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THE DIVIDED SCREEN

THE DOPPELGÄNGER IN GERMAN SILENT FILM

Bahareh Rashidi

PhD Thesis
University of Edinburgh
2007

This thesis has been composed by myself and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Bahareh Roshid

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Name of Candidate: Bahareh Rashidi

Address : 5647 S. Dorchester Avenue
Chicago, IL

Postal Code: 60637
United States

Degree: PhD

Title of Thesis: The Divided Screen: The Doppelgänger in German Silent Film

No. of words in the main text of Thesis: 86,956

The proliferation of the doppelgänger theme in so many films of Wilhemine and Weimar Germany raises the question of its historical significance, in particular during Germany's "crisis of classical modernity". While previous studies have addressed the double from a narrative perspective, focusing on its psychological significations as divided self, this thesis instead considers the theme from a structural and historical perspective: how, as a technical reproduction of the human body that is ontologically double, at once real and unreal, it serves as a site for reflection on the visual experience of modernity and on the medium of cinema. The thesis begins by considering the relationship between the theme of the double, born circa 1800, and the burgeoning visual regimes of modernity. Important aspects of this relationship are the abstraction of representation from stable referents in the aftermath of Kantian thought, the empirical study of the observing subject, and the development of new technologies of recording and projection. Nineteenth-century technologies of optical illusion, such as the phantasmagoria and lifelike automata, as well as the itinerant showmen who displayed them, gave rise to doubles of the human body with uncanny effects of ontological uncertainty. These not only influenced the doppelgänger stories of German Romanticism and after, but also were ancestors of cinema's doubles and their showmen. This study considers the "cinematic" themes of a set of stories and films of the double, including repeatedly performed scenarios of exhibition and voyeurism, visual pleasure and anxiety, foregroundings of the narration, and allusions to the history of cinema and media technologies. The central chapters of the thesis offer readings of five classics of German film: *The Student of Prague* (1913), *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1920), *The Golem: How He Came into the World* (1920), *Waxworks* (1924), and *Metropolis* (1926). Addressing the double as a reflexive theme of optical uncertainty, these readings focus on how moments of optical distress are depicted and how film language is used to construct a cinematic uncanny: an ontological problem arising from the ambivalent character of visual experience that affects the narrative and film form, characters and spectator alike. This perspective sheds light on the historical significance of the double theme, revealing its close relationship with the problematic status of vision and the observing subject in modernity, and with a special case of modern visual experience, the technological medium of cinema.

**THE DIVIDED SCREEN:
THE DOPPELGÄNGER IN GERMAN SILENT FILM**

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CHAPTER I

“THE SWAY OF THE DOPPELGÄNGER”

Since the early work of Georg Lukács (1913) and Siegfried Kracauer (1920s), writing on German silent cinema has focused considerable attention on the relationship between the films and the social and ideological context in which they were produced and received.¹ In the decades after World War II, sociological analyses of the film classics of the 1910s and 1920s have been undertaken above all with an eye seeking forewarnings of the reactionary revolution to come, retroactively searching for clues in the 1920s *Zeitgeist* to the kind of mass insanity that could allow Hitler's accession to power. These readings have particularly sought to relate films of the fantastic genre for which Weimar cinema is renowned to currents in Wilhelmine and Weimar thought that, in hindsight, appear to have foreshadowed the rise of National Socialism. “Expressionist” cinema in particular has been mined for its reactionary significations.² Expressionism itself, Lukács alleged in 1934, was “undoubtedly one of the diverse bourgeois ideological currents that would later result in fascism”, insofar as its “tendency towards subjectivism and romanticism linked it ideologically to the irrational mysticism of Wilhelminian philosophy, and therefore to one of the central sources of Nazi beliefs”.³ The best-known and most influential

¹ Including Kracauer's study of white-collar culture (*Die Angestellten*), collected essays published as *The Mass Ornament*, and later, *From Caligari to Hitler*.

² In fact, the usual categorization of fantastic films of Weimar cinema as “Expressionist” based on certain graphic motifs obscures their significance and individual distinctness, making it easier to make broad socio-historical arguments while blurring the problems inherent in such arguments. Taking into account plot, *mise en scène*, and so forth, the films usually classed together as Expressionist are quite distinct from each other and not easily constitutive of a genre (unlike Expressionist theatre). Also, as Barry Salt has pointed out, “All the features of film style that lazy critics call ‘expressionist’ predate any possible influence from any part of German Expressionism.” (Barry Salt, “From German Stage to German Screen”, in *Before Caligari: German Cinema, 1895–1920*, ed. Paolo Cherchi Usai and Lorenzo Codelli, Edizioni Biblioteca dell'Immagine, 1990, p. 418.) The common feature of these films is rather self-consciousness toward the medium and its possibilities.

³ See Patrice Petro, “From Lukács to Kracauer and Beyond: Social Film Histories and the German Cinema”, *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Spring 1983), p. 47. Georg Lukács, “Grosse und Verfall des Expressionismus”, *Essays über Realismus*, Neuwied, 1971, p. 120, trans. Patrice Petro. In this early essay, Petro compares Kracauer's work with two other sociological studies of German film, Paul Monaco's *Cinema and Society: France and Germany during the Twenties* (New York: Elsevier 1976) and Julian Petley's *Capital and Culture: German Cinema 1933–1945* (London: BFI 1979), arguing that Kracauer's influential approach remains the most viable.

sociological study of German silent film, Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler*, found in the plots of a vast array of films intimations of the dark struggles taking place in the "German soul" between its contradictory longings for anarchy and tyrannical authority, a conflict soon to be resolved.

One major stumbling block for these interpretations has been the difficulty of relating historical and empirical arguments – let alone abstractions such as a collective unconscious or a national or class psychological profile⁴ – not only to the artistic specificity of individual films, especially of self-avowed "art films", but also to the complex spectatorial experience of cinema. Kracauer, for instance, largely disregards the artistic and structural particularities of the films he discusses, forcibly narrativizing them to present plot-driven readings that support his larger sociological and psychological argument. Thus, while self-conscious formal effects may well be the hallmark of many of the well-known films of German silent cinema, their prevalence and significance have remained largely ignored in sociological studies. Similarly, the complex relationship between the fantastic themes of the films and the medium of cinema and its history has been glossed over.

For these same reasons, German silent cinema's major recurring theme, the double, has failed to receive adequate critical attention. Doubles appear in an astonishing parade of works of different styles and genres, from Wilhelmine successes such as *The Other (Der Andere)* and *The Student of Prague* (1913), to Weimar masterpieces such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920), *Nosferatu* (1922), and *Metropolis* (1926). These stories haphazardly recall well-known fictional archetypes from German Romanticism and after. At the same time, they rely on the visual language of cinema to construct often uncanny, and sometimes humorous, narratives of subjectivity in crisis. Some better-known representative films with themes of the double are listed below, although many of these could fit in different categories and/or have been remade multiple times:⁵

- ◆ The archetypal doppelgänger of German Romanticism, an uncanny shadow, mirror reflection, or portrait of a character that acquires an independent life of its own, is perceptible to the senses, whether to the character in question or to others as well, and generally haunts, pursues, or sabotages its "host": *Der Student von*

⁴ Or for that matter, single/unitary psychological profiles of social classes, such as the petite bourgeoisie.

⁵ E.g., several versions of *Hoffmanns Erzählungen* were made, in 1911, 1916, and 1923.

Prag (Stellan Rye, 1913; Henrik Galeen, 1926); *Der Andere* (Max Mack, 1913); *Der Mann im Spiegel* (Robert Wiene, 1916/1917); *Der verlorene Schatten* (Rochus Gliese, 1921).

- ◆ The artificial life-form created by a scientist-magician, which functions as a double of its creator, over which he generally loses control, as in the Frankenstein theme, and/or a replica of a real person: *Der Golem* (Paul Wegener, 1915); *Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam* (Paul Wegener, 1920); *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1926); *Alraune* (Henrik Galeen, 1928; Richard Oswald, 1930).
- ◆ The individual with multiple identities or a split personality (cf. Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde or Dracula): the *Homunculus* serial (Otto Rippert, 1916); *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920); *Der Januskopf: Eine Tragödie am Rand der Wirklichkeit* (F. W. Murnau, 1920); *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (F. W. Murnau, 1922); *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler – Ein Bild der Zeit* (Fritz Lang, 1922); *Orlacs Hände* (Robert Wiene, 1924/5); *Geheimnisse einer Seele* (G. W. Pabst, 1925–26); *Faust* (F. W. Murnau, 1926).
- ◆ Two people who uncannily resemble each other and function as doubles. *Die Schwarze Kugel* (or *Die Geheimnisvollen Schwestern*, Franz Hofer, 1913); *Die Bruder Schellenberg* (Karl Grune, 1926).
- ◆ The “unreal” double that is explicitly technologically induced, imagined, or hallucinated (Schiller’s *The Ghost-Seer*): *Der Golem und die Tänzerin* (Paul Wegener, 1917); *Unheimliche Geschichten* (Richard Oswald, 1919); *Schatten: Eine Nachtliche Halluzination* (Arthur Robison, 1923); *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett* (Paul Leni, 1924).

The proliferation of such themes in so many of the major works of Wilhelmine and Weimar cinema raises the question of what historical and cultural factors might have made the double particularly relevant, not only to this socio-historical context but also to the medium of cinema – especially at a time when the status of film as art was subject to debate. With regard to cinema, one is driven to consider how the transplantation of familiar literary motifs to a medium of moving images affects their meanings and effects, all the more in light of how themes of the double concern a narrative crisis of subjectivity that appears as a crisis of vision.⁶

Interpretations of the double theme, in the seminal histories of German silent film like others to follow, have relied on methods derived from literary criticism, focusing on the thematic signification of the divided self (Kracauer) or as a neutral

⁶ See, e.g., Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature*.

quotation from German Romanticism that cinema spectacularly and magically “brings to life” for the first time (Eisner). More recently, psychoanalytic theory has been the predominant tool in approaches to the doppelgänger, and the theme of identity crisis the focal point. In other words, the double has been considered within the context of narrative, as signifying the problematic and problematized identities of protagonist-subjects, for example as the return of the repressed. As a result, the specifically cinematic significance of the double has been considered only in passing, with the acknowledgment of a vague resemblance between the double theme and the mimetic activity of film.

While noting the strikingly many recurrences of doubles in films of the 1910s and 1920s, Kracauer’s *From Caligari to Hitler* and Eisner’s *The Haunted Screen* approach the theme as an unqualified re-emergence of a German Romantic obsession and as a phenomenon of Weimar culture, not only ignoring the significance of earlier films of the double but also obscuring the theme’s longer-term relationship with the medium of cinema. Kracauer dismisses Wilhelmine films as “archaic” and exclusively considers the double’s diegetic role: i.e., the literary, narrative theme of identity crisis. In his account the double indicates “split personality” and represents a “retreat into the depths of the soul”;⁷ its proliferation in Weimar film reflects how “cases of duality occurred in real life on a rather larger scale”, hinting at the “widespread discrepancy between theory and practice, thinking and living”.⁸ Reading the history of German cinema as a mirror of the German soul in conflict, the double becomes a metaphor for the paradoxical longings of the “German soul” for chaos and authority, while Kracauer’s book itself tells a doppelgänger story about the German people and their repressed and contrary drives.

Lotte Eisner’s discussion of the double also highlights its importance, but does little more than tabulate graphic resemblances between the examples and their sources, moving seamlessly from literary works to film.⁹ Voicing a common assumption, she ultimately defers the question of the double’s proliferation in German film with the conclusion that “It is reasonable to argue that the German

⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1947, p. 81.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁹ Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, London, Secker & Warburg, 1969, pp. 109–113.

cinema is a development of German Romanticism, and that modern technique (i.e. cinematography) merely lends a visible form to Romantic fancies".¹⁰

More recently, Thomas Elsaesser has addressed the crucial questions of why Romantic motifs should emerge so forcefully in such a different context and how "modern technique" affects their meaning.¹¹ Categorizing the doppelgänger as a German Romantic motif and focusing on the films' theme of social mobility, Elsaesser considers historical parallels between 1830s/40s and 1910s/20s Germany that might illuminate the popularity of such uncanny figures. In fact, however, the double has enjoyed popularity since the late 18th century in a spectrum of works of "popular" and "high" culture, and across Europe and in the United States. Even during a hiatus in the use of the motif in "serious" literature in the mid-19th century when naturalism was in vogue, its popularity continued unabated in pulp/sensationalist fiction. The forced choice of examples and search for strict historical parallels between time periods in which these motifs become popular is thus not very credible. From another perspective, the way in which the double has been a rhetorical staple of critiques of modernity and accounts of modern subjectivity also indicates that the problem is more far-reaching than such hypotheses would suggest.

For Elsaesser, the double theme in *A Student of Prague* (1913) provides a suggestive case study; with recourse to classical psychoanalytic theory (following Freud's thesis in *The Uncanny*), Elsaesser finds the double to signify disavowal and the return of the repressed, where

What is being repressed is the initial situation, in its social and historical dimension. The fact that it is repressed, rather than simply elided or passed over, characterizes the film as belonging to the genre of the Fantastic, what one might call "the Double as disavowal"... The repressed dimension of social or ethnic otherness returns to the hero in a horribly altered form, as the nightmare of the split self, as a crisis of identity and a compulsion toward self-destruction and death...the structure of disavowal is made visible across the shock which the uncanny return is capable of causing to the hero's body, be it because of what he *lacks*...or of what there is *too much*...: both times, the missing part or excessive supplement are the element of terror and total self-estrangement.¹²

¹⁰ Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p. 113.

¹¹ Thomas Elsaesser, "Weimar Cinema, Mobile Selves, and Anxious Males: Kracauer and Eisner Revisited", in *Expressionist Film: New Perspectives*, ed. Dietrich Scheunemann, p. 43. See also the classic essay "Social Mobility and the Fantastic", in *Film and the Fantastic*, ed. James Donald (London: British Film Institute, 1989), pp. 25–32.

¹² Thomas Elsaesser, p. 56–57.

Elsaesser's reading, an insightful analysis of the narrative significance of the doppelgänger in the film, nonetheless remains within the diegetic space of the protagonist's identity crisis, even while relating the latter to issues of social class and historical context. Despite his "looking for moments in the films where narration and genre do the ideological work on the story material... by way of foregrounding repetition or excess",¹³ the double's significance is considered only in its narrative effect.

These examples point to how interpretations of the doppelgänger theme have, in different ways, focused on its diegetic psychological significations, as "case studies" of identity crisis and the divided self. As a consequence, they have characteristically neglected the figure's structural significance – whether as representing a mimetic excess or as a theme of visual crisis in a visual medium – in other words, its relationship to film form, film history, and questions of visual pleasure and spectatorship.¹⁴ There has thus been no adequate account of what the reflexive themes and devices centering on the figure of the double have to do with the historical context in which they were produced and the significance of their resurgence.

Many of these films are usually ascribed to the fantastic genre, which is founded on an ambiguous perception of uncanny events on the part of a reader identified with a principal character.¹⁵ The fantastic, as Todorov has shown, requires a precarious, sustained hesitation between an uncanny experience being ultimately accounted for with the established laws of reality (*"l'étrange"*) or its being based on new laws altogether (the marvelous). Involving an inconclusive attempt to pin down the indeterminate ontological status of what is being perceived, these uncanny effects are based on a perceptual hesitation, a hovering between fantasy and reality that puts the credibility of the text itself into play.

¹³ Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁴ The problem with this reading is its consideration of castration anxiety in exclusively thematic rather than "structural" terms. Castration in the context of the uncanny, as Samuel Weber convincingly shows, is best understood as a crisis of phenomenality: as a structural rather than thematic phenomenon, that has to do with the status of reality itself, rather than a particular situation or scene: "For what is designated by the term 'castration' is precisely the impossibility of seeing directly, right on or straight ahead. Castration can never be looked at, en face, for it is always off to the side, off-side, like the uncanny itself." Samuel Weber, "The Sideshow, Or: Remarks on a Canny Moment", *MLN*, Vol. 88, No. 6, Comparative Literature (Dec. 1973), p. 1122.

¹⁵ See Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard, Cleveland, Ohio, Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973.

To put the problem differently, what previous studies have neglected, often as a consequence of adhering to psychoanalytic theory and thematic analyses of subjective crises, is that the appearance of the double has a structural significance because of its uncanny effect. As Samuel Weber noted in his classic discussion of Freud's *The Uncanny*, "Such a position misconstrues the peculiar structure of the uncanny, or, more precisely, ignores the fact that the uncanny has a particular structure, which, however intimately bound up with subjective feelings—above all with anxiety—is nonetheless determined by a series of 'objective' factors that in turn stand in a certain relation to literary discourse".¹⁶

Constitutive for the uncanny is not the alternative: reality-imaginary, for this alternative presupposes the identity and the meaning of whatever it thus questions, and seeks only to fix its ontological status. Uncanny is a certain indecidability which affects and infects representations, motifs, themes and situations, which ... always mean something other than what they are and in a manner which draws their own being and substance into the vortex of signification.

But the uncanny is not merely identical with this indecidability: it involves and implies a second moment or movement, namely the defense against this crisis of perception and phenomenality, a defense which is ambivalent and which expresses itself in the compulsive curiosity, the *Wissgier*, the craving to penetrate the flimsy appearances to the essence beneath—and below!—the desire to uncover the façade and to discover what lurks behind, "the thing on the doorstep" or "the haunter of the dark"... This desire to penetrate, discover and ultimately to conserve the integrity of perception: perceiver and perceived, the wholeness of the body, the power of vision—all this implies a *denial* (*Verneinung* is the Freudian term) of that almost-nothing which can hardly be seen, a denial that in turn involves a certain structure of narration, in which this denial repeats and articulates itself. The problem of the narrative context of the uncanny thus emerges as crucial for further investigation.¹⁷

With the uncanny, real and imaginary are no longer contradictory ontological states of what is perceived by a character, but the unresolvable double condition of this perception. The uncertainty as depicted has a reflexive moment that also affects the text that depicts it and the reader who follows the narration. Interrogating how the uncanny, which is first and foremost a specular problem, relates to the structure of narration becomes all the more significant in a visual medium. With the construction

¹⁶ Samuel Weber, p. 1103.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1132–33. The narrator in Charles Brockden Brown's novel *Wieland, or, The Transformation* (1798), faced with the ghastly sight of her sister-in-law's murdered body, illustrates this point: "I bore a light in my hand, and brought it nearer my eyes, in order to dispel any illusive mists that might have hovered before them. Once more I fixed my eyes upon the bed, in hope that this more steadfast scrutiny would annihilate the object which before seemed to be there..." (*Wieland or, The Transformation*, New York, NY, Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1973, pp. 172–73).

of perceptual indecidability in film, it is clearly the case that “If ... *das Unheimliche* has a privileged relation to ... ‘fiction,’ it is surely not to the mere contents represented ‘in’ or ‘by’ texts, but to their ‘formal,’ textual structure itself”.¹⁸ The relationship between the double and the structure of the cinematic text, where it appears as a spectacular film trick and as the onscreen redoubling of cinema’s double-images of the real, is thus vital. In this sense, the figure explicitly concerns the question of duplication and reproduction, the *modus operandi* of the cinematic text itself in which the psychological “case study” finds expression.

More recently, a number of scholars have discussed these films’ structural and self-referential effects, although the tendency to read the double thematically in discussions of individual films has persisted. Thomas Elsaesser in particular has considered the foregrounding of vision in Weimar cinema, justly noting how “the gaze is codified explicitly and implicitly as something that can substitute itself for other forms of power relations... But it also signifies more directly the power-nexus of the cinematic spectacle itself—modes of surveillance, manipulation, suggestibility, instrumentalization and ‘objecthood.’”¹⁹ Going further, Elsaesser points toward the historical significance of such constructions of vision:

There is, however, a reason that one might want to go beyond specific cases and individual film texts. These textual effects relate to another ‘crisis of perception,’ outside the cinema, described this time not within psychoanalysis and film theory, but in Georg Lukács’ account of ‘reification’ as well as Walter Benjamin’s remarks about shock-effects, visual stimuli, urbanization and the formation of the unconscious, perception, memory and experience... It is not possible here to explore the full implications of Benjamin’s or Lukács’ observations about the historical nature of human perception, visual decoding, attention span and memory. But it is important to note that they suggest a connection between specific forms of industrial organization, technological modes of production, demographic changes and urbanization on the one hand, and the emphasis that our society places on vision and the eye for mastery and control of the everyday environment on the other... This cultural shift is taken in charge by the cinema through its systematic overdevelopment of voyeurism and scopophilia.²⁰

Precisely how such textual effects of visual crisis relate to the shift in the status of perception in bourgeois modernity remains to be explored. Such a study would concern the intersection of two different ways of thinking about themes of vision in individual films: it would seek to connect what these themes say about the cinematic

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 1115.

¹⁹ Thomas Elsaesser, “Film History and Visual Pleasure: Weimar Cinema”, in *Cinema Histories, Cinema Practices*, ed. Patricia Mellenkamp and Philip Rosen, American Film Institute, 1984, p. 74.

²⁰ Thomas Elsaesser, “Film History and Visual Pleasure: Weimar cinema”, p. 74–75.

spectacle itself (interpreted for example from the perspectives of psychoanalysis and film theory) to what they signify concerning the historical determination of visual experience (Lukács and Benjamin). Approaching the double both in relation to the medium of cinema and to the status of perception in modernity offers a new perspective on the possible historical motivations for its recurring appearances from circa 1800 onward, and particularly in Wilhelmine and Weimar cinema.

In this vein it is also especially suggestive, as commentators have pointed out, how in German cinema the structures of narration are repeatedly foregrounded to an unexampled degree. It is interesting to take a closer look at how the *doppelgänger* is associated with the ways in which narrativity is brought to the viewer's attention. Even in the earliest German *doppelgänger* films, the visual doubling of a character onscreen and its symmetries can function as a structuring principle for the film as a whole. Leon Hunt, for example, has discussed the double and the structural significance of symmetry in *The Student of Prague* (1913).²¹ Similarly, Yuri Tsivian has observed with regard to Franz Hofer's *Die schwarze Kugel* (*Die geheimnisvollen Schwestern*; 1913) that

The very story is thus grounded in symmetry, and part of the reason why the film is visually compelling is that Hofer converts the story symmetry into the symmetry of space. Each time the two sisters are seen together in the shot, they are symmetrically positioned with respect to the centre of the frame; this symmetry is strictly lateral (rather than staged in depth); Hofer reinforces it by way of making the two sisters mirror each other's gestures and wear (always!) identical costumes which both actresses change from scene to scene as if to refresh this sense of symmetry.²²

While the double signifies various forms of identity crisis within its narratives, its appearance – whether as a visual shock or sublime feat of technology – always also foregrounds the uncanny magic of the cinematic apparatus. As the chilling multiplication of selves is often explicitly a consequence of technology, depicted as dangerous or dehumanizing, it is interesting to consider what the double signifies with regard to the status of film as a modern technology.

Such a structural approach raises the question of how the uncanny is constructed in film, and what specific effects are used to create the necessary visceral

²¹ Leon Hunt, "The Student of Prague: Division and Codification of Space", in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. T. Elsaesser, London, BFI, 1990, pp. 56–62.

²² Yuri Tsivian, "Two Stylists of the Teens: Franz Hofer and Yevgenii Bauer", in *A Second Life: German Cinema's First Decades*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 1996, p. 270.

effect on the spectator. Further, with such spectator-effects, how does the uncanniness of the medium itself come into play? For onscreen too,

The world becomes uncanny when it is perceived as no longer simple substance, but also as a shadow, a sign of the existence of a world beyond itself, which it is nevertheless unable fully to disclose. The uncanny sign is not allegorical, for it only *suggests* the presence of another world... It lacks both the transparency of the allegory and the positivity of the symbol. It is frustrated allegory, negative symbol.²³

Within its narratives, the double is both life and its shadow, embodying the analogous duality of the cinematic image. Maxim Gorky, who saw the Lumière cinematograph's "Kingdom of Shadows" in action in 1896, was perhaps the first of many sensitive viewers to describe this inherently uncanny quality of cinema's images:

It is not life but its shadow, it is not motion but its soundless spectre... It is terrifying to see, but is the movement of shadows, only of shadows... This mute, grey life finally begins to disturb and depress you. It seems as though it carries a warning, fraught with a vague but sinister meaning that makes your heart grow faint. You are forgetting where you are. Strange imaginings invade your mind and your consciousness begins to wane and grow dim.²⁴

This relationship between the double as uncanny theme and cinema's mimetic effects will be the focus of the following chapters, in tandem with the diverse thematic issues presented by the individual films. These narratives of the double have in common the production, by a diegetic agent or by the technological medium itself, of an identical, and for that very reason uncanny, image or copy of a diegetically real person. Here it is vital to point out an often neglected fact: that on film the "original" in question is always already an image and an "imaginary signifier", present but absent, a shadow or captured image, the portable ghost of an actor now long dead. The issue, therefore, is not the classic problem of mimetic representation involving the production of an (identical) image of the real, but that of reproduction (i.e., *Bild* versus *Abbild*), and by extension, of the *mise en abyme* of the represented body. Here

²³ Paul Coates, *The Gorgon's Gaze: German Cinema, Expressionism, and the Image of Horror*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 1.

²⁴ Maxim Gorky, a review of the Lumière programme at the Nizhni-Novgorod Fair, as printed in the *Nizhegorodski listok* newspaper, July 4, 1896, and signed 'I. M. Pacatus'. Translated by Leda Swan. Reprinted in Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1983, pp. 407–8.

too, where cinema's absent selves are re-doubled, the very structure of narration – the cinematic apparatus – is implicated.

From this perspective, the double theme evokes the question Walter Benjamin considered in “The Artwork in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility”: the significance of a shift from the image – whether it be what is seen by the eye gazing upon the world or the auratic, mimetic work of art – to the products of mechanical reproduction, such as film and other modern technologies of serial image production. As reproduction, the film doppelgänger shares a structural resemblance with the latter modern techniques of technical reproduction. Looking at the film double in this guise offers a promising way to relate the figure to its historical context, ultimately that of Germany's “crisis of classical modernity”.²⁵ More generally though, the context is bourgeois modernity, in which

Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former. To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose “sense of the universal equality of things” has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction. Thus is manifested in the field of perception what in the theoretical sphere is noticeable in the increasing importance of statistics.²⁶

In this light, the double's effects of similarity and equivalence, which are the basis of perceptual crisis, speak to the perceptual consequences of modernity, its proliferation of simulacra through industrialized image-making, the empirical study of the human body, and the constitution of a new kind of observer who is both a consumer of images and a “human resource”. The double is an ironic simulacrum, recalling the production, after the Industrial Revolution, of series of identical objects, the relation between which “is no longer one of an original and its counterfeit, analogy or reflection, but is instead one of equivalence and indifference. In the series, objects become indistinct simulacra of one another and, along with objects, of the men that produce them. The extinction of the original reference alone facilitates the general law of equivalences, that is to say, *the very possibility of production*”.²⁷

²⁵ See Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1992.

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, *Illuminations*, New York, Schocken Books, 1986, p. 223.

²⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death (L'Échange symbolique et la mort)*, London, Sage

Critical for film is how the visually ambivalent doublings of the real by the unreal that these stories enact parallel cinema's realistic yet unreal duplications of the phenomenal world. Approaching the doppelgänger as a formal involution or self-reference allows one to relate questions of film form to spectator effects, offering a promising perspective on the significance of uncanny themes in the social and historical context of their spectators. As a focal point of ambivalent narratives of modernity, it overcomes the characteristic difficulty in film interpretation of relating the specificities of a film's construction and its spectator effects to the historical milieu of its production and reception. As Thomas Elsaesser succinctly pointed out,

Film theory has attained the degree of self-reflexivity appropriate to a cognitive endeavour by constantly rearticulating a seemingly ineluctable dualism: that between realist tendencies of the cinema and formalist ones... Crucial in each set of terms is the importance given to the basic discontinuity of the filmic process when set against the perceptual continuity of the viewing process, i.e., whether priority is accorded to a specific form of production (aesthetic, technological, semiological) or a specific form of experience (perceptual, psychic, cognitive).

These antinomical tendencies name polarities that are intertwined and inseparable, and their common ground over the past two decades have [sic] been psychoanalytical theories of spectatorship and ideological theories about spectatorial effects. On the other hand, specific historical or sociological considerations have rarely informed the argument to any significant degree.²⁸

With the doppelgänger, a perceptual problem within the diegesis is constructed in terms of a problem of form – the contradiction between illusionist-realist effects and formalist trickery – which is in turn explicitly related to spectatorial effects of visual pleasure and visceral unease. These narratives highlight significant issues of cinematic representation: mechanisms of identification, the double nature of the image as real and unreal, the technical basis of film. But they also relate these issues to the historical context of technological modernity, the source of the narrative imbalance of the doppelgänger.

Fictional Prototypes and Literary Studies

German silent cinema abounds in references to the doppelgänger stories of Romanticism and after. An important motivation for the return to such themes, beginning with the first German "author films", *Der Andere* (Max Mack; 1913) and

Publications, 1993, p. 55.

²⁸ Thomas Elsaesser, "Cinema – The Irresponsible Signifier or 'The Gamble with History': Film Theory or Cinema Theory", *New German Critique*, Number 40, Winter 1987, p. 65.

Der Student von Prag (Stellan Rye; 1913), is doubtless the validation of cinema, the former fairground amusement, as a medium and art form suitable for consumption by bourgeois audiences and critics.²⁹ Justifying film as art at the time of the “*Kino-Debatte*” coincided with the use of recognizable “classic” themes and plot structures borrowed from literature as well as the involvement of respected and well-known authors in the film industry. Furthermore, cinema offered the possibility of depicting narratives of fantastic phenomena realistically for the first time. But the extensive use in film of such a figure raises further questions with regard to its literary sources. Do the effects and themes already present in fictional tales of the double somehow predispose it for cinema or make it especially meaningful in the new medium? How does the cinematic version differ from its literary progenitors in its effects and significations? What sociological factors influence the proliferation of the double theme, in different media or historical periods? While the double’s significance as a metaphor concerning the mimetic project has been glossed over, the question of the distinction between the double on film and the literary version, or how the metaphor is modified for and by its new medium, also has yet to receive adequate treatment.

As mentioned previously, interpretations of the cinematic double have generally reproduced the approaches used in literary studies of the figure. Although an in-depth account of the considerable critical literature on the literary doppelgänger theme is outside the scope of the present work, certain common tendencies in these studies deserve mention, where they help clarify the ways in which the present study serves as a departure. Most important is that, despite differences in methodologies, their focus has been the narrative function of the figure as a crisis of the self, while the reflexive signification of doubling in relation to textual production has received scant attention. Following the philosophical study, Emil Lucka’s “*Verdoppelungen des Ich*” (1904), the groundbreaking work on the subject was Otto Rank’s *Der Doppelgänger* (1914), inspired by his seeing *The Student of Prague* in 1913, followed by Freud’s influential essay, *The Uncanny* (1919), which set the course for psychoanalytic interpretations of the double as divided self. Both Rank and Freud

²⁹ See Anton Kaes, *Kino-Debatte: Texte Zum Verhältnis Von Literatur Und Film, 1909–1929*, Munich, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1978; the compilation *Hätte Ich das Kino! Die Schriftsteller und der Stummfilm*, ed. Margot Pehle, Ludwig Greve, & Heidi Westhoff, Stuttgart, Klett, 1976; and Sabine Hake, *The Cinema’s Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany, 1907–1933*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1993.

analyzed the double's fictional appearances as case studies on which they founded their discussions of classic psychoanalytic concepts such as primary narcissism (Rank) and the return of the repressed and castration anxiety (Freud).

There have been a number of studies devoted to the double, almost exclusively focusing on its literary appearances.³⁰ With the exception of Karl Miller's *Doubles*, the common feature of these studies has been their approaching the double from the perspective of its thematic signification. They consider, in other words, the signification of the divided self *within the narrative*, analyzing the causes, consequences, and significations of crises of subjectivity.³¹ Most interpretations are furthermore informed by psychology/psychoanalysis, although John Herdman's *The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1990) is distinct in its interpretation of the double in theological terms, reading divisions of the self as arising from moral conflict and the issue of free will. Focusing on a select set of stories chosen for their theological themes, Herdman identifies these themes with the "true" doppelgänger. He attributes the disappearance of theological double themes in the later nineteenth century to literary scientism, arguing that it marks the decline of the doppelgänger.

Especially noteworthy among these studies is Andrew Webber's, which offers a "case-history of subjectivity in German writing in and around the nineteenth century". While retaining the thematic perspective, Webber analyzes the "dismantling of the idea of the transcendental subject by assembling a series of individual literary case-studies into a case-book of subjectivity in crisis".³² Based on suggestive readings of case studies of the double against the theoretical texts they engaged and reciprocally influenced, he defines a set of recurrent characteristics of the doppelgänger story in a framework indebted to psychoanalytic theory. While

³⁰ In particular, Ralph Tymms's *Doubles in Literary Psychology* (1949); Masao Miyashi's *The Divided Self* (1969); Karl Miller's *Doubles* (1985); Aglaia Hildenbrock's *Das andere Ich* (1986); John Herdman's *The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1990); Andrew Webber's *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (1996); Christof Forderer's *Ich-Eklipsen: Doppelgänger in der Literatur seit 1800* (1999); and Gerald Bär's *Das Motiv des Doppelgängers als Spaltungsphantasie in der Literatur und im Stummfilm* (2005).

³¹ These include Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* (Chapel Hill: Univ. North Carolina Press, 1971); Ralph Tymms, in *Doubles in Literary Psychology* (1949), presents the double as an allegorical projection of the unconscious; Aglaia Hildenbrock, *Das andere Ich: künstlicher Mensch und Doppelgänger in der deutsch- und englischsprachigen Literatur* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg 1986); Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (1996); Christof Forderer's *Ich-Eklipsen. Doppelgänger in der Literatur seit 1800* (1999); Gerald Bär, *Das Motiv des Doppelgängers als Spaltungsphantasie in der Literatur und im Stummfilm* (Rodopi, 2005).

³² Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature*, p. 1.

Webber specifically considers the reciprocal influences of fiction and theory, questions of the double's specific significance for cinema and its historical motivations and context remain outside the scope of his study. This is acknowledged in some measure by a disclaimer: "Though my own focus is always primarily on the personal, this would suggest a false dichotomy. The case-studies also have significant implications for the politics of class, the family, gender, and sexuality".³³ Webber's readings of the film double, like the literary version, follow the same "personal" approach and focus on the depiction of subjectivity in crisis.

Similarly, the most recent work devoted to the subject, Gerald Bär's study, offers a compilation of representative films, literary sources, and typology of doppelgänger themes and the range of approaches to the theme of the divided self. Bär provides a useful compendium of the double's appearances in literature and silent film, a bibliography of relevant theoretical work on the subject, and a helpful description of the reception of a number of important films. But his discussion also specifically concerns the double as divided self and the theme of identity crisis, and focuses only on film narratives influenced by psychoanalytic theory.

With the overarching influence of psychoanalytic theory, the structural significance of the film double has been neglected because "the psychoanalysis of the uncanny does not touch upon modern technologies of trace detection with as much as a single word. Freud and Rank, in their hunt for the remainders of an archaic reaction, return mobile mirrors to stationary ones once again, turn cinema and railroad into the romantic world of books".³⁴ This study differs from previous work in its focus on how the double concerns mimetic reproduction and vision in conjunction with the narrative significations of the divided self. It will thus incorporate the spectator and spectator effects in the discussion of what the double "means", while relying on a concept of the uncanny that opens up the study of the double, usually mired in the "personal" sphere of *mises en abyme* of subjectivity, to a consideration of its relevance to film and modernity. But looking into the significance of the double in these films requires a concomitant reappraisal of the "cinematic" themes of the works from which they derive. A related aim of the

³³ Ibid., p. 10f.

³⁴ Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young & Michael Wutz, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 152.

following chapters is to return to the relevant literary sources of the double in order to reconsider the critically neglected but nevertheless pivotal narrative role played by their representations of mimetic technologies, such as fairground automata and the magic lantern. While the medium of film may be ideally suited for the depiction of the doppelgänger because of its technical capacities, this approach will allow us to consider what further formal or thematic issues are involved in its depiction. It is of consequence, for example, that in these stories uncanny, proto-cinematic mimetic technologies are implicated in unleashing shadow-doubles, “beings of a mixed nature”, while a structural resemblance between their optical illusions and the doppelgänger is foregrounded.

It is also illuminating to compare the stylistic requirements of the fictional doppelgänger to those of the film version. As Freud noted, for effect the uncanny requires a realistic, illusionist narrative that is sundered by the appearance of a strange phenomenon. From this perspective the formal construction of the films, their engagement with illusionist effects and shocking film tricks, are at stake in the narrative. Furthermore, the ways in which literary scenarios highlight visual mediation in the doppelgänger encounter, compulsively using metaphors on vision and visual phenomena, become especially significant for cinema. The narrative conflict of the double is represented by visual incommensurability. The appearance of the double itself is an optical crisis: characters who come across their uncanny alter egos “cannot believe their eyes”. Indeed, a kind of ambivalence toward vision is operative in the canonical scenes of doubling that foreshadows what P. Adams Sitney has described as the antinomy of vision in Modernism: Doppelgänger stories, prefiguring the obsessions of Modernist art, “stress vision as a privileged mode of perception, even of revelation, while at the same time cultivating opacity and questioning the primacy of the visible world”.³⁵ The stories’ concern with the questionability of vision and the visible, bound up with the indeterminacy of reality and fantasy, point toward what will become crucial issues for cinema. The following chapters will consider how the films in question replicate an essentially ambivalent construction of vision, a questioning of the credibility of what is seen and of vision as a source of knowledge about the phenomenal world. Significantly, the fictional

³⁵ P. Adams Sitney, *Modernist Montage: The Obscurity of Vision in Cinema and Literature*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 2.

doppelgänger was born circa 1800, coincident with the burgeoning visual regimes of modernity and in response to the aftermath of Kantian thought and the Radical Enlightenment. Insofar as the uncanny effects of these stories are founded on the ambivalent status of vision, it is interesting to consider how the incipient visual anxiety that they appear to chart relates to social and cultural changes brought about with modernity and modern science.

The Double and Cinema

Studies on the double in German silent film have characteristically neglected its complex relationship with the history of the development of cinema. This question encompasses several interwoven subjects: (1) the proto-filmic themes of the double in literature; (2) the relationship between the double theme and the history of media technologies; and (3) and the relationship between the double and the broader (i.e., not specifically German) context of modernity. Perhaps owing to the importance accorded to obvious literary allusions, the crucial, parallel line of descent of the film doppelgänger has been ignored: the optical mimetic technologies of the 19th century that created true-to-life doubles of man, culminating in the cinematic medium itself. From this perspective, the double harkens back to visual forms of entertainment and developments in optics in the nineteenth century. A stereoscopic photograph with its doubled image, one might argue, foreshadows the cinematic double no less than the literary versions of Jean Paul or Adelbert von Chamisso. To consider the distinctiveness of the double on film, it is important to view it not just as a literary derivative, but as referring to and descending from technologies of optical illusions, whose disturbing effects in turn figured prominently in the classic doppelgänger fictions. The rapport between the prehistory of cinema and the doppelgänger theme warrants a closer look at how vision and mimetic technologies figure prominently in the literary world of the doppelgänger as well as cinema's ancestral mimetic technologies and developments in optics.³⁶

One important aspect of this connection is how the real-life inventors and stage magicians involved in the production and use of these technologies appear not

³⁶ Even if inventions such as the kaleidoscope or stereoscope may be based on antithetical forms of spectatorship, they are nevertheless part of a broader narrative of visual discovery and invention on which the invention of cinema relied.

only in the doppelgänger literature but also in film history and film, as participants in the development of the medium and as the characters who produce doubles in early cinema and after. The innovators of early cinema, Thomas Edison, the Lumières, Georges Méliès, and Oskar Messter, belong in these ranks as inventors, showmen, and magicians. Much like their predecessors, they too have entered the doppelgänger cannon. The case of Méliès is especially interesting, not least because the film trick of the divided screen, used to double a character onscreen, is one of his many innovations in the medium.³⁷ Méliès the filmmaker – who invented the film double – repeatedly appeared in his own films as both double-maker and double, as magician and showman, and as scientist and devil. In a prototype of the double narratives to come, *The Double Magician and the Magical Head* (1902), Méliès appears as a conjurer, divides into two of himself, and brings to life the head of a beautiful woman. As the head turns into a complete woman, the two conjurers attempt to kiss her, but Mephistopheles appears, and they flee. Mephistopheles then takes off his disguise to reveal the original magician. In *L'Homme à la tête en caoutchouc* (1901–02), a chemist (Méliès) in his laboratory places his own head on a table, attaches a gigantic pair of bellows to it, and puffs air into it. It grows bigger and bigger until it explodes.³⁸ The radical multiplications of the protagonist in these short films prefigure the issues later raised by the film doppelgänger with regard to vision and cinema as an unleasher of doubles. Méliès also provides a noteworthy instance of the fact that doppelgänger-makers of fiction and film function at the same time as surrogate directors, recalling how “When professorial media technologists of the founding age conduct their experiments, they simultaneously play project director and subject, murderer and victim, psychiatrist and madman, but storage technologies do not want to, and cannot, record this difference”.³⁹

The early history of the film double has been generally glossed over by writers on German film, who tend to credit Paul Wegener and Hanns Heinz Ewers (Stellan Rye's *The Student of Prague*; 1913) with its representation on the film screen. In fact, dozens of films that involved onscreen doubling or complex related

³⁷ This technique involves masking part of the lens and filming a scene, then superposing a reversely masked filmed image on it to make a whole.

³⁸ See Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, trans. into English and ed. by Ben Brewster, London, BFI, 1990, p. 165.

³⁹ Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, p. 147.

themes were made before *The Student of Prague*. Not only early trick films with doubles, but a number of narrative films of the theme were made, including *The Double Life* (Percy Stow/Gaumont; 1907), *A Dual Life* (Selig Polyscope Co.; 1908), *The Accusing Double* (Gaumont; 1909), and *Doppelgänger* (Nordisk; 1910). In *The Haunted Man* (William Duskes; 1909), for example, a man sees a ghostly figure that imitates his actions everywhere he goes, which is visible to no one but himself. *Frankenstein* (J. Searle Dawley/Edison; 1910) takes up the theme of the double in a way that specifically relies on its reflexive connections to cinema for effect. In this film the monster dies by fading away, while his reflection remains in a mirror. Dr. Frankenstein enters: looking into the mirror, he sees the fading image of the monster reflected instead of his own face. Myriad versions of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* were also shot, at least seven by 1920 (e.g., Otis Turner/Selig, 1908; Lucius Henderson, 1912). Indeed, it is not far-fetched to claim that cinema has had a perpetual obsession with the double theme; far from its being an exclusively German phenomenon, the double's omnipresence in film rather hints at its paradigmatic connection with the medium and modern forms of visual experience.

Relating the double to the history of 19th century mimetic technologies is especially useful for attempting to understand the theme in its historical context. The 19th century's barrage of invention and discovery in optics, acoustics, and visual and aural storage media (e.g., photography, the X-ray, the phonograph, and film) belongs to the gathering impetus of the modernity of 1910s–1920s Germany. These innovations extended the senses of man: they made the invisible visible, the inaudible audible, and the transitory permanent through recording and replaying sounds and images. That such indicators of progress evoke the themes of the double is almost needless to say; they do so not only in their actual production of copies of man (e.g., photography), but also in what they reveal about the ideological context in which they flourished. Of particular interest is the 19th century's obsession with the manufacture of perfect replicas of the living world. A standard thesis of doppelgänger stories is the ultimately uncanny quality of the reproduction of life, which poses a threat to perception and the living body. Fictional human doubles critique the illusionist impetus of mimetic technologies (e.g., Schiller's *Der Geisterseher*), enacting ontological crises that originate precisely in the paradox of

the credible imitation of reality through an immersion in artifice. A closer look at this polemical relationship between the themes of doppelgänger fiction and the visual experience of modernity promises to be especially revealing for the German context of modernity in crisis.

A vital point of this connection is how the double's uncanny quality can mirror that of mimetic technologies: both are replicas of life originally intended as a defeat of death or a kind of immortality,⁴⁰ which paradoxically become harbingers of doom and morbidity. Tom Gunning has described this unnerving aspect of recording technologies, appropriately with recourse to the doppelgänger theme:

As an objective form of memory, these recording techniques represented man's triumph over death, the ultimate astonishment and wonder of which man was capable. But the uncanny aspect of these technologies does not reside simply in their apparently miraculous overcoming of fatal oblivion; a deep ambivalence marks these means of reproduction. Each delivers an uncanny foretaste of death, as a peculiarly modern *memento mori*. The proclaimed technological defense against death became death's image. The preservation of distinctive human traits divorced from a living individual produces less an experience of immortality than a phantom, a bodiless transparent, or even invisible, double, who haunts our imagination rather than reassuring us. As Charles Grivel has put it, "my self would live without me – horror of horrors!"⁴¹

Noël Burch, similarly alluding to a canonical double, has argued that the ideological impetus behind these technical innovations was the 19th-century bourgeois "Frankensteinian fantasy" of the "suppression of death". This fantasy, both fulfilled and exposed as uncanny in fictional accounts of lifelike doubles, found expression in a particular cinematic mission, originally exemplified by Edison:

And of course, Edison's wish to link to his phonograph an apparatus capable of recording and reproducing pictures, fulfilling a dream of 'grand opera being given at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York ... with artists and musicians long since dead' (Edison 1895), is not just the ambition of an astute captain of industry; it is also the pursuit of the fantasy of a class become the fantasy of a culture: to extend the 'conquest of nature' by triumphing over death through an ersatz of Life itself.⁴²

This particular understanding of film as an "ersatz of Life" culminates in a naturalist, illusionist cinema from which (ideally) the instrumentality of mechanical equipment

⁴⁰ See Otto Rank, *The Double*. Frankenstein's monster is a perfect example.

⁴¹ Tom Gunning, "Re-Newing Old Technologies: Astonishment, Second Nature, and the Uncanny in Technology from the Previous Turn-of-the Century", in *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, eds. David Thorburn, Henry Jenkins, & Brad Seawell, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2003.

⁴² Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, p. 7.

has been effaced. The formal principles of classical narrative (the “Institutional Mode of Representation”), Burch contends, express this Edisonian dream. Its established rules of shot–reverse shot, spatial and temporal continuity in editing, and the actors’ avoidance of looking into the camera, and so forth, are intended to erase the footprints of the instruments of recording and projection involved in film construction and to foster the illusion of a credible three-dimensional space that the spectator enters as voyeur.

With such structural correspondences, it is fitting that the doppelgänger has haunted film theory, in particular the seminal theorizations of spectatorship and film’s double nature as “imaginary signifier”, from the late 1960s through the 1970s. From the perspective of spectatorship, the double encounter, understood as the condition of seeing oneself or autoscopy, parallels the medium’s proffered identification with the human form onscreen. Jean Paul Richter’s original definition of the doppelgänger in 1796 as “People who see themselves” applies perfectly to the film spectator.⁴³ The seminal texts of film theory, the psychoanalytic-semiological analyses of the ideological underpinnings of “classical” spectatorship, raise the spectre of the double in their characterization of the experience of film viewing.⁴⁴ One can discern echoes of the double in the description of classical narrative cinema’s placement of the spectator in the position of a unified, transcendental subject with classical narrative strategies of identification and continuity, while the real film spectator is double: hovering between a “real” multiplicity and the pleasurable fictive unity imposed in the act of watching a film.

From the perspective of film form instead, cinema reproduces the visual tension of the doppelgänger as being inextricably both real and reality’s phantom image. In Christian Metz’s words, “the cinema, ‘more perceptual’ than certain arts according to the list of its sensory registers, is also ‘less perceptual’ than others once the status of these perceptions is envisaged rather than their number or diversity; for its perceptions are all in a sense ‘false’. Or rather, the activity of perception which it involves is real (the cinema is not a phantasy), but the perceived is not really the

⁴³ Jean Paul, *Werke*, ed. N. Miller, Munich, 1970, p. 67.

⁴⁴ E.g., Colin MacCabe, Stephen Heath, Christian Metz, Jean-Louis Baudry. See, e.g., *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986.

object, it is its shade, its phantom, its double, its *replica* in a new kind of mirror”⁴⁵. With its extraordinary iconic-indexical resemblance to reality coupled with simultaneous unreality, the double nature of its signifier as at once present and absent, film precisely parallels the ontological character of the doppelgänger. As a textual device, in short, the double reproduces the duality of the cinematic image and that of its spectator, yet also the process of film production. In Friedrich Kittler’s succinct phrase: “Film doppelgängers film filming itself.”⁴⁶ Understanding precisely how they do so, though, requires a closer look at the formal construction of specific films and the relationship between their uncanny effects and cinematic signification.

Because film is composed of moving images that are exceptionally rich in iconic resemblance to pro-filmic reality, the film double, not signified at the remove of language, is more “realistic” than its literary counterpart. And, when German silent cinema’s parade of doppelgängers and artificial creatures crosses the silver screen, its uncanny characters appear no less real to the viewer than do the already unreal, but purportedly real, canny characters they replicate and/or thwart. Moments of visual crisis, now related in a visual language, are especially significant in always also referring to their means of depiction. Significantly, many of the novels and screenplays on which these films were based underwent modifications that show a deliberate use of the medium’s specific possibilities to convey themes concerning cinema as a mimetic technology.⁴⁷ For example, with the final version of the prologue and epilogue of *Caligari*, which ascribe the narration to a madman in a lunatic asylum, the film becomes enigmatic and involuted, and the viewer’s diegetic pursuit inconclusive. As Kittler concludes, “It is precisely this indistinguishability between framed and framing story, between insanity and psychiatry, that does justice to film technology.”⁴⁸ In considering how the double is suitable or effective on film, such self-referential tendencies become especially important, not least because they exploit the relationship between the formal aspects of film construction (whether “realist” or “anti-realist”) and the cinema as experience from the spectator’s perspective. With these effects, the established norms of narrative cinema are

⁴⁵ Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 45.

⁴⁶ Friedrich Kittler, p. 149.

⁴⁷ E.g., Thea von Harbou’s *Metropolis* (1926), Hanns Heinz Ewers’ *Der Student von Prag* (1913), Paul Lindau’s *Der Andere* (1893), and *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*.

⁴⁸ Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, p. 147.

subverted, revealing the mechanisms of identification, scopophilic pleasure or unpleasure, that characterise the medium's spectator effects.

Looking at the thematic continuities in German doppelgänger films and their self-conscious effects casts doubt on the distinction usually been made between Wilhelmine cinema and the "Golden Age" of the classics of Weimar cinema. Recent studies of previously neglected Wilhelmine films have drawn attention to their prolific use of self-referential effects, foreshadowing the similar avant-garde and modernist techniques of Weimar cinema. As Thomas Elsaesser has asserted, "So many films from the early period – and notably those of Max Mack and Franz Hofer – display such a sophisticated grasp of filmic processes and contain so many references to the cinematic situation as one of 'doubleness' that one is tempted to make 'zweimal gelebt' the motto of Wilhelmine cinema itself."⁴⁹ Relying on Tom Gunning's concept of the early "cinema of attractions",⁵⁰ Sabine Hake has argued that the use of self-referential effects in Wilhelmine films functions as a form of advertisement by the new medium of its own spectacular products. With these effects "the breaking of the illusionist conventions draws attention to the constructed nature of narrative and invites the spectator's active collaboration; this process has affirmative and critical functions."⁵¹

The re-presentations of cinema, for instance in the form of stories about filmmaking and through images of images, imitate the aesthetics of the store-front window. Their primary purpose is to advertise the many goods this new mass medium has to offer. While the films create critical distance through the scenarios of duplication and display, they skillfully apply the rules of advertising, namely to make the product look appealing and to seduce prospective buyers into their realm of new sensations and new pleasures.⁵²

Whether or not one agrees with the description of these constructions as primarily a form of advertising, it is certainly the case that the spectacular, exhibitionist self-references of German silent cinema expose the agency of the cinematic apparatus and draw attention to its wondrous capabilities. In many cases, though, this exposure

⁴⁹ Thomas Elsaesser, "Early German Cinema: A Second Life?" in *A Second Life: German Cinema's First Decades*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser, p. 11.

⁵⁰ See Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde, in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. T. Elsaesser, London, BFI, 1990, pp. 56–62; "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator", in *Art and Text*, 34, Spring 1989, pp. 31–45.

⁵¹ Sabine Hake, "Self-Referentiality in Early German Cinema", in *A Second Life: German Cinema's First Decades*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser, p. 245.

⁵² Sabine Hake, p. 237.

has an uncanny effect – and therefore has ambivalent value as any form of advertisement of the medium. Nevertheless, it is fruitful to relate the double's appearance onscreen, especially as a shocking film trick, to the exhibition of the power of cinematic technology and as an interruptive gesture of a "cinema of attractions."

As the double theme's uncanny effect has a reflexive content while requiring (problematised) narrative continuity, it proves an interesting subject as a means by which German cinema's art films respond to the stylistic legacy of Hollywood's "Institutional Mode of Representation", which, after D. W. Griffith, aimed at obscuring the role of an apparatus in the creation and transmission of the film image to the audience (e.g., continuity editing, three-dimensional space, shot-countershot). The question remains of precisely what doppelgänger films say about the possibilities of cinematic representation, the double nature of the visible film image as artificial life, and the role of technology in its transmission. In particular, the thematic relationship in these films between science/technology and the production of doubles is of special interest in relation to how "The age of media ... renders indistinguishable what is human and what is machine, who is mad and who is faking it."⁵³

But the double also speaks to a greater American invasion, perceived at the time as a major threat to the German way of life: industrial capitalism, and the consequences of instrumental reason, rationalization, the occultation of production processes, and the tacit acceptance of technology as an extension of man's dominion over nature with no dénouement (or "essence") of its own. Despite the political importance of the question of technology and the tendency to read the films of the time for ideological content, the crucial relationship between the doppelgänger and modernity, its visual regimes and radical repercussions for human subjectivity, has received little critical attention. For it is the case that the contemporary sense of the uncanny

...is not simply a survival of a romantic commonplace, or a feeling confined to the artistic genres of horror and ghost stories. Its theoretical exposition by Freud, and later by Heidegger, places it centrally among the categories that might be adduced to interpret modernity and especially its conditions of spatiality, architectural and urban.⁵⁴

⁵³ Friedrich Kittler, p. 146.

⁵⁴ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, Cambridge, MA,

The survival of the uncanny in the context of critiques of modernity is all the less random if we recall the original irrationalist aspect of such themes and their appearance in response to the Radical Enlightenment. On film, as Thomas Elsaesser has pointed out:

These motifs, borrowed from Romanticism and the Gothic tradition, were transformed into the specific mythology of the cinema to become the very mark of a self-reflexive dialectic. This dialectic was based on the anti-technological conservative ideology of late-Romanticism ... which collided with and at the same time articulated the film 'creator's' own participation in this technology...⁵⁵

The appearance of such anti-technological motifs in the hyper-technological medium of film is not devoid of a certain irony. It hints at an ambivalence toward the experience of cinema itself, a modern technology for producing doubles that reproduces the diabolical dénouement of a doppelgänger story.

While the following chapter (CHAPTER II) will further explore these suggestive connections between visual culture in bourgeois modernity, themes of the double, and the German “crisis”, CHAPTER III will return to doppelgänger fiction to consider themes of vision in a couple of influential stories, E. T. A. Hoffmann’s “The Sandman” and Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *Tomorrow’s Eve*. CHAPTERS IV to VIII will present readings of six classics of German silent film: *The Student of Prague* (1913), *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1920), *The Golem: How He Came into the World* (1920), *Waxworks* (1924), and *Metropolis* (1926). The films, rather than providing supporting evidence for a preconceived theory of the double, will be considered on their own terms, their internal logic and textual structures determining the course of the analysis. The focus, though, will be on the uncanny and the articulation of vision: how it is depicted within the diegesis, how the spectator is projected to interact with the film’s images, how crises of perception involved in the uncanny are constructed, and what these effects say about cinema. Such a perspective, which allows a closer look at the intersection of formal and spectatorial effects, of metaphors of vision and the spectator’s visual experience, also allows one to reconsider how these films respond to and reflect their historical context of bourgeois modernity.

MIT Press, 1992, p. 12.

⁵⁵Thomas Elsaesser, “Film History and Visual Pleasure: Weimar Cinema”, p. 78.

CHAPTER II

THE DOPPELGÄNGER AND THE MODERN SPECTATOR



Georg Grosz, "The City" (1917)

Ich denke mich mein Ich durch ein Vervielfältigungsglas.
[I see my ego as being viewed through a lens.]

