

DIE TOTEN (The Dead)

By

Christian Kracht

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Précis

Christian Kracht's newest book, *Die Toten* (*The Dead*), mines the late Weimar and early Nazi era for a tale of international conspiracy, cinematic intrigue, memory, mysticism, and murder.

First and foremost, the novel relates the story of Emil Nägeli, a disaffected Swiss film director, who travels to Japan to make a horror movie. It is also about his *Doppelgänger*, however, the Japanese minister of culture, Masahiko Amakasu, who schemes to exploit Nägeli in a Berlin–Tokyo “celluloid axis” in order to counter the invasive ubiquity of American sound films.

Real characters in cameo are retouched, their identities smudged and smeared in fanciful retellings: Charlie Chaplin is a pistol-packing murderer, Jewish film critics Siegfried Kracauer and Lotte Eisner conspire with the fictional Nägeli to “fleece the Reich,” film magnate Alfred Hugenberg plots with Japan. And yet the novel also probes the interplay between memories and visions of a terrible past and the looming horrors soon to befall the world. Playfully tinkering with Nazi history, novelistic realism, and madcap black humor, *The Dead* reinvents historical fiction in the gothic mode, embedding it within the eerie framework of Japanese Noh theater.

The novel opens onto a silent scene of ritualized death; a Japanese military officer performs seppuku on film. The gruesome voyeuristic reel is dispatched immediately to Berlin to whet the cinematic appetite of the Germans. Jump cut: enter Nägeli. Recovering from grief at the death of his beloved but abusive father, the Swiss director, something of a nervous wreck, follows an urgent summons to the feverishly decadent German capital to meet with cinema

tycoon Alfred Hugenberg. He is to make a film with the Nazis. Exorbitant sums are put at his disposal. Heinz Rühmann and Nægeli's fiancée Ida are to star.

Haunted by memories of his father and his childhood, and pursued by uncanny physical manifestations of them, the reserved Nægeli cuts a skittish, self-conscious figure amid this fascist machismo, a withdrawn misfit among chipper conformists. A chance encounter with Kracauer and Eisner, however, yields a solution and steels his resolve: to bilk the Reich for every pfennig (nearly a million dollars) and turn their movie against them, to make "an allegory, as it were, of the coming dread." Kracauer and Eisner flee to Paris; Nægeli is soon on his way to Tokyo.

Cross-cut with Nægeli's exposition are scenes of Masahiko Amakasu, a Japanese bureaucrat whose childhood of rejection and bullying, social exclusion, and haunting hallucinations link him with Nægeli. Concerned with the encroachment of American cultural imperialism, Amakasu plans to conquer Hollywood through cinematic means: with German expertise in the new art of sound film and Japanese formal mastery. To this end he enlists the help of Hugenberg and asks for a director to be sent to Tokyo. Amakasu can scarcely foresee the challenges to his scheme: a Japanese tour by the immensely popular Charlie Chaplin, an abortive attempt on Chaplin's life, the successful assassination of prime minister Inukai by mutinous military men, his own impassioned love affair with Ida, and Nægeli's arrival, finally, in Tokyo. Delighted by the fresh filmic visions of Japan, Nægeli resolves to shoot a film "both supremely artificial and self-reflexive," something offbeat and out of place: a horror film without the usual clichés, a "metaphysics of the present." As he races around recording Amakasu and Ida, Nægeli soon learns to see their betrayal, with the help of his camera, and beats a hasty retreat into the Japanese countryside, abandoning the two lovers.

In the novel's third act the events come thick and fast. Chaplin, Amakasu, and Ida embark for Los Angeles, but only two of them arrive. Nægeli finally films his masterwork, essentially inventing the *Nouvelle Vague* avant la lettre; with this collage of the trappings of a dead or dying culture, he finds himself critically panned and misunderstood by his countrymen, a gratuitous avant-gardist. But it is ultimately Ida with whom the novel ends, poor Ida. Her poignant descent from the heights of desire to indignity and debasement sends her into a spiral of desperation. Succumbing to the icy capriciousness of Hollywood, Ida plunges into depression—and then into the canyon beneath the Hollywoodland sign. Like the officer in the opening scene, she is merely grotesque fodder for the lewd gaze of a camera, for the next tabloid scheme.

