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Caught in the Act: Visualizing a Crime-Free Capital[1]

The fall of the German *Kaiserreich* and military defeat in World War I engendered an accelerated collapse of institutional legitimacy and a sharp rupture in Germany's governmental and social structures. The very agencies that had functioned as stabilizing forces in modern society became objects of dispute and open contestation. Nowhere was this more the case than in law enforcement and criminal justice. At the same time that German political authority faced major reform on a local, national, and international scale, so too did the nation's cultural authorities have to realign their operations and allegiances. Any survey of Weimar Republic culture will call to mind countless literary and film titles that manifest a concern with such weakened leadership and severed communal ties through the representation of attempts to apprehend the deviant individual in the deep shadows of the city. A selection of the films alone would include Joseph May's *Asphalt* and *Das Panzergewölbe*, Johannes Meyer's *Der Tiger*, as well as the internationally familiar crime films *Dr. Mabuse* and *M* created by Fritz Lang. The study presented here looks behind the scenes at the conditions under which the creators of these films selected and crafted their tales of urban crime and detection, ultimately revealing that Weimar visual culture's insistent evocation of criminal and legal motifs served as the pretext for a larger exploration of the status of the modern urban subject as participant in and product of culture and the law. Conceived alternately as political subject, perceptual subject, and social subject, the resident of Germany's capital city, Berlin, became the target of legal disciplining initiatives that mobilized character typologies, narrative story lines, and hierarchies of knowledge shared in common with the era's popular culture of crime and detection.

In Berlin in particular, both high and popular culture of the period were self-consciously involved in a give and take with organized police work. This significant interplay between aesthetic production and actual criminal justice initiatives amounted to more than the mere reflection of criminology in fictional narratives: the Weimar Republic police and courts actively used urban mass media to reach out to the public in education and legitimation initiatives. With the cooperation of the press and popular entertainment institutions, the police transformed activity on the streets of Berlin into a performance of criminal detection. While the mass media forged ties with governing bodies and while cultural institutions framed politics

and society as an elaborate display or production, the distinction between real events and entertaining spectacles became less and less clear. The public's engagement with police detection efforts put into play a way of seeing and interacting that was in fact a composite of practices simultaneously rehearsed in a variety of settings in Berlin.[2] If, as many have argued, in turn-of-the-century France, *flânerie* offered the mass spectator in pre-cinematic Paris a gaze put into motion through the narrative digest of the press, then criminal detection offered Berlin's audiences a modified extension of that visual, narrative, and social operation, one that overlapped most profoundly with the cinema.[3]

Watching the Detectives

In the most common scenario of police cultural work, the Berlin force looked to the mass media for opportunities to teach the public about how it did its job. The particular informational efforts that will be addressed here were part of a broader Social Democratic initiative to employ scientific investigation, general education projects, and media campaigns to assert the state's reign over society, culture, and the economy. Through the experiences of World War I the public had become wary of technology's menacing potential, and their trust in the leadership structures that had led soldiers to the fronts waned. This wariness and suspicion inevitably tainted the profile of modern law enforcement agencies. Strident discussions in the German police journals during the earliest years of the Republic strategized ways to win back the general public's faith and admiration.[4] Criticism that the police force had survived the transition from the old regime intact and was thus practicing an undemocratic style of policing further withered public trust in the capital's constabulary. Commentators charged that Berlin's officers treated the era's radical demonstrators with unnecessary violence and, most importantly, with a policing style construed as militant. Countless professional policing journal articles debated to what degree the expert class of officers would maintain its authority and legitimacy by distinguishing itself from the public at large, and to what degree the experts' success depended on the cooperation of a well-intentioned collaborative community.

The resultant publicity initiatives struck a balance between both tactics by directly informing and involving the public, although mostly in a manner that gave the impression that the police were performing highly specialized, often scientifically based (and therefore objectively legitimate), technical work. This information strategy entailed the calculated creation of a mode of urban spectatorship and civic participation that revolved around recognizing deviance and aberrance, even in the absence of a specific criminal culprit. Police work in the Weimar Republic capital thereby enacted a process of communication and social interaction that amounted to the discursive transformation of the city's resident, whether police officer or civilian, into a specifically urban and specifically visual brand of participant detective.

The press was the most obvious media pathway through which images of crime and its solution reached a broad audience, so its usefulness as a pedagogical medium did not escape law enforcement agencies. In the daily papers of post-war Berlin, crime and detection had become a matter for exploration and action in arenas far a field from expert circles. Prussian police reacted and contributed to the proliferation of legal and criminological discourse in the city's public life by offering positive perspectives that might run counter to the harsh voices of critics of their institution such as Egon Erwin Kisch and Joseph Roth. One particularly apt example of an organ whose pages presented this proliferation of pro-law enforcement ideas and ideologies was the popular Berlin weekly *Die Montagspost*, a product of the Ullstein publishing house. This weekly paper devoted a regular supplement, called *Der Kriminalist*, to publicizing the work of police technicians and scientists, juxtaposing that work with crime fiction, puzzles, and witty reporting. In addition to print media, radio disseminated information on police work. In the spring of 1924, a regular series of Monday evening broadcasts was presented in which each week a different Berlin criminologist would deliver a talk about crime and crime prevention. Finally, the international urban exhibition, a standard cultural and professional event since the mid-nineteenth century, functioned as a third forum for distributing information about police work. Two major police exhibitions received wide public attention in the mid-1920s: the German police exhibition in Karlsruhe in 1925 and the Great International Police Exhibition held at the Kaiserdamm in Berlin in October and November 1926.

