

Advertising, Rhythm, and the
Filmic Avant-Garde in Weimar:
Guido Seeber and Julius
Pinschewer's *Kipho* Film

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That which determines the rhythm of the production on a conveyor belt is the basis of the rhythm of reception in film.

—Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”

In rotation, the triumph of the machine comes to the fore.

—Martin Heidegger, Parmenides

Introduction

In September of 1925, readers leafing through *Der Kinematograph* or *Lichtbildbühne* or another such film journal might have encountered a strangely familiar sight: in an advertisement for a major exhibition of the German film and photography industries entitled “Kipho” (“Kino und Photo”), which was to be held in Berlin from September 25th to October 4th, there appeared the following sentence: “You must go to the Kipho! [*Du musst zur Kipho gehen!*].” With its enigmatic injunction, the advertisement recalled another famous advertising campaign from the early days of Weimar cinema, namely that surrounding Robert Wiene’s *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920). In the weeks before *Caligari*’s release, advertisements had appeared in the public spaces of Berlin—and in trade journals such as *Der Kinematograph*—containing the enigmatic sentence “You must become Caligari! [*Du musst Caligari werden!*].” Viewers who went to see Wiene’s film soon found an explanation in a scene that depicted a psychiatrist succumbing to a hypnotic compulsion, emitted by an ancient book, to mimic the murderous experiments of the seventeenth-century charlatan Caligari. Echoing this intermedial performance, the Kipho poster also foreshadowed a scene in a film: namely, the three-and-a-half-minute experimental film *Kipho* by Guido Seeber, which ran as a trailer in German theaters in the weeks



Advertisement for the Kipho exhibition of film and photography industries. 1925.

leading up to the exhibition and culminated in an explicit appropriation of the famous *Caligari* injunction.¹ There, as we watch borrowed footage of the psychiatrist/Caligari hawking his somnambulist spectacle in the local town fair, a hand—not a little reminiscent of the sinewy hands from the *Caligari* poster—transforms the famous sentence “You must become Caligari” into “You must go to the Kipho.”

Through this onscreen transformation of Caligari’s occult tent show into an advertisement for the Kipho exhibition, the Kipho film not only compounded the doubling already thematized in *Caligari* and carried out in the repetition between print and screen; it also offered an exemplary—and notably early—instance of “the transformative power of montage” characteristic of found-footage cinema.² Indeed, although *Kipho* has largely fallen into obscurity today, it represented a pinnacle of experimental filmmaking upon its release in 1925. Conceived by Guido Seeber, one of the premier German cinematographers of the 1910s and 1920s, the film features a veritable showcase of special effects from superimposition and multiple split screens to animation, backward movement, fast motion, and not least of all the use of found footage such as the *Caligari* sequence. According to Standish Lawder, who devoted a chapter to the film in his classic study *The Cubist Cinema* (1975), *Kipho* thus displayed “the most advanced artistic vocabulary of its day” and deserved to be placed alongside

1. For evidence of the film’s screening in German theaters, see “Aus dem Program der Kipho,” *Lichtbildbühne* 159 (1925), p. 13. Since its release in 1925, this film has received several titles, including *Du mußt zur Kipho*, *Kipho*, or simply *Film*. I have opted for the title *Kipho* here in order to emphasize the film’s relation to the Kipho exhibition. I distinguish the film title from the exhibition by the use of italics.

2. William C. Wees, *Recycled Images. The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1993), pp. 13–14.



Advertisement for
The Cabinet of Dr.
Caligari. 1919.

works such as Hans Richter's *Rhythmus* films and Fernand Léger and Dudley Murphy's *Ballet mécanique* (1924)—with which Lawder thought *Kipho* had the closest affinity—as a milestone of the modernist filmic avant-garde.³

One could point out many similarities between *Kipho* and other seminal avant-garde films of the 1920s, not least in regard to their shared reflexivity. Like Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), the film stages the production of a film, depicting the film industry in the process as a vast industrial apparatus. Like other avant-garde works of the 1920s, moreover, *Kipho* explicitly rejects the genre of narrative cinema dominant since the 1910s in favor of a return to cinema's

3. Standish Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), pp. 180–81.



Guido Seiber. Sequence of film stills from an advertisement for Kipho. 1925.



Seeber and Julius Pinschewer.
Film still from *Kipho*. 1925.

origins in attractions and experimentation.⁴ This project is visible in the very refunctioning of the *Caligari* tent show, which now not only figures as a stand-in for the Kipho exhibition, but also bears an uncanny resemblance to early itinerant cinemas—indeed, to the very kind of cinema that Seeber himself had replicated in one of the stands at the Kipho exhibition entitled “Urkinio [Proto-Cinema].”⁵ This realignment of pre-narrative cinema is made even more explicit in the film by a plethora of images of early motion-picture technology, including the zoetrope, the magic drum (*Wundertrommel*), and the electrical tachyscope (*Schnellseher*) of Ottomar Anschütz, all of which are shown spinning in a frenetic rotation.

The presence of such optical toys in *Kipho* suggests a vision of cinema as an “art of motion” rather than one of storytelling. More specifically, they establish a pattern of looped and circular motion that will be echoed throughout the film in the many paradigmatic images of the film industry as a system of spinning camera cranks, platters, projector gears, and film reels. As André Gaudreault and Nicolas Dulac have pointed out, circular motion stood at the heart of early attractions cinema and constituted its specific, machinic temporality in opposition to the linear unfolding of narrative.⁶ Like other avant-garde works, such as *Ballet mécanique*, *Kipho*

4. On the avant-garde’s romanticization of early (non-narrative) cinema, see, of course, Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-garde,” in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: BFI, 1989), pp. 56–62. Such nostalgia for early cinema was alive and well in 1920s Germany. See for example Carlo Mierendorff, *Hätte ich das Kino!* (Berlin: Erich Reiß Verlag, 1920).

5. For a detailed description of Seeber’s display, see especially “Bericht von der ‘Kipho,’” *Lichtbildbühne* 189 (1925), p. 12.

6. See Nicolas Dulac and André Gaudreault, “Circularity and Repetition at the Heart of the Attraction: Optical Toys and the Emergence of a New Cultural Series,” in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*,



*Seeber and Pinschewer. Film
still from Kipho. 1925.*

thus calls for a return to this mechanical conception of cinematic time—a project encapsulated paradigmatically in the image of a generic “Drehbuch” (film script) now rotating in place on its axis rather than advancing along a narrative trajectory. For speakers of German, Seeber’s visual pun would have been unmistakable, the German term *drehen* signifying not only “to rotate” or “to spin” generally, but also specifically “to make a film [*einen Film drehen*].”

Despite such aesthetic affinities with other avant-garde works of the 1920s, however, it might seem counterintuitive to consider a work like *Kipho* as part of avant-garde history. Commissioned and financed by the most prominent advertising producer of the time, Julius Pinschewer, as an advertisement for an official trade-industry exhibition, the film would appear much more emblematic of a collusion between art and capital than the ethics of resistance that has come to be associated with the avant-garde.⁷ At the same time, however, as recent historical research into avant-garde cultures in the 1920s has shown, such forms of collaboration were hardly viewed negatively across the spectrum. Members of the Bauhaus, for example, maintained a vibrant interest in advertising layout and aesthetics and increasingly sought to integrate advertising theory into the school’s curriculum.⁸ Similarly, as Ingrid

ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), pp. 227–44. “If, as Paul Ricoeur remarks, ‘time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode,’ the temporality of optical toys is closer to that of the machine; it is more mechanical than anything else” (p. 228).

7. Pinschewer, who began producing advertisement films in the early 1900s, made over 100 advertisement films during the 1920s. For more on Pinschewer’s career, see Jeanpaul Goergen, “Julius Pinschewer: A Trade-mark Cinema,” in *A Second Life: German Cinema’s First Decades*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), pp. 168–74.

8. On this point, see Frederic J. Schwartz, “The Eye of the Expert: Walter Benjamin and the Avant-Garde,” *Art History* 24, no. 3 (2001), pp. 401–44.

