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'Depicting the Macabre: The lasting influence of German Expressionism on Photography'

Jennifer Maguire

A Thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of its requirements of Master of Art

August 2020

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This thesis is dedicated to my son, Theodore.

Abstract

The art movement German Expressionism, although over a hundred years old, was revolutionary, depicting monstrous figures and dealing with themes of horror and isolation. The purpose of this thesis is to explain why German Expressionism was so ground breaking at the time and what impact it has had on later artists and filmmakers. My argument will explain how German Expressionism influenced the work of three artists in particular, namely Anna Gaskell, Gregory Crewdson and Cindy Sherman. The argument is determined by multiple factors that piece together to show the incorporating elements of German Expressionism, as well as give an understanding of how photography relates to a medium that isn't traditionally associated with the art movement.

The beginning of the thesis will discuss how German Expressionism began, highlighting the most important artworks, films and groups during that time. This leads onto a study of psychoanalysis and its relationship with German Expressionism. Even though these subjects are contrasting, the two are integral to understanding the importance of mental health in the movements, artists and themes used in the work. The two later chapters then move on to discuss the later influences of German Expressionism. Even though these two chapters have some similar counterpoints, it is important to emphasise the key factors which strengthen the thesis argument. Chapter Four studies the aesthetics that lead on to filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock and his love of German Expressionism. Creating a narrative of how his work relates to Cindy Sherman, it leads on to examine tableau photography. The research then presents more work from Sherman and Crewdson. However, the discussion is focused towards the psychological aspects and staged photography, leading on to identifying the relationship of German Expressionism and Francis Bacon and Anna Gaskell.

Concluding the argument, the research in thesis is about presenting theoretical and visual evidence of how German Expressionism was able to influence these photographers. German Expressionism in itself was anti-photography and rejected an anti-realist movement. But, when studying works from artists such as Otto Dix and Robert Wiene, the themes of mental illness, isolation and trauma mixed with the unique aesthetics of German Expressionism can be seen in the works of later artists. Emotion, psychological pressures and private obsessions are apparent everywhere in the work of Expressionists. Their artistic intentions were not limited to catharsis and self-revelation, but also gave a voice to the ignored (Miesel, 2003). This thesis is a celebration of German Expressionist work and will illustrate how impactful it was been.

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'Depicting the Macabre: The lasting influence of German Expressionism on Photography'

INTRODUCTION

German Expressionism lasted for only twenty-three years, from 1909 to 1934, just after the turn of the twentieth century, and its impact left a long-lasting impression that can still be seen today through photography and other media. There have been many studies of German Expressionism's influence on film, artwork and psychology up to the present day; however, there is a lack of literature regarding the discussion when it comes to German Expressionism's impact on photography. I was fortunate to work for three years at the Tate Gallery in Liverpool during my time at Huddersfield University while studying for my BA (Hons) degree course in Photography. While there, I had an opportunity to speak to staff, guest curators and, occasionally, visitors about my love of German Expressionism. For me, the impact of German Expressionism is seminal and crucial to many significant artworks. Whilst working at the Tate Gallery, I spent many hours studying the work of George Grosz and Otto Dix. For me, the longer I looked at the artwork, the more I became aware of the impact of German Expressionism on present-day artists, especially with regards to its influence of contemporary photography. The connection seemed obvious, yet when delving into the research around the subject matter, although there is literature that discusses the relationship between photography and German Expressionism, there is very little that addresses any relationship to contemporary photography; rather, there are only brief studies that discuss any connections. Visually and thematically, this thesis looks in depth into the connections between German Expressionism and photography and states the importance of why German Expressionism's influence should be discussed and aligned with contemporary photography.

One of the critical pieces of literature on this study has been the Museum of Modern Arts' *German Expressionism: The Graphic Impulse* (2011) by Starr Figura. The book was published in conjunction with the museum's exhibition of German Expressionist prints. It is one of the largest and most comprehensive studies of the history of German Expressionism and the impact it had during the time. Detailing over 260 artworks as well as essays by Figura, its in-depth history of German Expressionism is one of the most important studies to examine the significance and the impact of the movement. There have also been several relevant studies of

German Expressionism and its relationship to psychology, which has been highlighted. Lotte Eisner was born in 1896, an art historian who wrote the review *'The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt in 1952'*. Eisner discusses the influence of the unique use of lighting, staging and intimate details that were crucial to the style of German Expressionism and what it evoked. Another integral essay is Siegfried Krakauer's *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. Published in 1947, it examines the cinematic history of the Weimar Republic while analysing the psychology behind films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Metropolis*. Krakauer explored the practice of using aesthetics to express the social and political realities of that time, giving insight into the unconscious motives of the film's narratives. Ian Roberts' book, *German Expressionist Cinema the World of Light and Shadow* (2008) is a more recent study of German Expressionist film and argues that the movement was the most important in the medium's history. Roberts provides visual examples of the movement's most iconic images, illustrating how the contrasts between dark and light created a new aesthetical language for Hollywood.

For the study of psychoanalysis, this thesis has utilised the studies of Sigmund Freud and several of his theories, which include the uncanny, dream theory, and fear and anxiety. German Expressionism's relationship with psychoanalysis gives us an insight into the critical roles that psychology and mental health had within the artworks that were produced at the time. The human suffering and repression explored in German Expressionism is interwoven with the popularity of psychoanalysis in the 1920s. As a viewer, an understanding of psychoanalysis also helps to relate to specific German Expressionist aesthetics and the rationale for their use.

Moving on from the first two chapters, the third chapter examines the work of Alfred Hitchcock. The director, famed for his gothic thrillers and use of suspense, is in integral part of the influence of the photographers highlighted throughout the thesis; the style and aesthetics that Hitchcock became famous for were born from his training as a film director in Berlin. This led to Hitchcock refining his style in line with German Expressionist film aesthetics. The camera angles and the perspectives he uses are tropes to the aesthetics in Expressionist cinema that had gone before. This will lead on to a discussion of Hitchcock's most famous film, *Psycho* (1960). This film is incredibly important as it encapsulates Hitchcock's perfect aesthetics and has key themes linking to Sherman's work as the femme fatale, whilst also relating Norman to the lonely protagonist he sees repeated in German Expressionist cinema.

Moving on to Chapter Four, this chapter details contemporary critics and theorists including Eva Respini, who wrote *Will the Real Cindy Sherman Please Stand Up* (2012), which accompanied the exhibition of the same name in 2012. Respini explores Sherman's career, as well as the impact of her work on contemporary art. Another exhibition, the accompanying book of which becomes integral to this study, is Peter Galassi's '*Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort*' (1991), which featured both Gregory Crewdson's and Cindy Sherman's work. The accompanying essay by Galassi discusses the importance of photography in contemporary art and its portrayal of the working classes. The study *Cindy Sherman's Office Killer: Another kind of monster* by Dahlia Schweitzer' explores the role of the only film that Sherman made, including Schweitzer's analysis of the impact *Office Killer* had on Sherman's work and contemporary art at that time. The film wasn't successful commercially, but was an essential piece of artwork that blended itself in with Sherman's critical aesthetics and values. Her work explores the underlying messages of how we view horror when it is made by a female and its use of horror clichés.

The advantages of creating such a thesis are to celebrate how groundbreaking German Expressionism was and how it empowered the lower and working classes. Before the movement began, Impressionism had embodied all the bourgeois values and had become stale. The picturesque landscapes and beautified portraits expressed nothing to the working classes; instead, they simply represented the higher classes of society. They were a symbol of a class divide. What the Expressionists sought to do was upend social norms and to articulate the feelings and energy of working-class Germany pre- and post-World War I. The horror of the war left its mark and the chaos that influenced the Weimar Republic. The closeness of the groups formed during those years, such as Die Brücke and der Blaue Reiter, produced some of the movement's key pieces. As Figura articulates:

> One of the defining aspects of Expressionism, which sets it apart from the other developments and indeed from almost any period or movement in art history, was the dedication and fervour with which the Expressionists embraced printmaking in particular, and works on paper in general. The graphic impulse in Expressionism can be traced from the formation of the artists' group Brücke in 1905, through the war years of the 1910s, and into the 1920s, when individual artists continued to produce compelling artwork. Expressionism emerged during a period of intense social and aesthetic transformation. (Figura, 2011, p.10)

The history of German Expressionism will be discussed in the first chapter. This is to explore how Expressionists created the aesthetics that became so synonymous with the movement. It will then lead on to the key groups and artists, leading to the impact of World War I and the effect it had. After Expressionism's great start, its end felt rather abrupt. Due to the trauma of World War I, resulting in many artists experiencing a mental illness, audiences had become tired of Expressionism's dark tone. The last real piece of Expressionist work is *Metropolis* (1927) by Fritz Lang, which has enjoyed a resurgence in audiences in recent years due to independent cinemas and the advances in remastering technologies in film. This will lead to exploring the relationship between German Expressionism and psychoanalysis. One of the practices of German Expressionism in its later years was used in a cathartic sense, with artists using their work to portray their struggle and inner emotional states. As Expressionism was being used as a physiological outlet, this chapter explores German Expressionism and its use of key psychoanalytical terminology.

One of the challenges of this thesis has been that German Expressionism was an anti-realist movement. In terms of the period, German Expressionist photographers simply didn't exist due to not being able to achieve the uniqueness of the genre aesthetics. Painting and woodcuts dominated Expressionism at the time until film became part of the genre. In *Expressionist Film-New Perspectives*, Dietrich Scheunemann observes that: "The anti-realist stance of the Expressionist painters and writers is of particular interest, in light of the rejection of the photographic imagery and exact representation" (Scheunemann, 2013, p.141).

The whole ethos of German Expressionism was to bring the viewer a narrative of something completely otherworldly. But Scheunemann goes on to state that photography played a crucial role in developing German Expressionist film. The uncanny trick photography used within films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* meant that photography and Expressionist design were mutually exclusive; it became an essential part of the German Expressionist cinema and went on to be used throughout the movement in other films.

The technology at the time meant that traditional photography could not contribute to German Expressionism. However, in the form of trick photography, it leant its way to format as part of the German Expressionist cinema. Scheunemann goes on to add that, thanks to trick photography, it enhanced the psychological aspects of the genre film aesthetics: "To achieve the uncanny effects through the creation of distorting sets in which contours of windows, doors,

roofs, and trees act not as representations of the visible world, but as ciphers of the inner urges and experiences" (Scheunemann, 2003, page 141).

Another problem that has to be considered is the jump in time between relating German Expressionism to such contemporary photographic artists. The artists that are discussed within this thesis are linked to Expressionism in more than one way. For example, when examining Cindy Sherman's work, we can study the aesthetics she uses but also the psychology behind them. Tracing back to Sherman's early influences is essential; for instance, in Chapter Three, Freud's theories of the uncanny are explained concerning German Expressionist aesthetics. The rest of the section will then explore film director Alfred Hitchcock's use of the uncanny and its influence on tableau photography. By examining the first subjects, we start to trace where German Expressionism became so crucial in Cindy Sherman's work. By showing the pattern of influences from Expressionism to contemporary photography, it will also show how important the use of the genre's aesthetics was.