E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Tagebücher*

The fantastic is not in opposition to living Life, it is a new aspect of it: a life without presence, fate reason, motives, a life with which the innermost recess of our soul will never – nor can be – identical.

Georg Lukács "Gedanken zu einer Ästhetik des Kinos" (1913)

Our favorite haunt was an amusement park in the "Kantstrasse," where sideshow magic could be found, where the lust for life was abroad, and hunger and misery, with the glamour of electric lights and mechanical music, where cheap, dainty candies, made of chemical by-products, were offered, and where young boys and girls flirted with each other.

Hans Janowitz, "Caligari—The Story of a Famous Story"

Sideshow Magic

Mythologising the genesis of the *Caligari* screenplay, Hans Janowitz describes a carnivalesque scene whose surfeit of objects make for a confusing mental picture, so that one hardly knows where to look. The amalgam of technological concoctions – electric lights, mechanical music, and chemical candies – evokes a very modern kind of sensory distress, an extreme-case scenario of the experience of the bourgeois world of the everyday or “second nature”: the world of the shopping centre, the city street, the movies, or the knick-knack collection. Suggestively situated on the Kantstrasse in Berlin, the scene with its uncanny atmosphere and visual excesses could be seen as primal not only for the milieu of *Caligari* the showman and psychiatrist, but for a host of variations on the doppelgänger theme – such as the carousel finale of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Strangers on a Train* or the replicant-designer’s workshop in *Blade Runner*.

Characteristics of the Luna Park and sideshow permeate German doppelgänger films, both recalling the exhibition spaces of early cinema and variety theatre and providing the spaces in which the doppelgänger appears. Their carnival *mise en scène* offers an antithesis to the bourgeois world of the everyday (the *Heimisch*): In the sideshow’s topsy-turvy suspension of order, especially visual order, people of different origins and classes mix freely as equals; the perceiver and the perceived are united by a mutual looking; the line between reality and fantasy becomes permeable; and bourgeois narrative rules are suspended.¹ Kracauer describes the milieu as Babel and Babylon, “an enclave of anarchy in the sphere of entertainment”.² For the doppelgänger cinema, the space of the carnival is not so much an orgiastic, anarchic utopia as a locus of ontological distress: the return of the spectator’s voyeuristic look by its object poses a threat – it can even result in murder.

¹ The carnival world has characteristically been discussed as signifying chaotic resistance to and an inversion of the disciplinary hegemonic order (and by extension the visual regimes of bourgeois illusionism) in the work of theorists notably beginning with Mikhail Bakhtin, and, e.g., Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and Guy Debord and the Situationists. Cf. Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World*. As Derrida writes: “It is the place where the spectator, presenting himself as spectacle, will no longer be either seer (*voyant*) or voyeur, will efface within himself the difference between the actor and the spectator, the represented and the representer, the object seen and the seeing object...”. (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Spivak, Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, p. 306).

² This and the following quotations are from Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: a Psychological History of the German Film*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1947, p. 73.

Such a haphazard, Baroque surfeit of visual stimuli can confuse and overwhelm the spectator's eye, giving rise to a distress involving the inadequacies of the sense of sight. In a comparison with Janowitz's scene, it is illuminating to consider the similar associations made by Walter Benjamin, based on his perusal of the concatenations of objects in the Parisian arcades. An evocative parallel is found in the following fragment:

On a pale-colored wallpaper full of figures and busts shone a gas lamp. By its light, an old woman sat reading. They say she has been there alone for years, and collects sets of teeth "in gold, in wax, and broken". Since that day, moreover, we know where Doctor Miracle got the wax out of which he fashioned Olympia.³

Like Janowitz's description, Benjamin's alludes to an archetypal double, E. T. A. Hoffmann's automaton Olympia, while fostering a similar sense of the uncanny through evocations of dismemberment, the "collection", and its grotesque admixture of "nature" and artifice, primitive and ultramodern, magic and technology. Significantly, both these scenes draw attention to the media by which they are illuminated, electricity and gas lamps, beyond which is an encroaching darkness, stressing the connection between the visibility of things and lighting technologies.

These media are themselves in no wise without value or immaterial. In one sense, especially in the stark chiaroscuro of the description, objects are so enframed by the light as to acquire the aspect of an image or representation. This "imaginary" quality of objects illuminated by lighting technologies is a consequence of modernity, whose light, wrote Kracauer, "blinds more than it illuminates – and perhaps the abundance of light pouring out lately over our large towns serves not least to increase the darkness".⁴ But as a re-presentation of itself, the image thus enframed can also allegorize that modernity, in other words, make its effects visible. This possibility is incisively captured in a chance remark of Benjamin's on the illumination by gaslight of the Paris arcades: "The cashier, by gaslight, a living image—as allegory of the cash register".⁵

³ "Parisian dolls - true fairies of the arcades", in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1999, p. 874.

⁴ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, London and New York, Verso, 1998, p. 90.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 570. Interestingly, a recent book by Frances Guerin (*A Culture of Light: Cinema and Technology in 1920's Germany*, Minneapolis, Minn., University of

Bathed in these lights the object is both itself and a “living image”. It is at once alive and dead... something like the *tableaux vivants* of the late 18th century. Its spectator feels a distrust of what he sees that is related to the medium of its illumination (although beyond it is the threat of the unknown) and that has to do with difficulty in distinguishing the real from the virtual. Visual indecidability, paradoxically accompanying increased visibility, is an effect of various optical products of the 19th century, above all mimetic technologies of illusionist entertainment whose “forms of visual experience usually uncritically categorized as ‘realism’ are in fact bound up in *non-veridical* theories of vision that effectively annihilate a real world”.⁶ It is shared by the cinema, whose “kingdom of shadows” causes a primal unease, and embodied in the uncanny figure of the doppelgänger, which “confronts the subject with the fact that it will never ... be able to believe its eyes, since what they have seen is neither simply visible nor wholly invisible”.⁷

For Ernst Jentsch, the early theorist of the uncanny, this sense had to do with facing the unfamiliar, and ultimately led to the intellectual mastery of the new: it recaptured the “feeling of uncertainty” at the “origin of the drive to knowledge and research”.⁸ Jentsch associated the uncanny with perceptual indecision – an inability to distinguish, for example, between the natural and artificial, the transcendent and the mundane, or the animate and inanimate. To borrow Freud’s terminology of the uncanny as return of the repressed, the coming to view of something that ought to have remained hidden (Schelling), the uncanny could thus be understood as the unexpected surfacing of a primitive fear (of death and nature) that positive science and habituation were intended to have repressed. Such a fear can arise in looking at the unknown and potentially unknowable, the irrational and unclassifiable, according

Minnesota Press, 2005) addresses a similar subject, namely, the relationship between modernity, electrical light, and the uses of lighting in the films of Weimar cinema. Guerin discusses how electric light’s representational possibilities were explored and thematised in the films of the time, how light itself was used as a structuring device of narrative, and the relationship between these effects and the anxieties and changes related to modernization in Weimar society.

⁶ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1990, p. 14.

⁷ Samuel Weber specifically refers to castration here, the “return” of its repression in Freudian terms being a sense of the uncanny; see “The Sideshow, Or: Remarks on a Canny Moment”, *MLN* 88.6, 1973, p. 1113.

⁸ Ernst Jentsch, “On the Psychology of the Uncanny (1906)”, reprinted in *Angelaki* Vol. 2, No. 1, 1996, p. 9. See also Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, New York, Penguin Books, 2003.

to present knowledge. In both Janowitz's and Benjamin's descriptions, it has to do with Hoffmannesque perceptual uncertainty, "the flowering of a sense of unfamiliarity in the midst of the apparently familiar".⁹

Circa 1800: Historical Background

Doubles have been common motifs all over the world, in "primitive" cultures, in folk tales and mythology, in antiquity, and in the Western canon. But, although studies of the double have often failed to make such a distinction (e.g., Otto Rank's), it is necessary to acknowledge the ways in which the *doppelgänger* of German Romanticism and other literary works of the late eighteenth century onward is a distinct and novel entity, as well as the product of a specific historical context. The modern concept of the *doppelgänger*, and the coinage of the word by Jean Paul in *Siebenkäs* (1796) as "people who see themselves", differs from the doubles that come before – e.g., in Shakespearean comedies – not least because the "companionate, faithful, heavenly twins have become clashing antagonists".¹⁰

German Romanticism's new doubles have an explicit association with a post-Kantian subjective and textual irony and with the concept of the uncanny, which likewise dates to the eighteenth century.¹¹ In order to understand the historical and cinematic relevance of the theme, it is necessary to keep in mind the connections between the birth of the *doppelgänger* and the concurrent formation of modern culture, especially visual culture, around the end of the eighteenth century. In part, it is significant that the first fictional *doppelgänger* responded to the problematic constitution of subjectivity in Idealist thought and to the burgeoning science of psychology, with Mesmer's discoveries and the work of G. H. Schubert giving rise to a notion of the unconscious as a kind of second self for the first time. Andrew Webber, considering the literary case studies of the double in tandem with the theoretical texts that they engaged, has described the figure as enacting a literary

⁹See Tom Gunning, "Re-Newing Old Technologies: Astonishment, Second Nature, and the Uncanny in Technology from the Previous Turn-of-the Century", in *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, eds. David Thorburn, Henry Jenkins, & Brad Seawell, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2003.

¹⁰ Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles*, New York, Zone Books, 1996, p. 83.

¹¹ Cf. Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

“dismantling of the idea of the transcendental subject”,¹² where “between the poles of Fichte and Schubert, the intense reflections upon subjectivity in and around the philosophy of Idealism were projected more or less directly into the *Doppelgänger* scenarios of Romanticism”.¹³ Kantian and post-Kantian thought thus influenced and fed into the *doppelgänger* fiction, while the latter has ever since lent the rhetoric of the *doppelgänger* encounter to theoretical figurations of subjectivity, echoes of which can be discerned in accounts of the heterogeneity of the self in psychoanalysis, or the crisis of the self in modernity and the alienated subjects of Marx.

While the double theme reveals that reflections on subjectivity may be doomed to a *mise en abyme*, as Webber argues, it is important to note the fact that this *dénouement* is explicitly constituted within texts in terms of problematic perception and, in the encounter with the double, as a crisis of phenomenality. The fragmentation and heterogeneity of the self made manifest are indissociable from the fact of the visual basis of the self’s constitution: With the double, the sense of sight and the value of images are discredited along with a unified conception of subjectivity because of their uncertainty and failure to ground the self. And, where vision and images are put into question, the problem that afflicts the self also has a reflexive effect of putting into question the status of the text as representation. Thus, for German Romanticism, “Ideas of subjectivity and of aesthetic production are mediated by specular reproduction, by processes of reflection of and on the self and the world which are always liable to be propelled into the vertiginous wonderland of a gallery of mirrors”.¹⁴

Charles Brockden Brown’s gothic novel *Wieland* (published in 1798), for example, thematises the untrustworthiness of the senses as a means of access to objective reality, while the recently discovered phenomenon of ventriloquism furnishes the mechanism by which identities are mistaken. The characters’ belief in the false testimonies of their perceptions, arising unbeknownst to them from an ambulant charlatan and ventriloquist’s interference, drives the *dénouement*’s gory bloodbath. The narrator, whose “mind seemed to be split into separate parts, and

¹² Andrew J. Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature*, Oxford, UK, Clarendon/Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 1.

¹³ Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

these parts to have entered into furious and implacable contention”, finds, ultimately, that “If I erred, it was not my judgment that deceived me, but my senses”. As for her lover, “appearances had led him into palpable errors”.¹⁵ Here too, the lack of “objective” reliability of physical descriptions coincides with the unreliability of the narrator and her narrative, the account of events that the reader experiences.

But the double has a considerable range of associations beyond the Romantic themes of subjectivity in crisis that are discussed in the critical literature. In particular, focusing on the visual effects of the fictional doppelgänger, it becomes clear that both in its narrative themes and its reflexive effects, the double addresses developments in physiology, optics, psychology, and technical advances in recording and reproducing the human body. Usually ignored in its interpretations are the ways in which stories and films of the double consistently and problematically allude to modern empirical science and technology, inseparably linking their effects to the crises of the self that unfold. Understanding the double as an uncanny theme, that is, as a phenomenal crisis involving an inability to trust the eyes, allows us to attempt to situate it within broader historical trends. One question that arises is how the infection of what is being perceived (within the narrative) by indecidability may be related to modernity’s visual regimes and the experience of the modern observer.

A crucial moment in the conceptualization of the modern observing subject is the work of Kant, and in particular, how the latter theorizes a radical dissociation of representation from a reality with which it was previously understood to have a relation of similitude and resemblance. Foucault’s discussion, which identifies the work of Kant as the founding gesture of the Modern episteme, points to the years circa 1800 as marking a change in the status of representation and of man as the viewing subject. The Kantian critique

[S]anctions for the first time that event in European culture which coincides with the end of the eighteenth century: the withdrawal of knowledge and thought outside the space of representation. That space is brought into question in its foundation, its origin, and its limits: and by this very fact, the unlimited field of representation, which Classical thought had established, which Ideology had attempted to scan in accordance with a step-by-step, discursive, scientific method, now appears as a metaphysics.¹⁶

¹⁵ Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland or, the Transformation*, New York, NY, Doubleday, 1973, p. 162.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London, UK, Tavistock Publications, 1970, pp. 242–43.

Arguing how with the Modern episteme knowledge and thought came to be located in the body of a perceiving subject, Foucault dramatically posits the “birth of man” as both the locus and subject of knowledge, an empirical-transcendental doublet in whom representation is related to its object. The consequence of the shift is the appearance of the “unthought”, evocatively presented in *The Order of Things* as a doppelgänger:

Man has not been able to describe himself as a configuration in the episteme without thought at the same time discovering, both in itself and outside itself, at its borders yet also within its very warp and woof, an element of darkness, an apparently inert density in which it is embedded, an unthought which it contains entirely, yet in which it is also caught. The unthought (whatever name we give it) is not lodged in man like a shrivelled-up nature or a stratified history; it is, in relation to man, the Other: the Other that is not only a brother but a twin, born, not of man, nor in man, but beside him and at the same time, in an identical newness, in an unavoidable duality. This obscure space so readily interpreted as an abyssal region in man’s nature, or as a uniquely impregnable fortress in his history, is linked to him in an entirely different way; it is both exterior to him and indispensable to him: in one sense, the shadow cast by man as he emerged in the field of knowledge; in another, the blind stain by which it is possible to know him. In any case, the unthought has accompanied man, mutely and uninterruptedly, since the nineteenth century. Since it was really never more than an insistent double, it has never been the object of reflection in an autonomous way...¹⁷

This twin Other, the condition of doubleness intruding with the invention of the modern subject, resonates in very evocative ways with the uncanny doppelgänger of fiction. Indeed, Foucault’s account could serve as an explanation of the birth of the fictional doppelgänger, strikingly at the same historical moment. Neither is it coincidental that the double appeared in the context of Romanticism’s sometimes irrationalist responses to Idealist philosophy and the development of the science of psychology.

Here it is relevant how, in many doppelgänger stories, catastrophe unfolds as a consequence of the Augustinian ocular sin of *curiositas* and the exaltation of instrumental reason. The Faustian/Promethean thematic of the double has never been adequately discussed, to my knowledge. In Beckford’s *Vathek*, for example, the eternal doom of the proud and scientifically minded Caliph is

... the chastisement of that blind curiosity, which would transgress those bounds which the wisdom of the creator has prescribed to human knowledge; and such the

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 326–27.

dreadful disappointment of that restless ambition, which, aiming at discoveries reserved for beings of a supernatural order, perceives not, through its infatuated pride, that the condition of man upon earth is to be – humble and ignorant.¹⁸

The doppelgänger's appearance as the pursuit of science that trespasses into the metaphysical, is especially obvious in cases where the uncanny second self appears as the unwelcome consequence of physiological research taken too far, e.g., that of Doctors Frankenstein or Jekyll, or by the work of amoral scientists who design distressing human-machines, as in E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Automata" or Karel Čapek's *R. U. R.* The subjective crises that unfold provide illustrations of Foucault's analysis: The uncanny appears as a revelation of the unthought, something that ought to have remained hidden with the ascendancy of instrumental reason (the "homely" to which it nonetheless owes its existence). With the uncanny, as Paul Coates has written, the Other has not yet been externalized, in contrast to the genre of the monstrous, but is located in the "blind spot that is the self's place vis-à-vis itself".¹⁹ The optical metaphor of the "blind spot", like Foucault's "shadow" and "blind stain", defines an area of self-reflection that is impervious to vision/rationality and irreproducible in language. Outside the realm of the rational, it is both unseeable and unseeing.

In these perceptual terms, the threat to the subject (and to knowledge) is that which lies outside the scope of mimetic representation, whether in image-making or in language. Here, the uncanny becomes especially appropriate as a critical device with regard to how in modernity, with instrumental reason and the organization of mimesis, the dominion over things is related to the possession of their images. Against the nineteenth-century drive toward the reproduction of perfect replicas of the world, the uncanny is "by definition that which defies representation; to represent it would be to draw its sting".²⁰

Thematically, though, it evokes that which cannot be represented of the self, by the self to itself or to others, i.e., in self-reflection and self-representation, the "blind spot" that appears in the Romantic responses to Kant in doppelgänger fiction.

¹⁸ William Beckford, *Vathek*, ed. and intro. by Roger Lonsdale, Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 254.

¹⁹ Paul Coates, *The Gorgon's Gaze: German Cinema, Expressionism, and the Image of Horror*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

Following Heinrich von Kleist's "Kant crisis", writes Webber, "subjective identity will be as vulnerable to the logic of distorted perspectives as other phenomena".²¹ In optical language, Kleist acknowledges how

Even the only thing which we possess, language, is incapable of this, it cannot depict the soul, and what it gives us are only torn-up fragments. This is why I have a sensation akin to horror whenever I am to reveal my innermost being to somebody; not because it shies from exposure, but because I cannot show him *everything*, I *cannot*, and so must fear being misunderstood from these fragments.²²

By extension, the theme of the divided self is interlinked with the problematization of the text's ontological status as representation. As an indicator of phenomenal crisis and unrepresentability, it appears as a threat to representational order, to the mimetic project of the text in which it appears: "The division of the self is concomitant with the incoherence of the text as life-story, as evidence for the continuity and integrity of the self".²³ As an uncanny theme, the double portends such a failure of signification, conjuring not only the self's but the text's (and mimesis's) "repressed" – that which remains unsaid, unrepresentable, and impervious to rational thought. While thematically enacting a crisis of subjectivity, it reflexively signifies a structural incommensurability intrinsic to the text that represents it.

Historical Doubles

It is remarkable that with the birth of the *doppelgänger*, the end of the eighteenth century also saw a vogue for a variety of cultural products and modes of entertainment that spectacularly evoke the same visual themes and spectator effects, and which are explored in Romantic and post-Romantic literature (CHAPTER III). In fact, there seems to have been a marked fascination with and fashion of real-life doubles of an indeterminate nature, whether life-like simulacra of the living body, such as automata and magic lantern projections, or the living body displayed as inanimate, as was the case with *tableaux vivants* and the fad of "striking attitudes". These spectacles played on a two-fold uncanny effect, "the arrested motion or

²¹ Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 28.

²² Heinrich von Kleist, letter of 5 February 1801 to Ulrike von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Vol. 2, p. 626, quoted and translated by Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 26.

²³ Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 181.

freezing—hence death—of the human body on the one hand, and the embodiment or bringing to life of the inanimate image on the other”.²⁴

It was for the literature of the *doppelgänger* to chronicle the strange experience involved, to draw attention to the curious duality of copies of man and the visual disquiet on the part of their spectators. As such, these tales reveal how human doubles are “archetypes of the unreasonable facsimile: images of ourselves that arouse consternation; omens of the peril of relentless copying”.²⁵ Thus in E. T. A. Hoffmann’s “Automata”, the protagonist bewails the optical unease produced by hyper-realistic automata, which have something “fearful”, “unnatural”, and “terrible” about them:

When I see the staring, lifeless, glassy eyes of all the potentates, celebrated heroes, thieves, murderers, and so on, fixed upon me, I feel disposed to cry with Macbeth

Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
Which thou dost glare with.

And I feel certain that most people experience the same feeling, though perhaps not to the same extent. For you may notice that scarcely anyone talks, except in a whisper, in waxwork museums. But it is not reverence for the Crowned Heads and other great people that produces this universal pianissimo; it is the oppressive sense of being in the presence of something unnatural and gruesome; and what I detest most of all is the mechanical imitation of human motions.²⁶

The disturbing effect of these automata is shared by other forms of entertainment that display lifelike copies of the human form, and ultimately, by cinema. What these different types of “performances” have in common is their presentation of the human body in a double state: as being at one and the same time alive and dead, the thing itself (the human body) and its counterfeit or copy.

The fashion for such dubious replications at the end of the eighteenth century, not to mention the new “realistic” representations to follow in the nineteenth century (e.g., photography) which had similar effects, begs the question of what socio-cultural causes and effects might have influenced or given rise to their curious prevalence. An in-depth historical consideration of the subject is unfortunately beyond the scope of this work, and attributing causes and effects among synchronic

²⁴ Brigitte Peucker, *Incorporating Images: Film and the Rival Arts*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 112.

²⁵ Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy*, p. 49.

²⁶ E. T. A. Hoffmann, “Automata”, *The Best Tales of Hoffmann*, New York, Dover, 1967, p. 81.

developments that are interrelated in such complex ways is in any case an impossible task. However, there are certain observations to be made with regard to the forms of spectatorship and type of experience involved and concurrent changes in the conception of the viewing subject that are relevant to understanding the *doppelgänger*. In any case, the following is only intended to give a few impressionistic snapshots, to show some striking correlations, and hopefully to hint at the previously unacknowledged complexity of the relationship between the double and its historical context, including cinema.

One aspect of this line of inquiry that deserves mention is how technological advances and optical inventions and discoveries have effected a radical change in the status of vision and the visible, in many cases engendering double themes in “real life”. One effect of modern optical instruments has been to dismantle the conception of the body as unitary or whole; for example, the microscope literally shows the human body to be composed of infinite fragments. Art historian Barbara Stafford has described the proliferation of optical instrumentation in the Enlightenment and after, specifically, of the microscope, as a major factor in the destruction of the conceptual unity accorded to the body.²⁷ And in conjunction with the recording technologies of the nineteenth century, optical instruments have revealed the human body to be duplicable and transportable (cf. cinema). Also relevant to the double theme is the sense in which human sight has been compromised or devalued by the proliferation of instrumentation with superior sight, capable of revealing, making visible, and recording what had always been inaccessible to “natural” vision; proving, in other words, its limitations and misperceptions.

Another key fact to consider, especially in anticipation of the film *doppelgänger*, is how in the same period (c. 1800) the projection of credible simulacra became possible for the first time, owing to advances in the crafting of lenses:

The totally convincing simulation of a worldly or otherworldly presence ... had to wait until the close of the eighteenth century. Prior to the romantic era, chromatic aberration – due to bubbles trapped in the imperfectly ground glass of slides – tended to deform figures and evocatively ring them with nebulous halos.²⁸

²⁷ See Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1991.

²⁸ Barbara Maria Stafford, “Revealing Technologies/Magical Domains”, in *Devices of Wonder: From*

These credible projections are, as aforementioned, but an instance of a number of similar contemporary scenarios of an in-between nature, which offer the realistic representation of the human body with an indeterminate ontological status. Other such productions, around the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, include Felice Fontana's anatomical waxes, automata, the phantasmagoria and related magic lantern entertainments, and Lady Hamilton's *tableaux vivants*. In Italy, to take a curious instance, it became fashionable to go to museums by night, so that the flickering candlelight would create the impression of motion in the artworks.²⁹

In the same period that saw the birth of the doppelgänger, the magic lantern was transformed into a medium of public entertainment, playing an important role in the rise of modern visual culture:

At the end of the eighteenth century, the magic lantern moved from the home, the coffeehouse, and the laboratory into the theater, where various showmen devised ways to project large-scale images of supernatural beings to scores of people while hiding the mechanism itself from view to increase the mystery... Although the magic lantern can be numbered among these older optical devices for puzzling audiences, its greatly expanded role at the end of the eighteenth century conditioned the modern world to a new kind of visual culture.³⁰

The optical experience of the public magic lantern performance not only figures in a number of doppelgänger stories, such as Schiller's *Der Geisterseher*, but prefigures the experience of cinema, offering an early structural connection between film and the double. The most basic aspect of this resemblance is how both experiences offer a credible copy of the human body that retains an ambivalent double nature.

Scenes from *Der Geisterseher* in fact recall the genre of the phantasmagoria, which used magic lanterns and other visual and sound effects to create ghostly moving images of horror and became tremendously popular around 1800. A predecessor of cinema, especially of its fantastic themes, "the subliminal power of the phantasmagoria lay in the fact that it induced in the spectator a kind of

the World in a Box to Images on a Screen, ed. by B. Stafford and F. Terpak, pp. 81–82.

²⁹ See Brigitte Peucker, *Incorporating Images*, p. 110.

³⁰ Frances Terpak, "Magic Lantern", in *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen*, pp. 301–3.

maddening, irrational perception: one might believe ghosts to be illusions, present ‘in the mind’s eye’ alone, but one experienced them here as real entities, existing outside the boundary of the psyche. The overall effect was unsettling—like seeing a real ghost”.³¹ This double character of the image – as objectively present yet thoroughly imaginary – and consequently of irrational perception, which is precisely the situation in film, is illuminating for understanding the cinematic construction of the uncanny.

Recent work on nineteenth-century visual culture and the constitution of the modern observer is especially helpful for our attempt to understand the doppelgänger within its historical context, with an eye to cinema. Concurrent with appearances of the uncanny literary double, in the aftermath of the work of Kant and Schopenhauer, were the beginnings of the visual culture of modernity and its shift in the conception of vision and the status of the observer. Following Foucault’s thesis in *The Order of Things*, Jonathan Crary has characterized the constitution of the modern observer as involving a move from an Albertian conception of spectatorship, in which vision was understood as perspectival and representations were thought to offer a window on the world, to a physiological grounding of perception and its theoretical dissociation from “real”, accessible referents. German Romanticism’s ironic critical dialogue with Idealism, based on metaphors of visions and themes of the *alter ego* – for example “Jean Paul’s objection to the tendency of Fichte and his ‘sect’ to take ‘das *Licht* (oder das *Auge*) für das *Objekt*”³² – can be read in the context of a broader evolution in visual culture and the conception of vision. An interesting example of these broader trends, and a focal point of Castle’s argument about the phantasmagoria, is the shift in the same period in the belief in ghosts as something external and supernatural to a new understanding of them as phenomena of hallucination and mental projection:

At the end of the eighteenth century, however, thanks to the emergence of the new scientific theory of mind, the projective argument took on a conceptual sophistication and an ideological urgency unmatched in previous epochs. A host of

³¹ Terry Castle, “Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Autumn 1988, p. 49. Castle describes the potential epistemological abyss represented by the uncanny metaphor of the phantasmagoria, arguing that the changing use of the metaphor exemplifies the process whereby “The rationalists did not so much negate the traditional spirit world as displace it into the realm of psychology. Ghosts were not exorcized—only internalized and reinterpreted as hallucinatory thoughts. Yet this internalization of apparitions introduced a latent irrationalism into the realm of mental experience.” (p. 52).

³² Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 32.

polemical treatises on apparitions appeared in England, France, and Germany beginning around 1800.³³

Castle also interestingly points out how the word “hallucination” was not in popular use until 1800.³⁴

The consequence of this shift, grounding the transcendental in the empirical, was, according to Crary, “an irreversible clouding over of the transparency of the subject-as-observer. Vision, rather than a privileged form of knowing, [became] itself an object of knowledge, of observation”.³⁵ The theoretical relation of what was seen to the specific physical makeup of the individual observer and dissociation of sensory impressions from reference to exterior reality, argues Crary, were preconditions for the constitution of observers and modes of observation required by modern life, the perceptual activities involved in participation in the urban landscape, consumerism, mass culture, and the labour force. Indeed, the new conception of the observer was part of the 19th century’s “pervasive ‘separation of the senses’ and industrial remapping of the body”, where

The loss of touch as a conceptual component of vision meant the unloosening of the eye from the network of referentiality incarnated in tactility and its subjective relation to perceived space. This autonomization of sight, occurring in many different domains, was a historical condition for the rebuilding of an observer fitted for the tasks of “spectacular” consumption. Not only did the empirical isolation of vision allow its quantification and homogenization but it also enabled the new objects of vision (whether commodities, photographs, or the act of perception itself) to assume a mystified and abstract identity, sundered from any relation to the observer’s position within a cognitively unified field.³⁶

Characteristic aspects of modern life – the profusion of visual stimuli, surveillance and spectacle, commodity fetishism (of phantasmagoric *imaginary* products), the spatialization of time, the rise of new mass media, and, generally, the growing indistinctness of the real and simulacra – require an abstracted conception of vision and the observer. Concomitantly, “The traumatic reorganization of perception that

³³ Terry Castle, “Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie”, p. 54.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

³⁵ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 70.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

masquerades as modernity manifests itself most obviously in spatial terms, as an uprooting of the subject from a human range of perception”.³⁷

With its themes of problematic perceptions of the phenomenal world, the double becomes relevant to understanding the experiential effects of modernity as a “traumatic reorganization of perception” and to the post-Kantian dissociation of perception from the world of things-in-themselves. Within these cinematic narratives, as the following chapters will discuss further, represented reality itself, along with realism, falls prey to distortions, a problem reflected in the early fictional works of the *doppelgänger*. Jean Paul, for instance,

is compelled to repeat the Fichtean model, but askew; to project selfhood into a gallery of distorting mirrors, where it becomes subject to a sort of dialectical repetition compulsion... Indeed, the distinction between original and parody itself recurrently collapses, so that we cannot be sure of the identity of the characters or narrative positions as we read them.³⁸

The ultimate narrative consequence is a *mise-en-abyme* effect in which it is no longer possible to distinguish the subjective misperceptions of characters from “objective” observations (cf. those of the omniscient narrator),³⁹ and where the textual true-false dichotomy is put in suspension; in other words, with a threatened destruction of the text’s ontological hierarchy, explicitly put in terms of vision.

But these textual themes of indistinguishability also chronicle a receding of the phenomenal world from human apprehension, significantly coinciding with this world’s progressive instrumentalization. With a compulsive use of visual metaphors and references to optical instrumentation, they question the ontological status of the world viewed, including through the mediation of instruments. The latter, which purport to offer realism or a sensory experience of the real –and we may include cinema by extension, paradoxically further distance their users from sensory engagement with the phenomenal world.

One issue these themes evoke is how optical devices of the nineteenth century, some of which paved the way for cinema, offered “realism” while being

³⁷ Miriam Hansen, “Benjamin, Cinema, and Experience: The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology”, *New German Critique*, No. 40, Winter 1987, p. 189; p. 254; p. 123.

³⁸ Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 32.

³⁹ In classical narrative film, this omniscient narrator is the camera.

implicated in a conceptual distancing of the observer from the phenomenal world and founded on the empirical study of vision. As Crary has claimed, “some of the most pervasive means of producing ‘realistic’ effects in mass visual culture, such as the stereoscope, were in fact based on a radical abstraction and reconstruction of optical experience, thus demanding a reconsideration of what realism means in the nineteenth century”.⁴⁰

Optical devices that became forms of mass entertainment, such as the stereoscope and the phenakistiscope, originally derived from new empirical knowledge of the physiological status of the observer and of vision. Thus certain forms of visual experience usually uncritically categorized as “realism” are in fact bound up in *non-veridical* theories of vision that effectively annihilate a real world.⁴¹

Precisely this paradoxical complicity of “realistic” media and the decline of the “real” is captured by Auguste Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, a master chronicler of the nineteenth-century bourgeois *Zeitgeist*, in his doppelgänger novel *Tomorrow’s Eve*, which ascribes a thoroughly Kantian skepticism and “sensationalism” to the fictionalized figure of Edison. The inventor justifies the equivalence (or superiority) of his automaton to the real woman on the grounds that, since knowledge of the “real” is inaccessible to man, who is imprisoned by his faulty individual perceptions, man-made simulacra of things are in no wise inferior to the (subjective) images that are all we can know of objects:

Never forget that the only things we see in objects are those which our eyes *suggest* to us. We only form our ideas of them from the few glimpses of their real being that they let us catch; we possess them only to the extent we are able to experience them... And Man, like a solemn squirrel, scurries forever around the spinning wheel of his own EGO without being able to escape from the illusion in which he is caged by his ridiculous senses. Thus Hadaly, when she deceives your sight, will do nothing else in reality than what Miss Alicia does.⁴²

Significant in the fictional Edison’s view is the equation of the simulacrum to the “original”, which no longer has grounds for taking precedence. While the skeptical derogation of man’s senses is by no means novel, the difference here is the broad dissemination of new technologies that constantly offer palpable proof of man’s

⁴⁰ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴² Auguste Villiers de L’Isle-Adam, *Tomorrow’s Eve*, trans. Robert Martin Adams, Urbana and Chicago, Ill., University of Illinois Press, pp. 66–7.

deficiencies and their superior capabilities. In the novel, modern optical instrumentation (including cinema) plays a crucial role in creating the conflict between the already-artificial modern “real” and its technological image; the *doppelgänger* is a product both of technological advances and of modern forms of entertainment.

The following chapters will consider how metaphors of the double foreground this ironic relationship between “realistic” media (and genres) of the nineteenth century and a burgeoning uncertainty of the visible. One focal point will be how the *doppelgänger* theme concerns a sense in which, from circa 1800 on, the ontological status of the visible gains in indeterminacy with the empirical colonization of vision and its objects and with the parallel proliferation of mechanically reproduced simulacra and the optical assault of visual commodities. This modernity is “inseparable from on the one hand a remaking of the observer, and on the other a proliferation of circulating signs and objects whose effects coincide with their visuality, or what Adorno calls *Anschaulichkeit*”.⁴³ It is vital to acknowledge with regard to the *doppelgänger* that the status of its “images” is radically different from that of the image defined in contradistinction to an “original”, in other words, by recourse to the concept of mimesis dating to antiquity. Instead, the problem is of interchangeable, equivalent simulacra with no ontological hierarchy *vis-à-vis* an inaccessible “real”; the fact that in the nineteenth century “a new kind of sign emerges: These new signs, ‘potentially identical objects produced in indefinite series,’ herald the moment when the problem of mimesis disappears”.⁴⁴

For this understanding of modernity the *doppelgänger* becomes especially relevant. For within what is already a mimetic product, the double appears not simply as a counterfeit reproduction of an original self, but as a mimetic excess, i.e., as too many visually equivalent versions of the same self, casting the notion of an “original” in doubt altogether. This is especially apparent in the cinematic version, with its re-doubled images of what were already ghostly doubles of an “original” performance. The double represents an excessive multiplication of what vision presents, whether to the diegetic subject or to the reader or viewer. The following chapters will more

⁴³ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

closely consider how the doppelgänger scenario coincides with ontological uncertainty affecting the images present to vision

From the standpoint of genre, the double concerns the status of illusionist versus anti-illusionist tendencies in art and the ultimate uncanniness of the too-faithful replica of “reality”. Webber has insightfully described the double’s appearance as a subversion of the naturalist understanding of mimesis in art, as a “return” of a repressed fantastic:

The *Doppelgänger*... serves as a test case for the dialectically complicated conflict between realism and fantasy; in the case of the *Doppelgänger* the ‘real’ is duplicated as phantasm in such a way as to defy distinction. The duplication, I will argue, points up an essential lack which must be supplemented, a lack within the ‘real self’, and by extension within the order of the real. The *Doppelgänger* can be said paradoxically to subvert the aesthetic principal of figuration precisely by a virtuoso act of imitation—duplicating the ‘real’ by the unreal. The subjective spook at once threatens and underpins the objective claims of realism; it has something of the effect of a photographic negative. The realist project can be said to rely upon a repressible fantastic, a source of profound insecurity against which to gauge and assert its security; the two are dialectically interdependent.⁴⁵

Although Webber’s account conflates the “real” and “realism”, thus eliding a greater phenomenal problem in which more is at stake than a generic distinction (even within the self), it points to the figure’s relevance to the relationship between bourgeois ideology and the illusionist drive of the nineteenth century culminating in cinema’s “Institutional Mode of Representation”. In his early discussion of the uncanny, Ernst Jentsch restates an ancient claim – that the task of Art should not be to produce perfect mimetic copies of reality – but adds a new reason: that such reproductions can give rise to distasteful uncanny effects,⁴⁶ something like the eerie quality of photographs. “Natural” copies are just what the mimetic technologies of the nineteenth century offered for the first time, and their vaguely unsettling effects are recaptured and magnified by doppelgänger stories and films.

In the German Context

Considering the double in conjunction with the perceptual consequences of modernity for the human subject offers an interesting perspective on what it would

⁴⁵ Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 9.

⁴⁶ Ernst Jentsch, “On the Psychology of the Uncanny (1906)”, p. 12.

represent in the Wilhelmine era and in Weimar Germany, a period that, in historian Detlev Peukert's expression, was the site of "crisis of classical modernity".⁴⁷ Not surprisingly, the critiques of modernity that were a staple of the time evoke the doppelgänger canon in describing the experiential effects of modernity and its crises of subjectivity. The resonance of these originally Romantic themes is also, more generally, attested to by historians' typical descriptions of Germany from the period of its large-scale industrialization in the 1890s through the Weimar Republic with recourse to the double.⁴⁸ It is commonplace to speak of the German "identity crisis", the conflict between Romantic, agrarian, and feudal traditions on the one hand, and industrialisation, capitalism, liberalism, and other perceived legacies of the Enlightenment on the other. While the onset of World War I delayed the breakdown of old social and economic structures, the war concluded in a crisis involving the German national character itself, and the need to forge an identity independent of the capitalism of the west and the communism of the east. Jeffrey Herf has described the situation succinctly:

Nowhere else in Europe did rapid industrialization confront feudal structures so rapidly and harshly as in Germany. No other European society became capitalist and industrial to such an extent without a single successful bourgeois revolt or strong liberal political tradition... Although aesthetic modernity and the cult of technics existed elsewhere in Europe and in the United States, nowhere did modernity and tradition meet in such unmitigated confrontation as in Germany. Nowhere else did the reconciliation of romanticism and modern technology become a matter of national identity.⁴⁹

The commonplace antitheses of the time – man and machine, *Innerlichkeit* and *Technik*, *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, irrationalism and reason – placed a certain notion of the German soul in a precarious opposition to the technophile legacy of Enlightenment thought. Where the Weimar Republic was seen as standard-bearer for modernization according to the rational Enlightenment model, its vehement and often violent critics bemoaned the consequences of "modernity" for the German "soul",

⁴⁷ Peukert uses the term to describe the Republic. See *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, New York, Hill & Wang, 1987.

⁴⁸ E.g., Kracauer's description of the "German psyche" in the period from World War I to Hitler's accession to power as undergoing a psychological crisis of identity owing to its contradictory drives toward chaos and authority.

⁴⁹ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 232–33.

grappling with the double threats (and technological identities) of American capitalism and Soviet communism. These icons of technological advance were attacked for their opposition to notions of the German “soul” and *Innerlichkeit*, hearkening to a Counter-Enlightenment Romantic tradition, where “The cry of the 1890s—inside and outside the natural sciences—for more life, more soul, more Goethe, more *wholeness* was, of course, raised in the face of the ‘other’ impulse spreading across German-speaking Europe: a fascination with the idea of efficiency and Technik”.⁵⁰ The strident debate about technology that emerged is especially important for the contemporaneous vogue of the *doppelgänger*, keeping in mind the latter’s original appearance in response to the Radical Enlightenment.

As Herf has shown, while some right-wing intellectuals saw the inexorable march of western technology as dehumanizing and soul-destroying, those who paved the way ideologically for the Third Reich paradoxically managed to find in technology – represented, for example, by the battlegrounds of World War I – a baptismal font for authentic German being (Ernst Jünger), a means for the expression of the German soul, or a *Sonderweg* compared to the capitalism of the West and the Communism of the East. The well-known dénouement of the debate was the bizarre reconciliation of technology and the German soul offered by the Nazis: the apocalyptic rejection of classical modernity in favour of irrationalism and “reactionary modernism”.

In this context, it is important that the films of Wilhelmine and Weimar cinema evoke national (and arguably nationalist) classics, such as Goethe’s *Faust* and the works of Wagner, at a time of social upheaval, rapid industrialization, the rise of white-collar culture, political and economic instability, and fervent debates on modernity and the question of technology. Even the more generic appearances of sorcerer’s apprentices, amoral magician-scientists, and of course the *doppelgänger* raise the spectre of the hallowed fictive icons of German culture. That they do so is important in several interrelated ways. First, many of these works themselves originally offered critiques of Enlightenment constitutions of subjectivity and instrumental reason. (This is readily apparent, for example, in the recurrent themes of

⁵⁰ Anne Harrington, *Reenchanted Science: Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 30.

the pursuit of rationality and empiricism gone awry.) Second, from a conservative point of view, these figures recall the golden age of the German “soul”, before it was beset by the horrors of urbanization, mechanistic science, and industrialization. And third, these works participate in defining a distinctly German cinema, not least in opposition to American cinema’s invasion of the German market.

But the Hollywood incursion is only an instance of the more general threat of soulless Americanism – the machine, mass media, Fordism, Taylorism, monotony, and uniformity. Stefan Zweig speaks for many critics of *Americanismus*, writing in 1925:

What is the source of this terrible wave threatening to wash all the color, everything particular out of life? Everyone who has ever been there knows: America. The historians of the future will one day mark the page following the great European war as the beginning of the conquest of Europe by America... In reality we are becoming colonies of its life, its way of life, slaves to an idea profoundly foreign to Europe: the mechanical idea...It is always inventing new artifices for itself, like cinema and radio, to feed its hungry senses with nourishment for the masses, and it transforms this common interest in enjoyment into concerns as massive as its banks and trusts.

America is the source of that terrible wave of uniformity that gives everyone the same: the same overalls on the skin, the same book in the hand, the same pen between the fingers, the same conversation on the lips, the same automobile instead of feet.⁵¹

Uniformity, culminating in multiple versions of the same person, and automatism, the replacement of obsolete natural man by uncanny beings of a mixed nature (cyborgs): critiques of modernity ceaselessly return to these doppelgänger themes. Ever present in such accounts is a looming ontological uncertainty and in conjunction, a perceptual anxiety, arising, for example, with an inability to distinguish the natural from the artificial. These indeterminacies of vision and of the self’s relationship to the phenomenal world, as mentioned previously, hearken to the problematic reorganization of perception in modernity, the spatial and temporal restructuring of experience occurring with what Martin Heidegger would call the “enframing” of the world as “standing reserve”.⁵²

⁵¹ Stefan Zweig, “The Monotonization of the World”, in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, & Edward Dimendberg, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1994, p. 398-99.

⁵² See Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology”, in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York, Harper & Row, 1977.

Writing in the turbulent Weimar years, Kracauer discusses the general contemporary malaise and its relation to the shifting status of perception (“Those Who Wait”). Considering what “gave rise to the emptying out of people’s spiritual/intellectual space”, he notes, requires retracing the fate of the self in the process of civilization, culminating in its version in the “age of materialism and capitalism” when “it both becomes ever more atomized and increasingly degenerates into an arbitrary chance construct”. The phenomenal world, that of “reality”, he argues, has undergone an attendant change, not least in becoming construed as a product of human perception:

One would furthermore have to show that, corresponding to these transformations of the self, there are transformations of the outside object-world, of reality, which is gradually robbed of its substance and compressed to a point where its structure depends on the self. One would also have to consider the social developments and a hundred other lines of development that ultimately lead to the present chaos; yet, in the end, one still wouldn’t have really answered the question (that is, in its metaphysical sense) but instead would have given a historical derivation encumbered with all the inadequacies peculiar to such derivations.⁵³

In the German-speaking world, what perhaps seems a heightened critical sensitivity to the consequences of modernity for the self and its perceptions may be related to a number of factors, along with rapid industrialization, which took especially dramatic form. One was the exceptionally sudden rise of a “society of the spectacle”, as described by Guy Debord.⁵⁴ Germany’s urban centers, above all Berlin, saw an unexampled explosion of the mass media, department stores, and picture palaces. Kracauer’s study of the lifestyles and worldviews of the mushrooming population of white-collar workers, *Die Angestellten*, describes the discombobulating effects of the urban phantasmagoria, wherein surface glamour has become a value for its own sake.⁵⁵ The sensory consequences of modernity were in any case most pronounced in the field of vision, with its surfeit of visual stimuli both titillating and harassing the human eye.⁵⁶

⁵³ Siegfried Kracauer, “Those Who Wait”, in *The Mass Ornament, The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed., trans., and intro. by Thomas Y. Levin, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 129-30.

⁵⁴ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, New York, Zone Books, 1995.

⁵⁵ See Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses (Die Angestellten)*.

⁵⁶ Georg Simmel ascribed the importance of sight to how “[The] sense of sight is the primary organ of the big-city dweller: Interpersonal relationships in big cities are distinguished by a marked

A further contemporary factor linking modernity to uncanny themes and ontological crisis was the Great War and its unprecedented technological bloodbath, as a result of which bodily injury and dismemberment became a mass phenomenon. It is perhaps no coincidence that Freud's castration-minded essay on *The Uncanny* dates to 1919, when the German-speaking urban landscape was littered with tens of thousands of dismembered veterans. Equipped with state-of-the-art mechanical parts that facilitated specialized factory labour, the war disabled were a new kind of double being, actual machine-men.⁵⁷ Prolific robotic veterans and other cyborgs appear in artwork of the time (e.g., Berlin Dada, the paintings of Georg Grosz), provoking a host of visual anxieties, ranging from the empathetic fear of losing one's eyes and dismemberment more generally, to the perceptual dilemma arising with a blurring of boundaries between the natural and artificial. Thomas Elsaesser has related the uncanny effects of German fantastic cinema, read in the Freudian paradigm of castration anxiety, to a Weimar "crisis of masculinity".⁵⁸ One might rather allow the possibility of a broad anxiety about literal dismemberment, in the face of omnipresent reminders.



Otto Dix, "Scat Players" (1920)



Umbo, "The Reporter" (1926)

preponderance of the activity of the eye over the activity of the ear. The main reason for this is the public means of transportation. Before the development of buses, railroads and trams in the 19th century, people had never been in a position of having to look at one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one another". (Quoted by Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, London, New Left Books, 1973, p. 38).

⁵⁷ Mia Fineman, "Ecce Homo Prostheticus", *New German Critique*, Special Issue on Weimar Visual Culture, No. 76, Winter 1999. Fineman suggestively compares the use of prosthetics with the camera as prosthesis for the eye.

⁵⁸ Thomas Elsaesser, "Weimar Cinema, Mobile Selves, and Anxious Males: Kracauer and Eisner Revisited", in *Expressionist Film: New Perspectives*, ed. D. Scheunemann, Rochester, NY, Camden House, 2003.

The sense of the uncanny, having to do with an “indecidability which affects and infects representations, motifs, themes and situations” (Samuel Weber), can in this context be considered historically, as a disorder affecting the perceiving subject in modernity – a kind of visual neurasthenia (also an American export) or nervous disease caused by modern life – inseparable from the effects of industrialization, the dream world of the commodity, modern transportation, and mechanical reproduction. The modern viewing subject is ideal prey for the uncanny, insofar as “Modernity, in this case, coincides with the collapse of classical models of vision and their stable space of representations. Instead, observation is increasingly a question of equivalent sensations and stimuli that have no reference to a spatial location”.⁵⁹

Considering the double in relation to the proliferation of simulacra and perceptual indecision offers a productive approach for a historically contextualized understanding of German film, especially in relation to the reorganization of perception in modernity. It is no coincidence that these visual “indeterminacies” are also recurring features of descriptions of modern life in Germany, for example in Kracauer’s account of an obsession with the “surface glamour” of things and the irrelevance of “substance” to the white-collar work-force, as evinced in the picture-palaces with their sham visual splendours.⁶⁰ Art critic Walter Petry’s diagnosis of the problem, published in 1929, brilliantly illustrates these perceptual concerns:

We believe that urban man is nearly blinded by the optical wealth, by the increasing confusion of his impressions; furthermore, we believe that this loss of peaceful, contemplative vision is not merely sensual, as in a weakening of the eyes, but spiritual, as in a loss of his human capacities. Man is no longer capable of securing a fundamental connection to some sort of appearance in his surroundings; the world seems to distort itself in a process of continual mechanical metamorphosis...⁶¹

In this account, the uncanny disorder of the nerves that afflicts the victim of urban life equally well describes the effects of a special case of the modern optical experience, namely the “continual mechanical metamorphosis” of cinema. It is here important that the films in question explicitly rely on metaphors of vision and cinema with highly self-conscious forms of narration. Looking into the reflexive themes of

⁵⁹ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 24.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., *The Salaried Masses* and *The Mass Ornament*.

⁶¹ Walther Petry, “Bindung an die Dinge”, *Das Kunstblatt*, May 1929, p. 247. Quoted by Mia Fineman, “Ecce Homo Prostheticus”, p. 99.

the double and the depictions of problematic vision in the films of the time, it is as well to remember that film is the medium *par excellence* among modernity's arsenal of visual replenishment, its barrage of simulacra that purport to compensate for a lost reality.

CHAPTER III

CINEMATIC THEMES OF DOPPELGÄNGER FICTION

The recurrent allusions found in the films of Wilhelmine and Weimar cinema to German Romantic literature have held considerable fascination for film critics and historians, in particular with respect to reactionary elements in Romanticism that were later to resurface in the rhetoric and ideology of the Nazis. Romantic characterizations and plots that are regarded as the hallmarks of German silent cinema have, in hindsight, been interpreted as indications of a cultural disposition toward the reactionary, counter-Enlightenment aspect of Romanticism, prefiguring the right-wing revolution to come with their “gloomy forebodings”.¹ In particular, the tendencies of these stories toward irrationalism, mysticism, and “inwardness”; their identification, not only thematically but as “classics”, with German nationalism (e.g., Schiller); and their themes of distrust of the outsider (e.g., “Jewish” itinerant charlatans), support such an argument. According to Kracauer, in consequence, the obsession of the German cinema with figures such as the doppelgänger showed “a deep and fearful concern with the foundations of the self” that led to the reactionary depiction of “outer duplicities as inner dualities”.² Even the “world” that these Hoffmannesque allusions – scientists and their creatures, divided selves, Romantic settings – are used to conjure foreshadows Fascism: “Like the Nazi world, that of *Caligari* overflows with sinister portents, acts of terror and outbursts of panic”.³ For

¹ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1947, p. 33.

² Ibid. pp. 30–31.

³ Ibid., p. 74.

Anton Kaes, the admixture of ultramodern and Romantic elements exemplified above all by *Metropolis* gives rise to a

...[F]usion of technology and vitalistic Nietzschean *Lebensphilosophie* [that] corresponds to what Joseph Goebbels would later call “stählerne Romantik.” It was an intoxicating mixture, putting modernity (steel technology) at the service of romanticism defined as irrationality. Ernst Jünger and Goebbels—and one might add Fritz Lang—reinvested modernity with the mythical dimension that had been repressed since the 18th century.⁴

In his plot-driven analysis, historian Peter Gay finds *Metropolis* to be an “essentially reactionary tale” that “sees the class struggle as science fiction and draws the kind of conclusion that can only be called a studied lie”.⁵

The currency of such themes, however, had complex motivations that cannot easily be related to reactionary undercurrents and psychological dispositions in Wilhemine and Weimar culture. One major influence, beginning in 1912–1913, is the justification of cinema as an art form and the *Autorenfilm*'s reliance on established literary classics and contemporary popular authors. The first “art films” in 1913, *The Other* and *The Student of Prague*, were validated as the products of well-known authors (Paul Lindau and Hanns Heinz Ewers) with time-tested motifs. Otto Rank, for example, excuses his use of *The Student of Prague* as inspiration for his groundbreaking study of the doppelgänger in 1914 with the argument that “Those whose concern is with literature may be reassured by the fact that the scenarist of this film, *The Student of Prague*, is an author currently in vogue and that he has adhered to prominent patterns, the effectiveness of which has been tested by time”.⁶

The popularity of cinematic doubles could also be considered in relation to the obsession with the double in literary and graphic works of “high culture” from the late nineteenth century onward. Indeed, its still-unabated popularity again points to its associations with industrial modernity. One common feature of these works is that Romantic double themes appear in “modernist” works (e.g., decadent, symbolist, expressionist) that are conceived in opposition to positivism and bourgeois naturalist aesthetics, as exemplified in the graphic arts by photographic realism. In the case of

⁴ Anton Kaes, “Cinema and Modernity: On Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*”, in *High and Low Cultures: German Attempts at Mediation*, eds. Reinhold Grimm & Jost Hermand, Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin Press, 1994, p. 23.

⁵ Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*, New York, Harper & Row, 1968, p. 141.

⁶ Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press, 1971, pp. 3–4.

The Student of Prague, for example, both Hanns Heinz Ewers, who became involved with film in 1907, and Stellan Rye, the director, were authors of decadent doppelgänger fiction. Gustav Meyrink's novel *The Golem*,⁷ which hearkened to a Romantic fascination with the Jewish legend and indirectly inspired several Golem films by Paul Wegener, was a bestselling novel.

But it is also from the perspective of the technical capabilities of cinema that literary works with the double theme came to be seen as especially suited for cinematic representation; i.e., because of film's capacity for realistically depicting fantastic phenomena (with the iconic and indexical verisimilitude of its images and techniques such as the divided screen). Ewers and Paul Wegener, for example, pointed to the artistic specificity of cinema as their motivation for using the doppelgänger motif in *The Student of Prague*. Early on (1914), Otto Rank in reference to *The Student of Prague* argued that modern technology has the capacity to depict internal states through images in ways inaccessible to language:

Any apprehensions about the real value of a photoplay which aims so largely at achieving external effects may be postponed until we have seen in what sense a subject based upon an ancient folk-tradition, and the content of which is so eminently psychological, is altered by the demands of modern techniques of expression. It may perhaps turn out that cinematography, which in numerous ways reminds us of the dream-work, can also express certain psychological facts and relationships—which the writer often is unable to describe with verbal clarity—in such clear and conspicuous imagery that it facilitates our understanding of them.⁸

Pursuing this argument of cinema's suitability for the fantastic, Lotte Eisner's well-known study traces iconographic associations between the films and German Romantic literature,⁹ drawing attention to how doppelgänger stories prefigured (and indeed seemed to be made for) cinematic effects with their fantastic and uncanny transformations of images:

Such transformations carry the phenomenon of split personality to its extreme. Wrapped in a cloak 'of a very particular shade of brown' (!) which flaps around him forming innumerable folds and re-folds, the odd little man in *Die Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht*, deprived of his reflection as the result of diabolical machinations, skips around the tavern; the image seems to multiply itself. 'In the lamplight those

⁷ Gustav Meyrink, *The Golem*, trans. Mike Mitchell, Sawtry, Cambs., Dedalus, 1995.

⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁹ See especially the section entitled "The Sway of the Doppelgänger" in Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1969, pp. 109-113.

present had the impression of seeing several superimposed figures cavorting like those in the phantasmagorical scenes of Ensler.’

Romantic authors such as Novalis or Jean Paul, while anticipating the Expressionist notions of visual delirium and of a continual state of effervescence, also seem almost to have foreseen the cinema’s consecutive sequences of images. In the eyes of Schlegel in *Lucinde*, the loved one’s features become indistinct: ‘very rapidly the outlines changed, returned to their original form, then metamorphosed anew until they disappeared entirely from my exalted eyes.’ And the Jean Paul of the *Flegeljahre* says: ‘The invisible world wished, like chaos, to give birth to all things together; the flowers became trees, then changed into columns of cloud; and at the tops of the columns flowers and faces grew.’ In Novalis’s novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* there are even superimpositions.¹⁰

While Eisner does not make much of how these scenes actually evoke the phantasmagoria, the contemporaneous proto-cinematic genre of optical illusions, her observations lead her to the important conclusion that “German cinema is a development of German Romanticism, and that modern technique merely lends visible form to Romantic fancies”.¹¹

Despite the visual resemblances to which Eisner alludes, the ways in which doppelgänger works of fiction are concerned with essentially “cinematic” issues has remained a neglected area in the study of the figure’s signification. It is therefore important to reconsider, with an eye to cinema, how stories of the doppelgänger are marked by obsessive metaphors of visual experience and optical instrumentation, an engagement with Idealist philosophy and the experiential consequences of modernity, and moments of visual/ontological crisis caused by the appearance of simulacra of the human body. While the fictional doppelgänger has been discussed extensively,¹² literature on the subject has primarily focused on narrative themes, i.e., on the double as a psychological case study of the divided subject. In what follows, we instead focus on the “structural” significance of the double’s figurations of vision and their related crises of subjectivity: not only how these effects relate to the ontological status of the text itself, but also how they refer to modernity and its forms of visual experience.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 112-13.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 113.