Westbrock showed already in the 1980s, many, if not most, of the key figures of experimental cinema in Weimar—including Walter Ruttmann, Lotte Reiniger, Hans Richter, and Oskar Fischinger—found in advertising not simply a source of income, but also an important sphere of filmic innovation, one conducive to experimentation with alternative modes of editing and the use of color and sound.⁹ More recently, Malte Hagener has problematized the notion of the 1920s filmic avant-garde as autonomous or independent, given that experimental film was regularly financed by patrons, film studios, and not least of all advertising companies.¹⁰ In Germany, for example, the earliest experiments in abstract film by Richter and Ruttmann were themselves supported by the prominent film studios UFA and Emelka; and even the legendary Berlin matinee “Der absolute Film” from 1925—in which abstract films by Ruttmann, Richter, Viking Eggeling, and Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack were shown next to Léger and Murphy’s *Ballet mécanique* and René Clair and Francis Picabia’s *Entr’acte* (1924)—was co-organized by UFA’s Department of Cultural and Educational Films [*Kulturfilmabteilung*] and introduced by the department head, Dr. Edgar Beyfuß.¹¹

Seeber, for his part, could be seen as emblematic of such intersecting currents and agendas making up avant-garde film culture in Germany in the 1920s; a prolific inventor and cinematographer, famous among other things for his innovative Doppelgänger sequences, which were first introduced in Stella Rye’s *Der Student von Prag* (The student of Prague, 1913), Seeber remained an industry favorite and insider throughout the Weimar years, working on some seventy feature films between 1918 and 1933 alone.¹² But he also maintained an active interest in experimental film, from his famous matchstick animation in *Die geheimnisvolle Streichholzdose* (The Mysterious Matchbox, 1910) to his series of “Rebus Films,” a set of filmed crossword puzzles made in collaboration with Paul Leni and screened in Berlin from 1925 to 1927.¹³ Indeed, Seeber appears to have taken a keen interest in the phenomenon of “absolute film” and explicitly understood *Kipho* as an effort to harness experimental techniques in the tradition of *Entr’acte* and *Ballet mécanique*—what he calls the “trick techniques of tomorrow” (*Tricktechnik von morgen*)—for advertising. As he described it in his 1927 book *Der Trickfilm in seinen grundsätzlichen Möglichkeiten* (The Trick Film in Its Fundamental Possibilities), “Advertising film has also made use of this expressive form [i.e. abstract film] and a successful experiment in this direction was the ‘Kipho-Film’

9. Ingrid Westbrock, *Der Werbefilm. Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Genres vom Stummfilm zum frühen Ton- und Farbfilm* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1983), pp. 59–63.

10. Malte Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture 1919–1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), pp. 44–50.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 46, 87–88.

12. Seeber’s notable inventions include the “Seeberograph” (a film developing apparatus) and the “Seeberophone,” a camera for recording sound film in 1900. For more on Seeber’s career, see *Das wandernde Bild. Der Filmpionier Guido Seeber* (Berlin: Elefanten-Press, 1979); Helmut Sontag, *Sidi: eine Hommage an den Kameramann und Filmpionier Guido Seeber* (Hannover: Kronsberg-Verlag, 1986).

13. The first film of this series was recently included on the second volume of Kino’s “Avant-Garde” DVD compilation. After 1933, Seeber would—like Ruttmann himself—place his film talents in the service of propaganda films such as *Der ewige Wald* (1936), a “Blut und Boden” history of the German forest.

produced by the Pinschewer company and recently shown in Berlin, for whose technical execution I was responsible.”¹⁴ Taking a cue from Seeber’s own description here, this article examines *Kipho* as a case study in synergies between avant-garde aesthetics and advertising. As I will show, the film not only mobilizes experimental techniques in the service of a particular advertising campaign, it also incorporates and stages contemporary ideas about moving images and advertising from the new science of advertising psychology—and this nowhere more explicitly than in the appropriation and transformation of the hypnosis sequence from *Caligari*.

Rhythm, Avant-Garde Aesthetics, and the Kipho Exhibition

Before turning to the main argument, however, I want to linger for a moment on the question of how to position *Kipho*’s aesthetics within the broader spectrum of avant-garde film culture in the 1920s, focusing specifically on Seeber’s use of rhythm in the film. In his discussion of *Kipho* in *Der Trickfilm*, Seeber sounded another familiar note from avant-garde film debates when he characterized the film’s non-narrative form more specifically as an experiment in the creation of visual *rhythm* and urged filmmakers—in an exhortation providing further insight into the image of the spinning “Drehbuch” in the film—to exchange narrative scripts for something bearing more resemblance to a musical score: “Just as a musician creates the instrumental score of a musical work, so the film author must write a kind of technical score (*Partitur*), which allows the cameraman to follow his imagination.”¹⁵ Just what such a “score” might look like in the case of *Kipho* can be gleaned from a diagram included in the book intended to illustrate the film’s most prominent collage technique, in which Seeber divided the screen into several visual fields where images and black leader alternate rhythmically in a kind of visual counterpoint measured by the number of camera cranks.¹⁶

Seeber’s call to refashion film into a rhythmical art analogous to music recalls a widespread understanding of abstract film in the early twentieth century, one that informed such disparate practices as absolute film, the city-symphony genre, and Eisenstein’s model of rhythmical montage. While traditional scholars such as Lawder have tended to read this tradition of “rhythmical” filmmaking in formalist terms, emphasizing the break with denotative representation, more recent studies have begun to reassess the cultural contexts in which “rhythm” could come to exert such a fascination on avant-garde filmmakers, highlighting in particular the links between discourses on rhythm in avant-garde film and broader debates about rhythm, industrialization, and modern

14. Guido Seeber, *Der Trickfilm in seinen grundsätzlichen Möglichkeiten* (repr.; Frankfurt am Main: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1979), p. 244. All translations from the German are mine unless otherwise noted.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 241–45.

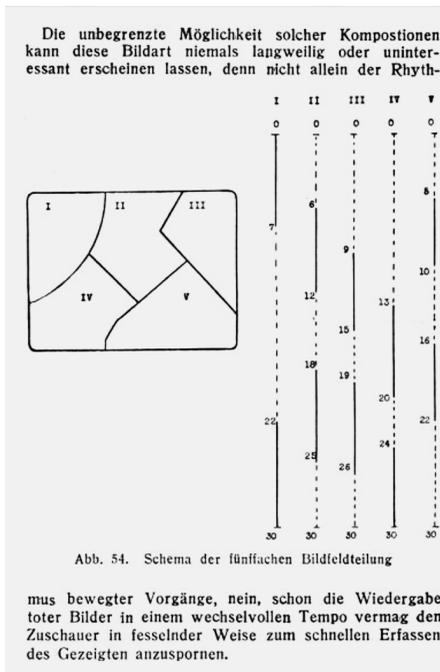


Diagram illustrating Seeber's multi-field collage technique, from *Der Trickfilm in seinen grundsätzlichen Möglichkeiten*. 1927.

experience.¹⁷ Perhaps no single publication did more to catalyze the latter debates in the early twentieth century than the study *Arbeit und Rhythmus* (Labor and Rhythm, 1897) by the economist Karl Bücher. Undertaking a sweeping investigation of traditional work forms, Bücher posited rhythm as the very essence of bodily labor, which offered a natural means of increasing bodily efficiency and productivity by rendering repeated gestures automatic and increasing the aesthetic pleasure in labor.¹⁸ More than a physiological treatise, however, Bücher's study represented above all a diagnosis of modernity. In the rhythmic work songs and collective work rituals of "primitive" peoples, Bücher believed he had found a lost form of communal activity, one in which labor, poetry, and festival still formed an integral whole.¹⁹ Against this utopian image of communal rhythmical labor, he saw the process of modernity as one entailing the replacement of the human by the rationalized and accelerated rhythms of machines. Central to this development, he insisted, was the replacement of the back-and-forth rhythmical

17. For a rereading of the rhythm discourse in the French context, see especially Laurent Guido, *L'âge du rythme: cinéma, musicalité et culture du corps dans les théories françaises des années 1910–1930* (Lausanne: Payot, 2007). In the German context, see Michael Cowan, "The Heart Machine: 'Rhythm' and Body in Weimar Film and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*," in *Modernism/modernity* 14, no. 2 (2007), pp. 225–48.

