

*Döblin's Hesitant Acceptance of Film*

No matter how much Döblin considered some of his later works more important, literary scholarship and the reading public view *Berlin Alexanderplatz* as the peak of Döblin's work. It is more or less agreed that Döblin was involved in the currents of various reactions to what is known as German Expressionism. However, discussion is then open on the extent to which the novel itself conforms to the paradigm of Expressionism, which is mostly described in terms reminiscent of some basic aspects of the definition of Expressionism, as in Steven Brockman's assertion: "Whereas Impressionism seeks to accurately record the play of light and color in the outside world, eschewing sharp contours and favoring gentle transitions, curves, and blurring, Expressionism seeks access to an interior world characterized by garish and unnatural colors, jagged lines, and sharp distinctions between color spheres" (Brockman, 2010: pp. 49–50).

Döblin himself – not really opposing the label *Expressionism* – defined his writing as "epic fiction". Obviously, his work differed from the intellectual currents of the time, although it somehow simultaneously conversed and interacted with them. It is no accident that Benjamin brings Dadaism into his discussion of Döblin, which through its "fanatical battle against artwork has made use of it in order to ally itself with everyday life" (Benjamin, 1991, pp. 232–233). This assertion points towards the entire background of *Neue Sachlichkeit* in its emergence from Expressionism and challenging it at it points towards rich dialogues and polemics of the time, involving some of the greatest intellectual authorities of the twentieth century such as György Lukács and Bertold Brecht.

Döblin's own writings on the relation between literature and film show that his position changed over time. Erich Kleinschmidt goes a bit too far in his claim that "[t]he often-repeated allusion to Döblin's 'filmic writing style' must therefore be refuted. It originates with contemporary critics of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and has been repeated ever since" (2004: p. 167). Kleinschmidt does not mention Benjamin in his article, and so it can be assumed that Benjamin's emphasis on the montage aspect reaches beyond the simple direct and non-reflexive concept of a novel as a narration mirroring cinema. In addition, Kleinschmidt himself contradicts his own assertion because on the same page of the text he realizes that "Döblin's reserved relation to film changed around 1930, along with his changing conception of literature. In place of a rather elitist conception of art, Döblin now wanted to reach a broader mass audience." Benjamin's claim about the role of mon-