

Technological reproduction at odds: Hand and cinematography in Robert Wiene's *The Hands of Orlac*

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Abstract

Around 1900, the paradigm of technological reproducibility threatened to replace the hand. As a matter of fact, though, hands speak the language of cinematic media specificity quite fluently. With its fine motor manipulations, the hand offers an intimate image of essentially human traits and showcases the logic of motion pictures at large. In addition, pointing gestures and dramatic poses establish narrative chains. A close reading of *The Hands of Orlac* (*Orlacs Hände*, Robert Wiene, 1924) will explain how hands allow for this marriage between a cinema of attraction and of narration in the Weimar period. One can discern a scientific interest for the hand in parallel with its occult implications. Orlac's murderous hands feature both, the motif of the enchanted doppelgänger as well as newly established techniques like prosthetic labor or the use of fingerprint. Even though the *topoi* of the mythological and the technological hand challenged one another after World War One, occultism and scientific progress meant less of a contradiction than one might think. Instead, the hand makes *explicit* a discourse which was only *implicit* at the time: technology and its impact on works of art appear as the natural extension to the human body, rather than as a substitution.

Murderous Hands

The elective affinity between the human hand and cinema is as alluring as it is complex. When a film chooses to make a hand its protagonist, the outcome is, more often than not, a discombobulated plot instead of a relaxing movie night. The murderous hands in *The Hands of Orlac* (*Orlacs Hände*, Robert Wiene, 1924) shall serve as a case study for the fascinating relationship that the hand upholds with the cinematographic medium.

The film's plot is indeed quite convoluted. Based on Maurice Renard's novel *Les Mains d'Orlac* (1920), it uses a number of central motifs common in the

Weimar era,¹ most significantly the figure of the doppelgänger. The film tells the story of the pianist Paul Orlac (Conrad Veidt) whose hands are cut off in a train accident. To allow Orlac to pursue his career, a surgeon transplants the two hands of Vasseur, a recently executed murderer, onto Orlac's arms. When Orlac learns about the origin of his new hands, he is terrified by the idea that they might bear a natural disposition for violence and murder.

In this essay, I investigate how Wiene's *The Hands of Orlac* reflects a specific appeal of the hand. After the turn of the century, the hand lent itself to various kinds of uncanny fantasies of disfiguration and dismembering, thus generating a high degree of emotional expressiveness, as well as complex narrative chains. A faithful companion to early filmmaking, hands highlight the spectacular elements of the cinematic medium along with its various techniques of creating a narrative. I am following the distinction made by film scholar Tom Gunning, who argues that the novelty of images in motion was fertile ground for films that proved to be equally spectacular, bringing such attractions as boxing fights, vaudeville dancers or the Coney Island rollercoaster in front of the camera lens. Actual plotlines, editing continuity, and character depth and development, for that matter, were only introduced later. From roughly 1895 to 1906, Gunning describes this most common form of early cinema as follows: '[T]he cinema of attractions solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle — a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself.'² Yet, banal though it may seem at first glance, the very curiosity about cinema in the early days was precisely its ability to set still images in motion. The novelty of moving images made a one-of-a-kind technological apparatus.³ It is no coincidence that the hand would often appear on-screen: its motoric abilities — the fine inclinations of each single finger, the act of grasping — made the hand a topic of particular interest in early filmmaking. What is more, the hand also served to attenuate the initial shock experience of the mechanical simulation of movement prompted by the cinematic apparatus. After all, hands bear a certain immediacy: their traits as well as their actions are of an essential human nature that makes it easy for the spectator to identify with a hand on screen.

Wiene had this mitigating effect of the hand fully in place. The motif of the hand as enchanted doppelgänger subject to the will of another — and, conversely, the motoric agency every hand theoretically possesses — mirrors the novel capacities of the cinematic apparatus. A case study for the hand as secret protagonist, *The Hands of Orlac* triggers a debate typical of the era, namely, the conflict between

¹ Already after its release, the film was praised for the use of expressionistic motifs, however embedded in the sober realism of *New Objectivity*: See Uli Jung and Walter Schatzberg, *Der Caligari Regisseur Robert Wiene* (Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1995), p. 118–19.

² Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attractions. Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. by Thomas Elsaesser (London: BFI, 2008), pp. 56–62 (p. 59).

³ Ivi, p. 58.

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scientific progress and its representation in media of technological reproduction. As will become clear, the hand conflates the human and the technological, thereby allowing for a number of media-specific considerations that have arisen from the very beginning of cinema.

Moving Hands

The plot of Orloc losing his hands has often been translated into a loss of his economic as well as sexual dexterity.⁴ While such readings rightfully place Orloc within the prototypical postwar *conditio humana*, I argue that more than being a symptom of a troubled state of mind, Orloc's hands need to be assessed in their capacity to negotiate the rivalry between technological reproduction and manual handicraft. The conceptual curiosity of hands derives from the fact that they always already contain the very principle of representation. They illustrate and execute the materialization of the immaterial, the becoming of form and the procedures of artistic creation. Precisely in this meta-reflexive quality, the hand enters in dialogue with the ways in which technological variety in the film differs from, improves, or even replaces established frameworks of representation. The dilemma to enhance the human body by means of technology, and the concomitant need to reaffirm bodily sense perception against its replacement by the machine — in other words, the synchronous extension and amputation of the human sensorium by the technical apparatus — evolves as the film's central conflict.

Before diving into a closer reading of *The Hands of Orloc*, it is worthwhile considering some of the first theoretical framings of the relationship between body and film camera. Pioneering film theorist Béla Balázs, for instance, accorded a special value to the manifold appearance of cinematic hands in close-up. In *Visible Man*, Balázs writes:

[T]he magnifying glass of the cinematograph brings us closer to the individual cells of life, it allows us to feel the texture and substance of life in its concrete detail. It shows you what your hand is doing, though normally you take no notice.⁵

He attests to the haptic quality of the object when framed in close-up, a framing that makes the material quality of life perceptible. What is important to note is the apparent indifference of the mind towards a more thorough topography of the everyday. Balázs's argument anticipates Walter Benjamin's passage on the

⁴ See, for instance, Anjeana Hans, "'These Hands Are Not My Hands': War Trauma and Masculinity in Crisis in Robert Wiene's *Orlacs Hände* (1924)', in *The Many Faces of Weimar Cinema*, ed. by Christian Rogowski (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), pp. 102–15.

⁵ Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and the Spirit of Film*, ed. by Erica Carter (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2011), p. 38.

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‘optical unconscious’ in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility* a decade later:

We are familiar with the movement of picking up a cigarette lighter or a spoon, but know almost nothing of what really goes on between hand and metal, and still less how this varies with different moods. This is where the camera comes into play, with all its resources for swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching or compressing a sequence, enlarging or reducing an object.⁶

Benjamin argues that the intervention of the camera, in conjunction with film editing, dissects the world with microscopic precision, enabling cinema to expose regions of human experience that hitherto had remained invisible. Pushing it further, I argue that the hand plays no incidental role in extending the human sensorium by means of the technical apparatus. Benjamin defines the significance as well as the function of the close-up with respect to tactility. He uses hands — more precisely, their ability to grasp — in order to show the extent to which tactile sensations condition the visual field that cinematography creates. In Benjamin’s example, in which someone absent-mindedly picks up a cigarette lighter, the hand figures as a medium to re-construct the logic of movement *within* the medium of film. ‘Filming something’ translates into ‘grasping something’.⁷ In other words, bodily mechanics serves as a blueprint for the technical apparatus. Due to its proto-technological nature, the hand epitomizes a cinema of attractions, bridging the metamorphosis from the inanimate to the animated. In addition, the hand is intimate and gives the attraction a greater immediacy.

Uncanny Hands

Inversely, the familiarity of the hand might also trigger its great potential for uncanniness. As understood by Sigmund Freud, uncanny effects are even more forceful when the object is familiar, an ambivalence he detected within the German word *unheimlich* (uncanny): it is the opposite of *heimlich*, which simultaneously means both ‘secretive’ and ‘homely, cozy’.⁸ If we follow Benjamin, it can be said that film in general bears the logic of the uncanny when it presents what is real as the most unfamiliar ground of human existence. The commonality of a hand picking up a lighter reinforces the uncanny experience of film even

⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, ed. by M. Jennings, B. Doherty, and T. Levin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 37.