18. Karl Bücher, *Arbeit und Rhythmus* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1897), pp. 21–23, 101.

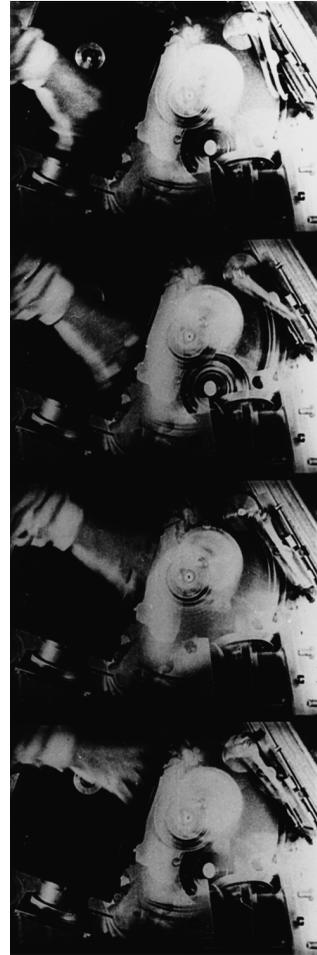
19. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

movements of hands and arms by the continuous circular motion of factory technology:

It will remain a noteworthy fact for historians of industrial machinery that many of the earliest factory machines display a rhythmic motion, in which they merely imitate the hand and arm movements of traditional labor . . . But with the advancement of machine construction, engineers attempted to eliminate the idle backstroke [*totten Rückgang*] associated with rhythmical motion and exchanged this horizontal or vertical movement for continuous rotating movement, which avoids that loss of energy . . . This transition marks the disappearance from factory floors of the traditional music of labor, which one could still hear in the first rhythmical machines.²⁰

Through continuous rotation, Bücher argued, machinic rhythms had suppressed the body's natural rhythms, subjugated the human worker to an inhuman temporality, and destroyed the ritual, poetic quality of traditional labor.

In its condensed presentation of the film industry, *Kipho* stages a similar transformation. Early in the film, we see a number of images of hands engaged in distinct back-and-forth movements as they perform various tasks such as hammering, sawing, and wiping in the preparation of the film sets. But these working bodies are soon absorbed into the frenetic spinning of the filmic apparatus via the hand operating the camera crank. In a constellation specifically foreshadowing Vertov's editing in *Man with a Movie Camera*, Seeber's collage technique inserts the cameraman's hand into an array of spinning mechanical parts. Through this progression from back-and-forth to circular movement, *Kipho* recalls Bücher's diagnosis of modernity, even as it playfully reverses Bücher's evaluation. Where Bücher lamented the loss of the poetry of work, *Kipho* calls for a new poetry of



Seeber and Pinschewer. Film still from Kipho. 1925.

20. Ibid., p. 115.

machines, a mechanized poetry dictated by the crank of the movie camera.

In this respect, the film's treatment of rhythm overlaps with that of the broader Constructivist avant-garde of the mid-1920s. While Bücher's study still displayed an ambiguous mixture of nostalgic and rationalist tendencies, the rhythm discussion in Germany became increasingly polarized after the First World War with the introduction of Taylorist and Fordist work principles into Germany. One school of thought—represented by vitalist thinkers such as Ludwig Klages—sought to cultivate the vital, natural, and cosmic rhythms they saw suppressed by industrial modernity. In his treatise *Vom Wesen des Rhythmus* (On the Essence of Rhythm) from 1923, Klages insisted on a strict separation of machinic repetition, which he labeled *Takt* (cadence, measure), and *Rhythmus*, which he identified with flowing, irregular movements that deviated from serial repetition.²¹ During the Weimar Republic, various schools of dance and eurhythmics such as the *Loheland-Schule* or the *völkisch Bode-Bund* sought to counter the mechanization of rhythm by industrial production. But this vitalist tendency was opposed by another rationalist school of thought—represented most centrally by work science and German psychotechnics—that latched onto Bücher's pairing of rhythm and efficiency and identified much more closely with the mechanical rhythms of industrial technology and urban life. Writing in 1925, for example, the psychotechnician Fritz Giese welcomed the mechanical rhythms of chorus girls and jazz bands, which he described—some two years before Siegfried Kracauer's writings on the mass ornament—as the embodiment of an “artificial-technological” type of rhythm directly opposed to the “natural-biological” rhythm cultivated by German dance reformers.²²

Within this context, as I have argued elsewhere, moving images were widely understood as a kind of interface between these two types of rhythm: a medium for accessing primal rhythm, and a means of asserting control over primal rhythm through technology.²³ Certainly, both of these projects were available to avant-garde and experimental filmmakers in the 1920s. The former was represented perhaps most obviously by the strand of Surrealist films that stretches from the early work of Germaine Dulac through Seeber's own dream sequences for G. W. Pabst's *Geheimnisse einer Seele* (Secrets of A Soul, 1926) to Man Ray's *Emak Bakia* (1926). But one also finds a long tradition of Constructivist films cultivating the mechanization of rhythm, from Eggeling's and Richter's experiments in the early '20s with abstract rhythms through Léger's *Ballet mécanique* to Ruttmann's and Vertov's city films. Richter, for example, maintained a view of film as a means of

21. See Ludwig Klages, *Vom Wesen des Rhythmus* (Kampfen auf Sylt: Niels Kampmann Verlag, 1934).

22. “To the old biological-natural rhythm, we can now oppose a technological-artificial one.” Fritz Giese, *Girlikultur. Vergleiche zwischen amerikanischem und europäischem Rhythmus und Lebensgefühl* (München: Delphin-Verlag, 1926), p. 25. A decade before Benjamin, Giese saw film as a training ground in the rhythms of modernity: “Film conveys . . . the ‘flow of our times’ in an immediate way . . . The most naïve person experiences this flow here; he adapts to it by visiting the cinema. He learns to take a certain pleasure in rapid alternation; he receives demonstrations of rhythm and sees the pulsing of machine halls, the maelstrom of the city and the waves of traffic transposed directly onto film” (p. 53).

23. See Cowan, “The Heart Machine.”

controlling rhythm throughout his career. Richter was well aware of Bücher-inspired research into the links between rhythm and labor efficiency, as one can read in his discussions of rhythm in his 1929 book *Filmgegner von heute—Filmfreunde von morgen* [Film opponents of today—film supporters of tomorrow]: “The power of rhythm has been amply demonstrated. Rhythmical marching animates the feet. Ship rowers use rhythmical singing to lighten their task. Blacksmiths, threshers, and road-layers all perform their monotonous pounding in rhythm.”²⁴ Again and again in his writings, Richter refers to rhythm as a kind of universal force, an “irresistible natural principle,” which could exert a quasi-hypnotic effect on spectators.²⁵ And he saw his abstract films such as *Film ist Rhythmus!*—later renamed as *Rhythmus 21*—as experiments in placing this vital force under the rational control of the will. As he explained in a text entitled “Die schlecht trainierte Seele” [The badly trained soul] from 1924:

In this rhythmical “movement,” we possess a vital energy, which . . . can . . . become a tool of human power—but one must be capable of controlling this process in order to render the emotions as accessible to our powers of judgment as the other domains of the human will, from which the “soul” has traditionally been excluded.²⁶

For Richter, the point of a rhythmical film was not to introduce more soul into an overly mechanized epoch, but rather—as Robert Musil might have put it—to introduce more precision into matters of the soul: specifically, to bring the power of organic rhythm under the control of a productive will. Rudolf Kurtz agreed. In a chapter on absolute film from his famous treatise *Expressionismus und Film* (Expressionism and Film, 1926) Kurtz described the rhythmical experiments of Eggeling and Richter as efforts to tap into the elementary rhythms of organic life: “This is the mental stage at which primal rhythm likely first arose quasi-biologically from the bodily sensations of pulse and heartbeat, from the natural sequence of the movements of primitive labor.”²⁷ But while reactivating such primitive rhythms, Eggeling’s and Richter’s films sought above all to subordinate them to precise mathematical order. “The way in which these form elements grow, disappear, spread, or whither away,” he explained in reference to Richter, “is in no way arbitrary; rather it follows mathematically calculated

24. Hans Richter, *Filmgegner von heute—Filmfreunde von morgen* (Berlin: Verlag Hermann Reckendorf, 1929), p. 94. Richter’s statement here takes up standard examples from Bücher. See his *Arbeit und Rhythmus*, pp. 21–25.