¹² For a list of relevant works, see “The Sway of the Doppelgänger” in this volume, pp. 14–15.

The Literary Double

Archetypal themes of the *doppelgänger* involve a character's psychological disjunction – whether as a multiple personality, conflict of desires, or the pangs of conscience – appearing as a visible second self that is both same and uncannily other, and therefore inducing optical and ontological crisis. As the previous chapter discussed, the themes of the divided self or *alter ego* resonate in far-reaching and complex ways with currents in the sciences, developments in mimetic technologies and forms of entertainment, and philosophical accounts of subjectivity in modernity (concomitant with the work of Kant and after). It is especially important that “in the case of the *Doppelgänger*, theory and creative writing are engaged in a complex and highly ambivalent exchange of reciprocal readings and representations”.¹³

For the film double, one significant aspect of such stories is their thematic preoccupation with the anxiety engendered by modern science and technology, including technical developments in optics and mimetic technologies. The creation of the double represents man's attempted domination of nature, the urge to recreate life or eliminate death (e.g., *Frankenstein*): a project that instead results in the construction or appearance of uncanny creatures tinged with morbidity. Along these lines, Otto Rank found the primitive motivation behind the duplication of the self to be a defense against death, which becomes its uncanny harbinger. Faustian scientist-magician figures play a key role in the process of unleashing doubles (sometimes themselves); often diabolical, they paradoxically combine positive science and magic.¹⁴ These stories present the mimetic project of the construction of the perfect replica as the ultimate human response to the threat posed by nature, revealing the primitive and mythical disposition of radical positive science.¹⁵

But scientists, magicians, and showmen likewise hearken to the real-life physiologists, opticians, and inventors of recording technologies whose uncanny work, from the late eighteenth century on, exposed what was previously invisible to the human eye, supplemented the eye's natural capacities with mechanical

¹³ Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature*, Oxford, UK, Clarendon; Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 1.

¹⁴ E.g., Hoffmann's *Miracle Doctor Dapertutto* in *Das Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht*, Stevenson's *Doctor Jekyll*, and Shelley's *Doctor Frankenstein*.

¹⁵ They are historically relevant, in other words, in the context of Adorno and Horkheimer's consideration in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* of the dialectic intertwining of myth and enlightenment and how the process of disenchantment of the world is founded on a primitive fear of nature.

extensions, and captured traces of the body. In particular, many such characters, taking their cue from the real-life versions (e.g., Edison), have the naturalist mimetic goal of creating duplicates or perfect replicas of living beings. Thus, their problematic reproductions relate to structures and effects of mimetic recording technologies of the 19th century, as well as to the archaeology of cinema.

Through a preponderance of metaphors of vision and optical instrumentation, these works stress the role of (unreliable) vision in the construction and breakdown of identity. In this context, “The *Doppelgänger*”, as Andrew Webber finds, “is above all a figure of visual compulsion”.¹⁶ The crucial significance of optical instruments, spectatorship, and the visual mediation of subjectivity, which we will explore in greater detail below, foreshadows certain archetypally cinematic issues. It is also significant with regard to film that the uncanny often arises as a consequence of amoral attempts to advance the sciences, especially physiology (e.g., Doctor Jekyll/Mr Hyde) and optics, and through the use of optical instruments (e.g., Schiller’s *The Ghost-Seer*).

Themes of vision often coincide with a multiplicity of styles and narrative voices, for example in the very common use of framed narratives. Stylistic heterogeneity or perspectivism is ironically intertwined with the doppelgänger plot and its uncanny effects. Taken together, these elements contribute to reflexive themes, whereby the ontological problem that the double poses as a replica refers back to the status of the text itself as a mimetic representation. The visual crisis of seeing the double is intertwined with the issue of the credibility of the narrative, precisely because both “Ideas of subjectivity and of aesthetic production are mediated by specular reproduction, by processes of reflection of and on the self and the world which are always liable to be propelled into the vertiginous wonderland of a gallery of mirrors”.¹⁷ Discussing Jean Paul, Andrew Webber has highlighted the ironic connection between the doppelgänger plot’s characteristic visuality and the mimetic success of the text, evoking at the same time the skewed optics of the film double’s fairground haunts:

Jean Paul’s instrumentation of the optical field—where every lens is prismatic, every mirror metamorphic—and the ophthalmic work he carries out on his characters,

¹⁶ Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

are of the essence of his tragicomic artistic vision. The processes of simulation of the self reflect not only the complication of subjectivity but also the mimetic apparatus of art... As the *Doppelgänger* embodies the breakdown of subjective integrity, so it represents the threat to aesthetic integrity; a threat which may strike at the very core of narrative life and life-likeness...¹⁸

The lifelikeness of the double as simulacrum thus closely concerns the question of lifelikeness of the narrative, or more generally, of the ontological validity of naturalist representation. With the double's uncanniness,¹⁹ the structures of narration – in particular of naturalistic mimetic representation – are compromised by perceptual uncertainty. Thus,

...above all, the role of the narrator and the narrative structure, totally neglected by Freud, must be interrogated, since this provides the context for that movement of repetition and splitting which is constitutive for the uncanny and for the crisis of perception and of corporal unity that are inseparable from it. This crisis involves the crisis of the traditional, representational narrative and this marks perhaps the specific frontier of the Unheimliche.²⁰

In the visual medium of cinema, the ironic connection between the optics of the doppelgänger encounter and the medium of its narration becomes a critical point of inquiry. It is interesting, in particular, to reconsider how the foregrounding of discursivity in German silent film, which accompanies the doppelgänger theme, responds in a similar way to “naturalistic” narrative norms.

Where the double theme is used to question the value of simulacra of the living world (whether traditional, representational narrative or mimetic technologies such as photography), it becomes a figure of critique of the bourgeois ideological motivations behind nineteenth-century realism. In part, the double reveals the association between realism and the bourgeois “Frankensteinian” drive (as Noël Burch calls it) to overcome death. The appearance of the uncanny depicts the failure of this project: the “repressed” of realism returns in these tales as the unhomely threat of death and dismemberment.

Doppelgänger stories thus negatively thematize the bourgeois mimetic ideal of the naturalistic copy, at times explicitly depicting the *process of production* of simulacra intended as a defense against mortality that instead cause death. For

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁹ Samuel Weber, “The Sideshow, Or: Remarks on a Canny Moment”, *MLN*, 88.6, 1973, p. 1132–33

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1123.

example, they depict “representations” being brought to life, not least through the classic escaped shadow or mirror image, resulting in the production of uncanny, even murderous doubles, or the artistic production of “copies” of the living for which the “original” has to die (or is killed by the artist for the sake of the work’s completion). In Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Oval Portrait”, for example, the completion of the perfect realistic portrait coincides with the death of its subject. In Brigitte Peucker’s words, “The fear of death motivates the flight into the text – just as making representation ‘come to life’ originates in this fear”.²¹ Thus, “Introducing the body into representation involves the urge to rescue it (metaphorically) from temporality; embalmed within the ‘death’ of representation, the body is secure from actual wounding or decay”.²² In a related vein, Paul Coates has pointed to the “identification of Idealism with the petrification of life”, whereby the fleeting mortal image is arrested and thus preserved from death (while dying in the process). In his reading of Büchner’s story “Lenz”, Coates concludes, “Lenz’s remarks reveal the dangerous, uncanny underside of photographic realism: the sense that humanity is engaged in recording the world so as to be free to destroy it”.²³ This association between photographic realism and the primitive fear of nature/death is crucial for cinema, itself a mimetic technology conceived as a way to overcome death.

If the appearance of the double implies a critique of bourgeois realism, it also responds to the ideological backdrop behind this mimetic ideal, driving the creation and accumulation of empty, equivalent simulacra of the real. Kracauer’s description of the style of *die neue Sachlichkeit* is especially insightful: “But this is what characterizes *die neue Sachlichkeit* in general, that it is a façade concealing nothing; that it does not derive from profundity, but simulates it. Like denial of old age, it arises from dread of confronting death”.²⁴ The “daemonic bourgeois” characters, lawyers and bureaucrat functionaries in frockcoats, who persistently appear in these stories and films testify to a complex relationship between the terrorizing double and a middle-class *Weltanschauung*. It is fitting, therefore, that the Romantic double

²¹ Brigitte Peucker, *Incorporating Images: Film and the Rival Arts*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1995, p.4. Likewise Goethe’s *Propyläen*, Peucker contends, shows how “the passion for mimesis is at bottom a desire to bring the body into the space of representation” (p. 113).

²² *Ibid.*, p. 166.

²³ Paul Coates, *The Gorgon’s Gaze: German Cinema, Expressionism, and the Image of Horror*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 13.

²⁴ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Culture*, London & New York, Verso, 1998, p. 92.

became a resonant metaphor in critiques of bourgeois culture and their descriptions of divided, alienated subjects. In his study of white-collar culture, Kracauer, for example, is struck by how

There are a great many fantastical E. T. A. Hoffmann figures among employees of advanced years. They have got stuck somewhere, performing unremittingly banal functions that are anything but uncanny. Yet it is as though these men were shrouded in an aura of horror. It emanates from the decayed powers that have found no outlet within the existing order.²⁵

E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman* (1817)

As the key text of the psychoanalysis of the uncanny and an important influence on German silent film, *The Sandman* provides an illustrative case study of the visual effects of doppelgänger fiction. In Hoffmann's novella, not only the characters but also the text itself are subject to a precarious *mise-en-abyme* effect. The initial epistolary narrative, in the first-person perspectives of various characters, unexpectedly breaks into the omniscient first-person narration of Hoffmann (as himself). Within this grotesquely fragmentary narrative, the protagonist Nathanael suffers from repeated crises of subjectivity and ricochets between sanity and madness. Clara, the "real" yet unfeeling female (out of whose eyes death looks), is doubled by the automaton Olympia (whose eyes are "sightless"): Nathanael repeatedly conflates and vacillates between the two, perceiving Clara as a lifeless automaton and Olympia as a real woman. The uncanny Sandman is both the advocate Coppelius and the barometer salesman and optician Guiseppe Coppola. A *mise en abyme* of the human form, which becomes foregrounded with the tale of the automaton, occurs not only within the story but is reflected in and reflects on the narrative structure.

Nathanael's madness is revealed in terms of his (discredited) discernment of seemingly doubled people and things, the faulty perceptions or "phantoms of his own ego" that determine and undermine his sense of self and subjective stability. Nathanael's subjectivity (especially as artist) is explicitly made a function of the

²⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

images and representations he both creates and witnesses, as well as of the optical and mechanical devices, including the automaton Olympia, which mediate his perception of reality. This “reality” is itself split for the reader into multiple incommensurable perspectives. His perception mediated by instrumentation, Nathanael is shown to project himself into what he sees and to see what he wishes or expects to see.

In this context it is significant how Nathanael’s voyeuristic interaction with the automaton Olympia, who he watches through binoculars and windows when her curtains are pulled back – a deliberate “staging” – approximates a magic-lantern scenario and, by extension, that of watching a film.²⁶ The binoculars purchased from Coppola seem endowed with magical powers: Just as they bring the object closer and improve visibility, these strange binoculars project the viewer outward and into what he spies. This is a defining moment: In voyeuristically looking at the automaton, Nathanael’s *own sense of sight*, mediated by instrumentation, is projected by extramission into the unnatural image, which becomes not only his reflection or double but also capable of vision and ocular self-expression. Nathanael’s viewing of Olympia becomes a magical *bringing to life*:²⁷

He took up a small, very beautifully cut pocket perspective, and by way of proving it he looked through the window.

Never before in his life had he had a glass in his hands that brought out things so clearly and sharply and distinctly. Involuntarily he directed the glass upon Spalanzani’s room; Olympia sat at the little table as usual, her arms laid upon it and her hands folded. Now he saw for the first time the regular and exquisite beauty of her features. The eyes, however, seemed to him to have a singular look of fixity and lifelessness. But as he continued to look closer and more carefully through the glass he fancied a light like humid moonbeams came into them. It seemed as if their power of vision was now being enkindled; their glances shone with ever-increasing life.

Nathanael remained standing at the window as if glued to the spot by a wizard’s spell, his gaze riveted unchangeably upon the divinely beautiful Olympia.²⁸

²⁶ Andrew Webber has in fact made a broader claim, with regard to the magic lantern paradigm, that “Hoffmann’s narratives can be said to proceed by analogy with this forerunner of the cinematographic apparatus, presenting a series of illuminations with a degree of overlay and continuity, but one equally prone to a sense of interruption and disjuncture.” (*The Doppelgänger*, p. 120).

²⁷ Cf. Noël Burch’s quotation of Demenÿ: “We will do more than analyse, we will bring back to life!” Demenÿ 1892, quoted in *Life to Those Shadows*, trans. Ben Brewster, Berkeley, Calif., University of California Press, 1990, p. 26.

²⁸ E. T. A. Hoffmann, “The Sand-Man”, in *The Best tales of Hoffmann*, ed. E. F. Bleiler, New York, Dover, 1967, p. 203.

Watching the automaton is like a film experience, down to the humming and scraping, a mirror for the protagonist-spectator in which he reads what he wishes, where, as Baudry describes narrative cinema, “the reality mimed . . . is first of all that of a ‘self’”: “Oh! what a profound soul you have! my whole being is mirrored in it!”²⁹ “Upon me alone did her loving glances fall, and through my mind and thoughts alone did they radiate; and only in her love can I find my own self again”.³⁰ Here too

Everything happens as if, the subject himself being unable – and for a reason – to account for his own situation, it was necessary to substitute secondary organs, grafted on to replace his own defective ones, instruments or ideological formations capable of filling his function as a subject.³¹

Nathanael falls prey to the kind of visual pleasure discussed by Baudry and others, a process of identification with a perceived image that reflects him ideally and wherein he experiences the fictive unity of a transcendental subject (here, insanity).

These optical prostheses, Coppola’s lenses and binoculars, which purport to supplement limited human vision, ironically turn out to have an ambivalent epistemological value: they are incapable of deconcealing the true nature of things, seeming instead to magically corroborate what the viewer most wishes to see. While they seem to respond prosthetically and “objectively” to the problem of the dissociation of human perception from the world of things in themselves, the instruments fail to provide an antidote to the subjective grounding of human perception and instead compound it. The extension of Nathanael’s vision by the binoculars is uncanny, in posing a threat to his own vision: he loses his eyes in the process. The grafting of a mechanical implement leads to a kind of blindness or misperception of reality, causing an uncertainty to infect what he sees, as well as what the reader, identified with him in his first-person missives, understands to be happening. Using the demonic binoculars provides him with seemingly greater clarity of vision by supplementing his own eyesight, but at the same time paradoxically deprives him altogether of a consensual or objective vision of the phenomenal world. A resurgence of this “madness” occurs when he unthinkingly

²⁹ Ibid., p. 206.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 208.

³¹ Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus”, in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, & Leo Braudy, New York, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 311–12.

uses the binoculars at the end of the novella. Through them he sees a close-up of Clara, misperceives what she is, and tries to kill the “wooden doll”.

The uncanny threat posed to Nathanael’s perception, arising from the indecidability of what he is seeing, is made apparent in his transaction with Coppola: his own eyes (and the fragmentation of his subjectivity) are the price he pays for the binoculars:

“Ah well!” thought he, “he’s laughing at me because I’ve paid him too much for this little perspective—because I’ve given him too much money—that’s it.”

As he softly murmured these words he fancied he detected a gasping sigh as of a dying man stealing awfully through the room; his heart stopped beating with fear. But to be sure he had heaved a deep sigh himself; it was quite plain. “Clara is quite right,” said he to himself, “in holding me to be an incurable ghost-seer; and yet it’s very ridiculous—more ridiculous, that the stupid thought of having paid Coppola too much for his glass should cause me this strange anxiety; I can’t see any reason for it.”³²

Spalanzani later confirms his suspicions of what the high price was:

“Coppelius—Coppelius—he’s stolen my best automaton—at which I’ve worked for twenty years—my life work—the clockwork—speech—movement—mine—your eyes—stolen your eyes—damn him—curse him—after him—fetch me back Olimpia—there are the eyes.” And now Nathanael saw a pair of bloody eyes lying on the floor staring at him; Spalanzani seized them with his uninjured hand and threw them at him, so that they hit his breast.³³

The uncanniness of the double/image (Olimpia) and the ontological crisis it provokes are inseparable from the monstrous character of the technological mimesis it represents, brought about by the obscure complicities of science with metaphysics and myth. The characterisations of the demonic Coppelius/Coppola and the amoral “professor of physics” Spalanzani support the anti-science and counter-Enlightenment tendencies of the story: the deception the two men of science practice reveals them to be charlatans, while painting the pursuit of instrumental reason as a morally ambivalent enterprise.³⁴ In part, Coppelius as “purveyor of anti-science opens up perspectives on what is conventionally discounted or repressed in the cultural heritage of the Enlightenment: the destructive potential of desire, the

³² “The Sand-Man”, p. 204.

³³ Ibid., p. 211.

³⁴ Similar themes become especially significant in works like Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

prevalence of the unknowable, and the corruptible condition of subjective identity”.³⁵ But more generally, the story’s chronic ocularphobia evinces such ambivalence toward Enlightenment rationality, the supreme symbol of which is the disembodied eye: precisely what the story makes uncanny, e.g., by highlighting its enucleation. This ambivalent valuation of the eye is captured in the scene where Coppola, to Nathanael’s absolute horror, covers his table with thousands of “eyes”, blinking and disturbingly animate spy-glasses and spectacles – the emblems of rational progress and learning.

While optical implements and the automaton, a media-technological simulacrum of man, either supplement visual access to phenomena or replicate the real *too perfectly* – Olympia dances and sings with perfect accuracy – they cause an uncanny indistinguishability to intrude, not least between human and machine. The automaton’s story may have concluded with the exposure of the ruse, “But several most honourable gentlemen did not rest satisfied with this explanation; the history of this automaton had sunk deeply into their souls, and an absurd mistrust of human figures began to prevail”.³⁶

This “absurd mistrust of human figures”, I would argue, is a paradigmatic effect of the onset of modernity and its technological artifices – describing an incipient understanding that with a proliferation of simulacra, such as automata, and a loss of faith in the human sensorium, a certain indecision comes to affect the observer. It is fitting, reading Hoffmann’s tale, that Jonathan Crary has traced the constitution of the modern observer to the same period:

What begins in the 1820s and 1830s is a repositioning of the observer, outside of the fixed relations of interior/exterior presupposed by the camera obscura and into an undemarcated terrain on which the distinction between internal sensation and external signs is irrevocably blurred.³⁷

Importantly, *The Sandman*, through various forms of self-reference, ironically links the uncanny problem of vision and representation within the diegesis to the problem of the text itself as a copy of the world or its mimetic representation. Its self-directed

³⁵ See Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 148.

³⁶ “The Sand-Man”, p. 212.

³⁷ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer, On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1990, p. 24.

irony is representative of much of the literature of the *doppelgänger*.³⁸ Here, a narrative concern with the credibility and value of “images” – the automaton, Nathanael’s own stories and poems, and even what the lenses of science bring into focus – is materially implicated in the textual irony and reflexive effects of the novella itself. Nathanael as a writer, for example, acts as a surrogate for Hoffmann himself in constructing a poem within the story – in which the Sandman destroys his chances at a happy life with Clara – that foretells the novella’s dénouement. Clara, distrustful of the images offered by art or the imagination, represents the voice of “reason” and is thus found soulless and mechanical by Nathanael:

Dreamers and visionaries had a bad time of it with her; for without saying very much—she was not by nature of a talkative disposition—she plainly asked, by her calm steady look and her rare ironical smile, “How can you imagine, my dear friends, that I can take these fleeting shadowy images for true living and breathing forms?”³⁹

Such reflexive gestures and stylistic heterogeneity are characteristic of the *doppelgänger* story, corroborating how “*Doppelgänger* and their host texts are typically literary double-agents, in the duplicitous service of conflicting aesthetic systems”.⁴⁰ In this case *The Sandman*’s initial epistolary structure is rudely interrupted by the first-person voice of the author himself (Hoffmann), who digresses into a discussion of his own difficulties in constructing a sensational, fantastic, and yet credible account of a sequence of events that he presents as a reproduction of life:

Perhaps, like a good portrait painter, I may succeed in depicting Nathanael in such a way that you will recognize it as a good likeness without being acquainted with the original, and will feel as if you had very often seen him with your own bodily eyes. Perhaps, too, you will then believe that nothing is more wonderful, nothing more fantastic than real life, and that all that a writer can do is to present it as “in a glass, darkly.”⁴¹

³⁸ Adelbert von Chamisso’s *The Wonderful History of Peter Schlemihl* (trans. Theodore Bolton, New York, B.W. Huebsch, Inc., 1923), for instance, is narrated by the eponymous hero in the form of a letter to his friend, the actual author, Chamisso. He complains at one point: “I must now pass quickly over one period of my story—how gladly I would dwell on it had I your lively genius for conjuring up remembrances! But the colors which vivified the scene and alone can reanimate it have been blotted out...” (p.51).

³⁹ “The Sand-Man”, p. 197.

⁴⁰ Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 10.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

The reference to Saint Paul's *speculum obscurum* – warning against the untrustworthy representations offered by earthly vision – is especially appropriate in this context, describing not only the problem the author faces, but also the central preoccupation of the narrative, which continues in Hoffmann's voice of omniscient narrator. In any case, such involutions draw attention to the novella's constructedness, counteracting its illusionist moment and disallowing the reader's passive stance toward the text as narrative. They serve, in other words, as distancing gestures that are analogous to the uncanny and interruptive effect of the double itself as something unreal intruding in the construct of a naturalistic, bourgeois, i.e., *homely* sphere. Concluding the episode of the automaton, a diegetic critic significantly sums up the "meaning" of Olympia as doppelgänger:

The Professor of Poetry and Eloquence took a pinch of snuff, and, slapping the lid to and clearing his throat, said solemnly, "My most honourable ladies and gentlemen, don't you see then where the rub is? The whole thing is an allegory, a continuous metaphor. *Sapienti sat.*"⁴²

An allegory for what? Where the theme of the double solicits a comparison between naturalistic reproductions of the "real" by technology and the illusionist tendencies of narrative, both are implicated in an uncanny, vertiginous indecidability, a loss of the power to see.

Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Tomorrow's Eve* (1886)

Proto-cinematic themes of the double become crucial in *Tomorrow's Eve*, a novel well known among film historians for its detailed description of the medium of film before its invention (in the Lumière or Edison forms). The novel, offering the rare case of a female doppelgänger, revolves around an exaggerated – and clairvoyant – characterization of Thomas Edison, the Wizard of Menlo Park, as a (film) pioneer who peddles in life and death through his masterful inventions in media technology. Edison's ambivalent portrayal dialectically intertwines the vocations of mechanistic scientist and magician. Villiers ironically stresses the inventor's paradoxical double nature as wizard and electrician, for example in describing his laboratory as

⁴² Ibid., p. 212.

“*positively*, a place of magic”⁴³ and even explicitly comparing him to the Sandman.⁴⁴ Here, Edison is showman and director of the technological mimetic representations that he displays to his astonished guest and reader, among which is the uncanny android double Hadaly.

Like other stories about artificial doubles, *Tomorrow's Eve* incorporates a summary description of past real-life attempts at building men, along with a credible scientific explanation of the new work and how it supercedes previous efforts (cf. *Frankenstein*). The story is therefore presented as taking part in a narrative of scientific progress, which lends both credibility and irony to the uncanny dénouement. Artificial life-forms made before are derided as the unrealistic (therefore unsuccessful) and obsolete work of mediocre quacks. The fictional Edison, by the late 19th century, sees his automaton not only as a new and improved technology, but also purely in illusionist terms: a mechanical reproduction that must ideally be indistinguishable from the original. Making an android for a spectator who must be unable to detect the presence of the “instrument” in what he views (Lord Ewald) – an aim that resonates with the illusionist tendency in film – he is able to say of the legendary builders of automata,

Poor fellows, for lack of the proper technical skills, they produced nothing but ridiculous monsters... Their automata deserve to be exhibited in the most hideous of wax museums; they are disgusting objects from which proceeds a rank smell of wood, rancid oil, and gutta-percha. Degraded works of that sort give man no sense of power; instead, they force him to bow his head before the great god, Chaos... The absurdity of their shapes and colors!... That noise of the key in the mechanism! The sensation of vacancy!⁴⁵

For Villiers' Edison – who is not so far removed from the real one – precisely those elements in the old androids that signal the fact of their mechanical nature, all of which are perceived by senses other than vision and are not “realistic”, are what deprive man of a "sense of power". This power has to do with the ultimate triumph over nature of which man may be capable, the fashioning of its perfect replica. This is the ideology of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the organization of mimesis understood as

⁴³ See the “White Magic” chapter in *Tomorrow's Eve*, trans. Robert Martin Adams, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982, p. 53 (italics mine).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

naturalism. Noël Burch's description of the real Edison is especially apt for the fictional version:

This association of naturalism and a certain petty-bourgeois metaphysics is a perfect evocation of Edison's character. In him we can locate the point at which the bourgeois fantasy par excellence, so well expressed in Demeny's living portraits, of the this-worldly non-finitude of the subject, of the materialist victory over death is, as it were, sublimated in that of total representation, in which spectators overstep the narrow limits of their lives in a communion with 'artists and musicians long since dead', *projecting themselves into the latter's survival*.⁴⁶

Edison's clandestine inventions in the novel, which chillingly foreshadow the later work of his real-life model, are explicitly intended by their inventor as a means of overcoming death through creating the credible illusion of reality. These technologies, predicated on recording the minutiae of life, preserve the characteristics of the dead in a kind of immortality and, according to him, replace what is already an illusion by a superior illusion. They therefore belong to a history of 19th century developments in recording technologies that, as Noël Burch has shown, were from the beginning conceived as a means of overcoming death – of loved ones or of great singers – by means of exhaustively recording visual and aural data. The recorded song of Edison's favorite nightingale, for example, compensates for its death, while revealing the complicity of technology with "primitive" mysticism:

Well, the fact is, I'm a lover of nature, so I am. I really was fond of the song of that bird, and his death a couple of months ago caused me, I assure you, genuine sadness... Dead, you say? Not altogether, since I've recorded here his song and his spirit. I evoke it by means of electricity; that's spiritualism put in really practical terms, right?⁴⁷

More than immortality, though, Edison claims to re-accord to the object its aura, to borrow Benjamin's term, which was lost with bourgeois modernity, paradoxically through its technical reproduction. With the reproduction of the bourgeoisie, artificial herself owing to makeup and modern manners, Edison argues, "Miss Alicia Clary will appear before you, not simply transfigured, not just made the most enchanting of

⁴⁶ Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, p. 28.

⁴⁷ Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, *Tomorrow's Eve*, p. 95.

companions, nor merely lifted to the most sublime level of spirituality, but actually endowed with a sort of immortality”.⁴⁸

Motivated by this ideology, the fictional Edison has invented a cinematic medium that captures its subject in a perpetually replayable moment of youth;⁴⁹ he consequently finds death to have become inconsequential:

–After all, you understand, her death mattered very little; I can make her come into our presence as if nothing had ever happened to her...

A long strip of plastic encrusted with bits of tinted glass moved laterally along two steel tracks before the luminous cone of the astral lamp. Drawn by a clockwork mechanism at one of its ends, this tip began to glide swiftly between the lens and the disk of a powerful reflector. Suddenly on the wide white screen within its frame of ebony flashed the life-size figure of a very pretty and quite youthful blonde girl.

The transparent vision, miraculously caught in colour photography, wore a spangled costume as she danced a popular Mexican dance. Her movements were as lively as those of life itself, thanks to the procedures of successive photography, which can record on its microscopic glasses ten minutes of action to be projected on the screen by a powerful lampascope, using no more than a few feet of film.⁵⁰

It is no great surprise that André Bazin uses part of the above quotation to justify the idea of “total cinema” as a myth that preceded the inventions that came to constitute it, and the thoroughgoing recreation of reality as the natural culmination of film.⁵¹

Edison relies on this medium of recording and projection to construct the perfect simulacrum, the android double. This process incorporates an amalgam of recording and playback devices that capture and “replay” the minute particularities of the real woman, such as aural, olfactory, and visual data (e.g., skin pigmentation). Edison’s aim, both with his “cinema” and with the android, is a recreation of reality whose true, mechanical nature is hidden and forgotten by the viewer. His success is complete when Ewald mistakes the artificial woman for the real.

The re-creation of life, however, turns out to be deeply unnerving and uncanny, capable of inducing ontological crisis precisely because of its indistinguishability from the “real”. Edison warns Lord Ewald that the sight of the android may induce perceptual distress, caused by astonishment before the machine’s liminal state between reality and illusion, between the phenomenal realm and the

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 53–54.

⁴⁹ See chapter entitled “Danse Macabre”, p. 117.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 116–17.

⁵¹ André Bazin, “The Myth of Total Cinema”, republished in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, & Leo Braudy, 4th ed., New York, Oxford University Press, 1992.

spiritual: “The being whose sight you are about to experience is of an indefinable mental condition. Its appearance, even when one is accustomed to it, always causes a certain shock”.⁵² This shock is the sense of the uncanny, “a certain indecidability which affects and infects representations, motifs, themes and situations, which... always mean something other than what they are and in a manner which draws their own being and substance into the vortex of signification”.⁵³ Significantly, both Edison and the android justify this unholy reproduction with recourse to a Kantian account of the subjective perception of phenomena as arbitrary and independent of the things themselves, which remain inaccessible. Dismissing the original as herself *already an image*, they can claim the reproduction to be not merely perceptually equivalent but morally an improvement over the original.

As a media technology, the android resembles the cinematic medium that Edison has invented: both are renditions of the phenomenal world that are indistinguishable from and even superior to it. As Edison is shown to understand, the similarity of the android double to his other invention of cinema inheres in their shared double nature as both real and unreal, as life and its shadow double, and as signifying a kind of immortality. At the same time, he underscores not only the vital role that new, magical technologies play in these reproductions of life, but also their fundamentally uncanny and morbid quality as phantom doubles with a “mixed nature”:

This is the arm of an Android of my making, animated for the first time by this vital, surprising agent that we call Electricity, which gives it, as you see, all the soft and melting qualities, all the *illusion* of life! ...

The techniques of reproduction, of *identification* have been rendered more precise and perfect, so that the resources available to man for new ventures of this sort are now different—oh, completely different—than they used to be. Henceforth we shall be able to realize—that is, to MAKE REAL—potent phantoms, mysterious presences *of a mixed nature*, such as pioneers in the field could never have conceived, and at the thought of which they would have smiled sadly and cried, “Impossible!”—Think now, didn’t you, just now, find it difficult to smile at the appearance of Hadaly?⁵⁴

The italics and capitalisation in the above quotation are original to the text, pointing out Villiers’s prophetic concern with issues that later became so significant in the

⁵² *Tomorrow’s Eve*, p. 55–56.

⁵³ Samuel Weber, “The Sideshow, Or: Remarks on a Canny Moment”, p. 1132–33.

⁵⁴ Villiers de L’Isle-Adam, *Tomorrow’s Eve*, p. 61.

discussion of film, for example in the work of André Bazin, Christian Metz, and Jean-Louis Baudry, Noël Burch's archaeology of the "Institutional Mode of Representation", and recently in Tom Gunning's discussions of amazement and the uncanny in the face of new technologies.⁵⁵ More generally, the novel foregrounds the structural analogy between the doppelgänger and mimetic technologies of the 19th century, the mythic moment at the heart of positive science, and the questionable ideological motivations of an archetypal nineteenth-century inventor.

⁵⁵ See, e.g., Tom Gunning, "Re-Newing Old Technologies: Astonishment, Second Nature, and the Uncanny in Technology from the Previous Turn-of-the Century", in *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, eds. David Thorburn, Henry Jenkins, & Brad Seawell, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2003.

CHAPTER IV

ALLEGORIES OF SPECTATORSHIP: *THE STUDENT OF PRAGUE* (1913)



Three years ago I turned for the first time to film, because I thought I had an idea which could not be realized in any other medium. I remembered seeing trick photographs in which a man plays cards with himself or a fraternity student duels against himself. I knew that could be done by splitting the image, and I said to myself that it must also be possible to film E. T. A. Hoffmann's fantasies of a *doppelgänger* or mirror image, as if they were reality, and thus achieve effects which were not possible in any other art form. Thus, I hit upon the idea for *The Student of Prague* which Hanns Heinz Ewers gave filmic form.

Paul Wegener¹

We penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognize it in the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, and the impenetrable as everyday.

Walter Benjamin²

¹ Paul Wegener, "Die künstlerischen Möglichkeiten des Films" (1916), in *Paul Wegener und Seine Rollen: Ein Buch von ihm und über ihn*, ed. Kai Möller, Reinbek, Rowohlt, 1954, p.110, quoted by Heide Schlüpmann, in "The First German Art Film: Rye's *The Student of Prague* (1913)", in *German Film and Literature: Adaptations and Transformations*, ed. Eric Rentschler, New York and London, Methuen, 1986, p. 13.

² Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia", in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, London, New Left Books, 1979, p. 237.

The 1913 *The Student of Prague*, the first film to receive broad critical consideration in the German press, was lauded at the time for its originality and resonance. It has since often been considered the “first German art film”. Film critics and historians have, however, tended to uncomfortably situate the film somewhere between early and “classical” cinema, or as a “primitive” German film that foreshadows what was to come in the “Golden Age”.³ Thus, Janus-like, the film is found to look back to early or “primitive” cinema and forward, both to classical narrative and to avant-garde or modernist film practices.⁴ In addition, the film’s central narrative theme of the doppelgänger has been discussed both by Lotte Eisner and Siegfried Kracauer in terms exclusively derived from literature. Their canonical readings conclude that German cinema’s Romantic quotations reflect the (stable) German Geist (Eisner) or a mass psychological, socio-political crisis of the divided self (Kracauer). Both, in short, ignore the importance of the specific relationship of the motif to the new medium, which, sublimely able to represent the “hybrid, half-real world”⁵ of German Romanticism, is itself fraught with the motif’s reflexive tensions concerning real selves and their indistinguishable copies, realism and fantasy.

While Ewers and Wegener are generally credited for the idea and execution of the film, Casper Tybjerg⁶ has shown in a recent article that the choice of Stellan Rye as director was especially appropriate for the “artistic” depiction of the cinematic doppelgänger. Rye, a decadent and dandy, had himself earlier (1905) published a doppelgänger story that reveals his fascination with the uncanny effects of simulacra and prefigures the scene of several of the films we will discuss. The story’s narrator visits a travelling waxworks show, where at a tent labelled “Teatrum Mundi”, he has a chilling encounter with his own wax double:

³ See, e.g., Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1947.

⁴For a discussion of the ambivalent reception of the film, see Leon Hunt’s “*The Student of Prague*”, in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. T. Elsaesser, London, BFI, 1990. Hunt compares the film in this respect to Noël Burch’s account of the films of Edwin S. Porter, describing Lotte Eisner and Siegfried Kracauer’s appraisals of the film as primitive but portentous.

⁵ Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1969, p. 109.

⁶ Casper Tybjerg, “The Faces of Stellan Rye” in *A Second Life: German Cinema’s First Decades*, ed. T. Elsaesser, pp. 151–59.

Then I look at the doll's face, and my breathing suddenly stops, as though it had hit a wall inside me. It is myself who stands there! The doll, the wax figure, it is myself. It is *my* features, *my* eyes, *my* frame, *my* haircut. And as it stands there, with the thumb and first finger of the left hand in the waistcoat pocket, with the coat collar turned up and a mocking smile around the slightly crooked left side of the mouth, it is me, completely, so lifelike in the dead wax. Only the eyes are somehow smaller than mine.⁷

That the double is a perfect replica but for a form of ocular inequality is a recurring effect in these stories and films that is especially suggestive. While in this case the actual eyes are different (we will see a similar inconsistency in *Metropolis*), in others the difference can be in the double's form of spectatorship. Tybjerg continues, "The doll comes to life and starts speaking, the very words with which the dandy commenced the tale we are reading. Unable to stop the doll, and enraged by its self-satisfied manner, he smashes it to pieces. The old man appears, smiles sagely and says, 'Now there is one doll less in the world.'"⁸ It is fitting that, with the reflexive effects of the uncanny, the text itself begins to be repeated as a result of the structural agency of the doppelgänger.

As Paul Wegener's remarks on the genesis of *The Student of Prague* underline, many of German cinema's film artists sought to establish an autonomous, non-derivative formalism for the new medium, independent of fiction, drama, or painting. What is involved in the choice of the double theme, then, is Wegener's insightful understanding of the specific possibilities of film. The pivotal fact is cinema's tremendous iconic resemblance to reality, coupled with simultaneous unreality – i.e., a structural resemblance to the double's ontological duality. To return to Christian Metz's classic account of cinema,

[The] activity of perception which it involves is real (the cinema is not a phantasy), but the perceived is not really the object, it is its shade, its phantom, its double, its *replica* in a new kind of mirror. It will be said that literature, after all, is only itself made of replicas (written words, presenting absent objects). But at least it does not present them to us with all the really perceived detail that the screen does (giving more and taking as much, i.e. taking more). The unique position of the cinema lies in this dual character of its signifier: unaccustomed perceptual wealth, but at the same time stamped with unreality to an unusual degree, and from the very outset. More than the other arts, or in a more unique way, the cinema involves us in the

⁷ Stellan Rye, "Teatrum Mundi", *Verdensspejlet* 3, No. 35, p. 550. Quoted and translated by Caspar Tybjerg, p. 157.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

imaginary: it drums up all perception, but to switch it over immediately into its own absence, which is nonetheless the only signifier present.⁹

It is in these terms that Wegener deems the cinema to be appropriate ground for the double, and the double suitable for the medium: “*The Student of Prague*, with its strange mixture of the natural and the artificial, in theme as in setting, interested me enormously”.¹⁰ As Heide Schlüpmann has pointed out,

If photography offers a world devoid of subjective and projected meaning, as Kracauer once suggested, if it demythicizes, then the cinema can achieve an uncanny effect *par excellence* by inserting subjective images of an animistic worldview into photographic reproductions of reality, e.g. by making a mirror image become the image of a soul.¹¹

To go still further, while the cinema provides the ideal context for the visual indecidability that is the uncanny, it especially does so for the old theme of the doppelgänger, precisely owing to the reflexive resemblance of the motif to the medium as double of reality. Fittingly, then, *The Student of Prague* screenplay borrows its material haphazardly from various literary renditions of the doppelgänger motif; the film is a pastiche of these stories, and not a literary adaptation. Indeed, it is a film about the motif of the double itself and is successful on the basis of the motif’s special relationship to cinema. In other words: “The penchant for mirrors and shadows in German expressionist cinema ... thus stands as a metafilmic consideration. The recourse to the romantic motif was not simply provoked by film technique, but above and beyond that by film aesthetics”.¹²

A close reading of the film’s spatial constructions is found in Leon Hunt’s article on the film’s “constant use of space to articulate narrative concerns”.¹³ This analysis addresses the relationship between the film’s articulations of space and the two narrative themes of the double and social mobility. Remaining within a rigid

⁹ Christian Metz, “Identification, Mirror”, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Ben Brewster et al., Bloomington, Indiana Univeristy Press, 1982, p. 44–45.

¹⁰ Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p. 40.

¹¹ Heide Schlüpmann, “The First German Art Film: Rye’s *The Student of Prague* (1913)”, p. 21.

¹² Ibid., p. 14. However, *The Student of Prague* (1913) is hardly an Expressionist film, as it predates the advent of so-called Expressionism in German cinema and has neither the graphic and decorative effects of Expressionist art nor the plot elements of Expressionist theatre or fiction.

¹³ Leon Hunt, “*The Student of Prague*: Division and Codification of Space”, p. 395.

formalist reading of binary spatial oppositions, however, Hunt glosses over the ways in which these structures are disrupted. For in the cinematic construction of the uncanny, precisely those moments in which expected visual cues are violated become the most significant.

As the previous chapter indicated, literary doppelgänger scenarios explicitly relate the uncanny crisis of seeing the double through metaphors of vision and optics. With the uncanny, vision and representation alike are infected by an indecidability or “crisis of phenomenality”. In the visual medium of film, this problematic has a pronounced metafilmic effect. Thus, of particular interest in looking at the doppelgänger in film is where, with uncanny spectator effects and visual metaphors, the diegetic conflict relates to film form and “exposes the instrument”.

An especially suggestive discussion of the film’s doppelgänger theme is that of Thomas Elsaesser’s well-known essay on “Social Mobility and the Fantastic”.¹⁴ Taking his cue from Eisner’s assertion about German cinema as a development of German Romanticism, Elsaesser considers the historical grounds for the return of the motif in the 1910s and 1920s, i.e., the “historical reality” to which its use responds. Elsaesser’s reading, however, does not consider the motif’s metafilmic significance,¹⁵ and thus neglects the question of whether or how the “historical reality” to which such motifs speak could also concern cinema, and in tandem, the historical determination of vision and of spectatorship. It is important, for example, that when the double appears onscreen, each time there is a split second of uncertainty in which the spectator is not yet sure which Baldwin is which. The theme of social mobility emerges as a consequence of this hesitation, and the reading of visual cues of wealth and poverty it compels in the double vision of two identical men.

More recently, Brigitte Peucker has discussed the film in the context of how the depiction of the human body on film relates to film’s consciousness of itself as a

¹⁴ Thomas Elsaesser, “Social Mobility and the Fantastic”, in *Fantasy and the Cinema*, ed. James Donald, London, BFI, 1989, pp. 25–32.

¹⁵ Cf. Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary*, London, Routledge, 2000.

hybrid and fragmented text, and in its relation to the other arts.¹⁶ Peucker's insightful conclusion is that the film contains "a figure of its own hybrid status as text, its discomfiting suspicion that its own body is not all of a piece".¹⁷

[The] function that the Double takes on in *The Student of Prague* has at least as much to do with the anxiety created by the production of the moving image itself as with the technology of this production, and must be seen within the experimental—and potentially problematic—context of movement both attached to and divorced from the human body.¹⁸

Clearly, the theme of the Double as it is figured in *The Student of Prague* expresses cinema's fascination with the ontology of the image, and it poses questions concerning the nature of cinematic representation, especially with regard to the manner in which narrative and visual coherence in films are anchored in the human body.¹⁹

Peucker, however, does not consider just how this reflexive figuration of the status of cinema in the figure of the double is established in the film.

The Divided Spectator



Confusions of the Real: Decentred staging.

The Student of Prague's main narrative opens in a beer garden peopled with frolicking students. This scene, a continuous shot²⁰ in which the camera is discreetly moved to refocus the spectator's attention, begins with the clutter and chaos of a kind of non-centrifugal "realism" in the tradition of the Lumières. The spectator is initially faced with a moment of confusion, hardly knowing where to look. As in

¹⁶ Brigitte Peucker, *Incorporating Images: Film and the Rival Arts*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁰ It is, however, interrupted by intertitles.

several sequences to follow, the fact that the film was shot on location adds a certain debris of the “real”, with a profusion of non-narrative visual detail that both confuses and engages the eye. Similarly, relatively long segments of the film showing forest scenes or the streets of Prague, unnecessary as regards narrative development, draw attention to the qualities of the image as such. Of the extended hunt sequence, for example, Heide Schlüpmann observes that “The scene manages to create interest solely through its images of reality, instead of through plot-motivated suspense”.²¹ These shots resist being mastered at a first viewing.

This scene reveals Baldwin, Prague’s wildest student, as world-weary, joyless, and unwilling to join in youthful festivities. As the camera pans to refocus the center of attention, the viewer is presented with the spectacle of the gypsy girl Lyduschka dancing for a crowd of young men, effectively placed on Baldwin’s shoulder. Although Lyduschka’s display is ultimately targeted at him, Baldwin refuses to be its voyeur, turning his back to the assembled company and instead facing the spectator. Significantly, then, Baldwin’s problem, the basis of the plot’s conflict, is introduced as this lack of desire to *look*, so much so, indeed, that not even the “unbelievably slender, beautiful, frisky legs of Lyda Salmonova”,²² in the words of a contemporary reviewer, succeed in offering him distraction. Baldwin’s “crisis”—and we as yet do not know of his financial woes – is therefore of a visual nature: he lacks *Schaulust* and curiosity. Toward the end of the film this problem is reiterated: Baldwin seeks to forget his love in dance and gaming: similarly seated, he faces the camera as the dancers and Lyduschka fail to capture his gaze.

²¹ Heide Schlüpmann, “The First German Art Film: Rye’s *The Student of Prague* (1913)”, p. 21.

²² Alfred Richard Meyer, quoted in Ludwig Greve, Margot Pehle, and Heidi Westhoff, eds., *Hätte ich das Kino! Die Schriftsteller und der Stummfilm* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1976), p. 106. Quoted by Heide Schlüpmann, in “The First German Art Film: Rye’s *The Student of Prague* (1913)”, p. 10.



Baldwin's separation from action and unwillingness to look: note change of camera position.



Repetition of Lyduschka's dance and first scene's staging.

This first scene is significant in laying out the film's central concern with visual uncertainty and conflict. While initially there are multiple points in the image on which one could focus and no hierarchy of narrative importance, with Lyduschka's dance the image is divided into two related narratives, which are literally separated by Scapinelli's coach. A foreground scene, Baldwin's meeting Scapinelli, follows an independent course from what is taking place in the background, Lyduschka's display and voyeurism.

Already, the film is split in two in a number of ways, not only divided between foreground and background, but also between a kind of hyper-realism and the fantastic. The camera both makes the viewer *see* and confuses vision, changing its focus to the center of attention yet showing a deep-staged scene with multiple narratives. As spectators, we are already doubled in the pursuit of two narratives,

split between following Baldwin's actions and looking at Lyduschka. This scene announces a bifurcation in the spectator's visual interaction with the film:

[Baldwin] looks straight into the camera, so that he is doubly separated from what goes on: spatially, and in terms of his field of vision. By contrast, we, the spectators are made to identify with two distinct points of view: we participate as spectator-voyeurs in the girl's self-display (and are thus part of the 'student scene') but we also identify with Baldwin's refusal to participate: as spectators we are already split well before Baldwin's double appears.²³

To complicate matters further, Lyduschka herself is a stand-in voyeur, watching the scene in the foreground. When Baldwin shakes hands with Scapinelli, she regretfully holds her forehead, acting out a commentary on the foreground scene. When they leave, she, like the viewer, follows: unobserved except by the latter.

Importantly, the two narratives are explicitly related to contrary diegetic positions with regard to spectatorship: one concerns a man who refuses to look, and the other a woman who acts as both exhibitionist and voyeur – espying not only Baldwin but the spectator, who receives her exhibitionist look at the camera. They also represent two possibilities of cinema, with an omniscient, voyeuristic spectator or with one whose look is acknowledged by the viewed object. In addition, the single shot, in its representation of multiple narratives, constructs a form of parallel action without the use of continuity editing. In the binary oppositions the image erects, however, one side of the image, the voyeur who shares her activity with the spectator, offers a commentary on the other. The multiplicity of perspectives and points of entering the narrative solicit a comparison with baroque art or with the cinema of the Lumières in the lack of centrifugality. The shot, like others in the film, could be viewed multiple times from different perspectives: it is not meant to be viewed once and “consumed” as a product. Here is one source of the film's resemblance to the mode of early cinema, its “primitive” quality.

²³ Thomas Elsaesser, “Social Mobility and the Fantastic”, p. 28.



Baldwin meets Scapinelli: Note Lyduschka's separate voyeuristic storyline.

This complex scene introduces us to several forms of visual conflict at issue, which are developed in the course of the film and are related to its central story of the doppelgänger. These include the visual uncertainties of “baroque” *mise en scène*; the bifurcations of the visual field into near and far, left and right; and the double modes of voyeurism and exhibition. In this context, Baldwin’s problem, the film’s central conflict, is introduced in the reflexive terms of a problem of vision, regarding his interaction with a spectacle, a disorder in which the spectator also participates with a doubled vision. Baldwin in a sense hates “cinema”: the modern arsenal of spectacle is powerless to attract his look and, as we find out, he also dislikes being looked at, antagonistically fencing with his mirror image – a voyeur.

Bifurcated Vision

As Leon Hunt has shown, the film’s spaces are constructed through a set of polarities that become crucial in the viewer’s reading of the narrative, as spatial articulations of the self/mirror-image and the rich/poor dichotomies. Specifically,

The division of the frame and the distinction between foreground and background of an image composed in depth becomes the basis of a textual system of repeated and alternated spatial articulations... The film’s ‘meaning’ is determined by this complex organisation of space. As a result, the film is ‘about’ Baldwin and his mirror-image occupying the left or the right hand of the frame; it is ‘about’ movements from the background (far-space) to the foreground (near-space) and back; and finally, it is ‘about’ Baldwin’s room being framed either frontally or diagonally.²⁴

²⁴ Leon Hunt, “*The Student of Prague: Division and Codification of Space*”, p. 390.

The bifurcation of the visual field is established through a number of strategies. Deep staging, for example, allows a distinction to be made between front and back, or near and far. In the scene of departure for the hunt, for example, we see the movement of the people going to the hunt in the far distance, among the birch trees. Here again, parallel action is set up within a single shot and not through continuity editing. In the foreground, the servants are attending to their duties, while in the distance their masters are going to the hunt: thus the split visual field corresponds to a class difference. As before, the spectator's look is doubled by the two (really multiple) areas that require attention. These multiple divisions, with repetitions and variations, are featured in most scenes. Scapinelli's unseen entrance into Baldwin's room from the background, for example, is an inverted repetition of how Baldwin is framed in the first scene, his position as voyeur recalling that of Lyduschka. Baldwin's room is divided into a left and right side, his space and the mirror's. His image is not reflected, hinting at what is to come.



Baldwin's divided room and Scapinelli's voyeurism.

The screen is often split down the middle, with two simultaneous narrative developments on each side whose interaction provides the film's narrative "meaning". Spatial divisions serve as signposts to the intentions and psychology of characters, acting as a cinematic language in the absence of words. When Baldwin first visits the Countess, for example, he speaks to the Count on the right side of the screen, while the Countess is wooed by her cousin (whose flowers are much larger than Baldwin's) on the left. The screen is divided down the middle between the two

parties by a doorframe, and, less noticeably, between foreground and background (the forest), which people may emerge from or recede into.



The (horizontally) bifurcated visual field.

Not least, these bifurcations solicit a way of looking at the cinematic image on the part of the viewer that paves the way for, and even foreshadows, the introduction of the doppelgänger and the possibility of its uncanny effects. In a way, they train the spectator to look at detail, repetition, and change. Thus, when for the first time in the film, Baldwin crosses his room and his mirror image is reflected in the mirror in the *other half* of the room, walking in an opposite direction, we are already cued in to the significance of the two motions, and in a mode of visual engagement whose uncertainties contain the threat of the uncanny.



Baldwin and his mirror image walk away from each other; the divided screen.

It is on the basis of this visual preparation that the later appearance of the doppelgänger on the divided screen is effectively uncanny: The uncanny arises precisely with the violation of the film's codes and binary oppositions. In the established field of "double" visions, moments of shock occur when – through a form of shock-cut sometimes – the two sides of the screen acknowledge each other, specifically, when the voyeur's look is acknowledged, in the in-between area of two fields of vision. Part of the image that at first is unseen by the protagonist(s), i.e., that is repressed (and this is where the voyeur resides) comes to be seen in all its horror. Baldwin's double appears as a transgression of the visual regime of the film and its split fields of vision. The construction has a decidedly reflexive significance, not least recalling how bifurcation is itself required by the film trick of the divided screen used to represent the double. The technical necessity that allows the collision of the two shots, filmed at different moments, in a single space and time is made uncanny.



At the cemetery.

Visual Hesitation and “Unaccustomed Perceptual Wealth”

The hunting lodge interior, the milieu of the film’s aristocrats, confirms the first scene’s visual chaos and its surfeit of visual clues to be deciphered. Here again, the eye is momentarily puzzled by the profusion of visual stimuli. The ornamentation of its décor signifies the wealth of owners – to be contrasted with the sparse furnishings of Baldwin’s humble lodgings. The scene shows a profusion of kitsch knick-knacks and furniture against the background of a detailed mural of a forest scene. This mural opens onto a deep forest of bespeckled birches, whose equally complex, flat, framed image replicates and blends in with the forest mural around it. The doorframe that marks off the forest from the mural is itself like a picture frame, marking the boundary of a picture within the picture. The door is flanked on either side by riders facing it, as if moving toward the framed forest.



Cluttered *mise-en-scène*: the riders to hounds can be seen in the deep staging of shot 2 of this group.

These painterly effects and profusion of detail make it particularly difficult both to gauge the depths involved in the image and to analyze the image surface itself horizontally. The scene’s visual excess and flat, planar qualities, in other words, create a “derangement of the conventional functioning of optical cues”, like in characteristic nineteenth-century stereoscopic images of interiors:

[T]he most intense experience of the stereoscopic image coincides with an object-filled space, with a material plenitude that bespeaks a nineteenth-century bourgeois horror of the void; and there are endless quantities of stereo cards showing interiors crammed with bric-à-brac, densely filled museum sculpture galleries, and congested city views... But the experience of space between these objects (planes) is not one

of gradual and predictable recession; rather, there is a vertiginous uncertainty about the distance separating forms.²⁵

The hunting lodge interior provokes just this kind of “vertiginous uncertainty”, both in terms of depths and horizontally. This uncertainty is partly resolved by the motion of the actors, who reveal the forest, the deep-staged background that the flatness of the image obfuscated, to be real. Their motion into the deep background, however, comes as a surprise. In the confused *mise en scène* they seem to recede into an unreal forest or to enter a painting. If the viewer at first categorises the scene as theatrical, its opening onto a “real” forest is unexpected. In short, the image – the very *theatrical* appearance of the scene, its planar, flat quality – fosters visual uncertainty: it is unclear to the eye what is real and what fake, what is a trick and what “true”. These ornamented scenes recall Christine Buci-Glucksmann's discussion of the Baroque as a “madness of vision”, subverting “the dominant visual order of scientific reason”. As Martin Jay notes, the Baroque represents

[T]he overloading of the visual apparatus with a surplus of images in a plurality of spatial planes. As a result, it dazzles and distorts rather than presents a clear and tranquil perspective on the truth of the external world. Seeking to represent the unrepresentable, and of necessity failing in this quest, baroque vision sublimely expresses the melancholy so characteristic of the period—that intertwining of death and desire trenchantly explored by Walter Benjamin.²⁶

The visual structure of the scene is especially significant as a subversive quotation of the *mise en scène* of the popular contemporaneous genre of “aristocratic” melodramas. In his 1916 speech, Wegener specifically dismissed as kitsch the standard high-society dramas so common in German (and other countries’) filmmaking of the first half of the 1910s, with “the film apartments with upholstered furniture and expensive bouquets, these lordly rooms with thick tapestries, these doormen, which pass for elegance”.²⁷ All these elements appear in the lordly scenes

²⁵ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992, p. 125.

²⁶ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1993, p. 48.

²⁷ Kristin Thompson, “Im Anfang war: Some Links between German Fantasy Films of the Teens and the Twenties”, in *Before Caligari: German Cinema 1895–1920*, p. 138. Paul Wegener, “Die künstlerischen Möglichkeiten des Films” (1916), in *Paul Wegener und Seine Rollen: Ein Buch von ihm und über ihn*, ed. Kai Möller, Reinbek, Rowohlt, 1954, p. 109–110.

of *The Student of Prague*. But what is specifically *cinematic* in the quotation is the means whereby their standard codes – geared to a ready “visibility”, linearity, and the effacement of the apparatus – are manipulated in order to pose a visual challenge to the spectator.

Ultimately, in this supremely artificial setting, a painting of a forest becomes the doorway to a “real” forest. But although in the diegetic context this forest is revealed to be real and walkable, it nevertheless represents – at the spectator’s remove – only the moving picture of a forest and the image of walking. The multiple layers of represented representation, of hunting images within hunting images, conspire to form “a strange mixture of the natural and artificial”: the effect is one of an ontological *mise-en-abyme* that foreshadows the uncanny visual effect of the *doppelgänger*.



Flight from the cinematic: Baldwin runs.

