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The Duality Persists
Faust on Screen

1.

The history of *Faust* in film is as old as the history of film itself and reflects the internationality which is part of the ongoing fascination and significance of this modern myth.

The long series of cinematic adaptations based on ideas connected with *Faust* started in the year 1896 with the film version by the French brothers Louis and Auguste Lumière, the inventors of the cinématographe. In 1897 the English film pioneer George Albert Smith, one of the influential directors of the group later to be known as the Brighton School, made the film *Faust and Mephistopheles*. In the same year French showman and stage magician Georges Méliès directed his first short film based loosely on the *Faust* story, *Le Cabinet de Méphistophélès*, in which Méliès himself acted as an impish devil who plays magic tricks and practical jokes on two knights. He continued to produce *Damnation de Faust* (1897), *Faust et Marguerite* (1898), *Faust aux Enfers* (1903) and *Damnation du Docteur Faust, ou Faust et Marguerite* (1904) – the two latter films were conceptualized as spectacular opera films referring to Hector Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust* (1846) and Charles Gounod's *Faust* (1858/1869). It is said that for *Damnation du Docteur Faust* Méliès employed about 500 actors from 19 different Paris theatres and 50 dancers from the *Grand Opéra de Paris*.

In 1900 American director Edwin S. Porter made a version of *Faust and Marguerite* for the Edison Company as well as a second *Faust* film in 1909, and British producer and director Cecil Hepworth staged his *Faust* in 1911. In Germany the first *Faust* film was made in 1910 under the direction of Oskar Meßter, starring Henny Porten as Gretchen and her father Franz Porten as Faust. Meßter's film was presented as a so called *Tonbild* – a *soundpicture* – i.e. a short film of about three and a half minutes with a gramophone playing a record of Gounod's opera synchronized to the film projector.

About 100 *Faust* films or films referring to characters or motifs from the *Faust* story were made in the era of silent film (and about 100 more after the invention of sound film).¹ Unfortunately, most of the silent films are lost, and we only know about them from contemporary reviews or ads in historical film magazines or from the catalogues of film producers and film distributors. But the sheer number of these film productions suggests that the subject matter of *Faust* was very suitable for adaptations in the childhood years of the cinema. It provided indeed several characteristics that guaranteed its popularity and its success with both producers and audience in the specific situation of early cinema.

1 The seminal works of Prodolliet 1978, Strobel 1987 and Lange-Fuchs 1999 provide a good overview of the topic of *Faust* films and constitute the indispensable groundwork for this article.

First of all the *Faust* story was well known to all the European people and well known to all social classes;² this is an important fact if one tries to reach and entertain a diverse audience with a medium that is not able yet to tell complex and self-sufficient stories in a convincing and coherent way. The early cinema was experienced as a mere technical apparatus and as a means of creating lifelike moving pictures for their own sake; according to Tom Gunning it was a *cinema of attractions* and »not dominated by the narrative impulse that later asserted its sway over the medium.« (Gunning 1990, 56) Filmic *proto-narratives* were told as short scenes – very often one single shot only – filmed with a static camera and without proper sound. These visual tableaux represented of course only selected, fragmentary moments of a plot and depended, as it were, on a more comprehensive understanding of the public. Being a story widely known the tale of Faust could be presented to a huge international audience by just displaying scenic parts and excerpts of that story in a rather primitive narrative context without creating misunderstanding or confusion. All the information necessary to understand the cinematic presentation and to contextualize the visuals was provided by the spectators themselves who were familiar with the characters and the basic plot. Consequently the popularity of the *Faust* story made its spread in the new medium possible and thus served an economic purpose.

Secondly: A good reason for the filmic aptness of the *Faust* story was its fantastic elements that could be brought to the screen by the evolving technology of film and the craftsmanship of people like Méliès. These elements of fantasy – devilish apparitions, magical transformations, weird and uncanny situations etc. – satisfied the audience's appetite for spectacular and fancy images and their demand for screen sensations. Early cinema was a show of visual magic and never before seen attractions, and stories like *Faust*, of course, were able to provoke cinematographic innovations on the basis of improving technical skills. So the artistic and technical challenge for film makers and the public demand for amazing sights on the screen worked together to promote *Faust* as a favourite subject for film.

Even today we can clearly see this connection between technical innovation and the predominance of visual effects in film entertainment on one hand and audience appeal on the other hand in huge and expensive, but also very successful film productions like *The Lord of the Rings* by Peter Jackson, the *Star Wars* series by George Lucas or the *Matrix* series by Andy and Larry Wachowski.

Finally there is the cultural connotation of the *Faust* story that made it a success as material for film. All over Europe the *Faust* theme had generated exceptional and renowned works of art in literature, in music, in drama, in the visual arts. Now the early cinema, struggling for a decent reputation in society and especially in the more educated, bourgeois classes, could use the respectable name of *Faust* to promote itself. Mainly known as a mere entertaining show for the lower social classes, as an attraction on fairgrounds and in amusement arcades and as a cheap pastime for the working class the cinema tried at the beginning of the 20th century to attract also a more literate and erudite audience. To legitimize the cultural claim of their medium producers and directors used more and more literary subjects and sources. In order to improve and establish

2 In his survey of *Faust* and its cultural meaning in both West and East German societies in 1987 Peter Boerner detects a wide spread »infrastructure of knowledge, be it conscious or unconscious.« (Boerner 1989, 271)

the quality of their films and to make the cinema more attractive and acceptable for the upper classes they brought literature and drama on the screen.³ In this scheme *Faust* films seemed to be a clever device, because the *Faust* story did actually appeal to the lower classes as well as to the upper classes of society. The *Faust* story has both the potential for magic and spectacular sights and for intelligent and philosophical content.

