Sounds Familiar

Intermediality and Remediation in the Written, Sonic and Audiovisual Narratives of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*

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1. Introduction

When Franz Biberkopf, the protagonist of Alfred Döblin's novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* steps out of the prison in Tegel after four years of imprisonment, »the horrible moment« has arrived. Instead of being delighted about his reclaimed liberty, Biberkopf panics and feels frightened: »the pain commences«.[1] He is not afraid of his newly gained freedom itself, however. What he suffers from is the sensation of being exposed to the hectic life and cacophonic noises of the city – his »urban paranoia«.[2]

The tension between the individual and the city, between the inner life of a character and his metropolitan environment is of course a well established topic in the epic literature of the nineteenth century, often dramatized by the purposeful narrative confrontation between city life and its peasant or rural counterpoint.[3] But as a new literary genre, the *Großstadtroman*, or big city novel, only emerges in the early twentieth century, and Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is often aligned with Andrei Bely's *Petersburg* (1916), James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) or John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) as an outstanding example of this new genre.[4] What distinguishes these novels from earlier writings dealing with the metropolis is their experimentation with new forms of narrative composition, often referred to as a »cinematic style« of storytelling. At the same time, however, filmmakers such as David W. Griffiths and Sergei Eisenstein developed

1 Döblin 1961, 13.

2 Cf. Hake 1994.

3 Cf. Williams 1987; Berbig 2011.

4 Cf. Barta 1996.

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new forms of filmic storytelling known as »montage«, which were inspired by their reading experiences of realist novels by Charles Dickens or Leo Tolstoy, experimenting with the complex interlacing of parallel narrative plots into a consistent epic format.[5]
This short and admittedly simplified juxtaposition of the montage technique as new filmic language and the emergence of the *Kinostil* as new literary genre brings us to the heart of our motivation for writing this chapter: to reflect upon the ways in which different media, in their narratives and composition, stage the city, and the intermedial relations between these forms of staging. Because of the complexity of the subject, in terms of the range of theoretical and conceptual approaches as well as in terms of the richness of existing scholarship, this chapter concentrates on a single example: *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. Even this self-imposed limitation needs further qualification, for the scholarly work dealing with Döblin and his masterpiece easily fills a library.[6] We will therefore restrict our endeavour to two sets of questions that serve as our basic concern throughout this chapter. First, what does a systematic comparison between the different media forms in which the original novel has been performed (novel, radio play, film and television series) tell us about the different ways in which *the city* has been staged as a symbol of modern conditions of life? And related to this, what are the specific techniques and styles used to create or invent a media-specific dramatization of the story? Second, what is the symbolic role and narrative function of city sounds in these mediated constructions of Berlin as a modern metropolis? How do the sonic representations of Berlin differ in the novel, the radio play and the two filmic adaptations of the subject?
To address these two sets of questions, we will start with a theoretical reflection on the concept of intermediality that informs our comparative approach to analyzing the different media versions of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*: the original novel published in 1929, the radio play *Die Geschichte vom Franz Biberkopf* written by Döblin in early 1930, the film version directed by Phil Jutzi in 1931, and finally the television series directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder and first broadcasted in 1980. We will describe and analyze the different productions in chronological order. This seems the most appropriate way of structuring the chapter as it allows for a broader contextualization of the different productions and the detection or absence of *familiar sounds* in the different media formats.
While this chapter builds on the excellent studies available on Alfred Döblin, his novel

5 Paech 1997, 122-50.

6 For a detailed bibliography of scholarly work on Alfred Döblin as well as on the different adaptations of the novel in radio, film and television, see Sander 1998. For a detailed portrait of the life and work of Döblin, see the impressive biography by Schoeller 2011.

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and its various medial adaptations, such as the impressive study by Peter Jelavich, we also present several new perspectives and more refined interpretations. Our main focus is on the sonic dimension of Döblin's book and its filmic or radiophonic adaptations – a perspective slightly neglected in most scholarship so far. Notably in response to Jelavich's intermedial approach, we aim at offering a stronger comparative perspective, analyzing the various versions of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* not only in their historical contexts but also by looking for intermediality across time. In addition we tone down the somewhat excessive political contextualization and interpretation of the radio play and Jutzi's film by Jelavich, and, at the same time, include into our analysis both the Fassbinder film and a recently realized production of a radio play based on the original script by Döblin. This broadening of the historical and material scope, as our argument will reveal, adds new insights to the rich literature on the topic.

2. Intermediality, Remediation and the Refashioning of Storytelling

That media – in both their form and their content – relate to each other is not a new insight. Yet, the theoretical approach to the various forms of intermedial relationships as a distinct field of research is still relatively young. This is also reflected in the broad, rather unspecific and sometimes contradictory way in which *intermediality* is defined and used as a concept. While scholars in literary studies often use this term in more or less open association with the terms »intertextuality« and »intertext« as developed by Julia Kristeva[7], scholars in media studies often connect it to the concept of »remediation« as introduced by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin[8] to describe the generic interrelatedness of »old« and »new« media. As Irina Rajewsky has aptly stated, the concept of intermediality has become a *termine ombrellone* – a comprehensive buzzword with many different meanings.[9]

In following the work of Irina Rajewsky, we will use a definition of intermediality that is based on the distinction of three subcategories:

1) Intermediality in the sense of *medial transposition* (for example adaptations of novels in radio or film). This category is a production-oriented, »genetic« conception of intermediality.

7 Cf. Graham 2011.

8 Cf. Bolter / Grusin 1999.

9 Cf. Rajewsky 2002. For a critical discussion of the different meanings of the term see Shail 2010.

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2) Intermediality in the sense of *media combination*, which includes phenomena such as opera, theatre, comics, illuminated manuscripts, computer or sound art installations, et cetera. The intermedial quality of this category is defined by the medial constellations that are the result of the very process of combining distinct media.
3) Intermediality in the sense of *intermedial references*. Examples are references in a literary text to a film through the evocation of filmic techniques such as montage, zoom shots or fading. Unlike in *media combination*, in *intermedial references* the referencing medium »thematizes, invokes, or imitates elements or structures of another, conventionally distinct medium through the use of its own media-specific means«.[10]

It is important to note that these categories are not mutually exclusive, and that this subdivision of intermedial practices into medial transposition, media combination and intermedial references is in no way exhaustive. But, as Jürgen Müller has pointed out, this tripartite definition of intermediality is very useful indeed, because it allows us to take into account the hitherto neglected processes of production of media formats while it also invites us to pay attention to the social dimension of media practices.[11] In going beyond the relatively narrow semiotic concepts of intertextual or intramedial references, intermediality in this tripartite definition allows for a broader use of the concept in cultural, social and historical studies. Integration of the material or technological dimension of media products and practices with their social or cultural meanings opens up new perspectives for an intermedial historiography, which is also a central concern of this volume.

In approaching the phenomenon of intermedial transpositions, combinations and references from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives and by focusing on sound, this chapter provides a contribution to the new field of intermedial historiography.[12] This contribution would be rather reductionist, however, if it would neglect the broader historical contexts in which the media products and practices under consideration emerged, developed or changed. When reflecting upon the specific urban environment in which Alfred Döblin worked on his novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and on its adaptations for radio and film, one has to be aware of the multimedia reality in which he lived. 1920s Berlin, to follow Janet Ward's account, emerged as European modernism's pre-

10 Rajewsky 2005, 51-53.

11 Müller 2008, 31-46.

12 Cf. Fickers 2012.

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mier capital of visual surface spectacles.[13] In this highly mediatized urban environment, all media were involved in struggles for cultural recognition. As Bolter and Grusin have argued, processes of remediation and refashioning of specific media formats are often characterized by rivalry and competition, where technological know-how, industrial strategies and business interests are at stake.[14] Rolf Goebel, in his comparison of the media rivalry between Ruttmann's *Berlin: die Symphonie der Großstadt* and Hessel's *Ein Flaneur in Berlin,* arrives at a similar conclusion:

> Then and now, the interaction between literature and audiovisual media is characterized by a complex dialectic of assimilation and competition, rather than a linear change from the former to the latter, even if the specific terms of this dialectic – styles, themes, ideological perspectives, moral values, etc. – are defined by changes of history, culture, and media technology.[15]

Following Goebel, 1920s Berlin offers a unique synchronic framework for the study of competing cultural media: typewriter, newspaper, telephone, gramophone, radio and film. At a time when Berlin celebrated itself as the hypermodern capital of technological speed, avant-garde arts and rampant consumer fetishism, these media, which originated in different historical contexts, co-existed in constellations of the »simultaneity of the non-simultaneous« (to adapt Ernst Bloch's famous phrase). In many ways, Berlin in the years of the Weimar Republic's cultural innovation can therefore be seen as the

> capital of modernist intermediality, as a metropolis where artists, writers, film directors, and theatre producers experimented with the aesthetic potentials and social effects created by the interaction of various traditional and avant-garde media.[16]

Intermediality, in this sense, is not only a theoretical category for the study of the complex interrelations among different media forms or their intramedial references, but also a lived reality in which new cultural practices emerge. This chapter will in fact address both dimensions by relying on an intermedial historiographical approach.

13 Cf. Ward 2001.

14 Cf. Bolter / Grusin 1999. For an impressive historical analysis of such a process of remediation and intermedial competition between the emerging media of telephone, gramophone, radio and sound film in the 1920s and 1930s, see Wurlitzer 2007.

