The Soul-Stripped Body: Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929)

Alfred Döblin: prose author, essay writer, theorist, doctor, and film buff. One name, multiple personalities — and not all of them compatible, as Döblin himself acknowledged. In an autobiographical essay from 1928, whose title "Zwei Seelen in einer Brust" is a clear riff on Faust's famous lamentation "Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust," the physician Döblin and the writer Döblin appear as distinct individuals talking about each other in a teasing, antagonistic manner. The publications of the latter leave the former "total gleichgültig" (Döblin 1986: 103), and the writer does not mince words either, calling the neurologist "mein gerades Gegenstück" (ibid: 105). This dramatization of Döblin's divided allegiances was originally meant to be satirical, but over time it fueled the idea of an unbridgeable gap between his medical and literary pursuits. Recent scholarship has successfully challenged this misconception. Critics have started to look at Döblin's medical writings in conjunction with his literary texts by way of demonstrating that an integrated approach is not just possible and worthwhile, but necessary in the case of someone with such varied interests. Untangling the intricacies of Döblin's thinking on psychopathology and on other pressing issues of the time can shed new light on his fictional works, as well as on the interaction between literature and other disciplines during the early 20th century. In the spirit of this recent shift in critical paradigm, I wish to argue in this chapter that physical descriptions from Döblin's novel of 1929 relate in complex ways to contemporaneous developments in mental health, novel writing, visual media, and politics.

The Case Against Psychology

Berlin Alexanderplatz is widely considered the most prominent novel of German modernism. The plot is notoriously hard to follow, because it is often interrupted by info-bites, similar to the consciousness of the modern city dwellers that populate Döblin's fiction. In a nutshell, the book documents the painstaking adjustment to freedom and to life in the big city of Franz Biberkopf, who is released from prison

after serving a four-year sentence for killing his girlfriend Ida. Although he vows to mend his ways once he is free, Franz cannot stay out of trouble. He becomes involved with a criminal gang led by Reinhold, a ruthless man who causes Franz to lose an arm by pushing him out of a moving car. In a curious masochistic gesture that has often been construed as a sign of repressed homosexuality, the protagonist tolerates Reinhold's behavior without protest, even though the latter hurts him physically and emotionally on more than one occasion. The action takes another dramatic turn when Reinhold murders Franz's new girlfriend, Mieze, and casts suspicion for it on the one-armed man. When her body is discovered, Franz loses his mind and is committed for a while to a mental institution, where he experiences a symbolic death as part of the healing process. In the end, the hero recovers, is once more set free, testifies against Reinhold, who receives a ten-year prison sentence, and attains a normal life at last.

It is undeniably difficult to piece together the numerous plot strands interwoven throughout *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, interrupted as they are by musical hits, folk-songs, proverbs, placards, and newspaper excerpts about "Skandalgeschichten, Unglücksfälle, [und] Sensationen von 28" (Benjamin 1966: 232). But hard to miss in spite of all the distractions, ellipses, and breaches of syntax is the visceral corporeality of Döblin's novel. This is remarkable for a text following on the heels of German Expressionism, which focused, in both theory and artistic practice, on the concept of *Geist* ("spirit," "mind," or "soul"), especially on the dark side of the human mind. It is not as surprising, however, in the context of some short stories from Döblin's early period, which, as Kurt Binneberg (1979) and Torsten Hoffmann (2009) have shown, evince a keen interest in body parts and gestural language. However, the role of body imagery in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* has so far escaped critical inquiry and will, for this reason, occupy us in what follows.

Most of the physical references in Döblin's novel pertain to the protagonist and are dispersed throughout the text. The narrator returns obsessively to Franz's appearance, providing one specific detail here, another there, but never too much in any one place, as if to match the fragmented narrative structure and style of the novel. This scattered distribution thwarts the emergence of a unitary hero and relegates the idea of a coherent modern self to the realm of illusion.

Much less transparent in terms of its intended effect(s), hence also more inviting to analysis, is the fact that Franz's appearance lacks psychological depth. A first case in point are his outfits. The clothes worn by the protagonist and documented meticulously by Döblin mark various stations in Franz's life but have no bearing on his state of mind. Upon his release from prison, for instance, the protagonist's tan-colored topcoat becomes a symbol of his newly regained freedom, especially by contrast with the convict's garb he had worn until the previous day (Döblin 2001a: 13). Once he takes to selling newspapers in the streets of Berlin, Franz starts to wear the official newspaper cap (ibid: 184) and a

windbreaker to protect himself from the cold (Döblin 2001a: 103). His brush with National Socialism also leaves its mark, however temporary, on Franz's dress in the form of a black, white and red armband (ibid: 86). Every now and then, the protagonist dons a military-style outfit, complete with "grüne Wickelgamaschen, Nagelschuh" (ibid: 103), as well as "alt[e], verstaubt[e], vom Pferdevieh mit Dreck beschmissen[e] Sachen […], eine Schiffermütze mit einem verbogenen Anker drauf, Jacke und Hose brauner abgetragener Bowel" (ibid: 267). These garments signal the impending onset, sometimes unbeknownst to Franz, of a new "regelrechte[r] Kampf […] mit etwas, das von außen kommt, das unberechenbar ist und wie ein Schicksal aussieht" (ibid: 9). The fight that the modernist anti-hero wages and the opponent he faces in battle may be different from those of Homeric times, but a "proper battle" it still is, and a proper armor it still requires. And also like in ancient epics, the warrior's state of mind is secondary at best and irrelevant at worst.

Sometimes, Franz tries to hide underneath his clothes, "Hände in den Taschen, Kragen über die Ohren, Kopf und Hut zwischen den Schultern" (Döblin 2001a: 170). At one point, the protagonist even uses a prosthetic arm and a wig as camouflage (ibid: 439). However, he does not always conceal his physical impairment. In some cases, he uses it to impersonate a war cripple, and a well-groomed one at that: "Was trägt er jetzt? Auf einem Tische für 20 Mark gekauft einen tadellosen Sommeranzug. […] Wie ein wohlgenährter biederer Kneipwirt oder Schlächtermeister sieht er aus, Bügelfalten, Handschuh, steifer runder Hut" (ibid: 278). In order to boost his credibility in this new role and ensure that people associate his missing arm with the war, the protagonist begins to accessorize his outfit with an iron cross. Initially reserved for special occasions, the cross grows to become a staple of Franz's appearance — so much so that he starts wearing it even to the pub:

> Welche Freude und Überraschung und Maulaufreißen bei Herbert und Eva und Emil, wie dann am 4. Juli, wie da reinkommt, wer, na, man kann sich schon denken. Proper, geleckt, das E.K. [Eiserne Kreuz] an die Heldenbrust geklebt, die Augen braun tierisch treuherzig wie immer, warme Männerfaust und starker Händedruck: Franz Biberkopf. […] Franz ist ein feiner Pinkel. (ibid: 280)

The contradictory ways in which the protagonist manipulates his physical characteristics — sometimes covering them up, other times exacerbating them for underhand purposes — is matched by the equally contradictory effects that Franz's 'makeover' has on those surrounding him. Some people are surprised at his uninhibited display of heroism. But he also elicits "die Hochachtung der Passanten und den Ärger der Proleten" (ibid: 278). These divergent reactions leave readers wondering why the protagonist acts the way he does. In this particular case, he seems to think that a missing limb and an iron cross legitimate him as a

war hero, but why would he want to pass for one in the first place? If he is trying to obtain a pension from the government, why does he need to look so elegant? Is his goal, rather, to inflame political spirits over the plight of war veterans? Or to raise pity? Does he think that, by posing as a war hero, he will recuperate some of the manhood he has lost along with his arm?[1] Or perhaps a combination of all these? Döblin offers no conclusive answer and no psychological point of orientation that might enable us to settle on a specific reading. However much some of the protagonist's outfits and changes of dress may carry symbolic meaning related to his trajectory through life, they provide no clarification about Franz's character, much less about what he is thinking or feeling at any given moment. And without insight into the protagonist's reasoning, any interpretation of his looks, gestures, and actions is as valid as the next. By eliminating psychology from the narrative picture, then, Döblin unlocks the potential of the human body and of texts to signify ad infinitum.

It would be misguided to expect any more conclusiveness from Franz's facial expressions and body language. These are, in effect, as inscrutable and ambiguous as his clothing. Döblin is interested particularly in the protagonist's facial movements, which are minimalist and recur at random points throughout the novel, thereby thwarting the reader's urge to interpret them psychologically. For instance, in several unrelated episodes, we read about Franz pressing his lips tightly together. When it happens for the first time, the narrator does not provide any indication of what this non-verbal signal might mean. Context does not help either, and even from subsequent iterations of this gesture, it is impossible to make out a pattern of signification. It is as if Döblin were interested solely in the mechanics of Franz's face and leaving the work of interpretation to the reader. Another example of this strategy is the mention that the protagonist's face is "manchmal ganz hart, manchmal zittern kleene Bündelchen in seinem Gesicht" (Döblin 2001a: 126). This reinforces the idea that Franz has a limited range of

1 Throughout the novel, Franz's physical impairment is repeatedly equated with loss of manhood. In the wake of the accident, Eva and Herbert characterize the protagonist as "ein Krüppel, ne halbe Leiche" (Döblin 2001a: 246), and Franz himself summarizes the violence done to him with the words: "Jetzt bin ich ein halber Mensch" (ibid: 320). In Franz and Reinhold's first face-to-face meeting after the accident, lack of manhood is associated with the powerlessness of the protagonist in front of the man on whom he should be taking revenge: "Ick kann nichts, ick kann gar nichts. Ick muß doch, ick wollt doch wat tun […], ich bin überhaupt keen Mann, ein Hahnepampen" (*sic*, ibid: 324). Significantly, the question of impaired manhood gives way toward the end of the novel to a more pressing concern with loss of humanity, as Franz asks himself in a manner reminiscent of Shakespeare's Hamlet: "bin ich ein Mensch oder bin ich kein Mensch" (ibid: 449). The answer comes right before Franz's symbolic death and resurrection: "ich bin schuldig, ich bin kein Mensch, ich bin ein Vieh, ein Untier" (ibid: 488).

facial expressivity, but it also confuses more than clarifies, since no details are forthcoming about when one can expect his face to harden or to quiver ever so slightly. As before, it remains a mystery what Franz's facial expressions (or lack thereof) might denote from a psychological point of view.

In one particular case, this resistance to corporeal disambiguation shows that readers' penchant for psychologizing not only curtails their interpretive freedom and diminishes the signifying potential of literary characters, but can also lead down treacherous paths from an ethical point of view. The scene in question makes reference to Franz's petrified face as he imagines holding a wooden tool in his hand and stabbing Mieze fatally in the chest: "Sein Gesicht ist dabei steinhart" (Döblin 2001a: 319). In this example, it is not that readers do not have access to the inner workings of Franz's mind; there is simply nothing there. No rational thinking and no emotion — just a raw murderous urge toward women. By resisting the novelistic practice of imbuing facial descriptions with deeper meaning, Döblin ensures that psychology does not excuse Franz's violent propensities. His descent into brutality remains unjustified and unjustifiable.

