Rive Gauche

Paris as a Site of Avant-Garde Art and Cultural Exchange in the 1920s

Edited by
Elke Mettinger, Margarete Rubik and Jörg Türschmann

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> *To make the portrait of a city is a life work, and no one portrait suffices because the city is always changing.* (Berenice Abbott)

The Legible City

Paris was, as Walter Benjamin has pointed out in his monumental but unfinished *Arcades Project*, *the* capital of the 19th century, and it was the first city to be called a metropolis by contemporaries (Stierle 282). The term 'metropolis' has become a metaphor and a myth owing to its long tradition in western culture. It circumscribes not so much a definite structure on a certain location with fixed dimensions, but rather the search and the desire for a special kind of urbanism (Zohlen 24). This makes the metropolis both a special object for scientific investigation and for political observation. It is because of this double epistemological impulse that theorists of urbanism like Michel de Certeau have divided the urban space in a transparent part, which is legible and governable on the one hand and an opaque part, which is not legible and not governable on the other. It is clear that the modern sciences and governments have made enormous efforts to reduce that opaque part.

For this reason it is no wonder that at the end of the 19th century the metropolis, in the eye of contemporary critics, had become fully investigated in many respects. As Maxime du Camp wrote with considerable regret in the first volume of his great survey about the French capital, Paris was "enregistré, catalogué, numeroté, surveillé, éclairé, nettoyé, dirigé, soigné, administré, jugé, emprisonné, enterré" (qtd. in Prendergast 2).[1] Thus at first sight it seems that the urban space had become fully open for a panoptic view and hence also fully legible. This is very much the case with Paris. Under the rule of Napoleon III, Baron Haussmann realized his revisionist "vision of the modern city as unified, centred and fully legible, opened up as a safe and regulated space of leisure and pleasure to all its citizens" (8). But his radical demolition and rebuilding of the old quarters resulted in a monotonous urban landscape which deleted the old characteristics and visual identities of the various boroughs and thus, paradoxically, made the city less legible.

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[1] See Maxime du Camp. *Paris, ses organes, ses fonctions et sa vie dans la deuxième moitié du XIX^e siècle*. 6 vol. Paris, 1883-98. The following quotation is from vol.1, 7.

As Siegfried Kracauer often observed during the 1920s, this monotony is very characteristic of the modern metropolis. For him, it is an effect of the increasing industrialization and urbanization in the western world: "The metropolitan centres, which are also sites of glamour, resemble each other more and more. Their differences are fading."[2] As editorial journalist of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* Kracauer also noticed such effects during his various visits to Paris in the late twenties. In short prose-miniatures he described the ambivalent and even conflicting implications of modernization for the millions of city dwellers. For instance, in the collection of international newspapers and magazines at the bookstalls that can be found at busy streets or corners in every metropolis in this world, he saw a striking metaphor of the increasing monotony of the modern cities that makes them less and less legible. In the already quoted text, *Analyse eines Stadtplans* (*Analysis of a Map*), he noted in 1928: "Out of the hurly-burly kiosks arise, tiny temples in which the publications of the whole world meet up. Despite the close bodily relations that these papers cultivate, their items of news are so unrelated that they give no news about themselves."[3]

Kracauer criticizes the fact that the news items reported by the papers are not connected – that is to say, although the newspapers and magazines are in close proximity on the shelves in the kiosk they do not constitute any coherent knowledge about the current world. Kracauer never tires of focussing on this blindness inside modernity – he is looking, always and everywhere, for signs that make the antagonistic developments of the metropolis more legible for him, more accessible for an understanding of life in a modern city. Such signs he finds, first of all, in visualizations that mirror the metropolis itself – for instance in a schema like a city map. In doing so he creates meaning about the metropolis through an image: this means, first, that in Kracauer's descriptions the city is regarded as a schematic image and second, that one needs such a symbol to obtain some knowledge of it: "Broad thoroughfares lead from the Faubourgs to the splendour of the centre. But this is not the intended centre. The happiness allotted to external poverty is touched by other radiuses than the existing ones. But the streets must be walked towards the centre, for their emptiness is real today."[4]

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2 „Die weltstädtischen Zentren, die auch die Orte des Glanzes sind, gleichen sich mehr und mehr einander an. Ihre Unterschiede vergehen" (5.1 403). All German quotes in this paper were translated by Caterina Novák.

3 „Aus dem Trubel erheben sich die Zeitungskioske, winzige Tempel, in denen die Publikationen der Welt sich ein Rendezvous geben. [...] Der engen körperlichen Beziehung ungeachtet, die von den Papieren gepflegt wird, sind ihre Nachrichten so außer jeder Verbindung, dass sie ohne Nachricht über sich sind." (5.1 403)

4 „Breite Straßen führen aus den Faubourgs in den Glanz der Mitte. Sie ist die gemeinte Mitte nicht. Das Glück, das der Armseligkeit draußen zugedacht ist, wird von anderen Radien ge-

This dense description of the cityscape of Paris evokes the difference between the centre and the periphery, the city and the suburb, which is so important for any conception and reception of the metropolis. Here Kracauer claims that the urban landscapes and architecture of his time no longer create meaning for the people living in them – the antagonistic poverty of the *faubourgs* and the glamour of the city centre reveal for him an emptiness which signifies the transcendental shelterlessness of the modern human subject. Regarding the problem of social interaction which is so necessary for the people living in a big city, the great boulevards in his *Denkbild* (mental image) do not function as connecting lines between the poor and the rich, between suburban and metropolitan life. Instead they reveal the absence of a fundamental social relationship between the metropolitan architecture and the city dwellers. Paradoxically, for Kracauer, the modern city no longer forms a coherent image. The difficulty of making sense of the modern city is, as Christopher Prendergast has explained, that of "a multiplicity of given perspectives, a juxtaposition, and often a clash, of representation" (3).

