifting through the facts and myths which surround the history of Weimar films – was an important source of inspiration in the development of this dissertation. [30]

AIMS

This dissertation will fill gaps in the existing scholarship. Using *Menschen am Sonntag* as its central source will help to redress the dearth of films analysed in cultural histories of Weimar Berlin. An open-minded, detailed analysis of this seemingly anomalous film will add a new facet to existing historiography which, when it does confront cinema, tends to confine itself to the canon of studio-filmed 'Expressionist' films. The first chapter of this study will reveal that the *Menschen* demarcates the city in a particular way. Modern Berlin was subdivided by new infrastructure which signalled a city in which places of home, work, and leisure were disparate locations.[31] Furthermore, Weimar-era Berlin presented a certain social geography; 'working-class' districts could be found relatively close to the centre (Kreuzberg, Wedding, northern Neukölln) and 'upper class' areas were in the south-west (Grunewald, Dahlen, Zehlendorf).[32] Similarly, some areas were considered 'entertainment' areas or 'shopping' districts, and some were characterised more emotively as 'seedy' or 'dangerous' locales.[33] With these aspects of the modern Berlin considered, this chapter asks: what imagined map of

[29] Ruttmann, W., *Berlin*: *Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (premiered, 1927)
[30] Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema*, p. 6
[31]Czaplika, 'Pictures of a City at Work', pp. 6, 10, Fischer, *Urban Experience*, p. 12
[32] Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, pp. 63-4
[33] Weitz, *Weimar Germany* p. 67,

the city does the film put forward?[34] In what ways is the film selective in its reproduction of Berlin, and what overall impression of the city does this produce? Exploring these questions will necessarily explore what is not shown in the film, as much as what is. The second chapter will see where this specific image of the modern city fits within contemporary discourses. This will involve a discussion of prevalent work science and life reform ideas, and *Menschen*'s resonance with these in relation to the city-space. Chapter Two will also relate these discourses to the impression of sexuality fashioned by *Menschen*.

[34] For the idea of cognitive mapping, see F. Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism.', *New Left Review* 146 (1984), pp. 53-92

Chapter One: Editing the Map

AN (A)POLITICAL CITY

As has been mentioned, the 'cross-section' chosen to star in *Menschen am Sonntag* were very much representative of the emergent class of 'white-collar' workers, (*Angestellten*). In this sense, the film is class-specific. However, the film avoids any sense of class-consciousness or allusion to class-conflict. Firstly, the film avoids any locales identifiable as working-class. The Saturday sequence of the film takes place in the central Bahnhof Zoo area, and the Sunday leisure scenes are films at Nikolassee in the South-West of the city. Significantly, the journey between these two locations is largely through woodland. Had the film chosen a leisure spot other than the lake area of the Berlin – one of the city's *Volksparks*, say – it would have been necessary to travel through recognisably 'working-class' areas.[35] This avoidance of working-class areas can be seen as equating to a desire not to highlight differences between social strata. Significantly, the *Mietskaserne* of Berlin's poorer districts hardly feature in *Menschen*. Built in the 1880s to accommodate Germany's late and speedy industrialisation, these tenements were built around endless mazes of courtyards, had with shared toilets, ran on coal, and permitted sunlight entry only as a luxury to those living on the outer rings of the building.[36] As such, the tenement was used by other commentators to expose and prompt sympathy for the dismal plight of the urban poor.[37] The tenement is not entirely neglected in *Menschen*, but when it does feature, it functions primarily as a counterexample; the image of Annie staying in the dingy apartment is used to highlight that she – compared to the others – does not optimise the opportunities that the city offers.[38]

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[35] As will be shown later, including footage of the journey was vital to the film's representation of the city. For the route travelled from the centre of Berlin to Nikolassee, see http://maps.google.com/maps?f=d&source=s_d&saddr=bahnhof+zoo+berlin&daddr=Nikolassee,+Berlin,+Germany&hl=en&geocode=FWgvIQMdkm_LACnv0S7N_1CoRzHSLE23GWPEzw%3BFWcYIAMdQmLJAClHWHL9CFmoRzHQkI4dmK3Iiw&mra=prev&sll=52.506191,13.352852&sspn=0.152758,0.444603&ie=UTF8&ll=52.484244,13.300323&spn=0.152835,0.444603&z=12&lci=transit_comp (accessed 24/04/11)

[36] Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, p. 68, M. Fulbrook, *History of Germany 1918-2000: The Divided Nation* (London, 2002) p. 16

[37] See C. Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*, first published 1939, here taken from C. Isherwood, *The Berlin Novels* (London, 1999), p. 362-368. For a filmic example, see S. Dudow, S., *Kuhle Wampe oder wem gehört die Welt?* (premiered 1932, DEFA Film Library / Icestorm, 2008) For artistic examples, see G. Grosz, Tenement Cross-Section (1916) and Apache (1916), both found at http://www.frenchquartergalerie.com/gallery/georgeGrosz/index.html (24/04/11)

[38] tt. 39:00-39:10 – This will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 2.

Using the tenement in this way can be seen as side-tracking potential inferences possessed by the image of the tenement. Had Annie been portrayed more sympathetically, the viewer might have been drawn to empathise with the plight of those living in the poorer areas of the city, implicitly referencing the exploitation of tenement-dwellers by rich landlords.[39] While other films used working-class images either as a way of inducing sympathy and highlighting inequality, *Menschen* uses the tenement only to confirm that the onus is on the city-dweller to make use of the time and space at their disposal.[40] In this sense, the message is that one should not concern oneself with systemic inequality.

Menschen's desire not to stray into contentious areas - physically and metaphorically - is confirmed by the film's avoidance of any images which might provoke a sense of relative deprivation; any sights which might highlight the luxury of the upper classes are avoided. In the scenes at the lake in Nikolassee, we see very little footage between the train station and the lakeside, and the shots of the lakeside itself are tightly framed.[41] This suggests a purposeful avoidance of the surrounding area. Knowing that Nikolassee was part of the Zehlendorf district, and that the lake was actually overlooked by many grand houses, we get the impression that *Menschen* tried to purposefully strip these scenes of any sense of class distinction.[42] Had the Sunday scenes shown footage of the surrounding area, the relative poverty of those enjoying their weekend would have been drawn into contrast, creating an altogether different ethos. On a more external level, the film avoids imbuing the viewer any sense of their own deprivation. Plenty of Weimar films focussed on material goods, sometime to the extent of showcasing and promoting products – or at least the latest fashions - at the expense of presenting a cogent storyline.[43] In contrast, *Menschen* for the most part presents its characters in their simple swimming attire. The fact that Brigitte and Christl's swim suits need mending further shows that the women are not intended to function as