The distribution of criminological knowledge through the press, radio, and urban exhibition provided the grounds for the police to mobilize similar media and cultural institutions to encourage public cooperation in the hunt for specific criminals. Movies became the site of public detection work after April 1923, when a professional organization of cinema-owners declared their willingness to show slide photographs of wanted fugitives during intermissions. The radio airwaves began to contribute to pressing police pursuits in August 1924, when the Berlin criminal investigation bureau came to an agreement with the *Berliner Funkstunde*, according to which updates regarding the most pressing criminal cases would be broadcast on a daily basis. These radio »wanted posters« (*Radiosteckbriefe*) offered visual descriptions of culprits, crime scenes, and witness accounts, promising rewards for information leading to the capture of a wanted criminal. These all-points-bulletins were broadcast after the news report: once in the morning at ten, in the afternoons at one, and finally at eleven at night. The criminal police initiated a strictly commercial setting as another venue for informing and involving the urban public in 1925, when the company *Deutsche Wanderschrift G.m.b.H.* signed a contract to display projected moving script (usually used for advertisements) relaying similarly important messages from the criminal police on the sides of buildings at five main traffic intersections every evening after dark.

In the tougher cases, the police even displayed crime scene evidence in Berlin

shop windows in the hopes that some of the thousands of passers-by might come forth with useful information. The storefront was one of the popular spectacles of the big city; people were known to take an evening stroll for the sole purpose of admiring the elaborate displays of the latest wares on the market.[5] Like the newspapers, shop windows drew crowds onto the streets and shaped interactions between people and between people and their material environment. Related to browsing as a model of reading, browsing was also a model of urban perception bound in modern commercial practices, one that was as much about looking and processing visual information as it was about purchasing.[6] Because perusing the city's thoroughfares was a formative activity in the daily life of the German metropolis, the police banked on traffic crossings, entertainment halls, and architectural facades and openings serving as a point where city-dwellers might begin to engage in more than a passive looking relationship with objects, spaces, and people. While being asked to translate looking into consuming, the public was simultaneously asked to turn looking into investigating and informing.

These settings were particularly useful for engaging the public when the crime scene could not be determined, was inaccessible to the general public, or had changed as time had passed. In some cases the actual objects from the original crime scene were carefully selected, taken out of context and re-contextualized in the shop window, at the intersection, or in the display case in an exhibition hall. In others the details of the original crime were abstracted through language and transferred to the newspaper page, a radio broadcast, or a slide projected during the intermission between movies. In each case, the police supplemented the ubiquitous urban wanted poster with objects, texts, and images that could either serve to fill in the blanks left by traditional photographs and personal descriptions or could extend their audience to those who might have overlooked such wanted posters. The implied rules of investigation established in the physical arrangement of objects and images were further shaped by the visually coded information presented in the verbal transmissions. Altogether, these rules worked to structure a specifically forensic urban subjectivity.

Cops and Robbers

Along with being addressed as participants in actual criminal cases, city residents were repeatedly invited to play the role of detective in the tightly organized pursuit of a *fictional* fugitive portrayed by someone working with the police organizers. One such occasion in 1919 was intended to raise the number of readers for yet another Ullstein daily.[7] In this event, called »*Augen auf*!«, the *Berliner Morgenpost* offered its loyal readers a 2000 Mark reward for spotting one of the paper's best-known journalists (Egon Jameson) on the streets of the city. The paper published several articles informing readers of the journalist's general whereabouts and a de-

Fig. 1: Advertisement for the criminal police festivities at Luna Park. Berliner Morgenpost, 30 June 1928.

scription of his appearance and mode of dress, characterizing him as a sly fugitive and an evasive wanted man. A Criminal Police Commissioner named Vonberg contributed to the series with an article explaining why now, on the heels of the war, it was more important than ever that the citizens of Berlin join forces in the active recognition and identification of disruptive individuals in their midst.[8] The event resulted in the confirmation of the police's negative stereotypes about disorder and lack of community. No one spotted Jameson that day, and when the contest was repeated two weeks later, it was a young boy and his brothers who managed to track him down. As much as this result seems to resonate with the plot of Erich Kästner's best-selling children's book *Emil und die Detektive*, these youngsters were hardly the model citizens the paper and the police might have liked to cultivate. But in its other effects, the »Augen auf!« event had achieved its goal: It brought police and the press into a relationship of cultural collusion.