25. Hans Richter, “Film von morgen,” in *Hans Richter: Film ist Rhythmus*, ed. Jeanpaul Goergen, Angelika Hoch, Erika Gregor, and Ulrich Gregor (Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek, 2003), p. 57. See also Richter, *Filmgegner von heute—Filmfreunde von morgen*: “[F]ew directors are aware of the necessity of rhythm, or of its power, its irresistibility [*Unwiderstehlichkeit*]” (p. 34). As Richter explained in another context: “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.” Richter, “Die schlecht trainierte Seele” (1924), in *Hans Richter: Film ist Rhythmus*, p. 28.

26. Richter, “Die schlecht trainierte Seele,” p. 28.

27. Rudolf Kurtz, *Expressionismus und Film* (Berlin: Verlag der Lichtbild-Bühne, 1926), p. 94.



Seeber and Pinschewer. *Film still from Kipho*. 1925.

respect to the *Kipho* exhibition: namely to *visualize the productivity of the German film industry* itself. Organized by the Head Organization of the German Film Industry, Germany's most prominent association of film-industry employees, in collaboration with the Association of Manufacturers of Photographic Equipment and the German Society for Mechanics and Optics, the exhibition represented the largest of its kind

tempi."²⁸ In this way, the absolute film could be read as a kind of symbolic representation of the industrial epoch, one that both taps into the vital force of rhythm and submits it to rational control: "The irrational is excluded as a matter of principle; art functions to organize the powers at work in life, expressed in relations between the simplest forms."²⁹

A similar project can be seen in Pinschewer and Seeber's *Kipho* film, particularly in its use of found footage. Like Léger's *Ballet mécanique*, with its loop of the washerwoman forever climbing the steps in mechanical repetition, *Kipho* is structured around a series of repetitive loops that absorb the footage borrowed from feature films into their mechanical motion. A case in point can be seen in an iconic image of the Mary Wigman dancers. Seeber borrowed the image from the popular body-culture documentary *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (Paths to Strength and Beauty, 1925), where it had served—in a sequence introduced by quotes from Klages and featuring footage of the Loheland school and the Bode dancers—to visualize the reintroduction of natural rhythms into a mechanized epoch. But in appropriating the dancers, Seeber turns this argument on its head, now refashioning the circle of dancers into one mechanical form among others. Like the marching feet of soldiers or the repetitive jump shown on the zoetrope, Wigman's dancers are absorbed by the *Kipho* film into an endless array of spinning gears, cranks, and film rolls.

But if *Kipho* shares this mechanization of rhythm with other Constructivist avant-garde films, its rhythmic aesthetics also fulfilled a specific function with

28. Ibid., p. 99. See also Kurtz's description of Eggeling's films: "The movements of the form elements is not to be seen as resulting from the play of the imagination; rather, they conform to mathematically calculated rhythms" (p. 98).

29. Ibid., p. 98.

to date. Attracting over 100,000 visitors during its week-long run, it featured displays by nearly all branches of the business, from production companies such as UFA to manufacturers of celluloid, lights, and projectors—as well as exhibitions on the history and economics of the German film industry, and even a model studio where audiences could watch directors and stars at work.³⁰ Although such a large-scale production involved multiple groups and agendas, the exhibition's principle goal was, above all, to bolster the image of a national film industry that had, by late 1925, fallen into a deep crisis in competition with American imports. Under the leadership of Erich Pommer, UFA had developed an unprofitable director-centered system that, unlike the Hollywood studio system, relied heavily on the exportation of art-house films in the tradition of *Caligari* and on high-budget blockbusters such as Fritz Lang's *Nibelungen* films.³¹ Against this backdrop, the Kipho exhibition represented perhaps nothing so much as an effort to drum up public and—above all—governmental support for an industry that in fact lay on the verge of bankruptcy.³² In the articles on the exhibition published in the film-trade journals, one repeatedly encounters sentiments such as the following from Gustav Kühn, editor of the journal *Der Film*: “If a member of government or parliament strolls through this exhibition with his eyes open, he must recognize the deep bonds linking the German film industry to the entire German economy and, in particular, the great cultural and economic power that film can wield.”³³ In a further sign of the organizers' appeal to patriotic sentiments, the exhibition also featured rotating screenings of recent German blockbusters in a 4,000-seat movie theater, and the entire event was followed in November by the so-called “German Film Week,” in which German theaters were asked to screen only German films for a week.³⁴

Pinschewer, who had founded the Patriotic Film Distribution Company (*Vaterländischer Filmvertrieb*) for the production of propaganda films during the First World War, was no stranger to patriotic causes, and the Kipho film largely reflected the exhibitors' aims.³⁵ Indeed, in depicting the production of a film,

30. For a more detailed account of the displays at the Kipho exhibition, see E. U., “Kunst und Geschäftsregisseure,” in *Der Kinematograph* 971 (1925), pp. 23–24; Aros, “Die Woche der Kipho,” *Der Kinematograph* 971 (1925), pp. 1–2; “Quer durch die ‘Kipho,’” *Der Film* 10, no. 40 (1925), pp. 23–24. For a detailed list of all exhibitors at the exhibition, see “Was wird aus der Kipho?” *Der Kinematograph* 952 (1925), p. 16.

31. On this point, see Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 116–24.

32. Only two months after the Kipho exhibition, UFA would sign the infamous Parufamet agreement with Paramount and MGM to pump cash into the system, a move that would only further exacerbate UFA's financial problems. In concluding the agreement, UFA received much-needed cash from the American companies, but it virtually lost control of its domestic cinemas and made little inroads into American markets in return.

33. Gustav Kühn, “Wir begrüßen die Kipho,” *Der Film* 10, no. 39 (September 27, 1925), p. 1.

34. See “Die Kundgebung des deutschen Films,” in *Der Film* 10, no. 38 (1925), p. 28; Albert Schneider, “Der deutsche Film und die Öffentlichkeit,” in *Der Film* 10, no. 39 (1925), pp. 41–42.

35. On Pinschewer's wartime film production, see Goergen, “Julius Pinschewer”; André Amsler, “Wer dem Werbefilm verfällt, ist verloren für die Welt.” *Das Werk von Julius Pinschewer 1883–1961* (Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 1997), pp. 9–14.

Kipho showcases the very industry branches that were on display at the exhibition, from the cameras to the lighting, editing, and make-up. Moreover, the film can be read specifically as a kind of “defense and illustration” of the German film industry. Its found-footage citations derive almost exclusively from highly acclaimed German films such as *Caligari*, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, and F. W. Murnau’s *Der letzte Mann* (The Last Laugh, 1924). Indeed, for the most part, these were the *same* films screened in the exhibition movie theater alongside other national attractions such as the great dragon from Fritz Lang’s *Nibelungen* film.³⁶

More generally, one might say that one of the exhibition’s goals was to promote an understanding of the film industry precisely *as* a national industry. In the words of one observer writing for *Der Kinematograph*, Seeber’s own historical exhibits served to remind audiences that the cinema is an industry first before being an art form:

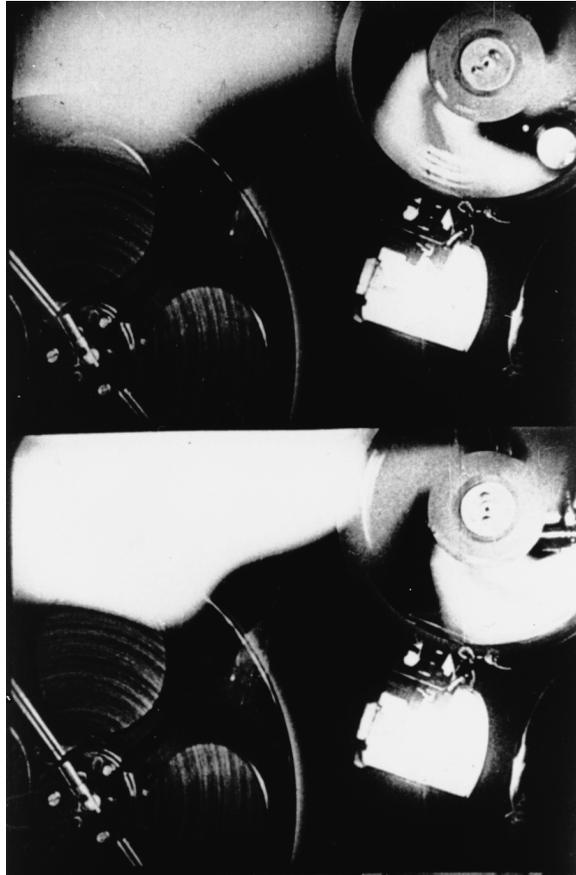
Nothing better demonstrates the ambivalence of the cinematic problem than the *Kipho* exhibition, which retraces the development of the cinema by means of historical material The crisis of the film industry comes from the fact that the industrial side of film has been forgotten underneath the vision of film as art; the will to art has buried the cinema’s financial possibilities The *Kipho* exhibition demonstrates that the pioneers and first entrepreneurs of the cinema saw it as an industrial affair; art was only a secondary consideration for them.³⁷

In a thinly veiled critique of the Pommer system, this observer held that the cinema’s real potential lay not in art, but rather in financial profit. From this perspective, the effort to return to film’s origins was not simply an aesthetic gesture, but also and above all a way of articulating a vision of the cinema’s calling: that of a national industry.

