Cinema and Film Industry in Weimar Republic, 1918-1933

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I. Introduction

Cinema or film making, is important with respect to the relation between art and politics at the down of a new century. The reason behind this is inherent in the character of the new medium. The art has been going into a closer relationship with technology since the end of 18th century. This can be observed in the changing staging techniques in theater, and in architecture. Examples are numerous but what differentiates film making is that film making is itself a technological output. It is the most tangible example for the ‘mechanical reproduction’ of art in Benjamin’s words. Reproduction makes this form of art more accessible to audiences. At this point the quality of the work is under question: is it a work of art, or is it only a part of popular culture which is open to the creation of ideological bias through the function of entertainment. Entertainment, at first glance, seems to be a very innocent function that is performed by popular culture.(1) However, when the process of production, which includes the institutional and financial framework, is considered, this innocence turns out to be illusory for the simple fact that the spectators are not conscious of the production process and of the bias inherent in it. Identification with the camera, the instrument of vision, transforms pain into pleasure. "The cinema is the domain of the declassed" (Coates, 1991, 28). Thus, cinema turned out to be a mechanism, which absorbed the reactive potential of the impoverished and ‘declassed’ middle class through entertainment. This means a wide spectrum of possible audiences (working class, petit-bourgeoisie, intellectuals, white-collar workers, etc.) seeks refuge in the cinema for their real expectations of economic success and social mobility which were in fact very limited at that time.

Under the heading of cinema and film making, the production of films both for pure artistic and ideological purposes will be discussed. It does not mean that films produced for artistic purposes are immune from ideology. Accordingly, a picture of the in the form of critiques, thoughts on German cinema and society, and reactions the films receive either as their success in attracting audience, or as public demonstrations and censure, will be evaluated.
Film industry in the Weimar Republic was deeply affected by the intervention of economic and political concerns in all aspects of cultural life. Politics even influenced the way films were discussed in the print media, whether by emphasizing their universal appeal or by insisting on the apolitical nature of mass entertainment. Economic expansion and concentration, the institutionalization of cinema as an integral part of modern life, and the instrumentalization of film for political purposes were the conditions under which film criticism was practiced in newspapers, popular magazines, and literary journals.

Among many film critics with diverse political tendencies, Siegfried Kracauer as the portrayal of the left wing intelligentsia and a representative of Frankfurt School had enduring significance. The reason behind his significance was that:

Writing about film became a way of discussing issues relevant to culture and society at large. In contrast to the pre-war years, the cinema was more frequently used as a lever than as a target in the analysis of political processes. [...] writing about film allowed them [left-liberal intellectuals] to put their opposition to bourgeois culture into practice and to contribute to the discourse that constituted modern mass culture (Hake, 1993, 126).

Hake argues that in this way they were overcoming their social isolation and they had the chance to establish closer contact with the masses through writing on film as a mass cultural phenomena. By 1920, 'three and a half million Germans went to the cinema every night' (Hake, 1993, 140).

1920s is known as the 'Golden Twenties'. The German golden age of film corresponds, approximately, to this era, from the making of The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari (1919) to "Hitler’s absorption of the German film industry" (Mast; 1986; 135) in 1933. Between 1914 and 1919, Germany was unable to provide British, French and American films. The only foreign production it was able to import were those from neutral Sweden and Denmark. Nevertheless, there were not enough Swedish and Danish motion pictures to compensate for the disappearance of other imported films. For that reason, the Germans renewed efforts to increase the quantity and quality of domestic production.

The first major step was the establishment of the nationally subsidized film conglomerate UFA by government decree in 1917. Small film companies came under the control of the new government-subsidized conglomerate Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft (UFA). Aware of the growing number of effective anti-German propaganda films coming forth from the Allied countries, General Erich Ludendorff, commander-in-chief of the German army, ordered the merger of the main German
production companies, as well as exhibitors and distributors, into a single unity for the making and marketing of high-quality nationalistic films to make Germany's image better at home and abroad. The organization was so effective that, by the end of the war, German production facilities were ten times what they had been in the origin. German film industry was ready to compete commercially with that of any other nation in the world.

When the war ended in November 1918, the government sold its shares in the company to the Deutsche Bank, and to corporations like Krupp and I.G. Farben. This caused little change in the studios internal organization, which was fundamentally authoritarian, but its mission was altered slightly because of the compelling necessity of competing in a new international market. The general impression on UFA is that it monopolized German cinema during the 20s and 30s. But during the 20s it functioned more as a distributor for smaller companies (Terra Film A. G., National Film A. G., Deulig Film for instance) than as a producer in its own right. (3) The reason for this erroneous impression is that nearly all of the few films UFA produced during the 20s became classics of the German cinema’s so-called Golden Age.

In the creatively changed atmosphere of Weimar Republic, where national censorship was abolished in early 1919 by the Council of People’s Representatives, the new freedom of expression manifested itself most immediately in a series of pornographic films. The only significant effect of these films was to agitate anti-Semitic sentiments against their supposedly Jewish producers and to cause the National Assembly to reinstitute state censorship through the Reich Film Act in May 1920. It was this act which would later enable the Nazis to assert ideological control over the German cinema.

As the cinema gradually integrated into middle class culture, various attempts to affirm the critical discourse of film in the process of cultural innovation and social change appeared. Meanwhile the film business transformed from a small industry to a large industrial complex including production facilities, motion picture theater chains, publishing ventures and a large area of employment. The process of concentration can be seen in the foundation of UFA in 1917. This process stimulated laws that regulate the distribution and exhibition of films on a national level. When film censorship was abandoned in 1918, Aufklärungsfilme (sex education films) flooded the market (Hake, 1993, 109). The introduction of Reichs-Lichtspielgesetz (national film law) in 1920 put an end to this trend. However the vague formulations of this law made it an instrument for political censorship especially in the late Weimar period.
In the first years of the Weimar Republic, small film companies increased in number because film industry became a profitable area as a result of the lack of competition in the export business, and the economic inflation. Consequently, banks began to involve in film business supplying large amounts of money for the production of prestige films. Meantime, UFA continued to expand and acquired Decla-Bioscope in 1922.

The German art film (or the so-called Expressionist film) was a product of those economic processes (Hake, 1993, 109). These films were made with the explicit goal to create quality product and to attract middle class audience to the cinema. The successful examples are Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari (1920, The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari), Der Golem (1920, The Golem), Die Strasse (1924, The Street), Das Wachsfigurenkabinett (1924, Waxworks), and Variété (1925, Variety). Whether working in an expressionist or more realistic mode, directors like Fritz Lang, E. A. Dupont, Robert Wiene, F. W. Murnau, G.W. Pabst, Paul Leni had created their personal style. They created an art cinema that used the most advanced technology for the filmic imagination.

II. Two Basic Genres in Weimar Cinema

The German films of this great era were of two types: either fantastic and mystical or realistic and psychological. One was developed in the traditional German romanticism of love and death, the other revealed the new German intellectual currents of Freud and Weber. In the film of fantasy, the action revolves around the occult, the mysterious, the metaphysical. These are films of fantastic monsters in human dress, of the kingdom beyond grave, of dream kingdoms of past and of the future. The German architect-painters devoted their imaginations to turn these uncanny, supernatural, abstract, and intangible regions into concrete, visual domains. In the psychological film, the action revolves around the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters, their needs, their passions, their frustrations. Unlike the fantasy films, which are inevitably set in some romantic time and place, the psychological films are set in a miserable and seemingly middle class present.

