



Little men and women are unfamiliar with literature, development, and direction. At night, they shuttle through the streets, gossip under railway bridges, or stand gawking at a fallen horse; they go out in search of excitement, stimulation, and thrills; they want to burst out laughing. The stronger the fare, the better. It is all about experiencing torture chambers and sea animals, and perhaps participating in revolutions.

There are freak shows, curiosity cabinets, and cinematographs. All of these attractions are designed to astonish and shock spectators through and through. The value of a show is directly proportional to the intensity of the goose bumps it produces. At the entrance to the curiosity cabinet, a visitor hesitates with doubt: should he first pay his respects to the mournful faces of a royal family or inspect the thumbscrews? He reels between reverence and dread. Over there he spots a “mouth-pear”: “This was placed into the mouth of delinquents and screwed open; it expanded in four directions and stretched the jaws so

severely that the unfortunate victims were incapable of bringing forth more than a whimper and often felt their oral cavities burst asunder.” The stranger gazes in wonder at a tottering Count Bismarck that looks like a giant potato. He observes the cut-open belly of a female sturgeon, producer of the beloved delicacy caviar; he sees a mentally deranged mother—Exhibit No. 486—simmering her own child in a kettle. Dead from exhaustion, he then drags himself toward a penitence cage from the region of Eisleben. And at the exit, the sight of the torture boots of Württemberg still lies in wait to deal our horrified stranger one final blow. For, you see, this highly educated man has very sensitive feet.

The situation is too much for him; he concludes uneasily that institutions such as this provide a variable image of a progressing culture; he drinks a glass of beer at a decent price.

Now he pushes his way toward the Kientopps. They lie in the north, south, east, and west of the city, in smoky parlors, useless shops, large halls, and vast theaters. The finest of them provide the opportunity to enjoy this photographic technology—the fabulous fidelity to nature, the optical illusions, and, in addition, amusing little dramas or novels by Manzoni.¹ How proper! Oh, this technology has the potential for development; it is almost ready to become art. In the more ordinary theaters, *Der Brand Roms* [The burning of Rome]² is already glowing; human prey flees its pursuers across rooftops, through streets, and between trees.

But the dives in the north are of a special genre; they exist well above the level of the merely artistic. Glaring lamps burn enticingly above the streets; in their light, colorful posters hang three feet high in front of the doors; a gigantic organ storms: “A murder has been committed.” Lining the entry hall are stuffed monstrosities behind glass and amusement machines. Inside the pitch-black, low-ceilinged room, a rectangular screen as tall as a man shines over a monster of an audience, a mass spellbound by the fixed stare of its white eye. Couples huddle in the corners and withdraw, entranced, their indecent fingers from one another. Consumptive children breathe flatly and shiver lightly with their evening fevers; the eyes of foul-smelling workers nearly pop out of their sockets; women in musty dresses, the painted streetwalkers, lean forward and forget to readjust their scarves. The call for “panem et circenses” finds fulfillment here. Entertainment becomes as essential as bread; the bullfight, a popular need. The arousing thrill is as simple as the reflex-like desire. One sees crimes with a dozen corpses, or terrible gangster chases rushing one right after the other. These then give way to extremely sentimental motifs: the blind man, the dying beggar, the dog that perishes on his grave, films entitled *Achtet die Armen* [Respect the poor] or *Krabbenfängerin* [The shrimper],³ and scenes of battleships. Upon seeing the kaiser and the army, the audience shows no patriotism, but rather a venomous stupefaction.

Clearly the Kientopp offers the remedy of choice for alcoholism and the strongest competition to the brandy shop. Perhaps the coming years will see a decline in cases of cirrhosis of the liver and in the birthrate of epileptic children. Neither smut literature nor the Kientopp should be withheld from the people and the youth; they need this very bloody fare—and without the tasteless gruel of folk literature or the watery infusions of morality.

But the more educated man leaves the place, glad above all else that the cinema is—silent.

Notes

1. Alessandro Manzoni (1785–1873) was an Italian novelist and poet.

2. A likely reference to either Edwin Porter’s *Nero and the Burning of Rome* (1908) or Luigi Maggi’s *Nerone* (*Nero*; *Or the Fall of Rome*, 1909), both of which were shown in Germany in 1909.