

A CRITICAL HISTORY OF
**GERMAN
FILM** 2ND EDITION

STEPHEN BROCKMANN



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EFA-FILM Nr1 Die Mörder
sind unter uns
Regie: Wolfgang Staudle
Kamera: Behn Grund-Kloßemann
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*A Critical History of German Film,
Second Edition*

Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture

A Critical History of German Film

Second Edition

Stephen Brockmann



CAMDEN HOUSE

Rochester, New York

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To Johnny Packard

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Cinema, and my interest in German cinema goes back to that period, when masterpieces like Fassbinder's *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* and Herzog's *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* were playing in New York movie theaters. Thanks to institutional support from New York's Goethe House, I was also able, as a freshman and sophomore in college, to see films like *Deutschland im Herbst* or Herzog's *Auch Zwerge haben klein angefangen* in film series at Columbia. I did not always understand these films when I first viewed them, but I became fascinated by them and wanted to learn more. I therefore owe a debt of gratitude to all those institutions—particularly the Goethe Institute, but also numerous universities—that make it possible to have noncommercial screenings of German films in the United States and other English-speaking countries. I also wish to thank the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, and the Fulbright Scholar Program for enabling me to make several study visits to Germany over the past four decades, during all of which I have continued my engagement with German cinema.

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I dedicate the second edition of this book, as I did the first, to one of my first students, who has been exploring cinema with me for a significant part of both of our lives: Johnny Packard.

Introduction: Critical Film History and German Studies

GERMAN CINEMA CONSTITUTES one of the world's most important cinema traditions, featuring some of the greatest films ever made, from Robert Wiene's *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, 1920) and F. W. Murnau's *Der letzte Mann* (The Last Laugh, 1924) through Leni Riefenstahl's notorious but undoubtedly important *Triumph des Willens* (Triumph of the Will, 1934) to postwar triumphs like Werner Herzog's *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* (Aguirre, The Wrath of God, 1972) and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (The Marriage of Maria Braun, 1979). These films, and many others, constitute a unique body of work, part of the fundamental heritage of world cinema, without which the history of film would be poorer. As one of the great film traditions, German cinema is as distinct from other nations' cinemas as the German language, culture, and history are. At the same time, German cinema and its practitioners have continually interacted with other traditions, particularly the American one; in fact, some of the best and most famous directors of American films originally came from the German-speaking world—Ernst Lubitsch, F. W. Murnau, Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, Fred Zinnemann, and Robert Siodmak.

It's not just for aesthetic reasons that German cinema is important, however, but also as a reflection of one of the most dynamic, if problematic, nations of the modern world. As Modris Eksteins has persuasively argued, by the beginning of the twentieth century, Germany, with its "disruptive energy," had become "the principal activist, and hence modernist, nation of the *fin-de-siècle* world."¹ The First World War confirmed this status as a powerful disruptive force, and the country became, in Eksteins' words, "the revolutionary power of Europe. Located in the center of the continent, she set out to become the leader of Europe, the heart of Europe, as she put it."² Germany was, for better or worse (and unfortunately, often for the worse), one of the principal movers of the twentieth century; its culture and its actions had a profound impact not only on its European neighbors but on the rest of the world as well. The Italian literary theorist Franco Moretti has called Germany "the centre

¹ Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 117.

² Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 169.

and catalyst of the integrated historical system we call Europe.”³ Hence, German cinema is as important for political and historical reasons as it is for artistic ones: it provides access to one of the key players in twentieth-century—and perhaps also twenty-first-century—history.

But why a critical history of German cinema? The answer is relatively simple. There are currently no other comprehensive, critical histories of German cinema in the English language—that is to say, histories that trace the development of German film from its beginnings through the postunification years (including both the East and West German cinemas from the Cold War period), and that also engage in criticism of individual films as works of art. This book therefore fills a two-fold gap—first, the lack of a contemporary critical history of German cinema, and second, the inevitable absence of contemporary material in earlier critical histories.

The only other English-language history of German cinema to include both East German cinema and the postunification period is Sabine Hake’s excellent study *German National Cinema* (2008), a book that can be recommended to anyone with an interest in the subject.⁴ Hake’s volume, however, is not a critical history in my sense because it does not engage in any analysis of individual films. Rather, it provides a broad overview of trends in German cinema from 1895 to the present. Hake’s book is an alternative to that older standard, eminently critical history of German cinema, Siegfried Kracauer’s influential *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947), which, for obvious reasons, could not take the history of German cinema much past the end of the Weimar Republic.⁵ Kracauer’s work has exerted a strong influence on subsequent film scholars and historians, becoming, as Anton Kaes has written, “the master narrative for the critical study of film within a national context.”⁶ Kracauer’s “psychological” approach treated German films as national dreams that needed to be interpreted, and he believed he could identify a direct link between the fantasies of early movies like *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* and the later emergence and triumph of Hitler in 1933. Kracauer’s book was critical or interpretive in the sense that it analyzed individual films as symptoms of Germany’s collective psyche, and it was teleological in its claim that film history provided privileged access to a political and social history that led, with seeming inexorability, to Hitler.

Hake’s book, published first in 2002 and in a revised edition six years later, offers a counter-program to Kracauer. Hake makes no broad claims

³ Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders* (London: Verso, 1988), 251.

⁴ Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2002); second edition 2008.

⁵ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1947).

⁶ Anton Kaes, “German Cultural History and the Study of Film: Ten Theses and a Postscript,” *New German Critique* 65 (Spring/Summer 1995): 47–59; here, 49.

about film as a mirror of the German soul and does not treat history in a teleological fashion. She is as interested in those aspects of the cinema of the Weimar Republic that pointed *away* from Hitler as in those that may have pointed *toward* him, and in her analysis of the cinema of the Third Reich itself, she is at pains to show ways in which it was not as monolithic as Kracauer and most later critics have perceived it to be. One could call Hake's project "revisionist" in the sense that it runs counter to most of the standard accounts of Third Reich cinema, including Kracauer's. Hake, moreover, is less interested in individual directors or films than she is in large-scale trends in the industry; she treats cinema as an economic and not just an aesthetic, political, or psychological phenomenon. She looks at stars, audiences, and producers, not just at famous directors like Fritz Lang or Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Finally, she is also more interested in those aspects of German cinema that make it international than she is in its German peculiarities. What is missing in Hake's account, however, is the interpretation of individual films as works of art.

My own approach is to try to move closer to Kracauer but to update the analysis and take into account justified criticisms of Kracauer's method. Although Kracauer has been rightly criticized for his teleology and for his broad claims about cinema as a mirror of the German soul, his approach nevertheless offers a powerful heuristic tool for understanding Weimar cinema and its significance—and indeed for understanding cinema's significance more generally. As Kaes argues, scholars learned from Kracauer "that films signify something not *in abstracto*, but concretely at a certain moment in time, at a certain place, and for a certain audience. They offer responses to burning questions; they are meant to resonate and have an impact."⁷ Kracauer's approach suggests that the study of German cinema can provide special access to the understanding of German history. That is an aspect that German Studies scholars would not wish to lose. In addition, Kracauer offers interpretations of individual films in support of his thesis, and since film is, among other things, an aesthetic object, such an approach is useful, and at present is particularly necessary. As Thomas Elsaesser pointed out as early as 1984, film history over the last few decades "has decisively moved away from films, in particular from film criticism, and toward what used to be called the sociology of film," addressing itself to economic and studio history, stars, "court actions and patent wars, real-estate deals, popcorn franchises," and the like.⁸ This move away from criticism, however, risks treating film like any other consumer product—in Elsaesser's words, it risks accepting the

⁷ Kaes, "German Cultural History and the Study of Film," 49.

⁸ Thomas Elsaesser, "Film History and Visual Pleasure: Weimar Cinema," in *Cinema Histories, Cinema Practices*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp and Philip Rosen (Frederick, MD: UP of America, 1984), 47–84; here, 49.

film industry's own commodification of its products "as accumulations of dead labor moving through time and space in order to realize surplus value for an industry" that is essentially similar to other industries.⁹

It is for this reason that Andrew Higson, at the end of the 1980s, noted that "the current state of film studies is characterised by a tension between those who are working on the political economics of cinema and those who analyse and investigate textuality."¹⁰ This tension still exists three decades later, and my own approach is to "investigate textuality," as Higson puts it—that is, to interpret. I contend that the serious study of German film history must confront German films themselves as aesthetic objects, however they are produced or consumed. For both Kracauer, and for me, it is not primarily the economics of the film industry—its producers, stars, and audiences—that is of interest, but the individual films themselves. This is what I mean by a "critical film history"—one that treats film not as a product, but as a producer of aesthetic pleasure and a bearer of meaning, and further, that seeks to discover, analyze, and interpret that meaning. Of course, any interpretation is open to question, and any film can and will have multiple interpretations. As Kaes points out, feature film is usually a form of fiction, and fictions "add ambiguity as well as the possibility (and necessity) of a multiplicity of readings. Ambiguous speech is one of the central distinctions between fictional and nonfictional texts. Any analysis must acknowledge and stress the undecidability inherent in fiction."¹¹ However, history itself is fundamentally an interpretive field of inquiry, and it is my contention that the interpretation of aesthetic objects, including film, can help to understand history. Kaes argues that "the fictional world of the movies should not be seen as the opposite of the factual realm, but rather as a site in which men and women symbolically express their understanding of life in a particular socio-cultural milieu."¹² Films are primary historical documents that are produced and consumed collectively, by groups of individuals, and therefore they offer access to the history of collectivities: in this case, the collectivity of the German nation. The critical study of German film history is, then, among other things, part of the study of twentieth-century German history.

There are a number of other English-language books that have offered critical overviews of German cinema, including Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel's *The German Cinema* (1971), which, necessarily, could not treat the cinema of the 1970s or later; Frederick W. Ott's *The Great German Films* (1986), which ignored East German cinema; more

⁹ Elsaesser, "Film History and Visual Pleasure: Weimar Cinema," 49.

¹⁰ Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema," in *Film and Nationalism*, ed. Alan Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2002), 52–67; here, 65. This essay was first published in 1989.

¹¹ Kaes, "German Cultural History and the Study of Film," 53.

¹² Kaes, "German Cultural History and the Study of Film," 51.

recently, Robert C. Reimer's and Reinhard Zachau's book *German Culture through Film* (2005); and Joseph Garncarz and Annemone Ligensa's edited volume *The Cinema of Germany* (2012).¹³ The two more recent books offer useful information and readings of over thirty canonical German films (in the case of Reimer and Zachau) and twenty-four films (in the case of the volume edited by Garncarz and Ligensa), but what they do not provide is precisely what the books by Manvell and Fraenkel, Ott, and Hake offer: an overview of German cinema history. Moreover, Reimer and Zachau's book, as useful as it is, does not treat interpretation as an ongoing process of inquiry and debate, a process with its own history and its own importance to the interpretive project; the Garncarz/Ligensa volume, although it tends to give this aspect relatively short shrift, nevertheless acknowledges its significance. In approaching a film like *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, for instance, it can be useful to know how Kracauer or others have interpreted it. Of course, interpretations that take into account other interpretations in a self-reflexive way can, in a worst-case scenario, lead to an endless regression of analyses of other analyses rather than of the aesthetic object itself. In a best-case scenario, however, such interpretations can produce a better-grounded understanding that retains the freshness and immediacy of the aesthetic object while opening itself to the history of interpretive discourse—which is itself part of the history of any art work.

Over the course of many years, thanks to the work of Kracauer and others, a broadly accepted canon of German cinema has emerged that starts with films like *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* and moves from the Weimar Republic to classics of the New German Cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, such as Herzog's *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* and Fassbinder's *Die Ehe der Maria Braun*. There is less consensus on the canonical films of the German Democratic Republic, partly because East German cinema did not become a serious object of study in the western world until after German reunification in 1990, and partly because some of the most important East German films were actually banned at the time of their intended release and did not become available for viewing until 1990. There is even less critical consensus on the canonical films of the post-unification period, a period that has only come in for relatively sustained critical inquiry in the last decade or so. I am grateful for the work that Kracauer and others have done in establishing a canon, and I do not wish to challenge it. However, since there is no established canon for East

¹³ Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel, *The German Cinema* (New York: Praeger, 1971); Frederick W. Ott, *The Great German Films* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1986); Robert C. Reimer and Reinhard Zachau with contributions by Margit Sinka, *German Culture through Film* (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2005); and Joseph Garncarz and Annemone Ligensa, *The Cinema of Germany* (London: Wallflower Press, 2012).

German or postunification cinema, I am proposing my own canon for these periods. Any critical film history establishes its own canon since, by definition, it has to focus on a particular corpus of key films. There is strong reason to believe that the East German and postunification films included for analysis in this book will stand the test of time and be accepted into the larger canon of German film history.

The book is structured around the seven key periods of German cinema history: (1) German cinema from 1895 to 1918, during what was referred to as the *Kaiserreich*; (2) the cinema of the Weimar Republic from 1919 to 1933; (3) the cinema of the Third Reich from 1933 to 1945; (4) the cinema of the Zero Hour from 1945 to 1949, between the German defeat in the Second World War and the founding of the two competing postwar German states; (5) East German cinema from 1949 to 1989; (6) West German cinema in the same period; and (7) the cinema of post-reunification Germany from 1989 to the present. Though each of these periods rightly belongs to the history of German cinema, I do not wish to claim that each is equally important. For example, I do not cover the cinema of the Third Reich as extensively as the cinema of the Weimar Republic, because it is not as significant as its Weimar predecessor, and also because it is relatively difficult to find Nazi-era German films with English subtitles. Nonetheless, the films I have chosen give insight into the most important elements of Nazi-era cinema, even if *Hallo Janine* (1939) is not currently available with English subtitles. In choosing West German films, I have been guided partially by a well-established canon and partially by films' availability and accessibility to English-language audiences. *Die Brücke* (The Bridge, 1959) is one of the most notable West German films of the 1950s, but it is also, unlike most other West German films from this period, commercially available with English subtitles. *Grün ist die Heide* (The Heath is Green, 1951), a key postwar German *Heimatfilm*, was extremely popular at home but is not, unfortunately, commercially available with English-language subtitles—a problem that persists with many of the most popular German-language films from the 1930s to the present, including *Rossini oder die mörderische Frage, wer mit wem schlief* (Rossini or the Lethal Question Who Slept with Whom, 1997). This problem tends to skew the view of German film history in the English-speaking world away from the popular and toward the political or intellectual, which in turn gives English-speaking viewers the mistaken impression that Germans do not “do” light entertainment or comedy but instead only ever make serious political films. Nothing could be further from the truth, however, since many of the most popular German movies are and have always been comedies. I have chosen Volker Schlöndorff's *Der junge Törless* (Young Törless, 1966) for reasons of both significance and availability: it is both one of the key West German films of the 1960s, it is available with English subtitles, and it is

relatively accessible to general viewers (unlike Alexander Kluge's *Abschied von gestern* (Farewell to Yesterday, aka Yesterday Girl, 1966), which is arguably just as important). Seemingly banal practical considerations such as the availability of German films with English subtitles or the accessibility of films to nonspecialist audiences should not be underestimated in the selection of a film canon; no matter how good a film may be, if it cannot be understood by an audience, it is unlikely to have an impact. With only three exceptions—two of them, tellingly, comedies and the other a “light” but extremely popular *Heimatfilm*—the works I have chosen are available with English subtitles.

