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EXPRESSIONISM IN 21ST CENTURY CINEMA

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ABSTRACT ENGLISH

Expressionism in cinema emerged in Germany in early 1920's and it became the dominant movement in 1920's and 1930's. Many masterpieces were created in that era, which were very unique and innovative in various aspects. The movement lost its power and presence in the following decades due to the circumstances in Germany. Even so, the influence of expressionism continued to exist until today and embodied itself in many contemporary films. This dissertation aims to prove that there is an undeniable connection between early German expressionist cinema and some of 21st century films and this way, it aims to prove that expressionism is still an on-going approach towards the craft of filmmaking. It aims to achieve this through a methodical analysis of the unique characteristics of expressionist filmmaking that is shared by both classical and contemporary examples of expressionist cinema.

ABSTRACT CZECH

Expresionismus ve filmovém průmyslu se objevil v Německu počátkem 20. let 20. století a ve 20. a 30. letech toto hnutí dominovalo. V této době vznikla mnohá díla, která byla v různých ohledech velmi ojedinělá a inovativní. Během následujících desetiletí se jeho moc i samotné hnutí ztratili v důsledku situace v Německu. Přesto vliv expresionismus vydržel až do dnešní doby a ztělesňuje se v mnohých současných filmech. Tato práce si ukládá za cíl prokázat nepopiratelné propojení mezi dřívější německou expresionistickou kinematografií a některými filmy 21. století, a tímto způsobem se snaží dokázat, že expresionismus stále představuje neutuchající přístup k filmové tvorbě. Tento důkaz se snaží vystihnout pomocí metodické analýzy jedinečných vlastností filmové tvorby sdílených na příkladech jak klasických, tak současných expresionistických snímcích.

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I. Introduction: Defining Expressionism in Cinema

a. Origin of the Expressionist Movement

Expressionism is an art movement that emerged from poetry and painting predominantly in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century. In the dark years following World War I, expressionism became the dominant art movement in Germany and spread across many forms of art including theatre, literature and cinema.

The origin of the term "Expressionism" can be traced back to an exhibition by Julien-Auguste Hervé in Paris, 1901. The paintings which were exhibited were called "Expressionismes".[1] These paintings demonstrate early relevance to the expressionist style but the main artistic roots of the movement lay in the paintings of Edvard Munch, Vincent van Gogh and James Ensor. These certain artists developed a highly subjective and expressive style in the period of mid 1880's to early 1900's by moving away from the traditional representation of nature in order to express a subjective view of reality which mostly conveyed the themes of fear, horror, insanity and the grotesque. [2]

Later, two groups were formed by young artists in Germany which were the first significant forerunners of the art movement. The first one, "Die Brücke" consisted of four German artists led by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and was established in Dresden, 1905. This group was arguably the founding organization of the art movement. They aimed to convey raw emotion through provocative depictions of modern society. Their paintings included scenes of prostitutes, city dwellers, dancers in nightclubs

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[1] Willett, John. *Expressionism*. New York: World University Library, 1970, p.25

[2] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. *Expressionism*. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 2019, para.2.

with the themes of alienation and isolation in urban culture. [3] These depictions are far from realistic and they are expressed through bold, impulsive brush strokes and vibrant, contrasting colours. As cited by Karl Ruhrberg, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner described their work in this way: "The German artist creates out of his imagination, inner vision, the forms of visible nature are to him only a symbol." [4]

The second group was formed just a few years later in Munich and was called "Der Blaue Reiter" (The Blue Rider). It consisted of important artists such as Kandinsky, Paul Klee and Franz Marc. This group shared a mutual interest towards symbolism, abstraction and spirituality. Their name emerged from one of the paintings of Kandinsky which included the symbol of the horse and the rider. For Kandinsky it symbolized the transition from world into the spiritual realm and thus a metaphor for art. This symbol became a central principle for the group; transcending realism and delving into abstraction. [5] As cited by Wolf Dieter Dube, Franz Marc described this principle as: "Art is nothing but the expression of our dream; the more we surrender to it the closer we get to the inner truth of things, our dream-life, the true life that scorns questions and does not see them." [6]

World War I was the prime catalyst for expressionism. It was a global catastrophe, a nightmare of guns, bombs, poisonous gases, tanks, death and brutality. Millions of people died on all sides. Artists tried to cope with this nightmare and produced all kinds of expressive artworks on both sides of the war, some focusing on realism, some focusing on abstraction. On the German front, art was delving into the darkest depths of the human psyche. This environment was the

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[3] Wolf Justin. *Expressionism Movement Overview and Analysis.* The Art Story Contributors, 2012, para.6.

[4] Karl Ruhrberg, Manfred Schneckenburger, Christiane Fricke, Klaus Honnef, Ingo F. Walther. *Art of the 20th Century*. Köln: Taschen, 1998, p.56

[5] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. *Expressionism*. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 2019, para.9.

[6] Wolf Dieter Dube. *Expressionism*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1973, p.126

perfect home for the expressionist movement and a very specific genre of filmmaking emerged from the German state which was referred as the Weimar Republic at that time: German Expressionism.

b. Birth of German Expressionism

The term "German Expressionism" refers to the film movement which occurred specifically from the 1910's to the 1930's in Germany. This style was initially confined in the country due to Germany's isolation during World War I. In 1916, the government had banned foreign films and the local demand of the theatres resulted in a soaring amount of domestic film production. In 1914, 24 domestic films were produced, whereas in 1918, it reached 130 films.[7] Given these circumstances and no foreign competition, German filmmakers found themselves in an environment of more creative freedom, although there was a lack of big budgets. A combination of these two factors resulted in filmmakers embracing a willingness to experiment with bold ideas and unique artistic styles. The influence of expressionism in other art forms was already at its peak and it influenced the German filmmakers who created some of the most important cinematic milestones in film history.

These achievements include films such as *Der Student von Prag (1913), Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari (1920), Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam (1920), Nosferatu (1922), Schatten (1923)* and *Metropolis (1927).* Within the palette of German Expressionist films which were produced, two of them stand out more as genre-defining innovations.

The first of these film is *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920)* directed by Robert Wiene and written by Carl Mayer & Hans Janowitz. It is a silent horror film which tells the story of a mad hypnotist who uses a somnambulist to commit murders. The script was inspired by the experiences of its writers who were in the military service during

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[7] Thompson, Kristin. Bordwell, David. *Film History: An Introduction.* McGraw Hill. 2010, p.87

World War I. The themes of the film present brutal authority, duality of human nature, the subjective perception of reality and the thin line between madness and sanity. It's one of the earliest horror films and it also has the first plot-twist ending in film history. Memory flashbacks and dream sequences are also used often, which later becomes staples of German Expressionism and an important cinematic tool. The film is known for its extreme visual style and innovative set design. Lights and shadows are directly painted on the background which gives the film a unique atmosphere.

1.1 Stills from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920)*

While *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920)* introduced us to silent horror, dreams, nightmares and glimpses from a twisted subconscious, *Metropolis (1927)* was considered to be first feature-length science-fiction film. Directed by Fritz Lang and written by Thea von Harbou, the film is set in a futuristic urban dystopia and follows two characters, Freder, who is the son of the city master and Maria, a saintly figure for the working class. They try to bring workers together with the city master and overcome the separation of the classes.

The film works as a critique of the society and as a warning towards the future of humanity. It featured an immense amount of special effects and incredibly designed vast sets. The importance of the film mainly lies in its technical achievements and innovations which are still influential even today. It can easily be stated that there are no science-fiction films which are not influenced by the vision of Fritz Lang and *Metropolis (1927)*.
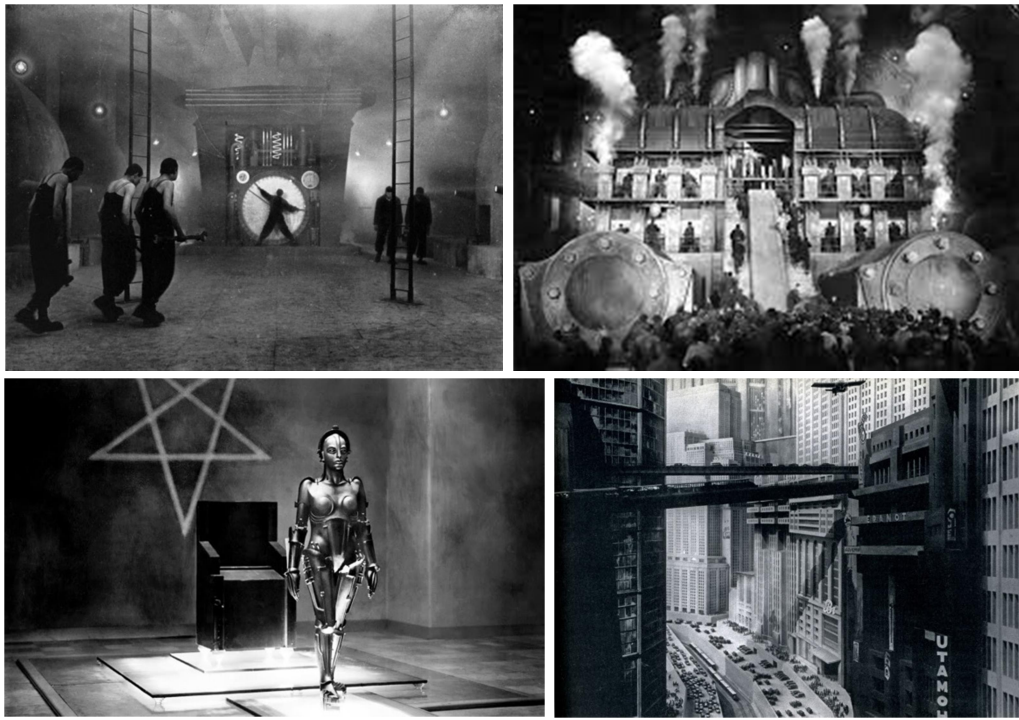
1.2 Stills from *Metropolis (1927)*

c. Unique Themes and Visual Characteristics of Expressionism

In order to analyse the echoes and prominence of expressionism in the 21st century, its themes, trademarks and characteristics needs to be precisely identified. These range from general themes and context to technical elements and artistic choices. The thread starts from expressionist paintings and reaches until today's commercial and avant-garde cinema. Given the introspective nature of expressionism, its themes and signature elements morph into different forms over time in parallel with the environments artists live and create in. Although the most interesting part of expressionism is the fact that even this phenomena cannot prevent the similarities and characteristics which can always be found in both classical and contemporary work. Introspection into oneself and human nature causes both differences and similarities at the same time in the work artists create and this duality is a perfect opportunity to study the characteristics of expressionist art through the decades.

i. Themes

Themes of expressionism can be explored separately in classical and contemporary examples. With changing times, the subject matter of expressionist art also changes, although a certain bridge connecting the decades can be easily found there. The medium has an impact on these themes as well. It is clear that certain mediums such as film has a more concentrated pool of themes compared to painting, literature or other mediums. This is due to the selective production choices of film studios and financial concerns, especially in earlier examples. Artists of the same movement such as German Expressionism also have a tendency to use similar themes which shapes a distinct style of similar characteristics. This is the result of being in the same environment as well as being actively influenced from each other.

Expressionism is an artistic style in which the artist seeks to depict not objective reality but rather the subjective emotions and responses that objects and events arouse within a person. In a broader sense Expressionism is one of the main currents of art in the later 19th and the 20th centuries, and its qualities of highly subjective, personal, spontaneous self-expression are typical of a wide range of modern artists and art movements. Expressionism can also be seen as a permanent tendency in Germanic and Nordic art from at least the European Middle Ages, particularly in times of social change or spiritual crisis. [8]

Given this context, the themes can be studied starting from earliest examples of expressionist paintings. Some of the most famous early expressionist paintings were created by Edvard Munch and Vincent Van Gogh. *Night in St.Cloud (1890), The Scream (1893)*, *The Sick Child (1907)* by Munch and *The Potato Eaters (1885), The Starry Night (1889), Wheatfield with Crows (1890)* by Van Gogh are one of the earliest paintings that depict some of the most common themes of expressionism.

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[8] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. *Expressionism*. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 2019, para.1

These artists explored the expression of fear, horror, the grotesque and the subjective distortion of reality.

1.3 *The Scream (1893), The Starry Night (1889), The Sick Child (1907)*

The mental state of oneself and the overwhelming need to express it through art is the main source of inspiration for the expressionist artist. According to José María Faerna, Edvard Munch described his initial inspiration before painting The Scream (1893) as: "I was walking down the road with two friends when the sun set; suddenly, the sky turned as red as blood. I stopped and leaned against the fence, feeling unspeakably tired. Tongues of fire and blood stretched over the bluish black fjord. My friends went on walking, while I lagged behind, shivering with fear. Then I heard the enormous, infinite scream of nature." [9] This description is the perfect demonstration of the link between the emotions of the artist and the final product of the expressionist work. As it can be clearly seen, the raw emotions of the artist and the subjective perspective of reality is the prime source of the artworks theme. These elements are prioritized over meaning or analytical observation. Arne Eggum interprets the piece as follows: "The Scream is Munch's most famous work, and one of the most recognizable paintings in all art. It has been widely interpreted as representing the universal anxiety of modern man." [10]

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[9] Faerna, José María. *Munch*, New York: Abrams Books, 1995, p.16

[10] Eggum, Arne. *Edvard Munch: Paintings, Sketches, and Studies*, New York: Crown Publishing Group, 1984, p.305

This statement is important, because the universal anxiety of man is one of the core themes of expressionism, whether in classical examples or in contemporary ones. In expressionism, inspiration is usually drawn from negative emotions such as fear, despair and alienation rather than any positive emotions. This applies to all mediums of expressionist art through the decades, including the films of German Expressionism and the contemporary examples of expressionist cinema.

Inspired by these forerunners, the aforementioned group "Die Brücke" aimed to defy the traditional painting and the school of impressionism by focusing on distorted subjectivity and influences of primitivism. They usually depicted scenes of their everyday life including their time in the studio with nude models and scenes from nightclubs they visited. Urban alienation and the modern city that induces both attraction and repulsion were their common themes.

The other pioneering group "Der Blaue Reiter" also practiced a similar style of distorted abstraction. Although they conveyed the themes of alienation as well, they also pursued the theme of spirituality of art in order to defy the mundane. In searching for a language that would express their unique approach to abstract visual form, the artists of Der Blaue Reiter drew parallels between painting and music. Often naming their works Compositions, Improvisations, and Études (among other things), they explored music as the abstract art par excellence, lacking as it does a tangible or figurative manifestation. This also led them to explore notions of synaesthesia, the crossing or "union" of the senses in perceiving color, sound, and other stimuli. [11] Later on German artists developed an even more intense visual style that express the themes of violence, frustration, pain, disgust, repulsion, anxiety, despair and fear. This was in response to the increasing meaningless modern life

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[11] The Art Story Contributors. *Der Blaue Reiter Movement Overview and Analysis*. The Art Story Foundation, 2015, para.4.

and the brutal, dark times they live in. The years following World War 1, expressionism became the dominant art style with the suiting post-war atmosphere of paranoia and frustration. This atmosphere was a big influence on the themes of artworks produced.

