

Prologue: Cinema and the Arts

1 VIENNA 1913: THE DAWN OF THE *AUTORENFILM*

The first decade of the twentieth century was a decisive moment in the evolution of German-language cinema, a moment which saw a general shift in the aesthetics of cinematic spectacle. The earliest authors of this shift, between 1913 and 1914, were part of the intellectual circles of the Viennese avant-garde. Composers like Arnold Schönberg and Alban Berg, as well as writers such as Robert Musil, Peter Altenberg, Gerhart Hauptmann, and in particular Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Arthur Schnitzler, developed a true fascination for cinema. Hofmannsthal and Schnitzler, the former with *Das fremde Mädchen* (1913) and the latter with *Liebelei* (1914), were among the first to actively contribute to the effort of ennoblement and artistic legitimation of the cinematic medium known as *Autorenfilm*.¹ Besides Vienna, this cultural phenomenon had a second hub in Berlin, where a similar intention to elevate cinema to the same status as literature led film producers and promoters, like

¹ *Das fremde Mädchen* is the title of a pantomime written by Hugo von Hofmannsthal in 1910 for dancer Grete Wiesenthal, and adapted by the writer in 1913 for the film of the same name, directed by Mauritz Stiller. The film version of *Liebelei* by Arthur Schnitzler was produced by the Danish company Nordisk Film in 1914, under the title *Elskovleg*, and directed by Holger Madsen. For an overview on this topic—on which extensive secondary literature is now available—readers can refer to Heller (1984). About the involvement of Viennese literary figures see Quaresima (1984a), and, about Schnitzler in particular, the recent study by Wolf (2006).

Paul Davidson (director of Projektions-AG “Union”), to involve stage directors, actors, and playwrights in their projects.² The major protagonist of the Berlin scene was the great playwright Max Reinhardt, who made a filmic adaptation of the pantomime *Sumurun* (1910), and then subsequently produced three films: *Die Insel der Seligen* (1913), *Das Mirakel* (1914) and *Venezianische Nacht* (1914).

The involvement of intellectuals and leading authors in the film industry is part of, as Leonardo Quaresima puts it, “a project for the growth of the cinematic apparatus” (Quaresima 1984b, p. 12). In this respect, the *Autorenfilm* shows absolutely *original* features: it should not be understood as a “humanist, moralist regression”—a common trait of several coeval French- and Italian-language productions³—but as an “enhancement of the specific qualities of cinema, also through the adoption of the ‘learned’ elements of theatre and literature” (Quaresima 1984b, p. 11). This “original meeting” between the artistic and literary avant-garde and the German film industry were to generate an “original perspective” (Quaresima 1984b, p. 11), which provided the background for a series of mutual relationships between cinema, literature, and music that were to continue to unfold throughout the 1920s and 1930s until the rise of Nazism.

The collaborations in film projects of authors, playwrights, and composers were never, in point of fact, merely face-value experiences. On the contrary, writes Quaresima, “they were real, they effectively exploited individual competences, so that, despite failures and ‘misunderstandings’—which were certainly not lacking—, they ultimately left deep traces also on the artistic and literary practice of the various protagonists” (Quaresima 1984b, p. 11).

²In this regard, these statements of Siegfried Kracauer are a significant historical document: “The upper world of stage directors, actors and writers began to show interest in the cinema after having despised it an inferior medium. Their change of mind must be traced, in part, to the missionary zeal of Paul Davidson, the great promoter of the early German film, who, under the spell of the new Danish film actress Asta Nielsen, firmly proclaimed the cinema’s artistic future.” Kracauer (2004, p. 17).

³For example, consider certain overambitious productions of the French Film d’Art, such as *Madame Sans-Gêne* and *La dame aux camélias*, or coeval Italian literary films, such as *Inferno* by Milano Films, all released in 1911 (cf. Miceli 2010, pp. 99, 131).

2 LITERARY CINEMA

In 1913 the Deutsche Bioscop-Gesellschaft made the first real attempt to recruit “eminent names of the German theatre” (Hauptmann, Schnitzler, Ewers, Lindau, Altenberg, and many others) to produce a “filmic adaptation” (*Verfilmung*) of their works.⁴ Behind the stated intent to artistically elevate the new medium, the alliance between literary authors and cinema in fact concealed a clever advertising strategy aimed at avoiding the crisis of cinema’s socio-cultural legitimization.

