GEORG BÜCHNER IN THE GERMAN CINEMATIC TRADITION: FILM, THEATER, AND THE ART OF ADAPTATION

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Germanic Languages and Literatures in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

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German films based on the works of Georg Büchner (1813-1837) constitute a fascinating body of cinematic texts, with more than a dozen productions spanning the period from the 1920s to our days. This dissertation is structured around four of the most significant Büchner-related films: two adaptations of *Danton's Death* (by Dimitri Buchowetzki in 1921 and by Hans Behrendt in 1931) and two adaptations of *Woyzeck* (by Georg Klaren in 1947 and by Werner Herzog in 1979).

Instead of merely comparing the adaptations to the original texts, my focus is on the broader "intertextual space" (a term proposed by Christopher Orr and Eric Rentschler), which involves: 1) Büchner's reception in Germany, including the elusive nature of his work and a wide-spread notion that he was a precursor of modernism. 2) The stage history of Büchner's plays and various levels of interconnection between

cinema and theater. 3) Relevant cinematic developments, including both specific influences and more general shifts in filmmaking, as the films in question belong to four very distinct periods of German cinema.

Buchowetzki's eclectic *Danton* reflects the struggle of film to emerge as a legitimate art form in the early Weimar years, and reveals a characteristic breadth of influences, ranging from Max Reinhardt's theatrical experiments to popular entertainment in Ernst Lubitsch's costume dramas. Behrendt's *Danton* is shaped by the challenges of early sound film and a resurgence of theatrical aesthetics in cinema. Klaren's *Wozzeck* produced in the Eastern Zone shortly after the end of WW II, revives a socialist reading of Büchner and, attempting to overcome the Nazi legacy, draws on the aesthetics of Weimar expressionism. Herzog's *Woyzeck* accentuates existentialist preoccupations in the context of the New German Cinema as well as within his own oeuvre, including *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser, Stroszek,* and *Nosferatu*. The study of all of these films adds a new dimension to the history of Büchner's reception in Germany and helps to highlight important facets of the history of German cinema; it also allows the examination of pivotal theoretical and practical questions concerning the adaptation of literary texts to the medium of motion pictures.

To my family

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List of Büchner-Adaptations in German Film

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Danton. Dir. Hans Behrendt. 1931. Allianz Tonfilm. Videocassette.

Wozzeck. Dir. Georg Klaren. 1947. Icestorm. Videocassette.

Woyzeck. Dir. Bohumil Herlischka. ARD/SWF. 3 May 1962. Television. Videocassette.

Dantons Tod. Dir. Fritz Umgelter. ARD/SDR. 17 March 1963. Television. Videocassette.

Woyzeck. Dir. Rudolf Noelte. ZDF/HR. 9 Oct. 1966. Television. Videocassette.

Der plötzliche Reichtum der armen Leute von Kombach. Dir. Volker Schlöndorff. HR. 26 Jan. 1971. Television. Videocassette.*

Lenz. Dir. George Moorse. ARD/BR. 24 March 1971. Television. Videocassette.

Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle [*The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*]. Dir. Werner Herzog. 1974. Anchor Bay Entertainment, 2004. DVD.*

Herz aus Glas. Dir. Werner Herzog. 1976. Anchor Bay Entertainment, 2004. DVD.*

Stroszek. Dir. Werner Herzog. 1977. Anchor Bay Entertainment, 2001. DVD.*

Woyzeck. Dir. Werner Herzog. 1979. Kinowelt Home Entertainment, 2009. DVD.

Heller Wahn. Dir. Margarethe von Trotta. 1982. Water Bearer Films, 1996. Videocassette.*

Wodzeck. Dir. Oliver Herbrich. Oliver Herbrich Filmproduktion/ARD/BR. 8 Feb. 1985. Television. Videocassette.

Introduction

Films based on the works of Georg Büchner constitute a fascinating body of cinematic texts. I am aware of fourteen German adaptations of Büchner, including TV productions: five versions of his dramatic fragment *Woyzeck,* three versions of the historical drama *Dantons Tod* (*Danton's Death*), one rendering of his novella *Lenz,* and five additional films either combining his works or containing recognizable quotations and motifs from Büchner (see List of Büchner-adaptations). While I shall cover all of these films in varying degrees of detail, my dissertation will be structured around four of the most significant Büchner-related productions spanning the 1920s to the 1970s: two adaptations of *Dantons Tod* (one directed in 1921 by Dimitri Buchowetzki, another in 1931 by Hans Behrendt), and two adaptations of *Woyzeck* (one directed in 1947 by Georg Klaren, another in 1979 by Werner Herzog). The study of these films adds an important dimension to the history of Büchner's reception in Germany, and helps to highlight some interesting facets of the history of German cinema; finally, it allows us to approach intriguing theoretical and practical questions concerning the adaptation of literary texts to the medium of motion pictures.

Cinematic adaptations of literary works already appeared in large numbers during the infant years of film, and continue to be an extremely productive enterprise today. Much has changed since the pioneering releases of *Hamlets* lasting ten minutes, or *Fausts* lasting fifteen, but the genre is still haunted by the fatal question: "How does the film compare to the original?" This question often leads to the purist's formulation – "How true is the film to the original?" – or to the straightforward inquiry of the "naïve" viewer or mainstream film critic: "What is better, the book or the movie?" (The answer here overwhelmingly tends not to be in favor of the

adaptation).[1] The question can involve more subtle modifications, but *mutatis mutandis* it permeates much of the scholarship in the field during the second half of the twentieth century, the underlying assumption being a comparison and contrast between two distinct modes of representation.

The conceptual framework for the film versus literature dichotomy was laid by George Bluestone in his seminal study *Novels into Film* (1957), a groundbreaking work in the theory of adaptation that for the first time treated cinematic adaptations as a serious genre, worthy of special scholarly consideration. At the basis of Bluestone's approach is the essential difference between literature as a linguistic medium and film as a visual one. While Bluestone strives to emancipate adaptations from the issue of fidelity and treats film as an autonomous form of art, he nonetheless often emphasizes cinema's relative shortcomings (for example, its alleged inability to transcend the present tense or to express the inner world of characters [48]).[2] Another manifestation of the contrastive approach is found four decades later in Brian McFarlane's *Novel to Film* (1996). His method is based on the analysis of different narrative potentials of literature and film, and distinguishes between transferable and non-transferable elements in a literary text. In concentrating on the unmediated relationship between two narrative codes, he explicitly excludes the influence of outside factors, including the "industrial" and cultural contexts (McFarlane viii). Such an approach may be termed formalistic, insofar as it tends to consider cinematic adaptations in a cultural vacuum and concentrates on the question of how the text in one medium is translated into another, the primary emphasis being on the narrative structures unique to each of the signifying systems.

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[1] The stigma of derivativeness seems to affect not only films but also other adapted works regardless of the genre and medium (see Hutcheon).

[2] Bluestone's German counterpart, Alfred Estermann, follows a similar approach in his 1965 study *Die Verfilmung literarischer Werke*; however, his main focus is on factual details rather than theoretical issues.

In the mid-1980s, an alternative to the formalist method – something that can be labeled as a historicizing approach – was formulated by Christopher Orr and Eric Rentschler, who developed the notion of the "intertextual space" between film and literature (Orr 72; Rentschler, "Introduction" 3). This space denotes the historical and cultural context in which the film is produced, and in which it engages with the adapted work of literature as well as with various aspects of its reception. During the past decade there has been a veritable explosion in adaptation studies. Most of the recent works are in the vein of the historicizing approach, since they strive to transcend the literature/film dichotomy and to pad the space between the original and its cinematic version with various contexts: socio-political factors, influences of other genres and other arts, study of the audiences, et al.[3]

The limitations of the formalist approach with its unmediated comparison of the source and its adaptation are obvious. However, this method remains both useful and attractive because of the attention to detail and the tools for close reading that it entails; after all, the link between the ur-text and its cinematic versions lies at the very core of the genre. In my dissertation, I pay tribute to this line of thought by examining the particulars of how Büchner's text is transformed into a cinematic narrative. At the same time, I take advantage of the broader contextualization offered by the historicizing approach, and dwell on the following three factors that were crucial in shaping the films in question: 1) Büchner's reception in German culture, including the academic community; 2) The history of Büchner's plays on stage and various levels of

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[3] The historicizing approach can be found in the following collections and monographs: *Film Adaptation.* Ed. by James Naremore, 2000; Kamilla Elliott, *Rethinking the Novel / Film Debate*, 2003; Mireia Aragay. *Books in Motion: Adaptation, Intertextuality, Authorship*, 2005; Thomas M. Leitch. *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents*, 2007; Christine Geraghty. *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama*, 2008; *Adaptation Studies: New Approaches.* Ed. by Christa Albrecht-Crane, Dennis Ray Cutchins, 2010; *Redefining Adaptation Studies.* Ed by Dennis Ray Cutchins, Laurence Raw, James Michael Welsh, 2010. In her *Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Linda Hutcheon deals with a much wider array of media, but characteristically an important impetus for her work is to overcome the novel / film dichotomy. At the same time, among recent studies there are also adepts of the formalist method (for example, Linda Costanzo Cahir. *Literature into Film*, 2006).

interconnection between cinema and theater; 3) Relevant cinematic developments, including both specific influences and more general shifts in filmmaking. While obviously important for any study of cinematic adaptations, these areas are especially relevant for Büchner.

Büchner is one of the most unusual authors in the German literary canon, to which he was a latecomer. Virtually unknown as a writer in his own day and almost forgotten after his death at the age of 23 in 1837, he gained widespread recognition only at the turn of the twentieth century. Moreover, he has been a very elusive classic. Quite meager in quantitative terms, his work generated a wide range of interpretations, at times sharply polemical and mutually exclusive. Especially the text of his final masterpiece, the dramatic fragment *Woyzeck,* presented considerable difficulties, from the spelling of the title character's name to the order of scenes and other text specific matters. All this makes the history of Büchner's reception especially pertinent for his cinematic adaptations. (Needless to say, the well-established figures in the literary pantheon, the "greats," like Shakespeare, Goethe, or Tolstoy, are also subject to ongoing reinterpretation, but there is more continuity, whereas the elusive Büchner is subject to more erratic treatment.) Another fascinating aspect of Büchner's reputation is that, from an obscure nineteenth-century author, he rapidly became the "epitome of political, literary, and scientific modernity" (Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1: 11).[4] Büchner's modernity, which was astonishingly ahead of his time, characterizes his reception throughout the twentieth century. Many critics consider him to be a precursor of modernism and, more specifically, expressionism, the artistic movement that is connected to Germany's highest achievements in the history of film.

The theatrical connection is likewise seminal in Büchner's case. Most of his adaptations are based on two dramatic works, *Dantons Tod* and *Woyzeck.* This has interesting theoretical implications, since one can differentiate between novelistic and dramatic sources for adaptation.

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[4] "[Der] Inbegriff der politischen, literarischen und wissenschaftlichen Moderne."

The "consumption" of a novel during the modern era can – all cultural and social contexts notwithstanding – be reduced to the privacy of the reader's mind. In dealing with adaptations of drama, however, the life of the theatrical text outside of the reader's perception is of great significance. Since it is meant to be performed, a dramatic text is inherently public and thus more subject to the influences of historical developments and contemporary cultural conditions. Moreover, there is a very tangible link between theater and film, as they often share actors, directors, set designers and, last but not least, audiences. Thus the theatrical reception of a drama inevitably becomes an important factor in shaping its cinematic adaptations.

As far as Büchner's stage history is concerned, it is as idiosyncratic as his oeuvre as a whole. *Dantons Tod*, the only play published during his lifetime, was considered unstageable because of its structural peculiarities. The loose arrangement of rather short scenes and their rapid succession proved to be technically impossible to accommodate on nineteenth-century stages, and still posed a challenge for the first productions of the play at the beginning of the following century. The fragmentary *Woyzeck* with its baffling uncertainties proved to be even more difficult. It was perceived as being ahead of its time at the date of its very delayed publication in 1875, and it was still considered a contemporary play when it was first produced in the theater in 1913. Many of the features that contributed to Büchner's unsuitability for nineteenth-century theater can be described as cinematic (as repeatedly emphasized by twentieth-century critics). Both plays consist of short, loosely connected episodes and involve a large number of different settings, something that is ideally adaptable to film. Such structural modernity, combined with the existential streak in Büchner's work, and the topicality of his social and political concerns, explains why he found a place in the German cultural canon only during the age of modernism and the rise of cinema as an art form.

The third factor I examine concerns the cinematic contexts that affected Büchner's adaptations. This involves both the immediate environment in which a given work emerged, and more general developments in the industry. As it happens, the four main productions under consideration represent very different stages in cinematic history: Weimar silent film, the early sound years, the beginning of the post-WWII period, and the New German Cinema. Over this time, cinema underwent sweeping transformations, conditioned both by changes in artistic paradigms and technological developments that are essential to the medium. Thus, even if one regards adaptation as a mere translation, one has to deal with the fact that the language into which Büchner's texts were translated was not something given, but remained in constant flux. A contextualization of developments in cinematic language is clearly indispensible for understanding the adaptation strategies in each film.

Chapter One of my dissertation deals with the very first cinematic adaptation of Büchner, Dimitri Buchowetzki's 1921 film *Danton,* based on the drama *Dantons Tod* and some additional sources. This film was produced at a formative period of German cinema, one especially concerned with the standing of film within German culture and, specifically, with its relation to the established "high arts." The issue of adaptation figures prominently in the shaping of early cinema as a legitimate form of art. In order to secure a place for cinema in German high culture, filmmakers frequently turned to literature for help, whether by adapting famous literary works or by enlisting the expertise of contemporary authors in the filming process. This dual influence of literature on film is summarized in the term *Autorenfilm,* coined in the early 1910's. Buchowetzki's *Danton* reflects the significance of literary adaptation in German film, but it also serves as an example of the blurring of boundaries and the blending of art forms in cinema. With

unrepentant eclecticism, Buchowetzki combines influences from literature and theater and also from the realm of popular art, such as the melodrama and grand style entertainment cinema.

Chapter Two examines Hans Behrendt's *Danton*, produced a decade later, based on Büchner's *Dantons Tod* and also, to a considerable degree, on Buchowetzki's earlier film. Behrendt's approach is affected by the seminal technological development in the industry, namely the introduction of synchronous sound. For adaptations of literature, film's new capability to verbally reproduce the written script in film entailed the possibility of a more direct comparison between the original and its cinematic rendering. The addition of sound also made cinema more of a verbal art, potentially becoming closer to and more comparable with theater. Interestingly, however, it was not the verbal code of theater that was adopted in early sound film, but rather the visual code. This seemingly paradoxical situation is the result of initial limitations of the new technology. Because of the severely restricted mobility of sound-on-film cameras and difficulties with editing, aesthetic changes in the production of film had become necessary. Many of these adjustments resulted in the resurgence of theatrical stylistics in the movement of actors, the use of screen space, and acting itself. In terms of its formal approach, Behrendt's *Danton* combines, just like its forerunner, theatrical and cinematic elements, while its plot mixes high literature and popular entertainment. Even more so than in the case of Buchowetzki, the content of the film is geared towards the broadest possible audience, thus assuring financial viability in the face of increasing economic pressures closely associated with the new, and more expensive, sound technology.

In both *Danton* adaptations, much of the "intertextual space" between the original and the film is occupied by the theater. Both films are connected to theater in many ways, including the participation of the stage stars cast in the leading roles. In addition to the transfer of certain

theatrical acting styles, both films also feature direct visual citations from theatrical productions by Max Reinhardt, including his stage versions of *Dantons Tod*. Reinhardt plays an important role in affecting cinematic styles of the era, through the influence of his acting school or his stylistic experiments with lighting and staging. At the same time, Reinhardt is an example of the reciprocal relationship between theater and film during the Weimar years.

In the two adaptations of Büchner's *Woyzeck* examined in Chapters Three and Four, the impact of specific theatrical productions is less concrete. Instead, the filmmakers engage more with the original text, choosing two very different approaches conditioned by the historical and cultural contexts of their productions. This is particularly evident in the case of Georg Klaren's *Wozzeck* (1947), which can be seen as a bridge between Weimar cinema and the new beginning of (East) German film after World War II. Its script was conceived during the late Weimar years but realized only fifteen years later by the newly founded DEFA. Aesthetically, the film resonates with Büchner's proto-expressionist and modernist tendencies and draws on the cinematic potential of the play. Klaren combines a cinematic style influenced by the Weimar period with a socialist ideology, and creates a quintessential socio-political reading of Büchner in film.

Whereas such an approach had a tradition on the German stage, especially in the early Weimar years, there were also numerous productions that toned down or altogether neglected the play's revolutionary aspects and elements of social criticism. Instead, they focused on other possible interpretations ranging from naturalism to metaphysics. The post-war scholarly reception of Büchner was equally diverse and often ideologically tinged. On the West German stage, the text's elusiveness often served as a pretext for aesthetic experimentation. In addition to theatrical productions, Büchner's works were also taken up by the increasingly dominating

medium of television. The politics of adapting literary classics on West German television were of a complex nature, being a consequence of the peculiar structure of public television, its educational mandate, and an intricate system of subsidies. Filmmakers of the New German Cinema, who often collaborated with public television, were equally drawn to adaptation. The reverence for literary texts often found as the basis of film scripts during this period finds parallels in the *Autorenfilm* of the Weimar years, albeit with an added touch of artistic autonomy on the part of the filmmakers, who see themselves as authors in their own right.

The focus of my final chapter is on Werner Herzog's *Woyzeck*, produced in 1979. The context of the New German Cinema and its recourse to the Weimar tradition are important for Herzog, although he was only loosely connected with this group. His approach to *Woyzeck* was gradual and entailed productions of several films inspired by Büchner but not directly based on any of his texts. Herzog's interpretation of *Woyzeck* is markedly different from Klaren's. Leaving aside any issues of social injustice or class struggle, he presents the existential plight of humanity in a cold and alienated world portrayed with somber gnostic overtones. While Klaren advances his socialist agenda by adding scenes and, most notably, by introducing a fictitious frame story featuring Büchner as a character, Herzog stays very close to the original. Such emphasis on the written text is quite unusual for Herzog, who is known for the compelling visual power of his films. The dominance of the word in *Woyzeck* is accompanied by a number of strikingly theatrical features. Thus, at a very different phase of film history, Herzog employs a combination of theatrical and cinematic aesthetics that hark back to German silent cinema and early sound film. Such incursions of resilient theatricality represent a fascinating phenomenon and in a sense make up an underlying "plot" that runs through all the films in question and deserves further investigation.

Chapter 1:

The Cinema of Adaptability:

Dimitri Buchowetzki's *Danton* (1921) and Its Sources

Introduction

The Weimar years were a formative period for German film when it developed a language of its own and also established itself as a legitimate form of art. In both regards, cinema was heavily indebted to theater insofar as it contributed to the creation of the cinematic language while lending the new art form an aura of cultural respectability – so much so that cinema eventually overshadowed its progenitor and, in turn, influenced new theatrical trends. The trajectory of this process is exemplified by Dimitri Buchowetzki's *Danton* (1921). On the one hand, it assimilates various dramatic and theatrical sources, since the film is based on the plays about the French revolutionary by Georg Büchner and Romain Rolland and their theater productions by Max Reinhardt. At the same time, drawing on the latest cinematic developments (most notably, American-style continuity editing and the success of Ernst Lubitsch's historical melodrama *Madame Dubarry),* Buchowetzki's *Danton* represents the emerging self-confidence of cinema as a new form of art and entertainment. In my analysis of *Danton*, I will situate the film in its cultural context and demonstrate how the cross-fertilization between film and theater shapes the cinematic language of the period.

German cinema between the two World Wars is often labeled as "expressionist film" – a term which is misleading, considering that the majority of films of that era belongs to the popular genres of detective film, melodrama, adventure film, and costume drama and has little or nothing expressionist about them. Addressing the issue of terminology in his comprehensive study *Weimar Cinema and After*, Thomas Elsaesser argues that the era is associated with

expressionism because it reflects the transformation of film from plebeian amusement to an art form (18). For understandable reasons, most studies dealing with this period concentrate on masterpieces with a high artistic value, which indeed tend to be expressionist in one way or another. This strengthens the perception that expressionism was the major cinematic trend of the time. However, as Barry Salt points out, even among those films that are routinely labeled as "expressionist," only very few can be fully qualified as such: according to Salt, only seven films deserve this designation ("Caligari" 119). Salt states that even *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, 1920), often referred to as the expressionist film par excellence, is not expressionist at all in terms of topic, plot, representation of characters, and language ("German Stage" 402). Given these considerations and in order to avoid terminological confusion, I will, following Elsaesser's example, use the broader term "Weimar cinema" for films produced between the late 1910s and early 1930s, without necessarily adhering to the strict chronological limits of the political Weimar.

Danton does not belong to the masterpieces of the period, but it was a quite successful film and also serves as an excellent example of early Weimar cinema. It is especially noteworthy because of the wealth of its sources – ranging from low-brow operatic attractions to the high culture of Büchner's drama and topical political allusions – brought together by the director and script writer Dimitri Buchowetzki (1895-1932). The Russian-born Buchowetzki came to Germany in 1919, after fleeing from the revolutionary turmoil of his home country. He could already look back upon a career in cinema in Russia, mostly as an actor, and launched his directing career in Berlin where he found a flourishing film industry that, after the isolation during World War I, aimed to assert itself within the world market with an increasing number of films, studios, and movie theaters. Buchowetzki had his most prolific period during the early

years of Weimar cinema: *Danton* was one of six films he released in 1921 and his first major success, followed by *Othello* (1922) and *Peter der Große* (*Peter the Great*, 1923). In 1924, Buchowetzki became one of the first European film artists to be invited to Hollywood, where he worked with such stars as Greta Garbo and Pola Negri. However, in America he was not able to repeat the commercial success of his German years (Dahlke 327).

Although Buchowetzki was little known at the time and his film was produced by the small Hilde-Werner company, *Danton* had a grand opening on May 4, 1921, in Ufa's flagship theater, the Ufa-Palast am Zoo. This "cult temple of the senses" (Kreimeier 115) was opened in 1919 with the premiere of *Madame Dubarry* and can be seen as a milestone in affirming cinema's status. The former exhibition hall, where films had been projected since 1913, was remodeled by Ufa into a movie theater in the true sense of the word, seating 1,740 in a horseshoe tier and a double row of boxes.

The development of film exhibition venues reflects the changes cinema underwent in terms of its cultural status, henceforth establishing itself as a legitimate art form and a respectable kind of entertainment. In the early years of cinema, when film projection took place at fairgrounds, *Ladenkinos*, 'storefront cinemas', and variety shows, its audience was largely confined to the lower-class clientele which frequented such venues. Although film was at first mostly perceived as a technical attraction, literary adaptations were already part of the cinematic canon, with celebrated theater actors often restaging famous scenes from plays they were currently performing on stage (Abel 626). However, these borrowings from high culture did not suffice to attract a new, more educated and more affluent kind of audience to the movies.

It was during cinema's "teenage years," from about 1909 to1920, that film truly penetrated the bourgeois realm, the new environment of movie exhibition playing a major part in

this transformation: "Only with the establishment of permanent motion-picture theaters and with the improvement of recording and projection techniques did cinema edge into a competitive relationship with mainstream literature, especially with the novel (which offered ready material for cinematic representation) and with the theater (which lost famous directors and actors to the new medium)" (Kaes, "Debate" 9). In addition to draining its human capital, cinema quite literally intruded into theater's space with the emergence of movie theaters, and was now perceived as a threatening competitor.[5] The first line of defense of cultural conservatives was to declare film *Schund,* i.e. trashy and vulgar (Hickethier 13-14), something that cinema aimed to counter by emulating literature and theater. These advances were expressed in the *Autorenfilm* 'author's film' movement, beginning around the year 1913. *Autorenfilm* projects included literary adaptations as well as films involving the active participation of writers and theater actors and directors. However, the more cinema attempted to embrace "legitimate" culture, the more it was attacked by literary critics. This so-called *Kinodebatte*, or "cinema debate", reached its fiercest point during the pre-Weimar years and calmed down "only after cinema had been firmly established in the culture of the 1920s" (Kaes, "Debate" 9).[6]

Cinema's claim to legitimacy was based mainly on the content of films and the venue for their exhibition, on what was shown and where it was shown. Thus, attracting a middle- and upper-class audience with films that promised entertainment with a "cultural value" went hand in hand with offering this new audience the comfort and respectability of bigger and better exhibition premises. In order to attract a more affluent audience, theater owners placed "more emphasis on the framework of presentation, which extended from motion-picture theater

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[5] The English term *movie theater* is much more to the point than the German rendering *Lichtspielhaus* or *Kino*, as it reveals the affinity between the two venues, which was quite deliberate on the part of the cinema.

[6] Anton Kaes's valuable collection of excerpts from contemporary primary sources documents the confrontation between literature and film in the 1910s and 20s. (Kaes, Anton, ed. *Kino-Debatte. Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film 1909-1929.* Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1978.)

architecture and design to rituals of attendance modeled on the bourgeois theater" (Hake, *Cinema* 14).

The obvious borrowings from the classical theater setup evoked mixed reactions from contemporary observers. Max Brod noted with amusement that the "frills" in the movies are "meticulously arranged just like in a real theater" (Kaes, *Kinodebatte* 39).[7] Kurt Pinthus recognized cinema's attempt to be culturally acceptable when he described the 1914 opening of the Königspavillon-Theater, which was celebrated like that of a "real theater" (Kaes, *Kinodebatte* 72). The advertising of the Gloria-Palast illustrated the self-conception of palace theaters when it proclaimed: "The motion-picture theater of good society will premiere the best films in the most distinguished of settings" (qtd. in Kreimeier 113). It was only in the mid-twenties, when cinema was already more or less established in German culture, that Siegfried Kracauer could turn the tables, expressing regret about theatrical atavism in the architecture of movie theaters. "Cinema has gained a reputation that is independent from theater; the leading movie palaces are longing for the *theater* again," stated Kracauer, advocating further emancipation from theater (*Schriften* 212-13).[8]

The premiere of *Danton* took place at a time when cinema was becoming increasingly assertive, although most contemporary films still relied on some form of legitimizing backup stemming from the theater, whether in terms of aesthetics, theater-like venues of presentation, or the employment of celebrated stage actors. The reason for the lavish premiere of *Danton*, billed a "Großfilm" 'grand film' (Kracauer, *Schriften* 10), is most likely to be found in the high "star

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[7] "Das Drumherum ist pedantisch genau so wie in einem wirklichen Theater." All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

[8] "Das Kino hat sich eine vom Theater unabhängige Geltung erworben; die führenden Lichtspielhäuser sehnen sich wieder nach dem *Theater* zurück."

power" Buchowetzki had been able to enlist.[9] The title role is played by the great superstar of the era, Emil Jannings, his counterpart being another famous actor (Werner Krauss as Robespierre.) It was mostly their performance that elated the audience and reviewers alike and accounted for the film's success, making its premiere, in Hans Wollenberg's words, "the greatest evening of the Ufa-Palast since *Dubarry*" ("der größte Abend des Ufa-Palastes seit der *Dubarry*"; "Danton").[10]

Emil Jannings (Theodor Friedrich Emil Janenz, 1884-1950) began his career at the turn of the century in small traveling theaters and engagements in the provinces before moving to Berlin in 1914, where he worked at Max Reinhardt's theaters, mostly portraying smaller parts during the 1915/16 season. During this time, he also had his first screen appearance in the war propaganda film *Im Schützengraben* (*In the Trenches,* 1914). He was repeatedly employed in films in the following years – mostly in rapidly produced, formulaic melodramas – while developing his stage career in various Berlin theaters. In 1918, he returned to Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater, where he was now cast in more important roles. His breakthrough as a screen actor came with the part of Louis XV in Ernst Lubitsch's *Madam Dubarry* (1919). The international success of the film made Jannings a star, but his portrayal of the French king typecast him for similar roles in historical films (for example, Henry VIII in *Anna Boleyn* or the title role in *Peter der Große*). He broke free of this pattern only with his celebrated work in Murnau's *Der letzte Mann* (*The Last Laugh)* in 1924 (Bock D1).

While Jannings eventually concentrated on film, Werner Krauss (1884-1959) combined two careers as a stage and screen actor. His voice being the weakest aspect of his acting and the

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[9] Characteristically, the term "Großfilm" has a non-cinematic genealogy, as it is derived from the literary label "Großroman."
[10] Also see A.F. "Danton". Buchowetzki had worked with Jannings and Krauss before in *Die Brüder Karamazov* earlier that year, and again employed the duo in *Othello*.

control of bodily expression the strongest, Krauss seemed to be predestined to become a screen actor (Kasten 96-97). However, he worked his way up as a stage actor first, playing in a number of different small theaters all over Germany before joining Reinhardt's company in Berlin in 1913. While he did not yet play the star roles, he was already part of some celebrated productions, such as the groundbreaking staging of Büchner's *Dantons Tod* in 1916, where he portrayed the revolutionary Saint-Just. Simultaneously, he began acting in cinema, often playing the villain in detective films and melodramas. By the end of World War I he had achieved stardom, primarily for his exceptional work in the theater. At this time, he signed a contract with Decla film productions, which was hoping to endow film with more artistic legitimacy through Krauss's reputation as a stage actor (Kasten 102). This turned out to be a well-calculated move, as one of the first parts Krauss accepted under his new contract was the title role in *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*. The film was hailed for making cinema the "seventh art" (Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema* 52) and it became the most influential work of the period. At the same time, it catapulted Krauss into international fame as a screen actor. He continued parallel careers in the following years, often playing the same role on stage and screen, as was the case with the role of Robespierre. Before starring in Buchowetzki's film, Krauss gave a well-praised performance of the revolutionary leader in the German premiere of Rolland's *Danton*, produced by Reinhardt in his new Großes Schauspielhaus (Kasten 104).

1. The Sources of Buchowetzki's *Danton*

a. The Reinhardt School: Acting

When examining Buchowetzki's *Danton* and numerous other films of the early Weimar period, one cannot get past Max Reinhardt, the most influential figure in German theater in the

1910s and 1920s. Reinhardt began his own career as an actor on smaller stages in Vienna and Salzburg, where he was discovered by Otto Brahm, an ardent advocate of naturalistic theater. Brahm was in charge of the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, where Reinhardt worked successfully as an actor for seven years. During those years, Reinhardt began to free himself from the restraints of naturalistic acting and in 1901, alongside like-minded actors, founded the cabaret group *Schall und Rauch*, 'Sound and Smoke'. The group acquired two small theaters and successfully cultivated "a new repertoire, representative of the reaction against the pure naturalism practiced by Brahm" (Esslin 8). Reinhardt irrevocably parted from his former mentor when he became the artistic director and owner of the Deutsches Theater in 1905. From there, he revolutionized German theater by placing a new emphasis on the interplay of choreography, language, music, costumes, and stage design. His emphasis on choreography and the language of body movement led him towards pantomime, which subsequently brought him to cinema (Fiedler 78).

The first two films that are associated with Reinhardt are reproductions of his most successful mime plays (although it appears that he was not actively involved in the filming process per se). In 1910, the Deutsche Bioscop filmed the performance of Reinhardt's *Sumurun* that had been staged in the Deutsches Theater especially for this purpose (Bier 17). This project was apparently eagerly awaited, something that only deepened the disappointment at the outcome. The reviewer from the *Berliner Tageblatt* wrote two days after the film's premiere on June 4, 1910:

> Tonight, the matter was to be resolved: Is the *Kinematograph* able to store, conserve, play back, eternalize a stage production? The conditions were favorable. A play was to projected on a white wall, a play consisting of form and

> movement only, not of words. But what did we see? Instead of vivid movement only flittering shadows. Instead of action only confusion. A pantomime without facial expressions. Where is Reinhardt's feeling for space? He can do so much with just and open door! When photographed, this door is nothing but a black hole! (qtd. in Berthold 15)[11]

Among the primary reasons responsible for *Sumurun's* failure was the use of a static camera positioned far away from the stage. Furthermore, the poor technical quality of both the recording and projection drove spectators away; as a result the film was screened only a few times.

Two years later, Reinhardt's pantomime *Das Mirakel* (*The Miracle*, 1912) was also turned into a film, while the play itself was performed in Vienna. As in the case with *Sumurun*, the film relied on the actors and costumes from the theatrical production. This time, however, only a fraction of the film was recorded on stage, with most other episodes taking place in specially constructed settings, including outdoor scenes. Critics acknowledged that the film allowed a better view of the actors in comparison to the spectators' view of the stage in a large arena. On the negative side however, it was noted that the mass scenes lacked the impressiveness of the stage version (Berthold 35). *Mirakel* enjoyed much more success than its precursor, especially in the 1914 showing in Berlin's Palast am Zoo organized by Frank Goldsoll, who put on a "multimedia" spectacle with burning incense, ringing bells, real-life extras, and a scenic setting around the film screen (Berthold 37). In all likelihood, Max Reinhardt did not

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[11] "Heute abend sollte die Frage entschieden werden: kann der Kinematograph ein Bühnenwerk aufspeichern, konservieren, wiedergeben, verewigen? Die Bedingungen waren günstig. Es sollte ein Stück auf die weiße Wand projiziert werden, das nur aus Form und Bewegung besteht, nicht aus Worten. Was sahen wir aber? Statt plastischer Bewegung huschende Schatten. Statt Handlung ein Gewirr. Eine Pantomime ohne Mimik. Wo bleiben Reinhardts Raumkünste? Er kann so viel mit einer offenen Tür anfangen! Photographiert ist diese Tür ein schwarzes Loch!"

directly participate in the making of the film, but since his name was used as a promotion tool, it was widely assumed that he was the creative mind behind this production:

> Reinhardt's *Mirakel*… once again shows proof of how much cinema supersedes theater because of its limitlessness – particularly when compared to the performance in the Rotunde. It was this longing for a larger scope that drove the director Reinhardt from the framed stage into the arena. Only cinema allows him to follow his inclinations to the fullest, only cinema, where nothing is merely hinted at and everything is brought into being. (*Die Filmwoche.* 19 Oct. 1915. qtd. in Berthold 37)[12]

Reinhardt embarked on a cinematic career in earnest in 1913 when he signed a three-year contract with PAGU and committed himself to produce at least four films a year. Once again the films were supposed to be based on successful theater productions, but both Reinhardt and PAGU's head Paul Davidson stressed that this did not imply mere recording of stage productions, but rather performances for film media (Berthold 45). In *Venetianische Nacht* (*Venetian Night*, 1913), Reinhardt's desire for technical experiments sometimes went beyond the capability of contemporary cinematography:

> Reinhardt became the terror of the cinematographers. He insisted on recording the lagoon in the moonlight, on photographing the movement of the waves, on having the palazzi fade away in the distance – nothing but problems that today's cinema can easily solve, but which were insurmountable technical obstacles for the cinematographer of 1913. (Herald, *Bildnis* 61)[13]

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[12] "Das *Mirakel* Reinhardts ... erbringt vor allem schon durch den Vergleich mit der Aufführung in der Rotunde wieder einmal den Beweis, wie weit das Kino durch seine Unbegrenztheit dem Theater überlegen ist. Die Sehnsucht nach einem größeren Spielraum hat ja den Regisseur Reinhardt von der Kastenbühne in die Arena getrieben. Voll und ganz seine Neigungen auszutoben, gestattet ihm nur der Film, wo nichts angedeutet, alles erfüllt wird."

[13] "Reinhardt wurde der Schrecken der Kameraleute. Er wollte durchaus die Lagune im Mondlicht aufnehmen, das Spiel der Wellen photographieren, die Palazzi in der Ferne verdämmern lassen – lauter Probleme, die der heutige Film spielend löst, die aber für den Kameramann von 1913 technisch unübersteigbare Hindernisse waren."

In other instances, Reinhardt and his crew succeeded in using innovative techniques; for example, they employed superimposition for a dream sequence, anticipating a device that became a hallmark of expressionist cinema (Fiedler 78).

One of the greatest potentials of film, Reinhardt found, was in the close-up: "It is exactly the wonderful possibilities of magnification and close-ups that endow film with the broadest range to show what is happening within the actor" (Reinhardt 443).[14] He made frequent use of this device in *Die Insel der Seligen* (*The Isle of Bliss,* 1913), which was shown at the opening of Union-Palast on the Kurfürstendamm, PAGU's new movie theater. The film was not much of a success: for regular cinemagoers it seemed too long, with too weak a plot, while the critics failed to discern in it new impulses for cinematic art (Berthold 48f). Reviews for *Venetianische Nacht* that premiered a year later were much more positive, acknowledging the artistic and technical achievements of the film: "At any rate, it is a fact that the premiere audience was presented with a real work of art last Thursday at the Union-Theater on Kurfürstendamm; a work of art far from old, well-trodden paths, offering a surprising wealth of technical, artistic, and literary individuality" (*Lichtbildbühne*. 22 April 1914. qtd. in Berthold 61).[15] Overall however, Reinhardt's films did not have the success that he and PAGU had envisioned and both parties terminated their contract after one year of cooperation. Plans to launch his own Max Reinhardt-Filmgesellschaft did not materialize and Reinhardt withdrew from the film business in Germany, returning to cinema only in the 1930s, when he adapted *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the United States.

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[14] "Dabei geben gerade die wundervollen Möglichkeiten der Vergrößerung und der Nahaufnahme dem Film den weitesten Spielraum, das zu zeigen, was im Innern des Schauspielers vor sich geht."

[15] "Tatsache jedenfalls ist, daß die Premierenbesucher am Donnerstag abend im Union-Theater auf dem Kurfürstendamm ein wirkliches Kunstwerk zu sehen bekamen, das weitab von alten, ausgetretenen Wegen wandelt und eine überraschende Fülle technischer, artistischer und literarischer Individualität offenbart."

Although he was no longer active in filmmaking, Reinhardt's influence on German cinema remained strong throughout the Weimar years. The most obvious effect he had on film was through the large number of film actors who had gone through his acting school: "The links between Max Reinhardt's theater and the German cinema were obvious as early as 1913, when all the main film actors [...] came from Reinhardt's troupe" (Eisner, *Screen* 44). Stage acting was considered an indispensable period of apprenticeship before embarking on a cinematic career, and Reinhardt's school proved to be the major "talent factory" for the German film industry.[16] Whereas before World War I cinema merely constituted work on the side for theater actors, it became their main employer during the Weimar years. Many of Reinhardt's actors who did not make it beyond his second or third ensemble cast found more success in film acting, including such superstars of the period as Marlene Dietrich and Emil Jannings. Some actors frequently returned to the stage for guest performances or, like Werner Krauss, combined two careers. Both actors and the film industry profited from this fluctuation between theater and film. While theater offered cultural prestige to the actors, film brought them public and economic success. Famous theater actors then lent their cultural reputation to film and bestowed upon it the desired "kulturelle Weihe", 'cultural consecration' (Hickethier 24). From an economic point of view, theater was on the losing end of this symbiosis, since actors' salaries were driven up by the high sums offered by the film industry. At the same time, theater gained new opportunities to reform and experiment with new aesthetic concepts geared towards a smaller, selected audience (Hickethier 12).

The large influx of Reinhardt's actors into cinema left a considerable mark on the style of film acting. Under his guidance, acting moved away from the naturalistic methods which

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[16] Only a few actors started their career in the film business straight away. These exceptions include Brigitte Helm and Henny Porten, who profited from the audience's hunger for new female faces (Hickethier 25).

Reinhardt had grown to despise when he was an actor himself. Instead, he asked of the actor not to lose himself in his role and instead to be aware of the effect of his performance (Reinhardt 416), placing great emphasis on rhythm, intensity, and the expressive gesture. While Reinhardt cannot be considered an expressionist director, his views on acting are in line with those of expressionist playwrights such as Paul Kornfeld. In the afterword of his play *Die Verführung*, Kornfeld instructs the actor:

> Let him dare to open his arms wide and at a point of culmination speak as he would never speak in real life; thus he should not be an imitator and should not look for role models in a world that is foreign to the actor. […] The melody of a grand gesture can say more than even the epitome of naturalness could ever produce. (202-04)[17]

Acting which emphasizes the expressiveness of the body lends itself very well to silent film. The contemporary film and theater critic Herbert Jhering acknowledges the importance of the body in film acting, and stresses that this kind of acting evolved from a new awareness of the body that had been developed on the theater stage (1: 387). In his essays on film acting, Jhering singles out both male leads in Buchowetzki's *Danton* as outstanding examples of different styles of film acting. He describes Jannings as a direct, uninhibited actor with a libidinal temperament, while calling Krauss "the phenomenon of calmness" 'das Phänomen der Ruhe', who concentrates all expression in "body intensity" 'Körperintensität' (1: 387).

These observations about Jannings's and Krauss's acting styles are very adroit. The opening scene of *Danton* shows both of them in the National Convention at the point when the conflict between the characters they are portraying is only beginning to develop. Jannings as

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[17] "Er wage es, groß die Arme auszubreiten und an einer sich aufschwingenden Stelle so zu sprechen, wie er es niemlas im Leben täte; er sei also nicht Imitator und suche seine Vorbilder nicht in einer dem Schauspieler fremden Welt. [...] Die Melodie einer großen Geste sagt mehr, als die höchste Vollendung dessen, das man Natürlichkeit nennt, es jemals könnte."

Danton is addressing the audience with grand, energetic gestures. A medium close-up shows his eyes wide in excitement and his lips articulating the words of the inaudible, yet fiery speech. There is no intertitle explaining what Danton says, but Krauss clearly conveys Robespierre's displeasure at his companion's words: while his body is completely immobile, the medium close-up reveals a minute, but eloquent movement of his eyes – something that would have been lost on stage. The "rigid gestures and exaggerated, slow movements" of Krauss' Robespierre recall his role of Dr. Caligari (Silberman 108), as well as the portrayal of Robespierre by Bruno Decarli in Reinhardt's 1916 production, in which Krauss played the role of Saint-Just. Krauss reproduces Decarli's frozen facial features (Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1:276) and translates the actor's pressed and sharp but never loud voice (Viehweg 66) into controlled and repressed gestures and expressions. Thus, even in the opening scene of *Danton*, Krauss adapts features of expressionistic stage acting to film.

Fig. 1.a. Bruno Decarli as Robespierre in Reinhardt's production of Büchner's *Dantons Tod* (Deutsches Theater, 1916).

Fig. 1.b. Werner Krauss as Robespierre in Buchowetzki's *Danton* (1921).

As I mentioned earlier, the actors' performance in Buchowetzki's film received highest praise from contemporary reviewers. Jannings was especially singled out for his powerful portrayal of the title role. The critic of *Der Film* states "this film, too, is called Emil Jannings" ("auch dieser Film heißt Emil Jannings"; A.F."Danton"). And Wollenberg of the *Lichtbild-Bühne* notes that Jannings "outdoes himself", 'überbietet sich selbst' ("Danton"). Siegfried Kracauer also hails Jannings's "excellent performance", 'ausgezeichnete schauspielerische Leistung' in his review of *Danton* (*Schriften* 10). Only Jhering, otherwise full of praise for Jannings, criticizes his performance in the first scenes of the film: "Emil Jannings, although one of the technically most confident movie actors in Germany, strayed – under the poor directorship – in the beginning into 'talking'. He opened his mouth wide and grimaced" (1:415).[18] Indeed, here Jannings's gestures and facial expressions seem to be overly histrionic. But since his character is appearing as if on the stage of the revolution's political theater, the hyperbole of his gestures seems justified. More problematic is his clear articulation of words, since it draws attention to the lack of sound. With the spectator trying to guess which words are being mouthed, cinema appears as an imperfect offshoot of the theater, its muteness a deficiency. This is one of the few instances in which influences from the theater can be seen as a handicap. As I will show later, there are other scenes in the film where acting and the use of space are quite theatrical without affecting the film negatively. For the most part, impulses from theater flourished in films of the Weimar period and became part of the epoch's cinematic idiom. Apart from acting styles, these also include the innovations in set design and lighting techniques that were present in Max Reinhardt's theater and subsequently became the trademark of the Weimar film industry.

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[18] "Emil Jannings, der doch einer der technisch sichersten Filmschauspieler in Deutschland ist, verirrte sich (unter dieser schlechten Regie) im Anfang zum 'Reden'. Er riß den Mund auf und grimassierte."

b. Reinhardt's Production of Büchner's *Dantons Tod*: Lighting and Stage Design

"When the cinema became an art form, it quite naturally took advantage of Reinhardt's discoveries, using the chiaroscuro, the pools of light falling from a high window into a dark interior, which people were used to seeing every evening at the Deutsches Theater", writes Lotte Eisner in her influential study *The Haunted Screen* (47). Needless to say, Reinhardt was not the first director to use light and darkness as a formal principle. Eisner herself makes a connection between romanticism and Reinhardt and expressionist film, and also acknowledges the influence of the Nordic filmmakers who worked in Germany. And, as Barry Salt points out, many of those features that are characteristic of expressionist film had already been used before World War I outside of Germany, for example, long shadows and low angle lighting in Danish and American films ("German Stage" 418; "Caligari" 120).[19]

Another consideration here is that a theatrical production, just like a film, represents a collaborative effort involving a combination of ideas and skills. One of Reinhardt's great talents was his ability to collect various inputs and influences and to use them in his own way. Because of that, he was often labeled "impressionable" (Fiedler 58) or even "dismissed as an eclectic who took his ideas from others and dabbled in all forms of theater for the sake of personal commercial success" (Esslin 5). But it is exactly this perceptiveness to contemporary aesthetic trends that helped Reinhardt to become not only the most influential, but also the most universal representative of German theater in the first decades of the twentieth century. In terms of the artistry of light, Reinhardt's groundbreaking work was the production of Büchner's *Dantons Tod* (1916), in which light and darkness became an integral part of the mise en scène. But before

[19] *The Mysterious X* (1913) by the Danish director Benjamin Kristenson is a striking example of the atmospheric use of light and shadow.

proceeding with a discussion of this production, a digression seems warranted into the history of the play's reception.

Like all of Büchner's works, his first drama has a peculiar "biography." *Dantons Tod* is the only poetic work that was published during the author's lifetime, with excerpts first appearing in March and April of 1835 in Karl Gutzkow's literary journal *Phoenix, Frühlingszeitung für Deutschland* (*Phoenix. Springtime Newspaper for Germany*). A complete version of the drama, albeit with alterations of the text by Gutzkow and the editor Eduard Dullers, was published later that year by J.D. Sauerländer. However, *Dantons Tod* remained largely unnoticed, even after it had been republished by Büchner's brother Ludwig in 1850, and in the first complete edition of Büchner's works by Karl Franzos in 1879.

In the theater, the reception of *Dantons Tod* begins sixty-seven years after its appearance. The debut performance of the drama took place in 1902 as a joint project of the Freie Volksbühne and the Neue Freie Volksbühne, two associations that aimed to open the theater to the working class. This production under the direction of Friedrich Moest and Alfred Halen was confined to a very small audience and, with only two performances, remained unnoticed by critics and a wider public alike (Viehweg 27). But the interest in Büchner was growing in literary circles, fueled, among other things, by a new edition of his works by Paul Landau in 1908. The young generation of expressionist writers especially admired Büchner and perceived him as a leader who – consciously or not – was emulated by many (Viehweg 28). In 1910, *Dantons Tod* was staged at Hamburg's Thalia Theater by the expressionist director Leopold Jessner, who became famous for his stage compositions using stairs and steps, the so-called *Jessnertreppen* 'Jessner stairs'. Although the production was a success and was praised by critics (Penzoldt 59), it did not provoke a breakthrough for Büchner's works in the theater.

For the author's centennial in 1913 there were two stagings of *Dantons Tod*: a very unsuccessful one in the Pfauentheater in Zürich and Eugen Kilian's production in the Residenztheater in Munich. In Munich, *Dantons Tod* served as an introduction to the debut performance of Büchner's *Woyzeck* which, in Kilian's stage version, was too short to fill the evening. *Dantons Tod* was abridged considerably; the play was reduced to about a half its original length. Kilian's aim was to bring out "the real drama of Danton […] and to do away with all the redundant historical and cultural padding that was nothing but an impediment for the stage effects" (qtd. in Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1: 253).[20] His radical approach apparently did the play a disservice, as Viehweg asserts: "This production of *Danton*, with such a mutilated text and only average acting performances, just could not turn into the big success that would have assured Büchner's success on the stage once and for all" (54).[21]

It was only when Reinhardt took up Büchner that the neglected writer truly found a place in Germany's cultural canon. Reinhardt himself, in stressing the merits of his Deutsches Theater for German culture in a letter to the Minister of Sciences, Art, and Public Education, claims somewhat immodestly that his theater cleared a permanent space for Lenz, Büchner and Grabbe in the German theatrical repertoire (143). But even less partial evaluators, both contemporary and modern, generally agree with this claim. For example, Heinrich Mann in his essay on the director calls Büchner "Reinhardt's great discovery", 'die Großentdeckung Reinhardts' (520), and Leonhard Fiedler, speaking of the response to Reinhardt's production of *Dantons Tod* and to the subsequent performance history of the play, concludes "that Reinhardt captured Büchner's essence, that Reinhardt was the first one who succeeded in finding an audience for Büchner"

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[20] "[…]das eigentliche Danton-Drama [...] und alles überflüssige, für die Bühnenwirkung hinderliche historische und kulturelle Beiwerk zu beseitigen."
[21] "Diese Inszenierung des *Danton* konnte bei der verstümmelten Textfassung und nur durchschnittlichen schauspielerischen Leistungen nicht der große Erfolg werden, der das Werk Büchners endgültig auf der Bühne durchgesetzt hätte."

(74).[22] Indeed, following Reinhardt's production, *Dantons Tod* was among the most popular German classics in the theater, with eighty-nine different productions between 1919 and 1933 (Silberman 119).

The question of why Büchner's reception was delayed for so long is taken up by practically all commentators of his work. The prevailing opinion is that he was too far ahead of his time, both in his politics and poetics, to be understood and appreciated for the better part of the nineteenth century.[23] In the case of *Dantons Tod,* the dramatic structure of the play remained opaque to the contemporary audience. Even such a benevolent critic as Büchner's publisher Karl Gutzkow speaks of deficiencies in the play's plot ("lack of a plot", 'Mangel an Handlung') elaborating on his thought in the following remarks: "One can say that life dominates the plot in Büchner's drama. […] Instead of a drama – a developing plot that rises and falls – Büchner presents the last twitch and rattle that precedes death" (qtd. in Büchner, *Werke* 1: 475).[24] The open form of the play, the loose connection between the scenes with few causal links (something which is more in line with modernist concepts) seemed to be too much of a challenge for Büchner's time.

Peculiar logistical considerations could also have contributed to the fact that *Dantons Tod* remained unstaged for such a long period of time. The sheer number of scenes and diversity of settings in the play was too large for traditional nineteenth-century stages, since the heavy backdrops used at that time did not allow fast scene changes. It was only in the last quarter of the century that such theater pioneers as the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen and Adolphe Appia did

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[22] "[…]daß Reinhardt Büchner in seinem Wesen erfaßt, daß er ihm erst ein Publikum gewonnen hat."
[23] See, for example, Hauschild, Hinderer, Knapp, Poschmann, Pinthus. One disagreeing voice is Friedrich Sengle, who contests the notion that Büchner was so "modern" that his work could only be comprehended in the 20th century.
[24] "Man darf sagen, daß in Büchner's Drama mehr Leben als Handlung herrscht. [...] Büchner gibt statt eines Dramas, statt einer Handlung, die sich selbst entwickelt, die anschwillt und fällt, das letzte Zucken und Röcheln, welches dem Tode vorausgeht."

away with bulky painted scenery, which paved the way for a modern, three-dimensional usage of the stage. Appia, inspired by Richard Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, concentrated on the movement of the actor within the settings and emphasized abstraction and lighting, forming landscapes of light and shadow. These innovations were adapted by Gordon Craig, who popularized these new conventions of stage design both in his productions at the beginning of the twentieth century and his first theoretical treatise, *The Art of the Theatre* (1905) (Kennedy 1,206).

This modernization of the stage was parallel to the development of modernist currents in literature which prepared the groundwork for a new era in the reception of Büchner. His writing was perceived as so much in tune with modern artistic sensibilities that, at the centennial celebration of his birth in 1913, Büchner was hailed as a contemporary (Hauschild 12). New editions of his works and the increased number of theater productions introduced Büchner to a wider public that had previously associated the name Büchner with the author of *Kraft und Stoff* (*Force and Matter*, 1855), the famous philosopher and scientist Ludwig Büchner, rather than with his older brother Georg (Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1:176). Thus, when Reinhardt decided to stage *Dantons Tod* as part of his *Deutscher Zyklus*, 'German cycle', he again picked up on a popular trend. The new aesthetic path Reinhardt took with this production was likewise in line with what was perceived at the time as Büchner's modernity.

Until the mid-1910s Reinhardt was known for his opulent stage settings, something that drew both praise and criticism. Later he departed from the lavish decor of his productions, explaining that too much decoration distracted the audience from the play (Reinhardt 370). To a certain degree, this change in attitude was also necessitated by economic considerations. With the ongoing war affecting budgets and the availability of material, Reinhardt, according to his

assistant Heinz Herald, decided to have only minimal set decorations and to build Büchner's drama "from human bodies and light" 'aus Menschenleibern und Licht' (Herald and Stern 86). As Eisner suggests, Reinhardt's decision to make light the key element in the formal concept of the production might have been the result of an attempt to cover up the scantiness of set decorations (*Screen* 48). This explanation seems too simplistic, however. The deeper meaning of this innovative approach can be discerned in the words of Reinhardt's collaborator and set designer Ernst Stern, who recollects his "epiphany" upon reading the play:

> When I read the play, my impression was of dramatic, tragic and fantastic scenes which flamed up for a short space and then disappeared. The chaos of the revolution struck me as a terrible storm to the accompaniment of the constant rolling of thunder, sometimes near, sometimes in the distance, the scene lit up with flashes of lightning, the passionate actors in the drama appearing for a while as though in the spotlight and then fading into the background. [...] "lighting" was the solution for the problem of staging "Danton". (*Life* 161)

This vision, together with Reinhardt's understanding that Büchner first and foremost wanted to show "human destinies against the dark backdrop of a tumultuous epoch" (Stern, *Bühnenbildner* 141)[25], form the aesthetic foundation for the 1916 production of *Dantons Tod.* The revolving stage, which Reinhardt had installed in the Deutsches Theater and which usually contained the centerpiece of his productions, was not used for the set this time. This decision called forth high praise in several reviews of the production (Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1: 276 and 1: 278). Instead, the plain setup was dominated by two sets of pillars framing the stage:

> Throughout the entire evening, the stage is set with neutral decorations that are neither interiors nor exteriors and thus represent both. Pairs of mighty round columns, colored in

[25] "Menschenschicksale auf dem düsteren Hintergrund einer stürmischen Epoche."

the grey of decaying stone, reach high up on the left and right sides. The changing backdrops are simple: drapes in multiple colors; steps on which members of the Convention and the revolutionary tribunal are crouching; steps that convert into stairs on which an agitated mob tries to storm the palace of justice; a fence; a green wall with books; a jailhouse window. Once or twice a little piece of Paris barely appears in the background. (Herald and Stern 87)[26]

Fig. 2. Max Reinhardt's production of Büchner's *Dantons Tod* (Deutsches Theater, 1916). Stage design by Ernst Stern.

The versatility of the set allowed a rapid succession of scenes which were separated by only a few seconds of complete darkness, a beam of light opening the next scene. This chiaroscuro governed the entire play and had interpretive as well as practical functions. The

[26] "Eine neutrale Dekoration steht während des ganzen Abends auf der Bühne, die weder Innenszene noch Außenszene und daher beides ist. Rechts und links streben mächtige runde Säulenpaare von der Farbe des verwitterten grauen Steins nach oben. Die wechselnden Hintergründe sind einfach gewählt: verschiedenfarbige Vorhänge, Stufen, auf denen die Mitglieder des Konvents und des Revolutionstribunals hocken, und die gleich darauf als Treppe erscheinen, über die ein erregter Volkshaufen den Justizpalast zu stürmen versucht, ein Gitter, eine grüne Wand mit Büchern, ein Gefängnisfenster; kaum ein- oder zweimal taucht in der Ferne ein Stückchen Paris auf."

short, dark interludes allowed minimalistic changes in the setting to take place without being noticed or interrupting the play. A sofa made way for a bookcase, or bars replaced a window stretching between the ever-present pillars on the sides while sounds of the following scene already swelled up (Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1:279). At the same time, the darkness stood for the black chaos "from which the phantom of these images of the revolution flicker in the chiaroscuro" ("aus dem der Spuk dieser Revolutionsbilder im Helldunkel hervorflimmert"; Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1:276). But most of all, Reinhardt employed light and darkness to enhance the impact of the characters on the stage. He isolated single actors or smaller groups and effectively augmented the presence of the masses, as Herald describes:

> Only single characters or groups were placed in the light, while large crowds remained in semi-darkness or were not lit at all. But you could feel their presence, you could hear them whisper, speak, cry out, you could see an arm reaching out from the darkness into the light, and you got the impression that there were thousands of people when there were only hundreds. You were startled by gigantic shadows, or maybe even more by a stray ray of light that accidentally fell on a spot far away and illuminated human faces even at that distance; surely, only in rare cases did a real assembly hall have the tension, the crowdedness, the uncanniness of this staged national convent. (Herald and Stern, 87)[27]

According to Stern, he "tried something completely new, namely, to paint with light, to stress only the essentials" (*Life* 163). Whether *Dantons Tod* was indeed the first production that

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[27] "Nur einzelne oder Gruppen wurden in die Helligkeit gestellt, während große Menschenmengen im Halbdunkel oder auch ganz unbelichtet blieben. Aber man empfand ihre Gegenwart, hörte sie flüstern, sprechen, aufschreien, sah aus der Finsternis einen Arm ins Licht greifen und hatte, wo Hunderte waren, das Gefühl, Tausende vor sich zu haben. Vor Riesenschatten und noch mehr vielleicht vor einem verirrten Lichtschein, der zufällig auf eine weitentlegene Stelle fiel und auch da noch Menschengesichter aufleuchten ließ, erschrak man fast, und gewiß hat selten ein wirklicher Sitzungssaal das Gespannte, Gedrängte, Unheimliche dieses dargestellten Nationalkonvents gehabt."

utilized light and darkness as a central dramaturgic principal is not the most relevant question for this discussion. It is quite possible that Reinhardt picked up and augmented a fashionable trend, but it is equally possible that he developed the principle of chiaroscuro himself in collaboration with his designers and assistants. Whatever may be the case, the overall importance of his production is unquestionable. Henri Poschmann attests that this performance was a landmark in theatrical history (Büchner, *Werke* 1: 476), and Gerhard Knapp speaks of its lasting impact: "stage techniques governed by expressionist effects concerning light and space […] were to remain authoritative for a number of other productions deep into the 1920s" (76).[28] Viehweg likewise attests to how influential the production was: "This production was more than just a big, personal success of Reinhardt; it established Georg Büchner's *Dantons Tod* on the German stage. It became the model for numerous subsequent productions in provincial theaters" (56).[29] Thus, even if Dimitri Buchowetzki did not arrive in Berlin in time to see the last of the 62 performances of Reinhardt's production that took place in the Deutsches Theater between December of 1916 and March 1919, he could have come across a performance inspired by it.