Following Kracauer's insights, the desire for legibility has much to do with scientific and cultural practices that use technical media for registration and for visualization. In photography, there has been a special interest in picturing the metropolis since its beginning in the 19th century – Daguerre's famous picture of *Vue du Boulevard du Temple*, dating from 1838 or 1839, shows a view of the probably crowded street from a position above, where, as a result of the long exposure time, only a man getting his shoes polished is visible in the resulting photographic image. There was not only an interest in preserving the city's important monuments, as the French poet Charles Baudelaire had defined the function of photography in his *Salon* of 1859, but also the beginning of an aesthetic interest in capturing the ever-changing shapes of modernity. This impulse questions not only the modes of portraying an unstable object like the ever-moving life of a city, but also establishes knowledge about what pictures are. So that, following Baudelaire, one might think the modern city changes our relationship to the image, or as Ackbar Abbas has put it: "We learn more about the image through the city than about the city through the image" (143). But what exactly do we learn about the image through the city? What kind of images does the city help to create? And furthermore, what is the special impact of their relationship? These questions will be answered in the following pages.

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troffen als den vorhandenen. Doch müssen die Straßen zur Mitte begangen werden, denn ihre Leere ist heute wirklich." (5.1 403)

The City as Imaginary Object

Walter Prigge has shown in an article about the mythological implications of the metropolis that because of the increasing industrialization and urbanization in the western world architecture loses its autonomy and is supplemented by other symbolic practices (73-86). In the modern metropolis, he argues, real locations are replaced by imaginative spaces. The modern city thereby sets free the forces of imagination and the collective unconscious. Thus it becomes a kind of a second nature, that is to say, a mythological one (77). Following this argumentation, one has to conclude that every image of the modern city constitutes the urban space as an imaginary object. An example might be Kracauer's description of the subway of Paris as an archaic labyrinth that is "directly wrested from nature"[5].

The city, in this perspective, is regarded as an aesthetic object producing images of a special kind – a proliferation of images which are, as the photographer Berenice Abbot has observed, never sufficient, because the city is always changing. Thus, images of the city always produce other images, which intervene in the collective unconscious and change the cultural memory of it. Regarding the city as an aesthetic object first and foremost means, as Henry James has declared, to be fascinated by the surface of things: "The city becomes an aesthetic object when you become totally fascinated by the energy and the multifariousness of the surface" (qtd. in Prendergast 4). To be fascinated by the surface of the city means nothing else than putting it into a chain of images.

This idea of the metropolis as a series of multifarious images became popular in the late 18th century in literature, for example with Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *Tableau de Paris* and with the invention of the panorama. Robert Barker's successful panoramic views of Edinburgh and London, for instance, were not only visited by curious city dwellers who wanted to see their hometown as a painted image overwhelming their senses. The panoramas also travelled around Europe to recoup their high production costs. Furthermore the "*panoramic* vision" ("der *panoramatische* Blick") was, as Wolfgang Schivelbusch has argued, an effect of modern transportation systems like the railway, which established the perception of things in motion (59). The panoramas can also be seen as a nostalgic compensation for the fragmentation of the urban space provoked by the growing modern cities and their needs for transportation systems. Such images find their way also into literature: in his novel *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831) Victor Hugo calls the overview over the city from the top of the famous cathedral "Paris à vol d'oiseau". Such a visu-

[5] "unmittelbar der Natur abgerungen" (5.2 299)

alization of the metropolis in a "bird's-eye view" was needed by city dwellers who wanted to conserve a permanent image of their town as a whole as well as by visitors and maybe tourists who wanted a reliable image of a city which most of them knew only by name.

That might explain why the panoramas experienced a renaissance in popularity in the second half of the 19th century, when modernization had taken command and sensational pictures of events of national importance, like battles or catastrophes, were highly esteemed. A notice of Gertrude Stein proves that panoramas were images that played an important role for the cultural memory and the collective unconscious. Stein lived in Paris for a long time, from 1903 until her death in 1946. In her book on Paris, published in 1940, she documented her first encounters with French culture. Long before she came to Paris in person, that is to say since her childhood, she had a dreamlike vision of the city, which she imagined obsessively. Stein remembers the sensuous impressions activated by imported French commodities like perfume and fashion items or by the smell of French dishes. Moreover she was impressed by the famous actress Sarah Bernhardt, who was regularly invited for guest performances at theatres in San Francisco, the city where Gertrude Stein had been raised. She was especially impressed by a panorama showing the historical Battle of Waterloo from 1815. Mainly, the sheer volume of the circular painting that surrounded the visitors completely astonished her. This visit helped her gain an important insight:

> It was then I first realised the difference between a painting and out of doors. I realised that a painting is always a flat surface and out of doors never is, and that out of doors is made up of air and a painting has no air, the air is replaced by a flat surface, and anything in a painting that imitates air is illustration and not art. I seem to have felt all that very intensely standing on the platform and being all surrounded by an oil painting. (Stein 4)

The panoramas almost vanished from public visibility around 1900 and gave way to a new kind of imagination: the city as a mediated space seen through the eye of a camera. Georg Simmel, in his essay on Rodin, has claimed that modern art did not merely reflect a world in motion; its very mirror had itself become more mobile (Prendergast 6). To think about this mirror means to think about the media of reflecting this world in motion – photography and film. In the twenties both technical media were more and more regarded as modern art forms that were able to capture the mobile and labile modern world. The idea of a new visibility affected many photographers and filmmakers as well as theorists of modernity. That is why it is important to investigate what kind of pictures of a metropolis like the French capital were made in the first decades of the 20th century, what their special characteristics were and how they were regarded by the contemporaries.

