

THE ART OF THE CINEMA IN EUROPEGERMANY by Edmund Luft

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The German film made its most important and greatest contribution to the development of the "seventh art" in the years from 1913 ("Der Student von Prag") to 1930 ("Menschen am Sonntag"). Students of the film have made an exhaustive study of this highly diversified phase in our film history and have given imaginative commentaries on it. It is considered classical - that is to say, highly-developed - and it is frequently described as the expressionistic era of the German film. This label is a valid one, in the narrower sense relating to the history of the "genre", only as applied to a few films dating from the beginning of the twenties - among others, the frequently-mentioned drama of the abuse of power, "Das Kabinett des Dr Caligari", which became the key work in Siegfried Kracauer's study in psychology and social history: "Von Caligari zu Hitler". In this much-discussed book, Kracauer attempts to give an explanation of the films of these years as a reflection of the collective unconscious. His experiment helped to arouse international interest in this attractive period of the German film; but there have been doubts about his method and his results. In a programme note for the re-showing of the "Caligari" film and the old "Dr Mabuse" film in German cinemas in 1964, the Swedish documentary film director Erwin Leiser, writes, for example: "Anyone who has previously read Kracauer will be disappointed by "Caligari". He seeks a world which "like the Hitler world" is full of "gloomy forebodings of extinction, deeds of violence and outbreaks of panic", and does not find this "Hitler world". He will criticise Fritz Lang on the score that his "Mabuse" just "was not a documentary, but rather one of those premonitions that flickered across the German screen at the time"; at the same time, such a statement has nothing to do with either the value of the film as a film, or with the appreciation of the intentions of the director. Kracauer attributes to the implications of the production a significance that they do not possess; above all, he sees the Weimar Republic as a preparation for the "Third Reich". Interpretations of this kind should be rejected, and the old films should be considered on the basis of their own premises; then justice will be done to them. And they have a claim to a place in the history of the cinema if their artistic power still shines forth and their message on men and situations thrills even a new generation of cinema-goers".

New Forms

If the term "expressionism" is given a wider meaning (and international linguistic usage has obviously decided to do so), it seems suitable for describing the first decade (1913-23) - the actual dynamic period, that is - of the classical German silent-film era. The influences of expressionism have been many and varied; its essential characteristics have been referred to as disruption and change; it has been "pathetic" in the original meaning of the word - that is, passionate, effervescent, intent on expressive action and on restoring the "latent physiognomy" of things (Balasz). The revolutionary zeal of this phase in history was a reaction against smooth, uncommitted aestheticism and the affected style of the last few decades of the last century. The movement was therefore directed towards the whole of existence. The "new wave" displayed highly varied and often controversial tendencies; writers distorted sentence structure, artists opposed "false reality", composers rejected harmony and philosophers caused doubts to be cast upon the prevailing truths and on any clear-cut notions: "Everything that has existed is false!" (Rubiner). "Life - that means drawing towards one another, inter-penetration, mutual enlightenment! The world has its beginning in people!" (Werfel). "The world is only there for us to see ourselves!" (Wolfenstein). "Drawing the worldly disposition struggling into chaos - this means the most complete direction of as many people as possible to the Infinite, the Divinely Spiritual!" (Brod). In 1917, Kurt Pinthus formulated the following in programme form in the almanac "Vom jüngsten Tag": "To free reality from its outward appearance, to free ourselves from it, to overcome it - not by its own means, not by fleeing from it, but by embracing it all the more fervently, conquering it and mastering it, through the penetrative power, agility and desire for clarity of the human intellect, and through the intensity and explosive force of feeling - this is the common will of the most recent poetry."

Artists, in groups such as "Die Brücke" and "Der blaue Reiter", were given a new theory in Wilhelm Worringer's work "Abstraktion und Einfühlung" (1907). In "Geist und Tat", Heinrich Mann described the aim of active philosophy: "The intellectual type of man must rule among a people that still wishes to rise in the world. The man of genius must consider himself the brother of the lowliest reporter, so that the press and public opinion - as the most popular manifestations of the intellect - rise above profit and material things, and achieve ideals and loftiness of the spirit. The bully and the authoritarian must be the enemy....".

He gave many similar objectives. The early part of the century was fascinating with its flood of new ideas, its liveliness and its enthusiasm. And through a sense of mission, which often had something of the adjurative about it, an "Oh - Man!" pathos filled the work of poets and playwrights. This flow of innate genius appears as the greatest power in the cultural life of Germany in this century, and it is understandable that a brother-in-arms of those days, the writer Kasimir Edschmid, should reluctantly growl today against modern intellectual arrogance: "And if the boys of today and tomorrow who boast of being a moderate generation, and cannot even say how they have come to be moderate.... if these boys of the "Oh - Man! period" speak with a sympathetic air, as if talking about some wild boar that has been shot for some time, then one can only wish for them that their moderate period will not one day force them into a state of misery that causes them to roar with rage."