It is therefore only fitting that in the climactic sequence of the film, Baldwin runs through these same “real” woods, woods of unaccustomed perceptual wealth yet marked with an oneiric unreality. He flees his double: Complicit in the impossibility

of this escape is the fact that he is trapped in a representational *mise en abyme*, a hall of mirrors reflecting the natural world. The doppelgänger too is a figment of this medium of reproduction in which all images are equal, all as “real” as the diegesis. Where these layers of reality and fantasy have become permeable and trust in vision disrupted, a sense of the uncanny assaults the spectator.

Voyeurism and Exhibition

The film’s consistent depictions of voyeurism and exhibition, which are a major factor in the spectator’s interaction with the narrative, also foreground the metacinematic significance of its visual constructions. Forms of voyeurism are a central motivating force in the film’s dénouement itself. The duel, for example, is a consequence of Lyduschka giving the Baron information that she gleaned through spying. Peeping Tom figures – especially Lyduschka and the double – are a constant presence in the film in almost every scene, from the beginning to the chase sequence, where Baldwin’s vain flight is powerless to deliver him from the torment of seeing and being seen by his double.

Baldwin, as previously mentioned, is defined at the film’s beginning by his unwillingness to look, with the exception of the scene where he sneaks into the Countess’s room. His antagonism toward his double, foreshadowed when he fences with his mirror image, is an indication of this problem, showing his reluctance ultimately to see or be seen by himself. While refusing voyeurism, he is however constantly under surveillance. The release of his double from the mirror only replicates the surveillance of Lyduschka, both of whom are only stand-ins for the spectator’s look. The ultimate voyeur is his doppelgänger, from whose gaze he is unable to escape except in death.

These scenarios of voyeurism are based on the bifurcation of the visual field. In almost every shot that offers two (or more) distinct arenas to the spectator’s look, whether front and back or left and right, these arenas belong to different viewing parties. Often, one party may be unaware of being under the observation of another, whose look may or may not be eventually exposed.



Lyduschka's unceasing voyeurism.

Lyduschka, whose incessant voyeurism is neither seen nor punished, is Baldwin's other shadow or doppelgänger, as well as that of the Countess. Incessantly watching and following him, in a couple of cases she is framed as literally hovering over his shoulder, like a whispering devil or angel, his past or his conscience. Her function as Baldwin's double is echoed by their repetitions of each other's actions: While Lyduschka scales a sheer wall to continue her observation of him, Baldwin scales a wall (using a ladder) to get to the countess, then enters her room exactly as the gypsy had done before. When the double appears to watch him in her place, she disappears from the scene (e.g., the sequence by the columns). At times, Lyduschka and the double seem interchangeable, colluding to bring about Baldwin's ruin. The

key difference between the two, however, is that Lyduschka is a purportedly “real” voyeur, while the double is fantastic and uncanny.



Baldwin's double-voyeurs; note 180° line bifurcating the visual field, a structural reflection of the function of the doubles.

The double's voyeurism contrasts markedly with the original Baldwin's refusal to look. The double thus does not simply appear as the return of his repressed poorer self or the “past”, haunting him in his social climb, but also as marking the division between himself as one who scorns to look and a repressed *voyeur* second self. If the double compensates for or embodies a lack in his host, that also involves this difference in position as spectator. Not just the uncanny visual crisis of seeing his double (both I and not-I), Baldwin's identity crisis is grounded in two antithetical ways of seeing (not-looking and looking).



Baldwin looks: Watching the Countess.

Expressed in terms of vision, Baldwin's doubling has a metacinematic aspect, relating to the viewing experience of the spectator, who is likewise doubled through identification with both Baldwin and the film's voyeurs. Importantly, the film does not rely on any point-of-view shots that would *invisibly* foster viewer identification with the characters' perspectives. [A "classical" spatial construction would cross-cut the viewer-camera point of view and that of the diegetic voyeurs.] Instead, when Lyduschka is spying on Baldwin, both in the beginning of the film and by the columns, she faces and looks toward the spectator, reflecting his/her look as in a mirror, and as if to acknowledge a collusion in voyeurism. In the scene of the card game the double also turns to look at the viewer, while Baldwin, facing him, remains limited to the visual space of the narrative. While the voyeur's point of view is never literally represented, the viewer's nevertheless colludes with and doubles it, sometimes as its mirror image. In the few scenes where the voyeur's look is absent, the viewer's takes its place.

Like other aspects of the film that seem to recall the modes and material of early cinema, such as its frontality or Lumière-like realism, these depictions of voyeurism hearken back to early cinema's archetypal genre of voyeurism films of "The Bride Retires" or "through-the-keyhole" variety. As Noël Burch has noted, "the film of voyeurism in the strongest sense" was among the first archetypal forms of narrative in cinema, where "a woman undresses under the gaze of a man (normally

concealed from the woman, if only by a convention of the ‘Bride Retires’ kind).²⁸ Contrasting the voyeuristic scenarios of *The Student of Prague* with the spectator’s voyeurism in classical narrative cinema is revealing. In the latter, what is indispensable is “the spectator’s *invulnerability*: the actors spied on must never return the spectator’s look, must never seem aware of the spectator’s presence *in this auditorium*, their looks must never pin the spectator down to that particular seat”.²⁹ In *The Student of Prague*, like in the early cinema “bride retires” genre, the spectator is explicitly acknowledged in his activity of looking by the diegetic voyeur’s complicit return of his look. This returned look, the frontality of the staging, and lack of point-of-view shots – and even the redundantly ceaseless vigilance depicted in the narrative – recall Tom Gunning’s description of early cinema as an exhibitionist “cinema of attractions”. However, the self-avowed stagings of voyeurism confront the spectator within an illusionist narrative structure. Precisely because of this dual mode, the film’s quotations of familiar scenarios come to have an uncanny effect.

Similarly, Thomas Elsaesser has observed that the comedy-musical genre is a subtext of *The Student of Prague*. These films, “set in the carefree milieu of wining and dining, wenching and duelling students”, were popular in German commercial cinema from its beginnings: “A film like *The Student of Prague* sets up expectations of this kind, but does not fulfil them”.³⁰ Specifically, it does not fulfil them by introducing the uncanny (and self-referential) into the familiar scene, bisected for example by the arrival of Scapinelli’s coach. With such deliberate generic concatenations as the film presents, if only to subvert them in the construction of the uncanny, it is easy to see how it has offered a challenge to attempts at situating it within a rigid timeline of film history, not least in the split between “primitive” cinema and after.

Finally, in its ultimate quotation from a familiar genre, the climactic sequence of the film fittingly returns to the first narrative form: the chase. Taking up its rules, the film transforms them into metacinematic parody: the impossible sight of a man

²⁸ Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, trans. Ben Brewster, Berkeley, Calif., University of California Press, 1990, p. 213. The through-the-keyhole genre, for Burch, is a further step toward the identification of spectator and camera.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

³⁰ Thomas Elsaesser, “Social Mobility and the Fantastic”, p. 26.

fleeing from himself. Baldwin, exhibiting an unwarranted faith in the “realistic” rules of space and time, and of classical narrative, keeps fleeing from and trying to lose his double, who is always ahead of him. The rules, it turns out, are a matter of indifference to the uncanny double and to cinema itself.

The examples detailed above show how *The Student of Prague* consistently takes up familiar “bourgeois” visual cues – from theatre, painting, literature, and cinema alike – to subvert their norms and viewer expectations with the introduction of a moment of uncertainty about what is being seen. This uncertainty engenders a visceral sense of the uncanny for the viewer, corresponding to the narrative’s depiction of Baldwin’s visual crisis of seeing the double. Thus the film, rather than straddling some divide between primitive cinema and classical narrative, makes sophisticated use of a variety of cinematic codes and the expectations they create for a successful representation of its uncanny subject. But significantly, this cinematic construction of visual uncertainty doubles as metacinematic commentary on the new language of cinema.



Baldwin’s futile flight from himself.

Uncanny Cinema

As a closer look at *The Student of Prague*'s obfuscatory realism, violated spatial bifurcations, and obsessive depictions of spectatorship has shown, the film's doppelgänger narrative is also a narrative concerning the cinematic medium and its spectator. Where the cinematic codes on which *The Student of Prague* relies, and masterfully makes use of, become themselves the basis of narrative conflict, the question is not merely one of how cinematic signifiers articulate the themes of the double and social mobility, but of how the latter are used to articulate a certain conception of cinema and spectatorship. "Realist" elements that derive from the film's being shot on location, which recall the Lumières' films, as well as scenarios of voyeurism, subverted generic archetypes, and the geometrical arrangements of the film's spaces become elements of a kind of doppelgänger story about film.

This metafilmic "theme" concerns vision, specifically, an optical-ontological uncertainty that corresponds to that of the doppelgänger encounter. From the perspective of the spectator, the doppelgänger motif is the diegetic representation of an optical problem that the film (ideally) seeks to enact for the viewer's sight with uncanny spectatorial effects. The spectator thus participates in Baldwin's perceptual crisis, explicitly represented in several shots when, after the appearance of his doppelgänger, he rubs his eyes in disbelief.



Perceptual crises: Baldwin rubs his eyes after seeing the double.



Optical crisis as film trick: The insubstantial foe.

That the doppelgänger is a perfect instrument of this formal involution has to do with a structural resemblance: how the indistinguishability of the two selves mimics the foundational tensions of cinema. Not least it concerns the question of mechanical reproduction: the problem not of original and image, as is usually assumed in studies of the double, but of the equivalence of the image and its reproductions. If the film actor is both present and absent, his image mechanically reproduced and transported, then his double presence on screen as doppelgänger recalls this very fact. It is also a gesture to the real/magical “nature” of cinema when, at the story’s conclusion, Scapinelli – foreshadowing the final scene of Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* – disappears from the scene.

To return once more to Thomas Elsaesser’s question about the historical reality to which fantastic motifs answer and the connection between the omnipresent doubles in German Romanticism and cinema, it would be illuminating at this point to consider a number of features *The Student of Prague* shares with E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *A New Year’s Eve Adventure*, arguably its major influence. In Hoffmann’s tale, the narrator and a man who has lost his mirror reflection are both suffering in the aftermath of their relations with two women (themselves doubles), Julia and Guiletta. These women’s vague familiarity and erotic power over the men is tied to their being doubles of ideal images of women in paintings: i.e., they exactly resemble women in paintings of Rembrandt, Mieris, or Brueghel. Simulacra of man-

made images (paintings that paradoxically play the part of Platonic Forms), their effect resides in their unreality and, one might say, re-representational nature. Fittingly, while looking into mirrors, the protagonists see them approaching from a distance.³¹

When the protagonist of the first-level nested narrative, the Travelling Enthusiast, meets Erasmus Spikher, who has lost his reflection to the diabolical Guiletta and (Scapinelli-like) Miracle Doctor Dapertutto, he describes him as

... engulfed in a cloak of peculiar brownish color, which bubbled and flapped around him as he bounced across the room toward us, so that in the dim light it looked as if a series of forms were dissolving and emerging from one another, as in Ensler's magic lantern show.³²

For Hoffmann too, the dim light and the transformations of forms, the sideshow space of the double's appearance, already solicit a comparison with the effects of the magic lantern. These media of optical illusion, whether mirrors or magic lanterns (or cinema), are the opaque intermediaries between the spectator and the visible world, the object of vision. They give rise to uncanny perceptual uncertainties that continue to act when the cause has been removed, as if they were involved in a structural change taking place in the consciousness and experience of their viewing subject – like the binoculars sold by Coppola to Nathanael in *The Sandman*.

Forms vaguely glimpsed in mirrors, multiply nested reproductions of selves and images, and even the uncertainty of the distinction between paintings and the real are elements of the uncanny optic shared by Hoffmann's story and *The Student of Prague*. These striking thematic resemblances point toward a set of particularly modern conditions: the proliferation of optical instruments and simulacra, the debased status of "natural" vision, the lack of reference of representation, and the inaccessibility of the "real". Once more, they evoke the turning point marked by Kantian thought:

³¹ Among the reflexive narrative effects of the story is that Hoffmann borrows Adalbert von Chamisso's famous doppelgänger character, Peter Schlemihl, the man who has lost his shadow. Thus his text too is a mirror of yet another representation.

³² E.T.A. Hoffmann, "A New Year's Eve Adventure", in *The Best Tales of Hoffmann*, ed. and intro. by E. F. Bleiler, New York, NY, Dover Publications, 1967, p.110.

Kant's "Copernican revolution"... is a definitive sign of a new organization and positioning of the subject. For Kant, continuing the use of optical figures, it is "a change in point of view," such that "our representations of things, as they are given, does not conform to these things as they are in themselves, but that these objects as appearances, conform to our mode of representation."³³

The fact that emerges as significant is that 1820s–1840s saw the "abstraction of optical experience from a stable referent", as a result of which "by 1840 the process of perception itself had become, in various ways, a primary object of vision".³⁴ The thematic intersection of *The Student of Prague* and Hoffmann's stories concerns precisely such a dissociation of representations, images formed in the mind or shown on a screen, from stable referents in "reality". The *doppelgänger* theme evokes this lack of referentiality, which instruments like cinema both compound and signify: a sense in which the phenomenal world becomes infinitely distant while its perception is stranded in a hall of mirrors of an individual subjectivity and prosthetic instruments.

With regard to the visual regimes of modernity and their supreme manifestation, cinema, it is important that "the *Doppelgänger* is more properly a figure of the displacement which inheres in the environments it disrupts".³⁵ On film, it points to what has been displaced from an environment that is composed of "realistic" images of the world and the human form: namely, referentiality. This absence, crucially, was "the ground on which new instrumental techniques [constructed] for an observer a new 'real' world".³⁶ In evoking the instabilities of realism, the double highlights the paradoxical fact that the realistic effects offered by modern instruments were founded on the abstraction of perception. What it exposes, in this case, is how realism coincides with the "real" world becoming (at least theoretically) inaccessible to human perception. The uncanny effects of the double coincide with forms of self-reference, and are inseparable from the paradigmatic ontological vertigo of cinema itself, precisely the kind of visceral discomfort that a naturalistic cinema would seek to elide or instrumentalise.

³³ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, pp. 69–70.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 113, 138.

³⁵ Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature*, Oxford and New York, Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 8–9.

³⁶ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 91.

CHAPTER IX

THE DOPPELGÄNGER ALLEGORY OF CINEMA



The writer in *Waxworks*.

The preceding discussions drew attention to a set of characteristics shared by the films of the double. One recurring feature is effects that create visual obscurity, ranging from unclear lighting and smoke in the *mise-en-scène*, to film tricks such as superposed images, to the structural uncertainties of multiply framed narratives. These effects contribute to ontological uncertainties of perception both within the narrative and for the spectator, and to distraction from a “natural” diegetic spacetime, e.g., with the intrusion of an alien temporality (as in the montage of eyes in *Metropolis*). They can even issue a direct threat to the viewer’s eye, as exemplified by the figure of Death wielding a scythe (*Metropolis*), or Jack the Ripper brandishing a knife as he moves toward the viewer (*Waxworks*).¹ Altogether, these elements

¹ Similarly, as Lotte Eisner noted of *Nosferatu*, “Murnau created an atmosphere of horror by a forward movement of the actors toward the camera”. (Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, trans. Roger Greaves, Berkeley, Calif., University of California Press, 1994, p. 102). In Fritz Lang’s *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler*, “the doctor’s head appears, at first small and remote on a black background, only to be suddenly projected forward, as if by some supernatural agency, filling the whole screen” (p. 104).

participate in the effective cinematic depiction of the uncanny. The close readings of films in the preceding chapters furthermore illuminated the ways in which the visual effects that accompany the double support metacinematic themes, while the figure of the double plays a key role in their allegories of cinema.

These films share a variety of visual and generic excesses, such as mixed quotations from different arts (e.g., theatre and painting) and from different genres or film styles (e.g., detective film and melodrama, early cinema and classical narrative). They quote with equal ease from early cinema and variety theatre, as from the nascent norms of classical narrative. They both foreshadow (in the case of the earlier films, such as *Der Student von Prag* or Franz Hofer's *Die schwarze Kugel* [1913]) and quote avant-garde and modernist film practices. From another perspective, while appropriating structures familiar from literature and classical narrative norms that seek to ground the viewer in a basic narrative continuity, they also characteristically use a variety of methods to defer, delay, or halt the progression of narrative.

Observing these films, it certainly holds true that in the cinema too, “*Doppelgänger* and their host texts are ... double-agents, in the duplicitous service of conflicting aesthetic systems”.² But for the film double, this is a more complicated phenomenon than for the literary version. On film the conflicting aesthetic systems involved encompass not only various generic conventions, such as realism and fantasy, but also the conventions of different art forms and media, such as theatre, painting, architecture, music, and so on. Drawing on heterogeneous cinematic effects and genres to create a *bric-à-brac* of visual effects, their directors display a keen awareness of the possibilities of cinema, while using the reflexive theme of the double as part of the project to define the specificity and position of the medium of cinema *vis-à-vis* the other arts.³

² Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 10.

³ See Brigitte Peucker, *Incorporating Images: Film and the Rival Arts*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1995. A promising approach for further study is reconsidering the double in the context of film's anxiety about its position vis-à-vis the other arts, taking a cue from Brigitte Peucker's study. Peucker's analysis, which focuses on the figuration of the body (and the film's body as a monstrous hybrid) concerns how the introduction of movement into the visual arts by film introduces the spectre of death/castration.

In a related vein, many of these films also contain scenes depicting a surfeit of visual stimuli or forms of ornamental excess, for which *Metropolis* may well be the extreme-case scenario. Thus for example, “excessive” Expressionist and early-cinematic imagery is combined with “primitive” camera techniques, such as the use of circular mattes, to illustrate what is essentially a detective story in *Caligari*. A basic effect of such seemingly gratuitously ornamental imagery and *mise en scène*, especially where these effects have limited narrative motivation, is a self-conscious aesthetic defamiliarization that stresses or draws attention to the visual characteristics of the film image as such. As a consequence too, the excessively detailed images in these films are not easily “consumed” or exhausted at a first viewing.

The recurring milieus of the carnival or Luna Park are a feature related to these excesses of visibility. Located or appearing on the margins of the naturalistic/bourgeois world of the everyday, these settings are often the backdrop of uncanny and/or fantastic phenomena. The carnival world appears in a large number of films of the double; in *Caligari* and *Waxworks* it is the primary site of the action. As mentioned previously, the fair has a set of characteristics that lend themselves to visual confusion and a suspension of perceptual (and by extension hegemonic) order. These include the ways in which movement from booth to booth has a random and episodic character, without beginning or end, and occurs in an irrational acentric space. But a number of other settings in these films resemble the fairground in their suspension of bourgeois visual order. For example, Prague’s Jewish Ghetto in *The Golem*, the Jewish Cemetery in *The Student of Prague*, and the catacombs in *Metropolis* play the same role, representing sites of suspended rationality in which the uncanny arises. The city of Prague in particular offers a recurrent haunt for the doppelgänger, signifying the “other” of German order on the margins of the German-speaking world. The theatre setting too, with its artificial lights and circulations of identity offers similar possibilities.⁴

The Baroque details of these settings and other elements of visual disorder in the films have the effect of compounding visual and ontological uncertainty, so that at times the viewer’s eye scarcely knows where to look, while the credibility of the

⁴A suggestive example is the use of the variety theatre setting in *Die Schwarze Kugel* (1913).

image is put in question and its mechanical nature foregrounded as an interruption of narrative. The ornamental, far from offering the meaningless beauty of empty aesthetic spectacle (in the midst of suffering, as Kracauer especially claims is the case in *Metropolis*), has instead a decidedly ambivalent effect: that of giving rise to an uncertain visual gratification with paradoxically dark and threatening undertones. Peucker, discussing Fritz Lang's *Destiny*, has pointed to such a tendency, which, I would argue, is not only a Langian gesture but a recurring feature of the *doppelgänger* theme:

Whether it is a patterned curtain, a wrought-iron gate, or a series of pillars behind which danger lurks, the visual surface at its most ornamental—where it is most obviously a lure for the eye—is particularly suspect and most vulnerable. This surface is less likely than any other to be able to contain the agent of death; indeed, it seems to be its special function to reveal this agent.⁵

The *doppelgänger* and its uncanny spectator effects require that what characters see become and remain questionable. The visible qualities of objects are revealed as “superficial”, as having the potential to deceive and hiding their monstrous “true nature” of untold terror. But what is shown onscreen partakes of this denigration of the diegetic visible and contains a threat to the spectator; the uncanny is not just a narrative but a structural effect. In other words, the world of “surfaces” that is revealed to vision by the camera eye is also exposed as a pleasurable phantasmagoria that obscures the true nature of things. [Cf. classical narrative cinema, where what the camera shows, above all in its role of omniscient narrator, is the incontrovertible, foundational true version of events, one exception being subjectivized point-of-view shots, such as a blurry shot of what a drunkard is seeing.] Taken together, these effects of Baroque generic and stylistic excess, forms of diegetic visual obscurity, and so forth, engender a visual regime that fosters an ontological uncertainty and an ambivalent characterization of vision and the visual, accompanying the affective presentation of the double theme and its metacinematic signification.

Beyond the scope of such sometimes egregious stylistic effects (e.g., the graphic Expressionism of *Caligari*), which contravene the unifying effects of

⁵ Brigitte Peucker, *Incorporating Images*, pp. 40–41.

narrative development, are other kinds of visual disorder that are no longer even decorative and instead distract the viewer from the narrative with an “obtuse meaning”. Examples include the multiplication of Jack the Ripper in *Waxworks* or the illegibility of particular detail elements, for example the strange hexagonal eyeglasses of the club doorman in *Metropolis* (see image below). These elements too contribute to perceptual confusion and/or distraction (from the diegesis) on the part of the spectator and reproduce the diegetic problematic based in vision. Such cinematic excess is not only intimately linked with the crises of perception in the diegetic world, but also to their possibilities for uncanny effects. Likewise, it is a necessary aspect of the themes of the double, insofar as the difficulty or bewilderment they pose for the spectator’s perception echoes the narrative optical crisis of the double.



The strange spectacles of the doorman (*Metropolis*).

Within the bounds of the naturalist tendencies of these narratives – in the sense that they could have been credible, classically cohesive stories, but for the fact that something is structurally not right – the double could be classed in the ranks of these visual excesses. Its uncanniness is as an excessive figure: it enters the narrative as a redundancy, as *too much* of the same realistic thing. It acts as a repetition of a figure beyond narrative requirements for its deployment, and thereby puts the naturalist-illusionist potential of the film in question. In this way it could be read as

an anthropomorphic representation of cinematic excess, as a reflexive symbol of this excess within the narrative. Its uncanny significations have a kind of a “third” or “obtuse meaning”,⁶ like other elements in film that cannot be accounted for in terms of narrative necessity and therefore have a potential counternarrative effect, where “Excess implies a gap or lag in motivation”.⁷

The Curious Spacetime of the Uncanny

Gustav Meyrink’s short story “Waxworks”, the film rights for which were bought by Paul Leni, begins with an interesting discussion of the uncanny that is unusual in describing the concept in spatial and temporal terms:⁸

“I suppose it’s probably the waxworks that have upset me,” Sebaldu went on, “I’m unspeakably nervous today. When I saw Melchior just now in the distance, and watched his figure getting bigger and bigger as he approached, I could feel some kind of perturbation, I don’t know how to say it, but it was something uncanny, as if the distance could swallow up everything, no matter what: bodies, sounds, thoughts, fancies, events. Or conversely, as if we could see them tiny at first, then slowly getting bigger, everything, even non-material things, which don’t have to move through space in the same way. – I don’t think I’m using the right words here, but you know what I mean? Everything seems to obey the same law!”

His friend nodded thoughtfully.

“Yes, and there are some thoughts and happenings that come creeping up, as if there were an ‘over there’, like a hill or something that they can hide behind; and then they jump out right in front of you when they’ve grown to giant size.”⁹

⁶ See Roland Barthes, “The Third Meaning”, *Image – Music – Text*, ed. by Stephen Heath, New York, Hill & Wang, 1981, pp. 52–68. “In other words, the third meaning structures the film *differently* without – at least in SME – subverting the story and for this reason, perhaps, it is at the level of the third meaning, and at that level alone, that the ‘filmic’ finally emerges. The filmic is that in the film which cannot be described, the representation which cannot be represented. The filmic begins only where language and metalanguage end” (p. 64).

⁷ Kristin Thompson, “The Concept of Cinematic Excess”, in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 134. Thompson argues that cinematic excess can arise in several ways: through the randomness of the specific form that an element takes, the length of time something is onscreen, a redundancy of narrative motivation, and the repetition of an element beyond the narrative’s requirements. These elements tend to alienate the viewer from the diegesis and baffle the critic who attempts to pinpoint their signification within a cohesive *thematic* reading of what the film “means”. Thompson relies on definitions of the concept by Stephen Heath and Roland Barthes.

⁸ The chapter on *The Golem* briefly considered how the visual effects and imagery of Meyrink’s novel replicated effects that cinema had made possible, such as fade-outs, close-ups, and so on. It is perhaps no coincidence that Meyrink’s conceptualization of the uncanny also has a “cinematic” quality.

⁹ Gustav Meyrink, “Waxworks”, in *The Opal and Other Stories*, Trans. Maurice Raraty. Sawtry, Cambs.: Dedalus/Ariadne, 1994, p. 135.

This somewhat murky description foreshadows Freud's attempt to define the uncanny a few years later (1919) as a "return of the repressed", the coming to light of something that should have remained hidden, signifying a threat to vision and castration anxiety. But it also expresses in evocative terms certain possibilities of the cinema: its capacity to overcome space and time through editing and montage; the ghostly, unreal approach of the flickering specter onscreen, getting bigger and bigger; the passive, immobile spectator's powerlessness before the approach; even the possibility of a sudden, threatening intersubjectivity.¹⁰ It especially captures the effect of Jack the Ripper's pursuit in *Waxworks*' irrational spaces: his floating toward the spectator caught in his path and his multiplication in the air.

What makes this an unusual and evocative description of the uncanny is its attribution of spatial and temporal dimensions to the concept, relating its vague unease to the violation of the "ordinary" and "natural" motions or positions of things, ideas, and so on – the cinematic counterpart of the latter being "naturalism" in classical narrative.¹¹ Interestingly too, it posits an immobile observer who feels threatened by the unusual approach and/or possible sudden deconcealment of something hidden. Instead of the observer's senses or agency, the unpredictable vagaries of space (distance) – of which time seems to be a function – determine his experience: the distance can "swallow up everything". With the immobility and passivity of the observer as a precondition, the unexpected agency of the things or objects themselves becomes the source of a sense of the uncanny. The viewing subject can be directly confronted by something that should not have been seen *in such a way*. Immobile, he is prey to an unexpected intersubjective experience, becoming the object of the gaze/approach of the things themselves.

Sebaldu's description of this uncanny experience also evokes a peculiarly cinematic spectatorial situation and the quite similar effects made possible by the

¹⁰ Perhaps this is even more the case after the "unchained camera" was invented by Karl Freund while shooting Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1924). At this point it was still the screen spectre who approached, and not the camera.

¹¹ In Meyrink's *Golem*, some people who have seen the Golem describe it as simply vanishing afterwards, while "On the other hand, you come across agitated people who maintain they saw it coming round a corner towards them. Although it was quite clearly walking towards them, it gradually grew smaller and smaller, like the figure of someone disappearing into the distance, until it finally disappeared" (trans. Mike Mitchell, Dedalus Books, 1995, p. 58).

movie camera and film editing, such as close-ups or slow-motion. While such effects are stock components of widely varied cinematic practices, from classical Hollywood films to avant-garde cinema, they specifically have the potential to create a sense of the uncanny when they appear as a violation of “natural” narrative spacetime. Signifying the “arrival of the instrument”, in such moments they expose the hidden conditions of illusionist cinematic practice (the cinematic counterpart of bourgeois naturalism): the production process and the mediation of the transmitted image. Uncanny temporal disjunctions, for example, have the potential to self-consciously draw attention to the structural constitution of a film.¹²

In the films we have discussed, a key feature of the construction of the uncanny is the treatment of narrative spacetime. Uncanny gestures often appear to interrupt or disturb the flow of natural narrative time, at times prolonging it so that the image seems to freeze within the moment. These effects illustrate the claim that, according to Paul Coates, “the modernist theme of temporality is linked to a perception of the uncanny, which establishes itself as time is abolished and one becomes trapped in the moment”.¹³ Within the confines of a progressing narrative, the unnatural(ist) appearance of space and time is itself uncanny. An example of such a sequence is Freder’s visual crisis in *Metropolis*, brought on by seeing the doppelgänger Maria in his father’s arms. In this scene and during his subsequent

¹² Instances of such effects can be found in a variety of genres of films with a doppelgänger theme. There are some especially evocative examples in Hitchcock’s films of the use of “cinematic possibilities” (in the midst of stock effects to which the viewer is habituated) to create a sense of the uncanny, often in conjunction with the doppelgänger. In *Strangers on a Train*, the woman (Mrs. Haines) about to be murdered at an amusement park looks back to one side, sees no-one and turns toward the camera: the murderer (Bruno) materializes out of nowhere on her other side. The sudden appearance of Bruno with this shock cut, defying the spectator’s “natural” temporal and spatial expectations, gives rise to an uncanny frisson. But at the same time it draws attention to the role of the apparatus in creating the response. In *Vertigo*, the uncanniness of the double (Madeleine Elster/Judy Barton) is conveyed through a problematic, unnatural representation of space and narrative temporality: not only in the theme of reincarnation but, for example, in the strange temporal and spatial attenuations and prolongations of shots, such as that of Scottie Ferguson embracing the double (ironically the same woman) while the camera revolves around them. Of course, the viewer is also affected by the protagonist’s spatio-temporal problem through the use of what is now called the “vertigo shot” and its unsettling visceral distress. But throughout, this visceral empathy with the protagonist is understood as such; the spectator knows that the protagonist is suffering from a psychological problem. By contrast, in these German films the problem is objectivised as part of the visual order.

¹³ Paul Coates, *The Gorgon's Gaze: German Cinema, Expressionism, and the Image of Horror*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 2.

hallucinations, the narrative spacetime is seriously disturbed, and, following the fate of Freder's sense of reality, the viewer's ontological orientation toward the film, or his notion of what is "actually" happening, becomes uncertain.

Uncanny moments in these films also coincide with a loss of motor activity for the viewing party (generally the protagonist). The motor activity of the film viewer, of course, is relinquished in advance, the requirement of film exhibition. Thus, for example, when Balduin comes across his double or attempts to flee him, Caligari glares into the camera or at Jane, or Jack the Ripper pursues the protagonists of *Waxworks*, the threatened characters appear to be deprived of corporal agency, like the spectator, and in many cases it is the threatening figure who approaches. In these moments, the visual disposition of what can be seen onscreen becomes all important; the viewer's attention is drawn to the visible details, and narrative time seems to grind to a halt.

These situations resonate with Gilles Deleuze's concept of the time-image, which is in fact very illuminating for characterizing the temporality of the cinematic uncanny. While the time-image is a term of Deleuze's analysis of Neo-Realism and its thematic of a "crystallization of time", it nonetheless pertains to the exactly parallel way in which the uncanny functions in these films as a problem of visual – including spatial and temporal – uncertainty. With the time-image, writes Deleuze,

[T]he distinction between subjective and objective ... also tends to lose its importance, to the extent that the optical situation or visual description replaces the motor action. We run in fact into a principle of indeterminability, of indiscernibility: we no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental, in the situation, not because they are confused, but because we do not have to know and there is no longer even a place from which to ask. It is as if the real and the imaginary were running after each other, as if each was being reflected in the other, around a point of indiscernibility.¹⁴

This is precisely the situation in the uncanny moments of these films, in particular in the doppelgänger encounter – the ultimate metaphor of the breakdown of the subjective-objective divide and of a principle of indiscernibility (between real and imaginary, self and other) that is founded in vision. The doppelgänger encounter

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson & Robert Galeta, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 7.

similarly privileges visual description over motor action and coincides with the near-collapse of the established temporality of the narrative. The preceding chapters have detailed at greater length how the optical situation or visual description are of great significance in such uncanny moments, not merely in the attention that is drawn to visible detail in tandem with the diminution of time (rather, its slowing down), but also where visual description becomes the basis of a problem of indiscernibility.¹⁵

But it is worth noting that this indiscernibility paradoxically emerges together with an excess of visibility. The viewer's attention is drawn to visibility and the visible, to the details of *mise-en-scène*, such as the Baroque excess of ornaments: such as of hunting lodge in *The Student of Prague*, the Ghetto in *The Golem*, the bridges and rooftops over which Cesare walks, or Haroun-al-Rashid's palace. At the same time, however, what is visible is profoundly suspect, ungrounded, and "unreal".

The Double as Metacinematic Theme

The films discussed in the preceding chapters reveal a host of self-conscious narrative and structural effects that justify reading the themes of the double as part of deliberately constructed allegories of cinema. As we previously noted, in the broadest sense this arises from how the uncanny is constructed as a problem of vision, and images are the language of cinematic representation. In other words, uncertainty regarding the true and the false, and effects of *mise en abyme* and embedded frames and perspectives, and the posing of questions of diegetic "truth",

¹⁵ Cf. Miriam Hansen on Benjamin and cinema: "Congealing of the temporal dialectic of experience into spatial categories is itself a sign of the times. With the optical unconscious Benjamin readmits dimensions of temporality and historicity into his vision of the cinema, against his own endorsement of it as the medium of presence and tracelessness. The material fissure between a consciously and an unconsciously permeated space opens upon a temporal gap for the viewer, a disjunction that may trigger recollection, and with it promises of reciprocity and intersubjectivity... With the temporal gap that opens up with the optical unconscious comes the 'surrender of spatial orientation to the gravity of the gaze, the memory image that seizes the beholder rather than vice versa.'" (Miriam Hansen, "Benjamin, Cinema, and Experience: The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology", *New German Critique*, No. 40, Winter 1987, pp. 217–219). Lukács attributes a "spatialization of time" to capitalist reification in *History and Class Consciousness*, published a year before the release of *Waxworks* in 1923: "The contemplative stance adopted towards a process mechanically conforming to fixed laws and enacted independently of man's consciousness and impervious to human intervention, i.e. a perfectly closed system, must likewise transform the basic categories of man's immediate attitude to the world: it reduces space and time to a common denominator and degrades time to the dimension of space."

are based in vision, the faculty through which the spectators' interaction with the film takes place. The uncanny effects whereby the identity crisis of the double translates into a perceptual and subjective crisis for the spectator are founded on and refer to the fundamental tensions of the medium of cinema itself, the source of the unease. To return to Christian Metz's well-known description of the double nature of film, in which he resorts to the rhetoric of the *doppelgänger* encounter, this is because

[The] cinema, 'more perceptual' than certain arts according to the list of its sensory registers, is also 'less perceptual' than others once the status of these perceptions is envisaged rather than their number or diversity; for its perceptions are in a sense 'false'. Or rather, the activity of perception which it involves is real (the cinema is not a phantasy), but the perceived is not really the object, it is its shade, its phantom, its double, its *replica* in a new kind of mirror. It will be said that literature, after all, is only itself made of replicas (written words, presenting absent objects). But at least it does not present them to us with all the really perceived detail that the screen does (giving more and taking as much, i.e. taking more). The unique position of the cinema lies in this dual character of its signifier: unaccustomed perceptual wealth, but at the same time stamped with unreality to an unusual degree, and from the very outset. More than the other arts, or in a more unique way, the cinema involves us in the imaginary: it drums up all perception, but to switch it over immediately into its own absence, which is nonetheless the only signifier present.¹⁶

Particularly appropriate to cinema then is the fact that "If ...*das Unheimliche* has a privileged relation to literary 'fiction,' it is surely not to the mere contents represented 'in' or 'by' texts, but to their 'formal,' textual structure itself".¹⁷

A variety of visual effects, as discussed above, contribute sustaining an uncanny optical regime, a "principle of indiscernibility". In this context, other reflexive effects, such as explicit representations of vision, the symbol of the eye, optical instruments, and scenarios of spectatorship and film projection, become especially meaningful. These effects support a metacinematic allegory centered on the figure of the double, exposing cinema as an ambivalent medium composed of doubtful images.

Other than the double, characters with metacinematic significance are found in all these films, which consistently showcase dealers in "cinema": surrogate

¹⁶ Christian Metz, "Identification, Mirror", in *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Ben Brewster et al., Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982, pp. 44–45.

¹⁷ Samuel Weber, "The Sideshow, Or: Remarks on a Canny Moment", *MLN*, Vol. 88, No. 6, Dec. 1973, p. 1115.

director figures, scientists, magicians, and inventors who put on cinematic spectacles. Such characters as Scapinelli, Caligari, the waxworks proprietor, Rabbi Loew, and Rotwang recall the scientist-inventors of the cinema: Marey, Muybridge, Demeny, and Méliès, and Oskar Messter. Their characterization and roles as often-diabolical media technologists are highlighted by their putting on shows and unleashing doubles. But as we have seen, they also refer to well-known, charlatanical Romantic literary predecessors and to their historical counterparts, who played a direct role in the development of the building blocks of cinema. The genre of the phantasmagoria and its showmen are one source of the connection between prototypes of such characters in Romantic literature and innovators of the “motion picture”. The return to Romantic motifs in the new medium of cinema is thus explicitly related to self-conscious and reflexive themes.

Scenarios of spectatorship are repeatedly performed: voyeurism and surveillance, exhibitions by showmen, audiences viewing films within films. These gestures draw attention to the constructed character of the cinematic experience, serving a narrative function while also acting to distance the viewer from the film as narrative. More abstractly in this category – as the case of *Caligari* shows – are the *mises en abyme* of frames, stages, doorways, and other indicators of the uncertain status of what is seen, indications that the visible film is a perspectival composite of images.

In addition, all these films showcase uncanny moments involving the look into the camera by the diegetic figure of threat, experienced by the spectator as the threatening, exhibitionist return of his/her look. In this way too, danger is associated with the language and “nature” of cinema. The antagonist’s look into the camera, figured as a threat to the viewer (who becomes a voyeur “caught in the act”) relies on generic heterogeneity: the narrative subscribes to a cohesion, in the context of which gestures that “expose the instrument” become uncanny. Exploding out of the spacetime of the narrative, this uncanny look perhaps more than any other effect is a gesture signifying “the arrival of the instrument”, and especially noteworthy as a point of contrast with American cinema, the primary competition for the German

market, against which products of German art cinema sought definition. For the former,

The solitary and ubiquitous voyeurism of the Institution demanded as its indispensable complement the spectator's *invulnerability*: the actors spied on must never return the spectator's look, must never seem aware of the spectator's presence *in this auditorium*, their looks must never pin the spectator down to that particular seat.¹⁸

In these diegetic crises of vision, on the contrary, their narrative status quo and the viewer's subjectivity are threatened by being observed while looking: by an embodiment and corporalization of vision. In this context the viewed object becomes a viewing subject while his in-between status as film image, as both alive and dead, is exposed in uncanny indeterminacy; from another perspective, the spectator becomes visible to the source of the diegetic threat of death/dismemberment.

Often this scene is set at the festival or carnival atmosphere of the funfair. The alternative visual regime of this milieu has a reflexive and exhibitionist effect, as Christian Metz has discussed:

If there is an element of triumph in this kind of representation, it is because what it exhibits is not exactly the exhibited object but, via the object, the exhibition itself. The exhibited partner knows that he is being looked at, wants this to happen, and identifies with the voyeur whose object he is (but who also constitutes him as subject). This is a different economic regime, and a different tuning of desire: not that of the fiction film, but the one which classical theatre sometimes comes close to, when actor and spectator are in each other's presence, when the *playing* (of the actor and the audience) is also a distribution of roles (of 'character parts') in a game, an active complicity which works both ways, a ceremony which is always partly civic, involving more than the private individual: a festival.¹⁹

The suspension of order in the festival atmosphere (like Bakhtin's carnival, with its orgiastic excesses and violence) puts its spectator ill at ease. The cinematic language used to construct these scenes – an obvious illustration being the *Waxworks* Jack the Ripper sequence – contributes to a visual decentredness and a Baroque "physiognomic excess". It is, in any case, inappropriate to read such milieus as a glorification of irrationalism, chaos, and anarchy: far from being Utopian, they are dangerously unpredictable, and visually and even corporally threatening.

¹⁸ Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, trans. Ben Brewster, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990, p. 216.

¹⁹ Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, p. 94.

Although a common observation, it is important to note how the themes and effects common to these films support a visual regime markedly contrasting with a (hypothetical) narrative mode in which every element has motivation and the spectator is accorded the omniscient position of a transcendental subject before the world viewed. Instead, they play up the arbitrary and contingent nature of the visible, engendering optical unease that ranges from visual indecision to direct “modernist” threats to the eye. This cinema of the double is marked by frontality, indecipherability, and visual assault; not least, with the direct look at the spectator from the source of the diegetic threat. The uncanniness of the double motif – and of cinema itself – is tied to this confusion and threat posed to the spectator’s vision.

The problems of vision that are the source of conflict in these films – nowhere more so than in the appearance of the doppelgänger – reveal what the viewer sees to be composed of nested images within images. Here, only representations and simulacra are available to the observer, whether to the diegetic observer, whose acts of observation are relentlessly highlighted, or to the spectator in the theatre, whose process of watching is part of the film. The cinematic images presented are shown to be equivalent, interchangeable, and epistemologically discreditable simulacra. It becomes unclear at what level the spectator could situate himself in any ontological hierarchy vis-à-vis this inaccessible and absent referent. The real forest within the painted mural in *A Student of Prague* exemplifies this problem of the mediation, recession, and inaccessibility of the real; likewise the multiple framings and perspectives leading to the feeble resolution of *Caligari*.

The double is the focal point of this visual problem. Within the diegesis it concerns the presentation of an “original” (which is itself always already an image) and its copy (a secondary image) as indistinguishable to sight and ultimately inimical to a mimetic ontological hierarchy. In thus evoking the uncanny, the double concerns the ontological status of what is seen (which remains indeterminate) and the power of vision to establish knowledge and certitude, putting in question the reliability of vision as a means of access to the “real” and iconoclastically dismissing its perceptions as a *mise en abyme* of equivalent images. Where interchangeability of the “original” and its “copy” evokes a “principle of indiscernibility”, this

[C]onstitutes an objective illusion; it does not suppress the distinction between the two sides, but makes it unattributable, each side taking the other's role in a relation which we must describe as reciprocal presupposition, or reversibility. In fact, there is no virtual which does not become actual in relation to the actual, the latter becoming virtual through the same relation: it is a place and its obverse which are totally reversible. These are 'mutual images' as Bachelard puts it, where an exchange is carried out. The indiscernibility of the real and the imaginary, or of the present and the past, of the actual and the virtual, is definitely not produced in the head or the mind, it is the objective characteristic of certain existing images which are by nature double.²⁰

The doppelgänger-couplet has this characteristic indiscernibility, being "by nature double" like the symbol of the mirror. Signifying the dilemma of indistinguishability between original and copy for human vision (in terms of a divided self), the image of the double is a potentially evocative "dialectical image" or "hypericon", in the sense developed by W. J. T. Mitchell: as an image that offers a site for reflection on the nature of images and on the nature of man.²¹ In the case of these films, it is too a site for reflection on the ontological tensions of cinematic representation, to which it has a close affinity, self-consciously reflecting the dual character of cinema's signifier as both virtual and actual, imaginary and real, but also its constitution from heterogeneous and fragmentary elements.

While film is assembled from myriad segments and body parts, pieces and perspectives of the real, into the illusion of a "whole" with an illusory homogeneity (cf. "suture" in classical narrative) the double exposes the uncanniness of this alliance of parts. It is interesting to consider in this context how the uncanniness of Frankenstein's monster is similarly related to the visible signs on his body of "suture", such as stitches and bolts, remnants that expose the labour of the scientist-magician in constructing a mimetic replica of a living man (from dead body parts). Both film and the double are disturbing as *memento mori*: the double reveals cinema to be the depiction of moving ghosts of an absent "real" and the spectral and deathly

²⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, p. 69.

²¹ See W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 158. "Concrete instances of these dialectical images are a familiar feature of iconological discussion. They include the canonical examples (Plato's cave, Aristotle's wax tablet, Locke's dark room) that come up whenever the nature of images becomes linked with an account of the nature of man. And they have their analogues in the realm of graphic images: Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit, Foucault's *Las Meninas*, Lessing's Laocoön (the image, not the text), all serve, like the philosophers' images, as what I have called 'hypericons,' figures of figuration, pictures that reflect on the nature of images."

nature of the body on film – its kinship to a reflection severed from the “real” body and captured in the undying spaces of representation, a process that kills off the original.

In all these films, the figure of the double both refers to and is built from the uncanny nature of film itself. What it undermines with its threatening, fantastic duplication is mimesis understood as the production of perfect replicas of the real – which the visual recording technologies of the nineteenth century purport to offer. Likewise the double responds to the stylistic counterpart of such simulacra, i.e., to the ontological claims of realism. As Webber writes with regard to realism in fiction,

The *Doppelgänger* can be said paradoxically to subvert the aesthetic principle of figuration precisely by a virtuoso act of imitation—duplicating the ‘real’ by the unreal. The subjective spook at once threatens and underpins the objective claims of realism; it has something of the effect of a photographic negative. The realist project can be said to rely upon a repressible fantastic, a source of profound insecurity against which to gauge and assert its security; the two are dialectically interdependent.²²

What is the counterpart of this problematized realism in the case of cinematic texts, which are heterogeneously composed of disparate “cuts”, of images that are at once real and unreal and ontologically ambivalent? One way to consider this question is to imagine a spectrum of possible modes of representation, distinguished based on the degree of their “transparency of form”, i.e., the extent to which the constructed “reality” is free of indicators of its constructedness or, in other words, the extent to which the spectator is made aware of his position with regard to the narrative. Once again the illuminating point of comparison (one end of the spectrum) is classical realism, as discussed by critics such as Jean-Louis Baudry and Colin MacCabe, which most closely resembles the realism of nineteenth-century bourgeois novels. This mode aims at the effacement of the apparatus, relying on suture, the illusion of a transcendental subject and the disembodied eye, a voyeuristic visual pleasure, and so forth. What is “repressed” in the classical narrative mode is the role of the apparatus – camera, screen, projection – and the discursivity of the narration. Its crucial feature is the primacy of vision in establishing the truth of events, where what the objective

²² Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 9.

eye of the camera presents is the established “reality”. As Colin MacCabe has notably written,

Classical fictional cinema... has the crucial opposition between spoken discourses which may be mistaken and a visual discourse which guarantees truth – which reveals all. For this opposition to be set up, the spectator must be placed in a position from which the image is regarded as primary... One such practice, which I have called classical realism... involves the homogenization of different discourses by their relation to one dominant discourse—assured of its domination by the security and transparency of the image.²³

It is precisely on the grounds of the (expected) ontological primacy of vision and the cinematic image that the *doppelänger* has its visceral effect of shock, which is at the same time a subversive effect aimed at realism and naturalist-illusionist mimetic order. While acting within certain realist narrative norms (the cohesive narrative structures of these films), it reveals the purportedly objective vision offered by the camera to be subjective and perspectival, disallowing the possibility of an establishing “true image”. In this guise it does act as a return of the repressed, not least, the repressed knowledge of the discursivity of the film. This deconcealment of the apparatus coincides with a sense of the uncanny, a challenge to bodily and textual integrity that is at once an evocation of mortality.

Here it is important to note the sense in which realism, and more generally, credible simulacra of the living world, are associated with a retreat from or defense against temporality and death (the Real in the Lacanian sense). This association is particularly poignant in the nineteenth-century bourgeois worldview, with what Adorno and Horkheimer called the organization of mimesis, and the Frankensteinian dream of modern science and technologies of reproduction overcoming death. Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s archetypally bourgeois heroine in *Tomorrow’s Eve*, for example, “finds the phenomenon of death very shocking; it is an excess that she doesn’t quite understand; ‘not the way we do things nowadays.’ That’s about the sum of her religious ideas”.²⁴ The copy is motivated by this fear of death.²⁵

²³ Colin MacCabe, “Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure”, in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 182–83. Originally published in *Screen*, Autumn 1976, Vol. 17, no. 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Cf. Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*.

Cinema has a special position in this connection, because its iconic-indexical capacities as a medium (the addition of motion to photographic realism) offer an unparalleled possibility of mummifying the real, the very possibility that motivated innovators such as Demeny and Edison. The development of film's Institutional Mode, as Noël Burch has convincingly argued, was the culmination of the nineteenth-century drive to eliminate death, the bourgeois century's Frankensteinian dream, perhaps most egregiously represented by the ideology behind Edison's technological breakthroughs. Much like how film was conceived as a way of overcoming death, the double as identical copy is originally intended as a defense against death (e.g., *Frankenstein*) that paradoxically becomes its harbinger and evokes a threat to corporal integrity.²⁶ The doppelgänger is thus a meaningful metaphor for revealing the connection between cinema as a medium for recording copies of "reality" and a primitive fear of temporality and death, symbolizing the problematic ideological motivations behind the naturalist use of the medium of cinema and its hidden potential for disturbing effects. In this sense the double's threat to corporal integrity (castration in the psychoanalytic interpretation) can indeed be read as a return of the repressed – specifically as the return of what is repressed in the illusionist cinematic simulacrum of the real.²⁷ Not least, it draws attention to how the nineteenth century's new recording technologies similarly purported to offer a kind of immortality, but instead gave rise to a proliferation of spooky *memento mori* and ghosts of the living.

In its symbolic affinity with the medium as copy, the doppelgänger reveals the hidden uncanny aspect of film technology: not only its intimations of mortality but also the occluded process of production behind its moving images. The case of *Waxworks* (see Chapter VII) offers a vivid illustration of these effects, insofar as the threat that Jack the Ripper poses is inseparable from the power of cinema and its

²⁶ Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press, 1971.

²⁷ To think about this from another perspective, what is repressed by a proliferation of simulacra is what not only poses a threat to the body but is also inaccessible to naturalist mimetic representation: e.g., blindness, darkness, and death. If what is repressed by realism/naturalism is precisely what cannot be iconically replicated – what cannot be *imaged*, in other words – the return of this repressed is the appearance of something that *cannot quite be seen* (or rationalized) – i.e., an optical problem signaling the limitations of naturalism.

specific capabilities to unleash copies of an uncannily double nature. As part of an allegory of cinema, the killer's approach and onscreen multiplication deconceal the nature of the cinematic image, both as a phantasmagoric visual commodity and as a simulacrum produced by an apparatus. Finally, considering how the double as an artistic device reveals the nature and function of the cinematic apparatus – a self-referentiality that the directors of these films were keen to exploit – brings us back to the question of the historical significance of the figure and its related themes of vision and cinematic narration. For invoking the uncanny aspect of photographic realism and the naturalist norms of institutional cinema also addresses an ideological position that associates organized mimesis and the attainment of perfect images of reality with the rational mastery of the object of vision and the attempt to overcome death and nature. Here the doppelgänger becomes especially relevant to modernity and its forms of visual experience.

CHAPTER V

SPECTACLES OF DOCTOR CALIGARI



Then I took a book by Schopenhauer, which contained a portrait of him. This inspired us with an idea: here was the mask for our authority! And thus in our directions for the professor may be found: “Doctor Caligari is a heavysset man who wears tortoise-shell glasses, in the mask of Dr Schopenhauer.”¹

Hans Janowitz

[The] liberal charlatan masks and unveils in dream his terrifying face: the bourgeois doctor “causes death by fright.” That buffoon comes from our phantasms. His identity is ours. What those filmic and textual figures return to us in inverted form is the threat of the too close: bourgeois, student, hysteric, all demoniacs, all victims, figures of a reversing projection that cinema and psychoanalysis put to work with the same power.²

Catherine Clément

All seeing is essentially perspective, and so is all knowing.

Friedrich Nietzsche

¹ Hans Janowitz, “Caligari – the Story of a Famous Story (Excerpts)”, in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories*, ed. Mike Budd, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1990, p. 234.

² Catherine B. Clément, “Charlatans and Hysterics”, in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories*, ed. Mike Budd, p. 204.

In the weeks preceding the première of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, Berlin was bombarded with Decla's advertising campaign for the film, particularly with the bizarre slogan "Du mußt Caligari werden". A contemporary review of the film in *Der Kinematograph* records the phenomenon: "Berlin has another new catch-phrase, 'You must become Caligari.' For weeks this mysterious command shrieked out at one from every kiosk, jumped out from the pages of all daily papers".³ Almost thirty years later, looking back with a kindly realist's eye, Siegfried Kracauer finds this slogan "puzzling".⁴ Naturally, one is led to ask what "becoming Caligari" entails as an invitation to watch the film.



Original poster advertisement for *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*.

Such a publicity campaign may be considered as one of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*'s various self-referential strategies, through which, rather than seeking to involve the viewer in the continuous spacetime of a fictional narrative (i.e., in a predominantly passive, voyeuristic experience), the film directly addresses its spectator, soliciting attention and astonishment. Considering the film's sundry effects that foreground the

³ Review of the film published in *Der Kinematograph*, March 3, 1920. Quoted by Kristin Thompson, "Dr Caligari at the Folies-Bergère", in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories*, p. 138. For a considered discussion of the conception and execution of the film weighing the different accounts of the participants, as well as providing a comparison between the scenario and the film, see David Robinson, *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, London, BFI, 1997.

⁴Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1947, p. 71.

act of narration, its metaphors of optics and film exhibition, and various ontological indeterminacies, it has become a standard approach to read the film's doppelgänger figure as part of a modernist allegory of cinema, where the "film itself explores cinema as a medium for hypnotism, sleepwalking, and phantom shadows".⁵ In other words,

Es ist genau diese prinzipielle Ambiguität und Doppelbödigkeit, die den Film vor anderen auszeichnet und ihn zu einem Exempel der selbstreflexiven filmischen Moderne gemacht hat. Denn indem der Film offenläßt, was Halluzination und was Wirklichkeit ist, spiegelt er Eigenschaften eines Mediums, das beim Anschein größtmöglicher Naturnähe essentiell auf Illusion und Sinnestäuschung beruht. Caligaris Zuschauer sitzen in seinem Zelt wie die Zuschauer im Kinosaal. Das Cabinet ist nichts anderes als das Kino selbst.⁶

In part, the film's self-conscious effects arise from an admixture of disparate and irreconcilable stylistic and narrative characteristics. On the one hand, the narrative is a traditional detective story with romantic and sentimental interest for the viewer; on the other, the anti-naturalist Expressionist graphic design and "primitive" effects contradict the possibility of a classical illusionist engagement with the narrative. And, in conscious rejection of what had by then become established norms of editing, the cutting up of individual shots to construct a haptic space is studiously avoided in the film. According to Mike Budd, "Articulating both norm and deviation, realism and modernism within itself, *Caligari* stages a dialectical struggle of these modes within its moments of production and consumption..."⁷ Thus, "*Caligari*'s unconventional aspects—mostly the Expressionist settings, the characters of Caligari and Cesare, and the plot reversal at the end—emerge from and are dependent on the largely conventional form of the film's classic realist narrative".⁸

While the film's themes of the double and aforementioned reflexive effects have received considerable critical attention, as enacting allegories of cinema, male identity crisis in the Weimar Republic, and female sexuality,⁹ what has been missing

⁵ Patrice Petro, "The Woman, the Monster, and *Caligari*", in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories*, p. 207.

⁶ Wolfgang Jacobsen, Anton Kaes, and Hans H. Prinzler, *Geschichte des Deutschen Films*, J. B. Metzler Verlag, 1993, pp. 47–48. See also Gerald Bär, *Das Motiv des Doppelgängers als Spaltungsphantasie in der Literatur und im deutschen Stummfilm*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2005, p. 575.

⁷ Mike Budd, "The Moments of *Caligari*", in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories*, p. 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹ E.g., Kracauer's original discussion of the film as a mirror of the German *Zeitgeist*; Elsaesser's essay on "Social Mobility and the Fantastic", and from the feminist perspective, Catherine Clément and

is a closer look at the significance of *Caligari* as doppelgänger from a broader historical perspective, i.e., in relation to Romantic literature, the history of cinema, and 19th century science. And, while the major works on the film's use of doppelgänger themes have addressed them from a psychological perspective, here the focus will be on how their historical signification relates to the medium of cinema and the structuring of the film. At the center of the discussion will be the unforgettable daemonic Doctor Caligari himself and his relationship to the film's reflexive metaphors of cinema and vision.