In conclusion one can say that the appropriation of *Faust* offered the early cinema the possibilities to test and develop its own technical capability, to improve the quality of storytelling and narrative content, to raise its cultural reputation and to attract a wide audience in all social classes. *Faust* proved to be the ideal subject matter for cinema, even by today's standards.

But thinking about the technical limitations of the early cinema, the limits in storytelling and sound production, it is clear that the *Faust* adaptations could still not fulfil the expectations concerning philosophical significance. It is true: The *Faust* story had the *potential* for intelligent and philosophical content, but the films were not able to deliver. In its first fifteen years the cinema had not yet a language of its own, neither visual nor lingual, to express these contents. Nevertheless, this shortcoming did not affect or diminish the aura of high culture surrounding the subject of *Faust*, an aura that never ceased to reflect and echo the names of Marlowe or Goethe, of Berlioz and Gounod, no matter how shallow the film adaptations were.

There was a duality from the start: The conflict between the poetic language, the art of drama, the thematic richness and philosophical meaning in its universal proportions embodied by Goethe's outstanding version of the tale on one hand, and the entertaining world of visual spectacle, the pure delight of motion and action on the screen on the other hand.

To make a film in the early 20th century meant to stage obvious events, to film actors who move and act in front of the camera without the benefit of the spoken word. It is performance without dialogue or monologue – and all the emotions and conflicts of the characters, including moods, psychological states and inner conflicts, have to be presented as visible and clear action. Of course the richness and philosophical core of the drama is lost in these film adaptations: Goethe's poetic world, full of meaning and tragedy, reflecting the existential dilemmas of modern man is inevitably reduced to a cinematic show of superficial attractions and visual effects.

The duality persists and it creates some difficulties when one is trying to judge a filmic adaptation. Each viewer has to ask himself or herself any time what he or she is expecting, and what is fair to expect from the medium anyway: The profundity of Goethe's drama, sophisticated dialogue or a visual presentation of the dramatic action of the *Faust* story?

The duality related to *Faust* is even twofold. Not only does it unfold in this clash of expectations and artistic possibilities or rather limitations of each medium but it also exists in a more positive and productive way as openness to diverse levels of cultural and artistic expression as well as openness to many different genres, subtexts and connotations. For artists the first form of duality is provoking and challenging, whereas the second form is always inviting and encouraging: The cultural history and tradition of the *Faust* topic with its evolution from common folk tales and legends to puppet

3 »The cinema was no orphan. Though it strangled its parents by taking their audiences, it fully participated in their values.« (Eidsvik 1978, 131)

theatre and opera, drama and prose literature, with its shares in tragedy and comedy, high culture and popular culture show its versatility and variety. Starting as a folk tale with naïve implications and a straightforward morale it has become a most efficient amalgam of basic ideas about the human condition and a set of typical characters and typical scenes with almost abstract proportions that is capable to reflect any kind of philosophical notion or ideology. Being so popular, well known and well defined on one hand and being so open to variations, different messages and interpretations on the other hand the *Faust* theme has gained an exceptional status within our culture. This specific form of duality makes the flourishing production of *Faust* stories in different fields of art and on different levels of artistic quality possible, because it allows the realization of various (artistic, social, political) intentions. It makes the topic comply with popular forms of storytelling and pure entertainment as well as with philosophical discourses and critical political messages, and thus it enables this modern myth to keep its popularity and its significance and to engender meaningful adaptations both in high culture and in popular culture.

The following examples prove the richness of the *Faust* tradition in cinema, its importance as part of modern culture and the effectiveness of the two sketched dualities related to *Faust* on the screen.

2.

Duality as a clash of audience expectation and concrete realization is a vital factor in our perception of the most famous *Faust* adaptation of the era of silent film: Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's film *Faust – Eine deutsche Volkssage* (*Faust – A German Folk Tale*), made in 1926.

Murnau is appreciated today as one of the most important and innovative German film directors, and his *Faust* film is known as a masterpiece of German expressionistic cinema. Produced by the biggest German film company, UFA, the film cost 2 million Reichsmark; that makes Murnau's *Faust* together with Fritz Lang's *Nibelungen* (1924) and *Metropolis* (1927) the most expensive and lavish film production in the Weimar Republic. It was a project of national and cultural prestige from the start.

The script written by Hans Kyser – with assistance by Murnau – is based not only on Goethe's drama but also on the German Volksbuch *Historia von D. Johann Fausten* published in 1587, on Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of D. Faustus* (1592) and on an already existing filmscript called *Das verlorene Paradies* (*The Lost Paradise*) written by Ludwig Berger. Murnau himself was fascinated by the subject of *Faust* because he wanted to display the specific time and setting of the German Middle Ages, »jene Zeit des deutschen Mittelalters, die zu den phantasievollsten, von Geheimnissen und Schatten am meisten durchzuckten Zeitaltern der Menschheit gehört, und die noch niemals im Film entstand.« (Prodolliet 1978, 33)

With this statement we can clearly see Murnau's artistic intention, and maybe we are allowed to conclude that for him the drama of Goethe and its philosophical implications were less important; more important for him as film director was the visual recreation of a certain period, the cinematic realization of a specific mood related to his notion of the Middle Ages rooted in the traditions of German romanticism and Gothic horror (*Schauerromantik*).