What makes Döblin's approach in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* so effective is that he first whets our appetite for psychology, then frustrates it. Nowhere is this more evident than in the scene in which Franz examines himself in the mirror and struggles to make sense of what he sees:

> Wer aber gar nicht erbaut war, als er seine blassen, schlaffen, pickligen Backen sah, war Biberkopf. Hat der Kerl eine Visage. Striemen auf der Stirn, wovon bloß rote Striemen, von der Mütze, und die Gurke, Mensch, sone dicke, rote Neese, das braucht aber nicht vom Schnaps zu sein, das ist kalt heute; bloß die gräßlichen ollen Glotzaugen, wie ne Kuh, woher ich bloß sone Kalbsaugen habe und so stiere, als wenn ich nicht mit wackeln kann. Als wenn mir einer Sirup rübergossen hat. (*sic*, Döblin: 2001a: 172)

The narrative techniques of introspection that Döblin uses here and throughout the novel hold out the promise of providing access to the inner workings of Franz's mind, but they never fulfill it. The protagonist's explanations for the way he looks are devoid of psychological import, invoking solely outside causes. Nevertheless, they do gesture toward an identity crisis, as mirror scenes often do in literature and the arts. Franz's attempt at physiognomizing himself reads like a classic example of the mirror stage theorized by Jacques Lacan, but with an important twist. According to the French psychoanalyst, the formation of the Ego results from a conflict between the image of a unified body that the child perceives in the mirror and the lack of bodily control that s/he experiences in real life. The child constitutes itself as an 'I' precisely in opposition to this specular Other, this ideal version of the self toward which it will perpetually strive (cf. Lacan 1977). Like the child in Lacan's theory, Franz perceives his body as fragmented before

looking in the mirror. Another similarity is that Döblin's protagonist objectifies himself throughout the specular experience. His shift between subject and object positions is rendered stylistically by the alternation in the excerpt above between free indirect discourse ("Hat der Kerl eine Visage") and direct speech ("woher ich bloß sone Kalbsaugen habe;" "als wenn ich nicht mit wackeln kann").

But Franz's situation also differs in an important respect from the scenario outlined by Lacan. On a formal level, this is the longest uninterrupted description of the protagonist in the entire book. This fact alone, when set against the dispersed, fragmented physical details in the rest of the novel, creates a sense that the resulting image must be unitary, similar to the mirror-image in Lacan's theory. The text does not bear out this expectation, however. Franz's mirror self is a far cry from the coherent reflection that Lacan postulates as a prerequisite for the constitution of subjectivity. Cheeks, forehead, nose, and eyes may all be part of the same specular portrait, but Franz's reading of them is not unitary. The welts on his forehead yield a straightforward explanation: "[sie sind] von der Mütze." But already in accounting for the redness of his nose, Franz identifies two possibilities: it could be the result either of drinking or of cold weather. By the time he gets to the eyes, there is no trace of certainty left, only a couple of "as if's" emphasizing the purely speculative nature of Franz's verdicts: "als wenn ich nicht mit wackeln kann," "als wenn mir einer Sirup rübergossen hat." Instead of becoming more sure of himself in the course of this specular experience, Franz renounces all claims to interpretive authority and all hopes of gaining clarity: "Wer […] gar nicht erbaut war, […] war Biberkopf." Nothing is unitary or coherent in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, least of all Franz's mirror-image. And because there is no contrast, no split between a 'false' and a 'true' self, the very idea that the hero might emerge into subjectivity is called into question. The semblance of psychological sophistication that attaches to Franz in this scene is exposed as just that: a semblance with no substance. Döblin thus denaturalizes the deeply ingrained habit of employing psychology as the sole key to unlocking all the subtleties, nuances, and meanings of a text.

The semantic emptiness of the human face is explicitly thematized in the novel during a conversation between the protagonist, his girlfriend at that time, and a newspaper vendor. While Franz is probing the man with questions in order to determine if selling newspapers would be a suitable occupation for him, Polish Lina obsesses over a particular aspect of the vendor's face: "der Kerl grient so dreckig" (Döblin 2001a: 69). She dislikes it so much that she immediately wants to walk away from the newsstand and tries twice to cut short the conversation between the two men: "»Komm doch, Franz.« »Na, wart doch einen Momang. Ein Augenblickchen. Der Mann steht hier stundenlang und wird auch nicht umgeblasen. Man muß nicht so pimplig sein, Lina.« »Nee, weil er so grient.«" (ibid: 69) The vendor tries to set Lina's mind at ease by explaining: "Das ist so mein Gesichtsausdruck, meine Gesichtszüge, Fräulein. Da kann ich nichts für." (ibid: 69) When he says he cannot

help the look on his face, the man is assuring Lina that he is not smirking on purpose and has no hidden agenda. The "dirty grin" plastered on his face is neither intentional nor spontaneous. By collapsing the distinction between pathognomy (*Gesichtsausdruck*) and physiognomy (*Gesichtszüge*), the vendor calls into question the very status of the smirk as an expression of emotions, whether voluntary or involuntary. What looks like a pathognomic expression turns out to be an ensemble of fixed facial features. It is permanent, unchanging in all circumstances, as Franz also observes: "Der grient immer, hörst du doch, Lina, der arme Kerl." (Döblin 2001a: 69) Clearly, the grin on the newspaper seller's face is divorced from what he is thinking or feeling in that particular situation. Nor does it convey anything about whether he wants to display or conceal certain emotions. The omnipresence of the grin undermines its potential to provide psychological insight.

This harks back to the absence of a psychological foundation that was discussed earlier for Franz's sartorial and corporeal attributes. There, as much as here, physical appearance becomes disconnected from thoughts and emotions. This is different from the autonomy of body parts and gestures that literary critics have traced in Döblin's early writings. Kurt Binneberg sees in Döblin's use of uncontrolled gestures "[ein] Merkmal für schwere psychische Defekte der Figuren," a sign of inner disintegration and of a complete loss of "personale Einheit von Bewußtsein, Willenssteuerung und Körperfunktion" (1979: 503). Torsten Hoffmann, on the other hand, focuses on the depiction of body parts that take on a will of their own in Döblin's short stories. Similar to Binneberg, he argues that an anarchical body signals a pathological condition (2009: 46). In conjunction with insights from Döblin's medical essays, he concludes that, for the author of *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume* (*The Murder of a Buttercup*),[2] "the mind is essentially governed by the body" (ibid: 46). The arguments of these critics, especially their insistence on what lies outside the conscious will of Döblin's protagonists, ties in with the crisis of agency that many writers of the early 20th century documented in their works. The problem is that both Binneberg and Hoffmann equate lack of bodily control with lack of sanity. In so doing, they uphold a one-to-one correspondence between body and psyche that goes not only against their own claims about the existence of an asymmetrical relationship between body and mind (Hoffmann 2009: 46), but also against evidence from *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. Döblin's novel advocates neither for an equivalence nor for an imbalance between body and mind. It simply denaturalizes the longstanding connection between physical appearance and inner being. In the next four sections, I will show that Döblin was emboldened in this endeavor by parallel, yet interconnected, developments in several areas that he was passionate about: novel-writing, medicine, visual media, and politics.

2 Title of a well-known collection of short stories published by Döblin in 1912.

Döblin's Anti-Psychologism in Literary-Theoretical Perspective

Alfred Döblin's turn away from character psychology and his sacrosanct approach to the body, as evident in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, must first be seen in the context of his views on the state of the novel vis-à-vis the state of modern humanity. The German author emerges from his literary-theoretical writings as a judicious and frank diagnostician of modernity, deeply cognizant of the exigencies that faced metropolis dwellers and profoundly committed to observing his fellow Berliners "in der Weise, die die einzig wahre ist, nämlich indem man mitlebt, mithandelt, mitleidet" (Döblin 2001b: 504). Out of this sensitivity to the daily struggles of his readers grew a conviction that the novel needed to be reformed, i.e., brought in line with the realities of modern existence. Time and again, Döblin warns that the novel is obsolete and in dire need of modernization: "Der Roman […] taugt überhaupt nichts und ist ein abgebrauchtes Möbel. […] Hier ist Schaukelei, Unsicherheit, Krise. Der Roman ist im Begriff, flötenzugehen" (1989: 275). As part of the rebirth of this literary genre "als Kunstwerk und modernes Epos" (1963a: 19), Döblin wanted first and foremost to do away with "[die] psychologische Manier" of prose writers, which he dismissed as "reine abstrakte Phantasmagorie," "ein dilettantisches Vermuten, scholastisches Gerede, spintisierender Bombast" (ibid: 16). This vehement rejection of "Romanpsychologie" explains in large measure why physical appearance is stripped of psychological overtones in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

But what exactly fueled Döblin's aversion to exploring the motivations of characters? His hard stance against narrative psychology does not bespeak a belief in the primacy of rationality, but rather a repudiation of it. The German author believed that psychology was the most fetishized and intrusive form of rationalism, and that rationalism had always spelled the death of art. While granting that thoughts, feelings, and conflicts do exist in real life, Döblin explained that, when trying to represent and analyze them, novelists excise these inner experiences from their "living totality" and turn them into something akin to "ein amputierter Arm; Atem ohne den Menschen, der atmet; Blicke ohne Augen" (1963a: 16). The comparisons in this quotation with images of bodily fragmentation and mutilation are not idle. Like the references to physical appearance from *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, they suggest that at stake in Döblin's anti-psychological narrative practice was the safeguarding of corporeal integrity and the preservation of human life in all its complexity and unknowability. That is to say, Döblin shed psychology to preserve humanity. And indeed, a few pages later, he explicitly lamented the watering down of life itself as another negative consequence of using psychology in literature and art:

> Hinter dem verderblichen Rationalismus ist die ganze Welt mit der Vielheit ihrer Dimensionen völlig versunken […]. Der Künstler hat […] den Kunstfreund

> und Leser entwöhnt, in den Reichtum des Lebens zu blicken. Man hat […] eine systematische Verarmung der Kunst betrieben. […] Diese Verwässerung, Verdünnung des bißchen Lebens, das in die Schreibstuben drang. (Döblin 1963a: 18)

In addition to aesthetic and existential considerations, Döblin's anti-psychology manifesto was fueled by his particular understanding of the author-text relationship, which can be gleaned from "Berliner Programm: An Romanautoren und ihre Kritiker" (1913). In this theoretical essay, Döblin identifies two means of overcoming the psychology craze that had seized so many novelists of his day. One is a form of lyricism in prose that thrives on "Gehobenheiten und Niederungen; Ichreden, wobei das naïve Räsonnement zulässig ist" (1963a: 17). The problem with this first option, as Döblin admits, is that the result would hardly qualify as a novel anymore, or even as a novella. For this reason, he favors the second alternative, namely a type of novel that focuses on the dispirited, prosaic reality of modern life:

> Oder die eigentliche Romanprosa mit dem Prinzip: der Gegenstand des Romans ist die entseelte Realität. Der Leser in voller Unabhängigkeit einem gestalteten, gewordenen Ablauf gegenübergestellt; er mag urteilen, nicht der Autor. Die Fassade des Romans kann nicht anders sein als aus Stein oder Stahl, elektrisch blitzend oder finster; sie schweigt. (ibid: 17)

The adjective *entseelt* that Döblin uses here brings up associations with two other ideas developed in 1917 and 1935, respectively, to describe the modern condition: Max Weber's disenchantment ("Entzauberung der Welt") and Walter Benjamin's loss of aura ("Verfall der Aura"). Unlike these, however, and also contrary to what the prefix *ent-* suggests at first glance, Döblin's notion of a 'soul-stripped reality' and the attendant de-psychologizing of the novel have positive connotations, because, as the passage above makes clear, they free readers from the tyranny of a single interpretive framework. Couched in the appearance of a loss is a momentous gain for mankind. People would not be losing their soul by reading such novels, but throwing off the shackles of bondage to psychologism.

Importantly for my purposes in this chapter, the comparison of the anti-psychological novel with a silent façade in the aforecited passage intimates that the body would need to play a central role in the process of *Entseelung*, i.e., in extricating the novelistic genre from the clutches of psychological rationalism. The excerpt above also invokes a third important reason why the author of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* was so passionate about dispensing with psychology. Like Spielhagen before him, Döblin believed that an excess of authorial control was incompatible with the goals of the novel and that psychology provided a breeding ground for such intrusive behavior. It was, therefore, imperative to curtail the

writer's involvement in the text. "Die Hegemonie des Autors ist zu brechen," declared Döblin in unequivocal terms, "nicht weit genug kann der Fanatismus der Selbstverleugnung getrieben werden" (1963a: 18).