My concept of interpretation includes attention to aspects that are specific to film (such as camera movements or editing) as well as to aspects that are not film-specific (such as plot, character, dialogue, framing, color, lighting, sound, etc.) that exist in other art forms. Some film scholars may find that I pay too much attention to non-film-specific elements and too little to film-specific ones. However, film is very much a brother or sister of the other arts— theater, literature, painting, photography, architecture, music, dance, design, etc.—and film historians need to treat it in conjunction with those forms. In particular, film is closely related to literature and theater, and in many cases the tools that enable one to interpret those can also help in interpreting film. Three decades ago the writer and filmmaker Alexander Kluge acknowledged that “a careful review of the history of the expressive forms of film would probably reveal . . . that film is more at home in literature than in photography.”¹⁴ Kluge may well be right; at any rate, film includes aspects from all of the arts that contributed to its creation. In the middle of the nineteenth century, long before the invention of film, the composer Richard Wagner railed against the isolation of the arts from each other, and proposed what he called the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art). In many ways, film is the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the twentieth century.¹⁵ It is an art form in its own right, but it is fundamentally based on, preconditioned by, and open to all of the other arts. As Higson has argued, “cinema inserts itself alongside other cultural practices, and . . . draws on the existing cultural histories and cultural traditions of the producing nation, reformulating them in cinematic terms, appropriating them to build up its own generic conventions.”¹⁶ Film is by nature not an isolated or egotistical art form but rather is gregarious. That is part of its power.

¹⁴ Cited in Heide Schlüppmann, “What Is Different Is Good?: Women and Femininity in the Films of Alexander Kluge,” trans. Jamie Owen Daniel, *October* 46 (Autumn 1988): 129–50; here, 137.

¹⁵ See Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1979), 62.

¹⁶ Higson, “The Concept of National Cinema,” 62.

On the other hand, my notion of German Studies keeps this book narrowly focused on Germany, and does not include Austria. Of course, in the history of Germany, and of German cinema, it is not always easy to distinguish between Germany and Austria, or between German and Austrian cultural products. Nevertheless, for most of the period since 1866 (well before the invention of cinema), Austria has not been part of Germany, and since 1945 Austria's separate existence has been unproblematic and uncontroversial. My focus on Germany has forced me to ignore some films that I consider truly important—in particular, the films of Michael Haneke, a filmmaker born in Munich but associated primarily with contemporary Austrian and French cinema—but it is necessary for an analysis of German film in the context of German nationhood.

In both film studies and elsewhere, the concept of the national has come into question over the last few decades. We are told, first, that the nation is an outdated concept in the globalized world of today, and, second, that film itself is by nature an international phenomenon. It is true that the peoples and nations of the world are interacting with each other now more frequently, and more intensely, than ever before, but there is little evidence that for this reason the concept of the nation has become outdated. In fact, nations remain the primary players on the global stage, far more important than any international organizations, including economic organizations like corporations or banks. In times of prosperity it is possible to overlook this fact, but at moments of crisis, such as the terrorist attack on the United States in September of 2001 or the worldwide economic meltdown of 2008–9, it becomes immediately apparent: in moments of crisis it is primarily nations that are expected to take action. Donald J. Trump's assumption of the US presidency in January of 2017 and his policy of "America first" further underlined the continuing importance of nations in world affairs. As Philip Rosen has asserted, "the institution of the nation is basic to confronting a number of crucial historical processes of the last several centuries," or, in the words of Stephen Crofts: "it would be foolhardy to underestimate the continuing power of the nation-state."¹⁷ I find it hard to disagree with such statements.

As for cinema, it is indeed an international phenomenon, but it is an international phenomenon that is created in, and often for, nations. Randall Halle argues that the process of transnationalization, particularly evident in Europe, "preserves a national cinema, even as it recontextualizes

¹⁷ Philip Rosen, "History, Textuality, Nation: Kracauer, Burch, and Some Problems in the Study of National Cinemas," *Iris* 2, no. 2 (1984): 69–84; here, 83; and Stephen Crofts, "Reconceptualizing National Cinemas," in *Film and Nationalism*, ed. Alan Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2002), 25–51; here, 44–45.

that cinema.”¹⁸ Many film scholars refer to “national cinemas,” with the implication that of all the cinemas in the world, only one, American cinema, is not “national.” Others might argue that even American cinema is eminently a “national cinema,” made by and in the first instance for a particular nation. It is not the task of a critical history of German film to decide the question of whether American cinema is or is not national; it can merely accept the overwhelming critical consensus that German cinema does in fact constitute a “national cinema”—in fact, one of the world’s great national cinema traditions.

It is true that German cinema, like the German nation itself, is not cut off from the rest of the world, and that there are movements of influence and personnel among different national cinemas, including between Germany and the United States. And it is also true that over the past few decades German cinema has to a limited extent begun to resemble American cinema. Nevertheless, it remains distinct both at home and abroad, and there are strong economic and political factors that are, for the foreseeable future, likely to maintain that distinction. As Higson has noted, among other things, national cinemas are not only assertions of “national specificity” but also marketing strategies, “enabling the maximisation of an industry’s profits while at the same time bolstering a nation’s cultural standing.”¹⁹ National cinemas, including German cinema, need to be understood as existing in continuing tension with Hollywood, the world’s dominant cinema; they are sometimes unpopular even in their home countries, but they nevertheless assert a distinct national identity in opposition to the perceived homogenizing tendencies of global culture. Moreover, national cinemas, including German cinema, should be understood not as the expression of an unchanging, stable national identity but as one element in the ongoing creation and contestation of national identity, while the nation itself can be seen, in Rosen’s words, “as a construction of . . . [national cinema’s] discourse, and its address.”²⁰ The process of globalization does not simply lead to uniformity but also includes a powerful counter-movement toward distinctness and singularity. Nations and their national cinemas are frequently part of that counter-movement. German cinema is part of the complex web of words, images, stories, speeches, political movements, and music that Germans use in order to create, maintain, enforce, and contest their sense of the German nation, and of themselves as part of that nation.

¹⁸ Randall Halle, *German Film after Germany: Toward a Transnational Aesthetic* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2008), 7.

¹⁹ Higson, “The Concept of National Cinema,” 54.

²⁰ Rosen, “History, Textuality, Nation,” 81.

Part One

Early German Film History 1895–1918

1: Early German Film History 1895–1918: Historical Overview

THE ADVENT OF PHOTOGRAPHY in the nineteenth century, made possible by advances in the chemical industry, ultimately led to the invention of what came to be called motion pictures, which were in essence nothing but the projection of large numbers of sequentially ordered still photographs. The word “film” still shows the provenance of cinema from photography and the chemicals that make it possible. The history of film in Germany began on November 1, 1895, when Max Skladanowsky—working together with his brother Emil—showed a fifteen-minute series of eight short movies as the main attraction in a vaudevillelike program at Berlin’s Wintergarten theater. This was the first showing of a movie before a paying audience in Europe.¹ Skladanowsky had invented a machine that he called the “Bioscop”—literally, the “viewer of life”—that enabled the rapid projection of images, creating the impression of motion. This was a technical novelty and stirred great interest, but it was not at that time considered art. A promotional flier for Skladanowsky’s Bioscop emphasized not the content of what was to be shown but the novelty of the invention itself: “The Bioscop! The most amusing and most interesting invention of modern times. . . . Photographs presented through the original invention of Messrs. Skladanowsky.”² A critic for Berlin’s *Lokal-Anzeiger* newspaper explained the apparatus thus: “Hundreds of quickly moving and illuminated pictures come together to compose lively scenes from life.”³ Another promotional flier tried to explain the workings of the new apparatus, noting that what the Bioscop accomplished was “the

¹ Manfred Lichtenstein, “The Brothers Skladanowsky,” in *Before Caligari: German Cinema, 1895–1920 / Prima di Caligari: Cinema tedesco, 1895–1920*, ed. Paolo Cherchi Usai and Lorenzo Codelli (Pordenone: Edizioni Biblioteca dell’Immagine, 1990), 312–25; here, 312.

² Sabine Hake, *The Cinema’s Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany 1907–1933* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1993), 3.

³ Wolfgang Jacobsen, “Frühgeschichte des deutschen Films: Licht am Ende des Tunnels,” in *Geschichte des deutschen Films*, ed. Wolfgang Jacobsen, Anton Kaes, and Hans Helmut Prinzler, second edition (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2004), 13–37; here, 16. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from German sources are my own.

naturalistic reproduction of life . . . through the lightning projection of innumerable photographs in front of large audiences.”⁴

On the whole, the emphasis on the technical novelty and fascination of the apparatus itself remained dominant in Germany for at least a decade. What the apparatus enabled was something completely new in human history: the illusion that a picture could actually move and seem to have a life of its own. One review in the German press of an early performance stressed the pleasure engendered by the invention: “It is . . . such a rare and nice pleasure to view these various street scenes and other settings, which are reproduced so naturally that one almost believes in a miracle. The opportunity to study the apparatus is also worth mentioning.”⁵ As these early reactions to Max Skladanowsky’s Bioscop demonstrate, the most interesting thing about early movies was their technical novelty, and the emphasis was on the projector—the apparatus that created the illusion of real life. Despite the fact that these early films were in black and white and were silent, audiences were nevertheless impressed by their realism.

As a technical curiosity, then, film in its beginnings—and not just in Germany—had a kind of circuslike quality to it. And in fact, most early films were shown in circuslike environments—at fairs and in vaudeville theaters. Films were only one of the many attractions at such venues, which offered a wide variety of amusements from juggling and trapeze acts to freak shows. And just as circuses tend to travel from venue to venue, so too the early film apparatus traveled from place to place. After a stint at one venue, the projection apparatus would move to the next venue, along with all the other acts. Audiences for these early films were the same as the audiences for circuses and vaudeville acts: often working class people with not much education—people who would have felt uncomfortable or out of place at a conventional theater or opera house, but who now suddenly had the opportunity to enjoy a new and technically interesting kind of entertainment. Films did not pretend to be great art, and great art was not what their audiences were interested in. Nor did films demand much patience from their audience, since most early films were only a few minutes long at most. Film screenings were always accompanied by live music—usually someone playing the piano, occasionally a small orchestra. E. A. Dupont’s 1925 feature film *Variété*, starring Emil Jannings as an acrobat who is betrayed by the woman he loves, sets its most dramatic scenes in Berlin’s Wintergarten theater, where film got its start in 1895, and it shows some of the different kinds of acts that might have appeared in such a theater in conjunction with a typical presentation of film. Made only a few years before the demise of silent film and the rise of “talkies,”

⁴ Hake, *The Cinema’s Third Machine*, 3.

⁵ Hake, *The Cinema’s Third Machine*, 3.

Variété gives contemporary audiences a sense of what audiences in the early twentieth century might have experienced.⁶

The invention of film—as opposed to the Skladanowskys’ moving pictures—is generally credited to another team of brothers, Auguste and Louis Lumière in France, who, in December of 1895, demonstrated their pioneering projection apparatus—they called it the “Cinématographe”—to audiences in Paris. The Lumière brothers tended to show very simple, short scenes from everyday life. For instance, one of their most famous early films, slightly less than a minute long, is called *The Arrival of a Train at the Station*, and that is precisely what the film shows. This may seem relatively banal today, but at the time it was revolutionary—the Russian writer Maxim Gorky saw this film in Nizhny-Novgorod in 1896 and recalled that the train “speeds right at you—watch out! It seems as though it will plunge into the darkness in which you sit, turning you into a ripped sack full of lacerated flesh and splintered bones.”⁷ There were even reports that some people at early film viewings thought that what they were seeing on the screen was actually happening, that the train really was coming right at them and that their lives might be in danger. And yet, as the film scholar Tom Gunning has pointed out, spectators were probably complicit in their own delusion: they were seeking thrills and perhaps *wanted* to be terrified, motivated by what Gunning calls “an almost unquenchable desire to consume the world through images,” even or especially if that consumption involved terror.⁸ Whether early cinema audiences were actually fooled or not, however, audiences did ultimately learn to differentiate between the screen and real life, but those first experiences with cinema reveal something about the power of cinema to this day: its ability to portray events convincingly and realistically, giving audiences the impression that what they are seeing is real and is happening right now.

The beginnings of cinema were generally documentary: early films tended to show events in everyday life. Far from being banal, this was considered an enormous novelty since it was the technical apparatus itself, not the content of the film, that was the focus of attention. However, at the same time, another kind of cinema began to develop, one based on illusion and the fantastic. The pioneer of this type of cinema is generally considered to be the French cinematographer Georges Méliès, who

⁶ For a perceptive analysis of *Variété* from the perspective of early film history, see Matteo Galli, “Die Artisten in der Kino-/Theater-Kuppel: entfesselt—*Variété* von Ewald André Dupont,” in *Späte Stummfilme: Ästhetische Innovation im Kino 1924–1930*, ed. Heinz-Peter Preußner (Marburg: Schüren, 2017), 156–74.

⁷ Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator,” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, fifth edition (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 818–32; here, 822.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 828.

created his own movie studio; in 1902 Méliès made the first major science fiction movie in film history, *Le voyage dans la lune* (*A Trip to the Moon*). This was an unusually long movie for the time, almost ten minutes, and rather than showing a slice of everyday life, it showed (as its title suggested) a fantastic voyage, replete with a dramatic battle between earthlings and moon men. The distinction between the Lumière brothers and their documentary films on the one hand, and Georges Méliès and his fictional films on the other, still exists today, with films generally being identified as either documentary or as fictional films. An early German film theorist, the writer Ferdinand Hardekopf, explained the distinction between documentary and fiction as one between “two kinds of cinematographic subjects”—“natural and staged, discovered and invented.”⁹ A third category beyond documentary and fiction, that of the avant-garde film, is sometimes added to these two, but it is not particularly significant for early film history. After all, in the first decade of its existence cinema was almost by definition avant-garde in the sense of being at both the technological and artistic forefront. Moreover, both documentary and fiction filmmakers were fascinated by the experimental possibilities of cinema—the ability to show things in reverse, for instance, or to slow things down or speed them up. Such effects were enabled by the apparatus of cinema, and had hitherto been unknown in film’s more established artistic brother, conventional theater. Film scholars and historians tend to talk about “visual pleasure” (German: *Schaulust*) with respect to these things, emphasizing the sheer pleasure of watching. As early as 1913, the Dadaist writer Walter Serner argued that the chief attraction of cinema was visual pleasure, a powerful sensation that was increasingly denied to modern Europeans. “If one looks to where cinema receives its ultimate power,” Serner argued, “into these strangely flickering eyes that point far back into human history, suddenly it stands there in all its massiveness: visual pleasure.”¹⁰ People had a natural inclination to be voyeuristic, Serner argued, and the bloodier the action they are watching, the better. It was this powerful desire that was thwarted by European modernity, and that was being brought back by contemporary cinema. The term “Schaulust” also has strong psychoanalytic connotations, which Sigmund Freud developed in a 1910 lecture, and it should be remembered that Freud was originating his psychoanalytic theories at precisely the same time as film

⁹ Jacobsen, “Frühgeschichte des deutschen Films,” 18.