Turning-point, 1913

Art and culture could no longer remain exclusive; the new spirit was to pervade every human sphere - even the new fields of science and technology and also the cinema. In a new edition of his "Kinobuch" published in 1963, Kurt Pinthus has described the events of the decisive year, 1913, the innovations and courageous actions of those days, which paved the way for the recognition of the film as an art form: "1913 was the year in which the greatest German actor of the time, Albert Bassermann - who had hitherto been so camera-shy that he did not even allow himself to be photographed - appeared for the first time in a film, a "writer's film", as films made from the books of well-known authors were then called, in this case based upon Paul Lindau's drama, "Der Andere", with a psychopathic theme. The self-righteous, schizophrenic public prosecutor gradually becomes aware of the fact that at night he leads a double life as a criminal. Bassermann's unexpected appearance in the film brought every theatre critic in Berlin into the despised cinema (Cines-Palast, in the Nollendorffplatz) for the first time, and they tore the film appearance of the great stage-player to shreds as a degrading spectacle. Another great actor, Paul Wegener, not only acted, but in that year created the first film that was consciously "artistic" in form and content. This was "Der Student von Prag", which was also (by chance) the story of a schizophrenic, based on a script by Hanns Heinz Ewers, the writer of tales of fantasy widely read at the time. This script was gone over very carefully in collaboration with the Copenhagen director, Stellan Rye, the remarkable cameraman, Guido Seeber and, above all, with Paul Wegener, who inspired and supervised the entire production. The film immediately went all over the world as the first German film, much-admired on account of its new kind of exciting action, photographic effects not seen before (Wegener's mirror-image steps out of the mirror towards - a living image), unusual scenery, lighting and beautiful landscapes."

The contemporary and chronicler, Kurt Pinthus, also points out in this brief chronicle that in that year, 1913, Berlin's prince of theatre, Max Reinhardt, shot his first film, the pantomime of fantasy "Venezianische Nacht", Ernst Reicher started on the first series of well-made detective films ("Stuart Webbs") under the direction of Joe May, Asta Nielsen scored a great success with the social drama "Vordertreppe-Hintertreppe" and Eleonora Duse played her first and only film role in "Cenere" - the film based on a novel by Nobel prize-winner Grazia Deledda - as well.

"Der Student von Prag" was the first film in this epoch to establish a "genre", and it was an example that took effect. It was not only in the circumstances of its production, but also in its staging, in the chiaroscuro mood of its pictures, that the influence of a great power made itself felt, which has had a strong influence on the German film up to the present time and still exerts it: this is the German theatre, with all the weight of its varied tradition. At a re-showing of the "Student von Prag" in Venice in 1954, Lotte Eisner, that fine connoisseur of the German "daemonic screen" of those years, remarked "The mystically shrouded interiors of the film "Der Student von Prag" show how familiar film-makers in Germany were, from the beginning, with Reinhardt's lighting effects - perhaps without even realising it. And there is another point: the "Student von Prag" was made by Stellan Rye, a Danish director. Many Danes - directors and actors - were working in the German film studios at that time. It is difficult to say today which is the greater influence; but one thing is certain, and that is that the German film is also under this influence, and in the end the Scandinavian directors will themselves be influenced by the German style. However this may be, in the "Student von Prag" the Scandinavian love of Nature, of the real countryside - which expressionism will oust, entirely to the benefit of the artificial studio landscape - still finds full expression."

The Cathartic Purging of all Fears

"Dämonische Leinwand" is the title given by Lotte Eisner to her book, which contains a wealth of detail and excellent studies of the period. She sees the daemonic, the questing element and the inclination towards the supernatural, as the strongest and most striking characteristic of the German film of that time. The "Student von Prag" was in fact followed by Paul Wegener's first screening of the "Golem" (1914), a modern adaptation of the mysterious tale of the man of clay from the Prague ghetto, brought to life by supernatural powers; also, by "Homunculus" (1915), which was likewise the story of a dummy human being, disillusioned with the world about him and full of hatred and desire for revenge (Director: Otto Rippert, with the Danish star, Olaf Fønss, in the

main role) and the famous, not infrequently over-rated "Kabinett des Dr Caligari" (1919) - Robert Wiene's (1881-1938) experiment in style on a dreadful deed by a sleep-walker. This was followed by "Der müde Tod" (1921) - a mystical love-drama by Fritz Lang; "Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens" (1922) by F.W. Murnau; "Wachsfigurenkabinett" (1924), a nightmare trilogy by Paul Leni, and "Alraune" (1928) by Henrik Galeen - the drama of a deadly, dummy vampire creature.

All of these productions included horrifying effects and had a supernatural atmosphere of fantasy. The broad heritage of romance and fantasy of German literature is discernable in these films and - "a delight in the macabre and horrifying seems to be inborn in the German", is the opinion of Lotte Eisner. Yet the actual agency of these cinematographic nightmares is an ordinary human phenomenon - namely, fear. "Von einem, der auszog, das Fürchten zu lernen" (One who set out to learn Fear) is the title of one of the best-known of German fairy-tales. Film producers in all countries produce spectacles that satisfy the need of people to get rid of the demons in their own selves, with the "shadow" (C.G.Jung). Its visualisation in the play of light and shadow on the screen signifies only a fresh attempt to control the forces of darkness, to work off fear, even to effect a compromise with the deepest discomfort, with the unremediable helplessness of the human condition. The violent emotional experience of all fears belonged to a period which, even before the first World War, felt itself to be uprooted, burdened, chaotic and feverish. At that time, the German cultural scene - and not least stage and screen - was receiving powerful stimuli from Herman Bang (1857-1912) and Knut Hamsun (1860-1952), the dramas of Henrik Ibsen (1828-1902) and especially of August Strindberg (1849-1912) had a lasting effect. Strindberg's visionary, mystical theatre, full of premonitions and hallucinations - his "Traumspiel" in particular (1903) - is becoming in many respects the model for film traumata, as his drama is felt to be "the most convincing document for the convulsive, destructive forces of the great crisis of his time" (H.W. Eppelsheimer). The obliteration of the dividing-lines between transcendancy and reality, between dreams and waking, corresponds to the Expressionistic aim of catching the fleeting, the visionary, and giving expression to magical forces in the living force of the picture. In all the films like the "Caligari" film, therefore, the "decor" is not merely decoration, but an essential element in the action of the film as well. Its plunging lines, sharp angles, inclined planes and contrasting shades symbolise the transient, movement; time, in the manifold meanings of the word, is manifested here in space. The wide significance and suggestive note of the decor set the character for the entire production, and not least the mimicry and gestures of the actors, as well, who are not any persons (individuals), but forms, figures (principles), and thus part of the picture, as "models". In the "Caligari"