The mass entertainment industry joined the public policing initiative when from 1925 through 1928 the criminal police sponsored a series of »criminal police days« at the Luna Park amusement complex at the outer end of the Kurfürsten-

damm. On a specified evening between May and August Berliners would come out to the park to catch a criminal. Upon entry each visitor received three numbered flyers bearing photographs and detailed physical descriptions of three wanted men who were to be located and arrested by an attentive participant between the hours of 6 and 8 pm. The award for identifying the fictional fugitives (hired by the police to participate in this role-play) was 1000 DM. (Figure 1)

This event coincided with the other police publicity events to ideologically reconfigure Weimar Berlin's social spaces and the culture practiced in them. Amusement parks, along with sports arenas, exhibition halls, shop windows, and movie theaters, were no longer available to urban residents as a recreational refuge from the binds of institutional authority or the fear of real violence. In the *Berliner Börsen Zeitung* of May 23, 1927, a reporter remarked that the two thousand participants in the criminal pursuit were also greatly fascinated by the fireworks, the lighted fountain, the two acrobats on the trapeze, and the tombola.[9] It was, however, rather difficult to become absorbed in the popular amusements when there was a culprit on the loose and, for the men at least, one was under the constant suspicious gaze of other participants. Repeated comparisons in the press between the participants and their fictional counterparts Sherlock Holmes and movie hero Nic Carter confirmed that detective fiction and film had come to bear the significance of a threatening urban reality.

The primary advertised objective of the Luna Park contest was to raise money for the social welfare programs run by the municipal police, but the local press was attuned to the many other incentives the police have for sponsoring such an affair. One of the earliest accounts of the event appeared in the *Kriminalist* on August 24, 1925, in article entitled »Kriminalistische Uebung fürs Publikum«.[10] This piece joined the familiar chorus of voices in the Weimar press lamenting that it was in fact quite difficult for urban observers to identify anyone in such a crowded setting on the basis of a potentially misleading photograph. Offering some insightful cultural criticism into the work of Hans Schneickert, the head of Berlin's criminal identification bureau, and in particular into his efforts to disseminate his version of a science of recognition, the *Signalementslehre*, throughout the public, the author remarked that the event was in fact quite timely in the way that it participated in the ever-increasing Americanization of Germany. He noted that not only had Germans adopted American labor techniques (meaning those initiated by Taylor and Ford) and traffic patterns, but so too were they adopting American forms of perceptual training intended to calibrate vision, hearing, and observation all around.

Reporting on the results of the event on May 23, 1927, the same publication identified the incentive of the police for promoting such an instructive participatory public spectacle.[11] The 1927 article reminded readers that recent high-profile murder investigations (the reporter specifically mentions the murder of one Friede Ahrendt) had elicited numerous public responses, in the form of letters, phone calls, and visits to the police station that were utterly useless, or led the police down the

Können Sie eigentlich sehen?

16 Fragen zur Selbstprüfung.

[illegible]

1. Was und in welcher Schrift und wo ist etwas auf unseren [illegible] zu lesen?
2. Besitzt Ihre [illegible] eine kleine [illegible]?
3. Was für einen Titel führt unser Telephonbuch auf seiner Umschlagseite?
4. Beschreiben Sie die [illegible] des Bürgersteigs vor Ihrem Hause!
5. Können Sie Ihre Haustür mit dem Mauerschmuck darüber aus dem Gedächtnis aufzeichnen?
6. Hat Ihr Sicherheitsschloß an der Wohnungstür einen Namen eingeprägt?
7. Wo steht die Ihrem Hause nächste Straßenlaterne?
8. Welche Straßenbahnen haben einen [illegible]?
9. In welcher Schrift (lateinisch oder deutsch) sind die Straßenbahnfahrscheine bedruckt?
10. Nach welcher Seite guckt der Bär im Berliner Wappen?
11. [illegible] das zweite Haus rechts von Ihrem Wohngebäude?
12. Wo trägt der Schutzmann den Reichsadler?
13. Welche Farbe hat die Autonummer, die seitlich an den Kraftdroschken angebracht ist?
14. Was für eine Haarfarbe hat Ihr Chef, Ihr Friseur, Ihr Hausmädchen? Welche Augenfarbe?
15. Wie sehen die Zeiger der Kirchenuhr aus, die Ihrem Wohnraum am nächsten liegt?
16. Wo tragen die Motorräder ihre Nummernschilder?

[illegible]

Industrie-Spionage.

Auflösung unserer letzten Aufgabe.

[illegible]

Die neue Woche

Montag, 5. November:

[illegible] „Die [illegible]“ [illegible]

Dienstag, 6. November:

[illegible] „Der [illegible]“ [illegible]

Mittwoch, 7. November:

[illegible] „Meine offizielle Frau.“

Donnerstag, 8. November:

[illegible] „Der [illegible]“ [illegible]

Freitag, 9. November:

[illegible] „Das [illegible]“

[illegible] „Der Bär“ [illegible] „Die Himmelfahrt der Galgentant“ [illegible]

—k.

Fig. 2: »Können Sie eigentlich sehen?«, Puzzler from Der Kriminalist, 5 November 1928.

Wie lautet der Steckbrief?

Eine neue Denksportaufgabe.