¹⁰ Walter Serner, “Kino und Schaulust,” in *Kein Tag ohne Kino: Schriftsteller über den Stummfilm*, ed. Fritz Güttinger (Frankfurt: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1984), 189–93; here, 189. For an alternative translation, see Serner, “Cinema and Visual Pleasure,” trans. Don Reneau, in *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory 1907–1933*, ed. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan (Berkeley: U of California P, 2016), 41–43; here, 42.

began emerging as a new art form.¹¹ It is no coincidence that film theory has been strongly influenced by Freud.

In the United States it was Thomas Edison who pioneered early cinematography with his film studio, which he called the “Black Maria” and his film viewer, which he called a “kinetoscope” (literally: movement viewer) in 1889. What we see with the emergence of early cinema is that inventors in several western countries—the United States, France, and Germany—were working on the development of motion pictures at roughly the same time. For many decades people had known that the human brain registers a rapid succession of sequential still images as flowing motion—that is, that the brain fills in the gaps between still images by imagining realistic motion—and even before the invention of photography there had been visual games that allowed people to take advantage of this phenomenon, such as flip books. With the simplification of the photographic process in 1871 by Richard Leach Maddox, who used silver bromide gelatins, and the development of celluloid by the Americans John and Isaiah Hyatt in 1870, the stage was set for further advances in motion, but the great problem that prevented real progress was always the problem of projection: How was it possible to project sequences of photographs to large audiences, not just to an individual viewer looking into a viewfinder, as was the case with Edison’s kinetoscope? It was this projection problem that was solved by people like Max Skladanowsky with his Bioscop and the Lumières with their Cinématographe, making it possible to show movies to large numbers of people. A member of the audience at an early presentation of the Lumière brothers’ projection device in Cologne in April of 1896 compared it favorably with Edison’s kinetoscope: “The Kinetoscope has various disadvantages—only one person could use the device, and the pictures were small and only weakly lit. Not so the new device invented by Auguste and Louis Lumière. We watch on a large screen as the different scenes unfold before our eyes. It is as if we were standing in front of an open window, looking out now at a factory yard, now at the open sea, now at a city railway station. All this appears before the eyes of the audience in such a natural way that those watching cannot contain their cries of astonishment.”¹²

Although celluloid was durable, it was also extremely flammable, and therefore early cinema was not without its dangers. Because of the hot light of the projector and the flammability of celluloid, there were a number of early theater fires, some of them deadly. The first cinema fire in history occurred at a demonstration of the Lumières’ projector at the Berlin

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, “The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis,” *American Journal of Psychology* 21 (1910): 181–218.

¹² Martin Loiperdinger, “1896—The Arrival in Germany of the Cinématographe Lumière,” in *Before Caligari*, 30–49; here, 34.

Trade Fair on August 16, 1896, when, as one newspaper subsequently reported, “the strips of celluloid loose in a basket underneath the device were ignited by particles of charcoal falling from the arc lamp.”¹³ As a result of this fire, both the projectionist and the electrical engineer suffered burns, and the Edison Pavillion in which the projector was being used was completely destroyed; fortunately, no one was killed. Later cinema fires were to be more deadly. On September 5, 1926, for instance, forty-six people died at a makeshift cinema in Limerick, Ireland, after a burning candle fell into a roll of celluloid. Three years later, on New Year’s Eve in 1929, at the Glen Cinema in Paisley, Scotland, seventy-one boys and girls died in a stampede when a spool of celluloid film caught fire in the projection room.

By the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, movies in Germany had become established and popular enough that they began to put down roots in specific locations and no longer had to travel around from fairground to fairground. Because of the popularity of movies, pub owners discovered that they could attract more customers if they had projection apparatuses to entertain them. Therefore, a coffeehouse or a pub would become an informal neighborhood storefront cinema known in German as a *Kientopp*, and it was in the *Kientopp* that most viewers of German cinema in the first decade of the twentieth century saw movies. Movies were generally shown on a continual basis, without any set starting time. People would arrive, order a beer and something to eat, and watch whatever they wanted of a series of usually rather short movies—anywhere from three to fifteen minutes each. Audiences were still working-class laborers and generally uneducated—the kind of audience that would hang out at an ordinary working-class bar. Out of the word *Kientopp* came the word *Kino*, which is generally the word that Germans still use today to refer to a movie theater. The word can be used both for the place where a movie is seen and for *cinema* itself. It came from the Lumière brothers’ Cinématographe, and the emphasis was still on the technical apparatus of projection and movement of images, not on the content of what was projected.

It was not until eleven years after the invention of cinematography, in 1906, that the first permanent movie theater was established in Germany, in Mannheim. After that, there was a rapid growth of movie theaters; by 1910 there were about one thousand movie theaters throughout Germany. These theaters were still relatively informal, and movies were still shown continuously, with no set starting times. They were also still relatively short, usually no more than ten or fifteen minutes long, and people came and went, eating and drinking. In the early years, theater owners had to

¹³ Loiperdinger, “1896—The Arrival in Germany of the Cinématographe Lumière,” 36.

purchase movies since there was no system of distribution; this changed after 1905 when, in response to the high cost of movies, distributors began to emerge who rented rather than sold movies to theater owners. This system made it possible for theater owners to pay less for films, and it also gave filmmakers a guaranteed revenue stream.¹⁴ By 1910, distributors moved toward renting exclusive rights for the showing of particular movies, which prevented movie theaters from entering into direct competition with other nearby theaters. As a result of these changes, movie producers began to invest more money in their movies, since they were guaranteed purchasers.¹⁵ Movies became longer. Because of the threefold system of production, distribution, and screening, and of the limited monopoly that local movie theaters now had on the screening of particular films, the so-called star system began to emerge, and German movie producers began offering large amounts of money to particular stars. The greatest early stars of German cinema were Henny Porten and Asta Nielsen, though the latter came from Denmark. Because films were silent, there were no language barriers for actors working in other countries.

Because early movies in Germany were quite popular with their relatively uneducated, working-class audience, they faced criticism from the upper classes. Movies were often seen as dangerous and perhaps even immoral or revolutionary. Like all other western countries, Germany at the time faced severe social problems. The nation had undergone breathtaking economic growth since its foundation as a unified *Reich* or empire in 1871, and by the beginning of the twentieth century it was the greatest economic power in Europe, with a formidable industrial base. The workers for those industries came from the country to the city, and within a single generation many German cities became overcrowded, with large lower-class slums. In essence, Germany had transformed itself from the sleepy agricultural country it had been at the beginning of the nineteenth century into one of the world's major industrial, economic, scientific, and military powers by the end of the nineteenth century. Germany's large and generally impoverished working class tended to have more children than the upper class, and they usually voted for their own political party, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), which was the largest working-class party in the world, and which favored a socialist transformation of the capitalist economy. The German upper class and the educated bourgeoisie, known in German as the *Bildungsbürgertum*, were afraid of both the working class and the SPD, and they suspected the *Kientopp* of having both revolutionary and immoral effects on its audience. The actor Paul

¹⁴ See Peter Bächlin, *Der Film als Ware* (Frankfurt: Athenäum Fischer Taschenbuch, 1975), 25–26.

¹⁵ On the development of this system, and of the longer feature film, see Corinna Müller, “Emergence of the Feature Film in Germany between 1910 and 1911,” in *Before Caligari*, and Bächlin, *Der Film als Ware*, 28.

Wegener, a strong promoter of cinema, acknowledged cinema's attractiveness to workers in a 1916 lecture: "Hardly ever has an art form captured the imagination, especially of the lower classes, in such breadth as film today."¹⁶ However, it was precisely cinema's attractiveness to the proletariat that made it suspect to the bourgeoisie, who, as Wegener acknowledged, sometimes looked down on or ignored it. Even more so than in other western countries, Germany's social elites tended to define themselves in terms of the quality of their literary and cultural education—hence the term *Bildungsbürgertum*: literally, a bourgeoisie (*Bürger-tum*) defined by its education and refinement (*Bildung*). These elites saw their country as a *Kulturnation*, a nation founded above all on the greatness of its culture, and they often viewed cinema as a degenerate, inferior, and possibly even dangerous form of cultural entertainment, very different from the sublime greatness attributed to German cultural heroes like Schiller and Goethe. The *Kientopp* was seen by many as pandering to the lowest common denominator by indulging in violence, sex, and low humor. In 1907 the German writer Hanns Heinz Ewers—who, six years later, was to work with Paul Wegener on one of the most important early German films, *Der Student von Prag* (The Student of Prague)—complained: "Like any young art form, moving pictures are for the time being basically just copying nature. And right now that's the best they have to offer. What human beings have added to them is partly awful, like the silly magic scenes, and partly funny and amusing, like the scenes of Paris burlesque, but highly unsatisfactory for finer tastes. Where are the poets and painters who create for the movies?"¹⁷ Moreover, movies were without language and poetry, since they were silent; therefore, they did nothing to improve the literacy or linguistic acumen of the lower classes.

However, cinema had strong defenders among the educated bourgeoisie as well. By the middle of the second decade of the twentieth century, some proponents of cinema believed that it had become a necessity for European masses who were tired of the intellectualized, abstract culture of words, logic, and philosophy. One German novelist, Friedrich Freksa, wrote in 1912 that films had become as necessary to contemporary Europeans as basic food items; cinema, he argued, "is just as important for our era as the potato was for its time, when it made it possible to feed the rapidly growing masses of human beings." Just as the potato had satisfied the hunger in Europeans' stomachs, so too the cinema

¹⁶ Paul Wegener, "Neue Kinoziele," in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 341–50; here, 342. For an alternative translation, see Wegener, "On the Artistic Possibilities of the Motion Picture," trans. Alex H. Bush, in *The Promise of Cinema*, ed. Kaes, Baer, and Cowan, 206–8; here, 206–7.

¹⁷ Hanns Heinz Ewers, "Der Kientopp," in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 12–14; here, 13. For an alternative translation, see Ewers, "The Kientopp," trans. Eric Ames, in *The Promise of Cinema*, ed. Kaes, Baer, and Cowan, 13–15; here, 14–15.

satisfied what Freksa called Europeans' "hunger of the eyes" (*Augenhunger*): "Rarely has an era suffered so much from *hunger of the eyes* as our own. For telegraphs, newspapers, and connecting roads have brought the world closer together. From all sides strange ideas press upon the working man who is bound to one place, but who is unable to connect these ideas with tangible visual sensations. This is reflected in our abstract language, so bereft of images, a language that has become the common currency of the bourgeoisie in place of the visually rich, illustrative language of our grandfathers, who were not troubled by the incoherence between eye and idea that plagues us."¹⁸ Almost all contemporary Europeans, Freksa believed, suffered from visual deprivation because they tended to live regulated, strictly circumscribed lives that offered little that was visually new or interesting: "All of us are like the worker in his factory who, day after day, does nothing but drive in the same screw. The result of this condition is a hunger of the eyes rarely experienced in human history. Human beings long to fill their abstract concepts with tangible images."¹⁹ Cinema's purely visual language, Freksa believed, offered a welcome antidote to the monotony of contemporary European visual hunger: "People who spend eight or ten hours a day working mechanically, whose brains are drying out on the work table, on the writing desk, or in the dust of the streets, find their relief, their visual nourishment, their tangible material for the imagination in the cinema."²⁰

Another German writer, the Expressionist Walter Hasenclever, conceded in 1913 that cinema was not really an art form at all, but he argued that it nevertheless had its justification: "Hatred of the movies is a result of a misunderstanding: movies are not an art form like theater, they are not sterile intellectualism; movies are in no way an idea. . . . Movies have something American, something brilliant, something kitschy about them. That's what makes them popular; that's what makes them good."²¹ Cinema, Hasenclever argued, had a kind of hypnotic impact on its viewers: "Of all the art forms of our time, cinema is the strongest, because it's the most contemporary. Space and time in cinema serve to hypnotize the viewers."²² Movies filled their viewers with a kind of naïve pleasure, plac-

¹⁸ Friedrich Freksa, "Vom Werte und Umwerte des Kinos," in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 98–100; here, 98.

¹⁹ Friedrich Freksa, "Die künstlerische und kulturelle Bedeutung des Kinos," in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 100–102; here, 100–101.

²⁰ Freksa, "Vom Werte und Umwerte des Kinos," in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 99.

²¹ Walter Hasenclever, "Der Kintopp als Erzieher: Eine Apologie," in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 282–84; here, 283. For an alternative translation, see Hasenclever, "The *Kintopp* as Educator: An Apology," trans. Sara Hall, in *The Promise of Cinema*, ed. Kaes, Baer, and Cowan, 39–41; here, 40.

²² Hasenclever, "Der Kintopp als Erzieher," in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 282; for an alternative English translation, see Hasenclever, "The *Kintopp* as Educator," 40.

ing them into the position of children enjoying their toys. Just as one would not dream of taking toys from children, so too one should not take cinema from its fans: “They shouldn’t spoil this naiveté for us with preachy sermons about a more noble art.”²³

The criticism of traditional German literary culture articulated by Freksa and Hasenclever demonstrates that by the middle of the second decade of the twentieth century, the cinema was fighting back against its highbrow literary critics in the cinema debate (*Kino-Debatte*). Not only was it refusing to concede its inferiority to them, it was actually claiming superiority. And relatively well-established literary intellectuals like Freksa and Hasenclever were offering the cinema ammunition in its battle.

Some of *Kientopp*’s harshest critics nevertheless called for drastic intervention. In 1910 one critic asked rhetorically: “When will the Hercules arrive who can clean out this Augean stable?”²⁴ With this allusion to Greek mythology, the critic was demonstrating his superiority to the uneducated working-class moviegoers he was criticizing; after all, they would not have known that one of the tasks of the Greek hero Hercules had been to clean out a massive stable filled to the rafters with horse dung. In 1913 another critic declared that movies were probably not capable of improvement: “I do not believe that cinematography, just because it is relatively new, still suffers from developmental shortcomings that will disappear automatically in the near future. On the contrary, I believe that it is in the very nature of cinematic representation—at least with today’s commercial orientation—that cinematography cannot be improved.”²⁵ In 1913, a year before the outbreak of the First World War, one book about the problem posed by cinema for presumably impressionable German youth warned educators to beware of “all the dangers threatened by bad movies and to protect youth from them.” It urged teachers and school administrators to “work for enlightenment, so that people . . . will understand how harmful a spiritual nourishment is frequently purveyed by the cinemas.” German teachers, the book suggested, should become active “in the press, at parent-teacher evenings, and at conferences. They must insist on the passage of legal measures and police ordinances so that our youth will be protected from all the pernicious influences made possible by cinema.”²⁶

Educators and other experts were particularly concerned about the possibly hypnotic effects that cinema could exert on vulnerable schoolchildren or on uneducated members of the working class. In 1911 one German physician called attention to a case of juvenile delinquency and thievery that had evidently been caused directly by the cinema. As the

²³ Hasenclever, “Der Kintopp als Erzieher,” in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 284; for an alternative English translation, see Hasenclever, “The *Kintopp* as Educator,” 41.

