... like Ruttmann, who w...
rather to see how film could be fashioned as an instrument, what it could
Ruttmann was no more preoccupied with hierarchizing its possible applica...
than were the experts of advertising and propaganda with the ends to whi...
own findings would be applied.[70] Film, in this understanding, was a tool
"experts," susceptible to multiple applications, and precisely therein reside...
legitimation. This is not to say that we should avoid condemning Ruttm...
political opportunism, but that we should read that opportunism as par...
parcel of one historical conception of the medium – and of the avant-gar...
role in shaping that conception – that has yet to be fully understood.

1. Absolute Advertising: Abstraction and Figuration in Ruttmann's Animated Product Advertisements (1922-1927)

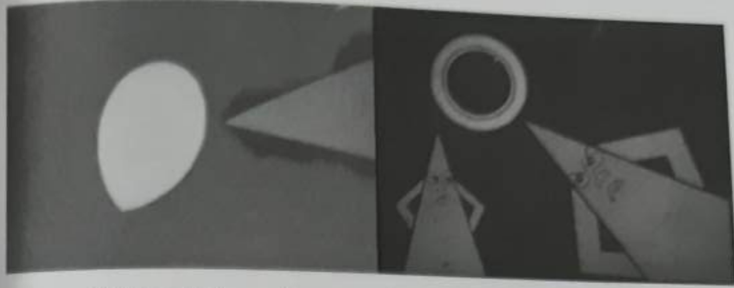
Introduction

Of all the domains of "sponsored film" recently rediscovered, product advertising has received perhaps the least amount of attention in English-language scholarship.[1] And yet, the sphere is rife with possibilities for the kinds of archival investigations suggested by Elsaesser: investigations into commissioning companies and contexts, into distribution and forms of screening, and not least of all into the theories and discourses of consumerism that informed both the production and circulation of these films. Moreover, product advertising is a particularly relevant field for anyone wishing to comprehend avant-garde film culture of the 1920s. Nearly all of the major proponents of avant-garde film in interwar Germany – including Ruttmann, Reiniger, Seeber, Richter and Fischinger – collaborated with advertising producers such as Julius Pinschewer.[2] Most, if not all, of this work employs the signature forms we have come to associate with experimental cinema, from abstract animation (Ruttmann, Fischinger) to silhouettes (Reiniger) to montage (Ruttmann, Seeber, Richter), which these artists placed in the service of advertisements for products as diverse as chocolates, tires, alcohol, flowers, cigarettes, skincare products, perfumes and illustrated magazines.[3] Nor would it be correct to describe this use of experimental aesthetics for advertising as "secondary" or derivative; as Ingrid Westbrock long ago argued, advertising film provided a consistent forum for experimentation in the 1920s and many of the major innovations in experimental film (in color, sound and montage) were actually first tried out in advertising films.[4]

Only recently has much of this work become available for researchers outside of archives, and only a handful of publications have devoted extended attention to its role within the avant-garde film culture of the interwar period.[5] No doubt, this dearth of research is in part the result of tacit assumptions, in avant-garde history, that such advertising commissions represented a "compromise" of artistic integrity or simply a means of financing the artists' more "serious" projects in visual music.[6] But if we approach these films outside of such assumptions, a different picture begins to emerge, one suggesting – as Jacques Rancière has argued in a different context – that modernist formalism and advertising design in fact shared some fundamental goals and principles. In a well-known essay

comparing Mallarmé's graphic poetry and the trademark designs of Peter Behrens, Rancière has argued that modernism, in both its "high" and "low" forms, was traversed by an ethos of design, where the "surface" (the page, the poster or – we should add in this context – the screen) came to be seen as a space for proposing new modes of collective life: a space for forging "types" that could help to reorder perception and redistribute the shared space of a world where the traditional forms of religious and courtly ceremony no longer held sway.[7]

For anyone wishing to investigate the ramifications of Rancière's reading of modernism for film and moving images, Ruttmann offers an ideal case study. While histories of avant-garde film stress Ruttmann's beginnings as a painter in the Munich art scene before the war, it is worth recalling that he was also a graphic designer and poster artist and in fact made his living, at least in part, by designing advertising posters.[8] Ruttmann would go on, of course, to become one of the pioneering figures of abstract film, whose LICHTSPIEL OPUS I, first screened in May 1921, is by many accounts the first abstract film ever shown publicly. But Ruttmann was also among the first experimental filmmakers – along with Lotte Reiniger – to delve into product advertising with his film DER SIEGER. EIN FILM IN FARBEN (THE VICTOR. A FILM IN COLORS), an advertisement for Excelsior tires completed one year after LICHTSPIEL OPUS I in April 1922. And advertising would continue to form a major part of Ruttmann's oeuvre throughout the 1920s, including at least six animated product advertisements made for Julius Pinschewer between 1922 and 1927,[9] as well as other animated advertisements that have been lost.[10] Examining the surviving animated advertisements in both their contextual and formal dimensions, this chapter suggests a different understanding not only of the place of advertising film within modernist film culture, but also of the aesthetics of advertising film – and indeed of abstract animation itself, its uses and its possible meanings in the 1920s. Far from being understood uniformly as a resistance to the culture industry, abstract film could and did appear both to filmmakers and advertising theorists as a form rife with financial and industrial possibilities, a means for harnessing film's effect on spectators, and a nodal point around which a filmmaker like Ruttmann could lay claim to a certain type of professional expertise. As I will show, Ruttmann's animated advertisements draw on these understandings of abstract film, while ultimately blending abstraction and figuration to stage a loss and retrieval of meaning that was part and parcel of early advertising theory itself.



Stills from Ruttmann, LICHTSPIEL OPUS I *(1921) and* DER SIEGER. EIN FILM IN FARBEN *(1922)*

Absolute Film and the Psychophysical Image: Ruttmann's OPUS Films

Seen against the backdrop of debates about Ruttmann's formalism, what makes his animated advertisements particularly interesting is the way in which they seem to hover between abstract "absolute" formalism and denotative referentiality, constantly moving back and forth between abstract-elementary forms and recognizable objects and thus highlighting the fluid border between the two. Throughout Ruttmann's advertisements from this period, one finds precise echoes of the forms operative in his OPUS films, but those forms now morph into identifiable faces, bodies and objects. Thus in DER SIEGER, the dance of round and angular forms from LICHTSPIEL OPUS I becomes a struggle between anthropomorphized spikes and Excelsior tires; similarly, the round and paisley shapes from LICHTSPIEL OPUS II (1922) become two arguing heads in the 1922 advertisement for Kantorowicz liqueur, DAS WUNDER. EIN FILM IN FARBEN (THE MIRACLE. A FILM IN COLORS); the spirals from OPUS IV (1925) become the serpent in the Garden of Eden in the 1925 flower advertisement DAS WIEDERGEFUNDENE PARADIES (PARADISE REGAINED); and the geometric shapes from Ruttmann's later OPUS films become the stairs on which the ravaged German nation climbs to health in DER AUFSTIEG (THE ASCENT), a 1926 advertisement for the "Gesolei" exhibition on health, welfare and physical fitness.[11] Nor is Ruttmann alone here; examining the range of advertising work by experimental filmmakers, one can find similar correspondences in works ranging from Reiniger's 1922 Nivea advertisement DAS GEHEIMNIS DER MARQUISIN (with its echoes of her early ornamental silhouette shorts) to Fischinger's cigarette

Stills from Ruttmann, Opus II *(1922) and* Der Aufstieg *(1926)*

advertisement Muratti greift ein (Muratti Steps In, 1934), which portends the aesthetics of his Komposition in Blau (1935).

