

ESSAYS

ROBERT WIENE

Expressionism in Film

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Translated by Eric Ames.

Asking what role expressionism has to play in film is tantamount to asking what film has to do with art. Today, only someone unfamiliar with the development of film would pose such a question. Where artists create, there is art, and because film places artistic powers in its service, it is art—and therefore necessarily had to strive for expressionism. For expressionism is the goal of all art in our era.

Should I explain what I mean by “our era”? Every thirty years or so, a new era begins. This one began in 1909–10, the one before it around 1880. At that time, naturalism arose and began its battle against historicism. Historicism in Germany led to the Meiningen style and to the Piloty school; naturalism led to the theater of Otto Brahm and impressionism. The nineties were filled with the noise of the struggles between historicism and naturalism. Today we are able to better appreciate the intensity of that new movement. The most intense struggle, to put it in Darwinian terms, is always that between closely related species, such as historicism and naturalism, both offspring of the same mother called realism. If the task of art is to represent reality as truly as possible, then there is no essential difference between historical reality—or authenticity—and social truths of naturalism (that is to say, between the past and the present reality), and it is of little consequence that historicism prefers to extract from reality the “beautiful,” and from naturalism the “characteristic,” or as naturalism’s enemies would say, the “ugly.”

To be sure, the concept of “reality” tends to vacillate. Naturalism in painting began with outdoor painting, with the acknowledgment, so to speak, that diffused light is real and studio lighting is a lie. The great confrontation with photography called painting into question in a new way. In trying to solve this problem, artists discovered that there are two realities; that of the photographic plate is different from that of the human eye. Impressionism was the attempt to

render pictorially the pure sensory impression of the eye, not yet corrected by associations from experience. "As I see it": this idea alone defined the artist's reality. Yet the very same program treated vision not as observation or desire, but rather as discovery. According to the true teachings of impressionism, art would be, in a certain sense, the finder's reward for all good discoverers.

Naturalism and impressionism had enjoyed an age all to themselves when suddenly, in 1909–10, there arose an irrepressible countermovement, which turned against the last vestiges of historicism—in short, against all forms of realism. This countermovement was called expressionism. Today, this name encompasses a variety of things. Yet all directions of expressionism have in common this negation; they all run contrary to realist art. For the expressionist artist, as well, the exterior means the external. Yet he tries to reflect the internal, to find the strongest (painterly or poetic) expression for his experience. Exterior impressions are merely occasions for experiences, and when, for example, a painter encounters a beautiful woman, his strongest impression must not be a painterly one; rather, it can be the memory of the affectionate tone of her voice. The question would then be how to express in painting the impression awakened by a voice; for the traits and hues of this woman would have faded in the artist's soul, and nothing could drive him to paint her.

Young hotheads and their associates are never content to speak of the reproduction of moods and feelings; they need celebratory words like "feeling for life," "world feeling," and "world outlook." Expressionism supposedly offers a new world outlook because it places the soul above nature. Yet one could recall how often the naturalistic epoch spoke favorably of the man who "subjugates nature." Perhaps later it will be said that expressionism was only a form of mastery over nature, not a disavowal of the mechanical age but rather an attempt at its completion (which futurism and Dadaism are already claiming for themselves). However, that may be, through expressionism, we now sense deeply the indifference of reality and the power of the unreal: the unprecedented, intuitive, and outward projection of inner states of mind.

If one compares film and stage dramas, one readily sees how superior the cinema, the true "spectacle," is to the stage in its possibilities for representing reality. A film is not constrained by the space of the stage; it knows nothing of those scene changes that interrupt

the illusion; it has no need of background sets and can only mock such functional stand-ins. Every real thing in the world—from the forest as God created it to the gardens of Le Nôtre;² from the most extraordinary buildings of all times to the simplest wooden hut—everything visible between heaven and earth, underground or underwater, as far as the light of the sun reaches, everything can be a setting for a film. An essential property of film is its freedom to travel. Take all the arts of staging in the great, indeed, the greatest theater, and what do they amount to? What is a staged Rome or Memphis compared to the images film can bring home from the real Italy, Greece, or Egypt!

Yet the war, which is still being waged without weapons, deprived German film of its freedom to travel. Slowly we are regaining it, even if the devaluation of our currency still limits our mobility. Meanwhile, German film has had to proceed to its advantage; it has had to follow the command of stage sets; and even when it was mocked, did it trade Potsdam for Versailles? Would that not amount to naturalism stripped of nature? Modern art, according to one of its allies, “left the representation of the external world to photography and cinema.”³ But because this external world was everywhere off limits to cinema, film had to resign itself to imitating theater, which it could never achieve without language and which it had to surpass by other theatrical means. The question thus arose as to whether the cinema would absolutely refrain from representing reality and whether it could find new possibilities in the realm of the unreal, the spectral, and the expressive.