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film, one can see very clearly how the posture of the principal actors, Werner Krauss and Conradt Veidt, is incorporated linearly and contrapuntally in the composition of the decor. The bodily posture, the violent gestures and the mimicry - often carried to grimace - conform to the concept of "dynamic" representation of the time. The pronounced abstraction that is associated with this decorative style as a whole distinguishes to advantage the early "Symphonien des Grauens" from most of the present-day "shockers", and they were more ingenious too. Many German writers of that time were devoted to the "cinematographic theatre", and nearly all Expressionists had this preference for the programme. In 1912, Max Brod - later to be Kafka's biographer - admitted: "... I am delighted that this very invention of Edison's, which in the beginning intended to give only a pale copy of life, should have brought so much fantastic theatre into the world."

From the "Kinobuch" to Carl Mayer

The delight in the new medium led, in 1913, to the publication of the above-mentioned "Kinobuch" by Kurt Pinthus (b.1886). This compilation - which was again made available in 1964 in the form of a documentary new edition - is one of the oldest documents on the meeting between film and literature. It contains "film fragments", drafts, original film material by writers - young at the time - such as Walter Hassencklever, Else Lasker-Schüler, Richard A. Berman, Ludwig Rubiner, Paul Zech and Max Brod. An astonishing wealth of material is displayed here, ranging from fiction, through robust comedy and the fantastic vision to the socio-political drama. The book proves how ready the writers of those days were to "offer new scripts and suggestions to the cinema then in difficulties". (Pinthus)

The actual film-writer and innovator did not come from any literary circle, however. He was a man who led a life typical of the time. Carl Mayer (1894-1944) was born in Graz, the son of a citizen who was well-to-do but became a gambler and bankrupt and finally committed suicide. Carl Mayer managed to make a living as a pedlar and as an odd-job man in the theatre. During the war, he developed a profound hatred for an Army psychiatrist who had examined and treated him several times. When Mayer later met the dramatic critic, Hans Janowitz, in Berlin, they drafted the "Caligari" material - the story of a dictatorial hypnotist who uses a sleep-walker for criminal experiments. The film as produced by Eric Pommer under the direction of Robert Wiene and with decor by the Expressionist painters H. Warm, W. Röhrig and W. Reimann became a world success, a milestone in the history of the film. For many people, it confirmed the impression - and the fact - that the film can be more than "a pale copy of life". The power of conviction exerted by "Caligari" on audiences and critics could never have evolved from the work of a mere adapter

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and arranger; the power of an original scriptwriter could be felt here. Carl Mayer also wrote the script for the films "Genuine" (director: Robert Wiene, 1920); "Hintertreppe" (Leopold Jbner, 1921); "Scherben" (Lupu Pick, 1921); "Vanina" (A. von Gerlach, 1922); "Sylvester" (Lupu Pick, 1923); "Die Chronik von Grieshuus" (Fritz Wendhausen, 1925) and for the four films by Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau: "Schloss Vogelöd" (1921), "Der Letzte Mann" (1924), "Tartuffe" (1925) and "Sunrise" (1927). He inspired the first long documentary, "Berlin, die Symphonie einer Grossstadt" (Walter Ruttmann, 1927) and acted as adviser for two films by Paul Czinner, "Ariane" (1931) and "Der träumende Mund" (1932). Mayer emigrated to England in 1933, where he first of all collaborated with Gabriel Pascal on "Pygmalion" and "Major Barbara". Pascal praised his fertile mind: "He had the soul and the eyes of a poet". During the war, Mayer worked on Paul Rotha's documentary film staff, helping him to put together and do the final cutting of "World of Plenty" (1942).

Carl Mayer possessed in the highest degree what in Germany is called "Dramaturgen-Begabung". This means that he was creative in clearing the ground, as an instigator, as a film "layout man". He had a sure feeling for the harmony of form and content, he knew how to represent psychical and vital phenomena, he knew the rules of dramatic construction and could also visualise the dramatic in movement in the simplest way. He wrote in pictures, in "moments of movement", in which a scenically visual shorthand-note was produced with precise technical skill from his expressionistic style, a "catapulting" mode of expression.

"A revolving door. Turning, turning in the light.

"And !

Before it:

A doorman! A tall figure. Stiffly servile.

And now: Stiffly he salutes.

For:

A motor car. Just driving up again ..."

Carl Mayer succeeded more than anyone else in reconciling poetry and technical skill.

Secrets of the Soul

The popularisation of the research results and findings of Sigmund Freud - frequently given a sensational tone - in the twenties, led to violent excesses at that time of economic distress. The exciting game with the soul - the excesses of "making aware" - began between the lust for life and the yearning for death.