²⁴ Hake, *The Cinema’s Third Machine*, 34.

²⁵ Hake, *The Cinema’s Third Machine*, 34.

²⁶ Florian Illies, *1913* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2012), 285.

twelve-year-old thief confessed after being arrested for stealing a lady's purse, "I admit to having carried out the purse-snatching: I by chance ended up in a crowd where Frau K. stood with her purse. I had once seen the presentation of a purse-snatching in a movie theater. I was thereby compelled to try something like that, too."²⁷ The German psychiatrist Robert Gaupp explained how the cinema functioned as a machine for hypnosis. According to him, it was a

well-known psychological fact that, when hearing or reading about exciting events, few people have sufficient imagination to visualize the events graphically before the mind's eye. Cinema, however, brings everything right before our eyes in embodied form, and does so under psychological conditions that are conducive to deep and often lasting suggestive effect: the darkened room, the monotonous sound, the forcefulness of exciting scenes following each other beat by beat lull every critical faculty to sleep in impressionable souls, and thus, not infrequently the content of the drama becomes a fateful suggestion for the complaisant youthful mind. We know that *all suggestions adhere more strongly when the critical faculties sleep.*²⁸

The prejudice of cinema's detractors is clear: movies were a purely commercial enterprise catering to the worst instincts of the masses, and it was only with state interference that movies could be improved.²⁹ In 1914, the year that saw the outbreak of the First World War, another critic expressed his fear that movies spoke to the worst in audiences, bringing the entire western world to the brink of a revolution: "In the internationalist cinema drama, the wildest passions of all nations come together for a gruesome rendezvous."³⁰

As a result of such criticisms, films were subjected to special entertainment taxes that varied from locality to locality, but that were occasionally quite exorbitant. These taxes were like those imposed on other consumer goods that are discouraged, but not actually banned, by governments, such as cigarettes or alcohol; like these items, movies were seen as dangerous, intoxicating, and in need of government regulation. Censorship measures were also introduced, not on a national but on a local level; censorship rules varied from city to city, and for this reason films were chopped and cut in

²⁷ Scott Curtis, *The Shape of Spectatorship: Art, Science, and Early Cinema in Germany* (New York: Columbia UP, 2015), 135.

²⁸ Curtis, *The Shape of Spectatorship*, 136. Emphasis in the original.

²⁹ Such beliefs ultimately led to the *Reichslichtspielgesetz* (censorship law) of 1920. On film censorship and state interference, see Martin Loiperdinger, "Filmzensur und Selbstkontrolle: Politische Reifeprüfung," in *Geschichte des deutschen Films*, ed. Jacobsen, Kaes, and Prinzler, 525–44.

³⁰ Hake, *The Cinema's Third Machine*, 36.

a multitude of different ways. This is one of the reasons why there are so many different versions of some early cinema classics.

In response to the intense debate about cinema among the educated bourgeoisie, filmmakers in the second decade of the twentieth century tried to move film from the level of a technical curiosity of limited artistic value to the level of a genuine art form in its own right. Films began to be longer, expanding from one to two reels and telling longer stories. Audiences now clearly preferred fiction films to documentaries: they no longer wanted a simple reflection of reality; rather, they wanted something that went beyond reality and transported them out of their everyday lives. In order to counter their critics, German film producers began to hire famous writers and actors to work on their films, and they began to create ambitious productions that drew on the traditions of German literature and theater, particularly the long tradition of German Romanticism that had dominated much of the nineteenth century. The 1913 production *Der Student von Prag* is one such film, aimed no longer at a working-class audience but primarily at the educated bourgeoisie. Its purpose was, in part, to convince the *Bildungsbürgertum* that film could be a genuine, and specifically German, art form—even without the help of the German language.

Throughout the first two decades of film history, from 1895 to 1914, French cinema was the dominant cinema of the world. Since films were silent, there was no language barrier, and cinema was a truly international art form, as the critic who had spoken contemptuously of the “internationalist cinema drama” had noted. Film in Germany was decentralized in its production and distribution, and prior to 1914 fewer than 12 percent of all films shown in Germany were of German origin; the vast majority came from France, and some came from the film industry in the United States, which was beginning to be centered in Hollywood.

The internationalism and openness of film in Germany changed dramatically with the outbreak of the First World War, which had an impact on the film industry for two reasons. First, because Germany was now at war with France, imports of French films were banned. This protectionism ultimately allowed the German film industry to grow without competition from the French film industry; by the end of the First World War, German producers had the large and growing German market to themselves. In the early years of the war the German film industry was dominated by a Danish company, Nordisk, which had secured production and distribution facilities in Germany. Partly in reaction to this foreign competition, German companies began to see the need for greater economic concentration of the domestic film industry.³¹ Secondly, after the beginning of the war, the German government began to intervene and support the centralization of the German film industry for military and political

³¹ Bächlin, *Der Film als Ware*, 35.

reasons. Film's elite critics had convinced the *Bildungsbürgertum* of film's impact on the masses, and the German government was keenly interested in gaining the masses' support for the difficult war against France, England, and Russia, which demanded tremendous sacrifices, particularly from the working class who comprised the bulk of the German infantry. The German government also became aware of Britain's use of film as an effective propaganda weapon against Germany, and it decided that it needed to respond in kind. Even Kaiser Wilhelm II took a personal interest in film. German companies began to make newsreels about the war, along with patriotic dramas intended to strengthen the bond between soldiers at the front and their families at home.

Ultimately, in 1917, the German army's High Command under General Eric Ludendorff founded its own film propaganda unit, declaring: "We have underestimated the political influence exerted by film for mass suggestion. . . . Modern warfare not only involves economic, military, and financial weapons, but also journalistic ones."³² By this point it was clear that film had become a significant part of the political and military landscape, and that film would play a major role in the political movements of the twentieth century. General Ludendorff also decided to centralize and strengthen the bond between the German government and private producers, such as the early cinema innovator Oskar Messter, and out of his program for centralization came the Ufa or "Universum-Film AG" in 1917, a massive German production and distribution conglomerate comprised of several previously separate companies, which was to dominate the German film industry through the classic era of Weimar cinema in the 1920s and early 1930s and during the years of Hitler's Third Reich as well. Ufa brought together the government, large banks, and several major production companies into a single overarching enterprise. The German film company Bioscop had established studios in the Potsdam suburb of Babelsberg in 1911, and in 1921, after the end of the First World War, the Bioscop company was incorporated into the Ufa conglomerate; Babelsberg quickly became the center of the German film industry, the German equivalent to Hollywood, and it was here that most of the classic films of the next decades were made.

Between 1910 and 1920 German cinema grew explosively, in spite of all criticisms. Prior to 1910 there had been about 1,000 movie theaters; by 1912 there were 1,500, and by the beginning of the First World War there were 2,446. After the end of the war, in 1919, there were 2,836. This explosion in the number of movie theaters, however, does not show the true extent of cinema's growth. In 1910 all existing movie theaters together could accommodate about two hundred thousand patrons; nine years later, theaters could accommodate one million—five times as

³² Hake, *The Cinema's Third Machine*, 17.

many.³³ By the end of the First World War, German films enjoyed a virtual monopoly in the German market, and German film production had become centered in Babelsberg. Moreover, the harsh criticism of cinema that had dominated in the early teens of the twentieth century during the *Kino-Debatte* began to diminish as producers saw that film could be a major money-making business and not just inferior entertainment for the working class. As movie theaters became larger, they also became more elegant. In the middle of the First World War, the actor and early film promoter Paul Wegener, star of *Der Student von Prag*, noted that “through the elegance of their design and the rather high ticket prices, the movie theaters in the large cities are already beginning to target the upper classes.”³⁴ Movies were increasingly posing a real threat to traditional forms of elite entertainment, particularly the theater. As early as 1912 Friedrich Freksa welcomed this development, proclaiming: “There ought to be even more theaters that bite the dust! Because theater in the traditional sense is outdated! Admit it! All of you who are involved in the life of the theater, you all know that the old theater is destined to die.”³⁵ The writer Hanns Heinz Ewers agreed with Freksa on the superior strength of cinema. “The theaters,” he wrote in 1912, “should watch out: they’ve never had to deal with the intense competition they’re facing now, and they’ll start noticing it more and more in their ticket sales. Today it’s the cheap seats that are emptying out—but before too much longer the expensive seats will start emptying, too, and then the theater folks will have to watch *Don Carlos* or Ibsen by themselves. The audience is saying no thanks and running to the movies.”³⁶ In that same year Erich Schlaikjer, writing in a journal for theater actors, proclaimed: “An enemy is marching. . . . That enemy is the cinema.”³⁷

All of these developments in early film history suggest a gradual trend toward redefining or broadening the concept of art. Throughout the nineteenth century art had been understood primarily as the creation of individual geniuses like Ludwig van Beethoven or Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whose remarkable, awe-inspiring talents enabled them to rise above the common run of ordinary people. Art, in other words, was generally understood to be an individual enterprise dominated by great men.

³³ Figures from Thomas J. Saunders, *Hollywood in Berlin: American Cinema and Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994), 20–21.

³⁴ Wegener, “Neue Kinoziele,” in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 343. For an alternative translation, see Wegener, “On the Artistic Possibilities of the Motion Picture,” 208.

³⁵ Friedrich Freksa, “Vom Werte und Unwerte des Kinos,” in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 98–100; here, 99.

³⁶ Hanns Heinz Ewers, “Vom Kinema,” in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 20–23; here, 22.

³⁷ Helmut H. Diederichs, “The Origins of the *Autorenfilm*,” in *Before Caligari*, 380–401; here, 382.

Geniuses worked alone, directed only by their own inspiration. Film's immediate high-art predecessors were the novel and theater; in particular, the novel tended to focus on the individual human being and his or her development, and it was written by only one person and also generally experienced by only one person at a time. Film, however, was not the product of one person: It required significant amounts of capital, the participation of a great many people in production and distribution, a technical apparatus and space for screening, and it generally did not have the psychological depth of the novel, since it was without language and usually had a large number of characters. For all of these reasons, as well as its lower-class stigma, film was initially not viewed as an art form at all, but rather as a low form of entertainment. The high-culture response to this state of affairs was either to reject cinema altogether or to "raise" it to the status of traditional theater. Paul Wegener complained that contemporary filmmakers and critics were simply trying to transform cinema into "the theater of the little guy," a kind of low-culture substitute for high culture.³⁸ And indeed in 1912 the German film industry had produced a brochure entitled *Kino als modernes Volkstheater* (Cinema as Modern People's Theater).³⁹ Wegener himself wanted to refocus cinema as an art form away from competition with traditional German high culture, such as the theater and the novel, and toward what he saw as cinema's own inherent technical possibilities, the ultimate goal of which was an art form governed "solely by photographic technology," not by stage actors or directors.⁴⁰ Rather than competing with other art forms on their own terms, therefore, Wegener believed that cinema should constitute itself as a new art form with new and different aesthetic possibilities. People's consciousness of new aesthetic potential always lagged behind the development of technology, Wegener argued; thus, the first automobiles had looked very much like horse-drawn carriages. So too early movies, trying to prove their artistic value, tended to look like bad copies of traditional high culture. But these problems were not inherent in film technology itself; they resulted, rather, from a lack of consciousness of cinema's new possibilities. "The movies pretend to be pantomimes, dramas, or illustrated novels. But there are film possibilities that come from the technology of moving pictures themselves, and for which not theatrical plays, not exciting dramas, and not sensational novels need to be written but rather content whose fascination lies primarily in the effects of the pictures themselves."⁴¹ It was Wegener's goal to offer the cinema such new possibilities, and his first chance to do so was the film *Der Student von Prag*.

³⁸ Wegener, "Neue Kinoziele," in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 343.

³⁹ Diederichs, "The Origins of the *Autorenfilm*," in *Before Caligari*, 382.

⁴⁰ Wegener, "Neue Kinoziele," in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 348.

⁴¹ Wegener, "Neue Kinoziele," in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 343.



*The unhappy student Balduin sits apart while others revel.
Courtesy of the Filmmuseum Potsdam.*

2: *Der Student von Prag* (1913) and Learning to Look

Director: Stellan Rye

Cinematographer: Guido Seeber

Screenplay: Hanns Heinz Ewers

Producer: Deutsche Bioskop

Art Directors: Klaus Richter and Robert A. Dietrich

German Release Date: August 22, 1913

Actors: Paul Wegener (Balduin); John Gottowt (Scapinelli); Grete Berger (Komtesse Margit Waldis-Schwarzenberg); Lyda Salmonova (Lyduschka); Lothar Körner (Graf von Schwarzenberg); Fritz Weidemann (Baron Waldis-Schwarzenberg)

DER STUDENT VON PRAG (The Student of Prague) should be seen as part of the general battle over cinema culture in the second decade of the twentieth century. The film was directed in 1913 by the Danish-born director Stellan Rye—who was to die only a year later as a prisoner-of-war in France in the First World War—photographed by Guido Seeber, and written by Hanns Heinz Ewers, based on a novel by Ewers and derived in part from Edgar Allan Poe’s tale “William Wilson” (1839). It was filmed largely on location in Prague. *Der Student von Prag* is representative of German cinema at a crucial turning point: the point where it was seeking to lose its lower-class, inferior status and to assert a claim as a viable art form in its own right. Ewers proclaimed in the year that he helped make this film, “*I want to prove that good art is possible even in cinema, even without words.*”¹ The film critic Lotte Eisner has noted that *Der Student von Prag* points forward to many of the classic German films of the 1920s because of its emphasis on Romanticism and the irrational.² The film stars Paul Wegener, a stage actor who had worked with the great German director Max Reinhardt, and who, in a 1916 lecture on the art of cinema,

¹ Hanns Heinz Ewers, “Der Film und ich,” in *Kino-Debatte: Literatur und Film 1909–1929*, ed. Anton Kaes (Munich and Tübingen: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag and Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1978), 103–4; here, 104. Emphasis in the original. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from German sources are my own.

² Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, trans. Roger Greaves (Berkeley: U of California P, 1969), 41.

proclaimed his own goal to be “a kind of kinetic lyricism . . . in which, ultimately, we can completely do without the reflection of reality.”³ For Wegener, cinematography was to be a kind of visual poetry that was not reliant on everyday life, documentary technique, or even conventional notions of artistic excellence.

Ewers, the screenplay writer, was already a well-known author at the time with serious literary ambitions. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Ewers had been involved in vaudevillelike theater, and he was, as he himself admitted, a tireless promoter of cinema as an art form. He criticized educated elites who looked down at film: “The people who are still railing against the cinema are precisely the same people who once railed against bicycles, then against automobiles, and now against airplanes: they’re the idiots.”⁴ Ewers was later to write the screenplay for an early Nazi film, *Hans Westmar* (1933), a bio-pic based on the life of the Nazi Horst Wessel, who was killed by a political opponent in 1930 and had attained the status of a martyr.

