Tod Browning’s *Freaks* and the Fraternity of the Fragmented

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Tod Browning’s 1932 movie *Freaks* has been a cat-o’-nine-lives. From its original conception as a horror movie exceeding all expectations, something more disturbing than anything seen so far, via Dwain Esper’s exploitation of it under dubious and misleading titles such as *Forbidden Love, Monster Show* and *Nature’s Mistakes,* to its revival as an avant-garde movie in the tradition of Buñuel and Robbe-Grillet, *Freaks* has covered the range of horror, art-house and documentary. While *Freaks* on the whole has remained a somehow underappreciated and undertheorized movie, those essays that deal with it read it in the context of disability and gender studies. Though there definitely are points of convergence, I will try a somewhat different approach here, relating *Freaks* to psychoanalytical theory, especially a ‘blend’ of Freudian and Lacanian concepts, since the movie’s associations with grotesque spectacle situate it in the Freudian realm of the fantastic and that of Lacan’s mirror stage.

Film and psychoanalysis – from their respective beginnings – have sported a relationship which can be defined as both elective affinity and dangerous liaison. The movies as a popular medium as well as psychoanalysis as a ‘popular science’ (at least in its ‘vulgar’ form) both saw a rise to prominence in the first half of the last century. After all, both of them deal with people’s dreams and fantasies. Thus, aspects of the dreamwork such as displacement and condensation, free associations, oedipal situations and traumatic constellations became important elements for both narrative structures and imagery of the cinema. On the other hand, films made (and more often than not distorted) psychoanalytic terminology into everyday household concepts. Freud himself was very skeptical about the ability of cinema to deal effectively with the subject. He was so famous in ‘Dream Factory circles’ that Samuel Goldwyn in 1924 planned sailing to Vienna on a mission to produce the greatest love story from the world’s most famous doctor of love, an attempt to get Sigmund Freud to write a
screenplay for a love story about Anthony and Cleopatra. Although the offer was more than generous — $100,000 — Freud kindly declined. In one of his essays, Montaigne had stated that dreams are "faithful interpreters of our inclinations; but there is an art sorting and understanding them." *Freaks,* I argue, is such a sorter of the dreamwork, attempting to provide an understanding of our inclinations or self-images, an understanding that may not always be easy or pleasing. As Louella Parsons, Hollywood gossip columnist, stated after seeing *Freaks* — "I came into the Criterion Theater from the gayety of Mrs. Gardner Sullivan's luncheon party and I felt as if I had suddenly fallen asleep and were having a weird nightmare . . ."\(^5\)

With a significant number of his movies set in the world of the circus and the sideshow, Browning very well knew the milieu he was talking about. Born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1880, as Charles Albert Browning, he soon ran away from home and entered the world of the circus, christening himself in Gatsby-like fashion as "Tod" Browning. True to the implications of his new identity ("Tod" is also the German word for "death"), Browning performed as "The Living Hypnotic Corpse," being buried alive in a box with a secret ventilating system. People paid for watching 'un-dead' Tod in his coffin through a tube. Entering movie business in 1913 as an actor in *Scenting a Terrible Crime* (he played an undertaker there), he soon worked as an assistant director for D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (where he even had a small role) before he started as a director in his own right.

By 1919, after profitable movies such as *Jim Bludso,* Browning was an established and successful director and script writer. This was also the year he started collaborating with Lon Chaney, the "Man With the Thousand Faces." With Chaney, Browning made a series of very successful movies focussing on the themes of obsessive revenge and sexually charged mutilations of the body. Chaney, with his genius for startling make-up (usually of his own invention) and performances that made use of his physique as a tool to be contorted and deformed into almost every (in)conceivable pose, "gave body to the macabre figments of Browning's carnival background."\(^6\) Together with his capability of completely changing his outward appearance, Chaney was able to equip his characters with an extreme emotional intensity when it came to the depiction of suffering — mainly due to his almost masochistic will to perfection. Joan Crawford, co-star in *The Unknown,* recalled Chaney sitting in a tight leather harness during hour-long breaks in the
production. Browning would ask him "'Lon, don't you want me to untie your arms?' And Lon would answer, 'No, the pain I am enduring now will help the scene. Let's go!'" That Browning's and Chaney's interest in bodily mutilations as a leitmotif served as an important working principle (and also as an already established leitmotif eagerly expected by the audience) is revealed in an interview given by a tongue-in-cheek Browning: "When we're getting ready to discuss a new story [Chaney] would amble into my office and say 'Well, what's it going to be, boss?' I'll say, This time a leg comes off, or an arm, or a nose' – whatever it may be."8

In 1931, MGM production head Irving Thalberg commissioned script writer Willis Goldbeck to come up with a story to out-horror even Browning's own Dracula and upcoming projects such as Universal's Frankenstein and Paramount's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: Freaks, based on Clarence Robbins' story "Spurs."