A suggestive starting point for this film-historical discussion of the film is to interrogate the relationship between the doctor's divided identity and the film's multiple, superimposed modes of representation. It is crucial to note, first of all, that in addition to its classical plot, the film deliberately evokes the "primitivism" of the milieu and mode of representation of early cinema. Noël Burch in fact has referred to *Caligari* as the first instance of a "revival" of the "Primitive Mode" in so-called avant-garde filmmaking:

Nor was it by accident that it was a film issued directly from the Expressionist movement which should have been the first to effect a deliberate, sweeping "return" to some of the major gestures of the Primitive Mode. Expressionism, after all, in its critique of all the manifestations of Naturalism, had for nearly two decades been keenly attentive to "primitive" art of all kinds; the sculptures of Africa and the folk woodcuts of Germany, as well as the creations of mental patients and children.¹⁰

In any case, the forms of spectatorship that are both solicited by – and depicted in – *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* resemble not only that of a fairground sideshow, *the milieu in which the framed action takes place*, but likewise that of early cinema: what Tom Gunning, borrowing Eisenstein's term, describes as a "cinema of attractions". *Caligari* recaptures the ways in which "Early films explicitly acknowledge their spectator, seeming to reach outwards and confront. Contemplative absorption is impossible here. The viewer's curiosity is aroused and fulfilled through a marked encounter, a direct stimulus, a succession of shocks".¹¹ Especially in its climactic

Patrice Petro's aforementioned articles.

¹⁰ Noël Burch, "Primitivism and the Avant-Gardes: A Dialectical Approach", in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 495. Burch perhaps overemphasizes the "primitive" aspect of early cinema, never describing just how it technically resembles the actual primitive influences on avant-garde art.

¹¹ Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator", reprinted in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Marshall Cohen and Leo Braudy, 5th ed., New York,

moments, the film effects an aesthetic of astonishment through a number of confrontational techniques whereby the cinematic apparatus itself comes to notice.

It is vital that in this context Dr Caligari's role as a fairground showman resembles that of the early film exhibitor, and his fairground milieu the chaotic proletarian sphere of early cinema. The correspondence points to a close relationship between the characterisation of Caligari and questions of film form and spectatorship at stake in the film (as have been extensively discussed), that is, the film's metaphors of vision and cinema. At this point, a closer look at Caligari's ancestry is called for, to illuminate not only the connection between his characterisation and the film's reflexive metaphors, but to ground what seems to be an iconic familiarity, evoking archetypal figures of German Romanticism, in an historical context.

Prototypes of Caligari: Romanticism and Nineteenth-Century Optical Entertainers

Caligari recalls a line of scientifically minded charlatans of late-18th and 19th century literature, characters made popular in German Romanticism, that had a resurgence in *fin-de-siècle* works of high culture and were subsequently appropriated by Expressionism and the early cinema: "Dr Caligari represents the return of such Hoffmannesque bogymen as the demonic showman Coppola, projected here onto the enlightened therapist".¹² Similar diabolical figures, including Professor Spalanzani in *The Sandman*, the charlatan magic-lantern showman in Schiller's *The Ghost-Seer*, Dr Frankenstein, and Dr Jekyll, characteristically provoke or experience crises of subjective identity (the *doppelgänger* theme) through their dark arts, which combine positive science with magic. Often, these characters rely on state-of-the-art scientific instrumentation with uncanny powers – technology that may also serve as media of entertainment, even as forms of art. For example, the uncanny binoculars through which Nathanael watches the automaton Olympia are not only a magical-scientific instrument, but also give access to a fascinating peep-show (as in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* [1954]) from which the spellbound, doomed viewer can scarce tear his eyes. The prototypical devil in Adelbert von Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl* (1814) who

Oxford University Press, p. 827.

¹² Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature*, Oxford and New York, Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 350.

unleashes the protagonist's doppelgänger by stealing his shadow foreshadows Caligari:

Besides, do you not see who I am? A poor devil, a sort of scholar and physician who gets but small thanks from his friends for his excellent arts and who has no finer amusement on earth than to carry on a few experiments.¹³

Caligari is also reminiscent of Doctor X— in Hoffmann's "Automata", a story with a number of significant similarities to the film, not least by virtue of its nested narratives. In the longest of these, two college friends, Ferdinand and Lewis, visit a famous automaton, the Talking Turk, who gives an alarming prophesy to Ferdinand concerning the woman he loves. The eerie automaton, as it turns out, was designed by the mysterious Doctor X—, a mountebank known for his mechanical and magical arts. The story stresses how the uncanny effects of such apparitions and automata rely on their contextualisation in the naturalistic world of everyday life. Much of the narrative concerns the sensory distress provoked by figures like the automaton, the sickening astonishment of looking upon something neither animate nor inanimate, human nor mechanical: the liminal condition that Cesare's mechanical motions approximate. A protagonist of Hoffmann's story remarks,

All figures of this sort, which can scarcely be said to counterfeit humanity as much as to travesty it—mere images of living death or inanimate life—are most distasteful to me. When I was a little boy, I ran away crying from a waxwork exhibition I was taken to, and even to this day I never can enter a place of that sort without a horrible, eerie, shuddery feeling.¹⁴

Doctor X—, like other sorcerer-scientists who motivate the appearance of the doppelgänger, reveals the grim dénouement of instrumental reason pushed too far, giving rise to the production of disquieting simulacra. Such prototypes of Caligari at once belong to the uncanny world of the fairground and to the sphere of the laboratory, grotesquely reconciling magic and positive science in works that critically engage the legacy of the Radical Enlightenment.

While studies of *Caligari* have highlighted the demonic Doctor's relationship with fictional doubles of Romanticism and after, they have failed to note his equally

¹³Adelbert von Chamisso, *The Wonderful Adventures of Peter Schlemihl*, trans. Theodore Bolton, New York, B. W. Heusch, 1923, p. 70.

¹⁴E. T. A. Hoffmann, "Automata", in *The Best Tales of Hoffmann*, ed. and intro. by E. F. Bleiler, New York, NY, Dover Publications, 1967, p. 81.

important relationship to the real-life scientific innovators and showmen of magical wonders – forebears and influences on the literary and cinematic characters alike. These figures of the joint history of technology and carnival showmanship specifically help illuminate the connection between Caligari's characterisation and the cinematic medium. Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz, the film's scriptwriters, conceived of Caligari as a murderous mixture of Cagliostro and Mesmer, at once itinerant showman, scientist and magician:

[He] has become Caligari, who in our story is a madman, whose character he has always studied, who was a fictitious character, invented by us, and who was supposed to have lived in the eighteenth century, in Northern Italy, and who travelled through the country as a showman, with a somnambulist, whom he hypnotized and ordered to kill...¹⁵

Caligari certainly evokes the itinerant showmen of the late-18th through the 19th centuries. In particular, like other magicians and fairground exhibitors of Wilhelmine and Weimar cinema, he resembles the showmen-scientists who directly participated in the history of optical technologies and in the early milieu of film. As showmen with multiple personalities, many of these innovators relied on mechanical and electric technologies, including recording devices and projection, to enact credible copies of man for their audience. Much of the entertainment value of their spectacles, whether by magic lantern or film, derived from the realistic, astonishing representation of human traits and/or human motion. Conjurers of visible doubles, they are the real counterparts of the fictional doppelgänger-makers.

Carl Mayer himself provides a marvellously Hoffmannesque example: At the age of 16, he worked during the day fixing barometers and advertising an optician on street corners of towns and villages.¹⁶ Thus Caligari recalls the spirits of Robertson the Magician, professor of physics and phantasmagoria innovator; Edison, the Wizard of Menlo Park; and Georges Méliès, director of the Théâtre Robert Houdin and of the first trick films. As hypnotist he is just as much a Méliès as he is a Cagliostro, while, as scientist he is no less a Charcot or Gustav Fechner. For *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, these associations are vitally important. Not least, Caligari's fairground realm, the central setting of the film, and Caligari's cabinet itself,

¹⁵Hans Janowitz, from "*Caligari—The Story of a Famous Story (Excerpts)*", p. 225.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 228.

reproduce the world of early cinema and the related milieu of late 19th-century magic theatre. In this forum “primitive” elements emerge (or are recorded) that in the narrative momentum of the film lend an opacity and indecision, casting doubt on the perspectives of narration and drawing attention to issues of spectatorship.



The curmudgeonly Schopenhauer.

Janowitz and Mayer’s characterisation of Caligari as “wearing the mask of Schopenhauer” with tortoiseshell glasses is also suggestive, considering the film’s perspectival narration and foregrounding of spectatorship. Schopenhauer is a crucial figure as regards the fate of vision in the 19th century; the curious uncertainty paradoxically intruding into the perception of phenomena at the same time as human vision came to be described and colonized by scientific study. His work, developing on the subjectivization of vision and the blurred distinction between external signs and internal sensations in Kantian thought, more explicitly embedded the perception of phenomena in physiology (i.e., in the empirical body of an observer) and was among the first conceptualisations the modern observer. As Jonathan Crary has written, “Once the phenomenal self is reduced to simply one empirical object among others, the autonomy and authenticity of its representations are also put in question... The subjective vision affirmed by Goethe and Schopenhauer that endowed the observer with a new perceptual autonomy also coincided with the making of the observer into a subject of new knowledge and new techniques of power”.¹⁷

Psychoanalysis and cinema, inaugurated in the same year, are founded on this subjectivizing of vision. Both as subject of study (Cesare) and as consumer of a world of images (Caligari’s spectacle, film), the modern observer is the focal point of *Caligari*’s diegesis, as well as its viewer. Doctor Caligari’s power is associated with his mastery of both psychoanalysis and cinema. As doctor, his study is the modern

¹⁷ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, pp. 77–79.

subject, his aim the rationalisation of human consciousness, or mapping the transcendent onto the empirical. But he himself is also a subject of study, ultimately the site of his own experiment. His project of disenchantment aims to make order out of the chaos of consciousness, to penetrate the mind, and, like classical narrative cinema, to restore a “fullness and homogeneity of ‘being’”¹⁸ to the fragmented subject. His efforts, however, result in his own doubling. As showman, he has the power to create spectacles, which he advertises and hapless spectators consume. These too turn out to be life-threatening.

Caligari’s characterization as a representation of Schopenhauer is especially relevant to the film’s narrative structures and formal effects: “The film plays with effects of *mise en abyme*, portraying a show-cabinet within the show-cabinet of the cinema, and producing its spectacle through multiple screens, curtains, and title”,¹⁹ resolutely perspectivizing its stagy scenes and the viewer’s perceptions. To complicate matters further, Caligari is envisioned not as Schopenhauer himself but as his effigy: i.e., as a representation of the theorist of the image. Even Schopenhauer thus falls prey to the film’s reflexivity, its *mise-en-abyme* of reflections that puts the status of the film itself as mimetic reproduction in question.

The addition of tortoiseshell glasses to the mask of Schopenhauer must be numbered among the film’s multiple frames, a diegetic manifestation of the quotation marks, so to speak, in which it puts its every image. A fixated attention is drawn to his glasses through close-ups or medium close-ups in which he is toying with them, putting them on, or in which they are simply weirdly askew. These spectacles, an integral prop of the film and Caligari’s characterization, are among the myriad optical instruments that repeatedly appear and are consistently foregrounded in doppelgänger stories and films. Diegetically a technological aid to his vision, Caligari’s spectacles also signify his desire to “see”, the scientist or scholar’s *curiositas* in unveiling the mysteries of nature and exposing the unknown to human vision. As lenses, however, they also reflexively refer to cinema, spectatorship, and Caligari’s role as a surrogate director.

¹⁸ Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus”, in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, & Leo Braudy, 4th ed., Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 305.

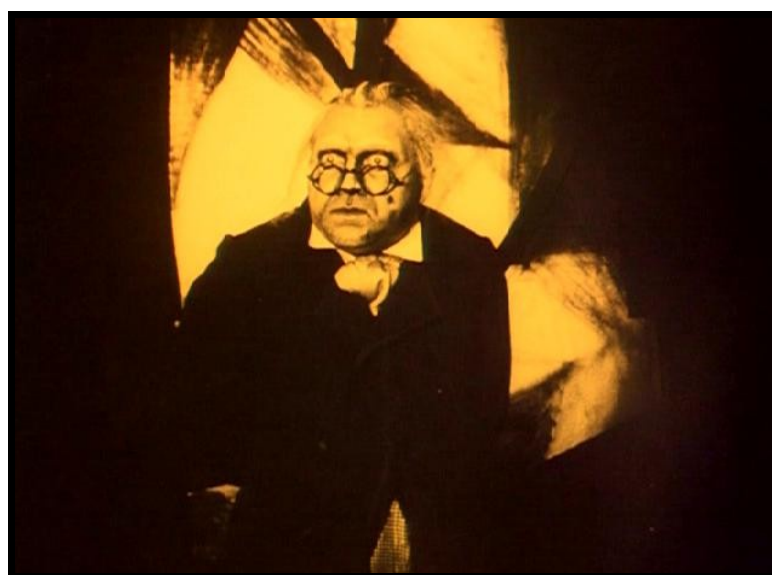
¹⁹ Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 351.



A *mise-en-abyme* of “frames”: Cinema itself, matte, window, glasses.

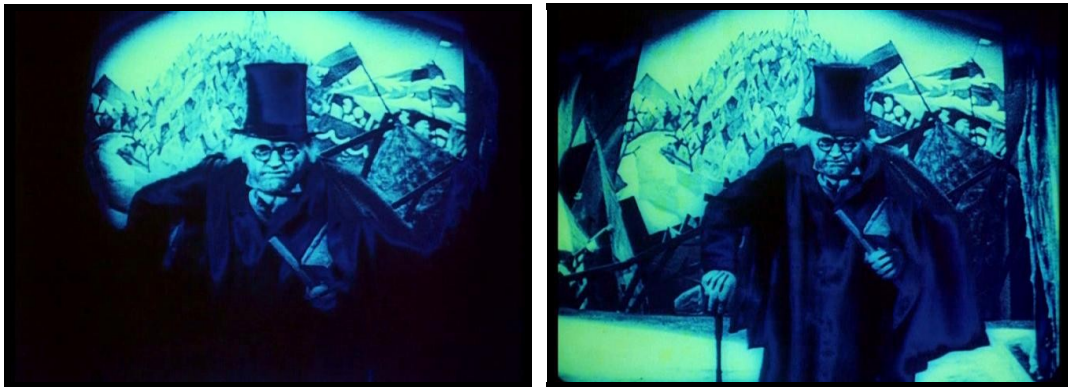
Caligari as Scientist and Showman

As hinted at by the discussion of his antecedents, Caligari’s characterisation as a scientist-showman doppelgänger is related to broader issues, not least the dialectic of positive science and myth, and the ontology of cinema as mimetic reproduction, but is also significant for the film’s heterogeneous modes of representation – its combination of deliberate “primitivism” with a classical narrative structure with spatial and temporal continuity. His roles in the two spheres of his authority, the fair and the institute, require further consideration in relation to the film’s mode of representation and reflexive effects.



Caligari accused.

The fairground setting offers a context for metafilmic references, for cinematic metaphors that foreground visual pleasure and spectatorship. Caligari is the showman of this “primitive” cinema, and the object of disproportionately many close-ups in which he answers the spectator’s look. The spectator’s introduction to this setting, when the fair is in session, begins with an iris-in from a small off-centre circle, showing an organ grinder “whose arm constantly rotates” – a gesture that recalls the cranking of a film camera – and his monkey. This limited view expands to reveal the fair and the circular motion of the carousels, signifying the inversion of naturalist/bourgeois norms and the chaotic character of the fairground. Kracauer characterises the fair scenes as representing “the chaos of instincts”: a worthy counterpoint of the institute. The Babelian heterogeneity of the fairground, “an enclave of anarchy in the sphere of entertainment”,²⁰ is an ideal haunt of the doppelgänger and a perfect metaphor for the cinema with its halls of mirrors and carnivalesque suspension of the order of things.



Doctor Caligari’s approach.

Caligari first appears in this fairground milieu. Uncannily, he looks directly into the camera, returning the voyeuristic glance of the audience. That he is enclosed in a circular frame (iris-in) that closes as he approaches progressively focuses attention on his disturbing glance. The use of a circular matte evokes early cinema’s genre of Peeping Tom narratives, indicating the point of view of a character looking at Caligari through the keyhole. This non-narrative and “cinematic” gesture, as others to come, acknowledges the spectator in his voyeurism in a spectacular way: the framing confronts and refers to this act of viewership, rather than according the

²⁰This and the following quotations are from Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, pp. 73–74.

viewer any pleasurable, fictive invisibility. Caligari's uncanny, disruptive look constitutes an exhibitionist mode of representation, and an active rather than passive spectatorship on the part of the viewer. From this introduction, Caligari as fairground showman is associated not only with the violation of "classical" norms, such as the interdiction on the look into the camera, but more broadly, with an uncanny distantiating and the exposure of the language of cinema.



Caligari's potential customers.

The "spectacle" (*Attraktion*) for which Caligari obtains a permit is introduced with the reflexive intertitle: "The Cabinet of Dr Caligari", a self-reference that is a fitting prelude to a film within the film. The shots of Caligari's tent play on a resemblance to the settings of early film exhibition, at the center of which "the key role of the exhibitor showman underscores the act of monstration that founds the cinema of attractions".²¹ The scene that follows reveals Caligari to be a consummate showman and the master of ceremonies of this cinema of attractions. His exhibition of Cesare's image, a poster, prefigures his display of the somnambulist himself, also an immobile image that he (and cinema) astonishingly bring to life.²²

As showman, the figure of Caligari is implicated in the film's reliance on a so-called primitive aesthetic of the spectacle. An early-cinematic exhibitionist (on film) and exhibitor (on stage), and surrogate director in the diegesis, he solicits the

²¹Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator", p. 826.

²² In fact, Caligari's show as a magical, cinematic bringing to life of the dead image (the poster of Cesare) has interesting echoes of Noël Burch's discussion of the ideological motivations of technical innovators of the early cinema such as Edison, and the Frankensteinian desire to overcome death. See "Charles Baudelaire versus Dr Frankenstein", in *Life to Those Shadows*, trans. Ben Brewster, Berkeley, Calif., University of California Press, 1990.

viewer's look with his astonishing spectacle. The *mise en scène* draws attention to Caligari's significance: his stage is framed within the outer frame of the screen, and his audience, the double of the "real" audience, are shown sitting and watching the spectacle.



Self-reference: Caligari's stage and audience.

This doubled frame, like a host of other strategies of the film, reflexively draws attention to the status of the image shown as a representation and echoes the film's narrative concern with perspectivism in its formal construction. Like accounts of early film exhibitors, Caligari begins his "screening" with the still image of the presentation that audience is about to see, which suddenly, to the foregrounded astonishment of the spectators, takes on life—here, movement. Peucker, for instance, has noted how "*Caligari* represents the earliest stages of the moving picture's release from the painted canvas".²³ The attraction of Caligari's show is the unforgettable spectacle of his "waking" Cesare, as if by magic. The theme of somnambulism is vital: in this context the "Cabinet of Dr Caligari" is a place where the coming to life of the seeming dead is performed and what is an image attains mobility (precisely how film is distinguished from other graphic arts). It reflexively alludes to the fact of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* being a film, a concatenation of static photographic

²³ Brigitte Peucker, *Incorporating Images: Film and the Rival Arts*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 22.

images – in particular, of a somnambulist – that magically attain movement through the wonder of modern technology.



Reverse shot: the astonished spectators of the magical spectacle.

As a psychiatrist, Caligari is also a surrogate director and motivator of the film's action. The crimes for which he instrumentalizes his creature Cesare are consequences of his pursuit of science as well as the diegetic motivation of the film (the detection plot). In fact, the very life and death of the characters are in his power. When Caligari returns to his scientist identity and to the institute, however, he is no longer on display and displaying, but has gone "behind the scenes". When Francis and the asylum staff search his office, the base of his scientific operations, he is not there; only a skeleton stands in the corner as a reminder of the professor's real job. Like the narrator in scientific writing, he is absent from his own discourse, except as reconstituted by his reader. He becomes invisible to the pursuing Francis and the film's audience, only appearing at yet another representational remove: in the imaginary visualisation, from the point of view of readers of his diary, of what he has written. As "director", the doctor is absent from the narrative he unfurls and even nameless; indeed, we never learn his name. In fact, Walter Benjamin's famous comparison of surgeon and magician in his discussion of cinema resonates with this precarious distinction between the two personae of Caligari:

The surgeon represents the polar opposite of the magician. The magician heals a sick person by the laying on of hands; the surgeon cuts into the patient's body. The magician maintains the natural distance between the patient and himself; though he reduces it very slightly by the laying on of hands, he greatly increases it by virtue of his authority. The surgeon does exactly the reverse; he greatly diminishes the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient's body, and increases it but little by the caution with which his hand moves among the organs. In short, in contrast to the magician – who is still hidden in the medical practitioner – the surgeon at the decisive moment abstains from facing the patient man to man; rather, it is through the operation that he penetrates into him.²⁴

More precisely, Caligari's duality as showman and psychiatrist is founded on the opposition of two distinct visual regimes in which the motivation, on his part, is being seen in the first place and seeing in the second. And if the showman's exhibition recalls the modes of early cinema, the invisible psychiatrist's alludes to classical structures of narrative. It is no coincidence that the explicit indications of acts of storytelling – the diary and the Francis's prologue and epilogue – occur in the asylum sphere. Along these lines, in her discussion of the film, Catherine Clément has drawn an analogy between the psychoanalytic project and classical cinema: "The cure puts violence on display and destroys the spectacular effects: like the domestic cinema, tames the magic of the look. No more fear, hardly any fascination in the look".²⁵ For a comparison between Caligari's scientist persona and the film's uneasy espousal of linear narrative norms, the plot of the criminal investigation is important. The investigator's project resembles the positive scientist's, the search for an aperspectival account of an objective truth or apodictic certainty. Francis as investigator is a double of the scientist Caligari.

A Cinematic Uncanny

Caligari's central story, a far cry from the themes of "Expressionism", is based on the linear narrative structure of the popular genre of detective films. The suspenseful dénouement of a criminal investigation, in other words, is meant to engage the viewer's interest with a generic format that is related to the earliest narrative genre of the chase film. Alongside this familiar set-up are the famous fashionable

²⁴ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, New York, Schocken Books, p. 233.

²⁵ Catherine B. Clément, "Charlatans and Hysterics", in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories*, p. 198.

Expressionist *mise en scène* and stylistic effects, in conjunction, however, with what would have seemed quite old-fashioned by the time: a return to elements characteristic of early cinema. These include frontal staging; the use of irises and vignettes; the absence of spatial continuity editing, by this time established as an institution; and the use of tableau scenes. With these effects, writes Noël Burch, “*Caligari* ... reveals a kind of *self-conscious return* to the major features of the primitive cinema (and especially the autarchy and fixity of the primitive tableau in preference to the ‘realism’ of modern editing)...”²⁶

Within the expectations engendered by the murder investigation narrative, the film’s Expressionist and early-cinematic elements have a defamiliarising effect, preventing the viewer from entering the space-time of the narrative or identifying with the camera’s perspective. They act as formal involutions, drawing attention to the discursivity of the film and to the experience of spectatorship. The repeated framing mattes or vignettes, for example, deliberately remind one of the fact of watching something seen through a lens. These features rely for effect on a dialectical relationship with the more classical narrative elements of the film. Even in individual images, Burch finds that

Caligari’s imagery plays constantly on a carefully sustained ambiguity... Thus, the same images seem to produce two historical types of spatial representation at once, two types which are as it were superimposed on one another... This same problematic of surface and depth has of course been at work in a number of important films made in the last few decades... But what is striking about *Caligari* is that through its dialectical inscription of a historical process—depth and flatness being resolved into an ‘average relief’—it provides an almost unexampled commentary on the constitution of the [Institutional Mode of Representation] as a pictorial system.²⁷

With the film’s heterogeneous mode of representation, *Caligari* corroborates Webber’s description of the doppelgänger as displacing “the conventions of genre, by gravitating between forms and styles in cases of what might be called generic doubling or, after Bakhtin, dialogism”, playing “a constitutive role in the structuring of its texts, by doubling them back upon themselves”.²⁸

The “primitive” elements, in the context of the film’s other effects, remarkably recapture an original astonishment at the marvellous invention of cinema, but with an

²⁶ Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, p. 183. Italics in the original.

²⁷ Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, pp. 183–84.

²⁸ Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 4.

added effect: they return as the uncanny. The heterogeneity of the film's style coincides with its evocation of the uncanny, through which the film's constructedness is made visible. The unforgettable scene in which Cesare comes to life at Caligari's bidding is notable. As a moment of crisis it reveals a dialectical connection between Caligari as the showman of a "primitive" mode of representation and the scientist embedded in the narrative.



The uncanny: Cesare awakens.

In the case of Cesare, the uncanny is related to a classical Hoffmannesque perceptual anxiety that is provoked by his indeterminate position between the animation of life and the immobility of death. He is doubled by the poster image and the doll that takes his place in his coffin-like bed. But the unease he inspires also derives from, and refers to, the uncanny character of recording technologies, the inherently ghostly and liminal character of the image of man on film, which Maxim Gorky first pointed out.²⁹ Cesare's perceptual indeterminacy fits into the play on perspectives and framings of the film, which leave no position of certitude for the viewer/investigator.

²⁹ "This mute, grey life finally begins to disturb and depress you. It seems as though it carries a warning, fraught with a vague but sinister meaning that makes your heart grow faint. You are forgetting where you are. Strange imaginings invade your mind and your consciousness begins to wane and grow dim". Maxim Gorky, a review of the Lumière programme at the Nizhni-Novgorod Fair, as printed in the *Nizhegorodski listok* newspaper, July 4, 1896, and signed 'I. M. Pacatus'. Translated by Leda Swan. Reprinted in Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, p. 408.

On the part of the spectator, a visceral sense of the uncanny is notably provoked by the shock of Cesare's return of the look and the unexpected intersubjectivity of the mutual act of looking. At the film's première, according to Janowitz, a woman in the audience screamed.³⁰ Here Cesare – an unreal image onscreen – is suddenly invested with an “aura”, in the sense developed by Walter Benjamin. Miriam Hansen's well-known discussion helps illuminate its effect:

Significantly – and, perhaps, at first sight paradoxically – the perception of the aura in natural objects rests upon “a projection of a social experience among human beings onto nature.” That experience, as Benjamin elaborates in his later essay on Baudelaire, is the anticipated reciprocity of the gaze: “The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in return. To experience the aura of a phenomenon means to invest it with the capability of returning the gaze...”³¹

A deliberate temporal gap is created with the opening of Cesare's eyes and the return of the look, a “surrender of spatial orientation to the gravity of the gaze, the memory image that seizes the beholder rather than vice versa”.³² This is a pronounced parallel to the distancing effects of the tableaux and other painterly gestures, which “are significant because in some sense they slow down the very automated forms of movement that were associated with the uncanny effect” and “express a hesitation concerning narrative development”.³³

At the same time Cesare is an anthropomorphic analogue of the mimetic technology that displays him. He is Caligari's film: “Cesare as ‘monster’ stands in, then, for the phantasmatic cinematic body, the body that critics and audiences of the period took to be soulless, one-dimensional, and lacking in presence, a frightening instance of nonorganic life”.³⁴ The uncanny quality he embodies is related both to the pursuit of positive science (Caligari's work) and characteristic of technologies of reproduction. His awakening recaptures what must have been the fascination of the earliest films. While the viewer's credulity or investment in the narrative is set aside, the attraction becomes the remarkable power of the film image as image, specifically, of the image's acquisition of motion:

³⁰ For a description of the première, see Hans Janowitz, “The Story of a Famous Story”.

³¹ Miriam Hansen, “Benjamin, Cinema, and Experience: The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology”, *New German Critique*, No. 40, Winter 1987, pp. 187–88.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 219.

³³ Brigitte Peucker, *Incorporating Images*, p. 27.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 26.

Rather than mistaking the image for reality, the spectator is astonished by its transformation through the new illusion of projected motion. Far from credulity, it is the incredible nature of the illusion itself that renders the viewer speechless. What is displayed before the audience is ... the force of the cinematic apparatus.³⁵

The uncanny spectacle of Cesare's face in close-up becoming animate, his eyes opening to look back, collapses the distinction between the diegetic and the "real" audiences. Both are transfixed by Caligari's show: the exhibition of Cesare's look. The scene confirms Caligari's role as surrogate director, while his use of a "primitive" mode of representation coincides with a reflexive gesture in the context of the film's storytelling. This astonishing exhibition, which is based on the participation of its audience, poses a threat to the spectator's vision and corporeal integrity: Participants can die, seemingly for no reason but the logic of the spectacle. The success of its uncanny effects has to do with its contravention of a viewing experience based on voyeuristic, invisible spectatorship and its promise of immortality.

Perspectivism and Film Technology

In *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, as Thomas Elsaesser has noted, "a visual form and a mode of narration have been found where several 'versions' or narrative perspectives (with shot set-up and editing echoing the sets' perspectival *mélange*) converge or superimpose themselves on the same fictional space".³⁶ Similarly, Mike Budd has pointed out how "In its representation of a seemingly subjective world, *Caligari* promotes a relativism over the objectivism of conventional realist films".³⁷ The film's multiplicity of perspectives, the almost-cubistic perspectivism of its narration, is not ultimately resolved into any version that the viewer can accept as the "true" account (in comparison with what an omniscient narrator-camera would offer), and does not give the spectator an easy answer to any of the plot-related questions it raises.

The major component of this uncertainty is the frame, which was substituted for the (insipid) prologue and epilogue Janowitz and Mayer originally had, in which

³⁵ Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator", p. 822.

³⁶ Thomas Elsaesser, "Social Mobility and the Fantastic", in *Fantasy and the Cinema*, ed. James Donald, London, BFI, 1989, p. 35.

³⁷ Mike Budd, "The Moments of *Caligari*", p. 104.

Francis recounts his experiences of 20+ years before to guests at his villa.³⁸ This frame has, following Kracauer and Janowitz, often been read as destroying the intent of the film³⁹ by revealing the story's so-called critique of authority as the ravings of a madman, seeking to restore "realism" (the liberal-humanist cure) to the topsy-turvy carnival world, and settling the spectator's uneasiness by giving the final meaning.

This argument was, and remains, quite tenuous. One crucial fact to keep in mind is the persistence of the *mise en scène*; the asylum in the frame has precisely the same Expressionist style as the central narrative, the pictorial language used to represent an interior psychological state. Thus, while the frame purports to negate the entire plot of the film one has just watched as a mad delusion, it does not offer a viable alternative that one may take as the contrapuntal "reality" to *Caligari's* "air of unreality".⁴⁰ Budd argues following these lines, that "Along with the continuation of the expressionist settings, this resemblance suggests less the confident reestablishment of sanity, order, and authority that Kracauer and Janowitz see, and hate, than the uncanny dream logic of repetition returning within the smooth, repressive surface of classical narrative action".⁴¹ Friedrich Kittler has insightfully described the problem in terms of the equivalence of the visible in the film and its reflexive thematisation of film technology:

It is precisely this indistinguishability between framed and framing story, between insanity and psychiatry, that does justice to film technology. Nothing prevents the asylum director in the narrative frame to act simultaneously as the mad Caligari... the identity between psychiatrist and murderer remains open-ended because it is offered to the eyes only and is not institutionalized by any word. A never-commented-upon similarity between faces renders all readings indistinguishable.⁴²

The film's uncanny is founded on such indeterminacy, a perspectivism of images that discredit themselves. In other words, vision is deprived of the power to familiarize or

³⁸ However, Janowitz (and by extension Kracauer), in a revisionist description of the film's production history attributed the addition of a frame to the production process (i.e., to Fritz Lang and Robert Wiene). The writers' scenario, published from Werner Krauss's copy, became publicly available only in 1995.

³⁹ Notably, by Kracauer, and Mayer and Janowitz.

⁴⁰ As Mike Budd has written, "For Kracauer and Janowitz, the film would be more radical in its implications if it were more conventional in its discourse". "The Moments of *Caligari*", p. 29.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁴² Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young & Michael Wutz, Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 147.

anchor the spectator. As such, the frame has no effect of putting things back to “normal”, as the structural basis itself for a cinematic “homely” is discredited.

The doppelgänger theme is vital for this perspectival indecidability. A medley of doublings, the “similarity between faces” that Kittler identifies, revolves around the asylum/film director Caligari, whose multiple personalities of showman, scientist, and magician drive the dénouement. Caligari, however, is also doubled by his “creature” Cesare, who enacts his master’s murderous inclinations; by Francis, who is linked with Caligari by mutual desire for the girl; and by Dr Olson, the other doctor of the film, who is dressed like Caligari in a coat and top hat.⁴³ While the film’s doublings in large part belong to the central story, the points of coincidence between the latter and the purported re-establishment of reality in the frame contribute to make the latter equally disturbing, for example with the repetition of a straitjacket scene.

The characterization of Caligari as double, as mentioned previously, is structurally implicated in the relationship between the narrative’s ontological crisis and the medium of cinema. His subjective divide, an uneasy coupling of the magician-showman and the doctor as “realist” authority, dialectically relates to the film’s crisis of form. Simultaneously involved in exhibitionism and voyeurism, strategies of “primitive” cinema and those of classical narrative, Caligari mediates between the aesthetics of astonishment and of suspense.



Caligari dons his glasses.

⁴³ See Thomas Elsaesser, “Social Mobility and the Fantastic”.

In an especially disturbing moment at the end of the film, we learn, with a chilling sense of recognition, how the benevolent doctor indeed “becomes Caligari”: by putting on his spectacles, in both senses. All the other doctors, incidentally, wear them too. Janowitz’s comments on the genesis of *Caligari* are illuminating, showing that the source of the professor’s madness and crime was above all conceived as the compulsion to gratify a scientific curiosity taken to an extreme:

Nevertheless, it was the nucleus of the tragedy of a psychiatrist who had lost his mind, the gripping story of a man whose *idée fixe* compelled him to “become Caligari” in order to learn whether murder through commanding a hypnotized medium was possible... Our professor had studied this story of that Doctor Caligari until he, himself, had actually gone mad, mad through studying this subject of murder by hypnosis; in his insanity he had the fixed *idea* that he must become Caligari and play that showman Caligari, whose case he had studied, over and over again.⁴⁴

The doctor “becomes Caligari” as a result of intellectual curiosity: Augustine’s *curiositas*, a “lust of the eyes”. Here, as for Augustine, this voyeuristic perversion results in a craving for theatrical spectacles and the pursuits of magic and science.⁴⁵



Double vision: Caligari’s madness.

⁴⁴ Hans Janowitz, “The Story of a Famous Story”, p. 238.

⁴⁵ See Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 10.

This understanding of how the doctor “becomes Caligari” could apply to the spectator too, insofar as the experience of watching the film as a co-investigator is equally “studying this subject of murder by hypnosis”. “You must become Caligari” thus translates into a command to see the film, couched in which is a threat of its inducing a kind of madness. This madness, we find, is that of perceptual uncertainty and the lack of any ultimate establishing perspective or perspectival hierarchy, a sense of unease that is grounded in the metacinematic effects of the double. In the words of Jean-Louis Baudry, here it is indeed the case that “...Disturbing cinematic elements—similar, precisely, to those elements indicating the return of the repressed—signify without fail the arrival of the instrument ‘in flesh and blood’... Both specular tranquillity and the assurance of one’s own identity collapse simultaneously with the revealing of the mechanism, that is, of the inscription of the film work”.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus”, p. 312.

CHAPTER VI

VISUAL APPREHENSIONS: *DER GOLEM* (1920)



I can imagine a kind of cinema which would use nothing but moving surfaces, against which there would impinge events that would still participate in the natural world but transcend the lines and volumes of the natural... The real creator of film must be the camera. Getting the spectator to change his point of view, using special effects to double the actor on the divided screen, superimposing other images – all this, technique, form, gives the content its real meaning...

With [the 1915 *Golem*] I went further into the domain of pure cinema. Everything depends on the image, on a certain vagueness of outline where the fantastic world of the past meets the world of today. I realized that photographic technique was going to determine the destiny of the cinema. Light and darkness in the cinema play the same role as rhythm and cadence in music.¹

Paul Wegener, 1916

The dramatically exciting moment in film is the image; everything, including the actor, must become images...²

Hans Richter, 1921

¹ Paul Wegener, "Die künstlerischen Möglichkeiten des Films" (1916), in *Paul Wegener und Seine Rollen: Ein Buch von ihm und über ihn*, ed. Kai Möller, Reinbek, Rowohlt Verlag, 1954, quoted in Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, pp. 33; 40.

²In *Das Kinojahrbuch*, Vol. 3, Berlin-Wilmersdorf, Hans Hermann Richter Verlag, 1921, pp. 47–48.

Paul Wegener, who famously brought the doppelgänger to the German screen with *The Student of Prague* (1913), was also among the first to proclaim the artistic – i.e., specifically cinematic – possibilities of film, and to envision abstract film. The appearance of the double in so many of his films testifies to his regarding the motif as an ideal vehicle for going “further into the domain of pure cinema”. An account of his second Golem film, *Der Golem und die Tänzerin*, a comedy shown in 1917 that is unfortunately lost, provides additional insight into Wegener’s understanding of the artistic use of the cinematic medium in relation to the double motif.

Der Golem und die Tänzerin, to judge by the accounts, was a strange parody of the 1915 *Golem* using clips from the original, at a time when humorous self-referential intertextuality must have been innovative: A man (played by Wegener) leaves the cinema after watching Wegener’s own 1915 *Der Golem*, starring Wegener and Lyda Salmonova. He then puts on a monster suit to frighten a dancer (Salmonova) in her apartment. The famous couple Wegener and Salmonova thus become the doubles of the principal characters they played in the first film (as the second film spells out) and also doubles of themselves as the *stars* of both films, as the *au courant* audience member would know.

Here the transformation of Wegener into the Golem – his doubling of an archetypal double – is instigated by Wegener watching himself as the Golem in his own film about the eponymous monster. Both the doppelgänger-maker (Wegener as director and showman) and the doubled protagonist (Wegener as actor, Golem, and film-goer) are Wegener himself. The double is thus bluntly an artifact of interaction with the cinematic medium: it is unleashed by the action of watching a film and by a process of identification with it, if not by starring in or making a film.

However one interprets this complex narrative, part of the visual pleasure of watching it, and its humour, no doubt derive from the shared knowledge – on the part of both the film-maker and the viewer – of the *discursivity* of both the film-within-the-film and *Der Golem und die Tänzerin* itself. Its illusionist effect as a narrative thus gives place to the ironic effects of tongue-in-cheek self-reference, shared by the knowing spectator, and exposure of the formal characteristics of cinema itself. Not least, the sophistication of these technically proficient manipulations of identity indicates how aware Wegener was of the complex possible significations of the

double motif on film. With this involuted scenario of a Golem film within a Golem film, doubles of doubles, and a plot parodying Wegener's own Golem film, *Der Golem und die Tänzerin* plays on the connection between the Golem as artificial life, the doppelgänger motif, and the film medium's mechanical reproduction of the human form as a form of doubling.

Wegener's several successful cinematic constructions of the Golem lead one to wonder why he found the clay automaton to be an especially suitable and meaningful subject for his filmmaking, in light of his understanding of the cinematic medium, or for film in general. What does the cinematic representation of the Golem signify? Regarding *Der Golem: Wie er in die Welt kam* (1920), there are several points to consider: what is specifically *cinematic* about the treatment of the Golem legend; how sources of the legend were modified for the film; and what these changes signify with regard to the change of medium. It is also especially interesting to consider how the Golem legend reflects or relates to the context in which the film was produced and exhibited.

Meyrink's *Golem*: Visual Mediation and the Doppelgänger Encounter

The legend of the Golem of Prague, an artificial man brought to life by Rabbi Loew in the 16th Century to protect the Jews of the Ghetto against persecution by Christians, was repopularised for mass German audiences in the early 20th Century by Gustav Meyrink's novel, *The Golem*, published in serial form in 1913–14 and as a best-selling book in 1915. The theme of the Golem had earlier been influential for German Romanticism, originally appearing in 1808 (Jacob Grimm), later to be taken up in a number of works, including Achim von Arnim's *Isabella von Aegypten* (1812), E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Secrets* (1821), and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The Golem thus belongs in the ranks of the myriad Romantic figures that resurfaced 100 years later in the Wilhelmine/Weimar era and in German silent film. In addition, the novel's miscellany of fantastic motifs with uncanny effects – antique texts that conceal secrets, wax dolls and puppets, menacing and demonic architecture, the motif of the eye and the demonic oculist – recall the obsessions of German Romanticism and prefigure those of German film.

While Meyrink's novel only tangentially evokes the legends surrounding Rabbi Loew that provide the subject matter of this third Golem film, the reflexive and cinematic effects of its doppelgänger narrative deserve mention with regard to the 1920 film. The novel involves a *mise en abyme* of doublings, especially with reflections of the central figure of the narrator by other characters. The Golem, whose hazy origins do follow the Rabbi Loew legend, is a free-floating Double: anyone who has the uncanny experience of crossing its path senses that the latter is somehow a part of himself that has assumed an independent form. Thus the Golem is a visible projection and embodiment of the viewer's problematic selfhood – problematic precisely in its heterogeneity – a manifestation of self-alienation as a moment of visual crisis. An uncanny and astonishing spectacle, it represents the breakdown of the viewer's identity between his empirical self or bodily presence and a separate, abstract, alien element of his being or "soul". A woman who sees it becomes "firmly convinced that it could only have been her own soul which had left her body for a moment and confronted her for a brief second with the features of an alien creature. In spite of the terrible dread with which she was seized, she said she was never in the slightest doubt that the other could only be a part of her inmost self".³

The Golem's appearance as projection/spectacle in which the viewer sees both himself and other resonates with the spectatorial dynamics of cinema.⁴ But more explicitly cinematic themes and effects play a pronounced role in the novel's depictions of the narrator's interiority. Indeed, the possibility that cinema may have provided the inspiration for such "visual" effects in the novel is evidenced by the fact that the original manuscript was subtitled "*Ein Guckkasten*". These effects include scene transitions with fade-ins and fade-outs and other random discursive "camera work", such as close-ups. This becomes apparent with the narrator's highly cinematic perception: "As if they had simply materialised before my eyes, two strange figures appeared out of the clouds of tobacco smoke" (p. 70). "A picture flashed through my mind's eye and immediately faded..." (p. 80). "[The] image of the stone that looked like a lump of fat grew in my mind to enormous dimensions..." (p. 23). These

³ Gustav Meyrink, *The Golem*, trans. Mike Mitchell, Sawtry, Cambs., Dedalus, 1995, p. 61.

⁴ Cf. seminal concerns of film theory, such as the mirror analogy and identification, the self-constitution of the viewing subject, Metz's imaginary signifier, etc.

cinematic descriptions contribute to the novel's narrative discontinuity and uncanny effects. In particular, as they comprise the (mad) narrator's account of his experience, they interfere with or cast doubt on his perceptions of phenomena, creating a structural instability that affects both the narrator's subjectivity and the narrative's credibility itself, giving rise to uncanny effects.

The narrator's fragmentary identity is represented through visual effects that are explicitly both cinematic and uncannily undecidable. The following scene highlights this suggestive connection between metaphors of cinema and the instability of the narrator's perception:

Zwakh's last sentences were drifting away over the surface of my consciousness; I saw him moving his hands to demonstrate the piston of a large pump going in and out, then the scenes that were unfolding all around us suddenly started to flick past my vision as quickly as if they were part of a clockwork peepshow, and yet with spectral clarity, so that for a while I completely lost awareness of myself and felt like a cogwheel in a living mechanism.⁵

Here, the narrator's drifting into a dream state is described as the metamorphosis of the world of the everyday into cinema. He is simultaneously part of the audience viewing the spectacle, the projection instrument's "clockwork", and the projected image itself. Becoming an element of this moving-picture scene as a "cogwheel in a living mechanism", an uncanny dyad of human and machine, the narrator is both self – the writing self – and other; and, as a machine part without self-consciousness – like the camera – both blind and all-seeing. Discussing such effects in Meyrink's *Golem*, Andrew Webber has similarly noted their association with cinema, arguing that

Even before the film version of the story, the novel anticipates the voyeuristic appeal of the cinematic effects of reflection and projection... The eponymous Golem is another sort of universal doppelgänger, not so much a mirror-man as a mirage..., a projection of a photographic or filmic negative... The protagonist becomes part of an uncannily live cinematic machinery.⁶

It is especially significant that visual uncertainty, exemplified in its most extreme, spectacular form by the shocking appearance of the Double/Golem, is represented

⁵ Gustav Meyrink, *The Golem*, p. 76–77.

⁶ Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 352–53.

through oneiric effects associated with the machinery of cinema, hinting at the medium's potential for ontological distress.

For the narrator, the Golem-double is encountered on the path to self-knowledge, signalling a recognition of his heterogeneous, equivocal identity by visibly representing this fragmentation in the moment of crisis of the self. The novel's mystical/Judaic solution for restoring the beleaguered self to its ideal unity is a "gift" available to the chosen few who alone can understand the magical side of the Kabbala, an understanding that is impossible to attain through reason. Meyrink's novel thus champions a form of elitist irrationalism with vague echoes of the contemporary work of Stefan George and his circle, but it differs from the latter in being explicitly anti-aestheticist.

A principal aspect of the novel's irrationalist tendencies is a keenly distrustful treatment of vision. With its ambivalent thematisation of the rational eye, Meyrink's novel denigrates the primacy of vision and the rationalist perception of everyday reality in favour of a non-naturalistic, "visionary" sight. The latter is represented in the uncanny Golem encounter, which is ultimately redemptive for the narrator. This representation of vision parallels that of Expressionism, as Lotte Eisner finds it represented by German cinema: "The Expressionist does not see, he has 'visions'. According to Edschmid, 'the chain of facts...' does not exist; only the interior vision they provoke exists".⁷

Interestingly, the novel's most reprehensible character is the greedy Dr Wassory: a demonic oculist who is paradoxically both positivist and aesthete; a devotee of "the cult of the beautiful" who performs unnecessary eye operations on people who fear blindness from glaucoma, giving them blurry vision for life. With his spiritual awakening, the narrator finds that the artist's true insight into reality (and art) comes through a form of elite blindness to the phenomenal world. The chosen few are those able to turn a blind eye to the world's shadow-play of images and "see" things-in-themselves:

For years I had parroted the mistaken dictum of the painters that to create a work of art one had to study nature. It was only since that night when Hillel had woken me that my inner eye had opened, that sight behind closed lids which vanishes the

⁷ Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969, pp. 10–11.

moment you open your eyes, a gift that everyone believes they possess, but that is given to less than one among millions.⁸

This denial of the ontological authority of the sense of sight is echoed by Meyrink's use of cinematic tropes, which destabilize perception both as depicted (what the narrator sees) and as solicited (on the reader's part). The uncanny arises with the inability to trust the eyes, appearing as an ontological problem that infects the narrative and the structure of the text alike.

What the chosen few "see", instead, is their own subjective heterogeneity: "The soul is not 'one and indivisible'; it will ultimately become so, and thereby attain what man calls immortality; your soul consists of infinite component parts—egos innumerable, like an ant-heap is composed of multitudinous ants".⁹ While looking into the mirror may promise a reassuring narcissistic duplication of the self, the insightful look shows the uncanny monster, and the recognition of fragmentary selfhood. The novel's conception of subjectivity, it is worth noting, has an expressionist flavour, in that it problematically proclaims both an extreme form of subjectivism, i.e., world-creation through individual vision, and a thoroughgoing abstraction of the individual: his multiplication, reflection of others, and heterogeneity.¹⁰

A kind of uncanny obscurantism, in short, pervades *The Golem*, where everything, including the self, to borrow Wegener's words, "depends on the image, on a certain vagueness of outline where the fantastic world of the past meets the world of today". The novel's use of visual metaphors is an illuminating comparison in analyzing the visual rendering of similar effects in the film. As we shall see, Wegener and Karl Boese's 1920 *Golem* offers a similar obsessive depiction of vision that echoes features of Meyrink's novel, but with quite a different result.

⁸ Gustav Meyrink, *The Golem*, p. 138.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

¹⁰ See Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*.

Perceptual Uncertainty

The immediate source for the plot of the 1920 film is Chayim Bloch's highly successful collection of stories, *Der Prager Golem* (1919). Bloch's book, based on the original source material, made the Jewish legends surrounding Rabbi Loew and the Golem's creation available to a broad German-speaking audience. Here, the learned Rabbi Loew, with the help of two devout colleagues, fashions a large man out of clay to help protect the Jewish community from the blood libel, the accusation that Jews were murdering Christians to use their blood in making matzo for their ceremonies. At the time, in the reign of the Hapsburg emperor Rudolf II, a Christian who planted a murdered body in the house of a Jew could accuse the Jew of murder. As a result, the latter would be executed and his property divided between the state and his accuser. The novel focuses primarily on the Golem as the Rabbi's instrument: He is a tool built by a noble and wise humanist to right an injustice.

While in Meyrink's novel the Golem is a type of universal double, in Bloch's he is explicitly treated as that of his creator, "a spectre of Rabbi Loew".¹¹ Specifically, he is an instrument that the Rabbi has constructed to extend his own senses and power; the Golem works as an investigator around the Ghetto on Loew's behalf. In one episode, for example, the Rabbi provides the Golem with an amulet that renders him invisible, so he may go about the Ghetto as a spy (as the Rabbi's eyes and ears), reporting anything suspicious or threatening so danger may be averted. In addition, he follows instructions to the letter, continuing to do as he is told until ordered to stop. Unlike in the 1920 film, the Rabbi does not lose control over him; rather, he is retired when his services are no longer required.

Wegener's film draws its plot from several distinct episodes related in Chayim Bloch's novel to form a cohesive tale. However, it also imposes a more straightforward Frankensteinian narrative on the legend: the artificial man who is shown to be all too human is rejected by society, eventually rebels against his unorthodox scientist creator, and goes on a rampage of destruction. At the same time, the film blurs the Golem story's political significations, presenting an ultimately ambivalent depiction of the Golem legend – a telling departure from its sources, which are highly sympathetic to the plight of the Jews and adulatory of

¹¹ Chayim Bloch, *The Golem: Legends of the Ghetto of Prague*, trans. Harry Schneiderman, Vienna, John N. Vernay, 1925, p. 76.

Jewish religion. Bloch's novel, for example, stresses the fact that Rabbi Loew, an eminent thinker and a close friend of Tycho Brahe and Copernicus, convinces the Emperor through the use of reason that the blood libel is unfounded. His role in the cases that are brought before him in the Prague Ghetto is that of a rational and just investigator; he determines the facts of the cases and identifies the true culprits in cases of false accusation, such as the blood libel, and of mistaken paternity and adultery. He detects the truth through reason (and spiritual revelation) and judges accordingly. In this respect *The Golem* film, as Kracauer argues, does indeed fit in with the anti-rationalist trends in German thought that assumed political significance in the 1920s and after.

Wegener diverges from sources in changing the reason behind the Emperor's expulsion order from the blood libel to the accusation that the Jews use black magic and thirst after the lives and property of their fellow men. The irony is that in the course of the film the accusation's truth is amply shown, even emphasized. That many of the Jews wear wizards' hats (albeit by Hapsburg decree) is mirrored by the silhouetted roofs of the Ghetto: the implication being that it is a site of dark sorcery. For the court, Rabbi Loew enacts a scene by magic and compels the Emperor's retraction of his expulsion decree by instigating fear and chaos; in other words, precisely by endangering the lives and property of Gentiles. The Emperor is thus convinced by force and not by reason. In addition, the love affair between the Jew Miriam and the Christian Count Florian is punished severely; the brutish Golem is the agent of this punishment. Finally, a curly-haired blond Christian child outside the walls of the Ghetto saves the Jews from the monster they have unleashed by taking away the amulet. Taken together, these deviations from the Golem legend tend to discredit Rabbi Loew's legendary status as a saviour of the Prague Ghetto and offer an ambivalent depiction of the Jews and their religion.

While the film originally consisted of five chapters, the narrative can usefully be divided into three sections, based on the climactic sequences: (1) the creation of the Golem in response to threatened misfortune; (2) the episode at the Emperor's court, whereby the Jews are allowed to stay; and (3) the loss of control over the Golem. The three climactic moments are the Golem coming to life, the scene of destruction at the Emperor's court, and the Golem's rampage through the Prague

Ghetto. These sections of the film are also unified by the continuity of the Miriam–Florian subplot, presented as parallel action, which is consistently cross-cut with the Golem scenes until the final sequence unites the two plots. Internal echoes between scenes also serve a cohesive function: The scene in which the Golem is brought to life by magic is echoed by the scene in which Rabbi Loew brings Jewish history to life for the Emperor’s court. The chaos that ensues at court is paralleled by the Golem’s rampage in the final section of the film.

In terms of editing, *The Golem* has a classical structure, with temporal and spatial continuity, including cutting back and forth between simultaneous events; the use of shot–reverse shot; and a straightforward narrative. The action takes place continuously in the course of a day. The Miriam-Florian subplot provides both suspense and the voyeuristic pleasure of watching a secret and forbidden erotic interaction. In contrast to these naturalist aspects are the film’s highly stylized aspects, such as the visual effects of Hans Poelzig’s Expressionist sets and chiaroscuro lighting. Titles are used minimally and only as necessary. At the same time, characters are not psychologized, and the viewer’s identification with any is not overtly solicited, with the possible exception of the Golem himself, who draws some measure of sympathy.

Like Meyrink’s novel, vision is a central theme of the 1920 *Golem*, which consistently draws attention to visual phenomena and the visibility of its images. Lotte Eisner has pointed out the extensive use of Max Reinhardt–inspired lighting effects and chiaroscuro lighting,¹² which seem to illustrate Wegener’s assertion that “Light and darkness in the cinema play the same role as rhythm and cadence in music”. But, importantly, the film’s images not only draw attention to lighting and the visibility of what is lit, but they diegetically account for the sources of light: candles and lanterns appear throughout to explain how the objects of the scenes are illuminated, and the film redundantly draws attention to them. They are even specifically described in the script: e.g., “Fade to candles burning”.¹³

Similarly, a number of shots in the film display optical instruments. In the beginning of the film, Rabbi Loew uses a telescope to study the heavens. In an over-

¹² Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p. 56.

¹³ *Golem* script; see *Masterworks of the German Cinema: The Golem, Nosferatu, M, The Threepenny Opera*, intro. by Roger Manvell, London, Lorrimer Publishing, 1973.

determined sequence, the intertitle announcement of what is about to be shown is followed by a classic shot-countershot sequence: a shot of him looking through the telescope is followed by a shot of the stars (what he sees), enclosed in a circular frame to triply stress the fact, followed by another shot of the Rabbi at the telescope. This is an initial indication of Rabbi Loew's function as a surrogate director figure: he alone in the film looks through a lens and sees a framed image. His response to what he sees through the lens determines the course of the film.



Rabbi Loew at his telescope.



Rabbi Jehuda shields his eyes, after removing his spectacles.



Famulus looking at beakers.

The film, however, also foregrounds the visual by portraying the obscuring of vision and poor visibility (e.g., through the darkness of many Ghetto scenes). In a couple of sequences, for example, visual instruments come to notice through their malfunction or discomfort. In two different shots, Rabbi Jehuda has problems with his eyes, and the viewer's attention is drawn to his spectacles. Toward the beginning

of the film he is reading by the light of two candles when, hearing a noise, according to the script, he removes his spectacles and shields his eyes from the glare. Shortly thereafter, a man enters to inform him of Count Florian's arrival, and he again takes off his glasses and wearily puts his hand over his tired eyes. These gestures are explicitly called for in the script.¹⁴

What are the effects of these depictions of vision, for example the obfuscation of what is seen by both the characters and film viewers? In part, the striking use of chiaroscuro lighting and other obscuring techniques contribute to the Ghetto's dark, mysterious, and opaque medieval atmosphere. They indicate the space physically occupied by the Jews not to be easily penetrable to vision, and by extension, to the rational, to habituation and the everyday. More generally, though, the unveiling of diegetic lighting conditions draws attention to the act of looking itself, to the fact that, as Wegener's speech proclaims, light and darkness are film's language.

What we as viewers see is strongly linked to the diegetic conditions of visibility: we can only see what the characters onscreen can see. Thus, conditions of diminished visibility affect both us and the characters; this is even indicated in the script, e.g., "The courtiers panic, fight, choke in the dust... Smoke blots out the praying Jews. The Rabbi is also lost in the smoke".¹⁵ The viewer sees *with the characters*, but not from any individualized, particularized perspective, and is subjected to precisely the diegetic obscurities they perceive. Differently put, the camera does not offer an easy answer – transparency – to the spectator's look, or an ironic, privileged viewpoint that may be identified with an omniscient narrator. That the viewer can see no more than the diegetic visible produces a structural parallel or identification between the spectator and the diegetic world, in terms of knowledge, by a mutual subjection to the same conditions of visibility. *The Golem's* visual obscurities in this sense foster precisely the effects Todorov ascribes to the fantastic: "The fantastic therefore implies an integration of the reader into the world of the characters; that world is defined by the reader's own ambiguous perception of the events narrated... The reader's *hesitation* is therefore the first condition of the fantastic".¹⁶

¹⁴ *Masterworks of the German Cinema: The Golem, Nosferatu, M, The Threepenny Opera*, pp. 20; 22.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 49.