In asking what made possible the translation of experimental forms from abstract film to advertising, it is worth reconsidering, here at the beginning, Ruttmann's "absolute" films themselves. In his 1926 study *Expressionismus und Film* (*Expressionism and Film*), the critic Rudolf Kurtz described the abstract work of Richter and Ruttmann, not surprisingly, as an effort to do away with the "psychological" dimensions of spectatorship – i.e. all of the processes of cognition, association and temporal ordering by which spectators normally identify things and people and piece together stories – in order to access elementary forms and laws of movement. But if abstract film emptied out the "psychology" of spectatorship, it nonetheless left room for, and even cultivated, a "psychophysical" dimension, in which the film elicits an elemental reaction from spectators. As Kurtz described it:

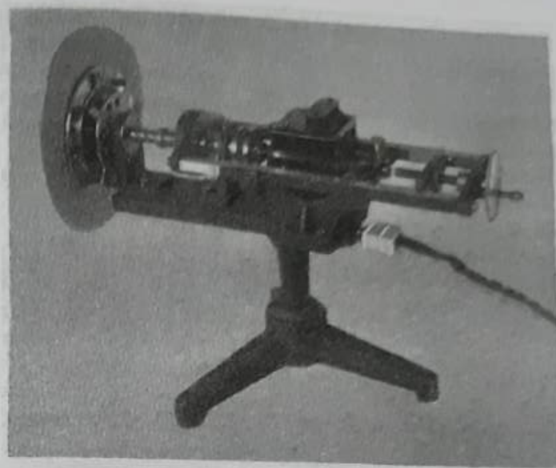
> Despite its rejection of the possibility for psychological comprehension, absolute art doubtlessly exerts effects on audiences in certain cases. Only this is not an act of contemplation that perceives forms in their pure relations to one another, but rather a mental process sufficiently familiar from psychophysics: the spectators feels his way into the mathematical forms [fühlt sich in die mathematischen Formen ein] and answers them with corresponding sensations. This process occurs at an unconscious and compulsory level; the elementary lines and form relations lead the spectator's sensation in their directions, making him move with their movements and guiding him through their various degrees of clarity – so that a mental counter-image arises that corresponds to the struggle, harmony or reconciliation of the forms on the screen.[12]

Stills from Lotte Reiniger, Das Ornament des verliebten Herzens *(1919) and* Das Geheimnis der Marquisin *(1922)*

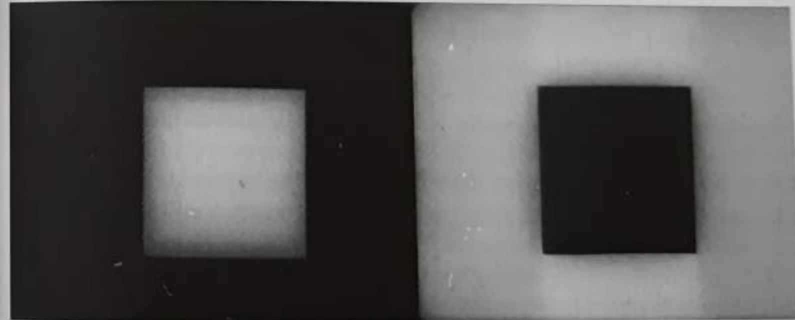
Kurtz's reference to "psychophysics" here is hardly fortuitous; already in the late 19th century, the idea that the sight of movement could provoke a tendency toward counter-movements within the spectator was a standard axiom of psychophysical research, invoked by scientists such as Charles Féré and Théodule Ribot – under the term "psychomotor induction" – to explain all sorts of phenomena from telepathy to the predilection for popular spectacles of movement such as sports.[13] This emerging model of spectatorship also came to inform a widespread understanding of film as a medium of visual movement that could affect spectators psychosomatically inducing "counter-movements" at the micro-physiological level.[14] As late as 1927, a writer for the journal *Filmtechnik*, in an article entitled "Von der Psychomechanik des Zuschauers" ("On the Psychomechanics of the Spectator") could still rely on this psychophysical explanation to argue that movement shown on the screen could elicit tendencies toward elementary counter-movements in spectators: "When we see a movement, it calls forth in us a need to produce our own movement in turn. When executed correctly, it 'hits' its target and infects us. [...] These are qualities that make man an appropriate object for film's effects."[15] But while it could theoretically be applied to any form or genre of filmmaking, this notion that visual movement could call forth counter-movements in spectators proved particularly attractive for describing the desired effects of *abstract* film, which was widely understood as an effort to bracket out psychological "content" precisely in order to isolate and amplify such psychophysiological mechanisms. Not only for theorists such as Kurtz, but also practitioners such as Hans Richter saw absolute film among other things as a field for cultivating the psychophysical power of moving images. As Richter explained in a 1924 text "Die schlecht trainierte Seele" ("The Badly Trained Soul"): "This film here offers no 'stopping points,' at which one

could look back through memory. The viewer is – exposed – forced to 'feel' – to go along with the rhythm."[16]

My point, in rehearsing such arguments, is not to maintain that Richter or Kurtz were empirically correct in their assessment of abstract film's ability to affect spectators. But such statements do tell us something about the ideas and motivations informing the very emergence of "absolute" film in the 1920s. That emergence was motivated not simply by artistic questions, but also by a desire to trade in psychological understanding for psychophysical effects. In this, absolute film can be read, at least in part, as the culmination of a broader media paradigm shift already begun in the 19th century, which has been the focus of much recent media archeology. Like the visual practices and discourses examined by Jonathan Crary, these films were created for an *embodied* spectator, one for whom the faculties of attention, sensation and affect mobilized in acts of visual consumption had become the new terrain of social power.[17] Like the modernist poetry examined by Friedrich Kittler, moreover, these films carried into aesthetic production a "flight of ideas" inaugurated by psychophysics. Kittler saw Hermann Ebbinghaus's use of meaningless syllables to measure quantitative memory capacity as the paradigmatic incarnation of a new regime of materialist media experience, one that would find its aesthetic continuation in the experimental "nonsense" poetry that emerged some 20 years later in works by Kurt Schwitters or Christian Morgenstern.[18] A similar relation between art and science can be observed in absolute painting and film, which operates with many of the same parameters on the visual level. The attention to elementary forms, for example, as well as the effects of primary colors and color combinations, were standard components of psychophysical experimentation – and scientists invented all sorts of apparatuses for testing them, such as the "form board" devised by Edouard Séguin in 1866 and subsequently used in children's education and in performance intelligence tests, or the "Farbenkreisel" (color wheel) designed to test the perception of color combinations. Both devices were still being used in the 1920s in the field of psychotechnics for intelligence and aptitude testing, as suggested by their inclusion in publications such as *Methoden der Wirtschaftspsychologie* (*Methods of Economic Psychology*) by the German psychotechnician Fritz Giese.[19] Indeed, one could point to numerous similarities between the modernist textual phenomena noted by Kittler and the visual experimentations of absolute filmmaking. Just as Mallarmé discovered the importance of the white page for defining the black of letters, so Hans Richter highlighted the relativity of black and white through the sudden reversal of figure and ground in his first rhythm film, a motif he would return to in his *Filmstudie* (*Film Study*) of 1926.