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Sexual enlighteners preached a "hygiene" that amounted to the extensive abolition of taboos, to psychological exhibitionism. In the sphere of the film industry, this wave was reflected in scripts that preached psychology to a greater or lesser extent. They combined the dramatisation of conditions of mental illness with the attraction of the revelation of secrets, and tended - in the "Triebfilm", as it was called - towards the macabre. Even in this comprehensive series, there were films that stood out on account of their subject and formal merit. Thus, Arthur Robinson (Dr.med., b. 1888) created with his "Schatten" a "nocturnal hallucination" (1922) and almost nameless, erotically perfumed, magical ballads. They show the conflict of the passions between a jealous husband, his wanton, pretty wife and their lovers. Before the collision leads to disaster, the tangles of the soul become resolved in a kind of dream-play, and reason prevails. This poetic study on the benefit of therapeutic trance and psychoanalysis goes beyond the straining after effect of an erotic "nerve contusion", in its form as well. "Orlacs Hände" (1925) - a film by the director of "Caligari", Robert Wiene - went further in the direction of speculative thrillers, showing the story of a famous pianist who loses his hands in an accident. He is driven to the brink of insanity when he learns that the surgeons have given him the hands of a robber and murderer. Conradt Veidt (1893-1943) brings out the trauma of this artist's soul with expressive and suggestive pantomime. The most important film in this series comes from G.W. Pabst, who created "Geheimnisse einer Seele" with technical advice given by two of Professor Freud's colleagues. Here, in realistic style, the cause, analysis and cure of a knife-phobia are represented. The film is accented with the note of a social sense of responsibility.

Social Involvement

"But I am driven to the apathetic, to the poor", the important poet Ernst Stadler (1883-1914) says in his work. For the young generation of writers of the time around 1913, social involvement was a matter of course; but not in the sense of the naturalistic, later domestic drama. Their revolutionary ancestors were Johann Christian Günther (1695-1723), the rebellious wandering scholar, and perhaps even more Georg Büchner (1813-37), the expressive revolutionary ("Peace to the huts, war to the palaces!"). Synonymity and a reflection of his "Woyzeck" can be seen in Friedrich Murnau's (1888-1931) film "Der letzte Mann" (1924). Through the glitter and misery in the life of a hotel doorman, he reveals the existence of the defeated and downtrodden in a hard-hearted, indifferent world. Although the film has no Caligari qualities of style, it is closely related to Expressionism. Its tragic irony and many individual features are reminiscent of the stage-plays of Frank Wedekind (1864-1918). There is an Expressionistic accent also in the acting of Emil Jannings (1886-1950), the

great mime who, in the deliberately intensified "extreme art" of Murnau, develops into the prototype of the figure to be represented: into the doorman of all doormen. Action: In his splendid uniform, this doorman, grown grey in honour, is the pride of the district. But one day, on account of his age and his liking for drink, he is reduced to the job of lavatory attendant, and loses all joy in life on putting away his uniform. In order to hide his humiliation, he steals the only badge of his social dignity - the uniform, and in the end becomes the heir of a millionaire who dies in his arms.

This film, which had a welcome revival in the German cinema in 1964, is the most powerful work of social appeal, and artistically the most coherent, the most "modern" of this silent film period. The script was written by Carl Mayer, and at the camera stood a master of his craft, Karl Freund (b. 1890), who worked with effective chiaroscuro impressions. "What immediately struck the onlooker, however, was the way in which he was incorporated in the action; the camera followed him at every moment, like a second self. One imagined one's self in his place; the film closed in on reality, so to speak and hence on the spectator. Jannings did not need to suggest his drunkard, not even with reeling. The moving camera gave the sensation direct; the spectator could enter into the feeling of the condition and was thus drawn into the scope of the action" (Waldekranz). "Der letzte Mann" became a turning-point in the lives of those who appeared in it. The artistic power and, no less, the success of the film, heightened the interest of Hollywood. F.W. Murnau also created in Germany "Tartuffe" (1925) and "Faust" (1926) - both films with Emil Jannings, who also achieved triumphant success in E.A. Dupont's "Variété". Lya de Putti was his opposite number in this psychologically realistic, visually fascinating tragedy of jealousy from the world of artists. This temperamental and experienced star was completely overshadowed by the great actor, however. "One of the reasons why Jannings has become such a popular and successful film actor is that all his looks and gestures have such an eminently visible sensuous quality", was the opinion expressed by Julius Bab in 1926, in an essay entitled "Schauspieler und Schauspielkunst". The decisive factor for Jannings' private attitude towards the film, for his knowledge and choice of media, was his meeting with F.W. Murnau. This most versatile and spiritually most profound director of German silent films answered the call of Hollywood in 1927. There, he created "Sunrise" and "Four Devils", concluding his work with the film full of evangelistic human love "City Girl" (1929) and - when he met Flaherty - the film of great, simple beauty, "Tabu" (1930). "Of all great directors, the strongest character, uncompromising and uncorrupted by money; his success and failure derived from this. Each work was a complete entity, unwarped, straightforward and logical. Although his work seemed cold, under the surface it glowed with the fire of an incorruptible artistic will!" (Jannings)