In literature, drama and poetry, expressionism emerged as a reaction to materialization, urbanization and thriving bourgeois society. The dissociation of self and the robotic nature of modern life were some of the central themes for the expressionist writer. The expressionism of words aimed to achieve a spiritual and a psychological reality rather than a depiction of external events in a logical manner. The authors used techniques such as stream of consciousness to find new forms of narration, which is in a sense very close to what painters or filmmakers did. Richard Samuel describes the inspiration of the expressionist writer as: "The desire of the Expressionists' is to break through the narrowing limits of finite reality, as represented by a world in which even before the war they had begun to lose faith, led them to a craving for death, which they visualised as the gateway to the transcendental life." [12]

In Expressionist drama, emphasis was laid not on the outer world, which is merely sketched in and barely defined in place or time, but on the internal, on an individual's mental state; hence, the imitation of life is replaced in Expressionist drama by the ecstatic evocation of states of mind. The leading character in an Expressionist play often pours out his or her woes in long monologues couched in a concentrated, elliptical, almost telegrammatic language that explores youth's spiritual malaise, its revolt against the older generation, and the various political or revolutionary remedies that present themselves. [13] All these themes and approaches of painting and literature also echo through German expressionist cinema and

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[12] Richard Samuel, R. Hinton Thomas. *Expressionism in German Life, Literature and the Theatre 1910-24*, Albert Seifer, 1971, p.132

[13] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. *Expressionism*. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 2019, para.9

contemporary expressionism.

German Expressionism in film was born directly during Germany's defeat at World War 1 and the following economic collapse. As expected, this catastrophe fully defined the themes of these films. The collective anxiety and anger of the nation visualized itself through this medium with nightmarish and distorted images. Madness, horror, fear, death, betrayal and despair were the most common themes. It was no coincidence that the roots of the horror genre lie in these films since the environment these filmmakers live in contained that exact horror and dread. According to Albin Krebs in his 1976 article about the filmmaker's death, Fritz Lang described his inspiration as: "I am profoundly fascinated by cruelty, fear, horror and death, my films show my preoccupation with violence, the pathology of violence." [14] The manifestations of such emotions were not unique to him. It was a collective psyche, embodying itself in art and filmmaking the most.

The film critic Lotte H. Eisner describes the dark environment during the rise of German expressionism and the surges of inspiration coming out of it perfectly in the following paragraph: "Mysticism and magic, the dark forces to which Germans have always been more than willing to commit themselves, had flourished in the face of death on the battlefields. The hecatombs of young men fallen in the flower of their youth seemed to nourish the grim nostalgia of the survivors. And the ghosts which had haunted the German Romantics revived, like the shades of Hades after droughts of blood. A new stimulus was thus given to the eternal attraction towards all that is obscure and undetermined, towards the kind of brooding speculative reflection called Grübelei which culminated in the apocalyptic doctrine of Expressionism. Poverty and constant insecurity help to explain the enthusiasm with which German artists embraced this movement which, as early as 1910, had tended to sweep aside all the

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[14] Albin Krebs. *Fritz Lang, Film Director Noted for 'M,' Dead at 85*. The New York Times, 1976, para.3

principles which had formed the basis of art until then. [15]

Given this context and the aforementioned establishment of common themes in German expressionist films, the plots of few famous and influential examples should be examined to narrow and specify these themes further. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920) and Metropolis (1927)* will be excluded since themes of them were already introduced previously.

One of the first films of German expressionism, *Der Student von Prag (1913)* directed by Paul Wegener and Stellan Rye is widely considered to be one of the first in many areas. These include being one of the first art films and the first horror film. The film is loosely based on a combination of Edgar Allan Poe's *William Wilson,* Alfred de Musset's *The December Night* and the legend of *Faust.* These inspirations alone tell us a lot about the long thread of collective inspiration that led to expressionism.

The story is about a young man who sells his soul to a sorcerer in order to fulfil his desire of getting a wealthy woman fall in love with him. The pact he signs with the sorcerer results in mischief and his downfall by summoning a doppelganger of him and revealing his inner demon to everyone. The directors used elements of fantasy and psychological horror to emphasize the central themes of the film; obsession, guilt, lust, dissociation, betrayal, alienation and death.

These themes would become increasingly common in the following years of the movement and would also find a place in contemporary examples of expressionist cinema in a more personal way rather than being a depiction of a collective psyche. At time of the film's release, the audience of the defeated Germany found the film and its themes extremely relatable. Sabine Hake described the

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[15] Lotte H. Eisner. *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, p.9

success of the film as: "Audiences flocked to see the film, in part because it tapped into a very real sense of dissociation and alienation inherent in a society that was struggling with the burgeoning collapse of the German empire." [16]

Another early example of the movement is *Nerven (1919)* directed by Robert Reinert. The film revolves around a "nervous epidemic" that happens at the end of World War 1 which drives people to do uncontrollable acts of guilt. The leader of a rebellion is accused of rape and a court case ensues. The narrative explores fates of people from diverse social status including Roloff, a manufacturer who has lost his faith in technological advancement, Johannes, a teacher who pursues a social reform and Marja, who becomes a revolutionary in order to fight the armed forces. The central theme of this portrait of life is the troubles of these characters and their collapsing mental state in relation to them. The major difference of these two films is the fact that one being centred more on the psychology of one main character but the other one being a display of various mental states of different people from society.

1.4 Stills from *Nerven (1919)*

The third film as another good source of examples for expressionist themes is *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler (1922)* directed by the most influential filmmaker of the movement, Fritz Lang. It is the first film of the trilogy about the character of Doctor Mabuse. The film is a four and half hours long piece separated into two parts. The character is adapted from the novels of Norbert Jacques and he is a criminal mastermind, a master of hypnosis, disguise and mind control as well as a doctor of

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[16] Hake, Sabine. *German National Cinema.*, New York: Routledge, 2008, p.22

psychology. The narrative follows Dr.Mabuse and his evil schemes to make a fortune using his skills of disguise and hypnosis, victimizing wealthy businessmen, gambling with unfair advantage and even dealing with murder. A determined police officer chases him relentlessly to put him behind bars. The film is a crime thriller full of plot twists and it portrays the decadence of 1920's Germany through gambling clubs, brutality and corruption. The central themes of the film are the dystopic environment of post war Germany and the economic catastrophe, the ever-present force of evil and perversion as an embodiment who is Dr.Mabuse, some occultism, surveillance and the state of being watched, decadence and degeneracy and the moral decline of a society. According to Stanford Lyman, Dr.Mabuse can even be seen as a foreshadowing of Adolf Hitler with his hypnotic power over the masses in pursuit of evil. [17]

1.5 A Still from *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler (1922)*

A character which works as a manifestation of concepts and ideas is an important element for expressionism in film. Sometimes these characters are

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[17] Lyman, Stanford. *Roads to Dystopia, Sociological Essay on the Post Modern Condition*, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 2001, p.232

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intentionally very two-dimensional in order to represent an idea rather than a person and Dr.Mabuse is a great example for that. Also the theme of surveillance and being manipulated by a higher power, such as a government or a powerful ruler is a very modern concern and this film depicts early concepts of this theme and the victims of the manipulation accurately.

According to Tom Gunning, Fritz Lang believed the purpose of film was to provide a record of contemporary times. [18] In this sense, this film differs from other examples as an observance of a certain time and environment rather than a study and expression of the psyche of oneself, the creator of the piece of art. Although the individualist approach to themes of a film seems to be more suiting for the tools of expressionism to explore, as it can be seen in most of Fritz Lang's films, an observing perspective is just as valid. In contemporary examples, both approaches can be seen but the focus on individual psychology and the source of inspiration that comes from oneself is still more common.

As a final example for the themes of expressionism in classical cinema, *The Man Who Laughs (1928)* directed by Paul Leni provides a much heavier focus on an individual and his psychology. The film is an adaptation from Victor Hugo's 1869 novel of the same name. The film is clearly a melodrama but sometimes it is considered to be a horror film as well, most probably because of the frightening appearance of the protagonist and the grim atmosphere emerging from expressionism.

The plot is centred on Gwynplaine, the son of a man who is executed because of his refusal to kiss the hand of the king. To continue the punishment for this treachery even further, Gwynplaine has a permanent scar carved on his face to

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[18] Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, London: British Film Institute, 2000, p.90

shame his father. Having lost his family, he is adopted by a travelling showman and becomes an idol known as "The Laughing Man". Soon he falls in love with a blind girl named Dea. Even though she is blind, Gwynplaine still thinks he is unworthy of her due to his disfigurement. He slowly overcomes his fear and unites with Dea, but the shadow of the dead king and his punishment still follows him in the form of an evil court jester called Barkilphedro.

The themes of the film revolve around political dishonesty, corruption, revenge, murder, love and ill fate. To differ from the previous examples, this story has a big influence of love as a theme and has less of a grim ending. Also the thematic structure of the film constantly changes, sometimes being a melodrama, other times delving into horror or even becoming a silly swashbuckler. This thematic diversity was contrasting with the other films of the period and was seen as a failure of direction at that time but modern critics considered the film to be a successful artistic achievement.

1.6 Stills from *The Man Who Laughs (1928)*

The biggest expressionist feature of the film is of course the face of the protagonist. It looks extremely grotesque and sometimes quite disturbing. The film makes an excellent use of this element by spending a lot of time on him and the incredible acting of Conrad Veidt makes it possible to convey a huge spectrum of emotions by that terrifying laugh only.

As clearly can be seen from his haunting face, "The Laughing Man" is a direct inspiration for the DC Comic's popular villain "The Joker" who found many appearances in modern cinema including Tim Burton's *Batman (1989)*, Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight (2008)* and *Joker (2019)*. The thematic connection is also present between these two characters, although The Joker usually appears to be evil whereas The Laughing Man is an honest, good man. The Joker is not the only character which is inspired by Gwynplaine as the expressionist theme of the deformed, grotesque loner found place in many other works of cinema.

To sum it up, the films of German expressionism portray the state of post-war Germany and explore the psychology of its inhabitants, who almost always delve into madness or drown in anxiety and sorrow. Only exceptions to this are the villains and evil characters that are in power, but even they meet their end ultimately. In such a grim style of expression, the end is inevitable. Supernatural, dreamlike and bizarre elements are frequent and they provide alternate explanations to the misfortunes the characters go through. Realism is never the most important element and usually gets subjectively distorted with the raw emotions of the narrative and its characters. Some films focus on observing the society as a whole, whereas other films focus more on individual characters and state of their minds. In both approaches, the psychology of the author itself manifests in the film through the language of expressionism. This enables the audience to feel and observe the psychology of the creator and his subjective perspective of reality. To convey this subjectivity by tools of filmmaking is the essence of expressionism in cinema and it's an unquenchable need for the expressionist filmmaker.

According to Kasimir Edschmid and Lotte H. Eisner's interpretation of his writings which describe this essence perfectly, The Expressionist does not see, he has 'visions'. 'The chain of facts: factories, houses, illness, prostitutes, screams,

hunger' does not exist; only the interior vision they provoke exists. Facts and objects are nothing in themselves: we need to study their essence rather their momentary and accidental forms. It is the hand of the artist which 'through them grasps what is behind them' and allows us to know their real form, freed from the stifling constraint of a 'false reality'. The Expressionist artist, not merely receptive but a true creator, seeks, instead of a momentary, accidental, form, the eternal, permanent meaning of facts and objects. [19]

This essence is the main bridge that connects classical and contemporary examples of expressionist filmmaking and it's the core element of the movement which is not subject to change. Themes and context will always find different forms due to changing times and environments but the essence of expressionism will remain the same and will be crucial in the analysis of the chosen contemporary films.

ii. Visual Characteristics

In order to study the visual style and characteristics of expressionism in film, the roots of the movement which lie in the art of painting need to be studied. It is important to observe how brush strokes used by the expressionist painter gradually evolved into the heavy chiaroscuro used by the German expressionist filmmaker and how the unique visual style of German expressionism influenced contemporary films in many ways.

Expressionist painter used exaggerated, bold brush strokes with vivid and often inaccurate colours, emphasizing their emotions over objective observation. Shapes are usually distorted, deformed or abstracted. The 1888 piece of his *Sunflowers* series is a very early example of an expressionist painting by the pioneer of the movement, Vincent Van Gogh. It was painted during a time of optimism while

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[19] Edschmid, Kasimir. *Über Den Expressionismus In Der Literatur Und Die Neue Dichtung.*, Berlin: Erich Reiß Verlag, 1919, p.364, Lotte H. Eisner. *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, p.9

he was waiting the arrival of another painter whom he saw as an idol, Paul Gaugin.

For him, the colour of yellow and the symbol of sunflower represented happiness. He simply described yellow as "How lovely yellow is, it stands for the sun." It is clear that in a state of such optimism; yellow was the dominant colour of this painting. According to Charles A. Riley, in a letter to his brother Theo, he described the connection between colours and his emotions as:

1.7 *Sunflowers (1888)*

"Instead of trying to reproduce exactly what I see before my eyes, I use colour more arbitrarily to express myself forcibly." [20] For him colour was an extension of his emotions. In contrast, he conveyed a state of deep melancholy on his painting, *Portrait of Dr. Gachet (1890).* This painting lacks yellow completely; instead it is dominated by a sad blue and a sickly combination orange and green. The posture of the man is distorted and conveys anxiety and sadness. It was painted soon after he was released from the mental asylum he was staying after cutting his own ear off. It is also noticeable that the brush strokes he employed are shorter and crisper in the previous painting, whereas in this one they are more loose and swaying.


1.8 *Portrait of Dr. Gachet (1890)*

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[20] Riley, Charles A.. *Color Codes: Modern Theories of Color in Philosophy, Painting and Architecture, Literature, Music and Psychology*, Lebanon: University Press of New England, 1996, p.99

This is another good example how emotions affect the tools of an expressionist and the outcome of the artwork.

Inspired by painters such as Vincent Van Gogh and Edvard Munch, Die Brücke developed a much harsher style. Scottish National Gallery online art glossary describe their visual trademark as: "Their work was influenced by the Symbolist Post-Impressionism of Paul Gauguin, Edvard Munch and Vincent Van Gogh, as well as the vivid colours and expressive techniques of the French Fauvists, but Brücke was far more aggressive, nihilistic and anarchic in spirit, with discordant colours, harsh, jagged outlines and deliberately crude or ugly forms." [21] This approach brings the thread of inspiration closer to the style of German expressionist cinema. *Kopf (1913)* by Emil Nolde and *Nollendorfplatz (1912)* by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner are great expressionist examples painted by Brücke members in the form of a portrait and a landscape. These two paintings have a rich spectrum of visual elements to analyse before proceeding to the study of expressionist cinematography.
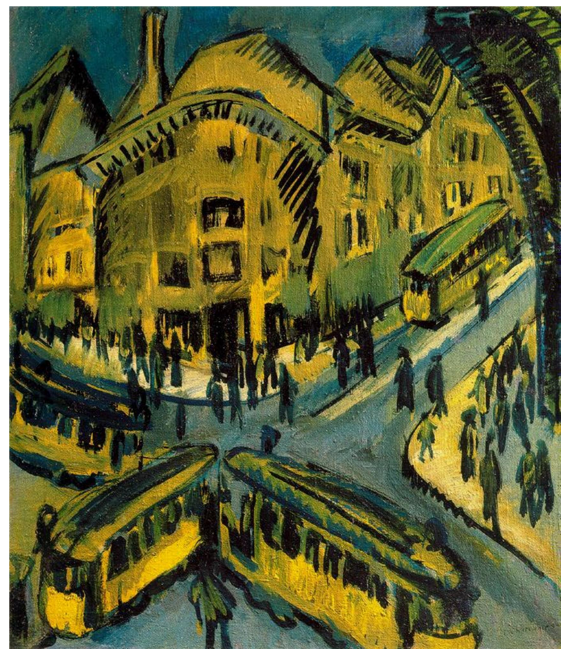
1.9 *Kopf (1913)*   **1.10** *Nollendorfplatz (1912)*

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[21] Scottish National Gallery Online Art Glossary. *Die Brücke (The Bridge)*. Scottish National Gallery, para.4

The primitive, sculpture-like head in *Kopf* lacks clear features of a human face. Shapes and proportions are distorted and the colour is closer to wood than human skin. The deep red of the background is very expressive and conveys primitivism and maybe even violence; it is not a pleasant red. The figure looks a lot like the creature from *Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam (1920).* Both the head and the golem are products of an expressionist approach, emphasizing primitive emotions over objectivity. Their features are hidden and blurred; the face almost works as a mask, conveying ideas and concepts rather than character and personality. The pale green and grey stripes of the shirt alienate him from the background, making him look like not belonging there. The use of shadows is remarkable on this painting, descending upon the figure from above and enveloping his face. Such use of shadow is a common staple of expressionist filmmaking.