Freaks starts with a carnival barker who is displaying a sideshow freak. Realism is introduced by the barker tearing apart the opening film title from within the diegetic space, thus attempting to fuse extradiegetic reality with the narrated universe, peopled by 'real freaks' – when casting the movie, Browning had the largest conglomeration of professional freaks applying for a role. The use of 'real freaks' somehow denied actors and audience the safe assurance that what was shown onscreen was 'just a fiction.' The 'life on screen' has always had the tendency to seem 'more real' than reality itself, but with the sole strategies taken away that would still leave open the possibility of differentiation – the make-up tricks and special effects – the already fragile distinction seemed to collapse completely. It was as if the audience were back in the times of Louis Lumière, trying to escape the train arriving at the station (or the freak, for that matter) and invading the 'safe' space of reality and the self – the audiences screaming and leaving the theatres at screenings of Freaks is a case in point.

The barker addresses the spectators, "Friends, she was once a beautiful woman..."9 After the audience catches sight of the freak, some women scream, and the barker tells her story. Cleopatra (Olga Baclanova), a beautiful trapeze artist with the carnival, is adored by a midget named Hans (Harry Earles). Frieda (Daisy Earles), his fiancée (also a midget), warns Hans that Cleopatra is only interested in him because he gives her money and expensive presents. Cleopatra has an affair with Hercules (Henry Victor), the circus' Strong Man, and when
Frieda confronts her to stop making a fool of Hans, she mistakenly reveals to Cleopatra that Hans has inherited a fortune. Cleopatra and Hercules plan to get the money by having Cleopatra married to Hans and then poisoning him. During the wedding reception, while Cleopatra is openly flirting with Hercules, the freaks all gather around the table and begin a ritual of accepting Cleopatra to their circle. When a dwarf passes around a large loving cup for a communal toast, he is rebuffed by Cleopatra. She seals her fate by recoiling in disgust, pouring the champagne over the dwarf’s head, mocking their acceptance ceremony, calling them “Dirty, slimy Freaks!” and ordering them to leave. Back in Cleopatra’s carnival wagon, she poisons Hans’ drink, but Venus (Leila Hyams), one of the sympathizing ‘big people,’ confronts her former lover, Hercules, and threatens him unless he tells the doctor who is treating Hans about the poison. With the medicine the doctor gives, Cleopatra attempts to poison Hans again as she gives him his dosage, but this time she is surrounded by all the freaks banding together and attacking her. Meanwhile, in the heavy rain, Hercules goes after Venus, who is pulling her carnival wagon out to escape from his fury when Phroso, the clown (Wallace Ford), comes to her rescue. He can’t handle Hercules by himself, so the freaks throw a knife at Hercules. Reportedly, in the original version of the film, he was castrated by the freaks – however, that scene was cut from the film. After that, we are back to the sideshow Barker again. This scene thus functions like a kind of frame. In the beginning, we left the audience after they have seen the “most amazing, the most astounding living monstrosity of all time.” The film audience is denied the gaze at the ‘living monstrosity’ up to this very moment. Now we see the result of the freaks’ revenge on Cleopatra. She has been turned into a legless, half-blind stump, a squawking chicken woman. A final scene, which was indeed tacked on later, as the studio insisted on a happy ending, shows Hans living like a millionaire in an elegant house, and Phroso and Venus bring along Daisy and the two lovers reconcile.