In *The Dead* Kracht's evocative, florid prose conjures a narrative of singular vision, as if shot through the lens of a camera. Indeed, one of the central tensions consists in the novel's pitting of the formal tricks of film against the rhetorical devices of literature against the ritualized structures of theater. None wins out in the end.

The book is a clever hybrid of narrative media and their emphases on perspective, imagery, and pacing. References to that first golden age of cinema abound, as do more veiled allusions to Romantic poetry, to the Faust legend, to Nabokov, Robbe-Grillet, Mishima, and others. And while the novel spins an imaginative yarn of conspiracy on a grand scale with a broad sweep of characters and cameos, it uses the intimate drama of Japanese Noh theater to tell an inventive ghost story of its own through Nægeli and Amakasu. In this regard, *The Dead* is thus ultimately about the spook of personal memory, the looming terrors of a fraught apocalyptic history we now know, the dangers of cultural jingoism, and the furtive, unsettling omnipresence of death in the living.

Sample Translation

1.

There had not been a wetter May in Tokyo for decades; days ago the smudgy grayness streaking the overcast sky had dimmed to a deep, deep indigo; hardly anyone could ever recall such cataclysmic quantities of water; hats, coats, kimonos, uniforms had become shapeless and ill-fitting; book leaves, documents, scrolls, maps had begun to warp; the rainstorms had pressed a wayward, imprudent butterfly down to the asphalt—in the water-filled depressions of which the brightly colored neon signs and paper lamps of restaurants were tenaciously reflected come evening: artificial light, cleaved and divided up by the arrhythmic pattering of endless showers.

A handsome young officer had committed some transgression or other, for which he now intended to punish himself, in the living room of an altogether nondescript house, over in the western part of the city. A camera lens was inserted into a corresponding aperture in the wall of the adjoining room, the hole's edges insulated with strips of fabric so that the whirring of the apparatus would not disturb the delicate scene; kneeling down, the officer opened his white jacket left and right, and with almost imperceptibly trembling, yet precisely searching fingertips he located the correct spot, bowed, and reached for the wispily sharp *tantō* lying before him on a sandalwood block. He paused, listening, hoping to hear once more the sound of the falling rain, but there was merely a quiet and mechanical clicking behind the wall.

Immediately after the keenly polished point of the dagger had pierced the bellywrap and the fine, white skin of the abdomen underneath it, whose gentle concavity was encircled by only a few black hairs, the blade slid through the soft tissue into the man's innards—and a fountain of gore sprayed sideways toward the infinitely delicate calligraphy of the *kakejiku*. It looked just as

if the cherry-red blood had been intentionally spattered across the scroll, which hung there in the alcove in exquisite simplicity, by a brush that an artist had shaken out with a single, whip-like motion of his wrist.

Grunting with pain, the dying man slumped over, nearly losing consciousness, and then with tremendous effort righted himself again. Erect, he drew the knife now lodged in him across his body laterally, left to right, and then he looked up, past the hole through which the camera was filming him; finally he spat blood thickened by a glistening gelatinous mass, and his eyes went permanently blank. Arrangements had been made to leave the camera running.

When the film was developed, a copy of it, sealed in oily cellophane, was borne carefully through the rain. The last streetcars ran around eleven o'clock in the evening; one had taken pains to deliver the print properly and on time.

2.

The film director Emil Nägeli, from Berne, sat uncomfortably upright inside the rattletrap metal fuselage of an aeroplane, biting and tearing at his fingertips. It was spring. How his brow became moist, how he rolled his eyes in nervous tension, how he sucked and gnawed! His skin grew sore and red from the constant pressure of his teeth. He believed he could sense the advance of an imminent catastrophe; time and again he envisioned the plane suddenly bursting apart in the sky with a blaze of light.

It was awful; he couldn't help himself. Polishing his round spectacle lenses, he stood up to visit the lavatory—but when he raised the toilet lid and, to his horror, was able to see down and out through the hole into nothingness, he thought better of it, returned to his seat in the cabin, drummed the cover page of a tedious magazine with his ruined fingertips, and eventually requested a drink that never arrived.

Nägeli was traveling from Zurich to the new Berlin, the spleen of that insecure, uptight, unstable nation of Germans. Beneath him the dappled forests of the Thurgau flew by—for a time the glinting of Lake Constance was visible—and then he discovered down below the lonely, desolate villages of a Frankish lowland beset with shadows. The flight took him ever northward, beyond Dresden, until shapeless clouds once more obscured his view.