Raubüberfall. In das Lebensmittelgeschäft der Witwe Müller in der Schulzestraße 111 drangen zwei Räuber ein. Während der eine die Ladeninhaberin und die anwesenden Kunden, einen jungen Mann und eine Frau mit ihrem sechsjährigen Töchterchen mit vorgehaltenem Revolver zwang, sich ruhig zu verhalten, raubte der andere die Ladenkasse. Beide flüchteten und entkamen unerkannt.

Soweit der Tatbestand. Kriminalbeamte, die mit der Aufklärung dieses dreisten Ueber- [illegible]

Schnurrbart. Nase. Mund. Kinn gewöhnlich. Seglermütze mit Vereinsabzeichen (Fahne).

Das Kind: verstümmeltes Ohr. Ohrläppchen fehlt. Mütze wie Onkel Ernst (Onkel Ernst trägt Seglermütze). Das Gesicht kann das Kind nicht beschreiben.

Wie wird der Täter wahrscheinlich ausgesehen haben? Wie groß und wie alt ist er ungefähr? Welche Merkmale haben die Beamten als feststehend angesehen?

Wie lautet der Steckbrief?

Fig. 3: »Wie lautet der Steckbrief?«, Puzzler from Der Kriminalist, 4 March 1929.

wrong trail. If the public only knew not to look at incidental details, such as clothing and hairstyle, and instead to focus on physiognomic details, the character of a person's gait, and even their speech patterns, the police would have much more solid information to go on.

Games, movies, and detective adventures were treated by the police as training grounds for vigilant subjects, who were reminded never to let down their guard. As much as serving as the policing citizen was intended to assure one a position on the right side of the law, it also reinforced the fear that anyone and everyone in the crowd could slip into the role of a wanted criminal. By insisting upon the need for a ubiquitous and multi-dimensional policing institution, the composition and staging of the living fiction in the amusement park strove to buttress the authority and appeal of the Berlin police.

Fiction and reality continued to merge within law enforcement's persistent effort to transform newspaper readers into the type of public detectives it desired, but did not believe would ever be the norm. On October 1, 1928, *Der Kriminalist* ran the first of what would become a series of puzzlers, or *Denksportaufgaben*, to test the criminalistic skills of its readers. These seemingly fanciful games employed directly the professional language and tone of the criminological personal description and the witness interrogation, again transforming readers into investigators and potential informants.

Shortly after the inception of the series, the paper published one particularly noteworthy example, entitled, »Können Sie eigentlich sehen?« (Figure 2) It contained the following text:

16 Fragen zur Selbstprüfung
Sie können nicht sehen! Fragen Sie, bitte, nur einen Kriminalisten. Der wird Ihnen nähmlich beeiden, daß Menschen, alle Menschen, ohne Augen auf die Welt gekommen sind, und diesen Fehler gewöhnlich bis ans Ende treu behalten. Vier „Augen« Zeugen und ebenso viele verschiedene, einander widersprechende Aussagen.
Wieso erwidern Sie empört mit „Na, na!«
Machen wir doch gleiche die Probe aufs Exempel. Beantworten Sie, ehrlich und „aus dem Kopfe«, gleich beim Lesen, die folgenden Fragen. Wenn Sie wirklich ein gutes Auge besitzen, müssen Sie alles sofort wissen; denn es sind nur Alltagsdinge, die uns ständig begegnen. . . [12]

The sixteen queries that followed included questions about the newspaper itself (such as what was printed on its stamp), about personal belongings of readers (such as whether their jackets had change pockets), and about features of the street (such as where the lamppost closest to their house stood), and even about the police (such as where a *Schutzmann* wore the imperial eagle). The article closed with the admonition, »ich glaube, Sie haben sich nun beschämt überzeugt, wie winzig gering Ihre Seh-Zuverlässigkeit ist. Seien Sie deswegen nicht gleich böse. Es geht allen so. Denken Sie: mir nicht?«[13] As though justifying the continued publication of these exercises, the article insisted that everyone in Berlin was still practicing a misdirected, impractical visual technique. Defying the readers to see better than the criminologists expected, the paper implicitly agreed to help them to do so.

The situations presented in the games were diverse, but all revolved around seeing as the basis of effective detection: barroom raids, crime scene evidence collection, passport forgery, etc. On March 4, 1929, the *Kriminalist* taught its readers to formulate the kind of personal descriptions that were printed on wanted posters, published in the police blotters, and broadcast over the radio. This puzzler called »Wie lautet der Steckbrief?« told the story of a robbery in a grocery market. (Figure 3) The story went like this: While Widow Miller and her three customers are held at gunpoint by one robber, another culprit empties the cash drawer. Afterwards, police come to the scene and interview the four witnesses and find that while all four can agree in their narrative accounts of the course of events, each witness produces a very different account of the appearance of the man who took the cash. In the middle of the article are printed three sketches based on the verbal descriptions and one outline of a head with a question mark for a face. It was up to the reader to filter through the witness accounts to make a sketch of that face. Among the contradictions in the facts presented were differing heights, different characterizations of the man's chin, and the type of hat he wore.The following week's supplement revealed the correct solution:

Der Gesuchte ist etwa 1,60 bis 1,63 Meter groß, 25 bis 30 Jahre alt, hat kleinen, dunkeln gestutzen Schnurrbart, eine Hakennase, Mund und Kinn gewöhnlich. Besonderes Kennzeichen: Ein Ohr ist verstümmelt, Ohrläppchen fehlt.[14]

More important than the correct answer, however, are the reasons for the mistakes made by the witnesses who gave false reports. The relative heights of the witnesses seemed to have affected their evaluation of the culprit's height; the witness facing him directly was the one who gave the best description of his facial features; a child was attributed with one reliable observation because he supposedly was the least shaken, protected by his naiveté; lastly, the shopkeeper gave only useless generic observations because she was too shaken up to make any deeper remarks. The text commented on her contribution, »Ihre Beschreibung ist ein Produkt ihrer erregten Phantasie und bietet keine Anhaltspunkte«.[15]

These puzzlers and the Ullstein sponsored events that coincided with them over the decade attempted to sculpt out of many observer positions one totalized mode of visual operation. In the games and competitions one was either right or wrong. This insistence on one primary perspective is particularly problematic in the last example, where the reasons for ruling out a person's testimony were themselves based in the subjective observation of variable standards such as emotional state or physical position over a long period of time. The police way of seeing was always presumed to be reliable, and these visual exercises instituted a technique of power in the culture, promoting the idea that only the police knew, and with the aid of the press, were able to teach what constituted perceptual truth. The rules of the games delineated a set of fixed relations to which each urban observer was made subject, and these relations were bound up in the politics of knowledge and power at the core of the police and press institutions.[16]

The police-sponsored events and texts were accompanied by a steady critique of the observation skills of the average subject in the modern metropolis. On numerous occasions newspaper and journal articles cited police officials bemoaning the public's proven propensity for muddling, rather than bolstering, investigative efforts to locate and identify criminals, an attitude that Fritz Lang portrays so vividly in his criminal detection film *M*. The spokesmen insisted that the average citizen could not see and observe rationally and clearly. Various reasons were given: In an argument reminiscent of Georg Simmel's classic essay on »The Metropolis and Mental Life,« they asserted that the metropolis and its high-speed activity, intimidating machinery, and suffocating crowds had dulled human senses.[17] The press and popular culture were derided for a sensationalist tone, charged with spawning irrational fears and prompting hysterical behavior; and *Schundfilme* and *Schundliteratur*, especially fantastic crime stories, were blamed for skewing people's ability to interpret circumstances in their objective, material reality.

The first proposition, concerning urban modernity's detrimental impact on human perception, intersected with a broader social discourse on the dangers inherent in modern life in the big city. In the effort to reestablish order in the city's social life, the Berlin criminal police force considered it to be its duty to rationalize urban space, reclaiming it from the threatening crowding, darkness, and obscurity and establishing it as the site of the orderly law enforcement. The successful rationalization of urban space depended upon the proper organization of urban life, and cultural production and reception played an incomparable role in shaping social interactions. As part of their efforts to demonstrate and legitimate their social service, legal authorities engaged in a veritable turf-war over the sites and stages on which modern psychological and cultural life played itself out. In police and jurisprudence publications reviewers laid claim to literary, theatrical, and filmic fiction as a forum for promoting their interests. Trade journals published regular reviews judging films, books, and plays on the basis of their accuracy and effectiveness in portraying contemporary crime, courtroom proceedings, and the latest police technology. Numerous reviewers critiqued the distorted content and sensationalistic form of what they judged to be two of the lowest forms of popular culture: *Krimis* and detective films. Praise was generally reserved for two categories within the crime and detection genre: *Krimis* and *Justiz-Geschichten* by authors and production consultants who were themselves legal or criminological experts. The reviews usually emphasized the research behind such works, celebrating the reliable accuracy of their portrayals. In the eyes of police and court authorities, mass culture lived a double life as both a threat to the reputation of law enforcement agencies and an instrument for raising public awareness. The police made the business of the cultural imagination the business of criminal detection.

Dispensing criminological data and techniques through popular culture did make the disciplining institution more accessible and understandable to a broader public. But it is debatable whether it actually represented a democratization of in-

formation or an improvement in general access to the networks of power. There is an important distinction to be made between information and communication in this kind of setting, a distinction that Ron Burnett delineates in his analysis of the ramifications that the Rodney King video had for policing in American society in 1992. In Burnett's terms, information is data or facts that can exist without being put into the public sphere, whereas communication is social and community based and involves the distribution and contestation of information.[18] Information is highly codified according to standards that are determined from the top down, whereas communication encourages interpretation and increases the circulation of viewpoints, furthering the development of bottom-up consensus by accommodating differences of opinion or point of view. In the case of police publicity work in the Weimar Republic, information and communication were collapsed into one category: the police claimed to be communicating with the public, but they were merely discharging information in an effort to impose their own standards. The truth of detective work was purported to reside in the information, in the photograph and the physical description, rather than in any contestation of interpretations that might arise out of sharing that information. The police-sponsored games and contests were overt expressions of the constabulary's will to structure Berliners' expression, perception, and interaction in urban spaces. In the mass-cultural setting of their promotional work, the police displayed the mechanisms by which law enforcement disseminated its power. They thereby established a pervasive surveillance system and a set of cultural norms to which all non-deviant citizens should conform (the »rules of the game«) and ensured that Berliners' self-conceptions centered on terms the police themselves supplied.

