

NEW YORK CITY SYMPHONIES:
CRITIQUE AND PROPAGATION OF INTERWAR YEARS MODERNITY

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ABSTRACT

NEW YORK CITY SYMPHONIES: CRITIQUE AND PROPAGATION OF INTERWAR YEARS MODERNITY

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This thesis aims to write an architectural history of interwar years New York analyzing eleven existing city symphonies. City symphonies are avant-garde documentaries which provide valuable information to understand life in modern urban cities. With its skyscrapers, bustling harbor activities, multilayered transportation network and immense immigration wave, New York bore many problems of urbanization and tried to solve them with innovations. This thesis explores receptions and representations of modernity through city symphonies focusing the specificities of films they reveal. It addresses mechanization of everyday life, American urban economy and its diversity, gender of time and space, privacy and publicity, similarity and diversity.

Keywords: Interwar years New York, city symphony, film and architecture, modernity.

ÖZ

NEW YORK ŞEHİR SENFONİLERİ: İKİ SAVAŞ ARASI MODERNİTESİNİN ELEŞTİRİSİ VE PROPAGANDASI

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Bu tez, şehir senfonilerini analiz ederek iki dünya savaşı arasındaki New York'un mimarlık tarihini yazmayı amaçlar. Şehir senfonileri, modern şehirlerdeki yaşama dair değerli bilgiler sunan avangart belgesellerdir. Gökdelenleri, yoğun liman aktiviteleri, çok katmanlı ulaşım ağları ve maruz kaldığı göç dalgasıyla New York şehri, şehirleşmenin birçok sorununu barındırmış ve bunları büyük bir enerji harcayarak çözmeye çalışmıştır. Bu çalışma, şehir senfonilerinde gözlemlenen modernitenin karşılığını ve temsiliyetini, filmlerin öne çıkardığı özelliklere odaklanarak inceler. Bunu yaparken, günlük hayatın makineleşmesi, Amerikan şehir ekonomisi ve çeşitliliği, zamanın ve mekânın cinsel kimliği, mahremiyet ve kamusalılığı, benzerlik ve çeşitliliği irdeler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İki savaş arasında New York, şehir senfonileri, film ve mimarlık, modernite.

To my family and my dear friend, Deniz Gürata



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aim and Rationale of the Study

Still photography does not capture them clearly. One would have to accompany the eye as it moves: only film can make the new architecture intelligible!¹

“The history of architecture became synonymous with the history of monuments,” writes Spiro Kostof, in the first chapter of his book *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*. He believes that all built structures, disregarding their size and status in the society they belong, are worthy studying.²

The situation Kostof refers to is that architectural historians had a tendency to study landmarks, monuments, or in other words structures that had a visible importance for their societies or a strong impact. The most common examples of such landmarks are symbolic structures such as religious architecture and palaces. Such architecture was built to last longer, therefore more durable materials were used. The ability of these structures to endure time allowed plenty of information to architectural historians to make a case. These monuments were regarded to be value-laden aesthetically satisfying one of the components of the well-known Vitruvian triumvirate: *venustas*. To the extent that these monuments were considered to be of the highest order

¹ Sigfried Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich—Bauen in Eisen—Bauen in Eisenbeton*, (Leipzig and Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1928), 92. cited in Andres Janser, “ ‘Only Film Can Make the New Architecture Intelligible!’: Hans Richter’s *Die neue Wohnung* and the Early Documentary Film on Modern Architecture,” in François Penz and Maureen Thomas (eds), *Cinema & Architecture: Méliès, Mallet-Stevens, multimedia*, (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 34.

² Spiro Kostof, “The Study of What We Built” in *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 14.

symbolically and aesthetically, they were deemed to be not mere buildings, but “architectures”.³

The aim of this thesis is to study the city of New York and reveal its urban modernity through city symphonies aligning the derived material with the history of New York. City symphonies are avant-garde documentaries on modern urban cities and as a genre it has been largely overlooked in both cinema studies and architectural history. Including more than eighty films, city symphony genre covers many cities and reveal varied modernities across the world. They provide us with a vast source of knowledge in many areas including the architectural history of these cities. City symphonies are mostly independent productions; they document certain parts of the cities and their inhabitants, and most of these films, in defiance of studio filmmaking practices of the time, eschew staged events, use of actors or, the funding of a production company. One sees the city through the eye of a flaneur-like person wandering around the city, capturing its streets and moments sometimes with the chance to see the smallest details as the cameraman moves through narrow little-known streets. City symphonies are an untouched reserve for the history of architecture rich in the ways in which they not only show a vast expanse of the built environment of the city but also the how people populate the city and interact with this environment.

Aiming to study architecture through city symphonies, I found myself remembering the quote by Kostof that opened this introduction. City symphonies, in accordance with what Kostof argues, primarily do not pay attention to historical landmarks constituting the official face of the cities, instead dealing with cities in their entirety, offering us a wider and more inclusive scope to understand urban modernity. Unlike earlier city vignettes, scenics and travelogues, filmmakers of the city symphony genre strolled in every void that a city provides such as streets, avenues, squares, harbors, train stations, aiming to capture the essence of the modern urban areas.

The argument, published by Kostof in 1985, that criticizes the mainstream tendency in architectural history studies up to that date, can also be associated with how city symphonies were overlooked and were not considered to be worthy of being studied

³ Ibid, 12-14.

for some time in cinema studies. Scholars largely neglected a comprehensive study of minor city symphonies just as ordinary buildings that do not possess what is deemed significant qualities. Studies on major films such as Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) and Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) dominate the academic field as well as discussions among the film enthusiasts.⁴ They are, just like the landmarks of the cities, primary examples of the genre.

Although there is no doubt as to how influential the films *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* and *Man with a Movie Camera* are for the history of cinema, there is another feature which makes them cases for studies with a role almost as important as their cinematic achievements: They shed light on intriguing social and political structures, as the latter utopiacally reflects on the future of the communist regime which had never come to fruition and the former shows the short-lived liberal Weimar republic whose life span coincided with the economic depression that dominated the era. Marking important historical eras for their respective countries and speculating on their respective modernities, these films stand at the crossroads of many academic fields and were therefore studied by various disciplines.

These two most studied films are, in a way, propaganda films of their societies and they express selective realities that promote modernity. Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, portrays a mighty Soviet Union, its modern people playing volleyball at the beach, hardworking people working at communication centers and factories. Montage, in this film, is no longer there for to assemble separate scenes to accomplish narrative, spatial, and temporal continuity, but to construct meaning and convey a message. Ruttmann, following a similar approach for the representation of the Weimar Republic, puts on display the liberal and affluent people enjoying the life in modern Berlin.

The most famous films of the genre, Ruttmann's and Vertov's films can be considered the quintessential city symphonies that display the genre's most propagandistic features. While these films, without doubt, are full of formal and technical

⁴ Graham Roberts, *The Man with the Movie Camera* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000); Vlada Petrić, *Constructivism in Film: A Cinematic Analysis: The Man with the Movie Camera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Michael Cowan, *Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity: Avant-Garde—Advertising—Modernity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014)

achievements on cinematic terms, unlike the other and overlooked minor city symphonies, they depict only a selective panorama of their cities. For example, economic crisis and poverty addressed in the film *Inflation* (1928) by Hans Richter, do not take any part in Ruttmann's *Berlin*, even though these two films were produced in the same period. What is even more interesting is that Ruttmann who had propagated the liberal life in Weimar Republic, later directs and takes active part in Nazi propaganda films such as *Metall des Himmels* (1935), *Mannesmann* (1937), *Deutsche Panzer* (1940), *Deutsche Waffenschmiede* (1940) during his last years as a filmmaker.⁵ His works for Nazi propaganda created sensation to the extent that one commentator expressed his admiration with the following words: "It clearly shows how the soldier at the front and in the homeland, the armed soldier and the soldier in the workplace constitute a holy partnership."⁶

In this sense, the privileged position that *Berlin* and *Man with a Movie Camera* occupy in the studies of city symphonies not only overshadows minor city symphonies and their representational concerns but they are also exceptions in terms of their commissioned status. Indeed, although there exist some commissioned works in the city symphony genre, such films occupy only a small portion of city symphonies. As far as New York city symphonies were concerned, only the collaborative work of Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke called *The City* (1939-1940) is a commissioned film which was produced with the assistance of Civic Films Inc., the American Institute of Planners and the Carnegie Institute.⁷

Without doubt, every documentary proposes an argument albeit in varying stylistic and organizational attitudes in order to convince their audiences and the same is true for the avant-garde documentaries produced in New York during interwar years. The

⁵ Barry A. Fulks, "Walter Ruttmann, The Avant-Garde Film, and Nazi Modernism," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 14, no. 2 (May 1984): 26-46; Michael Cowan, "Absolute Advertising: Walter Ruttmann and the Weimar Advertising Film," *Cinema Journal* 52, no. 4 (Summer 2013): 49-73.

⁶ Wilhelm Schnauck, "Deutscher Kulturfilm lebens- und zeitnah," *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte*, 12, Issue 122 (May, 1940): 295.

⁷ Anthony Kinik, "Steiner and Van Dyke's *The City*," in *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity Between the Wars*, ed. Steven Jacobs, Anthony Kinik, and Eva Hielscher (New York: Routledge, 2019), 321.

vast number of city symphonies on New York, which were independent productions mostly directed by amateur filmmakers, positions these films in a unique spot for the studies on city symphonies; yet they were never studied altogether to understand urban modernity as it unfolded in the city of New York in the interwar years and the ways in which it was constructed, perceived, and disseminated. Upon Harry Potamkin's urging of the amateur filmmakers to film and critique American life and Marguerite Tazelaar's remark that "the modern urban city" is an ideal place for amateur filmmakers, many filmmakers embarked on making city films.⁸ Consisting of eleven existing films, New York city symphonies provide an expansive horizon to understand the specific modern urban fabric of the New York City in the interwar years, life in a metropolis, problems embedded in modern urban cities, mechanization, and diversity of inhabitants. Accordingly, a comprehensive overview of these films provides valuable information for an architectural history study of the interwar city.

1.2 City Symphony: A New Form of Visual Documentation

Scott Macdonald explores the relation between documentary and avant-garde, and offers an alternative, the term avant-doc. He argues that earliest examples of films were avant-garde of that moment. When Muybridge transformed photography into moving images through Zoopraxiscope, his works became a photographic avantgarde. Similarly, with the invention of Cinématographe, Lumière brothers became the avant-garde of the projected motion picture. Macdonald continues arguing that city symphonies were another intersection between avant-garde and documentary film. He also states that it is a genre that transforms the way of documenting every day surroundings, technically and contextually.⁹

City symphony genre can be seen as a continuation of the earliest forms of documentary films. Filmmakers who are considered to be pioneers of cinema such as Eadweard Muybridge and Lumière brothers were interested in capturing movements and gestures: Subject of these early films (actualities) that cropped up everywhere

⁸ Harry Potamkin, "The Montage Film," *Movie Makers* (February 1930): 88–9; Marguerite Tazelaar, "Amateurs Point the Way: Their Experimental Approach Is Lauded by French Directional Find," *Movie Makers* (September 1929): 599.

⁹ Scott Macdonald, "Avant-Doc: Eight Intersections," *Film Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (2010): 50-57.

around the world was how people walk, how they leave a factory at the end of the workday, how a train approaches the station, how a blacksmith works, and how a horse runs.¹⁰ These seconds-long moving images are the first examples —documentaries— of people seeing their indexical representations on screen and identifying their gestures on a new medium; a medium that has the capability of tricking time and space. These early films made people understand how something moves and acts. In fact, action in general had never been indexically and mechanically captured before. Oil paintings and photography reflected the appearances of humans, machines and foods and philosophical toys provided Victorian audiences with the illusion of motion albeit in a painted format. Cinema's mechanical reproduction put the movements of the outside world on display for the masses to gaze upon and pay attention.

Between the first world second world wars, the city symphony phenomenon emerged. With the developments in cinematic technology, industrialization of film production, dissemination and exhibition, and the changes in audience attitudes and expectations, the length of the films extended from seconds-long documentaries to minutes and hours-long films. In a manner similar to the earliest forms of films that attempted to capture the actions of the outside world, city symphonies aimed to document the inhabitants' experiences of modern urban cities. City symphony movement started with the production of *Manhatta* (Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler, 1921), regarded to be the first city symphony, and this newly emerged genre was popularized by *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* and *Man with a Movie Camera*. Previously, travelogues and scenics had filmed a good variety of places, such as the countryside and particular buildings. However, the contents of those films were either too narrow and focused on the landmarks of the cities or were concerned with rural areas. Expanding over four continents, city symphony genre is the first example in the history of cinema whose subject is solely and truly modern urban city. Thus, it is with the city symphonies that the audiences for the first time were exposed to representations of how they and their cities lived.

¹⁰ Films mentioned here are: *Roundhay Garden Scene*, directed by Louis Aimé Augustin Le Prince (UK, 1888); *La sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon*, directed by Louis Lumière (France, 1895); *L'arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat*, directed by Auguste Lumière and Louis Lumière (France, 1896); *Blacksmith Scene*, directed by William K.L. Dickson (USA, 1893); *Sallie Gardner at a Gallop*, directed by Eadweard Muybridge (USA, 1878).

Portrayed the cities as living organisms, these city symphonies intended to show how a city acts, moves, and exists. In order to do so, these films captured shots of people populating urban areas and engaged in different urban activities, such as moviegoing or going to work by tram. Contrary to using characters and dramatic relations, such films aimed to show the daily (and mostly uneventful from a narrative standpoint) life in modern urban city. Similar to how people became subject to themselves and their own actions in the early films on screen, the city symphonies showcased to audiences how a city acts, breathes, sleeps and awakens.

Between the two world wars, a great number of city symphonies were shot and today records of more than eighty city symphony films exist; however, Kinik, Jacobs and Hielscher who had drawn attention to the peculiarity of city symphonies believe that many other symphonies were made. We know of the names of some of these no longer extant films and there are records of other examples whose titles did not even survive. It is nevertheless well documented that there are city symphonies of many cities in the world such as Berlin, Prague, Porto, Tokyo, Amsterdam, and New York.¹¹ Although city symphonies provide valuable information to understand urban modernity, it remains an almost untouched territory in academic studies. On the basis of its overlooked stance in scholarship and important documents on the built environments of cities as well as perceptions on the urbanism and urban lives it provides, this thesis analyzes city symphonies for architectural history concerns.

1.3 Scope, Framework and Overview of the Chapters

This thesis takes New York City as its main case investigating the city symphonies of this city specifically. New York is a metropolitan city that was iconized for its urban modernity especially with its skyscrapers, crowds, and transportation networks. As a rapidly growing city, it received immigrants and visitors from all of the world. Some of these were also film producers who directed city symphonies such as Rudy Burckhardt and Robert Florey. As the largest city of “empire state,” New York City was the iconic city of Americanism and its skyscrapers functioned as a symbol of the modern city. Even though there were no skyscrapers in Berlin at the time of the release

¹¹ Steven Jacobs, Anthony Kinik, and Eva Hielscher, “Preface,” in *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity Between the Wars*, xii-xiv.

of Ruttmann's *Berlin*, a skyscraper image was used on its poster providing a sense of Americanism.¹² This emblematic status of NYC combined with the extensive amount of city symphonies produced both by locals and visitors that take the city as their subject, provides us with a rich ground to study city symphonies and analyze how and what kind of ideas they propose about modern urbanism.

As I study New York city symphonies I will give detailed information regarding the content of each film relating these to the history of the city and its built environment. Each film adopts a different way of looking at the city; one looks at the city through the eyes of a visitor, one takes a critical approach to its techno-environment, one makes downtown its main subject while the other focuses on the Bronx. I will analyze in detail each approach and highlight the concepts put forth by the films in order to deliver a coherent and comprehensive framework of the ways in which urban built environment was perceived and how such perceptions circulated in the interwar years. I will use minor city symphonies to understand the architecture and modernity of New York creating a wholesome picture that touches base with different aspects of the city, minor or monumental.

This study owes great debt to many studies that helped to achieve such a goal. First of all, this study was realized with the insight I gained through the work of Steven Jacobs, Anthony Kinik and Eva Hielscher called *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity Between the Wars*. This very recent book was published in 2019 and it is the first book-length study that focuses exclusively on the phenomenon by documenting more than eighty films including lesser known and long forgotten city symphonies. Moreover, I was inspired by various other sources that I should mention; even though some of these sources are not directly cited, they helped me to gain insight into film studies. Bill Nichols' *Introduction to Documentary* (2001) and Michael Renov's *The Subject of Documentary* (2004) helped me understand the ways in which documentary films are organized thematically, stylistically, and argumentatively. Also, Guiliana Bruno's *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (2002) and Beatriz Colomina's *Privacy and Publicity: Modern architecture as Mass*

¹² Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, "Introduction," 17.

Media (1994) made me aware of the complex relations between architecture and different media.

Chapter 2 focuses on the relation between modernity and cinema. It primarily deals with how cinema played an important role in shaping modernity, helped people to adapt to the high-speed technology of the era, altered the lives of individuals, and created new ways of existing in the world. This chapter refers to the individuals' statements who lived around the same time with the rise and fall of city symphony phenomenon, that is, the era between two world wars and aims to provide a framework in order to understand how cinema promotes and represents modernity.

Scrutinizing the city symphony phenomenon and its features, Chapter 3 extends the information from the most comprehensive book on the subject *The City Symphony Phenomenon* into the realm of architectural history. The chapter discusses the history, basic characteristics, thematical elements, and structure of the genre and addresses what is to be gained from a study of this phenomenon by the discipline of architectural history.

The ultimate part of this thesis, Chapter 4 examines the city symphonies of New York. It highlights the modern elements of the city —skyscrapers, factories, ships, trains, and cars— and how they are represented both as part of a modernist celebration and a critique of the modern urban city in different symphonies. While I will provide brief information about the films, the chapter will primarily focus on the specificities of the films that offer useful discussion points and information for architectural history studies. This thesis offers a transformative architectural history; in interpreting films for architectural history purposes, it aims to investigate the discursive constructions of modernity, modern spaces and being in the interwar New York City as a jumping point for a more comprehensive history of the city's built environment.

CHAPTER 2

MODERNITY AND CINEMA

2.1 Introduction: Modernity Between Two World Wars

And here we all are, as never before. What will it do with us?
Dorothy Richardson, "The Increasing Congregation," 1927¹³

In the years that coincided with the rise and fall of city symphonies, the mainstream themes in art, theory, and mass culture were speed, America, mass society, spectacle, globalization, and utopianism, as James Donald states.¹⁴ To his apt list, it is possible to add machinery and urbanism as well. Almost all city symphonies with a few minor exceptions inscribed these themes into their thematics.

Modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which encompassed the time period in which the city symphony phenomenon appeared, created a rupture in ways of living. A significant outcome of the socio-historical transformations of the period was the modern city, which, in turn, generated a vast amount of responses ranging from philosophical treatises to artistic representations. The tones of these responses also varied greatly from celebratory or even propagandistic approaches to the new urban environments to critical and sometimes condemning ones. For example, Georg Simmel investigated the adversary effect of sensory overstimulation caused by

¹³ Dorothy Richardson, "The Increasing Congregation," in *Close up, 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, ed. James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 171, cited in James Donald, "Cinema, Modernism, and Modernity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth, and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 517. Dorothy Richardson frequently wrote in Swiss-based English avant-garde film journal *Close up* in the column titled "Continuous Performance."

¹⁴ Donald, "Cinema, Modernism, and Modernity," 514. While Donald referred only to the 1920's, such themes were also common in the 1930's.

urban spectacle such as crowds, traffic and billboards.¹⁵ On the other hand, the manifesto of the German art movement *Die Brücke* assumed an activist stance: “We want to achieve freedom of life and action against the well-established older forces.”¹⁶

One significant way of representing the modern city, and along with it, the new ways of urban life was the city symphonies. The genre emerged in one of the most intriguing era of all times, that is the time period between the two world wars. After World War One, the world underwent great changes whose effects can still be felt today: Soviet revolution of 1917 established a communist state in place of the Russian monarchy, smaller nation-states supplanted big empires, modernist architecture seemed to dominate the new building efforts especially in cities, and with the rising popularity of the cinematic medium, movie theaters began to sprawl across the world. Besides the conventional staples of modernity such as skyscrapers, crowds, and industry,¹⁷ I would argue that we can count city symphonies among the emblems of the newly-developed modern cities in a rapidly changing world. Many of the city symphonies propagate the modern built environments and being in the respective modern cities with which they engaged as their subject matter and formal inspiration.

In densely populated cities where machinery assumed the control of production, dissemination, and transportation, increased and tightly regulated work hours began to shape everyday lives. It was not daylight time that defined work hours anymore, but the numerical values displayed on clock towers. In fact, the increasing number of the clock towers during that time turned them into a staple of modern cityscapes that regulated the everyday lives of the citizens. Operated via trams, subways, and ships, transportation networks played a role in the expansion of certain cities into gigantic proportions. While major cities already had developed railway systems, a need to bury them underground or to elevate them emerged in this period to save place and avoid

¹⁵ Georg Simmel, “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben” (1903), translated as “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in David N. Levine (ed.), *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1971), 324–39.

¹⁶ Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Programm der Künstlergruppe Brücke* (Dresden, 1906).