There is no doubt that Paris was the meeting point of the European and American avant-garde during the twenties and early thirties. But what was so fascinating about this city? There is no simple answer: first, one has to remember that there was a broad discussion of the consequences of urbanization in the 19th century, and Paris was seen as the right place for this enquiry. In French literature and journalism, there was a strong criticism of the modernization and the demolition of the old Paris. The often nostalgic perception of the old Paris found its way into the 20th century – last greetings from a sinking world, so to say. In his *Pariser Beobachtungen* (*Parisian Observations*), for instance, Siegfried Kracauer noticed in 1927 that for the German observer French life and society seemed to be "like a hundred years ago": "The German, who is abreast of his time, rediscovers the past."[6]

Second, in the view of many European observers, the heavy and in many cases brutal impact of modernization was regarded as less effective, less obvious in Paris (see Fig. 1). Kracauer's fascination with Paris had much to do with the notion of the different atmospheres in the French and the German capitals, where he lived until his emigration to Paris in February 1933, shortly after the burning of the Berliner Reichstag. Kracauer often described the differences in architecture, space and lifestyle between the two cities. He experienced the change in the architecture of Berlin as a violent form of modernization. Therefore for him, Berlin, as opposed to Paris, was no place for *flâneurs*:

> The tempo is a result of the layout of the cities. Can anyone proceed with a Berlin tempo in Paris, even if he is in a great hurry? He cannot. The streets in the inner districts are narrow, and if you want to walk them, you must be patient. And although the great boulevards are broad, they connect heavily populated districts, which send a never ending steam of people along them.[7]

For Kracauer, the great interventions of the Haussmannian era did not really change the identity of Paris as the capital of the *flâneur* or the obscurities of the passageways. On the contrary, the crowded boulevards of the new Paris could be seen as actual signs of the illegibility of the modern city: the *flâneur* of the 20th century, a figure who was in former times the gifted reader of city

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6 „Der Deutsche, der mit seiner Zeit lebt, findet die Vergangenheit wieder." (5.2 25)

7 „Das Tempo ist eine Folge der Bauart der Städte. Kann einer in Paris ein Berliner Tempo anschlagen, selbst wenn er es überaus eilig hat? Er kann es nicht. Die Straßen in den inneren Stadtteilen sind eng, und wer sie passieren will, muß sich nach unseren Begriffen in Geduld üben. Und sind auch die großen Boulevards breit angelegt, so verbinden sie doch dichtbevölkerte Bezirke miteinander, die einen Dauermenschenstrom über sie schicken." (5.2 298)

signs, had become an anonymous passer-by. He was now part of the metropolitan crowd, and could not keep a certain distance or get an overview.[8]

Fig. 1: Germaine Krull: *Billboard Paris-Matinal*, 1927; estate Germaine Krull; © Museum Folkwang, Essen

The fascination with Paris has much to do with the images that this city has always produced in the minds of its visitors. In 1928 Kracauer collected a summary of his impressions of the French capital. In his short essay *Die*

[8] Tom Gunning has reconstructed the destiny of the *flâneur* in the 20th century who had become a detective or a gawker (1997). Here I accentuate instead the passer-by on the crowded street.

Berührung. Sieben Pariser Szenen (*The Touch. Seven Parisian Scenes*) he designs a kaleidoscope of various sights and insights on Parisian life. It begins – in a seemingly touristic manner – with a boat trip on the Seine and the impressions he gained alongside the river. The perspective of this panorama of vistas is very unusual primarily because of the lower standpoint of the observer on the deck of the boat. From that point of view, he saw, like a child, only the lower parts of the famous buildings at the riverside again and again interrupted by blocked sights so that they evidently revealed snapshots rather than full views: "The top of the Obelisk is sitting on the quay wall, the lower part of the Eiffel tower covers the sky with arabesques. These architectural fragments are messages in code which only the initiated can decipher."[9]

In the opening part of his Parisian impressions Kracauer describes the famous landmarks of the French capital from a very exceptional perspective: he takes a mole's-eye view in contrast to the more common bird's-eye view, which is the normal touristic viewpoint in order to gain an overview. Through this change in perspective he practises an alienation of the common, the all-too-familiar. Thus, the alienated image of the city reveals itself as a chain of snapshots that have to be deciphered. And this new sight produces new insights. Nevertheless, in the photography of the twenties there is an analogy for this change in perspective. Following the calls for a "new vision" that avant-garde artists like Alexander Rodtchenko or László Moholy-Nagy had sent out, many photographers made experiments with extreme camera positions and astonishing perspectives, cuttings and croppings of the things they photographed.

As David Frisby has pointed out, the change from the panorama image to the more ephemeral, snapshot-like photographic or filmic image also changed the practices of the observer of urban landscapes: "The 'panorama' of the city differs from the 'snapshot', just as the 'narrative' differs from the 'image'. In part, these differences were contingent upon the development of new techniques of representation. But, at the same time, the observer of the city and the practices associated with that observation were also changing" (6). Who should know better than a professional chaser of images how difficult it is to capture a portrait of a vivid city. The American photographer Berenice Abbott explains:

> Everything in the city is properly part of its story – its physical body of brick, stone, steel, glass, wood, its lifeblood of living, breathing men and women. Streets, vistas,

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[9] „Die Spitze des Obelisken sitzt auf der Kaimauer, das Fußgestell des Eiffelturms bedeckt den Himmel mit eisernen Arabesken. Die Architekturfetzen sind chiffrierte Mitteilungen, die nur der Eingeweihte zu entziffern vermag." (Schriften 5.2 129f)

> panoramas, birds-eye views, the noble and the shameful, high life and low life, tragedy, comedy, squalor, wealth, the mighty towers of skyscrapers, the ignoble façades of slums, people at work, people at home, people at play – these are but a small part of the subject matter of the city. Nothing is to humble for the camera portraitist. (qtd. in van Haaften 25-26)

In Abbott's view, the photographer relates to the historian as a collector of ephemeral things and to the painter who captures the surfaces of these things.