A constant throughout his work, sexually charged mutilations play a dominant role in Browning’s movies. This points to the fact that the body ‘as such’ is already libidinally charged. In the body, as a kind of ‘primary fact of existence,’ the human subject encounters itself as both subject and object. As Freud has shown, the agency and formation of the ego reveal a close complicity with the notion of the body. For Freud, the “ego is first and foremost a bodily ego . . . the projection of a
surface.” In fact, Freud argues that it is only through this investment that the body becomes accessible to us at all: “The ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations” (The Ego and the Id 364, n.2), a point where body and the social collide, and which gains the utmost importance by being the first ‘object’ to which the human being’s libidinal resources are attached. This peculiar status of the human being as speaking being also turns the body into metaphor as such. Since the speaking human subject qua signifier is always already inscribed in the symbolic, the body is always more than just a biological given or natural fact.

Jacques Lacan develops Freud’s notion of the ego being a ‘bodily projection,’ connects the question of identity to the relation of the human being to its body (image) and shows that the image of wholeness is an illusion attempting to cover a basic lack. In his essay on the “mirror stage,” Lacan reveals the ego to be not a pre-reflexive entity, a stable core of the self which gradually evolves. In fact, the ego itself is already based on reflection. Constructed within visual space, the ego is the result of various identificatory processes, of the constant oscillation between ‘self’ and ‘other:’ there is no chance of perceiving one’s own identity as separate from what is exterior to it. The ego is not so much the source of self-knowledge but the result of a fundamental “méconnaissance” (Écrits 6). There exists what Lacan calls the effect of a physiological “prematurity of birth” (Écrits 4) characteristic of the human newborn that shows itself in its “motor incapacity and nursling dependence” (Écrits 2). The child experiences ‘its’ own body in terms of incompleteness, insufficiency and motor uncoordination. What follows is the anticipatorial identification with the image of one’s own body in the mirror. The promised and illusory totality of the ego is always threatened by phantasmatic returns of images of incompleteness. Thus, the mirror stage is a “succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic — and, lastly, to the assumption of an alienating identity” (Écrits 4).

Lacan thus shows how identity is constructed, is an effect rather than a cause, and is forever situated at/as a precarious balance between the complete body and the fragmented body. Every identity is a “fictitious invention” and rests on a fundamental misconception. By “jubilatory” identifying with the imaginary mirage of the whole body, the ‘real’ of the fragmented body is repressed. However, this sense of unity is very frail, and the images of the fragmented body haunt and thus subvert any
illusion of wholeness—"This fragmented body . . . appears in the form of disjointed limbs — the very same that the visionary Hieronymus Bosch has fixed, for all time, in painting. . . ." (Écrits 5). Ultimately, for Lacan, these two body images are inseparable.

In Browning's movies, the body — in particular its dismemberment — plays a crucial role in his understanding of 'horror.' It is here that Freud's essay on 'The Uncanny' might present a fruitful theoretical foil against which to situate Freaks. Freud's essay, I argue, in contrast to its seeming dated-ness when it comes to the modern 'horror-genre,' still provides a rich concept for analysis, precisely because it adds a further dimension to the oft-quoted cathartic effect of horror — the 'return of the repressed.' David Skal and Elias Savada have speculated in their book Dark Carnival that Browning himself — or via one of his scenario writers, Herman J. Mankiewicz — might have been accustomed to Freudian concepts. Mankiewicz is portrayed as being equipped with "both the cynical literary sophistication of a mid-Twenties Manhattanite and an awareness of the literary/dramatic implications of Freudian theory" (Dark Carnival 103). Having lived in Berlin in the 1920s, Mankiewicz was likely to "familiar with the currents of psychoanalytic thought swirling about the German capital."12 Be it as it may, the Oedipus-complex as a narrative structure, as well as aspects of the Freudian "Uncanny," dominate Browning's work.

In his essay, Freud actually refers to bodily fragmentation as providing powerful images of the "uncanny": "dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist"13 — the dis-memberment is what is regarded as unheimlich. According to Freud, "[this] uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (Uncanny 363-4).14 The horror and repulsion associated with the sight of the freaks — the screaming audience within the film acts as a stand-in here — can thus be seen as a result of the repression of the primal fragmentariness of the body. What has to be stressed, then, is the relation of the uncanny to the 'normal:' "the unheimlich is what was once heimisch, home-like, familiar; the prefix 'un' [un-] is the token of repression" (Uncanny 368). If these findings are connected to Lacan's view of the body-image, there is much to be found, I argue, which makes a psychoanalytical reading of Freaks worthwhile. Read together with Freud's essay, what has to be stressed then is the fact that the fragmented body emerges as the
'real(ity)' of the whole body. Not its utterly other, but its 'dark self.' The narcissistic 'big people' Cleopatra and Hercules are tied to the midgets and Living Torsos as inseparable as Daisy and Violet Hilton, the Siamese Twins, are tied to each other.