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[39] Mumford, *City in History*, pp. 417-19, 432, G. Grosz, *Landlord* (1915), www.frenchquartergalerie.com/gallery/georgeGrosz/index.html (24/04/11)
[40] Dudow, *Kuhle Wampe*, tt. 02:08-06:32, 38:44-40:40
[41] tt. 29:50, 31:09 and Ch. 7, t. 33:34
[42] Weitz, *Weimar Germany* , p. 63, Similar information is found in K. Baedeker, *Berlin and Its Environs* (Leipzig, 1923) p. 50
[43] M. Ganeva,' Weimar Film as Fashion Show: "Konfektionskomödien2 or Fashion Farces from Lubitsch to the End of the Silent Era' *German Studies Review*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (May, 2007), pp. 289-293

clothes-horses for the garments to aspire to.[44] When the film does show the protagonists in their everyday clothes, these are shown to be low-key. All are neatly dressed - the women wear dresses with dropped waists, Erwin sports a rather drab suit, and Wolfgang is a little showier in checked plus-fours - but do not show the extremes of contemporary fashion, such as the American-style suit or the flapper dress.[45] In presenting the characters in clothing which we might assume mirrored what the audience themselves were wearing, *Menschen* avoids promoting aspirations to unaffordable luxury and thus the inevitable sense of relative deprivation.[46]

So we see that *Menschen* produces an image of the city with significantly softened class inequalities. This is particularly interesting considering the events of 1929, the year *Menschen* was filmed. Only a little over a month before filming commenced Wedding and Neukölln had been the arena of a deadly street violence between KPD (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*)* and RFB (*Rotfrontkämpferbund*) members and squads of *Bereitschaftspolizei*. This conflict – later remembered as *Blutmai* - became the 'revolutionary crescendo' of years of minor unrest.[47] One report stated that Wedding '[resembled] a revolutionary armed camp'.[48] Police fired at people indiscriminately, assuming the Communist enemy to be ubiquitous in the areas they identified as 'Red', leaving at least thirty civilians dead.[49] Significantly, at the time Studio Film-1929 were filming *Menschen*, media coverage of *Blutmai* had only just begun to die down.[50] It becomes apparent, then, that working-class districts of Berlin were not only associated with the relative deprivation of the lower classes; they also connoted the possibility – recently realised - of violent class conflict and a militant proletariat.[51] By logical continuation, the seemingly intentional absence of

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[44] tt. 28:15, 29:09
[45] Funkenstein, S. L., 'A Man's Place in a Woman's World: Otto Dix, Social Dancing, and Constructions of Masculinity in Weimar Gemany', *Women in German Yearbook*, Vol. 21, p.
[46] That this was the effect of some films has been convincingly argued in Ganeva,' Weimar Film as Fashion Show' pp. 299-305.
[47] Bowlby, p. 147. On the background of continual unrest in the period see D. Schumann, *Political Violence in the Weimar Republic, 1918-1933: Fight for the Streets and Fear of Civil War* (?, 2009), pp.251-280
[48] As cited in Bowlby, p. 147. Although this police report undoubtedly exaggerated the ferocity of Wedding's inhabitants, it does show how areas of the city could become viewed as a certain group's (contested) territory.
[49] Bowlby, pp.137-144
[50] Bowlby, p. 157
[51] It seems to have also been the case that such action was associated with the Communist international. See *Berliner Tageblatt* as cited in Bowlby, p. 140. Also see http://www.prints-

these areas, along with the muting of class inequalities, suggests a desire to avoid the elements of the city which signalled potential unrest. An examination of the presentation of city-dwellers in the film seems to confirm this thesis.

Firstly, the camera's view is restricted almost entirely to people of a similar social standing to the five protagonists. When working-class people feature on screen they are often only seen from the waist down; their faces remain off-screen. For example, when Christl and Wolfgang first meet and take a drink in a café, the waiter that serves them is faceless; we see the arms that function to serve the couple but not the whole person.[52] When a seemingly poor child is shown, the camera is carefully positioned so that a lamppost obscures all but the arms of her father.[53] Where the film does show a more representative selection of Berlin's populace, working-class people are pictured at ease, relaxing on the shore of the lake, men with shirts off and women in bathing suits. Here the worker is not instantly recognisable as proletarian.[54] By showing working-class people in their leisure time rather than in their occupational roles, the film provides a counterpoint to the easily recognisable revolutionary proletarian male. Instead of the stock image of KPD propaganda – a lean man wearing a worker's cap and boots, shirt-sleeves rolled up over muscular forearms, work tools in hand – *Menschen* undresses the worker of his class-ridden accoutrements, thus subsuming him into the general population.[55] This accepted, the idea that *Menschen*'s reproduction of the Berlin constitutes a razing of the political topography of the city seems ever more tenable.

A NATURAL RHYTHM

The stabilisation of the city we have observed in relation to political unrest continues in a different yet related vein in the way *Menschen am Sonntag* presents temporality. Although the film covers a twenty-four-hour period, the film at no point depicts the city after nightfall.

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online.com/kpd_poster_1929/print/623796.html (accessed 23/04/11), for the KPD's self-identification with the Comintern.

[52] t.. 05:20.

[53] tt. 7:00, 7:07

[54] t. 38:04

[55] For KPD propaganda imagery, see http://www.revleft.com/vb/historical-kpd-propaganda-t29281/index.html?s=ff95c1d3e5661f194b46c0907bd67a72&s=03bb8936e69f0b5e423637ff9166d10c&amp and http://www.amazon.co.uk/Photographic-Print-POSTER-Mary-Evans/dp/B004JH2F12 (24/04/11)

This is a significant fact when considered in the context of contemporary commentaries on urban night-time activity.

Firstly, the avoidance of night-time means the avoidance of artificial lighting. Curiously considering the modern-day connection of streets lights with security, Weimar commentators were wont to view artificial lighting negatively. While August Endell had seen artificial light as a beautiful extension of natural light, this view was by no means representative of popular opinion. [56] Joseph Göbbels was unsurprisingly suspicious of artificial lighting, relating the 'spewing' of illumination with themes of deceit, drug-abuse, and prostitution.[57] The *Berliner Tageblatt*, a more mainstream voice, stated most confidently that artificial lighting was responsible for stimulating sexual desires.[58] This idea is manifest in various artistic night scenes, too. Georg Grosz' *Ecce Homo* series is a particularly good example. In some of these minimal sketches, the lamp is the only scenery item depicted. This highlights that setting as night-time and also – through the nature of the action in the sketches – relates the artificial light to a somewhat unsavoury sexuality.[59]

Perhaps what troubled people the most about artificial lighting was that it simply equated to recognition of night-time activity. In this sense, artificial lighting was merely the illuminator of 'artificial' activity. It indeed seems to be the case that night time activity was associated with various elements that could be labelled as 'unnatural'. This included so-called degenerate sexuality. Firstly, androgynous figures and carnally sexual women, and haggard prostitutes seem to almost always have been portrayed in night-time settings.[60] Perhaps the best artistic representation of an unnatural temporality is George Grosz's *Dawn (Früh um 5 Uhr!)*, which shows men walking to work above a nightclub scene featuring naked women and lecherous men.(see picture) Grosz suggests that still being awake at 5am – as opposed to