Until the end of the first decade of the century, cinema had received almost no attention from literary critics and the world of culture. Relegated to fairs and variety shows at this stage, one that is usually described as “pre-literary” (*vorliterarisch*), cinema had nonetheless the advantage of performing a twofold function: to meet the entertainment needs of the masses and, at the same time, steer clear of the official institutions of bourgeois culture (Kaes 1978, p. 2 ff.).

Between 1908 and 1910, thanks to the opening of large permanent cinema halls in central city districts, the improvement of shooting and projection techniques, and the introduction of full-length films that allowed for the possibility to give them a substantial narrative structure, cinema lost its connotations as mass entertainment and sheer amusement. The change in the conditions of cinema laid the foundations for a competitive role with respect to the novel and theatre, and set the tone for a reform movement that demanded that the new medium of cinema be recognized as having the status of dramatic art. The logical consequence of this change was that, since 1911, the best theatre actors were recruited for cinema productions with the help of a financial and advertising system of unprecedented power.

The origins of this reform movement can be identified in the film *Der Andere*, produced by Vitascop, which premiered at the Mozartsaal

⁴The film producer announced it as follows in an article entitled *Der Autorenfilm und seine Bewertung*, published in *Der Kinematograph*, no. 326, March 26, 1913: “Leading names of the German stage have overcome their initial reluctance to collaborate in film productions and dedicate themselves to their new purpose with the same seriousness and dignity that they are used to putting into carrying out their duties at the theatre. And unprejudiced novelists and playwrights have already been found, who consent to the filmic adaptation of their works, in so far as these are suitable for the however limited possibilities of representation implied by cinema.”

in Berlin on 13 February 1913. The director of *Der Andere* was Max Mack, and the screenplay was authored by the writer Paul Lindau, who also authored the play of the same name on which the film is based. For the double role of the protagonist—lawyer Hallers, a schizophrenic who recalls Robert L. Stevenson’s Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde—the producers managed to recruit no less than Albert Bassermann, one of the greatest stage actors of the time, who was the first to break the taboo and “migrate to the competitor”.

Alongside *Der Andere*, and the previously mentioned *Die Insel der Seligen* by Max Reinhardt (based on a subject by writer Arthur Kahane) in 1913 a third movie was added, which, along with the other two, formed a kind of three-part manifesto of the *Autorenfilm* genre. Entitled *Der Student von Prag*, the film was produced by Deutsche Bioscop and directed by Stellan Rye, with a screenplay by Hanns Heinz Ewers and Paul Wegener loosely inspired by Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The first screening of the film, which took place on 22 August 1913 (again in the Mozartsaal), was accompanied by an original composition written by Josef Weiss. And, in a unique case in the contemporary practice of musical accompaniments, the Berlin publisher Harmonie produced a concert programme, which, in the spirit of Wagnerian *thematische Leitfäden*, listed the various *Leitmotive* in the score and specified their connection to elements of the film’s narrative.⁵

Der Andere by Mack, *Die Insel der Seligen* by Reinhardt and *Der Student von Prag* by Rye and Ewers marked the birth of *Filmdrama*, a cultivated genre characterized by engaged themes and the search for a refined visual language through which the new cinematic medium, for the first time, could enter into competition with literature and theatre, not just in terms of external architectural spaces, but also of cultural contents. As Kaes observes, cinema from then on aimed at “convincing the bourgeoisie that it had an artistic potential” (Kaes 1978, p. 2). As part of this argument, first-rate authors were asked to write the screenplays, a strategy that

⁵The thematic guide to the music accompaniment of *Der Student von Prag*, edited by Kurt Steinbrück and published by Harmonie GmbH, is stored at the Heinrich Heine Institut Rheinisches Literaturarchiv in Düsseldorf. The piano reduction of Josef Weiss’s score is consultable at the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin. On this topic see Huck (2012, pp. 249–255).

allowed cinema to gain huge popularity and the status of a “new literary institution” (Kaes 1978, p. 2).