A. Fantastic and Mystical: Expressionist Period

The German cinema of the silent era is defined to be fantastic. The dark, demonic, haunted and somehow profoundly irrational character of this tradition was linked to a particular social and political meaning by Kracauer in his book From Caligari to Hitler and Lotte Eisner’s The Haunted Screen (Elsaesser, 1989, 22). Kracauer’s thesis correlates fantasy in popular film and current political events. The
relation between urbanization, the industrial revolution or new forms of political or social control was a pattern whereby the fantastic both represent conflicts and disguises them, where it raises the question of power and at the same time attributes it to supernatural forces (Elsaesser, 1989, 22). The presence of a bureaucratic-military organization even after the defeat in 1918 and a strongly politicized working class, gave the struggle of the various sections of the bourgeoisie for power and hegemony quite distinctive features in Germany. The revival of fantasy after a revolution that failed was the reaction of a cultural minority to their exclusion from the course of historical events. It was the expression of a frustrated desire for change, rather than resistance. The German silent cinema, despite its commercial elements, remained an alternative cinema. It appropriated the codes of representation and conflict in which a society recognizes its moral and psychological reality.

Fantastic films were the direct expressions of the ambition and desire of middle and lower middle class that sought escape in the cinema because their real prospects were so limited. Moreover being chosen by fate and chance for social success was itself a distorted version of class struggle. An individual solution was offered by the film, while the question of the whole class or group was blocked off and suppressed. Thus, what is being repressed was the initial social and historical situation. The repressed dimension returns to the hero in a horribly altered form, as the nightmare of the split self, as a crisis of identity, and a compulsion towards self-destruction and self-annihilation. "It is the structure of repression itself, more than what is being repressed or what materializes in its stead which produces the effect of the fantastic" (Elsaesser, 1989, 27). What seems to happen is that between the hero and the world, an alien power introduces itself. The fantastic films function as a decisive bridge between them (the hero and the world) by letting an irrational causality to fill the gap. This is true even of films without a supernatural or fantastic elements, such as Der Letzte Mann (The Last Laugh).

The films of the German fantastic cinema seem to encode in their encounter with the social reality of the Weimar Republic not the street-battles, inflation, unemployment, but something else which is also historical. In these films, the history returns in the form of the uncanny and fantastic. In recovering the historical dimension of the uncanny motif, the emergence of the machine is important. But more important than this is the changing relations of production, especially as they affect artists and intellectuals, thrown into the market with their products, and finding there that they no longer control the modes of reproduction and distribution of their works. With this significant change, the cinema by the early
twenties was perceived as a dangerously powerful rival to theater and serious fiction. The films open up a perspective towards a class of spectators whose unstable social position make them members of the petit-bourgeoisie, whose engagement with the class struggle occurs in the form of avoiding class struggle by imagining themselves above and outside of it. Petit-bourgeoisie compensates for its fear of proletarianization by dreaming of the detour around social conflict in the shape of personal fantasies of success.

A. i.) Das Kabinett Des Dr. Caligari

Das Kabinett Des Dr. Caligari (The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari), which signals the start of the new German era in 1919, appropriately combined both the mystical and the psychological. The script was anti-authoritarian, almost rebellious, in its equation of power and madness. It was written by a Czech poet, Hans Janowitz, and a young Austrian artist Carl Mayer in late 1918. They submitted the scenario to Erich Pommer, chief executive of Decla-Bioscop (an independent production company which was to merge with UFA in 1922) and it was immediately accepted. It is not clear whether Pommer understood the script’s radical nature, but he saw it as an opportunity to raise the quality of the artistic content of his studio’s films. Initially, the young Austrian director Fritz Lang was assigned to the project but was replaced by Robert Wiene. However, against the authors’ violent objections, Lang convinced Pommer to add a Rahmenhandlung (framing story) to the film which inverted its meaning: Francis is made the narrator of the tale and introduced as a madman in an asylum which, we discover at the film’s conclusion, is operated by the benevolent Dr. Caligari himself. Lang thought that the reality frame would heighten the Expressionist elements of the mise-en-scène, but it also transforms the body of the film from an anti-authoritarian fable into the portrayal of a paranoid hallucination, which ultimately justifies and glorifies the very authority it was intended to destroy. Paul Coates defines the use of narrative framing in Expressionist Weimar cinema as "a Kafkaesque imitation of the functioning of the state bureaucracy, refering the question of the text to a higher instance, which usually overturns the sense of the subordinate text and sometimes destroys it entirely" (Coates, 1991, 32).

The surprise at the end of the film is our discovery that the tale we assumed to be one of horror and of superhuman powers is really the product of the imagination of a subhuman brain, a paranoid’s fantasy, a mad man’s hatred of his doctor. The world of the film is the product of Francis’s subjective vision, not of the director’s objective one. Robert Wiene, Caligari’s director, has intentionally used the decor of that film in a perpetual war against nature. The striking effect of
the film’s design (by Warm, Röhring, and Reimann) is not just the unnatural feel of it. Walls, floors, and ceilings bear a structurally impossible relationship to one another; buildings so constructed could never stand. Skin, that soft and flexible material of nature, becomes hardened and frozen with paint. Windows are painted in distorted and impossible shapes. And most unnatural of all, the world of Caligari is a world without sunlight. Shadows of light and dark, light beams where sun would normally cast its shadow, have been painted on the sets. By using paint to make shadow where the sun would normally make, the fact that no sun exists was emphasized. The outdoor scenes feel as if they were shot indoors and they were. Here was the perfect use of the studio film. The intentional unnaturalness of the film is so remarkable that it is difficult to tell if the acting is intentionally or unintentionally stilled. It is expressionistically appropriate.

The film has a clear relevance to antagonism of bureaucracy. Wiene make fun of the police and the authorities with their ridiculously high, skinny desks and their red-tape insistence that the hypnotist obtain a permit to perform at the fair, which was essentially a permit to murder. The insane asylum that the doctor heads is yet another bureaucratic enterprise with its procedures, methods and assistants. A bureaucratic institution is no better than another. When Dr. Caligari asked for a permit to put up his tent-show, the town clerk and his subordinates treated him in a crude, humiliating and insulting manner. This scene transmits to the spectator an identifiable experience of the arbitrary and disrespectful behavior that a militarist bureaucracy, which is what the civil service was even during the Weimar Republic, displayed toward civilians. Caligari takes revenge on the hated town clerk by way of his medium Cesare. But here, any analysis of the origins and causes of such an all-powerful but at the same time petty bureaucracy is blocked and displaced. Instead, there is a corresponding magic mastery which compensates. Cesare is Caligari’s double and the embodiment of rebellious, anti-authoritarian drives which stand in direct contradiction to his own authoritarianism. Thus there has been much debate about the meaning of the framing device.

Perhaps there are no answers to the question of who narrates the story, whose story it is, and to whom it is narrated. Perhaps the film’s ambiguities stem from the conflict between the writers, who conceived one kind of story, and the director, who accepted another because of governmental censorship of the original script. Kracauer’s answer is that it is the story of Caligari, the mad doctor, the materialization of a long line of tyrants, the faithful image of German military dictatorship and its demonic, hypnotizing
hold over others. Likewise, the doctor finds the secret of somnambulism and brings a patient under his control.

A. ii.) Studio Film

As mentioned above, the production of Caligari marked the beginning of the German cinema’s great decade. This era was to be characterized by films which, like Caligari, were completely studio-made, and by intense admiration for the German studio product all over the world. Emphasis on studio production seems to be a very important aesthetic quality of the German cinema between 1919 and 1924, and it withered away by the end of the silent period. The emphasis on studio production seems to have stemmed less from economic considerations, as it did in Hollywood, than from aesthetic ones. German directors found that they could exercise complete authority over every aspect of the film-making process when they worked in the controlled environment of the studio, as they could not when they worked on location. As a result, between 1919 and 1927 UFA became the largest and best equipped studio in the Western world. The UFA style of architectural composition and pictorial lighting was becoming an end in itself, and the sheer extravagance of its productions had substantially diminished the studio’s economic stability.

