

To arbitrary authority
as brutal and insane”
(barlow,



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To conclude, "Das Cabinet des Doktor Caligari" is a film which many aspects of the Expressionist style is displayed. Through the innovative use of cinematography and lighting, as well as the overall set design and costumes, a very alienated atmosphere is created, and makes the audience think deeper about the inner world and psychological aspects of the characters. There are arguments against the movie being solely an Expressionist display, with inputs about there being more of a "substance" rather than a "style". Overall this Expressionist film gives a different perspective in which the audience can interact with, providing a new platform in German cinema. Despite these obvious examples of Expressionism in the film, some still argue that there 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 denouncing arbitrary authority as brutal and insane" (Barlow, 1982).

Janowitz said it was only years after the film was released that he realised "exposing the authoritative power of an inhuman state" (Robinson, 1997) was the "subconscious intention of the writers" (Robinson, 1997). Several of Janowitz's past experiences influenced the writing, including a mistrust of "the authoritative power of an inhuman state gone mad" (Robinson, 1997) due to his military service. They told the story in a very intellectual way, including very little details about the mental and psychological motives of the characters; this is more symbolic through the visual representation of the film. The original script written by Janowitz and Mayer displays few indications of an Expressionist influence, both in the setting of the film and the character's appearance. In contrast to this, Siegfried Kracauer argues that

the film seems to glorify authority, rather than opposing it. The original storyline was changed to a " framing story", completely reversing the writer's original intentions with the film.

Wiene rewrote the story, glorifying authority whilst " convicting the antagonist of madness", rather than " exposing the madness inherent in authority" (Kracauer 1947). 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 being known for its " style". Exploring the film's scenes, it is appropriate to discuss elements of them in which the Expressionist style is clear, and captures the attention of the audience. An interesting example of a scene which demonstrates the characteristics of the Expressionist style is the " Du musst Caligari werden" scene. Here, you have elements of distortion, unease and fear, all features which the Expressionist style conveys.

Initially you have the intertitle, which presents itself in an unsettling font, setting the scene and bringing about the eeriness. This is soon followed by a medium shot of Caligari, highlighting the exaggerated gestures and facial expressions. This is symbolic of his compulsive nature and lust to carry on the real Caligari's fiendish experiment, also giving a sense of anxiety for the audience watching. The sinister connotations are further suggested in the next frame, opening up to a very unsettling setting. It is clear how the distortional aspect of Expressionism is portrayed here. As elsewhere in the film, the outside looks just as distorted as the inside, with the trees of similar design tilting in every way and the pathway appearing very alienated. However the

main focus of the scene is the use of on-screen text, with Caligari directly confronted by his own unremitting thoughts.

What makes this aspect of the scene so captivating is the fact that we aren't just seeing the protagonist's thoughts on the screen, he himself can see them too, and in turn stagger towards the letters. This symbolises the madness of Caligari, reinforcing the audience's feeling of fear and unease. This scene does include many of the aspects which make for a good portrayal of the Expressionist style produced in the film. Furthermore, the exaggerated use of light and shadows, along with cinematography, are also contributors in highlighting the film as an Expressionist masterpiece. The lighting, such as the tinted colours on the camera lens, helps to engage the audience with these inner worlds of the characters, and enables them to emotionally connect to the scene. For example, in the scene where Cesare was going to capture Jane, Wiene presents him as merely a shadow on the wall. The use of shadow really acknowledges Cesare's sinister intentions. The audience is able to see and feel the evilness inside this character, a main result of the Expressionist style.

The cinematography of "Das Cabinet des Doktor Caligari" also makes a contribution to the Expressionist style. The visual style of Caligari conveys a sense of anxiety and terror to the viewer (Eisner, 1974), giving the impression of a nightmare or deranged sensibility (Barlow, 1982). It has been argued that because Caligari was filmed all inside a studio, it enhances the madness conveyed by the film visually, because "there is no access to a natural world beyond the realm of the tortured human psyche" (Brockmann, 2010). As well as the character's input, it is also the set <https://assignbuster.com/to-arbitrary-authority-as-brutal-and-insane-barlow/>

design which demonstrates various features of the Expressionist style. As I have mentioned, a main characteristic which 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 in a real environment, and in a much more alienated world. With the twisted trees, disproportionate buildings and even the font of the intertitles, it is clear that we have become engulfed in a world full of madness and unease.

Siegfried Kracauer wrote that the settings “ amounted to a perfect transformation of material objects into emotional ornaments” (Kracauer, 1947). The idea of becoming one with the distorted, strange atmosphere is further highlighted by the idea that we are in fact viewing the film from the perspective of Francis, the mad man, and in turn we are forced deeper into the inner thoughts of the characters. This is important and is one main feature in which Expressionism attempts to convey to the audience. In terms of the contents of the film “ Das Cabinet des Doktor Caligari”, it is important to discuss how the different elements of Expressionism are portrayed throughout the film. Exaggerated gestures and character appearance is an important aspect of displaying Expressionism.

Through these exaggerations, the characters are as if they are acting as a graphical aspect of the set design. This is further evident with the character's appearance. The heavy make-up load on their faces, the most iconic example being the “ somnambulist” Cesare, are very symbolic of the Expressionist movement. Through this, along with their costumes, 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 the film is clear with the character

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of Caligari. We first meet him in a blackmantle, with the audience under the impression that he is evil. However, later on in the film we come to realise that the true mad man is Francis, and we see Caligari dressed all white in a doctor's robe, symbolic of the innocence and purity of his character. We also meet Jane in a bed filled with white pillows and lace, another aspect which is symbolic of innocence, and the fact that she remains unaware of the evil that surrounds her.

In contrast to this, we have the character 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 presents a warning to the audience watching as something evil. It is worth noting that Caligari and Cesare seem to be the main characters with "Expressionist costumes", with the other characters never being disturbed by their madness, and just see them as part of the already distorted background.

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

The style of German Expressionism allowed the filmmakers to experiment with filmic technology and special effects and to explore the twisted realm of repressed desires, unconscious fears, and deranged fixations (Kaes, 2006). Expressionism in cinema takes a different approach to produce a story in comparison to most other styles of film. It was a cultural movement which first came to Germany at the start of the 20th century. The main

characteristics of this movement include the utilisation of anti-naturalistic, abstract and symbolic devices, such as picture sequences and distorting the reality.

(Thompson and Bordwell, 2009). These traits are symbolic of the inner world of the creator rather than reflecting nature as it is. Expressionism introduced a whole new movement of film, with its innovative and unfamiliar editing, distorted sets and exaggerated gestures. "Das Cabinet des Doktor Caligari" concurs with these new filming methods, and brings out a whole new chapter in German cinema.

"Personal freedom and alternative thinking". These were the conditions in Weimar Republic Germany during the pinnacle of the movement of Expressionism in film. The link between horror and Expressionism quickly became a dominant feature, and continued to be acclaimed in contemporary films, mainly because of the German expressionist masterpiece "Das Cabinet des Doktor Caligari". It inspired many horror films in the following generation, demonstrating a distinguished eeriness throughout, which became a vital feature of embodying inner mental and emotional states of the protagonist, in this case Caligari.

Robert Wiene's "Das Cabinet des Doktor Caligari" is an example of a film which adapts the artistic elements into its visualisation, in order to create the strange, fictional world the audience views. The main elements of the "Expressionist" style will be discussed in this essay to underline the significance it has for this particular film.