The overbearing presence of the narrator in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* might raise questions about whether Döblin practiced in his prose what he preached in theory. Many critics have taken issue with this perplexing feature of the novel. Stephanie Bird, for instance, has argued that the narrator's interjections into the story "display a desire to control the meaning of the text" and "seek to deny the reader the freedom to make interpretative mistakes in the first place" (2009: 248-49). But an opposite argument can be made. The pronounced visibility of the narrator in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* does not translate into a more streamlined plot or a more transparent psychological scheme, quite the contrary. The narrator does not interpret the events for us, nor does he provide insight into characters' motivations, as the examples analyzed earlier in this chapter illustrate. His constantly felt presence keeps us abreast of what will happen and reminds us, like a refrain, of the endpoint of the narrative, but it does not make our task of getting there any easier. We still have to find our own way through the overload of information and decide for ourselves how the various narrative strands relate to one another. Just as he lures us in the mirror scene with the prospect of a psychological development, only to debunk it a short while later, Döblin deploys a visible, yet non-intrusive, narrator to throw the reader off from the actual absence of a guide. *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, then, does fulfill the desideratum for limited authorial control by refusing to psychologize the physical appearance of characters. In this way, the novelist restores to the text and body their freedom of signification, and to readers the freedom of interpretation.

Döblin's Anti-Psychologism in Medical-Scientific Perspective

The anti-psychological approach showcased in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* was also fueled by ideas from the medical-scientific realm with which Döblin was familiar from his training and experience as a doctor. Like the other two novelists discussed in this monograph, the author of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* used the narrative tools at his disposal to criticize medicine's unrelenting efforts to squeeze the body into the straitjacket of fixed molds and absolute laws. Döblin's response, however, seems more incisive, and his solution comes across as more drastic than Sophie von La Roche's multi-perspectival narration or Friedrich Spielhagen's "versable" types. The reason for this is that the situation had taken a dangerous turn in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Continued advancements in medical technology drove physicians even farther away from patients' bodies and experiences than before. Measurable aspects of illness gained priority over subjective human factors, with

profound consequences for the body's claim to visibility and for the doctor-patient relationship: "As the physician makes greater use of the technology of diagnosis, he perceives his patient more and more indirectly through a screen of machines and specialists" (Reiser 1978: 230).

Beyond this general neglect of the human body, there was something more specific that made Döblin's de-psychologization of physical appearance and of the novel so urgent and uncompromising — something that harked all the way back to the 18th century. Critics of *Physiognomische Fragmente* had warned already at the time of its publication that Lavater's project was susceptible to instrumentalization for nefarious purposes. That these predictions were right on the mark became fully evident in Döblin's time, when physiognomic ideas were mobilized in the service of racial and criminal profiling, with dire consequences for people deemed dangerous, inferior, or 'defective' in some way. I will return to this point in the last section of this chapter. For now, let it be noted again that, by denying readers the satisfaction of psychological clarity, Döblin refocused attention on the body at a time when medical disregard for its individuality and complexity showed no signs of abating. However, he had to offer readers at least the prospect of psychological development if he wanted to avoid the pitfall of essentialism into which eugenics and criminal anthropology had fallen. And that is precisely what he did, as my Lacanian reading of the mirror scene in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* has shown. The bodies that Döblin animates in his novel are not soulless (*seelenlos*), but soul-stripped (*entseelt*). That is to say, they did have spiritual depth at one point and may do so again in the future. Through this unfulfilled promise of psychological elucidation, Döblin's expositions of corporeality attend to the body's physical reality without turning it into a pretext for classifying people. Put another way, the author of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* recuperates the body that medicine had left behind, but is careful to not hand it over to race science.

Another specific development to which the soul-stripped bodies in Döblin's novel relate in complex ways is the advent of psychoanalysis in the 1890s. From everything that has been argued so far, it may seem paradoxical that the German novelist would have taken interest in this disciplinary expansion, and more anomalous still that he would have drawn inspiration from it for his narrative practice. It bears reminding, however, that Döblin studied and worked in psychiatry, and that his criticism was not directed at psychology as an ensemble of mental processes, but rather at the self-delusion of psychologists and psychological novelists that they could ever truly excavate the human mind. Psychiatry, on the other hand, made no such claims, according to Döblin, and was, for this reason, much better suited as a role model for novelists: "Man lerne von der Psychiatrie […]: sie hat das Naïve der Psychologie längst erkannt, beschränkt sich auf die Notierung der Abläufe, Bewegungen, — mit einem Kopfschütteln, Achselzucken für das Weitere und das «Warum» und «Wie»" (1963a: 16). If writing showed Döblin

that "Why?" and "How?" questions can never be suppressed, psychiatry taught him that they can never be answered, especially in matters of the mind. The German author translated this lesson into narrative practice by divesting physical descriptions of psychological content, thereby gesturing toward interiority without actually disclosing it.

Another strategy with resonances in the mental health field that Döblin adopted to keep his prose free of psychological connotations pertains to authorial involvement. As indicated in the previous section, the German writer disapproved of the overbearing author-narrators commonly found in psychological novels. But under-involvement was not a palatable option either. The new practice of psychoanalysis, I argue, offered him just the right blend of detachment and involvement on which to model the author-narrator of the new anti-psychological novel. The emergence of psychoanalysis in the late 19th century fostered a new understanding of mental life and human behavior. Equally important was that it prompted a re-evaluation of the role of medicine and of physicians. As the asylum movement of the 19th century came to a disappointing end in Western Europe, the therapeutic vacuum in which mental health professionals had been operating became more apparent than ever. Diagnostics alone was not enough anymore. A drastic change was needed, and that change came in the person of an Austrian neurologist by the name of Sigmund Freud. His 'talking cure' effectively put therapy on the map for the first time in the history of psychiatry and heralded a new era focused not just on investigating and diagnosing patients, but on treating them. Inevitably, this shift in mindset and paradigm brought into focus the retrograde, ineffectual nature of certain ideas, approaches, and methods — including the way physicians defined their role in the caregiving process. The time had come for doctors to adopt a more active role and deliver on their promise to reduce human suffering and mortality.

This discursive turn that came on the heels of psychoanalysis caused Döblin to tone down his former praise of a disengaged attitude in mental health professionals. The detachment of the psychiatrist that he had once extolled from a diagnostic point of view by comparison with the baseless posturing of the psychologist now appeared problematic against the background of discussions about therapeutic effectiveness. Fourteen years after the laudatory remarks concerning psychiatrists that have been cited earlier, Döblin struck a very different tone on the same topic in the essay entitled "Arzt und Dichter. Merkwürdiger Lebenslauf eines Autors" (1927). There, he describes as follows his experience working in the asylums Karthaus-Prüll and Berlin-Buch between 1906 and 1908:

> Und dann war es lauter Diagnostik. Ja, was hatte ich die Jahre über in den Irrenanstalten und Krankenhäusern gelernt? Wie die Krankheiten verliefen, welche es waren, — und ob sie es wirklich waren, woran diese Leute litten? Es

> schmeichelte meinem Denktrieb — auch dem meiner Chefs —, zu wissen, wie alles verlief. Wir wußten, und damit basta. Behandlung, Einfluß — lernte man nur nebenbei. Nein, man lernte es nicht, man luchste es den anderen ab. (Döblin 1986: 94)

For all his earlier praise of psychiatry over psychology, Döblin offers here an acerbic critique of the hands-off approach and self-centered, self-sufficient attitude of psychiatrists. Psychoanalysis promised new hope in this respect. The climate of intense cooperation that it fostered between analyst and analysand was said to come with many therapeutic benefits for the patient.

As a side note, it is worth mentioning that Döblin's first encounter with psychoanalysis was less than ideal. He completed his dissertation under the direction of Alfred Erich Hoche (1865-1943), a self-proclaimed opponent of Freud. Döblin himself had strong reservations about the effectiveness of psychoanalysis, declaring as late as 1927: "mir hat persönlich Freud nichts Wunderbares gebracht. […] Das Dunkel, das um diese Kranken war, wollte ich lichten helfen. Die psychische Analyse, fühlte ich, konnte es nicht tun" (1986: 93). Despite such protestations, research into Döblin's medical persona by Thomas Anz (1997), Jochen Meyer (1998), and Veronika Fuechtner (2004) has uncovered strong evidence that the German writer-physician started treating patients with Freudian methods as early as 1914, and that he himself sought psychoanalytic treatment upon returning to Berlin in 1919. Two years later, Döblin openly declared in "Autobiographische Skizze" that he was "doing" psychoanalysis.[3] His interest in this new medical subfield eventually took the form of a close involvement with the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute, where he gave a warm keynote address on the occasion of Freud's 70th birthday. It all culminated with Döblin describing himself in 1930 as a "Psycho-Analytiker" who was deeply indebted to Freud's pathbreaking contribution to psychiatry (qtd. in Plänkers 1996: 120).

One of the aspects that appealed to Döblin about psychoanalysis was that it offered an auspicious alternative to the outdated model of the psychiatrist involved solely in diagnosing, observing, and managing mental afflictions. Since, in the wake of Freud, psychic disorders were approached for the first time as something curable, the psychoanalyst took on a more active role in the treatment of patients, but — and this is crucial — he did not take over the healing process, giving precedence instead to the patient's self-analysis. Similar to a psychoanalyst, the narrator in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* provides guidance and reassurance, not clarification. He facilitates, but does not illuminate; he mediates Franz's ultimate revelation, but does not guarantee, much less prescribe, how the protagonist will

3 "Von meiner seelischen Entwicklung kann ich nichts sagen; da ich selbst Psychoanalyse treibe, weiß ich, wie falsch jede Selbstäußerung ist" (Döblin 1986: 37).

attain it. The transformative work is up to Franz, and the interpretive one up to the reader, in much the same way as the therapeutic process in psychoanalysis is ultimately driven by the patient, not the doctor.

The revolution that psychoanalysis engendered in mental health is relevant also in another way for understanding Döblin's anti-psychological stance. The separation of body and mind evident in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* evokes a major paradigm shift that Freud introduced in the etiology of mental disease. A brief glance at the history of science shows that, with few exceptions, "most theories of insanity before the 18th century emphasized physiological rather than psychological aetiologies" (Bynum/Browne/Porter 1981: 348). While debates in other fields over the body-mind relation were notoriously intense and protean, consensus prevailed throughout the centuries with respect to the somatic origin of mental illness. Beginning already in Greek times, during the heyday of humoralism, an organic model of madness asserted itself that equated nervous derangements with physiological disturbances. The belief that specific bodily sites, such as the guts or the heart, acted as seats of insanity prompted doctors to act upon the body in order to calm the mind. Isolating and purging the frenzied constitution, as well as restraining it through mechanical devices like manacles and strait-waistcoats, were common practice in treatments of the insane (Porter 2001: 290). This somatic paradigm endured until the 1750s, when a 'moral' approach to mental disorder was proposed. Advocates of this new model of abnormal psychology — including the German Johann Christian Reil (1759-1813), who coined the term *psychiatry* — rejected mechanical restraint, called for a more humane therapy without recourse to physical agents or procedures, and tried to replace the old physiological way of reading mental disorders with a psychological one: "Alienation of mind […] was not a physical disease like smallpox, but a psychological disorder, the product of wretched education, bad habits, and personal affliction" (ibid: 291). The problem was that this tentative shift to a new explanatory framework never materialized in practice. The hopes of moral theory reformers for psychiatric ways of overcoming derangement collapsed along with the asylum system that was supposed to realize them. Despite riding on a wave of optimism, institutionalization became plagued by many ills in the course of the 19th century. Asylums continued to operate as overcrowded carceral institutions and to treat the insane with biomedical methods, oftentimes precipitating disorders where none had existed before. All this perpetuated the status quo whereby afflictions of the mind were reduced to physical explanations.

And so it happened that, in Freud's student days, the belief still prevailed among medical professionals that mental disturbances originated in the body, not in the mind. The long tradition of a biologically grounded psychology had gone unchallenged since the time of Thales and Hippocrates, but this state of affairs was about to change dramatically. Freud's notion of the unconscious as a well

of repressed instincts and desires that threaten to break through the order of rational consciousness shifted attention to the psychic causes of mental disorders. Against orthodox psychiatry, the Viennese neurologist championed the cause of psychogenesis by arguing that at the root of neurosis was the inner struggle between conscious and unconscious elements of mental life, not physical lesions in the brain.