The dependence of the German film on the attraction of its visual elements led to its becoming completely a studio product. The only way to make sure that the lighting, the decor, the architectural shapes, the relationship of blacks and whites and grays were perfect was to film in a completely controlled environment. Even outdoor scenes were shot inside the four walls and ceiling of a studio. The vastness, the freedom of the outdoors that had become one of the sources of power of both the American and Swedish film was rejected by the Germans. The result was not only a perfect control of style and decor but also a feeling of claustrophobia that enhanced the mood of many of the best films, which were also claustrophobic in their content. The totally studio-produced film emphasized the importance of the designer, whose job was to decorate enormous indoor cities. The designers came to films from painting and, especially, from architecture, having absorbed the styles of many of the new artistic movements of postwar Europe: Expressionism, Cubism, other forms of abstraction. The German film could never have exerted its influence without its talented painter-architect designers, the most notable of whom were Herman Warm, Walter Röhring, Walter Reimann, Robert Herlth, Albin Grau, and Erno Metzner.

A. iii.) The Effects of Caligari

According to Gerald Mast, the film had a great influence on other film-makers, "not only in Germany, but in France, where
**Caligarism** inspired many of the early avant-garde experiments in abstract cinema, in film as _painting-in-motion_ rather than as realistic narrative of natural events in natural settings" (Mast; 1986; 136). However, David Cook argues that "despite the international acclaim when it was released in February, 1919, Caligari had little direct impact on the course of other national cinemas" (Cook; 1990; 120). Nevertheless, Cook accepts that in terms of its set design, its psychological examination and thematic ambiguity, its depressed subject matter, and its interpretation of the internal and subjective through the external and the objective, Caligari had an immense influence upon German films which followed it.

Anyway, between 1919 and 1924 many successors to Caligari appeared upon the German screen. Most of these _Schauerfilme_ (films of fantasy and terror) used horrific story lines and Expressionist decors to embody the theme of the human soul in search of itself. Some representative titles are: F.W Murnau’s _Der Januskopf_ (Janus-faced, 1920 -adapted from Robert Louis Stevenson’s _Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde_), Paul Wegener’s remake of _Der Golem_ (1920), Arthur Robison’s _Schatten_ (Warning Shadows, 1922), Robert Wiene’s _Raskolnikov_ (1923—a version of Dostoevsky’s _Crime and Punishment_), Paul Leni’s _Das Wachsfigurenkabinett_ (Waxworks, 1924), and Henrik Galeen’s remake of _Der Student von Prag_ (1926). All of Caligari’s spiritual descendants were technically proficient and were designed excellently, but two of them deserve special notice, both for their individual accomplishments and because their directors went on to become major figures in the cinema of the Western world. These are Fritz Lang’s _Der Müde Tod_ (1921—literally, "The Weary Death," but usually entitled _Destiny_ in English) and F. W. Murnau’s _Nosferatu_ (1922).

**A. iv.) Fritz Lang**

Lang’s other major films of the silent period were not intellectualized works in the manner of Caligari, but they were all strongly impressive in terms of pure plastic beauty and decorative design. _Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler_ (Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler, 1922), for example, offers an Expressionistic handling of a Caligariesque master criminal aimed at destroying the foundation of a post-war society whose rottenness certainly deserves it. In _Siegfried_ (1922-24) and _Kriemhilds Rache_ (Kriemhild’s Revenge, 1923-24), Lang again exercised his inclination for mythical romance and compositional power in a massive retelling of the Nordic Nibelungen saga, complete with studio-constructed mountains, forests, and a full-scale fire-breathing dragon.

Lang, for his excessive cost and arrogant subjects received sharp and aggressive attacks from Kracauer. Kracauer critically analyzed the ideological function of mainstream
cinema. In his expositions, he sometimes became very direct. “Of Lang’s Die Frau im Mond, he derisively ask: ‘When will they ever come down to earth in our country?’; thus using the film’s cosmic setting as a metaphor for the aloofness of German producers in general” (Hake, 1993, 250).

A. iv. a.) Der Müde Tod

Among the mystical descendants of Caligari, Fritz Lang’s Der Müde Tod (Destiny, 1921) is the most interesting. Lang, in partnership with his author-wife, Thea von Harbou, is more famous for a series of psychological studies of the activities of gamblers, murderers, and spies (Dr. Mabuse, Spies, M) (6). But he also made several metaphysical-fantasy films. In Der Müde Tod, a young girl and her lover enter a new town. On the road they encounter a dark, shadowy, supernatural stranger. The stranger has bought a piece of land near the town’s cemetery, and has enclosed it with a great stone wall that lacks a door or any other physical entrance. The girl’s lover disappears. When she discovers that he is a prisoner beyond the wall, she starts to drink a poisonous drug. Lang instantly cuts to the huge wall where she sees the transparent, supernatural images of souls entering the region beyond the wall. The means to enter the wall is metaphysical, not physical, because the wall surrounds the kingdom of death. The mysterious stranger is Death himself. But he is a tired and downhearted Death, looking after the candles of human life that inevitably flicker out. The girl begs for the life of her lover, and Death offers her a chance to save him, pointing out three candles whose lights have begun to flicker. The girl claims that love can conquer death, and she agrees to save at least one of the three lights. Each of these candle lights is a story in a far-off land: a middle-eastern Moslem city, Renaissance Venice, and a magical China. In all three, the girl and her lover are reincarnated as two young lovers whose monarchs declared war on their love. In all three reincarnations, the young man dies, and the girl’s love does not defeat death. After her failure, Death gives the girl one more chance. She can return to life and rescue her lover’s being if she can offer another life in return. She soon runs into a burning hospital to save an infant there. Death meets her inside and asks her for the child as the victim. She considers and then refuses; she will not kill the infant to save her lover. Instead, the girl herself dies in the fire; her soul and her lover’s are thereby reunited as their transparent images climb a hill and stand against the sky. Love, in dying, has, ironically, defeated death.

Kracauer sees Der müde Tod as a manifestation of Germany’s postwar obsession with fate and death and Götterdämmerung, the logical culmination of the cultural pessimism of the late nineteenth century, as expressed in such works as Oswald
Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* (1918-22). The film is clearly related to the major thematic concerns of Expressionism. Moreover, Lang added something new to the cinema through his extraordinary use of lightning to emphasize architectural line and space.

A. iv. b.) *Metropolis*

In his last major silent film, *Metropolis* (1926), Lang represented a terrifying, if not simplistic, vision of a twenty-first-century totalitarian society whose futuristic architecture and technology were exhibited excellently real through the process and model work of the special-effects photographer Eugen Schüfftan(7). Peter Gay argues that *Metropolis* is;

...a fantasy without imagination, a picturesque, ill-conceived, and essentially reactionary tail which has only a few good shots of mass movement and rising waters to recommend it; the film sees the class struggle as science-fiction and draws the kind of the conclusion that can only be called a studied lie (Gay, 1981, 141).

Many of Lang’s silent films were made for UFA and written by Thea von Harbou, who later became an devoted Nazi, and Lang himself was offered the leadership of the German film industry by the Nazi propaganda minister, Josef Goebbels, in early 1933 (*Metropolis* was Hitler’s favorite film for not all the wrong reasons of course). Half-Jewish and a political liberal, Lang refused the offer and fled Germany for Hollywood, where he became an important director of American sound films.

According to Anton Kaes, *Metropolis* was an intersection of the traditional love story (between the industrialist’s son and the worker’s daughter) with the fate of a megalopolis built on the exploitation of working class. "Love, revolution, communist class war and the Christian hope for a mediator, science-fiction and science fact, biblical floods and apocalyptic destruction, and, at the end, the utopian dream of community devoid of conflict" (Kaes, 1994, 20) forms a complex story line which touches many debates of the Weimar Republic. It can be said that, within the artistic and social history of the modernity, *Metropolis* was a bridge between the revolutionary expressionist avant-garde, and submission under a fascist leader. The tension of the film was between the machine-like modernity and the sentimentality of the heart(8).