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[56] A. Endell's 'Die Schönheit der Groβe Stadt' (1908), as cited in Czaplika, 'Pictures of a City at Work', p. 16
[57] Joseph Göbbels, 'Around the Gedächtniskirche', as found in WRS, p. 560.
[58] Weitz, *Weimar Germany* p. 45
[59] G. Grosz, *Ecce Homo* Series (1915-1922), found at http://www.frenchquartergalerie.com/gallery/georgeGrosz/index.html (24/04/11)

[60] G. Grosz, *Ecce Homo* Series (1915-1922), www.frenchquartergalerie.com/gallery/georgeGrosz/index.html, O. Dix, *The Salon I* (1921) www.ottodix.org, (24/04/11)

being on the way to work – was related to a lifestyle of debauchery and immorality.[61] Furthermore, the androgynous flapper dress, by its very nature, was related to dancing, and therefore to clubs and bars.[62] As such, the night was considered the setting for fashion which was seen not only as subverting gender norms but as frivolous, and shallow. This related to a more general view of nightlife – particularly in relation to the women who were involved in it – as unserious and unproductive. In one commentary, the male social dancer is all too aware of society's problems, while the women are depicted as 'little animals…[they] enjoy the drunken debauchery of this raving music, let the nails of the beat be driven into their masochistically lustful flesh.' In this account women at night are not only depicted as sexual – with their 'half-open mouths' – but also, and relatedly, as vacuously unaware – with 'half-closed eyes'.[63]

This avoidance of night-time leisure is compounded by the geographical selectivity of the film. Aside from the lakeside area at Nikolassee, the film concentrates on the main traffic arteries and rows of undistinguishable houses. In highlighting these aspects, *Menschen* shows the character of the city as rational, efficient, and functional. This is confirmed by the absence of entertainment districts, such as Charlottenburg which, during the Weimar period, was the centres of nightlife; it was home to cinemas, bars, restaurants, and cafés, including the legendary Romanisches Café. [64] The area is alluded to in the inclusion of the Bahnhof-Zoo U-Bahn sign, but it is significant that only the streets and traffic of this area are captured on film, thus avoiding images of recognisable night-clubs or bars, and corresponding ideas of frivolity, excess, and artificiality.(ubahn sign) It is also useful to note that not only does *Menschen* avoid the dark, the daylight it features is invariably glorious sunshine. This was almost definitely a conscious decision on behalf of the film's producers considering that the summer of 1929 was a notably rainy one. [65] Accepting that shadows equate to the sinister and

[61] http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=115081, (22/04/2011) This immorality was, of course directly related to class.
[62] Ganeva, p. 290. See O. Dix's *To Beauty* (1922) www.ottodix.org (24/04/11)
[63] Alice Gerstel, 'Jazz Band' (1922) as found in WRS, p. 554. It is interesting that this passage was written by a woman.
[64] This location is notably absent considering it was the regular meeting-place of the production team. Isenberg, *Weimar Cinema*, p. 243.
[65] Luppa, p. 92

the sensual – as was the case in 'Expressionist' cinema, we might see this decision as further evidence of a desire to avoid threatening sensuality.[66]

So we might say that the film avoids addressing the discourse surrounding night-time activity in the city. Considering that popularity of nightlife in the 1920s, this seems a significant omission.[67] But rather than serving up a critique of the negative aspects of nightlife like the various commentators mentioned above, *Menschen* instead constructs a more positive Berlin. The city sleeps – signified by the camera 'sleeping' too – while work and leisure are daytime activities. As such *Menschen*'s Berlin adheres to *Urrhythmus*, the primordial regular cycle of tension and relaxation, excitement and calm.[68] Through proposing that the city and its inhabitants do not disrupt this natural cycle, *Menschen* deflects claims of urbanity as artificial. Furthermore, productivity – the antithesis to the aforementioned 'degeneracy' – was signalled by an adherence to *Urrhythmus*. As the *Berliner Illustriete Zeitung* intimated, whoever wanted to know Berlin as an 'industrial city' should get up early, as production mirrors the cycles of natural light.[69] While George Grosz's 'Twilight' and 'Dawn' – through parallel action presented in both pieces – presented the city as unnatural in its state of permanent activity, the Berlin of *Menschen* fits in with Jakob Audorf's image of view of the city disintegrating at night and rebuilding itself every morning as people go to work.[70]

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[66] Any opportunity for a darker image is avoided. For instance, despite the film's emphasis on up-to-date transportation, the film chooses not to showcase the most modern of transport developments, the U-Bahn. *Menschen* uses Nikolassee as the location of the protagonists' Sunday excursion, a lakeside area which can only be reached by over-ground train. Sunlight also had significant symbolism in relation to Körperkultur – this will be explored further in Chapter Two, Part Three.

[67] The revue was the most popular form of live entertainment in Berlin in the 1920s. *WRS*, pp. 552

[68] Czaplika, 'Pictures of a City at Work', p. 30.

[69] Czaplika, 'Pictures of a City at Work', p. 25.

[70] Jakob Audorf as cited in 'Pictures of a City at Work', p 18. This, considering the following quote, implies that note only is the city not totally artificial but neither are its inhabitants. Emerson: 'Cities make men talkative and entertaining, but they make them artificial', as cited in Fischer, *Urban Experience*, p. 16.

Chapter Two: Re-presenting the City

Chapter one has shown that *Menschen am Sonntag* plots a particular map of Berlin, purposefully underplaying the city's social and political geography. *Menschen* seems to adhere to a traditional imagined map of the city which categorises certain areas – despite their geographical proximity – as very much peripheral.[71] The film also avoids entering the discourse surrounding Berlin's nightlife. This might lead us to think of *Menschen* as a socially conservative document. However, as this chapter will show, although the film stabilises the city with regards to its elements of political unrest and sexual threat, it simultaneously constructs a modernist image of the city, free of sentimentality or nostalgia. Firstly, the point-of-view adopted by the film will first be discussed in relation to the overall impression of Berlin. After this, work science and life reform discourses will be discussed in relation to the film's representation of the city-space, with the last section focussing specifically on *Menschen*'s construction of an urban sexuality.