The successful film of the middle twenties, "Neue Sachlichkeit", an architectural style of pure functional art ("Bauhaus", Dessau), with pronounced life-reforming and social accents, was accompanied by vigorous trends critical of the times and often sceptically satirical. There is also frequently a current pessimism of great bitterness (Spengler, "Untergang des Abendlandes"). These manifestations were most pronounced in the films of G.W. Pabst (b.1885). In his film "Die freudlose Gasse", he gave an accusatory, realistic picture of post-war misery ridden by prostitution, class hatred, hunger and disease. At times, the sharpness of his description is reminiscent of the "Miliön" drawings by Heinrich Zille, who belonged to the Berlin proletariat, and even of the satirical caricatures of George Grosz. On account of his realistic style and his social commitment, G.W. Pabst is often considered the most important director of those days. Thus, in the opinion of Roger Manvell, Pabst opposed the prevalent "film macabre" of the time with a realistic - that is, truer to life - "film noir"; he writes: "Pabst's most striking films fall into two groups - the silent films of 1925-29 (of which the more important titles are "The Joyless Street", "Secrets of the Soul" and "The Love of Jeanne Ney", with their themes steeped in decadence, disillusionment and vice), and the sound films of 1930-31 ("Westfront 1918" and "Kameradschaft", his greatest film), in which his idealism broke through the horrors of the broken world he had so closely portrayed during his first period of film-making. He was served in his silent films by some of the greatest artists of the time, by Asta Nielsen, Greta Garbo, Fritz Rasp and Werner Krauss. With their help he pushed the film to its limits (and sometimes from the point of view of the censorship of many countries, including Britain, Italy, France and his native Austria, beyond its limits) in the portrayal of vice and the collapse of social morale.... The plots of Pabst's silent films are melodramatic, with happy endings superimposed upon them in almost every case. His realism lies in his settings and presentation. His Germanic sense of drama, or rather of melodrama, gives his films a horrific power which frightened the censors of this period just as much as his prostitutes, brothels and orgies. In this he was uncompromising, although he compromised almost always in letting his "films noirs" resolve happily."

The type of demoniacally coloured social reportage, with utopian effects, was evolved by the director Fritz Lang (b.1890). With "Dr Mabuse, der Spieler" (1922) and the sequel "Dr Mabuse, Inferno des Verbrechens" (1932), he wanted to give a picture of the time. He has this to say about it: "The period following the first World War was for Germany a period of the deepest despair, hysteria, cynicism and unbridled depravity. Dreadful poverty existed side by side with quite considerable, new, wealth. Berlin coined a new word at this time; it was "Raffke", from

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"Zusammenraffen des Geldes" (money-grabbing), and was applied to the newly-rich. Dr Mabuse is the prototype of this period. He is a gambler; he plays cards, he plays roulette and he plays with people, with their lives. He does not believe in profound feelings. To his wife, whom he loves, he says: "There is no love, only desire". And he gambles with the life of these people; he gambles with death. At this time, there was a placard in Berlin, bearing the words: "Berlin, your dancer is death" People have often said to me that I made Dr Mabuse the dictator-prototype, that I anticipated Hitler; this is not so. For me, Dr Mabuse was a superman, in some way the Nietzschean superman - in the bad sense. Later on, I made a third film on Dr Mabuse, before I left Germany. This was "Das Testament des Dr Mabuse", and in this I did indeed put into the mouth of Dr Mabuse sentences hinting at the Hitler movement".

The Fascination of the Decorative

When the film discovered that it could become an art only with the introduction of order among the succession of deliberately selected excerpts, it immediately took instruction in direction from the great Venetian masters of the baroque, says André Malraux in his "Psychology of Art". This means nothing more than that art, whose aim is to help, indeed compel, to experience, must reduce and at the same time increase. The above-mentioned director, Fritz Lang, who was first a painter and an architect, conceived his works on the basis of this law of reduction, which led him to the graphic excerpt, to the cipher, to the ornamental. The decor corresponds with the content of his films, the action of which is invariably based upon primitive themes. His screening of the "Nibelungen-Lied" - a two-part film-epic: "Siegfrieds Tod" and "Kriemhilds Rache" - became the outstanding work in this decorative style. Lang's wife, Thea von Harbou, wrote a scenario reminiscent of the stage tragedy of the same name by the German playwright Friedrich Hebbel (1813-63). Hebbel disturbed his contemporaries with his alleged inclination for the bizarre and the violent. Features reminiscent of Hebbel's pathos were combined in the "Nibelungen" production with Böcklin idyllic elements and Harbou sentiment; yet the production appealed, with its suggestive effect of stylistic unity. Roger Manvell expresses his opinion about it as follows: "..... if you like symmetry, then you will find (for a time, at least) a nobility and grandeur in these palaces and courts, and in the costumes with their equally symmetrical designs from the Reinhardt theatre. The most impressive and beautiful scenes in the film are those in the forests, the misty glades and the caverns through which Siegfried has to travel before he reaches the kingdom of Burgundy. After many viewings spread over nearly twenty years I still find the sequence of Siegfried's approach to the dragon through the high trees one of the most beautiful in the silent cinema."

Lang's inclination towards the fantastic led him, in 1927, to the utopian in technical form - to science fiction. In "Metropolis" - the script of which was again drafted by Thea von Harbou - he evolved a social drama on the liberation of Man from technical and economic slavery, combining this very understandable wishful thinking with a vision of employers and workers. The gigantic spectacle ends not only with the destruction of the evil, hypertrophic world of the machine, but also with the all-embracing reconciliation of the brotherhood of Man. Unfortunately, Lang's production frequently lapses into gigantomania. The then new, ingenious trick-mirror invention of the cameraman Eugen Schüfftan furthered this intoxication with the wonders of technology. The people in his machine theatre are arranged as a chorus, and all too frequently give a barely ornamental effect, reduced to mere trimmings. Both films had a powerful effect on the German public. "Nibelungen" was considered a national achievement, "Metropolis" an appeal for solidarity. One may smile at this today; but people smiled at it even then, too. Nevertheless, Lang's ability to create "good cinema", to offer good entertainment, appears unmistakably in these films. Admittedly, this "questionable" circumstance has given cause for some deep thinking on the part of its commentators, who include political interpreters who see in the "Nibelungen" pageantry the model for the "Reichparteitag style" that was to follow. This shows defective knowledge of contemporary history, because those who were in power in the thirties did not have to rely on suggestions from the "Ufa-Palast". They had sufficient "models" abroad, in countries that had already had years of totalitarian parades.