The breaking of the barriers between official culture—along with its traditional institutions—and mass culture—expressed by cinema—ushered in a period of animated debate (that lasted until the 1920s) on the threat that cinema could pose to the very survival of literary art: “a harmful threat emerges for theatre: the cinematograph”, as Hermann Kienzl (1911, p. 219) brutally and concisely puts it. The new medium of cinema soon overpowered theatre in terms of advertising, profit and, finally, popularity. This turn of events led to a massive call to arms in the world of culture: in newspapers and literary magazines, intellectuals drew “a comparison between the two media, cinema and literature, in order to create a clear-cut division between the two” (Kaes 1978, p. 1), but above all they tried to seriously question the artistic aspirations of cinema by emphasizing everything that it lacked to be regarded as one of the dramatic arts.

It is within this field of opposition—against the background of a real cultural and institutional conflict—that, starting in 1910, the debate on *Filmdramen* breaks out.

3 “THE BIG AUTHORS GO TO THE MOVIES”

Throughout the second decade of the twentieth century, the German *intelligentsia* mostly embraced the position of literary authors and philosophers of language such as Julius Bab, Alexander Elster, and Walter Rathenau, who ruled out the possibility of granting cinema the status of art on account of the absence of the word.⁶ Writers, like Walter Asmus, Julius Hart, and the already mentioned Hermann Kienzl, consequently aimed their criticism at the claim that cinema could be regarded as ancillary to dramatic or literary art: in fact, wanting to portray dramatic events related to the inner life of a human being without words would be an act of violence. As Julius Hart asserted:

Give and leave to cinema what belongs to cinema, and give to the theatre of word and language that which is peculiar to it — and yet can always only be expressed through the word and language. Everything that only

⁶On this topic, readers can refer to the excellent study by Diederichs (2004, pp. 9–10).

brings visual pleasure and enjoyment [*Schaulust*], curiosity and suspense, can be most easily and quickly satisfied by a theatre of images. But cinema, where it stands today, is absolutely unable to express that which is the primary concern of literature, and coincides with its authentic values — the inner, spiritual-psychological world, the internal correlations, the representation of causality, the explanation of phenomena. (Hart 1913)

For the opponents of cinema, filmic adaptations of classic dramas boiled down to nothing but the visual transpositions of exterior actions, which, however, are utterly unable to express the innermost poetic and spiritual meanings. Paul Heyse wrote: “I also believe that the adaptation of poetic works is a bad thing, since the word, and hence the cognitive meaning, is neutralized by limiting oneself to sheer pantomime” (Heyse 1913).

The same opinion was held by Heinz Herald, who in the *Blätter des Deutschen Theaters*, attacked the genre of *Filmdramen* and the claim that cinema could be regarded as art:

This art (if we want to call it by this name at all, given its latent energies) has no tradition. Since it did not find any foundation in itself, it grasped at fixed points around itself. It stole and begged for all it could, and hung the plunder around its neck, however it best suited its needs. Above all it plundered its proximate art, theatre, from which it now borrows the actors and poets, too. [...] These artists, poets and actors, are tied to the word. To them, the word is the noblest matter. For poets they are the bricks, with which they build the edifice of their poetry [...], for actors they are not only part of their art, of their voice, but also that which originally sparks everything else, mimicry, gestures and movement. So, these artists should suddenly give up what they have done for years and decades. [...] What finally met our eyes was an aesthetic monstrosity. (Herald 1912, p. 502)

The *Verfilmungen* of novels and theatre dramas, in short, would cause the works to slip into mere exteriority: what they give us is but a visual and pantomimic surrogate, in which all the artistic prerogatives of the original are lost.

As Diederichs correctly observes (2004, p. 12), the definition of cinema as a surrogate of literary art is the crucial point in these critiques: if literature is the art of words, then cinema, with its dumb shadows, cannot, in any way, be compared to the literary arts. However, it does not have the same legitimation as the visual arts either, since it borrows its contents from adaptations of novels and theatre dramas that

are reduced to a mere sequence of exterior actions. Therefore, cinema is not really art, only “visual pleasure” (*Schaulust*) (Hart 1913) or, at best, “illusionistic show” (*Zauberbühne*) (Bab 1915, p. 9), just like a magic lantern or a fireworks show. In the eyes of a theatre critic like Georg Fuchs, the growing success of the new medium and the merciless competition it provided to the literary arts are ultimately viewed as the reflection of a general cultural decadence that was leading to a “de-literalization of humanity” (Fuchs 1913).