Nollendorfplatz (1912) by Kirchner is one of the paintings from his famous Street Scenes series that depict dystopic perspectives of Berlin nightlife, its alienated people and twisted architecture. It was painted towards his mental collapse and it expresses the anxiety and despair coming out of that state. Stephanie Buhmann interpreted his work in this series as follows: "Expressive brushwork, jagged lines, strong diagonals, harsh accentuations of form and infectious color combinations characterize the work. As a whole, they summon a feverish, unbalanced atmosphere. Staring at the blank faces of Kirchner's streetwalkers, shoppers, lowlifes, burghers and aristocrats, we realize we are looking at a ticking time bomb, a moment when anything is possible. Here, happenstance can easily turn into danger and laughter into a howl." [22] This painting, like his other architectural depictions from the same years, looks almost like a sketch from the storyboards of *Metropolis (1927).* The people are represented in generic forms and in similar colours, they lack identity and

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[22] Buhmann, Stephanie. *Kirchner and the Berlin Street*. The Brooklyn Rail, 2008 para.5

look more like ants of an hectic anthill. Buildings are distorted and painted with sharp lines and edges, akin to sci-fi structures. All vehicles look the same and resemble dystopic shuttles of a metropolis. The green and yellow is not appealing but instead sinister. Inaccurate perspective, sharp vertical lines and strange angles: these are the staples of German expressionist cinema in the field of set design and cinematography. This depiction of Berlin is a great example that displays these characteristics.

Chiaroscuro, Italian for "lightdark", is an art term to describe the heavy usage of contrast between the light and the dark. Development of this technique dates back to the masters of light in painting such as Rembrandt, Caravaggio and Goya. In cinematography, the term chiaroscuro is used for a similar technique. It indicates the usage of very strong contrast to create separated areas of bright light and heavy darkness, especially in black and white films. According to Lotte Eisner, the term would stand for "Helldunkel" in German which would represent the twilight of the German soul, expressing itself in shadowy, enigmatic interiors, or in misty, insubstantial landscapes. [23]

Being such an expressive technique, it is also one of the visual staples of German expressionism along with the usage of high and low angles of the camera, distortion of perspective and symmetry, extremely stylised set design, as well as exaggerated and gothic make up. Many such techniques used by the filmmakers of the era were the first of their kind and considered to be important innovations in the history of cinema. These innovations would later be adapted to many films and become staples of other genres such as Hollywood's film noir and modern horror. They are still being used and developed further to new forms in contemporary

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[23] Lotte H. Eisner. *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, p.8

filmmaking as tools of expression. In order to analyse the visual characteristics of the movement, the most innovative and influential films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920) and Nosferatu (1922)* are great to start with. Since it will be too comprehensive to focus on every single aspect of these films, the most defining elements of them will be studied in order to create a study with different films and different elements, which will later be very useful to analyse contemporary examples
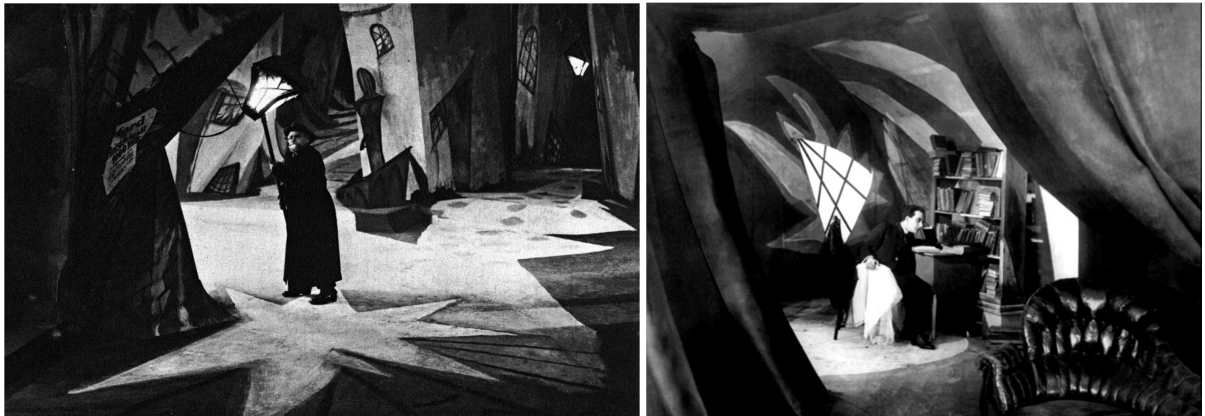
1.11 Stills from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920)*

The most interesting part about this film is its twisted and grotesque set design and expressive architecture. This unique look is achieved by shooting the film entirely in a studio rather than an actual space, as well as by the colloborations of the expressionst art directors, Hermann Wann, Walter Reimann and Walter Röhrig , who had backgrounds in theater. The most important element of this set design is the fact that the shadows and lights are painted on the space itself to create a distorted, dreamy space. This aspect gives the film an incredibly eerie, unreal and nightmarish look which helps the audience to delve into a sense of horror and anxiety. Vincent LoBrutto described the qualities of this space as a place transformed by evil, in a more effective way than realistic locations or conventional design concepts could. [24]

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[24] LoBrutto, Vincent. *Becoming Film Literate: The Art and Craft of Motion Pictures.* Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2005, p.64

This visual approach is not only an aesthetic choice, it supports the narrative by putting us in the mind of Dr. Caligari and see the world the way he sees it, and much likely putting us also in the mind of the director as he sees it. John Barlow also emphasizes this connection by pointing out that the majority of the film's story and scenes are memories recalled by an insane narraor, and as a result the distorted visual style takes on the quality of his mental breakdown itself. [25] This method will also be commonly used in the contemporary examples that will follow.

1.12 Stills from *Nosferatu (1922)*

In this second example, there is a much subtler yet still as effective visual style of expressionism. In *Nosferatu*, the set design is much more realistic and the horrifying exaggeration is concentrated on the character instead. The most dominant aspect of this film though is the use of light, shadow and chiaroscuro. It is so strong that it almost shaped the visual style of an entire genre by itself, horror. Murnau opts to play with the shadow and light and create a narrative coming out of it. The biggest fear is the fear of unknown and seeing the eerie, figurative shadow of Count Orlok moving around the castle and being cast on people is an excellent and expressive approach to create suspense and horrify the audience. Katherine Blakeney interprets this method as an excellent use of shadows and silhouettes that create the aura of a

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[25] LoBrutto, Vincent. *Becoming Film Literate: The Art and Craft of Motion Pictures* . Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2005, p.64

creature belonging to another world and convey a paranoid sense of evil omnipresence. [26] This is achieved by using a back-light and casting the shadow to the desired surface. Doing this shows the audience what is coming and creates suspense in advance.   Shadows of *Nosferatu* are the evidence of how light in cinematography can be used as a tool of expression, in this case, to convey fear. To supplement this, characters move in rhythms and pauses to become a part of the composition which gives life/unlife to the set. This is especially visible when Count Orlok is composed in narrow, coffin-like arches and doors of the castle. The games of light and shadow, as well as the organic merging of the creatures with the environment displayed in the film are innovations that become staples of modern horror and expressionist cinema as well. As Bill Leavy describes it, Nosferatu is an exemplary a work of German cinematic expressionism in terms of its use of light and shadow. Just like film noir which Murnau and German Cinema inspired, the film presents a dark world pierced by light. [27]

In the next example, the focus is going to be on different aspects of expressionist visual style, namely, usage of visual effects and camera movement. Although being not as innovative as the previous examples, *The Cat and the Canary (1927)* directed by Paul Leni is an expressionist horror feature that blends in elements of humour that creates a unique style. The film is adapted from a black comedy play of the same name written by John Willard. Since it's an American production, according to Bernard Dick, the film reduced German expressionism, with its weird chiaroscuro, asymmetric sets, and excessive stylization, to a format

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[26] Blakeney, Katherine. *F.W. Murnau, His Films and their Influence on German Expressionism.* Student Pulse Online Academic Student Journal, 2011, para.24

[27] Leavy, Bill. *Nosferatu: Murnau's use of Expressionism in his film.* New York: University of Albany, 2010, p.4

compatible with American film practice. [28] This might have reduced the stylization of certain aspects but in a way it opened up possibilities for new approaches such as the camerawork being a lot more expressive, dynamic and free compared to the simplicity and stillness of other German expressionist films in terms of movement and dynamic composition.

1.13 Stills from *The Cat and The Canary (1927)*

The film employs a lot of point of view shots with camera being the perspective of a person or sometimes even an object. In the left image above, the camera is a ghost that wanders the deserted corridors while the curtains blow back and forth with the wind. It is a very dynamic shot and in a sense also very modern as such moving shots later become staples of contemporary films, especially in the horror genre. A camera that lurks across uncanny corridors to reveal the ominous nature of the space itself is an approach that is very memorable from *The Shining (1980)* by Stanley Kubrick for example. The right image is another example when the camera is the observer in the body of a person; again an expressionist approach to connect the audience with the character possessing the lens and a tool that becomes quite common later on. Another remarkable aspect of this film is the expressive juxtaposition of cuts in the editing such as the below example of the mansion cutting

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[28] Dick, Bernard F. *City of Dreams: The Making and Remaking of Universal Pictures.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997, p.56

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into Cyrus surrounded by medicine bottles and cats in a total graphical alignment with the previous shot.


1.14 Stills from *The Cat and The Canary (1927)*

This approach conveys the story of this character who delved into madness because of his greedy relatives in his lonely mansion in two simple shots. It is an expressive and symbolic approach at the same time. Symbolism is evident with the black cats being compared to his greedy relatives surrounding him who are hungry for his fortune. Expressionism emerges from the visual storytelling of juxtaposed and superimposed images that reflect the psyche of the character. Superimposition of several images together is also a re-occurring stylistic choice in this film which can be considered expressionistic and commonly used in contemporary cinema by authors such as David Lynch.

As a final example before proceeding to the analysis of contemporary films, a great combination of editing, pace, camera angles and light techniques which carry influences of expressionism is demonstrated in the infamous shower scene from *Psycho (1960)* directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Having spent time in Germany and worked in Potsdam's UFA studios, Hitchcock learned a lot from master filmmakers of German expressionism and that shaped his style in many ways. This is most evident in one of his earliest films *The Lodger (1927)* but also significant in his later works.

Psycho is a great film that works as a bridge that carries the innovations created by German filmmakers towards the methods used by contemporary filmmakers.
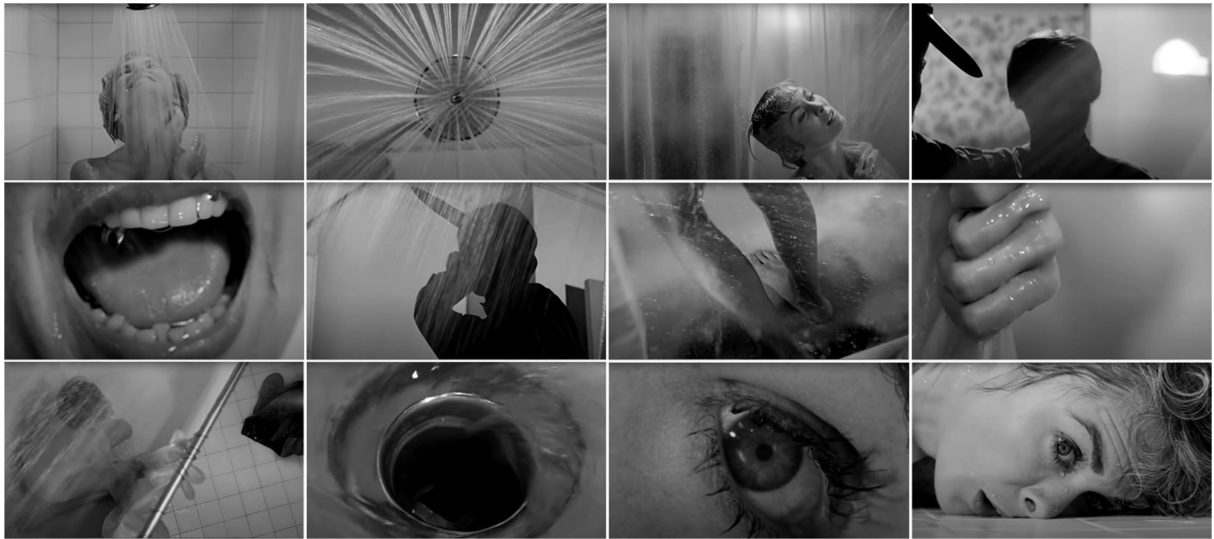
1.15 Stills from *Psycho (1960)*

The silhouette wielding the knife and appearing from nowhere is a clear reminiscent of German expressionism. The murderer does not have any visible features and almost looks like a shadow that Nosferatu casts on the walls of his citadel. Graphical alignments between the cuts such as the sink and the eye are also akin to the juxtapositions used earlier in expressionist films. What Hitchcock adds to these existing formulas is his usage of rapid-fire editing that utilises many, expressive close-ups and camera angles that jumps to every other possible direction after each cut, ignoring fundamental editing rules. These additions were very innovative and also adapted by future filmmakers that utilise tools of expressionism in their work. Filmmaker Kate Fisher makes similar observations by pointing out that the murderer remains shrouded in shadow as they stab Marion to death, along with the rapid cuts of the attack Hitchcock implants the panic and terror Marion is feeling into the audience. Hitchcock's *Psycho* is masterfully directed in expressing each character's

inner feelings using lighting and extreme imagery. [29] Hitchcock is certainly an artist which took a lot from expressionism and developed it in his own ways to create something unique.

To conclude, firstly, the analysis of the roots of expressionism, first four films provided us an insight regarding the common themes and narratives expressionist films explore which is important to build the bridge between the decades and observe the evolution of these themes. This is especially interesting to observe because expressionism is highly subjective and dependent on the emotions of the creators which most of the time reflect the environment they live in.