As a student in the early 20th century, Alfred Döblin received training in the old psychiatric tradition, which focused on diagnostics rather than therapeutics and posited a purely somatic basis for psychological disturbances. Already then, however, the German author found this paradigm restrictive and tried to break out of it, as seen in his dissertation on the role of language and personal history in pathological conditions. This revisionist bent endured well into his years as a mental health professional. Writing at a time when he actively employed psychoanalytic methods in his medical practice, Döblin echoed Freud's psychogenic view of derangement when he noted that even though patients complained about physical pain when they came to see him, what they really wanted was to talk about their lives: "Organisch ist an den Leuten nichts oder fast nichts zu finden" (1986: 100). Physical ailments, Döblin implies, were just a pretext to visit the doctor's office, not the cause of psychic afflictions.

The separation in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* between body and mind can be seen as reenacting this shift of psychiatric paradigm. Just as, in a medical context, somatic symptoms cannot be taken as sure signs of derangement, so, too, physical descriptions in novels do not have to be pregnant with psychology. Importantly, the fact that Döblin denaturalizes this expectation does not make him a blind apologist for psychoanalysis. Two scenes in particular show that his goal was much more complex than to replace one normative scheme with another. In the first of these episodes, the life stories of two disabled men are compared and a contentious debate ensues in Henschke's pub on the topic of veterans' pensions. One of the men, a self-professed globe-trotter, became paralyzed after suffering a stroke and being assaulted by intoxicated "deutsche Brüder" (Döblin 2001a: 270). He now roams the streets of Berlin in a curious little wagon, telling passers-by about his life, while an assistant sells them penny postcards. The story of the other man's injury is told by his son, who flies into a temper at the sight of the paralyzed street vendor:

> In dem Lokal, wo Franz Biberkopf an diesen schönen Tagen herumspioniert, […] da hat ein ganz grüner Bursche den Wagen mit dem Gelähmten am Bahnhof Danziger Straße gesehn [*sic*]. Und fängt nun im Lokal ein Geschrei darüber an und was sie auch mit seinem Vater gemacht haben, der hat einen Brustschuß, und jetzt hat er knappe Luft, aber mit einmal soll das bloß Nervenleiden sein, und die Rente haben sie ihm gekürzt, und nächstens kriegt er gar keine mehr. (ibid: 270)

What bothers the pub denizen is that the level of financial support from the state and of respect from ordinary people is incommensurate with the nature of the infirmity. The fact that someone who was injured in combat should receive equal or worse treatment than a collateral victim of the war is unacceptable to the young man, and he blames it all on an unholy alliance between physicians and lawmakers. In his view, the callousness of state authorities goes hand in hand with doctors' dismissive treatment of war veterans. The incident calls attention to the far-reaching social ramifications of psychiatry during and immediately after the Great War. Physical ailments were automatically associated with nervous disorders by way of denying compensation to veterans. In a medical culture in which the physiological and the psychological were inextricably linked, the rush to judgment by physicians bred gross social injustice on account of the stigma associated with mental illness.

With one stroke of the pen, Döblin criticizes in this scene two interrelated aspects that he had observed in real life. In a first instance, the increasingly problematic assumption by psychiatrists that all psychological processes have a physiological basis. Over time, this led to a misconception in the opposite direction: that all corporeal disturbances signal mental derangement, which in turn prevented doctors from properly attending to purely physical injuries. The message here is clear: a psychologized body is an invisible body. And the mind does not fare any better in this scenario either. For, as Döblin's second line of criticism shows, the fact that a diagnosis of nervous disorder would translate into lower state benefits proves that the old biomedical model of abnormal psychology fueled society's refusal to recognize psychic disorders as serious medical conditions and to address war trauma as a large-scale phenomenon plaguing German society in the wake of World War I. Nowhere in this scene does Döblin openly refer or covertly allude to psychoanalysis. His is not a doctrinal endorsement of Freudian psychology, but a genuine, non-partisan expression of concern for the plight of the little man.

We find the same humanist impulse in another episode from *Berlin Alexanderplatz* that explicitly thematizes the connection between corporeality and psychology. This time, the common man is represented by Franz Biberkopf, and he does not fall victim to a suspicious fraternization between doctors and state officials, but to internal strife among the physicians in charge of treating him at the Buch asylum. In this scene, the relationship between body and mind becomes a point of fierce contention among physicians, highlighting the precarious situation of people whose lives were caught in the crossfire of inter- and intra-disciplinary disputes. Aware that he is receiving more medical attention than poor people normally do, Franz surmises that the doctors either find his case unusual or that, like "richtig[e] Henkersknechte" (Döblin 2001a: 468), they want to deliver him into the hands of 'justice' healthy enough to be turned into a scapegoat for

Mieze's murder. While both of these possibilities are true to a certain degree, the course of events shows that Franz's case commands so much attention because it offers representatives of two competing psychiatric doctrines an opportunity to act out their differences. Everything, from diagnosis to therapy, provides grounds for disagreement. All the doctors seem to concur that they are dealing with "ein Stuporzustand" (Döblin 2001a: 469), but they do not see eye to eye on the origin of this psychic state, which, in turn, influences the kind of therapy they recommend. The younger generation, represented by two volunteers and an intern, consider Franz's affliction psychogenic and recommend a therapeutic regimen that corresponds to this diagnostic assessment:

> seine Starre nimmt von der Seele ihren Ausgang, es ist ein krankhafter Zustand von Hemmung und Gebundenheit, den eine Analyse schon klären würde, vielleicht als Rückgang auf älteste Seelenstufen, wenn — das große Wenn, das sehr bedauerliche Wenn, schade, dies Wenn stört erheblich — Franz Biberkopf sprechen würde. (ibid: 469).

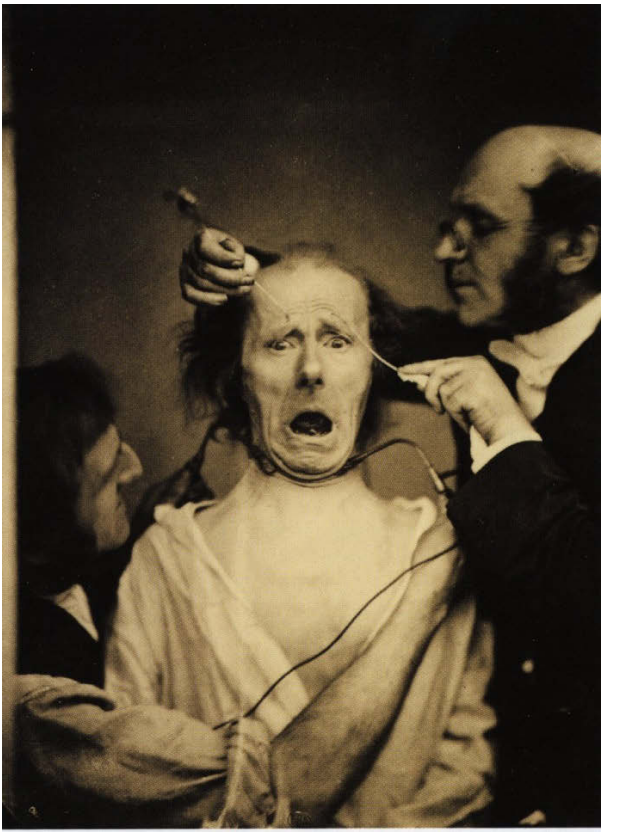
The retrospective dimension of this treatment method and its dependence on the patient's cooperation, as well as the explicit use of the word *Analyse* leave no room for doubt that the therapy described here is psychoanalysis. Döblin does not come down on the side of Freud's disciples, however, satirizing instead their inadequate response when one of the primary conditions for the success of this type of therapy, namely the patient's willingness to talk, is not met. The aside between dashes ("das große Wenn, das sehr bedauerliche Wenn, schade, dies Wenn stört erheblich") ridicules the "younger gentlemen" for treating Franz's resistance to 'the talking cure' as an unfortunate inconvenience. Even more troubling is that, when all else fails, the aspiring psychoanalysts resort to a method of 'treatment' that was certainly not in the van of psychiatric progress:

> ein Volontär [setzt] es durch, daß man von der Anstalt herüber einen Elektrisierapparat bringt, und daß man Franz Biberkopf faradisiert, und zwar am Oberkörper, und zuletzt den faradischen Strom besonders an die Kiefergegend ansetzt, an den Hals und den Mundboden. Die Partie müßte nun besonders erregt und gereizt werden. (ibid: 469)

The therapy described here, faradization, was named after the English physicist and chemist Michael Faraday (1791-1867) and consisted in the application of short bursts of electricity to muscles or nerves in order to stimulate them. Electroshock therapy was not invented until 1938 (Endler 1988: 5), nine years after the publication of Döblin's novel. And unlike the localized faradic intervention referenced in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, electroconvulsive therapy involved applying strong electrical current to induce generalized seizures. But the two procedures are related insofar as they both used electricity in connection with mental disorders. Moreover, as several

articles by the American doctor Nathaniel J. Berkwitz suggest, faradic shock therapy served as an intermediary in the transition from chemically to electrically induced seizures.[4]

Fig. 16 Guillaume Duchenne and an assistant performing electro-physiological experiments through faradization.



There is also an interesting connection here with the history of physiognomy. Faradization had been popularized in the mid-19th century by Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne (1806-1875), who used electrified metal probes to apply faradic current

4 In an article from 1942 about the use of faradic shock therapy in treating delirium tremens, Berkwitz concludes: "Experience has shown that the necessary 'protective' measures (chemical and physical restraints) often aggravate or prolong the condition. Faradic shock therapy promptly removes the acute psychotic symptoms in most cases and, therefore, lessens the need of these undesirable protective measures" (1942: 493).

to various facial muscles (Fig. 16) and published his findings in a book called *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression* (1862). The French neurologist's goal in conducting these experiments was investigative: by causing the muscles of the face to contract, he hoped to understand how facial expressions are formed and, thus, to gain access to the workings of the human soul (Duchenne 2006: 101). By contrast, the younger doctors in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* employ faradism for therapeutic purposes. However, the same idea underlies both practices: that taming the body can pacify the mind and even render it susceptible to manipulation. The precise selection of areas in Franz Biberkopf's body on which electrical stimulation is performed (jaw, neck, floor of the mouth) suggests that "die jungen Herren" are trying to faradize him into talking. Since the patient refuses to speak, they try to force him by jump-starting his speech muscles. In so doing, they disregard two cornerstones of psychoanalysis: the mandate for patient consent and the idea that afflictions of the mind originate in the psyche, not in the soma. Clearly, Döblin describes here a regressive move, a major step backwards from the promises of Freud's doctrine into the era of somatic psychiatry.[5] This does not mean that the novelist disavowed psychoanalysis in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. He could have been intimating that much fine-tuning was needed before Freud's vision could be realized in practice, and that the danger of reverting to old habits was very real. He could also have been warning that psychoanalysis, like any other therapeutic method, faced insurmountable limitations, and that there was no single panacea for all patients and all mental disorders. The asylum scene from *Berlin Alexanderplatz* suggests that, instead of chasing an elusive cure-all, physicians would do better to keep an open mind, stay humble, and remind themselves that treating patients should never come at the cost of treating them inhumanely.

