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Caligari then and now: an analysis of narrative adaptation from modernist to postmodernist.

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INDEX

1. INTRODUCTION		3
2. CALIGARI THEN AND NOW	> The Story	4
	> About the Writers	5
	> Wiene's Realization	7
	> Impact of the Film	10
	> Decline in Interest	12
	> Emergence of postmodernism	13
	> Evolution of the medium	15
	> Fisher's modern remix	16
3. CONTEXT, NARRATIVE, MISE EN SCÈNE	> Dominant	17
	> Narrative	18
	> Context	19
	> *Mise en scène*	20
	> The Dominant Trinity	20
4. EPISTEMOLOGY AND ONTOLOGY		21
5. SIMILARITIES	> Framing Device	24
	> Design	25

6. DIFFERENCES	> Technology - technique	26
	- special effects	27
	> Sound	30
	> Colour	32
	> Characters	33
	> Story	36
	> Approach to authority	38
7. ANALYSIS		39
8. CONCLUSION		40
BIBLIOGRAPHY		42

1. Introduction

The aim of this essay is to analyze the nature of a particular narrative – namely Robert Wiene's *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* (1920) – and how it has changed and been adapted for a 21st century audience by an American filmmaker, David Lee Fisher – *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (2005). This has value as an opportunity to investigate how passage of time impacts on aspects of a narrative and what is required for the narrative to be effectively retold for a modern audience. It is also of importance in analyzing the role technology has played in the development of narrative from the silent film era to modern films. I have chosen Wiene's *Caligari* and Fisher's remake for my study because both films follow the same narrative, yet are technologically and contextually very different and thus they clearly exhibit the changes that the narrative has undergone.

For my analysis of both Wiene's and Fisher's versions of *Caligari*, I will establish and discuss the key aspects of each film which make them representational of two very different times and places. There are many similarities between the two films, yet it is the differences of varying intensity (such as visual and narrative differences) which clearly depict the change in times – specifically the change in thought through the depiction of what is essentially exactly the same story.

Throughout this essay I will analyze how the narrative of *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* is conveyed in both a modern (Wiene's *Caligari*) and a postmodern (Fisher's *Caligari*) time and how the key aspects of each film relate to each other differently within these different

contexts. To do this I will first discuss the development of the film from the original script to the finished film, providing a platform from which to identify the key elements of the original film. By analyzing the key elements of the original film, I will be able to clearly contrast them with the key elements of Fisher's *Caligari* and thus determine how these aspects have changed within a postmodern context.

2. Caligari Then and Now

THE STORY

Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari tells the tale of an evil man, Dr Caligari, who travels from town to town exhibiting his somnambulist who has, Caligari claims, a supernatural precognitive ability – the ability to predict the future. Caligari is in fact using his power over the somnambulist, Cesare, to command him to commit various murders. The first casualty is the Town Clerk, who is found mercilessly stabbed to death in his own bed. The protagonist of the film, Francis, and his best friend Alan, attend Dr Caligari's exhibition, where Caligari tells the audience that Cesare knows all and can foretell their future. Alan, much to Francis's protest, asks Cesare how long he has to live, to which Cesare replies: "'till tomorrow's dawn". Regarding this as a cruel trick, Francis leads the shaken Alan away from Caligari's show. That night, however, a shadowy figure enters Alan's room and stabs him to death. The next day, Francis tells the police and admits his suspicion of Dr Caligari. Yet, a man is caught attempting to murder an old lady and the authorities blame him for the other murders. Dissatisfied with their conviction, Francis

continues to pursue his belief that Dr Caligari is behind the murders. When Caligari sends Cesare after Jane, the woman with whom Francis is in love, Cesare is unable to murder her and instead kidnaps her. However, her cries alert her father and others, who give chase. Cesare drops Jane and flees, yet he suffers a heart attack and dies. Meanwhile, Francis had been spying on Caligari and what he thought was Cesare. It is, however, a mannequin in Cesare's place. When this is discovered, Caligari flees. Francis chases him to a nearby asylum, where, it is revealed, that he is in fact the director. Working with the orderlies at the asylum, Francis manages to prove Caligari's insanity and he is strait-jacketed and locked in one of the cells in his own asylum.

The narrative of *Das Cabinet* was specifically crafted as an allegory for the horror and madness the writers – and the millions of other Germans - experienced as a result of the social conditions before and during the First World War. This is obvious in the portrayal of authority and the abuse of this authority that ensues. To understand the allegory of the film, however, we must understand how the film was conceived and the conditions under which it was made. To do that, we should start at the very beginning.

ABOUT THE WRITERS

Scriptwriter, Janowitz, served in the Austrian army and during his service grew to despise the political powers that drove people to war. It is this forced loyalty to the invisible 'higher powers' which caused the creation of the now infamous narrative of *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari*. As well as military service inspiring the story, Janowitz also witnessed a

murder, which further influenced certain aspects of the plot. While attending a fair in Hamburg, 1913, he was trying to find "*a girl whose beauty and manner had attracted him*" (Kracauer, 1947:61). However, she disappeared from sight into some bushes, where later an "average bourgeois" emerged. The next day the girl was found murdered and Janowitz was compelled to attend her funeral where, he felt certain, he saw the bourgeois again (Kracauer, 1947:61). This incident stayed with Janowitz and his grim fascination with it emerged as the murderous plot of *Das Cabinet*.

Co-writer, Mayer, during his involvement in the war, was subjected to much psychological evaluation. Mayer was "*embittered against the high-ranking military psychiatrist in charge of his case*" (Kracauer, 1947:62). This embitterment towards the psychiatrist seems to be the basis of the antagonist, Dr Caligari – who is a doctor of psychiatry.