Color wheel, illustration from Fritz Giese, Methoden der Wirtschaftspsychologie *(1927)*



Stills from Hans Richter, RHYTHMUS 21, *reversal of figure and ground*

Advertising Psychology and the Uses of Abstraction

Seen in this light, the absolute film of the 1920s would appear less as a mode of resistance to mass culture than as one part of a broader elaboration of new techniques of spectatorship, where the viewer figures as an embodied object of psychophysical testing rather than as a hermeneutic interpreter. It was precisely

this status as a forum for perceptual experimentation, moreover, that made abstract film, in the eyes of contemporary observers, an obvious realm to combine with advertising. For perhaps no other domain of applied science in the 1920s adopted the lessons and tools of psychophysics more enthusiastically than advertising psychology. That science emerged in the wake of World War I – almost simultaneously with the emergence of abstract film – from its status as a branch of psychotechnics to become a major field of independent scientific research during the Weimar Republic, one marked by the opening of institutes and laboratories (e.g. the Institut für Wirtschaftspsychologie [Institute for Economic Psychology] founded in 1920 in Berlin), the proliferation of specialty journals (such as *Die Reklame*, *Seidels Reklame* and *Industrielle Psychotechnik*), and a host of books and articles on advertising psychology.[20] Drawing explicitly on the pioneering research of figures such as Ebbinghaus and Hugo Münsterberg (particularly his *Psychologie und Wirtschaftsleben* [*Psychology and Economic Life*] from 1912), theorists within this new branch sought to forge a new science of advertising spectatorship by meticulously testing – via rapid-flash windows of tachistoscopes – the psychophysical effects of such material factors such as composition, contrast, color, typography, letter spacing, image size and ad placement.[21]

In conducting such tests, these advertising theorists were in part reacting to a new experience of visual culture in the Weimar Republic brought on by the increased presence of advertising itself. Among other changes introduced by the social democratic government was a thoroughgoing relaxation of prewar advertising laws, which opened up public institutions such as the German railway, the post office, public transportation systems and streets to use for advertising displays. As a result, print advertisements – once confined to street corner columns – began to turn up everywhere: in train stations and rail cars, in the roofs of tramways and the interiors of subway stations, at street crossings and along traffic routes, on postal delivery vehicles, construction fences, mailboxes, tram tickets, stamps and anywhere else a bit of surface space could be found. The period was also marked by a significant expansion of electric signage, along with the invention of numerous new advertising technologies, many of them strikingly cinematic, such as mobile advertising vehicles and special projectors for projecting colorful slide advertisements onto walls ceilings or sidewalks. To contemporary observers, it seemed as if *every surface* had now become fair game for advertising.[22] Where later observers would decry the "Bilderflut" or flood of images occasioned by the spread of illustrated magazines, advertising trade literature already spoke of a "Reklamehochflut" or "flood of advertising" in the early 1920s.[23] Within this context, advertising theorists also assumed – long before Benjamin and Kracauer – a new mode of distracted and divided visual attention. Thus in one of the earliest texts on advertising layout, the head of the

Advertisement for mobile publicity projector, from Die Reklame *(1922)*

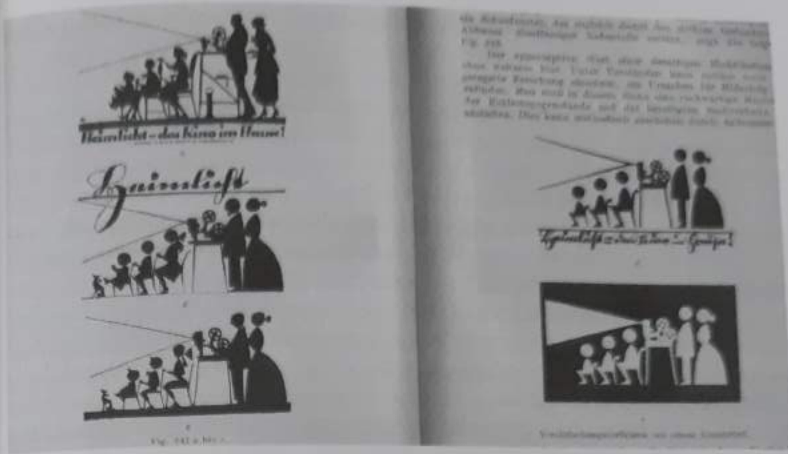
new Institut für Wirtschaftspsychologie, Walther Moede, argued that all advertisements had to conform to the "principle of the fleeting glance" (Prinzip des flüchtenden Blickes), which stipulated that consumers would only perceive advertising content for a fraction of a second.[24]

In reaction to this new configuration, these theorists called above all for a reductive visual aesthetic, one not a little reminiscent of the "elementary" forms of abstract film itself. Specifically, they argued that advertisements should strive for clarity and rapid recognition through the reduction of images to simple geometric forms, the adoption of streamlined typographies, and the strategic use of high contrast.[25] Such principles were put to use in the trademark designs by Wilhelm Deffke and others,[26] but they also came to characterize the aesthetics of poster design, most famously in the so-called "Sachplakate" (objective posters) of Lucien Bernhard, which simplified shapes and colors to the extreme to draw attention to the object advertised.[27] A case in point can be seen in a celebrated advertisement by Bernhard for home movie projectors by the Heimlicht Company, in which the family members, projector and light were reduced to abstract white geometrical shapes over a black background. The advertisement

Advertisement for "Reklamemobil," from SEIDELS REKLAME *(1920)*

was singled out for special mention in 1920 by the editors of SEIDELS REKLAME, who lauded Bernhard's use of "spherical human figures" (Kugelmenschen) and the "effects of black and white" (Schwarz-Weiß-Wirkung).[28] Looking back in 1927, Fritz Giese would also take Bernhard's advertising as a model of effective advertising layout in his *Methoden der Wirtschaftspsychologie*, where he walked readers through the simplification of a complex image through the reduction of detail and the reversal of black and white.

Such black and white reversals recall, once again, the work of Richter. But advertising theorists also meticulously discussed and tested the effects of contrasting colors. Wilhelm Ostwald's color theories, according to which "harmonious" color compositions could be achieved through the exact determination of the brightness of adjacent colors, generated widespread interest advertising circles.[29] But more often advertising theorists latched onto ideas about complimentary and contrasting color tones derived from the theories of Michel Eugène Chevreul via late 19th-century experimental psychology and now understood as a means of maximizing the advertisement's effect on consumer attention.[30] Walther Moede, for example, cited the "law of contrast" (Gesetz des Kontrastes) as the key to effective advertising design and recommended not only the use of black and white but also "Farbenkontrast" (color contrast).[31] Similarly, the editor of SEIDELS REKLAME, Robert Hösel, described a series of experiments designed to determine which color combinations would produce the most effective contrast between text and background on posters.[32] In one of the first book-length presentations of experimental advertising psychology, Theodor König would then argue in 1922 that the greatest effect on consumer attention could



Lucien Bernhard, Heimlicht *advertisement (showing successive stages), from Fritz Giese,* Methoden der Wirtschaftspsychologie *(1927)*

be achieved by contrasting the complimentary primary colors of green and red or yellow and blue.[33]

It is perhaps no accident that the same color combinations show up quite frequently in Ruttmann's animated color advertising films, suggesting that he was at least minimally aware of the latest science on fashioning words and images in terms of their effects on the attention. Ruttmann's awareness of the principles of advertising design would, moreover, hardly be surprising when one considers the intense research into color taking place simultaneously at the Bauhaus, where the study of color – often based on the theories of Chevreul – played a key role in the preliminary course, and courses in advertising, typography and even experimental film formed part of the school's curriculum.[34] Bauhaus teachers frequently employed color wheels of the type described above (including a device developed by Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, who also screened abstract color projections at the "absolute film" matinee in 1925) to illustrate the effects of color combinations, and it is surely no accident that the well-known children's block set designed by Alma Siedhoff-Buscher to familiarize children with primary forms – itself reminiscent of "form board" tests – employed the same primary colors combinations of red, green, yellow and blue.[35] Ruttmann knew members of the Bauhaus including Paul Klee and Lyonel Feininger from his days as a student in Munich.[36] Moreover, it was a Bauhaus student, Lore Leudesdorff, who would serve as Ruttmann's principal assistant on several OPUS films and advertising films in the mid-1920s.[37] According to Jeanpaul Goergen,