¹⁷ Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, “Introduction: The City Symphony Phenomenon 1920–40,” 45.

hustle. To mention examples from some major cities, first subway train started to operate in 1890 in London, an elevated “L” train line started to run in Chicago in June, 1892, Paris metro carried its first passengers in 1900 (although the idea of constructing it goes back to 1845), Berlin’s U-Bahn was realized in 1902, and New York’s subway in 1904.¹⁸ Whether buried or elevated, placing the trains somewhere other than the ground indicates how densely the cities were occupied and the dire need of and the concern with saving place. Evoking fascination, amazement, and respect, these developments, concerning the abstract regulation of temporality and the densely-packed and bustling spatiality of the modern cities, might have inspired filmmakers to create city symphonies.

In *Mechanization Takes Command*, whose title succinctly yet comprehensively defines the period in question, Sigfried Giedion explores how mechanization contradicts the human nature.¹⁹ The power of cinema lies here: Representing new ways of living along with creating a new strand of mass culture of moviegoing and spectatorship, it helped to reconcile this rupture created between modernity and the former everyday life. People like Italo Calvino who had a hard time assuming a place in the world or like Walter Benjamin who perceived the alienation of people from their surroundings saw a potential in cinema for allowing people to adapt to their environment. For Benjamin, this becomes possible through the illusionary effects offered by the medium of film: It acts as mediator that familiarizes people with modernity.²⁰

¹⁸ Oliver Green, *The London Underground: An Illustrated History* (London: Ian Allan Publishing, 1990); “The Chicago L,” Chicago Architecture Center, accessed December 4, 2020, <https://www.architecture.org/learn/resources/buildings-of-chicago/building/the-chicago-l/>; “Brief History of the Paris Metro,” France, accessed December 4, 2020, <http://www.france.fr/en/paris-and-its-surroundings/brief-history-paris-metro>; Benson Bobrick, *Labyrinths of Iron: A History of the World's Subways* (New York, NY: Newsweek Book, 1982), 135.; Werner Lorenz and Michael Fischer, “100 Jahre U-Bahn in Deutschland - Zu Planung, Gestaltung Und Bedeutung Des Stahlviadukts Der Linie 1 in Berlin,” *Stahlbau* 71, no. 2 (2002): 79-87.; James Blaine Walker, *Fifty Years of Rapid Transit: 1864-1917* (New York, NY: The Law Printing Company, 1918), 162-191.

¹⁹ Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), v-vi.

²⁰ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility,” in *Selected Writings*, iii: 1935–1938, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2002), 117; Italo Calvino, “A Cinema-Goer’s Autobiography,” in *The Road to San Giovanni*, trans. Tim Parks (London: Vintage, 1994), 38

Some of the recurring themes of films produced during these years, as it had been mentioned before, was modernity, technology, utopias, and urbanism. Since, genre criticism and theorization has only started to develop during this period, definitions and main aspects of genres were not so clear-cut.²¹ Modern city appears in diverse ways in various genres whose distinct classification and particular features will be set later. Dramas, films on architecture such as *Die Neue Wohnung* (Zürich, Hans Richter/Schweizerischer Werkbund, 1930), city films (a genre that appeared in Berlin), and various other film genres and sub-genres took modernity and the urban environment as their focus.²² To this extent, both Walter Ruttmann's quintessential city symphony, *Berlin: Symphony of Great City* (Berlin, Fox-Europa Film, 1927) and Fritz Lang's sci-fi *Metropolis* (Berlin, UFA, 1927), to take two silent films produced in 1927 in Germany as our instance, dealt with modernity albeit in their own particular ways. Consequently, as Miriam Bratu Hansen suggests, cinema provided "the single most expansive discursive horizon in which the effects of modernity were reflected, rejected or denied, transmuted or negotiated."²³

The introduction chapter of the *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity Between the Wars* argues that this phenomenon "exerted a powerful influence well outside its specific contours in its prime, and has continued to exert considerable influence decades later."²⁴ This chapter, relying on such influence of city symphonies on other genres, explores the effect of cinema in the creation and dissemination of modernity. Even though city symphony genre includes some well-known influential works such as *Berlin: Symphony of Great City* (1927) and *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), it also comprises many forgotten and minor films about which we do not have much information. Albeit produced at and taking their subject as different locations in the world, city symphonies seem to give voice to a uniform

²¹ Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, "Introduction," 43.

²² City films can be interpreted as an umbrella genre which are shot on location in streets instead of studios. While quite similar to city symphonies, city films differ from them in their frequent inclusion of characters and drama.

²³ Miriam Bratu Hansen, "America, Paris, the Alps: Kracauer (and Benjamin) on Cinema and Modernity," in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 365–6.

²⁴ Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, "Introduction," 43.

understanding of modernity. To do so, it turns its attention to cinema in general, rather than merely focusing on city symphonies. In order to explore how the audience at different locations might have been affected by films during the same era as city symphonies, we need to first understand how modernity and cinema are intertwined.

2.2 Cinema and Changing Behaviors

Compared to sculpture, painting, literature, dance, theatre and music whose history dates back to the early days of humankind, film is a relatively new medium that was only invented more than a century ago. Its way of production, semantics, and syntax are, to a certain extent, an amalgamation of other arts. The medium of film comprises altered versions of other mediums of art: Sculpture and painting were transformed into set design, make-up, editing and animation; film scripts drew inspiration from literature sometimes directly adapting literary works; theater and dance found their expression in on-camera-acting and musicals; and even before the invention of sound film and soundtrack music, live music accompanied silent films in exhibition contexts from the very beginning. Moreover, the first movie makers naturally came from various backgrounds of art production and entertainment. One of the most iconic figures in early cinema, Georges Méliès, for instance, was actually an illusionist and he was originally trained as a painter.²⁵ The insights he gained from both of these mediums helped him create a vast amount of films including his best-known one, *A Trip to the Moon* (France, Star Film, 1902). Similarly, Charles-Émile Reynaud, who produced some of the first animated films, was a self-taught painter.²⁶

Although the film medium can to some extent be conceptualized as a combination of other forms of art, it nevertheless depends on a technology which differentiate it from other mediums. “Without machine, movies wouldn’t move,” writes Bordwell and Thompson.²⁷ Always being on the move, film is a creation of the modern era.

²⁵ Miriam Rosen, “Méliès, Georges,” in *World Film Directors: Volume I 1890-1945*, ed. John Wakeman (New York, NY: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1987), 747-8.

²⁶ Glenn Myrent, “Emile Reynaud: First Motion Picture Cartoonist,” *Film History* 3, no. 3 (1989): 191-202.

²⁷ David Bordwell and Kristin Marie Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 10th ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education, 2013), 1.

However, just like modernity generated film, modernity itself is also created, shaped and manipulated by this art form. Presumably the most powerful feature of cinema in shaping society lies here: It imagines and delivers to audiences discourses on and approaches to modernity thereby playing a role in shaping modernity and its perception and conceptualization. One area in which we can observe this effect of the cinematic medium is the ways in which it influenced people to adapt to new behavioral modalities and attitudinal transformations associated with modern ways of life.

Of course, other art forms such as music, literature, sculpture also bear the potential to shape new types of social behavior, yet their capabilities are limited compared to those of cinema. For one thing, film is a spatio-temporal medium that is not only audio-visual but also tactile and kinesthetic to the extent that it incites its viewers to project themselves into its imaginary realm. Accordingly, in sensual and perceptual terms, it is more comprehensive than other mediums which appeal to a limited number of senses. Painting is visual; sculpture is visual, tactile, and volumetric; music is auditory. Mediums of theater and literature have the potential to establish new behavioral types, however, compared to cinema, the reach of theater remains narrow, whereas literature is prone to affect the intellect rather than bodily gestures.

Not only does cinema appeal to various senses but also it is a mass medium with a further extent of influence than any media preceding it hence its potential to influence the behaviors and mannerisms of people. Inasmuch as cinema is a mass medium, the ideas, personalities, ways of walking, behaving, and speaking that films take up on or generate reach far beyond their place of origin. Audiences whose culture may be drastically different than the ones represented in a film, may identify themselves with the characters and adopt new types of behaving, walking, and speaking. People exposed to new modes of conduct and attitude often find themselves adapting these gestures in their daily lives. Cinema, then, to some extent, played a role in disseminating new forms of behavior associated with modernity across certain distances.

During the time period between two world wars, cultural mannerisms attracted the attention of those looking with a critical eye such as Marcel Mauss. Culturally alien gestures may only be acquired through visits to other regions and countries or the

exposition to the representations in mass media, in general, and cinema, in particular. However, even though fast transportation vehicles that could traverse great distances within short spans of time, such as planes, were invented before the time period between the two world wars, it was merely the privileged who could use them.

In some parts of the world, such as Europe, people might have adopted modes of behavior and manners through visits. European culture was tightly-knitted allowing for cross-cultural exchange of behavioral and gestural patterns. In this respect, it is impossible to argue that cinema plays the most important role in the dissemination and adoption of new manners and gestures in such places of tight connections and frequent cross-cultural exchange. However, the vast distance between Europe and America, for instance, sets a cultural boundary that could only be bridged with a mass medium such as cinema. Therefore, cinema played an important role in the emergence of culturally alien and new gestures in certain places. To the extent that cinema is an easily reproducible, accessible, and intelligible medium with a mass appeal, it has the potential of cultural impact among distant lands.

Observing the dissemination and adoption of new mannerisms at distant lands, French sociologist Marcel Mauss attributed the cause of this phenomenon to cinema. To the extent that he traced the source of culturally alien mannerisms in nothing else but this particular medium, he must have perceived the capabilities of it as a cross-cultural transmitter of behavioral forms. He remarks on the way in which Hollywood films conditioned women in France to a new way of walking as follows:

I was ill in New York. I wondered where previously I had seen girls walking as my nurses walked. I had time to think about it. At last I realized that it was at the cinema. Returning to France, I noticed how common this gait was, especially in Paris; the girls were French and they, too, were walking in this way. In fact, American walking fashions had begun to arrive over here, thanks to cinema.²⁸

Before the late 1920's, films did not have synced sound. Therefore, as Marcel Mauss observed, the new types of behaviors that cinema offered to audiences were somatic behaviors and movements such as walking.

²⁸ Marcel Mauss, *Sociology and Psychology: Essays* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 100.

Before the invention of synced sound, movies incorporated sound often in the form of live music: depending on the exhibition venue, a full orchestra, a small ensemble or a pianist accompanied the screenings. Other in-situ practices also existed, such as narration by a lecturer, dubbing of on-screen dialogue by actors, as well as production of sound effects. A number of cinematic sound technologies were invented before, these, however, had problems of synchronization, sound quality, as well as affordability. Perceiving a level of profitability in sound film, Warner Bros. invested in synchronized sound film systems as a new business venture in the mid-twenties. The film *Don Juan* (New York, Alan Crosland/Warner Bros., 1926) featured on-disc sound effects and orchestra accompaniment. A year later, Warner Bros released *Jazz Singer* (New York, Alan Crosland/Warner Bros., 1926) with synced dialogue and music and upon its popularity, sound film became the dominant form of production within only a few years.²⁹

After the integration of sound into cinema, a new type of trait that can be adopted emerged: Film started to shape the ways of speaking along with gestures and movement. Winifred Holtby's book *South Riding* reveals the changes in the ways of speaking even in rural areas, which were shaped by films. Holtby, who was a novelist and journalist, was an avid feminist whose books often included strong women characters.³⁰ In *South Riding*, she portrayed these characters as ambitious and highly adaptive to different circumstances. Even though it was a fictional book, it suggests how spread of modernization to rural areas through the medium of cinema was notable enough to become a topic in literature: "Like most of her generation and locality, Elsie was trilingual. She spoke BBC English to her employer, Cinema American to her companions, and Yorkshire dialect to old milkmen like Eli Dickson."³¹

²⁹ Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, 480.

³⁰ Alan Bishop, "Holtby, Winifred (1898–1935), Novelist and Feminist Reformer," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/37563>.

³¹ Winifred Holtby, *South Riding: An English Landscape* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1954), 35; cited in Donald, "Cinema, Modernism, and Modernity," 515.

2.3 Cinema and the Retraining of the Perceptual Capacities

Cinema establishes new ways of behaving. Even the inattentive observer is prone to such a change as the cinematic representations of new types of behavior they encounter accumulate over time. Examples like Holtby's fictional character in her novel and Mauss' memoir about the time he spent in a hospital in New York can be further traced in the ways in which cinema influenced modernity's new forms of everyday lives as well as new sensorial capabilities. Cinema not only by representing and disseminating modern ways of life, but also by its formal aspects, such as montage and framing, as well as by its spectatorial practices played a role in easing the process of adaptation to some staples of modern life, namely, speed, shock, temporal regulation of everyday life, crowds, and technology-laden life.

Both Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kraucer wrote theoretical works on the relationship between modernity and cinema in the same era as those that specified cinema's effect on behavioral patterns and mannerisms. While they analyzed the effects of cinema on individuals, too, both Benjamin's and Kracauer's works were more concerned with how cinema plays an important role in a wholesale retraining of people's senses and perceptions in ways more fit for modernity. Taking a different approach, they focused on how cinema plays a role in the generation of perceptual and sensorial modalities that defined modernity. James Donald, who collected the samples related with the issue in "Cinema, Modernity, and Modernism," argues that Kracauer's and Benjamin's perspectives into the distraction offered by cinema derives from modern experiences being "somewhere between irony and uncanny."³²

Walter Benjamin focuses on the pedagogic function of cinema to the extent that he conceptualizes the distractive mode he assigns to cinematic spectatorship as necessary to retrain citizens' sensorial capabilities. He compares the activity of watching a film to walking down the street in a metropolis that abounds with a series of shocks and numerous visuals. Moving through streets and traffic requires a state of alertness and responsiveness. Such experience provides people with a complex training which set

³² Donald, "Cinema, Modernism, and Modernity," 515.

the standard for film.³³ Benjamin, in “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility,” summarizes the need for stimuli that was met by cinema as follows: “There came a day when a new and urgent need for stimuli was met by the film. In film, perception in the form of shocks was established as a formal principle.”³⁴

Walter Benjamin had extensively written about how cinema plays role adapting people to their new surroundings. Every parts of built environment—from modern urban cities to mostly rural areas—were affected by machines to some extent. Mechanical innovations such as trains, which are considered to be staple of modern urban life, stop at rural areas picking up people. Machines and high speed of technology, careening people and dispatching them from their surroundings, were welcomed with mixed feelings such as wonder, fear, and awe. According to a popular myth, at the first screening of Lumière Brothers’ *L’Arrivée d’un train en gare de La Ciotat* (The Arrival of a Train, 1896), the audience feared the train coming directly at them and ran. This story is never proven to be true, yet the myth of people getting scared of a train on the screen, shows not only the disparity between the speed of technology and human nature but also cinema being one of these new technological developments that inspired shock, awe, and wonder in its earliest audiences. This was the pedagogic function of cinema for Benjamin—it helps to ease the process of adaptation of people to new technologies as well as the artificiality of their surroundings owing to such technological changes. Temporal shocks and speeds caused by shop windows, advertisements, new types of glass and iron buildings, traffic, crowds, and machinery engrained every part of the modern urban city. The type of perception emerging from such an environment set the formal principles of the cinematic medium and cinema, in turn, made the transition into this new perceptive modality more swift.³⁵

Kracauer’s position on film slightly differs from that of Benjamin. Living in Weimar Republic in the same era as Benjamin, he rejects the argument that Berliners were addicted to distraction. Kracauer maintains that cinema offers daydreams to people who, in turn, would like to recreate their everyday lives by taking as their model the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility,” 120.

³⁵ Ibid.

dreams that they encountered when watching films. However, distractive mode of watching inherent in the fragmentary nature of the cinematic medium, argues Kracauer, exposes these repressed wishes to the audience, which in itself is at least a sincere act:³⁶

Here, in pure externality, the audience encounters itself; its own reality is revealed in the fragmented sequence of splendid sense impressions. Were this reality to remain hidden from the viewers, they could neither attack nor change it; its disclosure in distraction is therefore of moral significance.”³⁷

2.4 Cinema, Modernity, and Ways of Being in the World

Cinema, apart from its features of circulating new forms of behavior cross-culturally and influencing as well as responding to the new perceptive capabilities of people, also defines the modern ways of being at large. Even when people’s surrounding conditions and everyday lives remain the same, it bears the potential to alter the minds of individuals and propose new discourses on the possible ways of existing in the world. This is a feature of cinema that I would like to call “departure,” referring to its ability to take one’s mind away to new places and situations.

Famous author Italo Calvino was among the ones who needed such a departure. He had a rather unique life full of contradictions. Since he was born in Cuba, his name Italo was given to commemorate his ancestry. His name sounds nationalist, yet he was a communist. He and his family moved back to Italy in Sanremo and during the war he was a university student.³⁸ Spending his young adult years in a catastrophic environment and being a communist during the Mussolini regime, his mind needed to be transported somewhere else.

The cinema as evasion, it's been said so many times, with the intention of writing the medium off—and certainly evasion was what I got out of the cinema in those years, it satisfied a need for disorientation, for the projection of my attention into a different space, a need which I believe

³⁶ Donald, “Cinema, Modernism, and Modernity,” 516.

³⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 326.

³⁸ Italo Calvino, *Hermit in Paris*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 132-160.

corresponds to a primary function of assuming our place in the world, an indispensable stage in any character formation.³⁹

Calvino's comment on cinema is quite unusual. He is not simply interested in daydreams that cinema provides or its relation to modernity. Rather, he puts an emphasis on how people have a *need* for disorientation in order to *assume* their own place in the world.

Walter Benjamin's approach to the effect of cinema on the ways of being in the world significantly differs from that of Calvino. Even though Benjamin believed that cinema's potential to retrain people in the dynamic ways of the modern world could be veered towards revolutionary purposes of overcoming their alienation from their surroundings, he also criticized how the illusionary power of cinema allow people to adopt to modern cities to such an extent that they no longer notice the problems surrounding them:

Our bars and our city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories seemed to close relentlessly around us. Then came film and exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of the split second, so that now we can set off calmly on journeys of adventure among its far-flung debris.⁴⁰

This seems to be the dilemma of the ways in which cinema alters people's perceptive qualities: On one hand, cinema has the potential to depart people from their catastrophic contexts as in the case of Calvino. This therapeutic effect along with the medium's capability to train people in distracted modes of perception, on the other hand, runs the risk of functioning as an escape from problems in people's immediate environment that need dire attention as well as making these problems completely invisible to the extent that they begin to appear as just another distraction among the many that cinema trains people to adapt to and tolerate.

³⁹ Italo Calvino, "A Cinema-Goer's Autobiography," 38.

⁴⁰ Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," 117.

CHAPTER 3

CITY SYMPHONY PHENOMENON

3.1 Introduction: Studies on City Symphonies

I am kino-eye. I am a builder. I have placed you, whom I've created today, in an extraordinary room which did not exist until just now when I also created it. In this room there are twelve walls shot by me in various parts of the world. In bringing together shots of walls and details, I've managed to arrange them in an order that is pleasing and to construct with intervals, correctly, a film-phrase which is the room.⁴¹

This chapter aims to set a groundwork for the fourth chapter which is called “City Symphonies of New York” where I analyze how eleven existing city symphonies contribute to the architectural historiography of the interwar years New York as well as the kinds of circulating discourses they create about this specific urban environment. City symphonies bear certain common characteristics which helps us to label them as *Symphonies*. In order to provide an overview of the phenomenon for an architectural history study, this section scrutinizes the main features of the genre by analyzing city symphonies not only of New York but also from other cities around the world. Main research question of this thesis is how the city symphonies document as well as construct a discourse around the lives in modern urban cities with a specific focus on the ones produced the in the New York City. This chapter incorporate analyzes the genre and its relationship to urban environments at large in order to prepare a concrete ground for the particular New York examples as well as to demonstrate the vast expansion of the phenomenon.

⁴¹ Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 17.

City symphonies, in the shortest definition, represents what is modern and life in modern city. While these films most frequently approach this subject matter in a celebratory and propagandistic manner, some also indicates the problems of the modern city and draws attention to the issues arising from so-called virtues of modernity. Housing shortages, uneven distribution of wealth, excessive labor hours of workers and poor urban planning constitute the main themes of the films that criticize modernity. To sum up, city symphonies stand as varied representations of modernity.

Moreover, city symphonies reveal the perception towards modernity in early twentieth century. Machines, mechanization, skyscrapers and their promises toward the creation of a better future gives us clues about the mindset of individuals living in the era, specifically of the directors of city symphonies. The counter-view to such a promise can best be seen in *The City* (1939-1940), the film that concludes the life of the genre. The premise of *The City* is how cities dominated by skyscrapers like New York did not offer prosperity but chaos and alienation to their inhabitants. What is intriguing is that such criticism of modernity by the directors, Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke, turned out to be at least partially prophetic. The destructive effects of technology used not for the benefit of the people at large but in the service of weaponization also signaled the end of the city symphony phenomenon: the production of films in this genre ceased because of the outbreak of Second World War.

Most important and recently published source for city symphonies is *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity Between the Wars* edited by Steven Jacobs, Anthony Kinik and Eva Hielscher. There exist other books which were published earlier than *The City Symphony Phenomenon* that analyze a group of city symphonies among other avant-garde films. *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-garde, 1919-1945* (1995) edited by Jan-Christopher Horak includes book chapters on the works of Robert Florey, Ralph Steiner, Jay Leyda, Herman Weinberg, Irving Browning, Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler and mention the city symphonies they produced. Another similar work is Roger Manvell's edited book *Experiment in the Film* (1949), which investigates city symphonies among next to other avant-garde films from around the world. Yet, these books do not match the scope and the sustained focus on city symphonies offered by Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher's book.