Against this backdrop, the machinic rhythms of the *Kipho* film must be seen, I think, as an effort to reimagine the German cinema precisely as a productive industrial apparatus. Recalling Bücher’s pairing of circular motion with the reduction of waste, the film depicts the film industry as a system of coordinated “gears,” all shown spinning in frenetic motion. Indeed, Seeber’s signature multi-field collages connoted perhaps nothing so much as complex coordination. Because the images in the various fields rotated at different moments, their counterpoint rhythm could not be achieved through editing, but rather had to be painstakingly planned in advance using calculations based on the number of camera cranks and

36. See “Quer durch die *Kipho*”: “Die Spitzenleistungen deutscher Produktion, u. a. ‘Die Nibelungen,’ ‘Der letzte Mann,’ ‘Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit,’ ‘Liebe und Trompetenblasen,’ ‘Blitzzug der Liebe’ usw. werden hier allabendlich geboten” (p. 23). For an image of Lang’s dragon model at the exhibition, see “Veranstaltungen und Tagungen während der ‘*Kipho*,’” *Der Film* 10, no. 40 (1925), p. 22.

37. E. U., “Kunst und Geschäftsregisseure,” *Der Kinematograph* 971 (1925), p. 23. The writer proceeds to demand an end to the cultivation of artistic films designed for export and the encouragement of profit-minded directors (*Geschäftsregisseure*) in the American style (pp. 23–24).

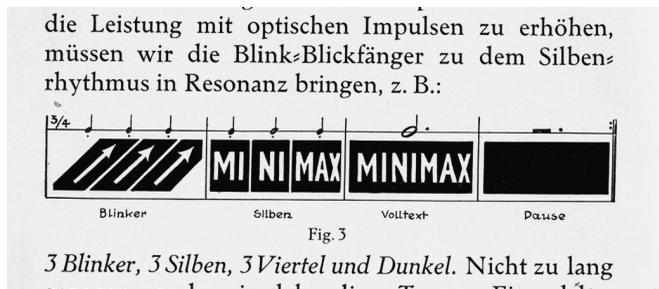


*Seeber and
Pinschewer. Film still
from Kipho. 1925.*

realized through the use of masks and multiple superimpositions—i.e., by filming one field at a time. What resulted was an image of a complex interacting system, the various parts of which are set into a contiguous relation by the superimpositions (linking simultaneous adjacent images) as well as the use of rapid dissolves (to link sequential images). Through such industrial collages, *Kipho's* rhythmical aesthetics sought to refashion a wasteful industry into the very image of industrial productivity, an apparatus as efficient as a Fordist factory.

Rhythm and Advertising

But if the cultivation of machinic rhythm in *Kipho* served to associate the film industry with industrial production generally, that rhythm also fulfilled a specific function with respect to the film's status as an *advertisement*. For industrial rhythm also held a key place in contemporary advertising psychology. In a widely



Fritz Pauli. Diagram for a rhythmic electrical advertisement for Minimax fire extinguishers. 1926.

acclaimed study from 1926 entitled *Rhythmus und Resonanz als ökonomisches Prinzip in der Reklame* [Rhythm and Resonance as Economical Principles in Advertising], for example, Fritz Pauli, a representative of the Hamburg rubber factory Phönix, argued that rhythm offered one of the most efficacious means of influencing consumers' attention. Like many psychotechnicians and advertising psychologists, Pauli saw the consumer's concentration of attention as a mode of labor entirely analogous to physical work, and he accordingly drew upon theories of work science to rationalize the spectator's mental labor; in a direct adaptation of Bücher, Pauli argued that the rhythmical presentation of advertisements could optimize consumers' psychic pleasure and thus the productivity of their attention:

The reception of commercial advertising is an act of labor [*Arbeitsleistung*] on the part of the consumer. Aperiodic, rhythmically dissonant and badly coordinated advertising materials produce . . . sensations of displeasure and fatigue. Periodic and well-tuned advertising systems, on the other hand, bring about a rhythmical organization of psychic complexes through the compulsory power of resonance.³⁸

Accordingly, Pauli sought to create “periodic” advertising—in which presentations unfolded rhythmically according to precise time signatures determined by the division of syllables or visual elements—through dynamic visual layouts on posters, animated electric signs, rhythmical radio advertisements, and not, least of all, film.

While Pauli's theories of rhythm were largely inspired by the work of Bücher, his notion of the “compulsory power of resonance [*Resonanzzwang*]” also explicitly invokes a more recent and oft-cited theory of *Resonanz* (referring to the frequency of oscillations) proposed by the engineer Heinrich Schiefelstein, who had argued that the cranks, levers, and gears of mechanical systems could

38. Fritz Pauli, *Rhythmus und Resonanz als ökonomisches Prinzip in der Reklame* (Berlin: Verlag des Verbandes deutscher Reklamefachleute, 1926), p. 39. Pauli explicitly formulates this definition in analogy to Bücher's theories of rhythm and physical work. See also p. 14: “If, as we have seen, rhythm and resonance offer a means of reducing effort and increasing productivity in physical and technological labor, they have the same function in the case of mental labor. If we can use rhythm to transform a physical mass, we can also place it in the service of mass psychology.”

themselves be made more elastic and efficient when synchronized to a common periodic frequency or “resonance” appropriate to the parts in question.³⁹ Once again making the analogy from physical to mental labor, Pauli adapted Schieferstein’s model to imagine the consumer’s nervous system and perceptual faculties as a set of intertwined factory gears that could be made to spin more efficiently when tuned to a common frequency by precisely timed rhythmical impressions:

[We] must imagine the sensory organs of the eye and the ear as continuously rotating and precisely measured cogwheels External forces can affect the operation of these gears negatively or positively. If the impressions are uneven and irregular, the result will be the kind of grating and rattling one hears in an old car factory But we can attain a smooth transference of energy if we adjust these gears to the correct tempo and the correct cogging.⁴⁰

Through rhythmical advertising, then, the consumer’s attention could be attuned, as it were, to the frequency of the product on display, resulting in a smooth transference of energy between the dynamic advertisement and the activity of consumer attention.⁴¹ It was precisely this power of resonance over the consumer’s attention that Pauli dubbed “Resonanzzwang” and likened to hypnosis: “Such a rhythm functions hypnotically to leave an inextinguishable impression with no unpleasant secondary sensations; for every consumer is immediately calibrated to the resonance of these lights and syllables.”⁴²

Writing on advertising practices in Weimar culture, Janet Ward has argued that advertising theorists and practitioners sought to break through the

39. See Heinrich von Schieferstein, “Die Ausnützung mechanischer Schwingungen im Maschinenbau,” in *Bayerisches Industrie- und Gewerbeblatt* 111, no. 19 (1925), pp. 117–23, 125–29. For Pauli’s citation of Schieferstein, see Pauli, *Rhythmus und Resonanz*, p. 13.

