

1920s German Cinema

The silent cinema of the Weimar is a “barbaric carnival of the destruction of the healthy human infancy of our art.” Sergei Eisenstein





Key study films

- The Cabinet of Dr Caligari
- Nosferatu
- Metropolis

Honourable mentions:

- The Golem
- Dr Mabuse, the Gambler
- The Last Laugh
- Faust
- The Niebelungen
- Pandora's Box

What issues of context affected the films we have studied?



Germany – the ‘negative’ influences on Weimar Cinema

- Post –war economic depression
- The new liberal Weimar republic unable to keep stability because of political tensions between right-wing (fascist) & left-wing (communist) activists
- Fresh memories of wartime horror led to an interest in ‘mystical arts’ (the occult, astrology, etc)
- Sense of escapism to a pre-industrial past
- Anti-Semitism on the rise

Germany – the ‘positive’ influences on Weimar Cinema

- 1920s Berlin was a time of artistic and cultural experimentation – art, music, architecture & film flourished
- The hyper-inflation that destroyed middle-class savings in the early twenties was over by the 2nd half of the decade
- UFA studios realised that the experimentalism in German cinema gave the films a selling point to the rest of the world
- Interest in the new psychoanalysis

The influence of expressionism



- [George Grosz](#)- The Lovesick Man (1916)

What strikes you as being characteristically expressionistic about the image?



Key features of Expressionism:

• Art was to express emotions

- Expressionist artist used strong emotional colours and wild brush strokes.
- The stressed irrationality of the world, the natural and the social world
- The world of the supernatural was a strong influence, of ghosts, magic, monsters, strange things happening, to mythic tales, etc.
- Individual alienation from the natural world and from the social world — The individual does not feel like they belong in either the social world or the natural world.
- That they are alone and abandoned.
- The impact of industrial, capitalist society on human beings.

Weimar Cinema & Expressionism

Remember, not all German film from this period was 'expressionistic'. Arguably, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* is the only 'truly' expressionistic film.

Fritz Lang, for instance distances himself & even has Dr Mabuse reflect on expressionistic art as 'a game'.

However, The specific influences of Expressionism on the films are:

- 1.The influence of Expressionist painting can be seen in the way the film set was painted and built.
- 2.There is a strong use of darkness and light, especially of shadow.
- 3.There is also use of strange angles in making Expressionist cinema, strange camera perspectives.
- 4.The story is sometimes taken from Gothic myth, the 14th century, e.g., Caligari, Dracula, ghosts.
- 5.The supernatural has a very strong place in the film.
- 6.There is the appearance of irrationality, in the world, in the people, and in the story.
- 7.Emotions are strongly expressed.
- 8.The film and the world appear to be insane.
- 9.An insane world is not a place where there is a happy ending.

How is insanity depicted in the films?



Why?

How is death depicted in the films?



Why?

Film form

What can you say about:

- Mise-en-scene?
- Performance?
- Lighting?
- Cinematography?
- Editing?



Portrayal of women



Critical Approaches

Siegfried Kracauer: foreshadowing the rise of Hitler

Evidence to support these key arguments?

- Popular cinema reflected a German desire for stability, even if it meant giving up to a tyrant figure
- Hypnotism and control are key ideas that recur throughout the films
- Chaos threatens stability

Critical Approaches

Anton Kaes: Shellshock Cinema

- The films reflect an unspoken war trauma
- Evidence?

The Exam Paper

Do NOT answer questions 1 or 2 on
Aspects of a National Cinema

Do answer question 3 or 4 on
International Film Styles

- Your answer should be based on a minimum of **two films** and **should be based on one of the** following:
- **German and/or Soviet Cinema of the 1920s**, Neo-Realism, Surrealism, New Waves

Q.3 To what extent has your chosen international style developed out of a response to a particular set of factors at a particular moment in history?

- **Level 4**
- A sound appreciation of the films studied in terms of their historical moment of production / reception
- A detailed and sophisticated knowledge and understanding of the films in themselves and in relation to the international film style which they represent
- An ability to develop an answer to the question based on the above, using detailed and appropriate examples.
- (The very best candidates) ... will either demonstrate a particularly high order of knowledge, understanding and appreciation of historical contextual factor or offer a convincing argument against the proposition.

Q.4 Discuss the distinctive contribution made to your international style by the use of *either editing or cinematography or sound.*

Level 4

- A sound appreciation of the films studied with **an ability to make detailed and close reference** to either editing or cinematography or sound in the chosen films
- A **detailed and sophisticated knowledge and understanding of distinctive aspects of the film style / movement within which the films are located**
- An ability to develop a discussion based on the above, using **detailed and appropriate examples.**
- (The very best candidates) ... will demonstrate **a particularly high order of knowledge, understanding and appreciation** of either editing or cinematography or sound in their chosen films and the international style they represent.