⁷ Also in the implicit sense of understanding (‘grasping’) something better by capturing it on film.

⁸ Accordingly, Freud defines the uncanny as ‘something familiar that has been repressed’: Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, in Id., *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, ed. by James Strachey, vol. xvii, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works by Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1968), pp. 218–53 (p. 244).

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further. A close-up of a hand, severed from the rest of the body, as if acting independently, thus reveals a high degree of eerie uncontrollability.⁹ This leaves us with the hand as twofold: the attraction value of the hand is easy to identify with, and, simultaneously, its immediacy bestows the hand with a high degree of uncanniness which, in turn, creates the conditions for the hand to start talking and tell stories.

This twofold nature is precisely that on which *The Hands of Orlac* relies, and what marks the conjoining of a cinema of attractions with a cinema of narration. On the surface, *The Hands of Orlac* would be a simple crime story, were it not for the criminal Nera tricking Orlac into believing that supernatural forces are playing cruel games with him. Orlac's amputated hands are located at the border between the occult and science: their gestures make them indicative of Orlac's unsettled state of mind. At the same time, the topos of amputation turns them into a token of a new politics of the human body emerging after World War I, which tries to merge technology and physical ability.

First, let us turn to the persuasiveness of Orlac's cinematic hands.¹⁰ Critics called the outstanding performance by Conrad Veidt, who plays Orlac, a 'work of genius' and extolled the eloquence of his hands.¹¹ Indeed, his acting leaves quite a mark on the spectator. Tricked into believing his transplanted hands commit murderous acts against his will, Orlac slowly loses control. Around halfway through the movie, we see him sleepwalking through the house, his hands stretched out, guiding his way. In such sequences, Veidt succeeds in completely externalizing his own hands. The film does not even need to rely on a caption of his hands in close-up since Veidt continually acts as if his hands were not part of his body, singling them out by means of his body language instead of editing techniques (fig. 1). The expression of Veidt's hands makes them an object of attraction precisely within the framework of a cinema of narration — as a matter of fact, his hands make the plotline plausible and effective in the first place. Orlac is presented as a completely detached onlooker to his own hands in motion, a detachment which becomes the film's central motif. The camera singles them out, puts his cramped hands in the very center of the frame, or lets Orlac get just close enough so that his hands seem to protrude from the screen, reaching out to kill. Nevertheless, the film is replete with hands in actual close-up, whether it be Orlac's hands failing to play the piano, a ghostly hand haunting his dreams, or the isolated frame of his hands sneaking around a corner as if they had a life of their own. Apart from Wiene's curiosity for severed, murderous hands

⁹ Freud equally points to the uncanniness of the severed hand. Ivi, p. 19.

¹⁰ Lucia Ruprecht provides an excellent study on sign language and hand gestures in the 1920ies: Lucia Ruprecht, 'Ambivalent Agency: Gestural Performances of Hands in Weimar Dance and Film', *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 46.3 (2010), 255–75.

¹¹ Quoted after Claudia Liebrand and Ines Steiner, 'Monströse Moderne: Zur Funktionsstelle der *manus loquens* in Robert Wienes Orlacs *Hände*', in *Manus loquens: Medium der Geste – Gesten der Medien*, ed. by Matthias Bickenbach, Annina Klappert and Hedwig Pompe (Köln: DuMont, 2003), p. 250.

performing as uncanny storytellers, the media transfer from a literary to a filmic genre brings to the fore the proto-technological nature of the hand in an era that seems to have abandoned the need for this instrument.¹² Hence, the significance of the hand in the film is twofold: an occult object mimicking the enchanted doppelgänger and a scientific instrument that reflects the genealogy of modern media. This dual nature is spelled out by the way in which *The Hands of Orlac* showcases contemporary methods in criminology. In 1903, German police implemented fingerprint identification — so-called dactyloscopy — as the default procedure in criminal investigation.¹³ It did not take long until the fingerprint appeared in film. Eerie fantasies of severed hands paired with state-of-the-art criminal investigation gave a special narrative grain to tales of law-and-order.¹⁴ Forging Vasseur's fingerprints on a pair of rubber gloves, the criminal Nera proves to be the most tech-savvy character in *The Hands of Orlac*. An assistant to the surgeon at the hospital, he uses his knowledge about cutting-edge pathology — rubber gloves had just become a mandatory protective utensil in



Fig. 1: *The Hands of Orlac* (*Orlacs Hände*, Robert Wiene, 1924). Screen capture.