The same message is echoed in the portrayal of the second group of psychiatric doctors who take care of Franz Biberkopf. On the other side of the ideological divide stand the older physicians led by "der Herr Oberarzt," who solidifies his position of authority by launching vicious attacks on his different-minded subordinates. He makes no secret of his disregard for psychoanalysis, declaring at one point that a broken leg "heilt nicht auf Zureden" (Döblin 2001a: 470). In the same vein, he calls

5 Doctors like Nathaniel Berkwitz, who believed that both psychogenic and physiologic factors contributed to the etiology of mental disorders and could be treated through faradic shock therapy, were few and far between. As Berkwitz himself notes, most of his colleagues gave insufficient attention to psychogenesis, focusing instead on the physical causes of mental disease (1942: 492). In the German-speaking world in particular, the equation of electrotherapeutics with organic disturbances had been entrenched by Fritz Kaufmann's method of violent suggestion, which became the most widely used therapy for functional disorders in Germany during the Great War. Combining as it did powerful electric shocks with shouted commands, the Kaufmann therapy was very taxing on the bodies of war veterans and paid virtually no attention to what was happening in their psyche.

the psychoanalytically inspired theories of the younger doctors "Quatsch" (ibid: 472) and describes their therapeutic efforts as "gesund beten" (ibid: 471) and "quälen" (ibid: 472). The chief physician amends the patient's diagnosis to "catatonic stupor," which emphasizes the physiological dimension of the affliction — in Franz's case, his motor immobility. And when the young clinicians ask him directly what he thinks should be done with the patient, the Oberarzt goes off on a tangent about physical ailments:

> Die [Nasenbluten, Hühneraugen und gebrochenen Beine] muß man behandeln, wie ein anständiges gebrochenes Bein oder ein Hühnerauge es von einem Doktor verlangt. Mit einem kaputten Bein können Sie machen, was Sie wollen, das heilt nicht auf Zureden, und da können Sie noch Klavier zu spielen, das heilt nicht. Das will, man soll ne Schiene anlegen und die Knochen richtig einrenken, dann gehts sofort. Mit einem Hühnerauge ists nicht anders. Das verlangt, man soll pinseln oder sich bessere Stiefel kaufen. (Döblin 2001a: 470)

In this same episode, the chief physician also praises the therapeutic use of a strong electrical current[6] over the methods of his younger colleagues, specifically the shock therapy with weak faradic current and the 'chatter' method ("das Gequatsche," ibid: 470) — clearly, a disparaging reference to psychoanalysis. He also makes fun of Freud and his followers for supposedly allowing criminals like Franz to feign a quick recovery from mental illness and get back on the streets in no time. All this identifies the chief physician as the spokesman of an older generation of psychiatrists whose inflexibility is ridiculed in the same physiological terms to which they clung relentlessly: "von einem gewissen Alter an lagert sich im Gehirn Kalk ab und lernt man nichts zu" (ibid: 470).

In the end, Franz's diagnosis is revised once more, to that of 'psychic trauma' ("psychisches Trauma," ibid: 491). While this may seem to be a victory for the psychoanalytic camp, it it is not. The final verdict comes too late in the narrative to

6 The Oberarzt also mentions the war in connection with the strong current treatment for which he is nostalgic: "Kennt man ausm Krieg, Starkstrombehandlung, Mann Gottes. Das ist nicht erlaubt, moderne Folter" (Döblin 2001a: 470). This identifies him more specifically as a proponent of the controversial electro-suggestive therapy developed by the Austrian neurologist Fritz Kaufmann and used widely for functional somatic disorders during World War I. The Kaufmann method, also called Kaufmann's 'coercive procedure' (*Zwangsverfahren*), involved bombarding war neurotics with electrical current and shouting commands at them. Starvation and isolation were also part of this regimen aimed at returning the patients as rapidly as possible to the front. Even though this form of treatment was discredited for being inhumane and ineffective, Döblin warns here, as a former military doctor with experience on the front lines, that some physicians were still fixated on primitive, aggressive 'therapies' of days past. For more on the Kaufmann method and its afterlife in psychiatry, see Lerner 2003 and Killen 2006.

be of any consequence. When readers find out how the diagnosis controversy was settled, Franz has already been reborn spiritually and is just days away from being discharged. In Döblin's words, "schließlich ist der ganze Diagnosenstreit schnurz" (Döblin 2001a: 491), and so is whatever treatment Franz might have received in the end. This is not so much a vote of no confidence against psychoanalysis as an acidic commentary on the inefficiency of a field plagued by inner strife. To be sure, paradigm shifts such as the transition from a somatic to a psychogenic model of neurosis were important, especially given the therapeutic nihilism that "persisted longer in psychiatry than in other branches of medicine" (Johnston 1972: 229). But new explanatory models have limits too, Döblin reminds us, and one must also beware that the infighting which accompanied such moments of upheaval in medicine often led to the objectification of patients. The fact that in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* neither group of doctors emerges victorious suggests that Döblin's goal was not to settle the complex debate regarding the etiology of mental illness. Rather, what anti-psychological novels can and should do, in his view, is stand up for the ordinary people who are caught in the vortex of disciplinary and institutional alliances or enmities. His commitment here, as much as in the earlier scene with the war veteran and in all the examples of de-psychologized corporeality, is to protecting humanity, especially in situations that threaten to obliterate it. Situations precipitated by the repressive practices of disciplinary institutions, but also by certain kinds of literature, as Döblin's critique of the psychological novel implies.

Anti-Psychologism and the New Media

In addition to developments in literature and medicine, the divestiture of corporeality from psychological meaning in Alfred Döblin's novel is also connected with the crisis of vision and epistemology that many feared following the advent of photography and cinema. Numerous literal and metaphorical references to eyes and seeing conjure up this turning point in modernity. In one scene from *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, a young man called Willi stages a curious performance to prove to the other people in Henschke's pub that it is irrelevant whether the gold watch he bought from someone for three marks is stolen or not. He asks a girl to walk a few steps, which she does, and then disagreement ensues over the best way to describe her movements. Some think she walked, but the girl herself claims to have danced, and Willi, for his part, describes it as marching. A puzzled onlooker asks Willi to make clear the purpose of this impromptu experiment, to which he replies:

> …wenn die [Frau] marschiert, dann ist sie marschiert oder geloofen oder getanzt; wat det aber war, haste ja selber gesehen. Mit deine Augen. Das wars, was du

> gesehen hast. Und wenn wer einem ne Uhr wegnimmt, denn is det noch lange nich gestohlen. Siehste, jetzt verstehste mir. Weggenommen ist sie, aus der Tasche oder aus ner Auslage, ausm Laden, aber gestohlen? Wer sagt denn det? (*sic*, Döblin 2001a: 274)

According to Willi, whether the girl walked, marched, or danced is inconsequential, because nobody can decide objectively one way or another. What matters is that people cannot agree on something that they have seen with their own eyes, and at the same time too. The emphasis on visual perception is important here, as is the corporeal nature of the performance. In an era in which new visual media challenged more and more the authority of high culture, there were no epistemological absolutes anymore, no Lavaterian formula for attaining a universal, univocal truth. It was not that the body gained more semiotic complexity during modernism. What the rise of new visual technologies did was illuminate how misguided single-strand interpretations in general had always been. In this scene, the reading of the body becomes a benchmark against which other phenomena are measured. If individual perceptions of something as visually immediate as bodily movements are so disparate and subjective, how can judgments of 'invisible' aspects be any different, for instance of an action one has not witnessed, or, in the case of novel characters, of motives and feelings? There is no vantage point anymore in modernity, only perspectives — each one as valid as the next.

Other scenes from *Berlin Alexanderplatz* approach the same topic from a different, more skeptical angle, focusing on modern man's inability to see — both in the literal sense of not perceiving what is physically manifest and in the figurative sense of a missed realization, of not understanding "warum das Leben so verfährt" (Döblin 2001a: 111). The novel announces in the beginning that man's most important assets are the eyes and feet, because "man muß die Welt sehen können und zu ihr hingehn" (ibid: 24). This is a much more difficult endeavor than might appear, given that seeing alone is marked with pitfalls and setbacks. Time and again in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, we find literal depictions of man's lack of visual acuity, and they always carry metaphorical resonances. At one point, for example, Franz runs into an old acquaintance, and both men note the irony of not having seen each other in such a long time despite frequenting the same neighborhood: "«Es ist man so, Gottlieb, daß man einen nicht sieht. Ich handle ja hier herum.» «Hier am Alex, Franz, was du sagst, da hätt ich dir doch mal treffen müssen. Läuft man an einem vorbei und hat keine Augen.» «Is so, Gottlieb.»" (ibid: 187) In this passage, the inability to notice someone becomes symbolic of people's estrangement from one another in the modern metropolis.

Many other disruptions of vision in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* denote a crisis in Franz's way of relating to the world. For instance, after parting company with

those who caused him to lose an arm, the protagonist suddenly starts to see the cheating and fraud around him "als wenn er jetzt erst Augen hätte" (Döblin 2001a: 267). This is one of many instances in which Franz seems to regain his eyesight, only to lose it again shortly thereafter. The hero's eyes fail him time after time, and he is admonished for it by Eva (ibid: 396), Karl the tinsmith (ibid: 409), and Death personified (ibid: 478), but by no one as harshly as the narrator, in whose view Franz lacks both the ability and the courage to look reality in the face: "Du siehst nichts, du hörst nichts, aber du ahnst es, du wagst nicht, die Augen darauf zu richten, du schielst beiseite" (ibid: 418). Ironically, it is the visions of physically absent people, such as Reinhold or the deceased girlfriends Ida and Mieze, that open Franz's eyes once and for all and force him to assume responsibility for his past actions, especially in the death of the two women. The narrator describes this milestone in the protagonist's life, this "Enthüllungprozeß besonderer Art" in paradoxical terms. Franz has to fall in order to rise, he must close his eyes before he can become enlightened and see the writing on the wall:

> Franz Biberkopf ging nicht die Straße wie wir. Er rannte drauflos, diese dunkle Straße, er stieß sich an Bäume, […] und wie er an Bäume stieß, preßte er entsetzt die Augen zu. Und je mehr er sich stieß, immer entsetzter klemmte er die Augen zu. […] Wie er hinfiel, machte er die Augen auf. Da brannte die Laterne hell über ihm, und das Schild war zu lesen. (Döblin 2001a: 499)

Once again, this last and most profound in a long series of transformations that Franz undergoes throughout the novel is best reflected in his eyes: "Eva sieht seinen Blick, einen stillen, dunklen, suchenden Blick, den hat sie noch nie an Franzen gesehn" (*sic*, ibid: 494). But unlike before, the hero's eyes are now silently searching for something. He is finally engaged with the outside world after having made peace with it.

The numerous metaphors of visual instability in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* dramatize the crisis of vision engendered by photography and cinema at the turn of the 20th century. They show that Döblin recognized the powerful, jolting, potentially adverse effects of these visual innovations on city dwellers in particular. Overall, however, he remained optimistic about the media. As the pub scene with Willi demonstrates, the German author understood that the new technology brought about irreversible sensory, cognitive, and affective changes, and he chose to embrace its possibilities. This is apparent in the pronounced cinematic quality of Döblin's narration. With its dense, yet exact style, its concise, but lively language, its rapid twists, and its efficacy in capturing "die Einzigartigkeit, […] die Physiognomie und das besondere Wachstum" of events (Döblin 1963a: 18), *Berlin Alexanderplatz* illustrates the *Kinostil* ('cinematic style') that Döblin recommended as part of the shift to an anti-psychological paradigm in novel writing. Thematically, his endorsement of photography and cinema can be gleaned from the fact that *Berlin Alexanderplatz*

casts the new media as the only solution to the crisis of vision that they themselves had generated. Franz's impaired vision, documented so minutely throughout the novel, finally clears up in the course of some imaginary encounters with his two deceased girlfriends. This calls to mind the experience of the first moviegoers, who associated early films with the world of the dead on account of the un-lifelike absence from them of sound and color. The most shameful low points of Franz's life flash before his eyes in the form of two cinematic specters, two projections of his own mind that take him to task about the past. Watching them — and, by extension, watching in general — is a painful, but necessary experience. Through it, the protagonist is not merely healed, but born anew, suggesting that one cannot simply revert to a pre-cinematic mode of seeing, but must embrace the changes in perception induced by mass media if one is to make sense of the modern world. In the allegory of vision and modernity that is *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Alfred Döblin comes down on the side of cinema.