Very few among us are still sensitive to the unreal, spectral qualities of film. During the war, a friend told me how, in a village in the Carpathians where troops were stationed, the peasants went to the cinema for the first time and came running out of the dark room, screaming out of fear; they believed they saw ghosts. How crude the bodies of ghosts—Banquo’s spirit or Hamlet’s father—appear on the stage! In contrast, film spiritualizes even the strongest corporeal presence, and the spirit maintains its transparent, shadowy body through which it becomes visible. Film technology itself meets the representation of the unreal—representation in the sense of expressionism—halfway.

Film meets the demand for flat images; its colors function as mood indicators. For film is not a black-and-white art as everyone believes; rather, it has everything to do with color. Why else would artists work so hard to conceive of colorful backdrops and costumes? As anyone

familiar with photography can tell you, colors come into play as values of intensity, and an artistic effect of color coordination is evident where an artistic drop in brightness manifests itself in the photographic reproduction. People also tend to speak of the emotional value of individual colors, but this is a mistake caused by habitual associations. Is white really the color of happiness? A pessimist might claim that white represents the snow that covers everything in life or the wall of atonement; in ancient times, white was the shroud in which human sacrifices were wrapped; and white is the color of the bridal gown, whose wearer, feeling herself sacrificed, sobs bitterly. Color in itself merely evokes the mood that we have assigned to it, yet the clashing of colors carries with it the power of emotional intensity, and in the filmic image, it is clearly a question of degrees of brightness.

There remain to be discussed those forms with which the artist, having turned away from nature, looking out from the inside, represents his experience. Film happily seizes on such forms wherever it wishes to render unreal, fantastic happenings. Filmmakers will have expressionists build sets of fairy-tale forests, magical palaces, and all those places that might attract the imagination of an E. T. A. Hoffmann, so that they might secretly whisper the artistic intuitions of otherworldly things; in our bookish knowledge, we cannot even begin to imagine such things, unless that knowledge one day ceases to know and begins dreaming. But in that case, the dreamer would not express his thoughts in ordered speech; he would speak only in cries, in screams, as the expressionist poet prefers to do. These cries and screams provide the "titles" that the expressionist film drama cannot do without. The first attempts in this direction began to be seen a year ago. The shortage of such attempts is most evident to those who dared to make them first. But where there is an artistic will, there is also a way.



Walter Reimann, Sketch for the set of *Caligari*

WALTER REIMANN

AN AFTERWORD TO CALIGARI

First published as “Nachwort zu Caligari,” in *Die Filmtechnik* 9 (September 25, 1925), 192, and *Die Filmtechnik* 10 (October 1925), 219-21. Translated by Alex Bush.

This film was a starting point, an attempt to find a new direction for the cinema. That this direction was never developed further, indeed, that it has even been forgotten and is threatening to peter out entirely is due to the fact that prominent voices in the German film industry, leaders of production who set the tone for everyone else, misunderstood this film from the start and still do not understand its origins or intentions. Even today, people still believe that the film’s peculiar conceptual style was chosen exclusively to support the theme of insanity; this

made them suspect that this design—commonly known as expressionism—is patented for lunacy and therefore cannot be used for any other purpose. Naturally, any particularly distinctive theme will always have a specific conceptual design that suits it best, but this cannot be taken from just anywhere and simply dropped onto the motif in question. Rather, it must develop from the screenplay's specific character and mood. But this conceptual design has nothing to do with any contemporary style; far from stylization or even mannerisms, it is the content of the writing itself made visible and elevated to rhythmic visual drama.

In my opinion, the actual value of *Caligari* and the reason it is always recognized as one of the most significant creations of film production lie not so much in its “expressionist” conceptualization (as far as I know, such attempts had already been made before this film), even if expressionism did make the film a “sensation” in terms of style; rather, it owes more to the fact that this was the first time a systematic and purely filmic conceptual will was in control, which forged everything—thoughts, images, and movement; the language of dead form, the language of living form, and the language of light—into a single dramatic whole.

Indeed, *Caligari* is not just illustrated and represented in the eternally unchanging manner of naturalist reporting; rather, in order to lend it the greatest expressive power, it is conceived according to artistic points of view—it is experienced! That is the secret of this film's effect!

Only once influential figures in the film industry come to this recognition can film become what is actually is and grow out of the stage of lapidary feuilleton entertainment to become a source of artistic pleasure!

We know that generally speaking, films are becoming shabbier every year; the great boom is starting to recede. Today's films, with their fully conventional approach, are slowly approaching that neutral point where they no longer know what they should convey. The reservoir of subjects is exhausted. This can be explained: for an institution that works as steadfastly as film does, the realm of real life, always seen only one-sidedly in a naturalistic style, is too narrow. A time must come when the leaders of production, whether they like it or not, will have to ensure that the realm of material is expanded if they do not want to dismantle their

businesses. They will have no other choice than to adopt art, which is eternally fruitful, for their purposes. But—and I would like to emphasize this again—in the case of this art, I do not mean

the contrivance of constructing new subjects; I refer rather to the power to shape characteristic things in a way that indeed lends them character. It is not a question of searching for things but rather of constantly reinvigorating the everyday objects around us through the currency of an artistic personality.

