

Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari

(The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari)

Germany, Decla-Bioscop A.G., 1920

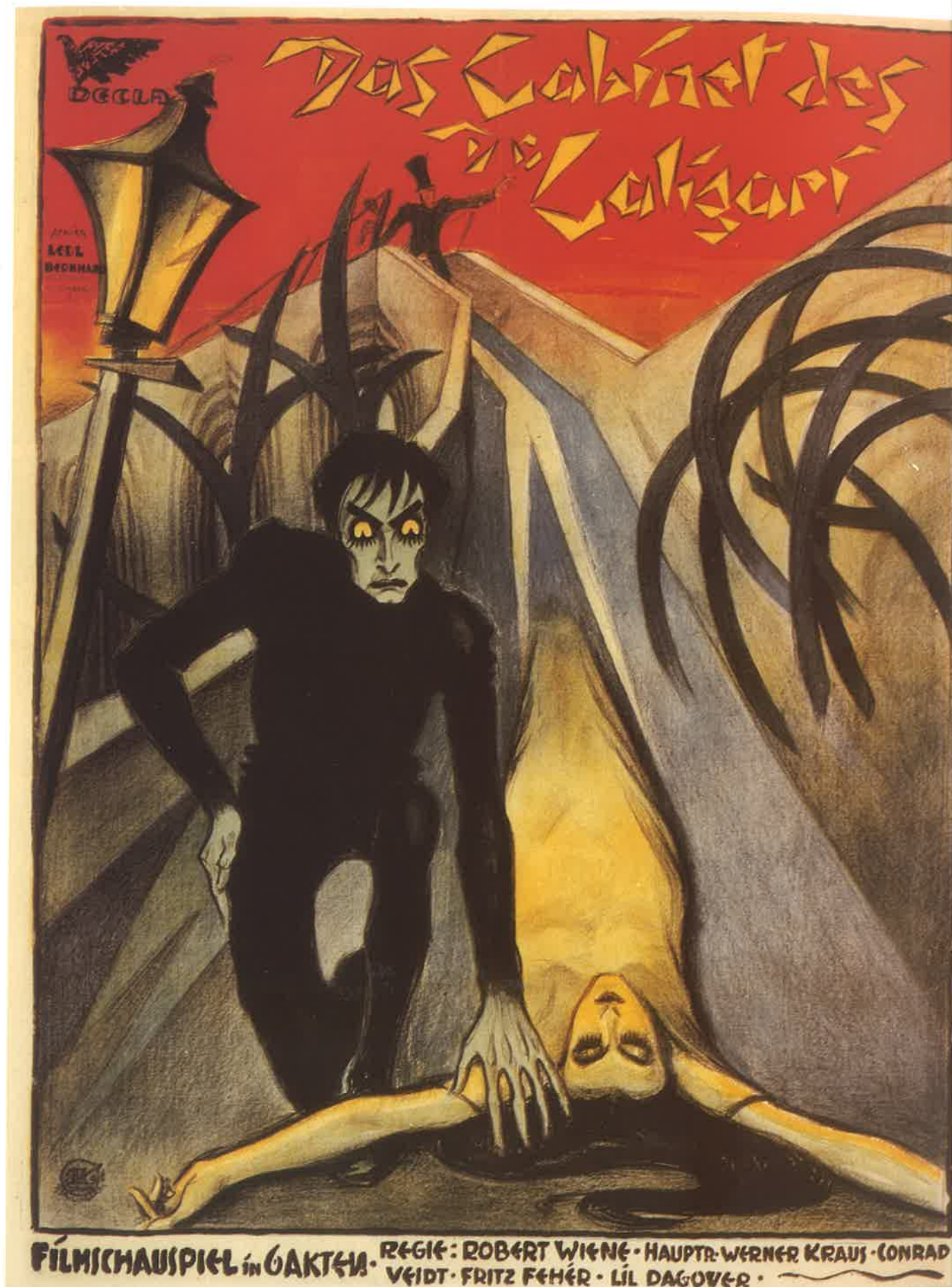
Director: Robert Wiene. **Script:** Carl Mayer, Hans Janowitz. **Sets:** Walter Reimann, Walter Röhrig, Hermann Warm. **Camera:** Willy Hameister. **Cast:** Werner Krauss (Doctor Caligari), Conrad Veidt (Cesare), Friedrich Feher (Francis), Lil Dagover (Jane Olfen), Hans Heinz von Twardowski (Alan), Rudolf Klein-Rogge (criminal). **Premiere:** 27 February 1920, Berlin.