I will discuss potential theatrical echoes in Buchowetzki's *Danton* further on, but at this point, in order to avoid presenting an oversimplified model of interaction between the arts (i.e. theater influencing cinema), one should mention that arguably we are dealing here with an instance of cross-fertilization. Reinhardt's "painting with light" can be seen, in turn, as a fascinating case of cinema influencing theater (perhaps, one of the earliest examples of this kind). The interplay of light and darkness that lies at the core of film is now adapted to the theater stage The director known for his love of color now chooses grey as the dominant hue of

[28] "[…] die Bühnentechnik im Zeichen expressionistischer Licht- und Raumeffekte [...] blieb für eine Reihe weiterer Inszenierungen bis weit in die zwanziger Jahre verbindlich."
[29] "Diese Aufführung war mehr als nur ein großer, persönlicher Erfolg Reinhardts; mit ihr wurde Georg Büchners *Dantons Tod* auf der deutschen Bühne durchgesetzt. Sie wurde das Vorbild für zahlreiche spätere Aufführungen der Provinztheater."

the setting which, together with the stark contrasts between light and darkness, mirrors the spectrum of black-and-white film. The abrupt endings of single scenes through a brief period of complete darkness resemble the cut in cinema. Most strikingly, the use of a spotlight works very much like a movie camera to direct the spectator's gaze. With only a small part of the stage illuminated, Reinhardt can focus the audience's attention exactly where he wants to have it, not offering the spectator's eye an alternative, just like a film director selects the frame he wants the audience to see.

While using inspiration from cinema, Reinhardt at the same time inspired film. To repeat, low or high angle lighting and long shadows may have been used in film earlier and outside of Germany, but these devices did become trademarks of German film, and Reinhardt's productions are the most prominent incarnations of this style on stage. As in the case of acting, Reinhardt's innovations in lighting and set design spread into film via his students and collaborators. His designer Ernst Stern worked as the art director and production designer in a number of films beginning in 1918, while his assistant Heinz Herald became a film director in 1921. One of the most famous filmmakers emerging from Reinhardt's school was Ernst Lubitsch, whose work in film was influenced by his teacher in many ways. Among other things, Lubitsch remade Reinhardt's famous mime play *Sumurun* into a film spectacle (1920) and brought his mentor's mass choreography to the silver screen in many of his productions.

c. Moving the Masses: Lubitsch's *Madame Dubarry* and Reinhardt's production of Rolland's *Danton.*

Like Reinhardt, Ernst Lubitsch started his career as an actor. In 1911 he joined Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater, where he performed minor parts and had his film debut as a cast

member of the production of *Das Mirakel* in 1912. Shortly before World War I, he began working as an actor in one-reel comedies and gradually switched to directing these films with moderate success. At the end of the war, Lubitsch presented his first *Ausstattungsfilme* 'costume dramas' in a more serious genre with *Die Augen der Mumie Ma (The Eyes of the Mummy)* and *Carmen* (both 1918). According to Siegfried Kracauer, these films "established his reputation as a dramatic director and revealed him to be a true disciple of Max Reinhardt, whose stage devices he adapted to the screen" (*Caligari* 48). Both films were highly acclaimed and secured him "a huge production budget", 'einen gewaltigen Produktionsetat' for his next project, *Madame Dubarry* in 1919 (Korte, "Geschichte" 326).

With *Madame Dubarry*, Lubitsch introduced the "monumental film" to Weimar cinema, a genre very popular in the United States and, especially, in Italy. While these national cinemas concentrated chiefly on their own history, Lubitsch chose as his subject the French Revolution, which offered both escapist entertainment and topicality. The background of a bygone era in a foreign country provided a touch of exoticism, while the political and historic context of the revolution reflected on recent events in Russia and Europe, including Germany. Allusions of this kind were not necessarily the main intent of the director, but *Madame Dubarry* can be interpreted from a political point of view.[30] Thus Helmut Korte claims, that the film contains an underlying assertion that also can be found in expressionist film and especially in many *Kammerspielfilme* 'chamber dramas': "Man cannot escape from his destiny, from the power of tyrants and superhuman beings or the abyss of his own soul" (336).[31] With that, Korte argues, the film enforces existing prejudices and fears of the new Republic "in the direction of resignation" 'in

[30] In general, Lubitsch did not partake in any art cinema or political movements in German film, "his orientation remained strictly populist and commercial (Hake, *Passions* 41).

[31] "Der Mensch kann seinem Schicksal, der Macht der Tyrannen und übermenschlichen Wesen oder den Abgründen der eigenen Seele nicht entrinnen."

resignativer Richtung' (Korte 336). Such an interpretation – reminiscent of Kracauer's approach in his study *From Caligari to Hitler* – works only from a certain historic distance. For the contemporary spectator, it was the visual impression and the atmosphere of the mass scenes that struck a chord, especially with the Berlin audience, who might have had first-hand experience with mass demonstrations during the November Revolution (Kreimeier 68). Thus the references to the revolution were more visual than ideological.

In terms of camera work and editing, Lubitsch employs cinematic conventions that had been developed in the United States during the 1910s, rather than the expressive use of the camera that German cinematographers were experimenting with.[32] The camera is static and shooting mostly from a straight-on angle; cuts between shots mostly go unnoticed, following the principles of Hollywood-style continuity editing. Spatial and temporal continuity is achieved by establishing shots, eye-line matches, shot / reverse-shot patterns during dialogues and match on action cutting. Point-of-view shots and explanatory close-ups help to clarify the story. Additionally, a few more eye-catching cinematic techniques are used to focus the spectator's attention, for example to point out the elapsing of time by means of a wipe, or to stress a character's reaction by surrounding their face with a mask.

In comparison to other German directors of the time, Lubitsch displays considerable skill and care in joining shots and scenes in order to form a smoothly flowing cinematic narrative. Most interior settings do have a theatrical look, with side and back walls framing the action which is taking place in the foreground, while the background is reserved for characters entering and exiting the scene.[33] But Lubitsch always combines theatrical presentation with cinematic

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[32] For examples of the latter see Guido Seeber's work in *Der Student von Prag* (1913) and *Der Golem* (1915), in which he uses extreme camera angles and stark lighting contrasts (Brandlmeier 144).
[33] Here I would disagree with Helmut Korte who writes: "Theatrical conventions (entries and exits of actors, a confined stage setting, dialogue – intertitle, etc.) that are often still present in contemporary film productions are not

narration, as for example in the episode when Jeanne visits the king's minister Choiseul with a petition from Count Dubarry. The scene opens with a medium long shot of Choiseul's parlor, where he is sitting with his sister at a table in the foreground. A servant, entering the set from the right background, announces Jeanne's arrival and leaves along the same path, while the minister signals his sister to retreat as well. As soon as she leaves the frame at the left background, Jeanne enters from the back right and moves to the foreground where she is greeted by Choiseul. As they sit down, they are occupying the left and right edges of the frame in the foreground with the round table between them. They are positioned in a three-quarter profile towards the camera which allows the spectator to see most of the two characters' features while they are still facing each other.

So far, the spatial arrangement and the movement of characters do not differ much from a theatrical set up. Lubitsch introduces cinematic dynamics to the scene with a series of six medium close-ups, alternating between the interlocutors in a shot / reverse-shot pattern. Framed by a round mask, the two characters' faces and hands are the focus of the spectators' attention now. At the end of this sequence, two medium shots show Choiseul denying Jeanne's proposal and her last futile attempt to persuade him. The scene ends with another medium long shot of the room, followed by a shot which breaks up the theatrical space of the scene: as Jeanne leaves, there is a cut to a hall where, before finally departing, she encounters Choiseul's sister.

A similar combination of theatrical conventions in spatial organization and character movement with an unobtrusive, almost unnoticeable cinematic narration through continuity editing is quite common in this film and might have contributed to its enormous success. *Madame Dubarry* attracted a large audience from all social strata, including the bourgeoisie that

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noticeable here." 'Von der in der zeitgenössischen Filmproduktion vielfach noch vorhandenen Theaterkonvention (Auf- und Abtritte der Schauspieler, enger Bühnenraum, Dialog – Zwischentitel etc.) ist hier nichts zu spüren.' (331).

was a major "target group" for the movie industry because of its affluence and social status. For this segment of the audience, the theatrical look of the film offered a visually familiar territory with an added twist of cinematic dynamics.[34] The lower class was attracted by "familiar plot elements from popular genres, fascination with the wealth and decadence of the aristocracy, the opportunities to exploit visual spectacle" (Silberman 107). Of special appeal to all members of the audience and to critics alike, were the film's spectacular mass scenes in which Lubitsch combined Reinhardt's use of space and his choreography of crowds with the resources of cinematic production.

Max Reinhardt had developed his concept of mass choreography slowly over the years, beginning with crowd scenes in his productions of Shakespeare's plays and continuing with the use of the chorus in Greek tragedies **(**Fiedler 93**)**. Berthold Held, Reinhardt's longtime collaborator, compared the function of the masses on the stage with their depiction in paintings, differentiating between two kinds of crowds: they can serve as a background, accompanying the action as in Rembrandt's *Night Watch*, where only the main figures are in the light, whereas the crowd in the background is in the shade, dissolving into darkness. Or crowds can function as a "selbsthandelnde Person," an "acting character," a dynamic part of the action, like the figures in paintings of Raphael and Dürer that are presented in exact detail (qtd. in Reinhardt 498-99).

Later, at the Großes Schauspielhaus, Reinhardt perfected the coordinated movement of large crowds and juxtaposed the mass dynamics on the stage with the presence of a mass audience. His former student Lubitsch followed a similar path at the same time, presenting mass scenes as an attraction in the new mass medium of film. To enhance the effect of mass movement, he took advantage of cinema's technical properties which can accommodate larger

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[34] The film's genealogy also includes musical theater, as the script is based on Carl Millöcker's operetta *Gräfin Dubarry* (*Countess Dubarry,* 1897). For a comparative summary of the respective plots see Salt, "Lubitsch".

crowds in a larger space, while the shifting of camera angles and camera distances offer additional dynamism. Most mass scenes in *Madame Dubarry* are filmed from a high angle in a long shot covering a large area, with crowds streaming in and out of the frame or converging in the center. In the first longer crowd sequence, the amorphous mass acquires a face – and a fate – when Lubitsch cuts to a medium high angle shot, showing Jeanne's lost love Armand holding a little girl whose father had been the victim of an unwarranted arrest in a previous scene. Raising the girl up in the air, he calls for a storm on the Bastille to free her father. A cut back to the long shot of the square now presents Armand and the girl at the very front of the frame, leading the crowd forward. The anonymous masses, previously only filling the background, are now a driving force of the action. As they rush towards the Bastille, they pass under a little bridge joining two houses with people standing on it and cheering. This can be seen as yet another tribute to Reinhardt, both in the combination of the two functions of the masses (chorus in the background and "storm troopers" at the foreground), and the spatial composition with a bridge or archway, something Reinhardt often used on his stage.

The film ends with another long crowd sequence, centering around the execution of Madame Dubarry. High angle long shots of the execution square, familiar from earlier scenes, are combined with medium shots of the guillotine and closer shots of Jeanne begging for her life and struggling. A fast succession of shots shows the cheering crowd, the executioner, and Jeanne from each other's point of view, and the raging masses again, until Jeanne is finally tied down to be executed.[35] The last shot of the film contains the image of a chandelier holding three

[35] In the European version of the film, this scene is slightly longer, with the executioner raising up Jeanne's severed head and throwing it into the crowd. As with many films at the time, different endings were produced for distribution in different countries. In general, European filmmakers included a "softer" ending for the American market, whereas on the other extreme, they added tragic endings for distribution in Russia (the so called "Russian ending"). I am working with the American version of *Madame Dubarry*, which does not include the gory details of Jeanne's beheading.

extinguished candles that symbolize the lives of Jeanne and her two great loves, Armand and the King. Thus Lubitsch brings his narrative back from the grand historical scale to the personal story of tragic love. But, as the film suggests, this love triangle was supposedly responsible for setting events of the revolution in motion. This far-fetched fabrication was widely criticized by contemporary critics. Kracauer, in hindsight, likewise remarks that "instead of tracing all revolutionary events to their economic and ideal causes, it [*Madame Dubarry*] persistently presents them as the outcome of psychological conflicts" (*Caligari* 49). The point, however, is that Lubitsch did not intend to make a film about the revolution, as he was more interested in personal relationships guided by power and desire, using history mostly as a decorative frame for his stylized melodrama: "History is here displaced to the margins, and historical ornament – especially dress, gesture, and decor – becomes essential for the needs of the *mise-en-scène*" (Silberman 102). Nevertheless, the historical period he chose was unquestionably highly topical at the time of social cataclysms, with Germany having had its own recent brush with revolutionary turmoil.

The French Revolution attracted attention in the theater as well. There was a new staging of Büchner's *Dantons Tod* in Leipzig in 1919, while Reinhardt's 1916 production of the play was still running in the Deutsches Theater. Reinhardt also embarked on another project involving the same topic. A great admirer of Romain Rolland, Reinhardt staged his revolutionary play *Danton* for the first time in Germany. Before Rolland became famous for his novels, he had been a playwright and key figure in the French People's Theater movement. In his manifesto *The People's Theater* (1903), he called for "a monumental art, made for a people, by a people" and described the tasks of this new theater (Fisher 87). In order to reach the lower classes and to become a viable alternative to cafés, vaudeville, or drinking, theaters should be situated in

working class neighborhoods, ideally becoming their social centers. Without attempting to paternalize or moralize, the People's Theater should educate the masses "to see and to judge things clearly", generating "joy, force and intelligence" among the people. A suitable stage form would be a circus arena, offering low admission prices for an equally good view from all seats. The theaters should also be big enough to house thousands of people and have a stage large enough to accommodate the movement of masses (Fisher 86-87).

The latter aspect must have been especially inspiring to Reinhardt, as it anticipates his concept of the Theater der Fünftausend, developed in the early 1910s. Although the French People's Theater failed in 1904 for lack of funding and public interest, Reinhardt set out on a somewhat similar experiment. He envisioned a performance space for the masses in the style of a Greek amphitheater, a space that would bring the audience and actors closer together than the traditional framed stage. Following the French example, such a theater should be affordable for everybody and also appeal to the lower classes. A circus arena, however, did not meet Reinhardt's standards and he ordered the rebuilding of the market hall housing Zirkus Schuhmann, which he had used for several productions before. He received support from Germany's new Minister of the Interior Wolfgang Heine, who acknowledged the educational and socio-political potential of the theater and urged a speedy completion of the renovation in early 1919:

> These days, where intellectual movements within the masses are becoming more important than ever, theaters deserve special attention; especially those theaters that are called upon to make valuable pieces of literature available to large masses in really good productions for a relatively small fee. The prospective Schauspielhaus is a grand theater planned entirely in this spirit; unlike other theaters of the time, it would be capable of

> fulfilling its social tasks. Thus, the Ministry of the Interior has a great interest in opening this theater as quickly as possible. (qtd. in Huesmann 34)[36]

The expressionist architect Hans Poelzig, who would later build movie theaters including the famous Gloria-Palast, was commissioned with the interior architecture and design. He turned the circus into a magnificent arena theater dominated by a large dome resting on pillars. Both the ceiling and the pillars were decorated to resemble stalactites and were adorned with light bulbs to create special lighting effects. The design of the auditorium, seating 3,200, and the large stage followed the ideal of the People's Theater:
"The principle of the people's theater prevailed here with a tierless horseshoe auditorium, shaped by the arena, and with a stage staggered at four levels that replaces the picture frame stage" (Huesmann 32).[37]

Named the Großes Schauspielhaus, Reinhardt's new theater opened on November 28, 1919, with Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. And the first contemporary play selected by Reinhardt for the new venue was *Danton* by Rolland, whom Reinhardt counted "among the three or four greatest dramatists of the day" ("zu den drei oder vier größten dramatischen Dichtern der Gegenwart"; 288). Rolland wrote this drama in 1899 as part of his cycle *Le Théâtre de la révolution*, in which he aimed to put his theories of the People's Theater into practice. In contrast to the fashionable escapist trend of *l'art pour l'art* in contemporary literature, his plays were to educate the people and urge them to "take up the work of the French Revolution" (Datta 215). In *Danton*, Rolland

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[36] "In diesen Tagen, wo [die] geistigen Bewegungen in den Massen mehr wie je Bedeutung erlangen, ist den Theatern besondere Aufmerksamkeit zu schenken, insbesondere denjenigen, die dazu berufen sind, literarisch wertvolle Stücke in wirklich guten Aufführungen gegen verhältnismäßig geringes Entgelt der großen Masse zugänglich zu machen. Ein Theater großen Stils in diesem Sinne ist das geplante Schauspielhaus, das imstande wäre, einer sozialen Aufgabe dieser Art, wie kaum eine andere Bühne, gerecht zu werden. Das Ministerium des Inneren nimmt daher ein großes Interesse an der möglichst raschen Eröffnung dieses Theaters."

[37] "Das Prinzip Volkstheater hat sich hier in einem ranglosen, von der Arena vorbestimmten, U-förmig ausgezogenen Halbrund des Zuschauerraums und mit der den Guckkasten überwindenden vierteilig gestaffelten Bühne durchgesetzt."

covers a short time span of the republican period shortly before Danton's death. Like Büchner, he concentrates on the conflict between the protagonist and his companion-turned-adversary Robespierre, and their opposing views on vice, virtue, and politics. The first two acts concentrate, in sequence, on Danton and Robespierre, with the action confined to the inner circle of the protagonists. Only in the final third act does the play move onto the broad political stage, as Danton and his followers face the Revolutionary Tribunal.

The final act allowed Reinhardt to take full advantage of his new arena's possibilities and to realize his ideal of involving the spectators in the spectacle. As descriptions of the production attest, Reinhardt successfully lifted the spatial and emotional barrier between the audience and actors: "During the trial before the Revolutionary Tribunal Danton spoke from the very edge of the thrust stage to the tribunal, which became a part of the audience. As the scene built to a climax, the audience became so drawn into the stage action and so interpenetrated with its reality that it perceived itself as participating in the condemnation of Danton" (Russel 28). Some players were also "placed in the audience to reinforce the extras standing in the arena before the tribunal. It was an exciting piece of a revolution, and the proximity of the shouting almost swept the patrons along to join the mob" (Volbach 15).

The trial scene in Buchowetzki's film is clearly inspired by Reinhardt's production, as this report from the shooting of *Danton* reveals:

> Yesterday, the spirit of Max Reinhardt was floating through the Johannisthal airplane hangar – the Jofa-studio – where a piece from the French Revolution is being shot;

> interestingly, the master himself was strolling among the guests who were invited by the Wörner-film company to witness the chief attraction of their production. (Jh.)[38]

Enlisting the help of Reinhardt's assistant director Richard Gerner and his *Komparsengeneral* 'extras' general' Fritz Plischke, Buchowetzki directed an impressive army of extras, placing them in the limelight in the manner of Dürer and Raphael, and emulating his teacher Reinhardt:

> With his exact handling of the direction of the chorus, the young Russian shows that he went through the Reinhardt school taught in the Großes Schauspielhaus with cleverness and success. He goes all out and seeks to emulate outward life in all its aspects. Dimitri Buchowetzki grasped the clear force of theatrical accentuation that Reinhardt developed like no other, and copied the master's handling of the extras to the letter without making concession to the audience's imagination. (Jh.)[39]

Reinhardt's stage production of *Danton* was performed only six times in February of 1920**,** but it reappeared on the program in September and lasted for 96 performances within the year. Werner Krauss, at the height of his fame after the success of *Dr. Caligari*, portrayed Robespierre in both versions of Reinhardt's production. Obviously a success, *Danton* seemed to have a greater appeal ("a stronger resonance", 'ein stärkeres Echo', as Reinhardt himself put it) to the lower-class audience than to the more educated spectators ("the jaded people in the parquet", 'den abgestumpften Leuten im Parkett') (285). This seemed to be the case for most

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[38] "Über der Johannisthaler Luftschiffhalle i. P., dem Jofa-Atelier, in dem jetzt ein Ding aus der französischen Revolution gedreht wird, schwebte gestern der Geist Max Reinhardts, und pikanterweise wandelte der Meister selbst unter den Gästen, die die Wörner-Film-Gesellschaft zu dem Clou ihrer "Danton"-Aufnahmen geladen hatte."

[39] "Der junge Russe ist in der exakten Behandlung der Chorregie, mit Klugheit und Erfolg mehr in Reinhardts Schule gegangen, die im Großen Schauspielhaus gelehrt wird. Er geht aufs Volle los und sucht das äußere Leben in allen Teilen nachzubilden. Die klare Kraft theatralischer Accentuierung, in der sich Reinhardt wie kein zweiter entfaltet hat, verstand Dimitri Buchowetzki in der Behandlung der Statisterie dem Meister getreulich abzugucken, ohne der Phantasie des Zuschauers Konzessionen zu machen." Apparently, Buchowetzki's work had a lasting impression on Reinhardt in turn. Following Buchowetzki's example of combining two dramatic sources, he incorporated speeches from Rolland's *Danton* in his 1929 production of Büchner's *Dantons Tod*. Years later, in the United States, he also planned an adaptation of Rolland's *Danton* to film, which did not materialize, however.

productions in the Großes Schauspielhaus, as it turned out that the setup of the arena and the stage effects distracted the audience from an intellectual engagement with the play (Brauneck 380). Critics shunned these effect-enticing mass spectacles, labeling them as "debauched theater", 'verkommenes Theater' (Fiedler 96), while the new lower-class audience Reinhardt was hoping to attract ultimately preferred lighter genres. Therefore, with time, the Großes Schauspielhaus evolved into a venue for operetta and variety theater, losing its experimental thrust, but becoming one of the most popular and profitable theaters in Berlin (Brauneck 380). With that, Reinhardt's attempt to consolidate disparate groups of spectators in one venue had come to an end.

2. Dimitri Buchowetzki's *Danton* (1921)

a. Combining Sources for a Broad Appeal: *Danton's* Multifaceted Plot

It appears that Buchowetzki had a similar desire to attract a diverse audience when he set out to produce his film *Danton,* although he lacked the experimental aspirations of Reinhardt. Eclectic and adaptable, the young Russian émigré aimed for commercial success in Germany's burgeoning film industry, and absorbed any high- and low-brow influences he saw fit for the task.[40] Already the film's plot reveals a mixture of sources, as it relies on the two most prominent dramas about Danton (Büchner's *Dantons Tod* and Rolland's *Danton*) interspersed with echoes from Lubitsch's *Madame Dubarry,* the pre-eminent historical melodrama of the period.

[40] Buchowetzki's view of German cinema is expressed in his article published in 1921 in the Russian magazine *Teatr i zhizn'* (*Theater and Life*) in Berlin. Citing among the strongest points of contemporary German film both its "literaturnost'" 'literariness" and advanced technological base, Buchowetzki speaks of market considerations that should be taken into account by émigré filmmakers in order to succeed in the new environment, combining "artistic satisfaction" with good pay (Bukhovetskii 334-35).

Unlike its literary sources, which depart from the classical rules of dramatic structure, the film's plot falls into a standard five-act pattern. The first three scenes of the film serve as the exposition, with a brief historical introduction in the titles and some visual references to the French Revolution. Shots of a guillotine and a short sequence of a crowd of people chasing and murdering an aristocrat are a replay of similar scenes in Lubitsch's *Madame Dubarry*. Also, the character of Lucile, an aristocratic lady who escapes from the violent mob, is introduced. The final scene of the exposition marks the starting point of the film's main action and establishes the conflict between Danton and Robespierre. Like Büchner's and Rolland's texts, the film centers on the historical conflict between the two revolutionary leaders and covers the same time span of several days before Danton's execution on April 5, 1794.

Departing from his sources, Buchowetzki omits the two rivals' dispute about vice and virtue, perhaps as too abstract and didactic. (This dispute is pivotal in Büchner and, to a lesser extent, in Rolland). In the film, their disagreement revolves around political approaches to guiding the ongoing process of the revolution. Danton's reflective remark in Büchner that he sees no reason for further killings, and that where self-defense ends murder begins (*Werke* 1:32), is much stronger in the film, where Danton demands an end to the revolution and bloodshed and accuses Robespierre of having drowned “the idea of liberty in an ocean of blood!” (title). His flare-up is met by Robespierre with the stoic restraint that governs his character throughout the film. Robespierre’s portrayal is more or less similar in all three works in question. Rolland allows Robespierre to show a softer side in the company of his housekeeper and when he displays concern for the fate of his friend Camille Desmoulins (something that Buchowetzki adapts), but in the political arena he is consistently presented as an unemotional man of iron principles.

In contrast to the well-established "mask" of Robespierre, the depictions of Danton's personality and, especially, his attitude towards politics and his role in the revolution vary greatly. Büchner's Danton renounces politics out of fatalism mixed with boredom and cynical resignation. As a reaction to the "loss of purpose as a historical agent" 'Sinnverlust als geschichtlich Handelnder' (Knapp 58), he escapes into epicurean self-indulgence and sexual pleasures. Whereas in Büchner's version of Danton's life women play an important and active role, in Rolland's play, Danton's predilection for the company of women is mentioned only in conversation. Nevertheless, they serve as a refuge from the moral abyss and hypocrisy of politics. At first, it seems that Rolland's Danton is withdrawing from the revolutionary struggle for reasons similar to those of Büchner's Danton; they show contempt for the people and express weariness in the struggle for the cause of the republic. In the scene where Danton dismisses his friends' fears for his safety, Rolland, like Büchner, uses the famous quote from Thiers: "They won't dare", 'Sie wagen's nicht' (Rolland 39; Büchner, *Werke* 1:31). But Danton's withdrawal here appears to be born out of a political strategy rather than fatalism, as was the case in Büchner. When alone with Desmoulins, Danton explains that he is planning to use his temporary absence from the political scene to strengthen his position: "I by myself – I am stronger than all of them together; and men of my kind are not afraid of oblivion. It will be enough for them to fall silent for a while, so that the world feels the enormous emptiness, when those who fill the void are gone" (Rolland 47).[41] In a silent film, it is arguably difficult to portray the subtle nuances of Danton's mind in Büchner or his political strategies in Rolland. Therefore the film concentrates on strong contrasts: the sheer enmity between Robespierre and

[41] "Ich ganz allein – ich bin stärker als sie alle miteinander, und Männer meines Schlages fürchten das Vergessen nicht. Es tut ihnen genug, für eine Weile zu verstummen, damit die Welt spürt, wie ungeheuer die Leere wird, wenn die nicht mehr da sind, die sie ausfüllen."

Danton who embody opposing political principles (pro et contra the reign of terror), as well as their different psycho-physiological types (cold reason vs. sensuality).

The characterization of Danton in the film is largely based on his relationship with women, which is at the center of the rising tension in the second act of the film. (Danton's womanizing serves to accentuate his sensual nature and also contributes to the melodrama, to such a degree that in American distribution the film received a somewhat misleading subtitle: *All For a Woman*). After Danton has left the National Convention with his friend Camille, he declares on the top of the building's staircase: "I want to live" (title), thus setting the tone for the following developments. The ten scenes of this act are very much influenced by Lubitsch's *Madame Dubarry*, as Buchowetzki introduces a subplot centering around the fate of Babette. She is a "lower class girl" (title), who is being adopted into high society just like Lubitsch's heroine Jeanne. As Babette is longingly watching a party in an aristocratic salon through its glass doors (marveling at the luxury and exoticism of a different world, her voyeurism being akin to that of film viewers), Danton jumps on her in a joking yet predatory fashion, grabs the young woman, and carries his trophy into the salon. Like Jeanne, Babette becomes the object of male desire, a collector's item of sorts: Danton places her on top of a table and Count Hérault-Séchelles, the host, examines her through his lorgnette "as if she were pinned down like an insect by his look" (Silberman 112). This masked shot stands out, since it is one of the few instances of a moving camera in this film: a vertical pan from her bare feet to her scared face. Lured by the object of her desire (the exotic and exorbitantly expensive drink of hot chocolate), she accepts guidance and patronage from the count.

Portraying Babette's introduction to the new life, Buchowetzki copies numerous details from *Madame Dubarry.* The count teaches her how to walk in a lady-like fashion (cf. the

lessons given to Jeanne by the King's valet Lebelle which, in turn, may be an allusion to Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion," 1913) and the close-up of the count's maid yelling at Babette with her eyes wide open and her mouth moving rapidly replays the shot from Lubitsch where the shopkeeper Madame LaBille is admonishing Jeanne. The character of Babette itself shows striking resemblances to Madame Dubarry in the way she flirts with the count, pretending to be shy at first, and how she immediately feels superior to the maid once dressed in fancy clothes.

A fascinating quotation from Lubitsch is found in the shot where Babette is counting the bow ribbons on the front of her new bodice. This has parallels with an important scene in *Madame Dubarry* that marks a turning point in the life of the heroine. There, Jeanne counts the bow ribbons on her bodice while trying to make a decision between her beloved, the poor student Armand, and the wealthy Spanish aristocrat Don Diego. Although the bows point to Armand, she recounts them, thus bending her fate in order to enter high society and, with that, the world of lies and deception. Counting bow ribbons by Babette points to a similar social metamorphosis (becoming part of the elite), although it is devoid of the dramatic tension present in *Madame Dubarry*. Babette's motif is much simpler: she is just proud of her beautiful new dress. But the marked repetition of the gesture can be seen as an open reference to *Madame Dubarry,* the very character of Babette being a variation on Jeanne and, possibly, an attempt to capitalize on the success of Lubitsch's heroine.

Fig.3.a. Jeanne counts out who is "it" (in Lubitsch's *Madame Dubarry*, 1919).

Fig.3.b. Babette counts her blessings (in Buchowetzki's *Danton*, 1921).

Buchowetzki, however, is not a mere imitator, and the stories of the heroines have very different endings. While Jeanne, who had cast her lot with the aristocracy, becomes a victim of the people's fury, Babette, seeing the tide turn against Danton and his friends, rips off her aristocratic attire and leads the mob in destroying the count's mansion.

Another story line in Buchowetzki that is centered around a woman involves Lucile, an aristocrat's widow whom Danton and Desmoulins rescue from the revolutionary troops. Danton asks Desmoulins to take care of her and she reluctantly marries Desmoulins to be protected from further persecution. Most of the details here are concocted by Buchowetzki who, in this particular instance, showed very little respect for his sources. A character of note in the history of the French Revolution, the actual Lucile was a girl at the time of marrying Desmoulins and not a widow. She came not from an aristocratic, but from a well-off bourgeois family, and in terms of her social standing was Desmoulins's peer. They had been acquainted for a long time before their marriage: Desmoulins was her childhood tutor and had proposed to her already

before the revolution (although back then he was rejected by Lucile's father). It appears that this story is introduced to enhance dramatic contrasts: Lucile's downward (relatively speaking) social mobility stands in contrast with Babette's upward mobility and, perhaps most importantly, Lucile and Desmoulins as a couple stand in stark contrast to Danton and his wife Julie. This is emphasized by the fact that the subdued and reticent scene showing Lucile and Desmoulins's marriage of convenience frames the scene portraying the lust and passion in the relationship between Danton and his wife.

Danton's debauched lifestyle serves as a focal point of Robespierre's attacks during the rising action of the film's third act. Büchner's Robespierre declares vice to be the Cain's mark of aristocracy and states that "the man of vice is the enemy of freedom" (*Plays* 15).[42] Echoing these pronouncements, Buchowetzki's Robespierre incites the crowds: "Whoever associates with doubtful women is offending the people. Whoever has orgies when there is famine is an enemy of the people! Whoever attacks the Convention is a traitor to the people!" (title). After his sermon, he dispatches the crowd to Danton's house (this turn of events is added by Buchowetzki). The subsequent images of the mob spilling down the steps of the Convention and rushing through the streets of Paris recall the crowd scenes in *Madame Dubarry* as well as Reinhardt's mass scenes. Shots of the running mob are intercut with shots depicting the life scorned by Robespierre, as Danton and his friends are enjoying a leisurely gathering in his salon. Urged by his guests, Danton faces the angry mob assembled in front of his house. Yet again he demonstrates his power over the people by reminding them of his contributions to the course of the revolution.

Danton manages to turn around the hostile crowd, but within his own circle his position is less stable, both in political and personal matters. While his speech to the crowd earns him the

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[42] "[…] der Lasterhafte ist der politische Feind der Freiheit" (*Werke* 1: 24).

open admiration of Lucile (which is, in turn, met with overt disapproval by Danton's wife), General Westermann is not content with Danton's position in the power struggle among the revolutionary leaders. Westermann, a historical figure who gained notoriety for the merciless crushing of the royalist uprising in the Vendée, does not appear as one of Danton's companions in Büchner's text, but is included in Rolland's drama. Here, and also in Buchowetzki's film, Westermann is portrayed as a man of few words who mostly stays in the background, "full of cares", 'mit sorgenvoller Stirn' (Rolland 31). Whereas his appeals to Danton to "make it up with Robespierre" (title) in the film are less aggressive than in the drama, Westermann's exit is angry in both versions. Since Danton refuses to act, Westermann takes matters into his own hands and sets out to confront Robespierre.[43] His visit at Robespierre's can be traced to Rolland, but in the film this scene is much shorter and Westermann does not even have the chance to talk to Robespierre, since he is brushed off by his friend Saint-Just.

In his private life, Danton has conflicts with his wife Julie, who is jealous of Lucile. After a heated quarrel, Danton sends Julie away. She is seen later in the company of Danton's enemies Saint-Just and Fouquier-Tinville, evidently passing on incriminating information about her husband and his circle to vindicate her hurt pride. Thus Büchner's Julie, who is Danton's faithful friend and confidant, is transformed into the melodramatic avenger whose betrayal contributes to the protagonist's demise.

Events leading to Danton's arrest are shown in rapid succession, with most scenes running only about thirty seconds or less: Desmoulins composes and performs a satirical song about Robespierre and the Convention and is arrested while distributing it among the people;

[43] The English title "Then I'm leaving..." appears to be a mistranslation. The German original must have been: "Dann gehe ich..." While this phrase can be ambiguous in German, meaning both "Then I'm leaving" (in the sense of "I will desert you") and "Then I will go" in the sense of "If you don't go to Robespierre, then I will," only the latter translation makes sense in the framework of the plot, as the subsequent scene shows.

Hérault-Séchelles conspires with fellow aristocrats to accept help from abroad; Danton antagonizes his supporters who beg him to “make it up with the Convention” (title) by sending them away, as he did with his wife before. Meanwhile, as in Büchner and Rolland, Saint-Just pushes the hesitant Robespierre to take the last step and have his enemies – including Robespierre’s childhood friend Desmoulins – arrested. In Büchner's text, Desmoulins's mocking song is sufficient to turn Robespierre against him; Rolland and Buchowetzki present a milder and more cautious Robespierre, who needs more evidence for decisive action against former friends and allies. In the film, Robespierre is finally convinced only when he receives reports about Hérault-Séchelles conspiring with foreign powers.

In the meantime, Danton carelessly ignores the signs of impending disaster. When Lucile comes to visit, Danton dismisses her warnings, and, remaining an unrepentant womanizer, seduces his friend’s wife. As was the case with Julie, Buchowetzki drastically departs from his sources in the portrayal of Lucile: both Büchner and Rolland, following the historiographical tradition, present Lucile as a devoted wife who remained loyal to her husband until his death. Most importantly, serious alterations involve the protagonist’s character. The film presents only the careless side of Danton, focusing predominantly on his lust for life and his love of women. In Buchowetzki, there is no sign of the reflectiveness of Büchner's Danton, who is tormented by the memories of the September Massacres, curses the fatalism of history, and wavers between wishing for death and reassuring himself: “They’d never dare”, ‘Sie werden's nicht wagen’ (*Plays* 36; *Werke* 1: 47). Rolland's Danton is torn as well between strategizing and resignation in the face of the inevitable. Again, Buchowetzki leaves aside political and psychological subtleties, moving to the forefront something that is more easily adaptable for a historical melodrama: strong emotions and action.

The fourth act of the film opens with the arrests of General Westermann and Hérault-Séchelles; the former violently resists arrest, while the latter accepts his fate with aristocratic restraint. Shaken by the news, Danton finally makes an attempt at reconciling with Robespierre on a personal level (as in Rolland). When this fails, he again tries to save the situation by appealing to the masses. Although Danton can still bring the crowd to his side, this is to no avail, since the revolutionary leaders are now against him. With arrest warrants approved by the Convention, Desmoulins and Danton are taken into custody as well (as is to be expected, the arrests that are merely mentioned in the plays are shown in the film).

The remainder of the film centers around Danton's trial before the Revolutionary Tribunal. The final act opens with mass scenes that, in a familiar pattern, show crowds gathering in the streets and rushing toward the courthouse. In Büchner, the trial itself is limited to two short scenes and focuses on Danton's conviction. Buchowetzki follows Rolland and expands the trial sequence by including Danton's co-defendants. For the portrayal of Danton's circle, Buchowetzki also relies mostly on Rolland, showing the honest and angry soldier Westermann, the arrogant aristocrat Hérault-Séchelles, and Desmoulins who is feeble to the point of collapse.

In Büchner, Danton's testimony begins with the dictum that can be found in two main sources of the play, the historical journal collection *Unsere Zeit* and Thiers' *Histoire de la révolution française*. Asked for his name and address, Danton retorts: "The whole revolution speaks my name, which will live for ever in the pantheon of history. My place of abode? –will soon be the void" (*Plays* 49-50).[44] This opening line is also used by Rolland and Buchowetzki. In the film, Danton's answer is preceded by his Homeric laughter, which corresponds to Rolland's stage directions: Danton "roars with laughter. The people are convulsed with laughter.

[44] "Meine Wohnung ist bald im Nichts und mein Name im Pantheon der Geschichte" (*Werke* 1:62).

The entire crowd is taken over by frenetic exhilaration. […] The entire hall booms with Homeric laughter. Danton bangs his fist on the banister in front of him, laughing" (138).[45]

Overall, the course of the trial is modeled after Rolland. Büchner's Danton defends himself only to preserve his honor, not his life. Rolland's Danton does not give up the hope for survival, he speaks of his contribution to the revolution and, instead of defending himself, accuses his prosecutors. In both plays, the people side with Danton, with the crowds playing a more active part in Rolland. Here, the people become so agitated that they start singing chants in support of Danton. Buchowetzki portrays this explosive situation by letting the trial spectators leave the stands and rush towards the prosecutors' desk, where they present an immediate physical threat. Büchner's crowd merely cheers at Danton's final statement: "You cry for bread, and they throw you heads! You thirst, and they have you lick blood from the steps of the guillotine!" (*Plays* 60).[46] With the mob on the brink of violence in Rolland's and Buchowetzki's trial scenes, the revolutionary leaders defuse the situation following the simple rule: "The heart is good, but the stomach is better" ("Das Herz ist gut, aber der Magen ist besser"; Rolland 171). At the critical moment, the authorities organize the distribution of bread outside the court building, thus causing the crowd to desert the building – and Danton. When Danton learns about this ploy, he has a violent outburst, tearing down the balustrade as he tries to approach his prosecutors. But he is restrained by the soldiers surrounding him and listens to the sentence in disbelief and resignation.

Rolland's play closes with the trial and obviously no longer serves as Buchowetzki's source, since the film also shows Danton and his followers in captivity. As in Büchner's

[45] "[…] bricht in donnerndes Gelächter aus. Das Volk biegt sich vor Lachen. Frenetische Heiterkeit bemächtigt sich der ganzen Menge. [...] Der ganze Saal erdröhnt von einem homerischen Gelächter. Danton schlägt mit der Faust auf die Barre vor sich, lachend."

[46] "Ihr wollt Brot und sie werfen euch Köpfe hin. Ihr durstet und sie machen euch das Blut von den Stufen der Guillotine lecken" (*Werke* 1:75).

dungeon scenes, the arrested, especially Desmoulins, find it difficult to accept their fate. When Lucile tries to calm him with the words "Be strong Camille! The people will free us" (title), Danton exhibits – for the first time in the film – some of the cynicism he has in Büchner's version. A medium close-up presents Danton rolling his eyes at Lucile's words and a fade-out and fade-in reveals his opinion of the people: the camera pans along a group of commoners in the street who are busy gambling, squabbling, and tussling for bread. As Danton's face fades back in, he is shaking his head with a slight, weary smile, looking down. A cut to the guillotine being cleaned and prepared for the execution confirms Danton's acceptance of the inevitable. Westermann and Hérault-Séchelles walk to the guillotine in a manner similar to their behavior in court, displaying fearlessness and aloofness respectively. The feeble and shaken Desmoulins finds the strength to follow them only upon receiving encouragement from Danton. As for Danton himself, before leaving the dungeon he shares one last passionate kiss with Lucile. This episode, added by Buchowetzki, brings the focus back to Danton and his relationship to women that dominates most of the film.

On the guillotine, Danton underlines that he no longer resists his fate by refusing to have his hands tied and asking the executioners to give his shackles to Robespierre. The film ends with a variation on the famous comparison of the revolution to Saturn, which Büchner places in Danton's mouth: "The revolution is like Saturn, it devours its own children" (*Plays* 21)[47] – an aphorism that was certain to strike a cord with the film's Russian director.[48] Facing the guillotine with his back to the spectator, Danton orders the blade to be pulled up and, stepping forward, proclaims: "Robespierre has won. But the Revolution devours its own children!" (title).

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[47] "Die Revolution ist wie Saturn, sie frißt ihre eignen Kinder" (*Werke* 1: 31).

[48] The association between the revolution and the Roman deity Saturn dates back to the times of the French Revolution, although its authorship is disputed. Most likely, the phrase was originally coined by Pierre Victurnien Vergniaud, a Girondist leader, but some historians ascribe it to Danton's circle or even to Danton himself, which is reflected in Büchner (Büchner, *Werke* 1: 513f.).

The film's tragic finale harks back to Büchner, thus appealing to the audience of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, the "educated bourgeoisie," that would have been familiar with his recently rediscovered drama. But as we have seen, Büchner is by no means the only or even the main source of the film. Equally important is Rolland's play that tends to replace Büchner's internal conflicts with more dynamic personal interaction, as well as Reinhardt's theatrical interpretations of both plays. In addition to the high political and historical drama, Buchowetzki introduces a strong melodramatic accent, very much in the spirit of Lubitsch's successful film *Madame Dubarry*. Bringing together all these sources (and bending them as he saw fit) in the story line of his film, Buchowetzki creates an eclectic production that draws on various segments of the cultural spectrum. As we shall see further, the aesthetic and stylistic aspects of the film display a similarly far-flung eclecticism.

<u>b. An Eclectic Tapestry: Aesthetic Influences from Cinema and Theater in Buchowetzki's *Danton*</u>

Buchowetzki's *Danton* provides an excellent case study of theatrical influences in cinema. Not only is the film based on dramatic texts, but it also draws on contemporary stagings of these texts. In addition to influences from specific sources, *Danton* also displays indebtedness to the theater in more general terms, especially concerning spatial organization and acting styles. The use of a straight-on camera angle and longer shots in some scenes likewise contribute to the feeling of theatricality. In other respects, however, Buchowetzki's narrative is markedly cinematic, which is mostly reflected in his use of editing. The theatrical and cinematic aspects of the film are not always harmoniously combined, resulting in a somewhat uneven aesthetic impression since some scenes are more theatrical or cinematic than others. While this disparity

can be seen as a compositional flaw, it also contributes to the understanding of divergent aesthetic principles in early film in general and dramatic adaptations in particular.

The overall first impression of the film is that of a fast-paced cinematic narrative, because of the high frequency of cuts and the relative brevity of takes. In comparison to most other European films of the early twenties, *Danton* has a fast rhythm indeed, with an average shot length of 6.5 seconds, which is 2 seconds below the mean value for European features in 1918-1923 (Salt, *Film Style* 173 and 146).[49] In this regard, Buchowetzki can be seen as following the example of Ernst Lubitsch, whose films are also on the lower end of the average shot length spectrum. Lubitsch is the closest to the American style of filmmaking among the German directors. He was one of the first to have mastered the principles of continuity editing, adapting with that the faster pace of American movies.[50]

In Lubitsch and many American films, the high cutting rate is due to a high degree of scene dissection, i.e. there are many cuts within one scene. The dynamic structure of *Danton* is different, since the frequency of cuts here results from a rapid change of scenes and settings. The majority of the film's 45 scenes are very short, with only one lasting longer than five minutes and two thirds of all scenes running under one minute. Most of these shorter scenes are confined to smaller sets involving a limited number of characters and a low number of cuts, with more than half of all scenes consisting of only five shots or less. By stringing together short scenes in different settings in fast succession, Buchowetzki realizes cinema's advantage in

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[49] For the comparison with other films, I am relying on Barry Salt's study *Film Style and Technology*, which provides the most comprehensive overview of shot length, types of shots and editing during this period in the US and in Europe. For statistical analyses within the film, I am working with my own observations. (My readings of time spans might not exactly correspond with Salt's numbers, since I did not have the opportunity to watch a 35 mm. projection of the film and am dealing with a VHS / DVD recording instead. The projection speed on this recording is obviously too fast (varying from 25 to 29 frames per second), but since I am primarily comparing scenes within this film, this does not affect my findings).

[50] The average shot length in American films in the above mentioned period is 6.5 seconds (in Europe it was 8.5 seconds) (Salt, *Film Style* 146).

overcoming theater's spatial limitations. At the same time, he does justice to Büchner's drama which was considered unstageable for so long partly because of the great number of different settings it requires.

As I mentioned earlier, it only became possible to perform *Dantons Tod* without major alterations or omissions in an era that saw an improvement of stage mechanics and innovations in set design. Even then, however, in order to represent many different locales without a great deal of rearranging on stage, the sets had to be very versatile and on the minimalistic side. This does not necessarily constitute an insurmountable handicap; the opposite was the case with Stern and Reinhardt's designs in the 1916 production of *Dantons Tod,* where the minimal settings contributed to focusing on the human dimension of the tragedy. Nevertheless, cinema offers a much greater liberty of choice between abstraction and verisimilitude in settings, making possible a more realistic recreation of a given historical period.

In *Danton*, Buchowetzki takes full advantage of both options. On the one hand, he pays his due to the lavish eighteenth-century décor. After all, period stylization is an important part of historical films' appeal. Besides, opulent interiors in the film contribute to the characterization of heroes, as they are connected with the aristocrat Hérault-Séchelles and the sensual Danton. On the other hand, there are also pared-down and unadorned interiors built around clear geometrical compositions that seem to be heavily influenced by Stern's modernist settings: these depict the National Convention, the Revolutionary Tribunal, and Robespierre's office. The implications here are manifold. This strategy again serves as a means of characterization (the ascetic Robespierre), while the overt theatricality points to the film's sources in high culture and also introduces the visual metaphor of history as a stage that is quite prominent throughout *Danton.*

Returning to Buchowetzki's editing, one should add that he uses it not only to join scenes together, but also as a narrative tool within longer scenes. The longer scenes mostly take place in larger spaces, such as the National Convention or Hérault-Séchelles's salon, and involve a high number of people. To cover the more complex settings and arrangements of characters, these scenes are dissected into multiple shots, presenting different parts of the setting as well as different points of view and closer shots of single characters. The longest scene in the film is Danton's trial at the Revolutionary Tribunal, which consists of 85 shots, driving up the average number of shots per scene to 9.4 (without this scene the average would be at 7.7 shots).[51] Generally speaking, in *Danton* the scenes with larger sets and greater numbers of actors tend to be longer and contain a greater number of shots. Only rarely are shots joined in one scene to cover more than one setting, such as in the cross-cutting sequence that shows a stream of people running from the National Convention to Danton's house, or a later scene when the masses rush to the Tribunal.

The final scene of the exposition is exemplary of the more "cinematic" episodes, where Buchowetzki by and large follows the principles of continuity editing. Lasting one minute and 47 seconds and consisting of 20 shots, this is one of the longer and more complex scenes of the film. It opens with a title informing the spectator about the time of action (one year into the Reign of Terror); we are left in the dark, however, about the location. Facing the camera, Henriot, a member of the Committee of Public Safety, reads a statement announcing the National Convent's decision to prosecute opponents of the revolution. The following medium long shot shows Danton entering the room and obviously hearing what is being read. He stops his movement from the back left corner of the frame to center forward and continues to listen with disbelief. Only the subsequent third shot of the scene establishes the location: it is the National

[51] I am not counting titles as shots.

Convention, which was introduced in the first scene of the film by a title. This long shot from a straight-on angle presents the members of the National Convention assembled around a long table with Robespierre placed in the central position of both the table and the frame. Danton, still motionless, is standing in the left background and observes the scene. The next shot is not from Danton's point of view, as one might expect, but a cut-in to a frontal medium shot of Robespierre from the perspective of the "fourth wall" (i.e. where the theatrical audience would be seated). With Robespierre positioned in the center, the spatial and narrative continuity is provided by Henriot's arm that enters the frame from the right and hands Robespierre a piece of paper. In the previous shot, Henriot was seen in a standing position to the right of and behind Robespierre, reading the statement from the paper. Now he is handing it over to Robespierre who signs the document.

Buchowetzki continues the scene with a medium shot of Saint-Just in a position similar to that of Robespierre, also signing the paper with a white feather. The graphic match underlines the accord between the two leaders. After signing, Saint-Just looks off-screen to the left and starts sliding the paper in the same direction. This movement is interrupted by a title introducing Fouquier-Tinville, the public prosecutor, as a new character. The following medium shot of Fouquier-Tinville presents not only a graphic match to the two previous shots and thereby links him to Robespierre and Saint-Just, but also features a match on action, since Saint-Just's moving of the paper is continued and completed in this shot. This piece of paper demonstrates an effective use of a prop to both create continuity and to convey meaning (here, an ominous political development supported by a group of like-minded revolutionaries).

The next character is introduced in a title as Desmoulins, Danton's friend. The subsequent shot makes clear that he belongs to the opposition. The paper stops at Desmoulins

who, in contrast to the three men before him, displays visible hesitation and eventually puts the paper down without signing it. His positioning within the frame also sets him apart, as a partial fade-in illuminates only the right half of the screen occupied by Desmoulins. A second fade-in exposes General Westermann, who is also introduced by a title, sharing the frame with Desmoulins. Westermann refuses even to touch the paper, and urges Desmoulins not to sign it. Then, with a nod towards the back of the room off-screen, he directs the assembly's attention towards Danton. Desmoulins turns his head, as does Saint-Just in a graphic and rhythmic match. A medium shot presents Danton as seen from the table; he in turn looks off forward towards the table, creating an eye-line match. The following long shot of the table and background of the room reestablishes the position of all characters.

This short sequence presents some continuity editing techniques that were standard in Hollywood by the 1920s but were still developing in Germany (this delay was partly due to World War I isolation). On the one hand, Buchowetzki employs these techniques in a very skillful way, as the above analysis shows. His use of continuity editing helps the spectator to follow the developing plot and interpret the characters' relationships and intentions. On the other hand, Buchowetzki's editing is sometimes inconsistent in terms of spatial presentation. The scene opens with a shot of an unknown character, followed by a shot of Danton entering a room. From the dialogue in the first shot, it can be inferred that the action takes place in the National Convention, but the spectator only gains certainty in the third shot about the locale and the position of the two characters in relation to the room and to each other. This long establishing shot lasts for only two seconds, making it difficult for the viewer to absorb all the information. Nor does the establishing shot reveal the entire set, leaving out the tiers filled with spectators that are located above the table in the National Convention. The people, who have an important role

throughout the film as a plaything between the two political camps, will only suddenly appear in the last third of the scene. A low angle shot shows them attentively observing the developing conflict between the two leaders, as a dialogue between Danton and Robespierre ensues.

The exchange between the two opponents is captured in a shot / reverse-shot pattern, which adds to the dynamics of the scene. Five short takes alternate between the interlocutors as they state their convictions. Danton, who had run up to his friends to read the previously circulated paper, turns towards Robespierre and demands an end to the terror. After the dialogue title, Robespierre is seen in the center of the frame in a medium shot, looking towards Danton in an eye-line match. His tight-lipped reply that the Republic's enemies ought to be destroyed is met by a furious outbreak on Danton's part, with broad gestures and emotional facial expressions. In a medium shot, Danton is positioned alone in the center of the frame, just like Robespierre in the previous shot, which serves as a graphic expression of their political and personal conflict.

This shot is also interesting from the technical point of view, as it represents a breach in the pattern of continuity editing. At the beginning of the sequence, one can see Danton close to his friends and also a less involved member of the Convention dozing peacefully with his head on the table next to a burning candle. Then, Danton is alone in the frame. His friends and the sleeping man have somehow disappeared, but the candle remains, creating a sense of incongruity. (Adding to the confusion is the changed position of the camera that no longer presents Danton from Robespierre's direction but from the opposite side). There follows a cut to Robespierre and back to Danton, this time again from Robespierre's perspective. At this point, Danton’s friends and the now awakened man reappear. It is difficult to say with certainty what lies behind this “disappearance act.” Perhaps we are dealing with an editing glitch, but possibly

this is an intentional “psychological” move, Danton’s solo in the frame being more important to the director than seamless transitions.[52]

Display of the cinematic arsenal through the intricate editing of the longer scenes intensifies the theatrical impression from the shorter scenes that contain fewer cuts. The small number of shots in the shorter scenes can be explained with technical and financial considerations. This also might be a legacy of the earlier trend in European features that relied not on editing, but rather on complex staging and acting in depth (Brewster and Jacobs 14). In *Danton’s* shorter scenes, the settings are modeled after traditional framed stages where the action takes place within three walls, the camera being positioned at the “fourth wall” or the theater’s auditorium. Shooting from a straight-on angle at a long, or medium long shot distance, the camera captures almost the entire bodies of the actors. Their movement is kept within the space presented in the establishing shot, only rarely is the screen space extended by a cut to an adjoining area.[53] The actors' positions vis-à-vis the camera are frontal or in three-quarters, even during their conversations with other characters. To better expose facial expressions, conversations are sometimes rendered by cut-ins to a medium close-up or medium shot, but the characters are still shown next to each other facing front rather than their interlocutor. This kind of mise-en-scène, quite common and acceptable in theater, seems especially unnatural in juxtaposition with the longer scenes of the film where dialogues are rendered in the dynamic and properly cinematic shot / reverse-shot pattern.

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[52] There are at least two other instances of editing imprecision in the film. One involves an overlap in Saint-Just’s movement when he turns his head towards Danton entering the hall of the National convention. A more extensive example is found in the scene where Desmoulins’s singing of his subversive song is interrupted by the appearance of the public prosecutor. The singer and his listeners are obviously frightened by the prosecutor’s presence, but then, somehow becoming oblivious of it, they continue merrymaking only to stop it again later. (Here the mistake is so obvious that it could have been a result of careless re-cutting in the projection history of the film’s copy).

[53] Because of its similarity to painting, this “static composition of [...] frames” is called a tableau shot (Peucker, *Incorporating Images* 147).

Theatrical use of space usually correlates to the brevity of a scene that makes intra-scene editing unnecessary. There are, however, instances in the film when the theatricality of the spatial organization seems to be an artistic choice. Especially eloquent in this respect is the scene following the arrest of Westermann and Hérault-Séchelles. With a running time of two minutes and twelve seconds it is one of the film's longer scenes, yet it consists of only seven shots. The scene opens with an iris fade-in, presenting Desmoulins and his wife Lucile leading Danton's wife Julie from the back to the foreground of the room. As their movement stops, they form a well-arranged composition: the women's white dresses dominate the left foreground which is balanced with the white window frames in the right background. Desmoulins' dark figure is positioned in the center. When Danton brings the grim news about the arrests, he enters the frame from the lower left corner and moves towards his friends with his back facing the camera. Reaching Desmoulins, he turns into a three-quarter profile position towards the camera. Such placement of actors – especially Danton's occupying the same plane as Desmoulins rather than standing in front of him during their conversation – is clearly permeated with theatrical conventions.

The theatrical mise-en-scène continues. After talking to Desmoulins, Danton moves to the back of the room, where Desmoulins follows and, after alerting his friend of Julie's presence, he brings him back to the foreground. Instead of cut-ins to the important parts of the action, the spectator's gaze is guided by the actors' movements within the set. The lack of editing in this first half of the scene enhances the effect of the first cut. A sudden sound – which is of course inaudible for the spectator but can easily be inferred – simultaneously prompts Lucile, Desmoulins, and Danton to look forward off-screen. A cut to this direction presents Robespierre, who has just entered the room. The shot reveals what Danton and his friends see,

albeit in a distorted scale, since Robespierre is shown in a medium close-up that enlarges his figure and underscores his dominating presence. Robespierre's gaze meets that of his adversaries, presented in a reverse shot staring at the intruder and almost motionless. Their arrangement in a tableau vivant-like composition adapts traditional pictorial acting styles of the theater, where the "most common narrative motivation for tableaux was surprise or astonishment" (Brewster and Jacobs 44).[54]

Fig.4. Tableau vivant in Buchowetzki's *Danton* (1921).

The tableau lingers for four seconds until Desmoulins starts hesitantly walking towards Robespierre and leaves the frame. His movement continues into the next shot that shows him entering a new frame and approaching Robespierre, who is now seen only from behind. This brief cinematic interlude is followed by another theatrical sequence. As Desmoulins starts talking, Robespierre turns towards the camera and takes a few steps, moving from a medium

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[54] The use of this composition not only reveals cinema's close relationship to the theater, but to other arts as well, attesting to the heterogeneity of the medium: "Tableau vivant is a meeting point of several modes of representation, constituting a palimpsest or textual overlay simultaneously evocative of painting, drama, and sculpture" (Peucker, *Material Image* 30, see also Peucker, *Incorporating Images* 147).

long shot distance to a medium shot distance at the front left corner of the frame with Desmoulins following him. Both of them are now facing the viewers while turning their backs to other characters in the room: this is a classical mise-en-scène of theatrical asides. When Danton later takes Desmoulins's position and confronts Robespierre, the frontal arrangement of the characters is largely kept, as Robespierre turns only slightly towards Danton. Robespierre meets Danton's vigorous and threatening gestures with the usual restraint and minimal facial expression. Again, Buchowetzki does not interrupt the take to cut in for a closer look of Robespierre's face. Instead, he gives the actor time to express his reaction in a series of short poses, again inspired by traditional pictorial acting.

The origins of pictorial acting can be traced back to the eighteenth century and follow a principle according to which internal states are externalized in graphic postures that often draw on other art forms, especially painting and sculpture (Brewster and Jacobs 88). The actor holds a given posture for a certain time before transitioning to a new posture to create a sequence expressing the entire range of his emotions in a particular scene. A persistent trend in theater history, pictorialism was still present in the early twentieth century (Brewster and Jacobs 140). In cinema, it was typified by such divas as Lyda Borelli and Asta Nielsen whose performances were formative for early European feature films, where the lack of spatial fragmentation provided actors with enough time to control their performance of complex gestures, repetitions and variations (Brewster and Jacobs 116). The cultural connotations of pictorial acting in the 1920s were mixed. It was a time-honored grand style which was, however, becoming increasingly old-fashioned and associated with theatrical routine. And yet it received a modernist update, since the grand gestures and eloquent poses of expressionist acting, arguably, can be derived from pictorial acting.

Both Krauss and Jannings employ this technique in representing their characters' reactions to the conflict. Robespierre listens to Danton's outburst with his eyes closed, leaning slightly back in a defensive movement. When Danton leaves the frame, Robespierre for a moment opens his eyes in shock and indignation, then closes them again as his right hand moves up to his chest reaching for a handkerchief in his pocket. He then lifts the handkerchief to his face to dab his right eye and wipe his cheek, which seems overly histrionic for Robespierre's phlegmatic character but underscores the severity of the conflict. Pressing his right hand to his chest, Robespierre opens his eyes wide again in a mixture of pain, indignation, and astonishment over his treatment by Danton. His hand still on his chest, he turns towards the door and away from the camera, pausing briefly and straightening his back as a sign of regained composure.

Fig. 5.a.-c. Repetitions and variations:
Werner Krauss as Robespierre in Buchowetzki's *Danton* (1921).

Fig. 5.b.

Fig. 5.c.