Secondly, the significant expressionist paintings showed us a point of origin how the visual style is born and developed towards the medium of the moving image. An evidence of how the expressionist approach to brush strokes translates into the expressionist approach to cinematography is certainly insightful to acquire.

Lastly, additional four films of the expressionist era and beyond demonstrated us how a wide range of expressionist tools are being masterfully used in the visual fields of cinematography, set design, visual effects and editing. Finding similar visual aspects of filmmaking in modern films is going to be the prime evidence of how expressionism is still very much alive and some contemporary filmmakers can be considered as expressionists in their own regard. Before delving into the analysis of the following films, it is fitting to end this chapter with a quote from Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: "No longer shall I paint interiors with men reading and women knitting. I will paint living people who breathe and feel and suffer and love." [30]

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[29] Fisher, Kate. *German Expressionism's Influence on the Work of Alfred Hitchcock. Personal Website of Kate Fisher*, 2018, para.6

[30] The Editors of Edvard Munch Website. *Edvard Munch Quotes.* Private Edvard Munch Website, para.9

II.   Embodiments of Expressionism in 21st Century Cinema

In this chapter, certain films that are created during 21st century which can be considered expressionist in modern terms will be analysed. These films are heavily influenced by the tools of classical expressionism in their various aspects. They are not labelled as 'expressionist films' or they don't make up 'a modern expressionist movement' but they have undeniable amounts of influence from German expressionism and expressionism in general. They share the inspiration for expressionism that comes from within and that is very individual for the artist himself. Due to this influence and inspiration which is visible both on their artistic and thematic aspects, this dissertation will aim to use the chosen selection of films as an evidence for the longevity of expressionist movement and existence of expressionism in modern cinema. Similar to the structure of the previous chapter, the chosen films will be focused in their most significant and unique elements which tie the film to expressionist qualities. These aspects will include the usage of cinematography, visual effects, editing, costume/set design, themes and narrative structure. Focusing on two to three aspects per film will condense the study of the film in an effective way to provide clear outcomes. These aspects will be studied both on their own and also will be connected to the classical examples to portray their relevance and similarity clearly. They are chosen as a selection of impressive films which are quite different from each other and yet portray the essential qualities and characteristics of expressionism.

a. Under the Skin (2013)
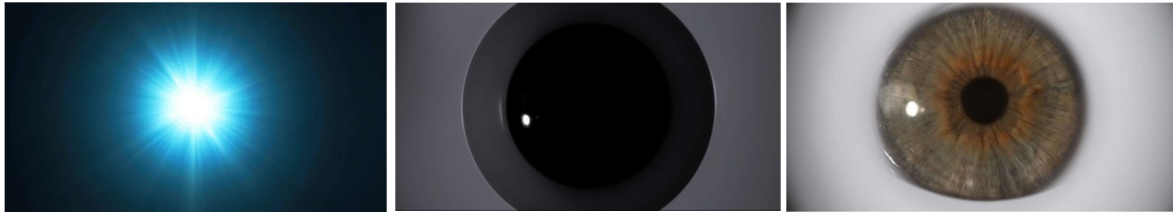
2.1 Transference of alien body into human body from *Under the Skin (2013)*

i. Introduction

Under the Skin (2013) is an impressive and unique film that blends genres of sci-fi/thriller/horror/drama directed by Jonathan Glazer. The film is loosely adapted from a book of the same name written by Michel Faber in 2000. The story revolves around an alien (Scarlett Johansson) infiltrating human society in disguise to seduce and lure unsuspected victims to be harvested and sent to another dimension. As she goes through this mission, she observes what is to be human. The main themes focus on important fundamentals such as the observation of human nature and society from an alien perspective that is completely detached from us. This enables the filmmakers to make objective observations of human behaviour through the eyes of an alien that is lost among humans. It is a philosophical film that explores questions such as what is to be human and what are our most defining characteristics. These characteristics usually revolve around death, violence, sex and rarely love. To communicate a story that focuses so much to our inner psyche, the filmmaker employs a variety of expressionist tools that creates a very unique style and storytelling.

ii. Alien Perspective / Alienation

One of the narrative tools that was earlier observed in classical examples of German expressionism was the establishment of perspective through the eyes of the protagonist and the display of world through his/her distorted psyche and subjectivity. Also a very common theme of the movement was alienation; this film

takes this theme very literally. In *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920),* the audience saw the world through the eyes of the demented Dr. Caligari. This shaped the set design entirely which was twisted and was like a terrible nightmare, just how it was in the mind of the mad hypnotist. Secondly, this perspective affected how the narrative is built. Narrative was full of flashbacks, dream sequences, inconsistencies and also the first plot twist of the cinema history. Such a narrative structure was a clear reflection of the fractured mind of the protagonist, shaping itself into a schizophrenic state.

In the case of *Under the Skin,* the same method is not only used but also brought to another level. The director puts us in the mind of an alien, not even a human. Through the cold and calculated eyes of an unknown force, he shows us our world. This again comes back to the relationship between the film and the psyche of its creator which is a prime indicator of an expressionist approach. According to The Guardian, Jonathan Glazer explained his motivation to establish an alien perspective as: "I suppose I must have that alien thing in me to start with. Yeah. Probably. I do feel outside. Not entirely, but I do. I've had that about me since quite a young age I think." [31] In practical terms though, this is done through several ways. First of all, the existence of this perspective is established to the audience by tools of acting, editing and cinematography. In terms of acting, Scarlet Johansson and the figure of alien authority commanding her appear to be completely detached from human emotions and expressions, unless they need it to use it as a tool for luring their victims. Scarlet Johansson maintains an extremely still and indifferent face as she walks among humans and observes the environment. There seems to be something off even in the way she walks and looks at things, it just doesn't seem human at all. The camera is

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[31] Leigh, Danny. *Under the Skin: why did this chilling masterpiece take a decade?.* The Guardian,2014, para.12

always on her as she lurks among humans and helps us to familiarise with this detachment which brings us closer to the alien perspective.

2.2 The Alien observing its environment from *Under the Skin (2013)*

Secondly, the filmmakers employ documentary-like, observant camera angles that show humans in their daily environment, almost just like a National Geographic series that explores animals in their wild life. These scenes included shots of people walking on the streets by daylight and going on with their business as well as the shots during the alien's night time hunt for its victims. To achieve the effect of the detachment and cold observation, the director made a choice to establish hidden cameras in the van she drove and shot these scenes with non-actors unscripted and improvised. Editing also helps this idea by employing sharp cuts into different moments of this observation and hunt rapidly. According to Jonathan Glazer, some events in the film were unscripted and filmed secretly, one scene where Johansson stumbles and falls over in a busy shopping street, and is helped to her feet by members of the public - only for her to walk off, robot-like, without thanks - actually happened and has been kept in and most of her "victims", who are chatted up by Johansson, and enticed to come and sit in her Transit van, aren't actors. [32] Later on, producers asked these people for permission if the footage can be used and some agreed.

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[32] Jones, Emma. *Scarlett Johansson on playing 'unscripted' scavenging alien.* BBC News,2014, para.10-11

**2.3** The alien surrounded by urban wildlife from *Under the Skin (2013)*

2.4 Unsuspecting victims shot by hidden cameras from *Under the Skin (2013)*

Lastly, another element which was common in the days of German expressionism is used: the two-dimensionality of the human characters. The film introduces the more significant human characters of the film almost as concepts rather than characters with real psychology. Concepts such as violence, primitivity, kindness, courage and fear appeared in the film separately as people embodying and displaying them. These people were mostly doing acts that convey the concept they were assigned to and collectively they built a picture of humanity and its core behavioural nature, at least according to the views of the director and how he sees it, which was quite Freudian. These people with assigned concepts also created the sub-themes of the film and helped shape the story which Danny Leigh describes as an abstract social realism with a skeletal story, heartbreak, horror and extraordinary sweetness. [33] The method of representing characters as embodiments of concepts, ideas or emotions rather than a fully developed individual was a very common trademark of German expressionism. Combination of these elements creates an alien perspective and creates an "alienation" which could be considered a thematic and a philosophical echo of early expressionism.

iii. Room of Creation / Room of Destruction

Whether it is the twisted streets and shadows of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920)* or the claustrophobic and ominous hallways of *Nosferatu (1922),* expressionist films always represented the main themes of the films through the usage of space and background. *Under the Skin (2013)* uses a similar approach all throughout the film by separating the experience of the audience in distinct spaces with some of them being realistic and some of them being totally unreal. The most significant spaces that were used were the rooms of pure white (creation) and black (destruction).

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[33] Leigh, Danny. *Under the Skin: why did this chilling masterpiece take a decade?.* The Guardian,2014, para.19
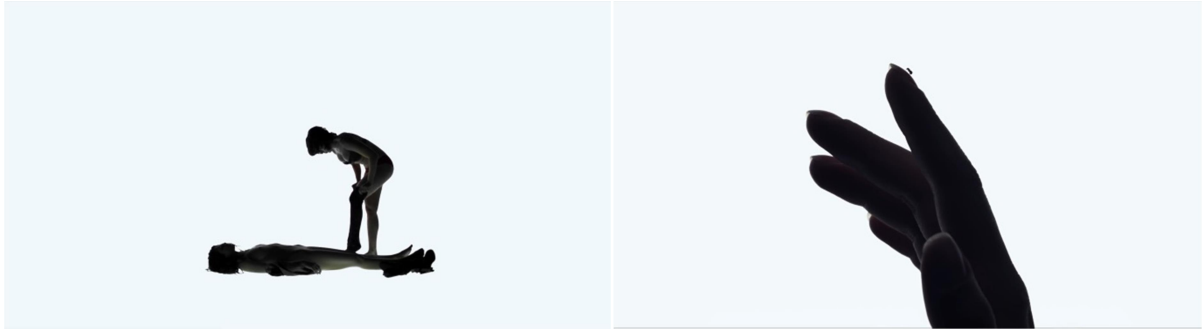
2.5 Acquiring human disguise and encounter with an ant from *Under the Skin (2013)*

The sequence of white room takes place in the very beginning of the film where the alien is completing its transference into human body and acquiring the necessary disguises such as clothes, voice and language. What is happening is some sort of creation and the expressive representation of it comes in the form of seamless, pure white space. The alien also experiences the first encounter with a living being from earth, an ant wandering on the dead body. It is a room of both acquiring and encountering a life. The sequences in the black room happen after the alien lures the victims in a place which disguised as a house but it turns out to be a room for harvesting organic material of humans to be transported to another dimension. Seduced by the alien, victims take step after step into a liquid of pure black until they are fully submerged and then destroyed. This room is the place where destruction happens and it is expressively represented with pure black along with a violent red. Again this is set design/visual effects in its purest form, a downgrade into basic colours and graphical elements which strikes the audience with pure dread.

2.6 Process of a victim being harvested and transported from *Under the Skin (2013)*

The music is also used very expressively in these sequences to convey anxiety and terror. Another thing to note is the fact that we witness the actual form of the alien first time in this space; this is because the space represents de-creation which removes the illusion of the aliens disguise. It is a room of losing a life. In few words, life and death are represented expressively by black and white in these sequences very artistically.

iv. Merging into Earth

Final expressionist aspect to be studied in *Under the Skin* is the usage of superimposed images that a very much reminiscent of *Nerven (1919), Schatten (1923), The Cat and The Canary (1927)* and many other films of German expressionism. In most of these films the superimposition is either used to create a dream-like effect or to create a meaning by juxtaposition of different elements. In *The Cat and The Canary* for example, the director used a superimposition of medicine bottles, cats and a person which was edited right after an image of that person's mansion to tell a story of his fate with effective visual storytelling. The superimposed images of *Under the Skin* serve a similar purpose, to create a new meaning using juxtaposition and metaphors.
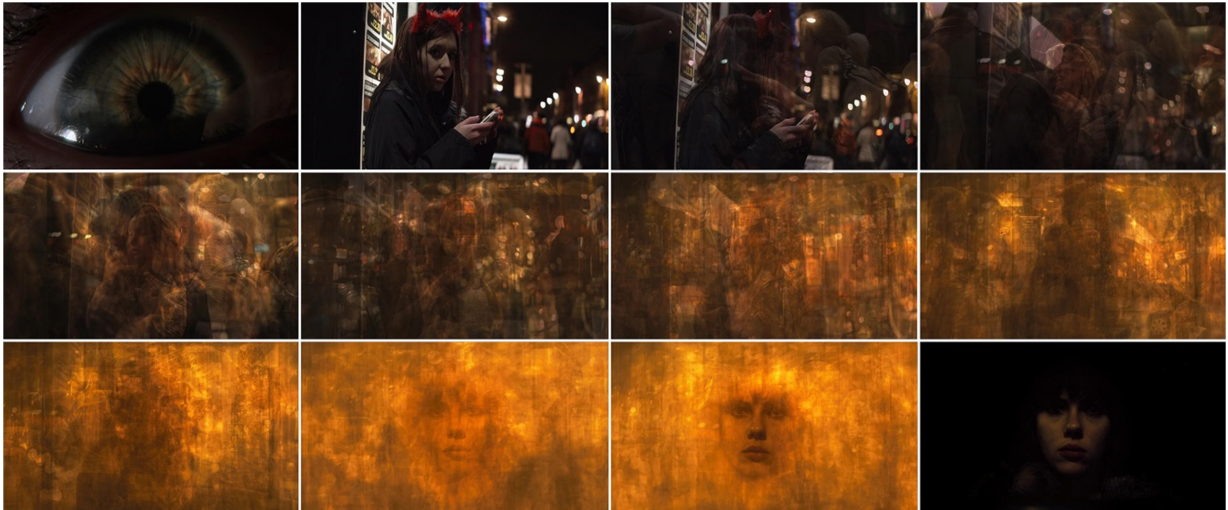
2.7 Superimposition of people on the streets and the alien from *Under the Skin (2013)*

The sequence above happens during one of the night hunts of the alien as she drives her van along the streets. Earlier she encountered an act of kindness from humans towards her after she fell to ground and also she got examined by her authority after this suspicious event. This sequence marks the beginning of her transformation towards being more human. Superimposed images are full of humans having good time. They add layer after layer to each other to create a beautiful image of warm colours which is accompanied by a mysterious but soothing sound. She goes through this almost like going through a tunnel with her van and comes out of it changed psychologically. In this example of superimposition, the juxtaposition is built with the gradually increasing amount of people and the alien emerging out of them to create a meaning of the alien merging into human society and thus merging into earth.

The superimposition below takes place after she becomes intimate with a human that protects and takes care of her. This happens after she disobeys her authorities and runs away from them. While with him, she almost transcends to being human but fails miserably in an attempt to have sex, realizing she can never be human. She runs away from him as well and takes shelter in a forest.

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2.8 Alien becoming one with Nature from *Under the Skin (2013)*

There she sleeps and the superimposed image shows us her being one with the nature and her literally merging into our world. There is a sinister wind in the air; even the earth seems to be not accepting her. This turns out to be true as she gets attacked by a rapist during her sleep. Her solitude is no more. Again, this is a very expressive approach of storytelling only done by images. An alien who attempts to become one of us is displayed to the audience reaching its goal for a brief moment but the dream-like embrace of nature is a short lasting illusion.

b. The Babadook (2014)

i. Introduction

The Babadook is an expressionist horror film directed by Jennifer Kent. The story of this dark film revolves around a family of a mother (Essie Davis) and a son (Noah Wiseman) who are coping with the death of the father. It is a film in which grief becomes a tangible nightmare in the form of a creature called Mister Babadook to haunt this family until either they are destroyed by it or until they embrace it. The film is inspired by German expressionism in a much more straightforward way with its chiaroscuro lightning, gothic set design and the nightmare-like structure of the plot. In a sense, it doesn't even look or feel different from classical German expressionist films apart from implementation of modern filmmaking techniques. *Under the Skin* used tools of expressionism in its own interpretive way to achieve something new, whereas *The Babadook* is an echoing nightmare coming straight from the past.