Another key theme is the subject of isolation, which will be the critical point of Chapter Four. Isolation was an incredibly relevant subject used within the genre's painting, but more so in film. Many lead protagonists in German Expressionist film were used to convey the isolation many felt after World War I. It engaged a broad audience and related to them on a mass level. Isolation is not to be confused with alienation, and it has to be remembered that isolation can be a choice, whereas alienation is forced upon one by peers and social groups. Again, this is a theme that Sherman and Gregory Crewdson both featured heavily in their work.

The last chapter will look at German Expressionist portraiture, the use of distortion of the character, and the critical role self-portraiture within the movement. Self-portraiture was used very much as a therapeutic and cathartic tool in Expressionism; due to trauma and mental illness, the artwork was an outlet for the innermost thoughts of the artists. This will be followed by an exploration of the painter Francis Bacon and how, even though he called himself a realist, he embodies much of the Expressionist aesthetic and values. His work was altogether as nightmarish as the Expressionists before him. The link between his work and Sherman's will be discussed; although one being a painter, the other a photographer, the relationship between them lies within the over-the-top monsters they both created to disguise identity. This will then lead to a focus on Sherman and Crewdson's work in the Museum of Modern Arts' 1991 exhibition entitled 'Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort.' The photography exhibition, curated by Peter Galassi, shows the current state of the American Dream of domestic happiness

and challenged the ideals that is associated with the domestic environment. The time of the exhibition is incredibly essential, as photography was now considered as contemporary art. The last part of the chapter will also focus on the artist Anna Gaskell, who embodies many of the German Expressionist aesthetics within her work while also drawing inspiration from Sherman.

The methodology behind this thesis was to examine German Expressionist aesthetics. Firstly, what was the true meaning behind them, and what purpose did they serve? The groundbreaking use of techniques creating these over-the-top realities gave way to a new visual world that audiences had not witnessed before – the stark contrast of light to dark, the grotesque use of stage make-up on screaming faces, to the vibrantly rich colour brush strokes on the canvas. This gave birth to an entirely new way in which we could view art and, more importantly, the way artists could express their innermost thoughts and feelings. Following this, the task was to show visual comparisons as well as the physiological story behind the link between German Expressionists and the photographers that have been discussed.

As to why this thesis needed to be written? To me, the over-the-top realities which the Expressionists invented can be seen repeated today and quite rightfully deserve acknowledgement in the role they play. If it had not been for German Expressionists, would Hitchcock have been able to define his style in such a way as we can see in the works of Sherman and Crewdson? The five chapters will examine Sherman and Crewdson at length and visual examples will be shown in various chapters so that a physical representation is present. There will be a constant comparison throughout to German Expressionism, whether that is through the discussion of aesthetics or theories.

CHAPTER 1 - The Birth of German Expressionism

German Expressionisms beginnings have, in the past, been mistakenly associated with the start of World War I. While the war was integral to the uprising of the movement, it began as a rejection of the ordinary and of impressionistic Monet's and Degas that proceeded beforehand. It grew from a disdain for all that stood within bourgeois values. The rejection of Jugendstil aestheticism and Art Nouveau led the way to a society that felt that all of these movements were interwoven with the wealthy middle classes (Miesel, 2003). In simplistic terms, it was a complete rejection of Impressionism and, instead, was inspired by the earlier works of Edvard Munch and Vincent Van Gogh, artists who laid bare emotive subject matter and mental health, which connected deep within the intent of German Expressionism. German Expressionism is a form of art that can be used for cathartic measures for artists to express the anxieties of a nation. There is not one strict term or definition for Expressionism, as there are many factors that can make an artwork expressionistic. One broad definition from the Dictionary of Expressionism states:

> Expressionist, whose essential aims is the distortion of visible reality, was to give outward expression strikingly to their feelings or ideas, and not those who used distortion primarily for pictorial ends. While they represent a generally somewhat hectic exaltation, in most cases, they reflect a state of disaffection, nostalgia, unease, which finds vent now in anxiety, anguish, neurotic torment, and now in revolt and protest, in violent denunciation. Their art tends to usually be sombre, highly strung, melancholy, passionate, or poignant. (Muller, 1973, p.6)

As a movement, German Expressionism's goal was to transform social norms, the artists engrossing themselves and indulging in new developments and a deeper understanding of psychology. The movement brought about a drastic change where artists focused on feelings and instincts, and threw away repression. Although primarily a movement that developed in Europe during this time period, more "primitive" cultures influenced the etchings and traditional prints made by artists during this time. Leading American curator Starr Figura explains that, at the beginning of Expressionism, Expressionists shared an interest in the art of non-Europeans, which they felt offered a more immediate and authentic mode of expression, in contrast to centuries of academic refinement and placidity. Directness, frankness, and a desire to startle the viewer characterise Expressionism in its various branches and permutations. The Expressionist piece is the intense, non-naturalistic colours along with warped and jagged

abnormal forms in place of a person or a building. The use of violent colours and linear distortions are used to express the most fundamental emotions of love, fear and hatred (Chilvers, Ian & Glaves-Smith, 2009).

German Expressionism's beginnings are traced back to two main groups of artists: Die Brücke and Der Blaue Retier. The first German Expressionist group to identify itself with the movement was Die Brüke, and the founding members were Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938), Erich Heckel (1883-1970), Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884-1976) and Fritz Bleyl (1880-1966), who left shortly afterward. The group was joined by Max Pechstein (1881-1955), Otto Mueller (1874-1930) and Emil Nolde (1867-1956), who started the group in Dresden where they shared a studio. Die Brüke's name translates to 'the bridge', being symbolic of 'the bridge' its members would cross over into the future together, and a title derived in part from the writings of the philosopher Friedrich Nietszche. In 1906, the group published its manifesto in the form of a woodcut print, which was then made into a leaflet and handed out on the night of its first exhibition, a year after the group was founded by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. The leaflet declared:

> With a belief in continuing evolution, in a new generation of creators as well as appreciators, we call together all youth. And as youth carrying the future, we intend to obtain freedom of movement and of life for ourselves in opposition to older, well-established powers. Whoever renders directly and authentically that which compels him to create is one of us. (Figura, 2011, p.54)

One of the group's key exhibitions was in 1910 at Galerie Earnst in Dresden. The exhibition focused on printmaking, a cheaper art form which could give the artist sharp, contrasting shapes quickly, with prints being produced at a fast rate. In the eight years that the members worked together, Die Brücke exhibited seventy shows. The Die Brüke group produced annual portfolios of its prints to which people could subscribe. In 1911, the group moved to Berlin to continue the promotion and to seek further advancement in its work. However, by 1913, the members went their separate ways due to artistic disagreements. (Figura, 2011)

The Expressionist approach was to tell a more in-depth story of cultural, social and political change with the emotional aspect being particularly significant. Its style at the start of the movement involved bright, garish colours that clashed with unnatural shapes, jagged brushstrokes smeared onto canvases to present animals, and humans reformed into abnormal beings. The subjects appeared more like a depiction of a character rather than a portrayal of a

person's ascetical likeness. Woodcuts, printmaking, and painting were the most popular mediums used to create work at first. For the collective Die Brücke, woodcuts offered a distinctively Expressionist idiom, involving sharper, more angular lines, occasionally mottled surfaces and irregular forms (Figura, 2011).

The second group, Der Blaue Retier, started in 1911, the leader of the group being Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944). Unlike those in Die Brücke, Kandinsky was in his forties and had moved to Germany from Russia in 1886. Kandinsky was not unfamiliar with German Expressionist practices and had worked with printmaking in Russia when he was the artistic director at the Kusnereb Publishing House in Moscow in 1885. There, he met Franz Marc (1880-1916), a German artist from Munich who specialised in printmaking and had worked in Paris. Both Kandinsky and Marc joined an artist group named N.K.V., being the 'New Artist Association'. Der Blaue Reiter exhibited in 1911 and 1912 throughout Germany (Figura, 2011):

> The Almanac der Blaue Reiter was one of the most important books of modern art. This anthology included articles on art, music and theatre and was illustrated with photos of contemporary Renaissance and non-western images. (Stephanie Barron, 1989)

Paintings such as Franz Marc's 'The Large Blue Horses' create a dreamlike landscape with animals interwoven throughout the composition. Typical of Marc's work, the piece is pre-war and subjectively is much lighter. Der Blaue Reiter also published an almanac featuring contemporary, primitive and folk art, along with children's paintings and, in 1913, it exhibited in the first German Herbstsalon. By 1914, with the outbreak of the First World War, the movement disbanded as Kandinsky was forced to return to Russia and Franz Marc was killed in action. In August 1914, the outbreak of the First World War was to be integral to the way German Expressionism developed over the next ten years. Artists that were involved with German Expressionism either enlisted or volunteered for the German Army, and artists within the Brücke group, namely Kirchner, Heckle, Schmidt, Rottluff, Pechistein and Mueller, died during their time of service. One should remember that Expressionists belonged to the 'war generation' and that Expressionism became a war phenomenon; few Expressionists were patriots, and some were aggressive pacifists from the very beginning of the war (Victor, 2003).

> The movement developed rapidly and reached a high watermark of influence during the years immediately preceding and following World War 1. Styles within the

> movement ranged from the representational to the non-objective, but all shared a common denominator to subordinate form and nature to emotional and visionary experience. (Miesel H. Victor, 2003, p.1)

In the aforementioned publication, *German Expressionism The Graphic Impulse,* 2011, Figura Starr describes how the purpose of German Expressionism had changed, as artists were changing from rebelling against Impressionism to using Expressionism to portray the horror of the war that many faced. Woodcuts and vivid, bright colours were replaced with dark, charcoal sketches. In August 1914, the war in Germany met with intense patriotism. While publications and exhibits were put on hold, the war shattered the German economy and destroyed the landscape in which many lived. Most of the Expressionists joining the war had been in their thirties at the time, with younger artists such as Otto Dix, Conrad Felixmüller and George Grosz enlisted or volunteering for service. Max Beckmann's work was heavily influenced by the war, as he had worked as a medic but was later discharged a year later due to a nervous breakdown. During the war, he adopted the Expressionist distortions and angularity as a means of articulating the disturbing events within the comprehensible reality of the times (Figura, 2011). Otto Dix, who had at first enlisted into the German Army, was quickly swayed against the war, as his disillusionment came to light after seeing what was happening during the fighting. Dix was deeply affected by his own experience of the war. On the tenth anniversary of World War I, Dix produced a group of etchings by the name of Der King ('The War') as a commemoration (Victor, 2003).

Commenting later, he said: "For years, [I] constantly had these dreams in which I were forced to crawl through destroyed buildings, through corridors through which I couldn't pass. The rubble was always there in my dreams" (Tate Online, 2020).

As the political landscaped changed and artists faced the realities of the war, themes and style of German Expressionism became much darker, both visually and emotionally. The subjects that carried over into German Expressionism were vast, ranging from nudity to city life, but its two most predominate themes became war and suffering.

In November of 1918, World War I ended with the defeat of Germany; this then gave way to Germany's first democracy, the Weimar Republic in August 1919. Post-war, several German Expressionists became involved politically in favour of social equality and creativity; just as the demand fell for Expressionists to make these prints, the movement itself was fading away. A new medium in German Expressionism was gaining momentum, with Expressionist cinema

gaining in popularity. Although Expressionist cinema's time was short (1920-1927), the cinematic movement for the Expressionist film reached its high point in its first year with the release of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), *Nosferatu* (1922) and *Metropolis* (1927). The film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) was startlingly original. It was a daring effort to put the essence of what German Expressionism was onto the screen. The film critic Lottie Eisner used the term "helldunkel" which she described as "a sort of twilight of the German soul, expressing itself in shadowy, enigmatic interiors, or in misty, insubstantial landscapes". These three films encapsulate the critical aspects of German Expressionistic aesthetics, themes and storytelling. Drawing from the movement's printers, painters and sculptors, it awoke the masses. It gained not only critical acclaim, but was integral to cinema's and Expressionism's lasting legacy (Gatiss, 2012).