As Robespierre leaves, a cut to a medium long shot presents Danton in a pose of exhaustion, with his head bent and feeble arms hanging down. True to his choleric temperament in the film and appropriate for the greater distance of the camera, his gestures become wide and more vigorous after he comes back to life when Desmoulins takes his left arm and entreats: “Make it up with Robespierre” (title). The gestures that follow express his being torn between powerful anger and spiritless resignation. As Desmoulins leans on his side and keeps beseeching

Danton, he first jerks his left arm away, but then slowly raises the other arm to cover his face with his forearm in despair, only to briskly shake Desmoulins off again. Angrily staring out of the frame, he clenches his fist and remains frozen in this pose until Lucile, who enters the frame from the left, approaches him. His features softening, he turns towards her and holds on to her forearms as she places her hands on his shoulder and chest.

Fig. 6.a-d. Repetitions and variations: Emil Jannings as Danton in Buchowetzki's *Danton* (1921).

Fig. 6.b.

Fig. 6.c.

Fig. 6.d.

While she talks to him imploringly, Desmoulins moves to the background to fetch his friend's coat and hat and then returns. Danton again looks forward and down, this time not in anger but with a resigned determination to overcome his wrath and reach out to Robespierre. Framed by Lucile and Desmoulins in profile, who are looking at him in supplication, Danton turns to the camera and then to Desmoulins to put on his hat and throw his coat over his arm. With the same dispirited expression on his face, he squeezes Lucile’s hand (now she is smiling) and sets out to see Robespierre.

The limited spatial fragmentation and longer takes in combination with the frontality and pictorialism of acting lend a very theatrical quality to this and many other, mainly shorter, scenes of the film. But influences from theater can also be found in longer and more dissected scenes, thus creating a hybrid of theatrical and cinematic languages. For example, the longest and most dissected scene of the film, Danton's trial before the Revolutionary Tribunal, displays striking similarities to Max Reinhardt's stage productions, while the presentation of space in this scene is highly cinematic.

Although extensive editing may be involved, the camera tends to shoot from one principal position throughout the film. Even with a reversal of angles (a common device for rendering dialogues) or other occasional shifts in perspective, the viewer retains a sense of his basic position with regard to the setting. In the trial scene however, the space is dissected in such a way that the viewer feels that he is everywhere in the courtroom: behind the prosecutor’s desk, on the defendants' podium, in the stands among the crowd, and even high above the scene. There is no actual camera movement within takes, but the variety of different angles and the high frequency of cuts create a very dynamic atmosphere. Two establishing shots open the scene: a long shot showing part of the trial's audience and a large archway framed by columns, then an extreme long shot from behind the prosecutor's desk presenting the entire set, including the stands filled with people.

The columns dominating the courtroom's auditorium are a quotation from Reinhardt and Stern's design for Georg Büchner's *Dantons Tod*, where sets of grey columns were the versatile centerpiece of the production. In Buchowetzki, the columns present a clearly structured contrast to the wild and chaotic movements of the crowds.

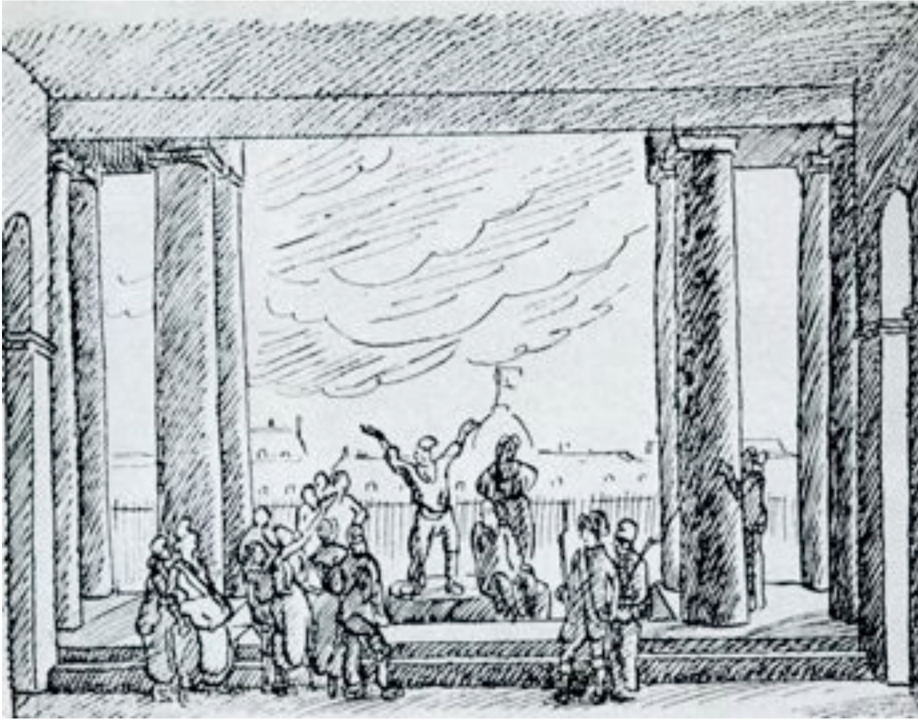

Fig. 7.a. Ernst Stern's set design for Reinhardt's production of Büchner's *Dantons Tod* (Deutsches Schauspielhaus, 1916).

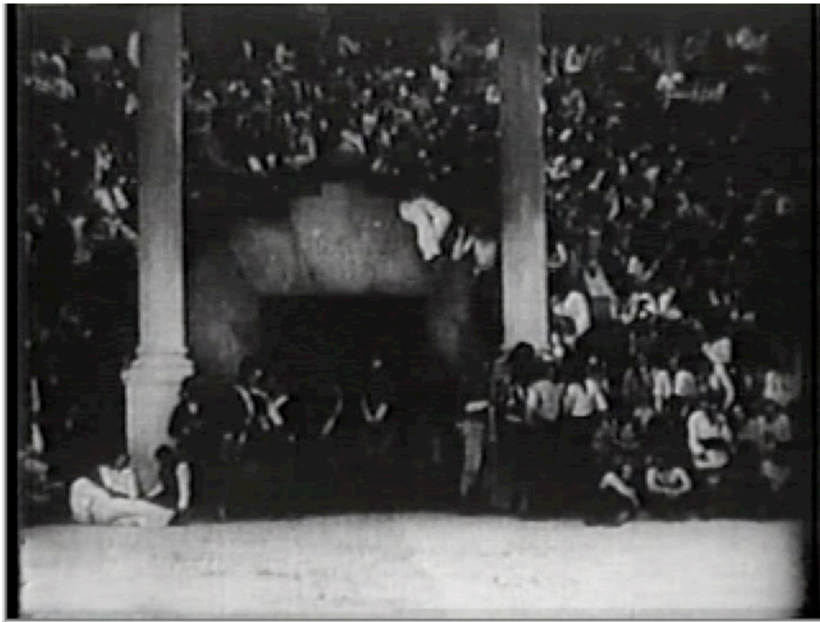

Fig. 7.b. Detail of the setting of the Revolutionary Tribunal in Buchowetzki's *Danton* (1921): Columns.

The large size of the set brings to mind the vast scenic space of Rolland's *Danton* produced by Reinhardt one year earlier in the Großes Schauspielhaus. The low balustrade

around the defendants' stand and the window front behind the prosecutor's desk likewise appear to be borrowed from Reinhardt.

Fig.8. Detail of the setting of the Revolutionary Tribunal in Buchowetzki's *Danton* (1921): Windows.

Emil Jannings's acting in this episode is inspired by Reinhardt's production as well. Following Paul Wegener as Danton in the Großes Schauspielhaus, Jannings leans on the balustrade addressing the court with grand gestures and also spreads his arms when imploring the people to take his side.

Fig. 9.a. Emil Jannings as Danton at the Revolutionary Tribunal in Buchowetzki's *Danton* (1921).

Fig. 9.b. Paul Wegener as Danton at the Revolutionary Tribunal in Reinhardt's production of Rolland's *Danton* (Großes Schauspielhaus, 1920).

Fig. 9.c. Emil Jannings as Danton at the Revolutionary Tribunal in Buchowetzki's *Danton* (1921).

Fig.9.d. Paul Wegener as Danton at the Revolutionary Tribunal in Reinhardt's production of Rolland's *Danton* (Großes Schauspielhaus, 1920).

The camera work integrates these theatrical details into a cinematic narrative. The interrogation is rendered in a series of reverse angles between long and medium long shots of the defendants and medium shots of the prosecutor Fouquier-Tinville. This sequence is interspersed with medium long shots of the agitated crowd, closer shots of separate minor characters (such as the clerk at the prosecutor's desk), and long shots of the entire room. The dynamic pattern of alternating angles, shot distances and lengths is maintained throughout the scene. Especially spectacular is the very high angle extreme long shot showing the crowds rushing from the stands to the prosecutor's desk. Contrasting the power of the masses with the influence of a single leader, Buchowetzki juxtaposes this extreme long shot with an extreme close-up of Saint-Just, who is able to stop the advancing crowd by accusing Danton of treason. Here, Buchowetzki adapts the device of the spotlight that Reinhardt used so strikingly for *Dantons Tod:* only Saint-Just's mask-like face is lit, and hovers ominously in front of the completely black background. Thus we are dealing with yet another theatrical influence, although, as I mentioned earlier, this device in Reinhardt is likely to have been, in turn, inspired by cinema.

While there is blend of the theatrical and cinematic in the trial scene, the film's finale is conspicuously theatrical. It consists of a single shot, presenting the platform with the guillotine (the scaffolding being almost constructivist in its geometrical design) from a low angle at a long shot distance. Danton and his executioners are seen as if on stage and Danton's last words in the film are taken from Büchner's drama: "[…] the Revolution devours its own children" (title). This again reinforces the metaphor of history's stage and also pays tribute to the film's theatrical roots. The final theatrical note, however, does not necessarily shift the balance in favor of the theatrical. Generally speaking, Buchowetzki's *Danton* does not support the idea of an opposition

between the theatrical and cinematic in silent film, with the newer art supposedly struggling to free itself from the legacy of histrionics. As was the case with the film's plot, Buchowetzki feels quite at ease in drawing on multiple sources and, far from ignoring the film's theatrical roots, adapts them into the eclectic tapestry of his *Danton.*

Chapter 2:

Theater Resurgent:

Hans Behrendt's *Danton* (1931), Early Talkies, and Theatrical Tradition.

<u>Introduction</u>

In 1931, ten years after Dimitri Buchowetzki's *Danton*, Hans Behrendt produced a sound film under the same title. Like its forerunner, Behrendt's film is based on Georg Büchner's drama *Dantons Tod* and on several of its theatrical productions.[55] While Behrendt treats the text of the play with considerable license, in aesthetic terms his film is very close to its theatrical roots, closer in fact than could be expected at a time when cinema had finally turned into an independent art form. In the 1920s, with breakthroughs in editing techniques and augmented use of the mobile camera, cinema created its own artistic language, offering a markedly distinct viewing experience and further distancing itself from theater. But the advent of sound in many ways reversed achievements of the late silent era, leading to a visible return of theatrical conventions, especially during the early years of sound film. These developments – including reduced camera mobility, longer shots, and the "logo centric" style of acting – to a considerable degree shaped the aesthetics of Behrendt's *Danton*. The overall theatricality of this production was further enhanced by the influence of the vibrant stage history of Büchner's drama and by the fact that several key figures in the film, one of them the director himself, had a theatrical background, while both male leads had played in stage productions of *Dantons Tod.*

In order to highlight the changes brought about by the early "talkies," I shall begin with an overview of the cinema of the 1920s and also describe its influence on the visual aspects of political theater. The subsequent analysis of Behrendt's *Danton* focuses on various theatrical

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[55] The influence of Rolland's play about the French revolutionary is much less pronounced than in Buchowetzki's film.

influences that arise from specific productions and individual performers, and also on the general resurgence of a theatrical style that accompanied the introduction of sound. In conclusion, I shall examine how the theatrical sources combined with the new technology shaped the film's content and influenced its contemporary reception.

1. Aesthetic Developments in German Cinema during the 1920s

a. Unchaining the Camera

In the course of the 1920s, cinema established itself as a major player both in culture and the economy, turning into Germany's third largest industry (Kaes, "Film" 46). Its staple fare consisted of quickly made serial and genre productions, such as detective films and melodramas, poised to compete with Hollywood films that were flooding the German market after the lifting of the import ban in 1920. Of special artistic value for the domestic film industry were two markedly German genres that stand out against the mainstream of light entertainment: the so-called *Kammerspielfilme*, 'chamber play films' and *Strassenfilme*, 'street films'.

The genre of the *Kammerspielfilm* derives from a theatrical term, denoting both the performance venue and a certain kind of drama. In 1906, Max Reinhardt opened an additional stage in his Deutsches Theater called *Kammerspiele* in analogy with chamber music performances. This small, unadorned stage, without an orchestra pit and with a limited number of seats in the auditorium, offered an intimate atmosphere for a small, select group of viewers. Because of the spatial proximity, the audience was able to register the most minute gestures and facial expressions of actors, very much like in the close up shots that Reinhardt considered the source of greatest potential in cinema (see chapter 1 and Reinhardt 443). Plays performed in this

and similar venues included mostly psychological dramas with few characters and an emphasis on the dialogue (especially popular were works by Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg).

As a cinematic counterpart of this genre, the *Kammerspielfilm* drew on theatrical conventions, not least by relying on major stage actors such as Werner Krauss and Fritz Kortner (Elsaesser, *Companion* 145). Most of these films are realistic dramas (a number of them were penned by Carl Mayer) revolving around lower-middle-class characters whose struggle with the challenges of modern life tends to have a tragic end. The confined and predominantly indoor, stage-like settings, and the focus on psychological conflicts, evoke the theater of *Kammerspiele.* At the same time, *Kammerspielfilme* are highly cinematic in their visual presentation. With a drastically reduced use of titles, the storytelling in these films relies on the talent of actors and the expressive use of the camera. Following the general trend, the predominantly static camera of the early twenties (cf. Leopold Jessner's *Hintertreppe* [*Backstairs*, 1921]) becomes increasingly mobile. Lupu Pick's *Sylvester* (*New Year's Eve*, 1923) already contains a number of tracking shots and pans that were called for by Carl Mayer's notations in the script.

In his script for *Der letzte Mann* ("The Last Man," 1924, released in the US as *The Last Laugh*), Mayer also envisioned camera movement, which was skillfully implemented by the cinematographer Karl Freund under the direction of Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau. Here, the camera's mobility is pivotal in foreshadowing the fate of the protagonist, who works as a doorman in a luxury hotel, while also illustrating the film's epigraph that speaks of the vicissitudes of fate. The opening shot contains a direct metaphor of decline, as the camera slowly descends in the hotel's glass elevator. For the next shot Freund strapped the camera to his chest and rode a bicycle through the hotel's lobby (Dahlke 111) in order to create a slow and smooth approach to the revolving glass door. The protagonist – proudly fulfilling his duties – is

then shown through the constantly moving doors that can be seen as the symbol of the reverses of fortune awaiting him.

In addition to such rhetorical uses, there are other functions of camera movement in the film. During the wedding sequence, the mobile camera is used to convey a sound effect: the “flying sound”, ‘fliegender Ton’, as Thomas Brandlmeier puts it (“Expressionismus” 37). There is a rapid track back from a close-up of a trumpet bell in a diagonally upward direction, followed by a cut to the doorman hearing the sound from his upstairs window. Soon afterwards, the protagonist's delirium is portrayed with a different kind of subjective camera that Brandlmeier terms a “drunken camera”, ‘trunkene Kamera’ (“Expressionismus” 37). Panning from side to side, it shows the drunken protagonist remaining in the center of the screen while the background is moving. A deliberately shaky, hand-held camera is used in the dream sequence when the doorman shows off his physical strength to the admiring neighbors. Thus Freund and Murnau's experimentation “unchained” the camera, setting new standards for camera mobility that was continually developed throughout the twenties.

In collaboration with Ewald André Dupont, Freund took the unchained camera to new extremes in the 1925 film *Varieté* (released in the US as *Jealousy*), interestingly by bringing the camera back to the fairground, the place associated with the humble beginnings of cinema. The main plot opens with a picture of the fairground in three shots which are in themselves static but portray multidirectional movement. After a shot through the wooden structure of a roller coaster with its moving cars, a long shot presents the entire fairground with the horizontal rotation of a carousel in the middle, flanked by the vertical rotation of a Ferris wheel on the left and swinging trapezes on the right; additionally, a train passes through the frame from the left to the right background. This is followed with a long static shot of the Ferris wheel, after which point the

camera cuts to a shot from within the Ferris wheel: while moving downward and forward, the camera shows the oscillating movement of swing boats that are positioned right next to the Ferris wheel. As the opposite car of the Ferris wheel blocks the view of the swing boats, the camera moves backwards and up, presenting a dizzying picture of the wheel and its rotating cars. A shot of a playing mechanical organ provides a static hiatus before the camera plunges into vertiginous movement again, this time filming from a moving swing boat – with movements so extreme that the viewer can easily lose his / her spatial orientation. The camera translates the attraction of the fairground into cinematic language, serving both as a conveyor of meaning and an attraction in itself. Brandlmeier notes in connection with this opening sequence: "These few shots alone abrogate a perception of the world that dominated visual discourse for five hundred years. Vanishing point and standpoint are no longer affixed, they are changing constantly, have multiple assignments, or do not exist at all" ("Entfesseltes Sehen" 154).[56]

Breaking with visual conventions regarding movement and mobility is also essential for the so-called *Straßenfilm* or "street film," another German genre that stands out from the mainstream. Unlike the *Kammerspielfilm* that was in many ways based on theatrical conventions, the street film is cinematic par excellence. In the opening scene of Karl Grune's *Die Straße* (*The Street*, 1923), which became the genre's inaugural production, a young man is mesmerized by the play of light and shadow projected from the bustling life of the street onto the ceiling of his quiet apartment. As he observes the street from his window, its attractions are presented in a series of superimpositions. Thus, as Anton Kaes remarks, "the street in itself (much like the cinema show) promises a world of distraction and excitement" ("Film" 58).[57] But

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[56] "Mit diesen wenigen Einstellungen bereits ist eine Sichtweise der Welt aufgehoben worden, die 500 Jahre lang den visuellen Diskurs beherrscht hat. Fluchtpunkt und Standpunkt sind nicht mehr fixiert, sie wechseln beständig, sind mehrfach besetzt oder existieren überhaupt nicht mehr."

[57] "Die Straße selbst (nicht anders als die Kinovorstellung) verheißt eine Welt von Zerstreuung und Aufregung."

in most street films this exciting world full of diversions and temptations also proves to be a locus of danger and instability for the protagonist (usually a middle-class male). He may fall victim to the ambition of a woman (often a prostitute) and finds himself in a precarious situation, eventually choosing to withdraw back into the humble but secure life of the petite bourgeoisie.

Essential for portraying the realities of modern life, a moving camera coupled with aggressive editing becomes ubiquitous during the final years of the decade. A tour de force of dynamic urbanism is found in another street film, Joe May's *Asphalt* (1929) that was one of the last silent productions in Germany. Its opening sequence presents the bustling life of a modern city and has a quasi-documentary quality bringing to mind Walter Ruttmann's masterpiece *Berlin, Symphonie einer Großstadt* (*Berlin, Symphony of a Great City*, 1927).[58] A series of superimpositions and split-screen mirror shots of heavy machinery and a row of men pounding fresh asphalt depict the construction of a street, laying – in the most literal way – the groundwork for the film. From here, May cuts to a swift tracking shot showing the reflection of trees and cars on a wet street, followed by a number of tracking shots of moving vehicles and people, and culminating in a bird's-eye-view extreme long shot of a large square dissected by trolley car tracks and wires. The shot is gradually superimposed with closer shots of moving vehicles cutting diagonally across the frame. This diagonal vector is reinforced through a fast succession of close shots of moving cars and buses taken at a tilted angle. Finally, the camera becomes completely unchained, swirling around and showing fragments of the city as if in a delirium. This vertigo ends abruptly with a static shot of a little bird in a small cage. A slow pan with slight tilts up and down shows the interior of a bourgeois apartment and finally introduces some

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[58] The genre of *Berlin, Symphonie einer Großstadt* can best be described as *Querschnittsfilm* ‘cross-section film.’ This term is used by Béla Balázs regarding his script for *Die Abenteuer eines Zehnmarkscheins (Adventures of a Ten Mark Note*, 1926.) Following the imaged journey of a banknote throughout one day, the film shows a realistic cross-section of every day life (Balázs, *Geist* 71-72).

characters (who happen to be the protagonist's parents): a police chief is resting complacently on a couch while smoking a cigar and listening to his wife reading from the newspaper. The mobile camera is used here to portray the fascinating, multi-faceted, fast-paced, and potentially dangerous life of the street, which is contrasted with the calm security – and boredom – of the petit bourgeois abode.

The above-mentioned examples provide a useful illustration to the fact that the last years of the silent era produced a unique and truly cinematic language, creating a visual experience that was distinctly different from that of the traditional theater. An increasing number of cuts allowed the fragmentation of space, while the mobile camera offered endless new ways of exploring and representing characters and their surroundings. With the combination of editing and camera mobility, cinema transcended the boundaries of theatrical space and created a cinematic style that left behind most of its theatrical origins. Interestingly, while film was moving away from theater, some forms of theater incorporated film and aspects of cinematic language as part of the stage performance. This trend found its most vivid manifestation in the so-called political theater of the Weimar years.

b. Political Theater and Political Film

Among the preeminent figures of political theater was Erwin Piscator. In 1920, he was a founding member of the Proletarisches Theater, which disseminated communist ideas in agitprop-style performances aimed at proletarian audiences in the working class quarters of Berlin. After a mere six months of existence, the troupe had to disband, both because of pressure from the authorities (its performance license had not been renewed by the police) and for financial reasons. As Piscator concedes in his treatise *Das politische Theater* (*The Political*

Theater 1929), “the proletariat, for whatever reason, is too weak to maintain its own theater” (qtd. in Patterson 120). Piscator himself wanted to move on from the simplicity of make-shift stages of beer halls and similar venues and was “eager to use the new technology of the theater in the service of political agitation” (Patterson 117). As a guest director at various stages in Berlin, he began implementing his ideas on the use of projectors and screens as a stage device. In his 1924 production of Alfons Paquet's matinée piece *Fahnen* (*Flags*) at the Volksbühne ‘People's Theater,’ he employed projections of still images and short titles on screens. Projection was a technique perfectly suited for his eclectic revues consisting of series of loosely connected montages, which he preferred at the time in a clear contrast to the classical dramatic structure. In the revue *Trotz alledem* (*In Spite of Everything*) that premiered at the Großes Schauspielhaus in 1925, he used film projections for the first time. This grand scale production, which was a highlight of political mass theater in Weimar (Brauneck 332), combined acted scenes with the screening of documentary footage.

The use of film in itself was not new to theater. As early as 1911, the revue *Rund um den Alster* (*Around the Alster*) opened with a film sequence. Moreover, some playwrights (e.g., Ivan Goll and Ernst Toller) explicitly called for the use of film in their stage directions (Patterson 125). But until this point film had only been an addition to the performance, while Piscator integrated it into the action. Newsreel footage of World War I both commented on the action of *Trotz alledem* and added an impressive touch of realism to the performance. In his production of Paquet's *Die Sturmflut* (*Storm Tide*, 1926), film was used to extend the perspective of the stage as “a living wall, the fourth dimension of the theater” (“eine lebende Wand, die vierte Dimension des Theaters;” Piscator 15). Here, a mass scene was staged by combining a small group of actors

on the stage with the projection of a large crowd on a screen behind them, creating an ad infinitum effect.

Piscator dreamt of taking film projection even further in his own company, Piscatorbühne, established in 1927. The founder of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius, designed a *Totaltheater* for him, that was to combine the utmost structural flexibility and extravagant technical equipment. Like Reinhardt before him, Piscator wanted to bring the audience and actors closer together by opening up the stage. In addition to removing the distance between the audience and actors, he also wanted to eliminate the separation within the group of spectators by seating them in one continuous rake down to the stage (Patterson 117). The domed ceiling and the walls of the auditorium were to be used as projection screens to completely surround the spectators. Gropius's design proved to be prohibitively expensive however, and Piscator had to house his company at Berlin's Theater am Nollendorfplatz, which was equipped with a conventional proscenium stage. Nonetheless, he was able to convert this old setup and to create groundbreaking new stage forms. For Toller's *Hoppla, wir leben* (*Hoppla, Such is Life!*, 1927), he used a large scaffold stage consisting of fours tiers reminiscent of Soviet constructivist settings. The arrangement of various stages on top of and next to each other served simultaneously to emblematize social order and to present different locations.

A very different stage design was employed in the same year for the production of *Rasputin,* which was based on the play *Conspiracy of the Empress* by the Russian authors Aleksei Tolstoi and Pavel Shchegolev. Taking as a base a segmented globe mounted on a revolve – a device introduced by Vsevolod Meyerhold – Piscator used this construction as both stage and screen. Film clips and images were projected on a large semi-sphere whose segments opened up to reveal different scenes. This ingenious stage design combined the potential for

simultaneity with fragmentation and offered a visual experience similar to that of a movie theater.

Innovations did not necessarily translate into a measure of financial success. The Piscatorbühne went bankrupt twice, haunted by an inherent dilemma as it strove to attract a proletarian audience and yet was dependent on support from the more affluent social classes. Piscator was unwilling to compromise the leftist political message of his productions and, together with like-minded artists, promoted *Zeitstücke* 'topical theater' that addressed the burning issues of the day, including unemployment, poverty, abortion, and other widespread social ills.

In its attitude towards cinema, the German left was initially either reserved or overtly dismissive. In 1919, for example, Clara Zetkin declared movie-going a waste of time that would be better spent attending workers' committee meetings (Perry 35). Not taking heed of such advice, workers continued to frequent movie theaters, where they were exposed to mainstream productions ranging from the seemingly innocuous commercial entertainment to reactionary propaganda. Fairly soon, then, leftist intellectuals realized the ideological potential of film. In a 1922 article for the Communist newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* (*The Red Banner*), Béla Balázs warned about the propaganda tendencies of bourgeois film (Kühn 1: 35-36). Echoing Lenin's dictum about cinema being the most important of the arts, Kurt Tucholsky criticized the communists for spending too much time in meetings and failing to gear "the cinema, the Bible of today" ("das Kino, diese Bibel von heute") to the service of the workers' cause while "the others" were already using film to promote their agenda (qtd. in Brennicke 11). And indeed, even less conventional genres within commercial cinema, such as the above-mentioned *Kammerspielfilme* and *Straßenfilme*, which touched upon social problems, ultimately reaffirmed middle class

bourgeois values and supported the socio-economic status quo (Hake, *Cinema* 40-41, Murray, "Introduction" 31).

Leftist film production began in the early twenties, but it did not have much of an impact on the general public until the end of the decade. Although both SPD and KPD founded film programs, they concentrated on "in-house" film productions with a distribution limited to party members. In an effort to reach a broader audience, the *Volksfilmverband* 'People's Film Association' was founded in 1928. Uniting both social democrats and communists, it was supported by a number of renowned artists and intellectuals, including G.W. Pabst, Karl Freund, Heinrich Mann, Käthe Kollwitz, and Erwin Piscator. As the association's organ *Film und Volk* (*Film and People*) openly declared, its goal was "to work against artistic, social, and political conservatism in film" (qtd. in Perry 37) by organizing screenings, exhibits, and seminars. In terms of political film production, most prominent and successful was the Prometheus-Film Company, founded in 1925. Its co-founder Willi Münzenberg called for cinematic propaganda in his manifesto entitled "Erobert den Film" ("Conquer Film", 1925). The task of political film, he claimed, was "to wrest away a means of propaganda of such extreme importance from the ruling class, in whose exclusive possession it has been to this day, and to use it against this enemy" (qtd. in Kühn 1:58).[59]

Initially, Prometheus produced relatively apolitical low-budget films, the so-called *Kontingentfilme*, 'quota films,' in order to be able to import seminal productions from the Soviet Union. This was a cover operation of sorts intended to bypass legal restrictions and, in particular, the 1923 quota law. Aiming to protect the domestic film industry, it stipulated that for every film imported by a company, it had to produce one film in Germany. The distribution of

[59] "[…] ein so überaus wichtiges Propagandamittel, das bis heute ausschließlich Monopolbesitz der herrschenden Klasse ist, dem Gegner zu entreißen und gegen ihn zu gebrauchen."

the *Russenfilme*, Russian films, turned into a financial success owing to Sergei Eisenstein's legendary *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). Although it had to undergo rigorous censorship, the film was extremely popular in Germany.[60] With the revenue from *Potemkin*, Prometheus was able to produce films that were more political, achieving a critical and commercial success with *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (*Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness*) in 1929.

Advertised as “the grand Zille production” (“der große Zille-Film”), this film was intended as a response to mainstream films that claimed to portray the life of Berlin's lower classes in the spirit of the famous milieu artist Heinrich Zille. In these films, the lower classes were shown from the bourgeois perspective in “sentimental depictions of misery” (“rührseligen Elendsmalereien”) or “romanticizing milieu studies” (“romantisierenden 'Milieu-Filmen'“; Korte, *Spielfilm* 233). Contrary to that, *Mutter Krause*, which was actually based on some of Zille's milieu accounts and was dedicated to the recently deceased artist, told the story from the proletarian point of view. Unlike most commercial filmmakers who shot their films on studio premises, the director and cinematographer Piel Jutzi took the camera out on the street to actual locations in Berlin's run-down Wedding district. To strengthen the film's credibility, Jutzi combined documentary footage of the outside world with the depiction of the cramped living conditions of the fictitious Krause family and their lodgers (Murray, “Introduction” 31). The film opens with a sequence of street images, as the mobile camera tracks along and dollys in on the grey facades of tenements. Extreme high and low angle views of the dark and narrow spaces between the buildings create a feeling of entrapment. Such impressions of urban life presented in a succession of short takes bring to mind the opening sequence of May's *Asphalt*. But whereas May stresses the sheer dynamism of the modern metropolis, here the focus is on stagnation and

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[60] The re-editing of *Potemkin* in Germany was carried out by Dimitri Buchowetzki (Jhering 2: 521). He cut out some 200 meters, including the famous stroller sequence on the Odessa staircase and most of Eisenstein's close-ups (Welch 679).

hopelessness conveyed by close-ups of the weathered faces and callous hands of old people, beggars, a staggering drunkard, and resting invalids.

The opening sequence reflects the overall pattern of Jutzi's film. Although following the prevalent aesthetic trends, it differs sharply from mainstream cinema in its point of view and implied message. Another example of this kind is the scene set at a fairground involving a breathtaking camera movement that echoes the beginning of Dupont's *Varieté*. In this scene, the spatial vertigo foreshadows a revolution in a character's mind, as Erna, the daughter of mother Krause, meets her future boyfriend Max. He will bring a radical change to Erna's life by introducing her to socialist ideas that offer a way out of poverty, unemployment, and horrible living conditions. While mother Krause could escape the hell of her miserable existence only by committing suicide (hence the bitter irony of the film's title), the younger generation takes a different path – the one that implies a social revolution. The film ends with a dramatic cut from Erna grieving over her mother to Erna marching in a demonstration.

For the most part, *Mutter Krause* employs a rather neutral continuity editing pattern, with two notable exceptions: in the above-mentioned opening sequence, and also in the scene portraying a protest march against bad housing conditions in the middle of the film. The demonstration is shown with rapid cuts alternating between longer shots of the marching crowd and close-ups of drums, cymbals, and singing mouths. Initially, Erna mixes with the crowd simply because she is looking for her boyfriend, but eventually she joins the protest in earnest. A close-up shows her hastily running legs (symbolizing confusion of an anguished individual) slow down and follow the marching rhythm as a clear sign of communion with the revolutionary masses. Here, one can speak of an obvious influence of the Soviet school, especially of Eisenstein's and Pudovkin's montage techniques that combined bold formal innovation with

compelling ideological narrative. But overall, it is surprising how little influence the much-admired *Russenfilme* had on the aesthetics of proletarian film in Germany. As David Welch notes, the left failed to create "a distinctive cinematic style of their own and as such to provide a radical alternative to the commercial film organizations in Germany" (674). In terms of content, most political films did not take a particularly radical approach either, concentrating on the depiction of social ills without offering clear alternatives. In this respect, *Mutter Krause* with its emphasis on the potentially successful rebellion of the younger generation stands out as one of the more radical productions.

Perhaps the only proletarian film that did have both a revolutionary message and a distinct "style of its own" was *Kuhle Wampe oder: Wem gehört die Welt?* (*Kuhle Wampe, or Who Owns the World?*, 1932), a joint production of Bertolt Brecht, Hanns Eisler, and Slatan Dudow. It was the last leftist political film and the only sound feature film of the German workers' movement released in the Weimar Republic. Following the Brechtian episodic structure, the film shows the story of a proletarian family forced to move out to a camp for the homeless outside of Berlin, called Kuhle Wampe. The first episode is reminiscent of *Mutter Krause*, opening in silent mode with background music, offering impressions of Berlin streets and dark back alley tenements before focusing on the life inside one of these houses. As a working class family with two grown children gathers around the dinner table, the first lines of dialogue are spoken – at about eight minutes into the film. The conversation centers on the son's failure to find work and the daughter's conviction that there is simply no work to be found. Put down by the humiliating treatment from his parents and the hopelessness of his situation, the son commits suicide soon thereafter, which brings the first episode to an end. Up to this point, *Kuhle Wampe* does not differ much from other leftist films, but the very fact that the film places a

tragic highlight so close to the beginning represents a break with prevalent narrative conventions. In the two subsequent episodes, the filmmakers depart from conventional aesthetics more clearly, especially with their innovative use of sound. In the scene following her brother's suicide, Anni attempts to avert the family's eviction by trying to solicit help from the welfare office and various other public authorities. She is shown walking along the busy streets of Berlin, and the diegetic street noise – normally used only as background – acquires the role of the main soundtrack here. It also creates a sharp contrast to the dead silence awaiting Anni in public offices where her pleas for help are invariably answered with dismissive shrugs and she is forced back out unto the noisy streets.

Throughout the film, sound is used both in an antithetical and a complementary fashion. For example, as Anni's family unloads its belongings in Kuhle Wampe, upbeat military marches are heard playing from a radio. The cheerful music is as unsuitable to this sad situation as is the family's heavy furniture in their new home – a tent. In the following scene, Anni's romance with Fritz is portrayed in a sequence of nature images accompanied by an original song performed by Helene Weigel comparing love to the fruitfulness of spring. The song both complements the present action (a couple of young lovers strolling through a spring forest) and, with an ironic twist, presages the future (an unwanted pregnancy). Anni's feelings at the prospect of an abortion are conveyed in a montage sequence involving both images and music. As Anni passes a group of children, their smiling faces are superimposed with a sequence of contrasting images, showing advertisements for children's products, the door sign of a gynecologist, children's toys, a funeral home, the scene of her brother's death, more toys and dolls. The accompanying sound represents a montage of a dramatic, somewhat atonal music with a well-known children's song whose tune is slightly altered. Their juxtaposition creates an alienating effect.

In contrast to most early sound films, which largely rely on dialogue and employ occasional sound effects in a more straightforward "informative" fashion, the combination of sound and images in the above-mentioned examples is used to generate new meaning. Dialogue plays a rather subsidiary role in *Kuhle Wampe*, except for the final scene, where it clarifies the political message of the film. Anni and a group of young athletes returning from the Proletarian Athletic Games mix with older, middle class excursionists on a crowded suburban train. This encounter brings to the forefront the issue of the generation gap seen throughout the film in the presentation of the older members of the working class as clinging to bourgeois ideals and unwilling to change. In the train scene, the older passengers are portrayed as quintessential representatives of the petty bourgeoisie. Kindled by a newspaper note about the destruction of coffee surpluses in Brazil, the ensuing heated debate among the passengers is shown from many different angles and in a number of close-ups that study different character and social class types. The young proletarians clearly distance themselves from the imperialist and capitalist fantasies of the older generation. Confronted with a condescending question from an older bourgeois man: "And who will change the world?" ("Und wer wird sie ändern?"), a proletarian girl faces the camera in a close up and says with a determined look: "Those who don't like it" ("Die, denen sie nicht gefällt"). Her statement is the last piece of dialogue in the film, which ends with a depiction of the crowd of young workers leaving the underground station and singing their song of solidarity: "Forward and don't forget!" ("Vorwärts, und nicht vergessen!"). The song ends with questions that imply a call for action: "Whose street is this street? Whose world is this world?" ("Wessen Straße ist die Straße? Wessen Welt ist die Welt?").

Thus this film stands out both through its radical political message and a level of aesthetic sophistication in the use of image and sound that was rare during the early sound era.

But it proved to be an exception. As will be discussed further on, the introduction of sound ushered in a revolution in filmmaking, but in general sound initially brought about a reversal of the many achievements that characterize the cinematic art of the late silent years.

c. The Breakthrough of Sound Film

The appearance of the full-fledged sound film in the late 1920s had a far-reaching impact on cinema, affecting all aspects of the medium, from the technical and economic aspects of production and exhibition to aesthetics. Artistic implications of sound sparked a heated discussion reminiscent of the *Kinodebatte* at the dawn of the film era (see chapter 1). Béla Balázs summarizes the prevalent opinion of the time in his treatise *Der Geist des Films* (*The Spirit of Film*, 1930): "The silent film was just about to develop a psychological subtlety and creative power almost unrivalled in any other art. Then the invention of the sound film came down on it like a landslide" (113, transl. in Balázs, *Theory* 195).[61] However, the introduction of sound was not as sudden as Balázs's statement suggests. In fact, experiments with the synchronization of sound and image were as old as the medium itself, but for a long time they failed to bring satisfactory results (Prümm 94). Early attempts to synchronize the moving picture with gramophone recordings were followed by a procedure in which photographed sound waves were copied as an audio track onto the film strip. This so-called Tri-Ergon-Lichtton-System – developed by German inventors Hans Vogt, Jo Engl, and Joseph Massolle – was introduced to the public in September 1922 in Berlin's Alhambra Theater. While the audience was enthusiastic, the new technology did not arouse the interest of Germany's leading film company Ufa (Kreimeier 178). Only in 1925 did Ufa acquire a license for the sound-on-film system, but

[61] "Der stumme Film war auf dem Wege, eine psychologische Differenziertheit, eine geistige Gestaltungskraft zu erreichen, die kaum je eine andere Kunst gehabt hat. Da brach die technische Erfindung des Tonfilms wie eine Katastrophe ein."

for various reasons it either could not or did not want to invest adequate funding in its new sound film department.[62]

In the US, the implementation of sound was pursued more aggressively, especially by Sam Warner, who began producing films with the Vitaphone sound-on-disc system for Warner Brothers. While the use of sound was at first limited to sound effects and background music, Warner Brothers took the next step with the release of the musical film *The Jazz Singer*. The enormous success of this film, which premiered in October 1927, brought a decisive change of attitude towards sound technology both in the United States and Germany. In the tradition of earlier sound film showings, *The Jazz Singer* banked on the effect of sound as a technical curiosity. Starting out as an ordinary silent film with mute dialogues, interspersed with rather long and frequent titles, sound is introduced by showing short synchronized singing sequences and people clapping along with the music. The big sensation occurs some fifteen minutes into the film, when Broadway star Al Jolson, portraying the Jazz Singer, interrupts the applause with his signature line: “Wait a minute, wait a minute! You ain't heard nothin' yet!” He then utters instructions to his piano player and performs another song. After this, the film goes back to silent mode and there is only one more spoken dialogue scene between the singer and his mother. All in all, there are less than two minutes of synchronized speech in the film. Nevertheless, the spectators' appetite to hear actors talk was whetted and sound film – which had suffered so many set-backs over the previous decades – began to conquer the screen. A fierce competition for the best sound system and the dominance over the new market broke out in the US and all over the movie world.

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[62] Harald Jossé argues against the commonly held view that Ufa lost interest in sound technology after the failure of *Das Mädchen mit den Schwefelhölzern* (*The Match Girl*, 1925) and points to financial considerations behind the downsizing of the sound department (232).

In Germany, a long battle over patent rights delayed the production of sound films and the equipment of theaters with playback devices. Finally, in 1929 the emerging sound film market was divided between two major companies. The Tonbildsyndikat AG (Tobis) was in charge of producing films and providing recording equipment, while the Klangfilm GmbH produced playback devices for the theaters (Jacobsen 83). Ufa, which previously had been so reluctant to invest in sound technology, now pursued an aggressive sound film agenda. In April of 1929, Ufa began the construction of four state-of-the-art sound studios – the so-called Ufa-Tonkreuz – that featured soundproof walls, a low noise lighting system, and recording equipment for both sound-on-disc and sound-on-film systems, making them the best equipped sound studios in Europe (Jacobsen 81).

The changeover to sound was a financial burden that many smaller studios could not handle. Many smaller companies, already struggling with the economic crisis, could not shoulder the increase of production costs by one third due to the new technology, and were forced into merging or went out of business (Murray, "Introduction" 31 and *Film* 150). Theater owners were struggling with the implementation of the new technology as well. While they welcomed the opportunity of reversing a downward trend in ticket sales with the attraction of an exciting technical novelty, the conversion to sound came at a high cost. New equipment had to be installed (in many cases necessitating architectural modifications), sound technicians had to be hired to ensure good quality, and finally, since production costs were rising, so were the rental fees for films. While the Ufa-owned theaters completed the transformation in a short period of time, for smaller theaters it took several years to catch up (Kreimeier 182). Only in 1935 were all German movie theaters converted for projection with sound. What had been known as the

Lichtspielbühne, literally the "light play stage" now became the *Tonfilmtheater* 'sound film theater' (Prümm 101).

The introduction of sound ended the careers of many artists. By the mid-1930s, when no more silent films were produced and there were only sound film theaters, the profession of the movie theater musician became extinct. For many actors switching to sound created serious challenges. Some of them lacked professional vocal training or their voices simply were not "phonogenic." Many foreign actors had to leave Hollywood because of their accents and return to their home countries, where only a few managed to make a successful transition to sound (as did, for example, Emil Jannings). With sound, cinema also lost its international language, much to the dismay of both film theorists and producers. While the former lamented the demise of a universally understood artistic idiom, the latter dreaded the complications in the international distribution of talking pictures. To retain a foothold in the international market, some companies produced films in several language versions, using the same set but different actors, or having actors recite their lines in different languages (something that, again, raised the issue of accents). But ultimately, the main problem in the transition to sound was associated with new aesthetic principles that challenged many accomplishments of the silent era.

d. The Impact of Sound Film on Cinematography and Acting

As in the United States, the first German features involving sound were music films, beginning with *Ich küsse Ihre Hand Madame* (*I Kiss Your Hand, Madame*) that premiered in January 1929. It was a silent film with some sound episodes in which the popular actor Harry Liedke performed the title song dubbed with the singing of the famous tenor Richard Tauber. The transition from such intermezzos to full-fledged talkies, where sound and speech were an

integral part of the action, revealed the main problem associated with the new technology; namely the loss of camera mobility. Because of the loud noise of the camera motor, the camera had to be placed in a large soundproof box from which the operator shot the scene through a glass window. This created serious aesthetic deficiencies. On the one hand, some filmmakers became "dialogue-happy" – even in the absence of a good script – and placed so much emphasis on the spoken word that "the visual track tended to degenerate into a mere accompaniment" (Kracauer, *Caligari* 205). On the other hand, the nascent sound technology that was as yet "inimical to the visual track" ("bildfeindliche Tonfilmtechnik"; Jossé 290) infringed not only on the camera dynamics but also on the mobility of the actors. Their movement was now limited because of the static camera, as well as by restrictions imposed by the position of the recording microphones.

One of the first true sound films in Germany, combining recorded music, sound effects, and dialogue, was the 1929 melodrama *Melodie des Herzens* (*Melody of the Heart*). A contemporary review of this film reflects the unsettling effect of stasis felt whenever characters had to talk or sing:

> Suddenly, the otherwise freely roaming camera – masterfully operated by none other than Günther Rittau (those images and angles!) – became cataleptic and stopped in front of the singer or the orchestra that was performing in the film. During Janos's solo parts, even the wildest extras were sitting quietly like pious Capuchin monks. (Betz)[63]

The striking contrast in camera work becomes apparent through a comparison between two of Dupont's films. His *Varieté* (1925) features some of the most radical examples of the unchained

[63] "Plötzlich bekam die sonst so wanderlustige, übrigens von Günther Rittau meisterhaft geführte Kamera (diese Bilder und Einstellungen!) Starrkrämpfe und blieb vor dem Sänger oder dem (im Film spielenden) Orchester stehen. Da saßen denn auch die wilden Komparsen bei Janos' Solopartien mucksmäuschenstill und waren zu frommen Kapuzinern geworden."

camera, which, far from being mere technical stunts, endow the camera movement with narrative significance (see above.) Four years later in England, Dupont directed *Atlantic,* a grand scale production based on the tragedy of the *Titanic*. To conquer international markets, *Atlantic* was shot simultaneously in English, French, and German with three different casts involved. Advertised in Germany as the "the birth of the German talking picture" ("Geburtsstunde des deutschen Sprechfilms"), it featured a number of long dialogues, all shot with a static camera at a medium long shot, as if recording a theater performance (Kaes, "Film" 82). As in many early sound films, the camera seemed to have lost its narrative role: "The camera did not try to 'speak' with images anymore, it was content with merely framing the actor when he was reciting his lines" (Jossé 290).[64]

It was this loss of visual refinement in cinema during the early sound era that appalled many critics and practitioners. In the ensuing *Tonfilmdebatte*, 'sound film debate', much like in the *Kinodebatte* of yore, the argument centered around distinctions between high and low art, but this time the frame of reference was entirely cinematic. Like Balázs, many critics felt that the introduction of sound threatened the refinement achieved in silent film. In his 1932 book, the prominent theoretician Rudolf Arnheim lamented the demise of the artistic language, which before had transformed "the peep show into an art" (*Film* 154). Similarly, the critic Herbert Jhering bemoaned the low quality of early sound films and urged the new medium to find its own form (2: 573). This apprehensive attitude was echoed by some industry professionals as

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[64] "Die Kamera versuchte nicht mehr in Bildern zu "sprechen", sie begnügte sich damit, den Schauspieler zu umrahmen, wenn er seinen Text sprach."

well. Thus, for producer Ernst Pommer, speech as a "major means of expression" ("führendes Ausdrucksmittel") was unthinkable (Jacobsen 86).[65]

Others saw the addition of sound as a liberation, as for example Dupont, who pronounced: "[W]e cannot exceed the limitations of the current silent film. Sound film seems to be a savior during this dry spell" (qtd. in Arnheim, *Essays* 34). However, since the new technology was not yet fully developed, initially sound proved to be more of a limitation than a liberation, as Dupont's own *Atlantic* and many other early sound films show. Not only were actors and cameras forced to remain static, but the inadequate recording technology also had a major impact on the acting. In connection with *Atlantic,* Arnheim notes that the "actors must speak with all the solemnity of funeral directors (and of course, to match this, they must gesticulate in operatic slow motion) so that the loudspeaker doesn't turn their words to mush" (*Essays* 38). Apart from these technical implications, acting styles as a whole had to change to be compatible with sound film.

As Ernst Bloch remarks in *The Principle of Hope*: "In general, through the good fortune that the film began as silent film, not as sound film, an incomparable mimic power was discovered, an until then unknown treasury of the clearest gestures" (1: 406). Early cinema, with its mostly static camera and in-depth filming, developed an acting style noted for expressive theatricality and an emphasis on gesture and pose. With the introduction of continuity editing, which brought along increasing cutting rates and decreasing shot distances, there was neither enough time nor space for grand poses and gestures. Broad pantomimic acting involving the entire body yielded to the development of more restrained, facially oriented acting (Thompson, "Lubitsch" 309). In particular, the close-up, registering even the most delicate nuances, called

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[65] Pommer's reservations concerned predominantly speech and not sound effects or music. A similar attitude was shared by the American producer Harry M. Warner. His famous words "Who the hell wants to hear actors talk" should be seen in this context.

for reserve and a naturalness of expression, something that was very much in tune with the overall shift towards the "sobriety" and clarity of the so-called new objectivity in film and the other arts (Balázs, *Theory* 77).

The close-up also reveals the problematic issue of the portrayal of speech in silent film acting. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, an exaggerated mouthing of words can be distracting and detrimental, as it exposes the lack of sound. To avoid the pitfalls of depicting mute speech, many filmmakers reduced dialogue titles to a bare minimum. Instead, they relied on the physical portrayal of emotions, be it in a broad pantomimic acting style, as in *Hintertreppe,* or with an emphasis on facial acting, as in *Der letzte Mann*. Ideally, the actors' mouth in a silent film was used not for speaking, but as an aspect of facial expression; the movement of the mouth "was only to express some emotion – it was not a rational gesture conforming to the requirements of articulate intelligible speech" (Balázs, *Theory* 68). However, in the late twenties there seems to have been a trend towards more dialogue, as seen for example in *Asphalt*. Exchanges between the policeman and the female thief are rendered in medium to medium close-up shot-reverse-shot sequences, frequently interrupted by dialogue titles. Both actors are clearly articulating words to the extent that the spectator can already lip-read what will be written in the following title. Such dialogue-heavy sequences foreshadow the shift towards verbal articulation at the expense of facial expressiveness in sound film, where the mouth is "no longer a spontaneous vehicle of expression" but rather "a sound-producing instrument" (Balázs, *Theory* 68).

The combination of talking actors and changes in spatial organization once again evoked a direct comparison between film and theater. In particular, static dialogue scenes were associated with a mere technical reproduction of a theatrical scene. As Jhering remarks about

Alfred Hitchcock's first sound film *Blackmail* (1929): "There was talking. For quite a while. Endless pauses. Stiff arrangements. You think: One person is acting, another talking. After this talking picture you know: This is not the way to go. Photographed scenes from the theater – no" (2: 577).[66] Likewise, Balázs notes that – especially under the influence of the American "pure talkie" – cinema "sank back to the stage of photographed theater which had once already been left behind by the silent film" (*Theory* 222). And Arnheim acknowledges sound film only insofar as it can preserve a theatrical performance and offer the spectator an orchestra seat view on actors at a gallery seat price: "Sound film as an improvement on opera glasses and as a means of 'canning' theater – superb! Sound film as its own art form...?" (*Essays* 43). Apart from obvious physical similarities to the theater's talking actors and their spatial arrangement, Arnheim also points out a metaphysical component that likens film to theater. Through sound, he argues, the image on the screen becomes three-dimensional and tangible: "[T]he edge of the picture is no longer a frame, but the demarcation of a hole, of a theatrical space: the sound turns the film screen into a spatial stage!" (*Essays* 30). The body on the screen would, then, no longer be one-dimensional, flat, and soulless, as it was often perceived in silent films (Peucker, *Images* 10). Thus with the introduction of sound, the cinematic body becomes, as it were, a theatrical body. In this sense, the addition of sound, especially speech, represents an advancing of cinematic realism, a development that had begun in the mid-twenties. As a result, acting turned away from stylization, authentic sets replaced the artifice of studio stages, and episodic structures gave way to a coherent, closed narrative (Prümm 96). Seen within the context of these developments, synchronized speech added a final touch to the realistic representation of the human body on the screen.

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[66] "Es wurde gesprochen. Es dauerte. Endlose Pausen. Steifes Arrangement. Man glaubt: Einer spielt, ein anderer spricht. Das weiß man nach diesem Sprechfilm genau: So geht es nicht. Photographierte Theaterszenen – nein."

For the most outspoken critics of sound film, the use of sound in the service of realism had to be avoided if sound film was to become a form of art. In his 1928 “Statement,” Eisenstein points out that sound can be a threat to montage, and calls for an asynchronous, contrapuntal use of sound (257-59). Arnheim follows a similar line of reasoning, speaking of a proper balance between image and sound. According to him, “sound film should not simply provide acoustic 'enhancements' to the silent picture”, nor should microphone and camera compete against each other. Good sound film art could be produced only when “sound and picture supplement each other contrapuntally” (*Essays* 40). As in the case of the earlier *Kinodebatte*, the discussion about sound did not have a significant impact on the industry (Jossé 199). Audiences showed little concern for finer theoretical implications as long as there was sound at all, and the demise of silent cinema became unstoppable. By September 1930, sound films accounted for 84% of the overall production compared to a mere 3% only one year earlier (Wollenberg, *German Film* 25). And in 1932, not a single silent film was produced in Germany (Prümm 95). As the quality of sound recording improved and the camera regained its mobility, there were fewer technical limitations in film production. Nevertheless, for many years to come sound film was often perceived by adepts of the silent era as ersatz cinema. As late as 1945 Balázs remarked: “The art of the silent film is dead, but its place was taken by the mere technique of the sound film which in twenty years has not risen and evolved into an art. On the whole the film has reverted again to a speaking photographed theater” (*Theory* 194-95).

2. Hans Behrendt's *Danton* (1931)

a. Theatrical Influences and Cinematographic Aspects

Hans Behrendt's *Danton* premiered in Berlin January 21, 1931, at the height of the *Tonfilmdebatte,* and it reflects many of the problems involved in the transition to the sound era. Especially apparent in this film is the close relationship of early sound productions to the theater, which is enhanced by dramaturgic details taken from contemporary stage productions. In this respect, it displays a strong resemblance to Buchowetzki's *Danton*, produced ten years earlier. While I would not call Behrendt's film a sound remake of Buchowetzki, as it has been labeled elsewhere (see Bock D2 and Silberman 101), the two films do feature a number of similarities and parallels. Here, the connection to theater in both films can serve as a good point of departure.

As in Buchowetzki's *Danton*, the most immediate links to theater in Behrendt's film arise from the theatrical background of its creators, including the two male leads and the director himself. Following in the footsteps of numerous other German filmmakers of the time, Hans Behrendt (1889-1942) began his career in Max Reinhardt's acting school at the Deutsches Theater and worked as an actor in several theaters before World War I. After the war, he left the theater stage for his first film role in Reinhold Schünzel's *Maria Magdalene* (1919). Schünzel enlisted Behrendt to work on the script for *Katharina die Große* (*Catherine the Great*, 1920), which inaugurated a successful co-operation with scriptwriter Bobby E. Lüthge. Together, they created the *Fridericus Rex* series, four notoriously reactionary period pieces, extolling the Prussian King Frederick the Great and the virtues of monarchy. In the first two installments of the film (1920-21), Behrendt also participated as an actor. *Fridericus Rex* set the tone for some of his own productions. His first film as a director was *Alt-Heidelberg* (1923, released in the US

as *The Student Prince*) based on a popular play by Wilhelm Meyer-Förster. The melodramatic story centers on the life of a student of noble descent who has to leave his beloved, a girl of humble social standing, because of an arranged marriage fitting his rank. While Behrendt was commended for avoiding excessive sentimentalism in this *Heimatfilm*, Kurt Pinthus remarks that he did not have the courage to treat the subject from an ironic angle (Bock D1). With *Potsdam, das Schicksal einer Residenz* (*Potsdam, Fate of a Residence*, 1927) and *Prinz Louis Ferdinand* (1926-27) Behrendt further established himself as a representative of all things Prussian in film (Bock D1). His adaptation of Carl Sternheim's *Die Hose* ("The Trousers" 1927, released in the US as *A Royal Scandal*) seems to go in a different direction, since the play mocks philistine morals and unscrupulousness. But according to Herbert Jhering, even in this film, with all its fine satirical moments, Behrendt "does not forget his Fridericus-Rex-heart" ("vergisst nicht sein Fridericus-Rex Herz"; 2: 536).

Behrendt made his first sound film in 1930. It was a remake of Ernst Lubitsch's *Kohlhiesels Töchter* (*Kohlhiesel's Daughters*, 1920) that failed to repeat the success of the original, apparently due to the technical limitations of the early talkies (Bock D2). In his second sound production, *Danton,* Behrendt returned to the historical genre in which he had considerable experience. Like Büchner's drama, the film centers on Danton and Robespierre, both in terms of their understanding of the revolution and personal dynamics. However, the film covers a longer time span than the drama, starting with the king's arrest in 1792. In the film, Danton fervently demands the king's execution, while Robespierre at first takes a more cautious stand and only eventually agrees to have the king tried and sentenced to death. The king's trial provides Danton with a stage to demonstrate his rhetorical talent and, among other things, wins him the admiration of the young aristocrat, Louise Gély, a character based on an actual historical

figure who became Danton's wife.[67] His love for Louise dominates much of the remainder of the film and explains Danton's neglect of his political duties in the Convent. To save France from a military defeat, he agrees to travel to the front and makes a deal with the Duke of Coburg, vouching for Marie-Antoinette's life. In the meantime, the murder of Marat ushers in the reign of terror and Robespierre, without waiting for Danton's return, signs the queen's death sentence. This brings about the conflict between the two revolutionary leaders, which is only aggravated by a failed attempt at mediation on the part of Desmoulins. Accepting the inevitable, the resigned Danton is ready to embrace his fate and raises his voice only once more during the trial, solely at the request of his wife who urges him to fight for his life. As Danton's demagogic power turns the tide against Robespierre, the latter has the courtroom cleared of the people in order to sentence his rival. On the guillotine, Danton's last words are: “Long live freedom! (“Es lebe die Freiheit!”).

For the lead roles Behrendt was able to recruit two famous actors who were active in both film and theater: Fritz Kortner as Danton and Gustaf Gründgens as Robespierre. The Austrian born Kortner (Fritz Nathan Kohn, 1892-1970) began his acting career at Vienna's Burgtheater. In 1911, Reinhardt invited him to his Deutsches Theater in Berlin, but Kortner left the company shortly afterwards. He performed at various theaters and also played his first film roles back in Austria during World War I. His breakthrough as a stage actor came right after the war in Berlin, where he shone in expressionist productions, most notably under Leopold Jessner. At the same time, he played in a number of films, working his way up from minor parts (as in Buchowetzki's *Danton*, where he is listed in the cast but not credited with a particular role) to more significant ones. In film, Kortner was often typecast in the same kind of demonic and

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[67] Showing Danton's participation in the king's trial, Behrendt treats historical record with considerable liberty. While Danton was indeed instrumental in condemning the king, he was not present at the actual trial.

sinister roles that made him famous on stage. This was the case in his portrayal of the crippled mailman in Jessner's *Hintertreppe* (*Backstairs*, 1921) and the murderer in Robert Wiene's horror classic *Orlacs Hände* (*The Hands of Orlac*, 1924). His first sound film was the German version of the above-mentioned Dupont's *Atlantic*, which made him "a first rate sound film star" ("Tonfilmstar erster Ordnung"; Jhering 3: 314).

In Behrendt's film Kortner took up a familiar role, as he had played Danton in 1924 in Erich Engels's production of *Dantons Tod* at the Deutsches Theater. Without a doubt, his theatrical experience shaped his interpretation of this role in film. Following Engels's call for restraint in the portrayal of the main character, Kortner emphasized "Danton's weary nonchalance, used broad and mellow gestures, spoke slowly, in a faint voice" (Viehweg 180).[68] In the second half of the film, which shows a more contemplative side of Danton, Kortner clearly echoes his stage performance, especially in the scene right before his trial at the revolutionary tribunal. Lying on a divan with his eyes closed, he answers Desmoulins's news of an impending death sentence with a weary wave of his hand. Only after his wife begs him to defend himself does he slowly sit up, talking to her in a soft voice and with a tired look on his face. Already in the subsequent trial scene Kortner "unleashes his temperament" ("lässt seinem Temperament freien Lauf") as in the stage production, creating a vast contrast to his otherwise subdued demeanor (Viehweg 180).[69] Kortner's impressive performance was described by a fellow actor, Rudolf Fernau (who played Saint-Just in Engels's production) in the following terms: "The highlight of the production was Kortner's speech at the tribunal. Never again will an actor

[68] "[Er betonte] Dantons müde Lässigkeit, gab ihm gedehnte und weiche Gesten, sprach langsam, mit matter Stimme."
[69] In the film, where Danton's spirited character surfaces throughout, the contrast is not as strong as in the stage production, which apparently suppressed this part of Danton's nature to the extent of causing a "rift between restraint and outburst" ("Bruch zwischen Zurückhaltung und Ausbruch") that was "too great and ultimately violent" ("zu groß und schließlich gewaltsam"; Jhering 2: 14).

deliver the eloquence and climax of this speech like Kortner. That was almost supernatural. A lion was unleashed. Magnificent and unforgettable!" (qtd. in Viehweg 180).[70] Kortner repeats this tour de force in the film, where his calm and confident demeanor at the beginning of the trial turns into stirring passion as he accuses his prosecutors. Contrary to common practice – which calls for large movements in longer shots and finer gestures in closer frames (Thompson, "Lubitsch" 390) – the calmer parts of Kortner's speech are in medium long shot. He is leaning on a small pillar, with one hand in his pocket and hardly moving at all. As he becomes more agitated, the camera tracks in on him and Kortner employs more pronounced facial expressions than before. But when the camera stops for a medium shot, Kortner engages his upper body and arms much more than his face, using broad histrionic gestures that are disproportionate to the frame size.