In the characters of Hercules, the Strong Man, and Cleopatra, the beautiful trapeze artist, the extreme individualism of American society is revealed. From its beginning onwards, American mythology had been preoccupied with the strong, whole, autonomous body. The American movie industry followed this preoccupation with the beautiful body. As Richard Watts, Jr., in a positive review of an earlier Browning movie, *The Show*, pointed out, "Where every director, save Stroheim, breathes wholesomeness, out-of-door-freshness and the healthiness of the clean-limbed, Tod Browning revels in murkiness." Thus, in *Freaks* Browning also continues his subversion of 'clean-limbedness' both on the level of content and form, or visual aesthetics. In contrast to the stylish, glossy and optimistic 'gray' tones of the 'usual' MGM productions, Browning was more inspired by movies of German expressionism such as *Nosferatu* and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, with its harsh black and white contrasts. Browning was about to bring shadow its due reception in the movies. No wonder for a director whose "psyche was an attic, a crypt, a trunk, it was terrorized by sunlight, fields, deserts, woods and open spaces. . . . Tod Browning, the agoraphobic director *par excellence.*" On another level, the complex complicity between fragmentation and wholeness is repeated in the filmic medium itself. The 'unseen' filmic cut represses the fragmentation of its images in favor of the illusory wholeness – the 'unity' and coherence of the filmic image, its propelling forward, is in fact an effect of its inherent fragmentation. Also the 'dismemberment' of characters by use of certain shots – decapitation as a consequence of a close up, dismembered limbs in detail shots – as well as their subsequent re-membering in the mind of the audience, relating all fragments to the image of the depicted character, can be read in the same way, in a kind of identification with images of wholeness as portrayed in Lacan's mirror stage, which is indeed not just a developmental phase, but a foil underlying all subsequent identifications, and ultimately the visual realm as such. Finally, *Freaks* itself was mutilated, cut, censored because of its obvious opposition against wholeness, unity and 'clean-limbedness.'
In a scene early on in the movie, the freaks are shown playing around at a pastoral lakeside under the surveillance of Mme. Tetrallini, the benevolent matron of the circus. A passing game-keeper has seen them and, terrified, reports to the owner of the property, describing them as “a lot of horrible, twisted things, crawling, whining, globbering . . . there must be a law in France to smother such things at birth, or lock them up.” Arriving on the scene, the proprietor and the game-keeper — and we, the audience — for the first time see the freaks as a group: the “pinheads” Zip, Pip, Schlitzie and the Snow Twins; the half-boy Johnny Eck, who moves forward on his hands because the lower half of his body is missing; a Skeleton Man (Pete Robinson), Angelo Rossito, the dwarf, and the “Hindu Prince Randian,” the “Living Torso” — a trunk and a head, no arms, no legs. When the two men arrive, the freaks seem to be frightened and run for shelter to Mme. Tetrallini. She explains to the proprietor, “When I have a chance I like to take them into the sunshine and let them play like children. That is what most of them are — children.” After the owner of the property has allowed them to stay, Mme. Tetrallini says to the freaks, “How many times have I told you not to be frightened. Have I not told you God looks after all his children?”

Yet, it is exactly mistaking the freaks as children as equal to being naive — or minor — that will prove dangerous for those who do. Constantly treating Hans like a child — and not as a man, as he insists — Cleopatra’s misconception reaches its fatal climax when she and Hercules plan to poison Hans to get hold of his inheritance. Cleopatra’s fate is sealed when she mistakenly thinks “Midgets . . . are not strong . . . They could get sick.” Georges Bataille, in an essay on *Wuthering Heights*, has commented on the realm of childhood as posing a serious threat to the restrictions and laws of society. By equating benefit with profit, the Good with reason, Bataille can say that what is at stake is a “revolt of Evil against Good” (*Literature and Evil* 19). It is not a question of the immoral against the moral: evil is understood here as something a-moral rather than immoral (and moral can be taken here in the Nietzschean sense of a thinly disguised craving for profit — Cleopatra and Hector would definitely subscribe to that). With the freaks, however, things change. *Their* law, their moral code, is based on different premises — not on individualism, but on group-strength, on mutual support: “Their code is a law unto themselves. Offend one, and you offend them all.”
Thus, I argue, any conventionally ‘moralistic’ reading of *Freaks* misses the point—although such a reading definitely has been invited by the awkward preamble of the film:

Before proceeding with the showing of this HIGHLY UNUSUAL ATTRACTION, a few words should be said about the amazing subject matter. . . . The revulsion with which we view the abnormal, the malformed and the mutilated is the result of long conditioning by our forefathers. The majority of freaks themselves are endowed with normal thoughts and emotions. Their lot is truly a heartbreaking one. . . . Never again will such a story be filmed, as modern science and teratology is rapidly eliminating such blunders of nature from the world. With humility for the many unjustices done . . . we present the most startling horror story of the ABNORMAL and the UNWANTED.

However, this preamble was tacked on to the movie by exploitation mogul Dwain Esper for his re-release of *Freaks*. As a consequence of the fact that this preamble appears on copies to this day, Skal and Savada explain, “audiences and critics have assumed it is some kind of position statement of Browning himself, instead of a distributor’s cynical attempt to position the picture with a moralistic, ‘educational’ defense—just like the pictures about sex and drugs” (*Dark Carnival* 223).

Yet, those who claim that the freaks’ violence undermines every attempt of the movie to ‘normalize’ them—e.g., the freaks are never shown in their show acts, as spectacles, rather in ‘normal’ everyday actions like hanging up the washing, lighting cigarettes, engaging in conversation—read it in accordance with the obvious (and seemingly obviously stated) message that the ‘normals’ are the monsters, and the freaks are normal: “Browning has turned the popular convention of horror topsy-turvy. It is the ordinary, the apparently normal, the beautiful which horrify—the monstrous and distorted which compel our respect, our sympathy, ultimately our affection. The visible beauty conceals the unseen evil, the visible horror is the real goodness.”17 This view would parallel, say, the Dickensian question of ‘true gentlemanhood’ discussed in *Great Expectations*, or, for that matter, in David Lynch’s *The Elephant Man*, which actually quotes Browning’s movie. But *Freaks*, I argue, goes much further than that. Not only are they like us (our self-image), but we are like them (our image of the other) as well. It is in fact this undecidable oscillation that makes *Freaks*
a truly uncanny work of art. In Robin Wood's view, "horror films . . . are progressive precisely to the degree that they refuse to be satisfied with [the] simple designation of the monster as evil."¹⁸ *Freaks* is progressive precisely in that way. It has often been pointed out that Browning's use of *real* freaks instead of make-up and contortionist-like stunts of 'able-bodied' actors like Chaney made for its uneasy (to say the least) reception. Yet, the "Freak Show," the "dime museum," P.T. Barnum's "American Museum" showing deformed people, had been a continuous presence in the life of 19th-century America.¹⁹ The cinema can in fact be seen as having developed out of the fairground attractions, circuses and sideshows – many of the early cinema people were, like Browning, associated with the fairground. What was truly shocking was not the cast, but the (a-)moral implications of the movie's message.²⁰ Instead of giving a re-assuring categorization of *us* and *them* (as the "Freak Shows" had still done), *Freaks* showed that, somehow, the very distinction between us and them does not hold, since both are two sides of the same coin. Thus, Cleopatra as the chicken woman is the repressed truth of her as the narcissistic "Peacock of the Air," or, in other words, the Peacock is only the dream – or "orthopaedic" (Lacan) armor – of the chicken woman.

The theme of the two seemingly separate realms of freaks and 'big people' is in fact being constantly both re-assured and opened up in the movie. In the beginning of *Freaks*, the Barker announces, "You'll laugh at them, shudder at them, and yet, but for the accident of birth, you might be even as they are." Later, when the freaks suspect that Cleopatra is simply misusing Hans' feelings for her, Frances, the armless girl, states "Cleopatra ain't one of us. Why, we're just filthy things to her. She'd spit on Hans if he wasn't giving her presents." One of the climaxes of the movie (and a crucial scene where the two realms are on the verge of collapsing – either as an invitation or a threat, or, both simultaneously) is the wedding banquet scene. Cleopatra has finally married Hans. During the banquet, she openly kisses Hercules. Hans is sitting there, beginning to suspect that he has been taken for a fool. His fault, in the economy of the complex interplay of the fragmented and the whole body, is that he has momentarily given in to the illusion and seduction of wholeness, given in to the (false) promise of being accepted, loved, taken seriously. The freaks begin their ritual of acceptance, passing a large goblet of champagne and finally offering it to Cleopatra, while singing "Gooble, gobble, We accept her, we accept
Tod Browning's *Freaks* and the Fraternity of the Fragmented