Ruttmann in fact met Leudesdorff in the offices of Edgar Beyfuß, the head of the Ufa Kulturfilmabteilung, when Ruttmann was first working on securing a contract for his films with Pinschewer.[38] Leudesdorff herself would later recall bringing to Ruttmann's advertising films specific knowledge gained from her Bauhaus courses, including "new techniques of colors and forms" (das Neue an Farben und Formen).[39]

As Frederic Schwartz has argued, the interest in psychophysics and advertising among Bauhaus artists, along with the predilection for the metaphor of the artist as "engineer," formed part of a widespread tendency, during the 1920s, to redefine the role of the artist as a potential "expert" in social and media questions rather than a hermetic creator withdrawn from social concerns.[40] This cult of the artist as "expert" was particularly pronounced among the constructivist circles of the Weimar avant-garde – one thinks here of the group around Hans Richter, Werner Graeff and the constructivist journal *G. Material zur elementaren Gestaltung* (*G. Material for Elementary Construction*) – and it also informed the frequent collaborations of avant-garde filmmakers with advertisers. Those collaborations in fact signaled the filmmaker's entry into a very specific kind of "expert" culture. As Corey Ross has shown, the emergence of a professional caste of "advertising experts" in the Weimar Republic (the most prominent association bore the title Verein deutscher Reklamefachleute [Association of German Advertising Experts, VdR]) was centrally bound up with a question and process of legitimation: having witnessed the new prominence ascribed to propaganda as a means of mobilizing public opinion during the First World War, Weimar scientists and policymakers came to see advertising and propaganda as crucial forces within the mediatized public spheres of modern mass democracies. Advertising theorists capitalized on this newfound prominence to legitimate their own role as "experts" in mass psychology and as a key professional class, alongside work scientists and psychotechnicians, within the management of the new industrial consumer society.[41]

It is against this background, moreover, that one can understand the transformations in the area of film advertising after 1918. Although filmic advertisements can be traced back to the earliest years of cinematography (the first known advertising film in Germany dating from 1897),[42] the period after WWI oversaw a veritable explosion in advertising film production, with over 80 companies operating in Germany alone by the end of the 1920s.[43] These companies and their major players stayed abreast of the latest developments in advertising theory and competed fiercely for their reputations as experts in the newly defined professional sphere of filmic advertising. As one writer described it in an article for *Die Reklame* from 1925, "Not every person – no matter how talented – is an expert in this field. Not every person can master the difficult instrument of

propaganda, and this goes especially for filmic propaganda, since this form must be treated in a very specific way."[44]

Within this new field of professional film advertisers, the most prominent player was surely Julius Pinschewer. Having started making advertising films in the 1910s, Pinschewer went on to become a major producer of propaganda film during the war years, before founding one of the most successful advertising enterprises of the Weimar Republic in 1918 (and he would continue to produce advertising films after his flight to Switzerland in 1933).[45] Pinschewer held numerous contracts, many exclusive, with major cinemas, variety stages, schools, exhibitions and trade fairs throughout Germany, and even with the on-board cinemas of the cruise ships belonging to the Hamburg-Amerika shipping line (HAPAG). By 1926, Pinschewer could claim that his films were seen by 3,000,000 spectators weekly.[46] It was Pinschewer who inaugurated the trend of avant-garde advertising films in Weimar, beginning with his collaborations with Ruttmann and Reiniger in 1922. Given the increasing prominence of advertising in the mass-mediated public spheres of the new democracy, working with Pinschewer's company – as so many of the experimental filmmakers of the period did – meant a legitimation of the public role of film itself within the new republic, and a confirmation of the filmmaker's status as a professional with expertise analogous to that of scientific experts in advertising.

That Ruttmann himself was understood at least partly in this sense can be gathered, among other things, by the reception that his advertising films received in advertising circles. While we do not have record of the precise circulation of Ruttmann's advertising films for Pinschewer, based on what we know about advertising film distribution at the time (and on the considerable investment Ruttmann's color films demanded from the commissioning companies), we can assume that they were screened in large and mid-sized theaters throughout Germany.[47] They were likely also shown – as examples of innovative advertising design – in trade fairs and other special venues for industry experts. This is suggested among other things by the attention Ruttmann's films generated in the trade literature of the advertising industry. As film itself came to figure more prominently within discussions of advertising in the mid-1920s, advertising theorists took an increased interest in the use of abstract film on account of its perceived psychosomatic effects on spectators, and they held out particularly high hopes for the films of Ruttmann. Typical, in this respect, was an article published in *Die Reklame* – the official organ of the VdR – in which the author praised Ruttmann as the most prominent representative of a "new type of color film advertisement" (neuartigen Buntfilm-Werbung). With their "wave-like movement" (Wellenbewegung) and play of primary colors, the writer argued, Ruttmann's films "exert a lasting hold on spectators" (fesseln nachhaltig).[48] Precisely what was at stake in this argument can be seen in another article

on advertising film for the journal *Industrielle Psychotechnik* (the journal of the Institut für Wirtschaftspsychologie mentioned above), in which the advertising theorist Käthe Kurtzig distinguished three prevalent forms of advertising film: the humorous cartoon caricature (the most widespread form at the time), the graceful silhouette in the style of Lotte Reiniger, and what she dubbed the "absolute" advertising film – a designation she almost certainly took from the much discussed matinee DER ABSOLUTE FILM (1925), where Ruttmann's OPUS II, III and IV had their public debuts a year earlier.[49] It was Ruttmann's animated advertisements that formed the model for the final category, and Kurtzig duly illustrated her article with still from DER AUFSTIEG, Ruttmann's 1926 advertisement for the Düsseldorf Gesolei exhibition of body culture and social welfare. Such abstract film, she argued, drew its efficacy above all from the psychophysical power of rhythmical movement:

> Absolute film, this latest type of artistic film, offers no rounded stories. Rather, it attempts to give visible expression to ideational content through the movement of ornaments and figures; it works above all through the rhythmical power of movement, which brings the spectator into resonance with its movements [den Zuschauer zum Mitschwingen bringt] and allows him not simply to see and understand events on the screen, but also to experience them.[50]

If Kurtzig's conception of Ruttmann's absolute film and its usefulness for advertising sounds like the descriptions of Rudolf Kurtz cited above, this is hardly a coincidence. Like the author of *Film und Expressionismus*, she held out the hope that absolute film, by peeling off the layers of narrative and psychological associations, could enhance film's psychophysical force, its ability to make spectators "move with" (mitschwingen) the images on the screen.

It was precisely this notion of "mitschwingen" that attracted advertising theorists to absolute film in their desire to harness spectatorial attention. The same year as Kurtzig's article for *Industrielle Psychotechnik*, another advertising theorist Fritz Pauli caused a small sensation in the advertising world with the publication of his treatise *Rhythmus und Resonanz als ökonomisches Prinzip in der Reklame* (*Rhythm and Resonance as Economical Principle in Advertising*).[51] Drawing on contemporary research in work science and engineering, Pauli argued that rhythmical presentations of advertisements (in print, electric signage and film) could lend them a quasi-hypnotic power over spectators by adjusting the movements of the spectators' nervous systems to the rhythms of the advertisements itself: "Such a rhythm functions hypnotically to leave an inextinguishable impression with no unpleasant side effects; for every consumer is immediately calibrated to the resonance of these lights and syllables."[52] Like Kurtzig, Pauli located the efficacy of abstract rhythm in the experience of "mitschwingen," the power of the advertisement to make spectators "move with" the rhythmical

presentation. When "the advertisement's oscillations" ("Werbeschwingungen") are correctly calibrated, he argued, the spectator himself becomes "a part of the oscillating system" ("Teil des Schwingsystems").[53] Little wonder, then, that Pauli would take interest in Ruttmann's abstract rhythmical films. Writing the same year for *Die Reklame*, he singled out Ruttmann's DER SIEGER and DAS WIEDERGEFUNDENE PARADIES for offering what he described as "the novel use of forms and colors for effects along with a clearly recognizable approach to rhythmical organization."[54]