15 Goebel 2009, 113.

16 Ibid., 111-12.

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3. Alfred Döblin, Berlin and the novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*

When Alfred Döblin, son of a Jewish tailor from Stettin[17], moved to Berlin at the age of ten in 1888, he entered a realm that was – as he declared at various occasions in his later life – to become the »humus« of all his literary and artistic thoughts.[18] This »afterbirth« as he called in an autobiographical retrospective[19] proved to be crucial for his social and intellectual development during the late phase of the Reich. Berlin, he confessed in the same article, »is the fuel that drives my car«.[20] Already in an essay entitled *Modern. Ein Bild aus der Gegenwart* (Modern. A contemporary prospect), written as an eighteen-year-old pupil, Döblin created a flâneur-like portrait of the city as a fluid and vibrant place full of noises and busy people.[21] In 1910, after a successful study of medicine, his first professional experiences as a physician specialized in neurology and several published novels, he joined the editorial board of the newly founded expressionist magazine *Der Sturm* and dedicated his hometown a first allegorical portrait with *Das märkische Ninive* (The Nineveh of Brandenburg). Here, Berlin is described as

> a peculiar city of lust and sin, channelled by railways, a crush of hounded drudges […] only praying to the goddess of time.[22]

With the publication of the short novel *Der Kaplan* (The Chaplain) in June 1914, just before the outbreak of the First World War, Döblin – according to Gabriele Sander – experimented for the first time with a montage-like narrative structure, characterized by a serial listing of disparate impressions and simultaneous perceptions of discrete details

17 Stettin, a trading town in the former German lands of Western Pomerania and today known as the Polish city of Szczecin, is one of the most important port cities of the Baltic Sea located at the Oder River estuary, some 120 km to the North-East of Berlin. Döblin's father had abandoned the family because of another woman and had moved to the United States.

18 In his essay »Berlin and the artists« from 1922, Döblin stated: »all my thinking and intellectual work – whether implicit or explicit – belongs to Berlin […] this ocean of stones that I grew up with is the native soil of all my thoughts«. Quoted in Sander 1998, 75.

19 Döblin, Erster Rückblick, quoted in Sander 1998, 74. Döblin's arrival and »new birth« in Berlin is colourfully depicted in Schoeller 2011 (37-42) too.

20 Quoted in Braunger 2006, 6.

21 Sander 1998, 76.

22 Döblin, *Das märkische Ninive*, quoted in Sander 1998, 77-78.

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of reality.[23] The main topic of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, the confrontation between the subjectivity of the individual and the collective reality of the city is somehow pre-formed in this short novel and was successively developed over the years that followed. After having served as a military doctor at various hospitals in Alsace-Lorraine during the war, Döblin was back Berlin in early 1919 and re-opened a neurological practice in the Frankfurter Allee, just a few blocks away from the Alexanderplatz.

Before Döblin started working on *Berlin Alexanderplatz* in late 1927 he published a number of essays and shorter novels dealing with Berlin as main subject, such as the utopian novel *Berge Meere Giganten* (Mountains Seas Giants, 1924) and the essay *Eine kassenärztliche Sprechstunde* (Consultation hour of a CHI doctor, 1928) where Döblin reflects on his medical practice and the many curious encounters that came with practicing in a working class district.[24] In *Berge Meere Giganten*, set in the twenty-seventh century, the giant city landscape of Berlin is ruled by a tyrant called Marduk. In using the name of one of the Babylonian gods as main character of his fantastic story, Döblin implies an analogy between Berlin and Babylon – the city that carries like no other place the symbolic signifiers of confusion, sin, temptation and destruction. Berlin, which was marked by unprecedented growth since the late nineteenth century and which turned from a residential and bourgeois Prussian city of 900,000 inhabitants in 1871 into the biggest industrial conglomerate of the Weimar Republic with more than 4 million people by 1925[25], served as a modern Babel, a »Chicago on the Spree River«.[26]

Döblin was of course not the first to artistically reflect upon Berlin as a symbol of industrialist modernism. The Futurists in their 1912 Berlin exposition; expressionist painters like Oskar Kokoschka, Ludwig Kirchner and George Grosz; poets like Johannes Becher, Ludwig Rubiner or Georg Heym; dramatists like Bertolt Brecht; or filmmakers such as Fritz Lang and Walter Ruttman – they all struggled to find an appropriate artistic language to come to terms with Berlin as the prototype of the modern condition of men, oscillating between addiction and disgust, inspiration and horror.[27] Yet Döblin was the first to depict and analyze the city using the artistic format of a novel. As Peter Fritzsche

23 Ibid., 79-80.

24 In a lecture that Döblin gave in Zürich 1932 he confessed that in his work as a physician had met a lot of »criminals«, and this had somehow provided him with most of the characters and information for his naturalistic depiction of Berlin and the »Berliners«. See Döblin 1961, 505.

25 For historical statistics of Berlin in terms of inhabitants see Wikipedia (German).

26 Schoeller 2011, 39.

27 See »Nachwort des Herausgebers« in Döblin 1961, 509-510.

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has mentioned, this artistic and intellectual examination of Berlin as the modern metropolis has successfully co-produced the modern myth of the city:

> What heightens the fascination is the link between the city as a geographical place and the city as a narrated form. From the beginning, written records and urban existence have gone hand in hand. This correspondence created an imaginary symbolic order that was as important as the city itself.[28]

In *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Döblin consequently developed a narrative style he had been experimenting with for more than a decade by then. This style, mainly characterized as *Kinostil* or filmic writing in the academic literature on *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, is defined as a narrative strategy that breaks with the »classical« linear construction of the novel with its chronologically or temporarily structured plot and homodiegetic narrator. Instead, the *Kinostil* – as theoretically developed in Döblin's reflections on the aesthetics of the novel in 1913 (the so-called *Berliner Programm*) – was intended as a plea for the re-establishment of the novel as a socially relevant instrument of artistic expression, breaking with the causal identity construction of literary characters in the psychological novels of the nineteenth century. As Eggo Müller and Andrea Melcher have shown, Döblin used film as the most popular symbol of modern aesthetic expression of his times – representing movement, dynamics, acceleration, fragmentation, flow, collectivist production, urbanity, mechanical reproduction and capitalist industry – for critical reflection on the aesthetic form and social responsibilities of literature.[29] Influenced by the observations he made as psychiatrist and inspired by the cinema as the timeliest expression of the edginess and rapidity of urban life, Döblin invented his own style of experimental prose which he described as »Döblinismus«. In a legendary *open letter* to Marinetti, Döblin distanced himself from the linguistic experiments of the Futurists and defended his *Döblinismus* as a narrative prose strategy in order to re-establish the novel as an appropriate form of contemporary literary expression.[30]

28 Fritsche 1996, 4.

29 Melcher 1996, 81-84; Müller 1988, 11-21. As Müller shows, Döblin developed his thoughts in temporal synchronicity with the so-called *Kino-Debatte* (cinema debate) of German intellectuals in the early 1910s. In this debate, prominent figures of the German intellectual milieu like Georg Lukács or Egon Friedell tried to enoble the film as art and as the most authentic aesthetic expression of the modern condition. On the *Kino-Debatte*, see Kaes 1978.

30 Schoeller 2011, 119 and 131-32.

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The basic narrative tool for creating a novel which »describes« the urban condition *and* makes it comprehensible and tangible for the reader is the technique of montage. This technique allowed Döblin to experiment with what he called »Tatsachenphantasie«, a factual imagination or poetics based in mimesis. According to Steffan Davies and Ernest Schonfield, Döblin's literary texts emerge from »a hybridisation of discourses: medical, psychiatric, biological, socio-historical, anthropological, ethnological, philosophical, and theological«, masterfully blended in his *Kinostil*.[31]
Following Joachim Paech, the technique of montage in »filmic writing« (*Kinostil*) has at least three forms:

- first, the construction of a meaning based on the combination of disparate narrative elements into a new narrative relationship.
- second, the literary mimesis of a montage-like perception of reality.
- third, the deconstruction of meaningful contexts and their decomposition into disparate elements which – in their heterogeneity – enable new / alternative readings.[32]

If the first two forms of montage can be described as »integrative« techniques of montage, potentially open to the creation of the illusion of a consistent reality by the author, the third form can be characterized as »deconstructive montage«, which aims at reproducing the heterogeneity of our perception of reality at the level of aesthetic production, thereby emphasizing the intrinsic impossibility of constructing a coherent perception of reality.[33] Given the temporal correlation of the emergence of film as a new form of storytelling and the metropolis as exemplary site for the experience of an accelerated modernity, the *Kinostil* proved a most powerful stylistic tool for Döblin, who experimented with montage in several ways.[34]
The most evident form of montage in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* involves the extensive documentary use of text fragments originating from other media, making the novel a primary source for the study of intermedial and intertextual relationships. In collage-like design, Döblin's original manuscript gives evidence of the integration of text fragments from newspaper articles, advertisement boards, poster walls, letters, statistics, popular songs, weather reports, radio announcements, court files, industrial leaflets, administra-

31 Davies / Schonfield 2009, 9.

32 Paech 1988, 129.

33 Ibid., 130.

34 On the temporal correlation and discursive interconnectedness of the city and the film, see Uricchio 1982.

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tive forms, window dressings and obituary notices. The integration of these heterogeneous text fragments into the narrative mainly aimed at creating a sense of simultaneity, expressing the disparate and conflicting perception of reality by the main protagonist of the story, Franz Biberkopf. Contemporary critics of the novel already referred to the term of »montage«[35] or used filmic and photographic analogies to describe the new stylistic principle. In a book review for the *Niederdeutsche Heimatblätter*, Chistian Otto Frenzel explained the »absolute verisimilitude« of the novel as a result of the »fast, cinema-like, photographically superposed alternation of images«[36], and Erich Mühsam, a leftist litterateur and political activist, praised the book as »the first and successful example of a written photomontage«:

> No laborious explanations, but a film of short sequences that speak for themselves; life flows by and it does so in front of the cinematographic lens in Franz Biberkopf's brain.[37]

Each of the opening paragraphs of the nine books of which the novel is composed functions as a kind of atmospheric introduction to the next episode, providing the reader with a dense description of the urban environment. The opening passage of the fifth book, in which Biberkopf gets trapped into a thievery and tragically recognizes his failed effort to develop into a »sincere man«, serves as an impressive example of Döblin's *Kinostil*:

> Boom, boom, the steam pile-driver thumps in front of Aschinger's on the Alex. It's one story high, and knocks the rails into the ground as if they were nothing at all. Icy air, February. People walk in overcoats. Whoever has a fur piece wears it, whoever hasn't, doesn't wear it. The women have ice on thing stockings and are freezing, of course, but they look nice. The bums have disappeared with the cold. When it gets warmer, they'll stick their noses out again. In the meantime they nip a double ration of brandy, but don't ask me what it's like, nobody want so swim in it, not even a corps.