For an entertaining and stimulating art—which film is!—any form of one-sidedness is dangerous. The Americanism that has been so violently forced upon us is dangerous for film; it is dangerous to look at all things through the old-fashioned lens of “naturalism only”—of course, it would be just as dangerous now to pronounce an era of “expressionism”! Let us be finally be done with all these “isms”!—for the most dangerous of all are methods, holy formulas that seek a bottled cure for dreams and reality.

Caligari’s success proves that audiences are not as averse to artistic conceptual design as film tradesmen always say. Audiences want to see new things and are right to demand enrichment for their daily lives. If the German film industry marches on with its current mindless system, constantly serving up the same stories in the same form for fear of rejection from audiences, it will be no wonder if cinema programs stop selling out.

The film industry has to finally learn that it does not matter what stories it tells but rather how these stories are presented. In every art, the artist’s personality is always more important than the theme. This basic lesson of all art also goes for film!

The original intention was to make Caligari realistic; it probably would have been an above-average film, like many others, entertainment for an evening with no lingering effect, because the film would have lacked what almost all films lack: namely, the personal touch of its makers. That is Caligari’s secret—but it is such an open secret that one only has to reach out in order to discover it.

But it is remarkable how a secret fear makes the German film industry beat around the bush when it comes to its best work, even though it knows that great profits are hiding in those very bushes.

Let us hope that before foreign markets can take away and exploit our success, a Dr. Caligari will emerge in the weakening German film industry, who, like the wonderful Werner

Krauß in the film, gravely wiping his eyeglasses, will declare: “I have diagnosed its illness! Now I know the way to its —(German film’s)—recovery!”



RUDOLF KURTZ

LIMITS OF THE EXPRESSIONIST FILM

First published as “Grenzen des expressionistischen Films,” in Kurtz, *Expressionismus und Film* (Berlin-Verlag der Lichtbildbühne, 1926), pp. 126-29. Translated by Brenda Benthien.

The difficulty of making expressionist film catch on does not lie in some variable external constellation, but in its intrinsic requirements. For there can be no doubt that, with the exception of the surprise success of *Caligari*, the expressionist film has not found favor with the public.

To arrive at a categorical assessment, we must consider the primary function that the cinema is accorded in the broad economy of human energies. Among the inventory of human

needs, film satisfies a very specific one. This has been demonstrated clearly by the global success of film in the thirty years of its existence. If film were only a popular and less expensive form of stage drama, it would long ago have killed off the theater, and it would not have reached any greater audience than the stage reaches at best. cursory statistical information indicates that the effect of film on society is totally different, a mass phenomenon with individual coloration.

The success of the cinema can be explained by means of its engagement with an intrinsic biological human need. The daily depletion of people's energy, whereby their cells systematically degenerate, requires these cells to be rebuilt during breaks from work in the evening, which is achieved during sleep. This regenerative process requires a condition of intellectual relaxation, which is normally accompanied by a feeling of emptiness. This is where film comes in. It sets up new conditions for physiological rejuvenation; it leaves the viewer with his passive mood and still gives him the feeling of being intellectually occupied-an arousal that can be absorbed so effortlessly that only minimal active intellectual effort, or none at all, is needed. The cinema brings about the necessary feelings of relaxation that switch off the perception of emptiness and boredom, without bringing with it a noticeable disruption of balance.

The effortless apprehension of film is thus one of its basic prerequisites. The viewer must be able to smoothly structure the contents conveyed by the film into his worldview, without this process requiring any form of intellectual activity. Expressionist film positions itself in basic opposition to this requirement, since the objective of its effort is the new structuring of formal elements based on a metaphysical intent. Psychology, the human soul's usual mode of transportation, is put out of service, so to speak, since expressionist film primarily involves not perception, but comprehension. Not empathy but understanding.

The expressionist film tended to make concessions from the beginning. It looked for bridges to connect the separate worlds of the film and the public, finally resigning itself to treating expressionist means in such a way that people could psychologically empathize with them. The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari produces a plethora of atmospheric factors, and it goes even further by setting up a common platform between art and the viewer: the plot involves the hallucination of a lunatic who, following his natural inclination, experiences the world as a distortion and a grimace. This is already an admission that the expressionist film, in its pure state, must remain opaque to the viewer. Its artistic form requires hereafter a commentary, an excuse.