The involvement of Wegener and Ewers in *Der Student von Prag*—the former already successful in the conventional theater and the other successful as a writer—is indicative of the way that the German film industry at this juncture was beginning to attract artists from other, more established art forms. Major writers like Arthur Schnitzler and Hugo von Hofmannsthal saw their plays adapted for the cinema, and theater directors like Max Reinhardt also had movies produced. In 1907 Ewers had complained about what he saw as the second- and third-rate nature of contemporary cinematic production, which he believed consisted mostly of imitations of lower-class entertainment—nothing capable of pleasing people of finer tastes. “Where,” Ewers asked, “are the poets and painters who create for the movies?”⁵ With *Der Student von Prag*, Ewers was trying to answer his own question by creating a movie that would be capable of pleasing people of good taste. The very presence of artists like Ewers and Wegener was intended to confer a higher social status on the films they made; however, such artists—even Ewers and Wegener, who were well aware of cinema’s new technical and aesthetic possibilities—tended to import the conventions of their own art forms into film, making it more acceptable to German elites. The German critic Heide Schlüpmann

³ Paul Wegener, “Neue Kinoziele,” in *Kein Tag ohne Kino: Schriftsteller über den Stummfilm*, ed. Fritz Güttinger (Frankfurt: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1984), 341–50; here, 348.

⁴ Hanns Heinz Ewers, “Vom Kinema,” in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 20.

⁵ Hanns Heinz Ewers, “Der Kientopp,” in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 13. For an alternative translation, see Ewers, “The Kientopp,” trans. Eric Ames, in *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory 1907–1933*, ed. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan (Berkeley: U of California P, 2016), 13–15; here, 15.

has called this process “the cooptation of film by the middle class.”⁶ By means of this process, as one film publication proclaimed, “film has become worthy of the arts pages.”⁷ Another publication announced that “the German cinema public shall be afforded through the so-called *Autorenfilm* to experience some of the most important and characteristic works of our writers.”⁸ One German film company, Deutsche Bioscop, boasted that “Films of famous authors are the future of cinema,” and that by offering such films, “we will do even more for the moral and artistic elevation of the cinema!”⁹

Der Student von Prag may be somewhat difficult for contemporary audiences to view for several reasons. In contrast to contemporary cinema, the camera in this film, as in all early films, is static: it stays in one place and does not “travel.” There are no tracking shots and no zooms. The only movement that occurs is achieved through editing, by cutting off one scene and beginning another with the camera in a different location. For contemporary viewers used to fluid camera movements, this can be a difficulty. In addition, the picture quality of these early movies is not as good as contemporary movies’, and of course they are in black-and-white rather than in color. Furthermore, it should be remembered that *Der Student von Prag* is almost a century old, and that film stock tends to deteriorate over time, sometimes drastically, both naturally and as a result of human intervention such as censorship or war damage. Even as far back as 1952, Eisner remarked of *Der Student von Prag* that “nowadays the photography . . . seems rather grey. One has to remember that the contemporary prints, toned in brown, green or (for night scenes) dark blue, were more subtle.”¹⁰

By far the most difficult problem for contemporary viewers, however, is that, like all early films, *Der Student von Prag* is silent. “Silent” is in fact a misnomer, however—early films were screened with accompanying music, and almost all currently available copies of these films have had musical soundtracks added to them. Nevertheless, these films have no running dialogue; the only language associated with them is occasional intertitles that tell viewers what is happening or what the characters are thinking or saying. Though a silent film may be unusual or difficult to

⁶ Heide Schlüppmann, “The First German Art Film: Rye’s *The Student of Prague* (1913),” in *German Film and Literature: Adaptations and Transformations*, ed. Eric Rentschler (New York: Methuen, 1986), 9–24; here, 10.

⁷ Helmut H. Diederichs, “The Origins of the *Autorenfilm*,” in *Before Caligari: German Cinema, 1895–1920/Prima di Caligari: Cinema tedesco, 1895–1920*, ed. Paolo Cherchi Usai and Lorenzo Codelli (Pordenone: Edizioni Biblioteca dell’Immagine, 1990), 380–401; here, 386.

⁸ Diederichs, “The Origins of the *Autorenfilm*,” in *Before Caligari*, 386.

⁹ Diederichs, “The Origins of the *Autorenfilm*,” in *Before Caligari*, 386.

¹⁰ Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, 42.

deal with now, it is important to remember that for the first three decades of film history—not just in Germany but everywhere else as well—films were silent, and there was nothing unusual about it. Moreover, with the emergence of new social media over the past few decades, one can observe a gradual return to some of the forms of silent cinema, since some online clips are very short, feature little or no sound, and frequently also contain captions or intertitles, as films did over a century ago.¹¹

The “silence” of these films differentiates them both from our twenty-first-century expectations of film—since audiences now expect films to have a synchronized soundtrack—and from the conventional theater, which was their most immediate high-culture competitor at the time. The absence of language in these films is both a disadvantage and an advantage, and twenty-first-century audiences would do well to remember the advantages as well as the disadvantages of silent cinema. Of course, the absence of a soundtrack was based on a technological problem that was not definitively solved until 1927 in the United States and 1929 in Germany—the problem of how to inscribe sound into celluloid and synchronize sound with action—and once that problem was solved, silent film quickly disappeared. It is also true that there were early attempts at sound film in Germany and elsewhere in the first decade of the twentieth century, but such attempts did not bear enduring fruit. Still, because it lacks a soundtrack, twenty-first-century viewers tend to regard silent film as inferior and primitive, and from a purely technological standpoint they are probably correct. Even Paul Wegener, writing in 1916, predicted that future generations would look at early cinema as crude and inadequate: “a later generation [will] look back on our early efforts as childish stammering . . . I’m convinced of that.”¹² Nonetheless, these films were not actually technologically primitive at the time.

There are, however, a number of advantages that come from the lack of a spoken soundtrack. The most obvious is that the films are comprehensible to anyone anywhere, regardless of language barriers. Plays, novels, and poems can be appreciated only by those who understand the language being used, but silent film could be appreciated by anyone who saw it, regardless of what he or she spoke. As Wegener noted in his 1916 lecture, “a motion picture, once produced, can be played anywhere in the world with minimal costs. Language plays no role. Films, which weigh so little, move like lightning all over the world—with an international speed that the art of theater and the *Variété* cannot achieve!”¹³ Or, in the words of a fictional film producer in Gore Vidal’s novel *Hollywood*, “the beauty

¹¹ Amanda Hess, “The Silent Film Returns—on Social Media,” *The New York Times*, September 13, 2017, C1.

¹² Wegener, “Neue Kinoziele,” in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 350.

¹³ Wegener, “Neue Kinoziele,” in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 343.

of movies is that they don't talk."¹⁴ But silent film had the advantage not only of overcoming the barrier between one language and another—such as, for instance, between German and English—but also the barriers that existed within the same language. Spoken language is one of the primary markers of regional and class distinctions, and, moreover, much of the language used on stages (and now, of course, in movies and on television) is relatively ritualized and meaningless and does not contribute much to genuine understanding or feeling. The conventions of language on the German stage in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were particularly ritualized, and actors had to learn a specific, artificial, and highly declamatory—some might even say pompous—way of speaking known as *Bühnensprache* (stage language); likewise, writers learned a particular, not very realistic way of writing characterized by the excessive use of adjectives and dependent clauses. With the early silent cinema, all of the elaborate linguistic ritual associated with German high culture—lengthy sentences, stilted vocabulary, pompous enunciation—was necessarily discarded, and a story had to be told directly in easily comprehensible pictures, not in words. One can imagine that for early film audiences, used to seeing the theater as a strange place where people spoke highfalutin language, the lack of spoken dialogue and the immediate visual presence of moving images must have been a relief rather than a disappointment—like going from a stilted parliamentary debate into a circus show. Without language and its accompanying complexities, film was more accessible to ordinary people, and directors and actors were forced to focus on purely visual rather than linguistic communication. Paul Wegener proclaimed in his 1916 lecture that “the real poet of the movie must be the camera itself.”¹⁵ If traditional literary art was generally for and about nobility or the bourgeoisie—kings, queens, aristocrats, or the rich—films could be about ordinary people. The writer Karl Hans Strobl wrote in 1911 that film “is very much a democratic institution and, as such, a valuable counterweight against all cultural efforts and artistic activities that demand a dinner jacket as their first precondition. Cinematic theater doesn't make any demands on one's wardrobe.”¹⁶ *Der Student von Prag* is somewhere in between the extremes of high art and proletarian culture: it features a middle-class protagonist—the student Balduin, who aspires to climb socially by marrying a countess and acquiring lots of money. Just as

¹⁴ Gore Vidal, *Hollywood* (New York: Random House, 1990), 98. The fictional producer is based on the publisher William Randolph Hearst, who is explaining cinema's advantages over his own newspapers.

¹⁵ Wegener, “Neue Kinoziele,” in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 348. For an alternative translation, see Ewers, “The Kientopp,” 207.

¹⁶ Karl Hans Strobl, “Der Kinematograph,” in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 54. For an alternative translation, see Strobl, “The Cinematograph,” trans. Don Reneau, in *The Promise of Cinema*, ed. Kaes, Baer, and Cowan, 25–28; here, 28.

cinema itself was trying to climb socially from the lower classes to the middle classes at the time this movie was made, so too the film's protagonist is trying to rise above his station in life.

Ewers was not at all apologetic about film's lack of language; he considered it very much an advantage, not a limitation. In 1913 he argued that because of its lack of words, cinema was ultimately superior to literary art forms: "But that was precisely what drew me to it: the possibility of finally, finally, doing without *words*, without words, which had previously been everything to the poet, and without which poets didn't even seem to be possible. Words—in spite of everything, they are only a vague and inadequate surrogate for the very *deepest* feelings!"¹⁷ Cinema, Ewers believed, offered the possibility of allowing "the soul to speak even without words." After all, he asked, "in everyday life, doesn't a mere glance often tell me more than words?"¹⁸ One is reminded, when reading Ewers's thoughts, of the old adage "A picture is worth a thousand words."

Already in 1907, when many intellectuals and upper-class people scorned the cinema, Ewers had criticized the cinema's snobbish critics: "Are all of these journalists really blind? Don't they know that moving pictures are more important, more overwhelming and primary, than any other factor in our culture? Don't they know that movies can easily be compared to Gutenberg's invention, to which we writers of books owe our lives?"¹⁹ In Germany, the much-vaunted land of *Dichter und Denker* (poets and thinkers), so proud of its literary heritage, this was a radical and powerful defense of cinema. Ewers claimed that even the smokiest storefront cinema was better than most legitimate German theaters, and he complained: "On the theatrical stage people talk and force me to pay attention to what they're saying, to follow their thoughts. But in the movies I can dream."²⁰

The rise of film from 1895 through 1920 coincided with the simultaneous emergence of psychoanalysis, founded by the Viennese psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, some of whose most important works and theories were developed during this period. Freud wrote his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900, "On Narcissism" in 1914, and "Instincts and their Vicissitudes" in 1915. Dreams, he argued, satisfy unmet, repressed desires, of which modern human beings, cooped up in big cities and leading abstract, alienated lives, have a great many. Freud did not specifically write about the cinema, but his ideas about visual pleasure, dreams, and the unconscious have had a major influence on thinking about film and

¹⁷ Ewers, "Der Film und ich," in *Kino-Debatte*, 104. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁸ Ewers, "Der Film und ich," in *Kino-Debatte*, 104.

¹⁹ Ewers, "Der Kientopp," in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 12. For an alternative translation, see Ewers, "The Kientopp," 14.

²⁰ Ewers, "Vom Kinema," in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 21.

its function. It is probably not a coincidence that the German psychiatrist Otto Rank, one of Freud's followers, began a 1914 treatise on the psychological problem of the *Doppelgänger* (the double) with an invocation of *Der Student von Prag*. Film, Rank argued, "reminds us of dream techniques in more ways than one, expresses certain psychological facts and relationships—which the poet cannot clearly articulate in words—in a distinct and manifest imagistic language and thus makes their meaning more accessible."²¹ *Der Student von Prag* is an assertion by the cinema of its unique status as an art form on a par with or even better than traditional literary forms. The film was largely successful on these terms, as a review in one journal noted: "The film is not just capable of being a surrogate for this or that art—it is much more a means for creating a self-sufficient and worthy art of a distinctive kind. To express it simply and clearly: film creates a bridge between painting and poetry—both arts which we have until now thought of as divided by irreconcilable boundaries. It[s] means go beyond those of painters, since it joins images with movement, and thus crosses over into the domain of drama; yet it does not inherit fully the domain of drama, since it lacks dialogue."²² Paul Wegener explained that by 1913, when the film was made, he had come to understand that because of its technological possibilities the cinema could actually present certain kinds of Romantic motifs—such as the motif of *Doppelgänger*—more successfully than literature itself. As a screenwriter, Ewers asserted the film's high-art status by immersing *Der Student von Prag* in the literary atmosphere of German Romanticism. For Ewers, film gave to ordinary people the Romanticism that they were lacking in ordinary life. "The cinema," he argued a year before the film was made, "is a feast for the eyes of our blind longing. And if you don't want to believe that our era is Romantic, then go to the movies. The masses want Romanticism—and the movies give it to them."²³ *Der Student von Prag* uses an old Romantic tale: a young, poor student in the city of Prague, in order to get money to impress the wealthy countess he loves, sells his mirror image to an evil sorcerer. It also draws on a number of Romantic motifs: the act of selling part of oneself to an evil power harks back to the most famous German national legend, that of Faust, who sold his soul to the devil and was ultimately damned. The idea of a mirror image recalls Romantic motifs of the *Doppelgänger* or "double," and people selling their shadow. For instance,

²¹ Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychological Study*, trans. Harry Tucker, Jr. (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1971). Cited in Schlüpmann, "The First German Art Film," in *German Film and Literature*, 13.

²² Kristin Thompson, "Im Anfang war . . . : Some Links Between German Fantasy Films of the Teens and the Twenties," in *Before Caligari: German Cinema, 1895–1920/Prima di Caligari: Cinema tedesco, 1895–1920*, ed. Usai and Codelli, 138–61; here, 142.

²³ Ewers, "Vom Kinema," in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 22.