¹⁶ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard, Cleveland, Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973, p. 31.

In addition, where “classical” cinema constructs “fictional characters in terms of what they saw and how they reacted to sights”,¹⁷ here they are not psychologised through an individualised vision.¹⁸ Here, vision is privileged as a mode of interaction both with and in the diegetic world, but it is at the same time deprived of primacy or stabilizing value with regard to what is seen. This basic identification between the viewer and the diegesis allows the uncanny, shocking effects of moments of the film when the “narrative” is disrupted and threatens the will of Rabbi Loew, the surrogate director: the crisis moments in which the Golem comes to life, the court of the Emperor is destroyed, and control over the Golem is lost. How vision is constructed in these moments is of great consequence for the uncanny effects of the film.

For two of the film’s characters – the Golem and Moses – the act of looking is foregrounded: In the film’s most uncanny moments, the Golem and Moses look around themselves, take stock of their surroundings, look toward the camera, and even approach it. The implication is that they assume an independent agency in these moments that escapes the will of the narrative and its director. Just after the Golem is brought to life, we see a prolonged close-up of his face that shows him looking around for the first time, and looking directly at the camera; the countershot shows Famulus’s fearful response. Immediately thereafter, the Rabbi orders him to walk: again we see a head-on shot of the Golem standing alone looking at us.



Golem comes to life; shown looking back.



Countershot: Famulus responds to Golem’s look.

¹⁷ P. Adams Sitney, *Modernist Montage: The Obscurity of Vision in Modernist Cinema and Literature*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 19.

¹⁸ The exception to this normalization of vision are the Golem itself and the Wandering Jew, to be discussed.

The Golem then walks toward the camera: Rabbi Loew stops him as if he has gone too far, orders him to walk in the opposite direction; he knocks down Famulus in his path.¹⁹ This sequence hints at the precariousness of control over the creature. Both before and after this brief trial run, when the Golem comes to life and when he is temporarily put to sleep, his eyes glow eerily in the darkly lit embrasure where he stands.



The Golem ordered to walk: detail.



The Golem's glowing eyes: detail.

Here, as later, a sense of the uncanny is fostered with the Golem's unambiguous looking, which threatens to escape the narrative space, an unwarranted intersubjectivity: above all, with the look into the camera at the viewer watching the film, and the approach toward the camera/audience. In the classically constructed narrative space of the film, this look creates a sense of fear or shock – an unnerving effect best described by recourse to the classic distinction between the point-of-view shot and the look. As Colin Maccabe has written,

The point of view preserves the primacy of vision, for what is left out of one point-of-view shot can always be supplied by another. The look, however, is radically defective. Where the point of view is related to an object, the look is related to other looks. The look's field is not defined by a science of optics in which the eye features as a geometrical point but by the fact that the object we are looking at offers a position from which we can be looked at—and this look is not punctual but shifts over the surface.²⁰

¹⁹ Similarly, at the Rose Festival, we see two terrified ladies. The countershot reveals what frightened them: a close-up of the Golem, looking at us. A sequence of shots of frightened courtiers follows.

²⁰ Colin MacCabe, "Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure", *Screen*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Autumn 1976. Reprinted in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. G. Mast, M. Cohen, & L. Braudy, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 86.

The uncanny becomes possible precisely with the loss of primacy of vision, which involves ontological uncertainty and a threat to physical and psychic integrity. In this sense, *The Golem's* unnerving cinematic effects, signifying the compromised position of vision as establisher of ontological mastery, could be compared to the critical engagement with Cartesian perspectivalism that is a common feature in Modernist works of art (e.g., Cubism). Here, the narrative itself is put on trial by the uncanny look, at once threat and metafilmic commentary, which constitutes a violation of naturalistic cinematic norms of continuity and the haptic space. The Golem's look disrupts the viewer's voyeuristic or objectifying interaction with the image, expanding unexpectedly beyond the bounds, both spatial and temporal, of its function within the narrative, and beyond the will of its director (diegetically, Rabbi Loew).

The scene at the Emperor's court, a key moment in the film's problematization of vision, has a similar structure. Based on this scene, Kracauer lauded the film as one of only two works of German silent cinema that suggest rational thinking as a solution to the German soul's dilemma, a double longing for tyranny and chaos: "But interest in mobilizing reason was apparently so limited that it reached the screen only in two isolated instances, one of which was nothing more than an episode of Wegener's second *Golem* (1920)".²¹ Kracauer's rigidly thematic reading of *The Golem*, however, is characteristic of his tendency in *From Caligari to Hitler* to neglect the specifically cinematic qualities of the film, which were likely Wegener's predominant concern. In this climactic scene, the Golem, as the tool of the Rabbi, helps save the oppressed Jews from the threatened pogrom:

To soothe the emperor's mind, Rabbi Loew, by means of magic, conjures up a procession of Biblical figures—among them Ahasuerus,²² who proceeds to trespass on the domain of reality, starting to destroy the imperial palace. The emperor, panic-stricken, agrees to withdraw his order of expulsion if the rabbi will avert the danger; thereupon the latter directs the Golem, his servant, to prevent walls and ceilings from falling down. The Golem obeys with the automatic promptness of a robot. Here reason avails itself of brute force as a tool to liberate the oppressed. But

²¹ This and the following quotation are from Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1947, pp. 112–113. The other film illustrating the power of reason, argues Kracauer, was *Schatten* (1922).

²² Moses is sometimes identified as Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, in discussions of the film. However, the script specifies that the figure is Moses. The Wandering Jew is also an unlikely figure because of the character's explicit anti-Semitic significance.

instead of following up this motif, the film concentrates upon the Golem's emancipation from his master, and becomes increasingly entangled in half-truths.²³

Focusing on the role of the Golem, Kracauer interprets the scene as the mobilization of instrumental reason: a powerful new technology, created by a brilliant man, serves the pacifist will of its wise master for a liberal end, protecting the courtiers and liberating the Jews. The anti-rationalist Frankensteinian denouement therefore appears to contradict this positive representation of the man-made man. But this reading characteristically ignores several crucial aspects of the scene that determine its significance and relationship to the rest of the film. Chief among these, as we shall see, is its depiction of an extraordinary visual crisis in the context of an allegory of cinema, a film projection scenario within the film. The sophisticated intertextuality of Wegener's previous Golem film, *Der Golem und die Tänzerin* (1917), should alert us to this scene's importance. Kracauer also ignores the important ways in which the Rabbi's display of this "historical film" parallels his other magical-mimetic enactment, the Golem.

In this scene the film's sources are modified in significant ways. First, in contrast to Bloch's story, the Rabbi brings his creature with him; the Golem thus becomes the saviour of the courtiers and, as a consequence, of the Jews. Second, the spectacle enacted by Loew is studiously depicted as the projection of a film within the film, i.e., as a biblical epic. In the version published by Bloch, however, the episode is related quite briefly: The Rabbi magically enacts a show of Jewish history for the emperor's court; the Emperor is impressed, yet laughs at the figure of Naphtali. The wall starts to crumble, but Rabbi Loew saves the Emperor with the name of God (Shem). Meyrink's novel also contains a laconic retelling of the story of Rabbi Loew and the Golem, including a version of this scene. Significantly, the Rabbi's legendary display – in which the dead are brought to life – is hypothesized to have been a magic lantern show, and Loew is compared to a showman of the phantasmagoria:

‘That same Rabbi is supposed to have been summoned to the Emperor in the castle on the Hradschin, where he called up the spirits of the dead in visible form’, added Prokop. ‘Modern scientists claim he must have used a magic lantern.’

²³ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 113.

‘A magic lantern! People will believe anything nowadays’, Zwakh rejoindered. ‘As if Emperor Rudolf, who had devoted his whole life to such matters, would not have seen through a crude trick like that right away.’²⁴

The magic lantern hypothesis is in keeping with the cinematic themes of Meyrink’s *Golem*. But *The Golem* film script even more explicitly foregrounds the resemblance of the Rabbi’s spectacle to cinema: “Fade back to the emperor’s court, where all are seated with their backs to us while Rabbi Loew stands on a platform... The Rabbi raises his hands. There is an explosion of white flame... There is a flare of light and as the guests wonder, we see two lines of people toiling across the desert”.²⁵ The images appear on a wall above the courtiers, who are shown both in groups and from behind, highlighting their position as spectators. The moving image appears on a white background resembling a film screen framed by a jagged edge. Although the screen is not rectangular, the jagged edge stresses the distinctness of the moving image as a conjured representation. Rabbi Loew occupies the position of the early film exhibitor or showman on the platform, enacting the spectacle and hearkening to a long tradition of similar characters and their representations of cinematic ghosts.



The film within the film’s mise en scène.

As a prelude to his biblical film, Rabbi Loew warns the courtly audience not to speak or laugh: in other words, not to react to the moving image as a form of

²⁴ Meyrink, *The Golem*, p. 56.

²⁵ *Golem* script, see *Masterworks of the German Cinema: The Golem, Nosferatu, M, The Threepenny Opera*.

entertainment. When the courtiers, regarding the spectacle precisely as moving-picture show, burst into laughter, Moses, shown walking across the desert – after having seemed to acknowledge the presence of an audience by looking around in their direction – starts wrathfully walking toward the court, i.e., toward the camera. As when the Golem comes to life, Moses’s look in the direction of the diegetic audience and head-on movement toward the camera, signals the uncanny disruption of the projected “classical” narrative and its intrusion into reality in terms of an explicit physical threat. The uncanny here is related to the indeterminacy of the image’s status, of something long since accounted dead coming to life. With this exhibitionist motion, the erstwhile shadow comes to life and towers over the court in a flash of light and smoke, and destruction ensues.



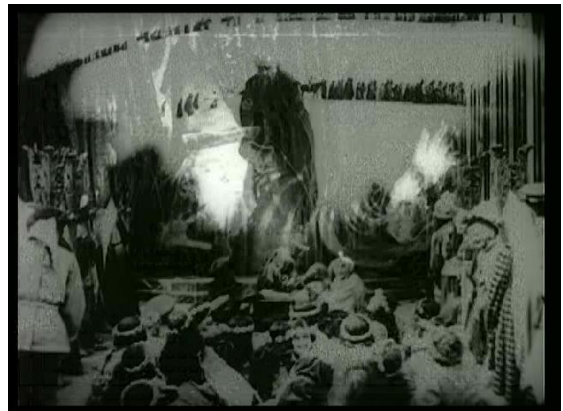
Moses looks around at the two audiences.

When Rabbi Loew projects his film, the breakdown of the diegetic “instrument”, the cinematic illusion, results in chaos and violence, and prefigures the Golem’s breakdown to follow in the film that we as spectators are watching. For the courtiers watching Rabbi Loew’s picture-show, seeing becomes uncanny and life threatening when what is being seen and objectified looks back and approaches the camera. In this moment of astonishment, Jewish history uncannily trespasses on the reality constructed by the film, not only interrupting the order of the represented audience’s reality, but constituting a shocking moment within the established narrative followed by the real audience, the doubles of the represented spectators. The diegetic viewers and the real audience alike are lulled into a voyeuristic interaction with the image that is suddenly disrupted by the exhibitionism of the

The Divided Screen image itself – its intrusion, in Kracauer’s words, into the “real”. In his anger, Moses crosses the boundary of the screen into the (comparatively three-dimensional) court, as if no longer conceding to being merely the image of himself. With a burst of smoke he flickers for a split-second outside the demarcated inner screen, appearing to have emerged from the screen into the court. This is a reflexive (because cinematic) formulation of the Frankenstein story, in which the creature escapes the will and intention of its creator: here the film escapes the will of its diegetic exhibitor/director and its instrumental function as a narrative representation.



Moses approaches the screen.



Fade-in to Rabbi Loew’s fear at the approach.



Moses reaches the screen and seems to flicker outside it.



Although the scene at the Emperor’s court clearly presents a projection and spectatorship scenario, a film within the film, Kracauer neglects its significance as such. Rabbi Loew is again shown as a surrogate director, both magician and technician – not just as exhibitor of the moving image but also as creator of the Golem. The analogous “nature” of these two spectacles is hinted at by the Emperor. Seeing the fascinating Golem, he invites the Rabbi to show the court further

wonders: “What manner of marvel is this that you display for us today, you strange illusionist? Let us see more of your art”. The Rabbi is explicitly compared to a Cagliostro-like illusionist who displays marvels, like a showman of early cinema, *and* the projection of the moving image is solicited as a continuation of the self-same mimetic art that made a Golem.

The episode at the Emperor’s court is a key unifying moment of the film, not least in evoking a structural analogy between the film-within-the-film and the automaton: Both are Frankensteinian spectacles magically and pyrotechnically enacted by Loew and meant to serve his interests. Both compel the astonishment of their audiences within the diegesis and beyond it, as spectacular techno-mystical innovations, sharing an uncanny nature as effigies of man – one is a clay statue and the other a representation of Biblical ghosts – that come to life through the agency of the director. Loew in both cases loses control over his creations, and the uniform result is life-threatening chaos.

Finally, both evoke a sense of the uncanny, construed as a threat to vision and an ontological crisis, at the moment when they exceed their instrumental (and narrative) bounds, blurring the line between animate and inanimate, natural and artificial. Paralleling the scene at court, the last part of the film shows Rabbi Loew’s loss of control over the Golem, again signalled by the creature’s uncanny look back at the audience: his fiendish glare toward the camera in close-up. The Golem’s transgressive look is thus both a precursor (just after he comes to life) and a repetition of that of Moses. But while Moses’s look into the camera has a clear diegetic audience within the film, that of the Golem more directly threatens the film’s spectator. In these moments of crisis, the uncanny is constructed as a spatial and temporal disruption of narrative continuity by the ghostly spectacle coming to life – signified by the look at or approach toward the camera. The representation itself, an effigy of man, poses a threat to narrative order. The uncanny arises, in other words, when the mimetic reproduction, *mise en abyme* and watched in a voyeuristic mode by multiple nested audiences, escapes its instrumental function to watch back.²⁶

²⁶

One could argue that this happens with the *Golem* film as a whole, which sets up a voyeuristic viewing scenario – cf. scenes with Miriam and Florian – and ultimately escapes this function.



A furious look: The Golem escapes control.



The Golem sets fire to the house.

These uncanny gestures not only rely on, but refer to basic structural possibilities of film editing and the position of the spectator *vis-à-vis* the narrative space. They are therefore key elements of the metacinematic themes of the film. Echoes between the film projection sequence and the fate of the Golem, which illuminate the structural parallels between the automaton and cinema, support an allegorical, reflexive reading of the film. Like cinema, the Golem is a mechanical reproduction of life with an uncanny double nature as both human being and his instrumental parody. Automatic and cinematic effigies of man present the same kind of threat to their diegetic and actual viewer: the threat of a mimetic reproduction that visually approaches indistinguishability from the “real” but is its Ersatz, a being of a mixed nature. Both have the capacity to engender a particular kind of visual and ontological uncertainty in the viewer. With *The Golem*’s reflexive effects, however, the *mise en abyme* of mechanically reproduced selves threatens the “reality” external to the text with the uncanny.

As we have seen, visual and ontological uncertainties are a central concern in *The Golem*. The film’s deliberate frustration of the viewer’s look sets the obfuscated stage on which the lucid, disruptive, and exhibitionist look of the double (Golem/Moses) enacts a crisis of vision and of identity. This materialization of vision, in conjunction with the uncanny, is a recurrent feature of the doppelgänger story. In opaque renderings of vision, perception is mediated or indirect, and the mediating process or material is made visible and foregrounded. As Tzvetan Todorov originally observed, vision has to be made opaque in order for “themes of the self”, such as the doppelgänger, to have a proper milieu:

Indirect vision is the only road to the marvellous... Eyeglasses and mirrors become the image of a vision that is no longer a simple means of connecting the eye to a point in space, which is no longer purely functional, transparent, transitive. These objects are, in a sense, vision materialized or rendered opaque, a quintessence of sight.²⁷

How such a thematization of vision actually functions within the narrative is illuminated by recourse to the concept of the uncanny. When vision is made opaque, it is also made contingent and perspectival, a function of instruments and viewing positions. The uncanny, as a crisis of phenomenality, is founded precisely on this denigration of vision, and begins where perception no longer has primacy in establishing a phenomenal or subjective stability.

In cinematic representation, however, the visual features of the *doppelgänger* literature assume a different aspect, not least because “indirect vision” is itself the medium’s axiomatic characteristic. Indeed, the experience is thoroughly mediated by visual instrumentation from production to projection. If for Hoffmann, “every appearance of a supernatural element is accompanied by the parallel introduction of an element belonging to the realm of sight”,²⁸ in film such introductions do not mean altogether the same thing: Everything is already in the realm of sight.²⁹ Effects that in a literary context merely describe the “visual” uncertainty required by the uncanny onscreen refer explicitly to cinema itself, exposing the contingency of its images.

Precisely because vision itself is materialized or made visible in a visual medium, *The Golem*’s foregrounding of visual phenomena in the diegesis has a reflexive tenor, revealing the mimetic reproduction’s position as shadow-play and double. The counterpart of the eyeglasses and mirrors is here also the film instrument itself, from camera lens to screen, the source of an indirect vision (and the appearance of optical instruments, such as Rabbi Loew’s telescope, alludes to this) through which vision itself is materialized or rendered opaque, navigating between the always-already-iconic effects of its realistic images and the ever-present possibility of the eruption of the uncanny.

²⁷ From a reading of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “Princess Brambilla”. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 123.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

²⁹ Here, incidentally, Moses is introduced by the projection scenario of the film-within-the-film, and the Golem is introduced by *the film itself* (the real projection scenario).

The Golem's scenario relies on a double mode of representation: both on naturalistic classical narrative techniques and on their problematic obfuscation. Where a narrative scenario along classical lines (with temporal and spatial continuity) blurs the role of the cinematic apparatus and supports a voyeuristic spectatorial interaction, in its context the reflexive effects by which the uncanny is evoked appear as interruptions or divergences from the film's characteristic play of the look. At the focal point of this treatment of vision, film is revealed as a medium with a double nature like that of the doppelgänger. These reflexive effects constitute an allegory of film as uncanny instrument. For Wegener and Boese, "going further into the domain of pure cinema" makes for a film concerning film and its conflicting possibilities, of spectatorship based on voyeurism and the shock of cinema's unexpected forms of intersubjective experience. The Golem parallels cinema's threat, as a man-made man, both natural and artificial, photogenically offering the considerable visual pleasure of the new technology and the threatening return of the look, and as something deeply uncanny emerging in the world of the everyday.

Returning to Wegener's 1916 speech, we can trace a connection between the visual thematics of the doppelgänger encounter, in which "By the hesitation it engenders, the fantastic questions precisely the existence of an irreducible opposition between real and unreal",³⁰ and Wegener's notion of a pure cinema, "a kind of cinema which would use nothing but moving surfaces, against which there would impinge events that would still participate in the natural world but transcend the lines and volumes of the natural". What is at stake, then, is a visual representation of the interdependence of the real and the unreal. This dialectic requires divesting vision of epistemological primacy, which is related to its mediation by instruments, its physiological exploration, and even the idea of seeing as essentially perspectival. The themes of vision involved, recalling those of German Romanticism, make visual apprehension the source of fright. Their representation in the optical-technological medium of cinema is at once ambivalent and ironic.

³⁰ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 167.



The Ghetto skyline silhouette as a community of wizards.

CHAPTER VII

THE TYRANNY OF IMAGES: DOUBLE EXPOSURE IN *WAXWORKS* (1924)



Jack the Ripper

If the designer merely imitated photography to construct his sets, the film would remain faceless and impersonal. There has to be the possibility of bringing out an object's essential attributes so as to give the image style and colour...

This is particularly necessary for films set wholly in a world of unreality. For my film *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett*, I have tried to create sets so stylised that they evince no idea of reality. My fairground is sketched in with an utter renunciation of detail. All it seeks to engender is an indescribable fluidity of light, moving shapes, shadows, lines and curves. It is not extreme reality that the camera perceives, but the reality of the inner event, which is more profound, effective and moving than what we see through everyday eyes, and I equally believe that the cinema can reproduce this truth, heightened effectively...

I cannot stress too strongly how important it is for a designer to shun the world seen everyday and to attain its true sinews... It will be seen that a designer must not construct 'fine' sets. He must penetrate the surface of things and reach their heart. He must create mood (*Stimmung*) even though he has to safeguard his independence with regard to the object seen merely through everyday eyes. It is this which makes him an artist. Otherwise I can see no reason why he should not be replaced by an adroit apprentice carpenter...

Paul Leni¹

¹Paul Leni, *Kinematograph*, No. 911, 1924. Quoted by Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1969, p. 127.

The framing narrative of Paul Leni's *Waxworks* returns to the fairground milieu, purportedly dispatched with by *Caligari's* conclusion (which, as some readings of the film would have it, relegated its fairground scenes to the narrator's psychotic delusions). Here, a writer enters a booth that is identified as a waxworks show, or *Panopticum*. Toward the end of the film, in the remarkable pursuit in the writer's nightmare by Jack the Ripper,² we once again see the word, superposed over the image of the killer. In the grotesque space-time of this dreamworld, Jack the Ripper is getting closer and closer, both to his victim and to the spectator. The word *Panopticum* (panopticon), a room for the exhibition of novelties such as waxworks, thus frames the film itself and assumes an undeniable significance, both with its repetition and as one of the few verbal signposts in the diegetic world. Not least, it serves as a reflexive reference to *Waxworks* the film, which promises its viewer something akin to the spectacle that this show offers: the astonishment of seeing liminal beings, lifeless technological creations that have the vitality of life itself... in other words, the uncanniness of cinema. The arrayed wax figures, illuminated one by one by the show's proprietor with a lantern, come to be illuminated in sequence through the writer's stories and by the film itself.³

The first two episodes of *Waxworks* present a "classical" spatial and temporal continuity and a familiar narrative structure that leaves little room for bewilderment. In fact, the plot would have been especially familiar from Fritz Lang's *Der Müde Tod* (*Destiny*; 1921), which similarly has a framing story and three "historical" episodes, in which a girl tries to save her lover from Death. However, in conjunction with a clear narrative structure, *Waxworks* relies on expressionist stylistic elements and other distancing visual strategies that prevent the viewer from illusionist immersion in the fiction. Among these are the *mise en scène* and its anti-naturalist ornamentation, and the film's constant foregrounding of its narration and narrator. The explicit identification of what the viewer sees with the imagination of the

² For the English version of the film, Jack the Ripper was changed to Spring Heeled Jack, a mysterious character who terrorized the British in the late 1830s. The latter's attacks mainly consisted of clawing young ladies about the chest with his sharp fingers and spitting balls of gas/fire to blind his victims before making his getaway with superhuman jumps over walls and onto rooftops. He was also described as a cloaked figure with fiendish, protuberant orange eyes and sharp ears.

³ It is perhaps no coincidence that the première of the Cinématographe Lumière in Berlin was in the "Panoptikum" at Friedrichsstrasse 65a, 1st floor. See Martin Loiperdinger, "1986—The Arrival in Germany of the Cinématographe Lumière", in *Before Caligari: German Cinema, 1895–1920*, ed. Paolo Cherchi Usai and Lorenzo Codelli, Edizioni Biblioteca dell'Immagine, 1990, p. 34.

narrator, as opposed to the presentation of a purportedly objective account of historical events (i.e., with an invisible narrator-camera), likewise forestalls immersion and suspense.

In his 1924 article for the Berlin *Kinematograph*, quoted above, Leni discussed the function of *mise en scène*, particularly in fantastic cinema and with reference to his approach in *Waxworks*: With an anti-naturalist aesthetic, i.e., a departure from the principles of photography, the film artist attempts to bring out “an object’s essential attributes” and “the reality of the inner event”. Leni’s argument participates in the broader German debate on film as a medium,⁴ in this case with the underlying claim that film has the status of an independent art form, and is therefore suitable for bourgeois consumption, in its distinctness from other arts. His comments, like those of others, attribute to cinema the possibility of “redemption of physical reality” (Kracauer), but through the medium’s capacity to record and reveal what is invisible to “everyday eyes”. Leni’s argument invokes metaphysical categories for differentiating art from craft, and film from other media. It is unclear just what is meant by “an object’s essential attributes”, or the formal structures or viewing experience that would deconceal “the reality of the inner event”. It is also unclear how the capabilities of representation specific to the apparatus – “indescribable fluidity of light, moving shapes, shadows, lines and curves” – are meant to penetrate the film under which reality lies obscured, to reveal the “reality of the inner event” in contradistinction to “what we see through everyday eyes”.

Taking *Waxworks* as an attempt toward these abstract ends, a distinguishing feature of its *mise en scène* seems to be a reliance on ornamentation and baroque imagery. The film also redundantly foregrounds the discursive, fictional character of what its viewer sees, e.g., with the straightforward framings. Indeed, readings of the film have tended to criticize these elements of distraction and a perceived over-reliance on ornamentation, on the “classical” grounds that such effects detract from the film’s narrative force and effect: in other words, for their making “safe” the film’s elements of horror. Lotte Eisner, for example, criticized the film’s refined

⁴ See, e.g., Anton Kaes, *Kino-Debatte: Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film, 1909–1929*, Munich, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1978; Sabine Hake, *The Cinema's Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany, 1907–1933*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1993.

Baroque imagery precisely for its seeming gratuitousness *vis-à-vis* narrative motivations. Discussing the Jack the Ripper sequence, she found that

...Despite its manifest virtuosity this film marks a regression, as this last episode clearly shows. Although Jack the Ripper moves forward threateningly and the sets open up like sliding-doors, the depth-effect is botched; there is more depth here than in *Caligari*. In addition, sort of resolute perfection, an over-refined composition, an excessive mannerism, can make the spectator feel uncomfortable. Purely 'decorative' Expressionism here ends in the same impasse as *Genuine* had done.

In the United States Paul Leni was to realize the necessity of intensifying the 'mood' and of going beyond mere enjoyment in the Baroque and in the use of a super-abundance of forms. The set stops being a game or a subterfuge and becomes part of the action.⁵

But considering Leni's comments on the possibilities of film as a kind of redemption of physical reality, one is led to wonder how the striking stylistic elements of *Waxworks* relate to Leni's understanding of cinema. What are the "essential attributes" of its cornucopia of objects, or the "reality of the inner event" and "true sinews" of the world? A closer look at *Waxworks*' visual style is needed, in the context of its narrative constructions, chief among which is the doppelgänger motif, of its relationship to cinema as "panopticon", and of its participation in a debate about film form in the context of Weimar Germany.

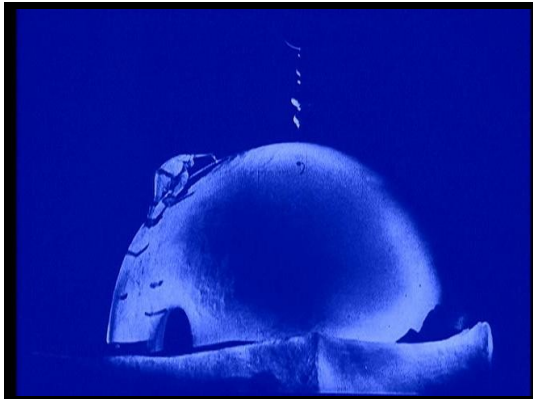
The Ornamental Image as Commodity

The most striking feature of *Waxworks*' imagery is its profuse, erotic ornamentation. This obsessive redundancy includes the serial repetition of similar shapes, presented by different objects and recurring motifs. One such repetition, especially in the Haroun and Ivan episodes, is of globular forms. Numerous objects – including the Caliph himself, his hat, and the Baghdad architecture; and Ivan's hourglasses, bed, and the palace's onion domes – share a rotund, bulbous shape. As with the hourglass, these forms are often doubled. Not least in their indexical association with eyes, breasts, or testicles, they also have an organic feel and an erotic resonance.

⁵Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, trans. Roger Greaves, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1994, p. 125.



Baghdad rooftops and the Czar's palace.

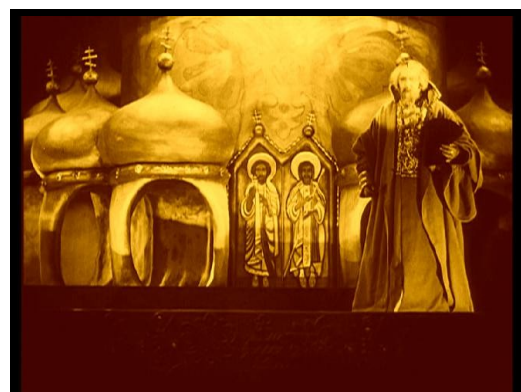


Assad climbs a dome; Ivan fondles the hourglass.

An effect similar to this diachronic multiplication or reproduction of forms occurs within individual images. The *mise en scène* of Ivan's place, for example, where the bride's father waits for the Czar, is overrun by onion-shaped domes, icons, and men: all these metonymically reproduce each others' shapes within the shot. Individual characters are also multiplied within the image, for example through mirroring scenarios – a manifestation of the doppelgänger theme.



Multiple hourglass bulbs.



The bride's father in Ivan's palace:
A surfeit of domes.

These forms both refer to and reinforce each other by purely formal/visual association, both iconically and indexically (in Peirce's terms). In other words, they echo the analogous forms and images of the film in a metonymic chain, referring to each other on purely visual grounds, rather than requiring symbolic interpretation or justification within the narrative itself – hence Lotte Eisner's charge that "Purely 'decorative' Expressionism here ends in [an] impasse".⁶ With their erotic undertones, these repetitive shapes are comparable to the chain of similarly "shaped" metaphors in Georges Bataille's *The Story of the Eye*: eyes, eggs, testicles, etc. According to Roland Barthes, whose reading of Bataille is suggestive for a discussion of *Waxworks*, *The Story of the Eye* enacts a "technical transgression of the forms of language, for metonymy is precisely a forced syntagm, the violation of a signifying limit of space; it permits, on the very level of discourse, a counterdivision of objects, usages, meanings, spaces, and properties, which is eroticism itself...".⁷

Waxworks' repetition of spherical forms is a visual counterpart of Bataille's discursive effect, enacting an erotic metonymy with no (paradigmatic) hierarchy. Here, a purely specular effect is the most pronounced, overriding any engagement of the viewer in a symbolic reading of individual motifs of the chain. But what are the effects of such metonymic eroticism – and its "violation of a signifying limit of space" – in the realm of images? For one, I would argue, the film's objects develop a kind of fetish character as "imaginary" commodities (imaginary in the Lacanian sense) for the viewer's *Schaulust* or scopophilia. Like the consumer's relationship with the commodity, as Karl Marx argued in *Capital*,⁸ here the mode of engagement is visual and the object of this engagement has a phantasmagorical, metaphysical, and erotic character. This, of course, could be argued for any cinematic image, which according to these criteria is the commodity *par excellence*: Not least, in the "classical" cinematic product, the process of production is masked by the outward appearance of the product, which presents itself as self-producing. Finally, the relationship of the viewer with the image, like that of the consumer with the product, is disconnected and phantasmal by nature.

⁶ Ibid., p. 125.

⁷ Roland Barthes, "The Metaphor of the Eye", in *Critical Essays*, Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1972, p. 246.

⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, New York, Modern Library, 1906.

For Leni's film, however, it is especially the case that through their repetition and erotic undertones, the film's idolatrous forms are openly foregrounded as fetishistic objects. The director's avowed intention of bringing out the "essential attributes" of objects makes for a film that is as much a representation of relationships among objects as among characters. Whereas the characters are not psychologized, things – which, following Expressionist principles, are meant to represent interior states – are. The lack of explicit narrative motivation to justify their foregrounding – often in close-ups that dissociate them from their spatial and narrative contexts – compounds this effect. In sum, the visual pleasure involved in its spectatorship, based on an indexical eroticism with quasi-mystical undertones, exploits the images' fetish character and commodifies them.⁹

In conjunction with this metonymy of objects, it is noteworthy that both episodes repeatedly present imagery of egregious surface glamour (i.e., *Glanz*), gleaming wealth and luxury. The Caliph's exaggerated jewelry and Ivan's icon-like golden habit, and both rulers' magnificent palaces, fill the screen with their resplendence and voluptuous opulence. This opulence, in the case of the first episode, contrasts with the humble poverty of the baker's residence and lifestyle, and in the second, with the horrors of the dungeon that it conceals within.



Surface glamour: The two tyrants' wax figures in chiaroscuro.

It is important that the type of visual fascination evoked by the film's images exploits a structural similarity to the visual appeal of the commodity, representing something ornamental whose "real" nature (i.e., the means of its production) is

⁹ For Marx, the commodity fetish had erotic undertones as well. See W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp. 193–95. Freud's theory of fetishism was published two years after the release of *Waxworks*.

masked by its external attributes and that operates in the visual register to hoodwink its consumer. Like the commodity in industrial capitalism, the film's objects are multiplied by mechanical reproduction, are disconnected from a historical/narrative context, e.g., as abstracted historical figures, and hint at a meaning/core/center that is inaccessible, or nonexistent. This commodified foregrounding of objects (including characters) dissociated from their surroundings, which are "made visible" in an exhibitionist solicitation of *Schaulust*, has a snapshot effect and enacts a spatialization of (narrative) time.

With the serial repetition of quasi-magical forms and the opulent and organic erotic glitter of the film's empty symbols, *Waxworks* transfixes its spectator with a visual pleasure based on ornamentation. The Baroque fascinations of its imagery are what compensates for any loss of scopic interest that might have resulted from the film's dispensing with narrative credibility and bracketing of any claim to naturalism or historical accuracy. Despite their being embedded in a semi-classical narrative structure, the spectatorial interaction these images solicit, the desire to look, is akin to the exhibitionist quality Tom Gunning attributes to early films as a "cinema of attractions":

Rather than ... an involvement with narrative action or empathy with character psychology, the cinema of attractions solicits a highly conscious awareness of the film image engaging the viewer's curiosity. The spectator does not get lost in a fictional world and its drama, but remains aware of the fact of looking, the excitement of curiosity and its fulfillment.¹⁰

The vital distinction to be made, however, is that in *Waxworks* the dialectic of fulfillment and deferment of curiosity and/or desire replicates that of specular interaction with the commodity. It is in this sense that the film's imagery relates to the context of its production; how, from the year of its release, the end of hyperinflation, the urban centers of Weimar Germany represented "a culture dedicated to surface",¹¹ with the sudden rise of department stores, new lighting effects, picture palaces, and white-collar consumers. As Kracauer notably described, Weimar urban white-collar culture was marked by the desire for façades and images,

¹⁰ Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator", in *Art and Text* 34, Spring 1989; reprinted in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Brady and Cohen, p. 825.

¹¹ Thomas Elsaesser, "The Irresponsible Signifier, or 'The Gamble with History': Film Theory or Cinema Theory", *New German Critique*, No. 40, Winter 1987, p. 75.

“surface glamour” and “distraction” were sought for their own sake.¹² Indeed, the images of *Waxworks* strike a chord with Kracauer’s discussion of the Haus Vaterland picture palace, where

The views and vistas reproduced merely have the function of signifiers, referring to other signs, the total effect deriving from the montage, the contiguity and coexistence of the heterogeneous: this gives both an experience of power and control, but also mimics the objective reality of a commodity-producing society.¹³

The *mise en scène* of *Waxworks* reflects this milieu, albeit in its incipience, and the cult of “surface glamour”. The fact that *Waxworks* was primarily filmed in the heyday of hyperinflation is a further indication that the kind of visual pleasure provoked by the film not only has a complex significance but is itself at issue in the dénouement of the film.

The Ornamental Uncanny: The Doppelgänger as Counterfeit and Commodity

As we have seen, the visual fascination of *Waxworks*’ effects and imagery, in particular in the first two episodes, tends to engage the viewer in moments of detemporalized (i.e., spatialized) aesthetic-erotic spectatorship. As the film progresses, however, the Baroque and luxurious *mise-en-scène* that compels the viewer’s desire to look becomes progressively more ambivalent and uncanny, growing more explicitly associated with violence and tyranny. In the process, the very forms that draw the viewer’s fixated look as simulacra, and that look itself, become questionable. Within the narrative too, fear arises with the act of looking. On several occasions, characters simply cannot bear to look, and shield their eyes from fearful sights to preserve themselves. They then peep through their hands and arms, both compelled by *Schaulust* and curiosity and repelled by fear of what they might see.

¹² See Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany (Die Angestellten)*, London and New York, Verso, 1998.

¹³ Thomas Elsaesser, “The Irresponsible Signifier”, p. 75.



Characters shield their eyes, but peep through.

At the same time, the plentiful, erotic bulbous objects come to be juxtaposed with indicators of violence and threat. For example, the movement of the vizier sharpening his sword, as Eisner points out, is continued by the baker kneading his bulging dough, a sequence reminiscent of dialectical montage in Soviet cinema. Similarly, the photogenic hourglass indicates the moment of death of tortured prisoners in Ivan's dungeons and finally causes the Tsar's madness. In Haroun's bedroom, a point-of-view shot shows us the Caliph's round hat together with the sharp sword with which Assad will slay his effigy, fetishized in their dissociation from the context and their spotlighting.



Haroun's hat and sword.



The visible hand: Ivan the Terrible's ring of power.

The recurring motif of tyrants' hands likewise functions as an emblem of regal power that, when cut off from its corporal or embodied context – literally severed in the case of Haroun – becomes uncanny. In fact, the first episode's narrative is motivated by the attempt to explain how Haroun's wax figure has lost his arm. In the writer's story, the Caliph's wrapped counterfeit arm is used to certify his death. Significantly, both tyrants wear rings, which as jewelry are ornamental and desirable commodities, and are foregrounded and fetishized. Metonymically associated with the power and the hand of the ruler, these rings represent another motif through which the visual pleasure of the image/commodity becomes associated with the uncanny and violence. The Haroun plot revolves around his magic ring, a commodity that compels desire and promises power and wealth, and its attempted theft. In the Ivan episode, the ring as metonymic symbol of power returns invested with a greater evocation of horror: The Czar's ring-bedecked hand, dissociated from his invisible body, gestures through the bars of the torture chamber to indicate whether the prisoner's torture continues or ends.

Broadly, it is important to note how the film's signifiers of luxury and wealth, the very sources of visual pleasure, come to be implicated in the plot's conflicts and visual anxieties.¹⁴ First, signifiers of wealth and power are inseparable in the film from (misplaced) erotic exchange. In the first episode, the poor baker's vain wife is amenable to the Caliph's love-play because she is seduced by his wealth, explicitly contrasted with Assad's poverty. The success of his suit is indicated when he encircles her in a row of his pearls: the luxury item signifies her compliance. In the

¹⁴ See also Thomas Elsaesser, "Social Mobility and the Fantastic: German Silent Cinema", in *Fantasy and the Cinema*, ed. James Donald, London, BFI, 1989.

second episode, Ivan, whose resplendence and power shine in his royal garb, attempts to coerce the bride into a sexual encounter by blackmail: if she complies, he will cease to torture her bridegroom. Here, the luxurious, ornamental, rotund, and luminous bed – the spectacular bed – on which this violation is meant to take place resembles not just a woman’s invitingly open gown but an iron maiden, the medieval German instrument of torture. With regard to the virgin bride’s unforeseen wedding night, the bed thus becomes an amusing visual pun. Here too, aestheticism, erotic and luxurious display – the surface of things – masks a symbolic association with violence, horror, and torture.



Ivan’s bed and the virgin bride; the Nuremberg iron maiden.

Waxworks’ ornamental uncanny, uniting visual pleasure and anxiety in ambivalent display, progressively instills a kind of distrust of the pleasures and revelations of vision, tending toward a full-blown denigration of perception. The narrative’s nested repetitions of doppelgänger figures is a key constituent of this progression. Lotte Eisner first noted how in *Waxworks*, even the figures on the screen are “reduced to ornaments, their gestures frozen to the point of a carefully elaborated abstraction”.¹⁵ This is especially the case with the film’s proliferate doppelgängers, which become yet another kind of serial repetition in the diegesis, but as *human* ornaments and counterfeits, both fantasy selves and visual commodities.

The status of both the film’s characters and their doubles as simulacra is explicit. The waxworks characters in the framing story,¹⁶ already merely effigies (an

¹⁵ Lotte Eisner, discussing *Waxworks*’ influence on Eisenstein’s *Ivan the Terrible*, *The Haunted Screen*, p. 119.

¹⁶ Excepting Rinaldo Rinaldini – unless it is he who appears in the Ripper sequence.

automaton in Ivan's case) of real historical figures, are redoubled – brought back to life – by the stories and the dream (and the film), as are the writer and the girl, perpetually fleeing from the waxworks' so-called tyranny. But within the sequences themselves, the “tyrants” create their own doubling scenarios. Haroun, known from *A Thousand and One Nights* for disguising himself as a commoner and going among his subjects in the pursuit of truth, here goes about in disguise just for a good time, leaving a wax double in his bed. This double is mutilated by Assad in the Caliph's place.¹⁷ In the parallel second episode, Ivan trades his luxurious robes with the bride's father and drives his troika, as a consequence of which the girl's father is assassinated in the Tsar's place. In each case, the body-double of the tyrannical ruler has harm inflicted on it that is meant for the ruler himself, whereby the ruler escapes death, and the dissimulation of identity is a tool of tyranny.

Characters are also multiplied within individual shots, where the doppelgänger theme participates in the film's ornamental repetitions. In a couple of cases, reflections in mirrors become the diegetic mechanism of this human repetition. A remarkable instance is how, about to attack the Caliph's effigy, Assad is reflected in Haroun's phony ring, multiplied seven-fold in the counterfeit version of the personal ornament. This shot, unnecessary for narrative momentum, instead pauses it for a time-image of seemingly gratuitous ornamentation. But it likewise compounds the levels of reflection at work: Assad, the narration's double of the writer, himself a double of the actor who plays him, is reflected kaleidoscopically by a phony copy of the Sultan's ring. This reflection, however, is fragmentary, with an amalgam of points of view that do not add up to a whole: the ring does not reflect him as it promises.

Gilles Deleuze's discussion of the symbol of the mirror in *Cinema II: The Time-Image* is especially illuminating – and strikingly appropriate – for what such a complex mirror image signifies. Mirrors, Deleuze argues, are inseparable from a circuit, where

This circuit itself is an exchange: the mirror-image is virtual in relation to the actual character that the mirror catches, but it is actual in the mirror which now leaves the character with only a virtuality and pushes him back out-of-field. The exchange is all the more active when the circuit refers to a polygon with a growing number of sides: as in a face reflected on the facets of a ring, an actor seen in an infinity of

¹⁷ Thus, the story the writer composes is written to explain how the *effigy* of Haroun lost his arm.

twins. When virtual images proliferate like this, all together they absorb the entire actuality of the character, at the same time as the character is no more than one virtuality among others.¹⁸

This mutual and nested virtuality, or dyad of actuality and virtuality, I would argue, is a central thematic concern of *Waxworks*. Precisely at its most ornamental moments, as in a multiplicity of reflections of an actor in a ring, the quality of the image as an ontological equivalent of a hall of mirrors is made apparent. The double theme is crucial for this kind of uncertainty, appearing as a multiplication of simulacra with no hierarchy of actuality from episode to episode, within individual tales, and even within individual shots.



Assad's reflections in Haroun's ring.

As with Assad's multiplication by the Caliph's ring, an astonishing scene of doubling within an image is the shot of Zarah looking flirtatiously into her broken mirror and directly engaging the look of the spectator through the shard's mediation. On the one hand, the viewer's visual pleasure derives from identification with the camera, and from unobservedly (by the husband) becoming the correspondent with whom the wife is flirting secretly under her husband's nose, shielded by the alibi of the mirror/film screen. Looking into the screen-mirror, he is also identified with the

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 70.

reflection of the actress. In both guises, he has a position of pleasure and power in the imaginary space, or the space of the image.



The broken mirror: Zarah looks at the audience.

The erotic construction, however, has darker undertones, and the mirror's jagged edge strikes a note of discord in the imaginary whole. The status of Zarah's reflection as commodity and fetish is highlighted by her fragmentary reflection in the mirror, as well as by the self-referential nature of the process in which she engages and the viewer participates: i.e., the application of make-up, an effort that seeks to increase her visual appeal and become more of a consumable image, not only within the diegesis, but outside it as a "star". This scene hints at a structural similarity between film and the mirror; it relies on the medium's spectator effects of identification and visual pleasure, but at the same time reflexively foregrounds the staging of these effects.

The second episode contains a more explicit and quite remarkable counterpart to this doubling scenario. Tsar Ivan, magnificent in his princely regalia, comes through a double door decorated by double icons, looking directly into the camera. Kracauer ascribes the scene's fascination to the "magic spell" of power:

One shot in the Ivan episode reveals the magic spell power radiates: Ivan appears in a folding-door, the portrait of a saint in life-size in each leaf, and as he stands there,

vested with all the insignia of his dignity, he seems a living icon between the two painted ones.¹⁹



A feast for the eyes: Ivan the Terrible's approach.

Emerging from this double-depicting door as a living icon, Ivan approaches the camera, growing progressively larger, engaging the spectator directly by looking into the camera and at the audience, and going from medium long shot to close-up. With his halo-like hat and luminous clothing, which closely resemble the icons' attire, Ivan becomes the third and middle term in a triptych, which ironically ascribes to him, the sadistic tyrant whose torture of an old man we have but lately witnessed, the position of a saint. This double valuation, pitting surface against essence, is characteristic of the film's images. But with the double (here, triple) theme it also enacts a *mise en abyme* of the perceived object that ultimately leaves no primary version or original against which counterfeits can be judged on visual grounds alone.

¹⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 86.

Like preceding depictions of multiplied inanimate objects, what this shot solicits with its techniques of a cinema of attractions, as opposed to its insignificant narrative role, is the spectator's desire to look. But hidden in the enchantment of looking, precisely because of the photogenic character and surface glamour of the consumable image, is its "true" nature: the sadistic tyrant. By the image's fetish character its "essence" is occulted: it even makes sense that something as Terrible should be as beautiful. Neither does the association between the Tsar and the icons, as icons, arise by chance: Ivan too is an ornament and counterfeit, a double of paintings, a copy of a waxwork, and of course, "Conrad Veidt". The constricted movements that the architecture necessitates, which ornamentalize the Tsar, are perfectly appropriate. The "magic spell" of power resides in its metaphysical pull as imagery.

The doppelgänger theme is perhaps an ideal vehicle for the representation of this dialectic of the surface and "true nature", and virtual and actual, as represented through a problematisation of vision and its loss of ontological primacy. Here, a sense of the uncanny has to do with the occultation of the "true nature" of what is seen by its purely specular attributes, and emerges as a function of aestheticism, the prioritization of the form of things over their "substance". But the viewer's visceral sense of unease is crystallized in the moment of Ivan's direct and shocking approach. Ivan's look confronts the viewer (and the viewer's voyeuristic look) and constitutes an interruption to the flow of narrative time: The peculiar, almost accusatory expression on his face seems to acknowledge the viewer's complicity.

Within the film's episodic structure, there is a progression in the level of horror. From the humour and charm of the Haroun-al-Raschid sequence, to the grotesque, twisted tyrant Ivan the Terrible, and finally to the phantasmagoric Jack the Ripper sequence, so too do the film's images gain in uncanny effect. And, while the film initially presents us with a diegetic audience of the writer's narration, the waxworks showman and his daughter, to whom the writer is describing the narrative we share, toward the end this audience has disappeared, and the spectator is left alone in the writer's imagination.

Phantasmagoria: The Jack the Ripper Sequence

In contrast to the clear narrative structure of the first two episodes, the Jack the Ripper sequence has no plot and is dominated by the obvious use of film techniques or tricks rather than set design, in particular by numerous superposed shots. Suitably for the depiction of a dream, there is little spatial and temporal logic – other than that offered by the familiar narrative structure of the chase – and little distinction between interior and exterior spaces. Although the chase was the “original truly narrative genre of the cinema”,²⁰ here the multiplicity of superposed images and spatiotemporal chaos make it much more an abstract chase than its classic counterparts. Superpositions are taken to an extreme, sometimes with more than five images at a time overlying the first-level spaces that the protagonists traverse. Their effect is spectral: pursuit by a ghostly foe who is visible yet invisible, and against whom all resistance is futile as he is effectively impossible to kill (his immortality is assured by the medium itself). This haunting, firmly entrenched in the capabilities and tricks of the medium of cinema, refers back to the apparatus itself, the foregrounded and unveiled source of horror. Kracauer captures the spirit of the sequence pithily, noting the significance of the fairground:

But what in the framing story was nothing more than a crowded pleasure spot is now a deserted hunting ground for specters. Expressionist canvases, ingenious lighting effects and many other devices at hand in 1924 have been used to create this eerie phantasmagoria, which substantiates more forcibly than the analogous décor in *Caligari* the notion of chaos... Much as the episode recalls *Caligari*, it goes beyond its model in stressing the role of the fair: the fair that in *Caligari* merely served as a background is here the very scene of action. In the course of their flight, the poet and the girl hurry past the constantly circling merry-go-round, while Jack-the-Ripper himself, *Caligari* and Cesare in one, pursues them on miraculous dream paths, hovering through a gigantic Ferris wheel that also turns without pause.²¹

The description of the scene as phantasmagoria captures the quality of these floating images, which recall and refer to the experience of the popular medium of projected horrors at the beginning of the nineteenth century. An ancestor of the horror film, the phantasmagoria enjoyed great popularity in Europe in the late-18th century into the 19th century, terrifying its audiences with ghoulish illusions created with magic lanterns and other forms of projection from behind the screen. Its greatest showman,

²⁰ Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde”, in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. T. Elsaesser, London, BFI, 1990, p. 60.

²¹ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 87.

Robertson the Magician (1763–1837), invented a magic lantern on wheels (fantoscope) that made effigies of the dead appear to approach the audience, as Jack the Ripper does in *Waxworks*.

But the phantasmagoria is an appropriate description not only in its significance as the precursor of the horror film, but also because of later connotations that the concept acquired in the nineteenth century. Terry Castle has considered the shift in the word's usage from its original signification of a genre of images of horror projected by uncanny, spectrelike showmen to its describing the capacity of the imagination to unleash its own daemonic projections (in other words, how the "ghosts" engendered by an actual external medium were internalized). Importantly, though, the term was also appropriated by Marx (and subsequent Marxist thinkers) to describe the objective, unreal experience of the commodity-world under industrial capitalism.²² In addition, as Tom Gunning has noted, the optical illusion of the phantasmagoria can be understood as an instance of how visual technologies "opened up an area in which ontological uncertainty held sway".²³

But the Jack the Ripper sequence, as we will see, also represents a phantasmagoria in the Marxist sense, of bourgeois capitalism as a world of equivalent, interchangeable simulacra, of fetishized commodities whose "real" nature and process of production are occulted by their surface attributes. The phantasmagoric effects of the Jack the Ripper episode resonate with the film's theme of an ontological uncertainty grounded in vision, connecting the proliferation of images enacted by the medium of cinema with the experiential consequences of bourgeois modernity.

Significantly, unlike the previous spectacular and photogenic tyrants of the film, with their surface glamour, Jack the Ripper is presented as the very type of modest bourgeois respectability, utterly normal and scarcely noticeable in his coat and scarf as a *Bürgerteufel*. Likewise suggestive is the fact that the identity of this notorious sex murderer of then-recent history (1888) has remained a mystery. He is

²² The phantasmagoria genre is discussed in relation to these films in greater detail in the conclusion.

²³ Much like the early cinema, notably discussed by Tom Gunning, a significant component of the visual pleasure of the phantasmagoria was curiosity and amazement at the power and magic of mimetic technologies, in particular their capacity to unleash doubles of man and their replication of motion (cf. Schiller's *The Ghost-Seer*). See Terry Castle, "Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie", *Critical Inquiry*, 15.1, 1988, pp. 26–61.

thus archetypal for the recurring demoniac bourgeois characters of German cinema.²⁴ Although his benevolent exterior hides his “true nature”, contrasting with the extreme terror he generates in the protagonists and with the phantasmagorical décor on which he is superposed, he is the worst tyrant of all in the film, not least because he is the most abstract. In fact, the introductory frame refers to the bourgeois gentleman on the outside, and devil inside, as “the most amazing character of all time”. Interestingly, there is little indication of any sexual motive in the chase sequence that follows, and instead of attacking the girl, the expected behaviour of an infamous sex-murderer, he stabs the young man.²⁵ Finally, whereas the first two tyrants wear rings of power, he carries a gleaming knife.

While the first two episodes take place in the distant past and far-off lands, the technological phantasmagoria of the nightmare sequence is integrated into the frame, occupying the self-same fairground realm and taking place in the diegetic present. The beginning of the episode is merged with the framing story. After penning the horrible fate of Ivan the Terrible, the writer walks over to peer at the now-sleeping girl through a curtain. After this Peeping Tom behavior, which marks him as a voyeur, who is identified here and throughout the film with the spectator, he walks – under the gaze of Jack the Ripper – over to his desk. Casting several curious glances at Jack, whose effigy in turn watches the writer, he grows bleary eyed. He looks at the murderer and sees a blurry image, composed of numerous superpositions. This shot signals the beginning of ontological doubts that mark the uncanny: a loss of faith in the primacy of vision and a concomitant infection by indecidability of the phenomenal world, and by extension, of the viewing subject. Worried by this unnatural vision, the writer rubs his eyes and looks at the waxwork again, this time for reassurance. Checking that everything is back to normal, he dozes off. But the perceptual distress refers back to the means of its depiction, implicating the agency of cinema and cinematic narration in the contagion of uncertainty.

²⁴ Cf. Beckert the serial child murderer in Fritz Lang’s *M*. The latter is, nevertheless, an individual – a psychologised character – and not a cipher/symbol, as is Jack the Ripper.

²⁵ Perhaps too shocking for the screen?



Shot/reverse shot: The writer's visual uncertainty.

The writer's desk and lantern are integrated into the beginning of the fairground sequence. While the writer is approaching from the background, in the foreground we continue to see the stand where Jack the Ripper's wax figure was perched, now empty but with his name remaining visible. The murderer is thus present through his absence, as if he has stepped off his perch and is lurking unseen. The scene is set with numerous superpositions, some at a slant, in a Cubist, aperspectival *mélange*.

A shot follows with Jack the Ripper in the foreground, with the viewer sharing his point of view, as the couple slowly back away from us into the center of the screen, looking back at the Ripper and audience. Also in the foreground, as a further nod to the integrated framing story, the wax figure of Haroun-al-Raschid remains and becomes animate, turning his head in the couple's direction to watch them go. The young man shields the girl from the sight of the Ripper, as if danger lies in sight.

Following this beginning, Jack the Ripper, over the word "Panopticum", approaches the screen looking directly at the audience, returning the gaze of the viewer, who is now identified with the pursued couple. This uncanny movement, recalling that of Ivan, is immediately reiterated against a different background. In the deliberately irrational architecture of the sequence's spaces, the viewer is sandwiched between the Ripper and the lovers and becomes the victim of the Ripper's pursuit, endangered by the facts of looking and being seen.²⁶

²⁶ One of the working titles of Fritz Lang's *M* recalls precisely this kind of terror: "*Dein Mörder sieht dich an*".



The approaching murderer, the cringing lovers, and the viewer in between (not shown).

The remarkable doubling of Jack the Ripper occurs shortly thereafter, when a strange series of shots brings us to a paradigmatic Weimar scene: the department store. Mistakenly thinking that the danger is past and embracing in celebration, the pair find themselves in a grotesque rendition of a department store display, next to a large sign that says “MODES”. Their manifest delight hints that the wares are there for the taking.



The happy couple.

While the writer inexplicably disappears, a most incongruous sequence unfolds: The girl puts on a luxurious fur-trimmed lamé coat. At that moment, Jack the Ripper appears, almost as an avenging angel punishing commodity fetishism, and with the semi-visibility of a spectre. About to pounce on his victim, the shadowy larger-than-life murderer is progressively doubled, tripled, and quadrupled, the girl's terror increasing with the serial killer's mechanical reproduction.



Double exposure as exposure to doubles: Two, three, and four Jacks the Ripper.