James P. Barker interprets the film as being grounded in German expressionism which works on a psychological level as an allegory to convey the

concept of suppression and repression, showing us the ill-effects - including cognitive dissonance - of what happens when emotions, particularly grief, have not been dealt with. [34]   Mister Babadook tells us this concept in his book very effectively with his riddle: " If it's in a word or in a look. You can't get rid of the Babadook.I'll wager with you. I'll make a bet. The more you deny, the stronger I get. You start to change when I get in, The Babadook growing right under your skin. Come see what's underneath!"

2.9 Mister Babadook as drawn in the children's book from *The Babadook (2014)*

ii.   The Nightmare that Never Ends, Grief

The film opens with the mother, in the midst of a nightmare recalling the traumatic car crash where she lost her husband. The whole film is based on this trauma and its impact to her and her son's psychology. They are in denial of this loss and the repression of it is coming out in the form of nightmares, and later in the form of Mister Babadook. The slow, dreadful emergence of this trauma defines the narrative structure of the plot. The film is structured into phases of her sleep in which this nightmare is gradually getting worse and showing its true form. Every once in a while the mother is shown falling asleep, waking up or just sleeping which is an indicator of the nightmare and the reality being entirely blended together.

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[34] Barker, James P. *The Babadook: when allegory meets expressionism in a therapeutic horror classic.* Wassup!,2018, para.2

2.10 The mother waking up from the nightmare from *The Babadook (2014)*

Her going to sleep or staying awake does not change her experience of surroundings much. The director uses narrative tools of expressionism to shape the film as this nightmare itself and this becomes even clearer as she develops insomnia and stops sleeping at all. The narrative plot and the space itself being the nightmare or at least having a nightmarish appearance due to the distorted psyche of the protagonist is a common trademark of German expressionism. Such an approach can be seen in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* with the reality being a reflection of the twisted mind of Dr. Caligari and in also many other films of that era. Also in *Nosferatu*, the castle is a character itself, a mirror that reflects the terrifying visage of Count Orlok. *The Babadook* deploys a similar approach by making the house an embodiment of their trauma and grief. The house reacts to the increasing intensity of the nightmare and acts as an extension of Mister Babadook and his presence. Both the son and the mother see separate, horrible visions in the house that are emerging from their damaged psyche. They share one vision that they collectively empower though, the demon, Mister Babadook. Mister Babadook first appears in the house as a children's pop-up book in a shelf. The son discovers it and wants the mother to read it. That's how Mister Babadook starts to grow, from only appearing as sound at first until having a physical form haunting the house.

2.11 Mister Babadook, from book to body from *The Babadook (2014)*

As mentioned earlier, the film is split into different phases. These can be interpreted as phases of her sleep/nightmare and the phases of grief as a psychological phenomenon. Actually these both interpretations are the same thing because they are deliberately connected to each other and made as one. According to James Barker, the allegory of grief has five stages which all are represented in the film. These stages happen in order as follows: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. The nightmare is precisely structured into these emotions. Building such an elaborate structure of a plot is a very expressionist approach which merges the psyche of the protagonist totally with the narrative structure of the film. Tools such as visualizations of dreams, flashbacks and plot twists which were innovated by German expressionist filmmakers are all well studied and utilised in this film to achieve this structure. The nightmare never ends, even after Mister Babadook is defeated. It only changes its intensity and phases. It starts off mild, becomes very intense and in the end gets reduced to a manageable, steady amount. Tom Beasley interprets this narrative in his article as an example of *The Babadook's* understanding of human grief. The loss of a loved one isn't something you can ever completely forget, but it is something that you can lock away and prevent from taking control of your life. There will be times when you need to feed that grief to keep it at bay, but it needn't be something that stops you living a happy life. Over time, grief may get better and you may need to feed it less, but it's never going to stop being upsetting and it's never going to completely disappear.

After all, you can't get rid of the Babadook. Not having a light in the end of the tunnel is not an alien concept to German expressionist films as well. In those films of the classical era, there is also usually an ending which is acceptable but not ideal. [35]

2.12 The projection of never-ending nightmare from *The Babadook (2014)*

iii. The Mansion and The Shadow

The Babadook has one of the most direct displays of being influenced from German expressionism in terms of cinematography and lighting. Extreme contrast and heavy chiaroscuro, lurking shadows on the walls and hallways, flickering lights, appearing silhouettes, faces being sharply split into light and shadow, black and white horror imagery being emitted from an ominous TV, every furniture in the house resembling a monster, this film has it all in their full extent. Although the film is not black and white, it has only a few colours which are very desaturated. This provides a precise control over the lightning to achieve the expressionist look. When asked about if her film is inspired by German expressionism, the director, Jennifer Kent agrees it by saying: "They were in a very pure period. Expressionism started in painting, and it was about bringing the inside out. And so often, architecture and interiors reflected the emotional space of the people that inhabited them. For me, this early silent horror was very theatrical, in a really good way. So it makes sense." [36]

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[35] Beasley, Tom. *Analysis – The Babadook as a study of human grief and bereavement.* The Popcorn Muncher,2014, para.17-19

[36] Lambie, Ryan. *Jennifer Kent interview: directing The Babadook.* Den of Geek,2014, para.23

2.13 The house lit with heavy chiaroscuro from *The Babadook (2014)*

As seen in the still images from the film above, the lighting and the set design almost looks like a re-mastered version of *Nosferatu*. The carefully designed gothic architecture and furniture provide perfect surfaces to use strong, directional lights. This method of lighting allows the filmmakers to light the important part of the frame only and obscure the rest. This creates fear and anxiety as the audience is constantly expecting a horror coming out of the unknown shadows. This approach is utilised extremely well in *The Babadook* just like *Nosferatu,* because the creature is not seen until the very end of the film when he is strongest and the mother and the son is always on the lookout for him to emerge. Before he finally appears, he is only a shadow that lurks around the corners, a sound that terrifies the family and an invisible force that hides under the darkest areas of chiaroscuro. This approach is an example of pure expressionism using the tools of light and shadow, a perfect execution of horror genre staples.
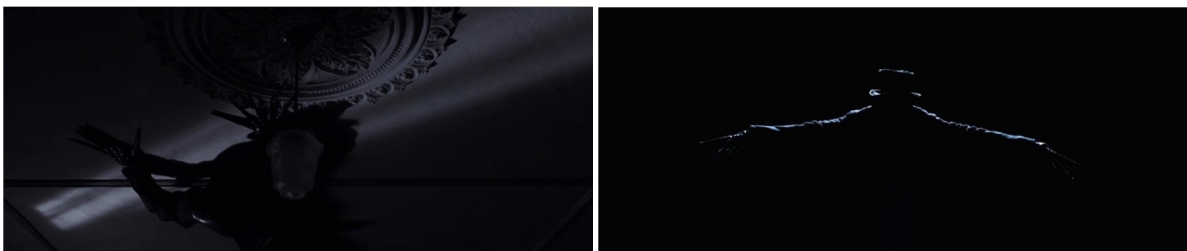
2.14 Mister Babadook lurking in shadows from *The Babadook (2014)*

Another method utilizing shadows used by the filmmakers which is inspired from German expressionism is the lighting of characters from a side angle to cast a shadow of them on the walls. In the famous shots of *Nosferatu,* the shadow of Count Orlok used to appear on the walls before he arrives, indicating the slow arrival of an evil force which fills the audience with emerging tension. This same approach was also used in other German expressionist films such as *Schatten*, in which shadows of the people took a big role and also in many films of Hollywood's film noir such as *The Maltese Falcon.* In *The Babadook (2014)* a similar approach is used when Mister Babadook possesses the Mother. Under the possession, her shadow was constantly being cast on the walls while she chases her son and their dog to hurt them. Mister Babadook was the shadow and she was the host containing the demon. This is a perfect example how the narrative expressionistically reflects to the cinematography of the film.

2.15 Mister Babadook chasing the son through the mother from *The Babadook (2014)*

iv. The Book and The Monster

In this section, maybe one of the most direct homages to German expressionism from the film will be studied. The most significant object in the film is the book, Mister Babadook. In this book, the concept of the monster is described. It shows in vivid pop-up drawings how the monster starts to emerge, how it gets stronger and how it possesses the living to kill people. These drawings are inspired straight from German expressionism imagery and almost look like storyboards for classical films of the era.

2.16 The pages of Mister Babadook, foreshadowing the events from *The Babadook (2014)*

The book acts almost like a relic from a classical era of cinema and happens to be found in this film. Upon the reading of it, the film starts to absorb the storytelling and the imagery of expressionism and change itself accordingly, just how the characters in the film are gradually changing for the worse. The mother tries several times to dispose the book, once by putting away and the second time trying to burn it but the book keeps regenerating itself and comes back even stronger than before. After all, grief cannot be denied. In a meta-filmic sense, the influence of expressionism on this film cannot be denied as well since it was transported into the film through the book.

The book brings us the monster, which is almost a combination of Dr.Caligari, the somnambulist Cesare and Count Orlok. It carries the clothes of Dr.Caligari, the make-up of the somnambulist and the physical features of Count Orlok with its long, twisted hands and slim, disproportioned figure. The director chooses the frightening characters of German expressionism and blends them into one.
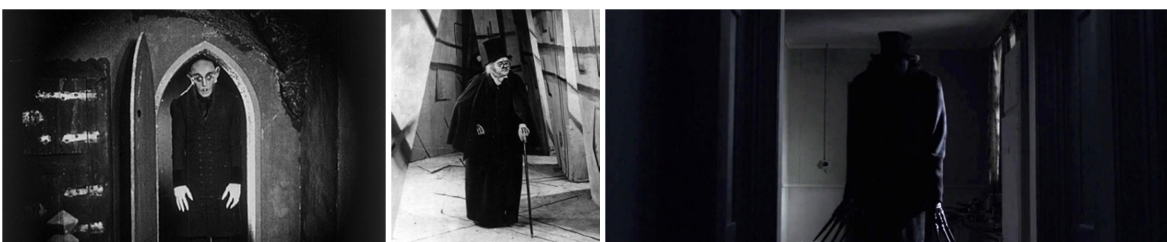
2.16 Nosferatu, Dr. Caligari, Mister Babadook, from *Nosferatu (1922), The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920) and The Babadook (2014)*

Upon the indication of the interviewer regarding the hands of Mister Babadook reminding German expressionism with its jagged fingers, the director comments on it as follows: It's something that appeals to me and it has a lot of tie-ins with fairy which this film explores: a fairy-tale reality. I'm not talking Disney, obviously, but the more brutal, true roots of fairy tales or something that contains a lot of those strange-looking characters and was really inspiring for The Babadook. [37]

2.17 Mister Babadook and other horrors from *The Babadook (2014)*

Last aspect from this film to be included is the usage of black and white horror imagery shown in the TV as portrayed above. This is again homage to silent era horror films and German expressionism. The director uses a meta-filmic approach to transmit images of her inspirations into the film through a television. These images were nightmares in their own worlds and they join this collective nightmare and accompany Mister Babadook, who is coming out of a cabinet in a freak show just like the somnambulist as a direct homage to *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.*

In conclusion, *The Babadook (2014)* is a film produced as if the era of German expressionism was not over. It has a deliberate, precise inclusion of many visual and

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[37] Hunter, Alex. *'The Babadook' Director Jennifer Kent Discusses Her Nail-Biting Directorial Debut.* Film at Lincoln Center,2014, para.16

narrative aspects of the classical expressionist films and combines them with a perfect modern execution. As Mister Babadook says: "You'll See Him If You Look!"

c. Enemy (2013)

i. Introduction

Enemy (2013) is a neo-noir psychological thriller directed by Denis Villeneuve. The film is loosely adapted from José Saramago's novel *The Double (2002).* The film revolves around a college professor (Jake Gyllenhaal) finding out about the existence of his doppelganger which results in him taking a journey into the depths of his own psyche to figure out who he really is. The theme of the doppelganger was an important theme of German expressionism and was explored in the films such as *The Student of Prague (1913), The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920)* and *Metropolis (1927).* According to Judith Kerman*,* the doppelganger represents the dark side of a character and the fear of emotions essential to German expressionist cinema. [38] In *Enemy,* the protagonist and his doppelganger are two manifestations of one personality, both possessing different qualities. They are enemies as the name suggests, who are in a duel to repress each other for good and this conflict is displayed very all throughout the film. To compliment this narrative, the idea of femininity is explored through the eyes of these two different sides with their wife and girlfriend. The film employs expressionist tools to construct itself according to the split-psyche of the protagonist and pushes the limits of the craft to achieve a pure form of visual storytelling. According to CBC radio, in their interview with Jake Gyllenhaal, the actor recalls Dennis Villeneuve calling the movie a documentary about the subconscious of Jake Gyllenhaal, which the actor identifies with to a

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[38] Kerman, Judith. *Retrofitting Blade Runner: Issues in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner and Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?.* Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University,1991, p.112

certain extent. [39] This is a statement indicating the expressionist nature of the film. Other than the impressive study of the doppelganger theme, the film has a very expressionist look portraying influences of film noir and German expressionism as well as a non-linear editing full of dreams and flashbacks.

2.18 The defining shot of the film, the protagonist being split into two from *Enemy (2013)*

ii. The Doppelganger

The film starts with a nightmare like the previous example in which the protagonist is witnessing some kind of a sick show together with other men who all seem to be expressing both pleasure and disturbance at the same time. They access to this show by walking down a corridor and going through a door with a special key they possess. In this ominous, dark room, nude women masturbate and kill a spider that comes on a golden plate. The show triggers some kind of introspection for those who are witnessing it, which results the protagonist to delve into his psyche and summon a doppelganger out of it. The film uses this scene as a key for the audience to interpret it as well. Jake Gyllenhaal shown in the image above splits his face into two by his hands, foreshadowing the events yet to come.

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[39] Gyllenhaal, Jake. Interviewed by Brent Bambury. *Jake Gyllenhaal on Enemy and dueling doppelgängers.* CBC Radio,2015

2.19 The audience witnessing the spider sacrifice from *Enemy (2013)*

After the nightmare a dreamy cityscape establishes the world. We witness repetitive routines of Anthony, who is a professor of history and who is the 'main' identity of the protagonist. At this very moment, his alternate self/doppelganger is repressed and not on the surface. He has a girlfriend, Mary, whom he doesn't have a good relationship with but he is actually married to another woman, Helen who is his true partner. His relationship with Mary is the result of his doppelganger taking over. Anthony always talks about how the history repeats itself in his lectures and that idea also applies to his doppelganger constantly coming out to take control. Throughout the film we will witness this event happening for the last time. Coming out to surface happens in three stages and that is conveyed in the film with specific encounters, first seeing himself on a DVD, then talking himself on the phone and finally meeting and confronting himself physically. Analyzing the theme of the doppelganger through this three stages will provide an insight how the filmmakers used expressionist tools to tackle this concept. His first encounter happens after his colleague recommends a film for him to watch. Anthony explains to him that he does not like movies but ultimately ends up renting the DVD of that film. His doppelganger is a low rated actor and his screen name is Daniel St.Claire. He watches it after another unpleasant night with his girlfriend and he does not notice himself acting in it. He sleeps and in his dream the images of the film appear again, in which he clearly sees himself. Implementing this first encounter as a dream in a film which is already a dream itself is a very expressionist approach to fracture the narrative and create a plot purely out

of the psyche of the protagonist. The dream/film he is acting in it features a very theatrical acting, vibrant imagery and expressionist music with no dialogue.