The visuals in Expressionist cinema have a list of familiar traits. Being black and white is a given, considering the period in which they were made. Stark, heavy shadows met with contrasting light and hand-made sets. Films were made in the studio; even outdoor scenes were created rather than using the actual outdoors. These combined to create an eerie mise-en-scène atmosphere. The strange, unexpected camera angles give the audience a peculiar perspective. Themes of intense emotional distress, death, shadows, ghosts and hallucinations are common aspects. Ian Roberts captures the aesthetics of Expressionist cinema perfectly in his book, *The World of Light and Shadow*, where he describes how the use of artificial light and shadow, the atmosphere of unease, exaggerated acting styles, themes of psychological expression and a pervading sense of horror, and of the supernatural, can all be traced back to Expressionism. Caligari took these aesthetic qualities from German Expressionism and embraced them wholeheartedly, giving us a perfect example of what a German Expression film should look like. With its intense use of lighting to create a tormented world where no straight lines or soft lights exist, and its emphasis on the overall composition, it gives us, the viewer, a claustrophobic and disorientating effect (Roberts, 2008).

Not all German Expressionist filmmakers rely on the supernatural to scare or alarm the viewer; an example of this is *Metropolis*, a science-fiction drama film set in a futuristic urban dystopia. It follows the story of Freder and Maria, who were working together to overcome a vulgar class system of mistreated workers and wealthy masters. With traces of gothic in the movie featuring catacombs and the cathedral, the film received very mixed reviews on its release, being heavily criticised for its communist message, some even saying the film was naïve in concept. Film critic Siegfried Kracauer disliked the film due to its 'fairy tale' message.

Nevertheless, in Germany, it was commercially well received by audiences. The success of *Metropolis* could have been in the storyline's messages of the power struggle within the class system in Germany at its time of release. Audiences were drawn along these dark themes showing periods of dramatic social change, with cultural unease.

Metropolis raises these questions by setting its story ahead of time, unfolding a familiar tale. The scenes of the workers underground were reminiscent of the soldiers in trenches; the masters in the city could be viewed as Germany's leaders at that time – the distrust of leaders after World War I was high. Most of the population still lived in poverty long after the war had finished. Films such as *Metropolis*, showing fictional characters, will be used to narrate the social and political turmoil at any time. Without war, Expressionism would not have reached its peak; public and political drama were essential to the influence of the movement. The film, rather than depicting the battle, shared the intense misery and sorrow felt by Germany as it was facing the reality of losing the war, with its already weak economy; by 1916, severe food shortages led to a hunger crisis throughout Germany which, in turn, led to more misery. It is not surprising that we find the most powerful of Expressionist works made at this time; the work conveyed to the viewer the suffering and degradation that could only be made visually. Eisner Lotte, an art historian and film critic who wrote *The Haunted Screen*, a study of German Expressionist film, addresses its complexities when defining the movement's cinematic style:

> On the one hand, Expressionism represents an extreme form of subjectivism; on the other hand, this assertion of an absolute totalitarian self-creating the universe is linked with a dogma entailing the complete abstraction of the individual. (Eisner, 1952, p.191)

One of the most recurring discussions in *The Haunted Screen* is that artists were solely concerned with images in the viewer's mind, such as the extreme distortions and visions we see in films like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Der Golem* (1920). Creatively, a vast amount of the Expressionist aesthetic relied on set design. Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) was a landmark film that epitomised the style and vision of Expressionist cinema.

In *The invisible man behind Calgari* (1993), the authors Uli Jung and Walter Schatzberg trace Robert Wiene's studies and career. They state that not much is known of the director. Wiene was born on 27 April 1873, in Breslau in what was then Prussian, his family having moved to Budapest when he was an infant. In 1986, he studied 'Psychology and Aesthetics of Richard Wagner' and 'The problem of form of fine art' at the University of Vienna, but left after one

term. By 1901, in the official directory of Weimar he appears to be listed as a 'cand jur' working with Messter film company, in which Wiene worked as a script writer and director before directing his masterpiece, *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920). The critical acclaim and commercial success of *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* meant that Wiene was able to attract more money for experiential films such as *INRI* (1923), a biblical film that enjoyed commercial success. Four months after the Nazis took power, Wiene's latest film, *Taifun*, was banned on 3 May 1933. Wiene fled Germany, never to return. He died in 1983 at the age of 65 (Jung and Schatzberg, 1993).

Robert Wienes *Das Cabinet des Dr.Caligari* in particular, holds many of the traditional German Expressionist aesthetics, such as the otherworldly set where buildings and cityscapes contorted; the contrast between light and dark create unnatural shadows on set. Siegfried Krakauer's book, *From Caligari To Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (1947), addresses the psychological concerns felt by artists and society after World War I. He tells us that "psychological art expresses mainly the collective consciousness of a society," and that "the artist has already done most of the psychic work for the audience" (Kracauer, 1947).

Hans Janowitz and Carl Mayer, who wrote the story of Caligari, were not supporters of World War I. Hans was serving in the war, but Mayer declared he was too mentally unstable to serve, which left him at the hands of intense examinations as to why he was avoiding public service. The tale itself is about two friends, Francis and Alan, visiting a funfair. Where Dr. Caligari presents himself as a hypnotist, he shows Cesare as a somnambulist, then proclaiming he can predict the future. After the encounter, Cesare tells Alan that he is to die the next day; Francis does indeed find Alan murdered, just as Cesare predicted. Francis then goes on the hunt for Cesare and finds himself in the asylum, where Dr. Caligari works as the asylum director. We then learn that Caligari has been controlling Cesare to commit murders. Cesare confronts Caligari and informs the police, but in a terrifying flashback he finds himself to be an inmate of the asylum with the rest of the film's characters, with Dr. Caligari being in control of everyone.

The film itself is a social commentary on the control that German officials had over the citizens at the time. Janowitz and Mayer set out to portray the horrors many faced during the time of the war. The theme of murder and control is synonymous with post-war German Expressionist works of art, with the characters representing those who were forced into service, then only to die.

> The Character of Caligari… stands for an unlimited authority that idolizes power as such, and, to satisfy its lust for domination, ruthlessly violates all human rights and values. Functioning as a mere instrument, Cesare is so much a guilty murderer as Caligari's innocent victim. (Buscombe & White, 1997, p.18)

In a true Expressionist style, not only is the film highly emotive but its success is seen in that, however nightmarish and otherworldly it may seem, the themes of political intentions come from an authentic place, in the mindset of the viewer, at the time in post-war Germany. German Expressionism has enjoyed a resurgence in recent years, due to the popularity of the subject and its new accessibility as a result of technological advances in home and independent cinema. The set design of Expressionist films, in particular *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, was one of its successes: fairgrounds and attraction places, which we associate with fun and light-heartedness, had become places of horror where monsters lurked. Cityscapes were bending the viewer's reality and presenting them with jagged paths and claustrophobic rooms, designed to evoke discomfort. As Eisner describes:

> These curves and slanting lines have a meaning which is decidedly metaphysical. For the psychic reaction caused in the spectator by oblique lines is entirely different from that caused in him by straight lines. Similarly, unexpected curves and sudden ups and downs provoke emotions quite different from those induced by harmonious and gentle gradients. But what matters is to create states of anxiety and terror. (Lotte H. E., 1952, p.21)

There are several other films key to the success of German Expressionist cinema such as *Nosferatu* (1922), *From Morn to Midnight* (1920), and *Der Golem* (1920). Embracing the gothic and all that is dreadful, each of the films also contains an element of the supernatural and otherworldly. *Nosferatu* is based on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The film's storyline follows the character Hutter as he leaves his wife and makes his way to Count Orlok's castle, where he has been given the task of selling it. While he is there, he notices unusual occurrences, feeling suspicious, and feelings of being watched while shadows loom over him. The chaos slowly ensues as the Count makes his way to Wisbonurg, causing death along the way. He ends his journey by murdering Hutter's wife, Ellen. While caught in the act, the dawn rises to kill the Count, just as he had killed Ellen. Most Expressionist films have a 'monster' within the film, for example something which drives the film's horror and makes it identifiable to the audience. *Nosferatu* gripped audiences, as horror had never been so garish before; there was no subtle

sense of tension, but rather a constant representation of struggle. Many of the lead protagonists in Expressionist films didn't have a traditional happy ending. For example, in *Morn to Midnight* the lead protagonist shoots himself at the end of the film after being haunted by visions of death.

The beginning of 1920s photography and film had come to the forefront once again. German Expressionist film and its theme of gothic stories carried on to influence cinema – horror had become marketable once again to film studios. By 1918, Dadaism was gaining popularity in Berlin, and the political intentions of the Expressionists hadn't reached the heights they intended. Rather than an abrupt end, it had naturally run its course. Printmaking had been so popular for the Expressionists, but as quickly as it had become prevalent, it fell out of favour and seemed to descend back into the background once more. The market had become over saturated with many amateur printmakers, and it soon becomes a parody of itself. Post-war, many of the original German Expressionists had fled Germany or had succumbed to ill health. As quickly as it had come about, German Expressionism ended. However, the Expressionists left a legacy of innovation that would influence and inform the history and artists in the future: the creative fever of the previous two decades had then entirely spent itself (Figura, 2010).

As fervently as the movement had made such an impact, the melancholy nature of the artworks become tiresome. Expressionist cinema created an old notebook on the Germans' defeated nation. With such dark subject matters repeated over the years, naturally there had to be a shift. Dadaism flourished, mocking the materialistic and nationalistic attitudes, and with its more comedic value was light relief compared to German Expressionism. A dialogue that started soon after Expressionism had ended was the psychological impact it had on artists and the public. The next chapter will examine how psychology and Expressionism were intertwined and how psychology was a critical component of its success.

CHAPTER 2 - German Expressionism and Psychoanalysis

This chapter examines the relationship between German Expressionism and psychoanalysis. Psychology has always been an integral part of the Expressionism movement; the two are inseparable and we cannot demystify how and why the movement became prevalent without investigating this deep-rooted origin. The chapter also serves to detail theories discussed in later chapters, such as the uncanny and mental illness. It will address several critical themes in psychoanalysis, focusing on a discussion of the psychological connections and themes within German Expressionism.

When German Expressionism began to fade, art historians continued to write about its impact; at the same time, in the late 1920s, psychoanalysis had become a widespread interest in the public psyche. An interest in the understanding and the meaning of dreams and struggles of repression were subjects extensively covered by Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud, coinciding with subjects and issues that German Expressionism explored and portrayed.