¹² Andrew J. Webber makes a media-specific argument about *The Hands of Orlac*, claiming that film is particular prone to grasp the nervous symptoms of the modern subject in crisis. Andrew J. Webber, 'The Manipulation of Fantasy and Trauma in *Orlacs Hände*', in *Words, Texts, Images*, ed. by Kathrin Kohl and Ritchie Robertson (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), p. 154.

¹³ See William James Herschel, *The Origin of Finger-Printing* (London: Oxford University Press, 1916). Due to the enduring evidence of fingerprints, dactyloscopy replaced identification via face recognition, a much more complex system developed by the French biometrics researcher Alphonse Bertillon. See Alphonse Bertillon, *Identification Anthropométrique* (Melun: Imprimerie administrative, 1893). For a detailed history of the fingerprint see Simon A. Cole, *Suspect Identities: A History of Fingerprinting and Criminal Identification* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ Brigitte Peucker notes how Fritz Lang's interest in objecthood made him the master of this genre: Brigitte Peucker, 'Fritz Lang: Object and Thing in the German Films', in *A Companion to Fritz Lang*, ed. by Joe McElhaney (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), pp. 291–310.

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medical practice — to twist the work of the police to his benefit.¹⁵ Cultural historian Carlo Ginzburg scrutinizes the matrix of this transition from the face to the hand in criminal investigation. He attests to a paradigm shift in modern epistemology at the turn of the century. At a time when subjectivity is shaken to its very foundations, he argues, it is no accident that the fingerprint is favored as the primary means for individual identification.¹⁶ The subject no longer leaves anything but traces, whose interpretation is left to the sciences:

[I]n the nineteenth century, traditional figures of those who control everyday life in society, such as priests, were increasingly superseded by new ones: physicians, policemen, psychiatrists, later on psychoanalysts and social scientists. It is in this context that we can understand the pervasive influence of the model based on clues — the semiotic paradigm.¹⁷

The Hands of Orlac reflects upon that reduction of the human subject to a semiotics of the trace. Actually, the film can itself be analyzed as a clue in Ginzburg's sense, since it delivers an apt description of modern society. Many a time, the hand and the technologies that surround it render the film a document of evidence on the impact of contemporary media of reproduction. Ostensibly a crime story, *The Hands of Orlac* is in fact an exposition of technological progress, from transportation to printing and beyond: the train accident covers the largest portion of the exposition of the film, with the camera hovering over the debris of destroyed wagons. At the film's beginning, a newspaper article praising Orlac's virtuosity on the piano is presented in close up. Other frames feature a vinyl record of Orlac's performances, or the telephones in the police office. Moreover, the film makes the science of fingerprinting its essential MacGuffin. Since all these devices and techniques are presented within the framework of a movie, the concept of technological reproduction — in a *mise en abyme* setting — is further reinforced. Apart from the technical procedures that the film quotes, its protagonist Nera himself defines the paradigm of reproduction. He reproduces identities, operates with fragments, and puts them back together as he wishes. He is a virtuoso of montage, embodying the art of cinema. Yet, the film countervails the technology with an emphasis on handwork. The printing press, for instance, is contrasted with Orlac's handwritten letter, while a central motif of the film remains the playing of the piano, a handwork whose success or failure determines Orlac's and his wife's wellbeing.

¹⁵ As a matter of fact, felonies of manipulating and erasing fingerprints were common at the time. See: Jürgen Thorwald, *The Century of the Detective* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1965).

¹⁶ See Carlo Ginzburg, 'Clues: Roots of a Scientific Paradigm', *Theory and Society*, 7.3 (1979), 273–88. Contrary to contemporary practices of pursuing a murderer in light of psychological traits, Wiene's movie highlights instead the technological aspects of crime and criminal investigation.

¹⁷ Ginzburg, p. 284.