There was a vertical social structure presented in such a way that wealthy live in the ‘timeless pleasurable gardens’ (Gay, 1981, 141) high above, and the working class down below. The human bodies of the working class were depersonalized to the point of being a part of the film’s architectural design (Lang was an architect in profession), forming what Kracauer has called a ‘mass ornament’(9). "The city, the workers’ body, and
the film itself are associated with the machine" (Kaes, 1994, 22).

The machine represents the basic metaphor of the 1920s discourse on modernity and technology. Inherent in the film, there was a fetishization of machine, moving by themselves and without outside referent. The fascination with mechanization is a common feature of both Futurism and Russian constructivism. The machine aesthetics of Lang paralleled Ernst Junger. Junger, referring to the 'front' generation of World War I, who experienced the symbiosis of man and machine in the trenches of the war, said that: "Ours is the first generation to as begin to reconcile itself with the machine and to see in it not only the useful but the beatiful well" (Kaes, 1994, 23).

A. v.) F. W. Murnau

The second major figure to emerge from the expressionist movement was F. W. (Friedrich Wilhelm) Murnau (1888-1931), whose highly stylized vampire film Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens (Nosferatu, a Symphony of Horrors, 1922) has become a classic of the genre. Trained as an art historian, Murnau became fascinated by the theater and began to wrote films shortly after the war, collaborating with both Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz. When he began to direct his own films, Murnau worked almost exclusively in the expressionist manner, making films like Der Bucklige und die Tänzerin (The Hunchback and the Dancer, 1920), Der Januskopf (Janus-faced, 1920), and Schloss Vogelöd (Castle Vogelöd, 1921). It is Nosferatu, however, adapted loosely by Henrik Galeen from Bram Stroker’s novel Drakula (1897), that represents the high point of Murnau’s expressionist period.

A. v. a.) Nosferatu

One of the remarkable things about Nosferatu is the apparent naturalness of its stylization. It should be noted, that it was achieved with a minimum of resources since the film was independently produced. Whereas Caligari’s Expressionism was mainly graphic, Nosferatu’s is almost purely cinematic, relying upon camera angles, lighting and editing rather than production design.

In Murnau’s Nosferatu, Jonathan Harper undertakes his journey to Transylvania in order to make money and improve his prospects for advancement his firm. The hero’s initial situation has economic overtones. Moreover Harper seems desirous to escape from the domesticity (flowers, cats) of his bride. The couple, separated basically for economic reasons, are united by Nosferatu. Elsaessler states that "the characteristic structure of a lack, an absence" was
overcompensated by the intrusion of metaphysical forces (Elsaessler, 1989, 25). In Nosferatu, the repetition of a feature of fantastic films can be observed. Nosferatu becomes the double of Jonathan Harper, his reverse side, his return of the repressed, parallel to the relation between Dr. Caligari and Cesare, or to the image of false Maria in Metropolis (11).

Murnau’s next important film was made in the genre which superseded Expressionism—that of Kammerspiel (literally, ‘intimate theatre’), or ‘instinct,’ film. The scriptwriter Carl Mayer, of Caligari fame, was the founder and chief practitioner of this genre, which dealt realistically with the oppressiveness of contemporary middle class life and, by extension, with the irresistibility of fate in a disintegrated society. They generally contained a few characters, each of whom represented a destructive and uncontrollable impulse. Mayer began writing Kammerspiel scripts in the heyday of Expressionism, and there is no question that they contain Expressionist elements. Indeed the whole realistic cinema which grew out of Kammerspielfilm can be seen as both an extension of and a reaction against the Expressionist cinema, in that it retained the unhealthy psychological themes of the earlier films but presented them in realistic form. The films made from Mayer’s early Kammerspiel scripts are Leopold Jessner’s Hintertreppe (Backstairs, 1921), and Lulu Pick’s Scherben (Shattered, 1921) and Sylvester (1923); but it was Der letzte Mann (literally, ‘The last Man’ but usually entitled The Last Laugh in English), written by Mayer and directed by Murnau, which incarnated the type and inaugurated a new period of German realism in 1924.

A. v. b.) Der letzte Mann

Der letzte Mann, produced by Erich Pommer for UFA, is a distinguished film in every respect but it is the innovative use of camera movement that makes Der letzte Mann so important to the history of film. The camera became a watching eye and entered every private moment of the life. The film concerns an aging doorman (Emil Jannings) in a fashionable Berlin hotel who loses his job and, more important, his resplendent uniform to a younger man. Within the lower middle class tenement where he lives with his daughter, the uniform has brought him prestige and dignity. Its unexpected loss invokes a kind of violent ridicule from his neighbours that is almost sadistic. Demoted to the position of washroom attendant at the hotel and completely dishonored in his own home, the old man begins to come apart. He becomes stoop-shouldered and untidy overnight. He gets madly drunk at his daughter’s wedding and experiences hallucination of persecution; he even makes a desperate attempt to steal his uniform back out of a hotel locker.
As the film nears its conclusion, we discover him crouched secretly against the wall of the hotel lavatory like a trapped beast, terrified of the entire world outside himself and apparently as mad as Caligari. But the film’s single title flashes on the screen to explain that whereas in the real world things would end at this point, the filmmaker have decided to take pity on the ex-doorman. There follows a absurd conclusion in which he inherits a vast sum of money by an unusual coincidence and shows up in the hotel dining room to display his wealth before his former employers in a grandly vulgar but good-natured manner. It is thought that this ending was attached onto the film either to arouse the American audience’s taste for such sentimental optimism or to ridicule it; no one is quite sure which is true. The American cinema had finally begun to influence the German cinema by 1924 and was to have considerably more influence as the decade progressed. But, it is argued that, the incompatibility of the ending is the only noteworthy defect in what is both cinematically and thematically a nearly perfect film. Indeed, Der letzte Mann was the most technically innovative film to come out of Weimar cinema. As a result, Der letzte Mann enjoyed worldwide success and had a greater effect upon Hollywood technique. Murnau left Germany for a Hollywood carrier after completing two final super-productions for UFA (Tartuffe [1925], and Faust [1926]), which were not that much succesful.

Hollywood was to be almost equally impressed in the following year with Der letzte Mann’s immediate successor, E. A. (Ewald André) Dupont’s (1891-1956) Varieté (1925), also produced by Erich Pommer for UFA and photographed by Karl Freund. The film deals with a love triangle among trapeze artists (Emil Jannings, Lya de Putti, Warwick Ward) at the Berlin Wintergarten which ends in murder, and it contains camera movement even more breathlessly dynamic than that of Der letzte Mann. As Lewis Jacobs writes, "Varieté put American movie-goers into a white heat of enthusiasm over film art," (Cook, 1990, 130) and it insured the permanence of German influence upon the Hollywood studios until the end of the silent era which was soon matched by a tendency to ‘Americanize’ the German film. For the German cinema, on the other hand, Varieté provided a bridge between the introspective Kammerspiel genre and a more objective kind of realism which was to emerge after 1924.

**B. Realistic and Psychological: Stabilization Period**

**After the Dawes Plan**

After the inflation induced hyperactivity of the post-war years, Dawes plan and the introduction of Rentenmark in 1924 resulted in the influx of American money. The new competition threatened the German film industry, so protective laws
restricting the foreign imports were passed. American companies reacted by producing Kontingenzfilme (contingency films; inexpensive, low-quality films) in Germany to guarantee their presence in the German market. After the Parufamet agreement, Americans increased their share in the German market, however only very few German films were ever distributed in the United States. "By 1925, 40 percent of the films shown in German theaters were of American origin" (Hake, 1993, 110).