35 Walter Benjamin identified the montage as dominant stylistic principle of the novel and praised its epic potential. See Benjamin 1930, »Berlin Alexanderplatz«, quoted in Sander 1998, 146.

36 Ibid., 145.

37 »Da wird nichts umständlich begreiflich gemacht, da rollt ein Film ab in kurzen Bildern, die sich selbst erklären; da flutet das Dasein vorbei, und zwar an der kinematografischen Linse im Hirne des Franz Biberkopf«. See Mühsam 1984, 131-32.

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> Boom, boom, the steam pile-driver batters away on the Alex. […] Everything is covered with planks. The Berolina statue stood in front of Tietz's, one hand outstretched, a regular giantess, now they have dragged her away. Maybe they'll melt her and make medals out of her.
>
> People hurry over the ground like bees. They hustle and bustle around here day and night, by the hundreds. The street-cars roll past with a screech and a scrunch, yellow ones with trailers, away they go across the planked-over Alexanderplatz, it's dangerous to jump off. The station is laid in our on a broad plan, Einbahnstrasse to Königsstrasse past Wertheim's. If you want to go east, you have to pass police headquarters and turn downs through Klosterstrasse. The trains rumble form the railroad station towards Jannowitzbrücke, the locomotive puffs out a plume of steam, just now it is standing above the Prälat, Schlossbräu entrance a block further.
>
> Across the street they are tearing down everything, all the houses along the city railroad, wonder where they got the money from, the city of Berlin is rich, and we pay the taxes.[38]

Like in film, Döblin plays with different »camera perspectives«, offering a montage of Biberkopf's simultaneous perceptions of the dynamic urban reality. Like a cameraman, he zooms in and out, makes tracking and pan shots, and changes the field sizes and lengths of his narrative lens. Obviously, the visual analogies are striking. But it would be short-sighted to reduce the innovative form of storytelling in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* to its analogies of visual montage technologies in filmmaking. The text owes its narrative force and dramatic tension in no lesser degree to the use of a specific language and syntax, characterized by an extensive use of local dialect and onomatopoetic spelling in order to create a naturalistic atmosphere. Both techniques are of crucial importance when it comes to the literary reconstruction of the urban soundscape of Berlin. More than anything else it is Döblin's playful handling of the sonic characteristics of Berlin as a social space, inhabited by people speaking in a very recognizable dialect that make *Berlin Alexanderplatz* a »monument of Berlinism« (*Monument des Berlinischen*), to quote Walter Benjamin. As he put it: »Döblin talks the city. Berlin is his megaphone«.[39] Specifically, according to Toni Bernhart, Döblin relies on three different techniques to make the city sound to its readers.[40] Apart from the abovementioned onomatopoetic

38 Döblin 1997, 216-17.

39 Benjamin 1930, »Krisis des Romans«, quoted in Sander 1998, 144.

40 Cf. Bernhart 2008.

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spelling and *O-Ton*[41] literary reproduction of local dialect, the text offers literal descriptions of noises, sounds or music and finally works with sonic presuppositions as a result of the creation of thick sensorial descriptions of specific situations. Examples of the first category are: »Boom, boom, the steam pile-driver batters away on the Alex«[42], quoted above, and

> […] as Franz closed his eyes, he heard the bells ringing. For several minutes he sat in silence, listened to them ringing: Boom, bim, bum, boom, bim, bam, bum, bum, bim.[43]

Very often, the onomatopoetic spelling is combined with descriptions of sounds or audible phenomena, for example when Biberkopf hears that his girlfriend Mieze was murdered:

> As he thinks of Miezeken something rises in him, fear arises, terror beckons him, there he is, there ist hat mower, Death's his name, hatchet and staff in hand he marches o'ver the land blowing on a little flute, he wrenches his jaws apart, and takes a trumpet, and beats the kettledrum and now it looms, a doom, gloom-black, battering ram, drooms, and softly drooooooms.[44]

The use of verbs, adjectives and nouns that explicitly refer to an acoustic event is for sure the most common literary strategy to narrate sound. When Döblin describes the turbulent scenes at the slaughterhouse in the beginning of the fourth book, he creates a dense acoustic impression by using a sequence of nouns or verbs which evoke a dull atmosphere:

> Nothing can be seen, the steam is too thick. But a continuous noise of squealing, snorting, clattering, men's voices calling back and forth, tools being dropped, slamming of lids. […] Behind there must be the slaughter-pens, there is a sound of smacking, clattering, squealing, screaming, rattling, grunting. […] Bing, one of them has run in front of his feet, bing, another one. The man is quick, he has given an account of himself, the hatchet has whizzed down, plunged into the lot of them

41 In German *O-Ton* refers to the *original tone* of a live recording on location.

42 Bernhart 2008, 216.

43 Döblin 1997, 267.

44 Ibid., 534.

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> with its blunt side, first on the head, then on another. That was a great moment. Kicking, writhing. Flinging from side to side. No longer conscious. Just lying there.[45]

By stressing the fact that nothing can be seen because of the steam, Döblin emphasizes the »blindness« of his protagonist and prepares the reader for his acoustic descriptions of the scene. The sensorial liveliness of these descriptions is further strengthened by the tactile specifications of the butcher's tacit knowledge and the rapid sequence of sonic words (smacking, clattering, squealing) which invoke the trope of the intrusive sound discussed in our introduction. Döblin's snapshot-like literary descriptions of specific situations can evoke an acoustic image in the readers mind, even if he does not refer to a concrete sound event in the narrative. This is what Bernhart describes as »sonic presuppositions«, which pertain to the implicit audibility presupposed by the reader when diving into the narrative.[46] While reading a passage where Döblin describes the hustle and bustle at the Alexanderplatz or a heated debate in a pub from the character's voice perspective, the reader identifies with the character and feels, hears or sees like him. Because of the montage-like construction of the novel and its style of simultaneity, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* has been described as a »sensual event« that

> covers the reader's eye with forms, colours, movements, letters; his ears with exclamations and dull mechanical and human sounds; and the whole body with vibrations and temperatures.[47]

This implicit process of sonification is often made explicit when the author verbalizes his characters' hearing or listening by using verbs that describe these acts. As Toni Bernhart established in a study of the use of such verbs in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, the novel contains 251 instances of usage of the three main verbs *hören* (hear), *horchen* (hark) and *lauschen* (listen), or compounds or derivations in which they figure.[48] But what is more interesting than this statistical evidence is the question of what is being heard, harked or listened to: What in fact does Franz Biberkopf hear when Döblin makes use of these diegetic references? Surprisingly, perhaps, Biberkopf mainly listens to the voices or speech by his fellow men, rather than to the cacophony of big city life. At least statistically, the great majority of explicit references to acts of hearing, harking and listen-

45 Ibid., 178.
46 Bernhart 2008, 54.
47 Klotz 1987, 390.
48 Bernhart 2008, 55.

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ing refers to interactions in which he is either actively or passively involved. Bernhart summarizes his findings with saying that it seems as though the soundscape of the city mainly consists of talk.[49] If somewhat overstated, perhaps, Bernharts findings rightly hint at the importance of the spoken language – and especially the Berlin dialect – as decisive aesthetic and narrative element in the construction of Döblin's *acoustic image* of Berlin.

4. Radio Play. Die Geschichte vom Franz Biberkopf

In early 1930, only a few months after the publication of the novel (October 1929), Döblin started working on a radio play adaptation of his book. Being an enthusiast radio amateur who owned an advanced four-tube superhet receiver by 1928[50], Döblin was also a regular guest on various radio programmes of the Berlin station.[51] He would perform his own works, but he was sought after as a critical mind for talks and discussions about contemporary literature and reflections about the Zeitgeist as well. He debated »cultural Bolshevism« with Friedrich Muckemann, a Jesuit publicist and sharp critic of National Socialism, discussed »The duties of authors in our time« with Bertolt Brecht and other writes, performed improvised storytelling before the microphone with Rudolf Arnheim and Arnold Zweig amongst others, and chatted with his son Wolfgang about the father-son relationship.[52]

Döblin embraced the new technology of radio as an excellent tool for the dissemination of culture among the masses. Against the elitist conception of art and »high culture« defended by many intellectuals of his time, he welcomed the medium of broadcasting for its »multiplier effects« and denied the widely shown cultural pessimism towards the new medium.[53] In contrast to Rudolf Arnheim[54] or Bertolt

49 Ibid., 61.

50 See Jelavich 2006, 76 for a photograph of Döblin tinkering with his radio set. The picture is also used for the cover design of the book.

51 Melcher 1996, 199-201 has documented at least 30 interventions of Döblin on the radio between 1925 and 1932, with a strongest presence in 1930.