Fig.1.a. Contra conventions: Restrained acting in a long shot.

[70] "Das Erlebnis der Aufführung war Kortners Rede vor dem Tribunal. Nie mehr wird ein Schauspieler diese Sprachgewalt und diese Steigerung der Rede so bringen wie Kortner, das ging ins Übermenschliche. Ein entfesselter Löwe tobte. Herrlich und unvergesslich!"

Fig.1.b. Contra conventions: Broad acting in a medium shot

Kortner's overacting is reminiscent of Jannings in the opening scenes of Buchowetzki's *Danton* and may have a similar justification. Since Danton is performing, as it were, in front of an audience, a certain staginess is appropriate. However, the unusually close framing intensifies and accents Kortner's theatrical acting more than seems necessary.

The theatricality of this scene is intensified by the fact that this is the sequence that most heavily relies on Büchner's play and the only scene that uses longer continuous quotations from the drama, although at times abridged and slightly altered. As in many stage versions, both trial scenes of Büchner's third act are combined here (III, 4 and III, 9), starting out with the defendant's interrogation in the fourth scene and Danton's famous retort: "My place of abode? – will soon be the void" (*Plays* 49-50).[71] In the film, the continuation of Danton's utterance is provided by Desmoulins: "His name in the pantheon of history" ("Sein Name im Pantheon der Geschichte"). After Danton refuses to tone down his bravado and directly confronts Saint-Just,

[71] "Meine Wohnung ist bald im Nichts" (*Werke* 1:62).

the president of the tribunal orders Danton to be excluded from the trial in order to sentence him in absentia (something that is not found in Büchner). Danton reacts with the outcry: "This is dictatorship" ("Das ist die Diktatur", *Werke* 1: 74) and other lines from Büchner in a slightly abridged version. As he speaks, he moves into the courtroom audience, shown in a long shot. Here some problems with the sound recording arise, due to the shot distance and Kortner's position with his back to the camera.[72] The muffled sound improves in the following medium long high-angle shot, which presents Danton frontally, surrounded by the crowd. His words "You cry for bread, and they throw you heads!" (*Plays* 60)[73] are interrupted by the president's bell and his calling "Don't you hear the bell" (*Plays* 51), which is taken from the fourth scene.[74] Danton answers at length using a direct quotation from this scene in Büchner, which gives Kortner ample opportunity to replay his stage performance in front of the camera. He has to strain his voice to overcome the background noise of people clapping their hands and tramping their feet in approval. Judging from a contemporary stage review, this dramatic "orchestration" was copied directly from Engels's production at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus.[75]

As in the case of his theatrical performance, Kortner received enthusiastic reviews for his portrayal of Danton in the film.[76] "Kortner as Danton is at his best," writes Kracauer (*Caligari* 253), while a *Lichtbild-Bühne* critic remarks: "Fritz Kortner's Danton is an artistic achievement, such as has not been bestowed on us by the great artist for a long time" ("Danton").[77] Aside from Kortner's performance, few aspects of the film received a favorable mention. In a

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[72] Apart from this, there is one other scene that has very obvious problems with sound technology: An extreme long outdoor shot showing a carriage travelling across the country is completely silent, without any background noise or even accompanying music, which makes the scene look out of place in a sound film.

[73] "Ihr wollt Brot und sie werfen Euch Köpfe hin!" (*Werke* 1: 75).

[74] "Hören Sie denn die Klingel nicht" (*Werke* 1: 64).

[75] "Kortner's speech was orchestrated brilliantly with the stamping and clapping of the masses" ("Die Rede Kortners [war] ausgezeichnet mit dem Trampeln und Klatschen der Menge instrumentiert"; Jhering 2: 13).

[76] For stage reviews see Jhering 2: 12-14 (also in Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 410-11) and Alfred Döblin in Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 409.

[77] "Fritz Kortners Danton ist eine schauspielerische Leistung, wie sie uns der große Künstler lange nicht schenkte."

contemporary review, Kracauer notes that the film is worth seeing only because of Kortner (*Schriften* 447). Echoing this opinion, the *Film-Kurier* describes the trial scene and Kortner's performance as the only highlight of the otherwise mediocre film ("Danton"). The actor's work dominates the discussion of the film to such a degree that Sabine Hake calls *Danton* a "Kortner vehicle" (*Cinema* 42). Praise of Kortner also stands in obvious contrast to the lack of enthusiasm for the performance of his counterpart Gustaf Gründgens as Robespierre.

By 1930, when Gustaf Gründgens (1899-1963) first began to act in film, he already looked back upon a long and successful stage career both as an actor and director. He gained his first theatrical experience in theaters on the front during World War I and subsequently attended an acting studio in his native Düsseldorf. After several short engagements throughout Germany, he came to the Kammerspiele in Hamburg, where he also took up directing. In January 1928 he produced Büchner's *Dantons Tod* on this stage, emphasizing strong crowd scenes contrasted with the clear definition and development of single characters (Viehweg 200). That same year, Gründgens joined Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater in Berlin and acted under his direction in 1929.

As mentioned previously, Reinhardt had repeatedly worked with the Danton material in plays by both Büchner and Romain Rolland. In 1921, he staged Rolland's *Danton* at the Grosses Schauspielhaus. His famous 1916 production of *Dantons Tod* was restored there by his collaborator Berthold Held and ran 51 times (Viehweg 181). Büchner's play was also shown during Reinhardt's tour of the United States in 1926 and 1927,[78] and in 1929 Reinhardt took up *Dantons Tod* again for two productions in Vienna and Munich, keeping many of the aesthetic aspects of his earlier staging of the play. In the latter productions, however, he altered the text significantly by connecting several scenes, transposing parts of dialogue from one scene to

[78] When Reinhardt was in the USA again in 1936, he signed a contract with Warner Brothers to produce a film based on Rolland's *Danton*. However, after extensive preparations, the project had to be abandoned.

another and adding long passages to the script. His goal was to emphasize three central scenes of his production: the gambling scene in the beginning, the revolutionary tribunal, and the scenes in the dungeon (Viehweg 182). Especially outstanding was the tribunal scene, for which Reinhardt combined the two scenes of Büchner's text and also inserted parts of Rolland's trial scene (Viehweg 185). It is quite possible that Reinhardt, who visited Buchowetzki's film set, was inspired by the way in which the latter combined the two sources for his cinematic version of the trial (see chapter 1). As in the film, the reaction of the masses was central to the scene and carefully orchestrated. For the remarks from the audience, Reinhardt combined lines from various Büchner scenes with Rolland's text. Also adopted from Rolland is Danton's Homeric laughter answered by a "broad general laughter" ("großen allgemeinen Lachen"; Viehweg 186), which is also an important moment in the film's trial.

Gustaf Gründgens played Saint-Just in Reinhardt's productions in Vienna and Munich largely by imitating Werner Krauss's performance from 1916. The interpretation of Robespierre was likewise inspired by this groundbreaking production, with Wladimir Sokoloff copying Bruno Decarli's marionette-like movements and the pedantic play with eye glasses (Viehweg 190). When Gründgens took up the role of Robespierre in Behrendt's film, he was obviously inspired by these earlier theatrical models.

Fig.2.a. Three Robespierres. The original: Bruno Decarli in Max Reinhardt's production of *Dantons Tod* (1916)

Fig.2.b. Werner Krauss in Dimitri Buchowetzki's *Danton* (1921)

Fig.2.c. Gustaf Gründgens in Hans Behrendt's *Danton* (1931)

The fundamentals of Gründgens's performance are introduced in the very first scene involving Robespierre. Like Decarli and Krauss, he maintains a very tense, upright posture, uses his

glasses as a marked prop and relies on certain signature gestures. His first action in the film is the meticulous examination of a folded shirt with his glasses propped on the forehead. With a brisk movement and a snappy tone he admonishes his maid, recommending her to spend less time worrying about the revolution and more time on her housekeeping duties. Although Robespierre's character is more gentle in the beginning of this film than in Büchner, Rolland, or Buchowetzki, Gründgens adapts the rigidity of posture introduced by Decarli and maintained by Krauss (as Robespierre in Buchowetzki's film), and Sokoloff. He also works with theatrical poses that harken back both to their performances and to the general pictorial style of acting on the stage and in early silent film. As the maid keeps talking about the revolution and mentions the possible trial of the king, the startled Gründgens freezes in a highly artificial pose, turned away from his interlocutor with one hand resting on his hip, the other tented on a dresser. This pose conveys his misgivings concerning the fate of the king and also his indignation at the maid's intrusion into politics. Hearing a knock on the door, he places his glasses back on his nose (he wears them on his forehead only in private) and resumes his previous position, brushing off the maid's inquiries with a simple: “Somebody knocked” (“Es hat geklopft”).

Fig.3.a.-c. Repetitions and variations: Gustaf Gründgens as Robespierre in Hans Behrendt's *Danton* (1931).

Fig.3.b.

Fig.3.c.

The artificiality of his posture combined with repetitive movements and gestures are typical of pictorial acting from an earlier epoch and were rather unusual for film in the early 1930s. His acting received a cool critical response. The critic of the *Lichtbildbühne* remarks cautiously: "Robespierre: Gründgens. Undoubtedly an idiosyncratic interpretation of the role. To what extent Gründgens manages to approach what he envisioned with his grotesquely stilted gestures remains to be seen" ("Danton").[79] The reviewer of the *Film-Kurier* is much more blunt in his negative attitude vis-à-vis Gründgens's mannerisms and exaggerations:

> Does he [Behrendt] not hear, does he not see how Gründgens, the most overrated actor in Berlin, disastrous in almost every sound film, completely misrepresents Robespierre with

[79] "Robespierre: Gründgens. Eine eigenwillige Auffassung der Rolle ist nicht zu leugnen. Wie weit Gründgens aber dem ihm Vorschwebenden durch seine grotesk-gezirkelten Gesten nahe kommt, bleibt dahingestellt."

> his benedixian[80] and blasé antics. Wagging his finger at Danton, jerking his glasses from the nose, with bulging eyes like a parody of himself. ("Danton")[81]

Gründgens indeed overplays the finger-wagging (in his first scene at the Jacobin Club alone, he uses this gesture five times) which gives Robespierre the air of an edifying schoolmaster rather than the cold, calculating politician portrayed by Krauss. Jhering keenly observes that Gründgens's emulation of his forerunner is to his disadvantage because of the difference in their characters: "Gründgens is not a Robespierre. One could have known that. (Werner Krauss would have been a Robespierre). Therefore, Gründgens hides "his insecurities behind a mannerism that is not a form but only an adopted style" Jhering 3: 327).[82]

Apart from actors and their performances, Behrendt's film also borrowed a number of dramaturgical elements from some theatrical versions of *Dantons Tod*. After a sluggish start in its production history, Büchner's play became one of the most popular dramas in the Weimar Republic, with eighty-nine different productions between 1919 and 1933 (Silberman 119). Before and during the war, the staging of *Dantons Tod* was dominated by the so-called *Stimmungsinszenierungen* approach, which focused on the general mood of the revolution rather than on its political aspects. This trend culminated in Reinhardt's production of 1916, in which the "atmospheric" element was masterfully enhanced through light and color (Viehweg 66-67). After Germany had its own brush with revolution, a number of productions shifted attention to the political aspects of the revolution and the plight of the suffering masses. The more radical among them implicitly glorified the events of 1918 and called for a new revolution, while others

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[80] The critic refers to Julius Roderich Benedix (1811-1873), author of very popular light-minded comedies and farces.

[81] "Überhört er, übersieht er, wie Gründgens mit seiner benedixschen Possen-Blasiertheit, der überschätzteste Schauspieler Berlins, unheilvoll fast in jedem Tonfilm, völlig neben seinem Robespierre steht? Dem Danton mit "Ei-Ei-du-Leser" drohend, die Brille von der Nase reißend, den Blick kullernd als parodierte er sich selbst."

[82] "Gründgens ist kein Robespierre. Das konnte man wissen. (Werner Krauss wäre Robespierre gewesen). [Er versteckt] seine Unsicherheit hinter einer Maniriertheit, die keine Form, sondern nur ein angenommener Stil ist."

tried to strike a balance between the political aspects of the play and the atmospheric approach (Viehweg 69; 97). Yet other performances tried to minimize revolutionary references altogether by concentrating on the individual fates of protagonists. For example, Eugen Kilian in his 1920 production excluded all mass scenes. A 1922 production in Düsseldorf centered around the theme of death and, downplaying the revolutionary aspect, even refrained from having the Marseillaise sung on stage to avert a possible scandal (Viehweg 148-49). Such a scandal indeed occurred two years later in Stuttgart, when nationalistic hooligans repeatedly disrupted the performance at the sounds of the Marseillaise. Although the production was devoid of any glorification of the revolution, it was banned by court order after several showings (Viehweg 142-47). In the above-mentioned staging by Erich Engels, all parts that could be interpreted as a reference to current political events were cut from the text (Viehweg 156).

Formal approaches to *Dantons Tod* were equally diverse. Reinhardt's concept of black and white contrasts, the use of columns as structural elements, and the seamless connections of scenes were imitated in numerous productions (Viehweg 206). Others took on a more innovative spatial design. A 1928 production in Essen employed projections in almost all scenes. Stagings in Düsseldorf and Kassel (both 1929) used scaffolding to arrange scenes in separate sections (Viehweg 206). Both the projections and scaffolding were certainly influenced by Piscator, who, as was discussed earlier, used similar devices in his political theater.

One of the most radical political interpretations of *Dantons Tod* during the Weimar Republic years was directed by Karl Heinz Martin at the Berliner Volksbühne in 1929. Interestingly, it used a rather conventional set design. The stage was separated into a proscenium and a framed main stage, adorned with drapes and many changing props, such as statues, chandeliers, and furniture suitable for the scene. This conventionalism stood in contrast to

Martin's background as an expressionist director both in theater and film. He was a founding member of the avant-garde theater Tribüne, where he produced the premiere of Ernst Toller's *Die Wandlung* (*Transfiguration*) in 1919. The set design by Rudolf Neppach featured a completely bare stage with a background consisting of one large flat painted with unfinished brush strokes in a bright color. Its edges were jagged and a window in the shape of a black trapezoid was painted on its side (Patterson 100).[83] Similar settings were used in Martin's film adaptation of Georg Kaiser's expressionist drama *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts* (*From Morn to Midnight*, 1920). In addition to the jagged and angular sets – again designed by Neppach – all props in the film were stylized and two-dimensional. A decade later such expressionistic stylization would certainly have been outdated, but the conservative style of Martin's production of *Dantons Tod* production is nevertheless surprising given the director's background. However, his approach to Büchner's text was less conventional. Together with the prominent Austro-Hungarian dramatist Franz Theodor Csokor, Martin undertook an extensive re-writing of the original.

Like many expressionist writers, Csokor valued Büchner as a pioneer of modern drama and intensively studied his work. In 1922, he published a "Versuch einer Vollendung" ("Attempt at a Completion") of Büchner's fragment *Woyzeck*, into which he inserted two scenes and added four scenes as a new ending (Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1: 550). Later, he concentrated on *Dantons Tod* and wrote *Gesellschaft der Menschenrechte. Stück um Georg Büchner* (*Society for Human Rights. A Piece about Georg Büchner*, 1929), a play centering on Büchner's life around the time he worked on his drama about the revolution. As he prepared a stage version of *Dantons Tod* with Martin, Csokor saw two options for dealing with the original text: either to follow Büchner verbatim, or, if the play were to be "incorporated into reality most intensely"

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[83] According to Barry Salt, Neppach's settings served as the inspiration for the famous distorted backdrops of *Das Cabinett des Dr. Caligari* ("German Stage" 402).

("intensivst in die Gegenwart einbezogen"), to change and extend the text in order to make it relevant for the present day (Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1: 553). The tenor of his interpretation was the plight of the people, which was clearly projected on the contemporary situation.[84] According to Wolfram Viehweg, "this performance marked the climax in the development of political and revolutionary stage interpretations of *Danton* (139).[85]

It seems that Behrendt was particularly inspired by this production, as his film shows some parallels both in terms of dramaturgy and the text of the play. Aside from re-arranging Büchner's play and inserting their own text (alongside excerpts from Rolland), Martin and Csokor also introduced a number of new characters that were supposed to represent various social classes. Among the additional characters are two executioners who comment on the action at the beginning of the play. This kind of commentary on political events from the perspective of the man on the street probably inspired the introduction of an old retiree in Behrendt's film (Silberman 120). In the first scene of the film, this old man is witnessing a revolutionary demonstration through the ground level window of a basement from a worm's-eye-view. While the people outside are singing revolutionary songs, he approaches Marat, who is preoccupied with paperwork. Hoping that Marat will be the people's advocate, the old man asks who will pay his pension of one hundred francs now that the king is powerless. Put off by Marat's promise that the people will now take care of his pension, he reappears throughout the first quarter of the film seeking the help, or at least the ear, of the powers that be in his quest for a measure of financial stability.

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[84] Csokor draws specific parallels between the hyperinflation of the French Assignats and the Deutsche Mark and the fraternal strife within the revolutionary parties in both countries.

[85] "Mit dieser Aufführung ist der Höhepunkt der Entwicklung der politisch-revolutionären Bühneninterpretation des *Danton* erreicht."

Behrendt also adopted a dramatic device from Martin's staging of *Dantons Tod*. To accentuate scene changes, Martin employed drum rolls, something that he, in turn, probably borrowed from Richard Weichert's 1928 production, in which drum rolls and a revolving stage were used to change from one scene to the next. Behrendt utilizes this sound device not so much in a structural fashion but more as a thematic sound and means of accentuation. As a theme, drum rolls – often in conjunction with a fanfare – occur when the military is involved; for example in the scenes of negotiations between Danton and the Austrian delegation. As an emphatic marker, drum rolls accompany major turning points in the plot, as in the scene when Robespierre changes his mind and agrees to support the king's execution, or when he signs Marie Antoinette's death sentence later in the film. (These uses also include the thematic semantics associated with the military drums, as they imply that a mechanism for death has been set into motion).

In addition to this sound effect, in one important instance Behrendt adopts an entire mise en scene found in Martin and Csokor. They envisioned the following setting for Danton's execution: "The revolution square, surrounded by sketchy silhouettes of houses. Rough bumpy cobbles. The scaffolding is set up in the center. A high podium, crudely timbered, with broad steps in the front. On top the guillotine, towering high" (Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1: 416).[86] The stage directions for the moment of the execution detail the following movement: "The people, paralyzed at first, soundlessly crowd towards the guillotine, flow round the scaffolding, stream up, press forward, fill up the stairs, the block - - - short drum roll – freeze – anticipation – the

[86] "Der Revolutionsplatz, schemenhaft von Häusern umgeben. Derbes holpriges Pflaster. In der Mitte ist das Gerüst errichtet. Ein hohes Podium, roh gezimmert, zu dem vorn eine breite Treppe führt. Darauf ragt sehr hoch die Guillotine."

blade falls – silence" (Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1: 418).[87] A very similar scene, both in terms of sets and dynamics, is that of the king's execution in Behrendt. The forward motion of the people is translated in the film by tracking in the camera closer to the guillotine. With the beginning of the drum roll, the clamorous crowd falls silent; the drum roll ends simultaneously with the camera movement – and after a brief pause the blade drops.

In addition to those dramaturgic details taken from specific stagings, the film's proximity to theater is reflected in more general ways. As discussed earlier, towards the end of the silent era visual affinities between theater and cinema decreased due to the augmented use of cuts and the increasingly mobile camera. With the introduction of sound, film once again approached the visual and spatial characteristics of theater, to some degree because of the technical limitations imposed by the new technology, but also because of the slower pace brought about by to the prevalence of dialogue in the "talkies." Although the extreme stasis of the earliest sound films was soon overcome, the change in visual qualities had left its marks on sound film. The camera remained less mobile, cutting rates were lower, and a medium shot range was preferred (Salt, *Film Style* 206, 219). A look at the average shot length in American cinema shows a significant increase from silent to sound film. During the late silent years (from 1924 to 1929), the average length is 4.8 seconds. In the first sound film years (from 1928 to 1933), it grows more than two-fold, reaching 10.8 seconds (Salt, *Film Style* 174, 214). Similar trends are found in European cinema. Between 1924 and 1929, i.e. at the end of the silent era, the average length is 6.6. seconds; it increases to approximately 10 seconds in early sound films and to 12 seconds for the period between 1934-39 (Salt, *Film Style* 215, 174).

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[87] "Das Volk, zuerst erstarrt, drängt lautlos zur Guillotine, umflutet das Gerüst, strebt hinauf, drängt, füllt die Treppe, den Block - - - Trommewirbel kurz – Erstarrung – Erwartung – das Messer fällt – Stille."

Behrendt's work falls into this pattern of a general slowdown in the pace of films during the early sound years. In his 1927 silent comedy *Die Hose*, the average shot length is 5.0 seconds (Salt, *Film Style* 173), which is a little below average, perhaps because the genre tends to rely on faster action. In contrast, the average shot length of *Danton* produced four years later is 14 seconds (my calculations). The overall pace of the film is rather slow, despite a relatively high number of very short scenes and frequent set changes. The latter characteristics have analogies in Buchowetzki's *Danton,* which – despite its numerous affinities to theater – displays some pronounced cinematic traits: a high cutting rate with a shorter than typical average shot length of 6.5 seconds (as compared to the average of 8.6 seconds in the 1918-1923 period [Salt, *Film Style* 173, 146]), an abundance of short scenes, and numerous set changes (see chapter 1).

Like Buchowetzki's *Danton*, Behrendt's film has very few long scenes: out of 42 scenes, only three last more than five minutes. Nevertheless, its pace is much slower due to its low cutting rate. Instead of dissecting scenes, Behrendt prefers to present space and dialogue in longer takes, using camera pans and tilts rather than cuts. This choice can be attributed to the technical circumstances of the sound film especially insofar as dialogues are concerned, where it proved to be difficult to insert smooth cuts. Consequently, the number of reverse-angles (also called shot/reverse-shot patterns) fell sharply with the introduction of sound (Salt, *Film Style* 190).[88]

In *Danton*, many dialogues are rendered in only one or two shots, necessitating a blocking of the actors that contributes to the theatrical feel of the film. This stylistic feature can be illustrated by a short scene involving Robespierre and the prosecutor presiding over Danton's trial. In this scene, Robespierre is following the trial from a small chamber next to the

[88] To achieve a less noticeable transition from one interlocutor to the other, a cut is inserted while the last syllable of one person is still being spoken. However this principle was firmly established only by 1933, i.e. after *Danton'*s production (Salt, *Film Style* 217).

courtroom. When the prosecutor storms into the chamber, Robespierre is shown in his signature pose: standing erect, his hands tented on a desk in front of him, his glasses propped on his forehead. He reacts to the prosecutor's arrival merely by placing his glasses on his nose and then assumes a variation of his former pose, now bending one arm behind his back while the other remains on the desk. He is framed in a medium long shot, in a three-quarter profile to the camera. As the prosecutor approaches, he positions himself next to Robespierre with his profile to the camera. Robespierre maintains his posture while listening to the news about the turmoil in the courtroom. When he answers the prosecutor's plea for advice, the camera cuts to a medium shot, now showing Robespierre from the front. He keeps this frontal orientation, never facing his interlocutor and only turning his head and eyes slightly towards him. Even when he hands over the sentence to the prosecutor, who is now also facing front, Robespierre does not abandon this theatrical frontality.

Fig.4. Frontal acting.

A theatrical arrangement of characters can also be observed in scenes that involve more frequent cuts, including reverse-angles. The conversation among Robespierre, Desmoulins, and Danton, after the latter's return from the front, starts out with a medium long shot. The three characters are arranged in a triangle, with Danton in the background, facing the camera, and Robespierre and Desmoulins in profile in the foreground.[89] When Desmoulins addresses Danton, he does not turn towards him, because this would place him with his back to the camera, thus blocking the view of Danton. Instead, he looks straight ahead and takes a step forward, bringing his body closer to Danton from the camera's perspective. As Danton learns about the execution of Marie-Antoinette, Robespierre walks to the background and Danton steps in front of Desmoulins while the camera is tracking in, underscoring the heightening tension. To portray his reaction to the news, Danton approaches the camera frontally until he assumes a medium close-up distance, while Desmoulins steps backwards out of the frame. Clenching his fist, Danton controls his anger, while Robespierre quietly stays in the background.[90] True to his less choleric nature in Behrendt's film, Danton does not seek a physical outlet for his feelings and merely raises his voice as he turns around to accuse Robespierre of jeopardizing the cause of the revolution. The ensuing exchange is captured in a series of six shot-reverse shots in medium close-up, alternating between the two interlocutors. This short cinematic sequence is followed by another theatrical arrangement when a cut to a medium shot shows Robespierre from behind and Danton approaching him with his profile to the camera. Danton places his right hand on Robespierre's right shoulder, choosing not the side that is closer to him – which would be a more natural option – but rather the side that is closer to the camera. By this means he gives his body

[89] The cut to this shot reveals an inaccuracy in spatial continuity: Robespierre is resting his elbows on a standing desk that was absent from the room in the previous shots.
[90] Kortner resembles Emil Jannings in this pose in a similar scene in the 1921 film, where Danton and Robespierre cut ties (see chapter 1).

more frontal exposure to the camera, while at the same time forcing Robespierre to turn back and out a little, so that more of his profile is seen.

Fig.5.a. and b. Adjusting to avoid reverse angles.

Fig.5.b.

The scene ends with another frontal arrangement, as Desmoulins and Robespierre are shaking hands without facing each other.

Fig.6. Frontal acting in Hans Behrendt's *Danton* (1931)

As the reverse-angle sequence in this scene shows rather vividly, the preference for longer takes and the reduction of cuts during dialogues can be ascribed to technical considerations. The cuts are not integrated into the dialogue, but rather create artificial pauses in the exchange. After Robespierre is shown responding to Danton's accusation, a cut back to Danton shows him just staring at his opponent, who has stopped speaking. Robespierre resumes speaking only after the camera has cut back to him; he pauses again during a reverse-angle showing Danton's silent reaction, and concludes his statement only when the camera is again back on him. To avoid such pauses, Behrendt frequently opts for a blocking of interlocutors that requires few cuts, thus allowing them to be captured in longer takes, with a mobile camera if necessary.

While the moving camera in the above example is used to underline dramatic tension, it can also assume a guiding function for the spectator's eye. As an alternative to indepth staging when a larger set and more characters are involved, Behrendt uses the mobile camera, which

allows him to shoot the participants of a conversation from a closer distance. For example, an earlier scene at the Committee of Public Safety involving several of its members starts out with an establishing long shot of the room and its occupants. A small pan and track-in follows Marat to the door of the room, where he receives a note about the enemy troops advancing towards Paris. While he reads the news out loud, the camera tracks in on Marat to a medium shot distance. As Marat utters a disparaging remark about Danton, the camera pans over to Desmoulins to show his reaction and then moves to Saint-Just, who cuts off Desmoulins's objections. From here, the camera pans and tilts down to Robespierre, who is sitting at the opposite end of the room and concludes the conversation. Instead of dissecting the scene and showing the input of single characters in separate shots, Behrendt preserves spatial unity by treating the set as a theatrical stage. Thus the moving camera, seemingly a cinematic device par excellence, is put to an intrinsically theatrical use, following in a fluent motion the flow of conversation, just as the spectators' eyes would do in the theater.

While the moving camera in this scene serves to bypass technical complications, the implied theatricality in its employment appears deliberate. The predominantly horizontal trajectory that guides the spectator from one speaker to the next does not take advantage of the cinematic opportunities of the camera's mobility. Here the camera merely serves as an engineered substitute of the human eye without transcending its limitations. It is noteworthy that in the opening scene of the film Behrendt demonstrates a much more cinematic usage of the mobile camera. In addition to tracking the dialogue cues and character movements, here the camera also has an interpretive function and helps to present space in a dynamic way. The opening shot shows the retiree's view of the revolution from the low angle of the basement and through the bars of a ground-level window. Accompanied by the sound of a revolutionary song,

the camera tilts down and pans left to frame the old man; when he steps forward, the camera tracks back and keeps moving while the retiree stops in front of Marat's standing desk. In a semi-circular motion, the camera moves behind Marat's back and, coming to a standstill, reframes the room from a different angle. When Marat steps out of the frame, there is a cut to yet another view of the room. The conversation between him and the old man is interrupted by the voice of Danton, penetrating the basement from the outside. Thus Danton is not introduced into the film visually but through sound, emphasizing one of his outstanding traits – his eloquence and the powerful voice capable of inspiring and leading the masses. As the pensioner walks up to the window to listen to Danton's speech, the dissection of space is kept up in a series of eight reverse-angle shots. After this, the camera breaks through the enclosed space of the basement, showing the pensioner from the higher angle of the street level – that is, from the outside and through the barred window. Easily swayed by Danton's demagogic talent, he shouts "Down with the king!", a call that reverberates in the crowd. Here, the camera clearly serves as a generator of meaning as – through a striking spatial metaphor – it reflects the pensioner's place in the revolution. The pensioner is among the smallest cogs in the revolutionary process, witnessing it from a lowly position and behind bars, literally incapable of truly becoming part of the unfolding events. Ironically, in the following shot Marat explains to him that the Revolution is all about freedom ("Es geht um die Sache der Freiheit"), while both of them are seen through the rods of a printing press, a variation of bars.

Fig.7.a. and b. Camera framing with an interpretive function in Hans Behrendt's *Danton* (1931).

Fig.7.b. "Es geht um die Sache der Freiheit!"

The camera movements and cuts in this scene exemplify a cinematic way of presenting space and endowing the visual narrative with additional meaning. However, this an exception in the film, as Behrendt mostly opts for a theatrical mise en scène. This choice is especially evident when large sets and a big cast are involved, as for example early in the film in the scene

at the Jacobin club, where Behrendt uses in-depth staging to accommodate a large number of characters. The scene opens with a long shot of the room, showing several groups of the revolutionaries arranged across various planes of the large set. After a short pan, the camera tracks in slightly on Robespierre, who has stepped into the center of the room. As he starts speaking, characters in the background also turn towards the front, lining up behind him at some distance.

Fig.8. Staging in depth in Hans Behrendt's *Danton* (1931).

Even when he talks about Danton – who stays in the background – Robespierre does not turn around to face him. Marat also faces forward towards the camera with his back to Danton, although he addresses him directly. Several cut-ins to medium shots of Robespierre, Danton, and a spectator do not offset the overall "stagey" quality of the scene with its in-depth arrangement of characters and their frontal orientation. Gründgens's stylized acting (with the already mentioned excessive finger-wagging) and Kortner's broad gestures contribute to the theatrical atmosphere of the scene.

The two most important and longest scenes of the film are the trials of both the king and of Danton. These scenes feature a number of cinematic devices in their deployment of camera work and in the higher frequency of cuts. Whereas the average shot length in the film is 14 seconds, in the king's trial it is 11.9 seconds and even shorter in Danton's trial, 8.9 seconds. Behrendt also employs a variety of shot distances and angles, as well as tracking shots and pans in the first trial scene. Nevertheless, for a number of reasons these scenes have the air of filmed theater. The very nature of the action in these scenes is theatrical, with speeches delivered in front of an audience, something that requires an appropriate acting style, as I discussed earlier. The confined and relatively small space of the set has the appearance of an overcrowded *Kammerspielbühne*. In contrast, the vast space in Buchowetzki's trial scene allows for the development of entirely different dynamics. The spectacular high angle extreme long shot of the enormous crowd streaming down the stands and flooding the courtroom creates a dynamic image unrealizable in theater. Because of the constriction of Behrendt's set, a similar movement of the crowd does not have the same effect. Only when portraying the people carrying Danton on their shoulders in a series of high angle long shots does the camera gain aesthetic significance. Here the camera enriches the action on a visual level in its immediate rendering of emotions. For the most part, however, the camera merely serves as a recording device, without acquiring more complex narrative functions or the aesthetic relevance it possessed in the late silent cinema.

This “un-cinematic” use of the camera contributes to the overall theatrical impression of the film, which is enhanced by the confined, stage-like settings, the in-depth staging, a tendency towards the frontal orientation of actors, and stylized acting. In addition, borrowings both from Büchner's dramatic text and from its stage productions create a direct connection to the theater. Not surprisingly, Herbert Jhering calls *Danton* “the best theater-film” (“der beste Theaterfilm”)

and praises Behrendt for “decent work, theater work” (“anständige Arbeit […], Theaterarbeit”) (3: 326).

Characteristically, even for those reviewers who think that Behrendt transcends the potential of the stage, theater still serves as a point of departure; they see in his film an enhanced version of theater, as one *Lichtbild-Bühne* critic puts it: “With the elements of speech and gesture, a human drama, set against the background of an eventful historic perspective, creates an experience the medium of theater could not communicate in any deeper, more immediate and more exciting fashion” (“Danton”). [91] And the *Film-Kurier's* reviewer is especially impressed by the mass scenes in the trials:

> No Piscator-Stage, no big Schauspielhaus can recreate this powerful impression of the masses in their totality. The camera rips the past into the present here. Twice, these peak moments, twice Kortner quotes Danton's appeals to the republic, fatherland and freedom, twice a formidable echo carried by the plaudit of the people. An Eroica of sounds and screams, from which the hymn of revolution arises. (“Danton”) [92]

Yet for the most part reviews seem to pay less attention to the film's visual and audio-qualities and focus on the treatment of the subject matter instead. In the same reviews, the film's script by Heinz Goldberg is denounced as a “long-winded, shallow, historicized dramatization” (“langatmige, flache Historisierungs-Dramatik”; “Danton,” *Film-Kurier*), that “falls short of more humane and intimate encounters with its hero (“bleibt menschlich-intimere Begegnungen mit seinem Helden schuldig”; “Danton,” *Lichtbild-Bühne*).

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[91] “Hier wird ein menschliches Drama vor dem Hintergrund eines bewegten historischen Prospektes mit den Elementen des Wortes und der Gebärde zu einem Erlebnis gestaltet, wie es tiefer, unmittelbarer, erregender auch nicht durch das Medium Theater zu vermitteln ist.”

[92] “Keine Piscator-Bühne, kein großes Schauspielhaus kann diesen Massen-Eindruck in seiner Totalstärke geben. Die Kamera reißt da Vergangenheit zu Gegenwart. Zweimal diese gipfelnden Augenblicke, zweimal Danton-Zitate Kortners mit Republik-Appell, Vaterlands- und Freiheitsruf, zweimal ein ungeheuer von Volksbeifall getragenes Echo. Eine Geräusch- und Schrei-Eroica, aus der sich die Hymne der Revolution reckt.”

b. Ideological Aspects of the Plot

Before coming to the cinema, Heinz Goldberg (1891-1969) was a theater actor and director. In film, he occasionally tried his hand at directing, but mostly worked as a scriptwriter. His scripts span a wide range from comedies to productions involving sensitive political issues, such as *Dreyfus* (1930, with Kortner in the title role). For the dialogues in *Danton*, Goldberg co-operated with Hans José Rehfisch (1891-1960), who began publishing plays and working in the theater while studying for a law degree. Together with Erwin Piscator, Rehfisch managed the Central-Theater in 1922-23 and subsequently collaborated with him at Piscator's Theater am Nollendorfplatz. After the great success of his tragicomedy *Wer weint um Juckenack* (*Who Cries for Juckenack*, 1924), he abandoned his law practice and concentrated on theater work. Rehfisch became a popular Weimar dramatist, marking his biggest success with *Die Affäre Dreyfus* (*The Dreyfus Affair,*1929), written in co-operation with Wilhelm Herzog. Rehfisch's work was especially valued for its pointed dialogues and socio-critical treatment of political topics, both current and historical. This background made him especially qualified to contribute to the script of *Danton*.

Surprisingly, however, the progressive tendencies characteristic of Goldberg and Rehfisch cannot be found in *Danton* (the above-quoted *Film-Kurier's* reviewer who sees in the film a hymn of the revolution seems to be projecting his own views onto this film). Instead of relating the explosive political situation and the accompanying philosophical and ideological questions of the French Revolution to the increasingly volatile political realities of the Weimar Republic, Goldberg and Rehfisch opt for a rather neutral stance. Unlike a number of contemporary theatrical productions, the film refrains from displaying any explicit historical parallels or even hints at the opportunity to learn lessons from the past. Instead, it takes a rather

vague approach to the ideological implications of dealing with the topic of revolution. Perhaps in order to appeal to a broad audience, the film avoids a decidedly pro- or anti-revolutionary stand, remaining ambiguous and open to various interpretations. As Helmut Korte observes in summarizing a number of contemporary reviews of *Danton*, “the film quite obviously did not hurt anyone. Everybody was able to select whatever met with his or her own interests, prejudices, and convictions” (297).[93]

The role of the retiree, mentioned above, exemplifies the approach Behrendt and his scriptwriters take towards the presentation of the revolution and its effect on the general public. This man from the street who comments on the big political picture is most likely influenced by Martin's theatrical production, but in this production he represents a very different point of view. The two executioners who were added to Büchner's text by Csokor and Martin discuss the revolution from an ideological perspective, with the younger one asking: “Why is it that people are starving, yes, exactly the same poor people who created all this, the guillotine, the law, the revolution, and your Danton?”[94] The older executioner comes up with a fatalistic answer concerning the nature of power: “Danton is a master now! Those who lead us always turn into *masters*! That's the way things were from the beginning of time!” (qtd. in Viehweg 122).[95] In the film, however, the old retiree cares only about his pension, regardless of its source. While in the beginning, instigated by Danton's speech, he shouts “Down with the king! (“Nieder mit dem König!”), he soon gets impatient with the revolution because it does not yield any tangible results for him. When witnessing another demonstration on the street, he comments: “What's in

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[93] “Der Film [tat] ganz offensichtlich niemandem weh. Jeder konnte sich das heraussuchen, was den eigenen Interessen, Vorurteilen, und Überzeugungen entgegenkam.”

[94] “Warum hungern also dieselben, ja, gerad' dieselben armen Leut' immer noch, die doch alles gemacht haben, die Guillotine, das Gesetz, die Revolution und deinen Danton?”

[95] “Danton ist heute eben ein Herr! Immer werden sie später *Herren*, die uns führen! So ist's seit die Welt eine Welt ist!”

it for me? They go and make a noise, those people. And I don't get my hundred francs!"[96] This selfish concern attenuates, and almost undoes, his function as vox populi. In the retiree's eyes, the revolution appears as a pointless and potentially destructive undertaking that does not improve his situation. As a representative of the petite bourgeoisie, the retiree is closest to the target audience of the film and stokes underlying fears of this class vis-à-vis social unrest. At the same time, his requests are turned down by leaders of all political leanings – by the more radical Marat, Danton, a couple of aristocrats, and finally Robespierre. Surely this is a political comment, suggesting that those in power do not care about problems of the people they are supposed to represent.

While the middle class is shown in this ambiguous fashion, the lower classes are represented in a more negative light both in Behrendt and Buchowetzki. The latter presents them as an amorphous and easily manipulated mass: "The anonymous group acts like a drill team taking cues, charging forth like an unleashed fury or calmly sitting in ordered rows. The masses never speak as 'we,' nor are they even quoted as a group, but rather they are spoken to or for by the leaders who are opposed to the crowd as its adversaries" (Silberman 111). Neither Danton nor Robespierre identify with the people. Rather, they use them as a political tool to support their own agendas as they see fit. Buchowetzki, in turn, "manipulates" the masses for artistic purposes. As an audience, the masses reflect the effect of their leaders' speeches, with closer shots of the crowds and on individual faces adding detail to the predominantly long shots of the people. When unleashed, the masses create a powerful visual impression, adding momentum, and filling the screen with movement.

There is only one closer and more personal look at a representative of the people in Buchowetzki. This involves Babette, the lower class girl turned aristocratic mistress (see chapter

[96] "Was hab' ich davon? Die machen immer Krach die Leute – und ich bekomm' meine 100 Francs nicht!"

1). Like the retiree in Behrendt, she cares mostly about her personal well-being and the satisfaction of her desires. Adopted into high society, the humble girl from the street quickly forgets her past and looks down at her servant with disdain. When the tide turns, she joins and even leads the destructive mob (although first clutching her fine shoes against her chest in a farewell to the world of luxury). Thus she embodies the malleability and opportunism of the masses that, in the end, will trade Danton for a piece of bread.

Behrendt uses the people in a similar way, primarily as a backdrop for the action, but he portrays them in a less chaotic fashion and diminishes their explosive potential. In his film, the masses are more organized and always follow one leading figure as, for example, in the episode when they "storm" the king's residence. Here, after a brief incendiary speech by Desmoulins, the spotlight switches to Legendre who leads the crowd to Versailles. Legendre serves as a link between the social strata within the revolutionary movement. Clearly belonging to the poorer classes by his appearance and attire, he has a voice among the revolutionary elite since he is a deputy of the National Convention (despite being in need of Danton's patronizing assistance, as the preceding scene in the Jacobin Club demonstrates). Legendre is an accepted leader among the common people, who follow him to the king's residence in a relatively orderly fashion, waiting for him to intone the chant "To the king!" ("Zum König!") before they join in.[97] When the king appears, there is an initial moment of awe, during which Legendre steps back slightly and even takes off his Phrygian cap. Regaining confidence while the revolutionary song *Ça ira* is heard in the background, Legendre steps up to the king, the crowd following him. As Legendre speaks to the king, some voices from the crowd are heard in support, but they merely

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[97] This willingness of the masses to follow a single leader and their orderly conduct could be seen as a comment on the alleged inability of the German people to have a revolution as expressed in a comment attributed to Lenin: "A revolution in Germany? That is never going to happen; when those Germans want to storm a train station, they will buy a platform ticket first."

echo Legendre's accusations. When a guard urges him to leave and let the National Convention take care of the king, Legendre and the crowd quietly withdraw. Throughout the confrontation, the king keeps his composure, bearing the insults with noble dignity, just as he will face his fate in the subsequent trial scene. The contrast between the dirty, tattered, noisy people and the dignified elegance of nobility is familiar from Ernst Lubitsch's *Madame Dubarry*. In both films, the people function mostly as a lively backdrop or willing claqueurs. Only in one instance in Behrendt's film do they criticize revolutionary leaders openly. Observing Danton's wedding from behind a fence, the people comment disapprovingly on his lavish lifestyle and his marriage to an aristocrat. Voicing their anger, they interrupt Desmoulins's satirical song about Danton's frivolity, but when Desmoulins changes the song into a hymn to Danton the great revolutionary, the crowd is easily appeased and vanishes from sight.

Because of their insignificance, the people do not serve as figures of identification for the audience in either Buchowetzki or Behrendt. Instead, the viewer turns to the two major revolutionary leaders, Robespierre and Danton. As in Büchner's drama, their contrasting personalities and ideologies are the driving forces of the narrative. This dichotomy is also reflected in the film's structure, which includes a number of cross-cut scenes juxtaposing the two leaders. In the first sequence of this type, Danton is leaving the debate at the Jacobin Club, saying that he is fed up with all the talking ("dieses Gerede habe ich satt"). While Robespierre debates tirelessly at the Club, Danton is seen enjoying himself with two women at a pub, ignoring the questions of the old retiree who also happens to be there. As the discussion about the king's fate continues among the Jacobins, and Robespierre reluctantly agrees to support the king's execution, Danton retires with his female companions.

The latter sequence reflects the general dichotomy present in Büchner (the epicurean Danton who is disenchanted by politics vs. the ascetic revolutionary Robespierre), but Robespierre's character in the film is more nuanced and – especially in the first part of the film – significantly diverges from his portrayal in *Dantons Tod.* In the film, Robespierre initially opposes the execution of the king, offering instead to exile him. This is contrary to both historical facts and Büchner's play. Moreover, a crucial dictum of Büchner's Danton – "Where self-defense ends, murder begins" – is uttered in the film by Robespierre, whereas Robespierre's reply in the play is split between Marat ("The social revolution is not yet finished ...) and Legendre ("... and the world of the idle rich is not yet dead") (*Plays* 23).[98] Such reshuffling of the text turns Robespierre into a more complex character, allowing him to develop from a relatively humane figure to a staunch proponent of the rule of terror, and at the same time somewhat "impoverishes" Danton, whose main motivation in the film appears to be centered on his amorous pursuits.

This idea is reinforced in the second cross-cutting sequence that contrasts the dutiful Robespierre waiting, together with other deputies, for Danton, who, in the meantime, is fully occupied with his love interest. Behrendt presents a long account of Danton's relationship to Louise, while he shows only short excerpts of the important meeting missed by Danton. Later in the film, Danton's political decisions are likewise influenced by his love for Louise, for whose sake he is willing to risk his political integrity and neglect his duties, so much so that Kracauer makes the following conclusion: "This picture resembled *All for a Woman*, Buchowetzki's Danton film of 1921, in its indifference to the French Revolution and its emphasis on the private life of the revolutionary leaders" (*Caligari* 252). Indeed, it seems that Danton's marriage is the

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[98] "Wo die Notwehr aufhört, fängt der Mord an." "Die soziale Revolution ist noch nicht fertig [...] und die gute Gesellschaft ist noch nicht tot" (*Werke* 1: 32).

main trigger of change in his attitude and character. While he is presented as rather unpleasant and cynical in the beginning of the film, his proposal to Louise transforms him into a more agreeable, sympathetic figure. Domesticated by the marriage, his character conforms to bourgeois ideals and has greater appeal for middle- and upper-class audiences. Yet the love line does not overshadow the historical and political aspects of the film altogether. With the survival of the republic at stake on the battlefields, Danton follows Robespierre's appeal and, against the will of his young wife, travels to the front in order to save the French army from defeat.

This third cross-cutting sequence outlines the irreconcilable differences that emerge in Danton's and Robespierre's approaches to the revolution. The murder of Marat pushes Robespierre to the ruthless fanaticism familiar from Büchner's text. While Danton is negotiating with the Austrian delegation at the front, Robespierre and Saint-Just proclaim the reign of terror at Marat's funeral. Echoing Robespierre’s speech at the Jacobin Club in Büchner (I, 3), Behrendt's Robespierre announces that “from this hour, there will be no more mercy” (“Von dieser Stunde an gibt es kein Erbarmen mehr”), while Saint-Just openly calls for terror in order to protect freedom (“zum Schutze der Freiheit”). Alternating between Danton's negotiations and the events in Paris, the sequence culminates in two close-ups showing the signing of two mutually exclusive documents: Danton vouching for the queen's life and Robespierre consenting to her death sentence. While Danton is willing to sacrifice some ideals of the revolution to save the republic, Robespierre becomes the high priest of revolutionary violence.[99]

In the last third of the film the script is much closer to Büchner, with a number of direct or only slightly altered quotations from *Dantons Tod*. The overall depiction of the protagonists

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[99] It is interesting, that Danton mentions Schiller during his negotiation with the Austrian / German delegation. Relating to the initial enthusiasm Schiller showed for the French Revolution, Danton portrays him as a prophet of revolutionary spirit and freedom, much like the German labor movement perceived Schiller in the early twentieth century. This view of Schiller bespeaks the progressive tendencies of the scriptwriters, countering the attempted ideological appropriation of Schiller as a national poet in conservative and right wing circles.

is closer to Büchner as well and includes manifestations of Danton's reflective side. After his rift with Robespierre, Danton talks to Desmoulins in the street, pondering whether executing the king was murder and trying to convince himself that it was an act of self-defense necessary to save the fatherland. This conversation is based on Büchner's Danton talking to his wife Julie:

> ’It *must* needs be’: it’s this ‘must’ that did it. Who’d ever curse the hand on whom the curse of ‘must’ has fallen? Who spoke the curse, who? What is it in us that whores, lies, steals, murders? Puppets, that’s all we are, made to dance on strings by unknown forces; ourselves we are nothing, nothing – mere swords in the hands of warring spirits, the hands themselves cannot be seen, that’s all, like in some child’s fairy-tale. (*Plays* 38)[100]

In the film, these remarks are abridged to: “Shall I curse my hand, upon which the curse of necessity fell?”,[101] which narrows the philosophical dimensions of Danton's thoughts. The subsequent scene, featuring the final attempt at reconciliation between the two adversaries, brings up the issue of vice versus virtue that is so central in Büchner's text. Here Danton, who is getting drunk, defends his lifestyle and, becoming visibly agitated, claims that Robespierre's dictatorship is ruining the revolution: “You taught the revolution to devour its own children.”[102] However, their dispute ends on a private note, with Danton accusing Robespierre of personal hatred and Robespierre expressing amazement at being constantly misunderstood by his counterpart.

Another key phrase from Büchner's text is quoted in the following scene, where Danton, his shadow still looming larger than life, has to hide from the revolutionary troops to avoid

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[100] “Es muß; das war dies Muß. Wer will der Hand fluchen, auf die der Fluch des Muß gefallen? Wer hat das Muß gesprochen, wer? Was ist das, was in uns lügt, hurt, stiehlt und mordet? Puppen sind wir, von unbekannten Gewalten am Draht gezogen; nichts, nichts wir selbst! Die Schwerter, mit denen Geister kämpfen, man sieht nur die Hände nicht wie im Märchen (*Werke* 1: 49).
[101] “Soll ich meine Hand fluchen, auf die der Fluch des Muss fiel?”
[102] “Du hast die Revolution gelehrt, ihre eigenen Kinder zu fressen!” For the origin of Büchner's line: “Die Revolution ist wie Saturn, sie frißt ihre eignen Kinder”, see footnote 44, chapter 1.

immediate arrest. Dismissing Desmoulins's suggestion to flee, he says: "Can you take the fatherland with you on the soles of your shoes?"[103]. Omitted here, however, are the subsequent words that Danton utters repeatedly in Büchner's text: "They will not dare" ("Sie werden's nicht wagen"; *Werke* 1: 31, 40, 47, 59

Fig.9. Danton, larger than life.

These examples demonstrate that the film takes Büchner's text only as a point of departure, simplifying both the political and personal side of Danton and the inner conflicts of his character. While Büchner's Danton is torn between fatalism and a sense of duty that requires him to defend himself – if only for the sake of the revolution – Behrendt's Danton at the time of his arrest is simply resigned and tired. He acts solely at his wife's behest.

With the execution followed by two more scenes, the ending of Büchner's *Dantons Tod* is decidedly anticlimactic. Contrary to that, Behrendt's film ends with Danton's execution as the

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[103] "Kann man das Vaterland an den Sohlen seiner Schuhe mitnehmen?" In the original: "Nimmt man das Vaterland an den Schuhsohlen mit?" (Büchner, *Werke* 1:40). ("Can you take your country with you on the soles of your shoes?" *Plays* 30]).

dramatic finale, which is also the case in Buchowetzki's film (and in Martin's theatrical production). Buchowetzki presents Danton as if on a stage, his last words the tragic proclamation: “The Revolution devours its own children!” (title). This stresses the pointlessness of revolution and, ultimately, underscores the overall anti-revolutionary stance of the film. Behrendt shows Danton's execution in a long shot from the high angle of a roof top, with a limb of a tree partly obstructing the view on Danton as he is ascending the guillotine. His last words are “Long live freedom!” (“Es lebe die Freiheit!”). The film thus appears to end on a more positive and universal note. However, these words are as ubiquitous as they are meaningless, both in the context of the revolution's trajectory and in also in terms of establishing a connection to the Weimar realities. Elements of the finale – the remote view of the execution as well as the playing of the Marseillaise while the screen darkens and Danton's drama fades into history – create a sense of distance between events of the film and the time of its making. Unlike political theater of the time and the topical interpretations of Büchner's drama on stage that inspired the film aesthetically, Behrendt avoids any straightforward messages about the current German situation.

The solemn invocation of freedom at the end of the film also stands in contrast to a very brief but significant episode earlier in the film. After Danton arranges to have General Dumouriez sent to the front in his stead, a young soldier approaches Danton and asks him to be sent back into battle. Benevolently granting this wish, Danton inquires about the young man's name and receives the following answer: “Lieutenant Bonaparte”. Danton repeats the name and remarks: “I will write this down” (“Ich werd's mir aufschreiben”). The young Napoleon is seen only from behind, presented as an as yet undefined specter of the future, but his apparition is of enormous importance. Although it is of no immediate consequence for the plot, it introduces a

historical perspective unavailable to the characters of the film. The meaning of this episode for the overall interpretation of the film arguably remains ambiguous. It can be seen as one of the few instances where the film's creators take a more or less definite anti-revolutionary stand, and as a warning about the futility of the revolution that ended in a return to monarchy and wars waged on an unprecedented scale. At the same time, Napoleon's appearance can be read as a shift to a higher, non-political dimension, since this episode introduces, as it were, the notion of a fate which recasts Danton's drama – and the drama of the French Revolution – with elements of Greek tragedy.

The film's neutrality and ambivalence is reflected in many contemporary reviews. While the film did not evoke particularly strong reactions, the conservative and right-wing press tended to see it more favorably. Thus, the National Socialist paper *Völkischer Beobachter*, although criticizing the casting of the "Polish Jew Kortner" ("den polnischen Juden Kortner") as Danton, admits that the film is "unusually powerful" ("von ungewöhnlicher Stärke") and has "extraordinary highlights" ("außergewöhnliche Höhepunkte") in the trial scenes, pointing out the parallels between the revolutionary masses shown as "rabble" ("Sauhaufen") and the "Bolshevik lowlifes" ("bolschewistische Unterwelt") (qtd. in Korte, *Spielfilm* 294-95). The conservative *Kinematograph* hints at the anti-socialist tendency of the film in the negative depiction of revolutionary fanatics, but mainly praises the film's willingness to find a compromise. It emphasizes that, despite its potentially combustible content, the film "did not turn out to be a revolutionary drama after all" ("ist nämlich gar kein Revolutionsdrama geworden"), but rather "a picture that any theater owner can screen without hesitation" ("ein Bild, das jeder Theaterbesitzer unbedenklich spielen kann") (qtd. in Korte, *Spielfilm* 296). This particular aspect of the film was bound to displease the KPD's organ *Rote Fahne*, which branded *Danton* as "pacifist"

("pazifistisch") and "counterrevolutionary" ("konterrevolutionär"), although without employing its usual fierceness. Predictably, the review criticizes the presentation of the masses as a mob and also the "excess of pompously sentimental love scenes" ("Fülle von prunkvoll-rührseligen Liebesszenen"), concluding that "the director shrouds reality with pretty pictures" ("der Regisseur verschleiert die Wirklichkeit mit hübschen Bildern") (qtd. Korte, *Spielfilm* 295-96).

However, it is precisely the "pretty pictures" despised by the *Rote Fahne* reviewer that were responsible for the popularity of period films, most of which indulge in opulent imagery. Monumental sets, lavish costumes, impressive mass scenes, and a focus on the personal life of historical figures contribute to the spectator's experience of the film on an emotionally involved level, precluding a more serious "analytic" approach to history. This mechanism explains why films like *Fridericus Rex* (1922), although quite openly advocating the restoration of the monarchy, enjoyed popularity even among the most unlikely audiences, including the working class with its leftist leanings (Welch 678). *Danton* is less extreme in lavish décor than earlier period films, something that can be attributed to the budget constraints brought about by the higher cost of production at the beginning of the sound era, and which translate into the relatively plain sets and the limited number of different settings in *Danton*. Still, one can argue that overall the film is reminiscent of the "Prussian" atmosphere of the *Fridericus* films, both in terms of settings and character portrayal. The two protagonists do not imitate the French in their manner and body language, especially Gründgens's Robespierre, who personifies Prussian uptightness almost to the point of caricature. Kracauer observes a characteristically German twist in the ideology of Kortner's Danton. He compares him with "Schiller's liberty-loving heroes" but also notices proto-Nazi tendencies. Danton "sides with democracy against tyranny. But at the same time he is so patriotic and emotional that he strongly recalls those rebellious

German idealists who, loathing Versailles and the Weimar Republic, were predestined to become Nazi sympathizers. This screen rebel is a paradoxical blend of a potential Hitlerite and a democratic fighter" (*Caligari* 254). Here Kracauer vividly demonstrates the fixation on proto-Nazi tendencies in Weimar cinema that was noted by subsequent critics. While Danton is certainly an ambiguous figure, seeing in him a budding fascist seems to be too far-fetched. But the ambivalence of his character is indeed related to the film's overall ambiguity that resulted in a wide range of interpretations. As the numerous reviews quoted above demonstrate, the film was received well by the conservative press despite its revolutionary topic, and, at the same time, was not condemned by the left, even though it pursued a much more conservative agenda than the topic and its textual source suggest. The makers of *Danton* followed a recipe used by many production companies during the early sound era, which, in order to ensure a sufficient return at the box office, opted for films that combined the appeal of topicality with a politically neutral approach (Korte, *Spielfilm* 298). Thus, in terms of its cautious handling of the "revolutionary" material, Behrendt's film reflects some important features of contemporary cinema, just as it does in its overall aesthetic paradigm.

Chapter 3:

From Under the Rubble:

Georg Klaren's *Wozzeck* (1947) and DEFA's New Beginnings

Introduction

Perhaps of all of Georg Büchner's plays, his final one, *Woyzeck*, lends itself most easily to cinematic adaptation. At the time of its introduction to the German stage in 1913, it was considered ultra-modern, but ill-suited for the theater. The first director to stage *Woyzeck*, Eugen Kilian, describes the play's format as “completely undramatic and untheatrical” (“gänzlich undramatisch und untheatralisch”, Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1: 255), referring to its fragmentary nature and the loose connections between short scenes, a feature that proved to be problematic for a stage performance. Interestingly, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who was instrumental in bringing *Woyzeck* to the theater and was involved in the stage arrangement of the text, underscores the cinematic potential of the play's structure: “The only feasible option is to have the 14 or 16 scenes unroll like a film” (Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1: 248).[104] In the review of a 1914 performance of *Woyzeck*, Paul Zifferer expresses a similar feeling when he describes the play as “sketchy; very brief scenes swish and flicker by” (“skizzenhaft, ganz kurze Szenen huschen flimmernd vorüber”, Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1: 266). Another critic writes about a 1921 production in Vienna: “The pictures unroll like a spooky film” (“Wie ein spukhafter Film rollen die Bilder ab,” *Neues Journal*, qtd. in Strudthoff 70).

Given Büchner's popularity among the expressionists – many of whom saw him as their forerunner – it is somewhat surprising that no film version of *Woyzeck* was created during the heyday of German expressionism. It was not adapted into a film script until the very end of the Weimar period, in 1932, by the writer and director Georg Klaren. As he states in an interview,

[104] “Aber im Übrigen ist das einzig mögliche, die 14 oder 16 Bilder abschnurren lassen wie einen Film.”