Gerhart Hauptmann was asked to write the text for the film titles, and he did indeed, composing his words in rhyming couplets. But his intertitles drew too much attention to themselves and thus diminished the effect and the power of the images, disturbing the narrative rhythm of the film. So Hauptmann's texts were finally not used in the film,⁴ but they were published in the programme for the (public) première on October 14th, 1926 at the *UFA-Palast am Zoo* in Berlin.

In 1952 Lotte Eisner praised Murnau as the master of light and darkness in the German cinema of expressionism and his film *Faust* as a great artistic achievement, a magnificent orchestration of visual magic. (Eisner 1987, 295 ff.) In 1965 the two French film critics Jean Mitry and Jean Dormachi declared *Faust* to be a peak of film history and stated euphorically that no other film has ever presented a drama of metaphysical meaning in such a brilliant way by using all its graphic resources. (Aumont 1989, 65) In 1977 French director Eric Rohmer wrote a detailed analysis of Murnau's film, in which he used unbridled words of praise to describe Murnau's artistic use of light and shadow, his original approach to the visual composition of each and every shot and the masterly construction of an imaginary filmic world unfolding in time and space. (Rohmer 1980) In Rohmer's point of view Murnau's *Faust* is nothing less than a masterpiece, a visual symphony that is inspired by great European painters like Altdorfer, Caravaggio and Rembrandt, but nevertheless has its own qualities of beauty, style and narrative power.⁵ All shapes and forms, says Rohmer, the features of faces, bodies, objects, landscapes and natural phenomena like snow, light, fire and clouds are presented on screen according to Murnau's ideas and his knowledge of their visual effectiveness. Nothing is left to coincidence. (Rohmer 1980, 10) Light creates and defines all forms in specific ways, and so light is Murnau's instrument of filmic creation and spatial organisation. It dominates the images, it sets the mood and propels the story.

It is interesting that this film, praised today for its original filmmaking and its visual splendour, was no success in Germany when it was first released. The contemporary audience and critics thought about the film as too heterogeneous, too unbalanced and in some parts as too corny.

In the *Film-Kurier* (No. 242, October 15th, 1926) Willy Haas wrote that Murnau succumbed to the *suggestion of Goethe*:

[...] er wollte unbewußt das Universalistische des Goethe-Faust, die ungeheure stilistische Vielfalt, durch eine Summierung filmhafter Intentionen widerspiegeln, ohne daß die Summe, die unendlich große Summe eines Goetheschen Geistuniversums, die jene stilistische Universalität erst fordert und rechtfertigt, da war, da sein konnte. Er hat der Musik ferner malerischer Stile alles geben wollen, was der Film zu geben vermag; aber er hat auch der Weib-Tragödie ›Gretchen‹ alles geben wollen; und dieses alles ist eben nur einmal zu vergeben. So hat eine Intention der anderen immer wieder die letzten entscheidenden Eindrücke weggenommen. Sein stilechter Volkssagen-Faust kann nicht wirklich leiden; sein Leiden bauscht sich zur gemäldehaften Draperie; sein Gretchen kann uns nicht zutiefst erschüttern, das Kunstgewerbliche spricht zu laut hinein ... So ist alles ein wenig fragmentarisch geblieben ...

(Gehler/Kasten 1990, 109 ff.)

4 Actually they were used for just one screening on August 26th, 1926 at the *UFA-Theater am Nollendorfplatz*. (Prinzler 2003, 279)

5 Concerning the influence of painting on Murnau's visual style see also Müller 2003.

Murnau's *Faust* adaptation was seen as a failure. There were few positive voices, praising the acting of Emil Jannings (as Mephisto) and Camilla Horn (as Gretchen) and the spectacular special effects, but the majority of the critics didn't like the Swedish actor Gösta Ekman in the role of Faust, and they didn't like the crude mixture of the naïve metaphysical hurly-burly and the heart-rending love story between Faust and Gretchen.⁶ Obviously the film audience had become more demanding since the early days of cinema and was not satisfied with visual spectacle only.

Siegfried Kracauer wrote in 1947 about

the futility of a film which misrepresented, if not ignored, all significant motifs inherent in its subject-matter. The metaphysical conflict between good and evil was thoroughly vulgarized, [...]. FAUST was not so much a cultural monument as a monumental display of artifices capitalizing on the prestige of national culture. The obsolete theatrical poses to which the actors resorted betrayed the falsity of the whole. While the film had considerable success abroad, it met with indifference in Germany itself. The Germans of the time did not take to Faustian problems, and moreover resented any interference with their traditional notions of the classics. (Kracauer 1947, 148f.)

Maybe that's the reason why the French seem to like Murnau's film better than the Germans. Maybe they don't feel that urge of comparing the film with Goethe's drama and thus are able to appreciate the film for its own (cinematic) merit. The cultural heritage of Goethe seemed to have turned into a kind of curse for the people trying to come up with new adaptations. The duality between high expectations due to the cultural value of *Faust* and especially due to the reputation of Goethe's work on the one hand and the reality of the filmic presentation on the other hand caused the disappointment of the contemporary spectators.

Today we regard Murnau's *Faust* film as a major achievement in filmmaking, looking at the specific aesthetics and the quality of visual imagination more than at complexity or unity of content. German film director Helma Sanders-Brahms, for example, confesses in a state of overwhelming rapture:

Ich stehe vor diesem filmischen Wunderwerk mit einer Begeisterung, die es mir schwer macht, mich flüssig auszudrücken. Hier hat die siebente Kunst eine Einfachheit und Klarheit, aber auch eine Würde und Tiefe erreicht, die das Sakrale und Mystische als ihren innersten Kern einschließen und sie zur Größe von Bach-Oratorien erheben. (Sanders-Brahms 2003, 188)

But nevertheless we still notice the striking distinction between this film and all the subsequent serious adaptations: Murnau's *Faust* appears as a hermetically sealed story. There was no attempt made to update the subject, to find some points of contact between the meaningful myth of *Faust* and the time and social situation in which the film was produced. So the film could only be seen and understood as a kind of medieval fairy-tale, a cinematic flight of fantasy with great special effects, but without any relevant messages to the contemporary audience.

