

German Expressionism

Backgrounds, History, Influence

Definition & Characteristics

An exaggeration or distortion of reality that is designed to reveal/unmask the deeper, repressed truths that reside in the human psyche.



Can be politically radical, depicting individuals who suffer at the hands of—and become horribly ostracized by—industrial, institutional, technological, and decidedly urban societies.

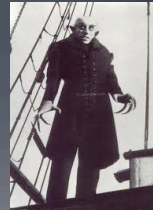


Metropolis, Fritz Lang, 1927

Violent extremes of mood are the norm, and these distorting effects blatantly contradict their more “realistic” or conventional counterparts.



Nosferatu, F.W. Murnau, 1922



A Brief History

Flourished in Germany from 1910-25 – ie. before, during, and after World War I.



Starts to wane by 1925, then is suppressed by the Nazis in the 1930s – a great historical irony, as their atrocities seemed perversely consistent with the movement.

Early Influences: Tremors

1. Painters Vincent Van Gogh and Edvard Munch (& others)
2. Poets Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud
3. Novelists Fyodor Dostoevsky and Franz Kafka
4. Dramatist August Strindberg
5. Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche
6. Psychologist Sigmund Freud



Early Influences: Tremors

Previous Artistic Movements such as:

- o Gothic Romanticism (late 18th century onward)
- o Symbolism (late 19th century)
- o Dadaism (~1916-1922)
- o Surrealism (1920s onward)



S. Dalí, "The Persistence of Memory"

Later Legacies: Aftershocks

Huge Impact on Specific Genres:

- o Horror & Slasher films
- o Film noir
- o Science Fiction
- o Graphic Novel



Also Influenced Writers in Drama & Television Industries:

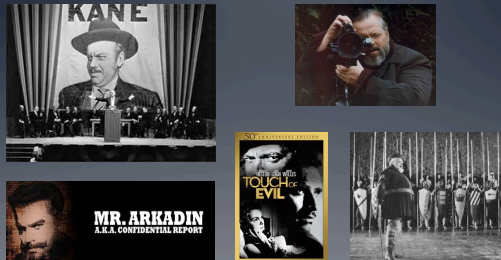
- o Arthur Miller (esp. *Death of a Salesman*)
- o All the "theatre of the absurd" dramatists, especially Samuel Beckett
- o Shows like "The Adams Family" etc.

Legacies & Aftershocks

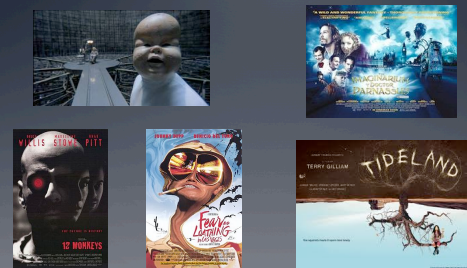
Also influenced countless films & film directors, including:



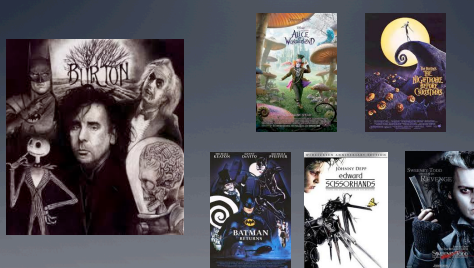
Orson Welles



Terry Gilliam



Tim Burton



David Lynch



Many Others



Even in Other Industries



Conclusions

Expressionism pre-existed the German Expressionist movement, although it wasn't referred to by that name. German Expressionism (like so many film movements) worked within inherited genres rather than inventing them.

Tales of horror and nightmare, for instance, are as old as the first person telling a story in a cave, and genres like the Gothic novel pre-date German Expressionism.

What the German Expressionist movement did – and this is crucial – is help us to articulate the visual imagery of horror and psychosis. That remains with us to this day – we visualize our nightmares through it. We see through its lens.