Abbott's first contact with photography took place in Paris. She was, like many American artists and bohemians of her time, fascinated by the atmosphere of artistic freedom at the French capital (Levy 15). In 1921 she followed Man Ray to Paris, who had a flourishing portrait studio in Montparnasse, where the avant-garde and high society of Paris stopped by for regular visits. From Man Ray she learned everything about photographic techniques; she also worked as his assistant. Abbott soon became very successful with her own portraits of high society ladies and avant-garde artists of the *rive gauche*, Jean Cocteau, James Joyce, Peggy Guggenheim and Sylvia Beach, among others. The latter, who was a proprietor of the famous avant-garde bookstore *Shakespeare & Company*, remarked that to "be 'done' by Man Ray or Berenice Abbott meant you rated as somebody" (qtd. in Yochelson 11). In 1926 she opened a photo studio of her own on the *rue du Bac*, after a well-received solo exhibition at the gallery *Au Sacre du Printemps*, to which Cocteau contributed a poem (van Haaften 11). Nevertheless, her main artistic interest was to record reality. Through the mediation of Man Ray Abbott made the acquaintance of Eugène Atget, who had made countless photographs of his hometown since the 1880s, but remained largely unknown to his contemporaries. From Atget, who had travelled a lot and worked as an actor before he started his career as a photographer, Abbott learned that the "photographer of the city needs many kinds of knowledge, besides how to operate the camera" (van Haaften 27). His experiences as an actor formed also his view on Paris as a photographic subject, "so that truly to him the city was a stage and all the men and women merely actors" (27).

Abbott particularly emphasizes Atget's ability to fix the small everyday dramas on the photographic plate – that means to represent the city and city dwellers in the best sense: as main actors in the history of civilization. She was fascinated by the transience of Atget's motifs, which revealed the uncanny in everyday life. Atget very often photographed the small streets of the vanishing old quarters of Paris and their petty bourgeois and proletarian residents, but almost never the touristic sites of the metropolis, such as the big representative monuments. Abbott states that this was a very conscious choice: "Selection makes the photographer a true historian. He must know what to photograph and what not to photograph, to give meaning to his visual

chronicle of civilization" (van Haaften 26). Abbott not only took the portrait of Atget shortly before his death in 1927, but also bought, with the financial help of friends, 1400 exposed glass plates and 7800 negatives from his estate (Yochelson 12).[10]

Benjamin in his survey *Kleine Geschichte der Photographie* (*Short History of Photography*) of 1931 mentioned Atget as an ancestor of surrealistic photography: "Atget's Parisian photos are the precursors of surrealist photography, the vanguard of the only truly broad column Surrealism succeeded in setting in motion. It initiated the liberation of the object from the aura, which is undoubtedly the achievement of the most recent school of photography."[11]

For Benjamin, Atget's merits consisted in liberating the photographic object from what he himself had called the "aura". In this respect one might think of Atget's preference for the detail, the fragmentation of things by making cutouts and his corresponding avoidance of photographing major touristic sites and landmarks. Atget's photographs always dealt with the transience and fluidity of things that make the city an object of history and change. Berenice Abbott herself reflected on the task of documenting the city from time to time. Her great photographic project *Changing New York*, which she started in 1929, directly after her return to the American metropolis from Paris, absorbed her for many years. In 1942 she wrote about this ambitious project:

> Truly the city reflects life at its greatest intensity, for it represents the most powerful, complex, coordinated, and dynamic structure of civilization. In its nexus all forces of contemporary society unite. Its facilities for dwelling, travelling, eating, recreation are keyed to the highest pitch of sensation. In the city, modern life's complexities are accentuated, exaggerated, heightened to unbearable tension. No other theme is as compelling for the photographer who seeks to express life today. (van Haaften 25)

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[10] The recent catalogue of the last retrospective exhibition speaks of 1.787 negatives and 10.000 prints (Atget 281).

[11] „Atgets Pariser Photos sind die Vorläufer der surrealistischen Photographie; Vortrupps der einzigen wirklich breiten Kolonne, die der Surrealismus hat in Bewegung setzen können. [...] er leitet die Befreiung des Objekts von der Aura ein, die das unbezweifelbarste Verdienst der jüngsten Photographenschule ist." (378)

A Variety of Vistas

Most of the young photographers, hungry for the comforts and thrills offered by modern metropolitan life, came to Paris during the 1920s and met there. Besides the Americans Man Ray, Berenice Abbott and Walker Evans for instance the Hungarian André Kertész, the German Germaine Krull, who influenced a lot of young photographers such as the Romanian Eli Lotar and the Transylvanian-born Brassaï, came here. They all stayed for an extended period in Paris. Evans, for instance, spent a year, from 1926 to 1927, in the French capital to hear lectures on literature at the Sorbonne and to study European modern art. Kertész lived in Paris from 1925 until 1936, when he settled in New York. He not only photographed the art scene of the *rive gauche* and made many wonderful moody portraits of the "city of his dreams" (Sandra Philipps 11), but also dedicated two books to Paris: *Day of Paris* (1945) and *J'aime Paris* (1974). In 1927 he also had a solo exhibition in the avant-garde gallery *Au Sacre du Printemps*.

Krull came to Paris in 1926 and soon entered the bohemian scene in *Saint-Germain-des-Prés*, where she met the filmmakers René Clair, Alberto Cavalcanti, Luis Buñuel and the photographers Berenice Abbott and Man Ray at the *Café aux deux Magots* (Sichel 84). She soon opened up her own studio for fashion and portrait photography in several locations in Montmartre. She became friends with the artist couple Robert and Sonia Delaunay, who introduced her to the glamorous art scene and supported her in finding clients for portraits. The photographer made also a portrait of Robert Delaunay that shows the painter on a ladder in front of his painting of the Eiffel Tower, *Les jardins du Champ-de-Mars* from 1922. At the beginning of the thirties, Krull moved to the *rive gauche* and lived in a flat on *Boulevard St. Michel*. She became also friends with Jean Cocteau, whom she accompanied during his adventures of the Parisian nightlife. She made some portraits of the French writer and was, as well as Berenice Abbott, especially fascinated by his long expressive hands.