Thomas Koebner compares *Faust* with Murnau's previous film *Der letzte Mann* (*The Last Laugh*, 1924) aesthetically, but his arguments also sound true in a social or even political sense:

6 For a selection of contemporary reviews see: Heining 1949, 68 ff.

FAUST mutet nach dem LETZTEN MANN wie ein Rückfall an: dort Transparenz, Weiträumigkeit und Bewegung, Zeitspiegel, Ironie und tiefere Bedeutung, Stadtmoderne und Widerspruch gegen das Recht des Stärkeren, hier angsterregende Enge und apokalyptische Finsternis, vormoderne Beklommenheit in einer mittelalterlichen Stadt mit schmalen Straßen und Durchgängen mit festen, blickabweisenden Mauern, keine Plein-Air-Fotografie, keine Tiefe des Raumes, kein unendlicher Himmel über den Figuren – es sei denn, der mythologische Himmel, in dem Gut und Böse miteinander kämpfen. (Koebner 2003, 37)

He concludes: »FAUST trägt die Maske einer konservativen Ästhetik, die aus dem imaginären Museum der christlich-abendländisch-deutschen Motiv- und Ideengeschichte schöpft.« (Koebner 2003, 39)

This dereliction of a contemporary approach, the missing points of contact to the social reality could be a major reason for the disappointment of the spectators in the Weimar Republic, a period of highly charged political and ideological debate and confrontation, in which serious commentaries on pressing problems and answers to topical questions were very welcome. For a similar reason Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* failed a year later, offering but a weak, naïve and implausible solution for the problems of industrialization and class struggle.

3.

In 1949 – in the period of sound film – René Clair made a French film version of the *Faust* story called *La Beauté du Diable* (*Beauty and the Devil*). Michel Simon and Gérard Philipe played both Doctor Faust – before and after his rejuvenation – and Mephisto. They exchange their outer appearance, thus symbolising the affinity, or even the fateful identity of scientific thinking linked to ruthless rationalism and ambition on the one hand and evil on the other hand. Extreme rationalism leads to pure materialism, and materialism ends in nihilism and despair – this lesson of the late age of Enlightenment is demonstrated here under the influence of the devil. And the devil is no ugly, demon-like creature but has a human face.

Clair and his co-writer Armand Salacrou realized the topicality of the *Faust* story in the age of tremendous scientific progress and nuclear weapons. The Hiroshima bomb had shown that the abilities of man and his knowledge of the physical world not only were a great achievement and the cause for rejoicing and triumph, but also the immediate source of great danger. In Clair's film Faust uses his skills and new technologies to invent new weapons, and although the atom bomb is never mentioned explicitly it is quite obvious in which direction Clair's interpretation of the *Faust* story aims. Under the guidance of Mephisto Faust starts to turn into a technocrat and a merciless dictator; in a vision of his own future Faust sees himself as a cruel military leader conquering and destroying the world – images in which the recent experience of the world war resonates most impressively. (It is quite interesting and revealing that these scenes of Faust as an inventor of weapons and as a war waging dictator were cut from the film when it was released in Germany in April 1950.)

Fortunately, Clair's Faust can finally avoid his sinister fate, and it is love of course that saves him and frees him from the devil's clutches. The glory of romantic love, the simplicity and honesty that constitute the relation between Faust and the gypsy girl Marguerite defy the wicked scheme of Mephisto. The pact is annulled by Marguerite,

and the devil must return to hell alone, while Faust keeps his youth and leaves together with his beloved to explore the simple life. The message is clear, maybe even naïve: Since evil is created and fostered by man himself, it can also be defeated by man. Eternal damnation is not unavoidable. Pure love and truthfulness can save us from our darker urges. What makes us human is not the exploration of all possibilities and the unquestioning reinforcement of rationalism but the reliance on sympathetic feelings and emotions and the striving for the realization of our more natural and honest inclinations.

4.

In 1960 Gustav Gründgens' successful stage production of Goethe's *Faust* at the *Deutsches Schauspielhaus* in Hamburg was made into a film, directed by Peter Gorski in close collaboration with Gründgens. Will Quadflieg portrayed Faust, and Gründgens himself played his favourite part of Mephisto, a part he had played over 600 times since 1932.

It was Gründgens' intention to present and preserve on screen the achievement of his long and intensive consideration of the subject matter of *Faust*, the brilliant peak of decades of theatre work. He wanted to find a balance between filmed theatre and pure film; the adaptation should neither display plain and boring photography of a theatre play, nor superficial cinematic effects. In the script for the film version he declared that the intentional meaning of his stage production, namely the rejection of all forms of mysticism, vagueness and shallow picturesqueness, should be maintained at all costs and should not be corrupted by *nice pictures*:

Aufgabe dieser Verfilmung muß sein, die genaue Mitte zu finden zwischen gefilmtem Theater und reinem Film. Das Resultat einer dreißigjährigen Bemühung um Goethes ›Faust‹ darf weder abphotographiert noch durch filmische Interessanz aufgeweicht werden. Der Sinn der Inszenierung, nämlich die Abkehr von jeder Art Mystizismus, Verschwommenheit und Malerei muß unter allen Umständen erhalten bleiben und darf nicht auf Kosten ›schöner Bilder‹ verfälscht werden. (Prodoliet 1978, 68f.)