American films became popular with German audiences for their simple stories, fast-paced action, explicitly physical humor, and charming stars. Kaes quotes from the theater critic Herbert Jhering who wrote in 1926 that:

The number of people who see films and never read books is in millions. They are all subordinated to American taste, they are made identical, made uniform. [...] The American film is the new world militarism which inexorably marches forward. It is more dangerous than Prussian militarism because it devours not only single individuals but whole countries (Kaes, 1994, 26).

This is an example of how mass culture had been seen by some critics as a secret American weapon to enslave the world. Such fear of mass culture found specific meaning in Germany, where the deficiency in national identity had been compensated by cultural identity.

In order to compete with the popularity of American films, UFA, Emelka, Terre and others pursued various strategies. On the one hand they continued in the art film tradition by introducing new genres like Strassenfilm (the street film) or Querschnittfilm (the cross-section film). On the other hand, they utilized some formulas of genre cinema as exemplified in Lang's Mabuse films (Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler, and M) and early film musicals like Die drei von der Tankstelle (1930, The Three From The Gas Station). Sentimental comedies and clownish comedies often proved very successful with audiences although the German film critics disliked them.

The introduction of the sound film caused further concentration in the German film industry. UFA produced the first sound film, Melodie des Herzens (1929, Melody of the Heart). Meanwhile the new language barriers brought relative economic stability for the film companies that survived the 1929 economic depression. In the meantime, Alfred Hugenberg, the director of Krupp, continued to expand his media empire. A prominent member of the DNVP (German National People's Party), Hugenberg increasingly involved in right-wing politics and as a first step UFA was aligned with the goal of German nationalism. "Films then produced by UFA reflected those developments, avoiding formal experiments and promoting nationalistic subject matters" (Hake, 193, 111).
In 1924, the German mark had been stabilized and the spiral of post-war inflation halted by Germany's acceptance of the Dawes Plan (named for the American banker Charles E. Dawes, who presided over an international committee set up to control Germany's war reparation payments). This provided for the long-term payment of reparations and allowed Germany to enter back into the economic system of the Allies. The effect was to create in the German Republic a stabilized period of false confidence and even prosperity which lasted until the stock market crash of 1929. Ironically, however, the German film industry, which had survived excessive inflation, was seriously threatened by stabilization, because the Dawes Plan imposed the reduction of all exports. Thus, between 1924 and 1925, many independent production companies declared bankruptcy, and the surviving ones found it very difficult to borrow money from German banks. Hollywood recognized its chance to break down its only European rival, and began to pour American films into Germany, founding its own distribution agencies and buying up theaters.

Losing millions on monumental films like Nibelungen and Metropolis and failing to establish a stronger presence on foreign markets, UFA experienced growing financial difficulties. By late 1925, UFA was almost collapsing due to external conditions and to the expenditures of its own recent productions, having lost over eight million dollars in the fiscal year just ended. At this point, the American studios Paramount and MGM offered to subsidize UFA's huge debt to the Deutsche Bank by lending it four million dollars at 7.5 percent interest in exchange for collaborative rights to UFA's studios, theaters, and personnel - an arrangement which clearly worked in the American companies' favor. The result was the foundation of the Parufamet (Paramount-UFA-Metro) Distribution Company in early 1926. Other film companies signed similar contracts, including Terra Film with Universal and Phoebus with MGM.

Within a year, however, UFA was showing losses of twelve million dollars and was forced to seek another loan, this time from the Prussian financier Alfred Hugenberg (1865-1951). Hugenberg, who had been a director of Krupp and was a leader of the right-wing German National Party (Deutschnational Volkspartei, or DNVP), subsequently bought out the American companies and became chairman of the UFA board in March, 1927. He established a nationalistic production policy which gave increasing priority and importance to Nazi Party meetings in UFA newsreels and which finally permitted the Nazis to overthrow German film industry in 1933. While the republic survived, Hugenberg did not display any extraordinary ultraconservatism and he waited.
The most immediate effect of the Parufamet agreement was the migration of UFA film artists and technicians to Hollywood, where they had worked for a variety of studios. Hollywood did not want them to film the kinds of subjects that had made them great directors in their native industries (Cook, 1990, 132). American studios did not correctly know how to employ the foreign talented people. The major artists quickly became bored with their pointless assignments and returned to Germany (some only to return to America later as refugees from the Nazis). Only Lubitsch (13) was able to successfully adapt himself to the complexity and triviality of the Hollywood production process, and his American career proved much more significant than his German one.

B. i.) Strassenfilme

Another effect of the Dawes Plan on the German film industry was less direct than the Parufamet agreement but more important to the general course of the domestic production. The period after 1924 produced a return to social normalcy in Germany. As a consequence the German cinema began to turn away from the abnormal and artificial psychological themes of Expressionism and Kammerspiel and towards the kind of literal (but still studio-produced) realism exemplified by Strassenfilme of the second half of the decade — G. W. Pabst’s Die freudlose Gasse (The Joyless Street, 1925), Joe May’s Asphalt (1929), and Piel Jutzi’s Berlin Alexanderplatz (1930). Named for their prototype, Karl Grune’s Der Strasse (The Street, 1923), these films all dealt realistically with the living conditions of ordinary people in the post-war period of inflation and confirmed the spirit of Neue Sachlichkeit which entered German society and art at every level during this time (Cook, 1990, 133). Lack of expectation, pessimism, resignation, disillusionment, and a desire to accept ‘life as it is’ were the major characteristic of Neue Sachlichkeit, and these reconstructed in the form of merciless social realism in the street films.

B. ii.) G. W. Pabst

The master of the new realism was accepted to be the Austrian-born director G. W. Pabst (1886-1967). Trained in the theater, Pabst was a latecomer to the Weimar cinema who directed his first film, Der Schatz (The Treasure) in 1924. His next film, however, was Die freudlose Gasse (The Joyless Street, 1925), which achieved world recognition as a masterpiece of cinematic social realism. In some countries recognition came in the form of censorship, England banned Die freudlose Gasse (Cook, 1990, 134). The film concerns the financial and spiritual destruction of the middle classes through inflation in post-war Vienna, focusing upon the lives of several impoverished bourgeois families striving to uphold
their self-respect and propriety under the conditions of a secret starvation. The misery of their existence is contrasted with the excessive pleasure-seeking life style of the war profiteers. Daughters of the middle class, played by the Swedish actresses Asta Nielsen and Greta Garbo, sell themselves into prostitution to save their families, while the wealthy amuse themselves at luxurious black market nightclubs, where these girls must eventually come to be bought. Pabst took 'life as it is' with a kind of photographic realism, without any reference to sentimentiality or symbolism.(14)

In Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney (The Love of Jeanne Ney), Pabst returned to the social arena to film the progress of a love affair caught up in the chaos of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath. Often using real locations, the film portrays post-war European society in the process of rapid disintegration. Pabst’s last two silent films, Die Büchse der Pandora (Pandora’s Box, 1929) and Tagebuch einer Verlorenen (Diary of a Lost One, 1929), both concern the lives of prostitutes and the way in which their degraded roles relate to the general decadence of society. Pabst immediately adopted himself to sound and became one of the leading masters of the early sound film. His pacifist films Westfront 1918 (1930) and Kameradschaft (Comradeship, 1931) are both among the most important works of the period. In fact, Pabst’s career extended to the fifties, but his greatest work was done between 1924 and 1931, a period which corresponds to the Golden Age of German film.

