**Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt** **(1927)**

*Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (*Berlin: Symphony of a City*) is a film directed by Walther Ruttmann, co-written by Carl Mayer and Karl Freund, who was also responsible for the cinematography. Together with *Manhatta* (Strand & Sheeler, 1921), *Rien que les heures* (Cavalcanti, 1926) and *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* (*Man with a Movie Camera*, Vertov, 1929), the film is one of the best-known examples of a city symphony – a film genre that is also often described as “city film” or “city poem.” Portraying the everyday life of a big city, mainly through visual impressions in an experimental and semi-documentary style, *Berlin* is marked by a script-free open narrative form. Although based on footage shot over a year, events of the film are arranged to simulate the passage of a single day. Unmistakably influenced by the rhythmic, expressive, associative, and metaphorical possibilities of Soviet montage, Ruttmann divided the film into five acts which can be compared to the “movements” of a symphony – in this case, a score written by composer Edmund Meisel. Making the city itself and the urban masses the true protagonists of the film, Ruttmann presents the multicoloured and multifaceted metropolis as the locus of modernity – something that is perfectly exemplified by the leitmotiv of moving trains and streetcars that connects the various parts of the film.

Further reading:

- Graf, A. (2007) “Berlin – Moscow: On the Montage Aesthetic in the City Symphony Films of the 1920s,” in Alexander Graf & Dietrich Scheunemann (eds.), *Avant-Garde Film*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 77-92.

- Hillard, D. (2004) “Walter Ruttmann’s Janus-Faced View of Modernity: The Ambivalence of Description in *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Groβstadt*,” *Monatshefte* 96 (1): 78-92.

- Weihsmann, H. (1997) “The City in Twilight: Charting the Genre of the City-Film 1900-1930,” in François Penz & Maureen Thomas (eds), *Cinema & Architecture: Méliès, Mallet-Stevens, Multimedia*, London: BFI, 8-27.

Paratexual materials

- 6 digital stills

- Publicity material (photomontage)

- link to film on Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/BerlinSymphonyofaGreatCity

Steven Jacobs

Ghent University, Belgium