The defenders of dramatic and literary art were, however, counterbalanced by the position of those intellectuals who saw in cinema not a danger, but an unprecedented potential. Both groups focused their attention on the “medial difference” (Rajewsky 2002, p. 39) of cinema, that is, on its being “other” than the traditional “learned” forms of artistic expression, but they respectively gave an opposite evaluation of this medial difference. This opposite evaluation can only be understood clearly if we read this debate in light of the broader aesthetical-philosophical clash at the time.

A lone voice in this chorus was that of Hanns Heinz Ewers, who, along with Paul Wegener, authored the script for *Der Student von Prag* and approached cinema with curiosity, seeing in it an opportunity to overcome the limits of the word:

But that was precisely what fascinated me: the possibility to finally dispense with the “*word*”, the “word” which, up to then, seemed to be everything to the poets, and without which nothing seemed even thinkable. The “word”—which however was only a surrogate, vague and never completely exhaustive, of all the *deepest* feelings! If it is true that a look, or a slight gesture of the hand can say as much as (and sometimes more than) the most beautiful words of a poet, then it becomes really possible to let the soul speak even without words. (Ewers 1913, pp. 161–162)

The same mistrust of words was the core theme in the argument of Egon Friedell in favour of the cinematic medium. He formulated his argument in his response to Heinz Herald in the *Blätter des Deutschen Theaters*:

However, I think today we will not be so ready to grant such absolute hegemony to the word. We could rather say that words, for us today, have something blatantly obvious, and hence something strangely undifferentiated, about them. The word is gradually losing credit. [...] Today

the human look, the human gesture, the whole body posture can sometimes say more than words. One should not mistake silence for dumbness. Silence is not mute, it is only another, maybe stronger form of communication. (Friedell 1912, p. 511)

Friedell's words make us understand quite clearly that this opposite evaluation of the relationship between cinema and the literary arts, and hence of the respective forms of medial expression, rests on a different conception of language. A philosopher of language like Alexander Elster maintained that "verbal language can express the psychology of an action without any residue" (Elster 1913, p. 279), whereas the image only gives us the outer appearance of that action, making the thought of representing dramatic events related to the inner life of individuals simply absurd in the absence of words. For Friedell, on the contrary, the word has all but lost its value because it is over-determinate, too accurate, and abstract. Therefore, paradoxically, "non-significant" with respect to the real perception of the world—so much so that the word can be blamed now for exactly the same flaw that was attributed to cinema, that is for being, as Ewers wrote, "only a surrogate, vague and never completely exhaustive, of all the deepest feelings".

It is by no means incidental that such intolerance of words and of verbal expression should manifest itself in an Austrian author like Friedell. His approach to cinema and the visual medium can be regarded as the corollary of the *linguistic crisis* that takes various forms within the Viennese writers circle at the turn of the century. Here, the critique of the verbal medium, as Heinz Heller writes (1984, p. 176), is counter-balanced by a high praise of those expressive modes—above all mimicry and gestures (not even to speak of music)—which are the particular stylistic hallmark of the silent movie. The absence of speech in films was not viewed as a flaw—on the contrary, mimicry and gestures, as its substitutes, were intended as forms of communication that transcended the expressive possibilities of both everyday prosaic speech and the most artful literary language. In their physicality, gestural art gives us access to a purer vision of the essence of reality, as opposed to the coldness of intellectual logic.