In the final phase of his work in Germany at that time, Fritz Lang made films of taut dramatic structure and powerful effects of tension. The preference for the decorative gave way to a concentrated, scenically visual production. In the amusing, utopian film, "Frau im Mond" (1928), the technical "sorcerer's apprentice" once again gave all the tricks full play, offering popular space-travel of "amazingly credible imagination" (Kracauer). But here, as also in the Mabuse-like detective thriller, "Spione" (1928), the decorative at times comes effectively to the fore, sensationally active. In "M" (1930), the story of a "crime passionnel", the visual effects give way to genuine psychological penetration and screen narrative. During the 1959-60 season, this film - which is still to be found in the regular programme of the German film theatre today - was awarded the mention "of particularly high quality" by the German "Filmbewertungsstelle der Länder" in Wiesbaden. In the preamble to the award (which carries a large tax reduction with it), it is stated ".... that here, in an unusually suggestive way, a criminal case is dealt with in psychological terms and, at the same time, through the precisely descriptive treatment of atmosphere (a substantial share of which

is taken especially by the camera-work with superior use of extraordinarily plastic, differentiated grey values), a tension is generated that has not lost its effect even today. Although the film analyses the mental make-up of a child-murderer, as it develops the logic of the situation entirely on a human basis, although it shows the machinery of the detective force at work (always, however, placing imaginative and, at the same time, very realistically conceived modes of human behaviour in the visual point of the scene), as well - such an eminently realistic way of seeing and stating things nevertheless competes again and again with a mystical expressionism, which shows itself especially in the description of the underworld which, with the aid of the beggars, ultimately catches the murderer. In the grotesquely macabre scenery of the underworld tribunal, the expressive elements are carried convincingly to a high level, always in exciting tension to what is credibly factual. This scene comes out as a striking achievement in its dramaturgic arrangement as well. An interesting and artistically noteworthy point is the symbolic use of a musical "leitmotiv". In "M" there is an imaginative "modernness" of screen interpretation, for which the ingenious, contrapuntal countersection may serve as an example. This brings together discussions of the detectives and of the five criminals, taking place simultaneously, to create a grotesquely realistic general discourse which, in an extremely small space, brings out the highly contrasting aspects of the situation in almost ghostly irony." (Fürstenau).

To the Peaks

The terrible characteristics of the creature, Man, that were presented by Caligariism, and the joyless streets of social protest, were compensated in a way in the nature film, which achieved its first great successes in the period immediately following World War I, with audiences that no-one had believed possible until then. The sudden preference for this kind of film was a result not only of the saturation with macabre and gloomy themes, but also of a wave of general reform of life at many different levels. A desire to travel and association with Nature also became the order of the day, like the cosmetic fashion of getting sun-tan on the body which was spreading at the time. With the growth of the industrial society, people crowded more and more into the metropolises, and the desire to escape "outside" became all the stronger. In all classes of society and not least among the proletariat, this tendency assumed a lyric character; a holiday mood prevailed as soon as the catchword "nature" was mentioned. In addition, there was the new enthusiasm for sport ("Wege sur Kraft und Schönheit", Dr N. Kaufmann, Ufa 1925), and the popularisation of physical exercise, which appeared to have been practised hitherto only by a few "extremely daring" people.

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This included ski-ing and mountaineering, in particular. In 1920 Dr Arnold Fanck (b. 1889) - originally a geologist - produced his first mountain film, "Wunder des Schneeschuhs", a thrilling symphony of sweeping movement, artistic body control and unique nature shots. Fanck kept to the gleaming ski-trail and the snow-capped peaks. With his colleagues, Luis Trenker, Leni Riefenstahl and Sepp Allgeier, he shot a series of mountain films which did justice to the great need of the public for the very powerful, the enduring and the daring. "Fuchsjagd im Engadin" (1923), "Im Kampf mit dem Berg" (1921), "Der Berg des Schicksals" (1924), "Der heilige Berg" (1926), "Die weisse Hölle vom Piz Palü" (1929), "Stürme über dem Mont Blanc" (1930), "Der weisse Rauch" (1931) - the titles alone give an idea of what was happening here. The series ended through repetition, through becoming mannered; but it remains to the eternal credit of Arnold Fanck that he brought into the cinema the "full-length Nature feature film", free of the studio - works in which Nature played a really primary role, films that gave people (at the beginning of this period, at least) a new experience of reality, a powerful experience.

The Stage

The sensational effect of the early Fanck films was due to their abandonment of the studio; they had Nature as their scene, and the forces of Nature as players. This meant the renunciation of a force that had hitherto supported all efforts in cinematography, a dissociation from the theatre. The revolution remained within certain limits, it is true, as shown by the style of many scenes of later mountain films. Even Fanck could not free himself without further ado from the tradition of the German theatre, although he frequently worked with young people and even with laymen. The great theatre heritage was both to the advantage and to the disadvantage of the German film. It helped to give the film polish, by providing a flow of power, assurance, experience, ideas and gifts of genius; it worked to the disadvantage of the film by making difficult the evolution of art forms peculiar to the screen. The chroniclers report that the gifted Carl Mayer - a scriptwriter of great quality - did less work and even gave it up altogether in the end, after seeing Eisenstein's "Battleship Potemkin" (1926) and perceiving a new language of the screen.