The German writer's engagement with film and photography outside his 1929 novel also evinces support for the new media. He openly admitted to a fascination with technical innovations (Döblin 1986: 39) and loved films and popular entertainment unabashedly. Döblin was one of the first to visit the cinemas opening in Berlin at that time and wrote about them as early as 1909 in the essay "Das Theater der kleinen Leute" ("The Theater of the Little People"). He also penned introductions for two photography books: Mario von Bucovich's *Berlin* (1928) and August Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit* (1929). Nowhere in these writings does the German author reflect on the nature of the respective medium or, in the case of cinema, on how various aspects of filmmaking — e.g., script-writing, directing, camerawork, and editing — relate to narrative authorship. This is because Döblin was not interested in the specifics of filmmaking and photography, nor in the media debate of the 1910s. Understandably, given his training as a psychiatrist, Döblin's attention focused instead on why "the little people" go to the movies and how they experience the cinema. What he found was that, in the modern world in which pleasure had become "notwendig wie Brot" (Döblin 1985: 72), cinemas offered spectators precisely what they wanted at the end of a working day: "gerührt, erregt, entsetzt sein; mit Gelächter losplatzen" (ibid: 71). The movie screen may have resembled a white eye that spellbinds with its vacant stare (ibid: 72), but it was also "ein vorzügliches Mittel gegen den Alkoholismus, schärfste Konkurrenz der Sechserdestillen" (ibid: 73). Döblin posits further that cinema held the potential to reduce the incidence of cirrhosis of the liver and of epilepsy in newborn infants (ibid: 73). Despite the sarcastic overtones of these pronouncements, "Theater der kleinen Leute" ends with a straightforward endorsement of movie-going. The essay is ultimately an unambiguous pro-cinema manifesto designed as an affront both to classical culture and to the "Höhergebildete" who, in those days, would leave the movie theater "vor allem froh, daß das Kinema — schweigt" (ibid: 73). Döblin's

goal with this honest and sobering assessment of cinema's effect on spectators was to impress upon his fellow novelists that the new media were neither a chance occurrence nor a passing fad. He hoped it would make them commit to writing for the masses, as he himself had done, by blurring the traditional boundaries between high culture and popular culture.

So far in this section, I have made a case that evidence from Döblin's novel and essays shows him advocating for a positive valuation of the decentralizing, destabilizing effect that the new visual media had on modernity's perception of bodies and subjectivities. The separation of corporeality from psychology in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* fits neatly into this interpretive scheme, because it, too, proves to be a benefit in disguise and because clear connecting lines can be drawn between it and some features of cinema. I am thinking here in a first instance of the multiple experiences of disembodiment associated with film. The living bodies of actors are separated in time and space from the corresponding cinematic bodies, a fact rendered all the more conspicuous in Döblin's time by the absence of sound[7] and color. Furthermore, film viewers undergo an out-of-body experience of their own when they identify with the on-screen figures. Another characteristic, this time of early cinema in particular, that the purely corporeal nature of physical descriptions evokes in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is the precedence of images over character and story in nickelodeon films of the early 1900s. These first motion pictures were short in length, lasting three to fifteen minutes, and consisted of a chaotic, unstructured juxtaposition of diverse, often contradictory genres: "fact and fiction, science and nonsense, tragedy and comedy, moral and immoral tales" (Jelavich 2006: 15). By virtue of their brevity, these films lacked adequate character development, focusing instead "on the visual, the object, the physiognomy" (ibid: 15). The small, simple nickelodeon theaters that had been set up in converted storefronts and showed such motion pictures disappeared by 1915, signaling the transition to narrative feature films. Although this type of cinema was, therefore, long passé when Döblin published his novel, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* harbors a deep nostalgia for a film genre that reveled considerably more in the visual possibilities of the medium than in plotline and character psychology.

A brief aside is necessary at this point by way of situating Döblin in the broad landscape of opinions on the status of the human body in cinema. If we focus specifically on the human face, the first name that comes to mind in this context is that of Béla Balázs. Writing in 1924, the Hungarian film critic espoused the virtues of cinema as the only art form capable of restoring the visibility and legibility that the human body had lost with the advent of printing. The close-up played a central role in this recuperative process by bringing viewers closer to "the little

7 Sound film was not introduced in Germany until 1929, the same year that *Berlin Alexanderplatz* came out.

things of life" (Balázs 2011: 38), i.e., to important details that are often ignored or of whose existence people may not even be aware. For Balázs, this particular technique distinguished film from all other arts because it revealed "the struggle of a human soul with its destiny [...] in a form that no literature can equal" (ibid: 31). Only close-ups could adequately capture the interplay of facial expressions through which access was gained to the human soul. In Balázs' own words, this cinematic device acted as a magnifying glass that discloses "the deepest secrets of the inner life" (ibid: 31) and provides "invaluable material for both anthropology and psychology" (ibid: 30). Close-ups, in his view, enlarged not just the face, but the soul as well; they brought the human being closer both optically and psychologically.

Thirty years later, Roland Barthes cast new light on this subject. In a short piece from *Mythologies* (1957), the French semiotician wrote about the face of the silver screen actress Greta Garbo as it appeared in films and photographs of the 1930s. He argued that her larger-than-life countenance marked an important transition in cinema, from the archetypal "face-as-object" (Barthes 2012: 73) that, as I have indicated, had been the domain of nickelodeon films, to the face as an individualized complex of "morphological functions," as exemplified by the actress Audrey Hepburn (ibid: 75). A transition, in other words, from concept to substance, idea to event, deified mask to human face: "Garbo's face represents the fragile moment when cinema is about to extract an existential beauty from an essential beauty, [...] when the clarity of carnal essences will give way to a lyric expression of Woman" (ibid: 74). Barthes believed that the close-up had facilitated on either side of this decisive moment an enduring fascination with the human face. In this, he agreed with Balázs. Not so, however, on the exact reason(s) for this fascination. Optical proximity had nothing to do with psychological closeness in Barthes' reading of Greta Garbo's and Audrey Hepburn's faces. According to his argument, what the cinematic face gained beginning with Greta Garbo was existential lyricism, not psychological depth.

Another thirty years later, during the 1980s, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze similarly challenged the inherited wisdom on how bodies and faces function in cinema. Whereas Balázs insisted on the possibility of reading the micro-psychology within the micro-physiognomy of the human face, Deleuze left the notion of interiority aside and described the close-up of the human face as de-subjectivizing and de-humanizing. According to him, the close-up transforms the face into a nothingness, a nakedness (1986: 101). Deleuze granted that cinema offers the possibility of drawing near to the human face, but only in the sense that the ordinary roles of the human countenance — individuation, socialization, and communication — disappear, leaving behind a phantom without signifying functions, an expression of the possible without actualization (ibid: 98-99). Deleuze, then, had a different understanding from Barthes of what it meant to

get close to the human face in and through cinema, but his argument nevertheless reinforced the idea of an anti-psychological close-up in early film.

Where does Döblin fall on this spectrum of opinions about how the body relates to the forms produced by the media technologies of the early 20th century? The German author did not specifically address the human face in his writings on cinema, but he did in the introduction to August Sander's 1929 collection of photographic portraits *Antlitz der Zeit* (*Face of Our Time*). The argument he makes there reinforces the message about corporeality conveyed in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and carves out a middle ground among the three theoretical perspectives outlined above. Written in the same year as Döblin's famous novel, this short prefatory essay is entitled "Von Gesichtern, Bildern und ihrer Wahrheit" and discusses three phenomena of deindividuation in modernity. The first two are combined under the umbrella term *Abflachung* ('flattening') and described in negative terms, as "die Gleichmachung, das Verwischen persönlicher und privater Unterschiede, das Zurücktreten solcher Unterschiede unter dem prägenden Stempel […] zweier Gewalten, des Todes und der menschlichen Gesellschaft" (Döblin 1983: 5). Döblin makes clear that both the flattening of human physiognomy through death and the erasure of individuality through social conditioning presuppose a deprivation ("es ist von allen diesen Menschen etwas weggenommen," ibid: 9) and result in "[eine] gleichmachende oder angleichende Anonymität" (ibid: 10).

By contrast, August Sander's photography is described praisingly, even though the typological approach underlying it also usurps individuality. Döblin's position is that a certain kind of photographic practice can turn the leveling of individual distinctions into something beneficial, namely an opportunity for epistemological growth. Distance from the object of study or vision yields different insights than close analysis, he argues. Like scientists, historians, philosophers, and economists, who similarly operate at a remove from what they are researching or describing, August Sander's comparative photography ("vergleichende Photographie") makes possible something that detail photographers can never achieve: "eine Erweiterung unseres Gesichtsfeldes" (Döblin 1983: 12, 14). Sander's "Blick […], sein Geist, seine Beobachtung, sein Wissen und nicht zuletzt sein enormes photographisches Können" (ibid: 14) teach through alienation: "Plötzlich werden wir uns selber Fremde und haben etwas über uns gelernt. Es ist ungeheuer gut, etwas über sich zu lernen. Ob man davon Gebrauch macht, ist eine zweite Frage, aber schon das Wissen ist gut" (ibid: 12). In order to turn his portraits into "ein herrliches Lehrmaterial" (Döblin 1983: 12), Sander does not attempt to restore individuality in a world where originals are no longer possible. Rather, he draws on the potential of types to generate a critical "Kultur-, Klassen- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte" (ibid: 14). Going methodically through the types identified by Sander, Döblin underscores the richness of information that they convey merely through a visual impression: from personal and concrete aspects, such as the food people eat, the air they breathe,

their profession, and the ideology of their class, to more abstract patterns and developments, such as "die Spannungen unserer Zeit" (Döblin 1983: 14), "der rapide Wechsel der sittlichen Vorstellungen in den letzten Jahrzehnten," "die Verwischung der Altersgrenze, die Dominanz der Jugend, der Drang nach Verjüngung und nach Erneuerung," as well as the emergence of new social types (ibid: 15).

Like Béla Balázs, then, Alfred Döblin believed that mediated visual representations of the human face and body could make viewers see with new eyes things they had never noticed before, as well as things they had stopped paying attention to because of an intimate familiarity with them. On the other hand, like Barthes and Deleuze, the German author disavowed psychology and highlighted not just the epistemological but also the narrative potential that inheres in the soul-stripped body. Just before the end of his August Sander essay, Döblin writes: "Vor vielen dieser Bilder müßte man ganze Geschichten erzählen, sie laden dazu ein, sie sind ein Material für Autoren, das reizender ist und mehr hergibt als viele Zeitungsnotizen" (ibid: 15). This passage indicates that, in addition to providing epistemological benefits, Sander's photographic typology cultivated a narrative frame of mind in viewers that could help recuperate some of the visibility lost by the human frame in modernity. Neither narrative photography/cinema nor a photographic/cinematic style of literary narration depended on psychology. In point of fact, they thrived without it and could, in its absence, generate new ways of seeing — truly seeing — the human body and being. Ample evidence of this followed in the same year, 1929, as part of the exercise in anti-psychological corporeality that Döblin delivered in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

Anti-Psychologism as Political Engagement

I turn now to the political implications of Alfred Döblin's focus on the body qua body. Specifically, in this section I will argue that the novelist's gesture of dispensing with psychology in depictions of corporeality opens the text up to readings of paramount importance in the volatile political climate of the Weimar Republic. The first example in this context comes from one of the many episodes in the novel that seem to have no bearing on the main plot other than to interrupt it. The scene takes place in Henschke's pub and features the following conversation between a new patron and two regulars sitting in Franz and Lina's proximity:

> Ein Junger mit einer braunen Sportmütze geht suchend durch das Lokal, wärmt sich am Kanonenofen, sucht an Franzens Tisch, dann nebenan: »Haben Sie einen gesehen mit schwarzem Mantel, brauner Kragen, Pelzkragen?« »Ist öfter hier? « »Ja.« Der Ältere am Tisch dreht den Kopf zu dem Blassen neben sich: »Brauner Pelz?« Der mürrisch: »Kommen oft welche hier mit einem braunen Pelz.« Der

> Grauhaarige: »Von wo kommen Sie denn? Wer schickt sie?« »Das ist doch egal. Wenn Sie ihn nicht gesehen haben.« »Gibt viele hier mit nem braunen Pelz. Muß man doch wissen, wer Sie schickt.« »Hab ich doch nicht nötig, Ihnen meine Geschäfte zu erzählen.« Der Blasse regt sich auf: »Wenn Sie ihn fragen, ob einer hier gewesen ist, kann er Sie doch auch fragen, wer sie herschickt.« (Döblin 2001a: 113-14)

In a dramatic departure from Lavater's faith, religious and otherwise, in the power of man's inner being to break through the barrier of the human flesh, Döblin strips characters' appearance of psychological referents, leaving the body to stand only for itself, unencumbered by associations with the mind and soul. The fact that one interlocutor is young and wears a brown sports cap, while another has grey hair, and the third one a pale complexion says nothing about their moral character, intelligence, values, emotions, or psychology. The three men's nondescript, non-psychological, non-symbolic appearance is meant only to distinguish among the speakers without recourse to names. Their identities are as elusive as that of the man about whom the stranger inquires. In this scene, then, details of physical appearance conceal rather than disclose, anonymize rather than individualize.