The yearning to reach beyond the limits of the word, and the myth of gestural art in silent movies as a form of primal communication, are shared by literary figures such as Schnitzler, Hofmannsthal, Musil,

and Altenberg.⁷ As Anton Kaes rightly highlighted (1978, p. 20), it is, however, to Maurice Maeterlinck and his seminal literary work *Le silence*, that we can trace the premise of this paradigm shift:

No sooner are the lips still than the soul awakes, and sets forth on its labours; for silence is an element that is full of surprise, dangers and happiness, and in these the soul possesses itself in freedom. (Maeterlinck 1903, p. 13)

An echo of Maeterlinck's words can be heard in Carl Hauptmann's definition of gesturality (*Gebärde*) as "the primal area of all spiritual communication" (Hauptmann 1919, p. 168), which in film manifests itself in its naked truth. For this reason, no art other than cinema is more suited to represent the whole world with its deepest essence of gestural art.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal, as well, saw in cinema an art form that suited his expressive ideal. In cinema language, he also seemed to glimpse an alternative to the word that had become worn-out and unable to signify. His protagonist, Lord Chandos, writes in an imaginary letter addressed to Francis Bacon:

In brief, this is my case: I have completely lost the ability to think or speak coherently about anything at all. [...] Rather, the abstract words which the tongue must enlist as a matter of course in order to bring out an opinion disintegrated in my mouth like rotten mushrooms. (Hofmannsthal 2005, p. 121)

"Visual expression", instead, is the "heart and essence of all poetry" (Hofmannsthal 1986a, p. 234): the true poet gives up words and finds in gestures and facial mimicry an immediacy full of meaning. Cinema is a visual medium, and as such it is the best suited for the poet's dreams and visions, for they, too, are originally devoid of words. In film, Hofmannsthal declared, an initial dramatic tension resolves into a "novel through images" (*Roman in Bildern*).⁸ Insofar as cinema shifts the

⁷ On the « "Mythos der Gebärde" » in literature see again Heller (1984), in particular pp. 176–179.

⁸ These are the words of the writer in a letter addressed to Carl Jacob Burckhardt, dated July 11, 1923. Hofmannsthal-Burckhardt (1991, p. 118).

focus of narration from the designation of *ciphers* to the expression of *vision*, such a “novel through images” can constitute a true *substitute for dreams*. This is the title of the famous pamphlet *Ersatz für die Träume* (Hofmannsthal 1986b), published by the writer on 27 March 1921, in the *Neue Freie Presse*, exactly 25 years after the first public presentation of the *Lebende Photographien* by the Lumière brothers in Vienna.

Writers such as Friedell, Ewers, Hauptmann, and Hofmannsthal, along with the cinema critic Béla Balázs, designated cinematography, physiognomic expression, and pantomime as the main road to a more authentic and humane culture of vision—one that is able to free itself from the limitations and abstractions of verbal language as well as rediscover the human being on a new basis. In this respect, the “dumb” images of cinema acquire an even more vivid, deeper eloquence than dry, abstract words: “One should not confuse silence with dumbness”, again in Friedell’s words. The “dumb” images are silent, but this does not by any way mean that they are unable to communicate.

4 FILM-RELATED TRANSFORMING DRAMAS

The involvement of literary authors in cinema cannot, however, be limited to the debate on *Filmdramen*, nor to medial transfer experiments consisting of filmic adaptation of literary and theatrical works. The influence of cinema on the literary, theatrical, and art worlds of the early twentieth century is even more evident in what literature and the traditional arts—including music—‘learned’ from cinema and then subsequently appropriated. In 1913, Josef Adler wrote that “Cinema will never be able to convey literature, but literature must learn from cinematography” (Adler 1913, p. 71). This appropriation was exactly what happened in certain literary and theatrical works of the Expressionist and Symbolist movements, which viewed cinema as an aesthetic phenomenon, a linguistic model, and a source of encouragement in order to unleash the imagination in completely new forms.

According to Horst Denkler (1967), the author of a seminal study on twentieth-century theatre, it is in symbolist drama—with its tendency towards a dreamlike, imaginative vision—that the intermedial reference to the cinematic component first originated. Those stage productions exploited innovative visual and scenic elements to evoke the “undetermined” (*Ungewisses*), and to express the “unspeakable” (*Unsagbares*) (Denkler 1967, p. 109). Therefore, while beforehand it was disowned

by writers and playwrights as a literary art, now “film obtain[ed] its own importance as a model for literary production” (Denkler 1967, p. 110).