Film and the Forensic Gaze

The visual elements of criminal detection were undeniably privileged in this police discourse. It comes as little surprise then that film played a particularly prominent role in this mass culture of perceptual rationalization. As Tom Gunning points out in his article »Embarrassing Evidence: The Detective Camera and the Documentary Impulse«, the special status of film as a witness to and record of events endows it with a unique judicial effect that often provides an occasion for judgment or punishment. It has been precisely this judicial quality that has always made film both useful in practical police work and engaging in recounting a gripping mystery story.[19]

In this light, it is significant that the Weimar years encompass the first substantial phase of recording and exhibiting films in German police academies, criminological laboratories, and courtrooms. Organs ranging from the daily press to professional publications for criminology and film production attentively covered its advances. Accounts and evaluations of documentary, instructional, and evidentiary

films proliferated in the journals *Archiv für Kriminologie*, *Die Polizei*, *Das Polizeischulwesen*, *Die Lichtbildbühne*, and *Der Filmkurier* through 1932. Such reflections on the practical uses of film had entered German police discourse close on the heels of the medium's emergence. Early twentieth-century discussions of the subject most often took the form of futuristic speculations. Between 1912 and 1918, the state of film technology and the diversion of resources to the war effort delayed the realization of even the most pragmatic proposals. However, the war's end engendered a confluence of political circumstances and technological innovations that prepared the ground for the use of film in police training, urban surveillance, evidence collection, legal adjudication, and the distribution of public information.

The reorganization of the Prussian police force as the disciplinary arm of the nascent Republic required a means for quickly reeducating older officers and effectively training new ones. In this context, film was heralded for its ability to hold student interest and for its reduplication of the sensory information to which investigating officers must be attuned when out on the beat. A pervasive fear that Communist demonstrators and career criminals might gain the upper hand over the reformed officers, who had been stripped of their right to bear arms under the Versailles Treaty, fed a discourse equating the camera with a weapon for the enforcement of public order. The earliest articles on film and the police tended to laud the evidentiary value of the medium, which could provide a higher degree of accuracy to police reports, witness testimony, and data gathered by the criminal identification bureau. Including instructional films in police training promised to offer more detailed information than a traditional lecture without film footage. Police and criminology experts expected film to surpass and replace the written and oral transmission of knowledge in the courtroom, which they discounted as excessively subjective and open to interpretation. Public information films were made by cooperative teams including police advisory boards and producers from the major studios such as UfA. (These ranged from crime prevention films such as »Card Sharks« to traffic advisory demonstrations, to information on the positive dimensions of police work such as »Police Duty«.)

Film's role in public education, urban surveillance, investigative work, and psychotechnical training fed Weimar culture's fascination with the movie camera's potential as a forensic recording device. High profile police leaders spoke out for allocating a portion of the state's sparse financial resources to supplying officers with portable cameras and police academies with projectors and screens, and in some cases, studio space. As the culture of the time became increasingly saturated with visual images served up by the cinema, illustrated papers, vibrant advertising, and the dense urban landscape, court officials touted cinematic reenactments, filmed testimony, and recorded visible evidence as necessary supplements to, and in some cases replacements for, traditional witness and expert statements. The rise of cinema as popular entertainment inspired police publicists to create movies educating the general public about crime prevention and instilling their faith in the efficacy and

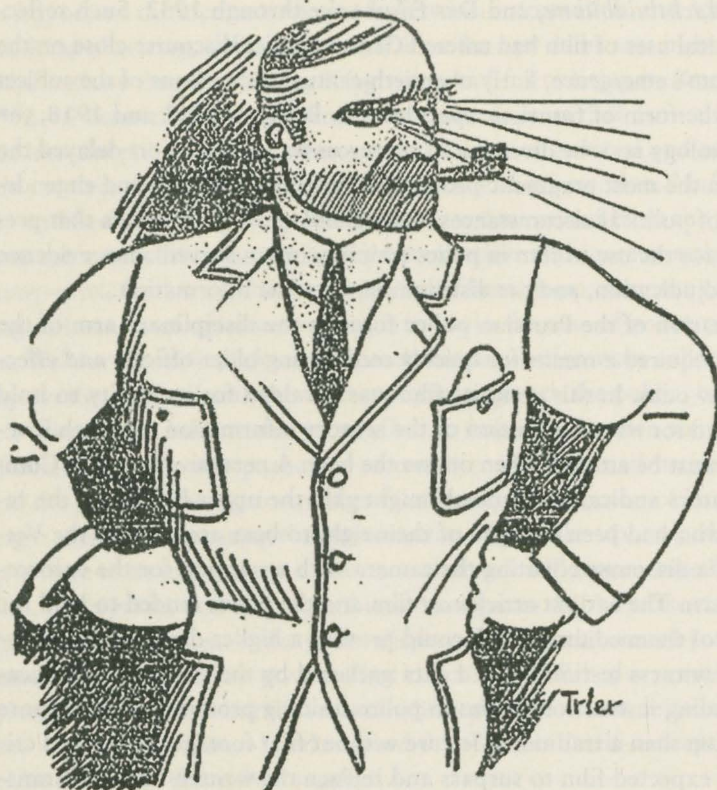

Fig. 4: »Film-Typen: Der Detektiv«, Cartoon from Der Film-Kurier, 3 June 1919.

benevolence of the force.