III. Montage Documentaries and Walter Ruttmann

The two important films of the late Weimar cinema were "montage documentaries" shot on location in and around Berlin. Walter Ruttmann’s Berlin, die Symphonie einer Grosstadt (Berlin, the Symphony of a Great City, 1927), based on an idea by Carl Mayer to create an abstract portrait of the city and its teeming life from dawn to midnight on a late spring day. Menchen am Sonntag (People on Sunday, 1929), a semi-documentary account of two young couples on a holiday at a lake outside Berlin, was the collaborative effort of several young men who would later become major directors of the sound era in America - Robert Siodmak, Fred Zinnemann, Edgar G. Ulmer, and Billy Wilder. Like its wholly documentary predecessors, Menchen am Sonntag showed the marked influence of Soviet montage. Kracauer dismissed experimental films like Ruttmann’s Berlin, die Symphonie einer Grosstadt and Eggling’s Diagonal - Symphonie (1921, Diagonal Symphony) as mere arts and crafts. "Their purely formal explorations, as Kracauer saw it, contributed to the fetishizing of the cinematic apparatus and aestheticized the equalizing force associated with modern technology" (Hake, 1993, 252).
The distinction between mainstream cinema, with its dependency on narrative and mimetic representation, and the avant garde film with its attempts to move beyond narrative and beyond representation was firmly in effect in Weimar cinema. The opposition of avant garde and mass culture is most obvious in the film aesthetics. The lifelike representation of moving images (an aspect of mechanical reproduction) led to a return to categories of authorship and self-expression of the traditional arts. Moreover, the politics of the avant garde did not develop an alternative definition of film, but draw the boundaries between high and low culture, between art and mass culture. Film, as part of mass culture aiming at apolitical entertainment, was transformed into a mechanism of pleasure and an object for consumption. Mainstream narrative film was no longer associated with the promise of social equality or the critique of bourgeois culture.

Walter Ruttmann accused the mainstream filmmakers of having betrayed film’s original mission of liberating the human senses through the power of vision. For him, only a critical separation of mass entertainment and film art could prevent the medium from submitting to commercialism. Ruttmann rejected the narrative film in favor of documentary material. His cross-section films were structured according to the principles of rhythm and montage, despising mimetic representation, thus reminding of Dada.

IV. Cinema as a Means of Political Propaganda

The cinema is a product of modern mass society because it is produced and perceived in a collective mode. Then contemporary cinema and society moved in the same direction of equating mankind with masses. The life pictured by film becomes the man’s own experience. With its prefabricated dreams, it can be consumed like any other product without any intellectual effort on the part of the spectator. "With these implications, the cinema becomes the mirror in which the masses encounter themselves" (Hake 1993, 180). The cinema became a testing ground for explicitly political forms of mass spectacle in which the denial of individuality meant the first step toward totalitarianism. According to Kracauer "under the rule of capital, film production necessarily becomes a mirror of the existing society and serves to maintain its structures of domination. It reveals repressed wishes and daydreams but only in an alternated form which at the same time reproduces their denial" (Schlüpmann, 1987, 99).

Siegfried Kracauer shows that the struggle for the control of the self, which proved the great theme of the Weimar cinema, had the effect of increasing the security and thus the authoritarian tendencies of the masses which in the postwar era included large segments of the middle class degraded and
impoverished by inflation. Since the German form of government was republican and Germany was a conquered nation, however, this authoritarian impulse had no means of expression, and the collective mind of the society was paralyzed by its inability to articulate itself. Thus, Kracauer states that the decline of the German cinema was due to multiple external factors supported by a nationwide loss of sensation, which the German cinema, as an organ of German society, had helped to create in some way. It was not the Nazis who destroyed the German cinema, but the cultural preconditions which permitted their rise to power.

As a result of its mass appeal, cinema became an important means of political propaganda. After World War I, the organisations on the left showed increasing interest in the cinema as a means for criticising capitalism and bourgeois ideology. Under the extremely polarised atmosphere of Weimar politics, nationalistic films and film magazines with their rightist discourse also took their place in the arena. In the years proceeding the end of the war, revolutionary spirit longing for radical change shifted from the realm of politics to that of cinema.

Expressionist dramatist and revolutionary socialist Ernst Toller praised film’s importance [...] for all socialists, and he demanded the production of a film about the German revolution, a historical documentary of great emotional appeal, and with workers as the main protagonists (Hake, 1993, 186).

However, until the mid-twenties, leftist organisations did not have the chance to use film for their own purpose. From then on, they concentrated on the effects of film on the development of a proletarian consciousness. Some leftist critics continued to doubt about the possibility to create a revolutionary cinema under capitalism, but against the success of commercial films, leftist parties, labour unions and cultural organisations are forced to review their cultural strategies and their definitions of art and mass culture. The representatives of Social Democrats emphasised the need for educational films and documentaries. They rarely opposed narrative film in principle, ignoring the psychological disposition they create through appealing genres and popularisation of stars.

Communists approached the problem more radically from the sides of production and reception.

Founded initially for the distribution of Russian films in Germany, Prometheus Film in the late twenties produced Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück (1929, Mother Krausen’s Journey to Happiness) and Kuhle Wampe (1932, Whither Germany?) [...] Behind many projects stood Willi Münzenberg, who, since his early involvement with the International Workers’ Relief Organisation (IAR), had continuously expanded his area of influence through
the publication of newspapers, critical journals, and illustrated magazines (Hake, 1993, 189).

Praising film as an important tool for Communist propaganda, Münzenberg called for the full utilisation of its artistic possibilities in the unmasking of class enemy and promoting a revolutionary struggle. Still, because of their instrumental approach to film, and culture in general, most Communist circles continued to insist that real revolutionary films could never be made in a bourgeois capitalist society. According to them, all films more or less contribute to false consciousness.

The independent leftist Volksfilmverband (People’s Film Association), which includes among its members Heinrich Mann, Käthe Kollwitz, and Erwin Piscator, acted more pragmatically. Based on the motto ‘The enemy is on the right, even the enemy of the film’, they organised groups to fight against reactionary films and oppressive censorship laws (Hake, 1993, 191).

During the last years of the republic, they offered seminars about film theory, started non-commercial distribution networks and production companies, published a journal on film. They organised campaigns against Hugenberg and his media empire. They tried to expose the anti proletarian propaganda behind the seemingly apolitical entertainment films and draw attention to the filmic means that made possible the evil manipulation of the masses. The strategy was to take the most popular commercial films and uncover their hidden messages.

While the Russian films represented the future of the cinema, Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück was regarded as the first German revolutionary proletarian film [...] announced as the first social drama that did not romanticise poverty, director Paul Jutzi’s gripping tale of a poor working class family proved to be a great success - perhaps because it relied for its emotional appeal on the same identification process that were exploited by the so-called Street films (Strassenfilme) and film melodramas (Hake, 1993, 199).

However, their efforts could not prevent the public reaction to films like Battleship Potemkin and Kuhle Wampe after 1928. The reception of films like Battleship Potemkin and Kuhle Wampe served as crystallisation points around which ultra conservative and National Socialist critics could present their ideas on national and racial superiority.

The decline of the German cinema after 1933 had been attributed to the Nazis, who subverted UFA after coming to power, turning the studio into a factory for the mass production of light entertainment and an instrument of propaganda for the state, under the direction of Josef Goebbels. However, the German cinema was dying of international disorders long before the Nazi takeover, even
before the coming of sound (Cook, 1990, 137). This is not to suggest that it had completely lost its capacity to present high-quality films. On the contrary, Germany produced three world famous early sound films: Josef von Sternberg’s Der blaue Engel (The Blue Angel, 1930), Fritz Lang’s M (1931), and Pabst’s Westfront 1918 (1930). But there is seemingly a general decline in the quality of production after 1924, the causes of which were intrinsic and diverse. Pacifist films like Pabst’s Westfront 1918 (1930) or Lewis Milstone’s All Quiet on the Western Front (1930) experienced censorship problems, and were often boycotted by right-wing groups. As a result of both political and economic problems, the major studios turned to state for protection and support. In 1933, they were forced to accept National Socialist film politics.