2.20 Anthony appearing as bellboy in the dream/film from *Enemy (2013)*

This encounter triggers the re-surfacing of his doppelganger and sends Anthony to a journey to find who he is. He starts to get disoriented and his daily routine gets affected. This collapse is also reflected to the editing style of the film. The filmmakers introduce cuts that distort the perception of time and space. Non-linearity gradually gets more evident as the psyche of the protagonist gets fractured into two realities. Tiffany Kaitlyn argues that trying to line up the pieces of the Jake Gyllenhaals' lives to create one whole story makes the whole thing collapse and this is the exact outcome the director is trying to create. [40] The protagonist is in the process of collapsing just like the narrative structure of the film. The psyche of the character directly translates into the film language, which is an example of introspection becoming an expressionist tool of filmmaking, just like how it was in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.*

2.21 The protagonist coming face to face with his doppelganger through the film from *Enemy (2013)*

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[40] Kaitlyn, Tiffany. *Arrival's director also made Enemy, a movie that argues history will repeat itself. The Verge*,2016, para.5

The above shots are a perfect example for an expressionist approach in visual terms how to portray the doppelganger, the inner shadow slowly coming out and embracing him. After this first encounter, Anthony the history professor contacts his doppelganger by phone. They speak to each other directly and this triggers the duel of two identities and the second stage of resurfacing. The editing starts to implement tricks such as jumping from one identity of him to the other one while blending the space and time between them. The audience starts to confuse which identity they are watching. Filmmakers are merging the perspective of the audience with his split-psyche. One of the tools they employ is a 'portal', a space where two identities enter at their home and come out with the other identity taking over. Clever tricks of camera and editing hide these transitions to jump from one house to another and keep the audience always guessing at which side is at control.

As Jake Gyllenhaal gets mentally unstable in both households, the girlfriend and the wife starts to get suspicious. Both women think that Anthony is seeing someone else, which is true. His collapse into two identities originates from his fear of commitment after all. This is especially true because his wife is pregnant and which is an ultimate test of lifelong commitment. The opening nightmare scene was a metaphor of him seeing the women in his life as danger and as him being trapped in spider webs. The conflicts on two households result in the fight of two identities to grow stronger and they have no choice but to meet each other in a solitary motel. There the film will depict them physically present at the same space but actually he is alone, confronting himself and his identities.

2.22 The third stage, direct confrontation from *Enemy (2013)*

In this sequence the filmmaker makes one identity visible and the other one a shadow. This is later intelligently switched as they move around. It is a visually expressionist way of showing their duel and them being a reflection of the other one. Here, the actor identity gets aggressive and the professor runs away in fear. The actor is taking over. After this event he threatens the professor in order to spend a night with his girlfriend. This is exactly what the protagonist does as a single identity, to chase other women and escape commitment. The actor meets the girlfriend and brings her to a hotel room to have sex. In the meantime, the professor goes to the house of the actor (his original house) and sleep with his wife. They switched places and this signifies the professor actually going back to his wife in regret. The girlfriend notices the ring mark on the finger of the actor and they fight. This results in them leaving the hotel and having a car crash on the road. Both of them are killed. The doppelganger is finally gone and the professor is finally one entity. In the morning, he is greeted by a giant spider, his wife.

2.23 The final shot of the film, Anthony is back to the spider web from *Enemy (2013)*

iii. The Spider Maze

As studied above, the film is a reflection of the mind of the protagonist and the imagery of spider is a reoccurring element of his nightmare/dream.   The film starts with a spider and ends with a spider. Along the journey the imagery of the spider is always present as well. According to Kevin Lincoln, the director describes his expressionist approach towards implementing the symbol of spider as follows: "It's an image that I found that was a pretty hypnotic and profound way to express something about femininity that I was looking to express in one image. Because in the book you can use chapters to express something, but in cinema you have one shot, and the spider was exactly the perfect image. There's movies that I saw in my life that propose images that were not explained, but were provocative, that were opening doors from a subconscious point of view, images that are frightening and oppressive, but at the same time, you feel the image. It prints itself in your brain, but you feel uncomfortable with it." [41] The meaning of the film is thoroughly studied in the first chapter, in this one the cinematographic approach to exteriors and interiors will be analysed instead, which are expressionist in their nature and reflect the psyche of the character vividly.

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[41] Lincoln, Kevin. *Revisiting the Ending of Denis Villeneuve's Enemy, Spiders and All.* Vulture,2017, para.16

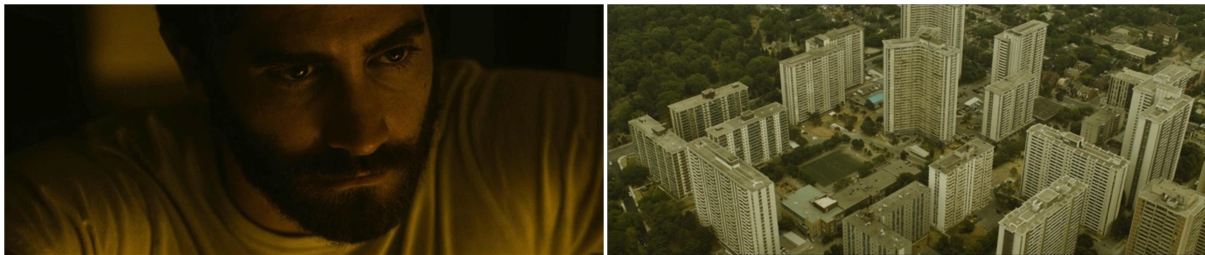**2.23** Dreamy cityscapes from *Enemy (2013)*

The film uses a dream-like cinematography on the cityscape which supports the idea of the entire world being a reflection of his mind. As seen in the images above, the city is hazy, giving it a dreamy quality. Also the shots are very monochromatic, again expressively reducing the realism. The architecture in the film has qualities of minimalism and brutalism which makes the city appear to be dystopic. The repetitive lines and squares are always dominant in the background, helping the narrative of repetition and conveying the feeling of being in a seamless maze.

2.24 Repetitive, maze-like cityscapes from *Enemy (2013)*

The metropolitan excess of windows and sharp lines remind the cityscapes of *Metropolis.* In both films, this expressionist approach is used to convey the same idea, being trapped in an alienating world with nowhere to run. José Teodoro reviews the the portrayal of the city as follows, his use of Toronto is especially inspired,

draining the city of character, bathing it in sickly amber, and drawing upon the most forbidding vistas of its downtown core and elevated freeways, of the University of Toronto's brutalist architecture, and of outlying suburb Mississauga's monolithic apartment towers, so as to render his setting as alienating and anonymous as possible". [42] These cityscapes are edited in abruptly during the events, giving the audience an elevated eye to look down upon the maze, which Anthony does it at one point as well.

2.24 Straight cut from Anthony to the cityscape from above from *Enemy (2013)*, reminding Jack Nicholson looking down to maze from *The Shining (1980).*

The cityscape gradually gets dreamier as the mental state of the protagonist collapses. This is accompanied by the imagery of the spiders and spider webs appearing more frequently and clearly. As Anthony is lost trying to find who he is and being split into two lives with two women, he appears to be roaming this maze, trying to find the direction and trying to stabilise his confusion. This is directly translated into the cinematography and editing. The electric wires seem like spider webs, the buildings hail ominously above, the cuts jump between time and space very drastically and Anthony is having hard time to navigate the maze that is his twisted psyche. As the film progresses further, the spiders literally invade the city, appearing crawling above the buildings and haunting Anthony in narrow corridors. According to Bharat Krishna Swaminathan this represents the connection to how Jake's character feels. He feels trapped in the web of the responsibilities that surround him.

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[42] Teodoro, José. *Film Comment, Review: Enemy.* Film at Lincoln Center,2014, para.3
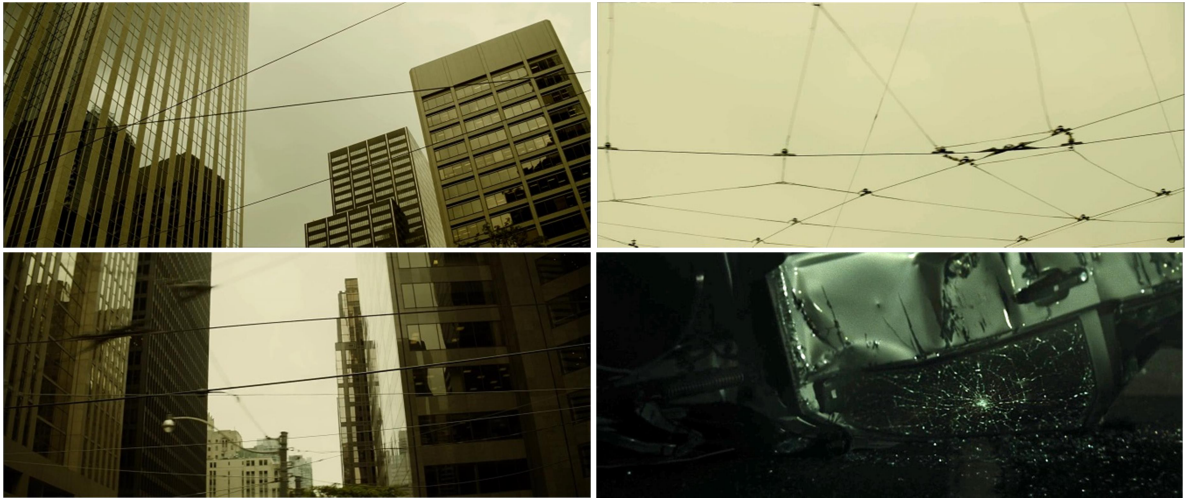
2.25 Gradually increasing spider web imagery from *Enemy (2013)*

He feels he is going to be devoured. That said, the responsibilities that are bearing on him are those posed by the women in his life. So in a sense, each of the spiders represents a woman in his life. [43] This also explains the very final shot of the film, where his wife turns into a giant spider. That image works as a final evidence for the interpretation of the spider imagery. It also proves how the mind of Anthony and the narrative structure is totally entwined. Such a narrative method is commonly used by many German expressionist films in the classical era. It is expressionism done purely in visual terms as the director himself previously explained in his interview. In conclusion, Enemy is an impressive, dark and mysterious film that blends expressionism and surrealism. It's a psychological study of a broken man who is terrified of his commitments. Its influences from German expressionism are undeniable and they come in the form of visual introspection, non-linear narrative, disorienting editing, heavy usage of chiaroscuro and expressive cinematography.

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[43] Swaminathan, Bharat Krishna. *Enemy Movie Explained.* This is Barry,2014, para.6

2.26 Spiders that haunt Anthony from *Enemy (2013)*

    d. Mother! (2017)

        i. Introduction

Mother! (2017) is a psychological horror film directed by Darren Aronofsky. It is a dark, surrealist and expressionist piece full of allegory and symbolism. The film is written by the director as well and it carries many elements of his own introspection in it, which results in a pure form of personal expression. Compared to some previous examples that were analysed, the films connection to expressionism is more obscured because of the overlaying, symbol-heavy narratives and metaphors but the expressionism is still present and strong in it, especially in terms of craft. The story revolves around a married couple living in seclusion in their Victorian mansion. The husband (Javier Bardem) is a poet/author who is recently having troubles to find inspiration and write. The wife (Jennifer Lawrence) spends her day renovating the house, trying to create a perfect space for him to work and for their marriage thrive. The spark, both for their love and for their work seems to be currently absent. Things

start to change and become pure chaos as a stranger comes to their house to meet with the poet he admires. This starts a chain reaction of their home being invaded gradually by more admirers, him finding more inspiration and her being mistreated, ignored or even abused. This madness keeps getting out of control as we observe her limits being tested and him getting blinded by admiration and worship. She ends up burning the house down, taking everyone with it. He is unharmed. He takes only remaining thing she can give, her love in the form of a crystal heart. He restarts the entire chain of events again, with another women being the wife. It is an allegorical story which functions in many layers and opens up possibilities for several interpretations. The most common interpretation sees the wife (who becomes a mother in the film) as mother earth and the rest as humans that defile and abuse her and her creations. Another interpretation argues that the story is about bible and the poet is the god, she is the mother earth, first intruders are Adam and Eve and rest are humans worshipping him and abusing her. The less common interpretation is actually tied to expressionism the most and it sees the director as the poet in the film who is obsessed with his work and who is treating her badly because of it, which makes the film a self-critique. This interpretation is all about the introspection of the director and how he expresses himself through a character he created. All of these interpretations are true to some extent, which makes the film a very interesting multi-layered piece. The common theme among these interpretations is the fact that we, as humans are decadent and degenerate who does spoil and defile whatever we put our hands on. The theme of degeneracy and moral decline were also quite common in films of German expressionism. According to Anne Thompson the director verifies this thematic approach by his comments as follows: "the mother earth is very much about loving and giving. She's given us life on this planet. All she does is to give us life. We also see nature's wrath in the scene when Mother is attacking the crowd.

The allegory is, here are these incredible infinite resources given to us and we abuse it all. We don't follow lessons from kindergarten to clean up your own mess. We are empathizing with Mother Nature, feeling her pain and her wrath." [44] The film can be seen in many ways but one thing is certain that its craft carries expressionist aspects which will be studied in following chapters. This is due to the director approaching the film and his art emotionally and introspectively.