Klaren was likewise fascinated by the cinematic quality of Büchner's work: "Fragments such as *Woyzeck* or novellas are much better suited for cinematic adaptation than theater plays or novels. Fragments, because they give leeway to visual imagination, because their culmination in one single point particularly matches the essence of film" (*Berliner Zeitung*).[105]

In his film, Klaren indeed tries to release the cinematic potential of Büchner's play. While textually much closer to the original, aesthetically he is much farther removed from the theatrical roots that are so pronounced in the earlier films based on Büchner. Klaren's case is especially fascinating because of the chronological distance between the first script and the time of the actual production. Although conceived in 1932, the film was shot only fifteen years later, in 1947, and thus it serves as a bridge between two very different cinematic – and historical – epochs. In terms of its artistic language, Klaren's adaptation of *Woyzeck* displays strong influences of the expressionist period, but his ideological reading of Büchner is clearly conditioned by the political and ideological contexts in the Soviet zone of occupation during the first post-World War II years.

I will begin this chapter with an overview of the history of *Woyzeck's* publication and interpretation, including its theatrical reception. Before moving to the cinematic scene in the soon-to-be-divided Germany, I will explore Klaren's earlier career, something that is crucial for establishing what kind of artistic baggage he brought to his Büchner project. My analysis of the film itself will center on the interaction between its expressionist aesthetic legacy and socialist ideological approaches.

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[105] "Fragmente wie "Woyzeck" oder Novellen eignen sich viel besser für die Verfilmung als Theaterstücke oder Romane. Fragmente deshalb, weil sie der optischen Phantasie jeden Spielraum lassen, weil ihre Zuspitzung auf eine einzige Pointe der Wesensform des Films ganz besonders entspricht."

1. Contextualizing *Wozzeck*

a. Reception and Stage History of Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*

The history of *Woyzeck's* publication and reception is quite remarkable, and in many ways reflects the complex trajectory of Büchner's legacy in German culture. Büchner's posthumous works – *Nachgelassene Schriften* – appeared in 1850, thirteen years after his death, edited by his younger brother Ludwig, the materialist philosopher famous for his *Kraft und Stoff* treatise. Ludwig Büchner did not include *Woyzeck* in this edition, claiming that its manuscript could not be properly deciphered. As he admitted later however, apart from the textual difficulties, the family also felt that the play's language and contents were unsuitable for publication (Hauschild 86). Several scenes of the play were published for the first time in 1875 in the *Neue Freie Presse* by Karl Emil Franzos under the title *Wozzeck* (hence this spelling in the early editions of the play). Franzos was able to decipher the manuscripts with the help of chemical agents but took the liberty of rearranging scenes and adding lines as he saw fit. A more complete version of *Wozzeck,* also prepared by Franzos, appeared in 1879 in the first critical edition of Büchner's works (*Sämmtliche Werke*). Scholars describe Franzos's rendering of the text as "extremely flawed" ("extrem fehlerhaft", Knapp 32). With all that, this edition seems to be unanimously recognized as a turning point in Büchner's literary reputation, and a true beginning of his influence on contemporary literature.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, Büchner gradually began to attract the attention of broader audiences as his plays made their way to the theater. Initially limited to semi-private performances (*Leonce und Lena* in 1895 and *Dantons Tod* in 1902), they appeared on the big stage in the 1910s. In 1913, *Woyzeck* became the last of Büchner's plays to be staged, one hundred years after the author's birth and seventy-seven years after it had been written. Its

premiere was part of Büchner's centennial ("Georg-Büchner-Geburtstagsfeier"), and was performed together with *Dantons Tod* at the Münchener Residenztheater under the direction of Eugen Kilian. In this double feature, *Woyzeck* was envisioned as the main offering, but since in Kilian's version it ran for only one hour, it was introduced by a shortened version of *Dantons Tod* (see chapter 1). As in the case of *Dantons Tod*, a major problem in staging *Woyzeck* was the rapid succession of different settings and the brevity of scenes. Since both Hofmannsthal, who prepared the stage version of the text, and Kilian agreed that *Woyzeck*'s "brilliance and charm lie precisely in the poetic succession of contrasting scenes," they tried to retain the original structure of the play.[106] However, in order to facilitate the ease of transitions, Hofmannsthal took out four scenes and combined the remaining twenty-two scenes into sixteen, for which nine stage settings were needed. The setting consisted of painted scenery without stage constructions, which allowed for fast changes in the dark in the absence of a curtain. It was crucial for Kilian to avoid any interruptions, since he aimed to convey a special atmospheric mood. As the artistic director of the Residenztheater, Clemens von Franckenstein, wrote to Hofmannsthal, the production was lauded by the press but not sufficiently appreciated. Moreover, due to the negative reviews in the conservative press that deemed *Dantons Tod* to be a glorification of the French Revolution, the number of spectators dropped quickly and drastically. But there was a new *Wozzeck* production only one month later, in December 1913, at the Lessingtheater in Berlin under the direction of Viktor Barnowsky. Shown with *Leonce und Lena* this time, *Wozzeck* was overshadowed by the comedy, which was received much more favorably by the audience.

The early productions of *Wozzeck* seem to have avoided aspects of social criticism, and even omitted the most controversial passages. Nonetheless they did not fare well with the right-

[106] "gerade in der balladenhaften Aufeinanderfolge der contrastierenden Scenen liegt das Geniale und Bezaubernde" (Hofmannsthal in Gotschnigg, *Moderne* 1: 248).

wing press and conservative audiences. Thus, the Viennese performance at the Residenztheater in 1914 (directed by Arthur Rund) was accompanied by heckling. Commenting on this incident, the critic of the *Neues Wiener Journal* remarked with indignation that the viewers seemed to take Büchner for "one of those Berlin impressionist poets of the likes of Wedekind and, therefore, thought they would be allowed to boo him" (qtd. in Strudthoff 49).[107]

In aesthetic terms, the above-mentioned productions were shaped by both naturalistic and expressionistic impulses. Albert Steinrück, who played the title role in all three, had a naturalistic style of acting, something that was not necessarily compatible with the expressionist tendencies in the stage sets. Likewise, there was disagreement among the critics as to what interpretation – naturalistic or expressionistic – would be closer to the spirit of Büchner's original (cf. Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1; Strudthoff). The contrast between the two approaches was intensified with Viktor Barnowsky's staging of *Wozzeck* at the Lessingtheater Berlin in 1920. There, the overall arrangement followed conventions of naturalistic theater, and the title role was played by Eugen Klöpfer, Hauptmann's actor and the quintessential representative of the naturalistic school. In contrast to this, the sets were conspicuously expressionistic (Strudthoff 59; Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1: 378). Created at the very beginning of the Weimar period in a political climate that was vastly different from the pre-World War I years, Barnowsky's production was perhaps most notable for the fact that, for the first time in the stage history of *Wozzeck,* it stressed the social aspects of the play, so much so that in the press it was nicknamed a "proletarian tragedy " ("Proletarier-Tragödie", Strudthoff 59).

The social aspects were toned down again by Max Reinhardt, who turned to the play one year later, in 1921, at his Deutsches Theater. According to the critic Siegfried Jacobsohn, since

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[107] "[Der Kritiker] entrüstet sich über das Verhalten des Publikums, das in Georg Büchner 'einen in Berlin lebenden impressionistischen Dichter in der Art Wedekinds vermutet und ihn deshalb auszischen zu dürfen glaubte.'"

Reinhardt was now catering to a bourgeois audience, his interpretation represented “not a social indictment,” but rather “a semi-realistic, semi-romantic lament” (“Keine soziale Anklage: eine halb realistische, halb romantische Klage”, Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1: 380). Yet, as in the case of *Dantons Tod*, Reinhardt set new standards with his production. For the first time in theatrical practice he used the title *Woyzeck*, following the latest publication of the play by Georg Witkowski in 1920. In the previous authoritative edition of Büchner's works, prepared by Paul Landau in 1909, the sequence of scenes in the play was slightly different from the initial 1875 edition by Franzos, but the title *Wozzeck* remained. Witkowski severely criticized Franzos' textological principles and compiled his own version, now under the title *Woyzeck*. This spelling was supported by the discovery of documents in 1913-14 pertaining to the criminal case of Christian Woyzeck, who had served as a partial prototype for Büchner's character (Richards 2).

Another innovation was that Reinhardt presented *Woyzeck* as the sole piece. There was no need for an accompanying play because in his version *Woyzeck* was long enough to fill the evening. Reinhardt chose a rather slow pace for the performance and accentuated the pauses as if to emphasize what was written between the lines, what is not said and what cannot be expressed by the troubled mind of the protagonist (Strudthoff 63). However, when it came to scene and set changes, Reinhardt avoided any pauses and interruptions. The revolving stage presented painted backdrops that were clustered in the middle of the stage, while the rest of it was covered with a black frame. This diminished the realistic dimensions of the play, moving “the stage action to the level of the symbolic” (“rückt das Bühnengeschehen auf die Ebene des Symbolischen”, Strudthoff 62). Such sets and the atmospheric use of light were widely praised by the critics, as for example Carl von Ossietzky, who speaks of the “unadorned, but expressive

background" ("schlichte, aber stimmungskräftige Hintergründe", (qtd. in Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1: 382).

The title role in Reinhardt's production was again played by Eugen Klöpfer who, several months later, created another incarnation of *Woyzeck*, now in his own production at Vienna's Raimund Theater. The stage design was clearly influenced by Reinhardt (it likewise used a frame construction around simple settings and a drastic interplay of light and shadow), while the overall scenic style was even more expressionistic. Different from Reinhardt was the strong emphasis on the social aspects of the play. Audiences and critics alike applauded the dynamics and forcefulness of the performance, which compelled the spectator to "sense the universal tragedy of poverty" ("zum Erfühlen der Allgemeintragik der Armut", Otto König in Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 1: 399). Klöpfer's production became a high point in the socio-political interpretation of *Woyzeck,* as during the following years the reception of Büchner began to shift. Becoming an established author on the German stage, Büchner was no longer a novelty. With the years of political stability setting in, the interpretations of Büchner as a social revolutionary or even a proto-communist were becoming less relevant, and *Woyzeck* was no longer treated as a social drama (Goltschnigg, *Rezeption* 60-61). Thus, in the 1927 production at the Berlin Schillertheater the social aspects of the play, let alone its supposed revolutionary tendencies, were altogether neglected. Instead, the director Jürgen Fehling emphasized the jealousy plot involving Woyzeck, Marie, and the Drum Major (Strudthoff 92).

On the scholarly level, the 1920s saw further attempts at restoring a definitive text of *Woyzeck*. In 1922, Witkowsky's version was challenged by a new edition of Büchner's complete works by Fritz Bergemann (*Georg Büchner: Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*) that became a major reference work on Büchner until the 1960s. Bergemann divided the *Woyzeck* manuscripts into

four different drafts: two preliminary versions (which Werner Lehmann later called H1 and H2), a final but incomplete script (H4), and one sheet containing only two scenes (H3).[108]

In terms of Büchner's artistic reception, the landmark event of lasting importance was Alban Berg's expressionistic atonal opera *Wozzeck*. Inspired by the 1914 production of the play at the Residenztheater in Vienna, Berg began working on his opera the following year. He based the libretto on Franzos's and Landau's renderings of the text – hence the title *Wozzeck* – and continued to work on the score until 1921. The premiere took place at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden in Berlin in December of 1925. While the opera was initially shunned by most critics, it enjoyed enormous success with the audience, and became a sensation in the world press (DeVoto 12). Soon thereafter, Berg's opera entered the repertoire of major opera houses across Europe and remains one of the most popular modernist operas to this day. However, the very popularity of the opera might have contributed to the waning of Büchner as a novelty.

The period of stability in the Weimar Republic was followed by a growing political radicalization in the wake of the stock market crash and its disastrous effects on the German economy. As a result, the theatrical *Zeitstücke* and topical renderings of the German classics were back in demand (Strudthoff 99). The changing mood also concerned the reception of Büchner, whose revolutionary leanings were now emphasized yet again (something similar can be observed in the productions of *Dantons Tod* and, especially, in the 1929 staging by Karl Heinz Martin discussed in the previous chapter). It is in this context that Georg Klaren conceived the script of his *Wozzeck* film in 1932.

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[108] See Werner Lehmann's unfinished historical-critical edition *Georg Büchner. Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* of 1967.

<u>b. Klaren's Early Work</u>

Georg Klaren is the pseudonym of Georg Eugen Moritz Alexander Klaric, who was born in Vienna in 1900. He began his writing career at the age of fifteen, working, among other things, for a film magazine. During his student years at the University of Vienna he wrote and staged three comedies, but also worked as a journalist and defended a dissertation in philosophy. In 1921 he was employed as a dramatic advisor for the Vita-Film AG in Vienna; at the same time, he was politically active and joined the Communist Party of Austria, maintaining his membership until its disbanding in 1934 (according to a curriculum vitae compiled by him in 1946). Upon moving to Berlin in 1925, Klaren became a prolific scriptwriter and also continued his involvement with social activism, co-founding a union for employees of the film industry. In addition, he published articles in the trade press on various issues, including the future of sound film, of which he was an ardent proponent. In 1928 he writes in the *Lichtbildbühne*: "We believe in the speaking film, we welcome it as a new form of artistic expression, which will never supplant silent film, but which will coexist as an equal and equally important factor [...]" (23 June 1928; this quote and above biographical information from Bock, "Klaren" B1-B2).[109] Although this prediction proved to be wrong, it shows that Klaren believed in a connection between the arts of silent and sound film, something which becomes apparent in his *Wozzeck*. As will be discussed below, this sound film retains in a number of significant ways the memory of silent cinema aesthetics in its expressionist incarnation.

Klaren wrote many of his scripts, among them a large number of literary adaptations, in collaboration with Herbert Juttke. They include established literary works, such as Arthur Schnitzler's *Liebelei*, as well as contemporary popular fiction and crime stories, for example by

[109] " Wir glauben an den lauten Film, wir begrüßen ihn als eine neue Ausdrucksform künstlerischen Schaffens, die den stummen Film niemals verdrängen, wohl aber als gleichwertiger und gleich wichtiger Faktor neben ihm bestehen wird [...]."

Edgar Wallace. Towards the end of the 1920s, Klaren and Juttke became increasingly interested in topics of social and political relevance. Their script *Feme* (1927), based on the novel by Vicky Baum, deals with a right-wing extremist's murder of a liberal politician, clearly referring to the assassination of Walther Rathenau in 1922. *Geschlecht in Fesseln* (*Sex in Chains*, 1928) is concerned with the sexual plight of prisoners and contains a plea for more humanity and liberalism in the German penal system. In their script for *§ 173 St.G.B. Blutschande* (*Criminal Code § 137: Incest*, 1929), Klaren and Juttke denounce the antiquated rules concerning the marriage between distant relatives and in-laws.

With the transition to sound film, Klaren, following the overall trend in the industry described in the previous chapter, at first wrote scripts for harmless entertainment films, but soon returned to his socio-political concerns. This is obvious in his debut as both scriptwriter and director, *Kinder vor Gericht*, also known as *Die Sache Robert Schulze* (*Children in Court. The Robert Schulze Case*, 1931), adapted from his own novel of the same title. In a milieu study reminiscent of *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (1929), Klaren presents the tragic story of Robert Schulze, a former Siemens foreman, who lost his job after the war. To supplement his income as a street peddler, he sublets a room in his already crowded apartment to the petty criminal Paule. Schulze's teenage daughter Hete, unhappy with her stepmother, falls for the new lodger, who seduces her. Threatened by Paule and under pressure from the authorities, Hete accuses her own father of molestation. Schulze is arrested and sentenced to 18 months in prison. Although Hete later recants her accusations, Schulze sees suicide as his only resort (synopsis taken from Dahlke 258).

At first, this film, although produced under the aegis of the Liga der Menschenrechte (League of Human Rights), was threatened with censorship. It openly denounced the German

judiciary system and its reliance on presumptive evidence, its use of children's testimonies without scrutiny, and its bias against the lower classes. A campaign in the press finally made the release of an abridged version of the film possible. In terms of artistic achievement, Klaren's debut received only lukewarm reviews, as for example in the *Filmwoche*: “Klaren the director is weaker than Klaren the scriptwriter; his directing sometimes seems awkward...” (qtd. in Dahlke 258).[110] However, the content and message of the film was applauded. In his report on “Die verflossene Tonfilmsaison” (“The past sound film season”), Siegfried Kracauer praises films that educate the people about “their human or inhuman circumstances” (“ihre menschlichen oder unmenschlichen Verhältnisse”) and points to Klaren's film as a positive example (qtd. in Bock “Klaren” B2). The *Rote Fahne* even sees in this film a propagation of “the inevitability of the proletarian revolution” (“die Unvermeidlichkeit der proletarischen Revolution”), apparently referring to the closing words which accuse society of inaction concerning social and judicial injustice (qtd. in Bock “Klaren” B2). Although this particular conclusion appears to be somewhat exaggerated, Klaren's script for *Wozzeck*, which was written at this time, displays a similar concern for the socially underprivileged who are at the mercy of the authorities.

The next film directed by Klaren likewise dealt with the plight of lower classes, again with a sexual twist, so to speak. *Ballhaus Goldener Engel* (*Golden Angel Ballroom*, 1932) shows how the young unemployed drift into crime and the erotic underworld. Upon its release in the summer of 1932, the film was prohibited for minors, becoming one of the first films to be prohibited under the Nazi regime in the following year. The ruling of the chief inspection authority for film (“Film-Oberprüfstelle”) argued sarcastically that *Ballhaus Goldener Engel* might as well be dubbed *Deutschland ein Bordell* (*Germany, a Brothel*), as it glorified crime and

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[110] “Der Regisseur Klaren ist schwächer als der Manuskriptverfasser Klaren, seine Regie wirkt stellenweise hilflos...”

was detrimental to public morality. After the ban on *Kinder vor Gericht* Klaren did not work as a director during the entire period of Nazi rule.

Yet, Klaren continued to be active in the German film industry, reverting to the more humble role of the scriptwriter. He commented on this transition in his 1937 essay "Der deutsche Film und der Autor" ("German Film and the Author"). Explaining his return to the typewriter, Klaren openly admits his lack of directing talent. He proceeds with ritual praise for the National Socialist state, affirming cinema's mission to address the "glorious German nation" in its entirety. Very much in tune with the official ideology, Klaren goes on to dismiss "liberalistic liberties" ("liberalistische Freiheiten") and "fruitlessly aestheticizing l'art-pour-l'artisms" ("fruchtlos ästhetisierende l'art-pour-l'artismen") that fail to engage the broader audience (qtd. in Bock "Klaren" B3-B4).[111] Needless to say, the sincerity of such statements, made in order to remain in the profession or simply to survive, is more than doubtful. But perhaps one can see in Klaren's words something beyond his obvious surrender to the pressures of a totalitarian regime. For a socially minded artist, it is indeed important to find a balance between message and style, since the message and the ability to address the people are of primary importance. A replay of these concerns is visible in Klaren's post-war production of *Wozzeck.* Another important concern is what to do in a situation when the people, either because they are deceived or coerced, support the system against which the artist may personally object.

Klaren chose a path that can be described as mild collaboration with the regime. Like most of the Third Reich's cinematic production, his scripts were predominantly aimed at light entertainment. Some of them represented adaptations of musical and literary works. For

[111] "Der deutsche Staat ist ein nationalsozialistischer Staat, und die deutsche Kunst hat zu erkennen, daß es nicht nur die eine oder die andere Kategorie von Menschen gibt, sondern daß sie für das ganze Volk da zu sein hat, für das herrliche deutsche Volk in seiner ganzen Vielfalt..." ("The German state is a national socialist state, and German arts have to acknowledge that there is not just one or another category of people, but that they have to be there for the entire nation, for the glorious German people in all its variety..."

example, *Der Schritt vom Wege* (*The False Step*, 1939) was based on Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest,* and became a big success under the direction of Gustaf Gründgens. Klaren also worked actively in the criminal and spy genre, but here, at least on two occasions, he paid more open tribute to the official ideology (Bock, "Klaren" B4). The spy adventure film *Mit versiegelter Order* (*Under Sealed Orders*, 1937), directed by Karl Anton, deals with the acquisition of raw materials in Central Asia and presents honest Germans faced with international corruption and betrayal. (It appears that the film was sufficiently neutral politically, as it was released in the United States in 1938). Another film based on Klaren's idea, Arthur Maria Rabenalt's *Achtung! Feind hört mit!* (*Beware! The Enemy is Listening!* 1940), was a spy thriller set in an armament factory. It was more heavily laced with propaganda and, in addition to exposing the subversive activities of British and French agents, emphasized every citizen's responsibility to support the nation's cause. Summarizing this idea, a contemporary reviewer remarks that factory workers "stand in the first line of the national front every minute they are working as well as in their private life" (qtd. in Giesen 157). Towards the end of the war, as German film production was dwindling, Klaren wrote fewer scripts and worked for the *Wochenschau* newsreel instead. Then, as soon as the war was over, he became involved in re-building the infrastructure for film production in Berlin. His involvement with the fallen Nazi regime was obviously considered too insignificant to bar him from this activity.

c. First Post-War Films in East Germany

Although the German film infrastructure, including the UFA-studios at Babelsberg near Berlin, was severely damaged through both bombings and scavenging, film production was resumed soon after the war. Especially in Germany's Soviet Zone, a good working relationship

developed between the occupying authorities and film professionals (Mückenberger, "Zeit" 12). The restoration of the Tobis Ateliers in Berlin already began at the end of May 1945 and work commenced there in the summer, although at first it was confined to the dubbing of Soviet movies (Schenk 14). Plans for German film productions soon followed. The *Filmaktiv,* a group consisting of six members who saw themselves as an anti-fascist nucleus of a new, independent film industry, was founded in November of the same year (Wolf 248). They proposed producing eleven films, among which was *Wozzeck*. Their plans were realized with the founding of the *Deutsche Film AG* (DEFA) under the license of the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD) on May 17, 1946.

While DEFA was an independent production company (distribution was reserved to the Soviet company Sovexportfilm), the new authorities in the Eastern Zone did set an ideological framework. The re-emerging German cinema had to be first and foremost anti-fascist and had to condemn German militarism. As Colonel Tulpanow of the SMAD put it: "Cinema as an art for the masses has to become a strong and mighty weapon against reaction and for a deeply rooted democracy, against war and militarism and for peace and friendship of all people around the world" (qtd. in Wolf 257).[112] The new East German film also had to be sympathetic to the cause of Communism, but a strict ideological agenda was not enforced. Many of the DEFA founders, just like the members of the earlier *Filmaktiv*, had a communist past anyway and had been active in proletarian film production during the Weimar Republic (Wolf 248). For this reason the filmmakers and the authorities easily found common ground in the condemnation of fascism, and in the notion that film could be used as a tool to re-think the tragic legacy of the Third Reich and the war-time devastation. Thus, most early DEFA films deal with Germany's recent history and

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[112] "Der Film als Massenkunst muß eine scharfe und mächtige Waffe gegen die Reaktion und für die in die Tiefe wachsende Demokratie, gegen den Krieg und den Militarismus und für Frieden und Freundschaft aller Völker der ganzen Welt werden."

its impact on the present situation in the so-called *Trümmerfilme* 'rubble films'. Among these was the very first DEFA feature film, Wolgang Staudte's *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (*Murderers Among Us*, 1946), a film which serves as an excellent example for the aesthetic approach of many early post-war productions.

As far as aesthetics were concerned, filmmakers in the Soviet zone were largely free of the constraints of socialist realism, partly because "realism" was associated with the official art of the Third Reich. (It was not until 1954 that socialist realism became the official doctrine of art in the GDR [Pflaum, *Film* 155]). Rooting out the Nazi legacy was a priority for the Soviet administration, as well as for the heads of DEFA. As Hans Klering, the company's first director, formulated it in his speech during the founding ceremony: "In the production of feature films, one of our most important artistic tasks is to overcome the pseudo-realism of the Goebbels era" (qtd. in Brandlmeier "Caligari" 143).[113] The determination to abandon the basic rules of filmmaking of the previous twelve years resulted in a certain loss of orientation, which, as Thomas Brandlmeier points out, is reflected in a number of early post-war film titles – for example *Irgendwo in Berlin*, *Film ohne Titel*, *Zwischen Gestern und Morgen* (*Somewhere in Berlin*, 1946; *Film Without A Title*, 1947/48; *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow*, 1947). "One foothold in this vacuum was the return to acknowledged values that had once existed in Germany. In cinema, this was expressionist film, which had greatly contributed to the international reputation of the German cinematic tradition," concludes Brandlmeier ("Caligari"

[113] "Bei der Gestaltung der Spielfilme sehen wir es als eine unserer wichtigsten künstlerischen Aufgaben an, den Pseudorealismus der Goebbelschen Ära zu überwinden." Moreover, Klering calls for a healthy mixture of politically engaging films and lighter entertainment: "We know, our people need serious films, which facilitate a focus on their genuine and true virtues and liberate them from remnants of a fascist ideology; but there is an equally strong demand for entertainment [...]" (qtd. in Brandlmeier "Caligari" 143). ("Wir wissen, unser Volk braucht ernste Filme, die ihm die Besinnung auf seine echten und wahren Tugenden erleichtern, und es von den Resten der faschistischen Ideologie befreien, aber es verlangt in ebenso starkem Maße nach Unterhaltung [...]").

139).[114] For this reason, a number of German filmmakers revived the aesthetics of Weimar cinema and expressionism. Because expressionism was so conspicuously non-Nazi it was tolerated by the Soviets despite the overt anti-modernism of the socialist realist agenda that artists had to follow back in the USSR.

Wolfgang Staudte, the director of *Die Mörder sind unter uns*, was among those filmmakers who felt the need to look back to pre-war aesthetics in search of an adequate cinematic language. His colleague Kurt Maetzig describes this approach:

> Wolfgang Staudte, for example, felt that he could not express the strength, depth, and uncanny quality that he wanted to express in his *Murderers* with the sleek, conventional, forms of German film of the fascist epoch. It is not a coincidence that he fell back on expressionist forms in his search for suitable forms, that the toppled and tilted perspective, the idiosyncratic shot and the expressionist lighting – for example the unnatural illumination of the nocturnal ruins – and partly even the acting had direct ties to the expressionist, artistically highly developed school of German silent film – because the academic sleekness of the previous cinematic epoch did not comply with the riveting plea that emanated from his film. (Maetzig)[115]

Like most early DEFA films, Staudte's *Mörder* concerned German guilt and tried to find ways to deal with it. Initially, Staudte offered his script for production in the western zones, but it was

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[114] "Ein Haltepunkt in diesem Vakuum war die Rückbesinnung auf anerkannte Werte, die es in Deutschland einmal gab. Im Kino war das der expressionistische Film, der international das große Renommee der deutschen Kinotradition ausmachte". As I pointed out in chapter 1, the term "expressionism" is often used too indiscriminately to describe German film of the 1920s. In the following discussion, I will try to distinguish, where possible, between Weimar cinema in general and properly expressionist aesthetics, although there are certainly numerous overlaps.

[115] "Wolfgang Staudte zum Beispiel fühlte, daß er das Starke, Tiefe, Ungeheure, das er in seinen "Mördern" aussagen wollte, nicht in den konventionellen, glatten Formen des deutschen Films der faschistischen Epoche aussagen konnte. Es ist kein Zufall, daß er bei der Suche nach den geeigneten Formen auf expressionistische Formen zurückgriff, daß die gestürzte und gekippte Perspektive, die eigenwillige Kameraeinstellung und expressionistische Lichtführung, zum Beispiel die unnaturalistische Ausleuchtung der nächtlichen Ruinen und zum Teil sogar die Schauspielerführung direkt bei der expressionistischen künstlerisch hochentwickelten deutschen Stummfilmschule anknüpften, denn die akademische Glätte der vorangegangenen Filmperiode entsprach nicht dem aufwühlenden Appell, der von seinem Film ausging."

rejected. The Soviet administration accepted the script only on the condition that Staudte alter the ending. The original script ends with an act of revenge when a former Nazi officer is murdered by his former subordinate, the witness of his war crimes. The Soviets asked Staudte to substitute this ending with an appeal to find war criminals and bring them to justice, arguably in order not to promote vigilantism in dealing with Nazi-era crimes. Otherwise, no alterations were required of Staudte, and the film set the tone for the post-war expressionist revival. Thus, this film also serves as an example of the mixture of ideological direction and relative artistic freedom in the early DEFA productions.

Staudte had started filming before the official founding of DEFA, so the company's new executives watched his work in the studio as part of the founding ceremony. *Die Mörder sind unter uns* tells the story of two war returnees and their life in the ruins of Berlin. Surgeon Dr. Mertens, traumatized by the horrors of war and destruction, meets Susanne Wallner, a concentration camp survivor. Her courage and vitality begin to heal Mertens's wrath and depression, but he is periodically afflicted by tormenting memories of a war crime he witnessed. When he sees that the person responsible for this crime, his former commanding officer captain Brückner, is living comfortably and complacently without a shred of remorse, Mertens plans to avenge the death of innocent civilians and kill Brückner.[116] At the last moment, Wallner is able to convince Mertens that taking justice into one's own hands is not an answer, and Brückner is brought before the court of law.

Staudte's narrative and visual leitmotifs represent contrasts and parallels, which are apparent already in the opening sequence. The first shot shows a steel helmet lying on a pile of rubble; as the camera cranes upward, a wooden cross next to the mound reveals that this is

[116] The depiction of Brückner is an astonishingly accurate projection of the typical West German *Wirtschaftswunder* profiteer: making the best of an unfavorable situation, he blots out the past twelve years and enjoys his newfound comfort in a bourgeois idyll, with no intentions to question or examine his, and his country's, past.

actually a makeshift grave. Finally a panorama of the bombed cityscape full of ruins comes into view. Some children are playing in the sunshine and between them is the dark figure of Dr. Mertens slowly making his way through the rubble. The scene is accompanied by inappropriate, cheerful, jazzy piano music which, as it turns out, is coming from a dance club amidst the ruins. In the following low angle shot, an overcrowded train cuts diagonally through the image, and the music changes to a pompous orchestral score as if welcoming the approaching train, which likewise creates an ironic dissonance with the picture of massive destruction in the aftermath of Germany's military defeat. A cut to a high-angle moving camera shot shows the city from the perspective of the arriving refugees and returnees on the roof of the train (here, the film acquires a documentary quality). Subsequently, the camera focuses on Wallner, who is in the arriving crowd, setting up a parallel structure of her story and Mertens's. As Wallner walks through devastated Berlin, Staudte presents the contrast between past and present, and stereotypes and reality, by juxtaposing a shot of a lopsided poster on a wall showing a photograph of Nuremberg captioned "Das schöne Deutschland" ("Beautiful Germany") with the very real ruins of Berlin. The parallel sequence goes back to the now-drunk Mertens, who is seen staggering upstairs to Wallner's apartment, which he occupies. This scene has a distinct expressionist-cinema look with its high angle and the stark contrasts of light and shadow in the staircase. The presentation of Mertens's neighbors as types has likewise an expressionistic tinge: a nosy woman in a bathrobe, a smartly dressed and polite dentist, and a slightly eccentric gentleman who turns out to be a "scientific" fortune teller and fits the mold of the crazy scientists that populated Weimar cinema.

As the stories of Mertens and Wallner converge, Staudte repeatedly evokes the image of shattered existences. Wallner sees her reflection in a broken mirror in front of her house, a

woman brings broken glasses to Wallner's friend Mondschein, the optometrist, and finally we see the famous image of Wallner and Mertens looking out at the ruins of Berlin through the broken glass of her apartment windows.

1a. Shattered existences in Staudte's *Die Mörder sind unter uns*: Susanne Wallner

1b. Wallner and Mertens

Another important visual device – and part of the contrast leitmotif – is the use of light and shadow, also a hallmark of Weimar cinema in general and expressionism in particular. The lighting is often conspicuously unnatural, especially in outdoor scenes. For example, when Mertens runs after Wallner after an argument and catches up with her on a deserted street, Staudte presents their two illuminated figures in a very long shot, standing out against the mainly dark rubble and the ruins, partly lit in an atmospheric glow.[117] In this scene, Staudte seemingly falls back on melodramatic standards that are inconsistent with the rest of the film. As Mertens and Wallner reconcile, they walk towards the camera, brightly lit, with ethereal smiles on their faces, and accompanied by sentimental orchestra music. This shot could be taken straight from a conventional Third Reich melodrama if it were not for the eerie background of the ruinous wasteland.

The use of human shadows is a specifically significant device to underline dramatic tension or turning points. When Mertens comes home to Susanne after performing an emergency operation on a child, his shadow enters the room before him; it is reflected on the ceiling and therefore appears to be upside down. What might seem ominous in a different situation is used here to convey that a turn for the better has taken place: Mertens changed when he found the strength to overcome his traumatic fears and saved the dying child. Now, as a new – and almost healed – man, he is able to declare his love to Wallner. In the final sequence of the film and its dramatic climax, shadows again play an important role. Once more Staudte employs visual parallels and contrasts in his narrative. On Christmas Eve, Mertens finally sets out to avenge the execution of the many civilians that had been ordered by his commander Brückner exactly three years before in Poland. He finds Brückner in his factory, addressing his employees

[117] The unnaturalness of this setting is also owed to the fact that Staudte chose to create his own artificial rubble scenery in a studio, although he had a city full of real ruins right on his doorstep (Shandley 196).

with an uplifting Christmas speech. Here, for the first time, the spectator witnesses a visualization of Mertens's war memories, which were rendered only through sound effects in the earlier scenes of the film. As Brückner speaks of peace, Mertens recalls soldiers herding civilians for the execution, which is carried out while Brückner and his comrades sing carols around the Christmas tree. These contrasting sounds and images are followed by another parallel montage showing Wallner reading about these same memories in Mertens's diary. As she reads his final note – "Brückner is alive! The murderers are among us" ("Brückner lebt! Die Mörder sind unter uns") – she realizes Mertens's plan and sets out to find him. Meanwhile, Mertens is confronting Brückner in the factory. During this entire scene Mertens himself is not seen, but his menacing shadow is looming on the wall next to Brückner, who is positioned frontally in a medium shot. As Brückner grasps Mertens's intentions and steps backwards in fear, he throws a smaller shadow on the wall. Eventually he is completely swallowed by Mertens's gigantic and overpowering shadow.

2. Menacing shadow in Staudte's *Die Mörder sind unter uns.*

Wallner's arrival breaks the tension, and now Mertens's face is seen for the first time in this sequence; in the following shot Brückner, relieved, leans back on the wall as Mertens's shadow is withdrawn. The film ends with the superimposition of Brückner behind bars yelling "But I am innocent!" ("Ich bin doch unschuldig") with images of his victims, war veterans, and a large military cemetery with rows of identical crosses.

Analogies to Weimar cinema abound in this film, both in terms of evoking features of typical Weimar genres, such as the *Kammerspielfilm* and the street film (Shandley 27), and in visual quotations from Weimar films, including *Der letzte Mann* by Murnau (1924) and *Dreyfuß* by Oswald (1930) (Mückenberger, "Zeit" 29). The references to Weimar and expressionism serve as a gesture of clear dissociation from Nazi aesthetics and are meant to re-legitimize German film. Typical expressionist stylistic devices such as extreme camera angles were perceived as degenerate during the Third Reich, and now was the time to "make up for all that had been forbidden," as Staudte's friend and cinematographer Friedl Behn Grund put it (qtd. in Mückenberger, "DEFA" 27). In addition to these ideologically driven motivations, turning to the legacy of the 1920s was justified by the fact that, ever since the great success of *Dr. Caligari,* expressionistic cinematography and mise en scène had been used as a means to convey a tormented state of mind (Dr. Mertens's war trauma in this particular case). As we shall see further, Georg Klaren's *Wozzeck* serves as another conspicuous example of the use of expressionist aesthetics.

2. Georg Klaren's *Wozzeck*

a. The Weimar Legacy

After years of backstage work as a scriptwriter, Georg Klaren took an active part in rebuilding the post-war German film industry. In November 1945, he attended the meeting at

Berlin's Hotel Adlon where German filmmakers voiced their ideas for new approaches to cinema. While the meeting's participants agreed on what the new German film should not look like (a continuation of Nazi cinema), their opinions diverged on what it should look like.[118] The film and theater director Herbert Maisch suggested a turn back to the classics, whereas the dramatist Friedrich Wolf called for film that offered a critical view both on the present and the recent past (Wolf 248). Georg Klaren argued against hasty second-rate productions put together under the motto "cheap, cheaper, cheapest, preferably with few people and few sets" (qtd. in Mückenberger, "Zeit" 26). Instead, he advocated the turn towards German expressionism, "German cinema's very own domain" ("[die] ureigenste Domäne des deutschen Films") (qtd. in Mückenberger, "Zeit" 26). His *Wozzeck* was indeed going to serve as an embodiment of this approach.

When Klaren became DEFA's senior script editor in March of 1946, he set out to finally realize his *Wozzeck* project, which he had conceived back in 1932. In keeping with his idea of building on expressionist foundations, he recruited the help of professionals from the Weimar era. His set designer was Hermann Warm, one of the three architects for *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari,* a paradigmatic film of the epoch which, among other things, had established the convention of employing expressionist aesthetics to portray mental derangement or strange visions. Another Weimar film artist working for Klaren was Walter Schulze-Mittendorff, who had been a sculptor in Fritz Lang's art department for the filming of *Metropolis* (1927), arguably the last and certainly the most grandiose expressionist production. Schulze-Mittendorff, who was responsible for the futuristic design of the robot in *Metropolis*, had thereafter worked as a costume designer. The artistic advisor for *Wozzeck* was the famous actor and director Paul

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[118] "Einig sind wir uns darüber, wie der neue deutsche Film nicht aussehen soll" (director Werner Hochbaum, qtd. in Mückenberger, "Zeit" 26).

Wegener, a veritable patriarch of German cinema.[119] He had begun his career in 1913 with *Der Student von Prag* (*The Student of Prague*, 1913), one of the outstanding films of the pre-World War I era, and in 1920 he directed a very successful expressionist remake of his own earlier production of *Der Golem.* The input from these artists, together with Klaren's agenda for the revival of expressionism, resonated with the proto-expressionist and modernist potential of Büchner's original text.

In terms of cinematography, *Wozzeck* is clearly inspired by the Weimar tradition. It appears that in shooting it the cameraman Bruno Mondi tried to "forget" his work during the Nazi years, when he had followed a quasi-realistic agenda in films such as *Jud Süß* (*Jew Suess*, 1940), *Der große König* (*The Great King*, 1942), and *Kolberg* (*Burning Hearts*, 1945), all three directed by Veit Harlan. In the Harlan films, monuments of Nazi propaganda film, cinematography is as unobtrusive as possible, angles are straight, the editing is smooth, shot distances show little variance, and camera movement serves mostly for reframing the movements of actors. In contrast to this style, *Wozzeck* is full of extreme high and low angles, especially striking being the frequent use of canted angles (also called off-angles or Dutch tilts). The only part of the film with exclusively straight angles is the frame story, which was added to Büchner's original text by Klaren. In the frame story, Georg Büchner appears as a character in the film, as one of the medical students who examine Wozzeck's body in the dissecting room. In these brightly lit surroundings with their clean lines, Büchner tells the disturbing story of Wozzeck – presented in a series of flashbacks – and also provides commentary on the unfolding action. Klaren punctuates the remarks of Büchner the character with quotations extracted from other dramatic works and actual letters by Büchner. Thus Klaren underscores the reliability of his

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[119] Wegener is not credited in the film, but his name appears in the contract with DEFA (Mückenberger, "Zeit" 27).

narrator, and invests him with the authority for his interpretation that is complemented by the straightforward mise en scène and cinematography.

A stark contrast to the aesthetics of the frame story is found in the scenes portraying Wozzeck's visions. All of them are overlaid with a white rotating haze that lingers for the duration of the scene, both marking it as a special entity and illustrating the fluidity between reality and vision in Wozzeck's mind. One of such scenes shows Wozzeck and his comrade Andres cutting sticks by the lake. The uncanny musical score in the first shot befits Wozzeck's remark about nature as an uninviting, hostile, and strange environment. The second shot of the scene is taken from Wozzeck's point of view and already presents part of his vision. It shows the bark of a tree that looks like a large distorted face, resembling Edvard Munch's quintessentially expressionist painting *The Scream*. The heightened artifice of this and most other natural settings in the film was quite intentional and even programmatic on Klaren's part, as he himself admits:

> In times of renewal and reflection it is advisable to go back to the roots. [...] Büchner's swamp is a swamp but it is also more than a swamp, because this swamp stands for the entire social structure of his times. That is why such a swamp cannot be found anywhere in Germany as a real motif, as in the case of the trees for Fritz Lang's film about the Nibelungs. These trees had to be constructed. Also in *Wozzeck*, there will be no real swamp, no real tree, no real flower. [...] Single things have to become symbols for the whole. (qtd. in Bock "Klaren" B5/B6) [120]

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[120] In Zeiten der Erneuerung und der Besinnung ist es angebracht, zu den Wurzeln der Entwicklung hinabzusteigen. [...] Büchners Sumpf ist ein Sumpf und ist mehr als ein Sumpf, denn mit diesem Sumpf ist die gesamte soziale Struktur seiner Zeit gemeint. Deshalb ist solch ein Sumpf in ganz Deuschland ebenso wenig als reales Motiv zu finden wie für Fritz Lang die Bäume seines Nibelungenfilms zu finden waren. Diese Bäume mußten gebaut werden. Auch im Wozzeck wird es keinen realen Sumpf, keinen realen Baum, keine reale Blume geben. [...] Es müssen Einzeldinge zu Symbolen für das Ganze werden.

In addition to the conspicuously expressionistic mise en scène, here and elsewhere Klaren employs the extremes in lighting that were another common feature of expressionist cinema. In this particular scene, Wozzeck is overlit with shadow patterns from leaves and branches moving across his body. Similar lighting is used in another vision scene towards the end, when, through the sounds of nature, he hears the words “Stab dead” (“Stich tot”). In this scene and in many other instances involving Wozzeck's visions and also thoughts, his face is shown in a medium close-up or close-up from a slightly off-angle (either a high or somewhat low angle and often a little bit canted), while his head is positioned at the bottom of the frame.

3a. Wozzeck's world: Vision

3b. Wozzeck's world: Thoughts

Even outside the vision episodes, Wozzeck is usually presented in canted angles, creating an impression that both he and the world he lives in are off-kilter, unstable, and unreliable.

3c. Wozzeck's world: Askew

There is one conspicuous instance when Wozzeck is shown in a standard shot: from a straight frontal angle at a medium distance. This happens to be during the only moment of true

happiness in Wozzeck's life, when he and Marie, still carefree lovers, are on the Ferris wheel at the fairground. They are both happy, beaming with joy, and Wozzeck even says: "Wonderful world, ain't it?" ("Schöne Welt, gell?"). Yet their fate is turning like the wheel they are on; dark shadows run across their bodies, and behind them everything is in rapid motion. The fairground was a prominent topos in the Weimar film, related to highly innovative camera movement. As I discussed in Chapter 2, in such scenes – which pay tribute to cinema's fairground roots – film itself was demonstrably turned into an attraction. The same is true of the fairground scene in *Wozzeck*, where everything is about movement and the play of shadow and light that make up the very essence of film. The scene opens with an organ grinder, who moves his body in unison with the rotating motion of his arm, and a twirling ballet dancer and her shadow. The Drum Major walks into the frame; he is looking for Marie and spots her and Wozzeck on a merry-go-round. He then follows them as they board the Ferris wheel that offers the quintessential fairground shot playing with movement, shadow, and light. The Ferris wheel also serves as a symbolic background at the turning point of Wozzeck and Marie's relationship. In order to impress the young woman, the Drum Major stops Wozzeck in the crowd and publically humiliates him in front of Marie. A low angle medium shot presents the Drum Major towering in front of the wheel, which rotates around his head in the background. He then gives Wozzeck a harsh admonition, which produces the desired effect as Marie looks down in shame for Wozzeck and then glances at the Drum Major with admiration. From this point on, Marie is lost for Wozzeck and her attention turns to the Drum Major.

In the final minutes of the fairground scene, shadows again play a prominent role. Realizing that Marie has left the performance of the "astronomical donkey," Wozzeck leaves the showman's tent. Astonished and lost, he stares at the fairground crowd standing in front of the

tent in such a way that the shadow cast by the statue of a donkey by the entrance appears to be Wozzeck's own shadow, as if to further ridicule him and his position (both a “dumb-ass” and a cuckold wearing horns).

4. Animalization of Wozzeck

The two following shots reveal a booth offering masks for sale and a big white screen with a shadow play in which a big horned devil descends onto a much smaller female figure. A cross-cut to Marie and the Drum Major presents a similar movement, as the Drum Major runs after Marie and embraces her. The action is suddenly transferred to the forest, where the couple is bathed in bright sunshine. This creates a stark contrast to the darkness of the previous sequence and also represents a conspicuous breach in continuity, since the fairground scene takes place at night. As Marie oscillates between the desire to give herself to the Drum Major and bouts of bad conscience, shadow patterns of leaves reflecting her inner struggle move across her brightly lit body. Meanwhile, Wozzeck is forlorn at the fairground, calling in vain for Marie amidst rotating lights and shadows, frightening masks, and general debauchery. This fast cut sequence of 16 shots – none of them longer than 6 seconds – turns into a somewhat surrealistic montage of

kissing couples, masks, large moving heads of wooden animals, and dancing shadows. Eventually, Wozzeck is surrounded by a gyrating ring of dancers in animal masks as he keeps turning around in confusion, until he finally charges towards the camera screaming "Marie!" This dynamic and dramatically orchestrated scene is certainly the closest to Weimar cinema both in terms of setting and cinematic style.

In addition to the fairground topos, Klaren takes up another hallmark motif from the Weimar era when he introduces the character of the deranged scientist. Overly exaggerated, grotesquely typified characters are often found in expressionist cinema. The protagonist's tormentors in Büchner's original text – the Captain and the doctor – easily fit this mold and are interpreted as such by Klaren. The doctor is presented in the frame story as a tall figure with gray hair and a professorial goatee; he wears a pince-nez, which is used as a visual aid as well as a prop that allows impressive gestures.[121] In the following scenes involving the doctor, his typifying is even more exaggerated and borders on caricature and the grotesque. Instead of the pince-nez, he now wears extravagant square glasses and a long black robe. In his demeanor, appearance and costume, complete with a tall top hat and a cane, Wozzeck's doctor bears a striking resemblance to Dr. Caligari from Wiene's celebrated film.

[121] Spectacles and, especially their outdated varieties, often serve as satirical markers of upper classes and educated elites. While these optical devices are meant to correct vision, their pretentious owners tend to be either blind to reality or intentionally distort the truth. The most relevant example of this nature is found in Sergei Eisenstein's *Bronenosets Potyomkin* (*Battleship Potemkin*, 1925), where a pince-nez is a conspicuous attribute of the ship's doctor who, instead of caring for the well-being of the crew, sides with the oppressive commanders. He uses his pince-nez to examine the meat that is obviously rotten (the famous naturalistic close-up shows it teeming with maggots), but the doctor declares it safe to eat. Later, when the doctor is thrown overboard by the rebelling sailors, all that is left of him is his pince-nez dangling from the rigging. This pince-nez of Potemkin's doctor stands as a striking symbol of science and education in the service of the Old Regime, a theme that is also central for Klaren's film.

5a. Greetings from Dr. Caligari: the original

5b. Greetings from Dr. Caligari: Wozzeck's mad doctor.

The doctor is portrayed through a combination of macabre and ridiculous features, which are based on Büchner's original text but also presented in an exaggerated form by Klaren. The chaotic interior of his office, stuffed with all kinds of gadgetry, resembles an alchemist's laboratory rather then a doctor's office. The doctor is occupied with odd explorations, such as

studying the secretions of his "sneezing organ" (he sneezes into a handkerchief and examines his own mucus under a magnifying glass). He utters pure nonsense, for example when claiming to have "the left molar of an infusorium" (i.e. of a single-cell organism) under his microscope. But the main focus of the doctor's research is Wozzeck, whom he exploits for human experiments. As has been pointed out on many occasions, the doctor is thus presented as a forerunner of the unscrupulous Nazi physicians who subjected concentration camp inmates to their cruel experimentation (Mückenberger, "Zeit" 27; Horak 141; Habel 700; Pinkert 61). The dark side of the doctor is no longer caricatural but rather – again in the vein of Caligari – demonic, a quality that is underscored by low angles and sinister shadows on his face. These effects contribute to the image of the deranged alchemist who will stop at nothing to achieve his goals. The experimentation scene ends with the exalted doctor raving about his "new theory"; he raises his hands with a blissful upward gaze and exclaims: "My fame, I will be famous, I will be immortal!" ("mein Ruhm, ich werde berühmt, ich werde unsterblich!").

To sum up, in terms of mise en scène and cinematic aesthetics, Klaren's film heavily relies on the legacy of Weimar cinema in general and expressionist film in particular. Nevertheless, comparing *Wozzeck* to the two cinematic versions of Büchner's *Danton* produced during the Weimar era, one cannot help but notice one significant difference. Both *Danton* films display, at least in parts, a distinct theatrical quality, which is discernible in a number of early Weimar films and early sound films as well (see chapters 1 and 2). While *Wozzeck* is not completely devoid of theatrical borrowings and references (they will be addressed later in this chapter), Klaren's film is conceived and constructed from a cinematic point of view. The reasons for this can be found both in the nature of the textual source and in the technical developments of cinema.

b. Camera Movement and Editing

Throughout the 1930s sound film technology continuously improved, slowly reversing the setbacks in camera mobility caused by the introduction of sound. One of the major problems in the early talkies was the interference of noise with sound recording. These deficiencies were eliminated or reduced in the early thirties, for example by improved sound stages and the use of the more quiet incandescent lights instead of arc lamps. The very restricted acting space was broadened by replacing stationary microphones with highly directional ones that allowed actors to move about more freely.[122] Most importantly, the camera was liberated from the soundproof box, which limited its movement to pans of no more than 30 degrees on either side (Salt, "Sound" 38). Now covered by a blimp instead, the camera was able to move freely in all directions again. At the same time, sound editing techniques improved as sound editors realized the importance of the "dialogue cutting point"; i.e. the point in a dialogue where a cut is least noticeable and interfering, as the last syllable of the last word is still being spoken by one interlocutor (Salt, "Sound" 38).[123] The simultaneous development of image editing techniques and standards, such as cutting on movement and the 180-degree rule, also promoted the smoother flow of images. The abandonment of the sound-on-disc system, which left sound-on-film as the superior method, allowed for easier editing, causing a drop in shot lengths and an increase of cutting rates. By the mid-thirties, editing styles returned to the late silent film level in the United States, with the average shot length of only about 5 seconds (versus the average shot length of 10.8 seconds in the early sound years) (Salt, "Sound" 39 and "Film Style" 174, 214). In Europe, where a tendency to longer takes was predominant, the fluctuation in pace was not as noticeable.

[122] For a more complete account of sound technology innovations see Altman 47-48.
[123] The disruptive effect of cutting at a different point during the dialogue is quite obvious, for example, in Behrendt's *Danton* (see chapter 2).

However, the average shot length did increase with the transition to sound and subsided in the latter half of the thirties, at least in Germany (Salt, “Film Style” 216).

The major breakthrough in sound recording came only after the war with the switch from optical sound recording to magnetic recording. Developed during the war – “thanks in part to German wartime technology” – the perfection of magnetic recording techniques meant “a quantum leap forward” for sound film (Altman 48). Magnetic recording was not only easier and cheaper, it also used lighter and more mobile equipment, liberating both camera and actors even more from previously existing restrictions.[124] *Wozzeck* was the first film in Europe that was recorded using magnetic sound exclusively (Wolf 249). Thus, Klaren had at his disposal state-of-the art equipment that offered more cinematographic freedom. However, he did not take full advantage of the mobile camera, relying instead on the improved editing techniques in order to create a fast-paced narrative. With an average shot length of 6.94 seconds (my calculation), *Wozzeck* is on par with late silent film in Europe (6.6 seconds from 1924-1929, Salt, *Technology* 174).

In terms of camera movement, Klaren's cinematographer Bruno Mondi uses mostly small and unobtrusive pans or zooms to reframe characters, or tracking shots to follow them (this somewhat anemic camera movement can be seen as virtually the only legacy of the straightforward realistic style of Mondi's Nazi era films). Occasionally, a more eye-catching fast pan is employed to direct the viewer's attentions to a particular character or object, but usually this task is carried out by cuts. In most scenes, the screen space is small and highly dissected, with many short takes from a close distance. The frame story constitutes an exception, as it is often staged in depth and more camera movement is used to move from one character to another.

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[124] As with the introduction of sound per se, most theaters did not catch up with the new technology for a while. The lack of technical equipment to play back magnetic sound in theaters delayed its breakthrough by decades. In the meantime, filmmakers would record in magnetic sound, but used optical sound for distribution prints (Altman 48).

It begins with a long take showing the door of the dissection-room that slowly opens to introduce the frame story. The camera tracks in on a group of students gathered around their professor examining Wozzeck's body on a bier. After a slight circular movement the camera stops, framing the doctor and his students at a medium shot length. In the background, at the other end of the large arched room, is a character who turns out to represent Georg Büchner himself, positioned with his back towards the group, looking out a window. As a debate about Wozzeck ensues, Büchner steps up to the table and joins the arrangement of students around it. The confrontation between him and the doctor is rendered through both cuts and zooms, with zooms carrying more significance. They are used to highlight important statements, such as Büchner's words: “You don't have to be a poet to feel the tragedy of human poverty and the comedy of human justice” (“Man muss kein Dichter sein, um die Tragödie der menschlichen Armut und die Komödie der menschlichen Gerechtigkeit zu fühlen”). The only close-ups in this scene show Wozzeck's face from the high-angle point of view of Büchner looking down on the autopsy table. A similar style of filming prevails in other segments of the frame story as well. The conversation between Büchner, the doctor, and other students is rendered with few cuts, mostly medium shots, occasional pans to follow a character's movement in the large room, and zooms to underscore pronouncements made by Büchner. This somewhat “clinical” style of the frame story set in the anatomy hall clearly separates it from the rest of the film in visual terms.

Most of the other scenes are cut much faster and take place in rather small and confined indoor spaces; accordingly, shot distances tend to be short, with an extraordinarily high number of close-ups. Two sequences differ from this pattern in that they take place in a larger space, are less dissected, and involve more camera movement. These are the fairground scene and the dance scene at the tavern; incidentally, they are also the two longest sequences in the film, with

run times of 9 minutes 52 seconds and 7 minutes 55 seconds, respectively. While the fairground scene does not display such vertiginous camera movement as its Weimar predecessors – for example, in Dupont's *Varieté* (see chapter 2) – it does derive most of its dynamics through camera movement, at least in the first part of the scene. In the first shot, the camera zooms out from a medium close-up to a long shot while panning slightly to bring the Drum Major into the frame. Following the Drum Major through the crowd, the camera zooms back to a medium long shot to direct more attention to the Drum Major. A cut shows the subject of his quest, Marie, together with Wozzeck on the merry-go-round where their circular movement is followed by a pan of the camera. Back to the Drum Major, the camera tracks his movement again, this time showing him from behind in a medium close-up. His search ends again with the Drum Major watching the happy couple enjoying their ride. The camera then cuts to the aforementioned ultimate fairground shot from the moving Ferris wheel. Unlike the reframing movements in other shots, here the camera movement complements the action, as it searches the crowd with the Drum Major and plunges into fairground amusement with Wozzeck and Marie.

The camera has a similar function in the dance scene at the tavern later in the film. It likewise covers a larger space which is presented in the opening shot. From a close-up of a trumpet's mouth, the camera cranes up to a high-angle extreme long shot showing the entire dance area with numerous couples twirling around a pole. After two more shots of the dance floor and spinning legs, the next shot zooms in on Marie and the Drum Major, who are sharing a glass of wine at a table below the dance floor. This is followed by a zoom in on two drunks, who will reappear throughout the scene with their comments on drunkenness and human behavior. Later in the scene, a slightly swaying tracking shot follows the drunks, who stagger their way into the tavern where they meet Wozzeck. Here the camera leaves them and pans and zooms to

follow Wozzeck's path to the window, from which he observes Marie and her lover. Again, the camera complements the action taking place in a larger space and involving more character movement.

A different approach can be seen in the drill scene at the beginning of the film, which is filmed with a static camera and relies completely on editing to convey an extremely tense and forceful situation. Wozzeck and his comrades are drilled by the Drum Major in a humiliating and useless exercise in the courtyard of their barracks. The background music plays an important role here in underscoring the rhythm of the drill and the frequency of cuts. From low-angle shots of the Drum Major, who with visible pleasure barks his "up – down" ("auf – nieder"), Klaren cuts to long shots of the row of soldiers throwing themselves down into the mud and getting up again. To further emphasize the dynamics of the scene, the axis of filming is crossed, revealing the soldiers going down from one side and getting up from the other side of the axis in four shots interspersed with a close-up of the yelling Drum Major. After this sequence, the rhythm of the music picks up and the takes get shorter and shorter, as a series of extreme close-ups of the Drum Major's face are contrasted with close-ups of hands and boots in the mud and a repetition of the axis-crossing sequence. The Drum Major's admonishing of Wozzeck creates a little pause, during which the music stops. As the drill continues after this hiatus, the takes rapidly alternate between the shouting Drum Major and the soldiers moving up and down, culminating in an Eisensteinian montage of the Drum Major's yelling face and a barking dog. This scene consists of an astonishing 65 shots in only one minute and 46 seconds, making this by far the fastest cut scene of the film.

While the speed of editing in this scene is certainly extreme, the rest of the film also tends to be very fast paced. The swift editing matches the brevity of the majority of the scenes (31 out

of the total 35 scenes run under 5 minutes and 24 scenes are shorter than 3 minutes). This, in turn, suits the nature of Büchner's original. As mentioned previously, the fast succession of brief episodes was seen as a major problem for the staging of *Woyzeck*, which was called un-dramatic and evoked associations with cinema. Klaren perceived Büchner's play as a rather non-theatrical text as well, pointing out the consubstantiality of the fragment and film. Nevertheless, Klaren's film is not completely devoid of theatrical or, to be more precise, operatic influences.

Klaren was, without a doubt, inspired on many levels by Alban Berg's opera *Wozzeck*, which premiered in the year of Klaren's arrival in Berlin in 1925. This is already reflected in his choice of the title – *Wozzeck* and not *Woyzeck* – although the latter had been well established when Klaren wrote the script for his film, let alone by the time of its production. Yet, as he states in the 1947 interview with the *Berliner Zeitung*, Klaren believed the title *Wozzeck* to be "more memorable and popular" ("einprägsamer und populärer"), since "Alban Berg used this title for his opera" ("Alban Berg hat seine Oper ja auch so genannt") (Klaren, "Soldat"). Moreover, Klaren based his script on the same version of Büchner's play as Berg, namely Paul Landau's edition from 1909. Although it was already outdated in the 1920s, with few exceptions Klaren chose to follow Landau's text and arrangement of scenes.

Berg's opera was also a musical inspiration for Klaren. He begins his film by adding to the opening titles a musical overture of sorts which contains musical leitmotifs of his film, very much like an operatic overture. It starts with a powerful orchestral tune accented by ominous drumbeats. This is followed by lighter glockenspiel sounds as in a military parade, introducing the Drum Major's leitmotif based on the folk song "Soldiers are Handsome Fellows" ("Soldaten, das sind schöne Bursch"). The melody of the folk song is rendered in an alienated version by pompous string and brass sounds. Then comes a lighter tune derived from the organ grinder's

song: “Auf der Welt ist kein Bestand” (“In this World There is no Abiding”). Later in the film, this melody will link the fairground scene and the dance scene; in the overture, the musical tune anticipates this connection by combining barrel organ sounds with a waltz rhythm. The overture concludes with a crescendo of the full orchestra ending in a single beat of the drum as the door of the anatomy hall, the first image of the frame story, comes into view. In the overture and throughout the film, the music makes “expressionistic forays into atonal realms,” which was quite unusual for the otherwise conservative approach to music in DEFA films (“expressionistische Ausflüge in atonale Gefilde,” Mückenberger, “Zeit” 27). Thus this musical score can be seen as a clear reference to Berg's quintessentially modern atonal opera. Expressionist features of Klaren's film find parallels in Berg's approach to the play as well. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, there were both naturalistic and expressionistic interpretations of the play's early stagings, sometimes clashing even within the same production. Berg chose the expressionistic option both in terms of music and stage design, even though expressionism on stage was already on its way out at the time of his opera's premiere.

c. Interpretation and Ideology

The dispute about the interpretation of *Woyzeck* was not limited to aesthetic approaches but also involved the ideological plane. As I mentioned above, only few productions addressed the aspects of social criticism in *Woyzeck*, with the revolutionary *Dantons Tod* taking precedence during the Weimar years. However, it appears that Klaren chose *Woyzeck* precisely to convey a powerful socio-political message, which gained all the more validity after the twelve years of Nazi rule and a devastating war.