A similar visionary aesthetic can be found in plays like *Krieg. Ein Tedeum* (1914) by Carl Hauptmann, *Die Menschen* (1918) by Walter Hasenclever, *Wie lange noch?* (1921) by Franz Jung, and *Die Gewaltlosen* (1919) by Ludwig Rubiner and so forth. Denkler refers to these plays as “film-related transforming dramas”, (*filmverwandte Wandlungsdramen*) (Denkler 1967, p. 110), in that they tend to evoke, thematize, and even simulate, aspects of film and film dramaturgy in theatre in order to arrive at a visual representation of dreams and surreality.

According to Denkler (1967, pp. 126–134), the distinctive features of the film-related transforming drama are:

1. the breaking down of the action into episodic numbers: the events follow after each other in a paratactic sequence of visual pictures—speaking *tableaux* that quickly succeed each other, simulating and partially reproducing, in their *mise-en-scène*, the rules of exposition, construction and communication that are peculiar to the cinematic medium system (dissolve, change of angle or image size, interruption of the succession, manipulation of time and space, etc.);
2. the reduction of events to a mimetic-figurative action and the representation of “mute” eloquent images charged with symbolical connotations;
3. a taste for parallel or contrapuntal connections between verbal texts, visual action, and scenic background: the visual medium generally supports the unfolding of events, and the word is either a pleonastic addition or stands in dialectical opposition to the scenic vision;
4. the revolutionary use of lighting design, which aimed at recreating phantasmagorias of lights and shadows on stage⁹;
5. the caricature-like stylization of characters: by reducing them to masks or allegorical walk-ons whereby their psychology is reflected

⁹Before becoming a particular stylistic feature of Expressionist cinema, lighting design originated as an experimental field in the theatre of Adolph Appia and Max Reinhardt himself. From 1911 to 1914, no less than Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau collaborates with Max Reinhardt. On the debt of Murnau’s cinema to Reinhardt’s theatre see Eckert (1998, p. 103).

in their outer appearance, and their personality and role being expressed through a grotesque series of gestures.

In Denkler's definition, then, the film-related transforming dramas revealed their intermedial nature not in the references they make to a specific cinematic texts, but in the fact that they evoked, simulated and partially reproduced—according to what Rajewsky calls “as if character” (*Als-ob-Charakter*) (2002, p. 39)—the cinematic medium, as such, as a distinct semiotic-communicative system.

The analysis of the intermedial references is particularly helpful in defining “the cinematic” as it is apprehended, in its specificity, by an early-twentieth-century intellectual through the filter of his or her historical perception. This specificity of the cinematic firstly lies in renouncing the word as an objectifying means of human thinking and feeling, as well as, secondly, in the dreamlike deformation of reality: in the warping of time and space, the relativity of visual perspective, and the fragmentary and simultaneous nature of perceptual experience.

The way out of the naturalistic reproduction of reality—which after all had been cinema's calling from its very beginning—is actually inscribed in film technique itself, in the possibility to produce alienating representations of reality that subvert the natural logic of events. Examples of this are the grotesque, unreal movements resulting from playing the film backwards, the flight of animated objects that escape the control of humans, and the metamorphoses of people and objects obtained by applying a cross-dissolve effect: just think of the imaginative, bizarre subjects of Cubist and Dada cinema, such as *Entr'acte* (1924) by René Clair or *Vormittagsspuk* (1928) by Hans Richter.

The possibility, unheard of up to then, to insert dreamlike and grotesque elements into reality, sparks the imagination of writers and artists as is clearly shown by the texts in Kurt Pinthus's *Kinobuch* (1914)—a bizarre anthology of cinema subjects written by a host of well-known literary figures. In his contribution to the volume, Max Brod suggested using film to give a visible form to the artist's fantasies:

A relatively little exploited technical possibility is that, in cinema, even pure fantasies can appear in their singular life. Thus you could, in case this was of interest to anyone, stage a “poet at work” cinematically. His intuitions would come out of the furniture, or off the blotting paper sheet, which he is staring at pensively. (Brod 1913, p. 65)

The evocation of cinematic language, in the form of intermedial reference, and the insertion of actual film projection, in the form of medial combination, both lend themselves to a visual representation filled with allegorical symbols that subvert the relationship between truth and illusion.