A murder becomes visible — as a play of shadows on a gray wall. And shows once again how something imagined is more horrible than anything shown. No cinema can compete with our imagination. That the scream of a raped woman can be heard, really heard (if one has ears!) in this film — shall always be remembered about it. — Kurt Tucholsky 1920

Literature: Ernst Angel, "Ein 'expressionistischer' Film," *Die neue Schaubühne* 2, no. 4 (April 1920), pp. 103–05; Herbert Ihering, "Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari," *Berliner Börsen Curier* (29 February 1920); Kurt Tucholsky, "Tagebuch: Dr. Caligari," *Weltbühne* (11 March 1920); Heinrich de Fries, "Raumgestaltung im Film," *Wasmuths Monatsheft für Baukunst*, nos. 1–2 (1920–21), pp. 63–75 (see pp. 183–84 of the present volume); Carl Sandburg, "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" (1921), reprint in Harry M. Geduld, *Authors on Film* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 47–49; Rudolf Kurtz, *Expressionismus und Film* (Berlin: Verlag der Lichtbildbühne, 1926); Walter Reimann, "Filmarchitektur – heute und morgen?," *Filmtechnik und Filmindustrie*, no. 4 (1926), pp. 64–65 (see p. 193 of the present volume); Virginia Woolf, "The Movies and Reality" (1926), Geduld, 1972, pp. 86–91; *Caligari und Caligarismus* (Berlin: Deutsche Kinemathek e.V., 1970); R.V. Adkinson, ed., *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: A Film by Robert Wiene, Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz* (London: Lorimer, 1972); Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 17–27; Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); "Le Cabinet du docteur Caligari," *Avant-scène du Cinéma* 160–61 (July–September 1975), pp. 8–27; Siegbert Solomon Prawer, *Caligari's Children: The Film as Tale of Terror* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1988); Mike Budd, ed., *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Jürgen Kasten, *Der expressionistische Film: Abgefilmtes Theater oder avantgardistisches Erzählkino?* (Münster: MaKS Publikations, 1990); Barry Salt, "From German Stage to German Screen," in Paolo Cherchi Usai and Lorenzo Codelli, eds., *Before Caligari: German Cinema 1895–1920*, exh. cat. (Pordenone: Le Giornate del Cinemat Muto, 1990), pp. 402–37; Uli Jung und Walter Schatzberg, "Ein Drehbuch gegen die CALIGARI – Legenden," in *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari: Drehbuch von Carl Mayer und Hans Janowitz* (Hamburg: Edition Text+Kritik, 1995), pp. 89–108.

Fig. 1: Fleeing from Holstenwall's Citizens, Cesare Leaves the Abducted Jane on the Bridge.

Fig. 2: Atelier Ledel/Bernhard, Poster. Lithograph, 127 x 95 cm. Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin.



It is symptomatic that the screenplay of *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* by Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz was only realized expressionistically because it is set in an insane asylum. The representation of healthy reality is thus opposed to the representation of sick unreality. In other words, Impressionism prevails where one is of sound mind, Expressionism where one is of unsound mind. In other words, insanity as an excuse for an artistic idea [Ihering 1920].

I realized that the sets had to deviate completely in form and design from the usual naturalistic style. The frames, averted from reality, had to acquire a fantastic graphic form. The images had to be like visionary nightmares. No real structural elements could be recognizable. Instead, eccentric painting corresponding to the subject had to dominate the screen. . . . Reimann, who applied the Expressionist painting technique in his designs, succeeded with his idea that this subject had to have Expressionist sets, costumes, actors, and direction. . . . Furthermore, I would like to say that sets should remain as background in front of which the action takes place, reflecting it and supporting the actor, who is after all supposed to have the major creative role. In *Caligari* this relationship is reversed. In this single (special) case I will concede that the sets became the major means of expression [Hermann Warm, "Gegen die Caligari Legenden" (ca. 1970), in *Caligari und Caligarismus* 1970].

This Film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, is so bold a work of independent artists going it footloose, that one can well understand it might affect audiences just as a sea voyage affects a ship-load of passengers. Some have to leave the top decks, unable to stand sight or smell of the sea. Others take the air and the spray, the salt and the chill, and call the trip an exhilaration

Cubist, futurist, post-impressionist, characterize it by any name denoting a certain style, it has its elements of power, knowledge, technic, passion, that make it sure to have an influence toward more easy flowing, joyous, original American movies" [Sandburg 1921].