40. Pauli, *Rhythmus und Resonanz*, p. 37. Pauli’s representation of the perceptual apparatus as a system of gears finds an echo in the popular illustrations accompanying Fritz Kahn’s biology textbook *Das Leben des Menschen*, released in five volumes from 1926 to 1931. A fold-out poster entitled “Der Mensch als Industriepalast” showed the human body as a giant factory system with gears, pipes, levers, belts, and workers. See Cornelius Borck, “Communicating the Modern Body: Fritz Kahn’s Popular Images of Human Physiology as an Industrialized World,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 32, no. 3 (2007), <http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/1876>.

41. Borrowing another idea from Schieferstein, Pauli elsewhere refers to rhythm as a “translational mechanism” (*Übersetzungsgetriebe*) designed to attune the buyer’s thoughts to the seller’s intentions (*Rhythmus und Resonanz*, p. 37).

42. Pauli, *Rhythmus und Resonanz*, p. 18. “Resonanzzwang” is a key term in Pauli’s study. In addition to the citation above, see pp. 27, 33, and 35. Pauli was not the only contemporary theorist to link Schieferstein’s model of resonance with a fantasy of hypnotic media. In a text written for *Der deutsche Rundfunk* in 1924, A. K. Fiala cited the same experiments by Schieferstein to argue that radio frequencies—the article appeared just after the first radio tower was erected in Berlin—could be used to exert mass suggestions: “Gelingt es früher oder später . . . diese . . . Wellen . . . derart auszustrahlen, daß sie von . . . dem Nervensystem aufgenommen und dem Gehirn und Bewußtsein zugeführt werden, so resultieren hieraus alle diejenigen phantastischen Möglichkeiten, die sich eben dann ergeben, wenn die Maschine lebendigen Willen und lebendige Energien ausstrahlen vermag und derart quasi zum Hypnotiseur wird.” A. K. Fiala, “Elektro-physiologische Zukunftsprobleme,” in *Medientheorie 1888–1933*, ed. Albert Kümmer and Petra Löffler (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), p. 153.

stimulus shield of blasé city-dwellers via Benjaminian shocks.⁴³ But while much advertising did adopt this strategy, Pauli's model of rhythmical advertising clearly represents a different school of thought, one that found a particularly positive reception among members of Germany's most prominent advertising association, the Association of German Advertising Experts [*Verein deutscher Reklamefachleute* (VdR)], which published Pauli's richly illustrated text in 1926.⁴⁴ In distinction to the shock, with its effort to bypass the well-worn paths of psychic habit, rhythm functions precisely by reinforcing those paths. As Pauli described it:

If the same phenomenon is now repeated, it meets with well-worn paths—i.e., the tracks of the previous phenomenon—and thus reaches consciousness with less resistance and less effort. If these phenomena are now repeated at regular intervals, the groundwork has really been laid for the reception of such temporal forms, and the presentations will find their way all the more easily and uninhibitedly into consciousness.⁴⁵

Far from shocking viewers via abrupt perceptive stimuli, then, rhythmical advertising sought to hypnotize viewers through the use of precisely calibrated mechanical repetition. Through such visual rhythm, Pauli explained, “the consumer himself becomes a part of the oscillating system [*ein Teil des Schwingensystems*].”⁴⁶

Coming back to Pinschewer and Seeber's *Kipho* film, we can now see more clearly, I think, what is at stake in the appropriation of the hypnosis sequence from *Caligari* with which I began this article. Transformed by the filmmaker's hand on the screen, that citation now serves not only as a demonstration of the powers of montage, but also as a visualization of the hypnotic power of rhythm as it was understood in contemporary advertising psychology: the very compulsory power the *Kipho* film itself was supposed to exert over spectators' attention by tuning their perceptive gears to the resonance of its machinic rhythms. In the many images of spinning camera cranks, reels, and platters, *Kipho* represents the filmic medium as a system of spinning gears—not unlike Schieferstein's mechanical systems or Pauli's perceptive cogwheels—attuned to a frenetic frequency. Just as this frequency absorbs the working bodies shown *in*

43. See Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2001): “Outdoor ads . . . strategically aimed, via the techniques of montage and desire stimulation, to break through the stimulus shield of the indifferent or distracted passer-by” (p. 123).

44. Shortly before publishing the book, the VdR printed a glowing review of Pauli's lectures on rhythm in the association's official journal *Die Reklame* in May 1926. See F. G., “Rhythmus und Resonanz als ökonomisches Prinzip in der Reklame,” *Die Reklame* 19 (1926), p. 513. Moreover, Pauli himself would contribute articles to *Die Reklame* on film advertisement and the calibration of audio and visual impressions in electric advertising. See Fritz Pauli, “Das Problem des Werbefilms,” *Die Reklame* 19 (1926), pp. 616–17; “Tönende Lichtreklame,” *Die Reklame* 20 (1927), p. 302.

45. Pauli, *Rhythmus und Resonanz*, p. 38.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

the film into the circular movement of technology, so it is also meant to absorb the spectators *of* the film via the eye and the nervous system, propelling them into the Kipho exhibition.⁴⁷

In its reflective function as a metaphor for the advertising film's hypnotic influence upon spectators, the *Caligari* quote in *Kipho* again constitutes both a repetition and transformation of Wiene's film itself. For the spectacle of hypnosis in *Caligari* already recalled earlier debates about film as a hypnotic medium. Throughout the 1910s, neurologists and child psychologists had warned of the nefarious suggestive influence of the cinema over youthful or uneducated spectators, who—not unlike the somnambulist Cesare in Wiene's film—would be compelled to commit the kinds of violent crimes suggested to them by popular crime films.⁴⁸ Through its poster campaign, *Caligari* thus sought to position spectators as the potential objects of the cinema's suggestive power, titillating viewers with “visual pleasure”—or *Schaulust*—in the precise sense outlined by observers in the 1910s: as a sensation of moral regression or double-consciousness before representations of crime.⁴⁹

In citing the *Caligari* injunction, the *Kipho* print and film advertisements similarly positioned viewers as the objects of the cinema's hypnotic effects. But if *Kipho* adopts the association of film and hypnosis from *Caligari*, it also turns the sense of that hypnosis on its head. Far from representing an occult or fantastic force, hypnosis, in *Kipho*, now appears as *a process amenable to rational control*, and one designed to induce maximum efficiency of consumers' attention. Rather than titillating spectators with the pleasures of psychic regression, *Kipho* now promises to make spectators into productive consumers. In so doing, the film depicts the German film industry as an eminently Fordist system, one that treats consumption as part of a productive cycle and leisure as an extension of work.⁵⁰ Visualized in miniature in the spinning loops that dominate the film visually, such a circular logic is specifically suggested by the titles at the end of the film; unrolling on an imaginary film roll, they promise to insert exhibition-goers into the film industry itself by means of sample film shots, screen-aptitude tests, and beauty and make-up contests.⁵¹ Lifting *Caligari's* hypnotic injunction from its

47. Pauli himself seems to have sensed an affinity of his theories with the *Kipho* film. Not only did he mention Pinschewer by name in his book on rhythmical advertising (pp. 28–29), but he also went on, in an article for *Die Reklame*, to praise *Kipho* explicitly, alongside the advertising films of Ruttmann, for their “visible tendency towards rhythmical composition” (Pauli, “Das Problem des Werbefilms,” p. 617).

48. See Stephan Andriopoulos, *Besessene Körper. Hypnose, Körperschaft und die Erfindung des Kinos* (Munich: Fink, 2000).

49. On this understanding of *Schaulust*, see Walter Serner, “Kino und Schaulust,” *Die Schaubühne* 9, no. 34–35 (1913), pp. 807–11.

50. Ford famously believed that higher wages would make workers contribute more productively to the welfare of national business through increased consumption. See Henry Ford, *My Life and Work* (London: William Heinemann, 1923), pp. 124–25. Ford's autobiography was translated into German in 1923 under the title *Mein Leben und Werk*, and the first German Ford factory was opened in 1925 in Berlin.