Although the book was published in 2019, the idea for it dates back to lectures and seminars of Jacobs and Kinik on city symphonies in 2008 and emerged as an outcome of their puzzlement that there is no general book-length study on the topic. Later in 2013, Hielscher joined the team and they started to collect a wide array of city symphonies in conjunction with the organization of “Beyond Ruttmann and Vertov: Minor City Symphonies” symposium of December 2014 at Ghent University. “We were well aware that we would only be scratching the surface with this symposium,” states Jacobs, Kinik and Hielscher. Their statement aptly summarizes how the majority of the films of this genre were left to oblivion which leads me to frequently state “across the world” throughout the thesis. Currently, their compiled list of city symphonies includes films expanding over four continents strongly suggesting that there exist city symphonies of many other countries waiting to be discovered.⁴²

Their collaboration resulted in the rediscovery and classification of more than eighty films under the city symphony phenomenon. City symphonies were undoubtedly an important movement of the interwar years cinema, however, they were never systematically analyzed as a genre before. Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher use Rick Altman’s “a semantic/syntactic approach to film genre,” which later becomes the main argument of his *Film/Genre* (1999), to conceptualize this cinematic phenomenon as a full-fledged genre. Altman argued that the formal and thematic features of the genres in film studies were still not defined in a methodical and organized way in the 1980’s and that films that share similar semantic and syntactic features can help us identify unique genres.⁴³ Building on the introduction chapter of *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity Between the Wars*, this chapter extends their effort to a discussion of how city symphony genre relates to architectural history.

3.2 Basic Characteristics and the Expansion of the Genre

Interwar years witnessed the production of films on modern urban life which have been alternatively named *city films*, *city poems*, and most commonly, *city symphonies*.

⁴² Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, “Preface,” xii-xiv.

⁴³ Rick Altman, “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre,” *Cinema Journal* 23, 3 (Spring 1984): 6-11.

With a concern of depicting the city as a living organism, these films use the city as a protagonist rather than a mere background. Filmmakers of this genre invented avant-garde nonfiction documentary film using real life footages. As an outcome of the concern to give the city centerstage as an animate organism, city symphonies employed abstract and metaphoric imagery, poetic expression, and rhythmic montage – features that defined their distinctive style.⁴⁴

City symphonies recognize the city as an ultimate emblem of modernity where every idiosyncratic characteristic of modern life, such as mechanical domination over spaces of settlement, use of mass transportation vehicles by everyday commuters, multilayered cohousing units providing living spaces for great numbers of people, come to the fore. In order to bring forward vitality, vibrancy and complexities of modern urban life and what László Moholy-Nagy once called as “the dynamic of the metropolis”, these films typically employed rapid and rhythmic montage, skewed angles, unusual perspectives, which were arranged in a way to evoke musical compositions.⁴⁵ These cinematic elements are used to capture the ostensible essence of modern cities and people who inhabit them. Embracing Vertov’s famous sentences “life as it is” and “life caught unawares”, city symphonies mostly eschewed actors, narrative elements, and the lives of individuals, instead engaging with a larger scope focusing on city as a whole.⁴⁶

Manhatta, directed by Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, is an important precursor that presents clues as to how city symphonies became a wide-spread cinematic genre. *Manhatta*, widely considered to be the first city symphony, is a modernist celebration of New York. The film was conceived in 1919, shot in 1920, and received its public premier a year later in 1921. This ten-minute long modernist celebration of the New York City became one of the primary and most-celebrated examples of the emerging genre, and did not remain within the boundaries of United States. Before its public premier, it was first screened amongst a small group of artists as a New York scenic

⁴⁴ Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, “Introduction,” 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 1-2; László Moholy-Nagy, “Dynamik einer Gross-Stadt: Skizze zu einem Filmmanuskript,” in *Malerei, Fotografie, Film* (Dessau: Bauhaus, 1927), 122–35.

⁴⁶ Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, 92–101.

with the title *New York the Magnificent*. Then, it was circulated in Paris under the name *Les Fumées de New York* (*The Smokes of New York*) as a part of Paris Dada group's *Soirée du coeur à barbe* in July 1923.⁴⁷ The circulating of the film in Paris, one of the cosmopolitan cultural centers of Europe, and its screening amongst the Paris Dada group, a prominent wing of an international artistic movement of the time, helped the phenomenon to sprawl to various countries.

Another significant contribution to the genre is László Moholy-Nagy's script titled *A nagyváros dinamikája* (*Dynamic of the Metropolis*). The book was written in Hungarian, later translated into German and published in combination with photographs in Moholy-Nagy's book *Malerei Photographie Film*. This "Sketch of a Manuscript for a Film" contributed to the development of the quintessential visual style of the city symphony genre especially by its proposal to express tempo through optical arrangement as well as its emphasis on the urban-industrial image.⁴⁸

However, it is Walter Ruttmann's film *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (*Berlin: Symphony of Great City*, 1927) that popularized the city symphony genre and whose subtitle lent its name to the phenomenon at large. With the film *Berlin*, Ruttmann became the first director who extensively used rhythmic montage, skewed angles, and unusual perspectives in the newly developed genre and codified the genre's unwritten rules of how one captures the essence of the city as living organism. The film extends over one hour unearthing many sides of the city, which had never been so intensively addressed in earlier films. On the importance of Ruttmann's *Berlin*, Grierson argued,

No film has been more influential, more imitated. Symphonies of cities have been sprouting ever since, each with its crescendo of dawn and coming-awake and workers' processions, its morning traffic and machinery, its lunchtime contrasts of rich and poor, its afternoon lull, its evening denouement in sky-sign and night club. The model makes for good, if highly formulaic, movies.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Jan-Christopher Horak, "Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's 'Manhatta'," in *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919–1945* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 270–1.

⁴⁸ László Moholy-Nagy, "Dynamik einer Gross-Stadt: Skizze zu einem Filmmanuskript," 122–35.

⁴⁹ John Grierson, "The Course of Realism," in *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 75.

Showcasing how everyday life in a metropolis can be represented in a modernist work of art, *Berlin* created a sensation and its example was followed by many other filmmakers such as Joris Ivens and Mannus Franken, Lucie Derain, Corrado D'Errico, Henri Storck, Robert Florey.⁵⁰ This new genre became so famous that even Alfred Hitchcock expressed his interest in making a city symphony to be called *London* or *Life of a City* with Walter Mycroft. Later, he explained to Peter Bogdanovich why he gave up on this idea arguing that it is not possible to capture a holistic sense of a city, because city as a content is too vast to deal with:

This is something I've wanted to do since 1928. The story of a big city from dawn to the following dawn. I wanted to do it in terms of what lies behind the face of a city—what makes it thick—in other words, backstage of a city. But the canvas is so enormous that it is practically impossible to get the right story. Two or three people had a go at it for me over the years but all failed. It must be done in terms of personalities and people and—with my technique—everything would have to be used dramatically.⁵¹

Hitchcock clearly believes that city symphonies should feature actors and he is rather interested in an expository mode of representation in order to depict life in modern cities. Since the project was never realized, his intentions as to whether this film was going to be a drama including city symphony attributes or was going to be a city symphony that would feature actors are not clear. Given Hitchcock's prominent position in mainstream studio filmmaking, it is also not possible to speculate on what role the profit-driven interests of production companies and the promotional purposes of commissioning authorities would eventually play in the making of the projected film.

Ruttmann's *Berlin* was a commissioned work which was a part of the quota program (Kontingentfilm). A number of other films, such as *De Stad die nooit rust* (Rotterdam, Maydell and Barsity/Transfilma, 1928) *A Day in Liverpool* (Liverpool, Anson Dyer/The Liverpool Organisation, 1929), *Praha v záři světél* (Prague: Svatopluk

⁵⁰ Films which are mentioned here are: *Regen*, directed by Joris Ivens and Mannus Franken (Amsterdam: Joris Ivens/CAP, 1929); *Harmonies de Paris*, directed by Lucie Derain (Paris: Films Albatros, 1929); *Stramilano*, directed by Corrado D'Errico (Milano: Za Bum, 1929); *Images d'Ostende*, directed by Henri Storck (Ostend: Henri Storck, 1930); *Skyscraper Symphony*, directed by Robert Florey (New York: Europa-Film, 1929)

⁵¹ Peter Bogdanovich, *Who the Devil Made It* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 494.

Innemann/Elektrajournal for the Electrical Works of Prague, 1928) *Fukkō Teito Shinfoni* (Tokyo, Tokyo Institute for Municipal Research, 1929), are also commissioned works made possible through cooperation with municipalities. Indeed, the commissioning authorities occasionally used these films for city promotional and propaganda purposes.⁵²

However, the majority of city symphonies are independent experimental films in documentary format which avoids the use of any sorts of individualized characters. Because of this, the number of films made in this mode and their popularity mainly proliferated through cine-clubs, social gatherings, as well as film and art journals. For instance, American avant-garde filmmaker Jay Leyda did not have access to city symphonies growing up in Dayton, Ohio and yet got acquainted with the films and acquired information on the genre by reading art journals such as *La Revue du cinéma*, *Der Querschnitt*, *Variétés*, *Theatre Arts Monthly*, *Hound & Horn*, and *Close Up*.⁵³ He later moved to New York to become the darkroom assistant of avant-garde photographer and filmmaker Ralph Steiner and finally had the opportunity to watch some city symphonies. Inspired by *Man with a Movie Camera* he saw at the Eighth Street Playhouse, he subsequently made *A Bronx Morning* in 1931.⁵⁴

3.2.1 Stylistic Properties

Directors of city symphonies employed some common thematic and formal approaches, styles, and techniques in the films that helped define these films as a cinematic genre in its own right. One of the most defining aspects of these films relates to their specific cinematography: these films usually capture the city scenes by positioning the cameras at unusual heights and angles. Techniques called low angle-shot, high-angle shot and skewed angles were frequently used both to create dramatic alterations of how the cities are usually represented in other films as well as to incorporate various items within a single frame so that a more holistic approach to the

⁵² Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, "Introduction," 7.

⁵³ Jay Leyda, "A Note on *A Bronx Morning*," statement written for FIAF Symposium (Lausanne, 1979), Jay Leyda File, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

⁵⁴ Elena Pinto Simon, "Four Men Who Made a Difference: Jay Leyda," *Film History* II (1988): 395–6.

representation of the city becomes possible. Low angle shots that position the camera below the eye level and direct it upwards makes a remarkable portion of the skyscrapers and gigantic cranes visible. This undoubtedly creates an oppressive feeling and depicts the horizon of a typical modern urban city as dominated by mechanical innovations, marble façades, and skyscrapers extending to the sky. While enhancing overwhelming feelings, this technique also aims to evoke admiration and awe in the audience by putting on display the monumental presence of the high-technology of the era within the cities.

High-angle shot evokes similar feelings achieved by low-angle shots by employing a reverse angle of the camera. Capturing the city from way above by usually positioning the camera at the top of a skyscraper, high-angle shots in these films minimize the size of humans and vehicles and transform them into ant-like creatures strolling on streets. Even though this technique fails to capture the entirety of skyscrapers within a single frame, they nevertheless capture perfectly the crushing power of tall structures: Putting everything else in perspective in relation to these tall structures, these shots make the skyscrapers seem like the most marvelous aspect of the city. High-angle shots of city symphonies create a vertigo effect in the ways in which they look down on the streets below from the tops of skyscrapers.

Skewed angle shots, which are created by holding the camera at an inclined angle in relation to the ground, construct an artificial horizon line for the city. City symphonies usually use this technique to depict skyscrapers, cars, trains, humans and machines in order to create dizzying feelings that take after the experience in a crowded, dynamic city. Perhaps the image of elevated train is intensified most through this technique. Elevated train looks as if it comes out slashing the earth.

In terms of editing, most city symphonies resort to rapid montage sequences that bring together these high-angle, low-angle, and skewed angle shots together. In these rapid montage sequences, the cuts are frequent meaning that the individual shot length is much shorter than the average shot length we would find in the studio films produced in the same. Within these rapidly cut scenes, city symphonies make graphic, thematic, and rhythmic connections between varied imagery of the city. The fast cut montage creates adds to the dizzying effects of the individual shots while also depicting a

general panorama of the city by introducing the viewers to a vast variety of the elements that constitute and shape it.

The organizational mode of city symphonies is documentary to the extent that the majority of the films do not have any narrative concerns, and do not feature any characters. Their documentary style is poetic rather than expository meaning that they do not assume a fly-on-the-wall attitude and observe events from a distance. Instead, their cinematographic techniques and editing make explicit the manufactured nature of the film's particular perspective on the urban environment. Furthermore, rather than directly making their point, these films open their imagery into associative and metaphoric connections.

3.3 Content of City Symphonies

Starting with the release of the first city symphony *Manhatta* in 1921 and ending with Rudy Burckhardt's *Pursuit of Happiness* in 1940, city symphony is one of the rare genres that so extensively engage with and stylistically represent urban life, modernity, modern architecture of the interwar years. Spanning almost twenty years of urban modernity, the genre occupies a particular status within cinematic production: With their concerns to capture "life caught unawares" and to represent cities as living organisms, city symphony films engage with the urban and architectural history in an idiosyncratic manner.

One reason why the genre is remarkable for the discipline of architectural history is that these films expose particularly overlooked urban neighborhoods or streets extensively and in great depth while disregarding buildings that constitute the official face of the cities such as historical monuments and tourist sites. Such sites formed the main thematics of earlier documentary genres that focused on the urban scene, such as city vignettes, scenics, and travelogues.⁵⁵ These earlier examples of documentary forms also present images of built environments, however, their imagery, with their tendency to focus on monuments and iconic buildings, offer only a partial sense of what constitutes the city. What also differentiates these earlier films from city symphonies is their fixed camera angles that assumes a certain distance from the built

⁵⁵ Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, "Introduction," 15.

environment they record and comparatively fewer cuts that bring together a number of images of selected parts of the cities. For instance, the Éclair travelogue *Smyrne* (France, 1911) includes selective shots of the caravan bridge and the government palace of the Ottoman city of Izmir.

Numerous short travelogues, scenics and city vignettes were produced in the first few decades following the invention of cinema and unlike city symphonies, historical sites constituted the settings of many of these films. Rather than aiming to portray the city in a more comprehensive account of its manifold aspects, these earlier films tend to provide the spectators with glimpses of mostly touristic sites. Although what predominantly constitutes the main setting of city symphonies is urban neighborhoods and streets rather than more iconic parts of the cityscapes, some cases, such as *Rien que les heures* (Paris, Alberto Cavalcanti/Néo Films, 1926), *Stramilano* (Milano, Corrado D'Errico/Za Bum, 1929), *Études sur Paris* (Paris, André Sauvage, 1928), *Mediolanum* (Milano, Ubaldo Magnaghi/Cineguf, Milano and Agfa, 1933), *Žijeme V Praze* (Prague, Otakar Vávra, 1934), *Odessa* (Odessa, Jean Lods/1st Komsomol Odessa Film Studio, 1935), includes shots of historical landmarks. Yet, rather than constituting the focus of the films, the inclusion of these particular shots helps create a panoramic view of cities where these landmarks present themselves as part of a much larger urban pattern and as well-integrated components of the modern metropolises.⁵⁶

Another aspect of the content of city symphonies that makes them particularly relevant to the architectural history scholarship focusing on the modern era is their interest in not merely modern cities but also how people lived in modern metropolises. Cities which rapidly expanded with the help of the process of industrialization, such as New York, Chicago, Rotterdam, Milano, Berlin, Moscow, Tokyo, constitutes the main setting of the films. In cities like Berlin and Milano, where historical urban fabric exists side by side with modern architecture, the principal focus of the films remains the modern face of the city and its patterns of urban life with people attending cinemas, workers laboring in factories, and people arriving at the city with trains. In this respect, these films also give us clues about the particular ways in which modernist movements

⁵⁶ Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, "Introduction," 16.

at large perceived metropolises and propagated these visions of the built environment to audiences.

While the films present new cities that underwent a rapid transformation in a short time period, the building of metropolises is also another common topic of the genre. Many city symphonies, such as *Berlin*, represent the city under construction, which draws attention to the idea that city is a living organism; it always expands and invades new territories. In such films, cranes, unfinished steel structures, bare concrete, and scaffoldings occasionally appear as indispensable elements of ever-growing modern cities. Several films produced for the cities of Chicago and New York incorporate imagery documenting the construction phases of high-rise structures and skyscrapers. As stated above, the heights of such structures provide the filmmakers with opportunities for a rich variety of low and high angle shots. A good number of city symphonies employ such imagery of high-rise structures dramatically altering the shot angles in montage to evoke feelings of dizziness and awe. That the skyscraper is an icon of modernity and modern cities is evident in how widely its images were used in the promotion of cities and city symphonies followed suit. Indeed, even though no skyscrapers except for the recently built radio tower existed in Berlin at the time, the film posters of *Berlin* photomontaged an image of a skyscraper to promote the city as a modern one.⁵⁷

As part of their efforts to represent the vitality of modern cities, these films also frequently document the processes of industrialization which they often depict as the energy source and driving force of urbanism. Many city symphonies focus on industrial cities such as Rotterdam, Liverpool and Chicago in the first place. Harbors, factories, chimneys cropping up among other structures occupy an important share in these films' imagery. Scenes of labor in these buildings as well as rapid montage sequences depicting wheels, bolts, pistons points to an organic bond between human and machine, which, in turn, provides the necessary energy to keep the city in progress.⁵⁸ The genre foregrounds machines and machinery to such an extent that some of the films are entirely dedicated to specific mechanical innovations, paralleling the

⁵⁷ Ibid, 17.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 18.

genre classified by Harry Potamkin as ‘machine films.’⁵⁹ For example, the film *De Brug* (Rotterdam, Joris Ivens/CAPI, 1928) pivots around a mobile bridge that connects to the Rotterdam harbor completing the gap in the urban transportation network. Among several types of industrial areas, harbors occupy a particularly prominent position in city symphonies. For instance, *Manhatta* (New York, Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, 1921), *Twenty-four Dollar Island* (New York, Robert Flaherty/Pictorial Films, Inc., 1927), *De stad die nooit rust* (Rotterdam, Friedrich von Maydell and Andor von Barsy/Transfilma, 1928), *A Day in Liverpool* (Liverpool, Anson Dyer/The Liverpool Organisation, 1929), and *Douro, faina fluvial* (Porto, Manoel de Oliveira, 1931) extensively document the harbors of their respective cities especially focusing on boats, workers, cranes, and the activities in quays.

Transportation modes that emerged in the modern era, such as automobiles and railway systems including trams and trains also prominently figure in the city symphonies. The films often present these means of transportation as the arteries of urban life reaching many parts of the city, which creates a sense of cohesion and cohabitation. In the films, we can observe that the general public and especially blue-collar workers use trains and trams to commute to work, while upper class people transport via cars. The films’ use of scenes documenting bridges, crowded streets accommodating various modes of transportation, as well as elevated train lines that give the impression to be floating in the sky evokes the multi-layered cities proposed by utopian urban planners such as Antonio Sant’Elia, Raymond Hood and Le Corbusier.⁶⁰

Although city symphonies mainly draw attention to dizzying effects of machines, they also deliver ideas on the lives led in modern urban cities. Factories filled with workers, quays in hustle, telephone operators working to keep communication channels flowing, police officers directing traffic, or simply people walking through crowded streets: The dynamic cinematography of city symphonies record such scenes alongside machine imagery. Depictions of individual acts as well as people as part of crowds take up equal screen time in the films. These crowds, however, do not pose any danger

⁵⁹ Harry Alan Potamkin, “On the Magic of Machine Films,” *Movie Makers* (November 1929): 722–3, 744.

⁶⁰ Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, “Introduction,” 19.

to the structure of the society as suggested by Gustave Le Bon's theories in *La Psychologie des foules* to the extent that these films represent the masses taking part in parades, funerals, festivals.⁶¹ In accordance with the dynamic scenes showing machinery, transportation, and industrial and urban expansion, most of the city symphonies also celebrate the vibrant and highly diversified people that constitute the makeup of a city.

3.4 Structure of City Symphonies

During the years that coincided with the emergence and proliferation of the city symphonies, many other filmmakers were also interested in producing other types of films on the city, modernity, and urban life. The most famous and influential among such films remains *Metropolis* (Germany, Fritz Lang, 1927) which takes place in an imaginary city even though the popular imagery of the New York City influenced Lang in the conceptualization of the film's setting. There also exist lesser known films produced in the Weimar Republic and United States such as *Die Strasse* (Berlin, Karl Grune/UFA, 1923), *Der letzte Mann* (Berlin, Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau/UFA, 1924), *Asphalt* (Berlin, Joe May/UFA, 1929), *Sunrise* (New York, Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau/Fox Film Corporation, 1927), *Just Imagine* (New York, David Butler/Fox Film Corporation, 1930), *Street Scene* (New York, King Vidor/United Artists, 1931), *42nd Street* (New York, Lloyd Bacon/Warner Bros., 1933), and *Gold Diggers of 1935* (Los Angeles, Busby Berkeley/Warner Bros., 1935).

These studio-produced films, which explore similar issues of modern urban life as city symphonies, frequently depict the pleasures and dangers of modern metropolis by resorting to production designs and the employment of special effects.⁶² Especially in some cases, there exist certain similarities between those films which were predominantly made in film studios or studio backlots and location-shot city symphonies. In one of the scenes of the beginning of Karl Grune's *Die Strasse/The Street* (Berlin, UFA, 1923), for instance, the director preferred to use high angle establishment shots to capture imagery of urban life. The shots depict a busy street full

⁶¹ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1896).