Fig. 3: Walter Reimann, Untitled (Woman on Couch). Pastel on cardboard, 30.5 x 34.9 cm. University of Southern California, Doheny Memorial Library, Department of Special Collections, Los Angeles.

Fig. 4: Walter Reimann, Untitled (Café Scene). Pastel on cardboard, 30.5 x 34.3 cm. University of Southern California, Doheny Memorial Library, Department of Special Collections, Los Angeles.

Fig. 5: Walter Reimann, "Dr. Caligari Bude." Pastel on brown paper, 30.4 x 38.1 cm. University of Southern California, Doheny Memorial Library, Department of Special Collections, Los Angeles.

In January and February 1919, during the days of the Spartacist revolt in Berlin, the as yet unknown screenwriters Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz wrote the script for *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*. In April 1919, they submitted the screenplay to the producer Erich Pommer, head of the Decla film company. The production of the film, based on a revised version of the script, began in October 1919. The hero, Francis, tells a friend the story of Dr. Caligari, who displays the sleepwalking Cesare in a "cabinet" at the fair in Holstenwall. A series of murders begins in the city. The sleuthing Francis finally exposes Dr. Caligari as the criminal who misuses the sleepwalking Cesare to do the murders. Caligari escapes and disappears into an insane asylum, eventually turning out to be its director. But instead of a morbid play on the dubiousness of state institutions, the tale is eventually revealed as a sick fantasy of the narrating hero. All the characters in his story turn up again at the end in the asylum's inner courtyard, the only structure in the film that displays conventional architectural elements.

In Germany the film was criticized by many for disavowing the Art of Expressionism as the deranged fantasy of a lunatic. After the war, Siegfried Kracauer and Lotte Eisner used this argument to link the film to the subsequent art criticism of the National Socialists. Kurt Tucholsky was fascinated by the "completely unreal dream world" of this film, in which he saw the poetic power of the medium at work. For him, almost completely suppressing realistic representation meant an enormous enrichment of film's suggestive design potential.

Caligari's architectural realization by the set designers Walter Reimann, Hermann Warm, and Walter Röhrig lends it a definitive design principle throughout. A total of 33 different sets were used. The painted views, which distort the sites of the action in perspective and tip them off balance, give the sets a claustrophobic atmosphere in which the actors move like ghosts. The walls of the city streets are covered with enigmatic graffiti. The specifications for the decor determined the camera work and lighting as well. Shadows painted on scenery produced the contrasts between light and dark, while the usually static and neutral

camera opened up the sites of the action from the front. Apart from the distorted shapes of the scenery, the obvious artificiality of the sets was programmatic in a more general sense. Reimann felt strongly that film should not try to imitate reality, but should create its own world through the simple means of stagecraft. He repeatedly pointed out the distinct differences between actual architecture and film sets and insisted that the term *film architecture* should be replaced by *film painting*. "In no way are film sets architecture! . . . The film, the art of 'optical' illusion, needs utopia. It needs a set that is utopian space, simulating the atmosphere of a space for the imagination" (Reimann 1926). Only very few of Reimann's sketches for the sets have survived; they are now scattered over four different archives in Paris, Berlin, Frankfurt, and Los Angeles. Warm provided sketches and a number of models for a retrospective exhibition at the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin in 1963.

No other film exerted as much economic and aesthetic influence on the cinematography of the early Weimar Republic as *Caligari*. Even though the Expressionist film boom following on its success subsided quickly, this film nonetheless opened up new export markets for the German film industry.

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Fig. 6: Prison Cell.
 Fig. 7: Hermann Warm, Prison Cell (ca. 1963). Colored pencil on cardboard, 26.5 x 35 cm. Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin.
 Fig. 8: Walter Reimann, "Bild für Passage 1". Gouache on paper, 27.5 x 32.5 cm. Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin.
 Fig. 9: Courtyard of the Insane Asylum.
 Fig. 10: Walter Reimann, Bridge. Pastel on brown paper, 39.5 x 32.7 cm. Deutsches Filmmuseum, Frankfurt am Main.



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Fig. 11: Dr. Caligari in the Streets of Holstenwall.