In 1923, Swiss psychoanalyst Oskar Pfister wrote *Expressionism in Art: Its Psychological and Biological Basis* (1923). The paper was a study of an artist, referred to as Joe, who had described himself as an Expressionist. Joe had suffered depression due to his national service in World War I. He had served as a soldier like many other Expressionist artists of the period and had been discharged on account of a highly nervous condition. This was not uncommon; Max Beckmann and Otto Dix suffered from poor mental health in the aftermath of the war – more commonly known in modern, formal medical terms as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

In the study, Pfister states, “Expressionism subjective presentation accompanied by total or almost total distortion of nature to the point of unrecognizability, or by suppression of all external reality.” In his study, he separates Expressionism from other forms of art, such as Impressionism and Romanticism, and explains that, in this, the artist becomes engrossed in the unconscious; external object engrosses so much that reality disappears or becomes unidentifiable.

What Pfister is emphasising in this study, where the artist bends reality to such a degree that its physical form can become indistinguishable, started with German Expressionism. This characteristic is one of the integral factors in how one distinguishes a German Expressionist artwork. Furthermore, other ways in which the artist separates from reality to present a unique

and, often highly emotive, lurid version of events are through repressive experiences in the form of dreams.

Another psychoanalyst whose work heavily revolved around dreams was Sigmund Freud. Within Freud's work, every dream had meaning and represented either repressed infantile wishes or repressions for later adult life. Dreams present themselves as a transcript of thoughts into another mode of Expressionism, considering the connection between our thoughts in reality and fantasy and the oppression one faces by the censorship imposed by resistance (Freud, 1900). The repressive mode that Freud talks about is our desire to appear normal in our day-to-day lives. Freud also asserts that internal censorship can lead to confusing inner conflict that can lead to what we know as nightmares. Freud relied on the imagery of dreams to be able to psychoanalyse them. By interpreting the images, he believed it led to an understanding of the underlying wish of the patient; if we use the same method to interpret German Expressionist imagery, we can decipher the psychology behind it. In *Dr. Caligari*, the use of dream sequences is often used to present the somnambulist character Cesare in his other world in which he is under the rule of Dr. Caligari. He is presented as being asleep for twenty-three years in a disposition more akin to death rather than living. The only time Cesare wakes is to commit a crime over which he has no control. Where the film starts to appear more fantastical or dreamlike, the shadows become more exaggerated and expressive, presenting the film's nightmare theme and undertones. German Expressionist paintings often featured the dreams and nightmares of artists, such as Ludwig Meidner's painting *Apokalyptische Landschaft.* A haunting landscape depicts a contoured cityscape on fire, of people running with desperate, screaming faces, the scene appearing as hellish as the dark skies that surround the burning buildings.

As a survival instinct, most people adhere to what are considered to be social norms: we naturally repress to fit into our peer groups rather than be ostracised. Mental illness, although explored through German Expressionism, was initially seen in the early 1900s as a taboo subject. Psychiatric hospitals were filled with patients suffering from mental illnesses that would be classed as minor in this day and age, such as depression. One of the most sombre aspects to consider is that, if it weren't for the severity of some of the mental illnesses that artists in the movement had suffered, would the works of German Expressionism have made such a dramatic impact? From scenes that seem straight out of nightmares to melancholy café portraits, through to contemporary times, German Expressionism's portrayal of pain and loneliness seems familiar to us; our worries and anxieties seem to echo from the artworks and,

although we may not have experienced the deeper trauma associated with the works, there is something that resonates with us as a present-day spectator.

A most fundamental aspect of understanding the psychology of German Expressionism is its relationship with mental illness. Not only was it conveyed on screen, but many of the artists that created the works suffered from it greatly. The two most common forms of mental illness that are associated with the movement are depression and PTSD. One of the first artworks to be categorised as an Expressionist painting was Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893). Munch suffered greatly from personal trauma, with his father suffering a nervous breakdown after the death of Munch's mother and sister. One of the most iconic Expressionist paintings, it was autobiographical. Munch describes here what inspired the piece:

> One evening, I was walking along a path. I was tired and ill; I stopped and looked out across the fjord. The sun was setting. The clouds were dyed like blood red. I felt a scream pass through nature; it seemed to me I could hear the scream. I painted the picture – painted the clouds as real blood – the colours were screaming. (Munch, 2003, p.1)

The image is an example of how Expressionist art helps to describe the inward experience of mental illness and the distress it causes; it helps the viewer see the isolation and loneliness that it brings. For example, the eyes are wide open with distress, while the two figures walk away from him (Baker, 2011). The thick brush strokes and intensity of the colours are typical within the Expressionist style. The heavy handiness we see physically brings underlying aggression to show via the exacerbation of the figure screaming. As explained here by Muller, appearing normal wasn't a concern for Expressionists:

> It does not always wear the same face nor reflect the same state of mind, but it invariably sacrifices the normal appearance of things to a concern for the powerful expression of some inner reality which has taken root in mind or the soul. (Muller, 1973, p.7)

The success of *The Scream* is, in part, its simplicity. The single character, with his eyes wide open, staring at the viewer, clutching at his face, could be seen as a cry for help. However otherworldly the winding bridge or the red sky may seem, his pain and distress are instantly recognisable to us. The lone character at the centre of the canvas is covered by thickly painted slanted lines, further disfiguring the pictorial space – a common Expressionist trait, by using contrasting colours and shapes, together with swirling painting gestures. The painting

communicates to the viewer recognisable psychological themes of angst and turmoil. Munch captured the fear of when loneliness strikes.

The First World War was responsible for an increase in the numbers of psychological illness, and artists took up the topic to formulate their protest against the war. From the time of the First World War, some psychiatrists had started to criticise Expressionism, their standpoint being that the makers of the art were taking no consideration of the health and well-being of the viewer. Many psychiatrists were fascinated by the work produced, but others saw it as deviancy (Roske, 2003). Fear and anxiety were an integral part of German Expressionism; the psychological toll of living with trauma was transferred on to canvas and screen by artists living the day-to-day horrors post-war. Fear and anxiety can be so individual, but there are common triggers which, on a basic level, are so identifiable to all. Freud made the distinction that there are two types of anxiety; one being triggered by a traumatic event is so complex that the individual cannot process either in the conscious or subconscious. He claims that it happens when the ego doesn't have time to respond to the traumatic situation, leaving the person psychologically overwhelmed. Signal anxiety was the prospect of the danger of foreboding events, for instance knowing that a particular situation will happen, such as a loved one's death, or losing one's job. Freud also explored the theory of repression causing anxiety, that if we repressed awful events and feelings, eventually they accumulate in experiencing anxiety. In post-war Germany, there were several fears felt by the general public; for example, the economic unsuitability, meaning higher numbers of unemployed, and also the rise in cases of syphilis, creating a massive sense of unease. One of the growing concerns was mental health, in particular the number of cases of mental breakdowns suffered by soldiers (Figura, 2011).

Otto Dix is one of the most successful artists to convey trauma and PTSD. Dix was one of the later artists of German Expressionism, yet had one of the most significant impacts; his work was dramatically more horrific, dealing with suffering and emotional destruction. He was twenty-two and still a student at the Academy of Art in Dresden when he volunteered for military service and trained as a machine gunner. Like many artists, Dix was discharged following a mental breakdown after four years of service from 1914 to 1918 (Figura, 2011).

Fig.1 Otto Dix. (1924). *Nocturnal Encounter with a Lunatic*.

The etching we see here in fig.1, *Encounter with a Lunatic at Night* (1924). Is a nightmarish black-and-white scene where Dix had come across a man exploring rubble in the barracks. It was unclear to Dix what army this man was from due to his torn uniform. We see from the etching an alien-like figure devoid of many features set around a scene of destruction. The setting was at night time, making plays into Dix's vulnerability. The night time creates poor visibility, plus the dark plays into the natural fears many have of being alone and what we cannot see. Many post-war images dealt with our worst fears being reflected towards us, the

audience. Common concerns such as death, rejection, and being in danger are repeated through German Expressionist works to evoke the viewer, while these themes are repeated through the movement's most successful films. The historical event's terrible outcomes gave way for a projection of the artist's fears to appear onscreen. As Adam Szymanski tells us:

> The German cineastes expressed unparalleled mass anxiety about the rise of Nazism and returned to war that was to come after the fall of the Weimar republic. To avoid betraying their subject matter, the expressionists could not help but put their faith in a dark, obtuse, and violent image—the only kind that could anticipate their nation's historical development. By exploring the interwar unconscious, the expressionists found a way to elucidate the coming socio-political actuality of World War II. (A. Szymanski, 2019)

In Szymanski's article *The Psychological Image* (2019), by examining Expressionist film on a psychological level, we understand that the impending rise of fascism gave way to a world of irrational behaviour. As humans, we are prone to herd mentality; therefore, men were willing to risk their lives for many totalitarian views. German Expressionism aesthetically displayed the chaos that many German people were being conditioned to accept. It invents a set of tropes where we recognise the real horror behind the story. It is one of enormous oppression and dictatorship, where the loss of control is identifiable to all. Expressionism became a form of social reality as an allegory of the abnormal psyche (Szymanski, 2019).

Often, what we see through the movement's work triggers either what we fear or something very familiar to us, so we recognise the monsters on the canvas staring back at us, but their distorted frames and wild eyes are foreign to us still. The word "uncanny" plays an essential role in German Expressionism. The uncanny from a theoretical standpoint was written about extensively for the first time by Sigmund Freud in 1919. For this study, the uncanny is utilised to investigate the subject of aesthetics within psychoanalysis. The research approaches Freud's analysis by addressing the origin of the word. Uncanny originates from the word *unheimlich* (unhomely), a term that describes when something appears familiar to the viewer but has been repressed at some stage of the viewer's life.

The word uncanny is more complicated than just the term unhomely, though. Firstly, *heimlich* (homely) is all that is familiar and reassuring to us, something that brings thoughts of domestic comfort and tranquillity to us. *Unheimlich* (unhomely, uncanny) is a psychological response of unease met with turmoil within the viewer. The uncanny is a psychoanalytical study of the

feeling of fear, anxiety when faced with something we recognise and are familiar with. Yet, there is something wrong with what we are viewing. Gazing over an image, the uncanny would present the viewer with first a feeling of uncomfortableness.

The uncanny belongs to a set of ideas that everything which was intended to remain a secret, to be hidden away, comes into the open; a complex mixture of memories, fears, and beliefs come together to the surface. Freud also addresses the theory of uncertainty concerning what a person experiences in reality and what is imagined. When a person experiences the uncanny, the sensations they experience, and what triggers them, are unique to the individual.

A trigger for the uncanny can be anything seen by the viewer, and what is entirely healthy and understandable to one, could be unsettling for another. It can be found in an inanimate object, a place, or even a song. Freud goes on to explain that the uncanny is nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and long-established in the mind, which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. The subject of the "uncanny" is a province of this kind. It undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror. It is equally certain, too, that the word is not always used in a definite sense, so that it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread. Yet, we may expect that it implies some intrinsic quality, which justifies the use of a unique name (Freud, 2003). Freud also went on to discuss how the repetition of experience can be a source of the uncanny. This can make one feel helpless, and it also is stated that this can often happen in one's dreams.

Freud also discusses 'The Sand-Man' in Hoffmann's *Nachtstücken*, a short story of Nathaniel, a young man whose father died when he was younger. His mother told the young man a tale, and the household nanny threatened that if he didn't go to bed on time then the sandman would come and take his eyes. Upon asking his mother, he is told that the sandman is merely a tale. Nathaniel later descends into mental illness, believing that he is being pursued by a man he considers also killed his father. In a sequence of hallucinations, Nathaniel then concludes that the man he believes killed his father is the sandman. The tale ends with Nathaniel's death through delusion, Nathaniel throwing himself off a building believing the sandman is pursuing him again. The story itself dealing with death, mental illness and fear connects to the themes repeatedly used within many Expressionist paintings and films. The idea of someone or something familiar, yet feeling fear when faced with it, is the basis for the definition of the uncanny.

