

# [To arbitrary authority as brutal and insane” (barlow,](https://assignbuster.com/to-arbitrary-authority-as-brutal-and-insane-barlow/)

Toconclude, “ Das Cabinet des Doktor Caligari” is a film which many aspects of theExpressionist style is displayed. Through the innovative use of cinematographyand lighting, as well as the overall set design and costumes, a very alienatedatmosphere is created, and makes the audience think deeper about the innerworld and psychological aspects of the characters. There are arguments against themovie being solely an Expressionist display, with inputs about there being moreof a “ substance” rather than a “ style”. Overall this Expressionist film gives adifferent perspective in which the audience can interact with, providing a newplatform in German cinema. Despitethese obvious examples of Expressionism in the film, some still argue thatthere is the case of the film being known for its “ substance”, rather than its “ style”. The film was written by Hans Janowitz and Carl Mayer, and were said to have “ set out to write a story denouncingarbitrary authority as brutal and insane” (Barlow, 1982).

Janowitz said it wasonly years after the film was released that he realised “ exposing the authoritativepower of an inhuman state”(Robinson, 1997) wasthe “ subconscious intention of the writers” (Robinson, 1997). Several of Janowitz’s past experiencesinfluenced the writing, including a mistrust of “ the authoritative powerof an inhuman state gone mad” (Robinson, 1997) due to his military service. They told the story in a very intellectual way, including very little detailsabout the mental and psychological motives of the characters; this is moresymbolic through the visual representation of the film. The original scriptwritten by Janowitz and Mayer displays few indications of an Expressionistinfluence, both in the setting of the film and the character’s appearance. Incontrast to this, Siegfried Kracauer argues that the film seems to glorifyauthority, rather than opposing it. The original storyline was changed to a “ framingstory”, completely reversing the writer’s original intentions with the film.

Wiene rewrote the story, glorifying authority whilst “ convicting the antagonistof madness”, rather than “ exposing the madness inherent in authority” (Kracauer1947). These points give rise to the fact that “ Das Cabinet des Doktor Caligari” can be seen as a film known for its historical “ substance” as opposed to beingknown for its “ style”. Exploring the film’s scenes, itis appropriate to discuss elements of them in which the Expressionist style isclear, and captures the attentionof the audience. An interesting example of a scene which demonstrates thecharacteristics of the Expressionist style is the “ Du musst Caligari werden” scene. Here, you have elements of distortion, unease and fear, all features whichthe Expressionist style conveys.

Initially you have the intertitle, whichpresents itself in an unsettling font, setting the scene and bringing about theeeriness. This is soon followed by a medium shot of Caligari, highlighting theexaggerated gestures and facial expressions. This is symbolic of his compulsive natureand lust to carry on the real Caligari’s fiendish experiment, also giving asense of anxiety for the audience watching. The sinister connotations isfurther suggested in the next frame, opening up to a very unsettling setting. Itis clear how the distortional aspect of Expressionism is portrayed here. Aselsewhere in the film, the outside looks just as distorted as the inside, withthe trees of similar design tilting in every way and the pathway appearing veryalienated. However the main focus of the scene is the use of on-screen text, withCaligari directly confronted by his own unremitting thoughts.

What makes thisaspect of the scene so captivating is the fact that we aren’t just seeing theprotagonist’s thoughts on the screen, he himself can see them too, and in turn staggerstowards the letters. This symbolises the madness of Caligari, reinforcing theaudiences feeling of fear and unease. This scene does include many of theaspects which make for a good portrayal of the Expressionist style produced in thefilm. Furthermore, the exaggerated use of light and shadows, along with cinematography, are alsocontributors in highlighting the film as an Expressionist masterpiece. Thelighting, such as the tinted colours on the camera lens, helps to engage theaudience with these inner worlds of the characters, and enables them to emotionallyconnect to the scene. For example, in the scene where Cesare was going tocapture Jane, Wiene presents him as merely a shadow on the wall. The use ofshadow really acknowledges Cesare’s sinister intentions. The audience is ableto see and feel the evilness inside this character, a main result of theExpressionist style.