⁶² Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, "Introduction," 23.

of cars and the way in which this opening scene illustrate people harmoniously existing with machines suggests an ordinary day in the modern city. As discussed above, such depictions of modern urban life are also commonly found in many city symphonies. Also, the social critique the film proposes by showcasing the different qualities of lives of various social classes resembles that of *A Bronx Morning* (Jay Leyda, 1931).

Although such films produced during the same decades as city symphonies share with them thematic similarities, city symphonies greatly differ from these films that also depict urban life because of their use of location footage. As one of the main concerns of city symphonies is to represent the city as a living organism, the outcome of which can be traced in both their content and structure, these films were shot on location, that is the actual urban spaces including streets, alleys, and squares. Moreover, to the extent that the filmmakers of the city symphony genre concerned themselves with how to delineate a panoramic and encyclopedic sense of urban life, their approach was at odds with the other films' interest in narrating stories in which the urban context played a major role. Accordingly, city symphony makers more often than not avoided the controlled conditions of studios as well as the profit-driven interests of the studio system that tended towards narrative films. Instead, they frequently opted for working independently which allowed them to offer their own artistic vision on the urban environment.⁶³

Although some famous directors and artists such as Dziga Vertov, László Moholy-Nagy, and Walter Ruttmann, made or proposed city symphonies, shooting on the streets without the controlled conditions of studio, along with ample possibilities and convenience afforded by location footage, also appealed to and suggested an opportune method of filmmaking to film enthusiasts who were only beginning their artistic careers. While the city symphony phenomenon was not the mainstream and leading genre of the interwar years, it was definitely among the strongest and most influential movements of this era. The popularity of films such as *Berlin* and *Man with a Movie Camera* and their suggestion that one only needs a camera and will to produce such films on cities encouraged others to produce city symphonies which resulted in numerous works. Currently, there are more than eighty known films made in this

⁶³ Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, "Introduction," 23.

genre; however, scholars assume that there exist more films that are no longer extant or remained buried in the archives.⁶⁴

In order to achieve a documentary and encyclopedic sense of urban life, city symphonies mostly avoided the use of hired actors.⁶⁵ More often than not, no specific characters or personalities that can be identified by the audience exist in the city symphonies. Rather, it is the city or the parts of cities, such as neighborhoods, streets, and other urban public spaces, that take up the role of the main protagonist in these films. In their poetic and reflexive mode, these films eschew dialogues and relations between individuals, depicting instead the interactions of people with the city itself.⁶⁶ In their depiction of such interactions, As Siegfried Kraucer argued when noting the similarities between *Rien que les heures*, *Berlin*, *Man with a Movie Camera*, *Markt in Berlin*, *Menschen am Sonntag*, to show the diversity of people but also to create a more wholistic image of the city, directors of city symphonies followed a cross sectional approach to the people populating cities in their films.⁶⁷ In order to do so, these films often present different layers of society in sequential order that offers a social cross section of various urban inhabitants. However, in *Halsted Street* (Chicago, Conrad Friberg, Film and Photo League of Chicago, 1934), for instance, this metaphorical cross section (in which people of different classes separated by distinctive shots) takes a literal dimension to the extent that the eponymous street socially divides Chicago cutting through its poor, working class and wealthy districts.⁶⁸

As well as using location footage, filmmakers utilized “one-day-in-the-life-of-a-city” structure to create an encyclopedic sense of the city. The temporal structures of the city symphonies were generally organized around a dawn-to-dawn or dawn-to-dusk configuration.⁶⁹ This way, the idea of depicting the city as a living organism was

⁶⁴ Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, “Preface,” xii-xiii.

⁶⁵ Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, “Introduction,” 22.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), 181–9.

⁶⁸ Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, “Introduction,” 25.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 24-5

inscribed into the structure of the films – city awakens, works, and rests. Almost all city symphonies apply this type of temporal organization in order to evoke the cyclical character of urban vitality. This kind of organization underlines the importance of the regulation of time to the functioning of modern cities. Many of these films, such as *Berlin, Man with a Movie Camera, São Paulo, Rhapsody in Two Languages*, also evoke this temporal regulation in the urban sphere by the inclusion of images of clocks. Even, in the film *Rien que les heures* whose title means “nothing but time” and which also frequently includes shots of clocks, passing time constitutes the central theme of the film.⁷⁰

Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* is arguably one of the best examples of this ‘one day in the life of a city’ structure. The film’s inclusion of some staged event, which is quite rare in the genre, intensifies the temporal structure of the film to the extent that the camera enters places such as domestic spaces and indoor areas, that would normally be out-of-bounds for city symphonies.

The film starts with a sequence of shots showing an empty movie theatre, streets, and factories devoid of life. In an obviously staged scene, Vertov’s kino/mechanical eye then penetrates into an apartment and exposes the life of a woman who is sleeping, just as the city. Shots of the homeless sleeping on the benches of a park and on the ground, babies slumbering in a hospital follow, giving the impression that no one in the city is awake and active, not even the animals. The shot sizes of these initial scenes are longer compared to the mid-section of the film rendering the montage tempo very mild. Then, the sleeping city slowly awakens: A shot of the lens of the mechanical eye gradually opening is followed by a series of scenes where a train approaches the city, a few people begin to populate the streets including some woman cleaning them, pigeons appear, stores slowly open, the woman in the previous sequence wakes up, gets dressed, and washes her face. These scenes, similar to those existing in many other city symphonies, represent the city coming to life. However, this staged event of the woman getting ready for a day in the city should not be mistaken for the utilization of a specific character, her identity is not important for the film; the woman in the film represents not a specific individual but any inhabitant of the city and their daily ritual

⁷⁰ Ibid.

of getting ready for the hustle and bustle of city. Also, the juxtaposition of the shots of the streets being cleaned with water and the woman washing her face deliberately stresses that not only the city is a living organism but also its inhabitants who constitute it are the ones who make it so.

Later in the film, the places which initially lacked vitality such as factories, shops, telephone operation centers, hospitals come to life with an immense speed: Telephone operators work fast in a jammed room to keep the communication network on, midwives, nurses, and doctors operate in a rush, so do others, such as factory workers, hairdresser, divorce attorneys, miners, drivers, street sellers and also horses pulling a carriage, who all keep the city alive. Extremely fast editing energizes this sequence giving it the potential to bewilder the audience. This fast-cutting parallels the dizzying effects of the modern dynamic city. In this sequence of the film, machines start to dominate their surroundings, even to the extent that trams almost run over people. In this phase, the city is depicted as a vivid being animated by the labor activities of people and machinery. Following the awakening and working phases when the city expends its energy, the film switches to a section of leisure activities where the city and its inhabitants rest and play. Scenes of people sunbathing, swimming, playing sports, doing gymnastics, dining in restaurants and attending cinemas populate this section. At the conclusion to the film, the mechanical eye shuts its lens completing the full cycle of the city's daily routine: Awakening, working, resting and finally sleeping.⁷¹

Man with a Movie Camera and, the other masterpiece of the city symphony phenomenon, *Berlin* are relatively longer films compared to the other examples of the genre, therefore they manage to depict the daily life of people in the modern city in a more comprehensive manner. Most other city symphonies are not as ambitious as *Berlin* and *Man with a Movie Camera* in their length and coverage, they are city sinfoniettas rather than symphonies. Nevertheless, many other films such as *Manhatta*, *Rien que les heures*, *Moscow*, *La Zone*, *São Paulo*, *Stramilano*, *Manhattan Medley*, *City of Contrasts*, *Vingt-quatre heures en trente minutes*, *Rhapsody in Two Languages* and *City of Towers* utilize a similar structure “suggesting a temporal organization of

⁷¹ *Chelovek s Kino-apparatom*, directed by Dziga Vertov, (Kiev: VUFKU, 1929)

the workday as a mainspring of the urban capitalist economy,” and in the case of *Man with a Movie Camera*, an urban communist economy.⁷²

3.5 City Symphonies and Architectural History

The emergence and development of city symphonies in many different places worldwide demonstrates the existence of various modernities with common features across the world, which, in turn, provides a valuable resource for architectural history. In order to show how the phenomenon sprawled across the world and became an international movement, it is worth noting here some better-known city symphonies, such as *Bezüčelná Procházka*, directed by Alexandr Hackenschmied (Prague, 1930); *Na Pražském hrade*, directed by Alexandr Hackenschmied (Prague, 1932); *Žijeme V Praze*, directed by Otakar Vávra (Prague, 1934); *Lisbôa: Cronica Anedótica*, directed by José Leitão de Barros (Lisbon, 1930); *À Propos de Nice*, directed by Jean Vigo (Nice, 1930); *Sinfonia de Cataguases*, directed by Humberto Mauro (Cataguases, 1928); *Nogent: El Dorado du Dimanche*, directed by Marcel Carné (Nogent, 1929); *Shankhaiskii Dokument*, directed by Yakov Bliokh, (Shangai: Sovkino, 1928), *São Paulo: A Symphonia da Metrópole*, directed by Adalberto Kemeny and Rudolpho Rex Lustig (*São Paulo*: Rex Film, 1929); *Beograd Prestonica Kraljevine Jugoslavije*, directed by Vojin Djordjević (Belgrad: Jugoslovenski Prosvetni Film, 1932); *Vibracion de Granada*, directed by José Val del Omar (Granada: Misiones Pedagogicas, 1935); *Así Nació El Obelisco*, directed by Horacio Coppola (Buenos Aires, 1936).

Abundance of city symphonies and their use of location footage that focus on the overlooked parts of the cities render the genre crucial for the discipline of architectural history. These films enable us to understand how urban modernities and the urban fabric of the era were perceived, constructed, reconstructed, and circulated among audiences. Furthermore, these films not only focus on iconic modern cities such as Berlin, New York, Chicago, but also on cities or boroughs, such as Prague, Lisbon, Nice, Cataguases, Nogent-sur-Marne, Shanghai, São Paulo, Belgrad, Granada, Buenos Aires who were overshadowed by the iconic ones. Revealing various modernities, their

⁷² Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, “Introduction,” 24.

common aspects and the diverse perceptions of such modernities that unfolded at different locations, city symphonies emphasize and attest to what Susan Friedman terms “planetary modernity” that have materialized across the world.⁷³



⁷³ Planetary modernity is a term used by Susan Friedman explaining how modernity unfolded separately at different locations. See: Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity across Time* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015).

CHAPTER 4

CITY SYMPHONIES OF NEW YORK

4.1 Specificities of New York Symphonies

As it had been stressed throughout this thesis, the number of city symphonies is not known. More than eighty films are currently defined as city symphonies including the lost films by Jacobs, Kinik and Hielscher.⁷⁴ Some of these films contain either semantic or syntactic criteria set by the scholars while the majority commonly adopt both features. Jacobs, Kinik and Hielscher assume that there are many other city symphonies we are not aware of yet; flexibility of the genre and convenience of the production methods of a city symphony are the main reasons of this assumption.

New York symphonies are mainly minor city symphonies. For this reason, although Jacobs, Kinik and Hielscher's edited book *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art and Urban Modernity Between the Wars*, which aims to rediscover all city symphonies, lists twelve New York symphonies (one being a lost film), I would like to suggest that it is quite likely that more New York symphonies are waiting to be discovered in the archives and personal collections unless they were completely destroyed and hence out of reach. The film Lewis Jacobs' *Footnote to Fact* (1933), which was discovered by Anthology Film Archives in 1990s may be used to prove my assumption.⁷⁵ It is highly possible that many filmmakers, as in the case of Robert Florey and Rudy Burckhardt, visited New York and produced a city symphony. Therefore, I believe this thesis may lead to new studies on this subject in the following years in the event that more New York symphonies are discovered.

⁷⁴ Jacobs, Kinik, and Hielscher, "Preface," xii-xiv.

⁷⁵ Eva Hielscher, "Footnote to Fact," in *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity Between the Wars*, 297.

Since New York symphonies in particular and American avant-garde films in general faced some criticism from scholars and film critics on account of their putative ‘inferior’ status. There was a tendency among scholars and critics to consider American avant-garde films insignificant and lesser copies of their European counterparts and this was the case for city symphonies produced in the states as well. For example, David Curtis noted that for the works of Leyda, Weinberg, and others that “[a]lthough they added little technically or aesthetically to the European originals, they served to popularize the idea that the raw materials of art are everywhere”.⁷⁶

Even though Curtis might have been correct in his assumption about how American city symphonies had played a critical role popularizing the genre, I would argue that they are not mere copies of European symphonies. American city symphonies, as Jan-Christopher Horak convincingly maintained, have different attributes that make them different from their European counterparts. Not only do they advocate modernity and propagate enhanced technology of their cities, but they also embody romantic notions about existence in the modern world.⁷⁷ While depicting the mechanized city and in some cases propagating modernity, New York symphonies thus also address problems of the metropolis and showcase stark contrasts of the urban life by highlighting the differences between rich versus poor, nature versus artificial, uptown versus downtown and privacy versus publicity.

This chapter analyzes New York symphonies by especially focusing on architectural spaces, cultural diversity, gender issues, economic activities, which are themes that form the backbone of the majority of these films. In my analysis, I re-interpreted these films and the existing scholarship on them in relation to the history of New York City, history of the city’s built environment, as well as the past works and biographies of directors. Some of these films are obviously praising modernity and some others are criticizing it. In their documentation of the city’s streets and boulevards, some of the films require work akin to that of a detective to be able to notionally reconstruct and get a sense of life in the interwar years of New York. Therefore, while some films

⁷⁶ David Curtis, *Experimental Cinema* (New York, NY: Universe Books, 1971), 42.

⁷⁷ Jan-Christopher Horak, “Introduction: History in the Gaps” in *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-45*, ed. Jan-Christopher Horak (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 3-11.

accentuate urban spaces of the city that proves to be instrumental in the conduct of an architectural history study, others do not specifically highlight spaces but offer clues about the complex relationships between modernity, cities, and cinematic representation within the interwar years. Nevertheless, eleven existing city symphonies, offering broad range of visual documents, shed light on how the urban modernity of New York was received and represented in particular ways as well as how such ideas were disseminated only when the films are studied altogether.

Twelve known city symphonies on New York, which constitute the subject matter of this chapter, in the order of their release date are: *Manhatta* (Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, 1921), *Twenty-four Dollar Island* (Robert Flaherty, 1927), *Skyscraper Symphony* (Robert Florey, 1929), *A City Symphony* (lost film) (Herman Weinberg, 1930), *Manhattan Medley* (Bonney Powell, 1931), *City of Contrasts* (Irving Browning, 1931), *A Bronx Morning* (Jay Leyda, 1931), *Autumn Fire* (Herman Weinberg, 1933), *Footnote to Fact* (Lewis Jacobs, 1933), *Seeing the World* (Rudy Burckhardt, 1937), *Pursuit of Happiness* (Rudy Burckhardt, 1940), *The City* (Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke, 1939-1940).

4.2 Planning the New York City

Since the first immigrations, New York has always had an issue of lack of space. Of course, for earlier periods New York only meant the area that is limited to the Manhattan island and for these periods the issue of lack of space is under the context of the island. East River flows on the East side of the island while Hudson river flows on its West. The island extends from South to North ending with a triangular narrow edge on the South. Even though the east-west width of the island may vary due to this narrowing, the general estimate of its east-west width is approximately 3 kilometers. In an area that is so restricted for a large metropolitan city, city and state municipalities had to take aggressive decisions in order to resolve the lack of space.⁷⁸

The first of these decisions, put into motion in 1811, was the grid planning of the city, which has had a great impact on the development of New York's present renowned

⁷⁸ Marc A. Weiss, "Real Estate," in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 1087-1089.

characteristic. While the grid plan led the city to be orderly it also allowed the estate areas between streets and roads to be larger and more useful. As a result of the issue of lack of space, the city continued to grow towards North yet failing to resolve the issue with the growing population. The second decision was a tendency towards high rise buildings. The fact that there was not enough space for an extensive number of new buildings encouraged the number of floors of the new buildings to continuously increase. The high-rise buildings of New York are still growing taller, in line with the advancing technology and production techniques.⁷⁹

Results of the housing issues, such as the growing structures, the appearance of mixed-use buildings, and the existence of apartments that were being rented for profit caused the value of the already limited space to increase which also reflected onto architecture. Until the Zoning Ordinance of 1916, the structures were built fully covering the estate land. Which, in other terms, meant that New York was a city that was fully covered with roads and buildings with no space provided as open areas.

Equitable Building, that was 169 meters tall and quite massive, construction of which was completed in 1915 is thought to be one of the effective factors leading to the 1916 Zoning Ordinance. The 1916 Zoning Ordinance, caused by this building that left the structures near it without light and air, led to be a determinant in the appearance of the architectural movement that we now know as Art-deco. Instead of explaining a complex set of calculations the regulations brought can be simplified as follows: According to the Zoning Ordinance the buildings would narrow as they rise in order to allow enough light and air to structures near them. This method is the distinctive characteristic of the set-back structures that can be seen in the interwar years New York City Symphonies.⁸⁰

The housing problem escalated, as on one side various cooperating companies were in the run for building the tallest structures of the city while on the other there were economic troubles caused by the Great Depression. This lead the city administration to enact tax benefits to allow more buildings to be built. This led the wealthy families

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

of New York to have structures housing units built all over the city. However, City Symphonies show that these so-called philanthropic acts were not enough to resolve the housing issue or to prevent homelessness.⁸¹

4.3 Modernity Exposed

Staples of a typical modern metropolis appear in every city symphony of New York, regardless of whether the film criticizes or celebrates modernity. This section concentrates on those films whose predominant rationale of production was to represent the modern spaces and other components of New York: Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta* (1921), Robert Flaherty's *Twenty-four Dollar Island* (1927), Robert Florey's *Skyscraper Symphony* (1929) and Rudy Burckhardt's *Seeing the World* (1937).

4.3.1 A Praise to Modernity

In 1921, Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler initiated a new form of filmmaking whose semantics and syntax set an example for many subsequent films around the world. The film is called *Manhatta* (1921) and its main theme, protagonist, and setting was solely the modern city.

Manhatta came into being as a result of the collaboration between two artists who initially worked in other mediums. Paul Strand was primarily a photographer and although his works cover a wide range of subjects and places, he was generally interested in shooting spaces of the modern urban city that made possible "clear focus photography and accidental abstraction," as William Uricchio noted.⁸² Charles Sheeler, on the other hand, was initially a precisionist painter whose main subject matter was industrial modernity in the form of gigantic urban structures, factories, chimneys, and bridges depicted without any human presence. At the same time, Sheeler also worked as a photographer and even gained reputation as a 'machine age artist.' While this label primarily came from his precisionist paintings such as *Upper*

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² William Uricchio, "The City Viewed: The Films of Leyda, Browning, and Weinberg," in *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-45*, 293.

Deck, Power series commissioned by the *Fortune* magazine, his photographs shot for the Ford Motor Company also contributed to such reputation in the art circles.⁸³ Given this background and interests, Strand and Sheeler's collaboration highlighted New York City's modernity, technology and urban spaces depicting it as a quintessential metropolis. Although modern urban elements appear in every city symphony on New York, unlike their European counterparts, only a few them including *Manhatta* used footages of modern spaces in order to portray life in a modern city and celebrate modernity. Furthermore, the film does not merely eschew the use of any actors as in the case of many other city symphonies, but eliminate the depiction of humans as much as possible.



Figure 1: Still From *Manhatta* (1921)

The main achievement of *Manhatta*, which accordingly started an international phenomenon, emanates from its destruction of “Renaissance perspective in favor of multiple, reflexive points of view”.⁸⁴ This mode of representation suggested new ways of portraying urban modernity. *Manhatta*'s unusual and diversified points of view bring architectural edifices of varying scales and styles, such as the Woolworth, City Hall, Equitable, Singer, and Banker's Trust buildings, in the same frame. According

⁸³ James H. Maroney, "Charles Sheeler Reveals the Machinery of His Soul," *American Art* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 27-57.

⁸⁴ Jan-Christopher Horak, "Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta*" in *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-45*, 267.

to Jan-Christopher Horak, this multiplicity of points of view into the built environment, in turn, helped portray New York as a multi-cultural city.⁸⁵ In addition, juxtapositions of different tropes that help define the city as a modern one - such as harbor-city, city-as-construction site, modern skyscraper-city - present the viewer with a vision of the modern metropolis that is always subject to change.



Figure 2: Still From *Manhatta* (1921)

While *Manhatta* deconstructs Renaissance perspective in favor of a montage of various points of view (canted, high, low, etc.), Sheeler and Strand also challenge conventional formats of in their depictions of the New York City buildings from carefully selected angles. While filming Park Row building, for instance, they focused on the south elevation with its neutral walls and ignored the elaborate façade with its historical references. Reducing the building into a prismatic shape, this selective process that highlighted the abstract qualities of the built environment helped the filmmakers in their representation of New York City as a predominantly modern one.⁸⁶ This act underlines Sheeler's and Strand's interest in making *Manhatta* a modernist project in terms of both form (modernist cinematic techniques derived from avant-garde art) as well as content (modern urban environment).

⁸⁵ Ibid, 271.

⁸⁶ Erica E. Hirshler, "The "New New York" and the Park Row Building: American Artists View an Icon of the Modern Age," *American Art Journal* 21, no. 4 (1989): 35.