The opening scene sets the tone for the analytical mode of the film that unfolds as a reconstruction of the protagonist's story. Initially, it appears that the narrative is hijacked by the

wrong narrators. The first words are uttered by the maniac doctor who is about to dissect Wozzeck's body: "A good cadaver..." ("Ein guter Kadaver"). They are echoed by two of his students: "A fresh cadaver, a nice cadaver..." ("Ein frischer Kadaver, ein schöner Kadaver"). These words are a paraphrase of the closing lines of the play: "A good murder..." ("Ein guter Mord ").[125] At this point, Büchner the character interferes and insists on talking about Wozzeck as a human being rather than a carcass or sub-human creature, and also argues that the true murderer is not Wozzeck but the society around him. Listening to Büchner's tirade, the doctor washes his hands in a gesture symbolic of Pontius Pilate. Subsequently, Wozzeck's tragedy is narrated in a series of flashbacks, interspersed with scenes from the frame story with Büchner's commentary. By using Büchner the character as his mouthpiece, Klaren sets an unambiguous ideological framework for his film. Klaren's Büchner states that the tragedy of Wozzeck and Marie had been predetermined by social circumstances before they were even born. Although Wozzeck was a normal child like everybody else present in the room, he did not have a chance in life because he was born into poverty. Social injustice becomes the destiny that ultimately leads Wozzeck to his crime.

The use of a frame story for explaining the meaning of the film was criticized in contemporary film reviews as being overly didactic (Jordan 87). However, it produces certain compositional benefits: the frame story allows the film to break the narrative structure into episodes, which helps to avoid a straightforward retelling of a famous work of literature and also reflects the fragmentary character of the play. What was considered an obstacle for theater production now becomes an integral part of the narrative structure, as the spectator follows Büchner's stream of consciousness as he retells and explains Wozzeck's story in short,

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[125] Werner Herzog uses his own variation of these lines twice in his film about Kaspar Hauser (*Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle*; *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, 1974), which will be addressed in chapter 4.

disconnected segments.[126] The frame story itself is partly grounded in Büchner's biography. As a medical student, Büchner spent several months from 1833 to 1834 in Gießen to finish his studies. In the summer he took a course in anatomy and possibly had contact with the body of the murderer Johann Dieß, which was dissected at the University of Gießen (Hinderer 188). Dieß died serving a prison sentence for killing his lover Elisabetha, and his case is considered to be one of three sources on which Büchner based his play. Some of the comments pronounced by Büchner the character are taken from Büchner's actual writings. For example, Klaren quotes from one of Büchner's letters to his parents: "I feel contempt for no one [...] since no one can prevent himself becoming a fool or a criminal" (*Plays* 192).[127] In the film, these words are used to convey the idea that it is circumstances that condition man. Alongside such quotations from Büchner, on many occasions Klaren puts his own words into Büchner's mouth. The thrust of Klaren's interpretation is best visible in such instances, in alterations of the play, and also in the scenes that he adds to the original.

Klaren's primary ideological focus is on condemning militarism and exposing its ill effects on society. This idea was apparently present from the onset of his work on the *Wozzeck* project, and was only intensified by the years of Nazi rule and World War II. As Klaren says in his 1947 interview, "the development of the political situation made it impossible" to realize his plans back in the 1930s.[128] The film was billed as a "great anti-militaristic classic" in the DEFA production program ("große antimilitaristische Klassik", Mückenberger, "Zeit" 16). DEFA's leadership "expected Georg Klaren's *Wozzeck* to become one of the most important films that would introduce a new chapter in history" and therefore aimed to reach the widest audience with

[126] Here, Klaren does not follow the example of Alban Berg, who converted Büchner's open form of the drama into a closed structure consisting of three acts (Chisholm 275).
[127] "Ich verachte niemanden [...] weil es in Niemands Gewalt liegt, kein Dummkopf oder kein Verbrecher zu sein" (*Werke* 2: 378).
[128] "Die Entwicklung der politischen Lage machte es damals unmöglich" (Klaren, "Soldat").

its message (Pinkert 60). Together with its distributor *Sovexportfilm*, DEFA organized a carefully orchestrated advertising campaign for the movie theaters in the French and Soviet sectors that were showing *Wozzeck* (Pinkert 60).[129] Klaren's strong anti-militaristic stance is evident in almost every scene he adds to the film. It is the ruthless military drill and the stupefying discipline that "breeds Wozzecks," declares Büchner, as a transition from the frame story to the drill scene takes place. This humiliating scene is followed later by showing a soldier running the gauntlet, in connection with which Büchner the narrator remarks that three years in the army taught Wozzeck to see "the order of the world" in his superiors ("die göttliche Weltordnung"). Another added scene shows Wozzeck being stopped by the Captain, whose gigantic shadow dominates the shot. The Captain reprimands Wozzeck for returning late to the barracks; subsequently Wozzeck is beaten for this breach of discipline.

This extremely negative portrayal of the military clearly implies the condemnation of Nazism with its link to the legacy of Prussian militarism. Whereas most costumes in the film more or less accurately follow the fashion of the early 19th century, military uniforms stand out for their anachronistic look and include "features of modern militarism, such as jackboots, caps, curved SS-breeches, etc.".[130] Thus, Klaren wanted to show that German militarism constituted a predisposition for the fascist mentality (Mückenberger, "Zeit" 16).

Büchner in the film serves as a counterexample to this mentality, and can be seen as a role model for de-Nazified Germans (Horak 134). Apart from denouncing militarism and advocating the people (with some revolutionary overtones taken from Büchner's *Der hessische*

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[129] Despite the film's pronounced anti-militaristic thrust, it was criticized by a representative of the *Sovexport* distribution company as "bourgeois, decadent, and reactionary" ("bürgerlich, dekadent und reaktionär", qtd. in Mückenberger, "Zeit" 22). The fact that the film was nevertheless distributed represents yet another example of the relative artistic freedom of filmmakers in the Soviet Zone.

[130] "Attribute des modernen Militarismus, wie Knobelbecher, Krätzchen, geschwungene SS-Reithosen usw." (Klaren, "Soldat").

Landbote), Büchner the character tries to educate his fellow students and his own teacher, the doctor. In contrast to the enlightened narrator, the other students are stereotypical to the point of caricature, with bandages in various shapes and forms on their faces covering wounds acquired by dueling. They are clearly labeled as fraternity members, and therefore stand for a group of people who were "among the first and most ardent supporters of the Nazis" (Horak 141). The students figure both in the frame story and the main plot, their roles ranging from being mere opportunists to active instigators or oppressors, and as such they mirror aspects of German society during the Nazi regime.[131] In the destructive system of a militarized society, the students represent a middle ground. The true danger comes from representatives of the military, in this case the Captain and the Drum Major, who are described by a contemporary reviewer as "prime examples of old Prussian-Hitlerite militarists" ("Musterexemplare altpreußisch-hitlerischer Militaristen", qtd. in Habel 700).

The Drum Major assumes a much bigger role in Klaren's film than in the original, and he has a much more direct impact on Wozzeck. Whereas in the play his main advantage over Wozzeck is his physical strength and handsome appearance, in the film he is portrayed as Wozzeck's direct superior. This is inaccurate in terms of historical reality. A drum major was essentially a showman, whose function, at least during times of peace, was to impress civilians, which he successfully does in Büchner's play.[132] By military rank a drum major was a sergeant,

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[131] Yet as the development in the frame story shows, they are susceptible to Büchner's message and eventually show compassion and sympathy for Wozzeck's fate. Thus, in a sense they can serve as role models for the film's spectators, who should also undergo a process of rethinking after having lived under a totalitarian regime for twelve years.

[132] In his poem "The Drum Major", Heinrich Heine vividly describes this aspect of the drum majors of yore: "Whene'er with a mighty roll of the drum / He enter'd a village or city, / He caused an echo responsive to come / In the heart of each girl, plain or pretty. // He came and saw and conquer'd too / Each fair one welcomed him in; / His black moustache was wetted through / With tears of German women. // Resistance was vain! In every land / That the foreign invaders came to, / The Emperor vanquished the gentlemen and / The drum-major each maiden and dame too." (transl. Bowring 168). ("Wenn er mit Trommelwirbelschall / Einzog in Städten und Städtchen, / Da schlug das Herz im Widerhall / Den Weibern und den Mädchen. // Er kam und sah und siegte leicht / Wohl über alle

but he was in charge of musicians and would have no direct authority whatever over the rifleman Wozzeck (Meier 40). Klaren disregards this fact, emphasizing the Drum Major's higher rank and power over Wozzeck in every scene in which they meet, some of which are witnessed by Marie. In the drill scene, which is the Drum Major's first appearance in the film, he actually functions as the drill sergeant for an entire platoon. To enhance the impression of his might, he is filmed from a low angle, standing in an imperious posture with his legs apart and his chin held high. His black uniform with its riding-breeches and high boots is very reminiscent of that of the SS. The Eisensteinian montage at the end of the scene – where a close-up of the major yelling "up - down, up - down" dissolves into a shot of a barking dog – both offers a satirical perspective on the Drum Major and underscores his brutality.[133]

It is only in the Drum Major's second scene that we see him in his actual role as the conductor of the military band. Proudly marching in front of the musicians, he glances at the civilians lining the street who greet him and his men enthusiastically. The Drum Major and the men in the crowd are quite aware of the effect he has on women; one young man even jokingly tries to shield his girlfriend's eyes with his hat to prevent her from seeing a potential competitor. The pompous Drum Major bursting with masculinity is contrasted with the image of a one-legged war invalid who is following the parade on crutches – "*the* iconic image of male castration and damaged masculinity since World War I" (Pinkert 70).

Klaren retains the emphasis on the Drum Major's virility in the scenes with Marie that are directly adapted from Büchner's text. The added scenes, however, emphasize the Drum Major's

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Schönen; / Sein schwarzer Schnurrbart wurde feucht / Von deutschen Frauentränen. / / Wir mußten es dulden! In jedem Land, / Wo die fremden Eroberer kamen, / Der Kaiser die Herren überwand, / Der Tambourmajor die Damen." [*Werke* 1: 318]).

[133] Eisenstein makes frequent use of such rhetorical "intellectual" montage in *Oktyabr* (*October*, 1928), a cinematic tribute to the Bolshevik revolution. For example, creating a vivid visual simile, he cross-cuts close-ups of Alexander Kerensky, the Prime Minister of the soon-to-be-overthrown Provisional Government, with a mechanical peacock displaying its tail. The peacock is part of an automaton clock on display in the Winter Palace and as such stands not only for vanity but also for the legacy of tsarist decadence.

social superiority and superiority of rank over Wozzeck. The Drum Major functions as one of the main tormentors of Wozzeck in the military, for example when he oversees Wozzeck's punishment for returning late to the barracks. Once again shot from a low angle, the Drum Major watches with sadistic delight as Wozzeck is beaten with the very sticks Wozzeck himself had cut earlier. After ordering the beating to stop, the Drum Major walks away, complacently whistling his musical leitmotif, "Soldaten, das sind schöne Bursch..." To what extent the Drum Major abuses the privileges of his rank as a tool to win Marie becomes evident in the fairground scene described above. After unsuccessfully trying to split up Wozzeck and Marie, who are enjoying their time together, he summons Wozzeck and rebukes him harshly. His actual words are not heard, which underscores the arbitrariness of his cavils and exposes his admonition as a mere power play. In a later scene, the Drum Major displays both his masculine and social superiority over Wozzeck. While Wozzeck is sweeping the barracks yard, the Drum Major, standing within earshot, boasts of his latest sexual conquest to Wozzeck's friend Andres, who is polishing the Drum Major's boots. As in the drill scene, the Drum Major is filmed from a low angle, looking down on his subordinates from above. In the original play there is an important encounter between Wozzeck and the Drum Major – their fistfight in the tavern – when their relationship is not mediated by rank. Klaren, despite the obvious action potential of this scene, omits it, arguably because the fight implies that there is no gap between the rivals. In the film, the Drum Major is clearly portrayed as someone vastly superior to Wozzeck, thus Marie's attraction to him is caused not only by his physique but also, and more importantly so, by his higher status.

The Drum Major's superiority in the play lies mostly in his physical strength and virile cocky appearance, which Marie admires repeatedly: "The walk of him – like a lion" or "Chest

like an ox, beard like a lion" (*Plays* 114, 120).[134] Klaren picks up Büchner's frequent animal metaphors, but contrary to Marie's admiring tone, his metaphors are less than flattering. In the fairground scene, when the Drum Major is searching the crowd for Marie, a showman advertises his little monkey who wears a military uniform and salutes like a soldier. This image is based on Büchner's text, but Klaren enhances it by a sound montage: A few moments later, right before the Drum Major admonishes Wozzeck, the camera cuts to the Drum Major as the showman again announces the "military monkey."

The Drum Major also stands for the animalistic dimension of human debauchery that is portrayed in the fairground scene and in the dance scene. Connected both thematically and stylistically, these two scenes serve as structural milestones, positioned at one-third and two-thirds into the film. They are significantly longer than almost all other scenes and involve sizable crowds and a greater variety of shot lengths, distances, and camera movement to accommodate the larger space and the higher number of characters. The scenes are linked by the repeated visual and musical motif – the organ grinder with his memento mori: "In this world, there is no abiding stay..." – at the opening of the fairground scene and at the end of the dance scene. And they both have an anticipatory function, pointing to Marie's infidelity and its fatal consequences. When Marie rides the merry-go-round, she utters words added by Klaren: "On and on and on" ("Immerzu, immerzu"); the same words are repeated by her as she is whirling around the dance floor with the Drum Major, and later by Wozzeck, just before the voices in his head command him to kill Marie.

The depiction of human immorality in both scenes is rendered through remarkably dynamic cinematography, achieved primarily by aggressive editing. In the fairground scene, a

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[134] "Er steht auf seinen Füßen wie ein Löw. […]. Über die Brust wie ein Stier und ein Bart wie ein Löw" (*Werke* 1: 148, 156).

fast montage of kissing couples, wooden animals, and animal masks frames Marie's seduction by the Drum Major. When Wozzeck watches Marie and the Drum Major dancing in the tavern, he says with repressed anger: "Whirl and spin! Wallow in your filth! Why doesn't God blow out the sun, so that everyone writhes in lechery, men and women, man and beast. They're at it right on the back of your hand."[135] These words, based on Büchner's original text, accompany a montage of superimposed images showing the dancing couple surrounded by various depictions of excessive indulgence: a young man stuffs phallic sausages into a girl's mouth, a middle-aged man semi-consciously gulps wine streaming from a keg right into his mouth, a young couple kisses, an older man corrupts a young girl with money. At the end of Wozzeck's tirade, the superimposition consists of multiple images of Marie and the Drum Major, dancing, laughing, drinking, kissing.

Klaren largely follows Büchner's model in the representation of Marie's conflicted personality, yet with a stronger emphasis on the extremes. On the one hand, she is portrayed as a motherly figure and frequently shown in a Madonna pose. On the other, Klaren stresses her sensual side that makes her break free of the limits that motherhood and society impose on her. This inner conflict is best visible when Marie tries to find solace in prayer, which in the film is reminiscent of the famous scene of Gretchen's prayer in *Faust*. With her hair undone, she kneels in front of a statuette of the Virgin Mary. This detail is added by Klaren; moreover, whereas in Büchner her prayer is addressed to the Lord ("Herrgott"), in the film Marie is calling to "Holy Mary, mother of God" ("Heilige Maria, Mutter Gottes"), her celestial patron and the archetype of pure motherhood. Marie seems to be truly repentant (although since she is not married to Wozzeck her infidelity is, strictly speaking, not a case of adultery), but while she is looking up to

[135] "Dreht euch, wälzt euch. Warum bläst Gott nicht die Sonn' aus, daß Alles in Unzucht sich übernander wälzt, Mann und Weib, Mensch und Vieh. Tut's einem schier auf den Händen."

the Virgin in supplication, Marie's hands wander down to fondle her breasts; at this point she understands that she cannot resist temptation. The contradictory nature of her emotions, visible throughout the film, culminates in this scene where it is even projected onto her son. She first pushes him away when he interrupts her prayer, only to pick him up lovingly immediately thereafter (the caring part is added by Klaren). At the end of the scene she has to fight her inner battle once more when the Drum Major in the street distracts her from praying and again wins her attention. Marie seems to realize fully what she has done to Wozzeck only after listening to the grandmother's tale of the lonely child. Several close-ups present the reaction of the listeners: while the children visibly fail to grasp the meaning of the tale, Marie's face grows sadder and sadder. She seems to have a foreboding that something tragic will happen, and that her son too will end up as an orphan. All in all however, Marie's sensuality in the film does not overshadow the reality of her dismal living conditions. Thus her succumbing to the charms of the Drum Major can also be seen as an attempt to escape from her poverty and forget the otherwise hopeless situation.

Even more than Marie, Wozzeck is portrayed as a victim of circumstances, but in Klaren's interpretation he has a clear rebellious side. Beginning with the first theater productions of the play there was disagreement regarding the character of the protagonist: is he a mere victim, who endures a life of injustice until he finally explodes, or is he a potential revolutionary, whose frustration and anger is channeled in the wrong direction? Woyzeck the rebel was introduced to the German stage by the powerful performances of Albert Steinrück in 1913/14, described by Ingeborg Strudthoff in the following terms:

> Steinrück was the “most revolutionary” of the Woyzeck actors. Even in his most submissive and oppressed moments, he had something of a fire that smolders under the

> ashes; even his most bitter suffering is passive resistance. And when his spirit does break free, in the provocation of the Drum Major or in the murder scene, when he finally acts – these are Steinrück's best moments; here, his cowering body tightens to spring, here the smoldering fire becomes a blaze. He plays the would-be revolutionary Woyzeck, in whom the revolution could not awake because life crushed him before he – so shrewd and brisk in little things – learned how to think on a large scale. (47) [136]

A very different side of the protagonist was stressed by another big star of the early stagings, Eugen Klöpfer, who was "all passive hero, all suffering creature", "shy, battered, [...] in fear of a world that he does not understand" (Strudthoff 60-61). In Klaren's film, Kurt Meisel (1912-1994) combined aspects of both of his famous predecessors' performances. Wozzeck was Meisel's first major film role after years of experience in the theater and as a supporting actor in a number of films throughout the 1930s.[137] Meisel resembles both Steinrück and Klöpfer in terms of physique, gentle yet with a strong body. He also combines their interpretations, portraying Wozzeck as an enduring sufferer who is, at the same time, bearing seething, repressed anger inside. Overall, the film's protagonist is presented as a potential revolutionary who falls victim to unfavorable social circumstances.

In Klaren's interpretation, Wozzeck's suffering is even elevated to the status of martyrdom, with images of crosses conspicuously associated with the protagonist throughout the film. Even the opening titles are projected on a background that resembles a large wooden cross.

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[136] "Steinrück war der "revolutionärste" der Woyzeckdarsteller. Selbst in seinen demütigsten und zerschundensten Momenten hat er noch etwas vom Feuer, das unter der Asche schwelt, selbst sein bitterstes Leiden ist passive Resistenz. Und dort, wo sein Temperament einmal losbricht, in der Herausforderung des Tambours oder in der Mordszene, wo er endlich einmal zum Täter wird, da sind Steinrücks beste Momente, da strafft sich der geduckte Körper zum Sprung, da wird das schwelende Feuer zur Lohe. Er spielte den verhinderten Revolutionär Woyzeck, in dem die Revolution nicht wach werden konnte, weil das Leben ihn erdrückte, ehe er, der im kleinen so gewitzt und hurtig war, im großen denken lernte."

[137] He also played in several Nazi propaganda films, such as Veit Harlan's *Der große König* (1940-42) and *Kolberg* (1943-45).

In the shaving scene, the Captain, accusing Wozzeck of immorality because of his illegitimate child, stands in front of a cross. Shortly afterwards, Wozzeck sees a field of white crosses in his vision. The house of his girlfriend Marie is located in sight of a cemetery, so a cross or gravestone is seen in every scene that takes place there. Just before Wozzeck discovers Marie's new earrings (the first evidence of her infidelity that triggers his agonizing jealousy) he stands in front of one of the cemetery crosses. Later, when the doctor and his students humiliate Wozzeck with the command to wiggle his ears, he sits down in front of a cross, weakened, wearily enduring the painful derision. The most prominent reference to martyrdom connects Wozzeck and Marie in their fate. When Wozzeck leaves Marie's house to hurry back to the barracks, Marie, who has a dark premonition, closes the window and is seen with her back to the camera with her arms stretched out to the side and up. This image cross-fades to the shadow of Wozzeck in a similar pose, with his hands tied to a wooden beam as he is being beaten for his tardiness.

6a. Marie in a martyr pose.

6b. Superimposition of martyrs.

6c. Crucified Wozzeck and his torturers.

A strong emphasis on martyrdom by no means precludes radical tendencies: direct analogies here are found in the images of revolutionary martyrdom in Eisenstein, for example in *Bronenosets Potyomkin*.[138]

The revolutionary potential of the story is articulated by Büchner the narrator. His pronouncements on social injustice provoke strong reactions from the doctor and medical students who call him a rebel and a Jacobin. In order to make *Wozzeck* more radical, Klaren repeatedly draws on Georg Büchner's revolutionary background and his earlier writings, including *Dantons Tod*. In this connection, Klaren also touches upon more general questions of human existence, as when he has his cinematic Büchner paraphrase Danton: "Trouble must come into this world, but woe betide the hand that brings trouble. This cursed necessity. What is it that compels us to lie, steal, murder?"[139] Characteristically, Klaren leaves out the continuation of Danton's phrase: "We are puppets of unknown forces. We ourselves are nothing, nothing!" (transl. in Patterson 44).[140] Such existential implications of Büchner's work do not fit the ideological framework of Klaren's film, which operates predominantly on the plane of

[138] On the one hand, Eisenstein, very much in tune with the militant atheism of the Bolshevik revolution, assaults both Christianity in general and the Russian Orthodox Church in particular. Early in the film, a frustrated sailor in the ship's caboose smashes a plate inscribed with the line "Give us this day our daily bread" from the Lord's prayer. (The importance of this act of existential rebellion is emphasized by the repetition of the smashing movement through editing). The ship's priest, just like the ship's doctor, serves the interests of the oppressive authorities, the crucifix in his hands resembling an ominous weapon (and like the doctor, the priest is eliminated by the revolutionary sailors). At the same time, Eisenstein appropriates Christian imagery in order to glorify martyrs for the Revolution. When the battleship's captain reacts to the brewing rebellion with the threat of hanging mutineers in the yard, the sailors are looking up to the ship's masts that resemble a cross. In their imagination, dead bodies are dangling from the cross-beam of the main mast. During the subsequent rebellion, its leader Vakulinchuk dies as a martyr after being shot by an officer. Vakulinchuk falls overboard and his body is caught in the ship's rigging as if crucified. When Vakulinchuk's body is retrieved by his fellow-sailors, the mise-en-scene clearly resembles the iconography of the Deposition from the Cross. The same iconographic motif is repeated in the Odessa staircase scene when a distraught mother is carrying the body of her dead boy shot by the government troops.
[139] "Es muß Ärgernis kommen in die Welt, aber wehe der Hand, durch die Ärgernis kommt. Dieses verfluchte Muß. Was ist es denn, was uns zwingt zu lügen, zu stehlen, zu morden?"
[140] The original quote reads in its entirety: "'It *must* needs be': it's this 'must' that did it. Who'd ever curse the hand on whom the curse of 'must' has fallen? Who spoke the curse, who? What is it in us that whores, lies, steals, murders? Puppets, that's all we are, made to dance on strings by unknown forces; ourselves we are nothing, nothing –" (*Plays* 38). ("Es muß; das war dies Muß. Wer will der Hand fluchen, auf die der Fluch des Muß gefallen? Wer hat das Muß gesprochen, wer? Was ist das, was in uns lügt, hurt, stiehlt und mordet? Puppen sind wir, von unbekannten Gewalten am Draht gezogen; nichts, nichts wir selbst!" [*Werke* 1: 49]).

sociological and socialist interpretation. Klaren emphasizes the role of class division and its ill effects on the underprivileged.

The main representatives of the ruling class in the film, as in the play, are the Doctor and the Captain, but their relationship to each other is significantly different from the one found in Büchner's text. Klaren omits most of the animosity between the two characters, something that is quite prominent in the original. There, the Doctor and the Captain use every opportunity to ridicule each other, addressing each other with mocking names, such as "coffin-nail" and "square-basher" (*Plays* 123; "Sargnagel" and "Exerziernagel" [*Werke* 1: 159]). In a sociological reading, this can represent the tension between the military and the educated bourgeoisie that in the first half of the nineteenth century is beginning to claim more power. For Klaren, however, this conflict is irrelevant, since he prefers to portray the ruling classes as more or less united against the "proletariat." While the Doctor still makes fun of the Captain's physique and limited intellect, they stand together in their condescending and abusive attitude towards their inferior, Wozzeck. Büchner the film character clearly categorizes them as members of the group that is responsible for Wozzeck's tragedy: "First you turn people into animals, and then you judge them because they do not feel humanely" ("Erst macht ihr die Menschen zu Tieren, und dann verurteilt ihr sie, weil sie nicht menschlich empfinden").

As described earlier, both in the play and, especially, in the film, the animal motif is an important recurring device used for satirical purposes (to show the bestiality of Wozzeck's tormentors), but also to demonstrate Wozzeck's de-humanization by the Doctor and the Captain. A quite literal example of this is found in the second scene with the Doctor, in which he orders Wozzeck to wiggle his ears, only to declare – much to the delight of his students – that this is the beginning of "the transformation into donkey" ("der Übergang zum Esel"). Wozzeck is also

seen in the shadow of a donkey in the fairground scene, but there more of the satirical dehumanization is directed against the military and academe, the institutions which the Captain and the Doctor represent. The above-mentioned fairground show features a monkey sporting military uniform and the "astronomical donkey" (in the play it is a horse announced as a professor). The Captain and the Doctor, sitting together in perfect harmony and blissfully unaware of their own ridiculousness, enjoy both the show and the budding romance between Marie and the Drum Major.

Although Wozzeck bears most of the humiliation in silence, and his revolutionary rage eventually finds a misguided outlet in the murder of Marie, several scenes in the film show the possibility of rebellion against the ruling classes. Pointing to the "true culprits" ("die wahren Schuldigen") of Wozzeck's plight, Büchner the narrator wonders what would have happened, had he stood up against them. In the shaving scene, Klaren uses a series of close-ups to direct the viewer's attention to Wozzeck's chance to retaliate against his oppressor. As the Captain urges Wozzeck to slow down, three close-ups show the Captain's playing with his spur, a symbol of his power. However, at this moment the Captain's life is literally in the hands of Wozzeck who is holding a razor next to his throat. Wozzeck's gaze downward following the third close-up of the boot reveals that he is visibly annoyed both by the captain's talk and his playing with the spur. When the Captain talks about eternity, Wozzeck again gazes angrily down at the boot, while a metallic sound indicates that the Captain is still playing with the spur. This shot is followed by an extreme close-up of the captain's throat and Wozzeck's hand with the razor. However, Wozzeck does not vent his frustration on the Captain, not even when the latter teases him with Marie's infidelity in a later scene. At first it seems that Wozzeck would rebel, as he threateningly asks the Captain not to besmirch Marie, since she is the only thing he has in the

world. While he says that, a close-up shows his hand clenching into a fist – a sign of revolution that dates back to Weimar cinema (Horak 136). The Captain seems taken aback, but he regains his composure and uses his own arsenal of threats: “Do you want some bullets in your brain?” (“Will er ein paar Kugeln vor den Kopf haben?”).

Another potential act of rebellion against the oppressors is added by Klaren in the second scene involving Wozzeck and the Doctor. Wozzeck tolerates the students' touching and examining him, but when the Doctor pulls his ears and orders him to wiggle them, Wozzeck addresses the Doctor with concealed anger as if warning him not to go too far. The subdued sigh “Oh, doctor!” (“Ach, Herr Doktor!”) in Büchner's text becomes the threatening exclamation “Doctor!” (“Herr Doktor!”) in Klaren's film. Since the Doctor insists and also threatens Wozzeck, the latter jumps up and stretches out his arms to strangle the Doctor. But his hands stop before they reach his tormentor's throat and Wozzeck sinks back on his seat (situated in front of a cross), becomes resigned, and follows the doctor's command. Wozzeck's utter frustration is expressed when he shakes his fist against the heavens in a gesture of rebellion against God while saying that he would like to hang himself from a nail in the sky. Ultimately, however, the rage against injustice that seethes within Wozzeck results in the murder of Marie, his own execution, and “a nice corpse” ready for the Doctor's scalpel.

The theme of social injustice is also revisited in Wozzeck's visions. In one instance, Klaren emphasizes the class motive by introducing an additional vision not found in the original text. In this scene, the Büchner character actually meets Wozzeck on the street and comments on his visions, describing the disgust Wozzeck feels with the creator of the unfair world. As Wozzeck looks at the wall of a bourgeois house, it dissolves to show a well fed, prosperous family at a neatly set dinner table. They are presented as caricatures with oversized white

napkins around their necks and stiff movements (Pleyer 80). With an alienated version of the folksong “Üb immer Treu und Redlichkeit” (“Always practice faithfulness and honorableness”) as the musical background, the children and wife stand up for prayer, while the man of the house remains seated, complacently watching the maid bring in a huge roast on which he fixes his eyes in gluttonous anticipation. Büchner explains that Wozzeck perceives injustice acutely but cannot get to the root of it. In the meantime, Wozzeck looks down to the gutter, which dissolves into a shabby basement lodging, exposing a family living in utter poverty. This image is accompanied by the alienated tune of the folk song as well, although in a more daunting version. Büchner comments in the spirit of the *Hessische Landbote:* “Things cannot go on like this, they *must* not go on like this!” (“So kann es nicht weitergehen, so *darf* es nicht weitergehen!”).

Wozzeck's second vision in the film is based on Büchner's text, yet Klaren expands it by giving it a new visual dimension. When Wozzeck talks about the rolling head, an executioner with an axe is superimposed on the background of the trees. While partially grounded in the play, this also represents a potential reference to the Nazi years, when decapitation by axe was a signature method for political executions (Horak 140). Moreover, Klaren uses images that cannot be derived from the original. The vision ends with a large field of uniform white crosses from which an army of the dead slowly emerges. Clearly reminiscent of the final montage in Staudte's *Die Mörder sind unter uns*, this image is meant to enhance contemporary allusions. As the dead march forward, Wozzeck's raises his voice in fear, exclaiming that there will be fire shooting into the sky from the earth and “a bluster as from trombones” (“und ein Getös [...] wie Posaunen”). His last words are underscored with brass music intoning the opening movements of the Marseillaise. This tune represents the quintessential call for revolution, but it trails off unheard because Wozzeck does not have the ability to channel his revolutionary thoughts into

productive action. Instead of rebelling against his oppressors, he directs his anger and frustration against the next-weaker link beneath himself in society, the unmarried mother of his child.

For the conclusion of the film Klaren follows Landau's edition, which suggests a court trial and even extends it up to the point where Wozzeck is on his way to the scaffold. This evokes a topos of the French Revolution, and in particular the two *Danton* films that culminate with the execution of the protagonist, deviating from Büchner's own un-climactic ending of *Dantons Tod*. Klaren also adds optimistic touches which are not to be found in any versions of the original. When Wozzeck is arrested after the discovery of Marie's body, Büchner's voice pronounces: “Had Wozzeck stood up against the real culprits, his deed would have galvanized the people, his act would have been committed for the sake of freedom” (“Hätte Wozzeck sich gegen die wahren Schuldigen erhoben, seine Tat hätte die Menschen wachgerüttelt, sie wäre für die Freiheit begangen worden”). As Büchner speaks, the camera zooms in on Wozzeck's somewhat stooped back, a posture symbolizing the heavy burden he was not able to bear on his shoulders alone. Later, when Wozzeck is escorted through the town to the scaffold, he passes by his little son, who – unable to understand the situation – joyfully reaches up with his arms to his father. With a faint smile on his face, Wozzeck turns to the boy and says: “Do a better job, lad” (“Mach's besser, Bub”). In his final words Wozzeck bequeaths the task he failed to do to his little son, who thus becomes his heir in the struggle to put an end to oppression and injustice.

With Wozzeck heading for execution, the ending of the film reconnects with its very first scene, in which Wozzeck’s fresh corpse is about to be examined by the Doctor and his students. At the same time, Klaren decisively departs from the analytical narrative mode associated with the anatomical theater in the prologue. Its limitations had become obvious much earlier. Close to the beginning of the film, Büchner the narrator comments (in Klaren's words) on the

deficiency of Wozzeck's point of view; he "only sees the way things are", without imagining the way things could or should be ("Er sieht nur, wie die Dinge sind"). Later in the film, the Büchner character voices a similar predicament: "I can only show the world as it is, not as it should be" ("Ich kann die Welt nur zeigen wie sie ist, nicht wie sie sein soll"). Such objectivism can be seen, in part, as a tribute to the "scientific" aspect of Büchner's vision (Schanze 263). But, as already mentioned, it is challenged throughout the film from the perspective of a socially committed artist. In the final scene, Klaren clearly goes beyond just showing or interpreting the world and introduces a strong note of historical optimism. The ending of the film implies that future generations of Wozzecks will succeed in changing this world.

Klaren's portrayal of the protagonist as a potential revolutionary follows the tradition of social / socialist interpretations of Büchner's play, and was found in some of its early stage productions. By condemning the evils of the *ancien regime* in general and, more topically, of German militarism firmly associated with the recently defeated Third Reich, Klaren expands this tradition into a new historical context. Thus the ideological perspective of *Wozzeck* brings together Germany's strong socialist legacy, Klaren's own leftist and communist background, and the political reality in the Soviet Zone. A socialist interpretation of Büchner was, after all, only natural for a production of DEFA, a film studio that had been created under the control of the Soviet authorities. Much more fascinating is that instead of adopting the artistic paradigm of socialist realism, Klaren draws on the aesthetics of German expressionism. The resulting product can be labeled as a work of "socialist expressionism" (Ungurianu 216). Contradictory as it may be, this designation reflects both the paradoxes of Büchner's play and the zigzagging trajectory of its interpretations.

Chapter 4:

Choreographing a Chicken Dance:

Werner Herzog's *Woyzeck* (1979) and Its Contexts

Introduction

This chapter focuses on Werner Herzog's *Woyzeck*, produced in 1979 in West Germany. Herzog's film is so stunningly unlike Georg Klaren's *Wozzeck* (1947) that it may appear that their films are based on absolutely different texts. As I argued in the previous chapter, Georg Klaren's *Wozzeck* clearly embraces the notion of an inherent "cinematic" quality in Georg Büchner's play. With a subjective, dynamic camera, Klaren creates a fast-paced narrative very much in the style of a classical expressionist film. Herzog, however, opts for a static camera, creating an illusion of objectivity in his painstakingly slow and detailed account of the protagonist's plight. In a curious move, Herzog combines hyperrealistic settings with a strong streak of theatrical aesthetics. His overall reading of Büchner is likewise radically different from Klaren's. While Klaren draws on the revolutionary potential of the original, emphasizing elements of social criticism, Herzog explores the existential aspects of human isolation and suffering with disturbing Gnostic implications. As a result, in Klaren's case we are dealing with a curious hybrid that can be, *cum grano salis,* termed socialist expressionism, while Herzog's approach can be labeled metaphysical realism (Ungurianu 216). The strikingly divergent presentations of the same text in these two films attest to the elusiveness of Büchner's work and provide a fascinating subject for the study of cinematic adaptations, as we shall see. Before analyzing Herzog's *Woyzeck,* I will present a brief overview of Büchner's post-war reception, particularly in West Germany, where it underwent a more significant development than in the

East. I will also outline Herzog's gradual approach to Büchner in the context of the New German Cinema.

1. Georg Büchner in Post-War Germany

a. Reception

The postwar scholarly reception of Büchner opens with two studies written in exile, by Karl Viëtor (published 1949) and Hans Mayer (published in 1946). Viëtor emphasizes the pessimistic and nihilistic side of Büchner (see Hinderer 11). Mayer approaches Büchner from a Marxist standpoint, yet concedes that Büchner was a pessimist because he did not believe that revolution could bring about beneficial social change (see Richards 27). This touch of pessimism notwithstanding, Mayer's study set the tone for the predominantly socialist reception of Büchner in the Soviet Zone and later in the GDR, of which Klaren's cinematic adaptation of *Woyzeck* is an early example. Following Georg Lukács's interpretation of Büchner as a proponent of class struggle, in East Germany Büchner is predominantly viewed as a "precursor of Marxism" ("Vorläufer des Marxismus," Goltschnigg, *Rezeption* 79).[141] The West develops a more "multifaceted image" ("ein vielseitigeres Bild," Goltschnigg, *Rezeption* 80), although with a delay, as there is little attention to Büchner in the immediate post-war years in West Germany.

The reception of Büchner in the second half of the twentieth century is marked by a revived interest in his work and a wide array of conflicting interpretations. Friedrich Sengle describes the extremes of Büchner scholarship as "Marxist twists" on the one hand and "bourgeois meditations" of "religious" interpreters on the other (268).[142] Indeed, the inventory of tags used in scholarship to define the elusive writer is quite impressive. He is alternatively

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[141] See Georg Lukács's 1937 essay "Der faschistisch verfälschte und der wirkliche Georg Büchner".
[142] "Marxistische Verrenkungen" and "bürgerliche Meditationen."

described as a socialist critic, revolutionary, and precursor of Communism, or as a nihilist and pessimist, a realist, or a religious and metaphysical writer, and forerunner of modernism and existentialism. Since such readings in many cases reflect the scholar's personal political and ideological background, the discourse on Büchner has a tendency to involve "massive polemics" ("massive Polemik"), as Reinhold Grimm, who himself is no exception in this respect, puts it (34).

One unquestionable result emerged from these "massive polemics" surrounding Büchner in the post-war decades. He was unconditionally canonized as a major figure in the German literary tradition, this status being reflected in the re-institution of the Büchner Prize for literature. The prize was originally established in 1923 as an award for visual artists, actors, singers, and poets from Büchner's native Hessen. After a hiatus during the Nazi years, the Büchner prize was re-instated in its previous format in 1945. In 1951, it was transformed into a purely literary reward of a much greater scope by the German Academy of Language and Literature (*Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung*). It was extended to honor achievements in German literature nationwide and outside of Germany, and soon became the most prestigious German literary prize. Since the recipients of the prize were expected to comment on Büchner, the award also played a role in both reflecting and reshaping the perception of his work. Thus, Gottfried Benn, the first recipient of the prize in 1951, admits that the themes of "guilt, innocence, paltriness, murder, bewilderment" ("Schuld, Unschuld, Armseligkeit, Mord, Verwirrung", Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 2: 224) are important in *Woyzeck*. And yet, echoing the contemporary West German tendency to depoliticize Büchner, he describes *Woyzeck* as evocative of the "tranquility of a field of grain" ("die Ruhe eines Kornfelds"). Read in contemporary times, the fragment appears to him a folk song of bygone times (Goltschnigg,

Moderne 2: 224). However, already in the late 1950s the socio-political dimension of Büchner is stressed in the acceptance speeches of such writers as Erich Kästner, Max Frisch, and Günter Eich.

The 1960s brought a decisive upsurge in attention to Büchner. In 1963, the sesquicentennial of his birth generated a number of new editions, scholarly studies, and theatrical productions. The issue of Büchner as a precursor of modernism was once again the focus of many contributions to this anniversary. Thus Walter Jens muses, in an extensive essay about Büchner's modernity, that neither his subject matter nor his language is explicable in historical terms (Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 2: 61).[143] Two new important Büchner editions appeared during this time. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, recipient of the Büchner Prize in 1961, published the first separate edition of *Der hessische Landbote* (*The Hessian Messenger*) in 1965. By relating the pamphlet to the current situation in developing countries, he introduced Büchner as an advocate of "worldwide social revolutionary solidarity" to the "New Left" in Germany, (Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 2: 65).[144] A significant milestone in Büchner's reception was the publication of Werner Lehmann's comprehensive critical edition of Büchner's works in 1967 (the so-called *Hamburger-Ausgabe*, 'Hamburg edition') that was groundbreaking especially as far as *Woyzeck* scholarship is concerned. Up to that point, Fritz Bergemann's 1922 edition had been considered authoritative and his arrangement of *Woyzeck* was used for theatrical productions. Lehman printed all the preserved fragments of the play, grouping them in separate manuscripts, and also reconstructed a hypothetical final version intended for reading and the stage (the four manuscripts are labeled H1

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[143] "Eine historisch kaum erklärbare Modernität."
[144] "Anwalt weltweiter sozialrevolutionärer Solidarität."

– H4). His arrangement of *Woyzeck* became the basis of most subsequent editions of the play and is generally accepted among scholars (Richards 147).[145]

The timing of Lehman's edition was also quite opportune, as the revolutionary aspect of Büchner's work became especially attractive to the 1968 movement. The following years witnessed a "true explosion of writings on Büchner" (Richard xiii), and a renewed fascination with his oeuvre in German art in general and the New German Cinema in particular, a topic which I will address later in this chapter. Interestingly, at the same time the political pitch in many Büchner Prize acceptance speeches was significantly toned down. It appears that the German Academy of Language and Literature tried to stay away from current politics and selected award recipients who did not relate to the revolutionary side of Büchner. In line with the New Subjectivity and inwardness characteristic of the 1970s literary scene, many prize recipients – such as Thomas Bernhard, Uwe Johnson, and Peter Handke – avoided detailed commentary on Büchner and focused instead on their own work. Others, like Heinz Piontek and Hermann Lenz, connected with the sense of tranquility that they perceived in Büchner's works (see Goltschnigg, *Moderne* 2: 83-89).

Such fluctuations and contradictions surrounding Büchner contributed to the increasing fascination with his work. This is also reflected in his renewed popularity on stage, especially in the 1960s and 70s. *Woyzeck* in particular lent itself well to a growing trend toward experimentation on the West German stage (Reeve 144). As a reviewer of a 1962 performance of *Woyzeck* in the newly opened Cologne Schauspielhaus notes: "[In] the whole of German stage literature, there is no work which permits of so many and so different interpretations" (qtd. in Reeve 145).

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[145] One notable exception is Friedrich Sengle, who criticizes Lehmann's version for reading and stage as speculative and unworthy of a critical edition (265).

An outstanding performance of *Woyzeck* outside of Germany was Ingmar Bergman's famed experimental production of the play in Stockholm in 1969. In an attempt to open theater to a wider audience, Bergman had an arena stage constructed at the Royal Dramatic Theater especially for this event. His approach was reminiscent of Romain Rolland's vision of a people's theater, and of Reinhardt's staging of Rolland's *Danton* at the Großes Schauspielhaus in Berlin. Like Rolland and Reinhardt, Bergman did away with seating sections and numbered seats and introduced the same price for all tickets. To establish a "personal, intimate relationship between actors and audience," he placed 150 seats directly on the stage (Reeve 148). Bergman also invited the public to several rehearsals of the play and asked for comments, which he then considered in his production. This collaborative effort of sorts resulted in a widely praised production that became the highlight of the season.

With six major productions, 1969 was also a prolific year for *Woyzeck* in Germany. The most radical performance took place at the Recklinghausen Ruhr Festival, where the text of *Woyzeck* was combined with *Leonce und Lena*, but this particular experiment received mostly negative reviews. In the 1970s, according to Reeve, "*Woyzeck* continues to be the object of [...] somewhat arbitrary interpretations often seeking novelty solely for the sake of novelty" (157). As in its earliest productions, Büchner's fragment was on many occasions combined with other plays or with different versions of the text. For example, the theater troupes of Krefeld and Mönchengladbach performed a combination of Büchner's *Woyzeck* and Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* in 1972. In 1975, *Woyzeck* was introduced by a one-act play by the contemporary German author Gerhard Kelling, entitled "The Soundness of Mind of the Murderer Johann Christian Woyzeck," with acrobatic movements enacted by the protagonist placed in a cage (Reeve 157).

With its open form leaving ample room for experimentation, *Woyzeck* once again proved to be in tune with the zeitgeist of the epoch. This notion of Büchner's ever evolving modernity is, perhaps, the most striking feature in his reception. Although Büchner's roots are often seen in the aesthetics of the *Sturm und Drang* (cf. Sengle and Kästner) and in the late Romantic complex in general, his poetics seem to transcend the literary context of his time, prefiguring many subsequent developments in art. Throughout the twentieth century, numerous artists belonging to various branches of modernism saw Büchner as one of their own, and even some scholars claimed that he was so far ahead of his time that he could be truly appreciated only in the twentieth century. This especially concerns *Woyzeck*, which was on many occasions hailed for its stunning modernity. Thus Eugen Kilian, who was the first to stage *Woyzeck,* states that there is “hardly another work [...] that is infused with a more modern spirit” (Goltschnigg, *Rezeption* 215),[146] while Brecht calls it the “first modern drama at all” (Mommsen 411). Walter Jens in his eulogy on the occasion of Büchner’s sesquicentennial in 1963 speaks about him as a “contemporary” (“Zeitgenosse”) and “recently deceased” (“jüngst Verstorbenen,” Goltschnigg, *Rezeption* 81). This notion of Büchner as a contemporary is important to keep in mind for the analysis of cinematic adaptations of *Woyzeck* in the New German Cinema.

b. Büchner on TV and the Context of Literary Adaptations in the New German Cinema

Before Büchner was once again featured in big screen productions, his work had been discovered for the increasingly popular medium of television. While literary adaptations enjoyed popularity in film in general, they were especially suitable for TV productions. Public television in West Germany had a mission not only to entertain but also to inform and educate its audience. Literary adaptations, especially from the classical canon, served well to fulfill such an

[146] “[Es gibt] kaum ein Werk [...] das von modernerem Geiste durchdrungen ist.”

educational mandate. This is quite obvious in the first TV version of *Woyzeck,* directed by Bohumil Herlischka in 1962. The film opens with titles providing basic biographical information about Büchner and an explanation concerning the play's format which rings with a touchingly schoolmaster-like intonation: "*Woyzeck* is a fragment, that is, a piece that was not finished."[147] Herlischka also delivers his interpretational leitmotif, referring to the authority of the influential critic Alfred Kerr: "Woyzeck is the man everybody tramples on. The main issue is mankind inflicting suffering – not the man who suffers."[148] Thus his focus is on the tormentors rather than on the tormented protagonist. The Drum Major, the Officer, and the Doctor are portrayed in great detail as ridiculous representatives of their kind, whereas Woyzeck is shown as a mere victim without any rebellious qualities. He emerges as an exhausted and hounded sufferer, very much in the tradition of Eugen Klöpfer's incarnation of the title role in the earliest stage productions of the play (see chapter 3). From its first scene, Herlischka's film leaves no doubt about its proximity to theater, something that tends to be a generic mark of teleplays as a genre. The film begins with a static close-up of Woyzeck describing his vision to Andres. Both actors are facing the camera, their exaggerated articulation suitable for a stage performance. Especially theatrical is the ending of this scene, when the spotlight on Andres is switched off, leaving only Woyzeck's face in front of a dark background. Theatricality is evident throughout the film. The positioning and movement of actors is mostly oriented towards the implied proscenium, and their acting is unmistakably "stagy," involving large stylized gestures and theatrical enunciation. Settings are basic and theatrical in nature, which is especially evident in outdoor scenes that are clearly filmed on a sound stage. Filming is mostly static and frontal with limited camera movement (mostly to follow actors' trajectories) and very few reverse

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[147] "Der 'Woyzeck' ist ein Fragment, ein nicht fertiggeschriebenes Stück also."
[148] "Woyzeck ist der Mensch auf dem alle rumtrampeln. Kernpunkt wird die quälende Menschheit – nicht ihr gequälter Mensch."

angles. Underlighting and the use of shadows do have some resemblance to expressionist film, but in these stage-like settings they look theatrical as well.

A similarly theatrical approach to a Büchner adaptation can be seen in Fritz Umgelter's *Dantons Tod* from 1963. With a running time of 180 minutes, the film includes all 32 scenes with only occasional rearrangements of their order and very few abridgments. The production stays close to the original dialogue and on some occasions follows Büchner's stage directions concerning the movement of characters. While the actors' performances are more adjusted to camera acting than in Herlischka's *Woyzeck*, the overall impression of Umgelter's film remains quite theatrical. Umgelter often uses staging in depth, filmed with a mobile camera in long shot. However, camera movement has no aesthetic function, it merely serves as a mechanical eye which pans from one part of the action to the other, mimicking a spectator's gaze in the theater. As in the previous production, the film's staginess is especially apparent in the "outdoor" episodes, for example in the promenade scene in the second act. Numerous extras are circling the stage while the main characters step to the foreground for the duration of their dialogues, subsequently blending into the background again. Umgelter does not try to hide the artificiality of his outdoor set. Thus, one character points to and then elaborately steps over a non-existing puddle on the stage floor. The lack of background sound in this scene (the promenaders are all conversing soundlessly) and throughout the film also adds to the feeling of a theatrical space. Overall, with its fidelity to the original, its attention to historic detail in terms of costumes and details of the interior, and in its affinity to theater, Umgelter's production is rooted in the tradition of West German cinema of the 1950s.

Rudolf Noelte's *Woyzeck*, produced for TV in 1966, opens with information on the real case of Johann Christian Woyzeck, who murdered his mistress in 1821 and was executed two

years later. The viewers also learn that during the trial the sanity of the defendant was determined in a controversial medical report, which Büchner used as a source for his play. Thus, as in Herlischka's version, there is a pedagogical opening, but the interpretational focus is quite different. While Herlischka focuses on the social circumstances that shape the protagonist’s life, Noelte is primarily interested in his state of mind. Woyzeck appears to be less troubled by his oppressors than by his own visions, which he himself cannot explain and nobody else tries to understand. Frequent close-ups of his face study his troubled state of mind. More in despair than in rage, he seems to be trying to flee from himself and is often shown from behind and running away. Marie, who is generally presented as a rather loving and caring character, also expresses genuine concern for Woyzeck's mental health.

Noelte’s settings are minimalistic and his cinematography is mostly unobtrusive; rarely does an eye-catching camera movement divert the spectator's attention from observing the protagonist and following the plot. At times, there are expressionistic touches that were most likely borrowed from Klaren's *Wozzeck*. (The DEFA film had been screened in West Germany for the first time in 1964, shortly before the production of Noelte's *Woyzeck*). For example, the physician's attire in Noelte's film is reminiscent of Caligari, the quintessential mad doctor of expressionist film, who clearly inspired Klaren's depiction of the character (see chapter 3). Occasionally, Noelte also makes use of light and shadow in an expressionistic way. As in the previous TV adaptations of Büchner, the script is very close to the original text of the play. The rendering is more cinematic (with an increased number of point of view shots, reverse angles, and close-ups, and less frontal acting), although just like Herlischka and Umgelter, Noelte ultimately approaches his material from a theatrical perspective.

In 1984, Oliver Herbrich produced a modernized version of the play with the slightly altered title *Wodzeck*. Keeping some of the original dialogue, Herbrich shifts the action into the present and alters details of the story. His Wodzeck is not a soldier but a metal worker whose life is conditioned by the monotony of his job. His only joy is the relationship with his girlfriend – here called Maleen, not Marie – who in the beginning is much more loving than in the original or any other adaptations. Their failing relationship is at the center of the film, with less emphasis placed on Wodzeck's oppression by his superiors. In fact, the character of the Officer is left out altogether and the interaction between the equivalent of the Drum Major (here a manager of the metal processing company) with both Maleen and Wodzeck is kept to a minimum and barely involves any dialogue. The Doctor serves as yet another example of society's indifference and lack of human empathy, which ultimately ruin Wodzeck. As in Noelte's film, the question of the protagonist's sanity frames the events; however the emphasis is not on his psychodrama, but on the fact that an individual becomes interesting to society only after committing murder, as a medical case study.

Herbrich's license in the treatment of his source arguably emerged from the new self-confidence of the filmmaker that had developed in the New German Cinema, whose corollary was the notion of the director as an *auteur*. Like Herbrich, many filmmakers had a deep indebtedness to literary sources, but at the same time displayed a strong drive for artistic independence, asserting themselves as creative artists / authors in their own right. The larger number of literary adaptations during the period is due to several factors. One was that the creators of the New German Cinema perceived themselves as a "fatherless generation" of filmmakers, being unable to adopt their immediate predecessors as models and thus turning to other, more worthy examples. As Wim Wenders put it:

> I do not believe there is anywhere else where people have suffered such a loss of confidence in images of their own, their own stories and myths, as we have. We, the directors of the New Cinema, have felt this loss most keenly, in our own persons, in the lack, the absence of a tradition of our own, as a fatherless generation, and in the spectators with their perplexed reaction and their initial hesitation. (127)

Throughout the 1950s the quality of West German film production had fallen dramatically, to the point where the jury of the 1961 Berlin Film Festival refused to award a prize for the best film simply because there was no film that deserved this honor. German cinema had been dominated by profitable but shallow entertainment films in the spirit of optimism and escapism that accompanied the economic miracle in the West (Sandford 11). Popular genres were the *Heimatfilm*, operettas, romantic and sex comedies, and westerns based on Karl May's stories. The frustration of young filmmakers with what they called “Opas Kino” (“grandpa's cinema”) was expressed in the Oberhausen Manifesto, proclaimed at the eighth Oberhausen Short Film Festival in 1962. With the slogan “The old cinema is dead. We believe in a new one,” a group of young directors demanded freedom from commercial pressure in order to offer a creative outlet for those who speak a new language of cinema. This new generation of filmmakers disdained the established industry for the banality of its output and its conventionality, which was not compatible with their self-conception as film authors. The self-proclaimed *auteurs* claimed to have authority over all artistic aspects of the film, including the script. And, as in the early days of film, the term *Autorenkino* often included the proximity to literature, an inexhaustible source of subjects and inspiration (Elsaesser, *Companion* 181).

The connection to literature allowed New German directors both to distance themselves from their country's dark past and to assert that cinema was high art. To quote Werner Herzog:

"After Kleist, Büchner and Kafka, we are legitimate German culture; [...] again we are legitimate. I have to say this because film-making and culture have been abused for the most barbaric purposes in recent history" (qtd. in Elsaesser, *NGC* 47/330). Such "literariness" of the New German Cinema continued the tradition of the German silent era, which saw a large number of literary adaptations and introduced the term *Literaturverfilmung* (see chapter 1). In the New German Cinema, however, the notion of the director as *auteur* allowed filmmakers to interpret their literary sources more freely, as in Herbrich's film described above. For example, another film that liberally utilizes Büchner sources is Margarethe von Trotta and Wolfgang Schlöndorff's *Der plötzliche Reichtum der armen Leute von Kombach* (*The Sudden Wealth of the Poor People of Kombach*, 1970). This film combines parts of a nineteenth century chronicle with Büchner's pamphlet *Der hessische Landbote* and excerpts from *Woyzeck* in order to create the new sub-genre of the left-wing *Heimatfilm*.

Logistical and financial considerations also contributed to the popularity of literary adaptations. Many young directors distrusted the established industry and founded their own production companies, as Herzog did in 1963. The disadvantages of such independence was the need to look for financial resources, which often turned into a time-consuming task in the maze of the German subsidy and funding system. As Fassbinder remarked: "It takes more time to read the small-print in subsidy contracts than to produce a film." Filmmakers were often unwilling to invest much time in the writing of original scripts or invest money to pay a scriptwriter. Under these circumstances, literary adaptations offered a good solution (Pflaum, *BRD* 18). It also proved to be much easier to find funding for a film based on literature through institutions like the *Kuratorium junger deutscher Film* ("Trustees of the Young German Film") or the *Filmförderungsanstalt* ("Institute for Film Sponsorship") (see Sandford, Elsaesser). Another

important matter was to attract financial resources from TV stations. Since government funding in most cases was not sufficient to produce a film, directors had to rely on TV companies to co-produce their films. Here, again, support was easier to find for literary adaptations because they counted towards the mandatory educational output of public television. Literary adaptations, especially from the approved literary canon, were also considered "safer" in terms of clearing the political and ideological censorship of TV studios; however, even dealing with the classics, filmmakers sometimes had to make serious concessions both in terms of aesthetics and content.[149] Finally, adaptations were relatively safe commercially. The high prestige of literature in German education secured the interest of a certain audience for such films (Pflaum, *Deutschland* 159). Indeed, among the six financially most successful films of the New German Cinema – successful meaning at least breaking even with the production costs – four were literary adaptations (Elsaesser, *NGC* 37).

The choice of authors for script adaptations was to a considerable degree determined by the oppositional stand of the New German Cinema vis-à-vis the filmmaking establishment and German culture and society in general. Especially popular among the new generation of filmmakers were "critical" contemporary writers (Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, and Peter Handke) and such "outsiders" from the nineteenth century as Heinrich von Kleist and Georg Büchner. Among the directors of this generation, Werner Herzog seems to be especially fascinated with Büchner. Some scholars even go so far as to see a kind of congeniality between the two, such as Emmanuel Carrère who proclaims: "Herzog plus Büchner...equals Herzog squared" (qtd. .in Stiles 226).

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[149] Schlöndorff addresses this fact in his section of *Deutschland im Herbst* (*Germany in Autumn*, 1978), which is a biting parody of a studio board meeting banning Sophocles' *Antigone* from the program in light of the impending funeral of RAF terrorists.

2. Werner Herzog's *Woyzeck* (1979)

a. References to Büchner in *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle* (1974) and *Stroszek* (1977)

Werner Herzog was born as Werner Stipetić in 1942 in Munich, but grew up in the remote village of Sachrang in Bavaria. As a teenager he returned to Munich, where he finished school and enrolled at the university to study history, literature, and drama. He began making films in the early 60s without any formal training, learning – as he claims – from bad examples and an encyclopedia entry about filmmaking. "I made myself a film-maker," he declares (qtd. in Elsaesser, *NGC* 91). Because producers did not take him seriously and refused to fund his films, Herzog founded his own company, *Werner Herzog Filmproduktion*, in 1963 and produced a number of short films. The autodidact Herzog advocates a non-academic approach to cinema, stating that "filmmaking must have experience of life at its foundation" (Cronin 12). His labeling of cinema as the "art of illiterates" can be seen as the rejection of literature as a relevant source of inspiration (Peucker, "Literature" 105). Yet literature and writing do play a significant role in Herzog's cinema, both concerning the act of writing and in terms of literary sources and influences (see Peucker, "Literature"; Peucker, "Arnim" 218). While *Woyzeck* is Herzog's only direct adaptation, a number of his films relate to literature in one form or another.