51. Such tests and contests appear to have constituted one of the main attractions of the *Kipho* exhibition. As one writer for the *Lichtbildbühne* explained, during the first days of the exhibition, thirty people were selected to appear in short film recordings. These were then screened before exhibition

context in Germany's most famous Expressionist film, then, *Kipho* refashions that hypnosis into the lynchpin of a Fordist feedback loop, where spectatorship and consumption are treated as no less vital components of the rhythms of labor than the hand movements on the conveyer belt or the camera crank.⁵²

Media in Motion

If, in *Kipho*, the use of rhythm to effectuate a rationalized hypnosis specifically recalls contemporary theories of advertising, it also forms part of a general reflection on the broader transformations of media and aesthetics in the industrial age. Before concluding, I want to consider the broader implications of the film's rhythmical aesthetics for thinking about mass media in the early twentieth century. In showcasing various components of the film industry, *Kipho* repeatedly presents the celluloid medium as one of a number of mechanized mass media, including not only photography, but also the aural media of the phonograph and the telephone, as well as the ubiquitous typewriter. All of these media—conspicuously operated in the film by women—appear to be defined less in terms of their capacity for transmitting information, than in terms of their psychic effects on receivers. One can see this emphasis most specifically in the film's treatment of writing. The first thematization of writing comes in the form of a collage, in which a set of hands performing what appear to be graphology tests can be seen next to a set of hands operating a typewriter at a furious tempo, suggesting a mechanization of writing that will be repeated in the many images of typists in Ruttmann and Vertov's city films.⁵³ After this shot, the film increasingly features images of a typographical script set into mechanical rhythms, a motif that culminates in the animated citation from *Caligari*. Finally, the film ends with a set of animated texts in superimposition; as messages unwind on an imaginary film reel in the foreground, a background loop continues to rotate the words "Kino," "Photo," and "Kipho" in mechanical succession. If this background text points to a

audiences, who voted on the contestants' beauty and screen aptitude. See "Aus dem Programm der Kipho," p. 13. Such contests offer a quite literal example of Benjamin's observation that film had turned audiences into "experts," authorized to evaluate the spectacle before them.

52. It might be tempting to read this fantasy of inserting consumers into a common rhythm as looking forward to the mass rituals and aesthetics of Nazi propaganda. At the same time, I would hesitate to draw any straightforward causal connections between the exploration of suggestion in advertising psychology or advertising film and the politics and political aesthetics of the Third Reich. As Sabine Behrenbeck has argued, Nazism itself had to compete in the market for attention that characterized the public spaces and mass media of the Weimar Republic, and it should come as no surprise if Nazi propaganda techniques would turn towards theories of effective advertising developed within that context. See Sabine Behrenbeck, "Der Führer. Die Einführung eines politischen Markenartikels," in *Propaganda in Deutschland*, ed. Gerald Diesener and Rainer Gries (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, 1996), pp. 51–77. On the difficulties of establishing causal connections between Weimar advertising and Nazism, see also Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*, p. 133.

53. Klages first introduced his conceptual opposition between vital rhythm and mechanical meter in his graphological study *Ausdrucksbewegung und Gestaltungskraft*, first published in 1913 and reprinted—with a much longer rhythm discussion—in 1923. See Klages, *Ausdrucksbewegung und Gestaltungskraft. Grundlegung der Wissenschaft vom Ausdruck*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Johann Ambrusius Barth, 1923), pp. 134–45.

Auf Dreiaxsenwagen und auf Verkehrswegen, wo wie in Tunnels oder an dunklen Wänden entlang der Angebotsträger nur ganz dicht vor den Fenstern angebracht werden kann, sind natürlich nur Leuchtbuchstaben oder Silbenteile zu verwenden, z. B.:

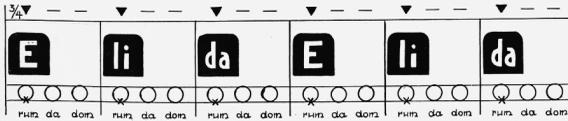


Fig. 6

Pauli. Diagram for a rhythmic electrical advertisement for Elida cosmetics to be placed along rail lines. 1926.

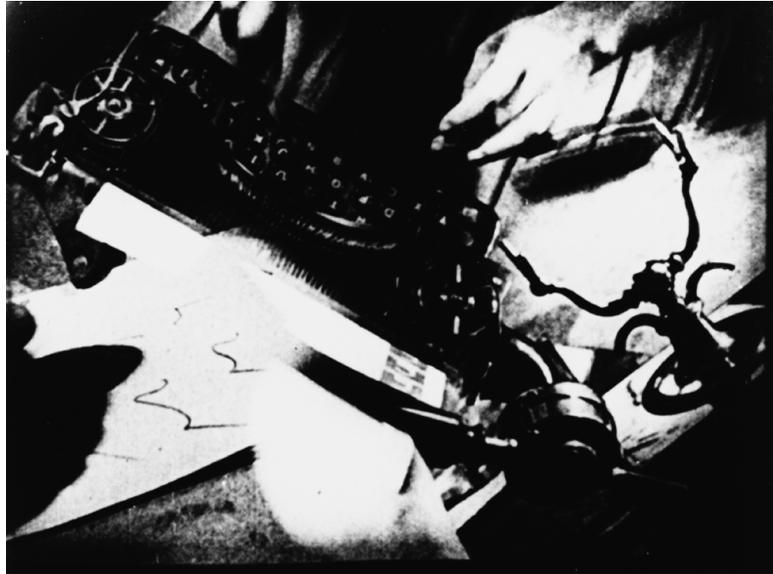
dynamization of photography signaled by the neologism “Kipho,” it also demonstrates, in its very form, a dynamization of texts and titles, which appear throughout *Kipho* in rhythmical blinks, dances, and loops on the screen.

Here, too, the rhythmicization of words and letters in *Kipho* finds a counterpart in Pauli’s arguments about text-presentation in advertising. For Pauli, the advertisement text was anything but a transparent medium serving to transmit information rationally; rather, cut into isolated syllables and introduced at rhythmical intervals, that text took on a performative function, serving to captivate the consumer’s attention. Pauli suggested all sorts of ways to place words and letters into rhythmical motion, such as kinetic illuminated advertisements, animated films, and even coordinated traffic advertisements in which signs containing isolated syllables would be placed at rhythmical intervals along subway or streetcar routes. With these suggestions, Pauli was, in fact, only codifying advertising practices that were already heavily in use by the mid-1920s. Fritz Giese, for example, saw electric advertising as one of the prime examples of the machinic rhythms of the modern metropolis. “The text, the image, the advertisement are not presented all at once, but rhythmically dissected [*rhythmisch zerlegt*],” he explained. “Bit for bit, the whole appears from parts, but we can grasp these parts better if their succession proceeds in equal intervals.”⁵⁴

For readers of Friedrich Kittler, such a dissection of text into a series of fragmentary syllables will surely recall the new paradigm of textuality circa 1900, where the generation of random syllables in psychological performance tests via tachistoscopes and mnemometers had displaced the model of the textual medium as the facilitator of an internal hermeneutic process.⁵⁵ If this treatment of textual signifiers in psychophysics influenced the experimental literature of modernism, however, it also found a logical application in the realms of advertising and advertising psychology. Walter Benjamin, for one, recognized the transformation

54. Giese, *Girnkultur*, p. 23.

55. Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 206–65.



Seeber and
Pinschewer.
Film still from
Kipho. 1925.

of textuality implied by the rise of advertising when he remarked, in *Einbahnstrasse* from 1928:

Script, which had once found refuge in the printed book . . . is now dragged mercilessly out into the street by advertisements Before a contemporary individual ever opens a book, his eyes have been exposed to such a blizzard of changeable, colorful, and conflicting letters that he has very little chance of penetrating the book's archaic stillness.⁵⁶

As Benjamin's description of the blizzard of moving letters suggests, the fragmentation of words in advertising went a step beyond the nineteenth-century memory tests discussed by Kittler in the pervasiveness of the *kinetic* element. In this observation, moreover, Benjamin was hardly alone; much of Benjamin's interest in advertising was stimulated specifically by the Constructivist phase of the Bauhaus represented, especially, by László Moholy-Nagy.⁵⁷ The latter's typographical—or "typophoto"—experiments in his film sketch *Dynamik der Großstadt* (Dynamics of the Metropolis, 1925), for example, attempted to reproduce the new conditions of reading on the commercial street—above all the rapid intake of signs and letters in movement—in book form. Moholy-Nagy described his project specifically as an effort to undo the linearity of typography and approximate the rhythmical and simultaneous temporality of film and advertising: "Each era has its own unique optical configuration.