ANTI-FLÂNERIE

Firstly, it is telling that despite being concerned with Sundays, the film does not show any images of Berliners going to church or conducting any other 'traditional' Sunday pursuits such as a family meal at home. In this sense, the Sabbath is secularised and the weekend modernised. This is part of the broader anti-sentimental aesthetic of the film which is in keeping with the cultural movement known as *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity). This aesthetic is evident in the film's inclusion of elements that might seem unpleasant: a toddler urinating,[72] a caterpillar on a café table,[73] a rubbish tip in the woods[74]. The film's desire to address the everyday and the here-and-now, rather than nostalgia for the grandeur of the past is perhaps most evidence in its opening scene. The film is concerned with establishing that the location of the action is Berlin. The obvious way to do this would have been to show an

[71] Czaplika points out that travel guides suggested one take the Ringbahn to get a (suitably elevated) view of the 'other Berlin', Czaplika, 'Pictures of a City at Work', p.20. The 1923 Baedeker, said that most important areas were within an area enclosed between the Tiergarten to the West, Alexander-Platz to the East, the Spree to the North, and Leipziger Straβe to the South. Baedeker, *Berlin and Its Environs*, p. 25
[72] t. 37:45.
[73] t. 06:13
[74] t. 51:03

iconic image such as the Brandenburg Gate. Instead, the film announces its location using a tightly-framed shot of Erwin's taxi's number-plate.[75] According to Bauer, the contemporary Berliner would have easily made the necessary mental links: the Roman numeral 'I' related to Prussia, the letter A signified that the car was registered in the district of greater Berlin, and the latter numbers were the personal registration of the vehicle.(See Fig. 1)[76] This sense of genuine documentary filming is cemented by the film's intertitles. The film opens thus: 'Film Studio 1929 presents its first experiment…a film without actors'. The title credits state that the film was taken from reportage ('*einer Reportage'*) by Kurt Siodmak. These titles establish a claim to authenticity and objectivity. This is also carried out through filming with intentional obstructions to the action.[77] .(See Fig. 2) These shots were certainly choreographed but the hidden camera-style point-of-view attempts to convince the audience otherwise.

So it seems that *Menschen* might be seen as a *'neusaclich'* in its avoidance of romaticisation and nostalgia. This analysis is not sufficient, however. The New Objectivity of the Weimar art movement often equated to a Negative Objectivity. In their conscious shedding of rose-tinted glasses, the *Neue Sachlichkeit* artists were largely concerned with showing modern society's ugliness.[78] In contrast, *Menschen* uses *Neue Sachlichkeit* conventions to construct a rather more positive impression the urban space. This is intrinsically connected to the point-of-view that the film bestows upon the audience. *Neue Sachlichkeit* art – along with a great deal of written commentaries – positioned the viewer as a divorced observer, judging the sights of the city from a distance. In Otto Dix's *To Beauty*, for instance, the viewer is positioned in front of a carefully constructed compilation of different 'types' of person; the

[75] t. 02:50
[76] Bauer, as cited in Luppa, 'Weimar Cinema', p. 94
[77] For example, observe the chair obscuring the café scene, Ch. 1, 04:47. See also the tram blocking the camera's view of Christl and Wolfgang's first meeting, Ch. 1, 04:47

[78] For examples from the *Neue Sachlichkeit* canon, see http://the-artists.org/artistsbymovement/Neue-Sachlichkeit (24/04/11). Two good examples of the negativity of *Neue Sachlichkeit* are George Grosz's *The End of the Road (Out of Fear of Starvation) [Das Ende des Weges (Aus Nahrungssorgen)]* (1913), www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A2374&page_number=3&template_id=1&sort_order=1 (24/04/11) and Max Beckman's Street II [Strasse II] (1917), www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A429&page_number=34&template_id=1&sort_order=1 (24/04/11)

flapper girl, the feminised man, the prostitute, and the black jazz musician are presented for our observation.[79] This desire to represent the city's inhabitants in a 'natural history' format was part of a wider tendency towards social categorisation[80] Written commentaries often tended towards the same format, Joseph Roth's vignette-based 'walking tour' of Berlin being a good example.[81] The advocation of a disconnected (read superior) point-of-view was well summed up by Franz Hessel: 'To walk slowly down lively streets is a great pleasure…The rush of others washes over you like a bath in the surf…To stroll and gaze correctly, one should not have any particular plans'.[82] For the flâneurs, viewing the city necessarily involved divorcing oneself – temporally as well as spatially, as Hessel shows – from the movement of the city itself. Conversely, *Menschen* invites the audience *inside* the functioning city. This is achieved through dynamic camerawork. For example, the camera pans in perfect time with walkers leaving walk, and later with people walking to the train station[83]. When the city-dwellers are leave the centre for their Sunday excursions, the camera adopts the points-of-view of drivers and train passengers.[84] The effect is that the viewer is posited as part of the functioning city, rather than as the dislocated observer(/judge). This difference in audience perspective has great implications for the film's overall impression of the city. Whereas *Neue Sachlichkeit* art claimed objectivity through showcasing the ugliness of society - thus signifying that existing outside the city makes one superior to the city's contents - *Menschen* takes the viewer inside the city, insisting that this is an acceptable position to adopt. In this stylistic confirmation of the safeness of the city-system, the film makes a positive comment on the urban space. One might read this point-of-view as a people's point-of-view. As has been elucidated in Chapter One, *Menschen* does not constitute a class-conscious text. Nonetheless, in avoiding adopting the detached position, the film actually takes the position of the masses. To be a flâneur one had to be rich; one could not possibly stroll around the town as others rush to work unless otherwise. As such,

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[79] O. Dix, *To Beauty* (1922) www.ottodix.org (24/04/11)
[80] See L. Frame, 'Gretchen, Girl, or Garçonne? Weimar Science and Popular Culture in Seach of the Ideal New Woman' in Von Ankum, *Women and the Metropolis*, pp. 35-69
[81] Roth, *What I Saw*. This tendency persists to the present day accounts. See Weitz's chapter, entitled 'Walking the City' Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, pp. 41-80
[82] Hessel, as cited in Weitz, *Weimar Germany* p. 43.
[83] tt. 03:04-03:08, 03:13-03:18
[84] tt., 22:48, 26:55-28:00, 23:00-23:23.

the view offered by the film is by definition not that of the wealthy. In addition to camerawork, more concrete aspects of Menschen's imagery seem to confirm a positive stance towards modern Berlin; these will be seen to relate to contemporary work science and life reform discourses.

PRODUCTIVE LEISURE

This section will first summarise the over-arching concepts of the life reform (*lebensreform*) movement, showing the intersection of these concepts with Weimar work science ideas. It will then be shown that *Menschen am Sonntag* constitutes an advocation of these intertwined discourses.