Given that *Manhatta* both depicts neutral walls of the Park Row building instead of its elaborated façade and presents a metropolis in a state of ongoing construction (the film often juxtaposes shots of construction workers with images of skyscrapers), the film demonstrates an interest in speculating what the future New York will look like. The ways in which the directors presented the city suggests that New York was in the process of expansion and invasion of new territories. The film insinuates that blank, neutral walls will replace the city's remaining façades with their historic references, and the ever-transforming and expanding city center will consume and absorb the outer boroughs, creating a new New York.

This foresight largely substantiated in the following years. New York underwent great transformations, reflections of which can be encountered in other forms of arts. Urban transformation of the New York city after the second world war, for instance, constitutes the theme of "An Urban Convalescence," a poem written by James Merrill:

Out for a walk, after a week in bed,
I find them tearing up part of my block
And, chilled through, dazed and lonely, join the dozen
In meek attitudes, watching a huge crane
Fumble luxuriously in the filth of years...

As usual in New York, everything is torn down
Before you have had time to care for it
Head bowed, at the shrine of noise, let me try to recall
What building stood here. Was there a building at all?
I have lived on this same street for a decade.⁸⁷

The urban transformation is an ongoing process. However, destruction in order to build was especially the case during Robert Moses' administration, which often resulted in the displacement of the inhabitants of destroyed buildings. The center of the Bronx, which is the home of around sixty thousand people, was destroyed in order to create space for the Cross-Bronx Expressway dividing the Bronx into two parts, north and south. This urban project significantly shattered life in the Bronx.⁸⁸ In response the criticisms, Robert Moses made the following statements: "There's very little hardship

⁸⁷ James Merrill, *Collected Poems*, ed. J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 127.

⁸⁸ Marshall Berman, "Robert Moses: The Expressway World," in *All That Is Solid Melts into the Air: the Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 290-312.

in the thing. There's a little discomfort and even that is exaggerated," "[t]here are more houses in the way, more people in the way-that's all," and "[w]hen you operate in an overbuilt metropolis, you have to hack your way with a meat ax".⁸⁹ The metaphor of the meat axe in Moses's statements inadvertently depicts the revitalization policies of the New York City administration as a carnivore in need of more sustenance in the form of empty space, a need that can only be fulfilled by demolishing the previously built environment.

Of course, Strand and Sheeler made *Manhatta* much earlier than Robert Moses's destruction of the Bronx. Besides, rather than Bronx, lower parts of the city constitute the setting of the film. The film is notable and valuable, however, in the ways in which, the public planning policies will destroy New York City's existing urban fabric in order to reconstruct the city's domain as well as to invade new territories.

Humans appear in only a few scenes, especially those that depict the labor of construction workers. The film opens with shots showing people's arrival to Manhattan by ferry. These people are the daily commuters from Staten Island, all of whom dressed in suits. Women in business attire can also be seen in this scene, although their number is much less than men. These are not ordinary workers but rather represent the middle class of the city's population. While depicting one of the morning rituals of everyday life in New York, this scene also references the history of the states in its allusion to the masses of immigrants arriving at the continent. Indeed, such a suggestion can be found in many New York symphonies, thereby constituting a common trope of their thematic vocabulary. Later in the film, people in business attire appear again, this time walking on the city streets, presumably going to work. Manhattan, at that point in time, offered a variety of transportation means, however, their depiction in the film is one of harmonious coexistence devoid of any traffic congestion or chaos even without the control of traffic police.

It is not surprising that Strand and Sheeler's New York emerge as a well-organized one. Setting of the film *Manhatta* is the utmost well-functioning part of the city, that is the lower Manhattan. The film does not reveal any poor neighbors and related

⁸⁹ Robert Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (Knopf, 1974), 849, 876.

problems of urban modernity. Instead, they depict the city as a flourishing and triumphant modern project and their intention can be inferred from one of the many titles of the film: *New York Magnificent*. As a matter of fact, the film's setting encompasses merely a five block area, including Wall Street, the Staten Island Ferry docks, Battery Park, Trinity Place and Broadway.⁹⁰ Within this limited setting, Strand and Sheeler depict the lower Manhattan area of the interwar years as a well-organized and neatly-functioning part of the city that especially finds its expression in the modern built environment.

4.3.2 Urban Transformation from Island to Densely Populated City

Sharing many similarities with *Manhatta*, Robert Flaherty's *Twenty-four Dollar Island* (1927) presents an urban panorama of New York that is dominated by machines. We do not have any information on whether Flaherty watched *Manhatta* or not. However, both films contain thematical and setting-related similarities such as the depiction of harbors and their activities, frequent emphasis on skyscraper images, along with footage that shows the metropolis under construction and a cityscape beneath fumes. However, *Twenty-four Dollar Island* differs, not only from *Manhatta* but every other city symphony as well, in its reliance on old maps and paintings to give brief historical information about the city. The film opens with an intertitle that states: "A camera impression of New York," then Flaherty juxtaposes the shots of New York from 1926 with depictions of the city's past that narrates the arrival of the Dutch, how they bought the island for twenty-four dollars, and built a few houses that were reminiscent of a rural Dutch village.

According to Anthony Kinik, the film received an assortment of criticism at the time of its release, ranging from negative remarks to positive ones. Favorable reviews even compared the film to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), which was released around the same time, in favor of *Twenty-four Dollar Island*. While one viewer commented that "[t]his was the most thrilling, fascinating and generally beautiful picture that I have ever been privileged to witness," another critic complained how the city depicted was

⁹⁰ Jan-Christopher Horak, "Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta*" in *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-45*, 269.

“not an open space - one feels breathless and overpowered - crushed by the machine age.”⁹¹

Flaherty himself described *Twenty-four Dollar Island* as “not a film of human beings, but of skyscrapers which they had erected, completely dwarfing humanity itself.” With such a comment in mind, Anthony Kinik argues that the “film was intended to be critique of modernity.”⁹² I would like to argue that while Kinik have valid reasons to stress that Flaherty’s film represents the city as oppressed by skyscrapers, Flaherty might not have specifically intended his film to propose a critique towards modernity but nevertheless certain problems emanating from modern cities found their way into the film’s scenes.

Flaherty’s life and how he became a filmmaker might give some clues about his intentions when making *Twenty-four Dollar Island*. Flaherty’s early life and his career is rather unusual for a filmmaker. He was born in Michigan and relocated to Burleigh Mine in Lake of the Woods with his family. His father was a prospector and together they went to travels throughout northern Ontario, which led to his interest towards expeditions. Patterning himself after his father who was working for the U.S Steel, he attended the Michigan College of Mines and worked as an explorer, prospector and railroader.⁹³

Flaherty worked for a company called the Canadian Northern and embarked upon expeditions to the remote parts of Canada in search for iron ore. His journey reached as far as to Inuit camps at Taylor and Gilles Islands located above the arctic circle, travelling forty kilometers of the road by sledge. Even though he could not find iron ore, he and his boss were excited to conduct many other expeditions. After the first journey, Flaherty took a movie camera with the intention to capture life in the Arctic. He only took a three-weeks-course for filmmaking in Rochester, from then on he always brought his camera to the expeditions to shoot the life in the Arctic and the

⁹¹ Anthony Kinik, “Twenty-four Dollar Island,” in *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity Between the Wars*, 220-1.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Janis Essner and Jay Ruby, “Robert J. Flaherty (1884-1951),” *Arctic* 40, no. 4 (December 1987): 354-355.

living circumstances of the Inuit. One of these trips resulted in shooting *Nanook of the North* (1922)⁹⁴, which, despite its claims to objectively document the ‘authentic’ life of the Arctic as is, reconstructed an idealized and romanticized version of the Western conception of the “pure native untouched by modernity.” It is now well-documented that Flaherty made the natives living in the area construct an igloo for the camera’s benefit and act as if they never saw a phonograph and record before even though the people in the area were already well-familiar with modern amenities.



Figure 3: Still From *Twenty-four Dollar Island* (1927)

"First I was an explorer; then I was an artist," says Flaherty.⁹⁵ Since his films were mostly set in remote rural areas, the film *Twenty-four Dollar Island* is a unique case in terms of setting in his oeuvre. His films discuss the struggle of people with nature and how they deal with their natural surroundings. In a similar vein, by depicting the Native American era of New York, Flaherty’s film insinuates how Europeans transformed Manhattan island into the economic and trade capital of the world in just a few hundred years extending the presumed artificial dichotomy between nature and

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Richard Corliss, "ROBERT FLAHERTY: The Man in the Iron Myth," *Film Comment* 9, no. 6 (1973): 38.

culture that defined his documentaries in the Arctic into the ‘primitive’ versus modernity discourse of *Twenty-four Dollar Island*.

While I suggest here that Flaherty might not have specifically made his film in order to pose a critique of modernity, some of the elements of the film expose the problems of urban modernity in New York. While skyscrapers, industrial structures, bustling harbor activities using tugboats and cranes in building a future metropolis appear in the film as staples of modernity, unlike Sheeler’s and Strand’s *Manhatta*, these visuals also amount to an oppressive city where one feels overwhelmed in urban congestion. This effect is an outcome of Flaherty’s devotion to the use of telephoto lenses. The use of such lenses makes distant objects appear much closer to the camera and to each other while flattening them in the process. In a city full of skyscrapers, using this type of lens makes us perceive buildings almost adjacent to each other. Also, people walking in the spacious streets of New York in *Manhatta*, appear far smaller than they actually are —such a play with scale reduces people into ant-like creatures when compared with the gigantic structures surrounding them.

4.3.3 Cityscapes of Immigrants

New York became a new homeland for many people who seek better opportunities than what they have at their native countries. Often noticeable in city symphonies are people wearing the traditional clothes of their native origins, which highlight them as newcomers to New York. The existence of those people in the symphonies reflect the heterogenous society which eventually amounts to the multivocal and multicultural makeup of the metropolis. As a matter of fact, not only the promise of better opportunities but also a fascination with the modernity of New York played a role in persuading people in search for a new context to immigrate to New York.

While those people were from varied backgrounds and classes, it is striking that artists, filmmakers, actors and actresses constituted a significant portion of the immigrants in search of “something newer.” New York City, in particular, attracted people interested in different fields of arts as they saw the city as a place where they can achieve their dreams.

4.2.3.1 A Foreigner's Search for Identity

Robert Florey was among the immigrants who pursued a career in the United States and while doing so, he produced a New York city symphony. He was born in Paris in 1900, and spent his childhood near the studio of Georges Méliès. He started his film career very early by working as a critic and editor of *Le Mondain*, which was a theatrical paper. While working for *Le Mondain* between 1918-1919, he was also actively involved in the production of the earliest Swiss films, making contributions as writer, director, photographer and actor to such films as *Isidore a la Deveine* (1920) and *Isidore Sur le Lac* (1920). Following his employment at *Le Mondain*, he joined *Cinemagazine* where he met notable people of the French film industry such as Max Linder. With Linder's advice and encouragement, he took the correspondent job of the same magazine in the United States and relocated in September 1921.⁹⁶ After working for Swiss and French film industries, he worked as a director for various companies such as Warner Brothers and Paramount. However, he got often frustrated with how Hollywood always adopts standardized techniques.

The rules didn't have to be followed—was it necessary to spend a lot of money to express an idea?—why should a sequence always be shot in the same order: establishing long shot— medium shot— close ups— over the shoulder shots and reverse shots?⁹⁷

Reportedly, one time while he was working a night shift, he was kept awake by the sound of riveter gun in the early hours of the morning, which made him go out to explore New York city and shoot the surroundings.⁹⁸ As a result, Florey, using a small De Vry hand camera, made a film which stood against the mainstream Hollywood way of filmmaking that he criticized. The film called *Skyscraper Symphony* (1929) explored the adverse effects of modernity.

Skyscraper Symphony is a unique film among the city symphonies of New York. Unlike those films, *Skyscraper Symphony* does not give any clues about the life in the

⁹⁶ Brian Taves, "Robert Florey, Hollywood's Premier Director and Historian," *Southern California Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 427-8.

⁹⁷ Letter, Robert Florey to Don Shay, 12 August 1972.

⁹⁸ Merrill Schleier, "A Parisian in Manhattan: Florey's *Skyscraper Symphony*," in *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity Between the Wars*, 86-95.

city and do not draw direct attention to the city's bustling commercial activities. Instead, Florey was interested in capturing the voids of the city which were shaped by massive, blank walls of modern architecture. He explored James Gamble Rogers's New York Presbyterian Hospital, a massive skyscraper complex consisting of twelve buildings between 165th and 168th street.⁹⁹ This new type of skyscraper hospital architecture is an outcome of developments in medicine: Consisting of multiple cubicals to cure varied illnesses, the hospital complex was designed in a stepped-back form reflecting such a functional division based on type of illness.¹⁰⁰ Florey, exploring the blank walls which are devoid of life often with a quick pan movements, enhances dizzying feelings and such building provides Florey with a convenient place to reveal modernity's dystopian qualities which destabilizes physical and mental life in a city.¹⁰¹



Figure 4: Stills From *Skyscraper Symphony* (1929)

The most important aspect of the film relies on how Florey captured the surroundings with unusual perspectives and pace. *Skyscraper Symphony* seems as if it was shot on a roller coaster and it is the most dizzying film compared to other city symphonies. Unlike other examples of the genre where fast pacing emanates from quick-cutting as well as depiction of machines in action at full speed, Florey instead uses quick pans of static buildings. With his hand-held camera, Florey scans the modern buildings and frequently changes the camera angles. The film juxtaposes images of revivalist

⁹⁹ Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930* (New York, NY: Rizzoli, 1987), 112–13.

¹⁰⁰ AnnMarie Adams, *Medicine by Design: The Architect and the Modern Hospital* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), VIII–XII.

¹⁰¹ Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 95.

architecture such as the Woolworth building designed by Cass Gilbert with ziggurat-like set-back architectures which appeared as a consequence of the 1916 Zoning Ordinance. The diversity of the built environment with revivalist buildings depicted next to set-back architectures seems to parallel the identity search of a Frenchman in his new adopted home while also giving us clues on the urban environment's commingling of buildings referencing the past architectural styles with modern functionalist ones. To the extent that *Skyscraper Symphony* was created as a result of insomnia caused by the sounds of machines along with feelings of displacement and nostalgia, it gives messages about the effects of skyscrapers in New York.¹⁰²

4.2.3.2 A Touristic City

Rudy Burckhardt's *Seeing the World: Part One, A Visit to New York, N.Y* (1937) is a city symphony which is a mock travelogue. Contrary to many city symphonies, the film mainly shows the touristic sites of the city. This manner is not surprising given that Burckhardt just relocated from Switzerland to New.

Seeing the World is a sound film with a voiceover, and satirically criticizes modernity of New York as well as the so-called modern people of the city. Criticism of the built environment plays a major role in *Seeing the World*'s ascorbic commentary. The film depicts the famous sites of New York such as Wall Street, Trinity Church, Wall Street and the Brooklyn Bridge as seen from elevated and subway trains. At some point in the film, the train stops at the 42nd Street just as the commentator says "42nd Street! Times Square! The heart of ... that we skip it." This act can be interpreted as a commentary on the lack of time in urban life and the tedious similarity of the city's touristic sites that do not offer anything different. After a short skit, the film again reveals the avenues in row in a mocking tone: All avenues look identical. At the closing scene, commentator again states: "And so we leave New York, in the light of early morning sun." While the voice-over says these words, the images show trinkets of landmarks suggesting both the commodification of the landmarks of the city and their consequent homogenization.

¹⁰² Jan-Christopher Horak, "Discovering Pure Cinema: Avant-garde Cinema in the 20s," *Afterimage* 8, 12 (Summer 1980): 4–7.

4.4 Urban Economy

New York symphonies also shed light and comment on the economic life New York City of the interwar years. In addition to the representation of varied economic activities taking place in the city, some of these films also defined economy as the main source and power of the city. This section explores *Twenty-four Dollar Island* (Robert Flaherty, 1927), *City of Contrasts* (Irving Browning, 1931), *The Pursuit of Happiness* (Rudy Burckhardt, 1940), *Manhattan Medley* (Bonney Powell, 1931) in relation to such concerns.

4.4.1 A Capitalist City from the Beginning

As argued above, *Twenty-four Dolar Island* (1927) occupies a unique position among other city symphony films in its efforts to contextualize New York, specifically Manhattan, within a historical timeline. After the film opens with an intertitle “A camera impression of New York,” another intertitle follows: “In 1626, Dutch merchants bought Manhattan Island from the Indians for 24 dollars.” The opening scene following these intertitles uses maps, drawings and illustrations of “Neiuw Amsterdam” to narrate the apocryphal tale of Manhattan at the expense of other boroughs such as Brooklyn, The Bronx, Queens, Staten Island. These boroughs were not a part of the City of New York at the time, and they were consolidated by the effort of Andrew Haswell Green between 1874 and 1898.¹⁰³ Green was a lawyer and a merchant elite. As the head of Consolidation Inquiry Committee, he became one of the prominent figures who shaped the New York City.¹⁰⁴

The tale of purchasing the “Island Manhattes” derives from the Dutch merchant’s lore who heard the story from ship passengers newly embarked from New Netherland. At that time, the story was that Dutch Merchants bought the island for the value of 60 guilders, which was the currency of Netherlands. In 1846, this value of money was converted to twenty-four dollars by a New York historian using the current exchange

¹⁰³ Thomas Kessner, *Capital City: New York City and the Men behind America's Rise to Economic Dominance, 1860-1900* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 62-8.

¹⁰⁴ Seymour Durst, “Grew, Andrew Haswell,” in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 552.

rate. This exchange rate of twenty-four dollars remained the same until today to become a mythical tale that masquerades the European invasion of the native lands around New York under the guise of an act of commerce.¹⁰⁵



Figure 5: Still From *Twenty-Four Dollar Island* (1927)

Although there is no deed of trade, this is the most commonly told story of how Europeans acquired land in Manhattan. However, there are other alternative suggestions such as the one that the Dutch did not purchase the island in exchange of sixty guilders, but acquired it through the exchange of beads, buttons, and trinkets. It might be true that the Dutch in North America preferred to occupy land by trade, not with war. One example for that, they bought Staten Island exchanging axles, needles, awls, knives and kettles. However, these were specific and useful goods which might have arisen interest among the Native Americans. Therefore, such argument—trading the Island in exchange of beads—remains a weak theory, just like the twenty-four dollars saga.¹⁰⁶

The accuracy of these of events purchasing New York for twenty-four dollars or in exchange for a number of beads have been debated ever since the Dutch West Indies

¹⁰⁵ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, “Introduction,” in *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), xiv.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, xiv-xvi.

Company set foot on New York. Even though the accuracy of these events are generally rejected and they are regarded mere tales, Flaherty's use of maps and illustration of property sale between the Native Americans and Dutch explorers in the film *Twenty-four Dollar Island*, first and foremost, defines New York as a place of commerce and as a property which can be sold from the very beginning. Relying on such a quasi-historical event—the island was not conquered, but gained through trade agreement—underlines economy as the main characteristic of New York. Also, it projects a conceited western-centric approach that regards the Native American as primitive people who were dazzled with a few unimportant beads which led them to selling their land.¹⁰⁷



Figure 6: Still From *Twenty-Four Dollar Island* (1927)

No matter how Flaherty conceitedly approaches the Native Americans and relies on tales as if they were historically verifiable events, there still remains much to draw from his film *Twenty-four Dollar Island*. First settlements of the Dutch in Manhattan, as seen in the maps given in the film, was located at the tip of the island which is the closest point to Brooklyn. The Dutch immediately started to develop the south of the island. They built houses and conducted their economic activities there. In order to protect their goods against the attack of Native Americans and the British, they had

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

built city walls encapsulating them to the tip of the island. The exact location where this city wall stood marks the location of Wall Street. Deriving its name from this city wall, the street still acts as the hub and symbol of the United States economy.¹⁰⁸ In other words, the first settlement of the Dutch where they concentrated their economic activities was inscribed into the fabric of the city as a center of commerce. *Twenty-four Dollar Island* makes a clear reference to such history and the significance of the economic activities for the urban life.

4.4.2 Street as Locus of Consumption

Irving Browning's *City of Contrasts* (1931) remarks first and foremost the contradictory features that New York embodies, such as rich versus poor, uptown versus downtown, high versus low. Among these stark contrasts there appears presumably the most vital characteristic of New York, that is, its urban economy. Streets of New York are places where every kind of economic activities unfold.

Including the footages of people from diverse ethnical background in the film *City of Contrasts*, Browning highlights New York's multicultural structure and the recent immigration wave at the beginning of the century. This diversity is so common and strikingly apparent, one can identify it even with an inattentive look. In the Browning's *City of Contrasts*, this diversity present New York as a kaleidoscopic city. A man wearing traditional Middle Eastern clothes sells things from the staircase of a building; another man wearing a fur hat specific to Caucasia walks back and forth on a street; yet another person wearing a sombrero sells vegetarian foods. The film depicts the streets of the city as teeming with diverse activities and always in flux. The film revealing cultural, architectural, and the urban history of the New York, also enlightens the culinary history of the city. Vegetarian practice has undoubtedly been inscribed into the cultural and religious codes of an array of societies in the world. Vegetarian way of living became popularized through the late twentieth century and as *City of Contrasts* shows vegetarian food was not only served in special restaurants, but also sold as street food in New York city around the time the film was shot.

¹⁰⁸ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Mankind* (London: Vintage Books, 2015), 360.