By 1918, there were 2300 cinemas with some 800,000 seats. Ten years later, these figures had risen to over 5000 film-theaters, with 1,940,000 seats (Guttsman, 1990, 263). During that period, the German film industry produced an average of 250 films a year, compared to 743 American, 74 French and 44 British movies per year (von Eckardt, 1993, 93). Of all the films made in the 20s, a total of 2300 German films include those which were among the most memorable and influential in the history of cinema. Estimates suggest that in 1926, one and a half million to two million people went to the cinema on an average day, and 800,000 of those were thought to be workers (Guttsman, 1990, 263). "For example, there were 20 seats for every thousand Berliners, at the end of the decade, this figure had increased to 30 seats per thousand" (von Eckardt, 1993, 93). Cinema-going was probably more popular among workers who were politically unattached and generally uninterested in politics. For this section of the audience, who frequently read neither book nor newspaper, the cinema created illusions and satisfied dreams (Guttsman, 1990, 264).

A. Cinema Industry and the Left-Wing Intelligentsia

The argument against commercial films often directed at their tendency to show the world in a rosy light, and to offer the viewer, especially the oppressed and impoverished worker, a vicarious satisfaction. Moreover, the political Left saw the commercial film as a weapon of ideological persuasion. "It transmitted bourgeois values and conservative nationalist interpretation of history, and frequently extolled the virtues of militarism disguised as patriotism" (Guttsman, 1990, 266).

In the years after 1918, a more positive assessment of the medium of film gained ground. A critical understanding of the new medium by the working class audience, the support of good films, the establishment of a workers’ cinema thought to be encouraged by SPD. Unless they do not interfere in the new medium in a positive way, this powerful instrument would be left to other political groups who would use it for their own
political ends. SPD realized the need to create its own films and to acquire good films for hire. The parties on the Left accepted that they had to go their own way in the production and showing of films in line with their policies and perspectives.

However, the first socialist step in creating a system of mobile cinemas came very late, in 1929. These mobile cinemas showed only party propaganda films in the 1928 election. The SPD’s film production facilities were very limited due to financial problems. SPD wanted to produce films with republican and socially progressive message to extend their appeal to the whole of the working class. A number of left-wing radicals, social democrats, and communists founded the Volksfilmverband, hoping that it would turn into a cultural mass movement (Guttsman, 1990, 268). They started with the recognition that cinema was more important than any other art for its large public and its correspondingly great influence. The society admitted that the function of the cinema was mainly to fulfill the need for relaxation and amusement. But the society never had achieved the expected mass-following directed itself towards the fight against the exploitation of the masses. It remained as a film club uniting communists, social democrats and bourgeois radicals who were interested in cinema and were criticizing commercial film production. They wished to develop the Tendenzfilm, the film that would stimulate political action, ignoring the cultural and aesthetic charm which attracted middle class. This unity is extraordinary, because social democrats and communists have contradictory views on the so-called ‘bourgeois film’. For the social democrats, the bourgeois film can be judged by its aesthetic qualities. They believe that cinema can be reformed and improved with the production of high-quality films. The communists rejected the whole system of bourgeois film production on the grounds that the bourgeois film industry can never produce high-quality films because of its economic basis. According to the communists, whoever controls film production, controls the ideology of the masses. Proletarian film aiming at education and political commitment, should replace bourgeois film. The communists solved the problem of finding films appropriate for their criteria by importing Russian films like Eisenstein’s Battleship Potemkin, and October, and Pudovkin’s The Mother (based on Gorki’s novel), and Storm over Asia which were distributed in Germany by Weltfilm.

Weltfilm was directed by Willi Münzenberg, "who was also the head of the major communist publishing empire" (Guttsman, 1990, 271). Münzenberg founded The Prometheus Film Company to produce German proletarian films. By the end of the 20s, Münzenberg had, within capitalism and by capitalist means, built up such a range of journals, newspapers and publishing
houses for the propagation of socialism that he was called ‘communism’s Hugenberg’ (van der Will, 1985, 189). His many ventures were referred to by venomous tongues as the ‘Münzenberg empire’. Münzenberg’s activities were free of all sectarianism and were genuinely addressed to the mass of working people, i.e. to those in the KPD, those in the SPD and those without any party-political affiliation (van der Will, 1985, 189). His efforts greatly helped the alliance of the left modernist and the working class movement. He was at the crucial point of the politicized avant-garde and mass media and class culture.

B. Mutter Krausens Fährt ins Glück

Most important of the films produced by Prometheus were Mutter Krausens Fährt ins Glück (Mother Krausen’s Journey to Happiness) (directed by Piel Jutzi, script by Heinrich Zille) and Kuhle Wampe (Wither Germany?). Mutter Krausen is a widow who cannot even manage to feed herself and her two unemployed grown-up children from her wages as a newspaper deliverer.

[She] has let her one room to a dubious tenant, while she herself along with her grown-up children Paul and Erna is camping in the kitchen. The tenant on his part keeps a prostitute and her child in his room. Since the young Krausens cannot avoid stumbling upon him, they are exposed to his evil influence. He seduces Erna and persuades Paul who was wantonly dissipated his mothers earnings, to make up for this loss by participating in a burglary. Paul and the tenant break into a pawnshop, but the police interfere and come to fetch Paul at his mother’s place. Her son led away as a criminal, mother Krausen’s whole universe goes to pieces (Kracauer, 1974, 197-198).

The daughter finds a solution to her misery. Erna meets a class-conscious worker, Max, and joins him in a communist demonstration.

Taking the prostitute’s child along - what would life give to that child? - she (Mutter Krausen) opens the gas pipe and departs on her journey to happiness (Kracauer, 1974, 198).

Kracauer, in From Caligari to Hitler, defined the problem as whether or not Max’s concept of happiness out-balances that of mother Krausen. From the emphasis placed on her suicide, Kracauer drew only one conclusion: that the film is intended not so much to play up socialist claims and hopes as to acknowledge them with melancholy.

C. Kuhle Wampe

Kuhle Wampe, subtitled wem gehört die Welt? (to whom does the world belong?), deals with broad social forces in a didactic theme. Produced by Bertold Brecht, Hans Eisler and Slatan
Dudow collectively, it is a film of the suffering and struggling proletariat.

It begins with an unsuccessful chase by unemployed young workers in Berlin after a vacancy. He returns to his family, and after a row with his father, commits suicide. The family, long in arrears with its rent, is evicted and settles in the permanent camping place Kuhle Wampe. Kuhle Wampe ends in a dialectical discussion among the passengers on a crowded journey home, occasioned by a newspaper report about the burning of coffee in Brazil. To the mocking question ‘who will change the world?’ the answer is ‘those who do not like it as it is’ (Guttmann, 1990, 273).

Kracauer notes that:

In 1932 the atmosphere in the streets is only to be compared with that of any large city in 1914-1918. After two or three days, the visitor wonders why revolution does not happen, not that there is any specific thing to provoke it apparent to the eyes, but outbreak against this odd insecure heaviness is to be preferred than waiting for a storm that has sometime got to burst. The film that interests Berlin most at this moment is Kuhle Wampe (Kracauer, 1974, 243).

Mutter Krausen’s Fährt ins Glück and Kuhle Wampe were films which satisfied the political demand for the visual representation of the dialectical tensions in working class existence at the time of the depression (Guttmann, 1990, 273). However against the constant stream of entertainment films, from the dream factories in Hollywood and Babelsberg (the home of UFA), the films produced by communists or social democratic organizations hardly had an impact. Although the German film industry also produced masterpieces, using different narrative and cinematic techniques, the majority of the commercially produced films were shows of happy endings. Moreover, the masterpieces were not devoid of deficiency, for instance, they usually comprehended social revolt negatively against traditional power structure in an expressionist manner.

Notes:

(1) “The popular media, above all the films, were calculated mainly to sow confusion, and it was not Hugenberg’s explicit orders alone that sowed it” (Gay, 1981, 140-141).

