

**Charlotte KRAUSS**

*Université de Poitiers*

*France*

**The "Ornament of the Crowd" between Text and Image:  
Functions of Anonymous Crowds in Representations of the City**

Among the numerous depictions of the city in literature as well as in the pictorial art of the 1920s, essential elements are street alignments, factory buildings and the crowd: pedestrians, passengers, workers, schoolchildren, customers, soldiers, athletes, spectators, and onlookers symbolize a life that has been greatly changed by industrialization and modern transportation. The mass fills the streets and buildings, it is impressive or even terrifying – but in any case, individuals dissolve into the mass. If at all, figures known by name emerge from the crowd only in brief moments (for example, in John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*). Crowds even tend towards abstraction: the contemporary architect and cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer identified the *Ornament of the mass* in the strongly symbolically charged depictions of crowds – his text with the same title is from 1927.

My lecture will analyze the representation of anonymous crowds in three very different but almost contemporaneous works: in Dos Passos's metropolitan novel *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), in Walther Ruttmann's film *Berlin, Symphony of a Metropolis* (1927), and in Frans Masereel's *The City* (1925), a history without words consisting of one hundred woodcuts, precursor of the graphic novel. A reading with Kracauer of the anonymization and abstraction of crowds and a comparison of representation through text, image, and film will help define the functions of the crowd in the 1920s metropolitan narrative.