What resulted in the script exhibits an extraordinary insight into the German dictatorship that was to follow – it pre-empted the course of World War II: Caligari being Hitler, Cesare being the soldiers and Alan being collateral damage – a tragic casualty of war. Francis represents those desperate to find some sort of reason in the surrounding chaos: the belief in the futility of war, the hatred towards the meaningless slaughter of thousands who loyally strode to their death to appease a corrupt dictator, drunk on power, using his people as pawns on a global chessboard.

Combining their experiences and their mutual detestation of the political authority of the time, Janowitz and Mayer decided to collaborate on a story exhibiting this shared feeling of loathing towards the ruling political powers. With this politically-driven script, Janowitz and Mayer approached Erich Pommer of Decla-Bioscop company, who commissioned the script. However, Pommer did not purchase the script for its revolutionary ideals. About this purchase Pommer said: "They saw an 'experiment' in the script. I saw a comparatively cheap production." (Bohn and Stromgren, 1983:120).

Now that the script was sold and had become the property of the Decla-Bioscop Company, it needed to be handed over to a creative team to be turned into a film. It is this conversion from script to screen in which the real controversy of the film lies.

WIENE'S REALIZATION

The finished film is not what the writers had originally wanted to be made from their script. Perhaps the most controversial occurrence around the creation of Wiene's *Caligari* is the inclusion of the infamous framing story. According to Lotte Eisner in "The Haunted Screen", it was Fritz Lang[*], the director of the celebrated German Expressionist film *Metropolis* (1927), who suggested the inclusion of the "Rahmenhandlung" (framing-treatment) so as not to "[scare] off the public" (1965:20). Because of the violent nature of

[*] Lang was originally chosen to direct *Caligari*, yet was unable to as he was in production of *Die Spinnen* films (Eisner, 1973:20)

the story, Lang felt it would elicit an unwelcome reaction of shock and horror from the audience.

However, it was this shock-value that the writers had intended, so the addition of the framing story as suggested by Lang, Janowitz and Mayer felt, completely destroyed the message of the film. The framing story changes the narrative by adding a scene onto the beginning and the end of the original story to make everything narrated by Francis.

The film begins with a scene which did not appear in Janowitz and Mayer's script. Francis sits with an old man on a bench in a garden. A woman with a dazed expression on her face walks past the two men. Francis explains that she is his fiancée, Jane. Francis begins to tell the old man of what he and Jane experienced in the town of Holstenwall. From this point, the film follows Janowitz and Mayer's script up until the scene where Caligari is locked up. However, the film deviates from the script again and we return to Francis and the old man in the garden. They leave the garden and enter the very asylum we have seen in Francis's tale where it is revealed that he is in fact a patient, along with Jane and Cesare. The director of the asylum is the same man as Caligari in Francis's imagination. When Francis accuses the director of insanity, he is bound and taken to a cell where the director admits to knowing what is wrong with him and is able now to treat him accordingly.

Janowitz and Mayer felt that this completely undermined the message they wanted the story to convey. No longer is it a tale of a man's fight for justice, but the tale of a

delusional mind unable to comprehend reality. The narrator is insane and should not be taken seriously, which the writers felt removed the "political sting" (Bohn and Stromgren, 1983:120). Although the framing device altered the writers' intended reception of the story, their original narrative is still intact within the framing device. There is much debate as to whether the framing device really does undermine the writers' intended message.

Much of the origin of Wiene's *Caligari* is lost in the dulled pages of history - many conflicting stories exist about the creation of the film. What is known about those involved is scattered amongst recovered scripts, old contracts and verbal accounts from many somewhat unreliable sources. As David Robinson discusses in his book, "*Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari*", the writers Hans Janowitz and Carl Mayer collaborated on the script and then sold the rights to the Decla-Bioscop company on April 19, 1919 (Robinson, 1997:8 - 11). Also, Robinson continues, the contract gave the producer permission to alter the script in any way they thought necessary. The contract also stated that Janowitz and Mayer's names must appear in all advertising and in the finished film.

However, Robinson also discusses how few facts can be provided from this point that give clear indication as to who was responsible for the end result of the film. Conflicting stories exist naming various different sources for the film's unique design. Whose decision it was to go with the visual style is not known for sure. What is known is that the writers wanted the film to have a unique design and that they wanted the Expressionist artist Alfred Kubin to be the designer. However, it seems a misinterpretation is necessary

for the design that survived to the shooting of the film, as according to Janowitz, an employee at Decla misread "Kubinische" as "Kubistische" and thus cubist designers were sought. This is contradicted by Pommer claiming that it was the design staff at Decla who decided on the Expressionist design. Furthermore, chief designer on the film, Hermann Warm, claims it was Pommer's successor, Rudolph Meinert, who was responsible for the choice (Robinson, 1997:20 - 22). And thus with each account confusing the former, the truth falls further into obscurity.

Regardless of whoever was responsible for the design, what can be said is this: *Caligari* was visually unique. The entire world of *Caligari* is dark and warped. The sets were hand-painted onto canvas, creating a twisted and irregular world. The houses are crooked, with extreme angles creating jagged windows and doors. The shadows are exaggerated and painted in, enhancing the grim nature of the world. Everything blends together to create a nightmare world - a world which clearly depicts the warped mind of the protagonist, Francis. Expressionism represents a "state of mind rather than the reality of the external world" (Pioch, 2002) and this is clearly visible in the design of *Caligari*.