Technological advancement was central to the police's film projects. It is important to note that in 1919 two innovations appeared that allowed films to be shown in a variety of new settings, such as well-lit courtrooms and lecture halls. These inventions were the »Tageslichtfilmwand« (a non-reflective projection system) by the Petra-Aktiengesellschaft and the »Heimlicht« projector (a projector that could be connected to an already existent electrical line). In 1925 the Krupp-Ernemann-Werke in Dresden produced a projector with an unprecedented capacity to freeze a frame or to switch to slow-motion during projection, thus providing the time and occasion for close analysis of the image and for verbal elaboration. Each adjustment in the Weimar police mandate and each technical innovation inspired the publication of a series of articles in newspapers and police and cinema journals reformulating the usefulness of visual media in law enforcement.

The possibility of using film to catch a criminal in the act and to recognize him

or her once captured was further popularized in the print media that accompanied detective film culture in the teens and into the 1920s. A cartoon image from the journal *Der Film-Kurier* from 1919 displays as one of a series of »Film-Typen« (others of which included »Die Diva« and »Der schwere Junge«) a broad-chested, confidently posed detective. (Figure 4) Along with the requisite bourgeois adventurer's costume, including the safari jacket and the pipe, the figure displays his most powerful tool – his vision.[20] Beams stream from his eyes, not unlike the beams of the flashlight that appeared in several of the popular titles in the Stuart Webbs detective series and that of the movie projector itself. The cartoon illustrates the alignment between the detective's gaze and the advanced visual technologies of detection. In this image the body of the detective merges with the forensic camera, which had the power to make visible that which was otherwise unseen. As the extension of the detective's eye, the camera supported a criminological network of vision, knowledge, and police authority.

The moving-picture camera was fantasized as a mechanism for the exercise of control, which reinforced the gaze as the locus of power. In the fantasy of filmmakers, critics, and audiences, cinematography became the technological extension of the detective's stance articulated in the other settings I have mentioned. The novel practice of using film to reenact criminal events, to record information about captured and wanted criminals, and to supplement witness testimony entailed epistemological and semiotic shifts that were manifest in the period's fictional films. In *M*, for example, Lang juxtaposed documentary techniques against the sensationalist stance of the press and the hysterical overreaction of the public, exploring the contemporary tendency to value film as a purely evidentiary medium. Other films such as *Das Panzergewölbe* (1926, directed by Joe May) and *Der Tiger* (1930, directed by Johannes Meyer) also used documentary-style footage to prove the plausibility of the fictional accusation made within the film, while also demonstrating the similarity between the process of tracing the deviant individual and the weaving of a compelling narrative. This historically determined visual and narratological technique provided a sense of urgency and authenticity that invited the audience to engage socially and intellectually in the detection process, thus also mobilizing specifically visible structures from the public detection initiatives I have just described.

These German detective films and their accompanying publicity invited the masses to participate in the surveillance practices of the cinematographic apparatus. This dispensation of visual investigative techniques throughout the populace extended and reinforced the panopticism of modern life. Texts displaying the public practice of policing essentially enacted a social legibility and transparency that could only come about through the participation of the very subjects under supervision. In conjunction with journalism and public events, cinema culture transformed obscure professional policing into lay detection. The camera provided a model for the recalibration of the senses and their mobilization in social interaction. Through it people learned to recognize one another and how to report suspicious observati-

ons to higher authorities. Through the visual medium, residents were mobilized to become reflexive about their own role in maintaining public order. The whole community was expected to start regulating itself. The police counted on the fact that the prospect of urban surveillance would make Berliners self-conscious about constantly being a potential object of supervision and a potential producer of material evidence. This awareness promoted the self-policing of the Berlin public.