As argued above, above anything else, *City of Contrasts* highlights the vivacious street life where every kind of economic activity takes place. Streets are heterogenous places populated by people from varied ethnic and religious backgrounds and their activities. *City of Contrasts* well illustrates this by demonstrating the diverse composition of people and their activities on the streets (buskers, illusionists, street vendors, and people of different classes populate the very same streets) that seem to appear as a microcosm of American society at large.



Figure 7: Still From *City of Contrasts* (1931)

These bustling activities influence the architectural configuration of the shops that form the bulk of the ground levels of the buildings on the streets depicted in the film. Ice cream parlors, juice bars, restaurants are all designed in a way that they project their activities towards the streets to invite and attract the attention of the passersby perhaps dazzled by the wide array of urban stimuli. This situation results in an outward emphasized design where the front of the shops gains primary importance. The sellers

attract customers with their embellished shop signs and elaborated counters where they deliver their products.

The expansive market policy of small businesses during the interwar years in New York City and its effects on the urban fabric can be clearly observed in *City of Contrasts*. The streets of New York are full of vendors, stores, markets, and musicians. Every part of the city is commercialized and houses some sort of economic activity. Billboards and shop signs cover the facades of the buildings. Also, New York abounds with sandwich people acting as human billboards attesting to how even people are used for commercial purposes and walk around wearing boards in order to promote stores.

4.4.3 Presenting the American Dream: Entertainment and Advertisement

In many city symphonies, including those on New York, shots of commuters reaching the city via cars, trams and ships constitute the very first scenes. These films demonstrate how work and commute to the workplace takes up the morning hours in a city. We watch the city gradually coming to life, shops beginning to open, and people working. Once the symphonies switch to nighttime as part of their day-in-the-life-of-temporal structure, entertainment and rest become their subject matter. As argued before, these daily cycles and rituals constitute one of the representational codes of the city symphony genre. Two themes of New York symphonies differentiate them from other symphonies: advertisement and entertainment.

While the representation of these themes preoccupy other city symphonies as well, in New York symphonies such representation gets especially intensified to the point that it almost occupies every scene. Façades of buildings are covered with all kinds of advertisements. Rudy Burckhardt's *The Pursuit of Happiness* (1940), a film that focuses on the rhythm of the activities of pedestrians, perfectly encapsulates the advertisement culture of New York. The film shows how advertisement boards with telephone numbers, names of the shops, and sale announcements are placed side by side in such a dense manner that they often touch each other. Number of advertisement boards on the ground and first floors of the facades is notably higher, which indicates the conversion of these floors into workplaces and buildings into mixed-use ones. Also, as it had been mentioned before, human billboards walk back and forth

promoting the stores. These all sorts of advertisements show how important was to promote businesses interwar years New York.



Figure 8: Still From *The Pursuit of Happiness* (1940)

While these films put on display advertisement boards and varied sorts of entertainment in the form of street performances during their daytime scenes, more distinguished advertisements and entertainments take up the night scenes. Both Bonney Powell's *Manhattan Medley* (1931) and Irving Browning's *City of Contrasts* (1931) draw attention to vivacious night life promoted by electrified billboards that tend to dematerialize the solid walls of the buildings giving form to an architecture of electric light and imagery. In Times Square and Broadway various electric billboards advertise entertainments as well as businesses. All sorts of entertainments and their names — Rialto theatre, performance of a jazz orchestra, various dances, burlesques, Chevrolet and Cadillac billboards, the Band Wagon play, Fred&Adele Astaire — pass by at an immense speed. These films depict the nighttime as the part of the day when 'the city that never sleeps' spends its energy to regain it.

4.5 Identity of Spaces

City symphonies of New York attribute certain meanings to spaces. These meanings are either defined by gender or the economic status of individuals. Existing eleven New York symphonies reveal the mindsets about how gender, time, and economic status find their expression in various ways within the spaces of the city. While these

attributions definitely reflect to some extent the intentions of the filmmakers, they also enlighten the common perceptions of and attitudes toward women's socio-cultural position in the society, as well as the privacy of the poor and the rich. This chapter explores how varied attributions were addressed in New York symphonies which were shot during interwar years. This part covers *Autumn Fire* (Herman Weinberg, 1933), *A Bronx Morning* (Jay Leyda, 1931), *Seeing the World: Part One, A Visit to New York, N.Y.* (Rudy Burckhardt, 1937).

4.5.1 Gender of Time and Space

There is a common tendency observed in New York symphonies that films attain gender roles to time and space. While these films associate early morning streets, nature, as well as domestic spaces with women furthering sexist stereotypes that attribute feminine qualities to private spaces and nature; they related night activities, artificiality of the modern urban city and public spaces with men. These films assumed the ideal place of woman to be the nature or inside the apartment.

4.5.1.1 Nature Versus Artificial

Autumn Fire (1933) directed by Herman Weinberg differs from most other city symphonies of New York to the extent that it employs actors and focuses on the romantic relation between characters. There is an interesting story behind the film: Weinberg produced the film in order to win the heart of a woman whose name was Erna Bergman and the director cast her to play one of the two main characters in the film in order to be able to get close to her. Apparently, Weinberg achieved his goal and after the shooting of the film, they got married.¹⁰⁹ This seemingly unrelated story might help explain why romance and the characters played by actors found their way into the unlikely context of a city symphony.

The film is about an estranged couple whose counterparts live in strikingly different environments — the woman is desperate and lives in a rural area, whereas the man lives in New York and his melancholy seems to be projected onto his environment. They couple got separated for a reason that remains unexplained within the film. After

¹⁰⁹ Anthony Kinik, "Autumn Fire," in *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity Between the Wars*, 295-6.

depictions of the characters in their own surrounding, the woman writes a letter to the man that she forgives him and would like to meet him at the Central Station on Wednesday at 5 pm. The film does not specifically reveal the specificities of New York or offer any information to understand its urban modernity. Instead, the film deals with a wider context, that sets nature (rural areas) versus artificial (the city environment) and assign a gender to each.



Figure 9: Still From *Autumn Fire* (1933)

This assignment of gender to the spaces within the film that reminds one of Beatriz Colomina's study of gender in relation modern architecture in her well-known article "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism." Colomina offers a close spatial analysis of how Adolf Loos defined the place of women in the house.¹¹⁰ In Colomina's reading Loss's modern private spaces enclose within walls and render them invisible from outside — outer world is full of dangers and women are vulnerable to attacks.¹¹¹ As Colomina suggests, the ways in which the film *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* (1930) directed by Pierre Chenal define gender roles in relation to the modern spaces reflect, in turn, how Le Corbusier himself used photographs to represent these spaces. In the film, we see the man arriving home by car, looking away from the terrace of the

¹¹⁰ Beatriz Colomina, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," in *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1992), 73-130.

¹¹¹ Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme* (Paris: Les Editions G. Crès & Cie, 1925), 174.

building in a manner that signifies domination. On the other hand, the woman in the film is portrayed at home and in a scene providing food to the man.

The separation of the couple and Weinberg's chosen habitats for them in *Autumn Fire* reveals certain resisting gender stereotypes in the interwar years that associate men with culture (and by extension the city) and women with nature (and the rural areas). The woman in the film lives in a detached home in the countryside and watches the outer world from her small window. Later, she takes a small trip forlornly, visiting a pond, passing through the bushes, stepping on soil instead of concrete. She looks at the pond and sees the reflection of trees. What she sees is nature, she is both alone and lonely.

What is interesting is that, the man remains in a modern city to overcome his romantic breakup, and just like the woman, he is also in despair. Paralleling the woman, he explores his environment and wanders around skyscrapers, under the bridges, and takes short walks at a harbor. Even though why they choose to stay in these two places that are contextually opposite of each other can be seen as an arbitrary decision of Weinberg, by associating the city with the man, the film also seems to argue that the city is a manmade environment. The film, by completely overlooking the traditional reproductive, maintenance, and service labor of women that makes the building of a city possible, supposes that the city, and in this case New York city, is a place which was built by men expanding effort and energy. What he sees looking at the sea is a reflection of what the man supposedly achieved without the help of women over the years.

4.5.1.2 Morning Versus Night

Gender's relation to space also emerges as a theme in Jay Leyda's *A Bronx Morning* (1931). As it can be inferred from its name, contrary to many city symphonies that generally represent an entire day in the life of a city, Leyda's film focuses only on the morning activities of the Bronx.

The film opens with shots taken from a moving elevated train. Contrary to many city symphonies, this scene from a moving train does not depict arrival to the city. Instead, this shot may be a consequence of Jay Leyda's special interests in European avant-garde films such as *Rien que les Heures*, *Berlin* and *Man with a Movie Camera*, which he learnt about by reading the film magazine *La Revue du Cinema* before he became a filmmaker and intended to produce a city symphony borrowing visual elements.¹¹² Also, other vehicles are seen and horizontal camera movements start to present the life around the Bronx. Early hours of the Bronx, streets are devoid of life. Shots of barbershop pole behind the store front, mannequins and signs in the deserted borough are tribute to his favorite photographer Eugene Atget.¹¹³



Figure 10: Still From *A Bronx Morning* (1931)

Then, Leyda offers snippets of the life in the Bronx borough: Children plays on the streets, mothers wander around with prams while shopping, merchants rearrange their counters. What is striking is that in the early hours, the Bronx streets are populated mainly by women. Women seems to be preoccupied with maintenance and reproductive labor: they shop for groceries to prepare food for dinner, walk with their children on a pram to provide them with fresh air and sun.¹¹⁴ Women also seen in front

¹¹² Jay Leyda, typewritten notes for ELAE Symposium, Lausanne (1979), Leyda File, Film Department, Museum of Modern Art (MOMA).

¹¹³ Jay Leyda, "A Note on a Bronx Morning," *Travelling* 56, 2 (Fall 1979).

¹¹⁴ Jan-Christopher Horak, "Leyda's *A Bronx Morning*," in *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity Between the Wars*, 172-5.

of the window watching streets: These scenes once again associate women with domestic spaces and even when they populate the public urban space, this space turns into an extension of the home where they continue house-related work. In this respect, the film gives a good sense of the interwar year mindset about the gender roles as well as how these supposed roles find their expression in the perception and representation of space.

4.5.1.3 Private Versus Public Spaces

Another film that appoints gender roles to spaces and time is Rudy Burckhardt's *Seeing the World: Part One, A Visit to New York, N.Y.* (1937). As in the case of Weinberg's *Autumn Fire*, Burckhardt associates nature with women. And in a similar mindset with Jay Leyda's *A Bronx Morning*, the film presents the morning activities as a more appropriate time period for women whereas night time exclusively belongs to men. Therefore, this film also could be categorized under chapters 4.4.1 and 4.4.2 of this thesis.

Burckhardt's film opens with a depiction of the Statue of Liberty captured from a remarkable distance which makes the statue seem to be floating on the sea. In this scene, no buildings are visible, there appears just the Statue of Liberty and a few boats at the bay. Donnie Brooke Alderson's voice-over narrates what we see in the scene as: "First to greet a visitor to New York is a lady—the Statue of Liberty. Oh, ain't she beautiful!". However, because of the camera's point of view that juxtaposes the statue with just the non-descript ocean rather than the cityscape, it seems that the film is associating women with nature and reserving the cultural space of the city to men.

Burckhardt's *Seeing the World* provides us with a good array of instances as to how makers of New York symphonies gender spaces along a binary axis that aligns nature and domestic spaces with women and night time activities, public spaces, and artificiality of modern urban environment with men. One of such scenes in the film depicts a private indoor space of an apartment in Park Avenue uptown. Uptown has been occupied mostly by the upper classes, and the couple seen in this scene stands as a representation of this class. The couple starts arguing about how a modern painting should be placed on the wall. The scene is unmistakably a skit that seems to argue that the painting lacks any aesthetical value attested by the use of a painting reminiscent of

children's art. The woman lays on a modern couch reading Social Register book and decides the painting should remain at a skewed angle whereas the man prefers positioning the frame perfectly even. This argument is not resolved and the scene is concluded by the couple leaving the house. While Burckhardt's film mockingly criticizes the philistine attitude of upper classes towards modern art, it also points to the commodity fetishism of this class to the extent that the painting in the scene is treated as a mere decorative aspect of the couple's modern space. At the same time, this space that acts as a status symbol is unmistakably gendered: the woman is depicted to be comfortable inside their modern and luxurious apartment, while the man wearing a tuxedo stares with a gaze of domination at the street below through the apartment's window, in a manner reminiscent of the gender binary construction in the interwar year modern spaces in Colomina's "The Split Wall."

This gender binary existing within the domestic space seems to extend, as a later scene in the film suggests into the public space as well. The later scene takes place in a pub whose customers are almost exclusively men. The camera shows only one woman who is not on her own and is dancing with a man. The camera focuses on one table where two men drink and hold a discussion. Their chat escalates into a fistfight that concludes the scene. The scene seems to be pointing to the dangers of the night time at public spaces of leisure and gendering such spaces accordingly.

In the conclusion of the film *Seeing the World*, the husband, who was arguing with his wife over the painting in the earlier scene, arrives at home on subway at 2 am. He is alone and yawning. Donnie Brooke Alderson narrates: "Well well, if it isn't our old friend again, and where is the charming wife?" The woman, the film suggests, is still at home among her commodities, and probably reading the Social Register book.

These are obviously skits, however, these scenes criticize the social position of woman among the upper classes of the society. Burckhardt was not just an amateur filmmaker, rather he was an intellectual who had strong ties with art circles. Notable actors and actresses feature in the film such as Joseph Cotten, Virginia Nicholson Welles, John Becker, Edwin Denby. His experiences with the upper class domestic lifestyles explains the mocking tone of the film which offers a social analysis of the gendered dynamics of the Uptown spaces of New York City.

4.5.2 Domesticity of the “Others”

Many city symphonies, including those on New York, do not take place in private spaces nor do they try to capture what private life was like during interwar years. Such a manner may be explained by considering that they are “city” symphonies predominantly concerned with the public spaces of the city. At the same time, shooting at public spaces without sets and actors must have appealed to these filmmakers who were mostly amateur and independent filmmakers experimenting with cinematic arts. As I explained throughout this thesis, many of these filmmakers are of different backgrounds. Evoking fascination and yet bearing many problems, modern urban cities must have seemed as convenient settings to start their filmmaking career and, for the ones who are already filmmakers, to experiment with new settings and methods. In other words, not including any staged events within a city symphony translates into the elimination of any scenes that would depict the life of individuals in the confines of their private comfort. In this respect, films that employ such scenes like *Seeing the World* are exceptions to the rules of the city symphony genre at large.

Irving Browning’s *City of Contrasts* (1931), for instance, represents the urban activities of the New York city by mainly focusing on the commercial vitality of the public spaces. Browning’s New York comprises of people of different origins which enriches its culture. Similarly, its urban panorama includes buildings of varied styles such as Neo-Gothic St. Patrick’s Cathedral designed by James Renwick Jr., 55 story Woolworth Building designed by Cass Gilbert, and many art-deco skyscrapers such as the one at 70 Pine Street. Revelations of diversity — people of varied ethnical groups, economic activity and buildings in designed in varied styles — display New York as an ever-changing, kaleidoscopic city.

Browning shows the spaces around the buildings just mentioned — streets, avenues, and parks — as places where every sort of economic activities unfolds. The film’s portrayal of public spaces suggest that these spaces are mainly allocated for economic activities. In-between such scenes depicting economic activities, however the film also includes one that shows the interior of a house. This is the only footage in the final film that focuses on an interior and it was shot at “Hooverville,” one of the many settlements built during the Great Depression. This particular settlement is located at

the Riverside park. The name Hooverville derives from Herbert Hoover who was the president of United States during the Great Depression. He was often criticized for the economic crises of the era and people named shanty towns built during his era after his last name.¹¹⁵



Figure 11: Still From *City of Contrasts* (1931)

The inclusion of interior shots in a city symphony which specifically pays attention to public spaces and economic activities, provides us with an assessment of domesticity of the poor. I argue that these interior shots of a shanty dwelling located at Riverside park Hooverville do not include any staged events or at least the film did not use any designed sets: There is no need to design a set when there are thousands of these shanty towns. Filmmakers had easy access to these dwellings to shoot their interiors. These dwellings were poorly built with any available and leftover materials at hand. In the interior scenes of *City of Contrasts*, holes in the walls, doors and roof are visible. The way these tenements are depicted in the film suggests that not only filmmakers, but anyone could enter such hovels and destroy them with a modest push. People living at those spaces do not seem to have a private and domestic life, their existence is exposed to the public. Such a scene, then, is paradoxical to the extent that Browning seems to be criticizing such conditions of the tenements that do not provide the residents with

¹¹⁵ Derek S. Hoff, "The Worsening of the Great Depression: Hoovervilles, Farm Troubles, Bank Crises," in *A Companion to Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover*, ed. Katherine A.S. Sibley (West Sussex: Wiley/Blackwell, 2014), 444, 464.

a private domestic life, yet, at the same time, his own camera freely invades these spaces to expose them to the public eye.

Among the New York symphonies, Lewis Jacobs' *Footnote to Fact* (1933) may be the most prominent one in terms of representing the harsh living conditions during the Great Depression. Although the film, like any city symphony, portrays the urban life by location shooting on the city streets, it also includes a staged event. Lewis Jacobs initially wanted to create a film project which explored social conditions of the Great Depression. This intended project's tentative name was *As I walk* and it was planned to consist four chapters: *Highway 66*, *Faces in the Street*, *Night Between the Rivers*, and *Footnote to Fact*. However, Jacobs managed to only complete *Footnote to Fact* (1933).¹¹⁶

The staged event in this chapter-turned-film *Footnote to Fact* represents a domestic space: A woman rocks back and forth on a rocking chair in an apartment. The shots of the woman intercuts with other shots that convey the harsh living conditions of the era — the poor trying to find edible food among garbage, old men selling their clothes in a flea market, homeless men lying on the ground, soldiers fighting on the war field, and the footage of a dead pig. Throughout this scene, the tempo of the film increases and so does the speed of the woman on the rocking chair. And in a shocking end that culminates this fast-cut scene, the woman screams and commits suicide. The scene makes use of associative montage in an explanatory style where Jacobs links the woman, the dead pig, the man lying on the ground, and soldiers in the battlefield. It is an exposition in reverse: The film seems to be implying in an agitative style that the poor lives on the streets and one who has a domestic space is about to be homeless and eventually will die of hunger.

Leyda's *A Bronx Morning* (1931) also represents the lives of the poor in New York City. However, Leyda does not include interior footages and the film seems to suggest that the main habitat of the lower-middle classes is public spaces. About the film, Horak aptly notes that "Leyda in his independently produced short, *A Bronx Morning*, seems to be interested in the way public city spaces become private family spaces in a

¹¹⁶ Eva Hielscher, "Footnote to Fact," in *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity Between the Wars*, 297.

place like the Bronx.”¹¹⁷ As I stated before, the film puts the early morning activities of the Bronx on display: children play on the streets, mothers shop and take walks with prams. Accompanying these shots showing the daily activities of the Bronx are three short intertitles forming a single sentence: “The Bronx business and the Bronx lives on the street”. The economic status of the people in this scene is not as severe as the ones living in “Hooverilles” in Browning’s *City of Contrasts* and the ones who live on the streets in Jacobs’ *Footnote to Fact*, and they are correspondingly depicted in the film to have a domestic life. Yet, the intertitles chosen by Leyda indicate that the main environment of the occupants of the Bronx where they spend a good amount of their time are the public spaces. The need for collaboration and dependence, as represented in the film, which might have seemed necessary in order to survive the economic crises, might have caused this turn towards the public spaces in Bronx.

4.6 Solution for Urban Crisis

City symphony phenomenon between the two world wars started with the production of *Manhatta* (1921) which clearly celebrated modernity and its transformation of the city, and concluded with *The City* (1939-1940) which criticizes how technology was not used effectively in the service of creating better cities. In other words, the first and the last films of the genre takes place and are produced in New York City. It is striking how, within the span of almost twenty years (*Manhatta* was actually shot in 1920, however it received its public premiere in 1921), the reception of metropolitan cities shifted from absolute praise to harsh criticism.

Steiner and Van Dyke’s *The City* is technically not a city symphony. Yet, the third and fourth parts of this five-part film can be regarded a city symphony inasmuch as these sections bear technical and thematical qualities of the genre. Also, *The City* is a sound film whose voice-over commentaries were written by Lewis Mumford. Therefore, rather than a poetic style commonly found in city symphonies, the film overall prefers an expository mode and a persuasive voice over.

A portrayal of life in a New England village constitutes the first part of the film. The scenes in this section harken back to a pastoral way of living before the introduction

¹¹⁷ Jan-Christopher Horak, “Leyda’s *A Bronx Morning*,” 174.

of machines into this lifestyle. Life is simple, people have a voice in their little towns where, the film suggests, lies the root of American democracy. Even though the film presents that human are in harmony with nature, even though they used to work from dawn to dusk. The irony of this part is the lack of reflexivity which overlooks the fact that the shooting of a scene is only possible with the help of a machine. Eliminating any reference to the technical process of the filmmaking itself, the film romanticizes the relations between humans and nature suggesting that it is possible for humans to interact with, perceive, and represent nature without the mediation of culture.

The second part of the film is concerned with the first encounters of humans and industrial machines depicting people living in poorly built wooden houses under the smokes of factories. The voiceover, accompanying the footage showing factories in front of people's houses, states: "Machines to build machines", and "smokes make prosperity they say, does this mean there is no way out for us?".

