Film Movements With Distinctive Stylistic Approaches: German Expressionism (The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari) And Film Noir (Double Indemnity)

German Expressionism / Film Noir

I am going to show how the distinctive stylistic approaches in the movements of the early films I will express my opinion on German expressionism film widely known as “The cabinet of Dr. Caligari”(Robert Wiene 1920) and Film Noir “Double Indemnity”(Billy Wilder 1944)

German Expressionism is a genre that artistically arises from Gothic - Romantic movement in the culture of Europe involving design, painting music, dance, sculpture, architecture, literature, theater, and film which continued approximately in the middle of 1906 and 1924 the values of this genre is philosophy aesthetic critique of capitalist rationalism expressionism can described as an endeavor to express the deformation isolation of modern life it’s a rejection of the realistic express and mode expressionism was interested in domination feeling, ideas, more suspicious. (Spicer, Andrew, 2002, p11) one of the keys of German expressionism was art cinema is against the normal the alienation and the distortion of how they set the whole set up from painting to designing to lighting and unbalance images of the films (Linda Badley, et al, 2005, p15) telling more complex stories rooted in specific characters, experiences. European filmmakers had begun experimenting with the absurd and wild aesthetics of German cinema. Two of the most influential films of the era were The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920), by Robert Wiene (German, 1873–1938). And Metropolis (1927), by Fritz Lang (Austrian, 1877–1961)

The noir films Film Noir is a style of American films that evolved in the 1940s and lasted in a classic period until about 1959(Spicer, Andrew, 2002, p vii). However, objective has to engage with what called the noir myth: those black and white films which offered dark mirror to American society and questioned the optimism of the American dream The noirs were inspired by literature and previous film history along with social history of the period of grew out in America there was literary tradition called hard-boiled fiction the release of four crime the Maltese Falcon (1941) Murder, My Sweet (UK title: Farewell my love, 1944) Double Indemnity (1944) and Laura (1944). in Paris August 1946 film noir was employed through its analogy with (serie noire) after the five years absence of Hollywood films during the occupation the American hard-boiled fictions represented different world a different kind of detective new type of crime film than those found in English and earlier detective stories this kind of fiction added a new tradition of realism to the detective fiction the origins of the label film noir has been traced to the French film critic Nino Frank who noticed the trend of how dark and black the looks and themes were of many American crime and detective films released. Who used the term of Black Film. (Spicer, Andrew, 2002, p 2)

German expressionism is always cited as major influence on film noir’s, the Style film noir it is arresting visual style and pessimistic mood (Spicer, Andrew p11) (Higham and Greenberg’s, 1968, P.19) celebrated description noir urban scene ‘A dark street in the early Moring hours, splashed with sudden downpour. Lamps from haloes in the murk. In a walk up, room filled with the intermitted flashing of a neon sign from across the street a man is waiting to murder shadow

upon shadow upon shadow… every shot in glistening low key (Spicer, Andrew, 2002, p45) guilt and claustrophobia paranoia. The hero and anti-hero portray corrupt character roles and villains include hard-boiled detectives or private eyes, cops, gangsters, government agents, crooks, war veterans, petty criminals, and murderers. These protagonists are often morally-ambiguous low life from the dark and gloomy underworld of violent crime and corruption (Spicer, Andrew, 2002, p64)

Distinctively, these characters adopt roles that are cynical, tarnished, obsessive (sometimes sexual) brooding, menacing, sardonic, disillusioned, frightened and insecure loners (usually men), struggling to survive and ultimately losing in life which they can do nothing about. The femme fatale was a frequent character in 1940s films noirs, the females in film noir are type which are obedient, dependable, trustworthy and loving women or mysterious, duplicitous, gorgeous, unloving, unreliable, irresponsible, manipulative and desperate women. Usually, the male protagonist in film noir has to necessarily choose (or have the fateful choice made for him) between the women and at all times he picks the bad woman, who destructively forces him into committing murder or various crimes, her appearance is always explicitly sexual with long dark or blonde hair worn loose, sensuous legs, heavy make-up, jewelry that sparkles and revealing costumes (Spicer, Andrew, 2002,p90)

the protagonist may end happily or dead. Typical conventions of guns, black suits, knives, cars, crosses, cigarettes as well as action, battles, romance and chases, are all key objects of a film noir as they help to portray a sense of danger and negativity

Physical Symbols

The physical symbols in noir films and German expressionism are, in my view, and the most important points of the films. They show how the character desires or how good or bad he/she are.

Storyline

‘Double Indemnity? is very representative of how important money was and the greed of humanity. after the war, a lot of money had -been lost and those that were wealthy stay wealthy. Phyliss Dietrichson comes across as well off in her mansion of house and expensive clothes, and yet she wants more money. This depicts her as very greedy as she already has more than enough -but still wants more. Neff seems to want the money, as his small house is not well furnished, and he seems to have to work quite hard to earn the small amount of money he receives. Phyliss has had go through no such labor and is just living off her husband’s earnings.

