

## CC II / GE II [SEMESTER II] History: World Cinema

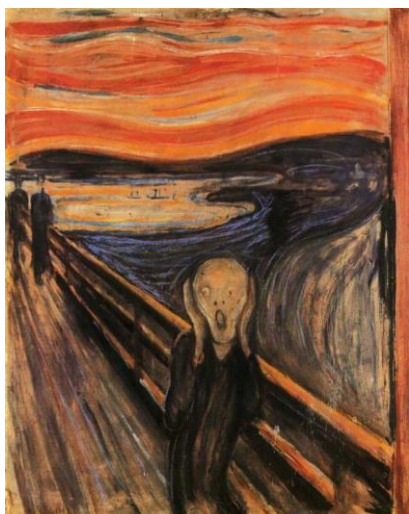
### Topic: Post WW I 1. German Expressionism

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#### What is German Expressionism in film?

German cinema is one of the oldest cinemas in the world as well as one of the deepest films in its history. The German cinema began to appear before the Lumiere brothers, as the brothers Skladanowsky filmed "Winter Park" and presented to the public at the Berlin Theater in early November 1895 - a month before the Lumiere Brothers Historic Show at the Grand Café. But on the other hand, the German cinema was not as advanced as that in France, England, and America. Although the Skladanowsky brothers showed some primitive but the German film industry somehow failed to grow in the next 15 years. After the outbreak of the First World War and the disappearance of imported films from German theatres, the Germans tried to increase how much and how local

production was. The first step was to establish a national joint-stock company, (UFA), after a government decision in 1917 to manufacture and market German films and to improve the image of Germany both at home and abroad. For this purpose, large new studios have been established near Berlin. German cinema is often said to have been created as an art form with the founding of UFA (**Universum Film-Aktien Gesellschaft**) which in later years became Europe's greatest studio before World War II. That was the general atmosphere in which Expressionism emerged and became the prevailing among the various art techniques and genres. Expressionism is a technical movement or artistic technique which appeared in painting, architecture, literature, theatre and cinema. Expressionism reached its peak between 1905 and 1920, especially in Germany and Austria. Vincent Van Gogh, Edward Munch, Gustav Klimt, James Ensor, Wassily Kandinsky, Oskar Kokoschka, Franz Marc, Erich Heckel, and Chaim Soutine are from the most important in Expressionism, and many others were inspired with it.



#### 1. The Scream (1893) Edvard Munch

According to cinema and painting, they tried to visualize the subjective feelings and psychedelic depth of the artist, and to achieve this they used unrealistic and dark techniques because at that time they believed that there was no need to be perfect or real in even art, the techniques they used were such as symbolism, abstraction, psychological depth, and deliberate distortion of the perception and amplification of color, mass, personality, décor, lighting, makeup, buildings, props, acting

style, and staging. German Expressionism is connected to various other contemporary developments whose objectives were upsetting conventional society. These developments all mutual a craving to achieve changes in the society and to define the Germans statues. Expressionism itself, particularly since it has been put inside the setting of Modernism, is difficult to explicitly separate thus it has various associations with different movements. The Expressionists from the earliest starting point

were separated into two gatherings: one which was supernaturally disposed and one in which political activity and convenience predominated. These two groupings were far-reaching enough that after some time, German Expressionism has been assembled in with German Modernism. This type of Expressionism likewise imparted plans to and was affected by Futurism, Dada, and other Expressionist developments.

The expression is anti-romantic, the colors are blatant and deceptive, the angles and perspectives are distorted, and the shapes depicted by them are of unusual and abnormal manifestations and sizes, all with the purpose of creating a psychological shock in the same scenes and taking it away from traditional manifestations. Generally, the German Expressionism cinema focused and cared about the Mise-en-scene and it was characterized by a suspicious and mysterious atmosphere, the visual style of the German expression films is the most visible and distinctive method of silent films. It is based on several elements, including: unusual camera angles, the characteristic lighting style known as "Chiaroscuro" which is a sharp contrast between light and shadow, unreal decoration, exaggerated performance of theatrical character, excessive use of decorative powders. The aim of the application of these elements was to raise the ambiguity and express the special view of the characters and the sense of alienation in the modern world, and the portrayal of delirium, dreams and emotional feelings of violent.

### Characteristics of German Expressionism

- High angles
- Deep shadows/chiaroscuro lighting
- Extreme camera tilting
- Impossible sets

When you consider the real-life situation in Germany after the war, it's no wonder that art and cinema got as dark as it did.

German Expressionism in film is associated with high contrasts of darks and lights to convey nightmarish sets, often using the **chiaroscuro lighting technique**. Let's look at some of the classic examples that cemented this aesthetic steeped in shadows.



he Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920). Directed by Robert Wiene

### **The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920)**

**Written by Hans Janowitz and Carl Mayer, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* was based on the writers' experiences as WWI soldiers and their distrust of authoritarian leadership. The filmmakers chose to deliberately distort reality in order to disorient the audience to invoke a feeling of the time rather than a truthful or realistic depiction.**

### **Metropolis (1927)**

**Fritz Lang's silent film uses expressionist imagery to comment on technology consuming society. The film is deep in exaggerated imagery heightening the emotion that drives the plot.**

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