The narrative style of the film turned out to be a combination of theatrical and filmic elements of presentation. The scenery is clearly the sparse scenery of a stage performance, reduced to abstraction, and there are unedited, long-lasting shots of the actors while they perform their monologues or dialogues; but occasionally there is also a filmic rhythm created by editing and alternation of camera distances, there are close-ups and changes of camera position and perspective to stress the action visually. In this combination the interplay of theatre and film becomes a topic of its own, and thus Gründgens' *Faust* film conveys a prototypical idea of the transformation of stage play into film creating a tensely duality between the two art forms. »Der ostentative und dann doch nicht konsequente Verzicht auf die Möglichkeiten des Mediums, die angestrebte Kargheit der engen Bühne und die in wenigen Szenen bewußt dagegenestellte Omnipotenz des Films werden in ihrem unaufgeklärten Nebeneinander zu Themen des *Faust*-Films.« (Fasbender 1995, 173) But on the whole – and because of its initial conception – the film has to be seen as a documentation of the stage production and the acting of Gründgens rather than as a cinematic approach to the *Faust* story.

Like in Clair's French film version there are hints to problems of our modern time, references to the technological progress of the 20th century and its inherent dangers. In

the background of Faust's laboratory we see a model of an atomic structure, and the Walpurgis Night not only features mechanical, robot-like or astronaut-like creatures, threatening embodiments of expanding science, but is interrupted shockingly by the explosion of a nuclear bomb. In this we may see Gründgens' intention to reject all mysticism and vagueness and to reveal Goethe's drama as a story with contemporary meaning.

In a similar way Thomas Grimm directed the TV version of Peter Stein's monumental unabridged stage production of Goethe's *Faust I* and *Faust II*. The première was on July 22nd and 23rd, 2000 at the World Exhibition EXPO 2000 in Hannover with Bruno Ganz and Christian Nickel playing the old and the young Faust, and Robert Hunger-Bühler and Johann Adam Oest playing alternately Mephisto; the television recording was made at a performance at the *Arena* in Berlin.

Like Gründgens' *Faust* film this TV-*Faust* features a combination of theatrical and filmic forms of presentation, focusing on the actors' performances and using at the same time the whole spectrum of camera distances from long shots to close-ups without distracting the audience from the stage feeling. Gerhard Kaiser stresses that Stein was able to present in his production the whole splendour of Goethe's drama and even to increase tension in scenes which are considered tedious, like the scene in the *Emperor's Throne Room* in the first act of *Faust II*:

Das dialogische Florettgefecht der politischen Amtsträger am Kaiserhof etwa gewann eine geistige Spannung, die den Zuschauer nur wünschen lassen konnte, so pointiert ginge es im Bundestag bei der Haushaltsdebatte zu. Eine gemeinhin für etwas dröge gehaltene Partie des zweiten *Faust*-Teils blühte derweise in Steins Inszenierung auf wie japanische Papierblumen im Wasser. (Kaiser 2002, 316)

This effect is increased in the TV version by the use of filmic means of storytelling like editing and camera distance: While the chancellor, the general and the treasurer report to the emperor about the miserable state of the empire the camera reveals the reactions of the emperor and Mephisto who listen silently. The monologues last about 5 minutes, and in this 5 minutes there are 11 close-ups of the emperor looking surprised and a little bit overtaxed, and 8 close-ups of Mephisto who seems to be quite contented with the report.⁷ Intercutting these close-up shots of the listeners focuses the attention of the spectators and makes them deliberately aware of the emperor's political insecurity and weakness and Mephisto's cunning machinations. However, the use of filmic means is subtle enough to maintain the impression of theatricality.

But unlike Gründgens' *Faust* Stein's *Faust* doesn't try to update the story or to put it forcefully into a new contemporary context; as a dramatic *tour de force* that makes the audience aware of the overwhelming imagination and the exceptional creative power, with which Goethe shaped and refined his two *Faust* dramas, it celebrates Goethe's vision of the tale and its poetic beauty.

Die ausgebreitete Weltfülle, die sprachliche Pointierungskraft, die strömende Phantasie, das dramatische Ballungsvermögen, der schier überwältigende Facettenreichtum der Figuren und Konstellationen prägen nachhaltig ein, daß wir nicht Nachlaßversteigerer, sondern Beschenkte diese großen Welttheaters sind. (Kaiser 2002, 317)

7 There are also 5 full shots of the Emperor, Mephisto and the Astrologist together, and 8 close shots of the other ministers listening to their speaking colleagues.

Both Gründgens' and Stein's *Faust* versions are based on stage productions and both subordinate the cinematic possibilities in favour of the theatrical *mise-en-scène* and the theatrical experience; thus both film versions actually are referred to and will be remembered as Gründgens' and Stein's *Faust* and not as Gorski's or Grimm's *Faust*.

5.

A very unconventional example for a *Faust* adaptation is the film *Faust* (alternative title: *Lekce Faust*) made by Czech surrealist Jan Svankmajer in 1994. Svankmajer transforms elements of Marlow's *Tragicall History of D. Faustus* and Goethe's *Faust*, Grabbe's drama *Don Juan and Faust* (1829) and Gounod's opera and combines real live cinematography with animation and puppet scenes to create a weird, sometimes funny, sometimes creepy exploration into a bizarre world of experimental filmmaking.