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari presented several aspects to the masses of the uncanny. The concept of trauma and being controlled by a higher power represented post-war bewilderment felt by the nation, and reflected Germany's own reality at that time. Freud analysed the "double" as "uncanny" in its essence. Not necessarily as an external double, but as an internal one, an exceptional faculty opposed to the ego whose function is to observe and criticise the self and to exercise censorship within the mind (Freud, 2003). Seeing one's inner turmoil can be considered a reflection, and the Expressionist movement's goal was to show the horror that they had experienced through World War I; it was the inability of the audience to decide what is real or imagined. The uncanniness of delusion is a common factor in the Expressionist cinema, whether one is experiencing a repressed memory or something more akin to a hallucination. For example, the set design of Caligari being so otherworldly, where roads curve impossibly from side to side and buildings are so distorted in shape that they look as if they are about to fall. The viewer can recognise what the forms are representing, but what is uncanny is how wrong they look. There is a discomfort in the unpracticality of these objects. In the Haunted screen, Eisner gives her analysis of essential German Expressionist films in which she touches upon the psychological aspect within certain commercially successful films such as *The Golem* and *Metropolis*. Eisner states that, "Expressionists are concerned solely with images in mind. Hence the sloping walls which have no reality." Eisner relates the use of uncanny to characters and set designs:

> These curves and slanting lines have a meaning which is decidedly metaphysical. For the psychic reaction caused in the spectator by oblique lines is entirely different from that caused in him by straight lines. Similarly, unexpected curves and sudden ups and downs provoke emotions quite different from those induced by harmonious and gentle gradients. But what matters is to create states of anxiety and terror. (Eisner, 1952, p.21)

This disruption of all that we are familiar with interferes with our perception of right and wrong. As the film's protagonists make their way through various sets, such as the fair, the streets and the asylum, the set design is painted in stark black, with white shapes painted on floors as windows, appearing unnatural: the surrounding for the characters is entirely *unheimlich* and uncanny. Their suggestion of insanity within *Caligari* adds to the uncanny, as most people dread the idea of mental illness or losing the ability to express one's thoughts to others. The nightmarish appearances of many Expressionist films and portraits add to the uncanny manner, which we recognise and which creates distress for the viewer.

Caligari and *Nosferatu* also address the subject of alienisation. Expressionists concerned themselves with the issue as a psychological dimension of the post-war subject's modern alienation – an alienation that could be derived from poverty, mental illness and deviant behaviour (Szymanski, 2019). Alienation should not be mistaken for isolation, though: alienation is imposed, whereas isolation can be a choice. *Nosferatu* showed alienation in many forms, for example Count Orlok's complete estrangement from the natural world. He is more akin to an animal than human, grotesque in the acts he commits. As an audience, it is near impossible to connect or understand with Count Orlok. His actions in *Nosferatu* are never justified, and he acts on impulse; he embodies all that is evil. Psychologically, we as a viewer alienate the character as we would in reality. However, it can be observed that Orlok's character symbolises dictators such as Hitler, a ruthless killer with no consideration for human life. In *Caligari*, we see the characters are constantly manipulated, while the alienation causes discontent and unease among them. Dr. Caligari controlling Cesare explores alienation through Cesare's lack of control of himself. He was utterly disconnected from rational thinking by being exploited, his then deviant behaviour separates him from society, alienating him even further.

What is so successful about *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* is the film's depiction of mental illness. The total loss of power it shows on the screen is a profound metaphor. Freud states that:

> [n]eurotics turn away from reality because they find it unbearable; the most extreme type of this turning away from reality is shown by certain cases of hallucinatory psychosis which seek to deny the particular event that occasioned the outbreak of their insanity.

Psycho. 1960. [film still].

The way the film depicts fantasy over reality was used in future films such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (which will be discussed in depth in a later chapter), including the power of insanity and the grip it can have over the human mind. Even when the dictating power isn't physically present for the repressed, the manipulation they hold over them is unbreakable. Much like Cesare, the character Norman blends fantasy and reality so tightly that we cannot separate the two; through trauma, he invents his own reality, much like Francis in *Caligari*, as it is easier to live with than true reality. Freud's study of the unconscious concerns itself with ideas being forced to the surface of the consciousness through repression. The theory of ideas can be both conscious and unconscious and also happening at the same time. Repression does not outweigh their power as both are drives for our everyday desires and outcomes; because of the nature of the unconscious, it controls our wishful thinking rather than what we achieve. Even if one is unaware of them, they continue to influence our lives and assert themselves into our everyday actions. Repression, though, is a constant effort to keep the desires at bay (Freud.org).

The fascination with the deep, dark horrors of Expressionism lies within the themes of repressions for us all, with an element of taboo in the subjects which captivates us as an audience. The anxiety that can be seen on the faces of characters and portraits unsettles us so much because it is so recognisable. Yet, with each different film or painting, it is new to us when we look at the key themes such as murder, trauma, psychology and war within German Expressionism. When Expressionism ended, these themes had become essential to media such as film. What was integral to the success of German Expressionism was bringing horror to the screen for the masses. The idea of ghostly beings, vivid nightmares and hallucinations had not been so successfully commercial or explored as much before German Expressionism. Before World War I and pre-Expressionism across Europe, Russia, Scandinavia and America, film industries were becoming professionally established. Advances in technology also meant that films were becoming more extended, with more professional production taking place with narrative and photography. As larger audiences were now buying tickets, and going to the cinema was a more popular leisurely pursuit, studios invested more money within the film industry. In the next chapter, I explore and examine how German Expressionism influenced future artists after the movement had disbanded and its lasting legacy.

CHAPTER 3 - The Uncanny and its recurring influence from Hitchcock to Tableau Photography

The key themes, such as murder, trauma, psychology and war, are subjects that are profoundly integral to what made German Expressionism so alluring and successful. When German Expressionism ended, these themes became crucial to visual media such as film and photography. Key to the success of German Expressionism was bringing horror to the screen for the masses. The idea of ghostly beings, vivid nightmares and hallucinations had not been so successfully commercial before German Expressionism. Before World War I and pre-Expressionism across Europe, Russia, Scandinavia and America, film industries were becoming established. Advances in technology also meant that films were becoming more prolonged, and more professional production was taking place with narrative and photography. As larger audiences were now buying tickets and going to the cinema as a popular leisurely pursuit, studios invested more money within the film industry (Welsch, 2009).

The economic downturn throughout World Wars I and II, instead of damaging the film industry, transformed the European film industry, in particular German Expressionist cinema. German Expressionist filmmaking broke many cinematic conventions and started a path on which the genre of horror and the psychological thriller began. The reworking and imitation of Expressionist aesthetic techniques can be seen past the New Objectivity movement, particularly film noir where we find that Expressionist cinema had crept into post-War 1940s American studios. These ominous and gloomy cinematic depictions of post-World War II America life reflected the fears of the mass public and of corporations (Roberts, 2008).

The director who most infamously reflected this best within his work was British director Alfred Hitchcock. In his mid-twenties, in 1924 Hitchcock embarked on an apprenticeship in Berlin as an assistant director on the production *The Blackguard* at Berlin's Babelsberg Studios. Consequently, Hitchcock was hired by the German company Emelka to make his own two films, *The Pleasure Garden* and *Der Bergadler* and, returning to London, Hitchcock made *The Lodger*. German Expressionism and Hitchcock's earlier work and subsequent films influenced the 1940s and 1950s' "American Noir" period, which became a term that was commonly used to describe the psychological thrillers that were most popular with cinema audiences at that time. The growing understanding of psychoanalysis at this time made psychological thrillers more in vogue, for example in America where audiences engaged with

and understood what psychology as a subject was, partly due to an increasing interest and rise in understanding of one's own mental state.

> Moreover, many Hollywood filmmakers, including émigré talent, were seeing psychoanalysts when making these American noir films. These émigrés brought a brooding style to American cinema. Further, psychoanalysis gained popularity in 1940s America and in the film industry itself. The cinematic depiction of psychoanalysis and psychological, mental illness was especially pronounced in American film noir crime narratives. (Biesen, 2014)

The cinematic visuals of film noir border a fine line with plagiarism, from its use of German Expressionist aesthetics, as both were usually filmed in black and white using shadows and silhouettes to create an eerie tension to the scene. Expressionism commonly used the character's state of mind to create doubt in the story for the viewer, making the story more complicated to determine what is fact and fiction for the protagonist's characters within the film. Where the Expressionist film is more dreamlike with stories of ghosts and monsters, noir – and, in particular, American Noir – deals with more logical tales of crime, betrayal, anxieties and glamorous women. Hitchcock's early influences from his years in Berlin and from working in the film industry at that time are evident within his work.

> Hitchcock's period in Germany has often been cited as exposing him to the specific stylistic features of German Expressionism and Soviet Montage, which can be seen in his subsequent films. (Geoff, 2003)

Taking Hitchcock's film *Rebecca* (1940; the tale of a young woman who has fallen for a widower whose housekeeper will not accept the new mistress of the house) as a narrative, the work turns darker as more German Expressionist aesthetics and motifs are utilised. An example is the dream sequence used in the opening scenes of the film, synonymous with German Expressionist cinema, with the tilted shadows moving over the main character in *Rebecca* (Joan Fontaine, the actress that plays Mrs De Winter) as they descend from the window, haunting the scene as she sleeps. Utilising shadows over characters within a film set is used frequently in several scenes in *Nosferatu* (1922); for example, as Orlok creeps up the stairs to his next victim, it is only his menacing shadow that we see travelling upwards towards the room. The contrast of light and dark in *Rebecca* as the film goes on becomes a lot more prominent; as the camera pans over the grand mansion, it appears very gothic to the viewer, foreboding the trouble ahead for young Mrs De Winter. More scenes towards the end of the film take place at night, with the

night time within Expressionism and cinema psychologically suggesting ideas of isolation, anger and anxiety. Hitchcock's work embodies many entities of Expressionist cinema, yet Hitchcock brought them to a new American audience to create *Rebecca*.

As the Noir style in America started to decline in the late 1950s, Hitchcock was not finished pursuing his craving for the darker side of cinema. Refusing to direct Ian Flemings's first adaption of James Bond, *Dr No*, Hitchcock made history in the 1960s with *Psycho*, groundbreaking at the time and, to this day, considered Hitchcock's masterpiece. The story is of Norman Bates, a psychopathic murderer, preying on guests visiting his motel. The film depicts the tale of Marion, a secretary impulsively stealing money from her boss to help her married boyfriend, Sam. While on the run from the police, Marion ends up on the wrong side of the freeway and then at the Bates Motel, where she meets Norman and his 'mother' who then murders her in the infamous shower scene. After this, Norman goes into shock and, on discovering what his mother has done, goes about hiding Marion's body in her car, where he watches it sink in the motel's swamp-like pond. Several people, from Marion's sister Lila to a private investigator, go in search of her. Norman's mother goes on to kill the private investigator, while Marion's sister and Sam continue to search for her. Sam distracts Norman while Lila searches the Bates residence; as Lila sneaks down to the basement, she discovers the skeleton of Mrs Bates. The final scene pans to Norman, zooming closer and closer onto his face. A voice-over of a psychiatrist explains that Norman is riddled with paranoia, believing that he was his mother. The 'mother' he thinks he is, has destroyed what is left of Norman.

