



One of the earliest film adaptations of the archetypal doppelgänger narrative, *The Student of Prague* (1913) is also a forerunner of the expressionist film so widely associated with the Weimar Republic of the 1920s. Thus, the remake of 1920, while based on the same script, is replete with dramatic lighting and brooding shadows so common to the genre. Conrad Veidt plays the young Balduin who makes a pact with extortionist Scapinelli, played by Werner Krauss, resulting in Balduin's mirror image turning to flesh.



The proto-typical expressionist film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), features the riotous studio landscape as one of the main protagonists, the set enacting much of the narrative by externalising the psychological states of the characters. Werner Krauss is the mental asylum director who, with the help of Conrad Veidt's somnambulist, re-enacts the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century murders of mystic Dr. Caligari. Themes of double lives pervade the expressionist screen, itself a mirror on a schizoid Weimar society torn between cultural exuberance and political turmoil.



cinema, Mendelsohn embraces the collapse of architectural space into the cinematic screen: "All surfaces, curves, orchestral pit and ceiling lights rush towards the screen through the medium of music into the flickering image – into the Universum."

In 1943, the U.S. Army and Standard Oil commission Erich Mendelsohn and fellow émigré Konrad Wachsmann to design a typical Berlin housing tract on Dugway Proving Grounds, a military weapons testing area in

Berlin's *Universum Cinema*, a technocratic cathedral to the newly confident medium of film, opens in 1928 with *Looping the Loop*, in which Krauss' character hides his profession as a clown to be accepted by society. The architect of *Universum* is early Modernist Erich Mendelsohn, known in Weimar circles for his Einstein Tower and Schocken department store. Associated with the Circle of Ten group which includes Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, Mendelsohn's later trail of buildings in England, Israel, and USA trace his life in exile. In his inaugural speech for the Universum



north west Utah. *German Village*, as it is termed in declassified military documents, consists of a single structure containing 12 apartments and mimics the vernacular architecture of urban Berlin in every aspect, down to the building materials and interior furnishings. The U.S. Army uses the building to test and develop the effectiveness



of a range of incendiary bombs, including Napalm, which are eventually deployed in the air raids over Dresden and Berlin. Mendelsohn's early involvement in theatre productions include a stage set for the 1912 Press Ball in Munich dedicated to theatre impresario Max Reinhardt. Reinhardt's troupe would later find a home in Berlin's *Great Theatre*, built in 1919 by architect Hans Poelzig. A young Konrad Wachsmann, then under Poelzig's mentorship, is involved in the construction of the theatre and is responsible for painting the interior red. Many of Reinhardt's actors would eventually become fixtures in front of and behind the expressionist screen, including Paul Wegener who appears in the original *Student of Prague* of 1913, playing both student Balduin and his mirror image. The director of this version, Stellan Rye, directs *House Without a Door* in 1914, itself a blueprint for subsequent expressionist thrillers such as Fritz Lang's *Dr. Mabuse* (1922), whose main character

is in constantly shifting disguise. The fact that the print for *House Without a Door* no longer exists mirrors my own failed attempts to view the interior of *German Village*: "Mr. Behr,

I would like you to know that the German Village area is no longer accessible on the interior of the building. I will have to coordinate with Security and others prior to confirmation of a visit. Will advise when a decision is made.

Thanks.  
Paula P. Nicholson  
Public Affairs Officer  
U.S. Army Dugway Proving Ground"



Max Reinhardt directs *Faust* at the Salzburg Festival in an elaborate stage, an entire Faust City set into the foot of a hill. Werner Krauss reprises the role of Mephisto in



the 1938 version. Reinhardt originally founds the festival with composer Richard Strauss in 1920, the same year that Hans Poelzig designs the sets for another landmark expressionist film, *The Golem* (1920). Paul Wegener plays the mythical clay figure brought to life in order to save a town from imminent destruction.

Edgar G. Ulmer, who works on the sets of *The Golem*, would later extend the reach of his former employer in the character of Hjalmar Poelzig, a reclusive architect and leader of an occult mass played by



Boris Karloff in Universal Studios' *The Black Cat* (1934). Ulmer moves to America in 1924 with F.W. Murnau, both part of the first wave of the German émigré community arriving in Hollywood in the 1920s, inadvertently influencing the aesthetic and narrative scope of American cinema.

That same year Fritz Lang visits America



for the first time, travelling with producer Erich Pommer who introduces him to Hollywood. "I first came to America briefly in 1924 and it made a great impression on me. The first evening, when we arrived, we were still enemy aliens, so we couldn't leave the ship. It was docked somewhere on the West



Side of New York. I looked into the streets – glaring lights and the tall buildings – and there I conceived *Metropolis*." –Fritz Lang On board the same ship, the S.S. *Deutschland*, he meets Erich Mendelsohn who himself is visiting for the first time. Mendelsohn, on his way to be introduced to Frank Lloyd Wright through his former colleague Richard Neutra, writes of the same moment of entering New

York: "The ship turns – Babylon. Ghostly in the moonlit darkness. Towering up in verticals of light. Rapid entry, turns, curves – a battle of space in the darkness, in the light of the embedded streets."

Lang and Pommer work on many spectacles together, including the epic *Nibelungen* (1922) in which 16 cameras simultaneously record the burning down of a castle. *German Village* is bombed and rebuilt at least three times, facilitating authentic combustion performance throughout its structure as it is built to closely mimic



the material properties of a Berlin housing estate. The interior of the building is periodically sprayed with water in order to replicate Prussian climate conditions in the heat of the Utah desert.

Before F.W. Murnau permanently moves to Los Angeles in 1926, he directs the quintessential film adaptation of the folk tale *Faust* (1926). Saturated with special effects from the hands of Robert

Herth and Walter Röhrig (the latter having been involved in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*), one particular scene features Emil Jannings as Mephisto descending onto a miniature paper village. During the shoot, Jannings is suffering from vertigo as he dangles from a scaffold, his sweat inevitably raining down on the model.

In the same year as *German Village*

is constructed, Fritz Lang collaborates with Berthold Brecht on *Hangmen Also Die*



(1943), Brecht's only foray into Hollywood as scriptwriter. It is Peter Lorre, one of the more successful émigrés in Hollywood, who introduces the two men. Lorre's role as murderer in Lang's *M* (1931) is reprised in the early noir *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940). Vernon L. Walker, responsible for the dramatic play of light and shadow in this movie, is also behind the expressionist leanings of Orson Welles' *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) which features an imposing staircase as a central character narrating the downward spiral of the Amberson clan.



The same staircase is used in *The Seventh Victim* (1943), both produced by RKO Radio Pictures. Perhaps it is because RKO releases *Hitler's Children* and *Behind the Rising Sun* in 1943 that Standard Oil contracts RKO's Authenticity Department to furnish the interior

of *German Village* and its immediate neighbour *Japanese Village*. From a purpose built concrete bunker set into the ground at a safe distance away from the German

and Japanese Villages, the test officers observe the repeated, clinically staged bombings. Their view of the scene is framed by the bunker's slit in a letterbox format as they gather data to be eventually deployed in the "European and Pacific Theatres".

(Right: Faust, Tooele County, Utah – 37 miles east of *German Village*.)

