

I. NARRATION IN *THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI* (1919), the first Expressionist film, directed by Robert Wiene, for the Decla-Bioscop company.

- A.** Use of framing story. Framed story is narrated by deranged narrator. (See Kracauer essay.)
- B.** The depiction of “freedom” is associated with the fair as anarchic and chaotic:
 - 1) diversity of people, glaring colors, shrill sounds
 - 2) use of iris in fair scenes: circular movement implies chaos
 - 3) theme of tyranny as the opposite of chaos (used to depict “freedom”)
 - 4) According to Kracauer, Caligari is a premonition of Hitler.
 - 5) The story is sometimes taken from Gothic myth, the 14th century, e.g., Caligari, Dracula, ghosts.
 - 6) The supernatural has a very strong place in the film.
 - 7) Emotions are strongly expressed.

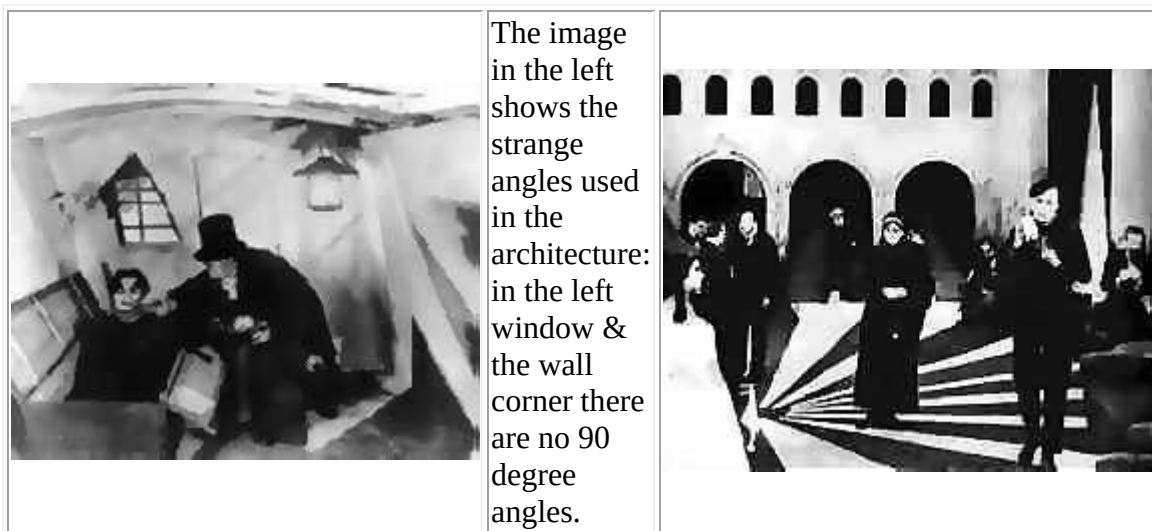
II. THE SPECIFIC VISUAL INFLUENCES OF EXPRESSIONISM ON FILMS ARE:

1. Expressionist painting influences 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: rejection of rules of Renaissance perspective.
4. “Studio constructivism”: sense of completeness and control: According to Kracauer, realism and total organization and incompatible; studio constructivism depicts unreal events in a sphere that seems very controlled.

There is one point that should not be forgotten with Caligari. Faced with the strong competition of big business cinema from Hollywood, European cinema makers had to find a different way to compete. Caligari and Expressionist cinema provided the basis for one of these lasting strategies, the art cinema.