This tendency continues in all films of this kind, which live off dreams and occult powers. Expressionist film is not capable of surviving as a pure art, and the first to recognize this fact were its inventors themselves

The linchpin of this crisis of understanding is the human being on film. The artist can create the active being in film to whatever extent required; he can completely alter his natural

form or construct it anew, from the ground up. The fact remains that the viewer in the theater identifies with "the person." No matter how man expresses himself on film, the moment he no longer expresses the soul of the viewer, contact breaks off and understanding and interest cease. The viewer tends to admit that bold exaltations of the spirit might still be possible-in principle. In order for him to conceive of the film's plot as "real," it simply must be possible, within the realm of his imagination, for a person to act that way at all. If this congruence cannot be brought about, the film remains an inas- similable foreign body and is meaningless to the audience.

This presents an opportunity for the absolute film. It categorically eliminates the potential for a comparison of formal elements, the "supports of the plot" in the film, with the viewing public. The natural object is neutralized and stripped of all accompanying sentiments. Line and surface speak as con1ponents of the space: if a natural object appears-if it is an element in space-its intellectual value is completely meaningless. A plate is not a utensil from which to eat, but a round, flat, hollowed-out disc, which behaves in varying ways in space. There is no value placed on it. It is clear that extraordi- nary activity on the part of the viewer is required in order for the process to be translated into a sphere of "understanding," even though only elemental energies are visualized. This brings with it many implications.

For easy perception and an effortless integration into the viewer's preexisting imagi- nation are not just preconditions for film as it attempts to realize its biological function. They are required if film is to prove commercial-which is the only way it can be distrib- uted in a manner in keeping with its physiological task. That is why film is an industry and has no life outside of industry.

When one views film as a commodity, expressionism becomes nearly irrelevant. This consideration is purely mathematical. Seen schematically, a manufactured good must not cost

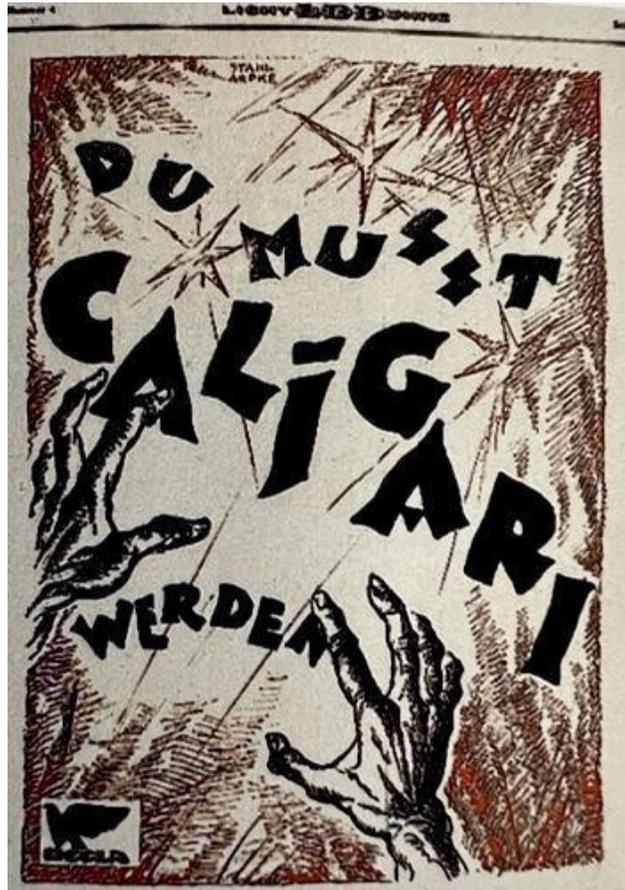
more than it normally yields when the prevailing profit margin is added to it. It must be at least feasible to achieve the required sales volume. A low estimate of the number of film consumers in Germany is around ten million people, with a correspondingly larger number abroad. Any film that does not compel mass acceptance narrows its capital base, thereby doing harm to the German film industry. Film is making its way in Germany from the metropolis to the smallest village. As differentiated as the human intellect is, by virtue of people's profession and education,

there exists nonetheless a certain emotional homogeneity, which of itself makes the case for film's survival. Human differences do not exist where commerce is concerned: only that which correlates to universal constants makes profitability possible-and thereby the continued existence of the film industry.

Insofar as the expressionist film incorporates these conditions, it still has prospects from a purely commercial point of view. But the more it turns its attention to the fundamental principles of film, and the more rigorously it aspires to shape reality in a unique way, the more it loses itself in commercial insubstantiality. It only remains to point out that the qualities of expressionist films could be used to stimulate the film industry as a whole, to open up new avenues of expression. But obviously the exceptional nature of such a phenomenon is assumed in its very mention, and such cases will be isolated and exceedingly rare.



REVIEWS



E.B.: THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI (1920)

in: Der Kinematograph (No. 686), March, 3, 1920.