Jack the Ripper, multiplied, resembles a mass-produced commodity in a department-store display, a salient feature of Weimar visual culture. The effectiveness of displays, through techniques such as the serial repetition of

commodities, was a subject of empirical investigation at the time. As Janet Ward has described,

Psychotechnical experiments were conducted on how best to achieve a “capture of the gaze” [*Blickfang*]. Paramount were light-effects and the machinic, serial reproduction of the commodity, as in the *Stapelfenster*... The aim was to move, incite, be electric, or simply impress by the rationalized repetition of mass-produced goods.²⁷

With Jack the Ripper, however, there is a bizarre inversion: instead of mass-produced goods, the shopper finds mechanically reproduced evils. And, while this sequence in some wise repeats the motifs of the first two episodes, where the tyrants are doubled through their own artifice, here the mechanism of the doubling is technological: based on lighting effects and montage. As its terrors are not diegetically explicable without recourse to the role of technology and phantasmagoric effects, the apparatus of transmission and multiplication of the image is implicated in their propagation.²⁸ The representation of vision and its uncertainties thus refers back both to the specular interaction of consumer and commodity, and to that of film viewer and film.

Following these ambivalent constructions of visual pleasure, *Waxworks* returns to the framing story, the purported “real”. Unlike *Caligari*, however, this only means the topsy-turvy world of the fairground, where the narrative of history is characteristically suspended, the real and counterfeit are indistinguishable, and a particular visual regime operates. The writer and the spectator, both observed by Jack the Ripper, confirm that the fair is, in Derrida’s words, “...the place where the spectator, presenting himself as spectacle, will no longer be either seer (*voyant*) or

²⁷ Janet Ward (Lungstrum), “The Display Window: Designs and Desires of Weimar Consumerism”, *New German Critique*, No. 76, Winter 1999, p. 138. See also Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001.

²⁸ In this sense, the description as phantasmagoria is even more apposite. For Marxist thought, the world becomes phantasmagorical under capitalism, in part with the powerful visual grip, a magical or metaphysical delusion, exerted by the commodity. Benjamin and Adorno rely on the term in discussing reification and the illusory nature of the commodity. Adorno, discussing Wagnerian opera, refers to the specular quality of the product that masks its true attributes, i.e., the process of its production: “...the occultation of production by means of the outward appearance of the product” whereby the “product presents itself as self-producing”. Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, London, NLB, 1981, p. 85.

voyeur, will efface within himself the difference between the actor and the spectator, the represented and the representer, the object seen and the seeing object...”.²⁹

While *Waxworks* initially offered its spectator a “classical” viewing prospect, as observers in a cinematic panopticon, by its conclusion this spectatorship comes to be radically altered. The word “Panopticum” superposed over Jack the Ripper coincides with a terrifying phantasmagoria that, instead of delivering a voyeuristic visual pleasure, puts the spectator in the position of the object of the look, thus signifying the viewer’s identification as a potential target for a serial killer. *Waxworks* as panopticon is an uncanny, self-referential display of novelties whose observer is as much viewed as viewing.

As the sequence concludes, the continuation of certain motifs from the dream into the frame casts doubt on whether there is a reassuring disjunction between the two episodes, between dream and diegetic “reality”. When the writer is stabbed by Jack the Ripper, he immediately wakes in the framing story, where he has been stabbed by his pencil. A jarring and sinister note is struck resoundingly in the last shot/still of the film, where, while the protagonists who have survived such imaginary dangers fulfill their responsibility as onscreen lovers, sealing the film with a kiss, in the background and center screen, we see the gleaming knife spotlighted in the hand of Jack the Ripper’s disturbing wax effigy, who continues to watch us.



The gleaming knife in the film’s closing shot.

²⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak, Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, p. 306.

While the *Waxworks* conclusion brings us back to its diegetic present tense, its “reality”, this is not the canny sphere of the everyday. And, as is ultimately the case with *Caligari* (and, e.g., *Schatten*), here the doublings within the plot are purportedly ascribed to the “unreal” or “imaginary”, an oneiric aside within the narrative order. However, the visuality of the medium itself – which has been at issue – democratizes the status of the different segments of the film and equalizes them for the viewer in terms of their ontological validity. What this and other doppelgänger films, in particular those with a frame structure, rely on, is the visual equivalence with which the medium stamps its images. Thus, the film’s “imaginary” realm and its “real” have equal(ized) ontological weight, inasmuch as the language of their representation, itself put into question, is the same. As Lukács insightfully wrote in 1913,

“Everything is possible”: this is the credo of the cinema, and because its technique expresses at every moment the absolute (even if only empirical) reality of this moment, “virtuality” no longer functions as a category as opposed to “reality”: both categories become equivalent, identical. Everything is true and real, everything is equally true and real; this is what a sequence of images in the cinema teaches us.³⁰

Waxworks relies on precisely this effective (and affective) equivalence in cinema – because it arises in the visual register – of the real and the counterfeit. In addition to the obvious importance of the waxwork effigies, the “phony” objects – Haroun’s fake ring, Ivan’s hourglass with his name on it, and the knife-pen – have major consequences in the film. Not only with the integration of the dream sequence into the framing story, but also because of their structural similarity, the similarity of the dream and film, which here literally shows a dream world, the conclusion’s stabilizing effect is diminished and a vague sense of foreboding prevails. Kracauer consequently remarks how “the dream character of the Jack-the-Ripper episode arouses the suspicion that Jack and his confreres are not merely figures of the past, but tyrants still among us”.³¹

While relying on standard narrative archetypes such as the chase and the kiss at the end, *Waxworks* accords them an uncanny, self-referential aspect, relating

³⁰ See “Gedanken zu einer Ästhetik des Kinos”, (1913), *Kino-Debatte*, ed. Anton Kaes, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1978, p. 114. Quoted and translated in T. Elsaesser, “Cinema – The Irresponsible Signifier”.

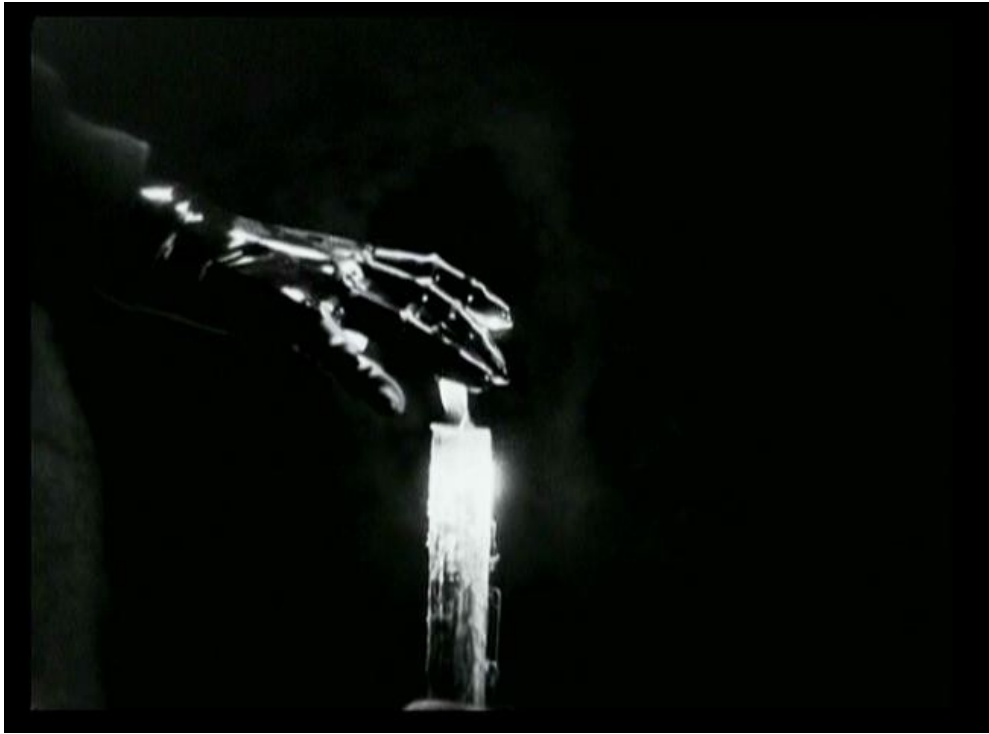
³¹ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 86.

visual uncertainty to the effects of the cinematic apparatus. Jack the Ripper's chase is reflexive in its unabashed cinematic motivation; the medium itself has unleashed the ghost, and the horror is directly tied to the apparatus and its capacity for spectral effects that challenge human vision. The technical nature of the threat dispels the possibility of any real resistance, and only allows a futile flight, as in *The Student of Prague*. At the conclusion, there is no real resolution: we are still in the domain of images that compel attention but are an unacknowledged source of terror.

To return to Lotte Eisner's comments on the Jack the Ripper sequence: In *Waxworks* it is precisely the "over-refined composition" and "excessive mannerism" that make the spectator's discomfort meaningful. For *mise en scène*, including ornamentation and the virtuosity of montage, as the third episode makes clear, are implicated in and, in some respects, the source of the uncanny. In other words, in decrying how these Baroque elements effect a discomfort in the spectator, Eisner fails to consider what such discomfort has to do with the film's subject matter: i.e., the relationship between the ornament, the commodity, and tyranny – as between the real and the counterfeit – that is grounded in vision. It is fitting to expect that an antithetical aim, using *mise en scène* merely to accentuate the "mood" and "action", might be realized in the United States.

CHAPTER VIII

VISIONS OF EXCESS: *METROPOLIS* (1926)



Rotwang's hand extinguishing Maria's candle.

I saw a street lit as if in full daylight... At night [New York] did not give the impression of being alive; it lived as illusions lived. I knew then that I had to make a film about all of these sensations.

Fritz Lang¹

For, from out the marvel of light, spun into ribbons, the knowledge had come upon him that it was day, that the invulnerable transformation of darkness into light was becoming consummate, in its greatness, in its kindness, over the world.

Thea von Harbou's *Metropolis*

¹ "Was ich in Amerika sah", *Film-Kurier*, 11 December 1924.

Legend has it, that a few weeks before the completion of their scenario for *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*, Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz were at a loss. They had amassed several ideas, but these somehow did not seem to fit together in the right way. Then late one night, Mayer took Janowitz to an amusement ground that they frequented “where sideshow magic could be found”, ironically located in the Kantstrasse in Berlin. There they chanced upon a show marked in huge letters “Man or Machine?” – starring a man in a stupor who performed feats of strength and clairvoyance. According to Janowitz, this incident was decisive in bringing together all their ideas, and provided the ultimate inspiration for the film: “On that night the original story of Doctor Caligari was conceived. We returned to my room in the Passauer Strasse, where we sat and talked through the night into the dawn.”²

It is doubtless telling that *Caligari*, widely regarded as the film that ushered in German cinema’s “Golden Age” and an icon of Weimar visual culture, was inspired by a sideshow whose spectacular and specular value lay in the indeterminate constitution of man on show. Although the tacit understanding of its spectator might have been that the man was real, the visual fascination of such a display would come of its making uncanny and ambiguous the distinction between animate and inanimate, the real man and his mimetic technological replica. Not incidentally, such a performance would require a showman who is both magician and scientist – a media-technology innovator like Caligari himself – who displays the man-machine, his “creature”, to the astonished spectator. His work, founded on a mechanistic conception of the human body, reveals the hidden magic within technology, releasing representations of man whose ontological status is unclear, uncanny doubles. Above all, however, this scenario taps into a broader cultural anxiety having to do with perception and intimately related to the visual regimes of classical modernity.

A primary product of these visual regimes is cinema, whose images of life have a similarly indeterminate and liminal position as mirrors of nature and the height of artifice. In the in-between sphere of uncertainty, where the mechanisms involved (of reproduction or projection) are not immediately apparent, simulacra of this double nature, whether cyborg or cinema, can give rise to their own fears: a

² Hans Janowitz, “*Caligari*—The Story of a Famous Story (Excerpts)”, in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories*, ed. Mike Budd, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1990, p. 233.

certain indecidability infecting vision that is a sense of the uncanny, the onset of indeterminacy between the organic and technological, living beings and machines. The issue – the distressing indecidability of the real and the illusory in the age of technology, including film technology – is a central preoccupation of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. A recent reading of *Metropolis* rightly highlights the film's diegetic concerns with the uncanny character of mimetic technologies, how

Mimetic technologies, including photography, cinema and even artificial intelligence ... transfix the modern imagination in a manner similar to the viewer's fixation on the Maria robot. Cinematic images mesmerize not because they simulate the living, but because we know they are dead, as if we have seen a ghost, as if the corpse stands up and walks away, a corpse. Life is quantifiable, we know it because we embody it. Death on the other hand, is incomprehensible. The fascination for anthropomorphic automata is macabre. It is based not on a preoccupation with immortality, but with death. Technologies of human imitation, then, are laden both with the celebration of human potential and its darker side...³

Lang's city of the future relates such technological misgivings and ontological distress both to Weimar debates on the question of technology (industrialization and modernity) and to film itself as a medium, in particular through the allegorical figures of Rotwang and the robot. The dystopic *Metropolis* is the outcome of unchecked rationalism and rationalization in a capitalist society, a city whose "Master" is a captain of industry and where civil bureaucracy and business concern are one. Likewise, the film's portrayal of ultra-specialised, rationalized factory work is the ultimate extension of Taylorism and Fordism. Thea von Harbou's novel makes both the Taylorist aspect of Freder's factory and Freder's understanding of the subordination of the workers to their machines quite clear. Confronting his father with the wretchedness of the workers' lives, Freder says:

[N]ear the god-machines, the slaves of the god-machines: the men who ... have nothing else to do but eternally one and the same thing, each in his place, each at his machine. Divided into periods of brief seconds, always the same clutch at the same second, at the same second.⁴

³ Julia Dover, "The Imitation Game: Paralysis and Response in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and Contemporary Critiques of Technology", in *Fritz Lang's Metropolis: Cinematic Visions of Technology and Fear*, eds. Michael Minden and Holger Bachmann, Rochester, NY, Camden House, 2000, p. 278.

⁴ Thea von Harbou, *Metropolis*, New York, Ace Books, 1963, pp. 28–29.

This depiction of American capitalism taken to an extreme responds to crucial debates of the day concerning the industrial dénouement of rationalism and the mechanistic conception of the human body. Historians attribute Germany's "crisis of classical modernity" partly to the fact that Germany underwent speedy industrialization on an unprecedented scale from the 1890s on, culminating in the "modern" outlook of the Republic. The turmoil of modernisation infiltrated all aspects of German life under the government's programmatic pursuit of technological advance in the framework of a rational liberal system. In the workplace, the American ideal of rationalization held sway as far as the recurrent financial crises would allow, involving the mechanisation of assembly lines, the specialization of labour, and the reification of the work of salaried employees, famously discussed by Kracauer in *Die Angestellten*. The proliferation of mass media, including newspapers and periodicals, and later radio and film, were part of these dramatic changes. In short, *Metropolis* appeared in a context where

The world of the new could no longer be ignored, and it was not an entirely attractive sight. The Janus-faced nature of the process of modernization became a fact of everyday life; it dominated cultural discourse.

The 'golden twenties' were seen, at the time, as the culmination of a process of rationalization and efficiency, not only in technology and the economy, but in the social structure and in people's daily lives. A *substitute religion* of social and technological utilitarianism and a euphoric faith in progress inspired a cult of 'Americanism', but optimism was dispelled by the brute realities of the economic crisis.⁵

The film's representation of alienation under high capitalism echoes the daily lives of its spectators, undergoing the drastic changes brought about by modernization. But it also relates to the unprecedented technological destruction of the "war machine" in World War I and the urban landscape in its aftermath, strewn with amputees wearing prosthetic limbs tailored to factory applications. The film depicts the possible gruesome conclusion of contemporaneous industrial practices, with its rows of interchangeable workers who are slaves to the machines they work for and to the network of artificial eyes that observe them. It engages contemporary currents questioning the consequences of high technology and the mechanistic conception of the human body, conjuring the worker's alienation in the face of rationalization in

⁵ Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson, New York, Hill and Wang, 1993, p. 277; emphasis mine.

the metropolitan workplace and the terror inspired by his (potential) robotic replacements. As Jeffrey Herf has argued, the debate on technology – the Weimar responses to which include the technophilia of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and the post-war technophobia of Expressionism – found a resolution in the “Reactionary Modernist” compromise of the Nazis: the paradoxical wedding of technology and the German *Geist*.⁶

Ambivalence toward modernity and technology – depicted as a competing religion – is perhaps the defining characteristic of *Metropolis*, a city where “Americanism” has led to oppression and panoptic surveillance, indistinguishability between men and machines, a “society of the spectacle” for the wealthy and mechanical slavery for the workers or “hands”. The men, the machinery, and even the city itself have a double nature, indiscriminately combining organic and mechanical traits. The workers, deprived of names and numbered instead, are already ambivalent machine-men serving the ruling class, slaves to rational time and to industrial machinery that is both futuristic and archaic.⁷ The driving force of the city, itself a complex of machinery and organic parts, is Frederson, the city’s brain. His office, the “brain-pan” of the New Tower of Babel, as the novel puts it, is “peopled with numbers”.⁸

Metropolis relies on the resonance of the double theme in this industrial context, especially in making apparent the rational, numerical, economic equivalence of its characters by its use of a *mise-en-abyme* of doubled and multiplied figures: not only including Maria and the robot, but Maria and the mother Hel (in the original film), Frederson and Rotwang, and ultimately, the interchangeability and equivalence of all men. There is a kind of facelessness in operation, an identity of workers and even their oppressors. The novel describes what the film seeks to depict quite explicitly: “And they all had the same faces. And they all appeared to be of the same age.”⁹ This kind of equivalence recalls Adorno and Horkheimer’s dictum on Enlightenment: “The identity of everything with everything else is paid for in that

⁶ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1984.

⁷ E.g., the man Freder replaces at the clock-machine, Georgy, introduces himself as the palindrome 11811.

⁸ Thea von Harbou, *Metropolis*, p. 22.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18. This is a recurring theme of contemporaneous avant-garde art’s critiques of modernity, e.g., in paintings of groups of identically dressed men without faces in the Berlin Dada movement.

nothing may at the same time be identical with itself."¹⁰ On film, this visual equivalence of men becomes apparent not only because of the medium's capacity to present a bird's-eye view of a group of men, but also insofar as figures onscreen have a kind of *de facto* equivalence as moving ghosts. "Facelessness" is therefore a cinematic, structural condition as well as a thematic/diegetic one.

This brief look at the significance of *Metropolis*'s central themes in the context of the Weimar Republic's accelerated modernization provides a background for looking at the relationship between the film's characterizations and the history of technology, including the visual medium of cinema and its role in mass culture. The conjunction of these themes in the figure of the double is vital for considering the film's constellation of meanings; it is significant, as Raymond Bellour has written,

The focus of Lang's *mise en scène* is so often vision itself, articulated in various ways, among which the most obvious is the presence of the investigator, the reporter or the photographer, the man who sees and seizes appearances within the rectangular frame of his camera... Every film-maker, in a sense, defines the essence of cinema, but is there another for whom it is so nakedly, and so unequivocally, as with Lang, the ultimate metaphor?¹¹

One important avenue to explore is how the film's formal constructions of vision and doubles, especially as part of its metacinematic theme, are related to its narrative concern with technology, alienation, and factory life. As Andreas Huyssen has noted, "doubling, mirroring and projecting not only constitute the technological make-up of this film, but they lie at the very core of the psychic and visual processes that underlie its narrative".¹² Looking at how the film constructs a relationship between vision and technology, both within the narrative and for the spectator, will illuminate the reflexive relationship between the themes of technology and the medium of its narration, and how the narrative conflicts of the film relate to the "nature" of cinema. *Metropolis* is, perhaps above all, a story of visual crisis – at once relating an allegory of cinema and referring to the crises of classical modernity; it is necessary to

¹⁰ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Concept of Enlightenment", in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, London: Verso, 1997, p. 12.

¹¹ Raymond Bellour, "On Fritz Lang", in *Fritz Lang: The Image and the Look*, ed. Stephen Jenkins, London, BFI, p. 28.

¹² Andreas Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*", in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1986, p. 68.

reconsider its complex images with reference both to an archeology of the cinema and to the Weimar context of modernity in crisis.

Metropolis foregrounds acts of vision and its discontents through a wide array of techniques of montage and *mise en scène*. Among these are numerous depictions of spectatorship and exhibition, and of crowds watching a performer or a speaker, sometimes voyeuristically observed by a hidden meta-viewer. The film also displays a stylistic and generic heterogeneity, a pastiche of different styles from the graphic/decorative arts, including Art Deco, Expressionist, and *Neue Sachlichkeit*. With this inexhaustible bricolage, it is unwise to categorize the film in terms of genre or to make broad stylistic attributions: for what defines *Metropolis* stylistically is, precisely, visual excess. In addition to profuse quotations from visual culture, gothic to avant garde, a cinematic dialogism is also at work: montage effects recalling Soviet and other avant-garde cinema, classical narrative norms, and even early-cinema effects of frontality and exhibition. The admixture of these techniques and styles, which has often resulted in the charge of excessive and gratuitous ornamentation on the part of critics, is in fact the basis of a self-referential *Gesamtkunstwerk* concerning vision and spectatorship.

The creation of the android double is vital for a cohesive reading of the film as an allegory of cinema exactly because it links the theme of technology in its two dimensions: that of the factory-city of the future, which the film portrays, and that of the film itself as a technological medium. The robot is not only a major technological industrial innovation, but also a total work of art, a perfect mimetic technology that reproduces the (diegetic) real as a compelling spectacle. With the robot, the question concerning technology, including film technology, becomes more precisely a question of vision and its technological manipulations, and of the ontological and epistemological consequence or capacity of the eye when indistinguishability between the real and its image has arisen. The robot Maria in this guise compels a kind of ontological anxiety that goes hand in hand with modernity, and is revealed in its critiques, one having to do with a loss of faith in vision emerging both with the science of optics and the proliferation of visual stimuli and simulacra.

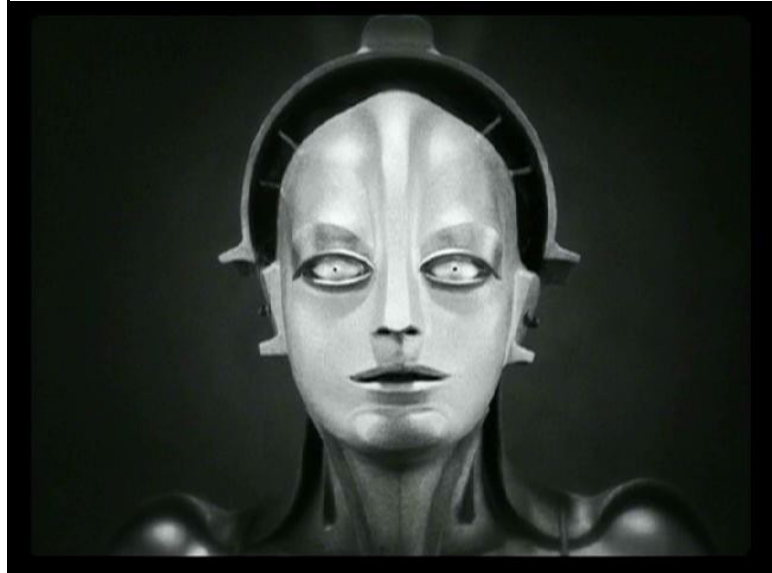
A Cinema of Excess

Metropolis's pastiche of styles and techniques involves a set of dichotomies whose common ground is an issue of vision: viewer and viewed, original and image, visible and invisible, darkness and light, blindness and sight, ignorance and knowledge, disempowerment and power. The fundamental divisions of *Metropolis* are expressed architecturally as the distinction between the world above the ground, brilliantly lit by infinite lights and presided over by a man in a tower with a panoptic view out of his windows over what transpires. Frederson's power is above all the power to *see*; his knowledge comes from vision. His henchman, the Thin Man, too serves as an extension of his senses as a detective uncovering what he wants to know – like a roving extra eye or camera. A closed-circuit TV system monitors his industrial empire, the machinery, on which he speaks to Grot. Frederson's senses are thus technologically extended; he is himself already a machine-man. His New Tower of Babel is intended to serve the same purpose as the architecturally akin panopticon designed by Jeremy Bentham, which was, according to Foucault, “a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen.”

Freder is under his father's ceaseless observation, especially through Frederson's instrument, the Thin Man. The workers are also under the Master's eye, but have not entirely internalized this surveillance, which exactly aims to “induce ... a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power”.¹³ They have secret hieroglyphic maps of the catacombs in their pockets, which Frederson cannot decipher. Significantly, what escapes Frederson's god's-eye view is that which is *underground* and in darkness, unlit by the gleaming electric lights. Not only do the dark catacombs predate *Metropolis*'s “age of reason”, but the Master has been unaware of their very existence. Both spatially and temporally, they lie outside Frederson's dominion. And the electricity that lights the city does not reach these depths: candles are used to illuminate their irrational caverns in medieval chiaroscuro. The contrast between high technology and the gothic underbelly, linked to a contrast in artistic styles, could not be clearer, and is founded on the opposition

¹³ This and the above quotation are from “Panopticism”, in Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 228.

of darkness, the unknown, that which is beyond the domain of reason, to signifiers of “Enlightenment” and modernity, including the technological impetus of capital, knowledge and power, and mimetic technologies that mechanically reproduce reality.¹⁴ Rotwang mediates between these two spheres – his house remains connected to the catacombs and, like the cathedral, tied to a gothic, irrational past that is impervious to “modernization”.



The photogenic robot.

The dichotomies in question become problematic, however, with the double motif and related self-referential themes of vision and spectatorship, which disrupt the clear-cut divisions between Master and slaves, knowledge and ignorance, reason and unreason, and so on. Here it is significant that “the hallmark of [Lang’s] style is precisely the interpolation of disorienting or disrupting visuals into the classic match-cut sequence, making what is represented seem ambiguously motivated and always happening at one remove”.¹⁵ These disorientations have thematic meaning: When Freder confronts his father about the deplorable work conditions of the workers, the

¹⁴ An interesting point of comparison for the symbolic function of the Metropolis catacombs is Georges Bataille’s concept of the labyrinth. As Martin Jay has written, for Bataille, “The labyrinth... served as the antidote to the pyramid, that architectural symbol of solidity and substance, which was homologous to the optical cone. Its valorization also signaled Bataille’s repudiation of the Enlightenment, which, as d’Alembert’s *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia* made clear, sought to place the philosopher high above the labyrinth of knowledge.” Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993, pp. 229–30.

¹⁵ Thomas Elsaesser, *Metropolis*, London, BFI, p. 40.

viewer's familiarity with classical shot-reverse shot structures, and according expectations, are used to take him/her off guard, and create visual ambiguity. A shot of Freder speaking, looking to his right, is followed by a shot of his father looking to his left. The rules of spatial continuity make one suppose they are looking away from each other. The third shot then comes as a surprise: It shows that the father is looking at Freder, while Freder is looking away from his father. The diegetic inability of the father and son to communicate is thus represented as a *visual* miscommunication: not only between the characters, who are unable to look at each other at the same time throughout this sequence, but between the film and its spectator. The disjunction between the father and son, which has a social and ideological basis and coincides with disparate views on technology, is presented as a visual disjunction *to the viewer*: as a problem of vision or an unexpected sight. When "Lang lets ambiguity hover over the relationship which unites character and creator through viewpoint",¹⁶ in *Metropolis* it is clear that this ambiguity has ideological significance. But it is also cinematically significant in its reliance on and subversion of "classical" narrative techniques. The representation of a narrative ideological conflict coincides with a conflict in the language of cinema. Where a conflict concerning technology is expressed in terms of visual disparity or contention over visual fields, cinema itself comes to be implicated in the film's dénouement.



Freder and Frederson speak: An ambiguous "shot-reverse shot" sequence.



Conclusion: Frederson accused.

¹⁶ Raymond Bellour, "On Fritz Lang", p. 31.

In the established visual order of *Metropolis*, rebellion against “Enlightenment” is expressed as blurring and obfuscation, the terrifying possibility of blindness and dismemberment: in other words, it brings with it the ontological uncertainty of the uncanny. “Irrational” rebellion in the film leads to visual threat, terror, and catastrophe. But the film also associates fears of blindness with its depictions of spectatorship and with the vamp-Maria (and the Father), which has served psychoanalytic readings of the robot as inducing castration anxiety. But the larger question of the relationship that the film sets up between technology and the danger of blindness, in conjunction with its ambivalent allegorisation of vision and cinema, remains. Andreas Huyssen has sought to rectify the limitations of an Oedipal reading of the vamp-machine motif by considering “how or why male fantasies about women and sexuality are interlaced with visions of technology in the film”, contending that “only by focusing on the mechanical vamp can we fully comprehend the cohesion of meanings which the film transports”.¹⁷ Huyssen argues that two competing views of technology, as represented by Expressionism and the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, are at issue in the film, and “the machine vamp plays the crucial role in resolving a seemingly irreconcilable contradiction”:¹⁸

[The] film manages an ingeniously original ‘resolution’ ... by constructing a fable in which the (culturally recent) fear of ‘technology out of control’ is mapped onto the (more archaic) fear of ‘female sexuality out of control’. The move at the ideological level has its stylistic correspondence: the characters’ language of Expressionist pathos is eventually contained by the *Neue Sachlichkeit* cool of the machine aesthetics.¹⁹

Huyssen’s account focuses on a homology between woman and technology, and not on the relationship between these technological themes of the film and its cinematic themes, focusing on film itself as technology: cinema’s implication in how technology is made problematic and the spectator’s incorporation as the site of the conflict. With regard to these questions, there is, on the contrary, no “resolution” as such: The film’s visual and graphic stylizations persist at the end, confronting the spectator with a dialectic of visual pleasure and (ideological) repulsion. Interestingly, Andrew Webber has read the visual structuring of *Metropolis* as playing a “now you

¹⁷ Andreas Huyssen, “The Vamp and the Machine: Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*”, p. 68.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁹ Thomas Elsaesser, *Metropolis*, p. 55.

see it, now you don't" game with its spectators (including its diegetic spectators), recalling Freud's *fort-da* game of pleasure and unpleasure, and representing the dichotomy of the two scopic drives of *Schaulust* and *Zeigelust*.²⁰

These metacinematic tropes relate narrative issues of technology and ideology to the modern medium of cinema in its technological and ideological significance. The depiction of technology in the film and its constitution of vision and spectatorship as reflexive effects (e.g., *showing* the terms of male gaze, female object) raise the question of what technological crises, depicted as visual crises, mean for and in cinema. Of Lang's use of technological advances in filmmaking, such as Schüfftan's *Spiegeltechnik*, Huysen has written, "For his indictment of modern technology as oppressive and destructive, which prevails in most of the narrative, Lang ironically relies on one of the most novel cinematic techniques".²¹ This irony, I would argue, is at the center of the constellation of the film's conflicts: an ambivalence toward cinema that incorporates the history of its development and its implications in and for modernity.

With *Metropolis*'s representation of modernity as Faustian science and (incomplete) Weberian disenchantment, film itself – a product of this process – is an ambivalent agent of modern visual experience. For example, when Maria relates the story of the Tower of Babel to the workers, it appears as a metaphoric film-projection scenario in which the viewer is presented with the image of the tower, fetishized by being cut off from its surroundings and presented as a wondrous, astonishing object. Then, the camera pans out to show that this tower is in fact only an architectural model, a small object surrounded by the men who envision it. A "cinematic" framing of the tower is used to dupe the spectator; then, the *process* whereby this was made to happen is ironically divulged – as if to train the spectator to distrust the mechanically decontextualised perspectives that cinema presents.

There are abundant scenes of exhibition, spectatorship, voyeurism, and surveillance in *Metropolis* whose metacinematic effects are readily apparent. Notably, in crowd scenes – the workers listening to Maria, to the robot, or to Grot; watching the witch burn; the final handshake; the men at the Yoshiwara watching the

²⁰ Andrew Webber, "Canning the Uncanny", *Canning the Uncanny: The Construction of Visual Desire in Metropolis*, in *Fritz Lang's Metropolis: Cinematic Visions of Technology and Fear*, eds. Michael Minden and Holger Bachmann, Rochester, NY, Camden House, 2001.

²¹ Andreas Huysen, "The Vamp and the Machine: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*", p. 68.

robot's lascivious displays – the processes of spectatorship depicted mirror the actual spectator's engagement in the same activity. In a sense, what unites the classes in Metropolis is this desire to look. The in-between characters, however, Maria, the robot, and Rotwang, evince a desire to show (*Zeigelust*). Maria's first word in the film is "Look!"²²



Rotwang as voyeur at eye-shaped aperture.

Scenarios of spectatorship and their spectators are themselves subject to another level of surveillance by someone unnoticed, e.g., at the back of the crowd (Freder) or voyeuristically observing the proceedings through an eye-shaped aperture (Rotwang and Frederson). This ironic *mise-en-abyme* of watchers of watchers again draws attention to the spectator's position as observer, incorporating him/her in ambivalent valuations of spectatorship and as victim of the (sometimes uncanny) nature of the exhibit. Numerous images of eyes in the film have similar signification, reflexively expose the viewer's culpability in voyeuristic spectatorship and exposing him to the diegetic threat. These images, for example the montage tapestry of numerous eyeballs and various other eyelike forms, participate in the construction of the uncanny. But in their way they also reflect the viewer's act of spectatorship. In the characteristically ironic vein of the *doppelgänger* theme, here the uncanny

²² At least, in the best available version, which is missing a fourth of the film as originally shown.

involves the return of the look: scrutiny is not only undertaken by the viewer but by the thousand eyes with which *Metropolis* is looking back.²³



The thousand eyes of *Metropolis*.

As symbols, the disembodied, uncannily technological eyes also recall the privileged, disembodied Cartesian eye of modern science and the “ocularcentrism” on which modern industrial capitalism and its naturalist narratives are based.²⁴ Martin Jay’s discussion of the status of vision in intellectual history is illuminating:

Cartesian dualism was, moreover, particularly influential because of its valorization of the disembodied eye ... shared by modern science and Albertian art. In either of its guises, speculative or observational, it justified a fully spectatorial rather than

²³ Echoes of this construction of the look as uncanny source of distress may be found in the more murderous “Thousand Eyes of Dr Mabuse” and in a working title for *M*: “*Dein Mörder sieht dich an!*”.

²⁴ Cf. Man Ray’s *La Marquise Casati* (1922), which has multiple superimpositions of eyes, and Dali and Buñuel’s famous slicing of the eye while a cloud passes across the moon, in *Un chien andalou* (1929).

incarnate eye, the unblinking eye of the fixed gaze rather than the fleeting glance... The Descartes who had called his own philosophical quest a journey in which he tried “to be a spectator rather than an actor” in the affairs of the world, in Gibson’s sense, to a visual field and consigned the body to objecthood in it.²⁵

Signifying the fetishistic, decorporalised look of the sons of the Metropolis elite, like that of the Master from his tower, these eyes are associated in the narrative with the mastery of denarrativized, instrumentalized objects in the visual field. But structurally, they appear as a form of cinematic excess, distorting narrative time and drawing attention to the act of narration itself.²⁶ They are made problematic, and contribute to an ambiguous hesitancy of vision, ironically exemplifying how, as Bellour has written, Lang “distorts time in favor of pure scrutiny”.²⁷ As reflexive motifs, also mass-produced by a mimetic technology, they are counterparts of the effects of the double.

The In-Between: Rotwang and the Robot as Reflexive Figures

Mythologising the origins of *Metropolis*, Fritz Lang attributed his inspiration to a trip to New York City, the paradigmatic modern urban experience: “I saw a street lit as if in full daylight... At night the city did not give the impression of being alive; it lived as illusions lived. I knew then that I had to make a film about all of these sensations.”²⁸ The sensations in question emerge because of the illusory character of modern optical experience, the nightscape lit by artificial lights, the assault of visual stimuli, the supposed triumph of technology over darkness (i.e., that which is impervious to knowledge and representation). The medium of electricity, unalloyed symbol of progress, is also related to a certain indeterminacy of the visible. At once alive and dead, real and illusory, the ultramodern metropolis is also a necropolis, inducing an ontological anxiety in its bewildered spectator founded on loss of faith in

²⁵ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 81.

²⁶ Rosalind Krauss's analysis of Surrealist photography succinctly describes the temporal effects of doubling in the frame: “Without exception the surrealist photographers infiltrated the body of this print, this single page, with spacing... more important than anything else is the strategy of doubling. For it is doubling that produces the formal rhythm of spacing—the two-step that banishes the unitary condition of the moment, that creates *within* the moment an experience of fission. For it is doubling that elicits the notion that to an original has been added its copy.” See “The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism”, in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Myths*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1985, p. 109.

²⁷ Raymond Bellour, “On Fritz Lang”, p. 35.

²⁸ Fritz Lang, “Was ich in Amerika sah”, *Film-Kurier*, 11 December 1924.

the visible and in the capacities of the eye. Lang's quite cinematic experience foreshadows the themes of *Metropolis*, the indecidability between true and false, reality and illusion, and the ontological uncertainties that assail the modern observer faced with the electrically visible. In this context, Rotwang (Edison's proxy) and the robot are especially important as mediators between truth and illusion, in their special affinity with electrical power, and in explicitly causing the intrusion of a distrust of vision and an inability to distinguish the real from its image. They are the key figures of the film's allegory of cinema.

Rotwang as Surrogate Director

Rotwang is revealed to have the ultimate power, over life and death, which is expressed as power over light and shadow and the creation of simulacra of man. Paradoxically a metaphysical physiologist, Rotwang descends not only from Caligari, whom he physically resembles, but also from Edison, the Wizard of Menlo Park. His creation, the false Maria, is represented as an astonishing new media technology, a fact consistently highlighted in the film's depictions of spectatorship and their montages of eyeballs.

As an amoral scientist-magician who unleashes doubles and presents them to the astonished spectator, Rotwang participates in a long tradition of similar characters in the history of media technologies, including cinema, who are represented in exaggerated form (or perhaps not so exaggerated, in retrospect) in doppelgänger fiction. Their real counterparts too were often consummate showmen, contributing to the development of technologies with applications in the realms both of entertainment, especially the development of cinema, and of science, in particular optics. Their work as scientists and magicians is based on mechanistic conception of man usually credited to the work of Descartes and most egregiously affirmed in Julien Offray de la Mettrie's *L'Homme machine* (1748), which established medical materialism.

Exploring these connections is illuminating for a reading of the film. Unsurprisingly, many major figures in media-technological developments that directly or indirectly led to inventions of the cinema were scientists and doctors by profession. Robertson the Magician (1763–1837), the greatest showman of the

phantasmagoria, was a professor of physics in Liège. Among his inventions was the fantoscope, a magic lantern on wheels that made effigies of the dead appear to approach terrified audiences. Likewise Vaucanson, the automaton designer, was a physician. His astonishing works, which asserted the mechanical nature of the inner working of living things, were robotic precursors of modern industrial machinery. As previously discussed, these historical characters and their inventions appear in transfigured form in the doppelgänger tales of Romanticism and after, where they and the doubles they unleash give rise to chilling uncertainties about the ontological status of what is seen.²⁹ Their proliferation indicates a broader cultural anxiety arising with scientific progress. Specifically as media technologists, they point to the historical significance of the double theme and highlight its relationship with the development of cinema.

With his real and fictional avatars, Rotwang shares the aim of reproducing life, inventing uncanny, undead replicas of the “real”, which grotesquely reconcile positivism and metaphysics and represent the canonical, Frankensteinian affinity of technology and myth:

Rotwang, whom Lang describes as the source of evil in the film, combines the images of the modern and the gothic in the Spenglerian figure of the Faustian scientist. He is a master of technology, whose own hand is mechanical, the inventor of a race of robots ordered by Joh Frederson. But the visual portrayal of his surroundings marks Rotwang as a medieval wizard, a trafficker in spirits and demons.³⁰

The director of the film’s horrors and its evil doppelgänger, Rotwang’s characterization as inventor (and one might argue, as a Jew) has an irrationalist, Counter-Enlightenment flavour. And he appears in a context where the pursuit of mechanistic science, its relation to industrialization, and the question of technology were hotly debated. Participating in the debate, *Metropolis* explores the dialectical association of magic/primitivism/myth with technology and the rational order. Both the novel and the film paradoxically wed an ultra-futuristic visual register with archaic emblems of myth and superstition. Rotwang thus fittingly lives in an old

²⁹ E.g., the Armenian charlatan in Schiller’s *The Ghost-Seer*, Edison in Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *Tomorrow’s Eve*, and even Miracle Doctor Dapertutto in Adalbert von Chamisso’s *The Wonderful Adventures of Peter Schlemihl*.

³⁰ Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, London, BFI, 2000, p. 65.

gothic house that, like the cathedral, predates the construction of *Metropolis*. Accordingly, Elsaesser has found that

Read from the point of view of Rotwang, *Metropolis* appears most truthful where it insists on the persistence of the archaic-anarchic aspects, but also the mythic dimension of the technological-rationalist fantasy that social progressives like H.G. Wells found so anachronistic and deplorable.³¹

In post–World War II hindsight, critics have generally considered the film’s and novel’s repeated conflation of technology/rationalisation with mythical/religious motifs to indicate a “Reactionary Modernist” ideology. In fact, however, it is undeniable that in the film this paradoxical union is presented negatively, as the miserable way things are. It offers a depiction of an (unresolved) controversy over technology, rather than any solution: “Joh Frederson’s head stood out against [the clock]. It was a crushing yet accepted halo above the brain of Metropolis.”³²

In light of Rotwang’s relationship to the history of mimetic technologies, it is especially important that the film foregrounds several scenes exhibiting his role as a showman, in which he puts on extraordinary spectacles. The demonic scientist stages Frederson’s introduction to the robot Futura/Parody, pulling aside a curtain to introduce the Master of Metropolis to his astonishing creation. In the false Maria’s show at the Yoshiwara, the male spectators are agog at the spectacle Rotwang has directed and produced, while he himself remains invisible behind the scenes. In the extraordinary metaphorical rape scene in which Rotwang captures Maria with electricity itself as his weapon, he masterfully controls the medium and determines what the spectator can see. In fact, this scene offers a very telling inversion of the norm in the horror genre, where characteristically darkness is the source and repository of terror: Maria is terrified by electricity and Rotwang’s light, which reveals her to his gaze, disrupting and inverting the association of fear and darkness. Maria is caught by electricity itself, and by the voyeurist, panoptic gaze of Rotwang: his superior ability to see. Finally, Rotwang’s mechanical hand (technology) puts out her obsolete candlelight. This sequence, like many others, equates power both with vision (knowledge) and with exhibition (e.g., when Maria preaches to the workers).

³¹ Thomas Elsaesser, *Metropolis*, p. 50.

³² Thea von Harbou, *Metropolis*, p. 23. The novel is not equivocal in its resolution, however, and could be read as an illustration of a “Reactionary Modernist” ideology, much like its author.

The camera following Maria's moves and shakes in its pursuit. Its shuddering course captures the terror of Maria's flight into the shadows and identifies Rotwang with the camera, bespeaking his power (not least in making things visible) in the denouement. The chase sequence also reveals the stark outline of Maria's shadow in the spotlight. Presenting her in the beam of light as a double image and as representation, it prefigures her soon-to-come mechanical reproduction, evoking the classic metaphor of doubling as the loss of the shadow. Maria's status as *doppelgänger* is hinted at again at the end of the film, where we see her disembodied shadow mounting the steps of a ladder while she herself is invisible on a staircase.



Maria's shadow: Before and after.

The remarkable reverse shot of Rotwang's uncanny gaze into the camera, flanked by death's heads and above the flashlight's electric eye, identifies his lamp with panoptic spectatorship, power, and the camera eye. Yet, as a scientist who seeks to create life through its mimetic reproduction, Rotwang is in the selfsame moment associated with death, evoking precisely the double bind of mimetic technologies of the 19th century that, while aiming to overcome death, instead unleash morbid replicas of the real that are neither alive nor dead. As the camera and the spectator are identified with Rotwang's point of view, for which Maria is the object of visual pursuit, the viewer participates in this terror-inducing voyeurism from Rotwang's angle and colludes in the girl's capture/rape. When the diabolical inventor seizes his prey, the scene fades to black.



Rotwang flanked by death's heads.

Crucially too, Rotwang uses his mechanical hand, the high-tech replacement of the hand he lost in creating the robot, to extinguish Maria's paltry, old-fashioned flame, a remnant of the candle-lit gothic scene in which she has spoken to the workers. While Maria earlier asserted a kind of power that escaped the will of the Master of Metropolis – the power to tell a story to the workers, metaphorically that of showing a film – the extinguishing of her flame by Rotwang's technological hand foretells that technology is about to assert itself over the resistant elements of the old world. Electricity, the binary opposite of candlelight in this context, is associated both with the power of technology and with the creation of illusion, i.e., the cinematic text itself, in *Metropolis*. As Brigitte Peucker has argued,

The artificial hand [Rotwang] wears, covered with a black glove, is an ominous reminder that in the literature of Romanticism man's hubristic attempt to create life is punished by violence to the mind or body; Rotwang is aligned with the many of Hoffmann's "false artists" who have this aim, while representing additionally the filmmaker who animates the image by technological means. With his gloved artificial hand, Rotwang is an emblem of the fragmented and heterogeneous nature of the cinematic text.³³

³³ Brigitte Peucker, *Incorporating Images: Film and the Rival Arts*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 32.

Himself a cyborg, Rotwang mediates between the world of machines and that of human beings, between film and the reality it aims to duplicate. That Rotwang has lost his hand to his uncanny creature, both machine and work of art, corroborates his role as surrogate filmmaker. Interestingly, Tom Gunning has recently discussed the significance of the hand as a metaphor in Fritz Lang's films, the imprint of the authorial presence.³⁴ Like Hitchcock, Lang himself often appeared in his films, but specifically in a shot showing a close-up of his hand. In this case, however, Lang's hand – identifiable from his watch – appears in a close-up of the hand of another “director”, Frederson.

The Robot as Cinema

Like Rotwang, the robot (allegorically named Parody in the novel) is a focal point of *Metropolis's* *mise-en-abyme* of mimetic effects and reflexive themes whose status as representation, spectacle, and metaphor for cinema is amply underlined throughout the film. The robot compels an extraordinary visual fascination, a thoroughgoing astonishment on the viewer's part that reproduces (and exceeds) that of looking at a new mimetic technology and that collapses into that of viewing *Metropolis* itself. A simulacrum of the human form, the robot is also a metaphor for cinema: In Rotwang's laboratory, the process of its transformation into Maria's effigy involves a “scanning” of Maria's body with an electrical light and the inscription of the data or life-force thus gathered on the robot's body. This mimetic production “steals” some of the original's soul and vitality, indicating that the duplication of the real as a defense against death in a sense paradoxically kills the thing it seeks to duplicate.

It is by now commonplace to acknowledge that this scene reenacts cinematic processes of recording reality, much as the false Maria's dance to follow allegorizes a certain mode of cinematic representation, male spectatorship, and the objectification of the female form. Specifically, the creation of the false Maria serves as a metaphor for how the camera records the “real” by inscribing its image on film emulsion:

The process aims at producing a simulacrum, a copy. Raymond Bellour, in fact, describes the sequence as a whole as a reflection of the cinematic medium, ‘the

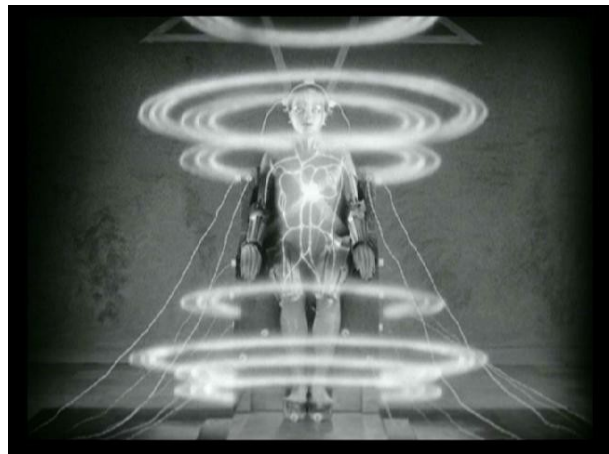
³⁴ See Tom Gunning, *Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*.

actual process of substituting a simulacrum for a living being directly replicates the camera's power to reproduce automatically the reality it confronts.³⁵

The creation of this android double is vital for a cohesive reading of the film's allegory of cinema precisely because it links the theme of technology in its two dimensions: the dystopic plot involving the city of the future and film itself as a technological medium. Anton Kaes has summed up the role of the robot as metaphor for cinema:

The robot as machine and simulacrum comments on the materiality of image production and the properties of the cinematic apparatus. Technology is able to conjure up machine-made images that cannot be distinguished from reality. Thus, the robot's lascivious dance in front of a male audience attracts and at the same time deceives the spectators' desirous gaze. Indeed, the female robot becomes an emblem for cinema as such: a product of technical ingenuity, an incarnation of visual pleasure, and a temptress out to delude anyone who falls for the illusion of a replica.³⁶

Thus, in accord both with the history of media technologies and its fictional renditions, the film foregrounds a structural connection between the double-automaton and film, both of which have the dual potential of being an astonishing mechanical spectacle – if the instrumentation is exposed – or an uncanny simulacrum, neither real nor illusory, if it is not.



The robot becomes Maria.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 67. Raymond Bellour is quoted from "Ideal Hadaly (On Villiers' *The Future Eve*)," *Camera Obscura*, No. 15, Fall 1986, p. 131.

³⁶ Anton Kaes, "Cinema and Modernity: On Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*", in *High and Low Cultures: German Attempts at Mediation*, eds. Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand, Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin Press, 1994, p. 25.

In the process by which Maria's physiological data are inscribed on the robot's body, complex special effects reveal a network of vein-like electrical currents, exposed beneath what will become the skin. Becoming human paradoxically requires the sorcery of high technology. Günther Rittau described the incredibly intricate production process of this scene – a making visible of the invisible – as follows:

Electric current tends to be invisible. On the other hand, the phantastic-mysterious transformation now taking place naturally had to be rendered in images. We illuminated liquids in strange test-tubes and made them bubble, the electric apparatus surrounding Maria was made to emit sparks and we gradually enveloped it in huge arcs of lightning, at the same time as rings of fire formed around the robot, moving up and down her body. As she became human, her blood circulation lit up. We spent months in the lab preparing these effects, with photo-chemistry playing a major role, as well as the most unlikely aids... Some strips of celluloid had to be exposed up to thirty times.³⁷

The scene illustrates the workings of the human-machine, the mechanical component of human bodily functions (i.e., *l'homme-machine*), in a manner recalling 19th century physiological illustrations. It also negates the outside-inside boundary of the body present to human vision. The process of the robot's "becoming human" is indicated by a progressive resemblance to "liminal" scientific imagery that purports to make visible what is naturally invisible to the naked eye. What it reveals, in fact, is an occluded connection between modern physiology and the consumption of optical simulacra, what Barbara Stafford has called

[T]he tendency to collapse all sensory experience into the visual and the human body, specifically, into an assemblage of its projected optical effects. What had been one of the chief forces of enlightenment—making visually accessible inaccessible domains—has turned into the creation of, and demand for, ghostly simulations.³⁸

³⁷ Günther Rittau, "Die Trickaufnahmen im Metropolis Film," *Die Filmtechnik*, 28 January 1927. Quoted and translated by Thomas Elsaesser, *Metropolis*, London, BFI Publishing, 2000, p. 25.

³⁸ "The history of this far-ranging *aesthetic* trend toward automated spectralization and the automatic consumption of illusions has yet to be recognized or analyzed in a systematic way." Barbara M. Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1991, p. 28.



The false Maria opens *mismatched* eyes.

Significantly, when the false Maria opens her eyes, one of them has been made to appear bigger than the other, hinting at the onset of a visual incommensurability – either in her perception or in ours, but certainly in “cinematic” perception. This lack of symmetry betokens the uncanny nature of the new Maria’s look. While a number of characters look into the camera in the course of the film, in the case of the false Maria and Rotwang this look is made uncanny, in part because it lacks diegetic motivation and is thus construed as a threatening, direct reply to the film’s spectator gaze. In contrast, when Freder and the real Maria look at the camera, the “classical” sequence of shots makes it understood that they are looking at each other, while the spectator merely has the good fortune to be sandwiched in between. In the case of the false Maria, the opening of her eyes and subsequent look into the camera violates narrative demands and expectations, becoming, like Cesare’s, an astonishing waking of the “dead” of representation, a creature of a mixed nature and a reflexive source of optical unease.

The *Metropolis* double confirms Friedrich Kittler’s assertion that “Film doppelgänger film filming itself.”³⁹ Appearances of the robot-Maria are framed in

³⁹ Friedrich Kittler, *Grammophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young & Michael Wutz, Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 149.

ways that draw attention to its or her status as a technological representation with an uncertain ontological position. Initially hidden behind a curtain and exposed by Rotwang, the robot is later onstage flanked by curtains. Toward the end, she is shown receding into the background and going “behind the curtains”. Andrew Webber has thus remarked that the film provides

A compelling case for viewing the uncanny body that is brought to life ... as having a *mise-en-abyme* function. That is, what is engineered or otherwise experimentally projected into life is always also figuring the celluloid body of the film medium, specifically film in its fantasy forms.⁴⁰

But to go yet further, the robot more broadly functions as a kind of “dialectical image” or “hypericon”, in the sense developed by W. J. T. Mitchell, as an image that serves as a site for reflection on the nature of images, which is itself bound up with reflection on subjectivity:

Concrete examples of these images are a familiar feature of iconological discussion. They include the canonical examples (Plato’s cave, Aristotle’s wax tablet, Locke’s dark room) that come up whenever the nature of images becomes a subject for philosophical reflection, whenever the nature of images becomes linked with an account of the nature of man. And they have their analogues in the realm of graphic images... all serve, like the philosophers’ images, as what I have called “hypericons”, figures of figuration, pictures that reflect the nature of images.⁴¹

Here, the robot doppelgänger is the site of reflection on the modern problem of technical reproducibility, the problem not simply of original and image, but of the image and its infinite reproduction, not least by cinema. The corporeal and psychological integrity of the subject, whether depicted or viewing, is put in jeopardy by this technological mimetic process. Cinema is thematized as an ambivalent medium that gives rise to uncanny effects.

Remarkably, in *Metropolis* the enigma of “machine life” is associated with avant-garde graphic and cinematic effects. From the technophilic montage of rhythmic mechanical motion at the beginning of the film to the transformation of the robot into Maria, formalist avant-garde montage effects are used to depict mechanical nature and its inhuman impenetrability. In fact, a stylistic dichotomy can be discerned in the film between the hi-tech montage and special effects associated

⁴⁰ Andrew Webber, “Canning the Uncanny”, p. 252–53.

⁴¹ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 158.

with machine life (and the uncanny) and the almost classical narrative style that naturalizes the “canny” for the viewer, above all in the interaction of Maria and Freder. Thus, the division of Maria and her double into virgin and vamp, the old world and high technology, is articulated by the cinematic language used to represent them: the canny Maria is naturalized through association with classical narrative norms, while the uncanny robot is associated with avant-garde montage effects that are threatening to the beholder’s eye. This stylistic disjunction translates the diegetic conflict into the reflexive terms of two different visual regimes, and is characteristic of the ambivalent ways in which the spectator is engaged with the film’s images. Rather than Huysen’s suggestion that the film’s stylistic heterogeneity could be understood as a conflict between Expressionism and the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, it would be more accurate to consider it in relation to conflicting views of technology, where, e.g., stylistic effects from technophilic artistic movements are used to signify the domain of the mechanical, almost as its leitmotifs.

The Conflict of Vision and the Assault on the Spectator’s Eye

With its themes of problematic vision, *Metropolis*’s narrative conflicts are implicated in an ambivalent allegory of cinema. As one commentator writes, “Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*... is a powerful laboratory of relationship between the biological subject and technological object on two levels: in the subject and style of its presentation, and in the cinematic medium itself, or the viewer’s interaction with the moving images onscreen”.⁴² These narrative conflicts register as tensions within the film’s dichotomous organization of vision and power, and are inseparable from the visual indecidability that infects its images and implicates cinema in its questioning of the machine world. This uncanny optic is expressed cinematically as visual excess, obfuscation, blurriness, and in the film’s climactic moments, as a full-on assault on vision. Here too, the in-between characters of Rotwang and the Robot are key figures.