Psycho is a homage to German Expressionist cinema from the beginning. In the opening scene, we view a cityscape, only for the frame to get smaller and smaller, almost peeping through a darkened window, metaphorically entering somewhere hidden and otherworldly, if you will. The daylight turns to twilight when Marion is driving away, escaping with her stolen money. In the car scenes where Marion is alone, her paranoia begins, she starts to hear voices, imagining fictitious scenarios. As Marion's thoughts turn more vicious, Marion's physical surroundings become darker and the rain blinds her; the electric windscreen wipers cast shadows against her face while the bright flashes of highway lights blind her. Paranoia is a key theme within Expressionism as the gloomy surroundings entrap the protagonist, creating tension for the viewer. Showing their world becoming bleak, it rises the heightened anxiety of the subject. The parlour scene is pivotal in seeing how German Expressionism influenced Hitchcock: as Marion enters the parlour room, the harsh lighting throws various shadows from the uncanny-looking stuffed animals onto the walls. The creepy-looking paintings and pictures

– one being of Norman's mother – were placed carefully on the set. It is said that this was strategically placed above Marion and Norman as a reminder of a foreboding presence, watching them feeling trapped in each other's company. Fear of authority figures was a commonly used trait within Expressionist cinema, too; for example, the story of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* is heavily entrenched in the fear of an authoritarian personality ruining one's existence and taking freedom away.

As they sit there under the shadow of the house, Norman leaves Marion and makes his way back to face his mother's confrontation. We only ever see the mother as a shadow figure in the window – once more, the use of shadow being an overtly used trick in Expressionist cinema to show the audience the monster, yet to hide them away at the same time, creating more tension. Fearing what we cannot fully see is a concept that is covered by the uncanny, where something is recognisable to the viewer, yet there is an alarming factor that worries us.

A commonly used subject within German Expressionist film, repeated in Hitchcock's movies such as *Psycho,* is the broken masculinity which the leading men suffer from within the story. Many male characters in Expressionist film suffered from insanity and hallucinations, are riddled with angst or were tormented throughout the narrative. This idea of breaking down the masculine figure symbolised the changes in society because of World War I and II. The significant role of women after World War I and II changed tenfold not only within the workplace, but women now had the right to own their own property and work full time and within industry, whereas before World War I it would simply have been unheard of.

The role of women in the German Expressionist cinema focused on beauty. From *Caligari* to *Metropolis*, women were used subjectively and their vision of beauty was ultimately their demise. Although there are examples of early use of the femme fatale, this term wasn't used during Expressionism and was invented after the genre. We see in *From Morn till Midnight* (1920) that Erna Morena's character mocks the lead protagonist's love for her; his obsession for her is, in turn, what sends him into madness with hallucinations about death and ideas of grandeur.

The term femme fatale is derived from the word "fatal", with the female's mysterious beauty drawing men to their own demise by leading them into disastrous situations. Sometimes, the femme fatale herself is given this label, as she is doomed from the beginning: often femme fatale characters met a gruesome ending themselves. The femme fatale was a hugely important role within Hitchcock's films to the point of a personal obsession. In pre-production with

Psycho, Hitchcock had been hugely disappointed that Grace Kelly had retired from the film industry, and it had been Hitchcock's wife, Alma, who had suggested Janet Leigh. Her character's beauty happened to be her own and Norman's ruin. She used her looks to gain the trust of the wealthy businessman to steal his money, but then fell victim to murder at the hands of Norman Bates. The identity struggles seen within *Psycho*, extreme camera angles, fatalism and the use of light to dark to set the mood of the scene, are examples of the inspiration Hitchcock took from German Expressionism.

Hitchcock's use of the femme fatale has a direct influence on where his work has almost become visually replicated in some respects, for example within photography, where Cindy Sherman's work has long been associated academically with Hitchcock's cinematic work. Sherman's 'Film Stills' body of work is connected to the femme fatale. Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* is a set of 70 black-and-white photographs made over three years in which the artist posed in the guises of various generic female film characters, among them ingénue, working girl, vamp and lonely housewife. Staged to resemble scenes from the 1950s and 1960s Hollywood, film noir, B movies, and European art-house films, the printed images mimic in format, scale and quality the often-staged "stills" used to promote films. By photographing herself in such roles, Sherman inserts herself into a dialogue about stereotypical portrayals of women (Moma.org).

For Sherman, ambiguity is essential; she aimed to recreate specific or immediately recognisable scenes, but left the settings, body language and facial expressions of her characters to the viewer's interpretation. Much like the character's make-up in Expressionist film, Sherman often applied heavy make-up to disguise herself. Stage make-up is, in particular, a critical tool, and it can create monsters and distressing features; these radical physical changes are what makes Sherman's work so connected to Expressionism – the term 'Trompe l'oeil', or the fine art of fooling the eye and the mind, applies here. We can explore Sherman's images to look for her real identity, but, as a result of her methods, the harder we look we are never any closer to her (Kramer,1995). Masking one's physical identity was repetitively used within Expressionism and stage make-up was often used to reflect a character's state of mind. In the film, heavy stage make-up was applied, faces would appear stark white with black rings around the eyes; these gothic-like features were to set the mood and tone of the film.

In works like *Untitled Film Still #21*, Sherman emphasised the uncertainty of the narrative by staging a scene "in-between the action" (MOMA.org). One of the unique aspects of her work

is that it only ever features herself. Sherman is the only model within the frame, usually heavily disguised by the character she has created. What is most fascinating about the images is the surrounding, which set the scene for the onlooker. The characters that are generated each tell a story, the people we come across appear uncanny, like something we have seen before. The appearances from clowns, lonely housewives, heroines, and frightened school girls living within these tableaux all have several factors in common. Highly staged, these mock film stills present the viewer with a simple piece of work. Sherman offers us a collection of characters that are a stereotypical portrayal of women we have seen before in film.

> Since her images are a projection of a whole array of stereotypical Hollywood or New Wave Heroines, along with the atmospheres through which they are cast – the film noir's hard-bitten denizen of the night, one of Hitchcock's plucky but vulnerable career girls, the B-movie's small-town innocent swamped by Metropolis, a new wave vehicle of alienated and so on. (Rosalind Krauss)

It is essential to look at the apparent factors both in visuals and themes that appear within the work. *Film Stills* was a collection of black-and-white 35mm film created over three years. Sherman interestingly uses her gaze to point the viewer away from herself, with the point of reference being outside our frame so the viewer never sees it; however, the lack of visual information is compensated for, by the often, overdramatic expression on the character's face.

Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* investigate the visual stereotypes seen within film, the female protagonist of the femme fatale and the victim being familiar characters repeated within the commercial cinema of the 1950s and B movies; the work is an index of representations and clichés repeated through cinema. The cues that one can connect to Hitchcock's work within Sherman's are both visual and theoretically. Although we cannot take this for granted, Sherman herself didn't overly contextualise her work. Sherman has stated in an interview for MOMA that she did not intend to portray a particular film. "Some people have told me they remember the movie that one of my images is derived from," she commented, "but I had no film in mind at all" (MOMA,1998).

Taking from cinematography, Sherman's film stills encapsulate the performance of the female character within an imaginary film. The film aesthetics that were born from German Expressionism, such as the harsh lighting and composition, create a tableau that would not exist otherwise. She draws the audience into this constructed unreality, where we are merely an observer of the story she has created. From an aesthetical perspective, what are most

recognisable within Sherman's work are repeated tropes that are almost taken straight from a scene of Hitchcock's or from an Expressionist film. Sherman frames herself within the photograph from high-angled mid-shots, with her use of lighting whereby she often surrounds herself in darkness and uses only selective bright light to capture the often worried or terrified expression on her face.

In Sherman's work, the figures we see in her film stills series rarely, if ever, look directly into the lens, but instead look off-screen, to the side, as if something is waiting to entrap them. In Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, we see Sherman in both photographs looking off the frame. The worlds that Sherman constructs are seemingly unsettling. Her "characters" frequently glance anxiously outside the frame at some unspecified menace, thereby implying the presence of a narrative even while withholding it (Owens, 2006).

In Fig. 3, we see Sherman looking off-camera, staring upwards with her arms bent, but leaning upwards. She appears in some way defenceless, surrounded by darkness, seemingly perturbed at what she stares into. The opposing light to shadow usage within the shot shows enough of Sherman so we can see her facial expression and outfit, but with the shadow framing her and giving the viewer minimal clues as to where she might be. In German Expressionism, at critical points the female victims are often lit so that the viewer can only see how terrified they appear, as Sherman has done here. It throws most of the surrounding environment into darkness, so the viewer can only see the foreboding horror that is about to happen. In Fig. 4, we see the moment where the scene becomes a confrontation of feminine virtue and masculine evil played out like a symphony of light and dark (Gatiss, 2012).

Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 are taken nearly sixty years apart. Fig. 4 is a real film still and Fig. 3 is a fake film still, yet visually they are seemingly parallel to one another; both figures appear in helpless positions already overpowered by the predator. Surrounded by darkness and only highlighted by intense use of light on their bodies, exposed in the sense of their costume, neither are formally dressed. Sherman appears in somewhat of a schoolgirl outfit, despite not looking school age, and Birch's character is seen in a nightdress, which speaks of vulnerability as if been caught off guard. The film stills produce an anxiety-provoking, uneasy and uncanny body of work. From the perspective of the surface, the organisation so carefully conveyed in the early photographs seems to be dissolving to reveal a monstrous otherness, that 'something' that seemed to be lurking in the background (Mulvey, 1991). Sherman's characters are presented within the idea of an outcast individual existing in a world where they are separated from

conventional society – the lonely female cast in bright lighting, but surrounded by dark shadows. The female character is often young looking, but always appearing ghostly white, still running from danger.

What Sherman has done so well here is to use familiar signifiers that the viewer would commonly see in a German Expressionist film, similar to the horrifying ending to Hitchcock's *The Birds* where the heroines become the victims in the face of their attackers. The uncanniness lies within a tale to which the viewer already knows the ending. This is where the dread and horror lie within Sherman's work. One of the essential parts of Sherman's work is always the disguise. All factors of the transformation are integrally so crucial to each character, creating reproductions of female stereotypes in film.

In an interview in the magazine 'W', Sherman talks about the purpose of make-up: "I'd been thinking about using make-up more extremely, perhaps since the last two bodies of work. As I was looking through a book about German Expressionist films and their stars, it all came together: Because of the extreme way actors made their faces up in those early days of film to make-up in the black-and-white. I just wanted to use make-up in the same way" (Sherman, 2016).

German Expressionists and Sherman are both anti-realists of identity in the sense that the character is never represented or reconstructed to look "usual". The character itself contains assumed roles within society. But both Sherman and the German Expressionists served identity in a much darker way. German Expressionism was used to give a new character to those affected by the trauma of World War I and to regain some dignity within its unique identity. Sherman used these newly created identities to give power to women, to question the social identity roles imposed on women at that time. It can be said that any representation of art is questioning identity in some way. It examines their status and social roles at the time and changed the way they were being represented. It is impossible to puzzle together what Sherman may appear like on a day-to-day basis without the character she uses in her work.