"One of us, one of us." This scene is very ambiguous. Though always read as an openly stated peace offer, a ceremony of acceptance, it cannot be denied that there are violent undertones—underlined by the fact that the freaks are beating a rhythm to their chant with knives. After having offended the freaks, shouting "YOU! DIRTY! SLIMY! FREAKS!", Cleopatra almost desperately tries to keep up the separate realms: "You filth! Make me one of you, will you!"

The opening up of the two realms—and in fact their complicity—is most clearly voiced by the characters of what I call the 'middle realm', most notably Venus and Phroso. After the wedding banquet, Cleopatra and Hercules have already begun to carry out the plot against Hans. Venus confronts Hercules and demands that the plot against Hans is revealed, "or I'll tell the coppers." Hercules is furious, "So, you'd tell on your own people." Venus replies "And I are decent circus folks, not dirty rats that would kill a freak for money." In a scene between Venus and Phroso, the clown replies to Venus' compliment that he is "a pretty good kid" with the unexplained line "You should have caught me before my operation." Within the Browning universe, such a remark more likely than not refers to a missing limb—in connection with Phroso using it in a flirtatiously sexually charged manner, it might even refer to a missing penis. Phroso most clearly voices Lacan's contention that in order to gain our entry into society, we have to accept castration—"that pound of flesh which is mortgaged... in [the subject's] relationship to the signifier." The yearning for a phantasmatic wholeness is already based on a bodily totality, which in itself has never existed except as an illusion. Phroso, then, as well as Venus and Rosco, the stuttering man about to marry Daisy, one of the Siamese Twins—they constitute the realm where this complicity of fragmented body and whole body is accepted.

We, the audience, have followed the subject's vicissitudes between the fragmented body and the whole body as well. Our gaze starts with the identification with the intradiegetic audience, then comes to an abrupt stop—the camera starts to descend into the cage where Cleopatra, the chicken woman sits, but then stops short—and is shifted to the perspective of Hans, viewing the "Peacock of the Air" from below. We thus adopt the initial position of the child in Lacan's mirror stage, wishing for and identifying with the illusory wholeness.
before us. In the end, then, we are placed in the position of the 'big people' again, looking down at the chicken woman from above – a position, however, which by now is revealed as at least precarious.

Like Browning, Diane Arbus, who has been the true heir to Browning's work, saw "that 'monsters' were everywhere, that the whole of modern life could be viewed as a tawdry sideshow, driven by dreams and terrors of alienation, mutilation, actual death and its everyday variations. . . . America, it seemed, was nothing but a monster show." Arbus sometimes thought that gazing at the freaks, at these dismembered bodies, "she was reminded of a dark, unnatural hidden self" – precisely the repressed reality of the fragmented body. No need to join the Fraternity of the Fragmented, though. We're always already members. Tod Browning, I argue, would have agreed.

Notes
1 A slightly expanded version of this paper appeared under the title "Join the United Mutations: Tod Browning's "Freaks" in Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities 21.3 (Fall 2002): 8-19.
5 Qtd. in Jack Stephenson, "Freaks – A Movie Undead". <http://hjem.get2net.dk/jack_stevenson/freaks.htm>
9 All quotations from the movie are taken from the transcript of the screenplay of Freaks – see <http://dvolpin.teleradiostereo.it/freaks.html>.
14 For an evaluation of “the Uncanny” as a conceptual tool for the analysis and taxonomy of the “horror movie,” see Steven Schneider, “Monsters as Uncanny Metaphors: Freud, Lakoff, and the Representation of Monstrosity in Cinematic Horror,” The Horror Film Reader 167-91.
20 On a political level, “Freaks is asking a Depression audience to identify not with the Beautiful people . . . but with the sideshow mutations, a total underclass. As a reflection of the time, it’s almost revolutionary. But Depression audiences were not prepared for this kind of thing.” J. Hobermann and J. Rosenbaum, Midnight Movies (New York: Da Capo P, 1983) 307.