The potential of the “creature” – whether the machines or the workers – to escape the Master’s control is presented as a threat of *obfuscation* that likewise

⁴² Julia Dover, "The Imitation Game: Paralysis and Response in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and Contemporary Critiques of Technology", p. 275.

affects the viewer. When Freder sees the Moloch machine at the site of the accident on his first trip to the machine rooms, visual anxiety and indecision are emblematic aspects of the moment of crisis. In a shot whose structure is repeated in the film, Freder covers his eyes because of the indecidability of what he sees, then looks again. The machine rooms, associated with steam and smoke and the loss of visibility, contrast both with Frederson's panoptic office with its view of the whole city and with the primitive darkness of the catacombs. Not only when there is a so-called accident or during the workers' rebellion, but indeed on a regular basis, the machines spew forth bursts of steam and smoke, and have a "natural" or organic quality of pent-up energies, unpredictable outbursts, untamable beastliness. It is therefore not surprising that a technophile such as H. G. Wells found them to be distressingly archaic.



Freder peers through fog at the first accident.

Moments of crisis in the film, such as Freder's hallucination and the flooding of the workers' city, are explicitly depicted as crises of vision. The danger that threatens, which equally affects the spectator with visual anxiety, is blindness itself, the potential for darkness. As Webber has noted, this is signified by the black eye-sockets of the death's head:

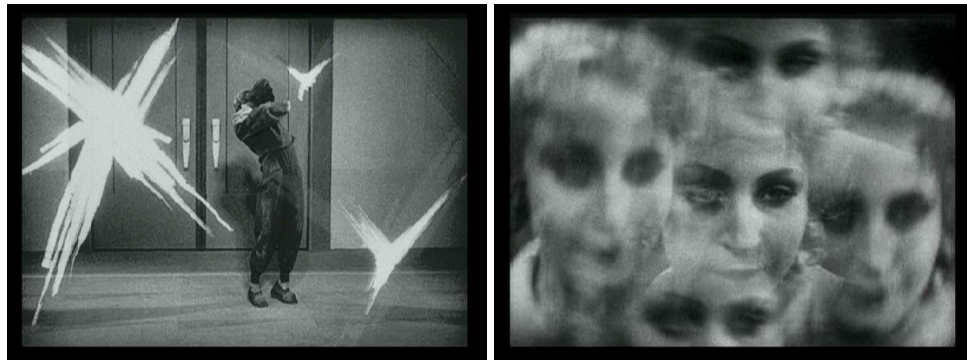
This absent gaze [of Death] represents the blacking out of the viewer's vision which duly ensues. The circles of light and the spinning dark sockets which feature in this hallucinatory vision on Freder's mind-screen correspond to a leitmotif which structures the film's visual regime. The circle of light as emblem of the gaze is prone to conversion into its negative, the black and blind socket.⁴³

⁴³ Andrew Webber, "Canning the Uncanny", p. 267–68.

Beyond this binarism of visual pleasure and unpleasure, seeing and the threat of blindness, however, what is at issue for the viewer is visual uncertainty itself: neither vision nor its absence, but the gray area in which the film makes visible a problem of perception through shots that have a reflexive indecidability; the narrative embodiment of this indecidability is the double. The stills shown below of Freder's hallucinations exemplify this, with formalist film tricks that disrupt the easy decipherability of the images. From this representation of contingent, ambivalent vision emerges a sense of the uncanny, involving, as Samuel Weber has argued, a reflexive moment that implicates its means of transmission.⁴⁴



⁴⁴ "...But the uncanny is not merely identical with this indecidability: it involves and implies a second moment or movement, namely the defense against this crisis of perception and phenomenality, a defense which is ambivalent and expresses itself in the compulsive curiosity ... the craving to penetrate, discover and ultimately to conserve the integrity of perception: perceiver and perceived, the wholeness of the body, the power of vision—all this implies a denial of that almost-nothing which can hardly be seen, a denial that in turn involves a certain structure of narration, in which this denial repeats and articulates itself." See Samuel Weber, "The Sideshow: or Remarks on a Canny Moment", *MLN*, Vol. 88, No. 6, 1973, p. 1133.

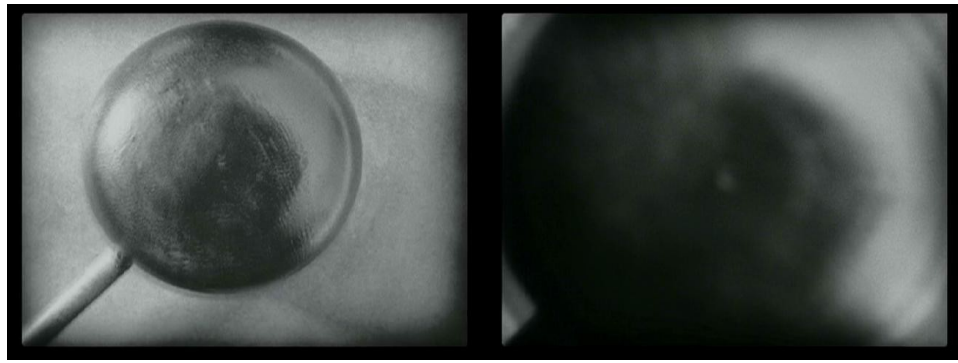


Freder's optical crisis.

Freder's hallucinations, arising with his unwillingness to believe what his eyes show him, exemplifies how the film's theme of visual anxiety is founded on metacinematic effects that call into question the ontological status of the medium itself. Freder's crisis is depicted by blurred point-of-view shots, superpositions, and even the scratching of the film emulsion itself. Finally, "Beautifully, Lang images Death's attack as an attack on the film image itself: a huge arcing scratch appears over the image of Freder, marking in a supernatural way the curving stroke of the scythe in this visionary reverse angle".⁴⁵ In terms of editing, Lang relies on the viewer's familiarity with shot–reverse shot conventions to cast doubt on what Freder sees through the subversion of classical optical cues. Because his look is cross-cut with the scene of the robot's dance, Freder, sitting in bed, becomes a hallucinatory participant in the Yoshiwara audience. Lang here uses the language of spatial continuity to connect two independent spaces, making it ambiguous whether Freder is witnessing the scene or not.

The climax of the film is the catastrophe of the destruction of the machines and the ensuing flooding of the workers' city, which puts innocent children at risk. This sequence is intercut with repeated shots of the gong that Maria uses to warn the children, filmed head-on, facing the camera. What it strikes with its strident warning is the eye of the spectator: a gesture that recalls distancing effects in Soviet montage and Brechtian theatre.

⁴⁵ Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, p. 75.



Cross-cut gong striking the spectator's eye.



Gratuitous ornamentation and visual obscurity:
The workers celebrate the destruction of the machines.

***Metropolis* in Context**

Reviews of *Metropolis*, before its recent “postmodern appropriation” by contemporary critics such as Andreas Huyssen, have characteristically been torn between applauding the film’s extraordinary visual effects and decrying its mawkish plot and apparent ideological message, which seem puerile or reactionary compared to its formal scope. In an especially vicious critique, historian Peter Gay has written that

As early as 1927, the greatly overrated director Fritz Lang brought out the tasteless extravaganza, *Metropolis*, which would be of no importance had it not been taken so seriously and acclaimed so widely. *Metropolis* is a fantasy without imagination, a picturesque, ill-conceived, and essentially reactionary tale 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 conclusion that can only be called a studied lie...⁴⁶

Interestingly, the film's ideological significations have been condemned as proto-Fascist or conciliatory to capital by leftists (e.g., Kracauer) and decried as Bolshevik by reactionaries (e.g., Nazi reviews). *Metropolis* has even been criticized for its "unrealistic" depiction of technology (H. G. Wells).⁴⁷ A very suggestive critique is that of Kracauer, who found the film's apparent fetishisation of the purely ornamental quite reprehensible, and accused Lang of dehumanising the workers by abstracting and aestheticizing their suffering:

The office of the big boss, the vision of the Tower of Babel, the machinery and the arrangement of the masses: all illustrate Lang's penchant for pompous ornamentation. ...In *Metropolis*, the decorative not only appears as an end in itself, but even belies certain points made through the plot. It makes sense that, on their way to and from the machines, the workers form ornamental groups; but it is nonsensical to force them into such groups when they are listening to a comforting speech from the girl Maria during their leisure time. In his exclusive concern with ornamentation, Lang goes so far as to compose decorative patterns from the masses who are desperately trying to escape the inundation of the lower city. Cinematically an incomparable achievement, this inundation sequence is humanly a shocking failure.⁴⁸

Similarly, both Andreas Huyssen and Anton Kaes have read the conclusion as exemplifying a "Reactionary Modernist" ideology: the handshake of spiritualism and technology (with the Jew Rotwang eliminated), foreshadowing the paradoxical union of the two that the Nazis were soon to offer. Huyssen, following Adorno and Horkheimer's thesis in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (the relation between the domination of outer nature and inner nature), has concluded that the film shows that "Vision as pleasure and desire has to be subdued and manipulated so that vision as

⁴⁶ Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*, New York, Harper & Row, 1968, p. 141.

⁴⁷ For a comprehensive history of reception of *Metropolis*, see Thomas Elsaesser, *Metropolis*, London, BFI, 2000; and Holger Bachmann, "The Production and Contemporary Reception of *Metropolis*" and Michael Minden, "The Critical Reception of *Metropolis*", both in *Fritz Lang's Metropolis: Cinematic Visions of Technology and Fear*, eds. Holger Bachmann & Michael Minden, Rochester, NY, Camden House, 2000.

⁴⁸ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1947, pp. 149–150. Kracauer's analysis is especially appropriate for the novel and its blatant authoritarian allegory of the abstract "face of the masses", the proletariat as a single entity without human agency and in need of an authority to guide it, as in the following passage: "When I came out of the cathedral door in the morning the masses were standing as one man, looking towards me. Then the face of the masses was turned towards me. Then I saw, it was not old, was not young, was sorrowless and joyless. 'What do you want?' I asked. And one answered: 'We are waiting, Mr Fredersen...' 'For what?' I asked him. 'We are waiting,' continued the spokesman, 'for someone to come, who will tell us what way we should go...' (Thea von Harbou, *Metropolis*, pp. 220–21.)

technical and social control can emerge triumphant”.⁴⁹ Anton Kaes has argued that the film displays an ambivalent appraisal of technology:

If placed in the artistic and social history of modernity, *Metropolis* ... is Janus-faced, looking back to the revolutionary Expressionist avant-garde and looking ahead to quiet submission under a fascist leader. *Metropolis*, I contend, displays the modernist dimension in fascism and the fascist dimension in modernism; it creates a site where modernism clashes with modernity.⁵⁰

The film’s interesting ambivalence about its own message stems from the images that fetishize technology even as they display its cataclysmic power... Seen in its historical context, the film thus dramatized the reaction of German modernism against an overpowering modernity. It was a modernist reaction of a modernity which had negated its own emancipatory potential.⁵¹

However, with an understanding of how vision is foregrounded and problematized in *Metropolis*, and of the role played by the film’s visual excesses and obscurities in a narrative that explicitly questions the impetus and outcome of technology and modernity, these readings of the film become problematic. Considering themes of vision and their reflexive effects, and at their locus the uncanny robot and Rotwang, it becomes difficult to ascribe an ideological stance to the film’s conclusion. The visual regimes of the film, which persist through its conclusion (which, in fact, continues the *mise en scène* of spectatorship and questionable visuality that the rest of the film has taught us to distrust) cast doubt on the value of the resolution. The viewer is left with an uncertainty that is at odds with the plot setting everything to rights and killing off the Jew outsider. When cinema itself is put in question – e.g., with how the climactic moments of the film, in the diegesis and for the viewer, are figured as an assault on vision, of threats to the eye – a diegetic resolution can no longer be read as a clear-cut ideological message. Instead, the historical significance of the film’s visual themes is better understood along the lines of Huysen’s speculations on how

...By thematizing male gaze and vision in the described way the film lays open a fundamental filmic convention usually covered up by narrative cinema. But there is more to it than that. Lang’s film may lead us to speculate whether the dominance of vision *per se* in our culture may not be a fundamental problem rather than a positive

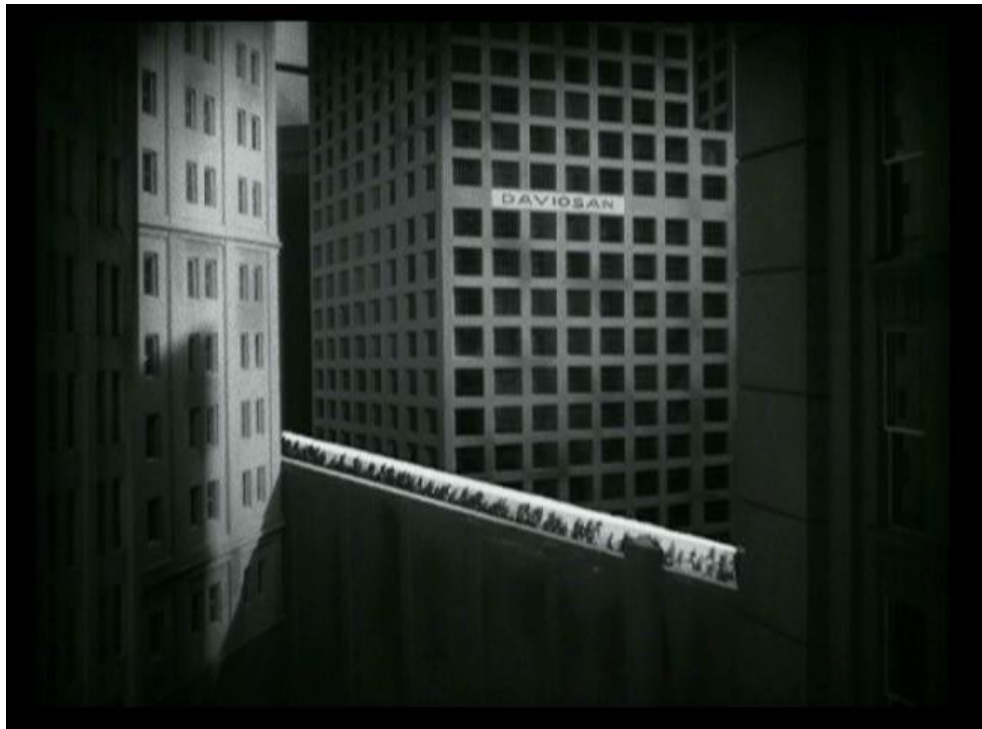
⁴⁹ Andreas Huyssen, “The Vamp and the Machine: Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*”, p. 76.

⁵⁰ Anton Kaes, “Cinema and Modernity: On Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*”, p. 20.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

contribution to the advancement of civilization as Norbert Elias would have it in his study of the civilizing process.⁵²

Considering the visual effects and metaphors of *Metropolis* from this historical perspective, i.e., of the historical determination of optical experience, is necessary for understanding their potential ideological import. For instance, the egregiously ornamental masses (and other constructions) of *Metropolis* can be regarded as a highly significant effect in terms of the film's visual themes. Partly, and only partly, this ornamentalism creates the impression that the people depicted in the film are overwhelmed and altered in nature by the dominion of the world of objects and technology. The structures the workers form underline their identity as "mass", their interchangeability and equivalence, facelessness and lack of individual identity, and their liminal nature as machine-men. These effects rely on and echo those of the doppelgänger motif in both the film and novel. That the viewer's look cannot easily assimilate or digest the profusion of visual stimuli presented mimics the visual regime of modernity and the urban landscape's "society of the spectacle".



⁵² Andreas Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*", p. 75.



Ornamental crises.

But these visual elements also have an important counternarrative effect that may in some degree account for the outrage its reviewers have shown. The viewer is presented with a profusion of visual cues, in whose choice and repetition there seems to be little narrative motivation. The concept of cinematic excess is helpful in clarifying the kind of spectatorship involved here, describing cinematic devices that seem to have “no function beyond offering itself for perceptual play”.⁵³ The excess of stimuli, the ornamental character of catastrophe, give these images a kind of “obtuse meaning” that exceeds the requirements of narrative momentum, and brings to the foreground the cinematic basis of the depiction. As a result, technological crisis, expressed as a visual surfeit, participates in the cinematic allegory. The film’s baroque heterogeneity in style and technique is part of its construction of an alarming optical regime – an uncanny *Gesamtkunstwerk*. These over-inscribed shots engage the spectator in an active relationship with the image, not just teaching but obliging the act of decipherment and scrutiny – one that is inconclusive and even threatening – of their visual complexities. This engagement calls forth not passivity vis-à-vis the

⁵³ Kristin Thompson, “The Concept of Cinematic Excess”, in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 133.

narrative, but a sense of astonishment comparable to that evoked by the experience of a new technology. [Indeed, most reviewers, even if inadvertently, confirm this response to the film's imagery.]

Lang himself admitted that what interested him in *Metropolis* was not Thea von Harbou's sentimental-reactionary plot as much as the machines.⁵⁴ But what *Metropolis* depicts with regard to technology remains controversial: it is neither pure anti-technological irrationalism (the Luddite rebellion of the workers who blame the machinery for their enslavement) nor technophilic idolatry of the machine-gods as superior and necessary extensions of the senses of man. Rather, both aspects are co-present dialectically in the film, which not only makes the ranges of choices problematic but also associates this ambivalence with the medium of cinema itself, where "*Metropolis* is not so much a film about machines as it is itself a machine, made up of parts fitted together, whose intricate clockwork elements are as much the human passions, anxieties and aggressions as they are the pistons, flywheels and dials".⁵⁵ In his insightful chapter on *Metropolis*, Tom Gunning finds,

Through the proliferation of looks at the camera, its multiplication of saviour and anti-Christ figures, *Metropolis* overloads the allegorical mission of its film and threatens to reduce it all to a hall of mirrors reflecting competing authorities, counterfeit identities and spurious images.⁵⁶

Instead, we have a text whose allegorical energies seem unable to coalesce into a single grand narrative, but rather ceaselessly generates reference to nearly all the narratives – political, religious, occult, aesthetic, sexual – that circulated through Weimar culture. The energy in *Metropolis* becomes increasingly centrifugal, images escaping from the grand narratives to which they belong.⁵⁷

Precisely this problematic heterogeneity, the *mise-en-abyme* of images, is where the film's formal effects relate to the theme of the double, and both in turn to the medium of cinema itself. These effects evoke a broad ambivalence toward vision and mimetic technologies, an anxiety having to do with the ontological status of simulacra in modernity.

⁵⁴ See Anton Kaes, , "Cinema and Modernity: On Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*".

⁵⁵ Thomas Elsaesser, *Metropolis*, p. 64.

⁵⁶ Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, p. 68.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

CONCLUSION

THE DIVIDED SCREEN



The real Maria (*Metropolis*).

From Edison, the “Wizard” of Menlo Park, to Méliès, who built automata before a film career in which he appeared as magician and scientist and multiplied onscreen, to Carl Mayer, who sold barometers before the fateful visit to the Kantstrasse – the history of cinema is a Hoffmannesque tale of sorcerer-scientists and their apprentices, uncanny mimetic technologies they use to capture and transport doubles of the living, and the images of a mixed nature that they generate. As the preceding discussions have shown, the double and its accompanying constellation of themes of vision and the self not only rely on but also refer to this prehistory and history of cinema and, by extension, to the uncanny tensions of the visual regimes of

modernity. In these films, the formal requirements and spectatorial effects of the double theme are structurally bound up with self-referential gestures concerning the medium of cinema and the experience of spectatorship. The double's appearance as a result of a scientist-magician's interference alludes to the agency of the writer or filmmaker, in a network of metaphors of vision, spectacle, and representation invoking basic issues of cinematic discourse.

As the preceding chapters have shown, these films (and their directors) deliberately explore and foreground the specific characteristics of the medium of cinema and the kinds of effects that it makes possible for the first time. The unfolding of their narratives is dialectically linked with the structural capacities of cinema. Nowhere is this made more apparent than by the *doppelgänger*, where an original capability of film (e.g., to show the moving image of a man fencing with himself, as Wegener noted in his 1916 lecture) becomes the motivation of the story. Such self-conscious filmmaking is concomitant with the effective cinematic construction of the uncanny and the remarkable and unusual spectatorial effects of these films. At the same time, the ontological stability of vision is put in question through a variety of strategies, such as bizarre forms of direct address (which diverge from early cinema's exhibitionist streak precisely because of their self-consciously uncanny effect) and strange and sometimes Baroque configurations of visible objects.

As the Introduction to this study suggested, and the intervening chapters have hopefully shown, the *doppelgänger* is an especially fruitful subject, because as an uncanny motif concerning vision and subjectivity it appears as a structural/metacinematic problem within the text. Considering the *doppelgänger* as a diegetic crisis of phenomenality and corporal unity which reflects back upon the cinematic text itself – thus as part of a self-conscious allegory of cinema – offers special insight into questions of historical motivation and the double's powerful resurgence in Wilhelmine and Weimar cinema, insofar as studying what the double “means” spans the gap between questions of film form and spectatorial effects. But the double also offers a way of incorporating questions of socio-historical context in the discussion because of its complex significations for modernity and the changing

nature of visual experience: not only with reflexive, distanciating effects, but also in the sense in which doubles are “In our era ... archetypes of the unreasonable facsimile: images of ourselves that arouse consternation; omens of the peril of relentless copying”.¹

The readings of the films in the previous chapters problematize a number of recurring assumptions in studies of German silent film and the double. For one, looking at the sophisticated use of the double, a recurring theme of both Wilhelmine and Weimar film, invalidates the usual division starkly made between the two periods or the characterization, notably Kracauer’s, of Wilhelmine films as “primitive”. These readings also indicate that approaching the doppelgänger as a national, specifically German phenomenon, which is the case with many commentators (e.g., Elsaesser in “Social Mobility and the Fantastic”) can tend to obscure its greater resonance with the experience of modern life by relating it to a specifically German experience. It also confuses the issue to interrogate the doppelgänger as a figure that proliferates at every *fin de siècle*, e.g., as illustrating a parallel between the 1790s and the 1890s. While the argument could be made that the double took especially stark forms in German high culture, nineteenth-century Europe abounds in doppelgänger fictions, as the twentieth does in films. The uncanny double of German Romanticism and after has, since circa 1800, been continuously present in European high art and mass culture, while also being a central metaphor in philosophical reflections on modernity and subjectivity, e.g., of man’s alienated condition or the heterogeneity of the self. The double in fact is a paradigmatic figure not only for modernism, in its ironic, anti-oculocentric tendencies, but also for modernity and its critiques, which inevitably rely on the rhetoric of the doppelgänger plot. In the words of one commentator, “We do now appear to accept a culturally and historically peculiar sort of self-commenting, self-combative, doubled but estranged consciousness. Doubleness has become an inescapable element of modernity; yea, for some, its very definition”.²

¹ Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles*, New York, Zone Books, 1996, p. 49.

² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

While the preceding chapters have primarily offered close readings of several representative films, the discussion has nonetheless consistently returned to the question of how their recurring metaphors and ontological problematics could be contextualized within the broader context of modernity and its cognitive and socio-cultural effects. These readings suggest that the use of such tropes evokes in complex ways tensions arising with modernity's visual regimes while also closely concerning the status of the cinema as a modern mass medium. The composite picture that has emerged offers a new perspective on the double as a reflexive theme that integrates the characteristic divisions in its study between thematic analysis and questions of film form.

The figurations of vision and representation in these films, which question the claims of "realism", at the same time put into question the ontological status of technologically mediated representations of the human body and the experience of the modern spectator. The concept of the uncanny has been especially helpful in elucidating the ambivalent character of vision and the visible in the films. In these films, the uncanny is so effectively tied to the mechanisms of the image's transmission that the resolution provided by the plot – in the same discredited cinematic language – lacks a stabilizing effect. What makes the visible uncertain arises from outside the individual, in the external order. Because it is only made visible cinematically it is insurmountable, being a structural characteristic of the apparatus that has brought about (i.e., made visible) ambivalence and distrust in the first place. Ultimately, when narrative conflict implicates the "nature" (the structure) of the cinematic spectacle itself, through multiple forms of self-reference, its unease cannot be put to rest through any diegetic resolution.

Thematically too, the films both reveal optical instruments to have the capacity to deceive the eye and show the eye itself to be untrustworthy. What the eye sees (whether the spectator's or protagonist's) is disclosed to be contingent upon both the empirical specificity of the observer (who could be mad) and upon the limitations of vision itself, which is circumscribed by nature and discredited by superior instruments. Thus, one aspect in which the perceptual problems of Weimar cinema and the double theme relate to the broader question of the status of vision in

modernity is the conception of vision as subjective, dissociated from external referents in the “real”, and mediated by a host of instruments and mechanisms.

In the context of these films, a wellspring of visual anxiety – for diegetic victims and for the spectator – is technologically mediated representation, including film itself (as the various films-within-films illustrate). Thus in *The Golem*, for example, catastrophe befalls the courtiers with the showing of a film and as a result of its thoughtless, pleasurable viewing. The use of the double as an uncanny and reflexive device is bound up with the problematic nature of mediated vision, even if this may ultimately be the only kind of visual experience possible in modernity. Yet it also references the actual history of the objectification and empirical study of vision. Thus it is significant, for example, how the spirit of nineteenth-century inventors and opticians, and modern science as a vocation, is ambivalently appraised in these films. Allegories of cinema in the case of the double are also allegories of modernity: appraisals of “modern” subjectivity, technology and industrialization, and mass culture. These films draw attention to the ways in which the technological stepping stones (linear developments or not) in the invention of cinema were implicated in and relied on the understanding of the human body that Ford’s assembly lines and modern war required; how, “With its dialectic of continuity and discontinuity, with the rapid succession and tactile thrust of its sounds and images, film rehearses in the realm of reception what the conveyor belt imposes upon human beings in the realm of production”.³ Not only a figuration of the fragmentary nature of the cinematic text, the double is also a “synecdoche of mass production”,⁴ metaphorically recalling the multiple copies of a technically produced (and infinitely reproducible) commodity whose nature (as Marx described) is phantasmagoric and whose process of production is occulted in the final product.

As we have also seen, the reliance of these films on literary themes and motifs should be understood in relation to a set of post-Kantian issues originally taken up in German Romanticism. Partly, it concerns problematic aspects of the Kantian account of subjectivity (in particular, as Andrew Webber discusses, its

³ Miriam Hansen, “Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology”, *New German Critique*, No. 40, Winter 1987, p. 184.

⁴ Hillel Schwarz, *The Culture of the Copy*, p. 39.

Transcendental Subject)⁵ and an arguably countervailing conception of the self as divided and heterogeneous. With regard to the experience of this subject, it concerns the problem of perception as a means of access to the real and to knowledge. Themes of optical advances and the proliferation of simulacra, the ambivalent figure of the scientist, and the magic/primitive moment at the heart of technological advance (including cinema) are shared by these films and the stories to which they allude. But focusing on the double shows that this return to Romantic (sometimes Counter-Enlightenment) themes specifically engages the status of cinema itself as a mode of experience and the optical history of modernity. Its effect is one of ambivalence toward modernity's experiential consequences, its instruments and images.

This said, the connection between the rise of the fictional doppelgänger and the composition of modern visual experience, including the conceptualization of the observer, is a forbiddingly broad area of study whose more detailed discussion has in many ways been outside the scope of this work, appearing as a subtext of close readings of the films. The present work nevertheless points toward a number of exciting avenues for further exploration of how the themes of the double are intertwined with the rise of modern visual experience. Speaking very generally, understanding the historical relevance of the double (specifically, in terms of a problem of perception and its anxieties) from its birth circa 1800 requires taking into account how, as Jonathan Crary has discussed, the conceptualization and status of vision underwent a shift in the same period.

One illuminating approach is the metaphorological study, as exemplified by Terry Castle's exploration of the phantasmagoria as metaphor of the poetic imagination and Jonathan Crary's discussion of the magic lantern and photograph as paradigms of visual experience.⁶ Crary's work, for example, revealingly combines a history-of-science perspective with an analysis of the use of metaphors in intellectual history, where he analyzes how metaphors of optical instruments and media were

⁵ See Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996.

⁶ See Terry Castle, "Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie", *Critical Inquiry*, 1988, 15, 1, pp. 26–61; *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995; Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1990.

used in accounts of subjectivity and cognition and how their uses may have changed over time. Along similar lines, it would be interesting to take a closer look at how themes of the doppelgänger (and more generally, the conventions of the uncanny) have been used to articulate a variety of theoretical and philosophical positions in influential critiques of modernity concerning the heterogeneity of the modern subject and the sensory experience of modernity, i.e., the subjective effects of modernity and/or its objective conditions. Suggestive examples include Marx's account of alienation, Freud's discussion of subjectivity and the unconscious, or Foucault's description of Modern man and his doubles. From a somewhat different perspective, further studies of whether and how the figure of the double has played a role in discussions of the nature of perception (e.g., in empirical studies) and recording technologies promise to be of interest.

As far as doppelgänger fiction is concerned, there has been little explicit consideration accorded to the significance in these stories of metaphors of optical instrumentation and forms of entertainment. The preceding chapters have contended with this question in part by considering the proto-cinematic themes and effects present in several works of fiction. In addition, the discussion of the doppelgänger stories that influenced many of these films would also benefit from greater insight into a subject that has received little attention so far, namely, the impact of cinema and even earlier technologies of recording the human body and motion (e.g., the camera obscura) on literary stylistics. As Anton Kaes has pointed out, "The new, more nervous rhythm of life, which found its most visible expression in the hasty and discontinuous series of images in silent film, also made its way into prose. The extent to which film, with its techniques of montage, close-ups, etc., functioned as a structural model for the prose of the early 20th century remains for the most part unexplored".⁷

⁷Anton Kaes, "The Debate about Cinema: Charting a Controversy (1909–1929)", *New German Critique*, No. 40, Winter 1987, p. 29.

The Return of the Phantasmagoria

Metaphorological approaches combining literary, scientific/technological, philosophical, and historical perspectives in the study of metaphors of vision and the double, along the lines hinted at above, offer important insights into the significance of the double in film. One important instance of such a connection is the metaphor of the phantasmagoria. Originally referring to a genre of moving images, the phantasmagoria as a form of optical illusion not only evolved into an important trope in critiques of modernity and the nature of modern perceptual experience, but also offers a suggestive way of historicizing the cinematic experience of the doppelgänger. It presents a point at which themes of the double in Romanticism may be connected with those of German cinema, and both may be related to critical and philosophical works on perception and modernity.

The phantasmagoria, a chilling optical spectacle that became enormously popular around the end of the eighteenth century, consisted of illusions created using the magic lantern and other visual and aural effects at the hands of an uncanny showman. In Romantic (and post-Romantic) literature of the doppelgänger, phantasmagoric scenarios recurringly appear to signify the uncanny visual experience: not just explicitly (as in Schiller's *The Ghost-Seer*),⁸ but also more implicitly in scenarios of horror and subjective crisis involving optical indecision – where the eye scarcely knows what to believe – often incorporating the magic lantern and other optical technologies. In addition, the concept is especially useful for characterizing the cinematic experience offered by these films of the double. In part, this is simply a consequence of the fact that the phantasmagoria is a kind of ancestor of the horror or fantastic film experience; in these films the original “ghost connection” of the phantasmagoric spectacle has been preserved:

In the end the phantasmagoria gave way to new kinds of mechanical representation. Yet amid all the technological breakthroughs and the refinements in cinematic technique, the ghost-connection, interestingly enough, never entirely disappeared. Well into the twentieth century motion-picture shows continued to be advertised in

⁸ Like the charlatan in Schiller's novel, Robertson, the greatest showman of the phantasmagoria, “emerged, specterlike, from the gloom, and addressing the audience, offered to conjure up the spirits of their dead loved ones.” (Terry Castle, “Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie”, p. 35).

the manner of the old ghost-shows, and many early films, such as Georges Méliès', featured explicitly phantasmagorical illusions. In various ways the new medium of motion pictures continued to acknowledge and reflect on its "spectral" nature and origins.⁹

But the doppelgänger films of Wilhelmine and Weimar cinema go further yet, in fact acknowledging their close generic association with the phantasmagoria, as well as with early cinema and its showmen. In many cases, for example, characters explicitly appear in the guise of showmen of the phantasmagoria and create problematic optical illusions, not the least of which is the double.

What is interesting about the phantasmagoria as a form of entertainment is exactly the quality that these films exploit to uncanny effect, namely a "principle of indiscernibility". Their effect relies on a hesitation on the part of the viewer who may know the vision is false but is presented with the thing's presence, in actuality, outside himself. The epistemological quandary this double nature signifies, which explores the tenuousness of the real-unreal binary and the foundations of rationalism, gives rise to a kind of uncanny ambivalence that was a recurring theme of German Romanticism. It also became a focal point of the Surrealist movement and its concept of the marvelous. Identifying themselves as the tail end of Romanticism, the Surrealists looked to German fantastic cinema as a model for their project, which aimed at the oneiric reappropriation of the world of the everyday, a redemptive, Utopian experience of being. As such, the movement was an important influence for Walter Benjamin and his work on the Paris Arcades.¹⁰

Considering the phantasmagoria – in particular how the word, signifying a sequence of optical illusions, was employed in intellectual history and how its use changed over the nineteenth century – is promising for a more historicized understanding of the doppelgänger theme (and metaphor). In her seminal essay on the usage of the word, Terry Castle has described how

From an initial connection with something external and public (an artificially produced "spectral" illusion), the word "phantasmagoria" has now come to refer to something wholly internal or subjective: the phantasmatic imagery of the mind. This

⁹ Ibid., pp. 41–42.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1989.

metaphoric shift bespeaks, I think, a very significant transformation in human consciousness over the past two centuries—what I shall call here the spectralization or “ghostifying” of mental space. ... The rationalist attitude, it might be argued, inevitably depends on this primal internalization of the spectral.¹¹

As such the shift in the use of the word exemplifies the more general trend of phenomena once considered real, such as ghosts, being reclassified as products of the mind, and paradoxically introducing an uncanny character into thought, “as if there were, at the very heart of subjectivity itself, something foreign and fantastic, a daemonic presence from elsewhere, a specter-show of unaccountable origin”.¹²

While Castle describes how the phantasmagoria became an emblem of the poetic imagination in the nineteenth century, her essay neglects to consider the highly significant appropriation of the term by Marx in *Das Kapital*. The phantasmagoria becomes paradigmatic for Marx in describing how under capitalism the object as commodity acquires the quality of an optical illusion, casting an arcane, fetishistic spell on the consumer, who is lured by its empty specular promise. At the same time, the real attributes of the object (such as use value or the labour involved in its production) are occulted by its magical, phantasmagoric phenomenality. In subsequent Marxist thought, the phantasmagoria has served as a pregnant metaphor for describing the modern commodity world under capitalism, the illusory visuality of alienated things and people, and the form of spectatorial interaction required from the spectator-consumer.

Interestingly, the Marxist metaphor of the phantasmagoria is a powerful reversal of the shift Castle describes in the word’s signification, i.e., its going from medium of objective projected optical illusion to describing subjective projections of the mind/imagination. It is very important that for Marx the phantasmagoria instead refers to the objective, external character of the world of things and people – as a quality that has become inscribed into the nature of experience under bourgeois capitalism. Along these lines, Walter Benjamin returns to the metaphor in his analysis of the effects of capitalism and the concomitant evolution in human experience. For Benjamin, with the phantasmagoria of capitalist modernity,

¹¹ Terry Castle, “Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie”, p. 29.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

To live in a world which appears as an enormous collection of (real or potential) commodities means to endow objects with significations that have nothing to do with their useful properties. Such a world confers meanings that, while no longer transcendent but inner-worldly and in fact fabricated (through display, fashion, and advertisement), again become reified. Commodities actually repress their own making, their origin in human labor and construction. This endows the things of everyday with an illusory glitter, an *aureole*: a weak remnant of the sacred. The world of commodity is not so much that of an impoverished rationality, but rather a world of re-enchantment which overlays everything with a spell promising profane enjoyment, but what it offers for enjoyment is the alienation of the individual from his/her own product and from other individuals, a contemplative empathy with the aesthetic luster of exchange value. This lure of novelty is primarily responsible for the continuous maintenance of this phantasmagoric attraction.¹³

In such a state of affairs, “One could say that the dynamics of capitalist industrialism had caused a curious reversal in which ‘reality’ and ‘art’ switched places. Reality had become artifice, a phantasmagoria of commodities and architectural construction made possible by new industrial processes...”¹⁴ But such a description of the commodity’s phantasmagoric attraction is above all exemplified by film, perhaps the bourgeois commodity (and actual phantasmagoria) *par excellence*: a form of experience in which the specular aspect and contemplative empathy are crucial, and what is offered for consumption actually consists of mere images of things which offer acutely oneiric and fetishistic visual pleasures. (Indeed, the effect of the apparatus is to greatly magnify these pleasures, compared to viewing the original objects themselves.)¹⁵ And in the institutional cinema, the process of production is occulted in the final product, which seems magically visible and alluring with its “illusory glitter”.

The concept of the phantasmagoria offers an illuminating way of interrogating the themes of the double as they concern the relationship between film, understood as bourgeois commodity and optical illusion, and the visual regimes of modernity and the modern observer. While all films are phantasmagoric (both as projected ghostly images and as reflections of the phantasmagoric commodity-

¹³ Gyorgy Markus, “The Commodity as Phantasmagoria”, *New German Critique*, No. 83, Special Issue on Walter Benjamin, Spring–Summer 2001, pp. 16–17.

¹⁴ Susan Buck-Morss, “Benjamin’s *Passagen-Werk*: Redeeming Mass Culture for the Revolution”, p. 213.

¹⁵ Needless to say, this is above all true for Hollywood cinema, as opposed to *avant-garde* and modernist practices that attempt to make these characteristics precisely problematic.

world), these doppelgänger films are radically distinct because of the ways in which they actually depict phantasmagorias, in the original sense of a genre of illusory and alarming optical entertainment and of characteristic “phantasmagoric” themes. To go yet further, it is very significant that the films are optical illusions that self-consciously concern the nature of optical illusions (cinema). But how these allegorical effects of doppelgänger themes (having to do, for example, with the forms of spectatorial interaction required by cinema) engage the problem of the greater phantasmagoria, namely, the commodity-world and its visual dispositions and their alienating effects, requires closer consideration.

Effects of Shock and the World of the Everyday

Paul Leni’s description of the task of the cinematographer offers special insight into the kinds of spectatorial experience he, and, I would argue, the directors of the other films, were attempting to create in depicting the world of objects and the spaces of the doppelgänger on the film screen. Leni’s conception of the ideal practice of filmmaking foregrounds how his intention is above all to shun a naturalist or illusionist film practice (involving photographic realism), and instead seeks to bring out the “hidden” reality of objects:

If the designer merely imitated photography to construct his sets, the film would remain faceless and impersonal. There has to be the possibility of bringing out an object’s essential attributes so as to give the image style and colour...

This is particularly necessary for films set wholly in a world of unreality. For my film *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett*, I have tried to create sets so stylised that they evince no idea of reality. My fairground is sketched in with an utter renunciation of detail. All it seeks to engender is an indescribable fluidity of light, moving shapes, shadows, lines and curves. It is not extreme reality that the camera perceives, but the reality of the inner event, which is more profound, effective and moving than what we see through everyday eyes, and I equally believe that the cinema can reproduce this truth, heightened effectively...

I cannot stress too strongly how important it is for a designer to shun the world seen everyday and to attain its true sinews... It will be seen that a designer must not construct 'fine' sets. He must penetrate the surface of things and reach their heart. He must create mood (*Stimmung*) even though he has to safeguard his independence with regard to the object seen merely through everyday eyes. It is this which makes

him an artist. Otherwise I can see no reason why he should not be replaced by an adroit apprentice carpenter...¹⁶

According to Leni, in other words, what the movie camera specifically offers, in spite of its Edisonian/naturalist appropriations, resides – paradoxically – in its capacity to penetrate the surface or externally visible attributes of things and to capture “essential attributes”, achieved by shunning the reproduction of the world seen through “everyday eyes”, i.e., the canny, natural bourgeois world. While Leni’s metaphysical rhetoric, the division of things into appearances (rational/empirical aspect) and essences (hidden authentic being), and the aim of revealing the “true” features of things through film artistry may sound like irrationalist mumbo-jumbo, or at least prefigures the position of the Surrealists *vis-à-vis* the everyday world and its objects, the film itself illustrates better what this may mean in practice. In the case of *Waxworks*, as we have seen, these principles result in a stylistic bric-à-brac, as Jürgen Kasten has put it,¹⁷ and a scenario actually involving a phantasmagoria at the “Panopticon” that are very much directed as a threat to everyday eyes and their everyday objects. Importantly, as our discussion of *Waxworks* showed, the film harnesses precisely the oneiric and fetishistic effects of the commodity in order to construct its sense of the uncanny.

To better understand the historical significance of such effects of film style and *mise en scène*, it is revealing to read Leni’s article side by side with another body of work altogether, namely, Walter Benjamin’s analysis of the experience of the world of the everyday under capitalism and his consideration of the utopian or redemptive possibilities of mass culture. For Benjamin, following the Surrealists, the outmoded commodities of the recent past, the detritus of bourgeois culture (as found in the Paris arcades), offered the possibility of divining the origins and nature of modernity and of overcoming the thrall of industrial capitalism’s phantasmagoria.¹⁸ In other words,

¹⁶ *Kinematograph*, No. 911, 1924. Quoted by Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1969, p. 127.

¹⁷ Jürgen Kasten, “The *Bric-à-Brac* Principle in Paul Leni’s *Waxworks*”, in *Expressionist Film: New Perspectives*, ed. D. Scheunemann, Rochester, NY & Woodbridge, Suffolk, Camden House, 2003.

¹⁸ See Susan Buck-Morss, “Benjamin’s *Passagen-Werk*: Redeeming Mass Culture for the Revolution”.

Benjamin's "physiognomic materialism" reveals not only the "origin" of modernity; it simultaneously intends also to *defamiliarize* this way of apprehending reality as a "phantasmagoria" by invoking its early-transitory manifestations that are now present only in ruins, whose strangeness strikes us. At the same time it aims, precisely through such distancing, to bring our own way of perceiving the world to reflexive, but *sensuous, presence*, to make the veil, which our collective dream-images impose upon it, directly open to the waking gaze. This veil not only conceals reality, but its very distortions also vaguely outline the possibilities of another, desired future as well.¹⁹

For Benjamin, while the world of the everyday, the commodity world, was a phantasmagoria in which the "real" natures of things remained hidden behind their specular enchantments (or were actively obscured), the ultramodern technological medium of film possessed the revolutionary possibility of revealing this condition of bourgeois experience for what it was. But what would constitute a film practice that attempted to do just this? How exactly could the structural characteristics of the moving image make a redemptive spectatorial experience possible? Miriam Hansen, in a classic exegesis of Benjamin's writing on cinema, has described how such a film practice would necessarily involve an ambivalent and uncanny experience:

[A]lthough film as a medium enhances the historical demolition of the aura, its particular form of indexical mediation enables it to lend a physiognomic expression to objects, to make second nature return the look, similar to auratic experience in phenomena of the first. Such film practice, however, would not only have to reject the misguided ambition to adapt and prolong the bourgeois cult of art; it would also have to abandon classical standards of continuity and verisimilitude and, instead, focus its mimetic devices on a non-sensuous similarity, on hidden correspondences in which even the dreamworld of commodities may "encounter us in the structures of frail intersubjectivity." Such a return of the gaze, in the emphatic sense, would always involve a transgressive, unsettling moment; it is certainly not, as in commercial conventions of direct address, "a question of the photographed animals, people or babies 'looking at *you*' which implicates the customer in such an unsavory manner."²⁰

This conception of film practice strikingly echoes Leni's description of the task of the cinematographer, and of the characteristics, more generally, of the films of the double that we have discussed. For one, the latter, as we saw, explicitly rely on a form of intersubjective spectatorial experience, most obviously so when the viewer is subjected to the unexpected return of his/her look by the source of diegetic threat.

¹⁹ Gyorgy Markus, "The Commodity as Phantasmagoria", p. 16.

²⁰ Miriam Hansen, "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience", pp. 209–210.

They likewise foreground cinema's capacity for a "physiognomic materialism", lending a "physiognomic expression to objects", much like what Leni calls "bringing out an object's essential attributes" – which the case of *Waxworks* exemplifies in images like that of the caliph's hat. Indeed, the very aim of this anti-naturalist cinema of the double is a renunciation of what is seen through everyday eyes, which is the bourgeois sphere of the everyday or "second nature". It comprises a curious mutuality of the gaze, taking the form of objects, including film images, which are in the first place part of the spectacle and the dreamworld of commodities, looking back and encountering us "in the structures of frail intersubjectivity".

Of special consequence here are the moments of shock, notably that of seeing the double, that this experience entails, both for the protagonist and for the spectator. They belong to the middle ground between anxiety and fear which characterizes the uncanny. But the vital point is that this frisson of the encounter with the double is directly related to the power of the technological apparatus of cinema, as the previous chapters described. As a technique of aesthetic defamiliarization, the double allegorizes and makes visible this power of the medium; the wonder and fear of its appearance is related to that of the cinema as unleasher of doubles.

In this sense, the figure of the double is able to recapture an original feeling of wonder at the uncanniness of cinema, a spectral awe much like what the viewers of the phantasmagoria and of early cinema must have felt, which, a couple of decades into the history of the medium, must have been ossified with habituation and domesticated in narrative.²¹ Tom Gunning has recently discussed the uncanny in the context of the reception of technology, arguing that aesthetic defamiliarization is a route whereby the original amazement at new technologies that have since become part of bourgeois "second nature" can be recaptured. Referring to Freud's association of the uncanny with the primitive and the belief in animism, Gunning argues that

[New] technologies evoke not only a short-lived wonder based on unfamiliarity which greater and constant exposure will overcome, but also a possibly less dramatic but more enduring sense of the uncanny, a feeling that they involve magical operations which greater familiarity or habituation might cover over, but

²¹ The counterpoint being, once again, the comparative invisibility of the apparatus in classical narrative films.

not totally destroy. It crouches there beneath a rational cover, ready to spring out again...

The reception of technology allows re-enchantment through aesthetic de-familiarization, the traumatic surfacing of allayed fears and anxieties, as well as the uncanny re-emergence of earlier stages of magical thinking. While this may not exhaust the variety of responses that we find to technology (parody and nostalgia are two other notable responses I won't treat here), it does, I think, provide a relevant model for a cultural history of the reception of technology in the modern era. But we should realize that not all technologies are received in the same ways and that the experiences of wonder and especially of the uncanny are more likely in some technologies than others.²²

Precisely this kind of dialectical relationship between high technology (in the “nature” of which something magical is hidden) and the “primitive”/magical is evoked through the uncanny elements of these films. This primitive aspect in part has to do with magical character of the double as production of a copy.²³ But it is also related to the use of atavistic or outmoded techniques, for example, allusions to the norms of early cinema (as we found in *Caligari*). Significantly, with the doppelgänger theme, a dialectical tension between the “primitive” and high technology is not only expressed in terms of stylistic features but is a central feature of the plot, as, for example, in *The Golem* and *Metropolis*. It is especially illuminating to read the shock effects of such uncanny moments, and their magical/technological undertones, with reference to Walter Benjamin's discussion of the redemptive possibilities of cinema vis-à-vis the phantasmagoria of bourgeois “second nature”. Like the potential Benjamin found in Surrealism, in these cases the figure of the double can be considered to offer a “radical crossing of the artificial flowering of images of second nature with a mode of experience traditionally reserved for those of an ostensibly more primary nature”.²⁴ For Benjamin, shock could “assume a strategic significance – as an artificial means of propelling the human body into moments of recognition”.²⁵

²² See Tom Gunning, “Re-Newing Old Technologies: Astonishment, Second Nature, and the Uncanny in Technology from the Previous Turn-of-the-Century”, in *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, eds. David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins, MIT Press, 2003, pp. 39–60.

²³ Cf. the notion of the copy and its role in sympathetic magic. See Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, New York, London, Routledge, 1993.

²⁴ Miriam Hansen, “Benjamin, Cinema, and Experience”, p. 193.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

Also applicable to our discussion of the theme of the double is how film, according to Benjamin, with its discontinuous structures (shots and montage) and alienating shock effects, had the potential to depict the similarly fragmentary phantasmagoric everyday world so that, in its reflected image, the illusory nature of the “original” would be revealed for the sham that it was. This effect would be contrary to that produced by the institutional mass media, as “the reality conveyed by the cinematic apparatus is no more and no less phantasmagoric than the ‘natural’ phenomena of the commodity world it endlessly replicates... Benjamin knew all too well that the primary objective of capitalist film practice was to perpetuate the mythical chain of mirrors”.²⁶ As Susan Buck-Morss has observed:

Mass media (Benjamin would have called it mechanical reproduction) could now replicate this commodity world endlessly as the mere image of an illusion (examples were Hollywood films, the growing advertising industry, Riefenstahl’s “Triumph of the Will”). But the critical, cognitive function in which a politicized art might participate was precisely the opposite: not to duplicate illusion as real, *but to interpret reality as itself illusion*. This, I would claim, was in fact the goal of the *Passagen-Werk*. If the artwork essay argues theoretically for the transformation of art from illusory representation into an analysis of illusions, the *Passagen-Werk* was intended to put theory into literary practice. It was to have appropriated the new techniques of film so that it could meet the distracted public halfway, in order to expose to them how and why reality became composed of illusions in the first place.²⁷ [italics mine]

Leaving aside the question of political consequence, the uncanny effects of these films, I would argue, should be understood as an illustration of such an effect. In contradistinction to attempts to copy reality naturalistically or to compose a credible (bourgeois) dénouement, they foster a visceral unease that is directed outward, i.e., toward the status of *external* reality as a point of reference, questioning its ontological priority vis-à-vis the cinematic/diegetic reality. This is a product of how the sense of the uncanny is engendered, and of its structural, ontological misgivings (i.e., the visceral response of the spectator and its in-between quality). In other words how, while the spectator knows that such apparitions are optical illusions, they are nonetheless actually present, and relate intersubjectively with their observer.²⁸ Hence the “epistemological abyss”, as Terry Castle puts it, of the phantasmagoria. In a

²⁶ Ibid., p. 204.

²⁷ Susan Buck-Morss, “Benjamin’s *Passagen-Werk*: Redeeming Mass Culture for the Revolution”, p. 214.

related vein, Brigitte Peucker has argued that this constructed blurring of the distinction between the real and the image evokes the possibility of film coming to life or of the spectator entering the diegetic world:

But it also wants to entertain the possibility, if only for a few moments, that the space of the real will be invaded by the image become thing, or that it might be possible to enter the diegetic space of the screen. It is this confusion between the real and the image that is recorded in the mirror shots of Expressionist cinema and thematized when a character shoots his mirror image only to fall down “dead” himself.²⁹

These films constitute a reversal of the usual mimetic intention of (institutional) cinema to naturalistically copy reality or create a credible visible world. The fantastic world, with no claims to naturalistic veracity and with an explicitly *constructed* quality, comes to affect the status of its original reference point – like the action of the double in relation to the status of the “original”. The indiscernibility between reality and the unreal that is operative in these uncanny situations as a structural problem acknowledges the “nature” of the illusion as a phantasmagoria but nonetheless contains an outward motion, reflexively speaking to the status of the external visible, the world of the everyday.³⁰ This kind of hesitation has an interesting echo of Marx’s (inverted) usage of the metaphor of the “phantasmagoria”: here too, the optical illusion that was diegetically purported to be the product of a sick mind (e.g., of the protagonist who sees his double, or the nineteenth-century patient prone to “phantasms”) is instead revealed as the structural condition of the experience, and at a remove, as the objective character of experience “outside”.

It is important to note the necessity that such a cinematic use of the double theme coincide with a self-conscious, defamiliarizing film practice, in which the exposure of the film image as both phantasmagoria and fetishized commodity likewise exposes the process of its production, the “apparatus” (see, e.g., the dance

²⁸ This is the axiomatic dual character of the film signifier, as discussed by Christian Metz in *The Imaginary Signifier*, but with the uncanny this dual character itself is the subject of the image and dénouement. Illusionism is not a possibility, as the experience of film spectatorship is simultaneously defamiliarized.

²⁹ Brigitte Peucker, *Incorporating Images: Film and the Rival Arts*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 118.

³⁰ A more recent film with similar uncanny effects is *The Matrix*. One leaves a first viewing somewhat uncertain about the natural special and temporal motions of objects and the status of external reality.

show of the robot Maria in *Metropolis*). The uncanny accompanies the unveiling of the “truth” of the moving image in terms of its process of production and transmission; precisely what, in institutional/Hollywood film practice, is occulted by the oneiric and fetishistic surface attributes of the image and its solicitation of *Schaulust*. But such effects arise only in the midst of cohesive narrative structures; similar techniques found in self-referential avant-garde and modernist films have no uncanny effects, for example in Dziga Vertov’s *The Man with the Movie Camera*. In this guise, reflexive and uncanny gestures not only engage issues of film form but at the same time, the economic and ideological “repressed” of representation (a telling point of contrast again being the institutional cinema, which aims at the production of a film commodity, a slick phantasmagoria from whose final version the traces of the labour and production process have been eradicated). (Although they sometimes reappear in advertisements, which tout the costliness of the production, the number of extras, and so on, as indices of quality.) And finally, the return of the gaze and its uncanny intersubjectivity, for example by Jack the Ripper as doppelgänger and daemoniac bourgeois, has a transgressive effect, as a revelation of the uncertainty of the visible.

The images produced by such self-conscious film practice, in *Waxworks* as in those of the other German doppelgänger films, and even the anti-naturalist tendencies of Meyrink’s *Golem*, thus have a paradoxically iconophobic quality, as images that disparage the status of the image. This quality strikes a chord with the iconoclastic tendencies of Marxist thought with regard to the inauthenticity of what can be seen with “everyday eyes” (second nature), exemplified, for instance, by Kracauer’s assertion that “The flight of images is a flight from revolution and from death”,³¹ or Guy Debord’s claim that with the society of the spectacle, “The real consumer becomes a consumer of illusions. The commodity is this factually real illusion, and the spectacle is its general manifestation”.³²

The function of the double as allegory of cinema is a paradoxical combination of technophilia and iconoclasm: it glorifies the magical-technological

³¹ Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, London and New York, Verso, 1998, p. 94.

³² Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 1967, section 47.

wonders of cinema while at the same time urging a distrust of its images. At a remove, though, these themes, with their ironies and multiple framings, enact an annihilation of the “real”, which is inaccessible to the faulty human sensorium, mediated by optical instruments that distort and distance it, and replaced by a proliferation of “images”. The basis of their engagement with their particular historical context becomes apparent in considering how in the use of uncanny themes and motifs, uncertain constructions of vision coincide with an ambivalent account of modernity, technology, and instrumental reason. Onscreen, the return to the old tropes of Romanticism also has an ambivalent character: despite their original irrationalism, the new versions can neither be categorized as unadulterated irrationalist inwardness (hence proto-Fascist), nor simply as bourgeois image-commodities.

As self-conscious works grappling with questions of film’s specificity – understood as something other than bourgeois naturalism in art or photographic realism, or than avant-garde formalism – these films respond to the optical consequences of modernity and its effects of perceptual distress. It is especially worth noting how the onscreen appearance of doppelgänger in these narratives is distinct from doubling effects in most self-avowed modernist or avant-garde works, because its narratives remain “systematically unstable rather than subversive”.³³ Unlike the case of much modern art, I would argue that the systemic instability of such uncanny effects prevents their easy co-optation by the bourgeois mass culture they critically engage, e.g., as advertising. “In the end”, according to Paul Virilio, “‘modern art’ was able to glean what communications and telecommunications now accomplish on a daily basis: the *mise en abyme* of the body, of the figure”.³⁴ Instead of mirroring the alienated and fragmentary status of the spectator’s body in modernity, as much of modern art, these films enact the *process* of its imprisonment in a hall of mirrors of simulacra. And, their critical appraisal of the consequences of

³³ “Subversive” is here used to indicate deliberate, politically engaged critiques of bourgeois art – which ultimately serve as technical preludes to advertising strategies. Mike Budd, “The Moments of *Caligari*”, in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories*, New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press, 1990, p. 25.

³⁴ Paul Virilio, *Art and Fear (La Procédure silence)*, trans. Julie Rose, New York & London, Continuum, 2003, p. 35.

modern technology for human experience is at odds with their simultaneous exploration of the specific possibilities of the most modern, technological medium of doublings – a productive tension that is never resolved. Because this exploration coincides with the critique of vision (mediated and modern), the capacity of the eye to apprehend the real, and mechanical extensions of human vision, doppelgänger films betray a kind of ambivalence to cinema itself, as emblem and product of modernity. It is in this sense too that the screen on which the double appears is divided: by an underlying uncertainty about the power and possibilities of the medium whose unprecedented capacities have brought the double to life.

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