representation of these experiences does not only fulfil Döblin's self-proclaimed poetic program of a "cinematic style" (*Kinostil*)⁵

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 sociopsychological 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(ma)6(8)-5(u8(e)4(r)3(of)3(t)-2(h)-10(e))

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-Teg

terms. After disembarking from the streetcar Biberkopf is

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 showwindows, 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 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 Schäffnerreat1rfwou Kelfs(w)-76(4-2(c) n-1r)3(e)43(e)44(s)-1(t)-2(e)-6 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

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

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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

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 legal 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 asn (he)4()]TJ -0.004 Tc 0.004cy Ncll2(c)4(c(c))4(oue)4(z)67 0 T (h1(e)

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

modes of representation, e.g., the high-

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,

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).