52 For a detailed analysis of Döblin's radio presence in Weimar broadcasting, see Melcher 1996, 153-204.

53 Ibid., 143.

54 Cf. Arnheim 1936.

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Brecht[55], Döblin never aimed at developing a consistent theory of radio, but he nevertheless had a clear vision concerning the possibilities and limitations of broadcasting as a medium for the dissemination of literature. Although being only third on the list of radio's main or most adequate functions – the first being the dissemination of music, followed by the transmission of news – Döblin asserted that literature had to undergo a fundamental reworking before being suitable for broadcasting. At a conference on *Literature and Radio* in Kassel in the Fall of 1929, jointly organized by the *Reichsrundfunkgesellschaft* (RRG, the federal broadcasting organization of the Reich) and the literary section of the Prussian Academy of Arts, Döblin – as invited keynote speaker – expressed his thoughts on the topic[56]: »Radio is a medium that alters literature. Literature must or would have to change its form in order to conform to radio«. While literature had fallen silent in an unnatural way because of the invention of printing, radio offered a new acoustic medium, able to »revitalize the native soil of literature«. In this context, the »Schriftsteller« (composer of written language) had to become a »Sprachsteller« (composer of spoken language).

The potential of radio, however, to restore the acoustic dimension of literature, appeared to be suitable for a limited number of literary genres only. For Döblin, the characteristics of radio are audibility, brevity, terseness and simplicity, but these characteristics only apply to the lyrical genres and the essay. In contrast, drama and epic, which need »breadth, expansiveness, and flow«, are not suited for radio at all. In Döblin's view, the audible voice does not add anything positive to the fantasy – quite the contrary; the specific sound of a radio voice does in fact restrict the »mental and sensual immersion« into a story. The radio is similarly inappropriate for drama, as a dramatic performance owes its aesthetic quality and social importance to the visual presence of its actors on stage. Theatre, according to Döblin, »is by no means at all broadcasting«; it involves, by definition, »a collective experience«. The theatre productions and drama adaptations that have been aired so far were nothing but »black and white reproductions of a colour picture«. Despite the fact that »radio had the power to address a 100,000 people simultaneously«, he concluded, »it speaks to 100,000 individuals«.

Because of this basic impossibility for broadcasting to assimilate the literary genres of

55 Brecht developed his thoughts on radio in a number of critical essays between 1927 and 1932. Most well-known is his article *Der Rundfunk als Kommunikationsapparat* (1932), where he criticizes the function of radio as a »distribution apparatus« and pleas for a reconfiguration of radio as a »communication apparatus«.

56 A reprint of the proceedings of this conference is to be found in Bredow 1950, 311-66. All quotations in the following passages are short extracts from this lecture as reprinted in Bredow 1950, 311-17.

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drama and the epic novel, Döblin ended his lecture with a plea for the development or invention of a truly »folk like radio art«. This new art form, he was convinced, could only be a literary development of the *Hörspiel,* the radio play. Because it blurred the classical boundaries between the different literary genres and it could assimilate music as well as other sounds the radio play offered the potential of a truly new art form:

> I truly believe that only the playful use of lyric, epic and also essayistic elements will enable the production of a real radio play in the future, which also implies the use of the other expressionist means of radio such as music and sound.[57]

With his call for the development of the radio play as a genuine artistic format for radio broadcasting, Döblin echoed similar claims made by avant-garde radio makers such as Hans Flesch[58], Alfred Braun[59] or Walter Bischoff.[60] Many radiophonic experiments of Weimar broadcasting in the late 1920s and early 1930s witness of this search for a new art form. Alfred Braun developed so-called *Hörbilder* (acoustic pictures), piecing together different sounds and noises in a non-narrative and impressionistic fashion in order to characterize a particular setting or idea.[61] Walter Bischoff, in *Hallo! Hier Welle Erdball*

57 »Es ist mir sicher, daß nur auf ganz freie Weise, unter Benutzung lyrischer und epischer Elemente, auch essayistischer, in Zukunft wirkliche Hörspiele möglich werden, die sich zugleich die anderen Möglichkeiten des Rundfunks, Musik und Geräusche, für ihre Zwecke nutzbar machen«. See Döblin 1929, »Literatur und Rundfunk«, in: Bredow 1950, 317.

58 First artistic director of the Südwestdeutsche Rundfunkdienst (Radio Frankfurt), 1924-1929, then head of Berlin based Funk-Stunde (Radio Hour). He was forced from office by the Nazis and partly imprisoned in the concentration camp Oranienburg near Berlin. He vanished without a trace in the outskirts of Berlin in spring 1945. For a detailed discussion of Flesch's innovative impact both on the theory and practice of radio play in Weimar Germany, see Gilfillan 2009, 45-86.

59 Actor and one of the first reporters of Funk-Stunde (Radio Hour) of the Berlin station. There he was head of the literary department (until 1929) and of the news department until he got arrested by the Nazis in 1933. After the war he served as first director of the Sender Freies Berlin (SFB) until 1958.

60 After a career as scenario editor at the Breslauer Städtische Bühnen, Bischoff was artistic-director and director general of the SchlesischeFunkstunde (Silesian Radio Hour, 1925-1933). He too had to resign from all functions after the Nazis came to power and was arrested. After the war, he became the first director general of the Südwestfunk in Baden-Baden. For biographical notes of all three personalities, see Bräutigam 2005.

61 See Jelavich 2006, 80.

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(Global Station Calling, 1928), experimented with an additional principle of composition, based on stringing together a sequence of disparate scenes, such as a telegraph office, a transatlantic steamer, an African village, and so on.[62]

A masterful realization of Braun's concept of *Hörbilder* is of course Walter Ruttmann's acoustic montage *Weekend* (1930). After the success of his avant-garde silent film *Berlin, Symphony einer Großstadt* (1927), Ruttmann created an acoustic portrait of a weekend in Berlin, adapting his film editing techniques to sound broadcasting. This eleven-minute experimental »acoustical film«, as Alfred Braun called it, consists of 240 sound bites of less than three seconds on average and explored the interface of film and broadcasting technologies through the use of montage, sound sampling techniques and editing »to capture and rearrange the fleeting and oftentimes unnoticed sounds of daily experience«.[63] The intellectual debates about the radio play as genuine art form coincided with the first experiments of utilizing the new technology of optical sound recording on film stock for broadcasting. This new emerging genre of the *Hörfilm* was not only a radical innovation in terms of its aesthetic and narrative characteristics; it was also a technical innovation and practical challenge. Both Bischoff and Ruttmann used the *Tri-Ergon* process which had been in use by experimental filmmakers since the mid-twenties. The fixation of sounds on film tape enabled for the first time the editing of sound bites in a montage-like manner, whereas earlier radio play experiments with pre-recorded sounds on discs had struggled with the »unnatural« combination of live and recorded sound. It was Hans Flesch, the avant-garde pioneer of Weimar radio and director of the Frankfurt station, who recognized the radical innovative potential of such technologies for the medium of broadcasting and for the radio play in particular. During a meeting of the programme committee of the *Südwestdeutscher Rundfunkdienst* in Wiesbaden in early June 1928, Flesch held a flamboyant plea for the use of recording technologies in the production of radio programmes. As a »mechanical instrument« (!), radio could only find its characteristic function by fully complying with the mechanical nature of the medium. The radio play in particular requires absolute precision, which could only be achieved through sound film:

> By recording a radio play on sound film, the director can – by means of cutting, cross-fading, and splicing – create a piece of art to be presented to the listener in the evening after he is fully pleased with it.[64]

62 Ibid., 81.

63 Gilfillan 2009, 3.

64 Flesch 1928, 31-63. Quoted in Stoffels 1997, 719.

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In a similar way, Bischoff noted that »acoustic dramaturgy is unthinkable without technical dramaturgy«.[65]

While many broadcast professionals reacted with scepticism to Flesch's programmatic statements or Bischoff's experimental broadcasts, their vision perfectly resonated with Döblin's ideas about what an original radio play should be. Döblin himself had made first contacts with the genre of radio play in 1929, when his drama *Lusitania* (1919) had been reworked as a radio play by Hans Peter Schmiedel and broadcasted – opening with an announcement by Döblin himself – under the new title of *Der Untergang der Patagonia* (The sinking of the Patagonia) by the Leipzig station in October 1919.[66] After the big success of his novel, Döblin – most likely by invitation of the new director of the Funk Stunde AG, Hans Flesch – started working on the script for a radiophonic adaptation of his novel. Already in May 1930, Flesch announced the production of the play which can be interpreted as a symbol of the great prestige that he accorded to the project. Another indication of the Radio Hour's high regard for Döblin's work was, according to Peter Jelavich, the fact that they hired the well known actor Heinrich George to lend his voice to the character of Franz Biberkopf.[67] George, who was to dominate the screen version of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* a year later, was also meant to become the omnipresent voice of the radio play.

But how to rework a novel of 529 pages into a radio play of approximately 80 minutes? A massive abbreviation of the story was needed of course, but to remediate the complex novel into an »acoustic picture« or »sonic photomontage« asked for more than a drastic shortening of the narrative. Erich Mühsam, who had praised the novel as the first successful literary »photomontage«, argued in an essay entitled *Franz Biberkopf and Radio* that the radio play should simply replicate the acoustic montage of the novel. Just as Döblin's manner of writing was »a fabulously subtle recording apparatus« that was able to create a lively impression of Biberkopf's feelings and of Berlin's turbulent life,

> the radio microphone only needs to listen in wherever a scene from *Berlin Alexanderplatz* happens to be playing, without any outside direction.[68]

65 Quoted in Jelavich 2006, 87.

66 Döblin decided to change the title of the play because he feared anti-semitic outbursts similar to the ones he had faced when *Lusitania* was premiered in Darmstadt in 1926. The title of the drama referred to the British passenger ship that had been torpedoed by a German submarine in 1915. The fact that the sinking of the Lusitania contributed to American intervention in the war made it a sensitive topic even after the war.