However, it is not true that the German film of those days showed no signs of developing a stylistic independence. Manvell remarks: "There is elementary cutting in the manner of Griffith as Siegfried approaches the watching dragon through the tall trees and sloping shadows of the great forest, or in the hectic dance scene in "Metropolis", and great feeling for tempo in the last reel of "Variety". On the whole, however, the German film remains closely tied to the theatre in its various distinctive stylistic features; it is regarded as a branch of the stage,

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although not quite as the "small man's theatre", even by the dritics of the time; but the cinematographers begin quite early to change the heritage of the stage - we noted the year 1913. Lighting and scenery, decor and acting go through highly varied changes; there are ingenious screen adaptations; retrospective, reviving movements; crude stage imitations and ingenious innovations such as lending wings to vision through the first use of the moving camera ("Sylvester", 1924).

Powerful influences were exerted by the experimenters in theatrical style, such as Leopold Jessner, the director of the national theatre in Berlin at that time. He had the puritanical idea of ridding the stage of the confusion of extraneous elements, of speculative non-essentials and illusion, laying bare the mechanics of dramatic poetry. "In this, he was served by the diversely articulated stairs, placed in the rising and falling of the combined and opposed action of the contrasting forces, and serving as auxiliary lines and as a supporting framework for demonstration; he was served by the contrasting shades of black, red and white, and by a rhythmic action that dominated the play entirely and was intensified by harsh music and crystal-clear lighting." (Franck). Demonstration, rising and falling, contrasts, harsh and crystal-clear - not only in details, but even more by its stylistic will, its radical determination, this modern theatre exerted its influence on the film.

The strongest influence was exerted by the stage art of Max Reinhardt: his light-magic, his composition of the scene, his subtle art of managing the cast. He was not only a producer full of ideas, but an all-round expert of the theatre, with a traditionally critical attitude; an organiser who knew how to combine with his work people from all spheres of art. He was a master of style. "Reinhardt's productions were subject to the spatial laws of the ancient theatre, in the circus as in very confined rococco halls (Joseph-städtertheater), in gothic halls of fantasy (Mirakel) as in the ordinary mechanical theatre of his time, and lastly also in altogether unrestricted halls (Leopoldskron), and even gardens in his view, there is not one style of production, there are thousands". (Joseph Gregor) His knowledge of the unresolvable problem of combining style and space, led him to put on "Kammerspiele" (private plays) in the neighbouring building of the "Deutsches Theater", Berlin. This was a small theatre in which the audience could see even the most subtle movements of mime and gesture by the actors. In this theatre of intimate effects, he put on dramas critical of society, psychological dramas, three-actor plays, works in the contemporary setting. It became the model for a series of "Kammerspiel" films of the character of naturalistic realism. "Scherben" by Lupu Pick and "Hintertreppe" (1921) by Leopold Jessner dealt in the very simplest form with everyday tragedies. Lupu Pick's

"Sylvester" (1924), with a unity of structure of time and place, dealt with the seamy side of human existence. With clock-symbolism and with efforts to achieve metaphysical associations, it showed a gloomy, enraged drama of the jealousy of a mother-in-law, and from then on had a repeatedly related theme: the sorrowful, friendless individual, full of boundless despair, amid a rejoicing, feverish crowd who are toasting one another. Paul Czinner's love-drama, "Nju" (1924), based on a stage-play by Ossip Dymow, is in the same category. In it, Elisabeth Bergner plays a woman who goes to pieces under the conflict between convention and the desire for love. Pabst's filming of an erotic satire by Frank Wedekind, "Die Büchse der Pandora" (1928) dealt with social immorality and the insatiability of the sexual impulse; similarly, his "Tagebuch einer Verlorenen" (1929) - a prototype of the drama of the prostitute with a noble heart. And "Die wunderbare Lüge der Nina Petrowa" (1929), by Hanns Schwarz, dealt with the sacrifice of her own life by a woman for love, the woman in this case being played by Brigitte Helm. The entire category bore the character of melancholy and despair. The "Kammerspiel" nature of the films and their masterly representation of the intimate were praised by the critics. However, these films achieved success with the public only when the erotic element was given special emphasis. Some of these films made an important contribution to the development of a special screen narrative style - "Sylvester", for example - by dispensing with titles and by means of a new camera mobility, or - as in "Die Büchse der Pandora" - through rhythmic structure and continuity in the control of the action and in the cutting.

The Lubitsch Touch

Among all the artists who passed on the heritage of the stage to the film, and made it fruitful there, Ernst Lubitsch (1892-1947) stands supreme, not only because of the great number of his films, but also because of the versatility of his great talent. Like his teacher, Max Reinhardt, he was a suggestive trainer of actors, an untiring searcher after material, a humorous, keen observer of human character and weakness. His greatest achievement was to make film comedy more profound with wit and humour.

Even as a youthful comedian, he worked in film sketches such as "Die Firma heiratet" and "Der Stolz der Firma" (1913), and during the War he shot burlesque comedies, as director and principal actor "Meier aus Berlin", "Schuhpalast Pinkus", "Der Fall Blumentopf". These were farces with crude humour but a significant humoristic basis, a genuine clown motif: the brave fight of the poor, cheerful devil against overwhelming difficulties and misfortune. With this "Truffaldino" comedy went ready wit, satire and artfulness, which have their explanation in Lubitsch's

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origin. He was from "Spree-Athen", from the very centre of old Berlin - the ready-made clothing area, where the Berlin "rough tongue with a heart" once held forth with a ready wit that is already legendary today. Lubitsch never forgot this "home-ground", he always remained close to the "man in the street". "Lubitsch, or the ideal of the average man", was the title given by Mario Verdone to a study in which, among other things, he draws attention to a striking philosophical affinity between the attitude of René Clair and of Lubitsch, to their close, positive relationship with the "small people". This closeness to his public helped considerably towards Lubitsch's successes.