Berlin has another new slogan. "You must become Caligari." For weeks this mysterious categorical imperative has been screaming at you from all the billboards and jumping out of the columns of all the daily newspapers. Insiders asked, "Are you already a Caligari?" In the same way people used to ask, "You're Manoli [crazy], aren't you?" And there were rumors about "expressionism in the movie" and "crazy". Now it's out, this first expressionist movie, and except for the fact that it's set in a madhouse, you can't find anything crazy about it. You can think what you like about modern art, but in this case it is definitely justified. In these distorted, strangely fantastic images, the pathological spawns of a mad mind find an expression raised to the highest potency. The world paints itself differently in the mind of a madman, and just as the figures of his imagination sometimes take on eerie forms, so the environment in which they move shows a bizarre face: crooked rooms with triangular windows and doors, unreal crooked

houses, and humpbacked alleys. And one can say of these great images, as of the plot: "If it is madness, there is method in it."

The manuscript takes the story of a madman, who has been driven insane by the death of a friend under strange circumstances, and mixes truth and fantasy into a strange horror story, in a quite logical development. The main character is a certain Dr. Caligari, whom he identifies with the director of the asylum, and who has mysterious murders committed by a somnambulist with whom he roams the fairs. The plot is gripping, with many scenes of immediate, fascinating, breathtaking effect, such as a murder scene in which we see only the shadows of the characters wrestling (a technically excellent image, by the way), or the dream experience of the madman's bride, in which she is overpowered by the somnambulist and carried over the rooftops on a dizzyingly narrow path. The final image in the courtyard of the asylum, with the madman's outburst of rage and his being rendered harmless by the straitjacket, is also very impressive.

Fritz Fehér plays this madman with excellent facial expressions, as are the acting performances of all the actors. Werner Kraus in the fantastic mask of Dr. Caligari; a masterpiece that is hard to imitate. Next to him, Conrad Veidt's demonic type as the Somnambulist is simply uncanny; people with weak nerves may get nightmares. Lil Dagover embodies the madman's bride with gentle beauty. Also excellent in smaller roles are Rudolf Lettinger and Hans Heinz v. Twardowski, the well-known poet and reciter. Robert Wiene directs with his usual mastery and, together with the painters Warm, Reimann and Röhrig, conveys strong impressions, supported by the brilliant photographic reproduction.

With this latest work, the Decla Film Company has proven that the art of film is far from being at the end of its wits and that there are still new, undreamed-of possibilities for its development.



KURT TUCHOLSKY (alias Peter Panther): DR. CALIGARI, in *Die Weltbühne* 11 (MARCH 11, 1920), pp. 347-348.

For years, since the great Wegener films, I have not sat in a movie theater as attentively as I did during *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.

This movie, written by Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz, directed by Robert Wiene with the help of the painters Hermann Warm, Walter Reimann and Walter Röhrig, is something completely new. The movie is set - finally! finally! - The movie takes place - finally! - in a completely unreal space, and here is solved without a break what was striven for at the time of the production of "Wupper" at the Deutsches Theater and could not quite be achieved. If the actors were now put into less real costumes - where are there such solid collars in these crooked, lopsided, hewn houses?-, then everything would be fine. (Almost everything: Mr. Feher is not, because he moves, like his partners, as if he were in a bad *Porten* movie). But now let me praise. A madman tells his fate to a colleague of the same faculty. The whole thing is built up in a clandestine way, blurred, but not completely freed from *raison d'être*. Almost every image succeeds: the small town on the mountain (all the scenery is painted, nothing is set against the real thing), a square with merry-go-rounds, strangely dignified rooms, delightfully stylized, and so on.

Hoffmann's officials sit on pointed chairs and rule. The gestures are twisted, light and shadow play on the walls...

The fable of the abuse of somnambulism is not new - but it has been made very memorable. Some images remain: the murderer in his high cell, streets with people running, a dark alley - you have to believe in miracles to create them. And the pantomimes?

Werner Krauss, as if cut out of a Hoffmann story, is like a fat goblin from a German fairy tale, a bourgeois devil, a strange mixture of realism and fantasy. You can feel it in him: No one walks through such alleyways because they do not exist - but if one did, one could only walk like this creepy guy (Goethe once called this the solid matter in fantasy.) Veidt treads thinly and not of this world through his confused world: once a magnificent opening of eyes, then like Kubin, black and shadowy and ghostlike sliding along a wall.

A murder becomes visible as a shadow play on a gray wall. And shows once again how the imagined is more terrible than anything shown. No movie can keep up with our imagination. And that in this movie, from a kidnapped woman, one hears a scream that one hears, really hears (when one has ears) - that should be unforgettable for him.

The audience wavered between joy and incomprehension: the Berliner has a laugh at his disposal when he gets scared, which is blown through his nose, and is highly effective. The film is not for the provinces, and I fear it is not even a Berlin thing.