IMPACT OF THE FILM

> "*In 1919*[*]*, one of the most influential horror films ever made was unleashed upon an unsuspecting world. Filmed in Germany before the*

[*] *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* was released in February, 1920 following a "*thorough propaganda campaign*" (Kracauer, 1947:71). This propaganda campaign included the displaying of posters simply stating "Du mußt Caligari werden" (you must become Caligari) weeks prior to the film's

advent of sound, its twisted and bizarre imagery proved so powerful that it remained in theatrical exhibition for over seven straight years."

(The Cabinet Reopened)

These opening lines to *The Cabinet Reopened* - a featurette about the making of Fisher's *Caligari* - sum up the awe with which the original *Caligari* was received. It preceded and continued screening during the release of both F W Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) - two other important German Expressionist films. However, these were not as monumentally successful as *Caligari*. Despite being released in the same year as Paul Wegener's *Der Golem* (1920), *Caligari* is widely regarded as the first internationally successful German Expressionist film (Cook and Mieke, 2000:67).

"…*Caligari* inaugurated a novel commercial film export: Art - new, exciting and, above all, both visible and fashionable." (Robinson, D. 1997 : 43). This quote defines what made *Caligari* so successful - the redefining of film as not only a visual medium, but an art form in itself. It introduced subtext and metaphor into film in a completely new, expressive way and gave a new approach to set design and mise-en-scene - quite simply, it opened up a completely new path for film to take.

Made a little over 20 years after the creation of motion pictures, *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* managed to make a lasting impact on filmmaking which is still evident today

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release. However there are numerous sources that state *Caligari* as appearing first in 1919, which is the year of the production rather than the year of release.

through the influence it had on other genres. The film caused "*double takes and generated hundreds of column inches of discussion in the press*" (Bohn and Stromgren, 1983:119). Not only was it praised for its uniqueness, but it was also critiqued for its difference. Sergei Eisenstein called *Das Cabinet* "*a barbaric carnival of the destruction of the healthy human infancy of our art"*. (Bohn and Stromgren, 1983:119). This bold new style of filmmaking had an undeniably powerful impact on the filmic world due to the stir it caused.

DECLINE IN INTEREST

Pommer, about *Das Cabinet*, said:

> "The mysterious and macabre atmosphere of Grand Guignol was at the time in vogue in German films, and this story was perfectly full of it."
>
> (Robinson, 1997:11)

The Grand Guignol was a Parisian theatre specializing in naturalistic horror plays. The traffic of the stage depicted murders, torture, rape, demonic possession and such entertaining terrors which both thrilled and disgusted audiences. Charles Nonon, the last director of the Grand Guignol, said about diminishing interest in this theatrical style:

> *"We could never compete with Buchenwald [the Nazi Concentration Camp]. Before the war, everyone believed that what happened on stage was purely imaginary; now we know that these things--and worse--are possible."*

(Peirron, 2006)

The violent escapist entertainment that the Grand Guignol and films such as *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* presented was tragically mirrored in the events of the Second World War. Audiences lost interest in the portrayal of violence and, instead, sought for a means of escaping the brutality and dread which dragged the entire world into a depression.

EMERGENCE OF POSTMODERNISM

However, as the world struggled to reclaim its equilibrium after this global trauma, a new awareness and style of thought emerged – the awakening of a postmodern age. In their book "Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations", Steven Best and Douglas Kellner discuss the feelings surrounding this postmodern awakening.

> "World War II was a turning point in history… the postwar introduction of new modes of communication, information, and energy inaugurated a postmodern period…"

(Best and Kellner, 1991:12)

Postmodern thought brought with it a new mode of expression, an "…unleashing of instinct, impulse and will…" (Best and Kellner, 1991:13) which was greeted with a sense of turbulent foreboding. Despite being an evolution of thought, it questioned the inherent conformity to which the world was wholly accustomed.

> "The negative discourses of the postmodern reflected… …Western societies and culture in decline, threatened by change and instability, as well as by the new developments of mass society and culture."

(Best and Kellner, 1991:15)

These changes into postmodernism were viewed by sociologist Daniel Bell as "the extension and living out of a rebellious, hyperindividualist, hedonist lifestyle" and "a radical assault on tradition" (Best and Kellner, 1991:13).

Some theorists praised the "new diversity and affluence" they felt came with postmodernism, while others criticized the "decay of traditional values or increased powers of social control" (Best and Kellner, 1991:15). This duality of theoretical stance clearly illustrates the magnitude of the change of thought into postmodernism. The Western world was clearly evolving. This dramatic shift in thought brought with it new

forms of filmic expression and is thus responsible for both the altered reception of Wiene's *Caligari* today, as well as the way in which Fisher remixed Wiene's film.

EVOLUTION OF THE MEDIUM

And as the ways of thinking changed, so did the technology of filmmaking. Only seven years after the release of *Das Cabinet* was the first sound feature screened. Audiences were now able to watch motion pictures with synchronous audio; spoken dialogue within a film improved the rhythm and tempo of the narrative. Films were also able to be more intricate due to the increase in information that was now able to be transmitted to audiences within the same time-frame of previous silent films. No longer did audiences have to read title cards which interrupted the film, sometimes too often for the intended emotional effect to be achieved. New genres, such as the musical, arose and new audio tools were available to increase the experience of a film - such as encroaching footsteps and breathing in a thriller, or slapstick sounds in comedies and cartoons. Silent films became less and less popular as audiences took to sound films and "talkies". Not long after sound came proper coloured film and the experience of watching a film evolved further, incorporating special effects which became more and more realistic. Even today, with the release of every new film, the technology involved in the filmmaking process continues to become more advanced.