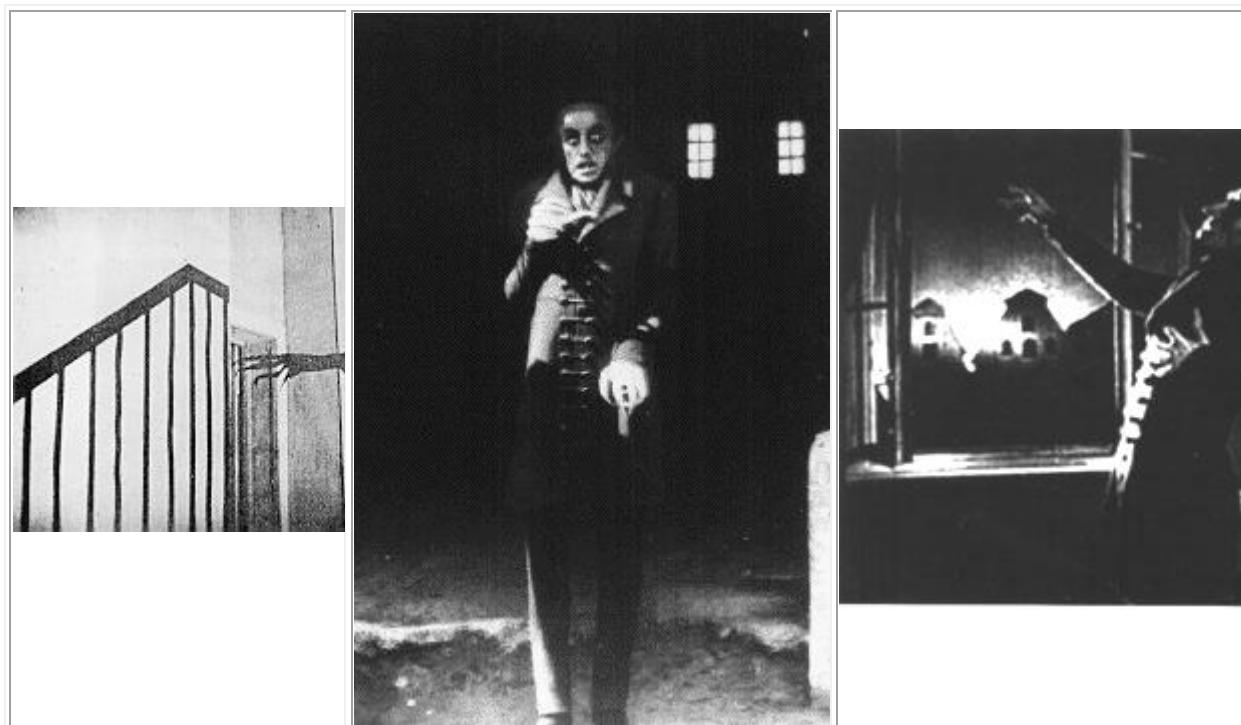
The German Expressionist film making had a very short life. It began at the end of WWI, 1918 / 1919, and ended 1926. The main difficulty was the cost of making the films. In the U.S., there is the sunny dry climate of California, and a potential audience of nearly 200 million English speakers; in Germany the climate was darker, so the films had to be made indoors with enormous stage sets and a lot of artificial lighting, all of which was very expensive. The film that ended Expressionist film making in Germany was Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1926). The film budget started at 1,900,000 marks, but it cost 5,000,000 marks to make the film. This film required the construction of a futuristic city in the Studio, seen in the photograph below on page 4:

Expressionist film makers used Expressionist painting and wood print styles to create stage sets, and Expressionist theatre in their storytelling of insanity, and illusion. In the wood prints there is a very strong use of black and white contrasts. In Expressionist cinema there is a strong use of shadows, of hiding things in darkness, as shown in these two still photographs from *Dr. Caligari*:



In film, shadow and darkness are used to create uncertainty and fear. This was one of the key innovations of Expressionist films used to give their films a stronger feeling of **fear**, and **anxiety**.

We can see this in the stills below, from Murnau's *Nosferatu* and Fritz Lang's *M*:





Innocence, as a child, is threatened by the shadow slowly falling over her...