The *lebensreform* movement promoted physical exercise, healthy diet, simple clothing – or in the *Freikörperkultur* factions, no clothing – as methods of combating the perceived unhealthiness of modern life. [85] In life reform circles, health, fitness, and an improved physique were the aims, but these were not always seen as ends in themselves. Health and fitness were presented as means of improving one's productivity in the workplace. The nudist gymnastics instructor Hans Surèn, for example, professed that 'sunshine shall give you strength for the many days of hard labour.'[86] As such, life reform promoted itself as a means to achieving career success and maintaining job satisfaction (*Arbeitszufriedenheit*). From the work science perspective, life reform's 'hygienic' leisure was helpful for re-energising workers, thereby optimising labour power. As Mary Nolan has illustrated, proponents of rationalisation believed that in order for structures of modernity to function smoothly, economic restructuring had to be accompanied by personal restructuring; the new worker would embrace a dynamic productivist outlook and rationalise his or her private life.[87] This outlook was intrinsically related to the most fundamental of work-science concepts, the metaphor of the human body as a motor.[88] This idea is represented well by a quote from

[85] See *WRS*, pp. 673-676, Hau, *Cult of Health and Beauty*, 55-58. On nudism in particular see C. Ross, *Naked Germany*: *Health, Race and Nation* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 83-101.

[86] Hans Surèn, 'Man and Sunlight' (1925) in WRS, p. 678 Hau, *Cult of Health and Beauty*, 63-81. Ross, *Naked Germany*, pp. 44-50.
[87] Nolan, as cited in Killen, 'Weimar Psychotechnics', p. 55
[88] A. Rabinbach, The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity (Berkeley, 1992)

Georg Schlesinger (known as the German Taylor): '[people are] working machines, perpetually exhausting and regenerating themselves.[89] In this context, healthy leisure was one factor in the optimisation of power output.

Menschen reveals itself as concurrent with the intersecting life reform and work science discourses outlined above. Firstly, the leisure exhibited by the film fits very closely with *lebensreform* ideals. As Chapter One has shown, the film avoids any recreation associated in the popular imagination with excess, which resonates with the life reforms attitude towards diet and alcohol consumption.[90] Instead, the leisure scenes are replete with swimming and walking. The physical effort involved in the four day-trippers leisure time is emphasised by close-up shots of moving body parts, in particular when Wolfgang and Brigitte are playing in the water together.[91] (See Fig. 3) What is more, the film emphasises the theme, which was intrinsic to *lebensreform*.[92] As was mentioned earlier, the sunny appearance of the film was certainly no accident. Furthermore, the film presents an abundance of images of people sunbathing at the beach. Even those that remain within the city-centre are pictures as eager to soak up as much sun as possible. Three minutes are spent showing Berliners leaning out of windows or standing on balconies to be in the light. (See Fig. 4) This chimes in with the love of sunshine which pervaded the *lebensreform* movement and was manifest most clearly in Hans Surèn's faction.[93] On another level, the casting reflects *lebensreform* principles. Wolfgang and Brigitte – the livelier characters – sport the fair-haired and tanned complexions of the sunbather. Annie, Christl - defined by their jobs and adornments as somewhat vain - are dark-haired and pale. Erwin - shown to be relatively inactive and over-indulgent in diet - is similarly dark and pallid, and has a notably less athletic physique than the others.

Menschen not only mirrors *lebensreform* ideas; it constitutes a manifestation of the specific intersection of between these ideas and work science concepts. The opening scenes introduce the five people and their occupation turn; 'Erwin Splettstößer drives Taxe 1A 100088',[94]

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[89] As cited in Killen, p. 57
[90] *WRS*, pp. 675
[91] t. 32:59
[92] Hans Surèn, 'Man and Sunlight' (1925) in *WRS*, p. 678, Hau, *Cult of Health and Beauty*, pp. 4, 189-93
[93] *Ibid*.
[94] 'Erwin SPlettstößer führt die Taxe 1A 100088'

'Last month Brigitte Borchert sold 150 copies of the record "In a small pastry shop"' [95] and so on. At no point are the characters developed in terms of their place of upbringing or family ties; they are defined entirely by their jobs. Despite the important placed on work success, the film focuses entirely on the weekend, suggesting from the outset the importance of leisure in relation to productivity. Most significant in illustrating the correlation between leisure and productivity is the use of Annie as a foil against which to portray proper leisure activities. From the outset Annie's inactivity is linked to her lack of career success; whereas the others' introductions are accompanied by information about their job, Annie's intertitle simply reads: 'Annie Schreyer, A Model [*Ein Menneken*]'.[96] While the other characters actively go about their jobs – arranging a window-display, taking notes – Annie is shown reclining on her bed. It is notable that Annie is pictured manicuring her nails. This detail links her not only with inactivity but – along with the nature of job – vanity, a trait thoroughly discouraged by the life reform movement.[97] Annie's links with self-image and consumerism are confirmed when scenes of price-tags and window-displays - including an advertisement for manicuring - are interspersed between shots of her slumbering at home.[98] While Erwin, Wolfgang, Brigitte, and Christl spend their Sunday soaking up sun, enjoying the North Sea breeze, and exercising their muscles, Annie – through her own idleness – reaps no health benefits from her weekend, which she spends dozing alone in her dingy tenement. By extension, the implication – shown by Annie's lack of zeal in job hunting – is that Annie's lack of 'productive' leisure time means she does not reap success in her professional life. She will remain a tenement-dweller rather than earning enough money to move into a more pleasant apartment block - such as the newly built Onkel Toms Hütte – thus passing up another opportunity increase her health and productivity.[99] That the film sees her situation as her own doing is confirmed by the newspaper print next to her head: 'And This Is How You Spend Your Fleeting Days [*Und So Verbringst du Deine Kurzen Tage*]'.[100] (See Fig. 5) Annie's unproductive nature is shown to even impact upon her partner, Erwin.[101] A

[95] 'Brigitte Borchert, hat im letzten Monat 150 mal die Platte: "In einer kleinen Konditorei" verkauft'
[96] t. 02:47
[97] tt. 40:09
[98] tt. 40:09-40:15
[99] For Onkel Toms Hütte, see Weitz, *Weimar Germany* pp. 62-4
[100] t. 39:09. The phrase is the title of a Carl Bulcke novel.
[101] There is no suggestion that the pair are married.

telephone call from Annie disrupts Erwin's performance of work.[102] Later in the film, Erwin misses out on swimming due to calling Annie to see if she has woken up.[103] As such, the film presents laziness almost as contagious; Annie's apathetic attitude negatively affects Erwin both directly and indirectly.