Adalbert von Chamisso's celebrated "Peter Schlemihl" (1814) tells the story of a man who becomes separated from his shadow, and E. T. A. Hoffmann's tale "Die Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht" (The Adventures of New Year's Eve, 1815) tells the story of Erasmus Spikher, who barbers away his mirror image. The Irish writer Oscar Wilde, whose primary works appeared shortly before the invention of cinema in 1895, also wrote books and fairy tales based on similar motifs, such as his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890–91) and his story "The Fisherman and His Soul." And as was mentioned earlier, Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson" was in many ways the template for *Der Student von Prag*. In all such stories there is something distinctly threatening about being separated from one's mirror image or one's shadow. The separation suggests that somewhere there is an alternate self running around and committing crimes in one's own name, and that one can do nothing to stop it; one has literally lost control of oneself. Frequently this loss of one's mirror image or one's shadow occurs because of a Faustian pact with an evil being, and one must pay for it, as the legendary Faust did, with the loss of one's soul. In the case of *Der Student von Prag*, the student Balduin's double constantly torments and stalks him, and in the end the protagonist shoots his mirror image with his revolver, only to discover that he has actually killed himself. Psychologically, the *Doppelgänger* was always just a projection of the protagonist Balduin's own evil tendencies. The story thus revolves around narcissism, madness, magic, individual identity, violence, and suicide—all common elements of German Romanticism. In making the film, Ewers and Wegener were demonstrating that film is just as capable as literature of dealing with Romantic motifs, and that film can play an important role in propagating the values of the German *Kulturnation* (a nation based on notions of culture). One critic, commenting ironically on the film's 1913 premiere, conjured up the spirits of Ewers's literary predecessors as spectators: "It was a real première. A lot of tuxedoes. The poet sat in a private box, occasionally visible with very pretty ladies. A monocle gave its master the necessary bearing. Goethe, Chamisso, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Alfred de Musset, and Oscar Wilde were also present."²⁴ Another writer noted that the film was "a dramatic production and very literary. Very literary. Its illustrious relations are Goethe, Chamisso, Amadeus Hoffmann and Oscar Wilde. . . . The blood races through your veins in a highly satisfactory and ghostly way during this fantastic drama."²⁵

One way of looking at a film like *Der Student von Prag* is to analyze it as a reflection of the national psyche, as pioneering film theorist

²⁴ Originally cited in *Hätte ich das Kino! Die Schriftsteller und der Stummfilm*, ed. Ludwig Greve, Margot Pehle, and Heidi Westhoff (Stuttgart: Klett, 1976), 111. Cited in Schlüppmann, "The First German Art Film," in *German Film and Literature*, 10.

²⁵ Thompson, "Im Anfang war . . .," in *Before Caligari*, 140.

Siegfried Kracauer did in *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (1947), his classic study of German cinema from its beginnings through the start of the Nazi period. Kracauer wrote the book in exile in the United States while working at the Museum of Modern Art during the Second World War, when Americans were seeking to understand exactly what made Nazi Germany tick.²⁶

Heide Schlüpmann, strongly influenced by Kracauer, asserts that “films, even so-called *auteur* films, are not the products of individual authors as in literature. Due to their collective production, films reflect—as Kracauer insists—the ‘collective mentality’ of a nation, the ‘superindividual’ layer, much more directly than traditional arts.”²⁷ Kracauer claimed that film “more than any other medium offers an access to the inner dispositions of broad strata of the population.”²⁸ Kracauer’s argument was similar to one that had already been made by Friedrich Freksa in 1912, a year before the filming of *Der Student von Prag*. Whereas contemporary literary authors, Freksa argued, were interested primarily in forcing upon viewers their own individual thoughts and morality, thus ensuring that literature was no longer “the instrument of a universal cultural force like the poets of the Greek era,” cinema allowed viewers to find their own vision, and thus it expressed a more generally applicable collective feeling. “The people,” Freksa claimed, “have the age-old, purely artistic approach: they want the events, the experiences, what they can grasp in their hands—and they want to create their own morality and ideas themselves.” Cinema allowed for this kind of freedom, Freksa believed, making it possible for ordinary people to see “the amazing things that they know from novels or local legends.”²⁹

A reading of *Der Student von Prag* that seeks to examine it as an expression of Freksa’s “universal cultural force” or Kracauer’s collective psyche might point to the split between the protagonist Balduin and his *Doppelgänger* as a reflection of a psychically unstable and divided Germany shortly before the beginning of the First World War, a Germany worried about its status and willing to enter into morally questionable pacts to defend and enhance that status. Such a reading might also point out that the protagonist Balduin’s actions are ultimately self-destructive, since the film ends in suicide; such a reading might infer from this the presence

²⁶ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1947).

²⁷ Schlüpmann, “The First German Art Film,” in *German Film and Literature*, 13.

²⁸ Siegfried Kracauer, letter to Carl Mayer, May 29, 1944. Cited in Uli Jung and Walter Schatzberg, *Beyond Caligari: The Films of Robert Wiene* (New York: Berghahn, 1999), 73, note 4.

²⁹ Friedrich Freksa, “Die künstlerische und kulturelle Bedeutung des Kinos,” in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 100–102; here, 101.

of a German national death wish. Kracauer himself calls *Der Student von Prag* “a dreamlike transcription of what the German middle class actually experienced in its relation to the feudal caste running Germany” prior to the First World War.³⁰ For him, the protagonist Balduin’s split personality represents the division among the classes in Germany, and the film’s psychological claustrophobia “reflects the profound aversion of all German middle-class strata to relating their mental dilemma to their ambiguous social plight”—that is, a preference among the educated middle classes for abstract psychologizing and philosophizing and a distaste for materialist, political, or economic explanations for individual problems.³¹

Such readings can be criticized, since it is possible to argue that there is no such thing as a “collective” or “national” psyche but only the individual psyches of particular human beings who are the viewers of films. However, in positing the existence of a collective psyche, Kracauer has the support of Sigmund Freud, who argued in one of his most famous essays, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (Civilization and its Discontents, 1930) that there truly is something like a collective superego and collective psychic illnesses. The “process of civilization,” Freud wrote, “is one of uniting separate individuals into a community bound together by libidinal ties.”³² Therefore, he concluded, “it can be asserted that the community, too, evolves a super-ego under whose influence cultural development proceeds.”³³ Kracauer’s book can be understood as an attempt to follow up on Freud’s theories, using film as a basis for the study of collective states of mind—reading films much in the way that Freud himself might have analyzed the dreams of his patients, or in the way that Otto Rank actually did read *Der Student von Prag*.

Another way of looking at a film like *Der Student von Prag* is to focus on its formal elements and qualities and to ask what they have to say about the process of watching a film itself. A film, after all, is a visual event: it appeals to the eye. Hence, it is entirely legitimate to ask in what ways a particular film deals with the visual, and with the act of looking. This aspect of film is particularly important for early film, since in the first decades of film’s existence cinematographers still had to educate audiences—and themselves—about the difference between reality and the illusion they were seeing on the screen. It is striking how predominant the problem of vision is in *Der Student von Prag*: after all, the entire film revolves around a mirror image and its presence or absence. The protagonist Balduin becomes obsessed with the actions of his *Doppelgänger*, and in the end he seeks to destroy it, thereby destroying himself. Certainly

³⁰ Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 30.

³¹ Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 30–31.

³² Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 104.

³³ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 106.

Der Student von Prag is, among other things, a demonstration of film's considerable technical possibilities, even at this early stage of film history: it is possible to make mirror images appear or disappear in a movie. The film's star Paul Wegener noted three years after the making of *Der Student von Prag*: "When I made my first movie three years ago, I did it because I believed I had an idea that could not be carried out in any other art form. I recalled trick photographs where a man played cards with himself or a student crossed swords with himself. I knew that this could be accomplished through dividing the picture's surface, and I said to myself: that must be possible in cinema, and here one could show E. T. A. Hoffmann's fantasies of the *Doppelgänger* or the mirror image in reality, thus producing effects impossible in any other art form."³⁴ Hanns Heinz Ewers later boasted about this technical innovation; for him, it was just one of the many "firsts" that characterized *Der Student von Prag*. "It was the first time that a cameraman, Guido Seeber, managed to carry out the idea of putting the same actor into the same image with himself, a trick that was subsequently imitated thousands of times."³⁵ One can think of this film as engaging in a dialogue about how to look at film images in general: as separated from the body that produces them and somehow "independent" agents acting of their own accord, as if by magic. The entire world of film is a *Doppelgänger* world that gives its viewers an extraordinary feeling of reality, and it can induce confusion, madness, and even self-destruction—or so, at least, many critics feared in film's first few decades. Cinema's figures become separated from the actors who play them and ultimately lead an independent existence, continuing to move about the screen even long after the actors who played them are gone. All of these problems are reflected in *Der Student von Prag*, and they echo the various arguments made in the *Kino-Debatte* about the power and danger of film as a medium. The evil deeds of the protagonist's mirror image might then be seen to reveal a deep underlying anxiety about the power of film to make people do things they wish they wouldn't do. This is a debate that, in various forms, is still with us to this day.

³⁴ Wegener, "Neue Kinoziele," in *Kein Tag ohne Kino*, 347–48.

³⁵ Ewers, "Geleitwort zu 'Der Student von Prag,'" 29.

Part Two

Weimar Cinema 1919–1933



*Max Schreck as Count Orlock in
F. W. Murnau's Nosferatu (1922). Screen capture.*

3: Weimar Cinema 1919–1933: Historical Overview

WEIMAR CINEMA IS THE CLASSIC CINEMA of Germany, the period in which Germany was, along with the United States, at the pinnacle of world cinema production, at least in terms of film quality, and in which German cinema was at its most influential internationally and historically. The names of Germany's great movie directors of the Weimar period—Ernst Lubitsch, F. W. Murnau, Georg Wilhelm Pabst, Fritz Lang—and of German film stars like Emil Jannings and Marlene Dietrich became internationally known and recognized during this period. Many of them, such as Lubitsch, Lang, and Dietrich, ultimately wound up in Hollywood, either before or soon after the Nazi ascension to power put an end to the Weimar Republic in January of 1933. Weimar classics like Murnau's *Nosferatu* or Lang's *Metropolis* continue to have an impact on world cinema today, and Weimar Expressionism and the Weimar detective film ultimately mutated in the United States into film noir in the 1940s and 1950s, often under the leadership of directors who had gotten their start in Germany in the 1920s: people like Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, or Robert Siodmak.

The development of German cinema in the Weimar period was closely connected to political and economic events. In general, Germany's cultural strength in the 1920s stood in marked contrast to its political and military weakness. The Weimar Republic, which put an end to the *Kaiserreich* (empire) that had lasted from German national unification under Kaiser Wilhelm I in 1871 to the end of the First World War in 1918, was the first German democracy. From the very beginning, it was characterized by profound political instability. The Weimar Republic began with a humiliating national defeat—Germany's military defeat at the hands of England, France, and the United States, in which over two million German men lost their lives and many millions more were wounded—and ended in exhaustion and chaos in a kind of republican suicide, when the aged aristocratic war hero President Paul von Hindenburg, who had never been a strong proponent of German democracy anyway, handed power to Adolf Hitler and his Nazi party.

Weimar history is generally divided into three periods. The first period, 1918–23, represents the aftermath of the First World War, in which the German empire collapsed, Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated, a

democratic Republic was formed, the economy suffered severely, and the country witnessed ongoing battles between left-wing groups propounding a socialist revolution and right-wing groups seeking a restoration of the monarchy or a dictatorship. This initial period of Weimar history culminated in the great inflation of 1923, in which the German currency, the Reichsmark, lost virtually all of its value, and many ordinary citizens saw their life savings disappear; it ended with the American-assisted stabilization of the currency at the end of 1923. The second period of Weimar history, 1924–29, was a period of relative political and economic stability in which the German economy recovered and even began to prosper. During this period, antagonisms between the left wing and the right wing diminished somewhat, and the political center grew stronger; Germany also entered into treaties of friendship with many of its former enemies. Finally, the 1929–33 period witnessed Germany's rapid slide into economic and political chaos; it ended with Hindenburg's appointment of Hitler as Chancellor of the *Reich* on January 30, 1933. This third period of Weimar history saw the onset of the world economic crisis known in the United States as the Great Depression, a massive rise in unemployment in Germany—over six million by 1932—and increasingly violent and open street fights between the growing National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP—the Nazi party's official name) and the Communist party, which was dominated by the newly formed Soviet Union.

Paradoxically, the economic history of the German film industry more or less precisely mirrored the political and economic history of the Weimar Republic, but in a negative way. When Germany as a whole was doing well economically and politically—that is, in the middle years of the Weimar Republic—the German film industry suffered; when Germany as a whole descended into turmoil and crisis—that is, at the beginning and end of the Weimar Republic—the German film industry tended to prosper, or at least to consolidate its position with respect to foreign competitors. What at first seems counterintuitive turns out to make eminent economic and political sense. In the early years of the Weimar Republic, when the German currency was relatively worthless, the German market was not attractive to foreign filmmakers, and therefore the German film industry faced little economic competition. Moreover, the very weakness of the German currency gave German filmmakers an advantage when competing abroad: a movie like Robert Wiene's *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920), made at a time of tremendous economic and political turmoil in Germany, was an economic and artistic success in the United States and elsewhere. With the stabilization of the German economy in 1924, the German market became an attractive target for foreign—particularly American—producers, and the German film industry went through years of financial crisis in which even prestige projects like Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) turned into financial flops. Finally, with the onset of

the worldwide economic crisis in 1929 and the simultaneous introduction of sound film in Germany, the German market once again began to turn in on itself, offering domestic filmmakers protection from international competition.

The political turmoil and uncertainty that so often characterized the Weimar Republic are well reflected in its films, from *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* through F. W. Murnau's *Der letzte Mann* (The Last Laugh, 1924) and Lang's *Metropolis* to movies like G. W. Pabst's *Die Dreigroschenoper* (The Threepenny Opera, 1931) and Lang's *M* (1931). In many of these films, particularly in *Metropolis*, one sees large groups of people stricken with uncertainty and fear and sometimes openly rebelling against the established political order. Many of the most important films of the Weimar Republic show established authority as problematic or even crippled. Cinema thus gave expression to a very real sense of change and insecurity that persisted throughout the Weimar Republic. At the same time, for many high-culture critics, cinema itself became associated with unwanted cultural or political change, and with the very masses who presumably represented a threat to the established order. Many of the same criticisms of cinema as an art form for the uneducated masses that had been leveled prior to 1918 continued to be leveled at cinema in the years of the Weimar Republic. In 1919, for instance, the conservative critic Wilhelm Stapel warned that cinema was contributing to the radicalization of the despised masses: "Under the influence of cinema a new kind of psychological type is growing up among us. A kind of person who 'thinks' only in crude generalizations, who lets himself be sucked without resistance from impression to impression, who no longer has the ability to make clear, self-determined judgments. The kind of person who already caused calamities during the revolution, and who will grow and grow, remaking culture (including political culture) in his own image, as more generations go through the psychological wringer of the cinematic apparatus. Cinema is creating a new form of human being who is morally and intellectually inferior: homo cinematicus."¹

The Weimar Republic has sometimes been called a *Republik ohne Republikaner* (a republic without republicans), meaning that it was characterized by a weak political center unable to resist the antidemocratic machinations of the strong left and right of the political spectrum.

¹ From *Deutsches Volkstum*, October 1919. Cited in Anton Kaes, "Film in der Weimarer Republik: Motor der Moderne," in *Geschichte des deutschen Films*, second edition, ed. Wolfgang Jacobsen, Anton Kaes, and Hans Helmut Prinzler (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2004), 39–98; here, 39. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from German sources are my own. For an alternative translation, see Wilhelm Stapel, "Homo Cinematicus," trans. Eric Ames, in *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory 1907–1933*, ed. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan (Berkeley: U of California P, 2016), 242–43; here, 243.