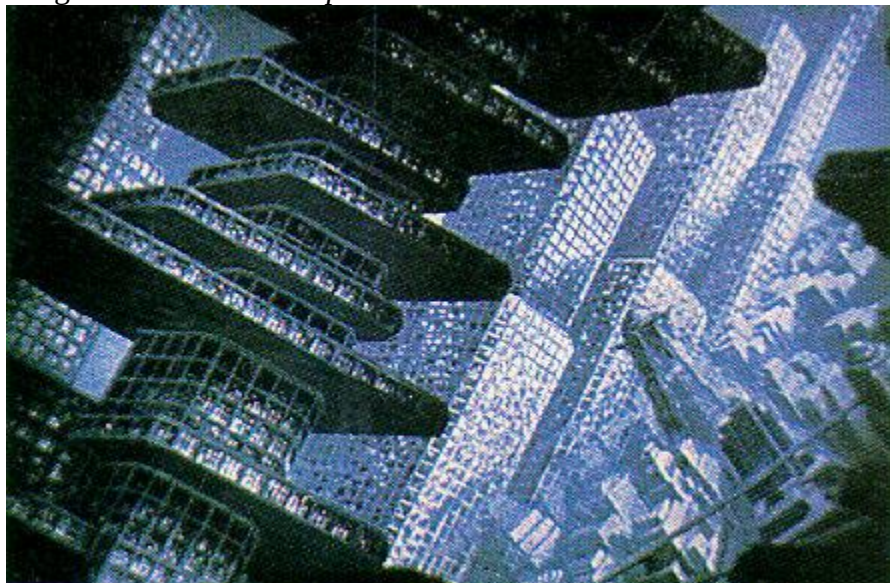


Peter Lorre, in shadow and darkness, is terrified at seeing his **own** image in a mirror. Notice also the M, for murder.

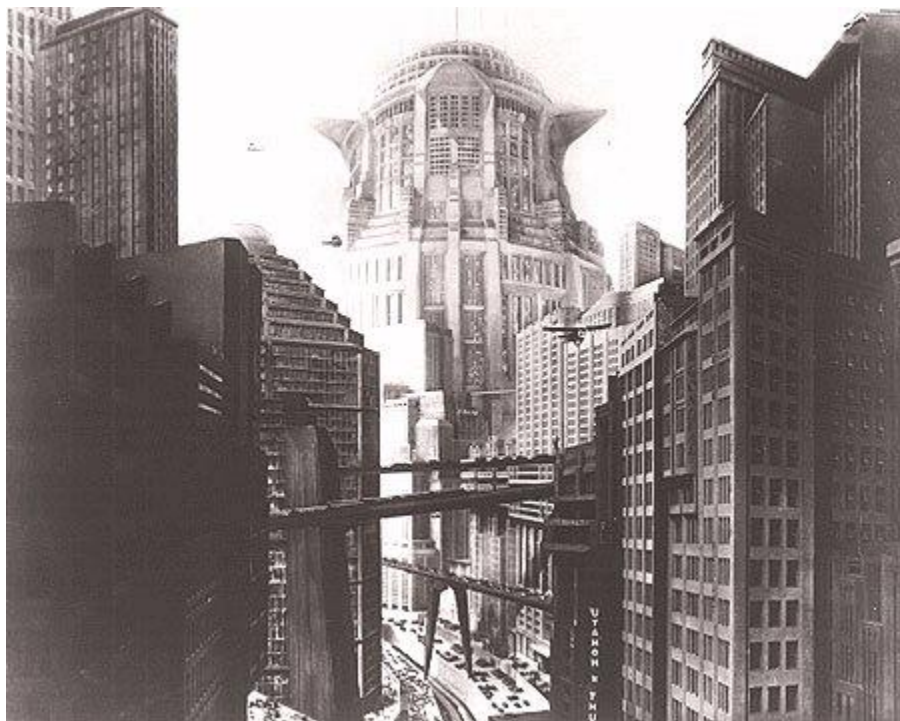


A graphic poster for the film.

The image of the world in Expressionist cinema is of an insane world. It developed unusual camera perspectives that gave strange picture angles. Buildings look as though they tower above people; they look as if they are going to fall over. Cities and buildings do not look like they provide a safe environment for people. This odd use of camera perspective is clearly seen in the image below from *Metropolis*:



Drawing by Erich Kettelhut. ©Filmmuseum Berlin-Deutsche Kinemathek.



This is a still showing the city of Metropolis. This is a futuristic vision of elevated highways, and helicopters and aeroplanes flying between buildings.