An ordinary man (Petr Cepek) in contemporary Prague is lured to the backstage of a strange theatre where he puts on a costume and starts to read curiously the drama text by Goethe. Suddenly he finds himself playing the part of Faust – on-stage and off-stage. He is confronted with the forces of evil, black magic and demons out of hell, who appear as wooden marionettes with a frightening life of their own. Tragedy unfolds in this self-referential play with masks, mirrors and marionettes as the man/Faust is drawn deeper and deeper into the vortex of hubris and sin. Finally he dies in a mysterious car accident, while a new Faust is just chosen to repeat this fateful journey to perdition – a true vicious circle.

Svankmajer uses the myth of Faust to invent situations of surrealism and the grotesque, to surprise the audience with his peculiar mixture of filmic styles, and to establish a political subtext about dark forces unremittently scheming to seduce, corrupt and destroy common citizens. With this he is reflecting in particular the threat of the oppressive structures of Socialism and Stalinism and their inclination to perpetuate despotism, a topic he also deals with in his short film *The Death of Stalinism in Bohemia* (1990), in which he uses surrealist images to portray the political history of his home country under the spell of Stalin and Soviet power. Although we encounter familiar scenes and words referring to the classical *Faust* texts the bizarre visuals of the film clearly predominate this presentation of the topic.

6.

A powerful subject matter about aspects and fundamental ethical issues of modern life, the *Faust* myth has conquered literature and film in various disguises. Dieter Borchmeyer states in his survey of the development of the *Faust* story in the 19th century that the variations and transformations of the tradition are sometimes more interesting and artistically more convincing than the mere repetitions of ideas and elements which already have made Goethe's drama the most elaborated version of the tale:

Der erdrückende Rang von Goethes *Faust I* hat die Rezeption des Fauststoffs im 19. Jahrhundert zum Teil gewissermaßen in den Untergrund getrieben. Dieses untergründige Fortwirken des Stoffes, das sich also nicht in dessen unmittelbaren Bearbeitungen, sondern in seinen vielfältigen Spiegelungen in anderen Stoffen und Gestalten – wie denen Ahasvers, Prometheus',

Don Juans - niederschlägt, hat jedenfalls bedeutendere Alternativen zu Goethes Dichtung hervorgebracht als die meist eben ›oberflächliche‹ Stofftradition in den Faust-Stücken eines Klingemann (1815) und Holtei (1829) oder der Faust-Oper von Spohr (1814). (Borchmeyer 1989, 171)

This is also true for the cinematic transformations of the *Faust* theme which put the characters of the myth repeatedly in new social or historical contexts.

In 1941, for instance, William Dieterle (= Wilhelm Dieterle, who played Valentin in Murnau's *Faust*) directed the film *The Devil and Daniel Webster* (alternative title: *All That Money Can Buy*), an adaptation of a story by Stephen Vincent Benét (1937). It is an American *Faust* version, set in New Hampshire, where the poor farmer Jabez Stone (James Craig) sells his soul to the devil, appearing here as the deceitful Mr. Scratch (Walter Huston), and gains in return material wealth. But of course Stone regrets his pact with the devil after losing all the love and respect of his wife, his family and his friends. It is the witty lawyer Daniel Webster (Edward Arnold) who finally defends the farmer at an infernal trial and rescues his soul from eternal damnation.

In a letter to Agnes E. Meyer (July 16th, 1941) Thomas Mann praised the film as an excellent Americanized fairy-tale, patriotic and fantastic and very well acted. (Mann 1963, 202) The film celebrates American values like family life, individual responsibility and democracy and was regarded as a display of the democratic spirit in the process of being tested. At the time of its production this *Faust* tale rendered the connotation of a call to arms, a political appeal to the USA to join the war against fascist Germany.

Japanese director Akira Kurosawa presented in his film *Ikiru* (i.e. »Living«), made in 1952, the story of old Kanji Watanabe (Takashi Shimura) who is a bureaucrat at the Tokyo city hall and frustrated of his boring and ineffective life. When he learns that he has cancer and just a few months to live he is trying to find the meaning of life and a goal to achieve before it is too late. His search is structured in a way that reminds of Faust's journey through the world under the guidance of Mephisto. Indeed Watanabe encounters his *Mephisto*, a novelist (Yūnosuke Itō), who introduces the old man to the night clubs of Tokyo, and he encounters his *Gretchen*, a young woman working in his office (Miki Odagiri), who symbolizes the carefree joy of life. Finally Watanabe finds a worthwhile goal: He works hard within and against bureaucracy to realize the building of a playground for children. He succeeds, his new found idealism defying all obstacles, and so he dies in peace with himself sitting on a swing of the new playground.

While the first part of the film, Watanabe's search for attractions and distractions, is told in a straight and chronological manner, the second part, his efforts to make the construction of the playground come true, is told in retrospect. His colleagues and relatives remember him and his actions from different point of views at his funeral, thus creating a kind of patchwork narration or collection of fragments that resembles in a certain way the specific sequence of just loosely connected scenes in Goethe's *Faust II*. (Carr 1996)

To tell this touching story about a man who finds an important task and a final goal in his life, Kurosawa transforms the narrative structures of both parts of Goethe's drama into a filmic structure and he uses some elements of the story of *Faust* to enhance the anthropological significance and meaning of *Ikiru*. His protagonist Watanabe is just an ordinary man, an unimportant bureaucrat leading a dull life in a cold and indifferent world, far from being an excessive explorer like Faust, but at the end of

his life he is able to give a meaning to his existence. The mission he pursues is not a great enterprise that could change history or the fundamental conditions of the bleak society he lives in, but it is a reachable goal with an immediate effect for the children. And by reaching this charitable goal the ordinary man gains the greatness and importance of a character like Faust.