We see then that *Menschen* presents a reiteration of the overlapping – perhaps mutually supportive – Weimar discourses of life reform and work science. Especially through Annie's function as foil, we are shown in no uncertain terms that 'good' leisure encourages productivity. It is evident that the film places the responsibility – which could also be viewed as power – of optimising one's environment with the individual. As such – and in direct relation to the 'apolitical' stance of the film explored in Chapter One – the film adheres to the work science view of the human body, rather than class solidarity as the arena of power.[104] Life reformists similarly placed the responsibility on the individual. Marieluise Fleisser, for instance, proclaimed: 'It no longer suffices to depict conditions...The point is to sow the seeds of will'[105]

PERPETUUM MOBILE

We see then that the film firmly posits itself within the intertwined discourses of life-reform and rationalisation. This accepted, we can go on to explore how the film represents the city-space in relation to the need for constructive leisure. It is first helpful to outline another aspect of work science discourse, namely the concept of 'heat death'. As Anson Rabinbach has shown, this concept grew out of the discovery of the second law of thermodynamics at the end of the nineteenth century. Earlier work science – in direct correlation with the first law of thermodynamics - had stressed the infinite energy of the human motor. Weimar rationalisation theory thus had a uniquely dark undertone. The concept of entropy in physics was translated into work science language which stressed the potential of the breakdown of the human motor, which itself signified the breakdown of the whole system of modernity.[106]

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[102] t. 08:11
[103] t. 26:02
[104] Rabinbach, *Human Motor*, p. 48.
[105] Marieluise Fleisser, 'The Athletic Spirit and Contemporary Art: An Essay on the modern type' in *WRS*, p. 689.
[106] Rabinbach, *Human Motor*, pp. 3-10

Weimar Germany exhibited various cultural incarnations of 'heat death'.[107] In filmic representations, the motif of heat death is most recognisable in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, in which the worker's fatigue precipitates the descent of society into total chaos.[108] *Menschen*, however, presents the city-system rather differently.

As we have seen, salubrious leisure is conceptualised in *Menschen* as vital in the maintenance of a functioning city-system. The film goes to lengths to suggest that this type of leisure was practised by the majority of Berliners. The film makes stylistic claims to its ability to represent Berliners in general. We are shown vast crowds at a train station before 8am Sunday, seemingly determined to get the most out of the free time at their disposal.[109] Those who remain closer to the centre enjoy the bathing facilities at a local park,[110] play sport,[111] or else take to their balconies to absorb as much sunlight as possible.[112] That the modern city is in a constant state of construction is even taken advantage of; children use the construction site sand to play in.[113] Interspersed between these unstaged scenes is footage of the empty city-centre. For instance Hausvogteiplatz – which on a weekday would be very busy – as deserted. In conjunction with the scenes of huge crowds at train stations, this technique persuades the viewer that everyone is enjoying their Sunday in the manner presented on screen. Through this endeavour, *Menschen* stresses that system-sustaining constructive leisure was not only existent in Berlin, but was ubiquitous. [114] Equally important – though harder to pin down - is *Menschen*'s suggestion of an infinite cyclical temporality. By starting and ending the film with a couple negotiating a date, *Menschen* implies that this weekend is just one of many similar ones. In a more stylistic sense, the ever-present movement of the city's transport suggests perpetual motion. On an external level, the knowledge that the five

[107] Roth, *What I Saw*, p. 5.
[108] Film details. See also I. Marler, 'Threats of Others'
[109] t. 19:20
[110] t. 38:04
[111] t, 37:23
[112] tt, 38:19-38:45
[113] t. 38:04
[114] This reflected the optimistic tone of some life reformers who saw *lebensreform* as permeating every level of society, such as Ernst Preiss, who asked: 'Do we not see the changes in the streets, in every slender young woman…is it not evident in mens suntanned faces?'Ernst Preiss, 'Physical Fitness – A National Necessity' (1926), *WRS*, p. 683

(non-)actors will return(/did return) to their job after filming gives the viewer the impression of infinite function. All these factors imply that the working-week/weekend time-frame is infinite, thus assuring us that the work force will continue to be replenished. Unlike *Metropolis* where the city is destroyed by a flood, or *Berlin*: *Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* where the rhythm of the city is interrupted by a suicide, *Menchen* gives projects an impression of a system free from all rupture, thereby quelling any threat of heat death.

The actual environment of Berlin plays a particular role in maintaining the *perpetuum mobile* described above. Through day-tripping at Nikolassee, the four characters demonstrate to us that the modern city provides the environment for such leisure. It is noteworthy that Nikolassee's status as part of the city was set out by the Greater Berlin Act (1920); it is the expansive nature of the modern city that means the locale of the 'city' now contains this leisure spot.[115] A shot of a barbed wire fence impressed upon us that havens found within the city are valued and protected.[116] (See Fig. 6) Furthermore, not only does the cityscape contain areas conducive to constructive recreation, the latter is shown to be actively facilitated by the city's modern features, particularly transportation. This is emphasised by the repeating of images of moving trains.[117] In particular, the time taken to travel from central Berlin to Nikolassee is presented as incredibly short. The journey would have taken approximately half an hour but on film takes less than a minute. As such, the film extols the wonders of the S-Bahn, which at the time of the film's creation had only been completed four years.[118] Modernity is seen enhance the quality of leisure, too. For example, in the scene of a photographer taking pictures of people at the beach, the inclusion of the resulting still images suggests that the camera's presence – along with the assumed affordability of purchasing the photographs – will add to the experience by creating a fond memento.[119]

It is clear then, that *Menschen* presents the cityscape as sufficiently equipped for healthy leisure, and thus self-renewing in nature. This is a notably progressive stance. *Lebensreform*, although liberal in some senses, still tended towards an anti-modernism that rested on a

[115] For the text of the Act see http://www.verfassungen.de/de/be/berlin20.htm (24/04/11)
[116] t. 40:15
[117] tt. 03:08, 04:43, 22:03
[118] Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, p. 13.
[119] tt. 44:00-45:56

utopian vision of pre-modernism.[120] Hans Surèn, for example, equated nurturing sunshine only with meadows and vales, stating that knowledge of one's body could be found 'only in the midst of nature'.[121] The film's particular vision of recreation and work ethic also constitutes an interesting commentary on sexuality and gender relations.

A MODERN SEXUALITY

In 1922 Joseph Göbbels said, in relation to 'degenerate' night-life: 'This is not the true Berlin. It is elsewhere, waiting, hoping, struggling.'[122] As we have seen in Chapter One, nightlife did not equate to *Menschen am Sonntag*'s vision of Berlin either. But while conservative critics responded with reactionary rhetoric and even the proposal of a new capital city, *Menschen* instead constructed its 'true Berlin' out of existing elements of the city. [123] In terms of personal relationships, the film, as well as constructing the city as a place *without* the immorality of the 'demimonde', presents Berlin as a place *with* – and actually fostering - a progressive and positive sexuality.