Soon they made their tinny and jumpy descent—for some reason he was informed that the plane needed repairs at Berlin's Central Airport; apparently something on the propeller housing was defective. He wiped his damp forehead with the end of his tie. And then, finally, with apologies, he was served a cup of coffee; hardly sipping it, he looked out the window into the fathomless white.

His father had died a year ago. Unexpectedly, as if his father's death might have been an initial sign of his own mortality, middle age had appeared, unnoticed, overnight, with all its prudishly concealed, secretly suffered mawkishness, its perennial purple self-pity. All that would follow now was old age, the era of feebleness, thereafter nothing more but a vacuum that to Nägeli seemed wholly grotesque, which is why he gnawed at his fingers, the skin of which had now peeled away in milky, translucent little shreds.

At home in Switzerland he had often dreamt that he stepped out into the snow-covered garden in winter completely naked and leaned over to perform some breathing exercises. Dreaming, he squatted down and observed the ravens circling overhead in search of sustenance in the snow, gliding gracefully beneath leaden skies, without any consciousness of themselves. He did not notice the numbing cold on his bare feet, nor the crystalline-whirling snowdrifts, nor the tearlet that fell forth into the frost.

Someone had shouted *cut!*, and an assistant had prepared the close-up of the tear by approaching him with a pipette. Nägeli persisted in his squat, freezing his pose. At the same time, he opened his eyes widely so he could more comfortably cry in the natural way should the artificially produced tear, as was often the case, ultimately seem too theatrical. At that instant in the dream Nägeli grew aware of standing both before and behind the camera, and he felt an inhuman, disturbing shudder at this disjointedness, and it was then that he usually awoke.

Emil Nägeli was a rather likeable man; in conversation he always leaned forward slightly; he displayed great civility that never seemed contrived; blond, soft, but somewhat stern eyebrows gave way to a pointy Swiss nose; he was sensitive and watchful, seemed to wear his nerves on the outside of his body, and consequently was quick to blush; he had adopted a healthy skepticism of firmly entrenched worldviews; above his weak chin were the soft lips of a sulking child; he wore

almost invisibly patterned English suits of dark brown wool whose somewhat abbreviated trouser legs ended in cuffs; he liked to smoke cigarettes, now and then a pipe, and was not a drinker; he gazed from watery blue eyes into a distressing and wondrous world; when prodded, he professed to like eating more than anything else hardboiled eggs with coarse bread and butter and slices of tomato, but in truth he intensely disliked the process of food consumption. It bored and, indeed, occasionally repulsed him, and thus, whenever by supper he had again ingested nothing but coffee, his friends suffered from his sour mood, brought on by his lowered sugar levels.

Nägeli was losing his light blond hair, which was falling out both at his brow as well as on his crown; he had begun combing a lengthy strand from his temple over his thus repudiated pate. To conceal the inconspicuous, persistent slackening of his chin he had grown a full beard that he had, disappointed at the result, hastily shaven off again; those wrinkly dark-bluish rings under his eyes, which used to appear in the mirror only in the brightness of morning, now no longer faded throughout the day; his sight, were he to remove his various glasses, grew more limited by the day, blurry haziness set in, and his full-moon-shaped belly, which stood in marked contrast to the rest of his slender frame, could no longer be made invisible by rigorously sucking it in. He began to sense an all-encompassing limpness, an attenuation of the body, a steadily accruing, dumbfounded melancholy in the face of mortality's impertinence.

3.

Nägeli's father had been a lithe, almost delicate man made somewhat smaller by life, his shirts had always been infinitely precious; the very spot at which his trim cuff had enveloped his wrist to reveal both the thin gold wristwatch there and the slender hand, tinged with hair only at its edge, filled little Emil with a vague, mute, yet almost sexual longing that his own hand might one day be able to rest with similar such elegance on the white tablecloth of a sophisticated Bernese restaurant, simultaneous expression of pantheresque power poised to strike and of genteel restraint.

It was the selfsame hand, his mother had later told him, that had often struck him in the face when he was a small boy who refused to eat his likely somewhat lumpy porridge: the very hand, therefore, that had also flung the punch-bell egg cracker from the breakfast table, together with the egg, against the wall, such that the dismal utensil clattered metallically against the red tiles and the egg burst, leaving a repellent orange yolk stain on the wall that was still visible or at least vaguely perceptible there for years after.