Because of this evolution in technology, Fisher's *Caligari* is a very different film, despite following the same narrative (this is also partly because it is made by an American director in the third millennium). The main reason for this difference, however, is because the films were made 85 years apart and, thus, for very different audiences and because both directors had different approaches and intentions. Fisher wanted to pay homage to the original film in his version – his reasons for remaking it were because he greatly respected the original for its unique story, characters and the twist at the end of the film.

> "When I decided to do the remake I wanted to stay true to the original. I didn't want to do a new adaptation of it… …I wanted to do more of like a remix of a song."
>
> (Fisher, "The Cabinet Reopened" Featurette)

And this is exactly what Fisher achieved. Much as a musician would remix a song, Fisher changed and remade certain aspects of Wiene's *Caligari*, while still leaving the finished product recognizable as a remix of the original. There are three main factors (within the scope of my essay) which I will address as being responsible for the great difference between Wiene's and Fisher's *Caligari*.

3. Context, Narrative, Mise En Scène

THE DOMINANT

In order to best analyze the different representation of the narrative in different times and from different social contexts, I will use a formalist approach in analyzing these films by discussing the dominant in each. In his discussion of the dominant, Brian McHale quotes Roman Jakobson:

> "*The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the other components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure.*"
>
> (Jakobson, 1935 *in* McHale, 1987:6)

Although predominantly focused on literary work, this concept of the dominant can be transposed to film analysis and be used to analyze the narrative of both Wiene's and Fisher's *Caligari*, as film is a work of visual poetics: a "structured system, a regularly ordered hierarchical set of artistic devices" (Jakobson, 1935). Therefore, in relation to the films in my study, the dominant is the main component of the film on which the other aspects depend for the film to be correctly understood, or to achieve its desired effect. The dominant is the foundation around which every aspect of the film is shaped to create a single, meaningful text. By establishing a dominant aspect of both films, I will be able

to analyze how the components of each film relate to each other and how these have changed between Wiene's *Caligari* and Fisher's remix of the same narrative.

McHale continues:

> "…there are many dominants, and different dominants may be distinguished depending upon the level, scope, and focus of the analysis."
>
> (1987:6)

I have already established narrative as a dominant aspect of the films, but narrative relies heavily on two other aspects which are of equal importance: the context of each film and the *mise en scène.*

THE NARRATIVE

The narrative of a film is comprised of two elements: the story and the plot. The story is "the basic succession of events arranged in a chronological order", while the plot "works on the story by giving the events a logic" (Rowe, 1999:117). For example, if the narrative of a film consists of five parts labelled "a" to "e", then the story would progress from "a", to "b", "c", "d" and then "e". However, if the parts were re-ordered and began with "e", then progressed to "a", then "b" (and so on) for a specific purpose or dramatic effect, that ordering of the events would be the plot.

In the case of *Caligari*, the majority of the story is in the past tense, as it is shown to be narrated by Francis. The narrative essentially begins at the end of the film. This is because, when we return to Francis sitting with the old man at the end of the film, the story continues and reveals that Francis is a patient in the mental hospital. The plot is arranged in such a way to give this twist in the story maximum effect. Since we began with Francis telling the story, we trust what he is saying throughout as we are drawn into his tale, only to be shocked by this revelation in the final scene.

CONTEXT

The context of a film involves the historic, social, political, technological and geographical instance of that film. The second a film is taken out of its context, it is open to different interpretations, depending then on the context in which it is viewed.

> "*The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition*."
>
> (Benjamin, 1973)

In other words, Benjamin infers that the exclusivity of a work of art relies on its context. I believe that it is this "fabric of tradition" which greatly separates the two films. Due to the context of the original *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari*, Wiene's film is dated and solidly

rooted in history as a text exhibiting a social frustration with post-war Germany. Fisher's *Caligari*, being so contextually different, is thus a very different depiction of the same narrative.

MISE EN SCÈNE

Mise en scène is a French term which means "having been put into the scene" and describes everything that is seen within a shot (Rowe, 1999:98). It consists of all aspects - both visual and audio - which serve to construct the shot, from the setting and characters to the camera movements and editing. The *mise en scène* is responsible for giving form to the narrative, as well as evoking emotion within the viewer. The *mise en scène* of *Caligari* is obviously a vitally important factor, given its unique design and powerful execution.

THE DOMINANT TRINITY

Within the scope of my essay, these three aspects of the films are the dominants. However, McHale continues:

> "…different dominants emerge depending upon which questions we ask of the text and the position from which we interrogate it."
>
> (1987:6)

As I have stated, Wiene's *Caligari* and Fisher's *Caligari* share the same narrative, despite there being differences in the story. These differences are a result of the difference in context. Thus, Wiene's *Caligari* and Fisher's remix are best analyzed from a modernist and postmodernist perspective respectively.

4. Epistemology and Ontology

Continuing with this theory of the dominant, McHale, in "Constructing Postmodernism", discusses modernist stories as being like detective stories. He says that modernist texts:

> "*…revolve around problems of the accessibility and circulation of knowledge, the individual mind's grappling with an elusive or occluded reality.*"
>
> (1992:147)

Detective stories were very popular to the German film market at the time of Wiene's *Caligari* (Robinson, 1997:29). Much of *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* plays out similarly to a detective story: a crime is committed and Francis pursues Dr Caligari until he proves him guilty. The majority of the narrative revolves around this pursuit of the truth and of justice.