Democracy had been achieved only with the defeat of Germany's armies in France, and it came to be seen by many Germans on the right as a foreign import alien to the true German spirit, and by many Germans on the left as a continuation of the rule of Germany's previous economic elites by other means. Both the political right and the political left found their expression in German film production of the Weimar Republic. As a kind of compensation for the loss of the monarchy and the international humiliation in the First World War, the film industry offered nostalgic Germans a rash of historical epics, frequently based on the Prussian hero Frederick the Great—from the Hungarian-born Arzèn von Cserèpy's four-part *Fridericus Rex* in 1922–23 to Gustav Ucicky's *Das Flötenkonzert von Sanssouci* (The Flute Concert of Sanssouci) in 1930 and Friedrich Zelnik's *Der Choral von Leuthen* (The Hymn of Leuthen), which opened a month after Hitler's rise to power in 1933. All of these films featured Otto Gebühr in the role of Frederick the Great and offered a Germany that had been deprived of its monarchy a phantasmatic king. Particularly toward the end of the Weimar Republic, left-wing filmmakers offered moviegoers different, more realistic films that dealt with contemporary social problems. Piel Jutzi's *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (Mother Krausen's Trip to Happiness, 1929), for instance, dealt with the plight of the urban working class and ended with the suicide of its protagonist; while Slatan Dudow's *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt* (Kuhle Wampe or Who Owns the World, 1929), named after a working class campground in Berlin that features prominently in the film, made in cooperation with the playwright Bertolt Brecht and the composer Hanns Eisler, dealt with the struggle of the working class and the unemployed for economic fairness and challenged conventionally melodramatic notions of filmic storytelling.

Between Weimar's far left (represented largely by the KPD, the German Communist Party) and the Weimar right (represented particularly by the DNVP, the German National People's Party, as well as by Hitler's NSDAP), a group of centrists coalesced around the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Catholic Zentrumspartei (Center Party, whose name was already a political program), and the Deutsche Volkspartei (DVP, German People's Party) to form the Weimar Coalition of relatively weak and unstable governments that held the country together until the onset of Weimar's final crisis. Between 1919 and 1933 Germany saw over ten different governments and nine national elections. No chancellor was able to govern the country for as long as three years, and most chancellorships were much briefer. In the final years of the Weimar Republic the nation was essentially governed not by the democratic parliament but by presidential emergency decrees, since no single political party or even group of parties, including the former Weimar Coalition, was able to achieve a parliamentary majority. To its critics, the Weimar Republic seemed a perfect

example of the failure and weakness of democracy and the need for dictatorial, decisive rule. Many Weimar films, such as Lang's *Metropolis*, reflect the political instability and turmoil of the Weimar years. Many others, from Wiene's *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* to Josef von Sternberg's *Der blaue Engel* (1930) and Lang's *M* (1931), also depict a profound crisis in male subjectivity that accurately reflects significant currents of the German psyche in the Weimar Republic. Male pride and honor had been severely wounded by the defeat in the First World War, and that wounded pride is clearly on display in German cinema of the period.²

The term "Weimar" Republic derives from the fact that in 1919, when Germany's national assembly met to draft a new constitution in the wake of the nation's defeat, the capital Berlin was too dangerous to meet in, because it was full of struggles between the German military and right- and left-wing paramilitary groups; therefore, the assembly met in the sleepy provincial town of Weimar, where the streets were not full of groups of men fighting. It was in Weimar's national theater that Germany's new democratic constitution was ratified in 1919, with the town giving its name to the republic created by that constitution. Friedrich Ebert, the Social Democratic leader who became the first president of the Weimar Republic, was also hoping that a bit of the national pride and idealism associated with Weimar's famous citizens Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller—the two primary figures of German classicism at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, whose statues stood in front of the national theater where the Weimar constitution was ratified—would rub off on the proceedings. Germany was seeking to invoke the aura of the *Kulturnation* in its re-founding of the *Staatsnation* (political nation). The reverence for German classicism and German literature also left its mark on the film of the Weimar Republic. F. W. Murnau's *Faust* (1926) was a genuflection to Goethe's most famous work, complete with specially composed rhymes by Gerhart Hauptmann, the Weimar Republic's most famous living playwright, and Fritz Lang's *Nibelungen* epics (*Siegfried* and *Kriemhilds Rache* [Kriemhild's Revenge], both 1924), based on a medieval German epic, sought to demonstrate the national and artistic legitimacy of film. A prestige production like Manfred Noa's *Helena* (1924), based on the most famous ancient Greek war epic, Homer's *Iliad*, amounted to a declaration that cinema was capable of taking on and retelling the most revered and celebrated elements of the cultural heritage for the modern age. Made at great expense and with casts of thousands, such productions insisted on the cultural value of film.

² Anton Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009).

Not all representatives of German high culture were satisfied with cinema as an artistic form, however: Thomas Mann, who had been disappointed by the film version of his celebrated novel *Buddenbrooks* in 1923, declared in 1928, a year before he won the Nobel Prize, that film “is not art, it is life and reality, and its effects, in their silent motion, are crudely sensational compared to the spiritual effects of art.”³ When G. W. Pabst filmed Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill’s *Dreigroschenoper* at the beginning of the 1930s, after the introduction of sound film in Germany, Brecht actually sued the production company Nero Film for violating his rights as an author; although Brecht lost his lawsuit, he did ultimately receive twenty-five thousand marks from the production company and wrote an essay entitled *Der Dreigroschenprozeß* (The Threepenny Lawsuit) in which he addressed the dichotomy between capitalist society’s avowed celebration of the autonomous artistic genius on the one hand and its de facto violation of individual artistic rights on the other.⁴

In the midst of the Weimar Republic’s political instability and turmoil, German culture and science flourished. In fact, it could be argued that during the Weimar Republic Berlin became the cultural capital of the world. Playwrights and directors like Brecht, Ernst Toller, and Erwin Piscator created radical, pioneering works that constituted breakthroughs in modern theater. In music, composers like Arnold Schönberg, Kurt Weill, Paul Hindemith, Hanns Eisler, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, and Ernst Krenek developed radically new and challenging forms, such as Schönberg’s twelve-tone system. In architecture Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe espoused a new international style associated with the Bauhaus, an organization of progressive artists that thrived in Germany throughout the entire period from 1919 to 1933. Germany’s art scene witnessed a powerful flowering of visual artists like Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Otto Dix, Emil Nolde, and Max Beckmann, who pioneered styles like Expressionism and *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity, or New Sobriety). In the natural sciences physicists like Albert Einstein and Max Planck opened up some of the secrets of the universe, from relativity to quantum mechanics. In literature Thomas Mann, Alfred Döblin, and Gottfried Benn wrote pathbreaking novels and poems. And in philosophy Edmund Husserl, Karl Jaspers, and Martin Heidegger were doing major work on the problems of existence and phenomenology. The list could go on and on. In spite of all of its political and economic problems at this time, Germany was witnessing a veritable ferment of cultural and scientific activity at the very highest level.⁵ Film was very much a part of that ferment.

³ Kaes, “Film in der Weimarer Republik,” in *Geschichte des deutschen Films*, 85.

⁴ Bertolt Brecht, “The *Threepenny* Lawsuit,” in *Bertolt Brecht on Film and Radio*, trans. and ed. Marc Silberman (London: Methuen, 2000), 147–99.

⁵ The classic statement on Weimar’s cultural ferment is Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

The spirit of artistic Expressionism and its emotional torments made its breakthrough into film with Robert Wiene's *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* in 1920, and it was to influence much of the rest of Weimar-era cinema. The New Sobriety, with its more matter-of-fact look at everyday problems, became a central force in cinema as early as 1924, with F. W. Murnau's *Der letzte Mann*, and it triumphed in Walter Ruttmann's brilliant 1927 documentary *Berlin, Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (Berlin, Symphony of the Big City), which, in a series of exciting shots taken throughout the German capital, captured one day in the life of the nation's greatest city.⁶ That film is hence a treasure trove for historians interested in the urban life of the Weimar Republic. Equally innovative in its matter-of-fact approach to everyday life in the German capital was Robert Siodmak and Edgar G. Ulmer's unassuming but lovingly created study of ordinary people and their lives in *Menschen am Sonntag* (People on Sunday, 1930), created in a style that mixed a semi-documentary approach with fictional storytelling and using amateur rather than professional actors.⁷ Also at the forefront of artistic innovation in the 1920s was Lotte Reiniger, who, together with a team of artists interested in exploring the possibilities of cinematic animation, labored for three years to create the first feature-length animated film in history, *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed* (The Adventures of Prince Achmed), which premiered in Berlin in 1926 and thereby preceded Walt Disney's first feature-length animation—*Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937)—by over a decade. Reiniger and her collaborator Stanislaus Kucharski also invented a technique—the animation table or *Tricktisch*—that closely resembled the multiplane camera patented by Walt Disney over a decade later, in 1940. The work of all these filmmakers demonstrated that Weimar cinema was at the artistic forefront of world cinema, experimenting with new forms that ranged from the documentary to the imaginary to the purely abstract.

The Weimar Republic was also sexually freer than the *Kaiserreich* had been. Women now had the right to vote in Germany, and Weimar films such as G. W. Pabst's *Die Büchse der Pandora* (Pandora's Box, 1929) or *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen* (Diary of a Lost Girl, also 1929), both starring the American actress Louise Brooks, depicted sexually independent women who, for better or worse, insist on taking charge of their own fates.

⁶ Sabine Hake, "Urban Spectacle in Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of the Big City*," in *Dancing on the Volcano: Essays on the Culture of the Weimar Republic*, ed. Thomas Kniesche and Stephen Brockmann (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994), 127–42.

⁷ Karl Prümm, "Resümee einer Epoche und Vorschein des modernen Films: *Menschen am Sonntag* von Robert und Kurt Siodmak, Billie Wilder und Eugen Schüfftan," in *Späte Stummfilme: Ästhetische Innovation im Kino 1924–1930*, ed. Heinz-Peter Preußner (Marburg: Schüren, 2017), 345–75. At that time Wilder was still spelling his name "Billie" rather than "Billy."

In films like Lang's *Metropolis* and Josef von Sternberg's *Der blaue Engel*, independent female sexuality even becomes a threat to the male ego. But films of the Weimar Republic did not just portray the problems and tensions of heterosexuality; some films also explicitly addressed homosexuality and the persecution of homosexuals. In 1919—the same year that the Weimar Republic's constitution was ratified—Magnus Hirschfeld, a gay German Jew who pioneered the field of sexology in Germany, created the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft (Institute for Sexual Science) in Berlin; also in 1919, Hirschfeld helped create the film *Anders als die Anderen* (Different from the Others), directed by Richard Oswald and starring Conrad Veidt (who plays the somnambulist Cesare in *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*) as a tortured homosexual who is blackmailed and ultimately commits suicide. Such films were intended to give strength and comfort to German homosexuals who still suffered from widespread discrimination under the notorious paragraph 175 of the Reich's criminal code, and to educate non-homosexuals about the plight of those who were sexually "different" from them. The aesthetically more demanding *Mädchen in Uniform* (Girls in Uniform, 1931), directed by Leontine Sagan, depicted the plight of a lesbian schoolteacher and student in a repressive girls' boarding school. Films like *Anders als die Anderen* and *Mädchen in Uniform* reflected the liberalization of sexuality in the Weimar Republic, a period when Berlin and other major German cities featured thriving gay subcultures that exercised a powerful attraction on non-German homosexuals like the English writer Christopher Isherwood, whose short stories "Goodbye to Berlin" and "The Last of Mr. Norris" affectionately depicted Berlin's sexually liberal atmosphere; these stories ultimately resulted in the American musical *Cabaret* (1966) by John Kander and Fred Ebb, transformed into a popular movie with Liza Minelli in 1972.⁸ Thus Weimar Berlin's sexual freedom and cultural ferment ultimately had an impact on the American sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. In 2017 and 2018 the popular German television series *Babylon Berlin*, featuring police inspector Gereon Rath's investigations into the seamy underside of the Weimar-era capital, again explored the mixture of sexual licentiousness, cultural advances, criminality, and political ferment that made Berlin a magnet for artistic, sexual, and political adventurers in the Weimar years, and that has exerted such a powerful cultural pull ever since.⁹

Even at the beginning of the Weimar Republic, conservative critics objected to the new openness of German cinema in sexual matters, and

⁸ Christopher Isherwood, *The Berlin Stories* (New York: J. Laughlin, 1963).

⁹ The series is loosely based on detective novels by Volker Kutscher and is directed, among others, by Tom Tykwer, who had directed the pop hit *Lola rennt* (Run Lola Run) in 1998. The visual style of *Babylon Berlin* is heavily influenced by the cinema of the Weimar Republic, in particular Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, but also Lang's detective films, such as *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse*.

they explicitly connected forbidden expressions of sexuality with criminality. One legal expert, for instance, complained in 1919 that films about sexuality and criminality were particularly dangerous for vulnerable German youth, for whom “the danger of seduction is far greater” than for adults. “How innumerable are the young people,” he said, “that cinema has brought before the courts and sent to jails, and every day it brings new victims. The judge at juvenile court, the pastor, the defense lawyer looking for reasons for the crime hears again and again from relatives of the youth: he was incapable of anything else, he had to run to the movies, and there he sees and learns how he is to do it.”¹⁰ Such sentiments echoed the anti-film rhetoric of the period before the First World War, and they pointed to concerns that the modern medium of film could be used for purposes of mind control and hypnosis. Such concerns were to find powerful expression in Weimar-era films like Robert Wiene’s *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* and Fritz Lang’s *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (1933). The latter film came out in the year that Hitler became chancellor of the Reich and was quickly banned by the Nazis.