That hand, however, often protectively reached for his own, too, whenever his father and he crossed the street in Berne and the boy had forgotten to look out for the automobiles rushing toward them; it then pulled him back to safety onto the sidewalk, it reassured him, it warmed him, it shielded him with the care he so longed for: this hand that he had clutched, nearly half a century later, in the hospice room of that Lutheran clinic at Elfenstein, and he felt a great shame at the same moment for feigning this final intimacy.

Where oh where should that *imawashii* gaze flow? Up toward the ceiling where everything gathered anyway, or straight on, ahead, at the strip of wood above the death bed bathed in icy green fluorescent light, where commemorative photographs or wishes for recovery might have been

pinned, or, yes, of course, better to direct it down into the past, to wish soundlessly now, at last, without lament, that those stories would return, the stories he had been told, the ones about the black raven and the black dog. Emil had rolled up cavernously in his father's silver fox blanket, down at the foot of his parents' bed, groping with his small hand for his father's familiar thumb, for his father's hand.

Philip was what his father had called him while he was alive. For forty-five years he directed this cruelty at him, only poorly disguised as humor, as if he did not know that his son's name was Emil, no, as if he did not want to know; Philip, this unyielding, calm, oppressive call for him, the emphasis on the first *i*; then, whenever the child, the adolescent, had averted the danger of this or that punishment, of this or that unpleasant task, then came the tender, curative call of *Fi-di-bus*, the demeaning familiar form of a name that was not even his.

When his father died, when Nägeli saw him alive for the last time, in Elfenstein, he lifted him gently from bed, sliding his arms under his back, not knowing whether he was even permitted to do so—but his father was on his deathbed, what power could forbid him this? The Herr Doktor was now as light as a feather, with hideous wrinkles on his back and hindquarters. He was covered in dark blue spots with yellowish edges from lying so long.

His so familiar face was in fact closer and sweeter to Emil than all else (the white-spotted beard his father had grown out on the beach in the summery freshness of Jutland, among the prickly Baltic pines, and then, to the child's disappointment, had shaven off again, as his son one day would; those two enigmatic blue dots, one on the left side, one on the right, like tattoos, between the ear and the cheek; that scar, bumblingly sutured, in the little groove between the lower lip and chin); indeed, this face now resembled the leathery, parchment hide of a hundred-year-old tortoise.

The skin had been pulled back from around the ears by approaching death, and he spoke *sotto voce* from ruinous, putrid, obsidian-colored dentures.

And as the wind whistled outside the window with steady uncanniness, he asked Emil whether someone had noted down Arabic characters on the quite obviously blank hospital wall behind him, yes, there, look, Philip, my son, and he hadn't also forgotten about his military service, had he, and when was he finally going to be discharged from this ignoble clinic where his son had had him detained for reasons he could not fathom, and, most importantly, was he, Philip, ready to do a dying old man a tiny favor, the last one, so to speak, he really couldn't deny him that now, could he?

Trembling, he waved for Philip to come closer, quite close, so that his father's lips were right against his ear. He chuckled that he had refused to clean his teeth for some time now, and in the last year of his life had consumed nothing but chocolate and warm milk, which was why his oral cavity was putrefying and festering, and now he wanted to whisper something infinitely significant and final to him.

Tightly clasping Emil's wrist, he said yes, come even closer (Nägeli could now smell the old man's musty, mandragoric breath, imagining preposterously that his black teeth were snapping at him while he drew his son closer, quite close, with his very last effort), and now a single, almost powerful *H* resounded; he was still able to aspirate the sound of the letter *aitch*, loudly, before a beetle-like rattling issued from his father's cavernous throat, and he passed away, and Nägeli gently closed his opaque and now streaming eyes.

4.

His elbow propped on a pillow, Masahiko Amakasu lay at home in the large room next to the kitchen, poured himself a few fingers of whisky, placed a phonograph record of a Bach sonata on the machine, and watched the film on his home projector not quite halfway through. He got no further than the sequence in which the young man, out of whose belly the haft of the knife jutted indecently, spouted carnage. Amakasu could not bear the sight of blood, which to him was repulsive; he found himself paralyzed by that cinematographically recorded, dehumanized imago of the real.