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari(Das kabinett des Doktor Caligari,1919), focuses on traveling carnival, a show as it explores the relationship between that show and its audiences a relationship that proves both duplication and dangerous (Linda Badley, et al, 2005, p16) tells the story of Francis, who through flashbacks, recounts his terrifying experiences at a carnival in a small German village, where he first encountered Dr.Caligari, a man with the power to control people in their sleep. When Francis’s friend is enigmatically murdered, and his fiancee is kidnapped, he follows Dr. Caligari to an insane asylum, determined to unravel the mystery surrounding these terrible events. There’s no dialogue in the film, but the music it helps tell

story the film starts with freaky music tells us is going to be scary film

Lighting

Lighting is one of the most important in German expressionism and films noir. ambiguous lighting is used to show the good/evil vengeance of the character.

Right at the beginning of ‘Double Indemnity?, we see the silhouette of Neff walking towards the camera. The effect this has on the audience is that Neff seems mysterious and because he is only a shadow, he is portrayed as dark and evil. This echoes how we feel about him at the beginning, because we know he has committed a crime and immediately condemn him for it.

Another lighting used in this film is the darkness of the room in the scene when the audience know that both Neff and Phyliss are planning to kill one another. As the room is dark it seems like death is hanging over them. It also prevents the audience from seeing the scene clearly. This adds more tension and makes the audience focus more on what they can hear making the conversation between the two characters seem more important.

Lighting in The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari you will see shadows everywhere in the film, when francis’s friend Allen asked how long he will live caeser chilling rely is until dawn that night Allen is killed while he is sleeping we see the light and shadow colored set very perfectly which very frightening scene is made by the lighting

Again, francis and Allen are to their kind of two friends who are both competing each other to marry named jane Jim the set of lighting and shadow is amazing

Camera

In The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari when Francis is checking in through the window to see what Dr. Caligari is doing he sees him with caeser (wide shot and close up shot) next shot that show how scary scene show caeser breaking into jane’s house with his knife and again show (Long shot) when caeser approaches her bed and knife on his hand coming to murder her while she is sleeping

In ‘Double Indemnity?, when Phyliss and Neff are in the car there is a Close Up (C.U.) of Phyliss? face. The audience sees what she is feeling, and the cold calculating look on her face shows that she does not care about her husband is being killed in the backseat.

When Neff firsts meets Phyliss she is at the top of stair Which represent her power over him right from the start This is reiterated in the camera angle, as it is a Low Angle Shot and both the audience and Walter Neff are forced to look up to her.

German filmmaker Fritz Lang in his best-known film M (1931) commented ‘’I use my camera in such a way as to show things wherever possible, from the view point of the protagonist: in that way my audience identifies itself with the character in the screen and think with him’’ (Spicer, Andrew, p13)

Likes

I loved how ‘Double Indemnity? used women in a bossy and manipulating fashion. Women in the fifties were considered the lesser sex, and it was wonderful to see Phyliss Dietrichson break away from this image and con the man into getting what she wanted. The actor who plays her, Barbara Stynwyck, did brilliantly well to act out a role within a role. The characters in this film were the traditional film noir ones and brilliant examples of them.

I also liked Walter Neff?s (played by Fred MacMurray) sense of humor in any situation, no matter how grim it was looking.

I really enjoyed the cabinet of Dr. Caligari because of the amount of symbolism in the film. All the hidden aspects of it that you do not see or think about the first time around are a delight to find the next time. Some people may have found all the expressions and the art of lighting and shadow very confusing, but I thought it made the film more interesting and gave it a lot more depth.

Dislikes

There were very few things I did not like about the two films, but one thing I do not like is the ending to either of the films. I cannot think of a better way for them to end, but I thought that even if it were the directors intention to leave the ending to the audiences? vision, it would be better if he gave us something.

The ending of ‘Double Indemnity? was Walter giving into his fate and doing so because of the femme fatale. I did not like this because we like to see our hero succeed in movies, not be manipulated and then meet their downfall because of someone else. This lack of binary opposition at the end almost ruined the film for me, but the amazing storyline up to that point far exceed the bad.

The ending of The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (Rachel and Deckert leave the city)

was very inconsequential to the rest of the film. Film?s end with a climax and then something to do with the rest of the film the “and they all lived happily ever after? part) and while their leaving may have tied in with the idea of everyone deserving freedom, I did not feel that it was strongly related to the rest of the film.

Noir film is the best style of filmmaking that continue to influence the modern films the contrast and the dramatic virtuously ambiguous narrative of white of black the long shadows the noir films show the character dark and light noir films give cinema this technique

German expressionism has done away the realism with distorted the surreal mirrors large shadows and optical effects are abundant strange world are created through purely subjective aye. Many, German expressionism is always cited as major influence of many films.

Reference list

Books:

1. Film noir Spicer, Andrew Published Harlow: Longman, 2002

2. Traditions In World Cinema Edited by Linda Badley, R. Barton Palmer and Steven Jay Schneider Publisher: Edinburgh University Press Published: 01 December 2005