2.27 Mother earth opening its gates from *Mother! (2017)*

According to Adam White, Darren Aronofsky described his inspiration for the film as "It came out of living on this planet and sort of seeing what's happening around us and not being able to do anything". I just had a lot of rage and anger, and I wanted to channel it into one emotion, into one feeling. In five days I wrote the first version of the script… It just sort of poured out of me." [45] These lines are exactly what an expressionist would say describing his/her process. In terms of craft, the dynamic camerawork which always follows the mother up close and the visual representation of the house as a living being will be analysed in their ties to expressionism. The

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[44] Thompson, Anne.*'mother!': Darren Aronofsky Answers All Your Burning Questions About the Film's Shocking Twists and Meanings.* Indiewire,2017, para.17

[45] White, Adam. *Mother! explained: What on earth is that yellow potion and who are Domhnall and Brian Gleeson?.* Independent.ie,2017, para.7

study of the narrative structure and editing will provide further insight on expressionist approaches used on the film.

ii. The Creation of the Poet

Javier Bardem as the poet represents the god in the film, either the god in biblical terms or the god in terms of being the creator of the film itself. In either case, he holds the strings of the occurring events and the unfolding of the narrative. In a way he holds the power of the editing in the film and that is consciously displayed in several scenes. Every line he delivers, every random stranger who visits the house, every little detail that occur, it's all his architecture and plan, just like how the idea of god is supposed to function. This plan of his is also in an eternal repetition. It resets every time it finishes and it takes place again. It is some kind of a narcissistic game he never stops enjoying. As he says in the film: "Nothing is ever enough, I couldn't create if it was!" This also can be traced back to the director himself, being the 'god' of the film and being a creator who goes through the same psychological journey the poet goes. The director expresses himself through the poet and admits his guilt and regret towards others in an expressionistic way. He puts himself in the film as the antagonist.
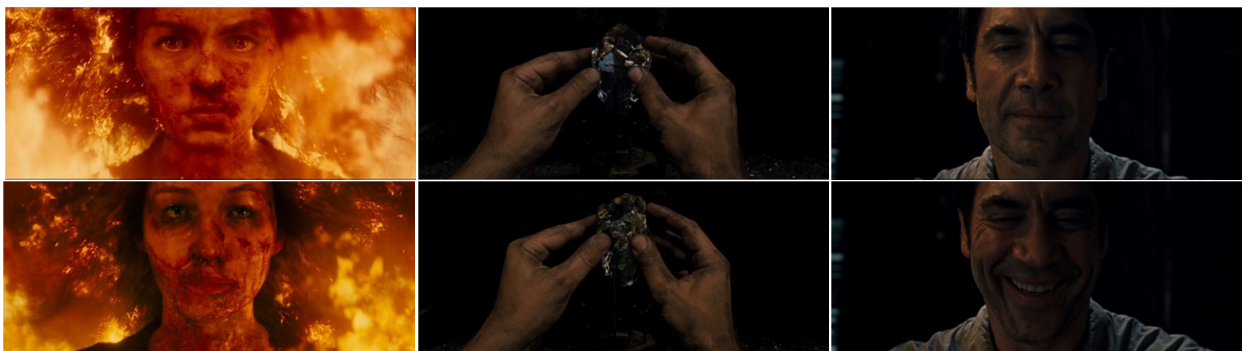
2.28 The opening (above) and the ending (below) of the film, mother earth destroys the home, the poet takes the crystal heart and starts everything again from *Mother! (2017)*

In this sense, the structure of the film seems to be like the mental maze of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920)*. In Robert Wiene's masterpiece*,* we are in the mind of Dr. Caligari and we explore the reality through his distorted perspective. In *Mother! (2017)* we are in the creation of the antagonist but we perceive it from another body, we perceive it from mother earth's perspective. The poet edits the film and we witness it helplessly and without power, trapped almost. The above images display the opening and the ending of the film, they are edited in the exact same manner with same shots, only the subjects change (previous mother and next mother).

This is a clear indicator of the analytical puzzle-like editing structure of the film, the puzzle that is under control of the poet, a puzzle which comes together step by step with perfect calculation. There is a perfect scene towards the end of the film that demonstrates the helplessness of the mother and the audience towards the power of the poet. The expressionist way of editing this scene communicates this concept perfectly without using words but just images. This scene takes place towards the ending of the film; the mother is pregnant with the poet's child. Their house is already invaded by thousands of people who live and conduct religious rituals in it, worshipping the poet. Amidst a chaos of violence, perversion and decadence (representing the human population defiling mother earth) mother gives a birth. The poet and the mother find a secure place at their home, keeping the wild populace outside. Although the populace is quiet they appear to be waiting for something. The poet wants to take the baby from her because the worshippers want to see it. The mother does not allow him. The poet patiently waits and cuts the film in rapid jumps to progress the time swiftly, days and nights pass by until the mother cannot stay awake to protect her child anymore. She finally falls asleep and the poet takes the baby away from her, only to present it to the worshippers who murder and eat it in a sick religious ritual. The Poet says they must forgive them but mother earth destroys

her house, her domain in wrath. The editing of this scene shows the omnipotence power of the poet who can meta-filmicly manipulate outcomes according to his plan, which can be interpreted as him being the director who is editing the film and doing that anyway.

2.29 The omnipotent poet taking the baby away from her from *Mother! (2017)*

The element of expressionism comes in here, this is one of the hints that the poet is a manifestation of the director and the thus the film works as an expression of guilt and self-critique, of consuming and sacrificing others for the sake of the "work", the art, in this case the film.

The systematic nature of editing is observable not only here but all throughout the film. Certain shots are always repeated periodically, usually involving small changes to the previous alteration to indicate a progression. That is the systematic

progression of the Poet's work, a work that is always the same except the small differences and a work that never ends, the artwork.

2.30 An expressionist shot portraying the poet as a god-like figure Looking down from above from *Mother! (2017)*

iii. The Eyes of the Mother

While the poet is creating the setting and assuming the control of chain of events, the audience is tied closely to the subjective perspective of the mother and becomes trapped with her in the nightmare. The director wants the audience to empathise with mother earth/the wife and that is why the camera is almost always either locked to the face of Jennifer Lawrence or it becomes her point of view trying to navigate the madness around with dynamic and moving camerawork.   Mark Kermode describes this as follows: "Throughout this escalating madness, cinematographer Matthew Libatique keeps his widescreen lens close to Lawrence, peering over her shoulder, pushing into her face, capturing her singular point of view in long takes. This is first-person cinema, a subjective sensory experience, part waking dream, part walking nightmare." [46] Scott Essman, having talked with the set decorator Larry Dias recalls him saying that the entire movie was oriented from

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[46] Kermode, Mark. *Mother! review – a complicated labour for Jennifer Lawrence….* The Gaurdian,2017, para.7

Lawrence's point-of-view and they were even moving things with the camera on several long tracking shots. [47]

2.31 One of many sequences where camera is frantically cutting between her portrait and her point of view, putting the audience in the nightmare from *Mother! (2017)*

The above example takes place when the invaders of the house are looting everything and she is trying to prevent them hopelessly. As she moves from room to room and people to people, camera is constantly switching between her face and her point of view. This disorients the audience and merges them with her psychology.

The subjectivity of perspective and the methods to communicate it through the camera was a common tool that expressionist filmmakers used in the classical era of the movement. The camera becoming the eyes of the character and moving through the space of the film is the most evident way to achieve this effect and it was also used in *The Cat and The Canary (1927)* as studied earlier in the classical examples. In *The Cat and The Canary* and some other German expressionist films this method was used only in small parts of the film in order to communicate a subjective detail regarding a character. In *Mother!,* it's the main language of the cinematography, a tool to assault the audience through the suffering of the mother and teach them a lesson whether it is about mother earth being defiled or an artist sacrificing his partner in sake of his work.

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[47] Essman, Scott. *Mother! – A Triumph of Production Design and Editing*. Below The Line,2018, para.7

2.32 Two other triptychs portraying the subjective language of the camera following Jennifer Lawrence and her perspective from *Mother! (2017)*

Darren Aronofsky explains this cinematographic language in one of his interviews as follows: "The entire movie was shot hand-held on 16 millimetre, which gives a beautiful patina and a great feel that's unlike stuff that's in cinema anymore and the entire film is shot only with three camera angles: close-up, over-the-shoulder and P.O.V. That basically was the entire language. This is an expressionist approach which is innovative for modern cinema and homage to classical cinema at the same time.

2.33 Same approach executed in extreme close-ups that create a visceral connection between the audience and the character from *Mother! (2017)*

iv. The Living House

Another element which was quite common in German expressionist films was the usage of space as a living and breathing character. This was especially true for *Nosferatu.* The castle of Count Orlok was a manifestation of him, carrying his ominous nature and communicating his character through its architecture and presence. This expressionist approach is also very strong in *Mother!* and it's a very key element in its story. In *Mother!* the house they live in is a manifestation of Jennifer Lawrence, the mother earth. The house is earth, the physical domain of nature. She even did build the house herself (which represents the creation of earth) and she is constantly giving life to it. The house represents a place for the god and the nature to reside and a place where the human population to exist. As she said in the film, she wants to make it a paradise. This narrative translates into the craft of the film in many expressionist ways that cover cinematography, visual effects and editing.
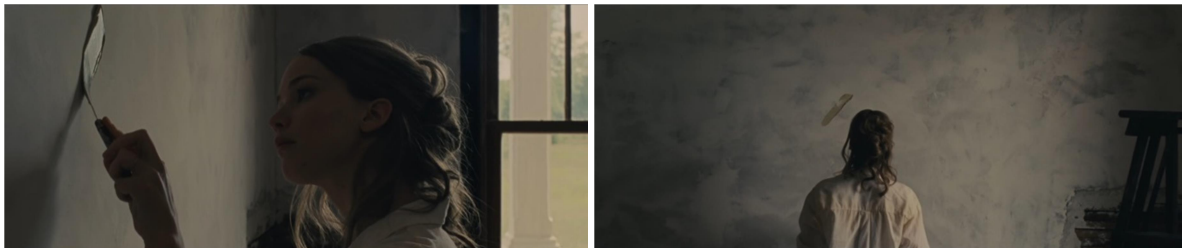
2.34 The mother earth creating and caring for her domain from *Mother! (2017)*

The film starts by her re-creating their home from scratch after it was burnt down in a fire. This same fire is the ending of the film as well, the final act of the eternal repetition of events. She makes it a perfect place without any flaws. It is a place of absolute order and that is why the god, the poet starts to get bored and uninspired in it. And after that he starts the chain of events for his own inspiration again.

2.35 Mother accesses the heart of the house from *Mother! (2017)*

Early in the film we are introduced that she is able to communicate directly with the house and understand it needs. Such a communication happens in the above scene where the mother is accessing the heart of the house through the wall and understands its preference for the colour of paint to be used. This is very important because it establishes the concept of the heart of the house which is an image and a narrative that will consistently occur throughout the film. Out of this heart comes the life of the house and that life is fully connected to the mother. As we progress into the film the house starts to get invaded. Slowly people arrive and start to settle there. They disturb the existing order of the place and at first this is communicated through those people entering the rooms they should not enter, smoking inside, leaving a mess, not respecting the rules and similar acts. This upsets the mother and manifests itself as an obsessive behaviour to bring order back to the place. As the disturbance increases, she starts to feel sick as well, she takes some kind of a golden liquid to neutralize that sickness and buy herself time. The house also reacts in a similar way by displaying signs of sickness and tries to warn her against the invaders. The director communicates this in an expressionist way through re-occuring images of the symptoms the house is having.

These include developing horrifying tumours, the heart getting rotten, the walls bleeding and blackening or the house screaming for help through fire alarms and rusty pipes. Accidents occur; fires starts or water leaks appear.
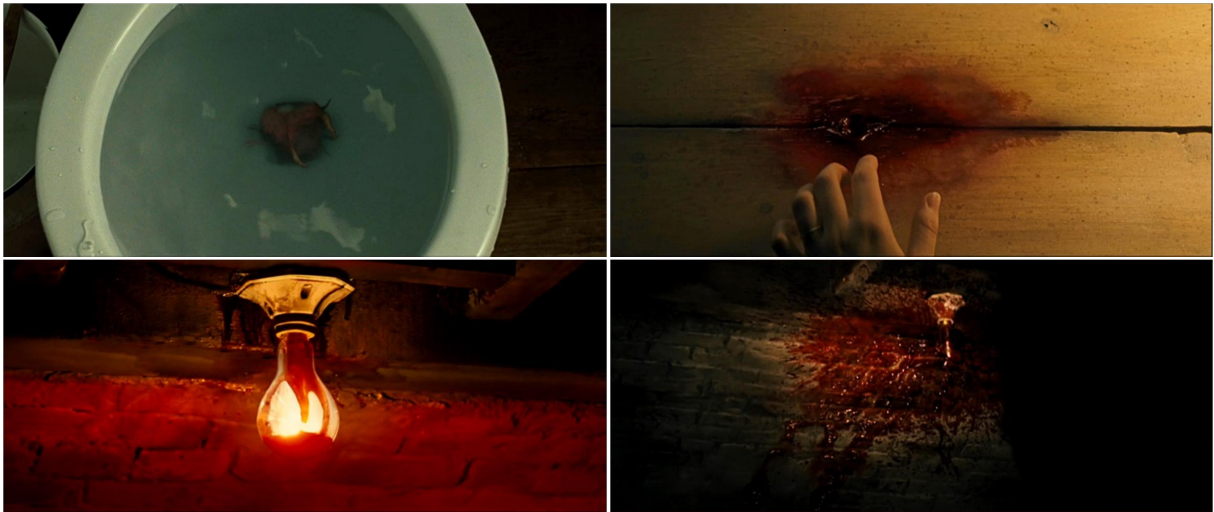
2.36 Symptoms of the house, warning the mother against invaders from *Mother! (2017)*
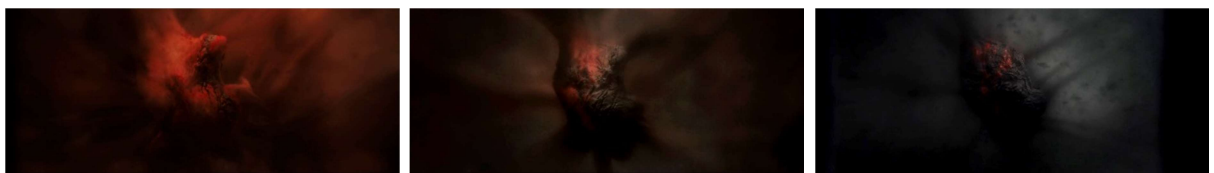
2.37 The heart of the house gradually rotting from *Mother! (2017)*

When the heart is fully rotten at last, she proceeds to destroy the house and burn it to ground. She cannot stand this defilement anymore and puts an end it. The poet carries the burnt body of her across the ashes of the house and takes her crystal heart out of her body that is shaped in fire and death and starts everything all over again. These images make the expressive nature of the film even stronger and help to convert the space into a dreamscape which was a very important goal of the director. Anne Thompson had similar thoughts which were confirmed by Darren Aronofsky. According to her, "Mother!" unfolds like a surreal landscape from Salvador Dali, where bloody mouths appear in the floor and a strange piece of soft flesh gurgles at the bottom of the toilet. The house has a breathing, pulsing heart. Aronofsky commented on this by saying that "The dreamscape in movies is one of

the great elements of cinema; It was popular all the way up to the '70s, when our heroes Scorsese and Friedkin started making realism, and we've left dreamscape." Dreamscape was also a very important concept for the German expressionist cinema and Darren Aronofsky continued the influence of this concept successfully in this expressionist piece. [48]

2.38 The Mother Earth and her domain dying to revive yet again from *Mother! (2017)*

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[48] Thompson, Anne.*'mother!': Darren Aronofsky Answers All Your Burning Questions About the Film's Shocking Twists and Meanings.* Indiewire,2017, para.7

III.   Conclusions

Expressionism was born at the beginning of 20th century due to the dark collective psyche of the society and its artists. It was a time of war, decadence, corruption and evil. The negative emotions coming out of this environment such as fear, anger, frustration, anxiety and sorrow had to manifest itself in some kind of way and in this case it was art. Initially it was apparent in painting and poetry and later on it spread to theatre, literature and cinema as well.   In cinema, it was mainly concentrated in Germany and that is why the movement was labelled as German expressionism in the context of filmmaking. There were many masterpieces created by the directors such as Fritz Lang, Robert Wiene, F. W. Murnau, Robert Reinert and Georg Wilhelm Pabst. They were surprisingly in an environment which was limiting financially but full of freedom in terms of creativity.   This resulted in filmmakers finding innovative ways to express themselves and develop many new tools for their craft and storytelling. This innovative approach helped them to convey the emotions they desperately needed to express. And thanks to this biome of art and creativity the art of filmmaking acquired new perspectives and tools to play with.   According to some, German expressionism started to disappear after 1930's. It is true that these filmmakers had to stop doing these films or simply had to flee Germany to somewhere else. Some of them continued their craft in USA or in other places such as Fritz Lang and F.W. Murnau. These migrations resulted in German expressionism spreading to other places and being transformed into new forms of expression under different circumstances.   This resulted in a growing thread of influence and inspiration starting from Germany and reaching many different places and contemporary filmmaking. Innovative tools and ideas created by German expressionist filmmakers found new homes and evolved into new forms of

expressionism. In this sense, expressionism in cinema did not disappear, it just evolved into something else and it is still as present as those days. This thesis aims to identify those innovative tools and aims to define the characteristics of expressionism in order to create a bridge between the classical era and contemporary cinema. This way it aims to prove that expressionism is still an on-going art movement in today's filmmaking. Here is the conclusion of the study which portrays the characteristics and tools of expressionism that were studied and are both present in the classical era and in 21st century cinema. These aspects of expressionist filmmaking work as a bridge between the decades and as a proof that expressionism is still alive and evolving.

a. The Subjective Perspective and The Distorted Reality

One of the main elements of expressionism that is shared by both classical and contemporary films is the establishment of a heavily subjective perspective. This is always the perspective of the main protagonist and this perspective is crafted to show the audience the world through his/her mind, making the world a place of distorted reality and a place that is a product of the protagonists' psychology. Usually these protagonists are most likely to be traumatized, paranoid, angry, mad or just very different. This method is used as a tool of expression in order to merge the psychology of the audience together with the psychology of the protagonist. The filmmakers put the viewers into the eyes of the character and let them explore the world as the protagonist sees it, and in most cases also as the director himself sees it. In a way, focusing consciously to the creation of this very subjective perspective that belongs to the protagonist creates some kind of a link between the character, the audience and the director which helps the emotions and expressions to flow freely between them.