Prosthetic Hands

In this competition between technology and human nature, the film takes another twist, offering a slightly different and less obvious reading than the struggle of artistic ingenuity with the machine age. In addition to the considerations of form and narrative, *The Hands of Orlac* is a film that points beyond itself, foregrounding a social and political debate that was at its height when the film was made. In this light, the idea that the hands of a murderer could successfully be transplanted onto the stumps of a former pianist is less a matter of suspension of disbelief than the symptom of a philosophy of technology emerging at the time. Such a conception of technology treats the human hand not simply as an organ but as equal to mechanical prostheses. When Nera and Orlac meet for the first time at the climax of the film, this philosophy of technology becomes most visible. In a frightening sequence, Nera pretends to be a reincarnation of the murderer Vassaux, telling Orlac that the surgeon turned him into a sort of Frankenstein's monster, cutting off his hands to give to Orlac and transplanting a different head onto his body. To support his claim, Nera suddenly reveals two hand prostheses from underneath his coat. I read this sequence as emblematic for the interwar period. World War I had left over 24,000 soldiers with missing arms.¹⁸ In the wake of such bodily mutilations, industrial psychology of the kind promulgated by Hugo Münsterberg experienced a heyday. This type of psychology was based on economic sustainability and aimed to enhance the physical and psychological disposition of human nature in its interaction with machine technology. With mechanization at full speed, the proponents of this type of applied psychology experimented with the optimization of humans' abilities for industrial labor. After the war, such endeavors opened doors for a large variety of research institutes to facilitate a reintegration of veterans onto the assembly line. There was also a proliferation of emphatic monographs on the topic, most notably the anthology *Ersatzglieder und Arbeitshilfen für Kriegsbeschädigte und Unfallverletzte*.¹⁹ The focus on the human body's role in industrial labor brought about a fundamental shift in prosthetic design. What had been known as the *Sonntagsarm*, or 'Sunday arm' — a cosmetic device used mainly after the French-Prussian war to conceal discreetly the lack of a limb — became the *Arbeitsarm* ('work arm'), a prosthesis designed to execute specific work procedures. The dramatically increased population of amputees that returned from the trenches required economic rehabilitation. To replace the lost functions of missing limbs, chronophotography à la Eadweard Muybridge was used to study meticulously the ingenuities of physical movement. In that way, the use-value of the hand as instrument, hardly noticeable in the everyday,

¹⁸ See Mia Fineman, 'Ecce Homo Prostheticus', *New German Critique*, 76 (1999), 85–114 (p. 88).

¹⁹ *Ersatzglieder und Arbeitshilfen für Kriegsbeschädigte und Unfallverletzte*, ed. by Moritz Borchardt, Konrad Hartmann, Radike Leymann and others (Berlin: Springer, 1919); see also Fritz Giese, *Psychologie der Arbeitshand* (Berlin: Urban & Schwarzenberg, 1928).

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was brought into focus. As art historian Mia Fineman notes, the interwar period signaled a ‘new notion of the human form as a functional assemblage of organic and mechanical parts’.²⁰ For that fusion to work, though, surgeons and psychologists alike took recourse to one of the first treatises to suggest an analogy between the physical and the mechanical: namely Ernst Kapp’s *Elements of a Philosophy of Technology*. Published in 1877, the book proposes the idea of ‘organ projection’, an evolutionary pattern in which technology follows the principles of human physiology. As far as the hand is concerned, Kapp relies on the Aristotelian idea that the body is both organ and tool and writes:

As the human being makes use of the objects ‘at hand’ in its immediate vicinity the first tools appear as extending, strengthening, and intensifying the human being’s bodily organs. If therefore the natural hammer is the forearm with clenched fist, perhaps reinforced by a stone clasped in the hand, then the stone attached to a wooden shaft is its simplest artifactual afterimage. For the shaft or the handle is an extension of the arm, the stone a replacement for the fist.²¹

Kapp maintained that the human body is equipped with its own proto-technology. In an evolutionary line of argumentation, he proposes that human beings, in exchange with their respective environment, exteriorize the tool function of their bodies. Thus, the hammer is not only modeled after the hand, the hand itself *is* a hammer. Just as the hand provides knowledge about the hammer, the hammer, inversely, explains what a hand is. I propose that the proliferation of work prostheses after World War I gradually raised Kapp’s approach to a new level. The prosthesis is not meant to replace a hand but to *become* one. Returning to Kapp’s expression of an ‘organ projection’, his concept might therefore be slightly misleading: what is at stake is less an *externalization* than the *internalizing* of the new body part.²²