In the context of early-twentieth-century theatre, this symbolist reading of the technique and language of cinema is undoubtedly favoured by the rise of a new aesthetic conception that, as Nora Eckert writes (1998, p. 12), finds in the dream image the answer to the question as to the identity of theatre. It is in this conception of theatre as “substitute for dreams”, in the words of Hofmannsthal, that a characterizing *topos* of Expressionist drama emerged. It is the *Traumszene*: the “dream scene” is a vision, suspended and deformed in space and time—which, as Denkler explains, does not merely tell spectators about the protagonist’s dream but has the task “to convey the inner experiences and conflicts of the protagonist in a non-mediated, visual way” (Denkler 1967, p. 125). The dream scene unveils his intimate state of mind, and the hidden motives of his actions. It adds further layers of meaning and levels of reality, unveils the background and consequences of visible actions, and makes the author’s allusions tangible (Denkler 1967, p. 125).

The archetype of the dream vision can be traced to *Ein Traumspiel* (*A Dream Play*, 1902) by August Strindberg, a drama whose purpose is described by the author himself as follows:

In this dream play, as in his earlier dream play *To Damascus*, the author has attempted to imitate the disconnected but seemingly logical form of a dream. Anything can happen, everything is possible and plausible. Time and space do not exist. Upon an insignificant background of real life events the imagination spins and weaves new patterns: a blend of memories, experiences, pure inventions, absurdities, and improvisations.

The characters split, double, redouble, evaporate, condense, fragment, cohere. But one consciousness is superior to them all: that of the dreamer. For him there are no secrets, no inconsistencies, no scruples, no laws. He neither condemns nor acquits, only relates. (Strindberg 1981, pp. 205–206)

To sum up: the dream play has a form that is apparently disarticulated because it exists outside the ordinary categories of time and space. But, in fact, it has its own internal organization based on a jumble of memories, absurdities, and improvisations.

Strindberg and his *Dream Play* provided the model for a whole series of theatrical works, from Gerhart Hauptmann's *Hannele* to Kokoschka's *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen*, from *Die Wandlung* and *Masse Mensch* by Toller to Kornfeld's *Der ewige Traum*, all of which allude to cinema, and sometimes even resort to actual film insertions, as a way to create a dream scene.

One would, however, be mistaken in considering this attention to cinema without taking into account these thematic and aesthetic connections. In fact, it should be pointed out that these authors were not interested in cinema as such, but as a resource for the theatre. The playwrights, Denkler rightly observes, limit themselves to developing theatrical forms and structures in close relation with filmic techniques, while continuing to stick to their medium. What they aim for is the complete emancipation of dramaturgic needs and an absolute liberation of the subject matter which, however, still remains theatrical: "Yet drama and theatre stay essentially true to themselves and turn the formal devices of film into dramatic and scenic devices" (Denkler 1967, p. 134). Which is a bit like saying that, in spite of everything, cinema continued to be understood, if not as a surrogate, then at least as an experimental branch of theatre. It had not, yet, come to be an independent domain of artistic creation. The cinematic scenes introduced in the body of theatrical representations are therefore paradoxically "not filmic" (Denkler 1967, p. 134), in so far as they remain anchored to drama and theatre.

The intermedial reference to cinema and the communicative-semiotic system of the new medium has, rather, the function of subverting the categories of nineteenth-century aesthetics. In lieu of the principles of organic unity and completeness of the artwork, a fragmentary, collage-like communicative form takes over. The work of art no longer stems from the creative inspiration of an artist who expresses her/himself in an individual, unrepeatable way, but as the product of a combinatorial play that is essentially determined by technique.

The encounters with cinematic art, therefore, are manifested in forms and modes that only apparently have a centrifugal tendency from the languages of the so-called "old arts". On the contrary, the confrontation with cinema acted as a catalyst for Modernist critical reflections on artistic languages, on forms, and even on the theory of artistic creation.

In this context, as we will see, also the musical-aesthetic debate that surrounded cinema can be read first of all as a debate about experimental directions of Modernism in music.

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