Firstly, the film shows itself as supportive of casual relationships. Despite Wolfgang's rejection of Christl in favour of Brigitte, there is nothing to suggest any serious repercussions. Christl sulks a little, but the mood soon becomes light-hearted again, and there is no suggestion that a grudge will be held.[124] There is a sense throughout of a 'sporting' sexuality.[125] When Christl and Wolfgang arrange their date, it is sealed with a handshake and the caption 'Done. At 10. Nikolasse.'[126] In a more literal sense, the sexual encounter depicted in the film is intertwined with athletic exertion. Brigitte and Wolfgang run quickly through the woods and chase each other around trees before have sex.[127] In this sense, *Menschen*, like the *lebensreform* movement, did not exhibit a traditionalist fear of physicality.[128] *Menschen* embraces the body and its libido as facets of part of a sportsmanly

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[120] *WRS*, p. 673.
[121] Hans Surèn, 'Man and Sunlight' (1925) in *WRS*, p. 678
[122] Joseph Göbbels, 'Around the Gedächtniskirche', as found in *WRS*, p. 561.
[123] Weitz, Weimar Germany, p. 56.
[124] tt. 55:28-57:26
[125] For an elaboration on this concept, see L. Springman, *Carpe Mundum: German Youth Culture of the Weimar Republic* (London, 2007), pp. 259-285
[126] t. 09:05 'Abgemacht. Punkt 10. Nikolassee!'
[127] tt. 49:01-50:29
[128] Hans Surèn, 'Man and Sunlight' (1925) in *WRS*, p. 680

and athletic leisure. This decidedly modern sexuality is seen to be facilitated by the modernity . As with the case of leisure more generally, technology – this time a record player - is shown to enhance romantic relations.[129] Additionally, not only did the city possess leisure spots at which to develop personal relationships, but the metropolis is shown to be a place to meet prospective partners. The opening shots of Christl and Wolfgang meeting take place in the Bahnhof Zoo area, which was known as a 'cruising' site – the locale of the "*Strassenbekannstschaften*".[130] Considering the light-hearted way in which the relationships of the film progress, this uniquely urban dating phenomenon is cast in a positive light. This Berlin seems far from alienating.

Perhaps most interesting is the way women are shown in relation to the *Menschen*'s casual sexuality. When Wolfgang and Christl sit down at a café, Wolfgang makes it clear that he assumes that Christl was only hanging around in the city centre because she had been stood up. Christl's response – "No one stands me up!" - refutes this, and suggest that she was in fact perusing Bahnhof Zoo in hope of being approached.[131] Furthermore, the film's women are shown to have the power to choose men on their merits. This is especially evident when Christl rejects Wolfgang's advances. What is more, not only are the women in *Menschen* shown as active in the search for and selection of a partner, they are also shown to have a genuine interest in the male body. Admittedly, some shots position the viewer as voyeur of the female form, especially when the Brigitte is changing into her swimming costume. However, the camera's gaze also survey's the male form. More interesting still is the fact that the women are shown to take enjoyment in the male body, watching Wolfgang undress and exchanging smiles.[132] Brigitte is shown as powerful in this scene; using the record player she brings with her – which, tellingly, is borrowed from her place of work - she plays music to accompany Wolfgang's undressing. (See Fig. 7) Here both the women on screen and women in the cinema audience are given access to the empowered position of voyeur. This is intriguing when we consider that the reference at the start of the film to Wolfgang having

[129] tt. 28:30
[130] Fritzsche, 'Review: [Von Ankum, *Women in the Metropolis*]', pp.122.
[131] t. 03:33
[132] tt. 28:47

worked as a 'gigolo'.[133] In direct opposition to Weimar gender norms – and even today's - it is a man who assumes the role of prostitute and stripper.

In general, it seems that women are presented as largely equal to men. The work of Führich has shown that women not only had less leisure time due to house-work duties, but that amongst women who did have free time there was still not much of a female leisure culture.[134] This considered, *Menschen*'s equal representation of leisure – although perhaps not entirely realistic – was certainly very forward-thinking. This equality was not unconditional, however. *Menschen* – through its emphasis on productivity as outlined in the previous section of this chapter – places a caveat on female independence. Once again, Annie serves as a counter-example. While Brigitte and Christl are decidedly independent and confident, Annie's attempts at assertiveness are overridden.[135] The message seems to be that, not only will lethargy make you miss out on potential relationships; your lack of productivity will negate any claims to emancipation.

[133] tt. 03:20 the original German reads 'Eintänzer'
[134] Führich, A., 'Woman and Typewriter: Gender, Technology, and Work in Late Weimar Film', *Women in German yearbook*, Vol. 16 (2000), pp. 151-166
[135] t. 16:07

Conclusions - Embracing the City

To summarise, it has been shown that *Menschen am Sonntag* portrays the city as capable of providing a life free from isolation and dissolution. In the context of the work science and life reform discourses with which the film engages, the city is represented as a space capable of replenishing the work force through the provision of a 'constructive' modern leisure. In response to Roth's question ('Can little heartbeats still make themselves heard where a big booming one deafens a world?'), *Menschen* insists that it is precisely the perpetual rhythm of those little heartbeats which ensures the continued function of the great heart of the city-system. In this sense, *Menschen* embraces modern Berlin as a self-protecting system; while modern industry produces the threat of breakdown – the 'heat death' which comes as a consequence of the breakdown of the worker's body, the very modern nature of the urban environment neutralises this threat. As one of the first intertitles of the film assures us: 'These people will all be back in their own jobs tomorrow.'[136] The positivity expressed by this sense of perpetual motion is cemented by a specific employment of *Neue Sachlichkeit* conventions. Not only does Menschen's unsentimental depiction of the city avoid the traditional images of the city that Erich Kästner wittily dubbed 'mummified yesterdays', it goes beyond the pessimistic objectivity of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* in its insistence that the audience adopt the viewpoint of the masses, rather than keeping the sites and sights of the city at arm's length. [137] What is more, this vision of a positive modern city carries a corresponding set of gender relations, which, while hinged on the principles of productivity, presents a potential for equality. Menschen's urban sexuality, in its straight-forward and light-hearted character, is a far cry from accounts which present Weimar sexuality only in terms of a smorgasbord of depravity.[138]

Admittedly, we must concede that *Menschen*'s embrace of the city is a somewhat tentative one. As shown in Chapter One, only a certain map of Berlin was seen as conducive to the aforementioned self-renewing city-system. This map is free of threats of degeneracy,

[136] 'Heute gehen sie alle wider ihren Berafen auch'
[137] Erich Kästner, 'The Cabaret of the Nameless' as found in WRS, p. 564
[138] For example, Mel Gordon's books. *The Seven Addictions and Five Professions of Anita Berber: Weimar Berlin's Priestess of Depravity*, (London, 2006*), Voluptuous Panic - The Erotic World of Weimar Berlin* (London, 2006)

deviancy, and dissent. It seems that there were simply some aspects of Berlin that could not be reconciled with *Menschen*'s optimised city. Berlin's "Red" strongholds, through their challenging of systemic inequality, did not fit with a view predicated on the belief in rationalisation as a societal panacea. Similarly, Berlin nightlife seems to have been a square peg which could not be made to fit in *Menschen*'s round-hole sexuality. Nightlife's threats, it seems, simply outweighed its modernism; despite the revue's claims of capturing the 'pulse' of modernity and of cleansing 'the dust of decades',[139] it remained the 'unleashed theatre…theatre gone wild'[140] This said, we should not be too disheartened. While *Menschen* edits out the city's perceived threats, it refrains from actively demonising them. Instead of 'exposing' the corruption of Berlin, *Menschen* prefers to construct a new positive metropolis. In this sense, the film's outlook is overwhelmingly positive.