Interestingly, Ruttmann himself would adopt similar language of "Schwingen" to describe the effects he sought to attain with his "optical music." Describing his BERLIN film in 1927, Ruttmann wrote: "And if I have succeeded in bringing the audience into oscillation [zum Schwingen zu bringen], to make them experience the city of Berlin, then I have attained my goal."[55] Scholars have often commented on Ruttmann's conceptualization of film as a means of provoking the experience of movement. Jeanpaul Goergen, for example, describes Ruttmann's project in BERLIN as follows:

> In fact, Ruttmann does not see himself [...] as a reporter. [...] He attempts rather to bring about a new artistic reality; he observes Berlin with an aesthetic gaze and attempts to transmit his artistic feelings to the spectator. He wants to intoxicate spectators, to set them into motion [zum Schwingen bringen], to trigger vibrations.[56]

As we have seen, however, the desire to provoke movement ("Schwingen") in resonance with the rhythmical image was not simply an "aesthetic" endeavor opposed to reality, but rather the object of intense advertising research, which understood "Schwingen" and "Mitschwingen" as an eminently useful economical phenomenon. This was a form and a language of advertising expertise: one that Fritz Pauli explicitly adopted from engineering treatises such as Heinrich von Schieferstein's "Die Ausnützung mechanischer Schwingungen im Maschinenbau" ("Harnessing Mechanical Oscillations in Mechanical Engineering," 1925), and one that Ruttmann likely adopted from advertising experts such as Pauli.[57] That Ruttmann understood animated advertising as a forum for generating such forms of "resonating" spectatorship is also suggested by several of his later animated advertisements. In the 1926 Gelosei advertisement DER AUFSTIEG, in which an allegorical "Michel" figure representing the German nation climbs back to health after the ravages of war and inflation, the character's restored vitality is marked by his ability to turn flips in resonance with the isorhythmical waves flowing at the bottom of the image. Similarly, in an advertisement for AEG radio equipment from the same year, SPIEL DER WELLEN (PLAY OF THE WAVES), a European listener, receiving the sound of an African drumbeat via his radio headphones, smiles as he rocks back and forth in pleasurable resonance with the waves of the radio. Although serving the immediate purpose of

Still from Ruttmann, SPIEL DER WELLEN *(1925)*

advertising radio equipment, the image also offers an intermedial corollary for the filmic *dispositif* Ruttmann sought to create with advertising film: one that – like Fritz Pauli's calibrated advertisements – would cause spectators to move in resonance with the representations unfolding on the screen.[58] Thus Ruttmann's abstract "Wellenbewegung" represented something more than a mere artistic phenomenon; it was, rather, part and parcel of an expert research on advertising design.

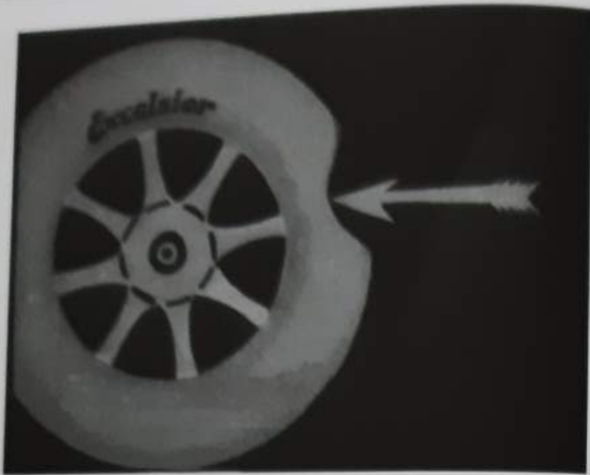
From Abstraction to Figuration: Ruttmann's Animated Advertisements in Context

Interestingly, for all of their enthusiasm for abstract forms, colors and rhythms, none of the advertising theorists who discussed Ruttmann acknowledged the extent to which his advertising films had, in fact, deviated from the central precept of "absolute" cinema through the reintroduction of identifiable objects. This too, however, could find a justification in advertising theory. Indeed, the

one point on which advertising psychology contradicted the "flight of ideas" inaugurated by psychophysical testing was precisely the question of meaning and recognition. Theodor König, for example, in the same book cited above, identified three principal goals for a successful advertisement: capturing the attention, producing pleasure and stimulating memory. And he argued – even as he extolled at length the benefits of Ebbinghaus's experiments in meaningless syllables for advertising research – that the use of *identifiable* objects was critical to all three phases. First, while novel impressions can stimulate our curiosity, the qualities of familiarity (Vertrautheit) and meaningfulness (Bedeutsamkeit) capture the attention more effectively because the objects thus recognized speak to spectators' interests.[59] Secondly, in terms of pleasure, König argued that, alongside other factors such as harmony of form or the use of humor, the very familiarity of objects served to stimulate spectatorial pleasure: "According to a well-known psychological law, the pleasure we receive from the very act of recognizing something is easily transferred to that object itself."[60] Finally, and in direct distinction to Ebbinghaus, König argued that while meaningless syllables might provide the ideal zero-degree material for testing perception and memory, in actual practice, representations allowing for meaningful associations were much more affective at *stimulating* memory. Customers, he argued, perceive and retain meaningful words much more effectively than "concatenations of meaningless syllables [Verbindungen sinnloser Silben]."[61] The same logic, moreover, applies to images: "Memory can and must be supported by images, drawing and diagrams that are, to the greatest extent possible, meaningful and easy to perceive and understand."[62] Similarly, for trademark design, König argued: "Trademarks should be meaningful, for the figures that are retained and distinguished from others are above all those that provoke an associative chain of thoughts and a process of interpretation."[63]

Within certain parameters, then, advertising theory actually sought to *temper* the evacuation of meaning that characterized both modern psychophysics and much experimental art. But I would hasten to add that this was not in order to return to any 18th-century model of spiritualizing or interiorizing hermeneutics. Rather, the call for "meaningful" associations was made in the very interest of increasing the advertisement's material efficacy with actual consumers: only a combination of signifiers and signifieds, only a mix of abstraction and identifiable content, could elicit the maximum productivity of the attention and of memory that advertisers sought and thus guarantee the advertisement's real-world success.

At this point, we can better understand how Ruttmann's advertising films – with their slippage between abstraction and figuration – took up ideas from advertising theory as it had developed by the 1920s. Indeed, according to Rudolf Kurtz, Ruttmann's absolute films themselves already contained something



Still from Harry Jäger, Im Lande der Appachen *(1919)*

of this mixture of abstraction and recognition key to the successful advertisement. In the endless multitude of rounded, wave-like and pointed forms populating Ruttmann's films, as well as their lively interaction on the screen, Kurtz saw a far greater degree of what he called "organic associations" or "organic reminiscences" (organische Anklänge) – and thus far greater room for psychological operations – than in the reductive geometry of Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter: "The strong attraction of Ruttmann's films lies in their psychological impulses, which continually account for their efficacy. His compositions are animated by a drama in which the actors are mathematical forms that contain a wealth of organic associations."[64] This tendency toward psychological associations might account for the ease with which Ruttmann's elementary aesthetics were adaptable to figurative animation, as for example in the sequence he created to depict Kriemhild's dream in Fritz Lang's Nibelungen (1924), where his familiar abstract shapes morph into silhouettes of a falcon and two eagles. But Kurtz also sees it as a factor that lent itself particularly well to advertising. "Just how great a wealth of expression is contained in these colorful forms in movement can be seen in the fact that Ruttmann had considerable success with an industry advertising film in this style."[65]

While one may or may not agree with Kurtz's assessment of Ruttmann's Opus films and their effects on spectators, it does suggest what was at stake in Ruttmann's *advertising* films. For what those films repeatedly thematize is precisely the line between abstraction and "organic" associations – associations