67 Jelavich 2006, 98-99.

68 Mühsam 1930, quoted in Jelavich 2006, 100-01.

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In short, the play needed to radiate the novel's spirit and language, by being *biberköpfisch* (Biberkopf-like).

According to Peter Jelavich, the necessity to produce a play in line with the characteristics that Döblin himself had formulated in his Kassel lecture in 1929 – audibility, brevity, terseness, and simplicity – confronted the author by one choice in particular: he needed to decide whether the play should focus on Berlin or Biberkopf as protagonist.[69] Döblin chose the latter – a choice which had a huge impact on the play's narrative composition and dramatic staging. Although he provides us with no traceable evidence for his motivation to foreground the story of Biberkopf, the play's revised title (*Die Geschichte vom Franz Biberkopf*; The Story of Franz Biberkopf) and its narrative structure clearly reveal the secondary role of Berlin. What are the implications for the radio play's representation of the urban soundscape of Berlin? How are urban sound events used to dramatize the narrative?

Before addressing these questions, it is important to point at the fact that the play was never aired during the years of the Weimar Republic. The first broadcast of the play, based on the original script of Döblin, only happened in 1963, six years after his death.[70] Curiously enough, one had to wait until the fiftieth anniversary of Döblin's death in 2007 before the play was realized in a version that fully concords with the original radio manuscript written by Döblin in 1930.[71] To this day, there has been no consistent account explaining the cancellation of the play's broadcast, which in advance was prominently advertised in radio journals and on the radio. While some refer to inopportune political circumstances that confounded the airing of the play because of its leftist undertone, others refer to statements by Flesch and Döblin, who publicly claimed that the play wasn't ready for dissemination yet. Schwitzke and Jelavich strongly push for a political interpretation of the cancellation referring to the sweeping success of the National Socialist Party in the September elections of 1930. The NSDAP reached 18.2 %

69 Ibid., 100.

70 A first transmission was realized by the Berliner Rundfunk of the GDR on 11 August 1963, to be followed by a transmission on the Norddeutschen Rundfunk on 15 September the same year. See Sander (1998), 225. Both versions were based on the original manuscript of the play written by Döblin and on the transcription of the pre-recorded prototype-version of the original play by Wolfgang Weyrauch. For the transcript of the recorded version, see Prangel 1975, 199-236, for the edited version of the manuscript by Döblin, see Schwitzke 1976.

71 The play was a co-production of the Südwestrundfunk (SWR), the BayrischerRundfunk (BR) and the Rundfunk Berlin Brandenburg (RBB) and aired in 2007 on 24 June (BR 2 and SWR 2) and 26 June (RBB). The complete play is available on CD as a bonus to the film on the DVD-edition sold by Arthaus.

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of the votes, 15.7 % more than in the elections of two years earlier, and became the second strongest party in the Reichstag.[72] Earlier anti-Semitic attacks against Döblin and deletion of politically critical words or passages (for example the opening dialogue between Job and »a voice« and the slaughterhouse scene) are interpreted to be the result of ideologically motivated censorship and a sign of the rising influence of right-wing extremists in Weimar broadcasting. To counter this political interpretation of the radio play's cancellation, Sander and Melcher argue that Döblin himself announced it on radio the day it was scheduled for transmission (30 September 1930) and that this suggests he was motivated by artistic reservations, rather than political ones.[73] Döblin said that the play in its actual state was not »mikrophongeeignet« (ready for the microphone) and that whole passages needed to be completely reworked. He explained they had started experimenting with pre-recording some passages on sound film and discs – an experience which had opened up completely new possibilities in terms of sound design and narrative direction. That a complete first version of the play was pre-recorded indeed and survived in the German *Rundfunkarchiv* strongly indicates in our view that the cancellation happened due to artistic considerations.[74]

The 2007 production gives us a vivid impression of how Döblin might have wanted his play to sound. It opens with a dialogue between Job and »a voice«, staged as a prologue recorded on a shellac disc. The voice whispers Job's name three times, and Job inquires »who is calling? [...] Who is it? …Who is asking«? »I'm only a voice«, to which Job replies, »A voice comes from a throat«. The voice continues asking what he fears most and why he doesn't accept any help. Job replies that nobody wants to help him – neither god nor the devil. »And you«, the voice asks, »do you help yourself«? »I can't«, Job replies. »You must«, the voice answers laughingly before it fades away [...] Because of its »radical indeterminacy« the opening offers a brilliant way to begin the story,

> inasmuch as every radio listener likewise hears a voice that does not emanate »from a throat«. […] Thus at the very outset of the script, listeners are warned to be suspicious of whatever they hear on the airwaves.[75]

More so, the dialogue between Job and »the voice« (which reappears twice during the play) – although it is not an accurate reflection of the biblical figure of Job – mirrors the

72 Schwitzke 1976; Jelavich 2006.

73 Sander 1998; Melcher 1996.

74 See the copy at the German Broadcasting Archive, Frankfurt, signature C 457.

75 Jelavich 2006, 104.

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fragile mental and emotional state of Biberkopf and underscores his hubris.[76] The playful association between the figures of Job and Biberkopf is reinforced by the fact that both parts are spoken by the same actor.[77] Right from the beginning of the play, the listener is confronted with a complex narrative construction, characterized by a constant shift between author and character voice, thereby blurring the boundaries between the diegetic and non-diegetic narrative perspective.

But what about the sonic representation of the city? Does the play offer the »acoustic images« of Berlin that Döblin was hoping for, despite his decision to have Biberkopf as the story's protagonist? Indeed it does. By constructing various »acoustic bridges«[78] among sounds and voices of different realms, the play offers a fascinating radiophonic portrait of Berlin as *locus delicti* of the story. Already the opening scene right after the prologue puts the listener in the position of a pedestrian walking on the streets of Berlin. He encounters voices from different spheres. A cacophony of vendors (from which Biberkopf's voice stands out) and newspaper men draw the listener immediately into the heart of the city. The whole scene is acoustically underpinned with music and *O-Ton*-street noises, creating an interesting tension between a naturalistic impression and a deliberate deconstruction of the diegetic perspective. This principle of mixing pre-recorded background noises (for example of a pub) with music and using them simultaneously as acoustic background for the play's monologues and dialogues make the 2007 version an intriguing example of a playful and complex narrative, constantly blurring the boundaries between realistic reportage and fantastic narration, between reality and psyche.

The strongest signifier with regard to the play's topographical setting is the extensive use of Berlin dialect, however. The main voices of the 2007 play are all taken from well known Berlin actors, such as Andreas Leupold (Biberkopf / Job), Andreas Schmidt (Reinhold) and Jule Böwe (Mieze). Their Berlinesque voices have probably the strongest impact on making the play sound »authentic« in terms of its spatial setting. But in order to maintain the ambiguity of character identity – the eliding and confusion of voices were

76 For an analysis of the meaning of Döblin's references to Jewish religion and mythical figures in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, see Bayerdörfer 1985 and Bird 2009.

77 In the 2007 version the role of Biberkopf (and Job) is spoken by Andreas Leupold.

78 The concept of »acoustic bridge« stems from Rudolf Arnheim's theory of radio (1936). Arnheim argues that the lack of visual clues in radio allows the creation of acoustic bridges that arise between all kinds of different sounds: voices, recitations, discussions, songs, music, noises – »what hitherto could exist only separately now fits organically together: the human being in the corporeal world talks with disembodied spirits, music meets speech on equal terms«. See Arnheim 1936, 199.

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a fundamental principle of composition in the novel – Döblin, in the view of Jelavich, resorted to »an obfuscation of sociolinguistic boundaries«:

> To rescue the polyvocality of his novel, Döblin had to emlay, quite literally, multiple voices; but whereas the printed text allowed a blurring of identities, the obvious distinctions among the voices of actual actors and actresses forced the roles to be differentiated. […] In particular, when the voices spoke *Hochdeutsch* they maintained their distance from Biberkopf; but the more they slipped into word games, rhymes, and Berlin dialect, the more they assimilated themselves to his thoughts and character. While the voices of the actors and actresses could not help but remain distinct, they could meld into each other across the »acoustic bridge« by varying their manner of speaking, by becoming *biberköpfisch*.[79]

This »sociolinguistic slippage« among voices, as Jelavich points out, was paralleled by the use of music to bridge the realms of the play. As in the novel, the radio play – both in its original and in its 2007 version – evoke many popular tunes of the day. Tunes like *Seit wann bläst deine Großmama Posaune* or *Ich hab' mein Herz in Heidelberg verloren* feature prominently. When Biberkopf first meets Sonja (the prostitute who later becomes his girlfriend Mieze), they start singing a popular tune from the operetta *Eine Frau von Welt* in duet:

> Schwör mir keine Treue, leist mir keinen Eid [...] . denn es reizt das Neue jeden mit der Zeit. Heiße Herzen geben niemals Ruh, suchen frischen Antrieb immer zu. Schwör mir keine Treue, weil ich mich zerstreue – gerade so wie du.[80]

Popular music as a major form of urban entertainment and leisure culture functions as an important intermedial element both in the novel and in the radio play, but its impact on the imagination of the »reader« is even stronger in the acoustic medium of the radio (or sound film).