But - the greatest of all rarities – a good movie. More of that!

EXCEPTIONAL PHOTOPLAYS

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THE FOREIGN "INVASION"

By ALFRED B. KUTTNER



It is probably as much beyond dispute as anything can be that the outstanding event of the past year in the American motion picture world has been the exhibition of a series of German pictures beginning with "Passion," and ending for the present with "All For a Woman," a picture which is reviewed at length on another page of the present Bulletin. The National Board of Review is proud of the fact that it was among the first to recognize the excellence of these pictures and their significance for our native screen art, and that it frequently has had the grateful task of supporting those producers and exhibitors who have had the courage of experimentation in showing these novel films to the American public. Its faith in the good taste of the American public has also been amply justified, for these pictures have proved to be not only an artistic but a commercial success.

It must be remembered that this "invasion" of foreign films, as it has been regretably described by certain factions in this country who argued that their very excellence was a sound reason for banning these films from our screen, came just at a time when our own motion pictures were at an extremely low ebb. The general business depression had caused the motion picture industry to retrench in a somewhat panicky fashion and to try to make only safe pictures of a standardized pattern. This was promptly met by what almost amounted to a strike on the part of the public against going to see inferior pictures. American pictures were in a fair way to being killed by ridicule and the expression "picture hokum" was fast becoming a byword. The average picture had come to deal with a trivial plot, enacted by conventionalized characters

entirely devoid of any personal significance, and the perfectly legitimate demand that pictures, like any other art, should create esthetic joy, had been so distorted that pictures regularly ended with a kind of professional propaganda for happiness which nobody could take seriously. The combination of Pollyanna and hokum on the inside of the motion picture theatre and of a public intent upon spending its pennies more wisely on the outside was having an alarming effect.

Into this low pressure atmosphere foreign motion pictures came like a refreshing breeze. These pictures dealt in a distinguished and authoritative manner with events and stories of real significance to the human spirit. They gave an excellent illustration of that very acute remark of Karin Michaelis, the authoress of "The Dangerous Age," about American fiction. Her complaint, it may be remembered, was to the effect that American fiction was mainly occupied with the doings of beauteous young ladies of a very tender age and daring and adoring young men, none of whom could possibly have had sufficient real experience of life to make their doings of serious interest to the mature and philosophical reader. Our fiction has somewhat recovered since then from this low estate, but our motion pictures quickly surpassed American novelists in the infantile level of their subject matter. Our best producers, men like Griffith, for instance, who had previously made history in motion pictures, complacently sank to levels of sentimentality which excluded them from the ranks of artists.

The point about these imported pictures is that they did not make any sentimental compromise. With insufficient funds, inferior equipment and a less advanced stage of technique than ours,

This bulletin is a critical review; it will carry no motion picture advertising

the directors proceeded to make the best pictures they knew how on the theory that a picture well done will find its proper audience, and without any silly notion that it was necessary to write down to a group of defective adults at the nine-year-old level. They created something in which they themselves could take pleasure—the true artist's primary concern—and found that an audience was waiting to acclaim them.

Conceived under such conditions, these pictures, and there have been only a handful of them so far, have already done a number of things any one of which would have been remarkable in itself. They have given us a new insight into the future possibilities of the motion picture as an art form, they have set a new standard for the historical motion picture, and they have shown us what it is to act on the screen. They have accomplished this on their own merits, without any particularly adroit publicity, and at times in the face of considerable opposition. Actors and actresses like Pola Negri, Asta Neilson, Werner Kraus, Emil Jannings, Paul Wegener, for instance, are established before the American public without any press agent tooting and even at first without any mention of their names, and a director like Lubitsch has come into an international reputation.

Of the five pictures reviewed thus far in the Bulletin, "The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari" occupies the position of unique artistic merit. It is already a part of motion picture history and its influence is likely to increase from day to day as it fertilizes the imagination of our directors. "Doctor Caligari" is fit to be an immediate point of departure for motion pictures and lays the foundation for a new school, the school of direct cinegraphic interpretation in which the thing created is as independent of any previous literary form as music is of painting. Next in artistic importance, though considerably more uneven than "Doctor Caligari," was "The Golem," in which a poetic legend was told with an amount of true cinegraphic imagination still almost unknown in our native pictures.

"Passion," "Deception," and "All For a Woman" form a trilogy in which the screen could show its enormous resource in recreating historical periods. These pictures were so satisfying because they combined a realistic method with genu-

ine historic imagination. They showed a fine balance between the personal story, the events of the period, and the architectural and historical setting. Our best historical pictures, such as "The Birth of a Nation," have had a way of over-romanticising the personal story and of using the historic panorama somewhat bombastically, as if the main function of past ages was to make a kind of Roman holiday for an exuberant director looking for thrills. It is not to belittle Mr. Griffith's very solid achievement in what is perhaps his best picture to point out that he has much to learn from these German pictures in the way of continuity and proportion and the resultant dignity of effect. The difference is not inappropriately illustrated if we say that "Deception," for instance, conveys a piece of Tudor history, whereas, "The Birth of a Nation" gives us a bit of Confederate romance with more than a dash of propaganda. Yet history is not romance and no motion picture, whether historical or not, can afford to dabble in propaganda if it aspires to survive in the history of art.