> Sherman alters her image so radically from picture to picture that it becomes impossible to locate the consistent term that ought to bind the series together. (Bryson, October issues, p.84)

This chapter has demonstrated German Expressionism's legacy and, in particular, the uncanny in Hitchcock's and Sherman's work. In the next chapter, the thesis examines artworks and

parallel notions of social isolation between the period of German Expressionism and today's contemporary, fast-paced, digital-reliant society.

Fig.1 Cindy Sherman. (1978) *Untitled Film Still #14*.

Fig.2 Cindy Sherman. (1978). *Untitled Film Still #10*.

Fig.3 Cindy Sherman. (1981) *Untitled #92*.

Fig.4 *Nosferatu.* (1922). Film Still.

CHAPTER 4 - Isolation and its Counterparts

Social isolation is defined as a "voluntary or involuntary absence of interaction with others" and can produce what is described as deviant or detaching behaviour – which can, in turn, lead the individual to experience neglect from their sociometric peer group. For German Expressionists, the ever-changing processes in the social and political climate significantly impacted on mental health in particular. The idea of Expressionist painters and filmmakers influencing post-war photography may seem outlandish. Expressionists, who felt their isolation through modern society, hoped that, by creating their works, it would connect the masses through an aesthetical exploration. It was an attempt to make the artist no longer anonymous. The bourgeoisie opposed the emphasis on personal expression. In many ways, the rebellion of the Expressionist movement isolated them from some of the most influential members of society.

German Expressionism was an anti-realist movement, yet alienation and social isolation are an essential and mutual element that brings the two together, inspired by feelings of exclusion and dissatisfaction. The photographers discussed in this chapter, Cindy Sherman and Gregory Crewdson, use the same universal themes, as we will see throughout this chapter. They both portray inner conflict while creating tension in their images. The artist's exploration of psychosis is heightened through the questioning of the current social and political climate.

One of the most fundamental themes of German Expressionism is the social commentary on injustice and, most importantly, social isolation. While isolation is a theme that was commonly explored by artists such as Edward Munch and Van Gogh before German Expressionism, the first Expressionists repeatedly expressed the subject, primarily through film. The rejection of bourgeois values inspired alienated artists to represent the unusual and deviant within society, art that belonged only within its community that challenged the state of mind at that time. Two of the most popular settings seen in Expressionist paintings and films were cityscapes and war tableaux. Post-war Germany gave way to an urban lifestyle that saw people alienated because of the busy pace of city life; being able to divorce from this reality and then create an imaginary setting to match emotional condition was one of the biggest successes of German Expressionism. During World War I, Erich Heckel, one of the founding members of Die Brüke in 1905, was stationed in Belgium with Red Cross medical corps, which was headed by art historian Walter Kaesbach, who ensured Heckel continued to paint and make prints. After the

war, Heckel created many portraits, self-portraits and landscapes embodying spiritual isolation and melancholy (Figura, 2011). Heckel's painting 'Ghent (Gent)', from 1916, depicts two lonely people, both seemingly staring vacantly off into the distance. Dark in tone and mood, the shadow with a single light above the gentlemen in the lithograph, the two figures appear to be lost in their gloomy thoughts, the seat across from them also empty, yet pulled away from the table as if someone had left.

One of early Expressionism's successes was portraying tableaus of ordinary, but depressing parts of life, for example Kirchner's scenes of 'The Street', which portray inner Dresden and the isolation with the empty faces and lonely figures. The streets are winding, unnatural shapes embodying what Kircher referred to as "agonizing restlessness", a defining quality of many Expressionist works (Kindersley, 2013). He left Dresden in 1911 and moved to Berlin and, for a further four years, he continued painting images of street scenes that expressed the anonymity that comes with city life. In 1918, Kirchner suffered a breakdown and retreated to Switzerland. After the Nazis had declared Kircher's work "degenerate", as they had done with other artists, they took all of his work down from public view; his mental health unfortunately continued on a downward spiral, and in 1938 he took his own life.

The next part of the chapter will also discuss themes of mental health, but by discussing the American photographer Gregory Crewdson. Crewdson was born in Brooklyn in 1962 and graduated in 1988 from Yale University School of Art. He is now director of studies in photography at Yale and one of the world's leading photographic contemporary artists. His major breakthrough exhibition featured in the Museum of Modern Art New York exhibition, 'Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort' in 1991. Specific works in this exhibition are discussed further in the final chapter of the thesis. His works are remarkably detailed tableaux, compositions that could be taken out of a film set. His photographs "depict an otherworldly version of America, taking inspiration from David Lynch and Alfred Hitchcock he evocates the psychological Interzone between every day and the uncanny" (gagosian.com). To understand fully how Crewdson's work links to German Expressionism and isolation, we must consider the construction of the photographs and what the artist's intentions were though the photographs.

In a *New York Times* interview, Crewdson states that:

> My pictures are about everyday life combined with theatrical effect… I want them to feel outside of time, to take something routine and make it irrational. I'm always

> looking for a small moment that is a revelation. It doesn't have a plot per se, though there is a narrative arc. I hope it will be beautiful, tender, and dreamlike – and as still as possible. (Crewdson, *New York Times*, 2004)

The construction of the images is almost identical to how a movie is assembled and staged: the production is expensive and takes a team of producers, set designers and actors to achieve the finished photograph. The sets are built from scratch around locations in America, where it has been known for Crewdson to have roads closed off for several days to achieve the perfect shot. Much like German Expressionism, a significant emphasis is drawn upon set design, lighting, and camera angles. Where the scene was set was just as important as the stories that were depicted for Expressionists; by manipulating the way the set looked, it could evoke eerie atmospheres and uncanny metaphors for the viewer. Dark shadows were repeated throughout Expressionist films and painting to create nightmarish scenes and, most notably, a psychological tension. The light was often striking and used to highlight small sections of the actors' faces or different parts of the room. In a series of untitled photographs, we see beams of bright light from the sky and through the ground in several pieces of Crewdson's work, only showing so much and leaving the rest of the image obscured and concealed from the viewer. What is hidden is used to create tension within the frame; it poses more questions than answers and builds a more exciting narrative. Crewdson and Expressionists both successfully allow the viewer to engage in their imagination when looking at the work. When we peer into the photographs made by Crewdson, we open up our memories, fantasies, dream lives, and nightmares (Banks, 2008).

The American suburban landscape used in the series 'Beneath the roses' and 'Twilight' focuses on towns such as Vermont and Massachusetts, which may lack any real individuality or identity, adding to the ambiguity of small-town America, creating scenes in banal settings such as car parks and forests. The people within the photographs almost always seem withdrawn and isolated; there is never a sense of interaction or happiness between the characters. The horrible scenes represent the anxiety and unease in America felt by the working and middle classes. Creating theatrical images, Crewdson takes domestic realities and turns them into fantasy, showing the darker side and mocking the 'American Dream'. Just like Expressionism, Crewdson uses his images to tell of the discontent felt throughout a nation; there is a sadness in the photographs that translates visually to the viewer as he creates a dystopia that we can all recognise.

> There is an undeniable sense of melancholia and foreboding in the series, which is a theme that runs through Crewdson's entire oeuvre. In Twilight, he explored the relationship between the domestic and the fantastic, and in Beneath the Roses, he explores the recesses of the American psyche in theatrical yet intensely real panoramic images. (Waters, 2017, *Telegraph*)

We cannot discuss Crewdson's work without addressing the psychoanalytical concept of the uncanny. Crewdson himself has a deep-seated history with the uncanny; his father was a psychoanalyst, and Crewdson still has his father's original Freud essays with notes on the pages.

Crewdson has justified his attraction to the uncanny by claiming, "ultimately, probably what scares me most is reality. When it's a representation, when it's separated from the world, it more effortlessly becomes poetic or beautiful" (Crewdson, Independentphotographer.com 2019).

The uncanniness within the work is recognisable in the everyday scenes, however fantastical they may seem. The tired-looking furniture in the living rooms, the intentional sadness and almost boredom on faces, and the isolation that lies within show how disconnected the subjects become to their surroundings.

Gregory Crewdson. (2004). *Summer Rain*.

In one image, *Summer Rain* (2004), we see a man standing in the pouring rain beside his car, his car door open, holding a briefcase. The image was taken at night, illuminated only by the light from the closed shop fronts and street lamps. Like most of Crewdson's images, the character is alone and utterly distracted by something the viewer will never see. There is a sense of the characters in Crewdson's images of being overwhelmed. The over-the-top realities he creates, like the Expressionists did, isolate the individuals even further.

The tableaux of lonely couples and figures in dark, isolated places are repeated throughout the work of Gregory Crewdson. The melancholy images often appear like film stills, much like in Cindy Sherman's work, immaculately staged and with a foreboding sense of anticipation. There is also an element of the sinister in Crewdson's image. The construction of the images is akin to film production, with actors being used and sets being constructed for a single image. Much like German Expressionism, the image we see is a surreal take on reality and appears uncanny. If we compare Heckel's print of Ghent to various pieces of Crewdson's work, several common factors occur.

Fig. 1. Gregory Crewdson. (2005). *Untitled.*

Fig. 2. Erich Heckel. (1916). *Ghent (Gent)*.

When we look at the images, there are striking similarities between the two. Even though they are both different mediums and produced ninety-four years apart, in both Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, we see a man and woman both staring vacantly away from each other. Again, just like in Heckel's work, we see an empty chair that has been pushed back. All the figures in both images look morose, preoccupied in thought and verging on depressed, uninterested in whatever is on the

table. This creates a familiar scene for the viewer, generating feelings of distraction and being unconnected to those around you. Another parallel between both images is the single light source in the image, the outer frame where darkness looms around the central image like an absent, foreboding presence. Anxiety and isolation are found in different visual cues.

Fig. 3. Gregory Crewdson. (2004). *Untitled*.

Furthermore, the aforementioned artworks also demonstrate comparable factors in relation to depicting isolated figures. In Fig. 3, the girl is standing in the middle of the road, while the car behind her has two other figures sitting inside. The high beams of light coming from behind the large tree are offset by the gloom of the house to the right, which, Hitchcock-like in style, adds an eerie feel to the total image. The woodcut by Heckle (Fig. 2) is typical in portraying isolation: the two figures, although in the same frame, are alone. There is no sense of communication between two figures; the melancholic expressions, as well as the hunched body language, can be seen in Crewdson's image too. Characters in either image do not 'engage' with the artist in the traditional sense. The scenes have been depicted for us, as the viewer, to read into the tale what the artist is portraying. The scene from Faust – one of the last films

classed as Expressionist – films the character's soul being argued over, in a bet that the demon Mephisto can corrupt a man's soul. Here, we see the film's main character alone just before the wager has been made. It is easy to see the similarities used in Crewdson's work with the use of Expressionist lighting techniques and the sense of isolation that the right use of shadows and spotlights can make; the characters in both images are central and surrounded by darkness and illuminated by staged lighting. All images tell a tale of isolation, one of German Expressionist's most common themes; it is in the storytelling, where this is successfully communicated to the viewer.