In the twenties many actors of the international art scene focussed their activities on Paris. The year 1928 saw the "First Independent Exhibition of Photography": the so-called *Salon d'Escalier*. The exhibition took place from May 24th to June 7th 1928 on the stairway of the *Comédie des Champs-Elysées* and was organized by Lucien Vogel, editor of the avant-garde magazine *Vu*, the filmmaker René Clair, the writer Jean Prévost and the art critics Florent Fels and Georges Charensol. The organizers wanted to present photography as a new art form. The extraordinary exhibition was dedicated to the avant-garde photography of the "new vision": Kertész's views of Paris, Krull's visions of iron constructions and the photographs by Man Ray were

regarded as the most exciting objects. A retrospective of Atget and Nadar was also part of the exhibition – as a celebration of the realistic heritage of that new constructivist realism in artistic photography.

The late twenties were also a time when many photo books were published which proliferated the image of the metropolis. One of them was Germaine Krull's *100 x Paris* from 1929, part of a book series of city portraits, which was published in Berlin under the title *Die Reihe der Hundert* (*The Series of the Hundred*). Another one was *Paris*, a book with photographs by Krull and Mario Bucovich, published in 1928 with an introduction of Paul Morand, as part of a book series entitled *Das Gesicht der Städte* (*The Face of Cities*), which also offered a city map to the reader. Krull's *100 x Paris* consists of a series of black-and-white photographs of touristic views, public sites and common urban scenes of everyday city life like streets crowded with passers-by or blocked with cars. The book contains an interesting introduction written by the art critic and publisher Florent Fels. Here he compares his hometown with an adorable woman's body: "This large extended body is Paris. Spread diagonally across the Seine is this city, which itself entrances bewitching sirens, surrounded by hills whose names are a hymn: Argenteuil – Meudon – Le Valérien – Chaville – Montfermeil – Montfaucon."[12]

Fels places the exceptional attractiveness of the French capital in a visionary mythological scene. In his vision even the sirens are bewitched by the beauty of the hills of Paris and by the sounds of their names. The mythological theme also introduces the transfiguration of the past – that is, the invention of a past that never existed. For Fels, Paris *is* the city of beautiful memories: for him there is no quarter, no single place in that metropolis, that does not evoke a reminiscence of happiness; so that even the stranger, who enters the city for the first time, finds his dreams fulfilled: "It would be difficult to find in any part of the city a place which does not recall moving or amorous memories and the stranger visiting Paris easily finds his dreams fulfilled."[13] Again, Paris reveals itself as the very place for dreams come true. This is because everything in this city, especially in a nostalgic perspective, is full of memories of historical and individual events, so that cultural memory and individual memory merge. This constitutes, in the words of Florent Fels, the "magic of Paris":

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12 „Dieser große hingestreckte Körper ist Paris. Quer über die Seine gelagert wird diese Stadt, die selbst bezaubernde Sirenen bezaubert, von Hügeln umgeben, deren Namen ein Gesang sind: Argenteuil – Meudon – Le Valérien – Chaville – Montfermeil – Montfaucon." (V)

13 „Man hätte Mühe, in allen seinen Stadtteilen auch nur einen Ort zu treffen, der nicht eine rührende oder galante Erinnerung wachriefe, und der Fremde, der Paris besucht, findet dort mühelos seinen Traum erfüllt." (V)

> You must look at these monuments as an ensemble and let yourself be moved by their great names. Then one day – and this is the day in which Paris softly pours itself into the foreigner's soul – you will see, at a streetcorner, through the crown of a tree decorated by spring, the small needle of the Eiffel Tower, a buoy in the air; the Arc de Triomphe stands outlined against a sky of fire, the morning sun trembles around the columns of the Louvre and makes flowers blossom on the balconies of the Place des Vosges, and you are forever addicted to the magic of Paris.[14]

Germaine Krull's certainly most famous photo collection, however, is *Métal*, which, in contrast, celebrates the comforts of modern iron architecture and industry with highly elaborated photographs. The collection of 64 plates was published in 1928 by the *Librairie des Arts Décoratifs* in Paris and earned remarkable resonance among art critics as well as among journalists. It included photographs of industrial iron constructions such as mines or port installations, which were shot in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Paris and Marseille. Krull's photographic style was influenced by the Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens, with whom she lived in Amsterdam. During the twenties, Ivens had experimented with extreme camera positions and astonishing perspectives, fast camera movements and montage. His film *De Brug* (*The Bridge*, NL 1928) was definitely a source of inspiration for her.

One of the most photographed objects of her collection is the Eiffel Tower, mostly taken from a low viewpoint. The cover shows a photo of the elevator wheels seen from a near distance. The Eiffel Tower, inaugurated at the World's Fair of 1889, became not only the city's landmark, but also a famous photographic and filmic object. Because of its rank and metal construction, which seems to be simultaneously aerial, the tower inspired many photographers and filmmakers. Its penetrable construction offers a variety of spectacular views – André Kertész's very suggestive photograph *Shadow of the Eiffel Tower*, for instance, taken in 1929, shows only a small part of the basic construction seen from a very high standpoint, so that the passers-by at the ground look like small black dots. Nevertheless, Germaine Krull has reported that for her the tower was not primarily an interesting photographic object – she first regarded it as an "*old black and inert thing*" (Sichel 97). Thus, the search for interesting perspectives became, as she later wrote, an investigation of unusual ways to get a new vision of that "*old black and inert thing*":

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[14] „Man muß diese Denkmäler im Licht ihrer Gesamtheit, unter der Erschütterung ihrer großen Namen, sehen. Dann sieht man eines Tages—und es ist der Tag, da sich die Seele von Paris sanft in den Fremden ergießt—an einer Straßenbiegung, durch die Haarkrone eines Baumes, den der Frühling schmückt, die schmale Nadel des Eiffelturmes, eine Boje in der Luft; der Arc de Triomphe steht gegen einen Himmel aus Feuer, die Morgensonne umzittert die Säulen des Louvre, läßt Blumen auf den Balkonen des Place des Vosges erblühen, und Du bist für immer dem Zauber von Paris verfallen." (VI)

> Finally, I found a small door at the very top of the staircase that no one uses and no one knows. I climbed and descended, and suddenly there was the magic of the iron, those great wheels that turned the elevators, those crowns of iron, the lace work of small ironwork that served as decoration, seen against the sky like huge spiders. Everything had come to life and no longer had anything to do with the Eiffel Tower as we know it: the iron was alive![15]