Aesthetically, the most important influence on German film during the Weimar period was Expressionism. Although it had a significant forebear in the work of the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1863–1944), Expressionism was a specifically German artistic style pioneered in the first decade of the twentieth century by painters like Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff of the group *Die Brücke* (The Bridge, founded in 1905) and Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc of *Der blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider, founded in 1911). The program of Expressionism is evident in the name itself: it is a highly psychological kind of art that seeks not to record what is happening on the outside (like Impressionism, pioneered in France in the 1870s) but to express what is happening on the inside, within the psyche of an individual human being. Whereas Impressionism seeks to accurately record the play of light and color in the outside world, eschewing sharp contours and favoring gentle transitions, curves, and blurring, Expressionism seeks access to an interior world characterized by garish and unnatural colors, jagged lines, and sharp distinctions between color spheres. As an artistic style, Expressionism had already been at the forefront of German art by the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, but it was only at war’s end that it made its breakthrough into German film with Wiene’s *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*. In film, Expressionism is characterized particularly by the use of chiaroscuro (an Italian word containing the words for light and dark and indicating sharp contrasts between light and shadow), by jagged and bizarre sets that indicate an otherworldly or inhuman space, or

¹⁰ Cited in Kaes, “Film in der Weimarer Republik,” in *Geschichte des deutschen Films*, 42–44.

that reflect the torments of the individual soul, and by stylized, unnatural acting. Whereas Expressionism in the visual arts more or less disappeared after 1924, with the relative stabilization of the German economy and the political situation, and was replaced by *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity, or New Sobriety), it remained a powerful influence in German film until the end of the Weimar Republic. Expressionism also had a major impact on German literature, influencing figures like Ernst Toller and Fritz von Unruh, who wrote Expressionist poems and plays characterized by gigantic emotions and inner and outer turmoil. As an artistic style in the visual arts, literature, and film, Expressionism well reflected the situation of a Germany that was itself undergoing radical turmoil, change, and uncertainty. As Lotte Eisner wrote in her study *The Haunted Screen*, the First World War gave “a new stimulus . . . to the eternal [German] attraction towards all that is obscure and undetermined, towards the kind of brooding speculative reflection called *Grübeleien* which culminated in the apocalyptic doctrine of Expressionism.”¹¹

The three most important Weimar-era directors in Germany were Ernst Lubitsch, F. W. Murnau, and Fritz Lang. Lubitsch was above all a consummate director of social comedies such as *Ich möchte kein Mann sein* (I Don't Want to Be a Man, 1918), *Die Austernprinzessin* (The Oyster Princess, 1919), or *Meine Frau, die Filmschauspielerin* (My Wife the Movie Star, also 1919). Such comedies disprove the common stereotype that German film is always serious or depressing. Murnau, famous for the revolutionary camera work of *Der letzte Mann* (The Last Laugh, 1923), directed the first Dracula movie, *Nosferatu*, in 1922; in that film he made horror a form of high art. Murnau was very much a product of German cultural traditions, and one of his most famous movies, *Faust* (1926), was based on the old German legend. Fritz Lang was a skilled director of crime films such as the two-part *Die Spinnen* (The Spiders, 1919–20), *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler* (Dr. Mabuse the Gambler, 1922), and *M* (1931). But he also excelled at science fiction with *Metropolis* (1927) and *Frau im Mond* (Woman in the Moon, 1929), the retelling of traditional German stories (the two-part *Die Nibelungen*, 1924), and Expressionist lyricism (*Der müde Tod* [Destiny], 1921). The fact that Weimar cinema's three most important directors all ultimately wound up in Hollywood says a great deal about the power of Hollywood in world cinema and about German political and cultural history in the 1920s and 1930s.

Throughout the 1920s, cinema continued to rise in prestige and popularity in Germany. By 1920 there were 3,731 movie theaters in Germany; ten years later there were over 5,000. Moreover, the 1920s witnessed the

¹¹ Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, trans. Roger Greaves (Berkeley: U of California P, 1969), 9.

creation of several very large, grand movie theaters designed in the style of opera houses or princely theaters; some of these massive movie theaters were capable of seating as many as two thousand patrons. One of Germany's largest theaters was the Ufa-Palast in Berlin, whose very name (palace) suggested grandeur and nobility; the Ufa-Palast seated 2,165 people. Such large and ornate venues indicated that movies in Germany—and elsewhere, as indicated, for instance, in the still-extant Radio City Music Hall in New York, which dates back to 1932—had become not just a popular entertainment but an attraction with significant cultural prestige. The architecture of such movie palaces declared that cinema strove to portray itself as an art form on a par with opera and theater, and that cinema's audiences sought all the comfort and luxury afforded to the patrons of the more traditional elite arts. In the 1920s, between one and two million Germans went to the *Kino* every day, which means that the average German went to the movies between seven and fourteen times a year.

In the 1920s the German star system blossomed, with major male and female actors becoming celebrities throughout the country. Female stars like Henny Porten, Asta Nielsen, Louise Brooks, Pola Negri, and Lilian Harvey won the hearts of many Germans and helped define what it meant to be a contemporary woman, while a male star like Willy Fritsch embodied the cinematic ideal of the dashing, sexy young man. Major actors from the German theater, like Emil Jannings, Heinrich George, and Werner Krauss, started working for the cinema. Even Weimar literature reflects the status of film and film stars as cultural commodities. For instance, in Erich Kästner's celebrated novel *Fabian* (1931), the major female figure ultimately becomes a film star, thus achieving the goal of all her dreams: power and recognition. Arnold Zweig's bittersweet short story "Cinéma" (1931) features an unattractive, down-on-his-luck adolescent whose entire fantasy life takes place in the world of the movies. Hans Fallada's Depression-themed novel *Kleiner Mann, was nun?* (Little Man, What Now? 1932) underlines the difference between the slick fantasies of the movie world and the petty reality of everyday life. Such works illustrate the way in which movies, by the 1920s, had become a major cultural commodity, extending their influence even into the previously dominant and more prestigious world of literature. They also demonstrate the way that movies were able to attract their audience by offering a kind of alternate reality that was better and more attractive than the real world. In movies, Arnold Zweig's pathetic, pimply protagonist could become a dashing, swashbuckling hero and win the beautiful maiden as his lover, and Fallada's struggling young parents could enjoy the pleasures of the comfortable and beautiful upper classes, at least vicariously.

One writer, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, summed up movies' function in such contexts as an "Ersatz für die Träume" (substitute for dreams). According to Hofmannsthal, movies allowed ordinary people to enter

into a happier world; at the same time, they prevented ordinary people from dreaming their own dreams. “What people are looking for in the cinema,” Hofmannsthal wrote, “is a substitute for dreams. They want to fill their imagination with images, strong images, that bring together the essence of life; that seem to come from inside the viewer himself and that go right back into his gut.”¹² Movies were an *Ersatz*, a substitute, not the real thing—not even a real dream, since Hofmannsthal claimed that contemporary German working-class people did not have access to genuine self-created dreams. Instead, films had to be industrially mass-produced for them. German cultural critics Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, who lived through the Weimar Republic, were later to call the film industry part of the *Kulturindustrie* (culture industry); they claimed that throughout the modern world people’s private lives and even their dreams were being subjected to the same economic regimentation and instrumentalization as human bodies in Henry Ford’s automobile factories or as the bodies of dancers in spectacular stage shows like those of the Tiller girls, where large numbers of “girls” moved in absolute unison on a stage.¹³

As the product of an industry requiring large amounts of capital investment and significant teamwork among screenwriters, directors, set designers, cinematographers, and actors, movies generally fell into particular generic categories that were believed to have a particular impact on the audience and therefore to be likely to make money. Among the most prominent genres in Weimar Germany were historical movies, like *Friedericus Rex*; exotic adventure movies like Joe May’s *Das indische Grabmal* (The Indian Tomb, 1921); melodramas like Leopold Jessner and Paul Leni’s *Hintertreppe* (Back Stairs, 1921); movies about the dangers of life on the street, often called “street films” after the model of Karl Grune’s melodrama *Die Straße* (The Street, 1923); detective and crime movies like Fritz Lang’s Mabuse series, from *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler* to *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse*; and the “mountain films” pioneered by Arnold Fanck, such as *Der heilige Berg* (The Holy Mountain, 1926, starring Leni Riefenstahl and Luis Trenker), *Die weiße Hölle vom Piz Palü* (The White Hell of Piz Palu, 1929, starring Leni Riefenstahl and Gustav Diessl), and

¹² Hugo von Hofmannsthal, “Der Ersatz für die Träume,” in *Kein Tag ohne Kino: Schriftsteller über den Stummfilm*, ed. Fritz Güttinger (Frankfurt: Deutsches Film-museum, 1984), 446–49; here, 446. For an alternative translation, see Hofmannsthal, “The Substitute for Dreams,” trans. Don Reneau, in *The Promise of Cinema*, ed. Kaes, Baer, and Cowan, 384–86; here, 384.

¹³ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, “Kulturindustrie, Aufklärung als Massenbetrug,” in *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1998), 128–76. English translation: “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmond Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2002), 94–136.

Stürme über dem Montblanc (Storm over Mont Blanc, 1930, starring Leni Riefenstahl, Sepp Rist, and Ernst Udet). Together with the film theorist and writer Béla Balázs, Riefenstahl went on to direct her own mountain movie, *Das blaue Licht* (The Blue Light, 1932) before making documentaries for the Nazi party after the end of the Weimar Republic.

Whereas German films had enjoyed a virtual monopoly in their own market during the First World War, the end of the war naturally saw the end of protectionist barriers and ultimately the beginning of stiff foreign competition, particularly from American films. By 1920, largely thanks to the collapse of the French film industry during the war, American cinema had become the most popular in the world, a position that it has not relinquished since. Just as the American economy as a whole had profited from the war, so too did the American film industry. During the 1920s, German cinema was Hollywood's most serious international challenger. By 1923, the year of Germany's great inflation, the United States was already exporting over 100 feature-length films to Germany. The stabilization of the German currency at the end of 1923 made the German market even more attractive to American film producers. From 1926 to 1928, the film market in Germany was divided as follows: German share: 42.5 percent, Hollywood: 39.5 percent, all other countries combined: 18 percent. From 1929 to 1931 the film market was divided differently: Germany: 48.4 percent, Hollywood: 31.3 percent, all other countries combined: 20.3 percent. As these statistics indicate, German films predominated in the German market, but American films offered stiff competition, and no other country even came close to challenging the dominance of these two cinemas. The middle period of the 1920s, in which the German film industry faced increasing challenges in its efforts to compete with American cinema, witnessed an agreement between Germany's Ufa conglomerate and the American film producers Paramount and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (known as the Parufamet Agreement) designed to ensure distribution of Ufa films in the United States and films by the American producers in Germany. This agreement did not particularly help the struggling Ufa, and in 1927 the right-wing German industrialist Alfred Hugenberg came to the rescue, making Ufa part of his media empire. The German government made several attempts to help the nation's film industry in its struggle against the Americans: in the early 1920s it required that for every foreign film shown in Germany, a German film had to be shown abroad, and later on in the 1920s it required that for every foreign film imported to Germany, a new German film had to be made. This resulted in the production of a great many German films made not for the purposes of quality but simply to fulfill the government quota as cheaply as possible. In the mid-1920s, as American cinema began to gain ground on the German market, the critic Herbert Jhering complained that what was happening in Germany was essentially

an imperialist takeover on the part of the United States at the expense of German high culture: “The number of people who watch movies and don’t read books is going into the millions. They are all being conquered by American tastes, transformed into identical, uniform beings. The problem is not Chaplin, Keaton, or Harold Lloyd but the crude, sweet run-of-the-mill films imported in overwhelming numbers from America or simply made here. American film is the new world militarism. It’s coming closer. It’s far more dangerous than Prussian militarism. It doesn’t just gobble up human individuals. It gobbles up entire nations.”¹⁴

The steep drop in the popularity of American films in Germany between the 1926–28 period and the 1929–31 period is attributable to a single simple but highly significant factor: the advent of sound film in Germany in 1929, which meant that American films were suddenly faced with a significant language barrier that made them difficult for German audiences to understand. Of course, American films were dubbed into German on the German market, but nevertheless such dubbed films were less popular than films originally shot in German. The advent of sound was the single greatest change in the history of film in the 1920s, and probably in the entire history of film from 1895 to the present: suddenly films were no longer “silent” but could have dialogue and a synchronized soundtrack. This meant that films became less purely visual and more like conventional theater, with spoken dialogue and conventional language.

Sound was introduced in the United States in 1927, two years earlier than in Germany. Al Jolson’s sound film *The Jazz Singer* was premiered in New York in October of that year. It was not until June of 1929 that Jolson’s second Warner studios picture, *The Singing Fool*, premiered in Germany, inaugurating sound film there. The first years of the sound industry witnessed intense legal battles about which companies had the best and most valid sound technology—essentially a war between German and American companies.¹⁵ The primary protagonists in this war were AT&T and General Electric in the United States, with their subsidiaries Western Electric and RCA; and Tobis (Tonbild-Syndikat) and the electric companies Siemens & Halske and A.E.G. in Germany. Tobis won the right to create sound films in Germany, while the two German electric companies, via their subsidiary Klangfilm, won exclusive rights to machines that could reproduce sound in movie theaters. The battle between German and American companies over sound technology lasted until June of 1930, when the competing groups essentially agreed to divide the world into zones of noncompetition and competition. The German group

¹⁴ Herbert Jhering, “UFA und Buster Keaton,” in *Von Reinhardt bis Brecht: Vier Jahrzehnte Theater und Film, 1924–1929*, ed. Jhering (Berlin: Aufbau, 1959), 2:508–9; here, 509.

¹⁵ Thomas J. Saunders, *Hollywood in Berlin: American Cinema and Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994), 224–25.

won the rights to purvey sound equipment to most of Europe, while the American group won the right to distribute sound equipment to most of the English-speaking world.¹⁶

Some basic statistics on production show how quickly the introduction of sound film changed the cinema landscape in Germany: in 1928 Germany made 224 films, all of them silent. In 1929 Germany made 183 films, with 175 silent and 8 sound. The next year, in 1930, Germany made a total of 146 films, of which 100 were sound and only 46 silent. By 1931, Germany made only two silent films and the other 142 films were sound. Within two years there had been a total revolution in technology, and the silent film essentially disappeared from German production. America's role in the German film market steadily decreased from 1928 on, going from a total of 199 films in 1928 to only 84 films in 1931.

The introduction of sound to cinema accomplished two things: it naturally made film more national and less international, since film now relied on a particular language. As film critic Fritz Olinisky declared after the breakthrough of sound technology in film, "We'll have to become more and more accustomed to the idea that sound film is the pacemaker of a predominantly nationally oriented film production."¹⁷ Second, sound technology made film more like the conventional theater, since it could now have dialogue. This resemblance to theater was further heightened by the fact that, since early sound technology was still relatively primitive, actors needed to stay close to the microphones. This restricted their movements to a smaller stage, and also limited the movement of the camera itself, which had, in Lotte Eisner's words, become "unchained" with the production of F. W. Murnau's breakthrough film *Der letzte Mann* in 1924.¹⁸

Given the fact that some of film's defenders in the teens of the twentieth century had argued that film was superior to conventional forms of literature because of its lack of language, it is understandable that not all critics or film theorists were happy about the development of sound technology. Some viewed it as a step backwards towards conventional theater and conventional language and away from the unique visuality and fluidity previously achieved by silent cinema. One of the most prominent of the critics of sound was the theorist Rudolf Arnheim, who claimed that the essence of cinema is silent movement because of its unique focus on visuality. Arnheim believed that the attachment of sound to images actually hampered them, returning the cinema to the aesthetics of ordinary, stilted stage productions. Sound was not an aid to visuality, Arnheim

¹⁶ On the battles over sound film, see Peter Bächlin, *Der Film als Ware* (Frankfurt: Athenäum Fischer Taschenbuch, 1975), 56–65. See also Jerzy Toeplitz, *Geschichte des Films*, vol. 2, 1928–1933 (Berlin: Henschel, 1985), 27–48.

¹⁷ Saunders, *Hollywood in Berlin*, 232.

¹⁸ Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, 213.