Marionettes

He did not get on with ironic comedies, but with showy grand spectacles. In 1917, with the newly-discovered Pola Negri he produced "Die Augen der Mumie Ma" and, shortly afterwards - also with the temperamental Negri - "Carmen". After that came Strindberg's "Rausch" (1919), a fairy-tale film, "Die Puppe", and a showy comedy, "Die Austernprinzessin" (1919). But his actual breakthrough to world-fame was achieved with the historical mammoth film, "Madame Dubarry", with Pola Negri in the title-role. This was followed by another mammoth film, "Anna Boleyn" and another "Das Weib des Pharao". Here, Lubitsch showed himself to be a theatrical showman, the supreme director of the masses, the historical picture-book director, for whom history served as the occasion for a film spectacle. His attitude was that of a puppet-showman, and he even portrayed himself as such in his fairy-tale film "Die Puppe" (1929). In 1921, he filmed "Sumurun", an Oriental pantomime, in which he took over a key role like this again - the part of a hunch-backed buffoon, who causes a tremendous riot of emotions, love, jealousy and death in the court of a sultan. This ironic fairy-tale already gives a hint of the later Lubitsch touch. One of the best achievements of his Berlin years was the production of the psychological drama "Die Flamme", the story of a sensitive composer who falls in love with a flirt. Pola Negri and the unforgettable Alfred Abel played the leading parts. Here, Lubitsch proved that he was a master of the "Kammerspiel" scene; he created a truly fascinating "lady with the camelias" atmosphere. This was in 1922, and when he had also shown the ability to produce films of "uproarious comedy" ("Kohlhiesels Töchter") with Henny Porten and Emil Jannings, 1919), Hollywood did not delay any longer in welcoming him.

Shared Experience of Life

The great success of Arnold Fanck's film "Wunder des Schneeschuhs" (1919) was an encouragement to the young German documentary film. Ufa built up a well-organised, highly esteemed, production of cultural films. The visually venturesome, dynamically composed "Querschnittfilme" ("cross-sectional films") were important for the development of the "avant-garde" documentary films. Thus, the film "Die Abenteuer eines Zehnmarkscheins" (1926) was created, produced by Bertold Viertel after a script by Bela Balasz. This offered a dramatised "composite view" of life during the inflationary period. The documentary by Walter Ruttmann, "Berlin, die Symphonie einer Groszstadt" (1927) - instigated by Carl Mayer - showed greater stylistic assurance. This was a kaleidoscopic "montage", an attempt to reproduce the rhythm of a modern city with picture composition and cutting. With his "Markt am Wittenbergplatz" (1929), Wilfried Basse presented a superbly constructed piece of reportage that is still fresh and seems up-to-date even today. This film is felt to be the fascinating forerunner of the greatest achievement in documentary films of those years "Menschen am Sonntag" (1929) - a film by Robert Siodmack, Eugen Schüfftan, Edgar Ullmer, Billy Wilder, Fred Zinnemann and Moritz Seeler. Their report on the Sunday activities of four young people proved to be a production that presented the viewer, in an unpretentious manner, with a new dimension of film experience - a shared experience of life.

Conclusion

When we once wished to view a large castle, the steward led us through the corridors and galleries, opened the doors of all the rooms and chambers and said, smiling: "Do not rely on my guidance any more; look around yourselves. You will find wonderful things - that is, exactly what is to your taste".... The author of these lines is in a similar position to that steward. It could not be his intention to give here an exhaustive description of the classical period of the German film, only an introduction to a realm of immeasurable fantasy. "The history of the German cinema is the richest in surprises that any nation can offer" - these are the words with which the Spanish historian, Carlos Fernandez Cuenca, begins his history of the German cinema, and he enumerates these surprises: expressionism, symbolist and psychological realism, social naturalism and nihilistic, anarchical characteristics. At the same time, it must be added, this German film had a vitality that hardly seems possible today. It devoted itself to great poetry and to burning questions of the day. It tried to make accessible to a larger audience the great heritage of the stage and, at the same time, it discovered Nature and possibilities of an idiom peculiar to the screen. It conducted its experiments in style passionately and without fear of ridicule. And it exerted its influence further, on a global scale, so that today a not inconsiderable part of international film history appears as its logical sequel.

The Author ; Edmund Luft

Writer, critic, dramatist. Born 1914 in Germany. In 1932 was technical assistant in the TOBIS, Berlin film-studios, for camera, sound-engineering and cutting. In 1934 he studied at the actors school of "Deutsches Theater" Berlin, in the department of dramatists, film, literature and the structures of film production. In 1936 became a dramatist for radio-plays and short films, and also took up journalism and wrote short stories. In 1938 was author and actor in the theatre "Die Dachluke" (Literarisches Kabarett) at Berlin, and in 1947 became a critic on films and theatres at Wiesbaden.

Since 1949, he has been editor, dramatist, columnist and critic, co-operating with numerous newspapers, motion picture periodicals, radio and television stations in Germany and other European countries.

He has written and directed television features about film "Schnitt im Schloss", "Vergnügen ohne Grenzen" and has been a member of the selection committees judging German documentaries, films and scenarios at Bonn.

Mr Luft has also been a member of the jury at the film festival of Berlin (1957), Acapulco (1959), Mar del Plata (1960) and Valladolid (1964).

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