Ironically, the discourse pertaining to optimisation would later undergo a paradigm shift. The Nazi period saw the rationalisation discourse transmography into a discourse of selection, as work science was subsumed under the wider, more sinister category of 'characterology',[141] and the nationalist elements existent in *lebensreform* would become evolve into a specifically racial.[142] Nonetheless, one must read the historical text neither retrospectively nor teleologically; *Menschen* remains an example of a pro-modern and pro-urban Weimar document. This accepted, we might take *Menschen* as an eye-opener. There were certainly many reactionary texts in the Weimar period, and more still that only expressed love for the city in terms of a morbid fascination with its flaws. However, what this study has shown is that using a source outside of the Weimar canon produce findings that differ from the general impression of the period. The natural progression from these findings would be to examine more under-studied films. A study of the *Bürofilm* genre could prove very interesting. To conclude, in recognising that a pro-urban stance did exist and find expression, we might be more careful to question our assumptions. It might now be possible to entertain the idea that other felt as Film Studio 1929 felt – namely, that Berlin was wonderful in its modernity.

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[139] Maximilian Sladek, 'Our Show' (1924), as found in *WRS*, p. 556
[140] Frank Warschauer, 'Berlin Revues' (1924), as found in *WRS*, p. 555
[141] Killen, 'Weimar Psychotechnics', p. 68
[142] Hau, *Cult of Health and Beauty*, pp.82-101.

Appendix 1. – Overview of Historical Context

The Weimar Republic is largely characterised as a period of insecurity. Firstly, soldiers returning from the Great War bore physical testament to Germany's defeat through their debilitated bodies.[143] Furthermore, the enforced reduction of the army from eight million to one million was a demonstration of German militarism's emasculation.[144]. Also, Germany was now a Republic run by the Social Democrats (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD) and its perceived failures, along with the great economic instability, produced a polarisation in political support.[145] This polarisation became a visible presence in the form of the left and right's respective paramilitary groups, the *Rotfrontkämpferbund* (RFB) and the *Freikorps*.[146] Throughout the 1920s German industry also subscribed to American theories of competitive production, which provoked varying measures of anxiety.[147] Perceived instability was compounded by the changing position of women who, during the war, had been drawn in great numbers into new occupations (as in the Krupp munitions factory), giving a perception of female independence which threatened (male) social and cultural hegemony.[148] Though simplistic, this overview of cultural tensions in Weimar Germany is frequently reinforced in texts of the time. Moreover, commentators largely treated the locale of Berlin as the epicentre of the aforementioned insecurities. By the end of the 1920s Berlin was the third largest municipality in the world, having around 4.3 million residents, compared to its 1900 population of around 1.9 million. However, between 1919 and 1920 the population near doubled, and then went on to reach its apex in 1930.[149] This extreme growth aided the predominant impression of Berlin as being sprawling, rootless, and artificial.

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[143] E. D. *Weitz, Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy, p. 8.*
[144] Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, p. 20.
[145] M. Fulbrook, *A History of Germany 1918-2000* (Oxford, 2002)
[146] For an example of revolutionary élan that aided this perception, see the speech given by Ernst Däumig at the General Congress of Worker and Soldier Councils, December, 1918. Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, p. 28.
[147] *WRS*, pp. 60-85, 393-411.
[148] See, for example ,R. Bridenthal, 'Beyond Kinder, Küche, Kirche: Weimar Women at Work' *Central European History* 6 (1973), pp. 148-66, B. Kundrus, 'Gender Wars: The First World War and the Construction of Gender Relations in the Weimar Republic' in K. Hagemann and S. Schueler-Springorum (eds.), *Home/Front: The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth Century Germany* (New York, 2002).
[149] http://www.statistik-berlin-brandenburg.de/ (accessed 13/12/10)

Appendix 2: Screen Grabs

Fig. 1

Fig 2.

Fig 3.

Fig. 4

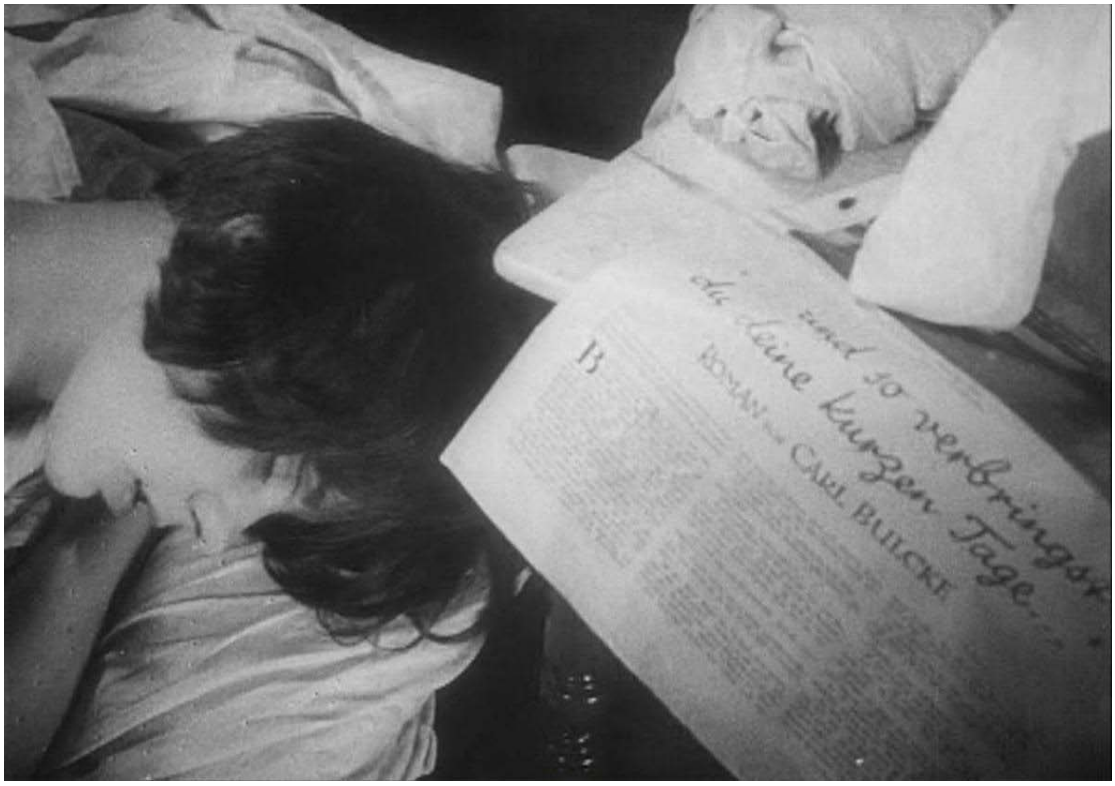

Fig 5

Fig 6

Fig. 7

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