In 1986 American director Walter Hill made the film *Crossroads*, a modern *Faust* adaptation set in the world of black Soul and Blues music and taking up Thomas Mann's idea of the ambivalent character of music that serves as the conceptual basis for his novel *Doktor Faustus* (1947). A young white guitar player (Ralph Macchio) meets an elderly Afro-American Blues musician (Joe Seneca), who once has signed a pact with the devil and is now afraid of losing his soul to hell. The devil in this film is also Afro-American and introduces himself as Mr. Scratch (Robert Judd), a reference to *The Devil and Daniel Webster*. But it is the power of music and the unselfish love of the young man to the old man that beat the forces of evil and save the soul in a final showdown and display of musical skills. The metaphysical tale aims at a social message: Salvation comes with the reconciliation of old and young as well as with the reconciliation of black and white; the acknowledgement of the Afro-American contribution to American culture, namely the black roots of popular music, and the crossing of the generation gap turn a hopeless situation into a triumph of the human soul.

In Taylor Hackford's film *The Devil's Advocate* (USA 1997), based on a novel by Andrew Neiderman, the young and ambitious lawyer Kevin Lomax (Keanu Reeves) falls prey to the devil who calls himself John Milton (!) and runs a very successful law firm in New York. The film is about greed and man's weakness for seduction in a world dominated by glamorous media images and the thirst for fame, popularity and luxury – a slightly exaggerated portrayal of the legal practice and the business world of the late 20th century and a satire about our epicurean society, in which materialism, ruthlessness and insatiable lust for life culminate in terror and despair.

Al Pacino playing Milton, the contemporary incarnation of the devil, highlights the film with his gnostic address to his Faustian disciple Kevin, in which he introduces himself as the benevolent friend of mankind while God is accused to be a distant and selfish and unjust being. His rhetoric is almost convincing:

Let me give you a little inside information about God. God likes to watch. He is a prankster. Think about it. He gives man instincts, he gives you this extraordinary gift, and then what does he do? I swear, for his own amusement, his own private, cosmic gag-reel, he sets the rules in opposition. It's the goof of all time. Look, but don't touch! Touch, but don't taste! Taste, don't swallow! And while you're jumping from one foot to the next, what is he doing? He's laughing his sick fucking ass off. He's a tight-ass, he's a sadist, he's an absentee landlord! Worship that? Never! [...] I'm here on the ground with my nose in it since the whole thing began. I've nurtured every sensation man has been inspired to have. I cared about what he wanted, and I never judged him. Why? Because I never rejected him, in spite of all his imperfections. I'm a fan of man! I'm a humanist, maybe the last humanist. Who, in their right mind, Kevin, could possibly deny, the 20th century was entirely mine? All of it, Kevin. All of it! Mine! I'm peaking, Kevin! It's my time now. (Cited from the film)

7.

This is just a small selection of films presenting the *Faust* myth or featuring elements of it. There are indeed whole film genres, in which thematic aspects of the *Faust* story are used as topoi. Ludger Scherer identifies two central motifs of the *Faust* story which constitute the fundamental source for numerous adaptations: The motif of the restless man searching for truth or the fulfilment of his dreams and transgressing the natural borders of human experience; and secondly, the motif of the pact with the devil. (Scherer 2001, 55)

In the genre of the fantastic film the plot device of the devil's pact or apparitions of infernal demons are common motifs in the repertoire of horror and eeriness. And in the genre of the science fiction film we encounter the archetypal character of the *mad scientist* who denies all moral conventions and crosses all borders in his ambitious search for knowledge and thereby causing more often than not chaos and disaster. Thus he becomes a warning symbol for the dangerous curiosity of modern man and his unlimited urge of expanding research and experience and controlling the universe. These *mad scientist* characters are true descendants of the ingenious alchemist Faust.

Like the literary tradition the cinematic approach to the subject matter of *Faust* has extended in the course of time and has absorbed and displayed various levels and directions of meaning and interpretation, thereby serving different artistic intentions: Murnau used *Faust* as a frame for his dramatic staging of light and shadow and his atmospheric description of the Middle Ages; Clair used it to warn of the dangers of technological progress and to celebrate the power of simple love; Gründgens used it to show his acting skills and his passion for drama and theatre; and Svankmajer used the world of *Faust* as a setting for his surrealist vision of our modern life and political corruption.

Because the *Faust* myth has such a vast scope of meaning and provides both philosophical and anthropological truth, artists in very different social and historical situations were able to adjust their adaptations to their specific needs and thus were able to reflect specific situations and mental states in society by using elements of the *Faust* story.

However, it is interesting that hardly anyone tried to make more use of Goethe's *Faust II* for filmic adaptations, except for the TV recording of Stein's stage production, of course. Though the second part of Goethe's drama offers numerous possibilities for fantastic images, for epic scenes and for visual spectacle it seems as if its profound mythological, philosophical and philological connotations defy a cinematic approach. Does all the magic and splendour of *Faust II* lie in Goethe's words only? Are the ventures of Faust into the realms of politics and economy and the symbolic encounter of northern culture and Mediterranean culture, of modern times and antiquity not transferable to the screen? Is it impossible to capture the beauty and profundity of Goethe's poetry in the beauty and magnificence of filmic images and filmic narration? - No one has tried yet. The duality between poetic language and cinematic spectacle persists.