Döblin's most innovative contribution when thinking about how to extend the artistic possibilities of radio in his *Story of Franz Biberkopf* however is his idea to give a voice to mute objects. Probably the most startling scene of the whole play is the housebreaking passage where Biberkopf has to keep cave. The scene is introduced by the voices of the two cars – one *Fiat* and one *Opel* – which will have to drive the Pums gang to the storehouse:

79 Jelavich 2006, 111.

80 The song was originally performed by Max Hansen and Edith Schollwer (1927).

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What kind of car are you?
An old Opel, and you?
A Fiat! I've been standing and waiting here for 3 hours already…
What are you waiting for, Opel?
It is not hard to imagine…
Kaiser Wilhelm Street: they're out to play a trick on us again!
Sounds familiar!
Watch out! They are coming.[81]

After this opening dialogue between the two cars, the members of Pums gang get into the cars whose engines are roaring. The whole scene – the drive to Kaiser Wilhelm Street, the housebreaking, Biberkopf's realization that he was taken for a ride, his rising antagonism that grows into a hysterical laughing when they try to escape, and finally his brutal being thrown from the car and being overrun – is constantly commented upon and interpreted by the voices of the two cars. Their duet-like dialogue – with the alternation of the two voices reinforced by the music's rhythm – serves as a dynamic motif, as well as a powerful narrative element in the scene's dramatization. Both the Opel and the Fiat express their disapproval of the criminal activities and show a great deal of sympathy for Biberkopf, especially when he is thrown from the car. The scene ends with the fading sound of the two cars running away from the overrun body of Biberkopf – who, in the next sequence – wakes up in the hospital and learns that the doctors had to amputate his right arm in an emergency operation [...]
Although Döblin during his lifetime has never had the chance to hear a broadcast of his radio play, the historically accurate 2007 version of the play tellingly witnesses of the ageless modernity and narrative power of his original manuscript and of his successful ambition to contribute to the development of the radio play as a genuine acoustic art form.

81 Was bist denn Du für'n Wagen?/'N alter Opel, und Du?/Ein Fiat! Ich steh' hier schon seit drei Stunden und warte…/Weeste, worauf Du wartest, Opel?/Kann mir det schon denken…/Kaiser-Wilhelm-Straße: die wolln' neuet Ding drehen!/Is mir nischt Neuet./Pass uff – sie kommen/Transcript of the dialogue (2007 version of the play) by Andreas Fickers. In the original recording of 1930, one of the car voices was spoken by the brother of Alfred Döblin, Hugo Döblin.

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5. Audiovisual Remediation. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* by Phil Jutzi (1931)

Already during his work on the script for the radio play in early 1930, Döblin was approached by Emil Jannings – arguably one of the most prominent actors of the German film scene – in order to talk about the possibility of a film adaptation of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. Many critics of the novel underlined its *cinematic* quality, and the montage structure and *Kinostil* of Döblin's text seemed predestined for a filmic adaptation of the story. But while Döblin had been an enthusiastic radio amateur and devoted radio listener, he was critical of film as a mass medium. Although film had fascinated him from the beginning as a new artistic form of visual storytelling, he was disgusted by its commercialization and virtually exclusive exploitation as mass entertainment industry.[82] For Döblin, cinema was first and foremost a social institution that needed to fulfil a social function. But, as he conceded in an interview on the occasion of the production of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* in August 1930, »only a changed author can change the film«.[83] In Döblin's view, a film had to »engage with social things« and the directors and script writers in return should not »fear reality« and learn to communicate their social messages to the mass public., next to each other]. It was Jannings who was instrumental in mollifying the cinematic suspicions of Döblin[84], but another factor was of greater importance in encouraging Döblin to consider filming the novel: the emergence of *talkies* in the

Figure 4: Still of the film *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1931) by Phil Jutzi: Title strip.

Figure 5: Still of the film *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1931) by Phil Jutzi: Biberkopf jumping off the tram shortly after being discharged from prison.

82 See Jelavich 2006, 194, and Melcher 1996, 25-50.
83 Döblin 1930, cited in Sander 1998, 228.
84 Jelavich 2006, 197.

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late 1920s. Since the mid-1920s, UFA already possessed the patent to the *Tri-Ergon sound film technology* developed by Hans Vogt, Joseph Engl and Joseph Masolle. But a 1925 short experimental film, *Das Mädchen mit den Schwefelhölzern*, was so disappointing that one year later the company decided to sell the patents to a Swiss conglomerate.[85] It was only after the American success of *The Jazz Singer* (Crosland), in 1927, that the sound film seemed a commercially and artistically realizable product. In 1928 two German companies immediately started working on a technology that could rival that of the American combination ERPI / Warner Brothers. Tobis (Tonbild Syndicate A.G.) acquired the Tri-Ergon patents and several hundreds more, while *Klangfilm* was a collaboration between the electrical manufacturers Siemens and Halske A.G. and AEG (Allgemeine Elektrizitäts Gesellschaft). Rather than competing between themselves the two companies decided to merge to be more competitive with ERPI / Warner Brothers.[86] On March 12, 1929 the first German sound film was released: *Melodie der Welt.* This film by Ruttman is a musical journey around the world in which Berlin does not play a part, as in fact is true of his later sound films. The first visits to Berlin in the history of the sound film date from 1931: *M – Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder* (Lang), *Emil und die Detektive* (Lamprecht) and *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (Jutzi).

The combination of the reality effect of moving images with the authenticity of spoken language and the dramatic potential of music seemed to offer the right technical and aesthetic possibilities to realize a filmic portrait of the doom of Biberkopf, who – just as in the radio play – should become the story's protagonist.[87] After Arnold Preßler from Allianz-Tonfilm GmbH purchased the film rights for *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and hired Heinrich George to play the Biberkopf role, Döblin started writing the screenplay together with Hans Wilhelm, a professional script writer who at that point had mainly composed light comedies and entertainment films.[88] Preßler engaged Phil Jutzi to direct the film. Jutzi began his career filming »low budget Sauerkraut Westerns« in the late 1910s, but he subsequently developed into a highly recognized exponent of the social realist school of leftist filmmakers.[89] As a result, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* was going to be

85 Hake 2008, 55.

86 In March 1929 the merger was finalized. See Gomery 1976, 51-54.

87 Müller 1992, 95-96.

88 Sander 1998, 229.

89 Jutzi adapted Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* for German distribution (1926) and joined the Communist Party two years later. With films like *Um's tägliche Brot: Hunger in Waldenburg* (1928) and *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (1929), Jutzi invented a Marxist version of docudrama. According to Jelavich, »a powerful, moving, and revolutionary work«. See Jelavich 2006, 201-08.

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a realistic film. But this realistic turn obviated the symbolism and spiritual multidimensionality that pervaded the novel – much to the deception of most film critics at the time.[90] Because most of the film was shot at the UFA studies in Neubabelsberg while the main actors and actresses had little or no experience with sound film, the final result was a rather stereotypical visualization and sonification of Berlin. Moreover, the film's main character was played by Heinrich George, whose stage persona, according to Jelavich, »had become a stereotype«.[91] The fact that *Berlin Alexanderplatz* was Jutzi's first talkie may also have contributed to the rather conventional end product, which Siegfried Kracauer bitterly labelled »an average gangster flick«.[92]

But what about the sonic representation of Berlin in Jutzi's film? Against the overwhelmingly critical interpretations of the film in academic discourse, Eggo Müller shows that the film offers a number of innovative narrative elements, especially when it comes to the use of sound. As his detailed analysis of the screenplay demonstrates, Döblin and Wilhelm thought very carefully about how to use the new technology of sound-on-film recording as a stylistic tool and narrative element in its own right.[93] This already becomes evident in the opening scene of the film showing Biberkopf's journey into the city, emphasizing the »danger« of the metropolis and Biberkopf's mental fragility. When he gets on the tram to the city, the music – as discussed in this volume in our »Shifting Sounds« chapter – is first punctuated by and then merges with the sounds of traffic: the tram engine, the tram bells and car horns. At the climax of the scene the sounds and sights of the city become too much for Franz, and he jumps off the tram. In a remarkable contrast to the score of *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, the soundtrack of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* offers a telling example, as Jasper Aalbers has claimed, of the »noisification of music«.[94]

This shift from music to noises is adhered to consistently in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. While there is plenty of diegetic music in scenes taking place in cafes and night clubs and during a wedding, it is not part of the big outdoor scenes in the film. During the scenes at the titular Alexanderplatz, when Franz is working as a street vendor, the film presents us with the soundscape of a modern city. Trains and trams arrive at and depart from the big train station; buses and cars drive by and sound their horns. Behind Franz there is

90 For a detailed description of the contemporary reactions that the film provoked, see Sander 1998, 234-44.

91 Jelavich 2006, 222.

92 Ibid., 223.

93 Müller 1992, 103-05.

94 Aalbers (forthcoming).

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construction work taking place, filling the square with its noises. Only from far away the soothing sound of church bells is heard to announce lunchtime. Biberkopf has to raise his voice to be heard by the crowd surrounding him, and he urges people to come closer, so that he may still have a voice left the next day. All in all, the noisification of music in the opening sequence and the conscious construction of the soundscape of Berlin in the rest of the film lead us to suggest that, in direct contrast to Walter Ruttman's *city symphony*, Phil Jutzi's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* certainly presents a cacophony of big city life.[95]

6. The Serialization. Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* as TV series (1980)

Viewers had to wait another forty-nine years before they could watch a second attempt at visually capturing Döblin's novel. This new version of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, realized by the German avant-garde filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder, confronts us with yet another form of adaptation: the translation of the novel into a television series. Fassbinder, now referred to as one of the outstanding film directors of the New German Cinema of the 1970s, had directed several films based on epic or dramatic artworks when he decided to embark on the *Berlin Alexanderplatz* project. It turned out to be the monumental late work of Fassbinder, consisting of a series of thirteen episodes and an epilogue with a total length of fifteen and a half hours of film.[96] Commissioned by the Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) and co-produced by the Bavaria Film Studios in Munich and the Italian public service broadcaster RAI, the film was the most expensive television production ever realized on German television so far. With a total budget of 13 million marks, the film was shot in 154 days between June 1979 and April 1980 and first broadcasted between October and December 1980 on WDR.[97]

95 See Aalbers (forthcoming).

96 For a detailed description of the different episodes and information on the production process and actors involved, see the 60-page booklet »Fassbinder: Berlin Alexanderplatz remastered«, which goes with the Arthaus DVD edition (2006) of the film.