The notable quality of the acting which characterizes these German pictures is by no means confined to the principals. The importance of minor roles in contributing to the general effect is well understood and the mob scenes are usually well individualized. The work of such principals as Pola Negri, Werner Kraus or Emil Jannings shows a sustained power of impersonation such as we seldom see on our screen. Their interpretation shows the greatest pantomic gift, seconded by an imaginative understanding of the resources of make-up which ought to prove a revelation to many of our actors. The result achieved is a sustained illusion of dramatic individualities moving in an authentic atmosphere of cinegraphic reality.

If these pictures pass over the American screen merely as a boon to starved audiences that have been looking for better things without a corresponding influence upon our native directors and scenario writers they will have fulfilled only a part of their mission. This is almost unthinkable, however. Already men like Chaplin, Herbert Brenon, Joseph Urban and others have made generous admission of a debt of inspiration to foreign film achievement and many studios are full of whispers about promising schemes of emulating the work from abroad. May something come of it.

THE NEW YORK TIMES MARCH 20, 1921

A CUBISTIC SHOCKER

FEW motion pictures have excited more interest, advance and accompanying, than the latest German production to reach this country, the cubistic photoplay, "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari," which the Goldwyn Company has bought and will show at the Capitol Theatre week after next. The picture was first reviewed for American readers

fashion and fades into the story which is being told in the garden.

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A CUBISTIC SHOCKER

FEW motion pictures have excited more interest, advance and accompanying, than the latest German production to reach this country, the cubistic photoplay, "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari," which the Goldwyn Company has bought and will show at the Capitol Theatre week after next. The picture was first reviewed for American readers in an article in The Freeman by Herman George Scheffauer, which was reprinted in part in these columns on Nov. 28 last. Mr. Scheffauer, who saw the photoplay in Berlin, noted its "bizarre expressionistic form" and described its action as taking place in a "cubistic world of intense relief and depth." He considered it important, however, not so much because of its cubism as because in it space had been "given a voice," had "become a presence.

"The picture was also seen in Berlin by Arthur Ziehm, a dealer in foreign films, who has written the following account of it:

"From the viewpoint of effect on their audience, the authors of 'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari' had the advantage of treating the subject of madness. Granting their mad premise, the story works itself out logically and remorselessly to the final sane ending. While original both in inspiration and interpretation. 'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari' strikes a pitch akin to that heard in the stories of Hoffmann, Poe, Fitz James O'Brien and Ambrose Bierce. It should be said that while the interpretation has added immeasurably to the photoplay, yet the profounder reason for the thrill which it awakens lies in the actual story of Dr. Caligari.

"That story is told through the lips of a madman, and it is in catching his twisted conceptions that the scenic artists have done notable things. The sets are a little mad. Everything is awry, somewhere; and, because it is almost impossible just to lay your fingers on the place, the sets add to the atmosphere of mystery and terror which permeates the picture. Recently I saw Mr. Jones's 'Macbeth'; the difference between his work in that play and the work done in Caligari is simply that Mr. Jones failed—this time—and the artists in the photoplay succeeded. The sets in the picture do not blacken your eye with their aggression or box your ears with their abruptness. They are subtly woven into the tale of Dr. Caligari.

"Since the picture is to be shown in New York, it would not be right to give away the secret behind it, thus robbing it, for those who read this article, of its element of surprise. However, a few general outlines can be given. The picture opens in a garden, with two men talking. One of them remarks that he feels the presence in the air of evil things from the past. A woman, pale, and dressed completely in white, passes; the other man tells the first speaker that the woman is his fiancée, and assures him that, whatever his experiences in the past, they cannot equal those endured by himself and his sweetheart. The scene fades out in old-time movie fashion and fades into the story which is being told in the garden.

"This story within the story is laid in a little provincial town with a half-medieval aspect. Everything has an air of old worldliness, from the student who throws away his book when he hears of the fair to the fair itself and the old men and young men and old women and young women who throng it. Furthermore, everything has an air of exaggeration which makes the characters seem unreal as human beings, but extraordinarily real as embodying qualities of goodness and evil, peace and terror.

"Dr. Caligari, who embodies sheer wickedness, is a masterly conception, and the work of Mr. Krauss in this rôle will, undoubtedly, arouse as much comment and enthusiasm in America as it did in Europe. The doctor is an elderly man who wears a cape and a battered top hat, while behind his eyeglasses are strange, roving eyes. In the conception of the man who is telling the tale he does evil for the sheer delight that it affords him. This monster reaches the town when the fair is being held and solicits from the town clerk permission to exhibit a somnambulist on the ground. The permission is granted, but not without rudeness on the part of the clerk. That night the unfortunate man is murdered in his bed.

