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The German Expressionist Movement Through The Lens of Fritz Lang's "Metropolis"

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The German Expressionist Movement Through The Lens of Fritz

Lang's *Metropolis*

Importance of the project

My research will add my own unique perspective to the discipline. It is my own interpretation of the German Expressionist movement connected to one of the last films of the movement, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. Films and movements are not unusual to study, but every time they are, new connections and new perspectives can be established. It is important to make connections and to be open to seeing the different connections that result from people of different backgrounds and perspectives.

Since German Expressionism has a very unique visual style, the deeper meanings behind its creation may be overlooked. German Expressionism came about because Germany wanted to look to the future and put the past behind them. Creators did this by thinking outside the box and trying techniques that had never been used before. This motivation of moving forwards and creating a new world is deeply imbedded in the plot of *Metropolis*. The workers below ground and the city people above ground come to terms with the fact that change must happen in order for their society to prosper.

Existing State of Knowledge

Many people have explored the progression of film throughout the ages and from this exploration have divided film history into the specific movements. It is possible that no one else has taken the same approach I have to viewing German Expressionism specifically through this particular film.

One of the books I used was *Voices of German Expressionism* authored/edited by Victor H. Miesel in which he provides readers with writings of the creators of the German Expressionist movement. From this we can compare inspirations of the artists and see where similarities may lie. Miesel states that a common agreement between artists was that art "should somehow improve the world." I find this a very interesting concept and was able to use it and consider how it applies to *Metropolis*.

Research Question

My project aims to analyze how German Expressionism is present in Fritz Lang's seminal film *Metropolis*.

Methodology

The first step in my process was to learn about German Expressionism. I did this through textbook readings, in-class lectures, and a few extra books and online

articles as well. Once I understood what German Expressionism was all about, I watched Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. While watching the film, I took notes on different features that specifically matched the movement. I chose to include still shots from the film in an Appendix because the techniques are visually based and seeing them is far more logical than trying to explain them through text.

One key feature of expressionism that I talk about is chiaroscuro lighting. The high contrast between light and dark was used by many filmmakers and Fritz Lang is no exception. At one point, however, he does use the chiaroscuro lighting as more than just a visual style, but to reflect the light and the dark within two contrasting characters.

Findings

This presentation discusses Fritz Lang's seminal film *Metropolis* as a symbol of the German Expressionist Movement popular during the Weimar period. Germany moved past the disastrous effects and disgrace of the First World War by embracing a new revolutionary excitement and expressing it through many different art forms. Artists working through all different kinds of medium began experimenting in ways never seen before and a common element present in their work was a special emphasis on envisioning the future.

In *Metropolis*, Fritz Lang envisions a futuristic society in which the lives of those who live above ground are drastically different from those who live below. It concludes with a handshake between two individuals, one from each section of the community, representing the willingness to move forwards and progress as a whole. Lang uses a very specific aesthetic style with elements such as chiaroscuro lighting, popularized by German Expressionism, and showcased throughout the film, highlighted in the caves deep below the city. Composition is especially important, emphasizing the contrast between the capitalists and the working class. Elaborate painted backdrops inspired by George Melies and unusual camera angles accentuate emotion and direct focus towards being a progressive society.