Stills from Ruttmann, Der Sieger. Ein Film in Farben *(1922).*
Tropical lagoon replaced by abstract forms

they continually make and undo before our eyes. A case in point can be seen in Ruttmann's first advertising film Der Sieger, a tire advertisement commissioned by the Hannover Gummiwerke Excelsior. For his film, Ruttmann borrowed motifs from a previous advertisement for Excelsior tires by Harry Jäger entitled Im Lande der Appachen (In the Land of the Apaches, 1920). Drawn in a black and white caricature style, Jäger's animated film showed a group of men in an automobile being attacked by bow-wielding Indians but escaping when the Indians' arrows prove no match for the resistant Excelsior tires. Where Jaeger's film relied on a well-tried adventure scenario, however, Ruttmann's film looks back to the design aesthetics of advertising posters to construct a drama of elementary forms. Following a title card reading "Der Sieger: ein Film in Farben," the film opens onto a clearly identifiable image of a tropical landscape, over which a sun then rises, reflected in the lagoon below. But hardly have we had time to absorb this harmonious image – with its static and balanced composition of palm tree, sun, water and mountain – when it is immediately transformed by a dark and menacing storm cloud into an abstract field of frenetic explosions followed by a dance of circular and paisley forms in primary colors of red, blue and yellow.

This transformation has everything to do with pleasure. For Der Sieger will recount precisely the effort to reinstate the lost idyll of the establishing image on a higher, industrial plane, and the Excelsior tire will form the agent of that sublation. As the tropical lagoon disappears in the opening sequence, only the form of the circle remains, no longer denoting a sun, but simply constituting one element among others in an abstract graphic conflict of colored shapes. Soon, however, this circle – the dominant form of Ruttmann's film – will morph back into an object, namely the Excelsior tire, which rolls over abstract waves, geometrical rectangles, and finally a new industrial landscape, all presented in various

Still from Ruttmann, DER SIEGER *(1922)*

combinations of red, green, blue and yellow. Throughout these transformations, the tire – here recalling Jäger's scenario – is characterized by its bouncy elasticity and its corresponding ability to withstand the shocks of Ruttmann's angry spikes. But seen within Ruttmann's new abstract technological environment, this theme of elasticity takes on new connotations, recalling George Grosz's contention, in his 1917 poem "Man muß Kautschukmann sein" ("One Must be Like Rubber"), that modern consciousness had to become as elastic as rubber in order to adapt to the jolts of the technological environment, with its traffic accidents, explosions and dizzying heights.[66] Indeed, in an image reminiscent of Freud's postwar description of consciousness as a protective shield, the elastic tire now encircles the sun itself, which smiles in glee as if happy to be shielded from the kinds of storms that destroyed the former paradise. Finally, at the end of the film, the tire will literally become a new sun, filling the screen with its glowing yellow halo. As the culmination of a narrative of paradise lost and found, Ruttmann's sunny tire is thus associated with much more than simply a smooth ride; the pleasure this ad promises is one of psychic stability, the pleasure of adapting to the perceptual shocks of war and industrial modernity – shocks which, as Janet Ward has shown, included the exponential increase in advertising itself with its constant claims on consumer attention.[67]

Most importantly, however, this loss and restoration of stability is echoed, on the formal level, by a drama of the disappearance and restoration of identifiable objects: the passage from the representation of familiar things to one of abstract forms and back again. Such a back-and-forth movement, as I argued above, echoes a tension between abstract shapes and meaningful forms (or "organic

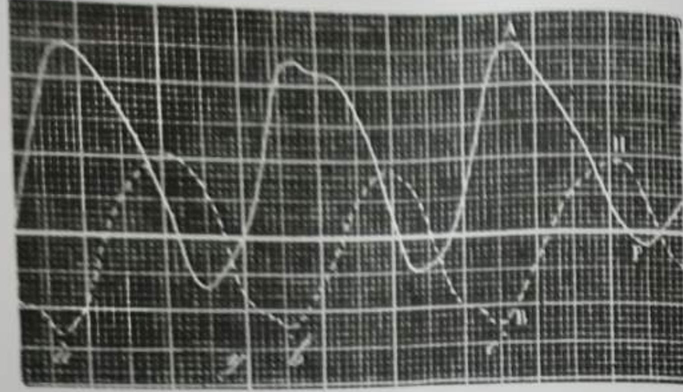
associations") already present in advertising theory itself. But within the context of Ruttmann's narrative of paradise lost and found, this tension cannot but also recall Wilhelm Worringer's theory of the dualism between "abstraction" and "empathy" in visual art. In his study *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (*Abstraction and Empathy*, 1908), Worringer associated naturalistic representations with a relation of trust and "familiarity" (Vertraulichkeit) between the observing subject and its environment, while he understood abstraction as a compensatory activity undertaken in reaction to a sense of anxiety before a chaotic or threatening external world.[68] Worringer attributed such an anxiety above all to "primitive" cultures, but he also saw it at work in the burgeoning avant-garde movements of the early 20th century (e.g. cubist painting), and compared it the signature modern pathologies discussed in the psychological literature of his day, citing the well-known condition of agoraphobia ("Platzangst") as an explanation for the elimination of three dimensional space in the abstract surface.[69] In unmaking and remaking the perceptual world of objects on the surface of the filmic canvas, Ruttmann's film rehearses, as it were, Worringer's conceptual opposition, passing from an aesthetic of empathy to one of abstraction and back again. And the tire, as the successor to Ruttmann's abstract circle, figures as the agent of this process.

Riding the Curve of Modernity's Information Flows

Of course, Ruttmann's abstraction differs from that described by Worringer in that it occurs not only at the level of spatial forms, but also at the level of *temporal* movement. In his much-discussed essay "Malerei mit Zeit" ("Painting with Time"), an unpublished text written shortly after WWI, Ruttmann described his own transition from painting to film as an effort to introduce movement into visual art. But he also emphasized his desire to isolate and visualize abstract trajectories of movement, a project he understood as a reaction to a potentially "hostile" environment, namely one characterized by a the acceleration of perception and a surplus of information:

> Telegraphs, high-speed trains, stenography, photography, high-speed press machines, etc. […] have brought about a speed in the transmission of intellectual results previously unknown. For the individual, this speed with which information is transmitted results in a state of continuous inundation by material that can no longer be processed by traditional methods.[70]

Nearly all of the media and technologies described here – most explicitly the train and the rotary press – would play key roles seven years later in Ruttmann's

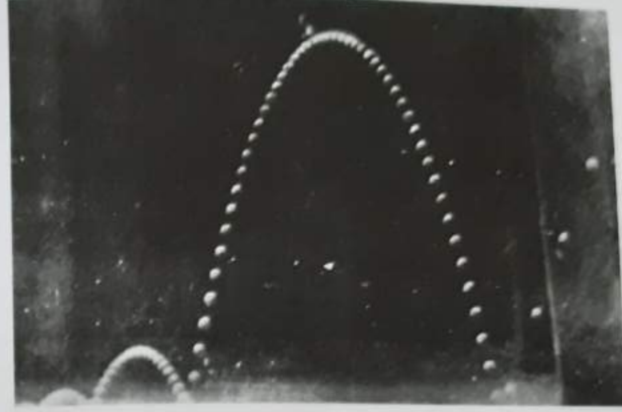


Marey, curve showing the movements of a pigeon's wing, from La méthode graphique dans les sciences *(1885)*

Berlin film as the catalysts of a process in which perception literally becomes blurred by acceleration.[71] But already in his 1920 essay, Ruttmann saw this technological transformation as the key factor underlying his own explorations in abstract animation. For it is above all in reaction to this sense of accelerated information flows, he argued, that art needed to abstract from the contingent details of individual images to focus on *lines of movement*:

> [A]s a result of the increased speed at which individual data is cranked out, the gaze is now diverted from individual contents to the overall trajectory of a curve formed from the various points, a phenomenon that unfolds in time. Thus the object of our observation is now temporal development and the physiognomy of a curve caught in continuous transformation, and no longer the static disposition of individual points.[72]

Ruttmann's language of "curves" here recalls a long tradition of abstract representations of movement stretching back into the 19th century: namely the scientific motion curves, by which 19th-century physiologists sought to represent abstract trajectories of movement and change. Such curves came in many forms: the rhythmical curves of breathing and heartbeat registered by pneumographs and sphygmographs; the trajectories of force and fatigue inscribed by dynamometers; the paths of bodies isolated by Marey's geometrical chronophotography or the chronocyclegraphic studies of Frank and Lilian Gilbreth. But as visual representations, all of these "curves" shared a labor of *simplification*: the effort to bracket the contingent details of individual bodies so as to visualize the elementary arc of a movement or a development.[73] However, this is not to argue



Etienne-Jules Marey, trajectory of a bouncing ball (1886)

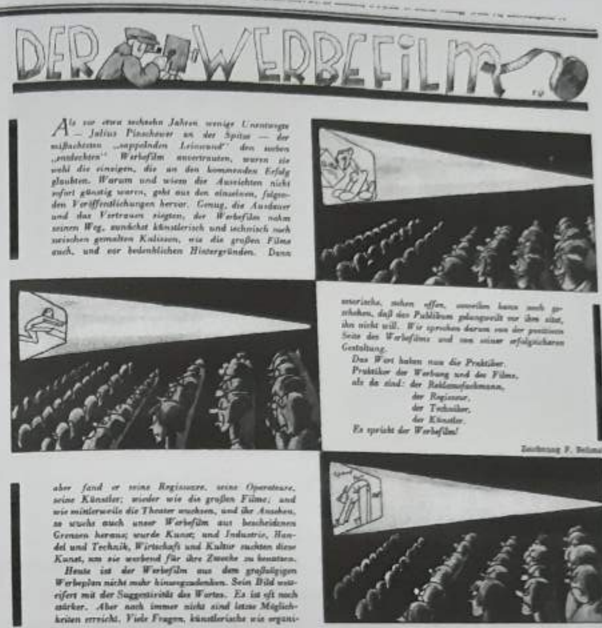
that Ruttmann sought simply to transpose the epistemological project of 19th-century motion "curves" onto film; on the contrary, as his description of the curve's "continuous transformation" suggests, Ruttmann's motivation for temporal abstraction was not to isolate trajectories of movement for study in a static image, but to create a new vocabulary of abstract movement-patterns unfolding in time (Ruttmann goes on to provide a long list of such movements with names such as "wave-like" (wellenförmig), "dance-like" (tanzartig), "snake-like" (schlangenartig), "galloping" (galoppierend), "raging" (tobend), etc.) In other words, at stake, in Ruttmann's filmic abstractions, was no longer an epistemological project, but rather an *experiential* one. This was, to be sure, a Bergsonian project, with precursors in the widespread use of color organs of the 1910s or in Loïe Fuller's light and electricity dances.[74] But it was also motivated by a desire to adapt vision and spectatorship to the information overload that threatened to overwhelm subjective perception. While such a project clearly resonates with Worringer's view of abstraction as a reaction to a hostile environment, that environment is now defined explicitly by technology (mass media and rapid transportation) rather than nature, and the central quality of its "chaos" is a temporal one linked directly to the modern experience of acceleration. This was, we might recall, the same experience that informed the development of advertising psychology itself, with its constant search for new ways of capturing the fleeting attention of consumers caught between myriad impressions in movement.

Coming back to DER SIEGER, one could thus argue that the real pleasure promised by Ruttmann's tire – an emblem of acceleration if there ever was one – consists precisely in its promise to navigate this new industrial world by overseeing the restoration, as it were, of the lost paradise of the opening image on a higher industrial plane. In this narrative of paradise lost and found, moreover, DER SIEGER establishes a pattern that will be repeated in different variations in several of Ruttmann's subsequent advertising films, in which pleasure is constantly evoked through an eminently Freudian narrative of restoring a state of harmony existing before the tension or conflict introduced by the play of graphic forms.[75] This narrative finds its most explicit expression in Ruttmann's 1925 ad DAS WIEDERGEFUNDENE PARADIES, which recounts a modified version of the expulsion from the Garden to promise viewers that flowers will literally "awaken memories of paradisiacal pleasures." But the promise of pleasure is also present in film such as DAS WUNDER, where alcohol has the magical power to resolve conflict; in the 1926 film SPIEL DER WELLEN, where the AEG radio receives waves from an African landscape transporting the latter into the protected space of a European radio-listener's headphones; or DER AUFSTIEG, in which the Gesolei exhibition promises to restore the nation to its healthy state before the ravages of warfare and hyperinflation. Thus, these films repeatedly stage moments of anxiety linked to the destruction of pleasurable origins through graphic conflict only to promise their restoration on a higher plane by means of industrial products. At the formal level, this back-and-forth between pleasurable stasis and unpleasurable conflict finds its parallel in the very tension between the unfamiliar world of abstract forms and figurative images of familiar things. Like Freud's child, Ruttmann's advertisements thus constantly throw away the object only to reel it in again in a repetitive back-and-forth trajectory between empathetic description and defensive abstraction, where the commodity and the trademark figure as the agents of a new trust in the world of things and three-dimensional space.

Pleasure was, not surprisingly, a central preoccupation for proponents of the advertising film and their conceptualization of the audience. In a 1926 article for *Die Reklame*, for example, Fritz Pauli argued that the darkened movie theater had the unique advantage over billboards, newspapers or radio of completely monopolizing the spectator's captive attention:

> [T]he audience *has* to register the advertisement, whether it wants to or not. One can deliberately oversee the advertisements section of a newspaper; one can more or less avoid the sight of traffic and electric advertisements; one can take off one's headphones during radio advertisements or simply turn off the receiver; but it is not easy to close one's eyes in the movie theater.[76]

However, Pauli continued, such a compulsory claim on the attention could backfire if didactic or boring films failed to please spectators through humor or



DER WERBEFILM

Als vor etwa sechzehn Jahren wenige Unentwegte — Julius Pinschewer an der Spitze — der mißachteten „zappelnden Leinwand" den neuen „entdeckten" Werbefilm anvertrauten, waren sie wohl die einzigen, die an den kommenden Erfolg glaubten. Warum und wieso die Aussichten nicht sofort günstig waren, geht aus den einzelnen, folgenden Veröffentlichungen hervor. Genug, die Ausdauer und das Vertrauen siegten, der Werbefilm nahm seinen Weg, zunächst künstlerisch und technisch noch zwischen gemalten Kulissen, wie die großen Filme auch, und vor bedenklichen Hintergründen. Dann aber fand er seine Regisseure, seine Operateure, seine Künstler; wieder wie die großen Filme; und wie mittlerweile die Theater wuchsen, und ihr Ansehen, so wuchs auch unser Werbefilm aus bescheidenen Grenzen heraus; wurde Kunst; und Industrie, Handel und Technik, Wirtschaft und Kultur suchten diese Kunst, um sie werbend für ihre Zwecke zu benutzen.

Heute ist der Werbefilm aus dem großzügigen Werbeplan nicht mehr hinwegzudenken. Sein Bild wetteifert mit der Suggestivität des Wortes. Es ist oft noch stärker. Aber noch immer nicht sind letzte Möglichkeiten erreicht. Viele Fragen, künstlerische wie organisatorische, stehen offen, zuweilen kann noch geschehen, daß das Publikum gelangweilt vor ihm sitzt, ihn nicht will. Wir sprechen darum von der positiven Seite des Werbefilms und von seiner erfolgsicheren Gestaltung.