Herzog's first feature film, *Lebenszeichen* (*Signs of Life*, 1968) was influenced by Achim von Arnim's novella *Der tolle Invalide auf dem Fort Ratonneau* (*The Madman of Fort Ratonneau*, 1818) and can be called a cinematic "borrowing" (Peucker, "Arnim" 217). As in Arnim's text, the plot in Herzog's film centers around a soldier who, in a fit of madness, declares a one-man war on his surroundings and barricades himself in the fort he was entrusted to oversee. In Herzog's film, the action is transposed from eighteenth-century France to the Greek island of Kos during World War II. *Signs of Life* won the Silver Bear Extraordinary Jury Prize at

the International Berlin Film Festival in 1968 and reignited Lotte Eisner's interest in German film. The famous film historian and critic of Weimar Cinema had been living in French exile since 1933, and had been working mainly with French cinema since World War II. In the sixties, intrigued by Herzog's debut feature, she turned her attention to German film again. As Herzog recalls:

> Lotte Eisner was the one who wrote to Fritz Lang: “All of a sudden there are films here again; I saw a film, *Signs of Life*. You have to see it. There is a German cinema again.” And Fritz Lang wrote back: “Lotte, that's impossible!” And Lotte sent him a copy. And all of a sudden, because of Fritz Lang and Lotte Eisner, it was as if we had received an anointment. This is legitimate German culture again, cinematic culture at least. (Appendix 285-86)[150]

Eisner, whom Herzog greatly admires and who became a mentor for many young German directors, was perceived as a link between the New German Cinema and the golden age of the twenties, as Herzog describes in his foreword to Eisner's autobiography *Ich hatte einst ein schönes Vaterland* (*I Once Had a Beautiful Fatherland*):

> Eisner, what was her significance for the New German Cinema? We are a generation of orphans, there are no fathers, only grandfathers that we could refer to – that is Murnau, Lang, Pabst, the generation of the 20s. It is strange indeed that the continuity of German film was severed in such a radical fashion by Nazi-barbarism and the following catastrophe of World War II. The thread was cut, actually before that already. The path led into nothingness. There was a yawning gap of an entire quarter of a century. In

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[150] Lotte Eisner war auch diejenige, die Fritz Lang geschrieben hat: Hier gibt es auf einmal wieder Filme, ich habe einen Film gesehen, *Lebenszeichen*, Du musst den sehen. Es gibt wieder einen deutschen Film. Und Fritz Lang schrieb zurück: Lotte, das ist unmöglich! Und Lotte schickte ihm eine Kopie. Und auf einmal, durch Fritz Lang und durch Lotte Eisner waren wir, als hätten wir die Salbung bekommen. Das ist wieder legitime deutsche Kultur, Filmkultur zumindest.

> literature and other areas this was not noticeable in such a dramatic fashion. That is why Lotte Eisner's concern for our fate, the fate of the young generation, built a bridge to establish a historic context, a context of cultural heritage. (Eisner, *Vaterland* 7)[151]

Herzog again stresses the significance of Eisner's blessing in his extensive interview with Paul Cronin for the "Conversations with Filmmakers" series: "[Eisner] alone had the authority, insight and the personality to declare us legitimate, and it was vitally important when she insisted that what my generation was doing in Germany was as legitimate as the film culture that Murnau, Lang and the other Weimar filmmakers had created all those years previously" (Cronin 153).

This understanding of a connection to Weimar Cinema as a source of legitimization is perhaps one of the biggest common denominators between the New German Cinema and Werner Herzog, who otherwise always perceived himself as an outsider. In general, it is important to note that the New German Cinema was not an aesthetic school comparable to the French *Nouvelle Vague* or Italian neorealism, but rather a group of filmmakers that was united in its opposition to the commercial German film industry and collaborated in establishing an independent system of film funding. Herzog, in his own words, had "a feeling of not belonging from the very first hour" (Appendix 285), and although he attended the Oberhausen Festival in 1962, he did not sign the group's manifesto. He also declined the invitation to participate in the collaborative film *Deutschland im Herbst* in 1978, most likely because of the political nature of the project.

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[151] Die Eisnerin, wer war das für den neuen deutschen Film? Wir sind eine Generation von Waisen, es gibt keine Väter, allenfalls Großväter, auf die wir uns beziehen konnten, also Murnau, Lang, Pabst, die Generation der 20er Jahre. Es ist ja seltsam, dass die Kontinuität im deutschen Film durch die Barbarei der Nazi-Zeit und die darauf folgende Katastrophe des Zweiten Weltkriegs derart radikal abriss. Der Faden war zuende, eigentlich vorher schon. Der Weg führte ins Nichts. Da klaffte eine Lücke von einem ganzen Vierteljahrhundert. In der Literatur und in anderen Bereichen war das keineswegs so dramatisch spürbar. Deshalb hat uns Lotte Eisners Anteilnahme an unserem Schicksal, also an dem der Jungen, eine Brücke in einen geschichtlichen, einen kulturgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang geschlagen.

All possible nuances notwithstanding, Herzog, like many filmmakers of the New German Cinema, turned to literature in search of a legitimizing connection with German culture. He is especially fascinated by those writers who went to extremes and were mavericks and outsiders. Thus Herzog admires Friedrich Hölderlin, who "explored the last boundaries of our language all the way into madness" ("der die letzten Grenzen unserer Sprache ausgelotet hat bis hinüber in den Wahnsinn," Appendix 191). Likewise he praises the baroque poet and mystic Quirinus Kuhlmann as someone who pushed the limits of German poetic language. Other influential writers mentioned by Herzog include Heinrich von Kleist and Georg Büchner (Cronin 137). For Herzog, Büchner probes the limits of art with his novella *Lenz* and also with *Woyzeck*, which he considers the ultimate dramatic text (Appendix 275-76). Without a doubt, Büchner had already been on Herzog's mind and influenced some of his work before the production of *Woyzeck*. One such film with a strong Büchner connection is *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle* (*Everyone for Himself and God against All*; released in the US as *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, 1974), Herzog's rendering of Kaspar Hauser's story.

Kaspar Hauser opens with a dedication to Lotte Eisner as belonging to "those – the better part – who had to leave Germany."[152] Thus Herzog creates a sense of continuity with the Weimar era. At the same time he distances himself from the ensuing age of Nazi barbarism, evoking yet again the sense of "fatherlessness." Related to this is the preoccupation with origin, a trademark of his generation of filmmakers and also the central theme in *Kaspar Hauser* (Elsaesser, *NGC* 217).

[152] The dedication reads: "This film is dedicated to Lotte Eisner. She belongs to those – the better part – who had to leave Germany" ("Dieser Film ist Lotte Eisner gewidmet. Sie gehört zu jenen – dem besseren Teil – der Deutschland verlassen musste").

As the opening titles explain, the film's protagonist was found one day in 1828 on the town square of N.; he was barely able to walk and could produce only one sentence.[153] Overall, Herzog follows the basic outline of the famous true story of the foundling who became an object of public curiosity and scholarly research in his day. Yet Herzog is less interested in the "pedagogical" aspect of the story, unlike François Truffaut in *L'Enfant sauvage* (*The Wild Child*, 1970), the film *Kaspar Hauser* is often compared to. Instead, he portrays Kaspar's domestication as a painful procedure; the integration into social structures and the gain in sophistication is at the same time a loss of identity and imagination. This process is represented through the topic of language and particularly writing: *Schreiben* (writing) is the very first word Kaspar hears in the film, "and with this word difference or otherness is introduced into his previously hermetic existence" (Peucker, "Literature" 108).

Writing has a clearly negative connotation in *Kaspar Hauser*. A vivid example of this is found in the character of the notary, a maniacal scribe whose compulsion to record events in full and exact detail, supposedly making them more relevant and real, is utterly ridiculous. Herzog's scorn for the authority that reduces life to a deadening and dehumanizing scheme finds close parallels in Büchner. Many editions of *Woyzeck* close with lines uttered by a court official who comments on Marie's death with callous delight: "A good murder, a proper murder, a lovely murder, as lovely a murder as anyone could wish, we've not had a murder like this for years" (*Plays* 138).[154] In *Kaspar Hauser*, the notary uses a variation of these lines after Kaspar and two of his fellow sideshow "miracles" try to escape from the fairground. Kaspar, Hombrecito, and the "Little Mozart" are seen in extreme shot running through a large meadow with tall wavy

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[153] The presentation of this information is reminiscent of the educational remarks at the beginning of the television adaptations of Büchner described previously. This is probably a concession to the co-producer of *Kaspar Hauser*, the public television channel ZDF.

[154] "Ein guter Mord, ein ächter Mord, ein schön Mord, so schön als man ihn nur verlangen tun kann wir haben schon lang so kein gehabt" (*Werke* 1: 173).

grass. They are pursued by townspeople, including the scribe who repeatedly orders them to stop. After the fugitives have been caught and are escorted back to the town, the scribe, a puny elderly man, slowly follows the runaways and their captors. He is seen from behind as he walks through the tall grass and says merrily: “A lovely report, an accurate report. I shall write a report you don’t experience every day.”[155] The static long shot lingers for another 20 seconds after the scribe stops speaking, watching his figure become smaller and smaller and more engulfed by the wavy grass around him. A similar, yet far more eerie image will appear in the final scenes of *Woyzeck,* when that film's protagonist is walking into a dark lake.

At the very end of the film, after Kaspar's autopsy, the scribe utters a variation of these lines for the second time. Here it is once again clear that Kaspar – just like Woyzeck – is of interest to the society only as a case study. This final scene recalls the opening of Klaren's *Wozzeck*, where the protagonist's dead body is about to be dissected by the doctor and his students, who also use a variation of the above lines from Büchner (see chapter 3). In Kaspar's case, the local doctors are particularly interested in his brain as the key to understanding his condition. And indeed, the doctors find “a remarkable abnormality in the overdevelopment of the cerebellum. [...] There is also a deformity of the cerebrum. The left hemisphere is reduced.” They conclude that this “explains a great deal” and “should be recorded” (subtitles).[156] Leaving the dissection room, the scribe is delighted at the perspective of filing the final report on Kaspar. The closing scene acquires strong absurdist overtones as the scribe, overwhelmed by the momentousness of the occasion, makes an odd decision: instead of mounting the carriage, he

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[155] “Ein schönes Protokoll, ein genaues Protokoll. Ich werde ein Protokoll schreiben, wie man es nicht alle Tage erlebt.” Because subtitles are often inacurrately translated, I am providing my own translation unless otherwise noted.

[156] “Eine merkwürdige Abnormität im Sinne einer Überentwicklung des Kleinhirns. [...] Andererseits besteht auch eine Deformität des Großhirns. Die linke Hemisphäre ist verkleinert. [...] Das erklärt vielleicht Vieles. Auch diesen Befund sollten wir festhalten.”

orders his hat to be driven home, while he himself proceeds on foot. Once more, he is filmed from behind, this time walking down the street and uttering the closing words of the film: "A lovely report, an accurate report. […] Finally we have an explanation for this strange man, an explanation of such kind that a better one is impossible to find."[157] For the scribe and the townspeople the enigma is solved, yet the spectator is left with uneasiness about Kaspar. Like Büchner's *Woyzeck*, Herzog's *Kaspar Hauser* ends with the words of a minor character that close a complicated case with a simplistic statement. Herzog also preserves the awkward wording of this final sentence with the unnecessary insertion of "tun" ("verlangen tun kann" in Büchner's original and "finden tun kann" in Herzog's version), which gets lost in the English translation. The clumsiness of the formulation adds another layer of discrepancy between the gravity of the situation and the banality of the statement.[158]

Herzog opens *Kaspar Hauser* with yet another quotation from Büchner, this time taken from the novella *Lenz*. The first image of the film following the opening titles shows a large grain field with long green blades swaying in the wind. This very long static shot is held for a total of 42 seconds; during the first five seconds nothing but a very faint blowing of the wind is audible. After that, the music of Johann Pachelbel's canon underscores the image.[159] Finally, after 30 seconds a title appears, reading: "Don't you hear that horrible screaming all round you? That screaming men call silence?" ("Hören Sie denn nicht das entsetzliche Schreien ringsum, das man gewöhnlich die Stille heißt?"). This is a slightly altered quotation from Büchner's *Lenz,* where the protagonist asks his host, pastor Oberlin: "Do you hear nothing? Do you not hear the

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[157] "Ein schönes Protokoll, ein genaues Protokoll. [...] Wir haben endlich für diesen befremdlichen Menschen eine Erklärung, wie man sie besser nicht finden tun kann."

[158] As Patrick Fortmann observes, the substitution of the word "murder" in *Woyzeck* with "protocol" in *Kaspar Hauser* "establishes an analogy between these terms that dovetail with the films [sic.] adversity towards writing and literacy" (201). For a detailed analysis of this subject see Peucker, "Literature and Writing in the Films of Werner Herzog."

[159] Curiously, this most famous piece of the baroque composer had been almost forgotten until its rediscovery in 1919. Thus it shares the fate of Büchner's most eminent play *Woyzeck*.

terrible voice screaming around us on every side, the voice known commonly as silence?" (*Plays* 163).[160] It is quite possible that the deviation from the original is a result of Herzog quoting from memory, since he claims to know the novella almost by heart (Appendix 292). For Lenz, stopping this terrible voice would be a relief: "I would be alright if only I didn't have to hear it anymore" (*Plays* 163). Likewise, Kaspar seems to long for the quiet and speechless days of his incarceration: as he remarks later in the film, his "coming into this world was a terribly hard fall" ("Mir kommt es vor, dass mein Erscheinen auf dieser Welt ein harter Sturz gewesen ist"). According to Herzog, the use of the quotation from *Lenz* is intended both to set a certain standard and to facilitate access to the film. Together with the image and the music, the citation creates a perturbing mood that sets the tone for the film (Appendix 292). Herzog explains that this quotation is a bow to Büchner, yet he did not reference the source of the inserted title. Thus the connection to Büchner will most likely go unnoticed for the majority of the audience.

Apart from the borrowings from Büchner's *Woyzeck* and *Lenz*, there is another unmarked literary quotation in the film. When Kaspar is discovered in a shed after his attempt to flee from the fairground, he says: "I want to fly as a rider into the bloody battle" ("Ich möcht als Reiter fliegen / Wohl in die blutige Schlacht"). This line is taken from Joseph von Eichendorff's poem "The Broken Ring" ("Das zerbrochene Ringlein"), which describes a young man's longing to die after he has been deserted by his beloved. When Kaspar utters these lines, they seem to be a variation of the only sentence he was originally able to produce: "I want to become the kind of rider that my father was" (subtitle, "Ich möcht ein solchner [sic] Reiter werden, wie mein Vater einer gewe'n ist"). As such, these words are not recognizable as part of a poem. Both the Eichendorff lines and the borrowings from Büchner "fit so effortlessly into Herzog's material

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[160] "Hören Sie denn nichts? Hören Sie denn nicht die entsetzliche Stimme, die um den ganzen Horizont schreit und die man gwöhnlich die Stille heißt?" (*Werke* 1: 249).

that they are lost as quotations" (Peucker, "Literature" 114). While Herzog does not disguise his musical sources – for example Mozart's *Magic Flute* – he is very cautious about his indebtedness to literature (Peucker, "Literature" 114). But for all the disdain for writing and literariness that Herzog displays both within this film and as a general attitude, there is an undeniable respect and reverence for literature discernible in his work. More obvious than verbal quotations are visual references to literature that appear repeatedly in Herzog's films.

As Brigitte Peucker points out, there are allusions to romantic poetry in the landscapes Herzog chooses as settings in *Kaspar Hauser*; most notably in the image of a pond at dusk, with a swan and a rowboat gliding through the dark waters ("Literature" 112). While this imagery represents general notions rather than a specific text, there are two very direct visual references to Büchner in the film. The opening image of *Kaspar Hauser* described above anticipates the poppy field that Herzog uses in his adaptation of *Woyzeck* to portray what Büchner simply calls "open field." Both fields are very large, have a similar color scheme and share a peculiar dynamic in their combination of the stasis of a vast field and movement created by the wind within. The visual relation of the two fields is complemented by a contrasting textual connection. While the field in *Kaspar Hauser* represents the screaming silence described in *Lenz*, the field in *Woyzeck* is full of whispering voices telling the protagonist to kill his lover. (The choice of a poppy field here is certainly related to the theme of visions). In both Büchner's *Lenz* and *Woyzeck* only the protagonists can hear these sounds, something that separates them from the rest of the world. Just like these Büchner characters, Kaspar Hauser is plagued by dreams and visions that make him view the world from a different perspective from everybody around him. Thus Herzog creates a connection between his two films and also between these films and Büchner's texts.

A similar instance of intertextuality can be found in the fairground scene of *Kaspar Hauser*. Two of the "Four Riddles of the Spheres" have a link to the director's previous films. The Little King of Punt is played by the same actor who appeared as Hombré in Herzog's *Auch Zwerge haben klein angefangen* (*Even Dwarfs Started Small*, 1970), while Hombrecito the Indian is reminiscent of the flute player of the same name in *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* (*Aguirre, The Wrath of God*, 1972). At the end of the presentation of the "Four Riddles," an unmotivated cut away from the stage area shows a little monkey sitting on a pony. These animals are not part of the show, but they are most likely an allusion to Büchner's *Woyzeck*. There, a trained "astronomic horse" and a "military monkey" dressed in a uniform are the main attraction of a show Woyzeck visits with Marie. Büchner's preoccupation with the polarity of the social and the natural expressed in this scene is shared by Herzog, who makes this the central underlying issue of his *Kaspar Hauser*. Herzog further reinforces the theme of natural versus unnatural behavior with an image of a man in the background who is making a camel walk on his knees in an oddly abnormal fashion.[161]

In his next feature film, *Herz aus Glass* (*Heart of Glass*, 1976), Herzog stays within the same geographical area and historic period as in *Kaspar Hauser*. A small pre-industrial village in Bavaria falls into madness and destruction after the foreman of the local glass factory dies, taking into the grave the formula of the much prized ruby glass. The frenzied young factory owner stops at nothing to recover the secret, committing murder and, in the end, burning down his own factory. His counterpart is the cowherd Hias, whose gift of clairvoyance the owner tries to exploit. Hias's visions frame the main story and are accompanied by atmospheric shots of mountainous landscapes. A number of commentators point to the resemblance of some of these

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[161] This is also an additional reference to *Auch Zwerge haben klein angefangen*, where Hombre laughs about a kneeling dromedary at the end of the film.

vistas to the paintings of the famous Romantic artist Caspar David Friedrich (see Peucker, *Images* 92, Prager 97, and Rentschler, "Politics" 170).[162]

According to my observations, the initial vision sequence of the film also contains clear echoes from the beginning of Büchner's *Lenz*. Herzog, like Büchner, employs strong contrasts in the opening episode in order to portray both the landscape and the protagonist's thoughts. The dark mountainous landscape is juxtaposed with gray fog and a white cloudy sky melting into infinity. To Lenz, the moving clouds appear as "wild, whinnying horses" (*Plays* 141).[163] In *Herz aus Glas,* we find the same swift movement of clouds, but here it is associated with a waterfall. The time-lapse shot of the cascading clouds has a more tranquil mood, because Herzog adds the calming sounds of a song and the faint ringing of bells to the image. But this conjunction, in turn, can also be an echo from *Lenz*: Right after the image of the galloping clouds, Büchner speaks of the wind that "fell silent and far below a sound like lullabies and church bells rose from ravines and treetops" (*Plays* 141).[164] Herzog reverses this sequence, as the serene view of the mountains is followed with a disturbing apocalyptic vision of collapse. Both Lenz and the clairvoyant Hias experience a deep and powerful connection with nature and describe how they become one with nature's forces. "He thought he should draw the storm right into himself, embrace all things within his being, he spread and lay over the entire earth, he burrowed his way into the All," writes Büchner (142)[165]. Herzog's seer recounts: "I feel an

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[162] Herzog himself acknowledges a connection to Friedrich, but one that transcends mere visual quotations: "For me a true landscape is not just a representation of a desert or a forest. It shows an inner state of mind, literally inner landscapes, and it is the human soul that is visible through the landscapes presented in my films [...]. This is my real connection to Caspar David Friedrich, a man who never wanted to paint landscapes *per se*, but wanted to explore and show inner landscapes" (Cronin 136).

[163] "[…] wilde, wiehernde Rosse" (*Werke* 1: 225**)**.

[164] "[…] wenn […] der Wind verhallte und tief unten aus den Schluchten, aus den Wipfeln der Tannen wie ein Wiegelied und Glockengeläute heraufsummte" (*Werke* 1: 225).

[165] "Er meinte, er müsse den Sturm in sich ziehen, Alles in sich fassen, er dehnte sich aus und lag über der Erde, er wühlte sich in das All hinein" (Werke 1: 226).

undertow, it draws me, it sucks me down. I begin to fall..." (subtitles).[166] Lenz has a similar sensation right after the lines quoted above: "The earth beneath him shrank, grew small like a wandering star and dipped into a roaring stream whose limpid depths stretched out beneath him" (142). Thus it appears that Büchner's text was an important source of inspiration for the opening sequence of Herzog's film.[167]

After the filming of *Herz aus Glas*, Herzog intended to start working on his *Woyzeck* adaptation, for which he had promised the title role to Bruno S. However, he suddenly realized that having Bruno in this role would be a "massive mistake" and envisioned Klaus Kinski as the protagonist instead (Cronin 142). To make it up to the disappointed Bruno, who had already asked for a leave from his day job as a forklift operator to participate in the film, Herzog spontaneously came up with the title of a film he would do with Bruno instead. He chose the name *Stroszek* for its consonance with the promised *Woyzeck* (Cronin 143). Both this name, borrowed from the leading character of Herzog's first feature film *Lebenszeichen*, and Woyzeck are of Slavic origin, their non-Germanic sound being a possible marker of an outsider status and liminality.[168] Bound by his promise to Bruno S., Herzog thus set out to write an original script for a new film instead of working on his adaptation of Büchner's text. Much of Stroszek's character and the environment in the first part of the film are based on Bruno's real life and biography, yet Herzog had the intention of creating a film with "the basic feeling of Woyzeck in it" (qtd. in Peucker, "Literature" 115).

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[166] "Ich spüre einen Sog, es zieht mich, es saugt mich hinunter. Ich beginne zu stürzen..."
[167] *Lenz* had been adapted into an eponymous feature film in 1971, four years prior to *Herz aus Glas,* by George Moorse, an American director based in Germany. Stylistically it is very different from Büchner with his stream of consciousness, that describe Lenz's impressions in a rapid succession with aberrations in normal spatial and temporal perception. Insread, Moorse opts for long slow pans and tracking shots typical of the "existential gaze" of the camera of the 1970s.
[168] Interestingly, the creators of the two major adaptations of *Woyzeck* had Slavic last names at birth, which they later changed to Germanic ones: Stipetić / Herzog, Klaric / Klaren. The actor who played Woyzeck in Herzog's film likewise had a Slavic last name: Klaus Kinsky (Nakszyński).

Bruno Stroszek is a social outcast, whose life is permeated with poverty, neglect, and abuse. The film begins with his release from prison into a hostile freedom (here, the film also exhibits parallels with *Kaspar Hauser*). While Stroszek signals a new beginning by blowing his little bugle to celebrate his liberty, his life is back in its old track all too soon. Despite his promise to stay away from alcohol, his old neighborhood bar is his first stop out of prison. Here he reconnects with Eva, a prostitute shunned by her pimps, and takes her under his wing. However, he cannot protect her, or himself, from her brutal procurers and decides to start a new life in America with Eva and their eccentric elderly neighbor, Mr. Scheitz.

Herzog not only chose the real names of the actors for his main characters,[169] the settings in this first part of the film are authentic as well. He shows Bruno S.'s real apartment and his neighborhood, in which Bruno tours the back alleys with his idiosyncratic musical routine to earn a little money. These street performances were actually part of Bruno S.'s routine when he first met Herzog, and Bruno uses his own instruments and arrangements in the film. Most importantly, Bruno's misery seems quite genuine, as Herzog remarks: "With Bruno you always see true suffering on the screen. His character in the film is very close to the real Bruno" (Cronin 143). Brad Prager compares the documentary-like nature of the film to John Cassavetes's style of "direct cinema," in which "we are looking at something that is only partly a performance" (72).

In the second half of the film, Bruno Stroszek begins his new life in the United States, again signaling the fresh start with a blow of his bugle, this time on top of the Empire State building in New York City. Ultimately, life in in the New World does not treat him any more kindly and a brief period of happiness soon ends in catastrophe with a distinct American flavor

[169] With the exception of Bruno S., whose last name is Schleinstein, not Stroszek. He kept his real last name a secret at the time of his collaboration with Herzog to maintain anonymity.

that anticipates the mood of the somber existentialist Americana later expressed in Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger Than Paradise* (1984). Although the second part of *Stroszek* has often been seen as a critique of the US and capitalism, Herzog spoke against such narrowing down of the focus of his work.[170] Instead, for him, the film is "about shattered hopes" (Cronin 144). This perception is also more in line with Herzog's determination to have the "feeling of Woyzeck" in his film. Unlike the previously mentioned works that establish a link to Büchner either through quotations or through visualizing parts of his texts, *Stroszek* indeed has more of the vague general atmosphere of *Woyzeck* alongside important thematic similarities. Both protagonists hope for a little personal happiness with their partner, who is portrayed by the same actress, Eva Mattes. Yet this domestic joy is denied to them not only by the circumstances of their life and society, but also by their mate. Eva in *Stroszek* and Marie in *Woyzeck* are not satisfied with what their man has to offer and turn elsewhere to gratify their material as well as erotic desires. In both films, their unfaithfulness does not come as a surprise, since the partnerships with Woyzeck and Stroszek are portrayed as a mismatch from the start, without any emotional involvement on the woman's part. Outside the domestic sphere, both Stroszek and Woyzeck suffer physical and emotional mistreatment by those who are stronger. In *Stroszek,* Eva's two pimps assault and humiliate Bruno, his co-workers in Wisconsin ridicule him, and finally the bank clerk takes away Bruno's home with a smile on his face. It is this kind of "spiritual" harm that is done "ever so politely, and with a smile" (subtitle, "auf die feine Art") that actually hurts Stroszek the most. As in *Woyzeck*, this non-physical, but equally painful, abuse comes from representatives of social hierarchies. In both stories, the combination of insults, broken trust, and abandonment drive the

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[170] This view is reflected in the choice of the cover image of the American DVD release of the film. It shows the native American co-worker of Stroszek's boss, the mechanic, standing in the miserable wasteland of Wisconsin with a little American flag in his hand. A minor character in the film, he is used here as a metaphor of Stoszek's estrangement and loneliness in a foreign and hostile environment.

protagonist to take extreme measures: a murder in *Woyzeck*, an armed robbery in *Stroszek*, and implied suicides in both cases.

After Eva takes off with two truckers and Bruno's mobile home is confiscated, he and Scheitz decide to get their money back by robbing the bank that repossessed their house. Yet the robbery goes awry, Scheitz is arrested, and Bruno flees in his boss's old pickup. His escape leads to a tourist trap on a Native American reservation (which is in turn a "trap" evoking massive historical violence and victimization). The final sequence of the film is permeated with the circular motion that constitutes "the central image of Herzog's *oeuvre*" (Peucker, "Arnim" 222). On the most obvious level, it serves as the metaphor of Bruno's life following the vicious circle of abuse and failure, but it is also replete with disturbing metaphysical connotations.

The circular movement indeed becomes the organizing principle of the film's finale. Bruno leaves his car running in circles on a parking lot and heads for a ski lift. He mounts one of the chairs clutching his rifle and a frozen turkey purchased with the stolen money (an absurd detail featuring an all-American bird) and starts going round and round. The sign attached to the back of his seat reads: "Is this really me!" (An actual sign on the ski lift, this represents another take on the American Dream in a dark existential context). When the camera is tilting up to reveal more of the bleak and depressing wintery landscape, a gun shot is fired, suggesting Stroszek's suicide. However, as in *Woyzeck*, there is no conclusive evidence of the protagonist's death, and the attention shifts away to the situation he leaves behind. This kind of anticlimactic ending and denial of closure is common both in Büchner's and Herzog's works. As I mentioned earlier, Büchner's *Woyzeck* ends with the words of the court official which Herzog recycles in *Kaspar Hauser*. For his *Woyzeck* adaptation, Herzog employs the same lines, this time a direct

quote from Büchner (the text is superimposed over the final image of the film).[171] *Stroszek* likewise ends with a report of a petty official, as a police officer in his communications with the headquarters provides an arid account of the situation, which is both tragic and delightfully absurd: A truck is on fire, a man is on the ski lift and they cannot find the switch to turn the lift off, and they "can't stop the dancing chicken."

The closing images of the film feature the little freak show at the ski lift that Stroszek had set in motion before going on his final ride. Several small animals in glass cases are conditioned to perform tricks whenever a quarter is inserted into the slot. Lured by the prospect of a reward, the animals engage in human-style behavior by interacting with mechanical devices. A rabbit jumps on a little fire truck, a duck beats a drum by pecking a trigger, and the chicken starts dancing on a plate. The star of the finale is the chicken, engaged in the most performance-oriented show. Its glass case is set up like a miniature theater, with blue curtains painted on both sides; the round plate serves as a stage, and colorful musical notes are drawn on the yellow background. The chicken repeatedly walks over to a toy music box in the corner of the cage and pecks at it, starting an annoying musical tune to which it "dances" on the stage (a hot plate that makes the chicken avoid prolonged contact with the surface, thereby making it leap and imitating a dancing movement). Here Herzog comes back to the preoccupation with a theme he shares with Büchner. Both are concerned with the polarity between man and animal and with the reversal of natural and socialized behavior. In *Woyzeck*, Büchner demonstrates the animalization of humans (for example, when Woyzeck is ordered to wiggle his ears and is subsequently called a donkey) and presents animals costumed as humans at the fairground (the aforementioned militaristic monkey and the astronomic horse). Herzog, who had already picked up this topic in *Kaspar Hauser*, now replays it in a more extreme form, emphasizing the compulsiveness of such

[171] Herzog even adheres to the archaic spelling of Büchner's original, writing "ächter" instead of "echter".

conditioned behavior. As he says in the commentary to the American DVD release of the film, he sees the chicken as "a big metaphor, without knowing – metaphor for what." The cruelty and pointlessness of the chicken dance are clearly projected onto the lives of the Stroszeks and Woyzecks. What remains deliberately and poignantly unclear, is who the cruel director ultimately in charge of all these inhumane shows is.

b. The Birth of *Woyzeck* from the Spirit of *Nosferatu*

Herzog called Büchner's *Woyzeck* "really the most remarkable and probably the strongest drama-text that has ever been written in the German language" (qtd. in Peucker, "Literature" 115). His cinematic *Woyzeck* can be seen as the culmination of a long-standing fascination with both the author and this particular text. The slow approach to *Woyzeck* stands in stark contrast to the blitz production of the film, which took only seventeen days to film and five days to edit. Herzog basically appended the shooting to his production of *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht* (*Nosferatu the Vampyre*, 1979) on location in Czechoslovakia, using the same crew. He did not even reveal to Czechoslovakian authorities that he was already working on a different film, in order to spare himself the inconvenience of having to procure a new permit (Cronin 159). Most notably, Herzog used the same lead actor for both films, his "best fiend" Klaus Kinski. *Nosferatu* was the second collaboration of the two after *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* (*Aguirre, Wrath of God*, 1972), and for Herzog, Kinski's participation was a prerequisite for the production of his vampire film. In an interview with the German listings magazine *Gong*, Herzog says about his actor: "The only genius I know. If Kinski had not done it, I would not have shot the film (*Gong* Nr. 12, 1983).[172] It seems that Herzog needed Kinski's genius at his side to tackle what he called "the greatest of all German films" (Cronin 152). Moreover, Herzog considered

[172] "Das einzige Genie, das ich kenne. Wenn der Kinski das nicht gemacht hätte, hätt' ich den Film nicht gedreht."

his work on *Nosferatu* as the final step in an undertaking that was of utmost importance for his cinematic self-concept: “What I really sought to do was connect my *Nosferatu* with our true German cultural heritage, the silent films of the Weimar era and Murnau's work in particular. [...] In many ways, for me, this film was the final chapter of the vital process of 're-legitimization' of German culture that had been going on for some years” (Cronin 151). In addition to reconnecting to a time in German film history before cinema's ideological abuse during the Nazi period, Herzog seeks to underline the concept of cinema as a legitimate form of art, a concept that Herzog and his peers share with Murnau and many of his contemporaries. Thus, Herzog conceived his version of the horror-classic not so much as a remake in which he tried to emulate a certain style, but rather as an homage to the notion of cinema as art that emerged in the 1920s.[173]

Despite Herzog's insistence on not labeling his *Nosferatu* a remake, he follows Murnau very closely, down to a number of almost identical shots and certain details of the script. Murnau had to depart from Bram Stoker’s novel and to change character names in an attempt to avoid copyright infringement. In the 1970s *Dracula* was already in the public domain, yet Herzog, although he restores most of Stoker’s character names, is otherwise much closer to Murnau.[174] As in Murnau's film, the action is set at the beginning of the nineteenth century in a small town in northern Germany (and not at the end of the century in England, as in Stoker). Jonathan Harker, a young real estate agent, travels to Dracula's castle in Transylvania to sell property to the count, who wants to relocate to Germany. Dracula – or, Nosferatu, the undead –

[173] “It was not nostalgia, rather my admiration of the heroic age of cinema that gave birth to the film in 1922. By this I do not mean I set out to explore German cinema of the 1920s. I never felt I was emulating a particular tradition. What I mean is that many of my generation shared a similar attitude to Murnau and his contemporaries: cinema as legitimate culture. When I had finished *Nosferatu* I remember thinking, 'Now I am connected, I have reached the other side of the river at last'“ (Cronin 152).

[174] For more detailed accounts of the relationship of Herzog's plot to Murnau's film and Stoker's novel see Mayne 120ff. and Prawer 42ff.

bites Jonathan, making him one of his own, and then leaves for Germany on a ship loaded with coffins full of earth and rats. He arrives in Jonathan's hometown, bringing with him the plague and death. While the city and its residents await their doom, Jonathan's wife Lucy tries to turn events by offering herself to Count Dracula. Her sacrifice redeems the vampire who is finally able to die, but Jonathan becomes his successor, setting out to spread death and perdition.

The major differences between Murnau's and Herzog's film in terms of plot lie in the portrayal of the title character and in the ending. Murnau's protagonist is a fearsome and soulless beast, whereas Herzog's Nosferatu appears to be deeply troubled and even sensitive, truly wishing to find peace in death. The two vampires share physical features, from the long fingernails to the bald head and the prominent front teeth that serve as their weapon (unlike in most other portrayals, which present vampires with enlarged canine teeth). However, instead of exploiting such a frightful appearance Kinski "was encouraged to play *against* his mask" (Prawer 45). By doing so, he manages to inspire fear as well as attraction, and adds a touch of vulnerability to his performance. Apparently Kinski felt a certain kinship with this conflicted character: "This is me. I never was an actor who only played a role. What I portray is also within me. It is a cry for love, the expression of despair or of hope. I express everybody's emotions in a concentrated form. In this respect, I am Nosferatu myself... Count Dracula feels like a familiar and likeable figure. He does not act on free will, he is driven. He reflects evil, but also all of our hope for love" (Cinema Nr. 4, 1979).[175]

The savagery usually associated with the vampire is passed on to his first victim in Herzog's film, Jonathan. While in Murnau the woman's sacrifice brings an end to Nosferatu's

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[175] "Das bin ich. Ich war nie ein Schauspieler, der eine Rolle nur eben spielte. Das, was ich darstelle, ist auch in mir. Es ist ein Schrei nach Liebe, der Ausdruck der Verzweiflung oder der Hoffnung. Gefühle also, die jeder hat, bringe ich konzentriert zum Ausdruck. Insofern bin ich selbst Nosferatu... Dieser Graf Dracula ist mir eine vertraute und sympathische Figur. Er hat keinen freien Willen, ist ein Getriebener. In ihm spiegelt sich das Böse, aber auch unsere ganze Hoffnung nach Liebe."

reign of terror and restores order to the world, in Herzog it comes too late and proves futile.[176] Not only does evil live on, it will also be spread far and wide by the escaping Jonathan. Herzog's dark ending is very much in tune with the overall mood of the time. As Hans-Christoph Blumenberg remarks:

> The German cinema of the 70s is one of fear and disease, of destroyed emotions and of trips into death. [...] There are hardly any survivors. And so it just makes sense that filmmakers in the days of [Chancellor] Schmidt recollect the dark, pessimistic cinema of the Weimar republic, the 'haunted screen' and its abysmal fables of a weary death and the last laugh. ("Zeit")[177]

Actually enhancing the Weimar gloom, Herzog's film also presents a "radical disgust with progress and civilization" prominent in the 1970s ("radikaler Fortschritts- und Zivilationsekel," Blumenberg, "Zeit"). This is vividly displayed in the scene on the market square, where the townspeople – all of them infected with the plague – meet their impending doom with a hysterical and defiant celebration, while thousands of rats are already invading their space. This scene is absent from Murnau's original and thus bears all the more significance in Herzog's film.

In terms of style, Herzog is clearly inspired by Murnau's masterpiece and expressionism in general. S. S. Prawer notices Herzog's adeptness "at projectioning moods and inner dispositions outwardly into the world" just "like the dramatists and film-makers who are seen as

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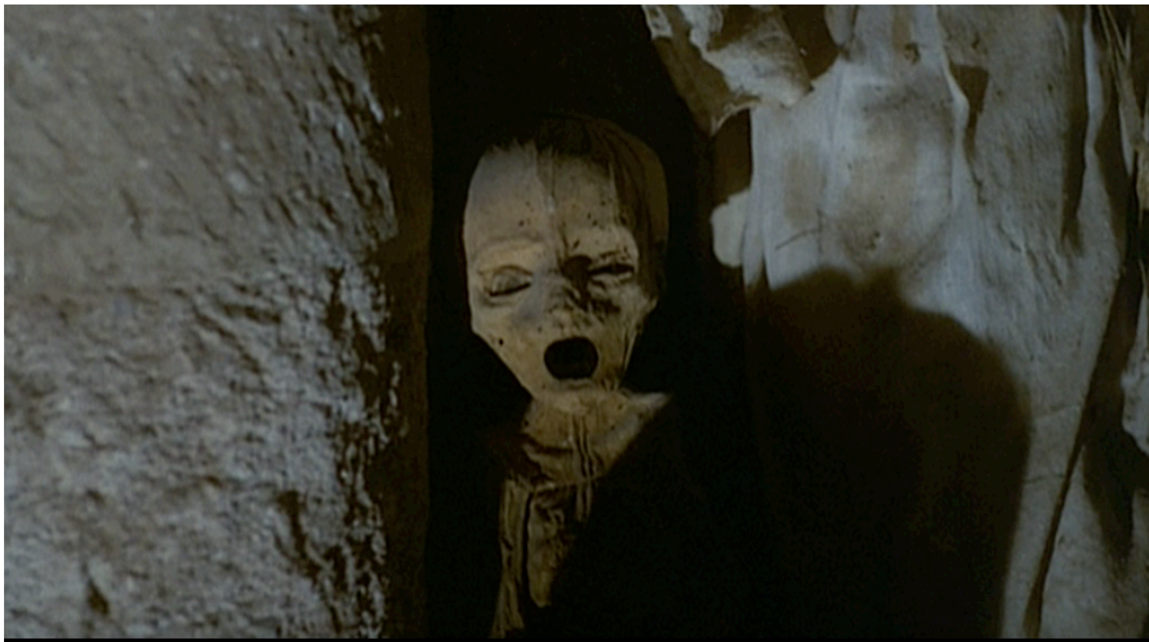
[176] Another difference is the eroticized presentation of Lucy's surrender, which is completely absent from Murnau's film (see also Prawer, 45).

[177] "Das deutsche Kino der siebziger Jahre ist eines der Angst und der Krankheiten, der kaputtgemachten Emotionen und der Reisen in den Tod. [...] Es gibt kaum noch Überlebende. Und insofern scheint es nur konsequent, wenn sich die Filmemacher der Ära Schmidt auf das dunkle, pessimistische Kino der Weimarer Republik besinnen, auf die "dämonische Leinwand" und ihre abgründigen Fabeln vom müden Tod und vom letzten Mann." One should note that this depiction of Weimar cinema is not entirely accurate. Influenced by the seminal works by Kracauer and Eisner, this era is represented mainly by the predominantly dark and pessimistic expressionist masterpieces it generated. Yet overall, these films constitute only a fraction of the period's cinematic output. A far greater number of films belonged to lighter genres, which were also much more successful and popular at the time. However, since Blumenberg's description follows the preeminent view of Weimar cinema, his argument remains valid here.

part of that movement [of expressionism]" (18). Indeed, there is a concrete reference to the atmospheric dimension of expressionism in the opening sequence of Herzog's *Nosferatu*. In the first shot of the film, the camera tracks along a row of mummified bodies, propped upright against a wall. A number of them have their mouths wide open, as if crying out their anguish in the face of death, and one close-up is strikingly reminiscent of Edvard Munch's iconic painting *The Scream* (see also Prawer, 42).[178]

Introducing the theme of death and horror, the screaming faces of the mummies also provide a connection to the film proper, which begins with Lucy awakening from a nightmare with a loud scream.



1a. The scream of death.

[178] As I noted earlier, Georg Klaren includes an allusion to Munch in his adaptation of *Woyzeck*, where the rugged bark of a tree appears as a distorted screaming face during one of the protagonist's visions (see chapter 3).

1b. Lucy’s scream.

In addition to this atmospheric affinity, there are numerous more specific analogies between Herzog and Murnau in terms of mise en scène, cinematography, and editing, including direct visual quotations. For example, Herzog plays with part of Murnau's famous cross-cutting sequence that establishes a triangular relationship between Nosferatu, Ellen and Thomas (called Lucy and Jonathan in Herzog). As Nosferatu approaches Thomas to prey upon him, Ellen wakes up at home and, miraculously, seems to be able to influence the events in far-away Transylvania. From a shot of Ellen’s terrified scream, Murnau cuts to the count, who lets go of his victim and looks screen right to meet the gaze of Ellen, who is looking screen left. Herzog does not replicate this eye-line match, but he likewise cuts back and forth between the count's castle and Lucy's bedroom, her scream seemingly stopping Nosferatu from further feasting on Jonathan.

Among the visual quotations, the shot of Nosferatu's ghost ship entering the town of Wisborg is especially striking. In Murnau, the ship's bow slowly enters the screen space from the right, eerily floating into the cityscape and blocking the view of a large church that

previously dominated the background of the frame. Herzog uses exactly the same angle for this shot and his ship glides into the harbor at the same speed, also concealing a church in the background. Towards the end of the film Herzog virtually reproduces the shot in which Nosferatu looks through a barred window towards the house of his last victim. In both instances, the vampire's pale face and his white hands with long narrow fingers are in the center of the frame, the toned-down nocturnal color in Herzog evoking the era of black and white film.

2a. Murnau's Nosferatu

2b. Herzog's Nosferatu

Apart from such obvious quotes and allusions, there is a general affinity to Murnau's style and aesthetics in Herzog's film. In fact, Herzog claims that his *Nosferatu* is "the one major exception to [his] lack of interest in aesthetics" (Cronin 108). The most notable influence of Murnau's style is in the depiction of landscapes that are often inspired by the romantic paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. As I mentioned above, echoes of Friedrich can already be seen in earlier films of Herzog, but in his *Nosferatu* they become plentiful, just as in Murnau (see Peucker *Images*, 92). Such reverence for the visual arts can be read as a manifestation of both directors' emphasis on "the communicative properties of the image above that of the text" (Prager 101).

The overall visual structure and pacing of the two films likewise display considerable similarities, with Herzog both paying homage to Murnau and using a "blow up" of some of Murnau's stylistic devices within the context of the 1970s. Both for Murnau and Herzog mise en scène is more important than editing, as both films are based on long takes and few cuts,

allowing the spectator to dwell on the image on the screen. In Murnau's case, the relatively slow pace of the film conforms with the general pattern of the period. Its average shot length of approximately 7.9 seconds[179] falls within the parameter of the 8.6 seconds average shot length of European films between 1918 and 1923 (Salt, *Film Style* 146, 173). Herzog's *Nosferatu* has a very high average shot length of 20.2 seconds, which is extreme even in comparison with the "slow" European art films of the time, where "the long take continued to be the standard mode" (Salt, *Film Style* 283). The exceptionally slow pace of the film appears even more unusual considering that this was Herzog's first big international production. In addition to the German public television channel ZDF the film was financed by the venerable French Gaumont, with Twentieth Century Fox in charge of the distribution. The leading female role of Lucy was cast with the French superstar Isabelle Adjani, who could attract a sizeable audience in her home country, where the film premiered. To further secure the global marketability of the film, *Nosferatu* was shot simultaneously in German and English.[180] While all these details point to a mainstream production, Herzog's style is anything but conventional. Even compared to his own works of that period, *Nosferatu* stands out for its sedate tempo (for example, his 1972 *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* has an average shot length of 11.8 seconds).[181] Herzog dwells on certain images even longer than Murnau, for instance in the shot of the arriving ship described above. In Murnau's film this shot lasts 28 seconds, while Herzog extends it to one minute and 13 seconds, lingering on the advancing ship until it fills the entire screen. It is important to note that the camera in Herzog's films is often static, just as in Murnau's film. The big difference is of course that in 1922 cameras were rarely mobile; an "explosion of camera mobility" in Germany came

[179] This number is the median of three different average shot length calculations in the Cinemetrics Database.
[180] The simultaneous shooting in two languages finds parallels with late Weimar period, when early sound films were shot in several languages to retain the universal commercial viability of silent films (see Chapter 2).
[181] The data is taken from the Cinemetric Database.

only in the following year (Salt *Film Style*, 157). In the 1970s, however, most longer takes were actually shot with a mobile camera used to explore and extend screen space, which makes Herzog's long, static takes all the more unusual, and, as it were, archaic and stylized. The stasis of the camera is yet another manifestation of Herzog's and Murnau's reverence for painting. The integrity of the image is preserved not only by the lack of dissection through editing, but also by the fixed gaze of the camera. As in a painting, the spectator can explore the image presented in the frame but cannot look beyond, since the static camera does not allow for an extension of the screen space.

In many instances the composition within the frame also resembles paintings, especially when the directors use a tableau shot. As Peucker notes, "tableau vivant is a meeting point of several modes of representation, constituting a palimpsest or textual overlay simultaneously evocative of painting, drama, and sculpture" (Peucker, *Image* 30). Thus the choice of this composition not only manifests a proximity to the visual arts but also to the theater. In pictorial stage acting styles, the "most common narrative motivation for tableaux was surprise or astonishment" (Brewster and Jacobs 44); both *Nosferatu* films include a classical example of this.[182] When Thomas / Jonathan mentions at a Transylvanian inn that he is on his way to the count's castle, the locals turn towards him in shock and then freeze in a pose of disbelief and fear. Both directors use a sequence of two consecutive tableau shots, showing a similar reaction of the innkeepers and other guests.

[182] For a discussion of pictorial acting in early cinema see chapter 1.

3a. Tableau shot in Murnau's *Nosferatu*.

3b. Tableau shot in Herzog's *Nosferatu*.

There are additional connections to the theater in the staging and cinematography of the two films. As I mentioned above, both directors often use a static frontal camera and few cuts. This kind of cinematography necessitates a specific use of screen space that is similar to a stage. To eliminate the need for frequent cuts, the shot distance has to be medium long to long, and staging has to be rather deep to avoid excessive constraints of the actors' movements. The acting has to be geared towards the front, or the “fourth wall,” to allow the frontal camera the best perspective on the actors, their gestures and movement. The image below is an example of a theatrical composition and use of screen space in Murnau's film. A medium long shot shows the professor's study, which the prison guard enters from the left, crossing the room in a diagonal to approach the professor. The two characters turn only slightly towards each other, their general orientation remaining frontal throughout their conversation. They depart following the reverse trajectory of the guard's entry, exiting upstage and leaving the spectator with a view of the empty stage.

4a. Deep staging and frontal acting in Murnau's *Nosferatu*.

In Herzog, such theatrical sequences are less conspicuous, but he also makes frequent use of deep staging and a frontal composition of actors in his *Nosferatu,* as in the example below.

4a. Deep staging and frontal acting in Herzog's *Nosferatu*.

Thus Herzog adapts not only the storyline and specific images from Murnau, but a cinematic approach replete with theatrical influences that was common in the Weimar years but appears unusual in contemporary filmmaking. The theatrical essence of this style was carried over to Herzog's next project, *Woyzeck*. Therefore, in addition to the obvious connection between *Nosferatu* and *Woyzeck* through the lead actor Kinski and the temporal proximity of production, there is a deeper relation between the two films in their cinematic style.

c. *Woyzeck*

The shooting of *Woyzeck* commenced only five days after *Nosferatu*, giving Klaus Kinski just enough time to grow "a few stubbles of hair" to be ready for his new role as Woyzeck (Appendix 277). While the production circumstances appear to be quite hurried and impulsive, the film had been in the planning stage for a long time. As I mentioned above, Herzog intended to begin his *Woyzeck* project in 1976, but at the last moment changed his mind about casting

Bruno S. in the title role and "digressed" into *Stroszek* to honor his commitments to the actor,. So when Herzog began the production of *Woyzeck* after the shooting of *Nosferatu,* everything and everyone was ready, including Kinski, who carried over his exhaustion from playing Nosferatu into the new role, giving it a "fragile and vulnerable" dimension from the start (Cronin 160).

Kinski's performance and the film as a whole received very mixed reviews. The spontaneous reaction at the film's premiere at the 1979 Cannes Festival was overwhelmingly negative, with "catcalls and jeers" during the screening ("Pfiffe und Buhrufe," Blumenberg, "Leben"). As a possible explanation, Hans Blumenberg cites the high expectations that Herzog had created with his previous films. Known for his love of the extreme and the exotic, Herzog seems to have disappointed the audience with this quiet, "small film" ("kleiner Film," Blumenberg, "Leben"). In Herzog's prolific oeuvre, *Woyzeck* might easily be overlooked, yet I consider it to hold a place of special importance. *Woyzeck* is the culmination of Herzog's long-standing fascination with Büchner, a film in which Herzog feels he touches "the very golden heights of German culture" (Cronin 161). Also, this is his only direct literary adaptation and thus the only film that clearly displays Herzog's fascination with literature, which he often conceals, as for example in *Kaspar Hauser* (see above). *Woyzeck* is also remarkable for its reliance on the original, which sets this production apart from many other adaptations of Büchner that tend to treat his texts with considerable license.

There is some disagreement in the scholarly discussion of the film as to what edition of the drama Herzog used for his script. In her 1985 article, Julie Prandi remarks in a footnote that Herzog's script "corresponds best" to the rendering of *Woyzeck* in Bergemann's 1958 edition

(214).[183] Victoria Stiles objects to Prandi's assumption and elaborates on her own conclusion that Herzog must have worked with "Büchner's uncensored manuscript" (227). She cites as an example a few lines that are missing from Bergemann's text but appear in the film.[184] However, the lines in question are included in the 1952 Reclam edition of the play (Büchner, *Woyzeck* 9). The order of scenes in this volume corresponds largely with Bergemann's sequence and matches Herzog's arrangement of scenes almost completely. While Herzog does not follow the text line by line, the high level of congruence with this edition led me to conclude that he used the yellow Reclam paperback as the foundation of his script, an assumption subsequently confirmed by Herzog during my interview with him (Appendix 276).

Herzog omits a considerable number of lines from the original text, especially when they appear too antiquated and associated with the early nineteenth century. But there are no additions to the dialogue and only two added scenes, which open the film and deserve special attention as they anticipate much of the film's interpretive angle on Büchner. The first take of the film is a long static shot of a pond with a few houses; a slow pan then reveals a view of a small town across a lake. Here, Herzog introduces the only line that is not based on Büchner: "In a small town, on a wide, still pond..."[185] This title underlines the serenity of the image and sets a fairy tale-like mood. The atmosphere of peace and tranquility seems to be underscored by the background music, a tune from a Beethoven piano sonata. Herzog used the same melody in his *Stroszek*, thus providing a musical link between the two films (Stiles 231). But the link is not only musical, it is also thematic. In *Stroszek*, the Beethoven melody sounds twice to mark a transition in Bruno's life: it is first heard when Bruno is released from prison, and a second time

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[183] Patrick Fortmann likewise does not further investigate Herzog's textual source and seconds this opinion in his 2007 article.

[184] At his first visit to the doctor, Woyzeck explains his understanding of doomsday: "that is when nature is extinct [...]" (Stiles 227).

[185] "In einer kleinen Stadt, an einem großen, stillen Teich..."

when he arrives in New York after fleeing the oppression he suffered in Berlin. However, in both instances a promise of freedom cycles back to a form of imprisonment. Thus the melody has a subversive potential, suggesting that the idyll in *Woyzeck* will turn out to be equally deceptive. The fact that this piano sonata is played on a celeste, literally a heavenly instrument, seemingly enhances the idyllic note, yet it is also foreboding, as the sound is reminiscent of a musical clock, anticipating the puppet motif of the next scene.[186]

After another panoramic shot that presents the city and the lake from a high angle, the camera cuts to a long shot of the deserted town square and the music switches to somewhat atonal string sounds. Woyzeck enters the scene from the left middle ground and runs up the street like a wound-up mechanical toy, chased by a drill sergeant. With jerky movements reminiscent of a marionette, Woyzeck stops, puts down his rifle, and starts exercising in front of a wooden panel that looks like a crude stage background. From now on only the boots of the sergeant are visible, reducing a personal tormentor to an inanimate synecdoche. No words of command are uttered, but these boots repeatedly kick Woyzeck, making him continue with his push-ups, although he is clearly on the verge of collapse. In the last shot of the scene Woyzeck looks like a beaten dog, exhausted and tortured. Behind him there are ropes hanging from a wooden beam as if from a marionette's control bar, further emphasizing the puppet theme, or rather the theme of a marionette that somehow acquires an infusion of consciousness: the marionette tries to comprehend where it is and what it is, but the ropes protruding above its shoulders imply the presence of an invisible handler... (Ungurianu 215).[187]

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[186] The use of this instrument might also be a nod to Bruno S., who owned a celeste, and who was originally promised to play the part of *Woyzeck*.

[187] Brad Prager also observes the puppet theme in his monograph on Werner Herzog: “[Woyzeck] resembles a puppet or someone who is being manipulated” (77).

5. Woyzeck: A marionette.

According to Herzog, he originally wanted to use an American precision exhibition drill team in the opening shots of his film, but because it was not available he decided to show the drilling of Woyzeck (Appendix 280). It is fascinating that both Herzog and Georg Klaren chose to add a drill scene to their adaptation of *Woyzeck*, and that in both films this scene sets the framework for the reading of Büchner's play. Klaren introduces in his drill scene the drum major as a representative of militarism (with a strong Nazi touch) and the tormentor of Wozzeck, who – and this is a crucial distinction from Herzog – is one of many suffering soldiers, a member of a class. Herzog creates a completely different picture: his Woyzeck is *alone* and tortured by a faceless sergeant who is reduced to the emblematic boots. Woyzeck is performing the drill as if pulled by strings, like a puppet in a play. Thus, even in the opening scene Herzog releases the Gnostic potential of Büchner's drama later epitomized in the parable of the orphan and his futile cosmic quest. Herzog's Woyzeck represents not the suffering of a social class, but rather the existential plight of humanity.

The topos of a lifeless world and human orphanhood found in the parable can be traced to a number of romantic works, including Jean Paul's novel *Siebenkäs* and Heinrich Heine's *Ideas* (*Ideen*), which were likely among Büchner's sources (see Henri Poschmann in Büchner, *Werke* 1: 777). The parable also incorporates elements and motifs from well-known fairy tales, such as the brother Grimm's "Die Sterntaler" ("The Star Money"). There is, however, a striking reversal of the happy ending found in "Sterntaler": instead of receiving a reward (or for that matter some kind of answer from his Creator), the orphan is plunged into eternal despair in a shrunken universe that appears to be somebody's evil joke, with the sun morphed into a wilted sunflower and the earth nothing but an overturned pot, or perhaps, even chamber pot – "umgestürzter Hafen" (*Werke* I: 169). In the play, the tale is told by an old woman in the presence of Marie and several children on the street. In Herzog's film, it is told by Marie, something that is quite fitting given her bleak situation. She looks rather downhearted when she steps out on the street, her arms dangling limply while she walks past the children. As in the original text, she declines a child's request for a song, but then it is she who calls the children closer to tell the story, not an old woman. This is the only other significant alteration of the play, perhaps made in order to give Marie's character "more background, more depth" (as Herzog himself explains it [Appendix 282]) and also to add an element of self-reflection. While Marie looks into the children's faces at the beginning of the tale, her eyes begin to wander and, as she reaches the depressing ending, she stares into nothingness. The portrayal of Marie in this scene has been criticized as being "deadpan" and "toneless" (Prandi 213); however, her lack of spirit can be read as a sign of both resignation and foreboding. She seems to sense the approach of her own demise and realizes that her child too will become an orphan.

This is one of the few instances when the presentation of Marie in Herzog's film is comparable to that in Klaren's. Otherwise, the two incarnations of the heroine are markedly different, starting with their appearance and general demeanor. Klaren's Marie is portrayed more as a motherly figure, frequently shown in a Madonna pose. Marie in Herzog's film seems to be less attached to her child, and wears clothes that are more provocative. That she is quite aware of the advantages of her body is obvious in the scene with the Drum Major. She stands in front of him with her arms akimbo, first looking down to her breasts and then giving an inviting look at the Major. When he approaches her, she resists only halfheartedly. Overall, she shows much less emotion than Marie does in Klaren. Her passivity is most apparent in the prayer scene: reading the Bible passage about the adulteress, Herzog's Marie is almost emotionless. Here Herzog also leaves out an essential phrase. In Büchner's text, Marie briefly stops reading from the Bible, clasps her hands in despair and cries out: "God! Dear God! I can't. O God, just give me strength enough to pray" (*Plays* 131).[188] The omission of this line in Herzog's film suggests that Marie lacks remorse and has no intention of resisting temptation. In my interview with him, Herzog says that these lines did not sound right coming from the mouth of his Marie, Eva Mattes:

> I remember that we left the text relatively intact at first but when Eva Mattes, who played Marie, said that [line] it did not sound right. I am not saying it was not right for Marie, but it was not right for Eva Mattes; it sounded wrong coming from her. It was not right for the character Eva Mattes. If I were to produce this in the theater I would probably

[188] "Herrgott! Herrgott! Ich kann nicht! - Herrgott, gib mir nur soviel, daß ich beten kann" (*Woyzeck* 22).

> leave that phrase in; or maybe not. It entirely depends on the person you are actually working with. (Appendix 282)[189]

This treatment of Marie is an example of the interconnection not only of themes but also of characters that is so common in Herzog's oeuvre. In their previous collaboration Eva Mattes played Eva the prostitute in *Stroszek*, echoes of this character lingering in Marie. Both women are not treated kindly by life, something they tend to accept with rather emotionless resignation. Yet whenever life throws them a small opportunity they take it, irrespective of consequences and the feelings of others.

The relationship between Marie and Woyzeck is also very different in the two films. In Klaren's adaptation, they look like a happy couple (at least at the beginning of the fairground scene), whose love falls victim to circumstance. In contrast to that, there is no "chemistry" whatsoever between Woyzeck and Marie in Herzog's film: "We have to accept without further proof that they are lovers and the child seems to be the result of an accident long past" (Mitgutsch 157). There is hardly a happy moment between the two and the only real physical contact (not counting the murder) is when Woyzeck learns about Marie's unfaithfulness and touches her body angrily in places where he imagines the Drum Major had touched her. Ironically, loving contact is only seen after Woyzeck kills Marie and is holding her dead body. The murder scene again reveals the differences in the portrayal of the couple. In Klaren, Wozzeck kisses Marie one more time before he kills her, regretting that this is their last kiss. Klaren leaves out the actual stabbing and shows Wozzeck's shadow raising the knife and, later, Marie sinking to the ground. Watching her struggling for life, Wozzeck asks almost lovingly

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[189] "Ich erinnere mich, dass wir den Text zunächst relativ vollständig hatten und wenn Eva Mattes, die Marie gespielt hat, das gesagt hat, klang das nicht richtig. Ich sage nicht, es gehörte nicht zu Marie, aber es gehörte nicht zu Eva Mattes; es klang verkehrt, es von ihr zu hören. Es war nicht richtig für die Figur Eva Mattes. Würde ich es am Theater inszenieren, dann wäre der Satz vermutlich drin; möglicherweise auch nicht. Es kommt ganz darauf an, mit welchen Menschen Sie das tatsächlich inszenieren."