Why this interest in anonymity? As my analysis of Döblin's photography essay has shown, the novelist believed that deindividuation can have significant epistemological and narrative benefits. But the political ramifications of Döblin's investment in anonymity cannot be ignored either. An excerpt from Walter Benjamin's "Kleine Geschichte der Photographie" ("A Short History of Photography") can help us unpack this further, especially since it, too, comments on Sander's photographic portraiture, albeit not with the same approbation as Döblin's text:

> Über Nacht könnte Werken wie dem von Sander [*Antlitz der Zeit*] eine unvermutete Aktualität zuwachsen. Machtverschiebungen, wie sie bei uns fällig geworden sind, pflegen die Ausbildung, Schärfung der physiognomischen Auffassung zur vitalen Notwendigkeit werden zu lassen. Man mag von rechts kommen oder von links — man wird sich daran gewöhnen müssen, darauf angesehen zu werden, woher man kommt. Man wird es, seinerseits, den andern anzusehen haben. Sanders Werk ist mehr als ein Bildbuch: ein Übungsatlas. (Benjamin 2002: 311-12)

Benjamin makes clear in this passage that, for all its noble intentions, August Sander's photographic study of the human face could easily become a tool for racial profiling in the divisive political environment of the 1920s and 1930s. The stark difference between his and Döblin's assessment of *Antlitz der Zeit* can be explained, in the first place, by how rapidly the situation deteriorated in the two years that separated the publication of their two texts. Benjamin's warning that Sander's 'picture book' could become a physiognomic practice manual speaks volumes in this respect, because it references the large-scale proliferation in those days of

racial-physiognomic handbooks. A pertinent example is Hans F. K. Günther's *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes*, which was first published in 1922 and enjoyed tremendous success in its time, going through 16 editions in 1933 and selling 420,000 copies by 1944 (Halley 1978: 40). It stands to reason that, witnessing as he did this virulent campaign of racial profiling for two additional years compared to Döblin, Benjamin would have had, by virtue of the passage of time, a different perspective on Germany's political trajectory and less cause for optimism vis-à-vis physiognomic projects.

Secondly, the disparity of opinion between the two Weimar intellectuals also reflects the double-edged nature of deindividuation itself, which, on the one hand, facilitated the Nazi efforts to objectify and dehumanize certain categories of people, and, on the other, acted as a means of resisting those same malevolent efforts. The facelessness of the modern metropolis to which Döblin had once traced the disappearance of the individual (1986: 183) suddenly held the promise of protecting people from physiognomic stereotyping. It is with this in mind that, in the pub scene with the three men, Döblin refuses to provide any unique details — be they physiognomic, sartorial, or psychological — that might identify these people beyond doubt. By equipping characters with a commonplace exterior, devoid of psychology, Döblin shows that, in literature at least, Benjamin's warning about the body becoming irremediably transparent did not have to come true. Contrary to the somewhat defeatist prediction of the German philosopher that "man wird sich daran gewöhnen müssen, darauf angesehen zu werden, woher man kommt" (Benjamin 2002: 311), the stranger from *Berlin Alexanderplatz* refuses, both physically and verbally, to satisfy the curiosity of the two pub regulars. As their attempts to read the newcomer's origin in his appearance prove fruitless, the idea crystallizes that novelists can and should adopt a proactive attitude in times of crisis — for instance, by deploying aesthetic strategies to resist ideological-political attacks on humanity. One of these strategies, for Döblin, was to protect the physical, psychological, and social anonymity of novel characters without, however, reducing them to flat, lifeless stick figures, since that would have amounted to doing the Nazis' work for them.

Additional evidence from the pub scene under discussion makes even clearer that the encounter of the three men has political valences, and it also shows that Döblin does not carry his optimism about literature's power of resistance to unrealistic extremes. An earlier scuffle in the bar between Franz, who was wearing a swastika at the time, and some Leftists had already established this locale as a public space where political tensions are played out. Lending more support to the idea that the confrontation among the three anonymous men is politically charged are the remarks of the two regulars after the mysterious visitor leaves the scene: "Die beiden am Tisch: »Kennst du den? Ich kenn ihn nämlich nicht.« »Der ist nie hier. Wer weiß, was er will.« »Ist ein Bayer gewesen.« »Der, ein Rheinländer. Aus

dem Rheinland«." (Döblin 2001a: 114) Both interlocutors resort to stereotyping by way of explaining and dismissing the ruckus caused by the stranger. But there is one major difference between their conclusions. Unhappy with the designation proposed by the first man, his companion chooses another, more problematic label. For unlike the term 'Bavarian,' which comments disparagingly on the stranger's supposed arrogance and feeble-mindedness, *Rheinländer* carried strong racial connotations in Weimar Germany — this in addition to the usual stereotype about Rhineland natives as jovial, superficial, and prone to excessive drinking. The way in which the word is used, as if it were the most degrading appellation possible, and the fact that its gist is repeated in the apposition "aus dem Rheinland" invite associations with the derogatory term *Rheinlandbastard*, which was used starting in 1919 to refer to mixed-race children fathered by African men who were stationed in the Rhineland during its occupation by France (1918-1930). Under Nazi racial theories, these children of miscegenation were considered inferior to Aryans and consigned to compulsory sterilization beginning in 1937. Already in the 1920s, however, a vigorous campaign was launched against them that resulted in a "racist conglomerate" of discriminations (Wigger 2017: 31). According to Richard Evans, "African-Germans were regarded by nationalists as the living embodiment of Germany's shame" (2005: 527). To go back to *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, even if the stranger's skin color does not identify him as someone of mixed race, the fact that prejudices against African-Germans are transferred onto him simply because someone does not like him suggests that, already in the 1920s, dangerous racial hierarchies were in place that people used and abused at will and at random.

It is not a gratuitous paradox that the racially-tinged reference to Rhineland natives goes unnoticed, or at least unchallenged, in the same bar from which Franz had been ousted earlier for openly communicating his pro-Nazi views. This oversight suggests that Nazi sympathies ran deep and were not always as visible as a swastika on an armband. Furthermore, the second half of this particular pub scene complicates the message about resistance that emanates from the earlier conversation among the three men. Specifically, it puts into perspective the apparent triumph of the anonymous stranger over his interlocutors — which is to say, also of Döblin's anti-psychological approach to the body over the racial essentialization of physical characteristics that formed an integral part of the Nazi doctrine. The fact that the two men project their stereotypical views onto the stranger despite his inscrutable appearance and defiant attitude shows that Döblin was realistic about the challenges and setbacks that a fight of this nature entailed. The message is not that opposition is futile. Rather, the novelist warns that the path of resistance is long, strewn with many difficulties, and that the value of resistance is not measured by its success alone, but, more importantly, by endurance and vigilance.

An equally important political commentary underlies the anti-psychological descriptions of Franz and his antagonist. Details of the two men's appearance are scattered throughout the novel and must be pieced together one by one. The result is a composite picture replete with inconsistencies, but telling a story nevertheless. Some information about the protagonist is mentioned only once or twice — for instance, his age ("ein Mann anfangs 30," Döblin 2001a: 26) and his "blondes Haar, rote abstehende Ohren, lustige Bullaugen" (ibid: 70). By contrast, the first part of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* teems with references to Franz's impressive build and strong physique. Measuring 1.80 meters in height (ibid: 184) and weighing "fast zwei Zentner" (ibid: 103), i.e., approximately 100 kilograms or 225 pounds, the hero is not excessively big. And yet, time and again, he is described as "der große Kerl" (ibid: 17, 29), "der eiserne Ringer" (ibid: 326), "stark wie eine Kobraschlange" (ibid: 103). Franz's former and current membership in athletic clubs is cited repeatedly as a measure of his physical prowess (ibid: 103, 172, 174). To make the inconsistency between objective reality and literary representation even more glaring, the protagonist loses weight immediately before his first encounter with Reinhold (ibid: 184) but continues to be called 'fat.' Similarly, even after losing his arm, people perceive him as a strong man "[mit] muskulöse[m] Nacken" and "straffen Beinen" (ibid: 357). Reinhold himself marvels at what Franz can do in spite of his disability: "Sein Arm faßt wie ein Kran, das ist eine kolossale Bombe, ein doller Kloben" (ibid: 350). Like Döblin's renunciation of psychology, these discrepancies draw attention to the mediated ways in which bodies are perceived. There is a big difference between the lived body and the narrated body, and Döblin makes sure readers do not confuse the two. His alienation techniques transition us from seeing-through to seeing, thereby making visible not just the work of literature but also the body in its irreducible, immanent, unrepresentable corpo-reality.

But more still is at stake, also politically, in how the protagonist of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* appears to us. Especially intriguing are the physical changes that he undergoes over time. As the novel progresses, all traces of Franz's former vigor and stamina disappear: "Dabei schmolz der kräftige Mann sehr zusammen" (Döblin 2001a: 462). He becomes very thin, "schwächer und schwächer" (ibid: 468), "sehr weiß, gelblich, mit Wasserschwellungen an den Knöcheln, Hungerödem, er riecht nach Hunger" (ibid: 472). He leaves the psychiatric hospital spiritually reborn, but physically broken, which reinforces the message conveyed by many other scenes in the novel, that body and mind do not always cohere and deserve individual attention. This wreck of a man — "todblass" (ibid: 490), "zusammengeschmolzen" (ibid: 491), and "kraftlos" (ibid: 493) — is a far cry from the strong physical impression he used to make. The full meaning of this dramatic metamorphosis can only be grasped by comparison with Franz's foil and nemesis.