Florent Fels once more contributed an essay to the remarkable success of the portfolio, in which he praised the lyrical mood and the transformational power of Krull's pictures: "L'acier transforme nos paysages. Des forêts de pylônes remplacent les arbres séculaires. Les hauts fourneaux se substituent aux collines" (Krull, *Métal* 4). In Fels's view, the signs of the industrialization not only change the landscapes, they replace nature and thus become a second nature. This argument frames his whole essay, as the following quote proves: "L'activité industrielle de notre temps met sous nos yeux des spectacles auxquels ils sont encore inaccoutumés. / Leur nouveauté nous saisit et nous effraie à la manière des grands phénomènes de la nature. A leur tour, ils créent un état d'esprit auquel sacrifient parfois les peintres et les poètes" (Krull, *Métal* 3).

Another critic celebrated the "brutal beauty" of Krull's photo collection, which indeed shows many machines, motors or wheels (qtd. in Sichel 94). Still other critics also praised the lyrism of Krull's shots of industrial constructions and the melodious rhythm of the photographic series, which makes them comparable to cinematic symphonies of images like Joris Ivens's *De Brug* (*The Bridge*, NL 1928) or Walther Ruttmann's *Berlin. Die Symphonie der Großstadt* (*Berlin. Symphony of the Metropolis*, GER 1927).

Like many other photographers at that time Krull was fascinated by abstract industrial forms – forms that were excised by means of photography from their former environment and in many cases could not be identified in the photographic pictures. She isolated and fragmented the shapes of things in order to transform them into visionary objects, until they became uncommon, sometimes even uncanny. But nevertheless, they remain very beautiful fetishes in the eye of the observer (Sichel 76) – and at the same time nonlegible as industrialized forms. The portfolio includes, for instance, a multiple exposure of bicycle wheels against an architectural backdrop that produces a phantasmagorical image of motion – a motion that can be seen at the

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[15] „Endlich fand ich ganz oben eine kleine Tür, sie führte zu einer Treppe, die niemals benutzt wurde und die wohl keiner kannte. Ich kletterte hinauf und hinunter, und auf einmal nahmen die mächtigen Räder, die den Aufzug in Gang hielten, die schweren Eisenkonstruktionen, die kleineren Verstrebungen, die nur der Dekoration dienten, im Gegenlicht betrachtet, die Form riesiger Spinnen an. Alles war lebendig geworden und hatte nichts mehr mit dem Eiffelturm, wie wir ihn kennen, zu tun: das Eisen lebte!" (qtd. in Sichel 97)

same time as an expression of progress and of loss of control. The photographs of these isolated forms are presented in a dynamic motionlike order so that the viewer loses his stable viewpoint when he leafs through the pages (77).

Such a kaleidoscopic view is highly characteristic of the modern regime of seeing, because its quality is very cinematographic. It combines different viewpoints and picture formats, and also prefers experiments in geometry, montage and formal breaks in the layout. That is why Krull's photographs are mentioned in Benjamin's *Kleine Geschichte der Photographie* as an example for constructivist photography which can arouse critical questions – and it is for this reason that they have a certain social dimension. Her interest in formal experiments is shown in a number of photographic montages, which combine pictures of very different objects. In a series she did for the art magazine *L'Art vivant* there is a rude montage of the facade of the *Palais Royal*, of the gate to the Louvre court and of an unidentifiable industrial building with two big chimneys that must have a disorienting effect on the eye of the beholder (94). This photographic image can be seen as a sign of the antagonistic forces that characterize modernity (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Germaine Krull: *Paris* (photo montage, undated); collection Le Clézio, Paris; © Museum Folkwang, Essen

In 1928 Krull also started collaboration with Lucien Vogel's avant-garde magazine *Vu*, where photographs of Abbott, Man Ray, Kertész and many

others were published. There some of her most inspiring reportages of modern life in Paris were announced. In the first issue, for instance, one of her street-photographs, *Chariot des Alfredistes*, was printed. Her first photo reportage, *Fêtes foraines*, was published one month later, in April 1928. The collage-like layout of *Vu* functioned as a model for the photo books of Krull, Kertész and Brassaï (Sichel 100). Krull also worked for more exclusive art magazines like *Jazz*, *Variétés* or the surrealistic art magazine *Bifur*, where she published more photographs than many other photographers at that time (101).

This shows that her photographs were circulating in the art world and at the same time in the world of the illustrated press, for whom she worked regularly until 1936. In *Vu* she released many photo stories about the modern city and street life, for instance "Une Porte Moderne: Une Ville d'Art: Anvers" (*Vu*, no. 38/1928), "Le Pardon des Terre-Neuvats" (*Vu*, no. 49/1929) and "Eden de Banlieue" (*Vu*, no. 331/1934). But her most famous project for *Vu* was the series of the Eiffel Tower, printed in the 11th issue of the magazine, in May 1928 with an essay by Florent Fels. These photographs created a kaleidoscopic image of the rapidly changing city, which in 1929 celebrated the 40th anniversary of the world-famous tower.[16]

At the end of the twenties, Krull was widely accepted in the Parisian art scene, where she was praised for bringing constructivist architectural photography to France. Berenice Abbott, for instance, named her "the Margaret Bourke-White of Paris" (Sichel 91). Brassaï, who was influenced by Germaine Krull's visualizations of modernity, remembers especially her photographs of the Eiffel Tower as something undeniably new. And Jean Cocteau, in a letter, gave her the title "miroir reformant" and declared: "Vous et la chambre noire obtenez un monde neuf, un monde qui a traversé des méchanismes et une âme" (qtd. in Mac Orlan 16). Her abstract pictures of industrial objects were often interpreted as a metaphor of modern life, but at the same time she was praised for her poetic visions and the realism of the photographs, which creates a new visual language. In his review of the exhibition in the *Salon d'Escalier* Fels, the most influential art critic of this time and an enthusiastic fan of photography, called her the "Valkyrie of photographic film" (qtd. in Christopher Philipps 25).