In the third and fourth parts, New York city is represented as a "development" of settlements. Here, vast canyons of skyscrapers and machines that humans use in their daily lives appear make insinuating the consumerist nature of the society. While the machines are supposed to enhance the lives of human beings, this is far beyond the case, the film suggests by showing that every artery of the city is jammed due to a car crash. These scenes show the signs indicating rules to follow to be dominating the cityscape implying that the city is not designed for the natural rhythms of the humans and thus only rules can maintain the order.

For the production of *The City*, Lewis Mumford cautioned that "(We) will either have to learn to plan itself, plan its industry, plan its environment, and plan its cities, or which will be before we know it in the midst of chaos and death."¹¹⁸ The final part of *The City* proposes a solution to this crisis between the machine and the human, or modernity and the human. The film advocates Ebenezer Howard's garden city concept as an ideal settlement for people. In such a city, the film argues, people can benefit

¹¹⁸ Lewis Mumford, Address to Progressives in the Arts (unpublished address, City Club of New York, New York, 11 December 1935), New York World's Fair Incorporated Records, New York Public Library, New York (PR1.41, Box 918), cited from Anthony Kinik, "Steiner and Van Dyke's the City," in *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity Between the Wars*, 199.

from technology without being deprived of nature. The film underlines how the size of the garden city is kept at a scale making it possible for humans to manage it. At the same time, the film represents the garden cities as capable of providing people with enough space and time to breathe.

Rather than a critique of modernity, *The City* condemns the alienation of humans from nature. Erik Barnouw argues that film is “an exposition of the urban crisis.”¹¹⁹ However, I would like to suggest that the film points to the problems in the conciliation between humans and technology and attempts to offer a method of reconciliation, that is, garden cities. *The City* expresses a programmatic discourse where the film step by step aims to persuade the audience about the benefits of a garden city lifestyle.



Figure 12: Still From *The City* (1939-1940)

City symphonies begin with films that praise urban modernity and the importance of mechanization. However, they finalize with a film that questions and criticizes modern cities, highlighting their problems. It proposes that modernity could be more beneficial and humane in smaller settlements promoting examples such as the Garden City. It is as if this outcome of the last symphony concludes the detailed observations of cities.

¹¹⁹ Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-fiction Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 111–23.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

City symphonies are avant-garde documentaries of modern urban life shedding light on varied layers of life during interwar years. Expanding over four continents, city symphony genre includes more than eighty films and enlightens varied modernities of cities which are overlooked. Convenience of making a city symphony is the main reason why the number of city symphonies is uncertain.

A number of rules defines the city symphony as a genre. The content of city symphonies is modern urban cities and their elements such as mechanization, urban transportation web, and factories. And “a day in the city” defines the common structure of the genre. Uniqueness of the genre for architectural history studies comes from how the films were produced. There are almost no staged events, no actors or a production company behind the films. One sees the city through the eyes of a flaneur-like person: In revealing the hidden voids of the cities, city symphonies present rich material for an architectural history study.

In parallel to the symphonies of other cities, certain New York symphonies defines machines, mechanization, and technology as a driving force of the city. Workers in harbors and construction sites spend immense energy building the metropolis that is always changing. These films often included varied juxtapositions of construction sites and skyscrapers, giving the idea that the city will ambitiously expand invading new territories, destruct old buildings in order to construct newer ones, all collaborating into the functioning of the giant mechanism of New York City. Films that specifically accentuate modernity of New York are Sheeler and Strand’s *Manhatta* (1921) and Flaherty’s *Twenty-four Dollar Island* (1927). These films devote significant amount of screen time into how mechanization plays an important role in modern urban cities. In these films, directors preferred to use unusual perspectives taken from very high or

very low angles stressing how humans seem almost crushed by skyscrapers and cranes. Therefore, such representations of the elements of modern urban city often make the audience feel overwhelmed by the built environment, as much as they awake awe and admiration.

Newcomers to the city also made city symphonies. As a rapidly growing city, New York attracted immigrants from all over the world and some of them were filmmakers such as Robert Florey and Rudy Burckhardt. Florey's *Skyscraper Symphony* (1929) narrates the adverse effect of skyscraperization, the film is a result of insomnia and identity search of a Frenchman who had just immigrated to United States with hopes of experimentation in cinematic techniques. Devoting an important share to ziggurat like art-deco buildings and also juxtaposing their images with revivalist architecture of the city, Florey embarked on an identity dialogue with the city with feelings of nostalgia. Another visitor of the city, Rudy Burckhardt, focused on the touristic sites. His film *Seeing the World* (1937), with a mocking voiceover, argues that New York bears tediously similar buildings in its modern urban fabric and does not present any interesting visuals to its visitors. Conclusion of the film epitomizes his views on New York: Only a few monuments symbolize New York in the public eye.

Moreover, New York symphonies tackle with the urban economy of the city. Robert Flaherty's *Twenty-four Dollar Island* (1927) refer to visuals, old maps, and the mythical tale of New York about how the Dutch purchased the Manhattan Island for twenty-four dollars from Native Americans. This tale of trade, defines New York as a center of commerce from its very beginnings and argues how the economy is inscribed into the genetic makeup of the city. Also, Irving Browning's *City of Contrasts* (1931) highlights the vivacious urban economy of the city: Economic activities are conducted at every part of New York, and small business owners ardently try to promote their goods. The battle of advertisement seen in Browning's film, becomes even more visible in Burckhardt's *The Pursuit of Happiness* (1940) and Bonney Powell's *Manhattan Medley* (1931). These films present the American dream empowered by entertainment activities and advertisements. Billboards dominate the façades of the buildings and almost all parts of the city seem commercialized. Also, night time entertainments such as plays, burlesques and film screenings at cinemas are where New Yorkers spend their energy to regain energy again.

Another point, New York symphonies shed light on is how gender, time, and economic situations are associated with spaces. For example, nature was gendered female in many of these films. Herman Weinberg's *Autumn Fire* (1933) is a film which includes staged events about an estranged couple: The woman retreats to the countryside and tries to overcome their breakup in nature whereas the man remains in the city of melancholy, New York. The reflections they see on water, one being of trees and other of skyscrapers, give clues about the ways in which gender was associated with different types of spaces. These films conceive nature as untouched and female, whereas modern urban city is masculine and was constructed by men with great efforts over years. Likewise, Burckhardt's *Seeing the World* (1937), carefully frames the Statue of Liberty juxtaposed against the background of a vast ocean in a way that associates women with nature.

Gendering spaces and time can also be observed in Leyda's *A Bronx Morning* (1931). Early morning streets of Bronx strictly belongs to women and are allocated for their activities such as shopping and taking their children walk. In Burckhardt's *Seeing the World* (1937) how even morning and night were associated with specific genders becomes more visible: Nighttime is represented to be full of dangers unfolding in spaces populated by men and mornings were defined as a time period which is filled with the activities of women. Not limited to this simplistic dichotomy between morning and night times, Burckhardt's film also genders private and public spaces.

While Burckhardt criticizes the high-class society's philistine attitude toward art and women's identification with luxurious private spaces, some films also address the poor's lack of a private life at all. Irving Browning's *City of Contrasts* (1931), the film which mainly focuses on the variety of the economic activities of modern urban city by capturing shots of the streets, also includes interior footages of a dwelling in the Hooverville located at the riverside. These dwellings, with their holes in walls and lack of properly functioning doors, are actually public spaces one can enter easily: Therefore, the poor does not possess any privacy and their lives are exposed to the public. Similar issues were also addressed in Leyda's *A Bronx Morning* (1931) with an intertitle stating that "the Bronx live on the streets". Also, Jacobs' *Footnote to the Fact* (1933) aptly links the visuals of a pig, the homeless lying on the street, and a

woman who is about to commit suicide providing a narrative in reverse chronological order of the fate of the poor.

City symphonies between interwar years were concluded with a New York symphony that criticizes the modern urban life. Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke's *The City* (1939-1940) presents the "development" of spaces with technology. The film opens with the depictions of life in a New England Village arguing that the life was simple yet people had to work from dusk to dawn. Then, the settlement of the people shifted from villages to slums around factories, later from shanty towns to "modern" urban cities. However, according to the film, none of these places were fit for humans as they posed many problems and failed to provide humane spaces. Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke's *The City* (1939-1940) is actually a propaganda film that programmatically informs the audience and proposes alternative solutions for reconciliation between machines and people. *The City* (1939-1940) argues that the perfect place for humans is where technology and nature are near to one another: That is Howard's garden city where one can freely enjoy their spare time, receive a good quality education, enhance the technology, and most importantly enjoy the nature.

Through analyzing and comparing the city symphonies of New York this thesis has put together a study that provides insights on how modernity and modern urban spaces were perceived and how such ideas were circulated during the interwar years. Studying city symphonies, a genre that only recently received sustained attention, provides a new form of resource for the discipline of history of architecture, not only because they to some extent document the built environment, but also because they showed how these spaces were populated, and how ideas about modern urbanism were constituted and distributed by the medium of cinema. This study also highlights the plurality of modernity, both confirming and enriching the existing knowledge. This thesis creates a ground work for further studies regarding city symphonies, from which we are able to extract valuable knowledge on both the physical environment and the mindset of the presented period. Studying city symphonies paves the path to an interdisciplinary way of looking at the history of architecture yielding a more comprehensive perspective.

It is important to acknowledge the importance of city symphonies for architecture history. City symphonies have taken urban cities that are continuously transforming as their subjects. The cities filmed in city symphonies do not exist anymore as these are urban organisms that are dynamic, consistently being demolished and rebuilt. As a result of this continuous demolishing and rebuilding the built environment undergoes rapid shifts. The past spaces and the life that took place in them is temporal and history works towards capturing pieces of these past lives. On the other hand, city symphonies provide visual, therefore tangible, resources on the past spaces which makes them invaluable for historic research. City symphonies shed light onto the built environment of the period, the urban life, and the politic structure.

Even though, this thesis focuses on New York, all city symphonies are vital resources. For instance, Ruttmann's film *Berlin* (1927), though it is selective, presents the Weimar period Berlin. Only six years after the film was shot, the liberal life in Berlin was completely erased and the oppressive life that arrived with Nazi Germany took its place. This did not reflect immensely onto the built environment however the life in the city changed extremely. Therefore, how the built environment was experienced changed. Eighteen years after the film, Berlin was captured by Allies which brought with it the complete destruction of the city. Berlin was split into East and West sides. The separation of the city reflected onto its built environment, the city life, the politic and economic structure. Berlin Wall kept its ground until 1989; after its demolishing West and East Germany united. However, whether the culture and economy that had been disconnected for so long managed to unite is debatable. This is still an ongoing process; and it need be stated that the effects of the once physically existent border within the city is still visible in cultural differences, election results, religious beliefs, the success of football teams, and the industrialization rates. This thesis has stated several times that *Berlin* is a propagandistic film providing a selective city life panorama. However, what Ruttmann's film is able to provide us as a resource is beyond its selective nature. Berlin was torn apart, demolished, reconstructed and redefined over and over again. Ruttmann's film presents visual resources on how the city was, therefore the film that shows the city life in an avant-garde documentary form, is one of the most important resources to understand the interwar years Berlin.

The city of New York did not transform due to drastic political conflicts as Berlin or Soviet cities (on which there also are city symphonies). Rather, it was continuously restructured in pursuit of the new. This was due to both the aim to preserve the modern image of New York and to plan the city in a way that would solve the space issue. The city continuously rose higher changing the urban fabric while every stage brought a new form of gentrification. The change in New York's built environment was so rapid that the city we see in the film and the present city are completely different. Of course, this drastic change can be seen not only in the built environment but also its values, cultural and ethnic structure, and problems. The biggest problems the viewer can observe in the interwar year New York symphonies are poverty, homelessness and the lives in Hoovervilles.

Even though issues such as homelessness are still valid, if city symphonies were presently produced they might have taken issues such as the struggle of Afro-American individuals and the racism they face, or the equal rights struggle of the LGBT+ community as their subjects. The European city symphonies may have chosen to reflect the refugee crisis, failure of integration policies in Germany, and Euro-skepticism through the camera of individuals who are critical about European Union. Taking into account how valuable documentation such films would provide if they were to be produced, one can once more acknowledge the value of the existing symphonies. In summation, I argue that city symphonies are vital resources that have captured the culture, lifestyle, architecture and problems of their period evidently and history is bound to benefit from them.

City symphonies are invaluable resources for examining the interwar years' built environment and society's relationship with this environment. Utilizing these films would lead to the reinterpretation of the existing literature as well as further and unique outcomes. This way, the interwar years can be analyzed and understood not only through historic documents but also visual products that are qualified as avant-garde documentaries.

As this thesis has put forward, various city filmmakers previously belonged to different disciplines of art. Therefore, further than their relation to built environment, city symphonies can also be benefitted within the context of analyzing the period's art

movements. I anticipate that this study will become the foundation of my own studies that will focus on the trio of cinema, art and built environment as well as guide others in this interdisciplinary prolific subject.

Lastly, I hope that the accumulation of knowledge I have acquired within the duration of this study will guide me towards finding and studying the city symphonies that are presumed to be done in and about Turkey. Another name for city symphonies is city poems which further encourages me to focus my investigations on Nâzım Hikmet, who is presumed to have produced city symphonies (city poems) on Istanbul and Bursa. The issue of whether these exist and where they might be found has given these city symphonies a mythical quality. The discovery and examination of these would be an unmatched contribution both to the Turkish cinema and literature allowing new studies to thrive. It would illuminate how the possibly the greatest poet of 20th century perceived Istanbul and Bursa as well as the structure and life of these cities. This way, history of Turkish cinema, literature, architecture and photography can be re-studied as a whole, bringing new layers to the subject that nourish from visual sources.

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APPENDICES

A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

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B. TURKISH SUMMARY / TRKE ZET

Bu tez, *New York Őehir Senfonileri: İki Savaő Arası Modernitesinin Eleőtirisi ve Propagandası*, New York Őehrinde çekilen on bir filmi inceleyerek iki savaő arası dönemindeki moderniteyi incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. New York Őehri, ziyaretçileri, göç eden insanların yeni yurtları ve zaten orada yaşayan insanları tarafından çekilen filmleriyle çok katmanlı bir mimarlık tarihi çalışmasına olanak sunmaktadır. New York Őehir senfonilerini özel kılan bir başka husus da yalnızca bir tanesi hariç tüm filmlerin bağımsız filmler olmasıdır; herhangi bir grup ya da kiői tarafından komisyonla ürettirilmeyen bu filmler mimarlık tarihi çalışmalara için değerli veriler vermektedirler.

Őehir senfonileri, en kısa tanımla, modern kent ve kentteki yaşam üzerine yapılan filmlerdir. Bu filmler Őehrin modern yapılarını sergilemekle beraber, modern Őehirde yaşamın nasıl olduėuna, yaşayanların ve ekonomik aktivitelerin çeőtliėine dair bilgiler sunarlar; bu bağlamda da sinema tarihindeki ilk örnekleri teşkil ederler. Tıpkı erken sinema filmlerinde makinaların, insanların ve hayvanların hareketleri nasıl belgelendiyse ve seyirci hareketleri ilk kez başka bir araç üzerinden gördüyse, izleyiciler Őehir senfonileri aracılığıyla yaşadıkları Őehirlerin ilk kez nasıl işlediėini görmüşlerdir.

Őehir senfonileri, modern Őehirlerdeki yaşama dair değerli bilgiler bulunduran avangart belgesellerdir. Toplumun sosyal yapısı, modern Őehirleri tanımlayan yapılar Őehir senfonilerinde öne çıkar ve dönemin modernitesini anlamak için uygun görseller sunarlar. Dört kıtaya yayılan bu film akımı seksenden fazla film barındırarak, sadece dönemin öne çıkan Őehirlerini değil, modernliėi diėerleri tarafından gölgelenmiş Őehirleri de anlaya olanak tanırırlar. Bu sebeple, Tokyo, Milan, New York, Berlin, Paris Moskova gibi dönemin en önemli ve modern ikon olarak görülen Őehirlerinin yanı sıra, Őehir senfonileri Prag, Lizbon, Nice, Őangay, Helsinki, Granada, Belgrad, Stockholm, Sao Paulo gibi Őehirleri de ele alarak modernitenin çoėulluėunu vurgulamışlardır. Őehir senfonileri Őu an için seksenden fazla filmi barındıran bir film akımıdır. Fakat

çoğunlukla amatör filmlerden oluşan, film çekmeye yeni başlamış amatör film yapımcıları için eşsiz fırsatlar sunan modern şehirlere dair daha birçok film olduğu düşünülmektedir.

İçlerinde tanınan, dönemin önde gelen film yönetmenleri olsa da şehir senfonileri çeken yönetmenlerin içinde azımsanmayacak kadar amatör film yönetmeni de vardır. Modern şehirlerin çok yönlülüğü, hareketliliği ve zıtlıklar barındıran imgeleri, sinemaya yeni adım atan birçok film meraklısına cazip gelmiş olmalı. Aynı zamanda, her sokakta yeni görseller barındıran şehirler, farklı teknikleri deneyimlemek isteyen yönetmenler içinde olanaklar sağlamıştır.

Şehir senfonilerini bir üslup yapan belli başlı ilkeler vardır. Bunların ilki bu senfonilerin içeriğiyle alakalı. Makineleşme, çeşitli ulaşım araçları, liman aktiviteleri, inşaat sahaları, şehir senfonilerinde çokça yer alan içeriklerdir. Bu içerikler adeta modern şehirlerin ayrılmaz birer parçaları olarak görülmüş ve modernliği belirleyen unsurlar olarak tanımlanmışlardır. Hızla ilerleyen tramvaylar, düzenli/düzensiz trafik şeritleri halinde arabalar hareketli ve canlı görüntüler sunarak ana akım sinemadan memnun olmayan ve yeni yöntemler denemek isteyen yönetmenlerin çekmeyi tercih ettiği görseller sunmuşlardır. Liman şehri olan metropollerin senfonileri sıklıkla limanları şehirlerin adet kalbi olarak tanımlar. Öte yandan inşaat işçilerinin sahadaki çalışmalarına sıklıkla yer verilir ve bu çalışmaların gelecekte oluşacak metropol, hatta ve de hatta metropoller zincirine dönüşeceği izlenimi uyandırılır. Ayrıca, bütün zorluklara rağmen iletişim hattının devamını sağlayan telefon operatörleri, adeta bir orkestra şefi gibi trafiği yönlendiren trafik polisleri, sıkışık odalarda çalışan doktor ve ebeler ve daha birçok profesyoneller, metropolü ayakta tutan insanlar olarak sıklıkla şehir senfonilerinde kendilerine yer bulurlar. Özetlemek gerekirse, modern şehirleri oluşturan makineler ve şehirleri ayakta tutan çalışanlar, şehir senfonilerinin ayrılmaz parçalarıdır.

Şehir senfonilerine tanımlayan diğer bir kriter ise bu film akımının başvurduğu yapılarıdır. Çoğunlukla şehir senfonileri, bir günde çekilmiş olmasalar da “şehirde bir gün” yapısını kullanır. Genellikle sabah şehirlere varış (bu çoğunlukla limana ulaşan vapur, tren ve arabanın temsili bir şekilde şehre varmasının imgeleriyle sağlanır), çalışma ve ticaretin olduğu öğle vakti ve eğlencelerin olduğu gece vaktiyle “şehirde

bir gün” algısı sağlanır. Bunu sağlamak için gün doğumundan gün batımına olan aktiviteler sıralansa da alternatif anlatımlar da mevcuttur: Gün doğumundan gün batımına, öğlenden gece yarısına ya da sabahdan öğlene kadar süreyi içeriğine dahil eden anlatımlar, bu yapılardan sadece birkaçıdır.

Şehir senfonilerini bu denli özel kılan, özellikle de mimarlık tarihi için incelenmeye değer kılan özellik, aslında bu film akımının ortaya çıkışına kadar böyle bir tarz olmamasından ileri gelir. Benzer bir şekilde şehirleri inceleyen, aslında şehir senfonilerinin öncülü olabilecek filmler mevcuttu. Fakat bu filmler, örneğin seyahat filmleri, şehirlere ve şehirlerdeki yaşamlara dair derinlemesine bir bilgi vermekten yoksundu. Bu tip filmler, şehirlerin tümünü incelemek yerine, şehirlerin turistik yüzlerini oluşturan yapılarla ilgilenmiş ve şehirlere dair ancak sınırlı sayıda bilgi vermişlerdir. Şehir senfonileri, öncüllerinin aksine daha bütüncül bir tutumla, şehirlerin sundukları tüm boşlukları, caddeleri, sokakları nakletmişlerdir ve bu sayede mimarlık ve kent tarihi yazımı için değerli bilgiler verirler.

New York senfonileri, diğer senfoniler içinde de ayrı bir yere sahiptirler. Aslında birçok şehir senfonisi, özellikle de üslubun en meşhur filmleri olan Ruttmann’ın *Berlin* filmi ve Vertov’un *Man with a Movie Camera* filmi, içinde bulundukları rejimlerin propagandasını yapan filmlerdir. Ruttmann liberal Weimar Cumhuriyetinin insanların yaşayışını ve rejim mükemmelliğini nasıl övdüyse, Vertov da aynısını yeni kurulmuş Sovyetler Birliği için yapmıştır. Fakat New York senfonileri, sadece katıksız bir propagandanın aksine, şehri kimi zaman eleştirmiş ve kimi zamansa şehri duygusal bir şekilde ele almıştır.

