

tion well: the characters of the novel keep building and taking themselves apart. Their identities, relations, and subjectively suggested “appearances” are crumbling as much as elusive truths are working against them. Finally, this turn comes close to a post-modern twist on reality, constructed in a double bind between the reader and a fictional text. “In fact”, says Benjamin, “the material of montage is not at all random” (Benjamin, 1991: p. 232).

The novel, decisively marked by the principle of montage derived from cinema, was first published in 1929, just at the time silent cinema was ending in Germany.⁵ However, Benjamin himself does not say anything about sound cinema and its potentials in this context, nor in any other context for that matter. Döblin’s novel was prompted in fact by silent film, but it implicitly anticipated sound film because one virtually “hears” the vibrating whirr of the city when reading the novel. Therefore, as hinted above, mutual relations between the film and the novel include Döblin’s signalling a lack of sound in moving pictures of the silent era.

Fassbinder’s Alexanderplatz

It did not take very long after the publication of the novel in 1929 for the first film version of the novel to be shot. Based on the script by Döblin himself and with Heinrich George in the role of Franz Biberkopf, the film was directed by Piel Jutzi, most famous for the successes of one of the “proletarian” films in the Weimar Republic, *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (Mother Krause’s Journey to Happiness, 1929). Although praised for its imagery of Berlin and especially the introductory sequence, in which Franz rides a tram after leaving prison, the ninety-minute film was widely considered inadequate in comparison to the “epic” proportions of the novel. Therefore, as much as the novel was generated in the world of cinema,⁶ there were obvi-

- 5 Brockmann quotes the dynamic of the transition process to sound cinema at the time. “Some basic statistics on production show how quickly the introduction of sound film changed the cinema landscape in Germany: in 1928 Germany made 224 films, all of them silent. In 1929, Germany made 183 films, with 175 silent and eight sound. The next year, in 1930, Germany made a total of 146 films, of which 100 were sound and only 46 silent. By 1931, Germany made only two silent films and the other 142 films were sound. Within two years there had been a total revolution in technology, and the silent film essentially disappeared from German production” (Brockmann, 2010: p. 55).
- 6 Döblin’s connections to the world of moving pictures were abundant and multifarious. From simply being a frequent and enthusiastic film viewer and a writer of film critiques, Döblin’s affinity to film also manifested itself in his professional activity in Hollywood while he was in emigration in the United States.