> "…modernist fiction is fiction organized in terms of an epistemological dominant, fiction whose formal strategies implicitly raise issues of the accessibility, reliability or unreliability, transmission, circulation, etc., of knowledge about the world…"
>
> (McHale, 1992:146)

To put it in simpler terms, modernist fiction is preoccupied with gaining knowledge about the world in which we exist. Postmodernist fiction, McHale continues, is more complex as it is:

> "…fiction organized in terms of an ontological dominant, fiction whose formal strategies implicitly raise issues of the mode of being of fictional worlds and their inhabitants, and/or reflect on the plurality and diversity of worlds, whether "real," possible, fictional, or what have you…"
>
> (McHale, 1992:147)

In other words, postmodernist fiction is more concerned with understanding our existence within a world. It is my contention that Wiene's *Caligari* is essentially epistemological in nature, while Fisher's *Caligari* is wholly ontological. Although the narrative of both films is the same, it is the differences in the story which leads me to make this claim.

Both films exhibit two separate realities through the framing narrative, which serves to separate the real world from Francis's delusional world. Although this suggests that both films are ontological in nature, in Wiene's *Claigari*, the only time we are made aware of the two worlds is right at the end of the film. The viewer is meant to wholly accept and believe Francis's delusional world is real until the final scene - for that reason the viewer is attempting to understand the world in which Francis exists throughout the film. Thus, this makes Wiene's *Caligari* epistemological in nature.

Fisher's film, however, questions the reality of the situation throughout the film. Francis's line in the opening scene of Fisher's *Caligari* already introduces this possibility of a fictional world or an alternate reality. He asks (in relation to the murders in Holstenwall): "How did it happen? Did it all really happen?" Although this line can easily be read as Francis's disbelief of his own horrific past, it certainly foreshadows the events to come throughout the rest of the film.

To use a simpler analogy, the framing narrative in Wiene's *Caligari* is exactly that - a frame. It surrounds the full picture of Francis's delusional world. If this frame is removed, what remains is still the full picture of this delusional world. In the case of Fisher's *Caligari*, however, the framing narrative is not so much a frame, as it is the canvas upon which Francis's delusional world is painted. They are merged into one another in such a way as to make them inseparable.

By surrounding an identical narrative with aspects pertaining to the ontological dominant, the very nature of the epistemological quest has been shifted to be part of the ontological whole.

5. Similarities

When remaking a film, the director is faced with a variety of choices, the main one being how to effectively execute the retelling of a story that has already been told. There is the vital choice of whether to mimic the original film, rework certain aspects of the original film, or make drastic changes to the original to create a new film that is merely based on the original. The story needs to be reworked in such a way as to captivate an audience which has, quite likely, already seen the original film and, thus, is aware of what will happen next at any point of the film. Since Fisher's *Caligari* is a remix of Wiene's film, there are important similarities between the two films which need to be acknowledged as they are indeed dominant aspects of both films.

FRAMING DEVICE

Fisher's Caligari did not need to include the framing device. A possibility would have been to make the film without the framing device and, thus, telling the story originally intended by Janowitz and Mayer. Since the framing device was originally conceived to make the film easier to watch, Fisher could have made the film without it to enhance the tension surrounding Francis's quest. However, the framing device is present and, despite

a few differences in the story, follows the same narrative as Wiene's *Caligari*. By including it, Fisher is acknowledging the framing device as necessary for the integrity of the narrative. Despite the authors' complaints against the framing device, it is this device which I believe to have been one of the main contributing factors to the film's phenomenal success. Also, by including the framing device, Fisher is able to use the twist in the original plot and thus keep the dramatic premise of the original film intact.

DESIGN

Another major similarity between Wiene's and Fisher's *Caligari* is the design of the film. In fact, most of the backgrounds in Fisher's *Caligari* are identical to the background sets from Wiene's *Caligari*. This was achieved by capturing the backgrounds from a 35mm print of the original film and digitally restoring them to match the new footage. Fisher was able to rebuild (digitally and through the construction of particular set pieces) the majority of the sets from Wiene's *Caligari* and, thus, effectively recreate the world in an identical style to the original. Again, by mimicking the original to such a degree, Fisher acknowledges the importance of this element of the film. Since the original film is still visually impressive and largely unique today, Fisher used the same backgrounds and design to achieve the same emotional effect that Wiene's film achieved 85 years earlier.

6. Differences

It is in the differences between Wiene's and Fisher's *Caligari*, however, that the shift in the dominant truly shows. Although the similarities are many, the various differences - some blatantly obvious, others subtle and easily missed - manage to change the story enough that it is easily and effectively accepted by a modern audience.

TECHNOLOGY

1. Technique

The main difference between the original *Caligari* and Fisher's remix is no doubt the method of creating the film. The original *Caligari* was shot directly onto film and edited in the only method that was available at the time – physically cutting and pasting the strips of film together. The sets were all physically built and hand painted, containing various set-pieces and props. In other words, for Wiene's *Caligari* it was a case of building a small piece of the world and placing the characters within it.

Fisher's *Caligari*, however, was a completely digital process. The actors were filmed against a green screen, enabling the visual effects technician to digitally remove the green colour and replace it with whatever background images were necessary for the scene. This meant that the opposite of the original was possible: namely taking a character and building the world around them.

Thus even the physical nature of making each film adheres to the epistemological and ontological perspectives discussed in chapter 4. Wiene's film created a world in which the characters must exist, whereas Fisher's *Caligari* shaped a world around the characters' existence. Whereas the original film relied on the actors' interaction with the world in which they were put, the remix relied on the actors imagining their own existence within a world they could not see.

The picture quality and clarity of Fisher's film is far more advanced than Wiene's *Caligari,* due to the advancements in filmmaking technology. The aspect ratio is now widescreen, as opposed to the 4:3 image of the original. By using digitally restored background images from Wiene's *Caligari*, Fisher managed to recreate the look of the original film to a large degree. Although the design is in the same style as Wiene's *Caligari*, there are new visual elements that were not possible to create in the time of the original film. These visual elements are made possible through the use of digital effects.