The Hands of Orlac takes recourse to a gradual softening of the fine line between the organic and inorganic. The congruency between body and machine is played out when Nera’s fake prosthetic hands are paralleled with Orlac’s useless new organic hands. What on Nera might first appear as the aforementioned ‘Sonntagsarm’, reveals a deeper layer of meaning: Nera’s stiff prostheses are a mere camouflage and therefore as inoperable as the amputated *organic* hands with which Orlac cannot come to terms. For a prosthesis or transplant to work properly — be it mechanical or organic — it must be internalized, i.e. both psychologically and physically re-integrated. This reintegration fails in both cases: for Nera, the prosthesis is no more than a hoax to trick Orlac into believing his

²⁰ Fineman, p. 88.

²¹ Ernst Kapp, *Elements of a Philosophy of Technology: On the Evolutionary History of Culture* (1877), ed. by Jeffrey West Kirkwood (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), p. 36.

²² Harrasser outlines the body politics of the interwar period in terms of prosthetic internalization. See Karin Harrasser, ‘Sensible Prothesen. Medien Der Wiederherstellung von Produktivität’, *Body Politics*, 1 (2013), 106–09.

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transplants are the hands of a murderer. Yet, this very scheme — the idea that he killed his own father — terrifies Orlac to such an extent that his hands gradually become as stiff as the fake prostheses on Nera's arms.

Hand Surgery

Wiene leaves it at this. He does not indulge further in utopian fantasies of a prosthetic god.²³ Instead, his movie ends abruptly with an array of loose ends. Whether or not Orlac will come to terms with his transplant hands is hard to tell, yet the stilted way in which he embraces Yvonne in the very last shots of the film makes this reconciliation appear rather unlikely. The ending is telling in a different perspective. Orlac's two hands in close up clumsily grope around his wife's face until only his and her hairline remain visible. (fig. 2) In a very suggestive manner, the film sets the hand in scene one last time, detached from the protagonist, in order to leave no doubt about the fragmented, composite nature of Orlac's body.²⁴ Thus, it is not only on the level of the plot that Orlac is left with a patchwork existence after his surgery. What is more, cinematography itself cuts off his hands in a literal sense.



Fig. 2: *The Hands of Orlac* (*Orlacs Hände*, Robert Wiene, 1924). Screen capture.

²³ Other filmmakers of the Weimar period, in turn, expounded upon this subject, most notably Fritz Lang in *Metropolis* (1927). The film delivers not just a fantasy of 'Man as Machine' but an abstruse reflection on the idea that 'Man is — *by nature* — Machine'.

²⁴ On the notion of the composite body, see Ursula von Keitz, 'Prothese und Transplant: Orlacs Hände und die Körperfragment-Topik nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg' in *Unheimlich anders: Doppelgänger, Monster, Schattenwesen im Kino*, ed. by Christine Ruffert, Irmbert Schenk, Karl-Heinz Schmid and others (Berlin: Bertz+Fischer, 2005), pp. 53–68.

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At this point, we encounter Walter Benjamin's artwork essay again in which he put the surgical aspect of filmmaking under scrutiny. The contrast between the detachment of a magician's hand and the high degree of the manipulative involvement of a surgeon leads Benjamin to make, famously, magician and surgeon the alter egos of painter and filmmaker respectively. As a consequence, what is at work in technological reproduction is the genius of hiding its conditions of possibility, insofar as the finished film delivers a totalizing imagery that leaves behind no traces of its former surgical fragmentation.²⁵ The last shot of *The Hands of Orlac*, however, puts this fragmentation in the spotlight. With its insistence on a body gradually falling apart as soon as it is exposed to an increasingly technological environment, the film can be conceived as an attempt to hold technology at bay. Orlac's body turns into a surgical makeshift of which the suturing lines remain visible if not to the eye than certainly to the manual dexterity of this technological site of investigation called Orlac. Ultimately, his hands allow us to retrace the intricacies that the age of mechanization exhibited in Weimar cinema.

²⁵ Benjamin, p. 35.