The first description of Reinhold is unusually long, unitary, and rich in detail, marking this character's importance in the novel. Like Franz, he wears military-

style clothes and is in his thirties (Döblin 2001a: 192). But this is where the similarities end. Slim, with a long, yellowish face, sad eyes, and deep furrows across his forehead and on both sides of his face, Reinhold is the exact physical opposite of Franz. He stutters, drags his legs behind him "als ob ihm die Füße immer wo stecken blieben" (ibid:192), and has a weak, sickly aura about him to which his outfit contributes as well: "da sah Franz, daß er [Reinhold] gelbe elende Stiefel trug, und die dicken grauen Strümpfe hingen über Bord" (ibid: 192). One can hardly imagine a more different physical type from Franz than Reinhold. But this is only part of the story. Gradually, it becomes clear that a curious exchange of physical energy is taking place between the two men. Franz and Reinhold gravitate toward each other like two meteors on a collision course. The end of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* finds the protagonist weak, unsteady on his legs, and deathly pale — three attributes that conjure up the image projected by Reinhold during his first appearance. This is the result of a transformation begun much earlier in the book. At one point, the narrator starts a new section in the text by asking: "Wer ist es, der hier auf der Alexanderstraße steht und ganz langsam ein Bein nach dem andern bewegt?" (Döblin 2001a: 438). Without any preceding context, the question misleads readers into thinking, based on what they know about the demeanor of the two male characters, that the answer will be "Reinhold." This expectation is strengthened by the memory of a very similar, and similarly worded, question from earlier in the novel that does pertain to Reinhold: "Wer latscht, als wenn er immer ein Bein nach dem andern aus dem dicken Lehm zieht? Na, Reinhold." (ibid: 227) The person described in the later question, however, is the protagonist: "Sein Name ist Franz Biberkopf, was er getrieben hat, ihr wißt es schon" (ibid: 438). Döblin's clever rhetorical maneuver drives the point home that Franz is effectively turning into Reinhold, and this transformation is apparent in language too. One of Reinhold's idiosyncrasies is his stuttering, which carries strong associations with a fragmented psyche. By nature, Franz is not very loquacious or articulate either, but as the novel progresses, he struggles more and more to communicate with the outside world, until all he can produce in the psychiatric hospital are unintelligible sounds: "da ist kein Wort aus ihm herauszukriegen, […] im Badewasser pflegte er […] ein paar Worte zu sagen, […] zu seufzen und zu stöhnen, aber all den Tönen war nichts zu entnehmen" (ibid: 462). Reinhold, by contrast, tries — and manages — in the course of the novel to cure his stuttering by slowly reading the newspaper out loud (ibid: 321). His physical development throughout the novel is also inversely proportional to that of Franz. "The stutterer" (ibid: 215) transmutes from "eine sehr unscheinbare Gestalt, ein Junge mausgrau in mausgrau" (ibid: 212) who looks "elend […], gelbblaß, die klaffenden Linien um den Mund, die schrecklichen Querfalten über die Stirn" (ibid: 215) into someone who makes a strong physical impression on Mieze. By the time she finds herself in admiration of Reinhold's strong, vigorous right arm (ibid: 376) and by the time we find out

from eye witnesses that Mieze's murderer had single-handedly carried her body into the woods inside a heavy trunk, nothing is left of the consumptive, pitiable man from before. The transformation of Franz and Reinhold into each other is complete.

The exact point at which the two men start to shed their former selves is clearly marked in the novel and coincides with the moment of aggression that causes their falling-out. Immediately prior to the fateful car accident that leaves Franz a one-armed man, the narrator notes a major change in the main character: "das war nicht mehr Franz, der da stand. Ohne Mantel, ohne Mütze, die Augen vorgetrieben, die Hände in den Taschen und lauernd" (Döblin 2001a: 230). Reinhold is not his former self either. The man sitting in the car next to Franz is "der andere Reinhold" (ibid: 230), who does not stutter and carries himself differently: "Was hat dieser Reinhold jetzt für ne andere Stimme! Er stottert nicht, spricht laut, sitzt straff wie ein Hauptmann" (ibid: 227-28). Like many other milestones in the lives of Franz and Reinhold, this transformation, too, is described in purely corporeal and sartorial terms, rather than through cognitive or emotional states. This renders the process unfolding before us (or at least its consequences) more tangible, more easily observable, and — however paradoxical it may seem — more open to interpretation. Because Döblin excises all psychological clues from the narrative, readers can more fully and freely inhabit their role as co-creators of meaning. The only message the author conveys clearly through the timing of these events is that the transformation we are witnessing is not the coveted apotheosis that readers versed in the *Bildungsroman* tradition would have expected, but a sudden, senseless, violent experience.

This brings into focus the larger question of how to interpret the volatile game of identity and difference that Franz's and Reinhold's bodies enact. In a literary vein, the examples discussed above problematize the complex nature and narrative importance of the relationship between protagonist and antagonist. In his theoretical writings, Döblin does not address this issue explicitly, but he is adamant about a related point concerning the monocentric approach to narration of some writers, i.e., their tendency to make the fictional universe revolve solely around one character: "Fortgerissen vom psychologischen Wahn hat man in übertriebener Weise den einzelnen Menschen in die Mitte der Romane und Novellen gestellt" (Döblin 1963a: 18). As stated here, Döblin saw a direct link between the monopoly of the main hero over the action of a novel and the psychologism that plagued novel-writing. He laments this unfortunate connection also in the essay "Bemerkungen zum Roman:" "Sie [das Drama und der Roman] haben beide weder mit den Menschen noch der Wichtigkeit eines einzelnen Helden oder seiner Probleme etwas zu tun. Das alles überlasse man dem Pädagogen, Pfarrer, Psychologen, Psychiater; gedichtete Psychologie ist ein Unfug" (Döblin 1963b: 21). This quote speaks volumes about why descriptions of people are void

of psychological content in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and why the physical dynamic between protagonist and antagonist is recorded so minutely: they both serve the writer's goal to create a decentered, anti-psychological novel, while at the same time preserving the virtue of narration.

From a non-literary perspective, the story that Franz's and Reinhold's physical descriptions tell, of two men exchanging identities, is yet another example of Döblin taking issue with the strand of essentialist physiognomy that played a central role in the rise of criminal anthropology and of racial physiognomics. Cesare Lombroso, the founding father of anthropological criminology, drew on concepts from physiognomy, psychiatry, and Social Darwinism to argue that criminals could be distinguished from non-criminals through physical anomalies. Although Lombroso's theory was challenged and, eventually, disproved, it did fuel the notion that one could obtain an absolute, unadulterated image of several types of people, not just criminals — which, in turn, bred more problems and abuses. One of those who took Lombroso's theory into dangerous territory was Francis Galton (1822-1911), cousin to Charles Darwin and notorious founder of eugenics. Beginning in the late 1880s, Galton devised a technique called composite photography, which consisted in superimposing onto the same photographic plate several portraits of individuals representing a 'natural' kind — for instance, Jewish men, criminals, patients with tuberculosis, etc. The result of this overlapping procedure was a slightly blurred composite in which individual physiognomic qualities receded into the background, revealing instead the 'common characteristics' of the group.

Döblin's views could not have differed more fundamentally from those of Lombroso and Galton. Having dealt with and treated many delinquents in his psychiatric practice, the German writer was convinced that the line of demarcation between criminals and non-criminals was by and large permeable. This gave him a unique perspective on society, as he explains in the postface to *Berlin Alexanderplatz*:

> Und wenn ich diesen Menschen [den Kriminellen] und vielen ähnlichen da draußen begegnete, so hatte ich ein eigentümliches Bild von dieser unserer Gesellschaft: wie es da keine so straffe formulierbare Grenze zwischen Kriminellen und Nichtkriminellen gibt, wie an allen möglichen Stellen die Gesellschaft — oder besser das, was ich sah — von Kriminalität unterwühlt war. (Döblin 2001b: 503)

At a time when physiognomic theory was being mobilized to single out criminals from good, law-abiding citizens, Döblin employed details of physical appearance to blur this artificial distinction and expose the social hypocrisy of those who fought to maintain it. This is precisely what the physical dissolution of the protagonist into his counterpart achieves in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, perhaps nowhere more emphatically than in the description that two garden workers provide to the police of the man they had seen in the woods on the day of Mieze's disappearance: "Sie

[Zwei Gärtnereigehilfen] beschreiben den Mann leidlich, Größe etwa 1,75, sehr breit in den Schultern, schwarzer steifer Hut, hellgrauer Sommeranzug, Jackett Pfeffer und Salz, zieht die Beine, als ob er nicht ganz gesund ist" (Döblin 2001a: 415). For all their specificity, the physical and sartorial details in this passage confuse more than help, because they apply just as readily to Franz as to Reinhold. Readers know from a previous account of Mieze's murder that the perpetrator is Reinhold, but in the eyes of the police, Franz could also be a suspect, since he, too, matches the description provided by eye witnesses. According to earlier information, the protagonist is 1.80 meters tall — right around the 1.75 mark indicated by the two gardeners. Also like the described man, Franz has a strong physical build and sometimes drags his feet in a manner reminiscent of Reinhold. Moreover, his outfits in the first half of the novel often feature a dark-colored bowler and a summer suit. In a complete reversal from the physiognomic craze of the 18th century, bodily features, demeanor, and sartorial choices in this excerpt from *Berlin Alexanderplatz* collapse, rather than create, distinctions between good and bad, hero and villain, protagonist and antagonist, actual and potential perpetrator. The fact that the description which renders Franz and Reinhold virtually indistinguishable is central to the progress of a police investigation confirms beyond doubt that Döblin wanted to debunk the criminalization of human appearance and criticize the blind faith of institutions in physiognomic methods of classification and recognition. This also entails, by extension, a critique of all those who tried to discipline bodies and texts into semantic uniformity.

Last but not least, it is impossible from today's perspective to disregard the political reverberations of this sameness between two antagonistic figures. By showing that, when judged by his/her physical characteristics, one and the same person can inhabit multiple, even opposing, categories, Döblin turned the Nazis' own weapons against them. At the same time, he did not want readers to delude themselves into thinking that, if a certain doctrine is fallacious, it cannot or will not produce harm. Franz's and Reinhold's transformation sounded a timely warning in this respect. Written on the cusp of Hitler's rise to power, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* foreshadowed, through the transfer of characteristics between the hero and his antagonist-turned-alter-ego, the spread of violent Nazi ideology among ordinary citizens. In a turbulent political environment of this nature, no one is absolutely good or evil, no one supremely immune or susceptible to indoctrination. Everyone is in danger, and everyone must exert vigilance.

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To sum up, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* undoes the link between corporeality and psychology that novels had tried to naturalize over time. In so doing, it responds to the formation during the early 20th century of two very different attitudes vis-à-vis the body: on the one hand, an enthrallment with its expressive possibilities

and a readiness to advance them; and, on the other, a desire to control the body for nefarious purposes. Döblin saw both of these attitudes playing out in the fields in which he worked (literature and medicine), but also in the socio-political and cultural arenas more broadly. As a result, he worried that the urge to instrumentalize the body would prevail, with dire consequences for humankind. He also recognized that this autocratic impulse could not be repressed or contained, because it drew strength from technological developments that were there to stay, and also because it was intimately connected with the other, benign interest in the human body that similarly showed no sign of subsiding. Appropriation and fascination were two sides of the same coin when it came to corporeality.

Under these circumstances, Döblin's solution was to show that the body could not be circumscribed either by psychology or by dubious taxonomic discourses that intermixed science and racism. Franz's and Reinhold's mutual transformation unsettles the Self/Other dualism on which traditional physiognomic theories relied. Together with the absence of definitive clues about the meaning of the human frame, the blurring of boundaries in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* between protagonist and antagonist serves to counter the facialization of alterity practiced in real life by Weimar physiognomists. The bodies in this novel entice without revealing; they engage in order to estrange. By exploring the narrative potential of physical appearance outside the realm of psychology and moralizing pronouncements, Döblin invites readers to forge their own interpretation of bodies and texts. The more he refuses to psychologically disambiguate the human form, the more fervent and necessary readers' search for meaning becomes. And what better way to resist political indoctrination than to think for oneself?

By way of concluding, I want to circle back to the beginning of this chapter. Given what has been said there about Döblin's split professional personality, it may be inferred that, for all its merits in resisting the obliteration of humanity, the novelist's commitment to a de-psychologized narrative understanding of the body would have increased tensions between science and literature. This could not be further from the truth. Döblin did rail against psychological novels and go to great lengths to free his prose of psychiatric posturing. The reason for this, however, was not to keep writers and scientists apart. Rather, Döblin wanted them to develop a disciplinary identity independently of each other, then find points of common interest and ways of working together that did not involve one field encroaching upon the other. The novelist's goal, then, was not to burn bridges between writers and scientists, but to build new ones — sturdier and with more traffic in both directions. The kinds of bridges that could withstand disagreements, allow for differences of opinion while maintaining civility, and give both sides a better chance of weathering the storm that was brewing in Nazi circles.