97 Lorenz, 2006, 21-23. Parts of the film were shot at original settings in Berlin (mainly scenes playing in the backyards or staircases of the typical Berlin tenement houses or at underground stations), but all street settings were shot at the Bavaria studies in Munich were the »Berliner street«, Biberkopfs apartment and his local had been rebuilt. See Braunger 2006, 33.

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Realizing this film had been an old dream of Fassbinder, who declared in an autobiographical essay published a few days before finishing its shooting in the German weekly *Die Zeit* that his reading of the novel at a younger age has had a significant effect on the further course of his life.[98] This almost existential importance of the work for Fassbinder indicates that the filmic adaptation expectedly showed a highly subjective reading of the novel. Fassbinder never intended to produce a film that would stay close to the original, but he decidedly opted for a biographically motivated interpretation of the text, using the main protagonist Franz Biberkopf as an agent to stage the complex and obscure condition of his own haunting biography.[99] As is true of most of his other work since the late 1960s, Fassbinder's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* provoked heated debates in both the popular and quality press and developed into *the* media event of 1979 in the Federal Republic of Germany.[100] While most of the professional critics praised the film as a milestone of avant-garde filmmaking – the film also being a big success at the film festivals of Venice and Oberhausen in September 1980 – the popular press (Springer press) sharply attacked the film as a product of violence, sex, and morbid fantasies of the director.

The response in the quality press is more relevant to the subject of this chapter. Critics specifically discussed the intermedial relationships between the film and the novel and they focused on the aesthetic and narrative strategies employed by Fassbinder to dramatize the many internalized conflicts, fears and perceptions of the film's protago-

98 »[…] mein Leben, gewiß nicht im Ganzen, aber doch in einigem, manchem, vielleicht Entscheidenderem als ich es heute zu überblicken vermag, wäre anders verlaufen, als es mit Döblins Berlin Alexanderplatz im Kopf, im Fleisch, im Körper als Ganzes und in der Seele, lächeln Sie meinetwegen, verlaufen ist.« See Fassbinder 2006, 5.

99 Sander 1998, 245-56. The homepage of the Fassbinder Foundation offers a detailed overview of his life and works, and documents the rich intellectual debates and discussions that his films, theatre plays and public statements evoked. »His flamboyant and at the same time seedy life-style, his openly displayed and well advertised homosex- uality, and at the same time life and love to women [sic], the scandals, public outrages and bouts of self-pity ensured that in Germany itself Fassbinder was permanently in the news, making calculatedly provocative remarks in interviews, which nonetheless were usually shrewd and to the point. His work often received mixed notices from the national critics, many of whom only began to take Fassbinder seriously after the foreign press had hailed him as a genius.« See Elsaesser, The Fassbinder Foundation, 2010.

100 For a detailed list of the many reviews and critical articles both in press that preceded, accompanied and followed the broadcasting of the series at the public service television station of WDR, see Biesenbach 2007, 656-59.

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nist, Franz Biberkopf, so brilliantly performed by Günter Lamprecht. While this concentration on the inner life of Biberkopf has been criticized as a re-psychologization of the main topics of the novel and, for that reason, as a reduction of its portrayal of societal complexity and urban conditions to a mere portrayal of the central character's psychology,[101] others interpret the radical appropriation and personal interpretation of Döblin's text by Fassbinder as a perfect example of a post-modern aesthetic, demonstrating the subjectivist and constructionist nature of all artistic expression.[102] But in contrast to the radio play and the Jutzi film of 1931, Fassbinder's focus on the character of Biberkopf was not chosen because of narrative simplification and genre-specific conventions of storytelling. Instead, Fassbinder consciously broke with established conventions both concerning the length of a classical feature film and concerning aesthetic and moral norms in the public service television culture of the Federal Republic.

The most radical difference between Jutzi's filmic adaptation of Döblin's novel and Fassbinder's approach is certainly their length. While Jutzi fitted the story into a standard feature film of his days with a duration of 84 minutes, Fassbinder produced a monumental film of nearly 900 minutes, expanding the narrative time span of his story into a series of 13 episodes.[103] This extraordinary attempt to break with the conventions of filmic storytelling is, according to Susan Sontag, the radical innovation in Fassbinder's approach and the main condition of its success. In comparing Fassbinder's project with Erich von Stroheim's failed ambition to produce a complete filmic adaptation of Frank Norris novel *McTeague* in 1924[104], Sontag praises Fassbinder's film as the first »real« filmic adaptation of a great big city novel ever.[105] The pure length of the film is of course no sufficient condition for making the film a great movie, but certainly a necessary one. The serialization of the film into an episodic narrative constitutes – in the eyes of many critics – an artificial fragmentation of the storyline and destroys much of the immersive power of the film. According to Fritz Göttler, Fassbinder dreamt of cinema that sucked the viewer into the fictional reality of the story, of films that »tears holes in the life of

101 See for example Burger (1987), in: Sander 1998, 250-51.

102 See Haag, »Fassbinder verfilmt Berlin Alexanderplatz«, in: Sander 1998, 254-55.

103 Episode number 14, the »epilogue«, has no equivalent in the novel. It is a highly allegorical and provocative filmic commentary on the main topics of the novel by Fassbinder.

104 When the silent film called Greed was first shown in theatres, it had a total length of 2 hours and 20 minutes. Stroheim originally produced a version with a total length of nearly ten hours, the film was radically cut down by the producers (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) in order to fit it into the conventions of feature films of the time (because of financial reasons). See imDb.

105 Sontag 2007, 48-53.

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their viewers«. In that sense, Göttler interprets Berlin Alexanderplatz as a »masterpiece of filmic somnambulism«.[106] And indeed, where Fassbinder's opus magnum was shown in movie theatres in full length (mainly in a two-day or three-day screening as in New York during several weeks in 1983), the reactions of the public were much more positive than in Germany, where the televised episodes where broadcasted in a late night timeslot (starting at 9:30 pm) and at weekly intervals.[107]

One could argue, however, that the »forced« format of serialized production (WDR commissioned the film as a television series) also allowed for a stronger association of the filmic adaptation with the nine books of the original novel.[108] Fassbinder even strengthened this association by inserting lengthy quotations from the novel, read by Fassbinder and presented in an off-screen voice mode. The titles of the 13 episodes, all based on passages from the novel, were prominently visualized in old German letter type in the front credits of each episode, and recurring motifs like the abattoir scene or the appearance of »Schnitter Tod« (Grim Reaper) are accompanied by chroma keying of text passages from the novel. But the Fassbinder production shows many other intermedial references such as the incorporation of original photographs (of Berlin or the abattoir), newspapers articles and advertising columns, graffiti on frontages, billboards and board partitions, and so on. The most prominent intermedial references Fassbinder plays with, however, are of a musical or acoustical nature. While Biberkopf's close relation with music is staged in many singing scenes, the sound design of the production is characterized by a strong presence of background noises, often dominated by music. Music is used in both a diegetic and non-diegetic way. Biberkopf very often sings or hums to popular tunes from the gramophone or radio in his home. But he also sings in public – for example in episode two (»Wie soll man leben, wenn man nicht sterben will« / How to live when you don't want to die?), when he engaged in a singing contest with a group of communists in his local. Challenged by their singing of the *Internationale*, he responds with *Die Wacht am Rhein* – a German folk song written by 1840 von Max Schneckenburger and set to music in 1854 by Carl Wilhelm. During the Kaiserreich (1871-1918), the song was extremely popular and acquainted – albeit never official – nearly the status of a national hymn. Biberkopf already performed the song in the first episode when, in a mood of panic and disorientation after his disimprisonment, he fled into a courtyard of a tenement. In singing the song with a strong voice, he regains self-confidence and reveals his relief.

In addition to the diegetic performances of the singing Biberkopf, non-diegetic musical

106 Göttlich 2007, 32.

107 Lorenz 2006, 23.

108 The different chapters of the original novel were entitled »books« by Döblin.

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references are quite often visualized by showing a radio or gramophone and thereby marked as a historical tune of the 1930s. In addition, Fassbinder uses a lot contemporary music (for example Janis Joplin's *Me and Bobby McGee* or the song *Radioactivity* by the German electro-pop band Kraftwerk) to dramatize or emotionalize specific situations. Music – both as instrument for the creation of a reality effect that suggests historical authenticity and as alienation effect in the Brechtian sense – is probably the strongest stylistic device used in the melodramatic staging of the story. According to the Swiss writer and literary critic Hermann Burger, the »requiem-like seesaw between polyphony and cacophony« that characterizes the soundscape of Fassbinder's film can be interpreted as the most successful translation of Döblin's technique of »filmic writing« into *audio*visual filmic storytelling.[109] As such, the film is an acoustic realization of the »style of simultaneity« for which Döblin's novel had been praised. For Burger, the film is less a visual than a sonic didactic play demonstrating the felicitous appropriation of Döblin's style of montage by Rainer Werner Fassbinder.[110]

Figure 6: Still of the television series *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980) by Rainer Fassbinder: Biberkopf after his release from prison and holding his ears, trying to protect his head from the brutal intrusion of city noises.