“Can’t you die?” (“Kannst net sterbe?”). Although Woyzeck and Marie are holding hands as they walk to the pond in Herzog's film, they seem very distanced from one another, and when Woyzeck tries to kiss Marie she turns away. The murder itself is stylized as an “apotheosis of violence” (“Apotheose der Gewalt”, Jansen 143) and filmed in slow motion, as if to savor its every moment. This is one of the few episodes in the film with non-diegetic music, being accompanied with the same tune (somewhat atonal strings) that was heard during the drill scene. Woyzeck's tortured facial expression is likewise reminiscent of that during the drill, as well as his up and down movements while he repeatedly stabs Marie. After a moment of silence a harmonic oboe tune sets in, as Woyzeck picks up Marie’s corpse and holds it with an expression of pain and suffering on his face.

This scene stands out not only because of its use of music and slow motion, it is also different from most scenes of the film when it comes to cinematography and editing. Consisting of seven shots, it is one of the more complex scenes in terms of editing. (For comparison, out of 27 total scenes, there are only four with more than 5 shots, the majority of scenes [66%] consisting of only one or two shots). Unlike in most other scenes, Herzog employs a wider range of shot distances, starting with a long shot as Woyzeck and Marie approach the pond, followed by a medium long shot of the couple standing close to the water's edge. These are the dominant shot distances throughout the film, making up 65% of all shots. The act of murder itself is presented in a series of three medium shots focusing on Woyzeck, until the dying Marie is shown in medium close-up; the scene ends with another medium shot of Woyzeck. The unusual dominance of medium shots in this scene breaks down the distance that the camera has kept from the protagonist throughout most of the film. Except for the close-up at the end of the drill scene

(which is the protagonist's only close-up!), the audience rarely gets a closer look of Woyzeck or, for that matter, any other character, since there are only two close-ups in the entire film.[190]

As I mentioned above, the absence of frequent cuts often coincides with longer shot distances and also with longer takes. In *Woyzeck*, Herzog's preference for long takes is extreme. From the already very high average shot length of 20 seconds in *Nosferatu*, *Woyzeck* has an average shot length of an astonishing 57 seconds, creating a peculiar aesthetic in this film. The long duration of single shots stands in contrast to the brevity of scenes, a feature that endows Büchner's play with its "cinematic" feel. While Klaren incorporates this cinematic potential into his adaptation of the play, Herzog chooses a different technique. Building upon the theatrical look in some episodes of *Nosferatu*, he further enhances this stylistic approach in *Woyzeck*, starting with the very first scene based on Büchner's text per se. After the establishing shots of the little town and the drill sequence, the film's action proper begins with the shaving scene (which is the opening scene of most *Woyzeck* editions before Lehmann's re-arrangement of the manuscript). Here Herzog introduces many of the stylistic features that are characteristic for his *Woyzeck*. Running for 5 minutes and 48 seconds, this is one of the longest scenes in the film (there are 2 more scenes longer than 5 minutes), yet it consists of only 3 shots. Most of the scene is presented in a medium long shot, with Woyzeck in the foreground, the Captain in a chair in the middle ground, and a second soldier sitting quietly in the background. As in many other scenes, Woyzeck is at first positioned with his back to the camera (thus his alienation is conveyed not only by shot distances but also through the positioning of the actor). We can see Woyzeck's face only when he moves around the Captain into the middle ground of the set. Otherwise, this scene has a conspicuously theatrical layout. A deep set with three walls is shot by a static camera from

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[190] The second close-up is a shot of Marie admiring herself in the mirror with her new earrings. Thus she is seen at close range at a moment of rare joy and finally at the moment of her greatest suffering as she struggles with death.

the side of the implied "fourth wall" or the audience. With the notable exception of the view of Woyzeck from behind, the positioning and movement of the actors is arranged towards the front, in order to provide the spectator with a good view of the performers.

6a. Theatrical arrangement in Herzog's *Woyzeck*.

No part of the dialogue is presented in a conventional cross-cutting sequence, neither in this scene nor later in the film. A similarly distinctive theatrical arrangement of actors occurs in the scene where Woyzeck gives away his meager worldly possessions to Andres. The opening long shot of their room in the barracks makes the setting look even more like a stage, since the two actors are positioned in the background and half of the image is occupied by the wooden floor of the room. Again, Woyzeck is seen from behind in the beginning as he starts talking to Andres. But he later turns towards the front, now facing the camera, not his interlocutor, who is sitting

behind him and looks out towards the camera and the audience as well. The two actors remain in this position also during the second and last shot of the scene, which is a medium shot.[191]

6b. Frontal arrangement in Herzog's *Woyzeck*.

For the most part the camera is completely static throughout the film, with occasional little pans or tilts. Often, these camera movements are used to follow the trajectory of an actor, such as in the scene at the Doctor's office. While Woyzeck remains positioned in the front, facing the camera, the doctor is pacing the room, circling his test object and rebuking him. When the doctor walks to the other end of the room, the camera leaves Woyzeck and pans to follow the Doctor, who does most of the talking and therefore draws the attention of the audience. Thus, the camera embodies the spectator here, serving as his mechanical eye that observes the action as if on a stage. This kind of cinematography is reminiscent of early sound

[191] The arrangement of the two actors recalls a shot from Herlischka's 1962 TV-production of *Woyzeck*, which I mentioned above.

films that reproduced visual and spatial characteristics of the theater through the use of a restrictedly mobile camera and the lack of scene dissection through editing (see chapter 2).

While it was certainly not Herzog's intention to produce a filmed theater version of Büchner's play, his proximity to theatrical aesthetics is striking. Peter Schott and Thomas Bleicher's analysis goes so far as to state that there is "too little cinematic realization" in this adaptation and that "film only clearly emerges at the beginning and the end and, therefore, merely provides a 'frame' for a theatrical production" (101).[192] This is a bit of an exaggeration that overlooks some clearly cinematic aspects of the film. The most cinematic scene of the film takes place at the fairground, as if to underline Herzog's insistence that "cinema comes from the country fair and the circus" (Cronin 139). While by no means the longest scene in the film, it consists of 15 different shots and thus is by far the most complex scene in terms of editing. It also has a classical cinematic opening with an establishing extreme long shot of the town square housing the carnival, followed by a series of unrelated long and medium long shots presenting different aspects and moments of the fair, thus dissecting the previously established space. Perhaps ironically, it is this scene that involves an actual stage where Woyzeck and Marie enjoy the performance of the "astronomical horse." The sideshow is presented in a rare series of reverse shots between the stage and the audience; at the same time this series includes equally rare point-of-view shots, as the action on the stage is filmed in a long shot from the distance and the angle of the show's audience.

Apart from such clearly cinematic sequences, there are also many scenes that may seem rather theatrical at first but also involve cinematic aspects as, for example, the shaving scene discussed above. Towards its end, the enclosed, *Kammerspiel*-like space gradually expands

[192] "[…] der Film nur zu Beginn und am Ende deutlich hervortritt und somit lediglich den 'Rahmen' für eine Theaterinszenierung bildet."

when the camera, shooting from a different angle, presents the street outside as seen through the window. This extended view becomes part of the action when, upon leaving the room, Woyzeck appears in the far background rushing down the street (instead of slowing down as ordered by the Captain, who still occupies the center foreground of the image with his massive body). Such window views recur frequently throughout the film, extending an enclosed theatrical space with cinematic vistas. Another effective combination of theatrical and cinematic elements takes place when the Drum Major confronts Woyzeck at the inn. This single-shot scene involves deep staging and frontal acting and only miniscule camera movement. Yet at one point, when Woyzeck tries to get away from the Drum Major's assault, he steps forward as if "fleeing into the camera" (Herzog DVD commentary); this creates an immediacy that would be impossible in the theater.

Overall, such a cinematic closeness to the protagonist is rare. Herzog mostly uses the camera to keep a distance, and thus employs cinematography for interpretative purposes. A comparison of Klaren's and Herzog's renderings of the visions scenes in the wood serve as a good illustration of this point. Klaren introduces white rotating streaks on the screen and uncanny music. The camera is subjective and presents nature as Wozzeck perceives it, distorted and hostile (see chapter 3). The twisted landscape surrounding Wozzeck is superimposed with images from his vision (the executioner and the graveyard) and shots of his own tormented and scared face. This dynamic surreal scene is created with the help of a contorted mise en scène*,* camera tricks, and editing, visualizing the workings of Wozzeck's disturbed mind.

In Herzog, this scene takes part in perfectly "realistic" surroundings and the camera is for the most part static, simply observing Woyzeck and Andres in a medium long shot. At first, Woyzeck is positioned with his back towards the camera and his face towards the horizon, where

his vision begins with the perception of a streak of light. Neither the viewer nor Andres can see this and, as long as Andres is still whistling or singing, the scene has nothing uncanny about it. Woyzeck's visions start having an impact on Andres and the audience only when Woyzeck, with a scared and confused look on his face, turns around and tells Andres to be quiet. Whereas in Klaren's film Andres stays calm and tries to soothe Wozzeck, here Andres – as in the original text – becomes scared. The viewer of Klaren's version tends to identify with Wozzeck, since he sees what Wozzeck sees. In Herzog's film, the audience is rather in the position of Andres, who cannot comprehend what Woyzeck experiences. Thus the observing camera also has a distancing function and emphasizes Woyzeck's isolation, in this scene and throughout the film (Mitgutsch 157).

Another striking contrast in this scene, and in the two films overall, concerns the use of music. Klaren employs music in a rather conventional way, in order to create certain moods or to underline motifs. While both diegetic and, to a lesser degree, non-diegetic music is present in Herzog, his main "tuning fork" is silence, something that goes back to Büchner's words from *Lenz* that Herzog uses at the beginning of *Kaspar Hauser:* "Don't you hear that horrible screaming all round you? That screaming men call silence?" Herzog recycles the image associated with this quote in *Kaspar Hauser* (the rustling field of grain) in the scene where Woyzeck hears voices telling him to kill Marie. Here the wind is blowing through a field of poppy pods and creates a mesmerizing rustling sound that makes Woyzeck stop and bend down to listen. In contrast to the busy movement of the poppy field, the camera is characteristically static with only minimal tilts following Woyzeck who lies down on the ground and gets up again. Like many scenes in the film, this one ends in complete silence: when Woyzeck is running away not even the wind is audible any more.

The distance Herzog establishes with the camera is a translation of his protagonist's alienation from the world into cinematic means. The mise en scène serves the same purpose: the neat and seemingly realistic settings only intensify the gap between Woyzeck and his surroundings. Herzog chose the Czechoslovakian city of Telč as the filming location, a small town close to the Austrian border. According to Herzog's impression, the "city was constructed in a way that at first only the facades were built, like a theater backdrop" (Appendix 279).[193] As a result, the market square, where most of the outside action takes place, looks like a tidy dollhouse. All the greater and more astonishing is the abyss that opens beneath this seemingly idyllic world. The artificiality of this locale is increased by its prevailing emptiness. Even in scenes that involve townspeople as part of the action, such as the fairground scene and the first appearance of the Drum Major parading down the street, the crowds are always small and centered; the common hustle and bustle of a central town square is completely absent. Woyzeck is repeatedly shown almost or completely alone on this empty square, as in the drill scene. And after he buys the knife, his murder weapon, Woyzeck steps out onto the eerily deserted square and speeds up his hasty steps until he is running, all alone, looking back over his shoulder repeatedly as if he were being chased.

[193] "[…] damals wurde diese Stadt angelegt in einer Weise, dass nur die Fassaden erst gebaut wurden, wie eine Theaterkulisse."

7. Woyzeck: All alone in a dollhouse.

Like his brothers in spirit Kaspar Hauser and Bruno Stroszek, Woyzeck is an outcast who can ultimately only turn away from society. In his last scene he is positioned with his back towards the camera, and walks away from it until he is reduced to a tiny white spot on the dark screen.

In terms of stylistics, there is a seeming paradox here. *Woyzeck* is a nineteenth-century play that was perceived in the twentieth century to be unusually modern and – as has been stressed on numerous occasions – surprisingly "cinematic." Yet a major modern filmmaker renders its screen version with the unmistakable flavor of theatrical aesthetics and a strong dependence on the text of the original play. Furthermore, this is done by a director who has consistently displayed a clear preference for the visual code of cinema over the narrative code, and even expressly denied the relevance of literature and writing to his work (Peucker, "Literature" 105). Why then, would Herzog relinquish the supremacy of the image to the performance of the written word?

One possible answer might draw on Herzog's reverence for Büchner's text, a piece of literature he calls "probably the drama of all dramas" ("wahrscheinlich das Drama aller Dramen," Appendix 275-76). Another answer could point to the genealogy of Herzog's *Woyzeck* that, in very immediate terms, emerged, so to speak, from the spirit of *Nosferatu* with its indebtedness to the theatricality present in early Weimar cinema. Finally, there is a third explanation that dovetails with the previous two. The film's theatrical feel resonates with the central metaphor of Woyzeck as a marionette that is already established in the beginning of the film, during the drill sequence. Thus Herzog's aesthetic approach is extremely successful in conveying the metaphysical dimension of Büchner's play with its dark Gnostic overtones. In Herzog's film, Woyzeck is the quintessential man, a reincarnation of Adam, whose Creator is anything but benign, and who, on top of everything, is robbed of his Eve; he is an eternal orphan, cast into a cruel and imperfect world. A miserable Pierrot in an eerie puppet show, Woyzeck nonetheless has insights into a different reality, transcending the level of consciousness accessible to other characters. However, even his insights turn out to be a mockery of an unseen evil puppeteer who pulls the strings in that show. Instead of discovering the light, Woyzeck is driven to murder and self-destruction. This reading is grounded in the existential cinema of the 1970s and Herzog's own previous oeuvre, so much so that one can view *Kaspar Hauser, Stroszek,* and *Woyzeck* as a trilogy centered around the orphaned protagonist, who is forced to participate in some kind of an absurd performance very much akin to the various freak shows that figure in all the films in question. In fact, providing yet another link among these films, the drill scene at the beginning of *Woyzeck* is a sui generis continuation of the chicken dance in *Stroszek'*s finale. And in a very similar pattern, all three protagonists choose to escape from the show (even the chicken stops his dance and walks away from the plate, a move that parallels

Stroszek's "walk out"). One can argue about whether Herzog was using Büchner as a point of departure or perhaps, conversely, projected his general vision onto Büchner. But, whatever the trajectory, Herzog's film clearly stands as a high point in the metaphysical interpretation of Büchner's drama.

Conclusion

In my introductory remarks I mentioned two major approaches to the study of adaptation: The formalist one, with the focus on an unmediated comparison of the source and its cinematic version, which is seen as a translation of a narrative from a literary text into the medium of film, and the historicizing method, which fills the intertextual space between the source and its adaptation with various contexts that influenced the cinematic version. Looking back at my work on this dissertation, I can define the trajectory of my research as a constant increase in contextualizing my study of Büchner-adaptations, or, in other words, an expansion of the intertextual space. When I was contemplating the topic for my Master's Thesis, I was familiar only with Büchner's *Woyzeck* and the eponymous film by Herzog. (I will leave out Alban Berg's opera in order not to complicate matters). Thus, the point of departure was the stereotypical "text versus film" situation, which would not have required much recourse to outside contexts in order to arrive at a useful and meaningful comparison between the two works.

The rules of the game changed considerably when Professor Evans advised me to add Georg Klaren's DEFA production to the comparison. Now I had to interpret a much more challenging case, as one and the same work of literature inspired two films, which were strikingly dissimilar both in their style and in their overall interpretation of the original. This required a "digression" into film history (the immediate post-war years and the New German Cinema), and also an extensive study of the history of Büchner's reception. I concluded that the two films in question represent the two extremes in the tradition of Büchner's interpretation (social/socialist vs. existential), their stylistic strategies being defined by the aesthetic challenges of their time. The question of a direct relationship between the films remained unanswered.

Herzog's film seemed to be openly polemical in regard to Klaren, but I was not sure whether Herzog had seen the DEFA production. (Later, Herzog told me in an interview that he was not aware of Klaren's film). But in a way this did not matter much, since the films realized the two opposite potentials present in the history of Büchner's reception. I still think that my findings were quite relevant, although I also felt that my overall vision was somewhat schematic, too neat and too much tilted towards ideology, and that there were many more layers to both films. At any rate, I made important steps towards broadening the framework of my understanding of the material.

Any neatness and straightforwardness disappeared when, already for the dissertation proper, I focused on the adaptations of *Dantons Tod.* Here the subject matter seemed to be most conducive to ideology (reflections on the French Revolution in Weimar Germany). However, both Buchowetzki and Behrendt, although capitalizing on the topicality of the plot, were primarily concerned with making commercially successful films appealing to broad audiences. Thus, no clear ideological coordinates could be established. In looking for an underlying principle to analyze these productions, I again turned to the history of Büchner's reception and to developments in the film industry, which was going through a truly revolutionary change: first, with the establishment of cinema as a legitimate art form during the Weimar silent years and, later, with the advent of synchronized sound. And here, under the guidance of Professor Peucker, I came across one common thread that, uniting Büchner's reception and contemporary cinematic developments, also dovetailed with the *Danton* films. This thread involved the theatrical connection, including both Büchner's stage history and also more general questions of interactions between film and theater.

Some approaches in this area postulate a stiff opposition between the two media, curiously echoing the literature vs. film dichotomy. As Robert Knopf points out, theater is frequently categorized as a more verbal art, whereas film was initially, and often still is, considered to be more visual. This perception might stem from the "silent" origin of cinema, while the primacy of the verbal in theater can be attributed to the fact that for centuries theatrical productions could not be preserved, leaving only the script of a play as a concrete trace of its existence (Knopf 2-3). The roots of this opposition can also be traced back to the early days of cinema, when theater felt threatened by the new medium with its broad appeal of technological superiority, while cinema struggled to become a legitimate and independent art form. Susan Sontag, who challenges the oppositional approach, summarizes the matter in the following fashion: "A commonplace of discussion is that film and theatre are distinct and even antithetical arts. . . . The history of cinema is often treated as the history of its emancipation from theatrical models" (134).

It appears that attempts to separate film and theater mostly took place on the theoretical level, as is evident in the fierce *Kinodebatte* during the early days of German cinema. In practice, however, such theoretical boundaries were easily overcome and both arts benefited from cross-fertilization. Thus, Reinhardt's "painting with light" in his famed 1916 production of *Dantons Tod* emulates the very essence of cinema and its interplay of light and darkness. Piscator likewise adopted cinematic features in his political theater, very much in tune with Vsevolod Meyerhold's call to "cinematify" the theater (Meyerhold 22). His use of Meyerhold's segmented globe in 1927 provides a measure of fragmentation that has parallels with the increasing importance of editing and scene dissection in cinema.

In cinema, theatrical influences concerned the change in exhibition venues that, much to the dismay of Siegfried Kracauer, began to emulate bourgeois theater buildings. (Interestingly, the opposite trend can be observed in theater, where Max Reinhardt and Erwin Piscator tried to open the stage to the masses). The theatrical link is especially evident in early adaptations. Thus, the script of the 1921 *Danton* is based on a dramatic text (or rather, texts, as Buchowetzki combines two plays for his script), the lead roles are played by the stage actors ,who inevitably carry over a theatrical style of acting, and there are prominent theatrical features in staging and lighting. I even discovered direct visual quotations from Reinhardt's stage productions of *Dantons Tod* by Büchner and *Danton* by Rolland in Buchowetzki's film.

With the "unchaining" of the camera – i.e. intensified camera mobility – cinema indeed seems to have moved away from visual concepts of the theater. However, this development came to a temporary halt after the introduction of sound. Some film theorists of the day, for example Béla Balázs and Rudolf Arnheim, bemoaned the loss of a "truly cinematic" and universal language of silent film and the resurgence of theatrical aesthetics. Filmmakers, however, fulfilled the audiences' demand for talking pictures and, obviously unperturbed by concerns of the purists, intermingled theatrical and cinematic elements. Hans Behrendt's *Danton* serves as a good example of blending theatrical features necessitated by the imperfections of the new sound technology (frontal arrangements and theatrical acting styles) with properly cinematic elements (cross-cutting in dialogue sequences and the use of camera movement and editing in the service of story-telling).

Film's interaction with theater provided me with a new approach for re-examining the *Woyzeck* adaptations by Klaren and Herzog. It is true that these works belong to the periods when German cinema was less concerned with its artistic and social standing in the overall

cultural context and vis-à-vis the theater in particular. Film and theater now appear to be rather separate entities, and aesthetic impulses seem to go into one direction only, from film to theater (Sontag 147). However, as both films show, theatrical elements can still have an important place in film. In Klaren's film, they are a result of evoking the aesthetic models of German expressionist film in terms of lighting and settings. In Herzog, who offers a completely different stylistic as well as ideological reading of the text, much of the theatricality is likewise derived from the legacy of Weimar cinema. This period of German film was of great importance to Herzog's generation of filmmakers as a source of inspiration and also as a basis for the legitimization of the New German Cinema.

The most obvious engagement with this tradition in Herzog's work is found in his remake of Murnau's *Nosferatu,* which also served as a catalyst for *Woyzeck*. The adoption of certain cinematographic conventions of early film, often in a stylized and exaggerated form, provides for a strong sense of theatricality in *Woyzeck*, so much so that for some critics it evoked associations with "filmed theater" along with its negative connotations. (As André Bazin remarks, "'filmed theater' still frequently passes for heresy" [1:76]). This label is hardly warranted in Herzog's case, considering the metaphoric significance of the theatrical elements and their interaction with the properly cinematic aspects of the film. The disappointed critical reaction to *Woyzeck*, arguably the most theatrical of Herzog's work (and, in my opinion, one of his masterpieces), seems to be part of the widespread dismissiveness towards having "too much theater" in cinema. From a historical perspective, the desire to separate the two media could have been justified in early cinema, a time when it was imperative "to stand up for filmmaking as an art, independent of its competing, older stepsisters, the novel and the drama" (Knopf 16). However, focusing on theater as a possibly detrimental or inhibitive influence in cinema seems both unnecessarily

purist and also unproductive. As my examples from the Weimar era show, alongside a formal separation, film and theater established a close and mutually advantageous relationship. This connection is sustained, albeit in a less obvious form, even in times when cinema no longer had to prove itself as a relevant cultural factor, as the more contemporary films discussed here demonstrate.

It is possible to surmise, however, that the strong theatrical connection in the adaptations of *Dantons Tod* and *Woyzeck* is partially due to the fact that both ur-texts are dramas, and as such posses an inherent theatrical potential. Moreover, especially if there happen to be influential theatrical productions of a given play, its stage history may become an important factor contributing to the shaping of cinematic adaptations (this was definitely the case with both *Danton* films). In this regard, it would be interesting to compare the degree of theatricality in films based on dramatic texts versus those based on prose. In other words, are dramatic adaptations more influenced by theater than adaptations of novels and other prose genres, which undergo a different, less public, kind of reception? And is there a development that is specific to German cinema or is this something that can be observed across cinematic traditions? Needless to say, "measuring" the degree of theatricality is a difficult task that cannot be formalized, unlike the statistics of shot length or short distances, but such research could add a new and fascinating dimension to adaptation studies. However, this is clearly a subject for another scholarly project, and as far as this particular study is concerned its trajectory has come to an end.

Appendix: Interview with Werner Herzog

The following interview was conducted during the "Extreme Documentary: Alternative Verité" conference at Williams College in Williamstown, MA on April 8, 2006. Werner Herzog generously devoted some of his time to talk to me about his *Woyzeck* adaptation and allowed me to record our conversation. At that point, I was in the very early stages of my research and I would have a number of additional questions today. Nevertheless, I find this interview informative and enlightening. With the permission of Lucki Stipetic from the Werner Herzog Film Office, I am providing the transcript of my interview in this appendix.

Gespräch mit Werner Herzog

8. April 2006, Williamstown, MA

Lioba Ungurianu: Ich möchte mit einem Zitat von Ihnen anfangen, das man sehr oft liest: "Film is not the art of scholars, but of illiterates."

Werner Herzog: Das muss man im richtigen Zusammenhang sehen. Ich bin da immer gequält worden, in fürchterlichem akademischen Kauderwelsch gefragt worden über Bedeutungen von diesem oder jenem, oder was die Konstruktion von diesem oder jenem ist und ich habe in diesem Zusammenhang immer darauf hingewiesen: Filme entstehen nicht aus dem abstrakten akademischen Denken, sondern eigentlich eher aus einer physischen Bewältigung von Situationen, von Choreographie, von Personen, von Verständnis für Raum. Für mich ist es deswegen immer absolut verständlich gewesen, dass viele von den wirklich bedeutenden

Filmregisseuren sehr athletische Leute waren, ein sehr hoher Prozentsatz. Bei Musikern finden Sie das nicht, bei Leuten, die Literatur schreiben, finden Sie kaum je einen Athleten dabei. Und viele wirklich gute Leute [beim Film] sind sehr athletische Menschen gewesen. Und in dem Zusammenhang müsste man das eher sehen.

LU: Sie haben nur sehr wenige Filme gemacht, die auf Literatur basieren: *Signs of Life/Lebenszeichen* auf von Arnim...

WH: Das ist keine Literaturverfilmung, *Lebenszeichen*, ganz sicher nicht. Aber es ist angeregt durch diese Novelle von Achim von Arnim.

LU: *Woyzeck* ist also Ihre einzige "richtige" Literaturverfilmung.

WH: Ja.

LU: Was hat Sie so fasziniert an *Woyzeck* und wie sind Sie überhaupt zu Büchner gekommen?

WH: Literatur hat mich immer fasziniert, ich habe sehr früh auch schon selbst geschrieben. Vor allem drei Figuren [haben mich fasziniert]: Kleist, Büchner, Hölderlin – zufälligerweise Zeitgenossen – aus unterschiedlichen Gründen. Aber Büchner war mir immer sehr präsent und hat mich sehr fasziniert, vor allem eben *Woyzeck* und der Prosatext *Lenz*. *Lenz* ist sicher das intensivste Stück Prosa was wir in deutscher Sprache haben. Und *Woyzeck* wahrscheinlich das

Drama aller Dramen, obwohl es so schwer zu fassen ist, weil wir ja die Textgestalt nicht wirklich kennen und uns da durchnavigieren müssen und unseren Weg finden müssen.

LU: Haben Sie sich, als Sie die Idee bekamen *Woyzeck* zu verfilmen, mit den verschiedenen Handschriften und dem literaturgeschichtlichen Hintergrund des Dramas beschäftigt?

WH: Nicht als Literaturwissenschaftler, d.h. ich wusste natürlich, dass das Problem der Handschrift, des Manuskripts enorm ist. Das hat ja auch die Literaturhistoriker über Jahrzehnte hinweg beschäftigt und es ist im Grunde genommen unlösbar. Wir müssen also versuchen, wenn wir uns praktisch damit beschäftigen, also am Theater oder in meinem Fall im Kino, eine spielbare Story zu etablieren. Das ist relativ einfach, ich habe da auf das Reclam Heft zurückgegriffen. Ich kenne natürlich andere Ausgaben von Büchner, aber das war die Arbeitsgrundlage. Ich bin mit dem Text und der Abfolge so vorgegangen, wie es gerade eben nötig war, wie ich es für richtig gehalten habe.

LU: Sie haben *Woyzeck* nur fünf Tage nach *Nosferatu* gedreht – haben Sie das spontan angehängt oder hatten Sie das schon geplant?

WH: Nein, das war geplant und deswegen so knapp drangehängt, weil wir damals eine Drehgenehmigung in der Tschechoslowakei hatten. Das war ein großer bürokratischer Aufwand damals mit dem sozialistischen Regime, da sind die Auswüchse der Bürokratie ganz außerordentlich gewesen. Ich habe so getan, als würde ich *Nosferatu* weiterdrehen. Dann hatte natürlich auch die Tatsache ein Rolle gespielt, dass Kinski da war, und der ließ sich gerade ein

paar Stoppel Haare wachsen und dann war er drehfertig. Das war so eine Art Ökonomie mit der Bürokratie und auch mit dem Darsteller, dass wir das so schnell hinterher gemacht haben. Das war alles längst vorhergeplant.

Das hatte eine seltsame Vorgeschichte mit Bruno S. (der Kaspar Hauser und Stroszek gespielt hat), der ja ursprünglich mein Woyzeck gewesen war. Sie müssen sich die beiden Filme anschauen, dann werden Sie verstehen, warum ich gedacht hatte, ich sollte *Woyzeck* mit ihm machen.

Bruno hat damals, und lange Jahre danach ja auch noch, in einer Metallfabrik in Berlin als Gabelstaplerfahrer gearbeitet und er hatte sich eigens Ferien genommen und unbezahlten Urlaub drangehängt. Und wir hatten immer Maßnahmen ergriffen, die es sicher machten, dass er seine Arbeitsstelle nicht verlieren würde, wenn er also unbezahlten Urlaub dazu nähme.

Relativ knapp vor Drehbeginn, bevor ich *Woyzeck* drehen wollte, war mir auf einmal klar, das ist ein großer Fehler, dass Bruno das macht, das muss Kinski sein.

LU: Ich stimme mit Ihnen überein, dass Kinski die bessere Wahl ist. Man kann sich Kinski besser als Woyzeck vorstellen.

WH: Bruno wäre auch ein Woyzeck gewesen, aber der wäre dumpfer und wehrloser, nur Opfer gewesen. Und das sehe ich nicht nur in diesem Drama.

Das war ein furchtbarer Moment: Ich musste ihn anrufen und sagte „Bruno, ich habe schlechte Nachrichten. Wir können den Film nicht miteinander machen, das muss jemand anderer sein." Und dann war lange Stille am anderen Ende der Leitung und dann sagte er: „Ja, aber ich habe doch meinen Urlaub schon genommen und gebucht." Und in der Peinlichkeit- also mir wurde

ganz heiß und ich war blaurot am Telefon vor Scham - sagte ich so aufs geradehinaus: „Bruno wir machen stattdessen einen anderen Film." Und da sagte er: „Ja was für ein Film wird's denn sein?" Ich hatte keine Ahnung, und ich sagte: „Er wird so ähnlich sein wie *Woyzeck* und wird auch ähnlich heißen." Und aus dem Nichts hinaus sagte ich Stroszek. (Stroszek war eigentlich der Name der Hauptfigur in *Lebenszeichen*). „Dieser Film wird viel mehr über deine Art von Leben und deine Umgebung sein und über deine Tragödie. Nicht über eine Tragödie eines Dramatikers aus dem 19. Jahrhundert." Ich sagte, „Du hast in einer Woche ein Drehbuch." Da musste ich mich also schnell hinsetzen, und so entstand *Stroszek*.

Das heißt also die Hinbewegung auf *Woyzeck* hatte einen merkwürdigen Umweg über *Stroszek*. Und *Stroszek* hat das auch dann ziemlich beeinflusst.

Die Figur Bruno und die Figur Kinski haben in irgendeiner Weise miteinander zu tun, und Woyzeck, so wie ich ihn bei Büchner lese, hat damit zu tun. Mit beiden wirklichen Menschen.

LU: Also ein Art Dreieck.

WH: Ja.

LU: Sie fangen den Film [*Woyzeck*] an mit einer Drillszene...

WH: Kommt nicht vorher noch ein idyllischer Teich...

LU: ...ja, und eine Stadtansicht...

WH: „In einer Stadt an einem stillen Teich"

LU: Das ist so ein Märchenanfang.

WH: Ja, richtig. Das wollte ich unbedingt vorher machen, damit ich eine Welt zeige, die so scheinbar idyllisch ist. Eine ganz in sich ruhende idyllische Welt.

LU: So etwas hat auch der ganze Film. Die Architektur, und alles sieht so sauber aus, so ein bisschen wie im Puppentheater.

WH: Das Ganze war ja als Theaterkulisse gebaut, die ganze Stadt Telç, in der wir das gedreht haben. Die Stadt liegt nördlich von Linz etwa. Und damals wurde diese Stadt angelegt in einer Weise, dass nur die Fassaden erst gebaut wurden, wie eine Theaterkulisse. Und erst nach und nach entstanden dann die wirklichen Häuser, die an die Fassaden sich hinten anlehnten und angebaut wurden. Das war also ein Ort, der für mich wie eine Puppenstube war, wie eine Theaterkulisse. Nein eigentlich mehr wie eine Puppenstube, wie eine Miniaturwelt, die aus einem Guss war. Die scheinbar aus einem Guss war; und die Risse, die sich auftun und die Abgründe, die sich auftun, werden dadurch umso schwindelerregender. Deswegen auch die Idylle am Anfang und die Musik, die das auch unterstreicht.

LU: Die Musik hat einen Klang wie eine Spieluhr.

WH: Richtig, ja. So wie Kindheitserinnerungen. Dass sich da aber auf einmal Abgründe auftun, vermuten Sie nicht.

LU: Haben Sie den DEFA Film von 1947, *Wozzeck*, von Georg Klaren gesehen?

WH: Nein, habe ich nicht. Ich habe keinen anderen [*Woyzeck*] Film oder je eine Büchnerverfilmung gesehen.

LU: In diesem Film gibt es interessanterweise am Anfang auch eine Drillszene. Wie sind Sie auf diese Idee gekommen, denn diese Szene ist ja nicht im Stück.

WH: Nein, die gibt's nicht im Stück. Ich wollte eigentlich den Film ähnlich anfangen, mit einem Drillteam. Die US-Armee hat ein ganz spezielles kleines Bataillon, das bei ganz besonderen Gelegenheiten auftaucht und einen Gewehrdrill macht. Der ist so unvorstellbar perfekt und mechanisiert, dass Sie der Schwindel ergreift, wenn Sie das sehen. Ich habe lange versucht, dieses Drillteam zu bekommen und in historische Kostüme zu stecken, aber das wurde mir leider verwehrt.
Es ist natürlich schwierig: wie springen Sie in dieses Drama hinein. Es geht gleich mit sehr intensiven Dialogen los in dieser Szene mit dem Hauptmann und dem Barbier. Das ist eine Szene, die eigentlich an den Anfang gehört und so dialogintensiv ist, dass Sie keine Titel darüberlegen können. Nachdem eine vollkommen perfektionierte menschliche Drillszene in meinen Gedanken da war, wurde dann schnell klar, dass wir mit Kinski etwas machen. Und derjenige, der ihn da tritt und herumhetzt, ist der Produktionsleiter, Walter Saxer, der eh ein

Hühnchen mit ihm zu rupfen hatte. Aber Kinski war da immer sehr kooperationswillig. Er hat gesagt: „Nein, er hat mich nicht richtig getreten, er muss richtig zutreten." Kinski wurde so getreten, dass er ganz hart mit dem Gesicht auf die Pflastersteine geknallt ist, und er hatte ein ganz geschwollenes Gesicht. Man sieht ihn dann auch kurz ruhig dasitzen mit einem ganz geschwollenen Gesicht. Das war nur, weil ich beobachtet habe, dass er ganz verquollen war auf einer Seite, und ich habe dieses Bild stumm einfach noch schnell aufgenommen. Also so setzen sich dann manchmal Dinge zusammen, die aus dem Moment und aus der direkten Beobachtung direkt athletisch geboren sind - um diesen Begriff zu verwenden. Es war kein großes konzeptionelles, kein akademisches Denken dahinter.

LU: Zu Büchners Text: Sie sagen, Sie haben nicht alles genau übernommen, und man merkt das auch...

WH: Ich habe gerade den Text angeschaut, und wenn Sie die Dialogliste mit Büchners Text vergleichen, sehen Sie: mindestens die Hälfte von Büchners Text kommt gar nicht vor; ein guter Teil ist zusammengerafft. Vieles ist weggelassen was sprachlich zu sehr ins frühe 19. Jh. hindeutet. Zum Beispiel „die Zickwolfin" und so etwas.

LU: Eine Frage zur Darstellung der Figur der Marie: Da ist eine Stelle, die sie ausgelassen haben, als Marie in der Bibel blättert und daraus vorliest. Da lassen Sie diese Stelle aus: „Herrgott, Herrgott ich kann nicht... gib mir nur soviel, dass ich beten kann." Für mich hatte es den Eindruck, dass Sie dies weglassen, weil es Reue zeigt oder vielmehr ein tieferes Verständnis...

WH: Ich erinnere mich, dass wir den Text zunächst relativ vollständig hatten und wenn Eva Mattes, die Marie gespielt hat, das gesagt hat, klang das nicht richtig. Ich sage nicht, es gehörte nicht zu Marie, aber es gehörte nicht zu Eva Mattes; es klang verkehrt, es von ihr zu hören. Es war nicht richtig für die Figur Eva Mattes. Würde ich es am Theater inszenieren, dann wäre der Satz vermutlich drin; möglicherweise auch nicht. Es kommt ganz darauf an, mit welchen Menschen Sie das tatsächlich inszenieren.

LU: Warum haben Sie sich entschlossen, das Märchen vom Waisenkind, das im Stück von einer alten Frau erzählt wird, von Marie, also von Eva Mattes erzählen zu lassen?

WH: Ich glaube zum einen, weil ich keine geeignete alte Frau hatte und das zweite war, dass ich der Figur von Marie eigentlich mehr Hintergrund, mehr Bandbreite, mehr Tiefe in verschiedene Richtungen geben wollte. Und es passte gut zu ihr. Insofern gehe ich mit dem Büchnertext, sagen wir mal, nicht nonchalant um, aber den wirklichen Bedürfnissen des Kinos entsprechend.

LU: Sie haben auch einmal gesagt: “Cinema comes from the country fair and the circus”. Im *Woyzeck* ist diese Kirmesszene…

WH: Die Ursprungsgeschichte des Kinos kommt eben von den Jahrmärkten her, das waren eigentlich die ersten Kinoerfahrungen, die das Publikum hatte. Man spürt auch heute noch dem Kino diesen Ursprung an, wenn Sie nach Cannes gehen, dem Filmfestival. Der selbe Zirkus, natürlich heute perfektioniert mit allen Medien in allen Bereichen; aber letztlich ist es Jahrmarkt,

ist es Zirkus. Und wer das dem Kino absprechen und verleugnen will, der versteht Kino wahrscheinlich nicht wirklich.

LU: Kann ich Sie zu Ihrem Verhältnis zum Neuen Deutschen Kino fragen? Sie werden oft im Zusammenhang damit genannt, aber wie ich Sie verstehe, zählen Sie sich eigentlich nicht wirklich dazu.

WH: Ja, man muss vorsichtig sein. Das Neue Deutsche Kino hat es eigentlich nie so richtig gegeben, wie es z.B. die Nouvelle Vague gab. Die hatten zumindest weitgehend ähnliche Sujets und vor allem auch einen neuen stilistischen Aufbruch. Noch deutlicher sehen Sie das beim italienischen Neorealismus nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Da war ganz eindeutig nicht nur ein eigener Stil, eigene Themata da, es gab auch eine moralische Grundhaltung, Positionslinien, die in den Filmen fast durchgehend vorhanden waren. Beim Neuen Deutschen Film war das nur ein historischer... - nicht ein Zufall, aber es war historisch ganz simpel so, dass eine neue Generation nach dem Krieg aufwuchs ohne wirklich Lehrer zu haben. Keiner von den Regisseuren, die da gearbeitet haben, hatte eine Karriere als Assistent oder als Lernender von den Filmregisseuren der 30er, 40er Jahre hinter sich – die gab es ja nicht. Entweder sind die besten emigriert oder sind im KZ gelandet; und der Rest hat sich eben arrangiert mit der Barbarei des Regimes und dem zugearbeitet.

Das heißt, wir waren ohne Tradition, ohne Lehrer. Und jetzt wächst also eine Generation auf, die sich im Alter von 19, 20, 22, 24 Jahren auf einmal im Kino artikuliert. Viele von denen haben Kino weitgehend selbst für sich erfunden. Ich bin das beste aller Beispiele, weil ich ja erst sehr spät in meinem Leben Kino überhaupt erst kennengelernt habe. Ich wusste bis zu meinem

elften Lebensjahr nicht, dass es überhaupt Kino gab. Erst als ich elf war, kam ein herumreisender Projektionist in der Volksschule in Sachrang an und zeigte ein paar Filme. Erst da wusste ich, aha, Kino existiert. Die Vorführungen dort beeindruckten mich nicht, weil sie schlecht waren. Ich war also ohne Vorgeschichte und sowieso Autodidakt. Ich wusste natürlich von den anderen, die da waren, habe mich aber immer ganz klar abgegrenzt. Meine Themen sind völlig andere, meine Weltsicht ist eine andere, weil ich anders als die jungen Filmregisseure um mich eine ganz andere Kindheit hatte und sehr viel früher als die anderen draußen in der Welt war. Und ganz elementare Erfahrungen gemacht habe – in Afrika und ich weiß nicht wo; und schon sehr schwer krank war und hungrig war. Das alles hatten die nicht erlebt.

Es hat sich dann ergeben, dass die Medien den Neuen Deutschen Film als eine Stilrichtung oder Schule des Kinos erklärt haben, aber wenn Sie genauer hinsehen: weder Wenders, noch Fassbinder, noch ich haben stilistisch, thematisch oder in irgendeiner Weise etwas miteinander zu tun. Wir hatten aber miteinander zu tun, weil damals die Situation noch ganz auf das 50er-Jahre Kino ausgerichtet war, und wir haben einen Sinn für Solidarität entwickelt. Das heißt, es gibt kaum Freundschaften untereinander, wohl aber, z.B. für Fassbinder, Respekt und Solidarität. Wir mochten uns, wir waren aber nicht Freunde.

Der Zusammenhang war eigentlich nur oberflächlich und hatte damit zu tun, dass wir unser eigenes Verleihsystem, unsere eigenen Produktionen aufgebaut haben; eine Filmförderung in Gang gesetzt haben, die es ja nicht gab. In dieser Weise gab es einen gewissen Zusammenhalt und auch Zusammenarbeit; nicht aber was die Filme selbst betraf. Es gab einen einzigen Film, *Deutschland im Herbst*, da war ich aufgefordert worden mitzumachen und schaute mir an, was die anderen machten und dachte: Um Gottes Willen, nein, da passe ich nicht dazu. Dieses Gefühl, nicht dazu zu passen, hatte ich von meiner ersten Stunde an.

LU: Sie hatten eben angesprochen, dass Sie, diese Filmemacher um diese Zeit, ohne Lehrer waren, man liest auch von der "vaterlosen Generation"...

WH: Das ist ganz wörtlich zu nehmen; bei Fassbinder war der Vater sehr bald verschwunden, der hat sich scheiden lassen. Bei mir ähnlich; bei anderen waren die Väter im Krieg gefallen. Diese ganze Generation vor uns war komischerweise ein Totalausfall, während die Großvätergeneration wunderbar war. Mein Großvater, meine Großmutter waren ganz starke, großartige Figuren.

LU: Und außerhalb des persönlichen Bereichs, im Film? War es wirklich so, dass man sich auf die goldene Zeit des Weimar-Kinos bezogen hat?

WH: Ich bin ja so ein Beispiel; ich weiß nicht, wie das mit den anderen war. Bei mir war es so: nachdem ich *Nosferatu* gemacht hatte, hatte ich das Gefühl, jetzt habe ich festen Fuß am anderen Ende, jetzt habe ich den Fluss überquert. Zumindest fühle ich jetzt festen Boden. Und zwar deswegen, weil der Zusammenhang mit der Filmkultur wiederhergestellt war dadurch; nicht weil eine Kontinuität dagewesen wäre. Da ist eine Lücke von einem Vierteljahrhundert, und wir sind wie Abgeschnittene. Lotte Eisner war eine dieser Figuren, die uns wieder in diesen Kontext gestellt haben. Lotte Eisner war auch diejenige, die Fritz Lang geschrieben hat: „Hier gibt es auf einmal wieder Filme, ich habe einen Film gesehen, *Lebenszeichen*, Du musst den sehen. Es gibt wieder einen deutschen Film." Und Fritz Lang schrieb zurück: „Lotte, das ist unmöglich!" Und Lotte schickte ihm eine Kopie. Und auf einmal, durch Fritz Lang und durch Lotte Eisner waren

wir, als hätten wir die Salbung bekommen. Das ist wieder legitime deutsche Kultur, Filmkultur zumindest.

Ich glaube, dieses Gefühl hatten auch die anderen: Ja, das, was wir machen setzt sich ganz deutlich ab von dem, was geschichtlich so katastrophal geendet hatte und ein Gefühl von Barbarei in uns allen hinterlassen hat. Im übrigen geht es auch nicht nur um die Filme der zwanziger Jahre, sondern auch um die Kultur, in die wir eingebunden sind. Auch was die Kultur angeht, war weitgehend eine Lücke, die ich besonders gespürt habe, und deswegen war da vielleicht auch so sehr die Suche nach einem soliden Zusammenhalt mit unserer Literatur. In dem Fall *Woyzeck*, Büchner, oder Hölderlin, oder Quirin Kuhlmann.

LU: Man kann das auch bei anderen Filmemachern sehen. Vor allem in den 70ern gibt es eine ganze Reihe von Literaturverfilmungen, das ist schon auffällig.

WH: Da war ich nur nicht dran beteiligt, weil ich mir immer meine Geschichten selbst erfunden habe.

Aber ich will nochmal zurück auf die Frage des Zusammenhangs mit der eigenen Kultur. Das heißt nicht nur Literatur; ich meine auch die Mathematiker, ich meine auch die Komponisten. Und für mich war in Momenten von höchster Gefährdung – die Momente hat es ja gegeben, wenn Dinge nicht mehr machbar schienen oder tatsächlich physisch gefährlich wurden – immer war der letzte Rückhalt Sprache; gar nicht so sehr Bilder. Sprache, meine letzte Zuflucht ist immer Sprache gewesen. Sie können das sehen an dem Buch *Eroberungen des Nutzlosen*, bei *Fitzcarraldo*. Ununterbrochen, wann immer eine Möglichkeit war, zwischen zwei Szenen oder auf einer Bootsfahrt oder wo auch immer, habe ich geschrieben, geschrieben, geschrieben; und

immer winziger, d.h. also bis zu mikroskopischer Winzigkeit habe ich geschrieben. Aber das war gar nicht so sehr um Tagesgeschehen festzuhalten. Was ich festgehalten habe damals, waren innere Landschaften, waren erfundene Katastrophen; um sie zu bannen, um sie präventiv sozusagen nicht mehr möglich zu machen. Aber immer war die letzte Zuflucht in der Sprache.

LU: Wie ist das mit Musik?

WH: Auch Musik ist eine Zuflucht, natürlich; die vorletzte eher. Musik ist etwas anderes, weil sie das Einzige ist, was uns, außer der Religion vielleicht, Tröstung, wirklich Tröstung vermitteln kann.

LU: Nochmal zurück zu *Woyzeck* und Musik: Am Anfang hatten Sie diese Spieluhrmusik, und dann gibt es im ganzen Film nur noch zwei Szenen, in denen Musik spielt, die nicht in den Film reingehört. Da ist dieses Streichquartett, wo kam diese Musik her?

WH: Es gibt ein Quartett, das im Bild zu sehen ist, bei der Tanzszene z.B. Das war ein Fidelquartett aus der Ortschaft Telç, das ich sehr gerne mochte. Alle andere Musik ist sehr schnell hineingekommen, weil ich ein sehr intensives Verhältnis zur Musik habe und ganz schnell weiß, das muss hinein, und die Musik sollte hier anfangen und nicht eine Sekunde früher. Das lässt sich auch schwer erklären, zumindest schwer verbalisieren: warum diese Musik? Bei *Woyzeck* spielt die Musik keine so große Rolle wie in anderen Filmen, hier ist es mehr der Text und mehr die Intensität der Darsteller. Und mehr auch Choreographie, wie gehe ich mit Raum um? Normalerweise hat man eine Szene aufgelöst in eine ganze Reihe von Einstellungen, und

hier sind sehr viele von den Szenen, oder die meisten, in einer einzigen Einstellung gedreht. Aber wie erzeugen Sie z.B. Tiefe – Tiefe von Raum und Verständnis von Raum. Das ist sehr, sehr schwierig. Und wie füllen Sie eine Szene, die vier Minuten lang dauert - was eine Endlosigkeit im Kino ist -mit einer einzigen Einstellung.

LU: Warum haben Sie das so gemacht? Es gibt dem Film ja einen besonderen Rhythmus.

WH: Richtig, ja. Der Rhythmus musste sich aber beim Drehen herstellen. Der stellte sich also nicht beim Schnitt her. Das ist eigentlich ein guter Nachweis für mein Dictum: Der Rhythmus eines Films stellt sich nie im Schneideraum her, sondern beim Drehen schon. Warum? Weil ich ein ganz bestimmtes, intensives Verhältnis zwischen Raum und Sprache und Körpern herstellen wollte, und das darf nicht unterbrochen werden und darf nicht – ich kann das nur instinktiv beantworten – es durfte nicht durch eine große Anzahl an Schnitten und Kameraeinstellungen gelöst werden.

LU: Sie inszenieren auch Opern, haben Sie *Woyzeck* je als Oper inszeniert?

WH: Nein. Ich bin eigentlich in die Oper hineingezerrt worden, von Leuten, die absolut sicher waren, dass ein Mensch, der so mit Musik und Bildern umgehen kann, eigentlich Opern inszenieren sollte. Ich war erst sehr skeptisch und habe es dann gemacht und war eigentlich vom ersten Moment an völlig vertraut damit, obwohl ich nie eine Operninszenierung in meinem Leben gesehen hatte. Ich habe auch in der Regel nur Sachen gemacht, die eher ungewöhnlich waren, also Opern, die wenig aufgeführt waren; oder Opern, die viel gespielt wurden, aber dann

unter ganz besonderen Bedingungen. Das Haus musste das richtige sein, der Dirigent musste irgendwie einen Rapport mit mir haben, weil ich jemand bin, der keine musikalischen Noten lesen kann. Aber ich kann sehr genau hören und habe ein sehr gutes musikalisches Gedächtnis. Ich kann nur Opern inszenieren, wo ich die Musik in einer tieferen Weise auch verstehen und umsetzen kann, denn Oper ist ja immer eine Verwandlung einer ganzen Welt in Musik. Und wenn Sie die Musik nicht verstehen, können Sie auch keine Zusammenhänge der Bilder- und Phantasiewelt herstellen. Seltsamerweise habe ich keinen Zugang zu Schönberg oder Alban Berg; also zumindest *Moses und Aaron* von Schönberg und *Wozzeck* von Alben Berg sind Musiken, zu denen ich keinen richtigen Zugang habe. Ich bin wie ausgesperrt. Obwohl Kompositionen weit nach Schönberg oder Berg mir wieder ganz einfach eingehen.

Es gibt eine etwas merkwürdige, ja witzige Episode: Ich habe an der Scala in Mailand eine Inszenierung gemacht und praktisch nebenan in Florenz war Zubin Mehta, der auch gerade eine Oper dirigiert hatte. Und Mehta wollte unbedingt etwas mit mir zusammen machen. Ich war aber gerade in der Generalprobe und konnte nicht nach Florenz hinüber fahren, und ich schickte meinen Bruder, der sehr in Musik ist und auch sehr großes Verhandlungsgeschick hat. Ich schickte ihn nach Florenz: Triff den Zubin Mehta, wenn er dir vorschlägt *Moses und Aaron* von Schönberg oder *Wozzeck* von Alban Berg – keine Diskussion, das macht dein Bruder nicht. Und er trifft also Zubin Mehta und nach ein paar Höflichkeiten, die sie beide ausgetauscht haben, schlug also Zubin Mehta *Wozzeck* von Alban Berg vor. Und mein Bruder stand auf und sagte: Nein, mein Bruder kann das nicht machen; und ist wieder zurückgefahren nach Mailand.

Zubin Mehta ist bis heute noch beleidigt.

LU: Ich springe nochmal zurück zum Film *Woyzeck*. Sie sind ja eigentlich bekannt für Ihre großartigen Landschaftsaufnahmen und im *Woyzeck* gibt es nur am Anfang das Bild von der Stadt und dem See und am Schluss das wogende Mohnfeld, und ansonsten waren Sie in der Stadt, was eigentlich ganz gut passt. Das alles hat so ein Gefühl von eingesperrt sein – habe Sie sich auch so gefühlt?

WH: Richtig, ja – nicht, dass ich mich selber so gefühlt hätte, aber der Film und die Stilisierungen des Films deuten natürlich darauf hin. Da ist eine Art dreieckiger Platz in der Stadt, wo kein Ausgang zu sehen ist. Und wie tun sich auf einmal in sehr beengten Räumen, die scheinbar idyllisch sind und scheinbar in einer bürgerlichen Ordnung gezeigt werden, wie tun sich da Abgründe auf. Es ist, als würden sich auf einmal Erdspalten auftun.

LU: Ich habe Ihren Film *Mein liebster Feind* gesehen: Die Arbeit mit Kinski am *Woyzeck* schien eine der harmonischsten gewesen zu sein.

WH: Ja, das stimmt. Ich weiß nicht genau warum. Möglicherweise, weil sich Kinski wochenlang schon vorher bei *Nosferatu* bis aufs letzte erschöpft hat, in Schreikrämpfen und Panikanfällen und Verwüstungen am Set. Aber ich glaube auch ein Teil der Kraft, ihn zu domestizieren, kam von Büchner, von der Kraft des Textes. Kinski hat ein unfehlbares Gespür, er weiß, hier ist etwas ganz großes.
Meine Faszination in der Literatur war immer bei denjenigen, die sozusagen aufs äußerste gegangen sind, also Büchner in *Lenz* oder im *Woyzeck*. Schwer zu erklären, aber das ist für meine Begriffe die letzte Grenze, die in einem dramatischen Text denkbar ist. Deswegen

wahrscheinlich auch Hölderlin, der die letzten Grenzen unserer Sprache ausgelotet hat bis hinüber in den Wahnsinn. Wenn Sie die allerletzten Gedichte von ihm sehen, die er im Turm in Tübingen geschrieben hat, die sind ganz armselig, wie Kindergedichte fast. Wo er eigentlich diesen Grenzgang beschreibt, der ihn zurückgeworfen hat in Umnachtungen. Deswegen auch Quirin Kuhlmann, der größte von allen Ekstatikern, also einer, der auch an die letzten Grenzen der Sprache ging, der Barocklyriker, der mir ganz besonders wichtig ist. Oder auch Kleist, also Novellen von Kleist.

LU: Kleist hat einen Essay über das Marionettentheater geschrieben...

WH: ...ein wunderbarer Text...

LU: Hat Sie das auch beeinflusst in der Drillszene, wo Woyzeck wie eine aufgezogene Puppe läuft?

WH: Nein, nicht wirklich, aber in anderer Weise. Wie Kleist beschreibt, wie ein Fechtmeister mit einem Tanzbären ficht und wie er immer Finten ansetzt. Der Bär durchschaut die Finte nicht, aber er durchschaut, er erkennt die Bewegung des Degens schnell genug und wischt den Degenangriff unweigerlich beiseite – er ist nicht täuschbar. Diese Metapher von dem Bären, der so physisch eine Situation erkennt, hat mich immer beindruckt, weil das wie eine Metapher ist für denjenigen, der Filme macht. Dass Sie in der Lage sind, eine Situation zu durchschauen über alle Hindernisse hinweg und über alle Täuschungen hinweg und dass Sie sozusagen einer Situation körperlich in richtiger Weise folgen können und sich darauf auch verlassen können.

Also ich zumindest. Ich komme daher wieder auf Ihre erste Frage zurück: es geht um ein physisches Verständnis für das, was ich mache.

Und dann gibt es eben bei Kleist verschiedene Sätze, übrigens auch im *Lenz* von Büchner, die in mich eingebrannt sind und die mir auch Tröstung geben, und Zusammenhang und Stabilität geben. *Lenz* kann ich fast auswendig.

LU: *Kaspar Hauser* fängt mit einem Zitat aus *Lenz* an.

WH: Ja, genau. "Hören Sie denn nicht das Schreien ringsumher..." Es ist leicht abgeändert, aber es ist ein Zitat. Es ist eine Verbeugung Richtung Büchner. Das hat also schon früh angefangen im Kino bei mir. Ich mache bedenkenlos so etwas, und zwar deswegen, weil Sie in dem Film *Kaspar Hauser* auf einem ganz anderen Niveau als Zuschauer einsteigen. Und von der Höhe lasse ich Sie nie wieder herunter.

Das habe ich auch in anderen Filmen gemacht. Z.B. in *Lektionen in Finsternis*, das mit einem Zitat von Blaise Pascal beginnt. Und das Blaise Pascal-Zitat ist völlig erfunden von mir, aber es steht Blaise Pascal drunter. Ich glaube es heißt: „Der Untergang der Sternenwelten wird sich ereignen in grandiosen..." Auf Englisch erinnere ich mich besser: „The collapse of the stellar universe will occur like creation in grandiose splendor." – Blaise Pascal. Er hätte es nicht besser sagen können.

LU: Da spielen Sie also mit dem Zuschauer.

WH: Nein, ich spiele nicht. Ich hebe ihn auf ein Niveau, mit dem er in den Film hineintritt und niemals auch nur einen Schritt darunter. Bei *Kaspar Hauser* oder *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle*... da sieht man, wie das mit dem Bild zusammen außerordentlich tief wirken kann, auch mit der Musik zusammen. Und mit diesem Zitat zusammen sind Sie schon mal im Film drin. Das dauert oft sehr lange, bis Sie als Zuschauer richtig eingestiegen sind. Hier reißt eine Tür auf, und Sie sind im Film.

LU: Ich finde, dieses Mohnfeld bei *Woyzeck* ist auch noch ein Echo von diesem Weizenfeld in *Kaspar Hauser*.

WH: Auch, ja. Es gibt immer wieder so bildliche Motive, die einen Zusammenhang haben. Oder Figuren, kleine Nebenfiguren, die auf einmal einen Zusammenhang haben, die in einem Film auftauchen und im nächsten Film plötzlich wieder da sind. Oder jetzt gerade kürzlich: in dem Dokumentarfilm *The White Diamond* spricht einer der lokalen Helfer im Urwald einen Satz zur Kamera, oder zu mir auf Kamera, und er sagt: „I cannot hear what you say for the thunder that you are." Das ist aber rein inszeniert, und das ist ein Satz, der in einem früheren Spielfilm schon vorkommt, in *Cobra Verde*. Und jetzt in meinem gerade erst abgedrehten Spielfilm sagt den selben Satz Christian Bayle – den selben, identischen Satz. Das heißt also die Sätze haben auf einmal in jedem dieser Filme ein eigenes und anderes Leben, und die Filme gehören aber in irgendeiner Weise zusammen. Das habe ich öfter gemacht, dass Bindeglieder da sind, die wohl auf etwas hindeuten, was ich zwar weiß, aber nicht genau erklären kann. Alle meine Filme haben in sich einen Zusammenhang anderer Ordnung. Büchner gibt einen Zusammenhang – ja, mit dem Zitat in *Kaspar Hauser*, dem Zitat aus *Lenz* und dem Film *Woyzeck* gibt es in

irgendeiner Weise einen Zusammenhang. Ich weiß, es besteht ein Zusammenhang, kann ihn aber nicht wirklich erklären oder zumindest jetzt noch nicht. Das grämt mich aber nicht. (lacht)

LU: Vielen Dank für dieses Gespräch.

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