Nevertheless it was still a great honour for her that in 1931 the prestigious publishing house *Librairie Gallimard* released a book on the photographic work of Germaine Krull, which included an essay by the novelist and critic Pierre Mac Orlan. His essay "Les sentiments de la rue et les accessoires de la

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[16] Some of Krull's Eiffel Tower photos had already been published in the German magazine *Uhu* together with a text about the tower's history, but it was their release in *Vu* that made them popular and famous (Sichel 102).

rue" not only praises her industry pictures, but also emphasizes her street photographs of Paris.

> Que Germaine Krull transpose un paysage de machines en une sorte de symphonie stupéfiante, qu'elle joue littérairement avec les lumières de Paris entre la place Pigalle et celle de la Bastille, elle ne crée pas des anecdotes faciles, mais elle met en évidence le détail secret que les gens n'aperçoivent pas toujours, mais que la lumière se son objectif découvre là où il se cachait. (7)

In his essay Mac Orlan focuses on Krull's ability as a photographer to reveal the relevance and beauty of the small things, the importance of details, which are often overlooked by common viewers.[17] It is their very dynamic viewpoint and almost cinematographic style of shooting that makes these photographs so important for the image of the metropolis. They are snapshots from a mobile point of view, forming a modern vision of the ever-changing city (see Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Germaine Krull: *Eiffel Tower* (from: *Métal*, plate 2, 1928); estate Germaine Krull; © Museum Folkwang, Essen

[17] Mac Orlan also wrote an introduction to Kertész's book *Paris vu par André Kertész*, which was published in 1934 by Editions d'Histoire et d'Art in Paris, including 48 photographs made in the French capital.

The critic Marcel Auclair, in an article for *L'Art vivant* from October 1928, has compared the structure and the details of Krull's photos with René Clair's fantastic feature film *Paris qui dort* (F 1925). This comparison is anything but surprising. In using a panoramic view from the Eiffel Tower the film offers "a variety of vistas that turn the city into a cinematic event" (Bruno 22). The city itself is imagined as "the product of a scientific experiment" (22), because there is a machine called "ray" that brings it to life and to death. In the photographic as well as in the cinematographic vision the interplay of light and shadows is very symbolic, because it enforces the dematerialization of the object.[18] So Auclair's comparison can be seen as voiced evidence of an aesthetic regime that visualizes the metropolis as a fragmented cinematographic structure.

The Cinematic Vision of the Metropolis

Since the early days of cinematography, shots of metropolitan life belong to the very heart of cultural memory. The cinematic visualizations of busy streets, municipal buildings and crowds of passers-by have formed our picture of the metropolis. Paris soon became a site of cinematic investigation. In 1900 American cinematographers came to the city in order to record the 'event of the year': the World's Fair. James H. White's *Panorama of Eiffel Tower/Scene from Elevator Ascending Eiffel Tower* (US 1900), for instance, shows a series of views of the exposition area, which approaches, step by step, the main visual object in this area, *la tour Eiffel*. First the camera was positioned among the endless stream of visitors who often noticed they were filmed and reacted to the camera. At the end of the short film the camera climbs inside the elevator to the top of the tower. There the circulating camera gives an overview over the French capital, over the network of streets, places and municipal buildings. In this moving bird's-eye view the city itself becomes a mobile image. Such views are, as Tom Gunning has argued, a common genre of Early Cinema and stand for the availability of the metropolis as a mobile image – an image that was seen as a realistic and 'vivid' reproduction of the real world. Gunning has convincingly demonstrated how people's curiosity made such views very attractive for early film audiences ("Before Documentary" 9-24).

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[18] An example of such a dissolution of the visualized object is Robert Delaunay's painting of the tower *Les jardins du Champ-de-Mars* from 1922. Kertész also shows in his photographs of the Eiffel Tower abstracted details and the shadows of the great iron construction.

The Lumière brothers and other filmmakers quickly broadened the collection of images of metropolitan life. Their then well-known *actualities* pictured not only the railway as the epitome of the modern transportation systems (see for instance *L'Arrivée d'un train à la Ciotat*, F 1896), but also made the everyday-life of the working class and the bourgeoisie a part of the visual memory (see for instance *La sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon, Démolition d'un mur, Les repas de bébé*, F 1895 or *Bataille de boules de neige, Partie de cartes*, F 1896). Early filmmakers also often focussed on urban sites, which are in many cases architectural sites of transit like city skylines, traffic lines or railway stations. Michel Foucault called such locations heterotopias, because they are places where no one stays for a long time. As Giuliana Bruno has pointed out in her study about the modern spatiovisuality as a "product of the era of the metropolis and its transits, film expressed an urban viewpoint from its very inception" (18). Thus, the film camera mobilizes the gaze of the viewer and the screen mirrors the urban audience.

The German sociologist Emilie Altenloh, in her book *Zur Soziologie des Kinos* (*A Sociology of the Cinema*), published in 1914, praised France as a country born for the cinema and declared: "Where else would I find an audience of such mobility, with such a pronounced penchant for quick sensation, with so much taste for anything intrinsically cinematic"[19]. The French film audience is regarded as very mobile and thus with a great affinity to the image-in-motion on the cinematographic screen. On this screen the modern city regularly reveals itself as a visionary object: "a composite practice of spatiality was born in film that mobilized place and transformed it into a site of landscaping" (Bruno 19). The montage cuts the continuous cinematic space into pieces. That is why the city space, in the eye of the filmviewer, is dispersed to a kaleidoscope of moving vistas and has to be recomposed.

In the twenties many films were released that belong to the genre of metropolitan film – to name only one: Fritz Lang's utopian feature film *Metropolis* (GER 1926) plays with the antagonistic consequences of modernity, the struggle between nature and civilization in a very artificial metropolitan set design. Other films of that genre, like Dimitri Kirsanoff's *Ménilmontant* (F 1925), are located in a more 'realistic' environment and are even sometimes shot outside the film studio on 'real' locations, which thus become visionary objects, too.