2. Special Effects

Wiene's *Caligari*, having been made so many years ago, was obviously very limited as to what special effects were available. What effects were then available were simple camera tricks, such as double exposure or running the film backwards. This certainly limited what Wiene was able to do. The writers, too, envisioned certain scenes which were not able to be achieved due to technological limitations. For example, in Janowitz and

Mayer‘s script, there is a scene preceded by a title: “Zwangsvorstellungen!!!” which means “Hallucination!!!”. In this scene, the words “Du musst Calligaris[*] werden” (“you must become Caligari”) appear to Caligari and follow him as he attempts to flee from them. However, a change passes over Caligari and he begins to chase the words, catching them and playing with them before placing them in his pocket. This is simplified in the film, most likely due to this effect having been too difficult to achieve at the time (Robinson, 1997:72 - 73).

Fisher, however, opted for a different depiction of Caligari’s insanity. As in Wiene’s *Caligari*, Francis, the orderly and the inspector search Caligari’s office and find his medical journal. It reveals Caligari’s study into controlling Cesare to commit murder. However the flashback scene which follows shows Caligari’s obsession with Cesare: his insanity is conveyed by his actions. He states “My greatest jewel! My precious Cesare! The desire of my life fulfilled!”, before throwing his notes away and cackling manically. By not showing Caligari’s hallucination, Fisher’s depiction of Caligari’s insanity is more realistic.

By using digital graphics and effects, the sets in Fisher’s *Caligari* appear more intricate and more real. Despite the expressionistic appearance of the world, there are new elements that make it more alive for the viewer. Subtle visual effects, such as beams of light streaming in through the windows and clouds passing through the sky bring the world to life. Rain falls in front of the establishing shot of Holstenwall seen in the

[*] Caligari was called “Calligaris” in Janowitz and Mayer’s original script (Robinson, 1997: 14)

opening scene of the film. A glowing aura of light flickers behind the town, making it not just a painted picture, but a living town.

Fisher is able to push the boundaries of the original film's design to adapt it visually into a three dimensional environment. This is not to say the backgrounds are three dimensional, but the world itself simply appears to have more depth. Instead of using simple painted backgrounds, Fisher animates the backgrounds, giving the impression of a real world. In some shots the camera moves, which further brings the world to life by creating a greater sense of space and the illusion that the world continues beyond the edges of the frame.

Instead of being a totally expressionist depiction of the world, the expressionist set is now mimicking the world to which we are accustomed. Whereas before real life was mocked by the art, the art now tries to recreate those aspects of life that make the world real. The reason for this is that now, through Fisher's direction, the world is no longer representing the fragmented world of a post-war German's imagination. It is now a world in which we as the viewers are meant to join Francis in questioning the reality of his existence.

The overall visual effect achieved by the chroma key process, however, is a slightly disjointed appearance between character and set. This is not always blatantly obvious, but often presents itself as a hazy border around the characters – separating them from the surroundings. This is because of the green colour spilling very slightly onto the characters in long shot. When digitally removing the green colour, the edges of the characters are

very slightly distorted and, when this is corrected during the post-production process, it creates the hard outline we see in some of the shots. For example: in the scene where Cesare kidnaps Jane, he flees over the rooftops of Holstenwall. In the iconic long shot of Cesare carrying Jane up the rooftop between the chimneys, there is a very definite outline to the moving characters. Although this is because of the digital process, the resultant image has an almost cartoon-like appearance. This helps sometimes, given the premise of the film - that nothing is truly real. It is a subtle visual effect that, although not intentional, adds to the feeling of an occluded reality.

SOUND

Another great difference between Wiene's and Fisher's *Caligari* is sound. The original relied on live music played during exhibition of the film, whereas Fisher's *Caligari* could take full advantage of music, sound design, synchronous audio and most of all, spoken dialogue.

> "…even with elaborate musical scores and varied sound effects, silent films were considered incomplete and artificial…
> …sub-titles… were intrusive and usually broke the rhythm of a film."
>
> (Bohn and Stromgren, 1983:182)

As discussed in chapter 2, the use of spoken dialogue enables Fisher's *Caligari* to have a much more intricate story due to the amount of information that can now be communicated. Fisher's film begins with a voice speaking words which send shivers down the spine of any true fan of the original film:

> *"Spirits are everywhere,*
> *they're all around us…"*

The opening titles from the original film have now been substituted for sound. This iconic line now introduces the film before the familiar scene of two men sitting on a bench in a garden lights up the screen.

Wiene's *Caligari* could only be accompanied by a musical score if it was performed live during the film's screening. Fisher's *Caligari* has a synchronous musical track which was written specifically for the film. This enables the composer to create simple musical swells to elicit certain emotions, or to create musical accompaniment for the action within a scene. Music has thus become a more effective emotional tool, further intensifying the viewing experience.

Also, because vertically layered sound design is now possible, there are moments when music is unnecessary to create an emotion. Throughout Fisher's *Caligari*, the sound of wind blowing, or a hollow, droning ambience accompanies the scene, creating a continuous sense of unease. Another example of sound design is in the scene where Alan

is murdered. There is no music and no shouts or sounds of struggle. Instead, the scene is accompanied by a strange rushing sound, a mix of what sound like muffled whispers, along with a pulsing noise as Cesare stabs Alan. The overall effect is to disturb the viewer, intensifying the mania within the scene.

