

Channing Pollock

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Symbolism run riot

Channing Pollock über seine Bearbeitung von *Metropolis*

Da *Metropolis* nach der Absetzung der Premierenfassung weltweit nur in der Bearbeitung von Channing Pollock gezeigt wurde, ist es vielleicht nicht ganz unwichtig, seine diesbezüglichen Äußerungen nicht nur zur Kenntnis zu nehmen, sondern sich auch ernsthaft mit seiner Deutung auseinanderzusetzen. Schließlich wurde nicht immer ein bekannter Bühnenautor engagiert, um die Auslandsversion eines Films zu bearbeiten.

Als Ausgangspunkt einer Beschäftigung mit der Pollock-Version von *Metropolis* dokumentieren wir die beiden bisher bekannten Texte von Channing Pollock über seine Bearbeitung; andere Dokumente sind möglicherweise noch zu entdecken.

Der erste Text erschien im Presseheft der Paramount zur amerikanischen Aufführung von *Metropolis* am 5. März 1927 („Channing Pollock Gives His Impressions of *Metropolis* / Pollock, Author of „The Fool“ Edited Film for American Moviegoers“). Wir dokumentieren ihn nach einer Abschrift im Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Handakte des Staatlichen Filmarchivs zur Rekonstruktion von *Metropolis*.

Der zweite Text ist ein Auszug aus Channing Pollocks 1943 veröffentlichten Autobiografie „Harvest of My Years“ (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, S. 232f.) Der vollständige Text kann unter <http://www.uow.edu.au/~morgan/Metroo.html> aufgerufen werden.

Dank an Martin Koerber und Enno Patalas für die Hinweise auf diese Texte. (jpG)

1.

Channing Pollock, author of such plays as „The Fool“ and „The Enemy“ believes that he has seen the first motion picture that will hypnotize the high-brows and enthuse the masses.

He doesn't express it that way, but that is the gist of his analysis of *Metropolis*, a spectacular film produced by UFA which is being released in this country by Paramount.

After editing the production (...) he said: „It is symbolism run riot. It is overwhelming. It has the greatest theme of modern times – – a picturization of the present mad tide of our material progress as opposed to intellectual and cultural and spiritual progress. It is the most important subject today.

But it has entertainment value. It is stimulating and awe-inspiring. It has the greatest quality of all true art; it can reach the masses by stirring their emotions.“

When *Metropolis* reached this country it was much too long. Because of his experience with stage productions and his known ability to make symbolism understandable and interesting to the average audience Mr. Pollock was called on to work with Julian Johnson in cutting and titling it.

„I was overwhelmed at first,“ Mr. Pollock recently said. „The sets were so tremendous, the handling of the material was on such a vast scale that I

could not grasp it. Then it dawned upon me that the rhythm of the machines, and the movements of the masses were the heart beats of men; that the pistons were pounding life out of hearts and that the machines were grinding out their souls.

I remembered that Edison once said: 'Scientific achievement has gone about as far as it can for the present; it is time for the spirit and human culture to catch up.'

I understand that Fritz Lang, the creator of this picture, conceived his idea when he first saw down-town New York. He went back to Europe intending to put on the screen a picture of where this vast piling of buildings, this burrowing underground, this ceaseless hurry is leading our civilization. He accomplished something that would have been impossible with any other medium of art. He photographed the results of his imagination with no technical limitations.

My problem was to interpret it, to make it understandable to large numbers of people. It is my contention that art without purpose ceases to have value. This has definitive purpose. It shows the colossal results of materialism carried to the n'th degree.

As it stood when I began my job of structural editing *Metropolis* had no restraint or logic. It was symbolism run such riot that people who saw it couldn't tell what the picture was all about. I have given it my meaning.

I don't pretend to have given it an original thought. All I have tried to do is to make it interesting to the ordinary intelligence. Unless it reaches millions of people it is useless either as art or entertainment.

Actors never make up for the people in the back row. If they do, they look daubed to those down front. If they make up for those down front, they look wan and pale to those in the rear. They make up for those in the center. That is what I have tried to do with *Metropolis*.

Some may call it SYSTEM -- a cog wheel drama, but it is so effective that every plunge of a piston reaches your heart and every cog grinds into your brain. The best of the machinery is like the theme of a symphony.

Metropolis contains a quality that is lacking in most pictures -- imagination. It leads and points to where we are going. There can be no effective intellectual appeal. The only possible way to tell a story is to make an effect on the emotions. *Metropolis* does this in a tremendous way.

2.

There was an incredible footage of film; more than twice what could be shown in an ordinary space of time. I began sitting in a projection room beside a push button and a stenographer, and viewing all the film half a dozen

times. Touching the button halted the performance for thought. That night I wrote a quite different story that, I believed, could be told with the available „shots.“ It wasn't a very original story, being based on the theme of Frankenstein, but it had drama and an idea. A greedy employer hoped to get rich by hiring the inventor to create hundreds of steel workmen. These proved to be perfect, except that they could not be endowed with souls, and the result was catastrophe. As stated, this required putting together a jigsaw puzzle, taking from here a few feet of picture to be used there, and changing my story whenever some bit of it failed to lend itself to this surgery. One scene between a father and son was pieced together from five different scenes in the original, and then we discovered that papa began the short talk in a dinner jacket and ended it in business clothes. Sometimes a jointure of two scenes would result in a table or chair leaping across the room, and such miracles often required omitting the offending „shots,“ and substituting titles. Altogether – if I do say it – this was a remarkable piece of work and one of which I shall always be proud. The original photography, showing a city of the mechanistic future, was amazingly ingenious and artistic, which, of course, was the only real hope of success. When my job was done, none of my employers felt sanguine.

Walter Wanger said, „You did your best, but the damned picture is nothing but machinery.“ Vainly, I argued that it was an interesting idea to make the machine the villain of a play, but Walter was unconvinced. The film was released under the title of *Metropolis*, and afforded one of the thrilling moments of my life when, accidentally, Walter and I found ourselves landing together at Southampton, and decided to spend an evening at a theater in London. At a ticket office of the Savoy Hotel we learned that our movie was on view at one of the principal cinema palaces. Walter asked for two seats, and the agent answered that *Metropolis* was the biggest hit in town and sold out for weeks in advance.