The whole thing reminded him of a series of sepia-toned photographs he had once briefly held in his hands. In them was depicted a minor offender from imperial China being tormented with *lingchi* and sent to his death—the condemned, who during the torture directed his gaze ecstatically heavenward like Saint Sebastian, was barbarically abused with knives; his skin had been flayed, his extremities, finger by finger, sliced off individually. Appalled, Amakasu had dropped the pictures as quickly as if they had been coated in contact poison. There were certain things one must neither depict nor duplicate, events in which we became complicit by beholding their reproduction; it had been enough; they showed everything.

Recently, owing to severely blurred vision, he had sought treatment from a physician friend of his who, after a thorough examination and admonishment, had diagnosed a fairly serious infection and, while still in the outer office, plucked out several of his eyelashes with tweezers, causing almost unendurable pain. The problematic lashes had apparently grown inward, toward the eyeball. While he could now see in focus again, his recollection of that procedure, which could

not have even lasted a minute, nevertheless unleashed in him a malaise as profound as the filmic record of that suicide.

In recent weeks Amakasu had taken it upon himself to watch dozens of European feature films: Murnau, Riefenstahl, Renoir, Dreyer. Among these had been *Die Windmühle* by Swiss director Emil Nägeli, a simple story set in an austere Swiss mountain village that recalled in its long-winded narrative style Ozu and Mizoguchi. This for him represented the attempt to define the transcendental, the spiritual—employing the tools of cinematic art, Nägeli had quite clearly succeeded in illustrating, within this uneventfulness, the sacred, the ineffable.

Occasionally Nägeli's camera lingered long and gratuitously on a coal oven, a log, the braided circlets of hair on the back of a farm girl's head, on her white nape dusted with blond down, only then to glide out an open window toward the fir trees and snow-covered mountain heights as if it were disembodied, as if perhaps this director's camera were a floating ghost.

Amakasu had often dozed off while watching this Swiss film, not knowing whether it had been for a few seconds or for minutes at a time; his head had drooped to the side, and after the brief sensation of flying or perhaps of walking under water, he awoke again with a frightened jolt; the film's floating, almost nonrepresentational mosaics, flickering in all hues of gray, had blended with the images from his dreams and glazed his consciousness with the violet sheen of an indeterminate fear.

Now, however, he had that repugnant suicide film before him, this documentation of a real, actual death. Shutting off the projector with a curt flick of the hand, Amakasu lit a cigarette, remained sitting in the humid wind of the table fan, and considered not sending the film reel to Germany, but rather locking it away in some basement archive of the Ministry, leaving it there to

be forgotten forever. Gradually he was becoming that type of person who has lost all faith, except perhaps faith in the counterfeit.

He abhorred the indomitable secrets of his country, that reticence that implies everything and says nothing, yet even so, to him, as to every Japanese, foreigners were deeply suspect on account of their soullessness—if, however, one could exploit them and their obtrusive irrelevance to carry out one's unwavering duty to emperor and nation, well, then so be it.

A moth had lost its way in the kitchen and flitted now in circles around the refrigerator, its wings rattling noisily. He dried off his plate and glass, returning the dishes carefully to the shelf, and listened to the rain rapping steadily onto the roof of the house.

On second thought, the whole affair with the Germans was right after all. He would send the film to Berlin first thing tomorrow. In the end, it did ultimately boil down to the fact that real sensations tend to take shape more around a photograph or a film than, say, a verbal utterance or even a slogan. The sufferings of the officer in the film were simultaneously beatific and unbearable, a transfiguration of horror into something higher, something divine—the Germans would in fact understand that well in their immaculate obsession with death.

Amakasu walked through the corridor to the bathroom, blew his nose, and twisted a plug for himself from tissue paper to clean out his ears in a Dostoyevskian flight of abandon. He sniffed at it, smelling nothing from those yellow-stained spots, wadded up the paper, and tossed it into the bowl of the modern Western toilet, flushing it and watching as the maelstrom of water, indecently swirling and gurgling, sucked it all down to the final bars of the Bach sonata.

5.

The next morning he rode the streetcar through the rain to the Ministry. Once there, he hung hat and coat behind his office door, ordered tea and some rice, and spent the whole day preparing a letter, in German, to *Universum Film AG*, which for security reasons that even to him seemed a bit exaggerated he did not dictate to his chic (but unfortunately somewhat short-legged) German secretary from the typing pool of the Foreign Ministry, but instead composed himself, on the typewriter, pale, neatly manicured forefingers raised in two curved arcs over its keyboard.