COLOUR

Colour is another feature of film which was only properly developed after Wiene's *Caligari*. Although it existed in the form of tinted film stock or manually colouring film negatives as early as 1894, commercially feasible colour films only became popular in the mid to late 1930s (Bohn and Stromgrem, 1983:194-196). But because of the budget constraints which existed for the "relatively cheap production" (as Pommer described it (Bohn and Stromgren, 1983:120)), manually colouring the film stock was not an option for Wiene. He did, however, use tinted film stock. Yet today, where colour films make up the vast majority of almost every film market, making his remix in black and white was a very specific choice by Fisher. The lack of colour serves to emphasize the contrast-heavy sets and thus pays further homage to the design aspect of the original film.

Fisher does use colour, though, in two different scenes. Firstly, when Francis and the police return to Caligari's trailer and the officer pushes Caligari to the ground, he lands next to three pink flowers. The colour is faint, possibly to signify the flowers wavering on the edge of another existence. One of these pink flowers appears again in the final scene. Cesare stands alone, nursing the flower and touching the petals to his face. This flower

serves as another link between the real world and Francis's delusional world, again reinforcing the ontological nature of the film.

CHARACTERS

Some of the characters in the film have changed in manner, or their role has changed to add new levels to the story. For example, the man who attempts to murder the old woman in Wiene's *Caligari* is portrayed as a potential rapist in Fisher's *Caligari*, adding to the malice and mania expressed throughout the film.

The most significant difference in character, however, is that of Alan, who changes drastically between Wiene's and Fisher's *Caligari*. In Wiene's film, Alan's role is tragic, as he is Francis's dear friend, but he is murdered by Cesare, which leads to Francis's pursuit of the truth. Yet after his demise, he is a memory throughout the rest of the film. Although he is mentioned, or referred to indirectly, at no point does he reappear. This would be expected if it were not for the character of Cesare, who also dies within Francis's imaginary world. However, when Francis has finished telling the old man his tale, they return to the asylum in the 'real world' and see Cesare standing on his own, still very much alive. In Francis's imaginary world, Cesare dies of exhaustion after being pursued by the townsfolk and his corpse is brought before Dr Caligari. Upon seeing his somnambulist - his tool for murder - dead, Caligari flies into a rage and his criminal madness is revealed. Bringing the deceased Cesare before Caligari represented Francis's desire to expose the madness he believes Dr Caligari to possess. Even after Cesare's

death, he is still visibly present as a character in the story and when we return to the real world, Cesare is revealed to still be alive. It is through Cesare we understand that the events which we have witnessed are all a fabrication within Francis's mind.

Alan, however, does not appear in the real world asylum alongside Cesare and Jane, which leaves the viewer open to numerous different readings or assumptions. This could mean that Alan was never real and was simply a figment of Francis's imagination - an internalized, imaginary friend who was destroyed by Caligari's treatment of Francis, which is why Francis harbours such hostility towards Caligari.

It is also a possibility that Alan existed in the real world and was a friend of Francis's in the asylum. In this case, perhaps something actually did happen to him. Either he was cured and left the asylum, or he died at the hands of the real Caligari. Francis's grief for the loss of his friend manifested itself into the murderous plot which is the story of the events which he tells to the old man. He blames Caligari for Alan's death and thus creates a scenario in his own mind where Caligari is indeed a villain and is caught and punished for his foul deeds. However, this is purely speculation about a facet of the original narrative, which is left open-ended.

It is this open-ended facet that Fisher uses to great effect and Alan becomes a much more intricate character in Fisher's remix. There are various differences which arise that serve to intensify the emotional bond between Alan and Francis, as well as certain aspects

which further elaborate the ontological nature of the ‘real world’ and Francis’s imaginary world.

The first major change to Alan’s character in Fisher’s *Caligari* is the introduction of a history of mental illness and depression (this suggested back story is made possible by the use of spoken dialogue, as it would be difficult to convey so much information using titles as in Wiene’s *Caligari).* When Alan visits Francis near the beginning of the film, Francis remarks on Alan seeming “a lot better… Happier.” To this, Alan replies:

> “It does seem as though the medication is finally working this time. I mean, I still have moments when I get… certain thoughts.”

There are other incidents in the film where Alan’s condition is mentioned, an important one being Jane’s father, Dr Stern, suggesting that Alan could possibly have committed suicide, since he was suffering from extreme depression. Francis interrupts Dr Stern before he can complete his sentence, insisting that Alan was “much better”. Francis then makes the observation that Alan and Dr Caligari “acted as if they knew each other”, like there was something in their past. It is this observation which foreshadows the revelation which occurs in the framing narrative.

In the very last scene, when the real world has been revealed, Francis attacks Caligari, shouting that it is he who is mad. Francis is then restrained and taken to Caligari’s private observation chamber. It is revealed here that Caligari’s assistant is actually Alan. Francis

recoils in shock at the sight of his supposedly deceased friend. Alan reassures Francis by saying, “We‘re friends - best friends!”, much in the way an orderly would say this to gain a rapport with a patient. This inclusion of Alan into the ‘real world’ reaffirms Francis’s delusion and also serves to weave the two worlds into one another.

Having Alan as recovering from an unspecified mental disorder and depression serves a dual purpose: not only does this further heighten the frail and tragic nature of Alan’s character within Francis‘s world, it also further elaborates the instance of mental instability throughout the film, weaving the real world into Francis’s imaginary world. And having Alan as Caligari’s assistant in the real world serves the same purpose, yet in the reverse way. Because Alan is an orderly who has much contact with Francis and refers to them as “friends”, it is logical for Francis to manifest a role for Alan as his friend in his imaginary world.

STORY

Although the narrative of both films is essentially the same, there are various elements of the story which are different, or in the case of Fisher‘s *Caligari*, completely new. These differences serve to intensify, or add new aspects to the story.