Expressionism is very much about introspection and the creators' own emotions. The usage of such a subjective perspective is almost a must to eliminate objective, analytical observation and create an emotional, expressionist representation of reality. This is the main goal of an expressionist artist, whether he was living in the classical era or doing films in today's cinema. In terms of craft, creating a subjective perspective means building expressive, unreal sets, creating disorienting, non-linear narratives, using the camera as an bodily extension of the protagonist, implementing repetitive imagery which associates with the protagonists' psychology, removing the distinction between reality, dreams and visions and many other similar creative approaches.
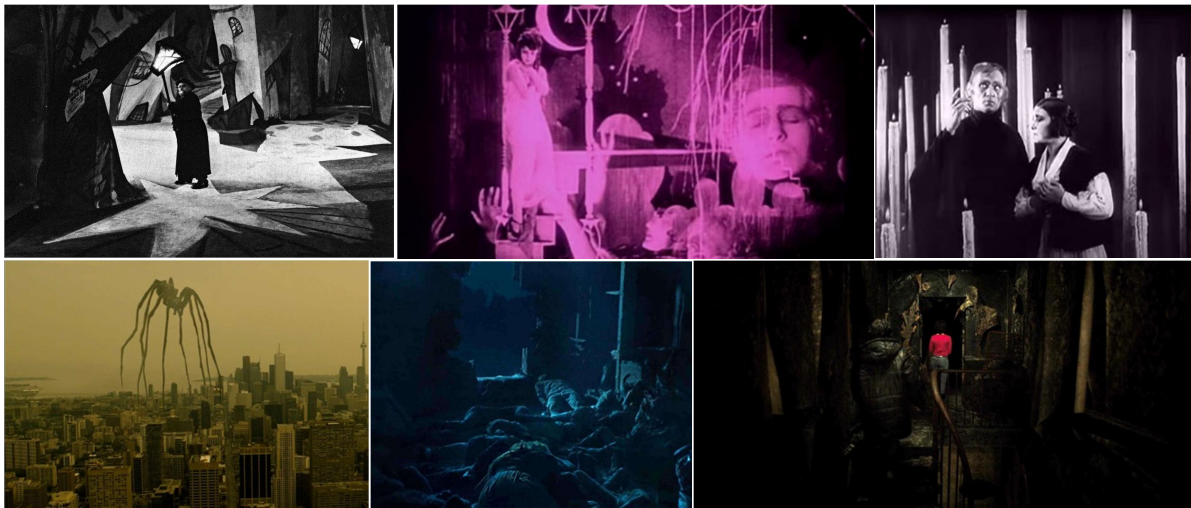
3.1 Subjective representations of realities through the eyes of the protagonists from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920), Schatten (1923), Destiny (1921), Enemy (2013), Mother (2017), Under the Skin (2013)*

The perception of reality is something subjective and individual anyway and expressionism makes this phenomenon visible by works of art, especially by cinema which imitates life through a lens.

b. Dreamscapes, Nightmares and Living Spaces

Some of our most subjective and individual experiences are dreams and nightmares that visualize our subconscious in vivid images and sounds. One can argue they are films in their own regard with the director being our psyche, an inner entity that acts in its own initiative. They convey our deepest emotions and thoughts, things we bury deep in our mind and things that look for opportunities to re-surface. For expressionist artists dreams and nightmares are tools to express themselves and tools that help their craft. Almost in every expressionist work they are included to some extent. In films, they either help the narrative by portraying the inner world of the characters or in some cases they make up the entirety of the film, taking us into a journey similar to experiencing the dream or the nightmare at first-hand. In expressionist films, the emotions and thoughts appear in images the same way they appear in our dreams, raw, direct, subjective and powerful. That power comes from the emotional and direct approach the artist/ director takes during the creation of the film. His/her emotions deliberately become a very important part of the process and they are implemented and explored with conscious provocation.

A film is a dream and a film is a nightmare. The expressionist filmmaker takes this statement as his/her main standpoint and creates subjective worlds out of it. In practical terms, this can mean a variety of things. It can mean the narrative being distorted and shaped just like a dream or a nightmare, it can mean the inclusion of manifestations of fears such as creatures or other entities, it can mean the setting being unreal and supernatural, it can mean the things that appear having different meanings rather than how they seem to be, it can mean the space and time of the film having different qualities, it can mean people and objects having different, distorted appearances and it can mean many other forms of expression which has dreamy or nightmarish qualities.

3.2 Expressive dreamscapes from *Metropolis (1927), The Golem: How He Came into the World (1920), Algol (1920), The Babadook (2014), Under the Skin (2013), Enemy (2013)*

One can argue that every film ever produced has a dream-like quality to some extent but watching an expressionist film means taking the concept of a dreamscape as a key to decipher the meaning and emotions of the film.

One of the other elements of expressionism which is tied closely to the dreamscapes is the spaces/places of the films having a life and a character of their own. Whether if it's the house in *Mother!* being a reflection of mother earth, the castle in *Nosferatu* being the manifestation of Count Orlok or the spider-maze of *Enemy* constantly changing like a puzzle, the spaces of expressionist films always live together with their protagonist. Due to the subjective perspective attached to the characters, the spaces of the expressionist films always represent or manifest them in various ways. They are projections of the minds of those characters and they carry all their emotions and thoughts with them. This concept is observable very clearly in the films of German expressionism as well as the films of contemporary expressionist cinema. The places breathe, change, evolve, rise or die together with protagonists.

3.3 Living spaces from *Mother! (2017)* and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920)*

c. Chiaroscuro, Worlds of Light and Shadow

Another defining element of expressionist cinema is the heavy usage of contrast and chiaroscuro, the games of light and shadow. This is one of the most evident visual characteristics of the movement that all German expressionist films shared and that is still a big part of the contemporary expressionist cinema. Control over light is the most important power of filmmaking without any doubts; cinema exists solely because of it. Subjects of a single frame can be expressed in thousands of different ways only by manipulations of light and exposure. In this regard, with its power to mould anything into desired form, it's no surprise that it's a tool expressionists focused on and created a unique style of it. Obscurity creates room for imagination and fuels fear. Obscurity comes from shadows. Black, unrecognizable depths of a frame invite the audience to fill it with their own imagination. Expressionist filmmakers take these qualities of shadows and utilise them to their full extent. They submerge their worlds into shadow and let lit objects and people wander in it as if it was a dream. Shadows works as a conduit for the filmmaker to carry the anxiety, fear and anger into the film. Shadows also work as a portal between the filmmakers and the audience, a shared zone of imagination and creation. Because of these qualities, in expressionist films, both in classical era and the contemporary cinema, the shadows are always very dark and rich and they paint big chunks of the space and the frames, filling them with emotions and thoughts which are unique to the individual viewer and the filmmaker. This way shadows

become a pure form of expression. On the other hand, light not only makes things visible, but it gives them life and meaning. The control over exposure is a tool that gives filmmakers many opportunities to express emotions and meaning. The amount of exposure defines the realism of the shown element. The higher the exposure is, the more abstract and unreal that element becomes. This is due to the features of an element such as a face disappearing with strong light, becoming more of a graphical form and more akin to painting rather than photography.   That is the reason expressionists used strong light on people and objects, giving them new meanings. They also isolated these lit elements in shadows rather than showing the whole picture clearly. This is because they wanted the audience to focus on that particular element and emotion. Combining the power of obscurity coming from shadows and the power of abstraction and meaning coming from light, expressionist cinema always has a unique cinematographic approach.

3.4 Images of subconscious through light and shadow from *Nosferatu (1922), Schatten (1923), The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920), The Babadook (2017), Under the Skin (2013), Mother! (2017)*

3.5 The shadow that embodies both identities of Anthony from *Enemy (2013)*

d. Innovative Visual & Special Effects

Lastly, another defining element of expressionism is the usage of innovative visual and special effects to convey an emotion or a meaning through juxtapositions, visual manipulations and unrealistic but expressive images. Taking realism as not the main concern, filmmakers acquire room to experiment different things in their craft, especially through visual effects. These can range from superimpositions of images which were commonly used in German expressionist era to deliberate distortion of an image through practical or digital means, or even to implementation of computer graphics to acquire an expressive outcome. Sticking to traditional tools only is not an approach an expressionist filmmaker would take. Sometimes an expression requires more than a simple image and forces the filmmaker to innovate new approaches. In German expressionism this need resulted in filmmakers to create heavily stylised and unrealistic set designs, superimpositions and other visual distortions to create dream-like states and juxtapositions as well as innovative camera tricks and unconventional angles to establish an expressive subjectivity that conveys emotion. In contemporary era, computers had a huge impact in filmmaking. They introduced thousands of different and new ways to manipulate an image. Expressionist filmmakers took advantage of this in various ways. Whether it's the sceneries of pure white and black of *Under the Skin*, the giant spiders haunting Anthony's mind from *Enemy*, Mister Babadook creeping on the walls from *The Babadook* or the life and death of the

house from *Mother!*, visual effects and special effects helped contemporary filmmakers to achieve expressionist outcomes. What separates these approaches from other filmmakers using visual effects is the fact that these contemporary expressionist filmmakers were heavily inspired by German expressionism and its innovative tools.
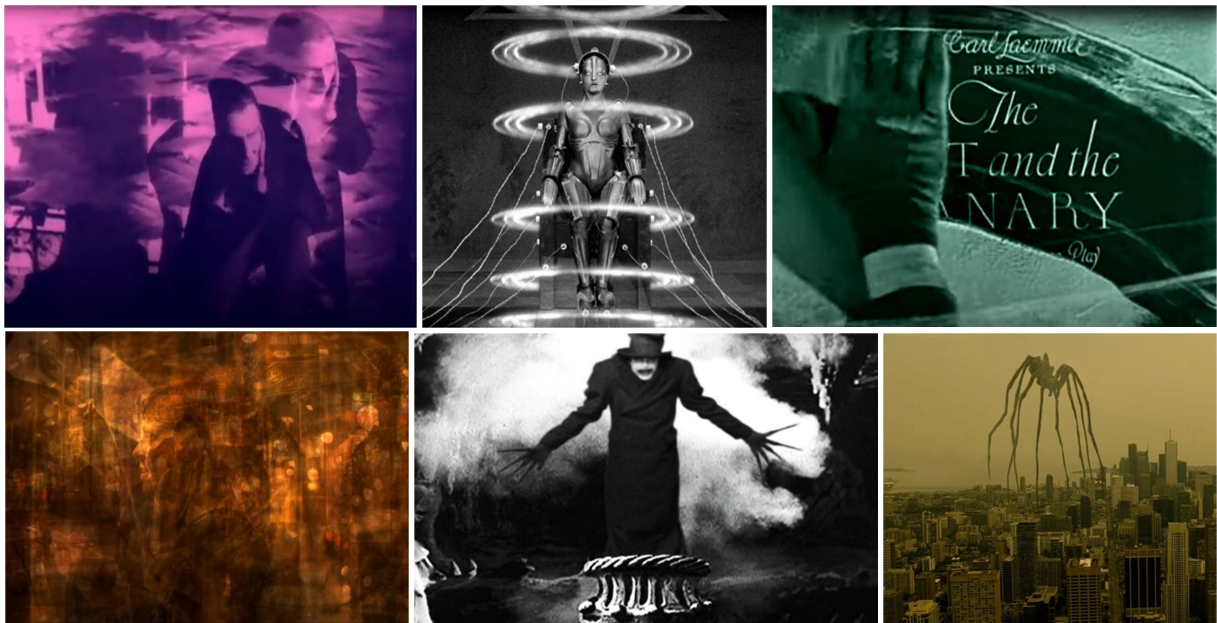
3.6 Innovative visual effects from *Nerven (1919), Metropolis (1927), The Cat and The Canary (1927), Under the Skin (2013), The Babadook (2017), Enemy (2013)*

There is something expressive about implementing sights we cannot see in our lives into the films. When the element of realism is skilfully taken away, the emotion and abstraction takes over and that creates a pure form of visual storytelling. Absence of sound and digital effects provided German expressionist filmmakers to push the limits of such storytelling methods and the contemporary expressionist filmmakers took and developed them further.

In conclusion, I believe the influence of expressionism is undeniable in contemporary filmmaking. The expressionist movement started in 1920's Germany still exists in a different, evolved form and it is far from perished. Some of 21St century films such as the ones studied in this thesis can be considered expressionist in their own regard and in their connection to the classical expressionist films. Expressionism is a very personal way to approach a film and most of the time it comes out subconsciously without the filmmaker making a deliberate choice to use its elements. There is something in it that comes out naturally due to the unique psychology of the expressionist filmmaker. It is not a choice but it is a way of seeing things, just like the re-occurring theme of subjective perspectives of the protagonists in expressionist films, the perspective of the expressionist filmmaker translates directly into the film and defines his unique style of filmmaking. Artistic tendencies to expressionism start to emerge from the lives of the filmmakers at first, maybe due to their harsh environment or due to the emotional and personal events in their lives and then it changes the perspective of the filmmaker and it changes how that person see his/her life. For those emerging artists, words start to lose their power and new ways of expression needs to be found and cinema gives them exactly this opportunity to explore, innovate and express themselves the way they desire. As long as there are filmmakers who want to express their deepest emotions and thoughts through an art medium such as cinema, expressionism will continue to exist and evolve into different embodiments.

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