Das Wort haben nun die Praktiker,
Praktiker der Werbung und des Films,
als da sind: der Reklamefachmann,
der Regisseur,
der Techniker,
der Künstler.
Es spricht der Werbefilm!

Zeichnung F. [illegible]

Caricature of film audiences, from Die Reklame (1927)

interesting tricks: "Audiences do not wish to feel cheated, as it were, out of their time or their ticket price. [...] They wish to be amused, thrilled or educated in an interesting way. When this is the case, they feel entertained and regard the product being advertised with favor."[77] Pauli's argument here was echoed more or less verbatim in numerous other books and articles from the time,[78] and it found an illustration the following year on the title page of a special issue of *Die Reklame* devoted to advertising film, on which a caricature drawing compared bored, angry and entertained audiences to suggest that pleasure played a central role in the success of filmic advertisements. Nor was Pinschewer himself unaware of such theories, as he would later resort to the same argument to explain the prevalence of animation in advertising film:

> A particular advantage of film advertising resides in the fact that spectators sitting in the darkened room cannot avoid paying attention to the film. Precisely for this reason, the advertising content should be presented in a pleasurable form. This is also the reason why people prefer to clothe advertising film in the form of animation [Trickfilm], for animation satisfies the need for relaxing entertainment.[79]

Sill from Ruttmann, Das Wunder *(1922)*

It was also in the interest of stimulating such pleasure that product advertisements resorted from the beginning to strategies of humor, a topic much discussed in the literature on advertising and one of the principal motivations for the widespread use of caricature animation in film advertisements of the 1920s. As one writer for Seidels Reklame put it in 1927, "Audiences today want humor. The animated film offers the possibility of conjuring up the most grotesque Chaplinades, the most fantastical improbabilities on the screen."[80] In particular, advertisers called for the use of gentle humor typical of German print caricature traditions as opposed to the biting satire of Dada and expressionist cabaret. Typical, in this respect, was a 1927 article by the animator Lutz Michaelis, who argued that the advertising animator "should ensure that he does not develop aggressive humor (satire); rather, his figures should be based in a jovial humorous characterization. (To draw on a crass comparison, Wilhelm Busch's caricatures are funny and jovial, while George Grosz's every pen-stroke is caustic and aggressive)."[81]

Although Ruttmann's experimental advertisements sought to distinguished themselves from the caricatures of animators such as Michaelis and Harry Jäger, he was not averse to employing such moments of gentle humor – for example in the Kantorowicz film, where the bickering faces begin to kiss one another lovingly after consuming the liqueur from the bottle conjured up by a magician. But as I have argued, his films also sought to produce pleasure at the formal level through the play of abstraction and empathy, by which Ruttmann continuously staged perceptive reactions to the new technological conditions with which these advertisements were concerned. If Ruttmann's commodity objects promised pleasure, this was above all through their promise to navigate this new world of accelerated information, and more precisely to restore a sense of trust in the new landscape of people, objects and information in motion. Ruttmann's advertisements not only participated, with their targeted stimulation of attention through color and movement, in the shocks of this new media environment, but also promised to help spectators come to terms with that environment in and through acts of consumption.

Conclusion: Experimental Advertisements and the Governance of Perception

In conclusion, I might add that although I am focusing on Ruttmann in this book, the play of abstraction and empathy I have followed here was not entirely unique to his films, but found many imitators in the world of film advertising during the interwar years. From Ewald Schumacher's 1925 advertisement Flammentanz (Dance of Flames), where the flames produced by the gas fuel transform from abstract forms into personified dancers and back again, to the cigarette commercials by Hans Fischerkoesen (e.g. Schall und Rauch [Sound and Smoke], 1933), Wolfgang Kaskeline (Zwei Farben [Two Colors], 1933) and Oskar Fischinger (Muratti greift ein, 1934), with their play of abstract movement and recognizable objects, the alternation of abstraction and figuration constituted an important strategy of filmic advertisement in the 1920s. Given the involvement of avant-garde and experimental artists in these films, one could easily read them as neglected examples of what Gilles Deleuze has called "liquid" or "gaseous" perception in modernist experimental cinema; according to Deleuze, a good deal of early experimental filmmaking attempted to overcome territorialized modes of instrumental perception to attain – or "regain" – a Bergsonian realm of pure fluctuation or universal variation underneath.[82] Above all Vertov, Deleuze argued, sought "to reach 'another' perception, which is the genetic element of all perception."[83] But in order to understand the full stakes of the preoccupation with abstract movement in experimental advertising films of the 1920s, it is also crucial to read them within the context of advertising culture – and more specifically to see their relation to theories of advertising pleasure. It was precisely in the back-and-forth movement between abstraction and familiar objects, between the loss of meaning and its recuperation in the commodity, that the pleasure and efficacy of these films resided.

Still from Hans Fischerkoesen, SCHALL UND RAUCH *(1933)*

Far from challenging that efficacy or undermining the "usefulness" of the image, the avant-garde filmmakers who participated in product advertising in the 1920s affirmed it. If these filmmakers were attracted to advertising, this was not on account of a financial compromise or as part of a campaign of subversion, but because advertising provided a forum in which to demonstrate the filmmaker's expertise, and the relevance of that expertise for a technological-industrial society. Abstraction, movement and rhythm, that is, were not simply artistic elements, but also scientific and practical ones: the building blocks of "management images" that might regulate perception, attention and audience reactions. Reducing the image to its "psychophysical" potential, Ruttmann's "absolute" film promised to harness this governing power of the image. As we will see in the following chapters, Ruttmann's subsequent turn toward photographic images and montage might have constituted a break in appearance from his abstract animation, but he would continue to fashion cinema as a tool for managing mass culture throughout his career.

2. The Cross-Section: Images of the World and Contingency Management in Ruttmann's Montage Films of the Late 1920s (1927-1929)

Introduction

In the last chapter, I argued that abstract design was never simply an aesthetic phenomenon, but also the object of psychophysiological research, much of it carried out within the new science of advertising psychology. The participation in advertising on the part of Ruttmann and other filmmakers could hardly be written off as a compromise of aesthetic principles; it was, rather, a logical extension and application of their own experiments in abstract film design, which were carried out within a horizon of application. In a broader sense, we saw that Ruttmann understood reduction and abstraction as a potential answer to a problem of perception in modernity. Drawing on the convention of the scientific "curve," he saw the aesthetics of abstraction as a means of training perception to operate within the new technological and mass-mediated public spheres of the early 20th century, spheres defined above all by acceleration and the increasing accumulation of mental and visual "data."

One could easily carry this analysis of "perception training" over to the film that sealed Ruttmann's international fame in 1920s and since, his magnum opus BERLIN. DIE SINFONIE DER GROSSSTADT (BERLIN. THE SYMPHONY OF A GREAT CITY, 1927), in which Ruttmann used montage to depict the teeming life of the metropolis from morning until nightfall.[1] As has often been pointed out, Ruttmann's first full-length film, despite replacing animation with photographic images, retained a schematic "musical" quality in its imitation of the symphonic form, its division into five "acts" of varying intensities, and its calibration of visual montage with the musical score by Edmund Meisel. Upon the film's premiere, critic Herbert Jhering spoke of Ruttmann's "Bildmusik" (image music) in BERLIN,[2] and Béla Balázs would invoke the term "optische Musik" (optical music) to describe BERLIN in his book *Der Geist des Films* (*The Spirit of Film*, 1930).[3] Subsequent scholars have largely followed in the same path.[4] Such a musical quality, moreover, would appear to have informed Ruttmann's very planning of the film. As Goergen notes, rather than basing the film on a linear script, Ruttmann employed a kind of card catalogue for the individual scenes; each card included not only a description of the scene's content, but also, as one