Bununla beraber, bazı New York senfonileri, makineyi, makineleşmeyi ve teknolojiyi şehrin itici gücü olarak tanımlamıştır. Liman ve inşaat işçileri büyük enerji harcayarak sürekli değişmekte olan metropolü inşa etmek için uğraşırlar. Bu sebeple, zıtlıklar barındırarak aynı zamanda bulunan çeşitli dizilmeler filmlerde yer alarak, şehrin sürekli olarak büyük bir hırsla büyüyeceği, eninde sonunda yeni alanları işgal edeceği, eski ve modası geçmiş binaları yıkarak yerlerine yenisini inşa edeceği ve bunların hepsinin devasa bir oluşum içinde New York’u yaratacağının izlenimi uyandırılır.

Özellikle New York’un modernliğine ve makineleşmesine dikkat çeken filmler Charles Sheeler ve Paul Strand’in filmi *Manhatta* (1921) ve Robert Flaherty’nin

Twenty-four Dollar Island (1927) filmidir ve *Manhatta* aynı zamanda şehir senfonileri akımını başlatan film olarak da oldukça değerlidir. Bu iki film, sürelerinin büyük bir kısmını makineleşmenin ve teknolojinin modern şehirlerde nasıl önemli roller oynadığına adanmıştır. Devasa vinçlerin, tramvayların ve gökdelenlerin imgeleri sıklıkla verilir ve bunların modern şehirlerin sembolleri olduğu vurgulanır. Bu filmler, tıpkı hemen her şehir senfonisinde olduğu gibi, sıra dışı açılarla çekilmişlerdir. Özellikle çok yüksekte ve çok alçaktan yapılan çekimler, makinelerin ve teknolojinin gücünü vurguladığı kadar insanların bunlar arasında ne kadar önemsiz görüldüğü algısına yol açar. Gökdelenlerin tepesinden yapılan filmlerde, insanlar (ve arabalar) sanki karıncaymışçasına kadar ufak görünür. Çok alçaktan yapılan çekimlerdeyse, gökdelenlerin insanları neredeyse ezmekteymiş olduğu gibi görüntüler ortaya çıkar. Hatta bu görüntüler öylesine dikkat çekmiştir ki, bazı izleyenler, özellikle Robert Flaherty'nin filmini izlerken neredeyse nefessiz kaldıklarını ve bunaldıklarını söylemişlerdir. Hatta bazıları bu yorumlardan yola çıkarak, filmlerin kritik olduğu fikrine de varmışlardır. Oysa ki filmler her ne kadar kentsel sıkışıklığı temsil de etseler ve çeşitli problemler göze çarparsa da, bu tez de bu filmlerin kritik olmadığı öne sürülmüştür. Çünkü Paul Strand modern şehirleri çekerek ün kazanmış, yine Charles Sheeler “makine zamanı artisti” olarak ün kazanmış bir ressamdır. Flaherty ise bir mühendis ve aynı zamanda bir kaşiftir. Flaherty'e her zaman topraklarda verilen mücadele ve bununla baş edebilme ilgi çekici gelmiştir. Yine bu filmde de New York'un nasıl bir zamanlar sıradan bir toprak parçasından birkaç yüzyılda ekonomi ve ticaret merkezine geldiği vurgulanmıştır.

New York senfonileri ayrıca şehrin ziyaretçileri tarafından da üretilmiştir. Uluslararası modern ikon ve Amerika'nın itici gücü olarak, hem içeriden hem de uluslararası birçok göç almıştır. Kendine has modernliğiyle yeni bir şey arayan birçok insan New York'u yeni yurdu olarak belirlemiş ve oraya yerleşmiştir. Yeninin arayışında New York şehrine taşınanlar arasında, sanatçılar azımsanmayacak kadar çoklardır. Bunlardan bazıları şehir senfonisi de çekmiş ve New York senfonileri oluşumuna katkı sağlamışlardır. Bu kişiler Robert Florey ve Rudy Burckhardt'tır.

Robert Florey'nin çektiği *Skyscraper Symphony* (1929) turistik bir film olmaktan ziyade, aslında Florey'nin yeni ülkesiyle kurduğu bir diyalog olarak düşünülebilir. Fransa'da doğan Florey, İsviçre'de filmler çektikten sonra endüstriye yakın olmak

amacıyla genç yaşta Birleşik Devletlere göç etti. Sıklıkla Hollywood'un aynı metotları denemesinden rahatsızlığını dile getirdi. Bir gün, gece vardiyasından döndükten sonra perçin makinesinin sesinden olayı uyuyamadı ve etrafında gördüklerini çekti. *Skyscraper Symphony* (1929) filmi bu şekilde, uykusuzluk, eski ülkesine ait nostalji ve belki de Amerika'da yaşadığı hayal kırıklığıyla ortaya çıktı. Film, ilginç bir şekilde New York'ta yeni inşa edilen Presbiteryen hastanesine büyük bir bölüm ayırmıştır. Neo klasik binaların New York'ta yeni yükselen zigurat gibi binalarla karşılaştırmalı olarak sunulması, bir yandan kimlik arayışı bir yandan da ileride gökdelenlerle dolacak New York'un negatif etkilerine dair bir öngörü niteliği taşımaktadır.

New York'a ziyaretçi olarak gelen bir diğer isim Rudy Burckhardt ise *Seeing the World* (1937) filminde çoğunlukla turistik alanlara odaklanmıştır. Bu turistik alanlara odaklanış, New York'un mimarisini ve kentsel tasarımını övmektense, bir yergi niteliği taşımaktadır. Film, şehir senfonisi akımında pek sık görülmeyen bir şekilde sesli film, hatta dahası bu ses alaycı bir tonla şehri tanıtır. Burckhardt, filminde sırasıyla şehirdeki anıtları ve turistik nitelik binaları gösterdikten sonra, filmin kapanışında şehre alaycı bir şekilde yaklaşan bir haritaya ve üzerinde konumlandırılmış üç boyutlu nesnelere yer verir. Bu, New York'un yapılı çevresinin aynılığının ve onu oluşturan sokakların yeni imgeler sunmayışının bir eleştirisidir: New York, Burckhardt'ın filmine göre sadece birkaç binadan ve anıttan ibarettir.

Modernitenin nasıl temsil edildiği haricinde, New York senfonileri şehrin ekonomisine de ışık tutmaktadır. Robert Flaherty'nin *Twenty-four Dollar Island* (1927) eşi film akımında rastlanmaz bir şekilde New York'un Hollanda kolonisi olduğu döneme, hatta daha kesin ve net belirlemek gerekirse, Hollanda kolonisi oluşumuna dair resimlere ve haritalara yer vermiştir. Bu resimler Amerikalı yerliler ve koloniciler arasındaki Manhattan adasının satışını temsil eder. Bir şehir mitine göre, Hollandalı koloniciler Manhattan adasını Amerikan yerlilerinden yirmi dört dolar karşılığında almıştır. Bu mit, zamanla farklı süreçlerden geçmiş, ağızdan ağıza dolaşmış ve on dokuzuncu yüzyılda o zamanın parasının karşılığı olarak adanın yirmi dört dolara alındı ortaya sürülmüştür. Bu hikâyenin doğruluğu oldukça şüpheli olmakla beraber, New York'un en başından beri bir ticaret merkezi olduğunu ve Manhattan adasının alınıp satılabilir bir ada olduğunu belirtmektedir. Diğer bir deyişle, bugün zaten önemli bir ekonomi ve ticaret merkezi olan adanın, yüzyıllar önce de aynı

olduğunu ve ticaretin adeta adanın genetik yapısının bir parçası olduğunu öne sürmektedir. Ayrıca, batı merkezci bir bakış açısıyla kolonicilerin önemsiz gördüğü birkaç parça taşla (bir benzeri hikayedeki yirmi dört dolar'ın karşılığı kolonicilerin adayı boncuk ve taşlarla aldığıdır) yerlilerin büyülenebildiği ve bu sayede adayı satmalarıdır.

Şehir ekonomisine ve çeşitliliğine dikkat çeken bir diğer ise Irving Browning'in *City of Contrasts* (1931) filmidir. New York'un sokakları her türden ekonomik aktivitenin var olduğu yerlerdir. Sokak sanatçıları, seyyar satıcılar büyük bir rekabetle kazanç sağlamaya çalışmaktadırlar. Bu rekabet, binaların giriş katındaki dükkanlarda mimari değişimlere ve çeşitlemelere de sebep olmuştur. Dükkanlar, iş yerleri dikkat çekici ve gösterişli reklam panolarıyla müşterilerini çekmek için kıyasıya bir rekabet halinde gözlemlenmiştir. Dahası, dükkanların ön cepheleri önem kazanmış ve dükkanlar dışa dönük bir tasarımı benimsemişlerdir: İşletmelerini panolarla sundukları, ürünleri hazırladıkları ve satış yaptıkları hep ön cephelerdir. Ayrıca, Browning'in filmi, şehrin ekonomik faaliyetleri ve çeşitliliği sunduğu kadar, kültürel çeşitliliğine ve hatta gastronomi tarihine de ışık tutmaktadır. Kıyafetlerinde kültürel farklılıklar barındıran insanlar, aynı sokak üzerinde bulunmakta ve zaman içinde New York kültürünü oluşturacaklardır. Ayrıca, şüphesiz farklı kültürlerin içinde hep var olmuş, fakat batı dünyasında ancak yirminci yüzyılın sonlarında popülerite kazanmış vejetaryen yemek akımı, New York şehrinde lüks restoranların yanı sıra, Browning'in filminde gözlemlendiği üzere, sokak yemeği olarak da bulunabilmekteydi.

Browning'in filminde bulunan reklam rekabetinin bir başka boyutunu ise insanların reklam panoları halinde bürünüp sokaklarda bulunmasının sıklığı vurgulanmaktadır. Bu durum, şehrin her yanının ekonomik aktivite alanı olarak belirlediği kadar insanların da bu uğurda kullanıldığını göstermektedir. Reklam ve eğlence kültürü, ayrıca yine Burckhardt'ın bir başka filmi olan *The Pursuit of Happiness* (1940) ve Bonney Powell'ın *Manhattan Medley* (1931) de genişçe yer tutar. Bu filmler Amerikan rüyasını anlatan reklam ve eğlence kültürünü en iyi nakleden filmlerdir. Özellikle Powell'ın filmi içerisine gece çekimleri de ekleyerek, elektriğin New York'ta nasıl önemli olduğunu ve aynı zamanda Amerikan eğlence kültürüne ne gibi katkı sağladığı gösterilmektedir. Times Meydanı ve Broadway, New Yorkluların tüm gün çalıştıktan sonra enerjilerini yeniden toplamak için harcayacağı yerlerdir ve tam

teşekküllü bir Amerikan rüyası satar: Chevrolet reklam panoları, burleskler, tiyatro oyunları ve bunların tümünün ifade eder.

Bunların yanı sıra, New York senfonileri sıklıkla cinsel kimliği, zamanı ve ekonomik statüyü mekanlarla ilişkilendirir. Bu ilişkilendirmelerin sayı ve teması o kadar çoktur ki hemen her filmde gözlemlenebilir. Bunlar içerisinde Herman Weinberg'in *Autumn Fire* (1933) filmi dönemin cinsel kimlik algısına oldukça paralel bir anlatı sunar. Film, oldukça açıklayıcı bir usulde tertiplenmiştir ve şehir senfonilerinde pek sık görülmeyecek bir şekilde filmde aktörler rol alır. Filmin ana konusu ayrılık acısı çeken bir çiftin acılarını çekildikleri inzivada onarmalarıdır. Kadın, kırsal bir yerde ayrılığı atlatmaya çalışır. Ufak yürüyüşlere çıkar, göl kenarında ağaçları izler. Yansımada gördükleri doğadır ve dönüp dolaşıp geri döndüğü yer de doğanın içinde herhangi bir yapıyla çevreden uzak bir evdir. Öte yandan, adam ayrılık acısını melankoli şehri New York'ta atlatmaya çalışır ve yansımada gördüğü hem kendisi hem de ileri teknoloji ürünü gökdelenlerdir. Kadın doğaya, erkek ise modern şehirlere —erkeklerin yüzyıllardır büyük mücadeleyle kazandığı yapay yerlere— aittir.

Bu seçimler rastgele alınmış kararlar olarak görülebilir. Fakat erkeğin kamusal ve modern şehirlerle, kadının ise doğayla ilişkilendirilmesi birçok New York senfonisinde görülmektedir. Burckhardt'ın *Seeing the World* (1937) filmi kadın ve erkeğe benzer roller atar. Film özgürlük heykelini, yani kadın simgesini denizin ortasında göstermeye gayret etmiştir. Yine aynı film, erkeğin eve geç saatte tek başına dönmesi, kadının evde kalması, barda çıkan kavgayla akşam saatlerinin kadın için tehlikeli olduğunu aktarır. Kadın izolasyonda, mahrem alanda ve doğada saklanmalıdır: New York senfonilerinin çoğu, bazıları bu kadar kuvvetli belirtmemekle beraber, bu temayı takip eder.

Kadınlara atanan ve uygun görülen başka bir zaman dilimi ise sabah saatleridir. Jay Leyda'nın *A Bronx Morning* (1931) filmi, Bronx semtinde bir sabah rutinini anlatır. Başlangıçta hayatta yoksun olan bu semtte saat ilerledikçe dükkanlar açılmaya ve insanlar görülmeye başlar. Fakat ilginç olan, birkaç satıcı hariç bütün sokak kadınlara aittir. Fakat bu durum, kadınların egemenliğinden ziyade, kadınlara ayrılmış bir zaman dilimi niteliği taşır. Kadınlar bu saatlerde bir eş ve anne olarak sorumluluklarını yerine getirmek için dışarı çıkarlar: Çocuklarını gezdirir, yemek için alışveriş yaparlar.

Burckhardt'ın *Seeing the World* (1937) filmi birçok kurgulanmış sahne içerir. Filmde bir sahnede New York'un yüksek sınıfının ilişkisini anlatır. Kadın sahip olduğu koltuklar içerisinde yatarak kitap okur ve büyük olasılıkla kitapta okuduğu bir bilgi üzerine harekete geçip resim çerçevesini eğik tutmaya karar verir, öte yandan adam buna karşı çıkar ve çerçeveyi düzeltmeye karar verir. Bu sahne şehrin ayrıcalıklı sınıfının sanata karşı kültürsüzlüğünü ve kadının mülkiyet sevdasını belirtmek için uzunca bir süre devam eder. New York'un ayrıcalıklı sınıfı mahrem, evsel bir alana ve bu konuda anlamsız tartışmalara girecek zamana sahiptir.

Buna karşılık bazı New York senfonileri, “diğerlerinin” evsel hayatına da ışık tutar. Irving Browning'in *City of Contrasts* (1931) filmi esas olarak şehrin sokaklarındaki çeşitli ekonomik aktivelere ve kültürel çeşitliliğe dikkat çeken bir filmidir. Browning filminde kamusal alanları adeta ekonomiyle özdeşleştirmiş ve bu yerleri Amerikan ekonomisinin hayat bulduğu yerler olarak tanımlamıştır. Fakat çok kısa bir sahnede, ayrıca Riverside park'taki Hooverville'ı da çekmiş ve filmine dahil etmiştir. Hooverville, büyük buhran döneminde ülkenin birçok yerinde bulunan gecekondulardır ve bu gecekondular ismini, ekonomik krizden sıkça sorumlu tutulan dönemin başbakanı Herbert Hoover'dan alır. Hooverville'deki sığınaklar, ev olmaktan çok uzak yapılardır. Herhangi artık malzemelerle sadece hacimsel birlik oluşturması için yapılmış derme çatma yapılar, boş olan her yerde olabilirlerdi. Browning, ana konusu şehir ekonomisi olan filminde, ayrıca bu gecekondulardaki sığınaklardan birinin içini de çeker. Duvarlarında ve çatılarında boşluklar bulunan, fonksiyonunu yerine olduğu gibi yerine getiremeyen kapısı olan bu sığınakta kurgulanmış sahne olması pek mümkün görünmemektedir. Herhangi bir insan kapıyı açıp, içeriye girebilir. Bu sayede toplumun en alt tabakasında bulunanların mahrem yaşamı bulunmamaktadır, gecekondularda yaşayanların hayatı kamusaldır. Benzer şekilde, yaşadıkları yerler ekonomik döngünün bir parçasıdır ve yok olmaya mahkumdur.

Lewis Jacobs'un *Footnote to Fact* (1933) filmi toplumun en alt kesiminin evsel yaşamına ışık tutan bir başka film. Bu film de şehir senfonilerinde pek sık görülmeyen bir özellik taşıyarak kurgulanmış sahne içermektedir. Sahnede, bir kadın sallanan sandalyede sallanmaktadır. Bu esasında ana olay olmakla beraber şehirden farklı görüntülerin araya konulması, Jacobs'un incelikle kurguladığı, kadının düşüncelerini anlamamıza yarayan bir araç niteliği taşımaktadır. Sahnelerde ölü bir domuz, sokakta

uyuyan evsiz bir adam, savaş alanında çarpışan askerler, yiyecek için son kıyafetlerini satan evsizlerin görüntüsü geçmektedir. Bu aslında, kadın varmak üzere olduğu sonun imgelem yöntemiyle anlatımıdır. Kadın son sahnede intihar eder ve film böylece sona erir.

Benzer durum, alt tabakanın evsel yaşamı, Jay Leyda'nın *A Bronx Morning* (1931) filminde de görülebilir. Toplumun alt sınıfını oluşturan insanları anlatan filmde sahne geçişleri arasında "Bronx çalışır ve sokaklarda yaşar" yazmaktadır. Hayatları belli seviyede mahremiyete sahip bu tabaka, toplumsal birliğin ve hayatta kalma mücadelesinin sonucu olarak, bir arada yaşamak durumunda kalmıştır.

New York'la başlayan iki savaş arasındaki şehir senfonileri akımı, yine bir New York senfonisi ile sonlanmıştır. Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke'in *The City* (1939-1940) filmi aslında teknik olarak bir şehir senfonisi değildir, fakat şehir senfonilerinin tüm özelliklerini barındırır. Beş bölüm halinde olan bu film sistematik olarak Amerika'daki yerleşimlerin nasıl değiştiğini ve "geliştiğini" gösterir. Film New England bölgesindeki kırsal bir yerle başlar ve hayatın birkaç yüzyıl önce nasıl daha temiz, fakat insanların tüm gün çalıştığından bahseder. Teknolojinin gelişi insanların yaşamını yaşamlarını kolaylaştırmadığı, aksine insanların sanayi bölgeleri etrafındaki derme çatma yapılarda yaşamaya mecbur bırakıldığı belirtilir. Sonraki aşama, yani modern metropol kentlerde insanların bu sorunları çözülmemiş, yerine sıkışık yerlerde yaşamaya mahrum bırakılan, kurallarla zapt edilen ve tüketimi destekleyen kentlerde yaşamaya itmiştir.

New York senfonileri, aynı zamanda şehir senfonileri, ideal yaşamın nasıl olması gerektiğini anlatan bir filmle sonlanmıştır. Bu yerleşim Ebenezer Howard'ın garden city, yani bahçeli evler akımıdır. Böyle bir yerleşimde, yaşayanlar makineleşme altında ezilmeden, fakat hayatlarının bir parçası olarak tutarak en ideal hayatı yaşayabilirler: Doğadan kopmadan ve modern yaşamdan uzaklaşmadan.

Özetle, şehir senfonileri, iki savaş arası dönemdeki yapıli çevreyi ve insanların bu çevreyle ilişkisini incelemek için eşsiz kaynaklardır. Bu filmlerin değerlendirilmesi, var olan çalışmaları yeniden yorumlamamıza ve yeniden anlamlandırmamıza yol açacaktır. Böylelikle, iki savaş arasındaki dönem, tarihsel belgelerin yanı sıra, avangard belgesel niteliği taşıyan görsellerle buluşacak ve daha iyi anlaşılacaktır.

Şehir senfonileri, ayrıca dönem içindeki sanat akımları bağlamında da yeniden değerlendirilmelidir. Belirtildiği üzere, birçok şehir senfonisi film yönetmeni, önceden farklı sanat disiplinlerindendi. Bu tezde incelediğim çalışmalarımın ileride sinema, sanat, yapılı çevre üçgeninde yeni çalışmalara yönelmesini umuyorum.

Son olarak, bu çalışmalardan edindiğim birikimin, Türkiye’de yapılmış olduğu düşünülen şehir senfonilerini araştırmama, bulmama ve bu konuda yeni çalışmalara yol açmasını umuyorum. Şehir senfonilerinin diğer adı şehir şiirleridir. Var olduğu düşünülen fakat bulunamayan, varlığı neredeyse mitle gerçek arasında olan, Nazım Hikmet’in çektiği düşünülen İstanbul Senfonisi ve Bursa Senfonisinin keşfedilmesi hem Türk sineması hem de Türk edebiyatı için eşsiz değerler taşıyacak ve yeni çalışmalara olanak sağlayacaktır. 20. Yüzyılın belki de en önemli şairinin, İstanbul’u ve Bursa’yı nasıl ele aldığı, aynı zamanda şehirlerin yapılı çevresine de ışık tutacaktır. Böylelikle, Türkiye tarihi sinema, edebiyat, mimarlık, fotoğraflarla yeniden incelenebilir ve böylelikle yeni bir görsel boyut kazanabilir.

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