56. Walter Benjamin, *Einbahnstrasse* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1955), pp. 141–42.

57. See Schwartz, "The Eye of the Expert," pp. 404–05.

László Moholy-Nagy.
Page from *Dynamik der
Großstadt. 1925.*



The optical configuration of our era is that of film, electric advertisements, and the simultaneity of perceptible phenomena. This configuration has given us a new basis for artistic production also in the realm of typography.”⁵⁸ Moholy-Nagy’s mention of electric light advertisement here might not be fortuitous; as Frederic J. Schwartz has suggested, in their effort to dynamize typography and textuality, the artists at the Bauhaus took commercial advertising as a central model, and Moholy-Nagy himself would later open a private practice as a designer of advertising posters and books.⁵⁹

With its dancing and blinking letters, *Kipho* can be understood, among other things, as an experiment in the dynamization of typography similar to those of Moholy-Nagy. In this sense, Pinschewer and Seeber might have found yet another reason to turn to the citation from *Caligari*. For the text of that hypnotic injunction was itself already characterized precisely by its dynamic presentation, writing itself in animated letters before the psychiatrist’s captivated gaze. In *Kipho*, this kinetic presentation now takes on a specifically rhythmical quality when the Caligari injunction is dissected into individual words that blink across the screen.

Indeed, *all* of the titles shown in *Kipho* appear in rhythmical form, flashing, dancing, or unwinding before spectators’ eyes. Seeber clearly recognized the links

58. László Moholy-Nagy. *Malerei, Fotografie, Film* (Mainz: Florian Kupferberg, 1967), p. 37. Seeber, in fact, knew Moholy-Nagy’s work well and described his *Dynamik der Großstadt* as a model script for the non-linear, musical script he sought to develop for films like *Kipho* (see Seeber, *Der Trickfilm*, p. 244).

59. See Schwartz, “The Eye of the Expert,” pp. 414–15, 428, 430.

between such a dynamization of text in film and electric advertising, as he himself compared the two in a lengthy discussion of methods for creating animated titles (*Tricktitel*) in *Der Trickfilm*.⁶⁰ There, Seeber mentions not only scrolling electric texts (*Wanderschrift*) of the type popularized by electric advertisements, but also self-writing texts (such as appears in *Caligari*), texts that grow and shrink, and one type of animated text specifically used for the last title in *Kipho*:

One can employ a wide array of means to make titles appear in a striking manner. For example, I once cut a title-line in half lengthwise and made both halves move back and forth in opposing directions, so that the spectators at first could not decipher the text. Only after the two halves of the text come to a standstill in the correct positioning with respect to one another is the spectator able to read the text.⁶¹

In the context of this dynamization of titles, the paradigmatic image of the spinning “Drehbuch” in *Kipho* acquires yet another level of meaning. Positioned between a stack of books and more typewriters in furious movement, the spinning book not only connotes a desire to undo narrative cinema, it also offers an argument about the filmic medium with respect to the book. Far from reproducing the hermeneutic operations of silent reading, the cinema would represent the culmination of a process entailing the kineticization of communications media already underway in the early twentieth century. As such, the film suggests, cinema would represent the paradigm of media development in an era in which media are understood less in terms of their capacity to facilitate meaning than in terms of their performative effects on viewers’ attention. As with the letters in the tachistoscope, Seeber wanted *all* of the images in *Kipho* to exist at the edge of comprehensibility, remaining visible on the screen for the “shortest possible interval during which the eye can still identify and grasp the content presented.”⁶²

The media-theoretical argument contained in *Kipho* also overlaps with a rationalized understanding of aesthetics particular to the mid-1920s. As Schwartz has argued, the preoccupation with advertising and typography among the avant-garde was largely bound up with an effort to redefine the artist as a professional expert in matters of graphic layout at a time of increasing competition from mass-reproduced advertising images.⁶³ As such, the engagement with advertisement on the part of artists formed part of a wider reconfiguration of aesthetics in the age of New Objectivity, a move away from models of genius and artistic inspiration toward an understanding of the artist’s role as being more akin to that of a technician. While this process finds perhaps its best-known

60. Seeber, *Der Trickfilm*, pp. 162–78.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

63. Schwartz, “The Eye of the Expert,” p. 429; see also Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*, pp. 136–40.

expression in the work of constructivist artists and the Bauhaus, it can also be clearly seen in the realm of advertisement films, where filmmakers such as Ruttmann, Richter, and Seeber could enlist the aesthetics of experimental filmmaking in an effort to steer audience attention.

Against the backdrop of this reconfiguration of the role of the artist, beauty was understood not as something ineffable, and certainly not as an autonomous realm free of material interests, but rather as the result of rational calculations. As Pauli described it, in the age of consumerism, the beauty of artistic creation was being displaced by a new form of beauty—the beauty of speed to be sure, but above all the beauty of precise calculations:

*Art stops where the conformity to rules and laws [Gesetzmäßigkeit] begins. Both paths lead to beauty or, to employ a synonym, to utter purposiveness [vollständige Zweckmäßigkeit]. But the path through art, because it depends on a thousand imprecise sentiments and imponderable forces, is unreliable, whereas the rule-bound path is sure to lead to the desired goal. This path is therefore the shortest and hence the most rational.*⁶⁴

Such a rational path to beauty, Pauli argued, found its most paradigmatic expression in the advertising poster. But it also marked the general thrust of all avant-garde art:

In the art world, as well, one sees an omnipresent struggle for expression of this sort. Cubism, impressionism, expressionism, and all of the other “isms” are really stations in a development, whose goal can perhaps be reached by practical graphic design in its use of rhythm and resonance for advertising.⁶⁵

While Pauli’s own grasp of avant-garde movements certainly appears reductive, his interpretation of recent developments in art wasn’t entirely incomprehensible. As is well known, many of the artists associated with Italian Futurism, French Cubism, and Viennese Kinetismus had long been undertaking rhythmical compositions similar to those proposed by Pauli, and from the vantage point of the mid-1920s, it was easy to see these movements as so many precursors to the rational experiments with image and text layouts in advertising.

At the end of his study, Pauli called on graphic artists to “combine beauty with efficacy [*das Schöne mit dem Wirksamen zu vereinigen*],” an exhortation that recalls not only the program of the Bauhaus, but also the many collaborations that took place in the realm of film advertising.⁶⁶ As a concrete collaboration between an artist and an advertising producer, *Kipho* offers a good example of such an aesthetic

64. Pauli, *Rhythmus und Resonanz*, p. 29.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

66. *Ibid.*



Pauli. Advertising poster for swimming contest. 1926.

program, displaying a similar gesture of rationalizing the aesthetic process in the interest of efficiency. Integrating the Wigman dancers from *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* into its machinic movement, the film suggests a transformation of organic rhythms of expressionist dance into something repetitive and calculable.

Expanding on this observation, I might summarize my argument in closing by stating that the basic operation of the *Kipho* film consists in such a rationalization of the irrational, be it the ritualized movement of the Wigman dancers or the occult hypnosis of *Caligari*. But such an operation also characterized the broader rationalist understanding of rhythm in the 1920s. According to Pauli, the medical sciences had never really succeeded in explaining the uncanny attraction of rhythm or its ability to produce pleasure.⁶⁷ But if it wasn't explicable, the hope was that rhythm might be controllable, a power to be harnessed in the service of both physiological and psychological productivity. Like Pauli, constructivist filmmakers such as Richter largely adhered to this fantasy of controlling rhythm and

67. "Neither the psychological nor the physiological sciences have as yet been able to provide a clear explanation of rhythm as such, of the compulsory power of resonance, or the rhythmical structuring of motor and psychic complexes" (Pauli, *Rhythmus und Resonanz*, p. 35).

understood film as a medium for doing so. Perhaps no filmic sequence is more indicative of this project than the citation and subversion of *Caligari* in the *Kipho* film. Where *Caligari* titillated viewers with the prospect of succumbing, like the psychiatrist, to the forces of a medium understood as occult, *Kipho* promised to insert viewers into a decidedly machinic temporality, training them in productive consumption. Commanding viewers to go to the exhibition of the German film industry, *Kipho* also promised to make viewers a part of that industry through a feedback loop that inserted consumption into a productive cycle. Far from Karl Bücher's lament about the end of poetry, then, *Kipho's* rhythmical collages suggested a new kind of visual poetry for a thoroughly mechanized age: one that saw the artist as expert and reception as an act of productive labor.