It was, as Amakasu realized with some satisfaction, a masterwork of manipulation. Self-abasement alternated with flattery, reluctant demands with completely untenable promises.

He proposed that they please send specialists from Germany, with all haste, who were ready to work in Japan with the excellent lenses of Carl Zeiss and the wholly superior film processing of Agfa, to shoot here, produce, and thereby—if one might phrase it like this—counteract the seeming omnipotence of American cultural imperialism, the manifestations of which had spread like a virus throughout the Showa empire, especially in the realm of cinema, and thus of course had made its way onto the street and among the people. This was why, for example, a quota had recently been implemented to protect and foster the hectored Japanese film industry.

The catalyst for his decision to approach the great nation of cinema, Germany, he wrote, had been a secret meeting with representatives from the *Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association* and one American consul general, in which they had advised Amakasu to reopen the domestic film market (which naturally affected the Japanese colonies of Korea and Taiwan as well as the new territory of Manchukuo) to American motion pictures, which were being shut out by introducing said quota. Otherwise they would find themselves forced henceforth, alas,

to cast not only all villains, but also generally all negatively connoted roles in each and every US production solely with actors of the Japanese race.

Although this, Amakasu wrote, had been a splendidly elegant chess move that Japan would quite certainly have employed, too, had it found itself in the American position, the domestic film productions aimed at the Asian market were unfortunately not as influential by far as those of Hollywood. They lacked the timelessness of narrative, of exportability, and of universally comprehensible *craftsmanship*; Japanese films were, if one might put it so simply, just not good enough to keep pace with the Americans.

And thus arose the compelling notion of allying oneself with Germany, the only country whose cultural foundations could be respected as one's own, ergo the wish, hereby stated officially (he bridled at actually putting such nonsense down on paper), to establish a *celluloid axis* between Tokyo and Berlin.

And then came the heart of the matter, the truly important part amid all the window dressing: They should send him, if he might so request, a German director, or even several of them, but he is thinking primarily of Arnold Fanck, whose *Stürme über dem Mont Blanc* he had watched with profound admiration. With Fanck behind the camera, one enters a forbidden, mysterious, Hölderlinian zone; something is conveyed there, behind the things, that touches on the soul; this echo chamber is German through and through, but universal as well, which even he as a Japanese man can understand quite clearly.

He would take the liberty and write it quite bluntly: if Fanck were not available, might he then hope for Fritz Lang? Friedrich Murnau and Karl Freund are of course already hopelessly and irretrievably in Hollywood, Murnau having even recently died there in an automobile accident, alas. Oh, the movie *Mädchen in Uniform* has also made such an extraordinary impression on him

and reminded him, if he be permitted the personal remark, of his own time in boarding school. Frankly in this country, to make a film that is so radical and yet so personal is entirely impossible.

The Germans might also send him Austrian or Dutch directors, if they liked; hotel expenses, travel costs, per diems, lump-sum honoraria, everything would be paid for by the Ministry. That this cultural exchange was supported by the highest Japanese echelons was entirely self-evident, and should certain German officials wish to come along and thus bear witness to the Japanese empire in all its splendour, then they'd be most wholeheartedly welcome.

And he is including with this letter a small, unassuming film to foster a deeper understanding of Japan. This, in the open and honest hope of having piqued the interest of *Universum Film AG* and thereby the admirable, great German nation.

When he had finished the document and signed at the bottom of the very last page with the curt but still elegantly formed, ceremonial characters *A-ma-ka-su*, he replaced the ink ribbon, putting the used ribbon into his briefcase to burn later, along with the letter and the film reel, which he had sealed in a ministerial envelope with wax.

The small package, addressed to the director of the *UFA* himself, was dispatched by diplomatic post to Berlin that very same day, where it was received a week later by the Japanese embassy after largely uneventful flights via Shanghai, Calcutta, and Istanbul. It was ferried by courier through the well-proportioned avenues of the German capital, initially ending up at the film company stuck in an exceedingly directorial, mahogany-clad pigeonhole adorned with an understated brass sign. Herr Director Hugenberg was out of town on vacation, skiing the glaciers in Switzerland.