As the city became a network of policing glances, modern German culture developed fantasies about how individuals could transform themselves into the independent, invisible subject of the surveying gaze. Detective stories at the cinema offered the opportunity to view the world, if only briefly, from an invisible vantage point, and these opportunities fed the tales of disguise and deceptive appearances that enlivened the detective narratives. In the »Metropolis and Mental Life«, Simmel had expressed an optimism shared with some of his contemporaries, hoping that increased anonymous circulation in the modern city might foster tolerance and personal freedom. The more types of people one encountered, the more understanding for difference might be cultivated. And the more personal room beyond the watchful eyes of neighbors and family members allowed to the individual, the more chances for him or her to develop unique interests and talents. However, the policing paradigm of mutual surveillance eliminated the possibility of the metropolis developing as the site of a radically new kind of sociability.[21] A range of social and cultural practices, right down to going to see popular detective films, helped make the city a site of constant, multi-directional observation by contributing to the development of a subjectivity that would support the police's model of surveillance and normalization. Under the watchful eye of police and police collaborators there could be no suspicion-free convergence. The intersection of diverse social strands was always tempered by an insistence that people be on the look out for the recognizable differences that might distinguish »us«, the law abiding citizens, from »them«, the criminals. The individual was constantly examined for indications that he or she carried signs of guilt accrued through the perpetration of crimes on the policed community. The perceptual grid that enforced standards of normalcy created communities out of the communality of fear. The gaze that metropolitans were expected to cast on one another was not one motivated by curiosity or tolerance, and through the policing eye there was hardly any way to look at a crowd of strangers as a fascinating display of the complexity and uniqueness of others. The distance afforded by the technology of the camera only aided in creating a posture of abstraction and objectification. It involved no interest in immediate physical or mutually respectful visual contact.

A close look at police initiatives makes evident that Weimar visual culture manifested a positivist dream of the cinematic camera yielding observations about crime and deviance that offered a necessary supplement to those provided by the naked eye or the photograph. The look of the forensic camera, as it was imagined and thus manifest in police discourse, was intended to sculpt out of many potential ob-

server positions one instrumental mode of visual operation. According to the dominant public policing model, access to legitimately conclusive observations ultimately remained with those who could see without being seen, those operating the camera. No matter how widely surveillance practices were distributed through popular culture, the police were the ones who could press charges on the basis of the information collected. In order to effect social order, the individual subject had to ally himself with that institution when something or someone suspicious appeared on the horizon. The police's way of seeing was always presumed to be reliable in delineating the grounds for suspicion. Their visual exercises promoted the idea that only law enforcement officials knew and, with the aid of the media, were able to teach what constituted socially (and ultimately politically) productive urban cultural practices.

Notes

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2 Mark B. Sandberg's study of the effects of crossover spectating in nineteenth-century Scandinavian visual culture provides another perspective on the prehistory of the twentieth-century visual practices addressed here in Mark B. Sandberg, Effigy and Narrative: Looking into the Nineteenth-Century Folk Museum, in: Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds., Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life, Berkeley 1997, 320-361.

3 For an analysis of the relationship between the culture of the *flâneur* and the precinematic culture of Paris, see Vanessa R. Schwartz, Cinematic Spectatorship before the Apparatus: The Public Taste for Reality in *Fin-de-Siècle* Paris, in Charney and Schwartz, Cinema, as note 2, 297-317.

4 In addition to my own survey of the major police journals of the time, two fundamental sources for this account of early Weimar police history have been the research presented in Johannes Buder, Die Reorganisation der preußischen Polizei 1918-1923, Frankfurt am Main 1986; Hsi-Huey Liang, The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic, Berkeley 1970.

5 See Anne Friedberg, Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern, Berkeley 1993, 104-108.

6 See Peter Fritzsche, Reading Berlin 1900, Cambridge 1996.

7 Among others, articles promoting and recounting the event include »Preisausschreiben der Berliner Morgenpost«, Die Berliner Morgenpost 12 November 1919, and »2000 Mark Belohnung«, Die Berliner Morgenpost, 13 November 1919.

8 Kriminal Kommissar Vonberg, »Augen auf!«, Die Berliner Morgenpost, 17 November, 1919.

9 »Der kriminalistische Wettbewerb im Lunapark«, Berliner Börsen Zeitung, 23 May 1927.

10 »Kriminalistische Übung fürs Publikum«, Die Montagspost, 24 August 1925, Der Kriminalist.

11 »Berlins Amateur-Detektive am Werk. Das Kriminalisten-Fest im Luna-Park«, Die Montagpost, 23 May, 1927, Der Kriminalist.

12 »Können Sie eigentlich sehen?« Die Montagspost, 5 November 1928, Der Kriminalist.

13 Ibid.

14 »Wie lautet der Steckbrief?« Die Montagspost, 11 March 1929, Der Kriminalist.

[15] Ibid.

[16] The discursive creation of the observer cum detective can be understood as a further and specialized stage in the modernization of vision as a social and aesthetic technique, accounted for in Jonathan Crary, Techniques of the Observer, Cambridge 1990.

[17] Georg Simmel, The Metropolis and Mental Life, trans. H. Gerth with the assistance of C. Wright Mills, in: Richard Sennett, ed., Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities, Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1969, 47-60.

[18] Ron Burnett, Rodney King: Community and Communication, in: Ron Burnett, Cultures of Vision, Bloomington 1995, 20-21.

[19] Tom Gunning, Embarrassing Evidence: The Detective Camera and the Documentary Impulse, in: Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov, ed., Collecting Visible Evidence, Minneapolis 1999, 46-64.

[20] Thank you to Eric Ames, who drew my attention to this image.

[21] David Frisby presents this optimism in Simmel's theory and modernity's failure to match up to it in Georg Simmel: Modernity as an Eternal Present, in: Fragments of Modernity. Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin, Cambridge 1986, 38-108.