

While last week's readings focus on the 19th century London, this week's pieces take us on a tour of the 19th century Paris and the early 20th century Berlin (and of course, a bit of London from Woolf).

I was first attracted to the film by Walter Ruttmann, *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*. The film shows a day in Berlin in chronological order—workers taking public transport to work, workers having lunch and taking a break, as well as the nightlife in Berlin. I am nevertheless mostly drawn to the opening scene of the film, where a train goes from the countryside to the great city, seeming to represent how the industrial revolutions have brought people to the urban. The change of scenery also seems to refer to the change from tranquility to the bustling lives of the city. The juxtaposition of the train against the horses is likely to be another contrast between the old way of living and the newly industrialized city. Then, the scene turns to the regular commute of workers and monotonous movements of machines. The film seems to suggest that modern life—provided by industrialization and urbanization—has trapped people in this regularity and predictability. In a sense, it is not hard to find similarities between this film and *Modern Times* by Charlie Chaplin—in the way they both illustrate what modernization means to people.

In my reading of Franz Hessel, I think his pieces share many similar ideas. On the one hand, the description of the bustling streets and the fact that people throw glances at the narrator when he is trying to be a flaneur do a successful job at depicting the frenzy of urban lives. The narrator even goes on saying that “Around here, you have to have a purpose, otherwise you are not allowed. Here, you don’t walk, you walk somewhere” (p. 4, “The Suspect”). This echoes *Symphony of a Great City*, which also pinpoints that as urban dwellers, we are often moving from one task to another, not being able to experience the city as the narrator does. This reminds me of Poe's short piece “The Man of the Crowd” we read last week. Everyone in the piece is part of the crowd, walking around and going somewhere; and only the narrator can do something out of the routine—following someone for an entire night. It is no coincidence that Hessel's piece is named “The Suspect,” which seems to be the mirror image of the man that Poe's narrator is chasing after (just like how Poe's narrator is also the mirror image of the man he himself is chasing after). In both pieces, it is the ability to do something outside of what the urban lives have prescribed us to do that has made one suspicious.

Last but not least, it would be a shame to end the post without discussing Virginia Woolf's essay “Street Haunting: A London Adventure.” In this essay, the idea that exploring the city is a means of freedom becomes explicit. Woolf, a flaneur of London, simultaneously becomes an observer detached from the city and also an anonymous passer-by that is part of the city. Moreover, it is worth considering why the essay has “haunting” as part of its name. Appearing only once in the body of the essay, “street haunting in winter the greatest of adventures.” If what Woolf does in the essay is street haunting, she then becomes the haunter who escapes from her room, turns into an anonymous part of the crowd, and goes about an adventure in the city. Interestingly, Woolf starts the essay by explaining an urge to buy a lead pencil, which becomes her excuse for getting out of the room. I could sense that it is street haunting for Woolf, not in the sense that is horrifying. Instead, Woolf's haunting is a type of celebration of inhabiting the public and male-dominated sphere, as male flaneurs (e.g. Poe and Hessel's narrators) do not seem to be needing an excuse to venture out. I suppose that I really appreciate Woolf's piece because it not only criticizes the original idea of the flaneur that goes around the city easily, without problems that might arise from their gender (and class and race, etc.) but also illustrates a type of resistance through street haunting.

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