Georg Wilhelm Pabst's *Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney* (*The Love of Jeanne Ney*, GER 1927) is a good example of this cinematic view of the urban space that has become an imaginary object. The film is based on a novel of the

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[19] „Wo fände sich sonst noch ein Publikum von solcher Beweglichkeit, so ausgesprochener Vorliebe für rasche Sensation, von soviel Geschmack für alles von Natur dem Kinematographen Eigene." (8)

Russian writer Ilja Ehrenburg which was published a year before.[20] In this highly melodramatic feature film Paris is the arena of a love story set in the dubious milieu of exiled Russians. A revolutionist and his beloved were separated because of the troubles of the Russian Revolution. The girl moved to Paris, where she is waiting for her lover. The city functions in this film first and foremost as an ideal backdrop for their reunion. No wonder that their first meeting point is a great municipal park, which creates an atmosphere of innocence, security and happiness. As Christopher Prendergast has pointed out, the big municipal parks, which were built under Haussmann's rule, adopted a pastoral imagery for the absurd sake of "suspending the frictions and divisions of social hierarchy and class conflict" (9). These parks were enriched with phantasmagorical images of an idyllic life and thus themselves became imaginary objects.

One of the most notable municipal parks of this kind is the *Buttes-Chaumont* located in the XIXth *arrondissement*, in the northeast of the centre of Paris. It was inaugurated on April 1st 1867 at the opening of the World's Fair. The park consists of a big lake, waterfalls and a rope bridge, green hills, a temple dedicated to the goddess Sybille at the top of a cliff and many rocks, which offer terrific sites. Louis Aragon has drawn a portrait of this park in his often quoted surrealist novel *Le paysan de Paris* of 1926, which is also an outstanding tribute to the antagonisms of modernization. In this nostalgic park the reunion of the couple in Pabst's film takes place, and there is no other arena that could have been more adequate. The film shows the protagonists sitting and flirting on a rock with municipal buildings and the *Sacré Cœur* in the background. This camera position offers, apart from the couple's interaction, a wonderful touristic view of Paris as the ideal backdrop for a love story (see Fig. 4a and 4b).

[20] Siegfried Kracauer wrote a review of Ehrenburg's novel for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* that focuses on the highly melodramatic story (5.2 36-37). Ehrenburg himself has criticized Pabst and the film very much for his false adaptation, which overemphasizes the melodramatic elements and changes even the end of the novel.

Fig. 4a: G.W. Pabst, *Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney* (*The Love of Jeanne Ney*, GER 1927): The Couple at the Buttes-Chaumont; DVD still, Kino Video, 2001

Fig. 4b: G.W. Pabst, *Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney* (*The Love of Jeanne Ney*, GER 1927): The Couple at the Buttes-Chaumont; DVD still, Kino Video, 2001

The other main locations of the film also evoke central urban spaces like the marketplace or the railway station and activities like driving in a car. Pabst's film prefers to show the city life of Paris in full daylight, and one has to remember what Florent Fels has written about the "magic of Paris", which appears together with the morning sun. At the same time he refuses to record the well-known touristic sights of the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe, the Champs-Elysées or the Louvre. Instead, his film focuses on the visionary old Paris with its small alleys illuminated with gas lanterns, where the reunited couple strolls around looking for a good night's lodging.

Nevertheless, the car rides through the city and the couple's stroll across a typical French market on an early morning look very realistic, because they were not filmed in a studio (see Fig. 5). The ordinary people of Paris appear in these shots – mostly without noticing that they were being filmed.[21] These scenes are reminiscent of the views of early cinema, which was popular more than two decades before. They bear the charm of a day in the real life of a metropolis, not without evoking the imaginary memory of the city at the same time.

[21] There is one noticeable exception: a middle-aged man with a hat is crossing the camera standing at the crowded market and watching for seconds in the lens. Pabst has not cut off this sequence, so that it may be a conscious reminiscence of the early days of cinematography.

Fig. 5: G.W. Pabst, *Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney* (*The Love of Jeanne Ney*, GER 1927): The Couple at the Market; DVD still, Kino Video, 2001

First of all the car rides offer an image of the city that is always changing, and undoubtedly an image-in-motion can be very emotional, that is, an image of the imagination. This fact can be proved by a look at the already mentioned scene of the first meeting of the couple at the *Buttes-Chaumont*. When the car with the girl arrives at the park the lover cannot wait to see her and runs alongside the running car. The camera, which is installed on a driving vehicle, simulates the view of the girl on her running lover, who is only partly seen, because the sight is blocked of trees and bushes. This short scene demonstrates the ability of the film camera to capture motion of every kind: human, mechanical and imaginary. At the end, these few marginal sequences give Pabst's film and its conventional melodramatic plot a definitely 'realistic' look that makes it, at the same time, interesting for an analysis of modernity as an imaginary object. The very randomness of their use in Pabst's mediocre film is an indication of a circulation of an image of Paris that is always an object of the imagination – an imaginary object that is shared by literature, photography and film. That is why the last word of this paper belongs to Kracauer, who has envisioned the striking power of regeneration that Paris possesses – a power that, for him, reveals itself as a woman with white hair and, paradoxically, a fresh young face: "Paris, too, bears the signs of age on her forehead. Out of the pores of its houses memories spring, and time and again rain washes the columns of the Madeleine, so that they are white like

snow. The white of age is the city's colour. Beneath this cover, however, she lives protected and fresh as on the very first day."[22]

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[22] „Auch Paris trägt Zeichen des Alters auf der Stirn. Aus den Poren seiner Häuser quellen Erinnerungen hervor, und immer wieder wäscht der Regen die Säulen der Madeleine, sodaß sie weiß sind wie Schnee. Das Weiß des Alters ist die Farbe der Stadt. Unter der Hülle aber lebt sie geschützt und ist frisch wie am ersten Tag." (5.3 300)

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