It is different with *Faust I*, of course. Because of its straightforward story and a gist one can summarize with a few words, it is obviously much easier to transform the first part of the drama into film. Consequently, the two most favourite story elements of *Faust* used for films are the pact with the devil and the love story between Faust and

Margarete, elements which usually lend themselves to melodrama and/or an affirmative morale in accordance with common values. Since film is a medium determined to please and entertain masses and to cover the production costs this accordance is certainly no coincidence but a commercial necessity.

»Wie machen wir's? daß alles frisch und neu / Und mit Bedeutung auch gefällig sei«, the director asks in Goethe's *Prologue for the Theatre*. (Goethe 1986, 536) How can we succeed in offering a new and striking and meaningful play?

The cinema has always tried to re-tell old stories in a new and striking way; it may be unable to present the wholeness of the complex modern myth of *Faust* in one single film, but it has split up this complexity and displayed bits and parts of its profound thematic richness in striking new ways, some of them serious, some of them silly. The dualities persist: The duality between specific expectations and possibilities of realization, but also – and more important – the duality between well defined story elements and familiar characters as central parts of a strong tradition on the one hand and openness to various interpretations and diversity of artistic presentations as options for transformation and development on the other hand. These dualities mean artistic challenge and encouragement; they invite film makers time and again to explore the story and its elements with different intentions and to apply new connotations, and thus guarantee the continuing presence of *Faust* as a vital part of our culture and as a signifier of our state of mind. He has fulfilled this role for centuries, and as a man with glorious visions of the future and dangerous ambitions he will certainly be our companion throughout the 21st century.

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Faust in Film (selection)

- Faust* (France 1896; dir. Georges Hatot; produced by Louis & Auguste Lumière)
- Faust and Mephistopheles* (GB 1897; dir. George Albert Smith)
- Le Cabinet de Méphistophélès* (France 1897; dir. Georges Méliès)
- Damnation de Faust* (France 1897; dir. Georges Méliès)
- Faust et Marguerite* (France 1898; dir. Georges Méliès)
- Faust and Marguerite* (USA 1900; dir. Edwin S. Porter)
- Faust et Méphistophélès* (France 1903; dir. Alice Guy)
- Faust aux Enfers, ou la Damnation de Faust* (France 1903; dir. Georges Méliès)
- Damnation du Docteur Faust, ou Faust et Marguerite* (France 1904; dir. Georges Méliès)
- Faust* (GB 1907; dir. Albert Gilbert)

- Faust* (USA 1909; dir. Edwin S. Porter)
Faust (Germany 1910; dir. Oskar Meßter)
Faust (France/Italy/GB 1910; dir. Henri Andréani, Enrico Guazzoni, David Barnett)
Faust (GB 1911; dir. Cecil Hepworth)
Der Student von Prag (Germany 1913; dir. Stellan Rye)
Faust (USA 1915, dir. Edward Sloman)
Faust (France 1922; dir. Gérard Bourgeois)
Faust (GB 1923; dir. Bertram Phillips)
La Damnation de Faust (France 1925; dir. Victor Charpentier, Stéphane Passet)
Faust - Eine deutsche Volkssage (Germany 1926; dir. Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau)
Faust (GB 1927; dir. H.B. Parkinson)
The Devil and Daniel Webster/All That Money Can Buy (USA 1941; dir. William Dieterle)
La Leggenda di Faust (Italy 1948; dir. Carmine Gallone)
La Beauté du Diable (France 1949; dir. René Clair)
Ikiru (Japan 1952; dir. Akira Kurosawa)
Marguerite de la nuit (France/Italy 1955; dir. Claude Autant-Laras)
Faustina (Spain 1958; dir. José Luis Saenz de Heredia)
Faust (Germany 1960; dir. Peter Gorski, Gustav Gründgens)
Faust (USA 1963; dir. Michael Suman)
Faust in secolul douăzeci/Faust XX (Rumania 1966; dir. Ion Popescu-Gopo)
Doctor Faustus (GB 1967; dir. Richard Burton, Nevill Coghill)
Bedazzled (GB 1967; dir. Stanley Donen)
Nach meinem letzten Umzug ... (Germany 1971; dir. Hans J. Syberberg/B. Brecht, 1953)
The Mephisto Waltz (USA 1971; dir. Paul Wendkos)
Majstor i Margareta (Yugoslavia/Italy 1973; dir. Aleksandar Petrovic)
Phantom of the Paradise (USA 1974; dir. Brian de Palma)
Président Faust (France 1974; dir. Jean Kerchbron)
The Forbidden (GB 1978; dir. Clive Barker)
Mephisto (Hungary/Germany 1981; dir. István Szabó)
Faust (Germany 1982; dir. Klaus-Michael Grüber)
Doktor Faustus (Germany 1982; dir. Franz Seitz)
Crossroads (USA 1986; dir. Walter Hill)
Angel Heart (USA 1987; dir. Alan Parker)
Hellraiser (GB 1987; dir. Clive Barker)
Faust - Vom Himmel durch die Welt zur Hölle (Germany 1988; dir. Dieter Dorn)
Faust/Lekce Faust (GB/Czech Republic 1994; dir. Jan Svankmajer)
O Convento (Portugal/France 1995; dir. Manoel de Oliveira)
Faust (Sweden 1996; dir. Eva Bergman)
The Devil's Advocate (USA 1997; dir. Taylor Hackford)
Faust (Germany 2000; dir. Thomas Grimm, Peter Stein)
Faust - Love of the Damned (USA 2001; dir. Brian Yuzna)
Fausto 5.0 (Spain 2001; dir. Alex Ollé)
666 - Traue keinem, mit dem du schläfst (Germany 2002; dir. Rainer Matsutani)
I Was a Teenage Faust (Canada 2002; dir. Thom Eberhardt)