(2) In response to the great success of the French film d’art, an important development began in German cinema around 1910. Directors, actors, and writers associated with the German theater began to take a serious interest in the cinema for the first time. In 1912 the first Autorenfilm was brought to the screen by the former stage director Max Mack. This was an adaptation of Paul Lindau’s successful stage play Der Andere (The Other One), about the divided personality of a Berlin lawyer. In 1913, the famous stage director Max Reinhardt
filmed versions of the plays *A Venetian Night* and *The Isle of the Dead*. The poet-playwright Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote the play *Das fremde Mädchen* (The Strange Girl), the first important German feature film to express a truly supernatural theme. With the influx of literary and theatrical people into German film, film's social status was radically raised, but the movement also put off the development of true cinematic narrative by restraining it to the narrative conventions of the stage. The first pre-war German film to break with stage conventions was the Danish director Stellan Rye's *Der Student von Prag* (The Student of Prague) in 1913. The film concerns a young student who sells his mirror reflection, and thus his soul, to a sorcerer who in turn causes the image to become a murderous incarnation of the students evil second self.

However, the film's immediate impression was in terms of its content rather than of its technical excellence. Siegfried Kracauer has noted, *Der Student von Prag* introduced the unhealthy theme of 'deep and fearful concern with the self,' which was to obsess the German cinema from 1913 to 1933, at which point it was taken over and anesthetized by the Nazis (Cook; 1990; 111). This theme is central in Kracauer's book *From Caligari to Hitler*.

(3) UFA produced only 12 of the 185 German features for 1926, 15 of 222 for 1927 (while distributing 105 of these), 16 of 224 for 1928 (distributing 18), and 13 of 183 for 1929 (distributing 68) (Cook; 1990; 115). Kracauer points out that UFA was only an instrument of the cinema's birth.

(4) German Expressionism, then, attempted to express interior realities through the means of exterior realities, or to treat subjective states in what was widely regarded at the time as a purely objective medium of representation. Thomas Elsaesser talks of the German Expressionist cinema as an art cinema (*Authorenfilme*), in which the forms of the fantastic are developed, in the context of a self-conscious attempt to make 'art' in the cinema. He conceives this attempt as a counter-cinema not only in a position to Hollywood films but also to the burgeoning mass-commercial film production in Germany.

(5) Many leftist critics focused on relationship between film and ideology developing their approach with an analysis of class society. What differentiate Kracauer was that he concerned with cinema as a public sphere. He exposed the cinema’s links with the public spectacle and lived experience.

(6) Marc Ferro asserts that those films working on minor criminal events (an accident, crime, disaster, theft, etc.) are the best sources to improve our understanding of social and political problems, because, they offer the monotonous repetition of everyday events in cinematic language (Ferro, 1988, 155). They serve as a sign of a larger picture.
According to Ferro, the best example to this type of film is Lang’s M. The story was inspired by a real event. Little girls were murdered by a sadist in Dusseldorf in the late 1920s. The police looked everywhere but the underworld organization found the criminal. The organization of the beggars get involved with the event, because they cannot work in peace while the police was in charge of finding the criminal. Kracauer and those who follow him consider this film as the reflection of a society in which the gang members represent the Nazi party and their chief, Scherenke, represents Hitler. Ferro even claims that Hitler adopted Schrenke’s gestures in early 1930s. In the film, the gang is organized well in a hierarchical way. On the other side, the State does not inspire confidence and respect. The State and the police with their scientific methods of inspection, technology and knowledge, was not able to get the criminal. On the contrary, the gang members used their instincts, the metaphysical and hidden marks in finding the criminal. The opposition between instinct and institution reminds the dilemma of heart and mind in Metropolis. The film’s emphasis on the instinctual is significant in comprehending the social distrust of the democratic institutions of the Weimar Republic.

(7) Lang claimed that Metropolis was inspired by his first vision of the New York City skyline in October 1924, at night. For Metropolis, Schüfftan invented the trick-shot technique, still universally used and known today as the Schüfftan process.

(8) “The Expressionist love story (oedipal son rebels against rich father to win the heart of a working class girl) appeared to be incongruent with the technical fetishism characteristic of fiction films” (Kaes, 1994, 21). Peter Gay handles Expressionist years under the heading of ‘The Revolt of the Son’, and the forthcoming fascist years ‘The Revenge of the Father’ in his book, Weimar Culture. “If Expressionism is shot through with images of revolt against the father, Metropolis both unmasks the paternal order and consolidates it. [...] The film bridges Expressionism and National Socialism, linked to both but of neither camp” (Coates, 1991, 52).

(9) Kracauer saw the same process at work in the marching columns of the military as well as in the calculated, mechanized dancing style of the American girl revues which fascinated Berlin in the mid-1920s. These revues had more than hundred dancers who all performed identical movements. He believed that the mass ornament was a sign of the prevailing economic system (Kracauer, 1995, 84-85). Less than ten years later, Leni Riefenstahl would organize the masses similarly in her documentary of the Nazi Party congress, Triumph of the Will.
In Junger's view, the war machine transformed a group of individuals into a cohesive mass that left behind the frightful world of utilitarianism for the sake of higher values, community and primitive passion. However, the war also showed the destructive potential of modern technology. It was also the generation which experienced bombing raids, machine-gun fire, and poison gas. As Junger put it: "The domination of the machine over man, becomes apparent, and a deep discord which already in peacetime began to shake the economic and social order emerges in deadly fashion. Here, the style of a materialistic generation is uncovered, and technology celebrates a bloody triumph" (Kaes, 1994, 24).

Following Marx, Elsaessler argues that in the capitalist production process, the product alienates from the producer and seems to him as something uncanny. The emergence of the uncanny motif is related to the changing relations of production and its perception by artists and intellectuals who were thrown to the market with their products (Elsaessler, 1989, 27). The image of the uncanny and the double represented in many films as dominant figures symbolizes the creator half possessed by his creature.

Kracauer bitterly argued that "The more expensive the production, the cheaper the taste" (Hake, 1993, 250). In the early thirties, he wrote "It is not worth talking about most of the films. They are industrial productions, they have their audience or they don't, and that's that" (Hake, 1993, 251). According to him, the institutions that produce them were very powerful and they distributed cheap mass entertainment as a substitute for, and not an expression of, the real. This harsh criticism was implicitly directed towards Fritz Lang.

Ernst Lubitsch (1892-1947), who had worked as an actor for Max Reinhardt and directed a popular series of short comedies before coming to UFA in 1918, directed successful costume films for UFA until 1922. Lubitsch emigrated to the United States in 1922, where he enriched American cinema with his sophisticated comedies of wit, urbanity, and sexual innuendo. Lubitsch's technical excellence was the first of its kind in the German screen. His expertise in historical realism made his spectacles among the most popular of the post war years, not simply in Germany but all over the world. Other UFA directors successfully practiced the Lubitsch formula, among them Dmitri Buchowetski in Danton (1921), Otello (1922), and Sappho (1922), and Richard Oswald in Lady Hamilton (1922) and Lucrezia Borgia (1922) all of which exploited the postwar mania for craftsman-like reconstructions of the past (Cook, 1990, 130). Kracauer suggested that they tended to present history as a slave to individual passions and psychoses rather than a process dependent upon a wide range of social and economic variables. Thus the films of German historical
realism are anti-historical in an important sense and Romantic to the point of nihilism. Significantly, their popularity in Germany died out in 1924, the year which witnessed the rise of an undistinguished and confident nihilistic realism in the triumph of the *Kammerspielfilm*.

(14) "Pabst was the first German director to be substantially influenced by Eisenstein’s theory and practice of montage. Prior to Pabst, the German cinema had evolved through its various phases as essentially a cinema of *mise-en-scéne* rather than of montage, since it had developed in isolation from the innovations of Griffith and his Russian successors" (Cook, 1990, 135).

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