In Wiene’s *Caligari* and indeed, in the original script of the film, after kidnapping Jane, Cesare is chased out of town and dies, supposedly of a heart attack induced by exhaustion. Fisher’s *Caligari*, however, is a lot more malicious, as Cesare is murdered

rather than being dispatched by natural causes. A new scene is added to the film, in which we enter a dark and twisted forest. A new character, Joseph, chases a terrified Cesare through the trees, shouting out in a violent rage. He swings the blade he wields and the scene goes black. Later, in the scene where Caligari is revealed to be behind the murders, Joseph tells of how he chased Cesare all through the night and at dawn was able to slay Cesare with his own blade. The insanity of Joseph's actions is further enhanced when Francis comments on the dead Cesare still looking the same. Joseph then comments "Yes, maybe he still is…" and, as he reaches to touch Cesare, he begins to laugh in a very childish manner as if amused by the fact that he murdered Cesare. This reaction is disconcerting and elaborates the feeling of mental instability and mania that is weaved throughout the film.

Another aspect of the story which is intensified is the love triangle between Francis, Alan and Jane. In Wiene's *Caligari*, Francis states that they are both in love with Jane, but no matter which of them she chooses, they will remain friends. Both friends agree to this point. However, Jane and Francis are already together. Alan returns after being away due to his depression and does not know about them. He still thinks that he and Francis are fighting for her affections. It is now Alan who says to Francis that they must remain friends no matter what. It appears that Alan suspects something between Francis and Jane and is now afraid of losing his friend. This is another new facet of the story which heightens the tragedy around Alan's character within Francis's delusional world.

Also, Alan being an orderly in the real world gives reason for Alan being in love with Jane within Francis's delusional world. Alan, being an orderly, would no doubt spend time with Jane in the asylum. However, because Francis believes that Jane is his fiancée, he views Alan as being worried about losing his friend to her.

APPROACH TO AUTHORITY

The approach to authority in Wiene's *Caligari* relates directly to the political nature of Janowitz and Mayer's script. The first instance where authority is ridiculed is when Caligari meets with the Town Clerk. The Town Clerk is, "perched up on his ridiculously high stool as a caricature of petty authority…" (Robinson, p29). Despite his position of power, he appears hunched over and uncomfortable and his character is mocked by this somewhat undignified representation. He is also represented as being cruel and unreasonable by his treatment of the polite and seemingly harmless Dr Caligari.

The police are ridiculed with the same high chair treatment as the Town Clerk. However, this is further enhanced by the background within the police station, which resembles a laughing face. This suggests that the police are not to be taken seriously. Also the way in which the police assume that the man apprehended by the townsfolk is responsible for the other murders without conducting an investigation suggests further incompetence of authority. This rejection of police and authority also enhances Francis's role as protagonist and gives him a higher status.

In Fisher's *Caligari*, the authority is not represented in quite the same way. The Town Clerk is, too, perched on a high chair, yet his attitude and manner make him more intimidating than the Clerk from Wiene's *Caligari*. He is not simply brash and rude, but cold and mocking too.

The police station has changed in Fisher's *Caligari*. It is no longer the mocking face, laughing at authority, but is now a more effective looking office, yet still in the style of the rest of the film. The police are also shown to be conducting a proper investigation.

This shift in the representation of authority also illustrates the difference in context, as no longer is it Fisher's intention to ridicule authority. Instead, his depiction of authority is subdued, as the police are conducting their investigation while Francis continues with his own pursuit of the truth.

7. Analysis

Throughout this essay I have emphasized the importance of the dominant. By analyzing the dominant of a particular film, we can see that it is indeed difficult to name simply one aspect as being the dominant. Instead, the grouping of certain key aspects becomes the dominant and this is different depending on the way in which one approaches the film. Jakobson's theory is thus no different when applied to film as it is from literary work. Within the scope of my analysis, we can see how narrative, context and *mise en scène* can

be isolated as separate key aspects of a film, but are much better understood when grouped together and analyzed in relation to one another.

I feel that the dominant of Wiene's *Caligari* is the context. The narrative and *mise en scène* are both features of the film which are vital to the film's integrity, yet both are directly a result of the context: the narrative was created as a critique of the German social context at the time and the *mise en scène* was a result of using a specific German artistic style of the time to support the main premise of the narrative (namely, the world being a depiction of the mind of a mental patient).

On the other hand, I feel that the dominant of Fisher's *Caligari* is the *mise en scène*. Since the context of the original film is no longer directly relevant to the viewer of Fisher's film, the context has become more about postmodernity and thus relates more to the ontological nature of the narrative. And since the narrative, too, has changed to suit the context, it is the *mise en scène* which most directly relates to the original film. Thus, the *mise en scène* is the pivotal facet around which the other aspects revolve.

8. Conclusion

In his book: "The Life and Times of Post-Modernity", Keith Tester describes modernism as a house and modernists as those who live inside the house, always looking to improve their lifestyle within the house. They surround themselves with all of the best and latest technologies to make living in the house as comfortable as possible. However,

postmodernists are those who tear down the house to get to the foundations, looking to understand beyond the boundaries of the known and accepted. (1993)

So in relation to Tester‘s analogy, Wiene’s film could be compared to the house and Fisher’s film would be trying to tear down the house to get to the foundations of what is known. The narrative of Wiene’s Caligari makes up the walls, ceiling and floors and everything contained within these boundaries - however the narrative of Fisher’s Caligari is not content within the confines of the original and so must tear it down to discover new boundaries.

In this way, narrative in film is greatly supported and enhanced by technology. By giving filmmakers more tools with which to convey a story, technology has allowed for an ever increasing freedom of expression and, through this expression, we are free to explore our own existence.

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