The opening scene of the film (episode 1 entitled »Die Strafe beginnt« (The punishment commences – a literal quotation of the sentence following the opening paragraph of the novel) provides us with a telling example of how Fassbinder stages the city as a cacophony of noises, symbolizing both hectic big city life (as contrasted with the security and silence of Biberkopf's life in prison) and the inner tension and despair of the protagonist. While Biberkopf shows a glimpse of happiness when looking into the open sky of the prison yard that he had to cross in order to get to the main gate, he immediately

109 Burger, »Kein Platz für Alexanderplatz«, quoted in Sander 1998, 250.
110 Ibid.

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shrinks back from the gate when confronted with the heavy traffic sounds coming from the street in front of the prison entrance. He even walks back into the yard, holding his ears and grimacing with pain. When he finally leaves the prison after some friendly suasion by the guardsman, Biberkopf runs blindly onto the street and is nearly run over by a car – despite repeated honking by the driver. In contrast to Jutzi's film version, where the confrontation between Biberkopf and the city is staged in the tram ride (using a rhythmic montage of shots and sounds to allegorize the rising inner tension and panic of the protagonist), Fassbinder deviates from the novel and does not refer to the tram ride at all. Instead of using the tram as symbol of the electrified mobility of big city life, Fassbinder stages the conflict between men and the city in a rather static form by using sound as key element in the dramatization of the narrative.

This rather static staging of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* by Fassbinder with its high theatrical production style (most scenes play in closed, slightly darkened rooms) and focus on the visualization of the inner monologues of Franz Biberkopf (with many close ups in order to catch the vivid and expressionist facial expressions of Günter Lamprecht), is without doubt a key feature of the film.[111] In disassociating the story from the concrete topography of the city of Berlin, Fassbinder condensates the existential orientation of a big city inhabitant to the mental state of an individual living in a cage, thereby underlining the desperate feeling of being locked-in.[112] Captured in his (mutilated) body, trapped by his social condition, and caught in his fantasies and desires – it is through this intimate portrait of Biberkopf's existential condition that Fassbinder visualizes, dramatizes and composes the conflict between individual and society in a modern urban environment. In this sense, Fassbinder's dramatization of the Biberkopf story comes very close to the montage-like narrative construction of Berlin as place of psychological estrangement and physical transit by Döblin. Both Döblin and Fassbinder construct their representations of Berlin and of the Alexanderplatz in particular as »psycho-topographies«, where

> city scenes are always conditioned as other scenes in the Freudian sense, distorted and displaced by desires and anxieties at both individual and collective level.[113]

111 The catalogue of the 2007 exhibition *Rainer Werner Fassbinder: Berlin Alexanderplatz*, curated by Klaus Biesenbach at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin (March – Mai 2007), shows 560 (!) colour stills of the film offering an intriguing panorama of Fassbinder's visual imagination. See Biesenbach 2007.

112 Biesenbach 2007, 40-41.

113 Webber 2009, 261.

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7. Conclusions

The challenge of the different media versions of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* analyzed in this chapter was simultaneously to represent and to evoke the feeling of the urban condition of men – and of one man in specific: Franz Biberkopf. Mobility, both in its cognitive and physical meaning, has probably served as the most crucial factor in visualizing and sonically evoking metropolitan life. In that respect, the idea of mobility inspired both the narrative construction of the novel and its filmic and radiophonic adaptations and served as a leitmotif for the characterization of Biberkopf's inner life. As Patrick Fortmann has argued, this double sense of mobility as both bodily and mental movement is a central characteristic of Döblin's novel and permeates the other adaptations as well:

> By contrasting the deficient narrative at the onset of the essay with new forms of representation in its body and by juxtaposing the sampling tourist with the true visitor seeking the whole of Berlin, Döblin not only underlines his call for a new aesthetics, one that is mindful of urban modernity, but also exposes different approaches to the metropolis and to the experiences it enables. At the center of these approaches is the transport of a subject through space, be it by tram, by bus or even on foot. Focusing on the interplay between movement and perception and oscillating between fragmented impressions and coherent gestalt, dismembered parts and organic whole, these approaches model at once the self in motion and the space traversed.[114]

The tension between »fragmented impressions and coherent gestalt« and »dismembered parts and organic whole« not only characterizes the mobile condition of men in a metropolitan environment, but also applies to the narrative and stylistic principles of the novel and its various adaptations. Döblin's *Kinostil* and *Tatsachenphantasie*, his montage-like combination of textual fragments originating from different media (newspaper, advertisements, radio announcements, musical lyrics, etc.) into impressionistic yet dense descriptions of Berlin as seething metropolis stages the city as a highly mediatized construct. But the many intermedial references not only serve as indicators of urban life, but exemplify a stylistic principle aiming at challenging the linear narrative of classic epic storytelling. The »deconstructive montage«-character of the novel aimed at reproducing the heterogeneity of the perception of reality at the level of aesthetic

114 Fortmann 2009, 126.

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production.[115] In that respect, Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* put into praxis what the author theoretically had postulated in his »reflections on the novel« (»Bemerkungen zum Roman«, 1917) some twelve years earlier: »If a novel cannot be sliced into 10 pieces like an earthworm, and each part is able to move along, it is no good«.[116]

From a narrative point of view, neither the radio play nor the filmic adaptations by Jutzi and Fassbinder can claim such a radically new approach in storytelling. Although Döblin saw the innovative potential of the radio play as a new art form, technical limitations and aesthetic doubts frustrated his intentions to produce and transmit a radiophonic adaptation of his novel in 1930. But the 2007 version of the play, a contemporary production based on an accurate performance of the original manuscript written by Döblin, eventually shows the creative ideas and the eagerness to experiment with the new format – most convincingly demonstrated in the »humanization« of the *Fiat* and *Opel* cars. In contrast to the radio play, the filmic adaptations had the possibility of both visualizing and rendering audible the many intermedial references of the novel and to stage the city of Berlin as capital of visual and sonic spectacle. Yet they did so in quite different ways. While Jutzi's adaptation struggles with the customization of the novel into an emerging format of cinematic storytelling (sound film), Fassbinder's serial approach challenged classical forms of movie adaptations of literary works by a dramatic prolongation of the filmic narrative into a television series.

We do not aim at making any qualitative statement about the degree of »authenticity« of each of the adaptations in comparison to the original novel – a question that has largely dominated the intense public debate among critics and that continues to trigger the intellectual and scholarly discussion in literature and film studies. Instead, our comparative and intermedial approach aimed at analyzing and describing the complex relationship between the emergence of specific media products and their specific historical environment, and – more importantly – to look at the different ways of sonic representation and acoustic staging of Berlin in the novel, radio, film and television series. When revisiting the three forms of intermediality as outlined by Rajewski and introduced in the first paragraph of this chapter (intermediality as medial transposition, media combination or intermedial reference), two of them apply to the study presented here: first, the radio play, the film and the television series are of course adaptations of

115 Paech 1988, 130.

116 »Wenn ein Roman nicht wie ein Regenwurm in 10 Stücke geschnitten werden kann, und jeder Teil bewegt sich selbst, dann taugt er nicht«. See Döblin 1917, »Bemerkungen zum Roman«. According to Michael Opitz, Döblin's provocative thoughts on the novel have inspired Brecht's work on the »Verfremdungseffekt«. See Opitz 2011.

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the novel and thereby a form of medial transposition; secondly, both the three adaptations and the novel provide ample evidence of intermedial references. Examples are the references to newspaper articles, posters, song lyrics or film titles in the novel, the musical references to popular Schlager songs and the playing of gramophone tunes in the radio play, the noisification of music or the acclamation of newspaper news in Jutzi's film, the period photographs and the frequent use of radio background sounds in Fassbinder's television series – to mention just a few of the many intermedial references.

As demonstrated, the transposition of the textual format of the novel into audio and audiovisual formats of storytelling in the radio play, film and television series was characterized by format-specific constraints: the complex story of a 400-page novel hardly fits into a 60-minute radio play or a 2-hour feature film. These format-specific constraints of the different media do not say anything about the aesthetic quality or narrative creativity of the adaptations as such, of course. The 2007 version of the radio play, Jutzi's early sound film adaptation and Fassbinder's monumental television series each demonstrate creative appropriation of the original text through exploration of the dramatic potential of the story in distinct ways. Yet all three adaptations share one important characteristic: while Berlin was the subject in Döblin's novel and Biberkopf its main object, the three adaptations turned Biberkopf into the main subject of storytelling through which Berlin was to be experienced (or not). This shift from Berlin as subject of storytelling in the novel to object of implicit or explicit urban reference in the adaptations has clearly affected the repertoire for the sonic representation of the city as well.

While the audiovisual medium of film and the acoustic medium of radio in theory seem to offer preferred means of staging the sonic experience of urban life, the choice of narrative conventions (mainly the focus on a single protagonist) and format-specific conventions (such as the length of a movie; the scheduling of the broadcasting of the series) has caused the city to fade from view. All three adaptations in fact »downgraded« Berlin to the status of supporting actor, even though the original novel aimed to be the city's megaphone. The most surprising and perhaps paradoxical finding of this comparative intermedial approach, then, is that the novel version emerges as the narrative format that is most explicit and eloquent in referring to the soundscape of Berlin by means of onomatopoetic language, the *O-Ton*-like literary reproduction of local dialect, and its many descriptions of noises, sounds or music. In addition to these explicit intermedial references, the novel's text implicitly evokes an acoustic environment of the city by playing with the sonic assumptions in the reader's mind. This rather unforeseen silencing of the city in the audio-visual adaptations of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is perhaps bound to produce some noise in a future debate on intermedial historiography.

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