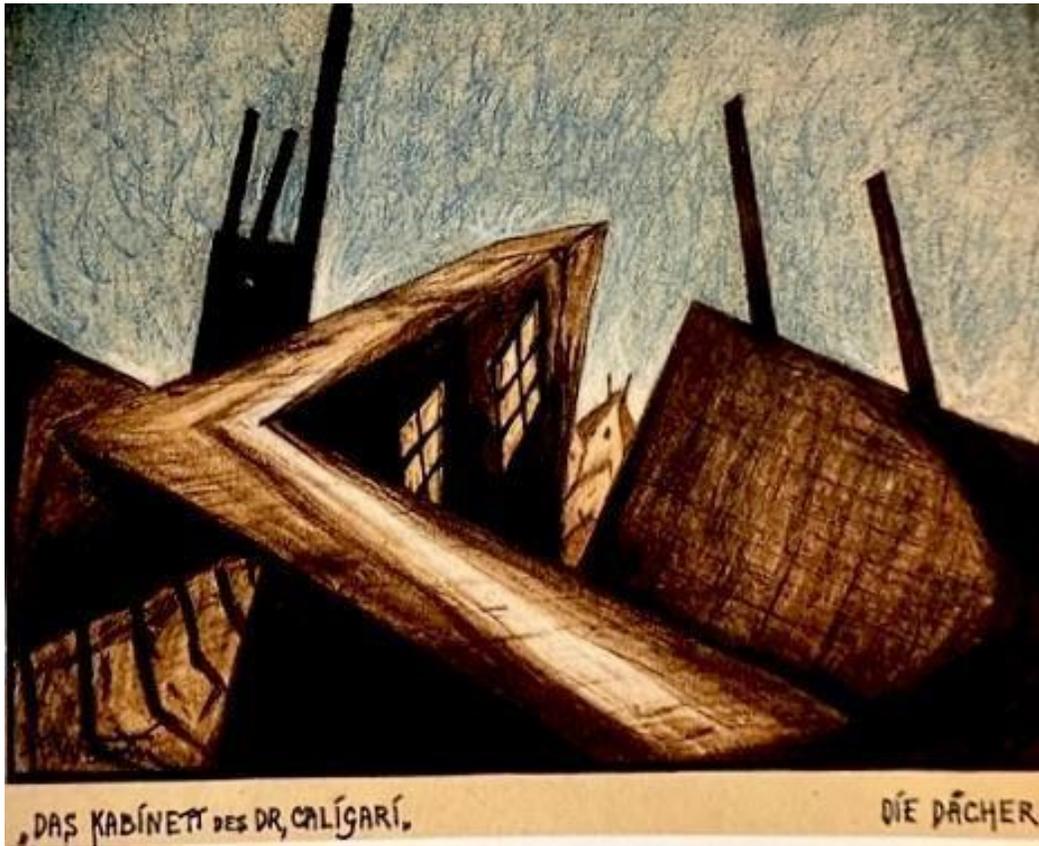
"This is the beginning of a mysterious sequence of crimes. The hero—the storyteller—tells of how he visited the doctor's booth with a friend when the doctor, opening a huge, standing cabinet, revealed an immensely tall and skinny man, fast asleep. This creature is completely under the domination of the doctor. He sleeps until awakened by Caligari, and when awake obeys his master implicitly.

"The showman invites the audience to have their fortunes told by the awakened sleeper and the creature predicts to the friend of the storyteller that he will not live beyond tomorrow's dawn. Next day he is found murdered in his bed. In all the murders a strange, dagger-like weapon is used, so that there is no doubt that they are all the work of one man. Eventually, the sweetheart of the hero is threatened with the hatred of the old wretch and from this point onward the story moves to an unguessed-at climax.

"It is obvious that a synopsis of such a story cannot convey the flavor of the actual vehicle. 'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari' represents to me something very real and terrible. Do you remember the fear that you felt when you were a guest in 'The House of Usher'? The story of Caligari is entirely dissimilar, yet awakens the same kind of fear—that fear of things having no reason and loving evil instinctively."

"The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" was written by Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz; it was directed by Robert Wiene, and its scenic designers were H. Warm, Walter Reimann and Walter Röhrig, according to the announcement from the Capitol. Mr. Scheffauer, in his article in *The Freeman*, credited it chiefly to "Walter Reimann, Walther Röhrig and Hermann Warm."

(This transcription is from the *New York Times*, [TIMESMACHINE](#), where it is offered for sharing)



Hermann Warm, Sketch "Die Dächer" (The roofs)