The cinematography of “ Das Cabinet des Doktor Caligari” also makes a contribution to the Expressionist style. Thevisual style of Caligariconveys a sense of anxiety and terror to the viewer (Eisner, 1974), giving theimpression of a nightmare or deranged sensibility (Barlow, 1982). It hasbeen argued that because Caligari was filmed all inside a studio, it enhancesthe madness conveyed by the film visually, because “ there is no access to anatural world beyond the realm of the tortured human psyche”(Brockmann, 2010). Aswell as the character’s input, it is also the set design which demonstrates variousfeatures of the Expressionist style. As I have mentioned, a main characteristicwhich portrays Expressionism is the abstract display and distortion of reality. In terms of set design, it is clear to us that this film does not take place ina real environment, and in a much more alienated world. With the twisted trees, disproportionate buildings and even the font of the intertitles, it is clearthat we have become engulfed in a world full of madness and unease.

SiegfriedKracauer wrote that the settings “ amounted to a perfect transformation ofmaterial objects into emotional ornaments” (Kracauer, 1947). Theidea of becoming one with the distorted, strange atmosphere is furtherhighlighted by the idea that we are in fact viewing the film from theperspective of Francis, the mad man, and in turn we are forced deeper into theinner thoughts of the characters. This is important and is one main feature inwhich Expressionism attempts to convey to the audience. Interms of the contents of the film “ Das Cabinet des Doktor Caligari”, it isimportant to discuss how the different elements of Expressionism are portrayedthroughout the film. Exaggerated gestures and character appearance is an importantaspect of displaying Expressionism.

Through these exaggerations, the charactersare as if they are acting as a graphical aspect of the set design. This isfurther evident with the character’s appearance. The heavy make-up load ontheir faces, the most iconic example being the “ somnambulist” Cesare, are verysymbolic of the Expressionist movement. Through this, along with theircostumes, we gain a deeper reflection of the inner world in which they are apart of, whether it’s the good or evil, the innocent or guilty. Evidence in thefilm is clear with the character of Caligari. We first meet him in a blackmantle, with the audience under the impression that he is evil. However, lateron in the film we come to realise that the true mad man is Francis, and we seeCaligari dressed all white in a doctor’s robe, symbolic of the innocence andpurity of his character. We also meet Jane in a bed filled with white pillowsand lace, another aspect which is symbolic of innocence, and the fact that she remainsunaware of the evil that surrounds her.

In contrast to this, we have thecharacter of Cesare, presented with heavy make-up and an overall dark, cynical appearance. The darkened eyes and black costume is symbolic of an evil entity, and presentsa warning to the audience watching as something evil. It is worth noting thatCaligari and Cesare seem to be the main characters with “ Expressionist costumes”, with the other characters never being disturbed by their madness, and just seethem as part of the already distorted background.

(Barlow, 1982). It is clear thatan Expressionist influence is considered with the appearance and acting stylesof the characters in the film. Itis important to consider what Expressionist cinema is and how its style has an effecton the telling of a story.

The style of GermanExpressionism allowed the filmmakers to experiment with filmic technology andspecial effects and to explore the twisted realm of repressed desires, unconscious fears, and deranged fixations (Kaes, 2006). Expressionism in cinema takes a different approachto produce a story in comparison to most other styles of film. It was acultural movement which first came to Germany at the start of the 20thcentury. The main characteristics of this movement include the utilisation ofanti-naturalistic, abstract and symbolic devices, such as picture sequences anddistorting the reality.

(Thompson and Bordwell, 2009). These traits aresymbolic of the inner world of the creator rather than reflecting nature as itis. Expressionism introduced a whole new movement of film, with its innovativeand unfamiliar editing, distorted sets and exaggerated gestures. “ Das Cabinetdes Doktor Caligari” concurs with these new filming methods, and brings out awhole new chapter in German cinema.

“ Personal freedom andalternative thinking”. These were the conditions in Weimar Republic Germanyduring the pinnacle of the movement of Expressionism in film. The link between horror and Expressionism quicklybecame a dominant feature, and continued to be acclaimed in contemporary films, mainly because of the German expressionist masterpiece “ Das Cabinet des DoktorCaligari”. It inspired many horror films in the followinggeneration, demonstrating a distinguished eeriness throughout, which became avital feature of embodying inner mental and emotional states of theprotagonist, in this case Caligari.

Robert Wiene’s “ Das Cabinet des DoktorCaligari” is an example of a film which adapts the artistic elements into itsvisualisation, in order to create the strange, fictional world the audienceview. The main elements of the “ Expressionist” style will be discussed in thisessay to underline the significance it has for this particular film.