The relationship between German Expressionism and the psychology of isolation is explored in depth in Siegfried Kracauer's study, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. Kracauer was a film critic who explored the links between film aesthetics and the psychological turmoil behind the personal stories on screen. He examines how the character of Cesare from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* succumbs to the spell of Caligari and becomes compelled to kill. The power Caligari has over Cesare is an obvious metaphor for the power Hitler had over his army. When looking into a more profound psychological aspect, Cesare completely loses all sense of his familiar self; his pathological impulses symbolise the unlimited authority that idolises power as such, to satisfy its lust for domination, ruthlessly violating all human rights and values, thus portraying the common man who, under the pressure of compulsory military service, is drilled to kill and to be killed. The revolutionary meaning of the story reveals itself unmistakably at the end, where reason overpowers unreasonable power; insane authority is symbolically abolished (Kracauer, 1947).

> During the period of its retreat, the German mind was shaken by convulsions, which upset the whole emotional system. While this mind neglected or obstructed all external revolutionary possibilities, it made an extreme effort to reconsider the foundations of the self, to adjust the self to the actual conditions of life. Qualms about those deep-rooted dispositions which had supported the collapsed authoritative regime constantly interfered with the desire to keep them alive. It is true that during the post-war years, introspection dealt solely with the isolated individual. (Kracauer,1947)

What is being described here is the psychological mind during the post-World War I period Kracauer also goes on to describe that much of German Expressionism is associated with sensations of inferiority and isolation. When the unbearable power had left, the Expressionists

of World War I were abandoned, many suffering from PTSD. Another fascinating and vital point raised in *Caligari* regarding Hitler is the difference between German and American films after the war. It is important to note that both parties made propagandist films, within purely commercial film and storytelling; whereas German film embodied all that was dreadful, the trend in America in their post-war conquest was to portray themselves as heroes and idols. In the period 1917-1919, comedic roles ruled American film, one of the most successful American actors at that time being Charlie Chaplin, who went to form and join the United Artists Corporation to take full financial control of his film distribution.

As we observe German Expressionism and its relationship with isolation, we are again brought back to Cindy Sherman, this time as a director of the 1997 film *Office Killers* which repeatedly refers to German Expressionist, both aesthetically and thematically. *Officer Killers* is the tale of a lonely office worker, Dorine; on hearing that her job is to be downsized and that she must work from home, she goes on a murdering spree throughout the office, killing her fellow office workers. Eventually killing her manager, the last moments of the film show Dorine setting fire to the basement; driving away from the trail of destruction, she circles an office job advertisement in a newspaper.

It achieved no financial success, and it was passed off by the studio as a comedy horror, not the dark and sophisticated horror it had been firstly advertised as. In Dahlia Schweitzer's book, *Cindy Sherman's Office Killer: Another kind of monster*, several reasons are highlighted for the film's underwhelming performance. The film's advertising campaign had featured Sherman's name and association: since Sherman had featured herself so heavily in her work, audiences had anticipated seeing her physically in the film and were disappointed to see there wasn't even a cameo. It was agreed that the plot was predictable and, when viewing the film, one can agree it is filled with clichés. Some critics found the film to be anti-feminist, by pitting female colleagues against one another in the workplace.

Rather than being a homage to past horror films, from the classics such as *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane*, *Office Killer* unfortunately failed to make an impact in terms of originality – it was even classed as a comedy horror. Sherman and her colleagues distanced themselves from the film; it was only in the June 1997 issue of *Art in America* that Sherman acknowledges she had full creative control over the film (Schweitzer). As Schweitzer argues in her book, I would agree that it was always the intention of *Office Killer* to be a serious horror film. The film had

taken several critical aspects of German Expressionist visuals, ambitions and themes of isolation.

> In Office Killer, we have gruesome murders of a horror picture, dark shadows, and the femme fatale. Revolving around the melodrama, Office Killer encapsulates specific vehicles and questions "conventional social and political values." The ways they apply to the film enrich an understanding of appreciation of those genres. (Schweitzer, 2014)

The themes of isolation in *Office Killer* are apparent from the beginning, starting with Dorine's character, a stereotypical anonymous office worker lost in society in the drudgery of ordinary life, much like the protagonists of the German Expressionist cinema we see in *Metropolis*. Overpowered in her decisions by an authority-like figure, isolated and feeling misunderstood by those around her, Dorine becomes the film's protagonist by eliminating a dictating force in her life. Protagonists in Expressionist film are always experiencing a sense of isolation, either physical and psychological, and this isolation and alienation are pronounced (Schweitzer, 2014). It is a subject matter repeatedly echoed in Sherman's photographic work, as Schweitzer goes on to summarise the relationship of *Office Killer* to photographic series such as *Film Stills*.

> She cannot connect to us, her viewer. We stare at her, but she is forever out of reach. We see this kind of isolation in the Office Killer as well. Even though there some other characters in the film (unlike her Photographs), a group strangely dissociated. Dorine, as the Sherman stand-in, seems perpetually alone. (Schweitzer, 2014)

A critical factor that has been highlighted in the above quote is how Sherman is always the lone figure in her photographs, more often than not appearing utterly terrified by something unseen. Sherman completely isolates herself and depicts scenarios of hitchhiking and cowering in the corner of a dark room; apart from masks and the occasional doll's head, she presents herself as the single figure in her work – it could be argued this is to evoke a more profound psychological response from the viewer, such as anxiety or trepidation. The ambiguity of the surroundings gives little visual clues either, as Sherman's characters are used to fill the frame. Female characters in Expressionist film were often isolated; the lonely female surrounded by darkness was a repeated motif. Age was also a factor; many female characters were younger than their male lead counterparts. Their faces were covered with ghostly white paint, and the character was almost always running away from danger. All these features within the Expressionist film created a sense of isolation for the female characters. As an artist, Sherman

isolates herself from her work by presenting a new personality each time and, through these skilful masquerades, she has created an astonishing and influential body of work (Respini, 2012). The prosthetics and costumes touch on social commentary about identity and how isolated we are now as a result of modern technology. Indeed, Sherman said in an interview in the *Wall Street Journal* in 2019 that 'selfies' are a cry for help and that modern technology had no place within her work. She sees the use of self-portrait on social media as a sign of vulnerability and insecurity. The act of isolation will always be a psychological response to the world we choose to live in. We can also choose to participate, but it can be argued that the act of isolation can be for self-preservation and protection. When examining isolation, it is important to acknowledge that, rather than weaken a subject or character, it can in fact empower it. German Expressionist artists, Crewdson and Sherman, all took isolation and used it to give a deeper meaning to their work. They created a visual narrative that also explored the many different types of isolation. The subject of isolation was heavily explored in portraiture and self-portraiture and became cathartic for many German Expressionists.

The next chapter will examine the history of German Expressionist portraiture and its impact on photography, and referencing the painter Francis Bacon.

CHAPTER 5 - Portraiture and its Haunting Tale

In this final chapter, Expressionist portraiture and its importance within the art will be explored. At the same time, I will examine post-Expressionist painters such as Francis Bacon and photographers Anna Gaskell, Cindy Sherman and Gregory Crewdson. This chapter will also examine the usage of stage photography and how that defines Gaskell's, Sherman's and Crewdson's work.

Portraiture was traditionally concerned with royalty, political leaders and the bourgeoisie. When Expressionism arrived, portraiture underwent a dramatic transformation in the people it featured and the range of subject matter; instead of beautifying the individual, Expressionists exaggerated features, facial expressions and surroundings. Often using their girlfriends for life drawing lessons, the artists would spend short amounts of time drawing bodies and creating spontaneously. Printmaking and woodcuts were used and gave way for greater reproduction freedom, being a less expensive way of producing prints; this immediacy offered a heightening sense of excitement. The more critical aspect of the portrait became the exploration of the inner psyche; by heightening the emotional element, it could change the subject matter to much darker themes such as death, war and loneliness (Figura, 2011). The subjects in the frame were often city dwellers, soldiers, and the homeless.

This major shift from portraiture exhibiting the rich, to showing the normal, working-class people of Germany gave the common man a platform. The Expressionist artists changed the purpose of portraiture. Instead of seeing plain faces staring back, the subject being in constant sitting poses, viewers were faced with monsters and ghosts screaming back at them. The anger and the passion bleed through violent, harsh and vivid colours, deep and cutting brush strokes, adding new depth and creating new landscapes audiences hadn't seen before. A large part of German Expressionism's success is the honesty within the images. Taboo as it may have been, mental health was significantly compromised during the Expressionist period due to war. In particular, self-portraiture became cathartic: by presenting themselves from scared to melancholic, art has always been the therapeutic approach of choice for many of the artists.

Many Expressionist portraitists also concerned themselves with images of the mind, as the popular aesthetics of the movement constantly renewed the way portraits and self-portraits were created. Representing the grotesque and monstrous gave artists a chance to change conventional modes of perception. This transformation caught the public off guard and gave

way to a new sensation (Jenkins, 2007). In literature, while the gothic had been popular for so many years previously, Expressionism brought horror to life aesthetically: repressed nightmares and fears were now staring back at the viewer in the form of portraits. Painters had the freedom to startle the viewer, and Expressionist tropes became recognisable; where bold colours, nightmare-like figures, tinged with melancholia had characterised Expressionist painting, Die Brüke often used sharp, angular lines and occasionally mottled surfaces and jagged form when printmaking (Figura, 2011).

German Expressionist portraits were striking in what they showed the viewer: faces were now stark black and white, where the eyes were too big for the face, and many features were distorted. People often appeared more like monsters and ghouls, and there is also an emphasis on showing the person to be depressed or sad – rarely do we see in Expressionist portraits a smiling face with normal-sized facial features.

Many German Expressionists created portraits, and self-portraiture was used cathartically by many artists; for example, Max Beckmann's self-portraits are some of the most fascinating due to the constant costume changes in the paintings. For Beckmann, his self-portraits were about creating tableaux that conveyed disappointment and identity crisis. He had served in World War I and joined the medical team where he served in Berlin, meeting Erich Heckel, a fellow German Expressionist artist who made self-portraits. When we look at two of Beckmann's self-portraits pre and post-war, there are several differences. After he was discharged after suffering a nervous breakdown, his work began to become more intense and darker in tone. His sketches, such as *Madhouse* and *Street II,* show the public's faces mangled and uncomfortably close together, creating a sense of claustrophobia when looking at the images. Beckmann drew and painted over two hundred self-portraits: pre-war, these appear quite simple above-the-shoulder sketches; there is no costume or background. Post-war, his face appears much darker, and there is a macabre tone with a complete lack of any smile, only a stern face appearing on the canvas. Beckmann's self-portraits give the viewer an insight into the grim life he led (Gordon, 2009).

Looking closely at his work, we have to question what Beckmann hoped to achieve with so many self-portraits. It may have been to keep a visual diary and keeping a sense of control over his life; or, by documenting his decline into mental illness, this could have been a method of therapeutic measures. Other German Expressionists used self-portraits as a way to communicate their current situations, for example Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, who created self-depictions which were based on his fear that the war would destroy his creativity. In *Self-*

Portrait as a Soldier (1915), we see Kirchner appear more alien in appearance. In his soldier's uniform, he shows the loss of his right hand; the symbolism of this is losing his ability to paint, and his eye appears empty apart from the blue reflecting his uniform. The naked woman in the back expresses his anxiety around manhood and his loss of control. Ludwig was another Expressionist who was discharged from service due to suffering a nervous breakdown.

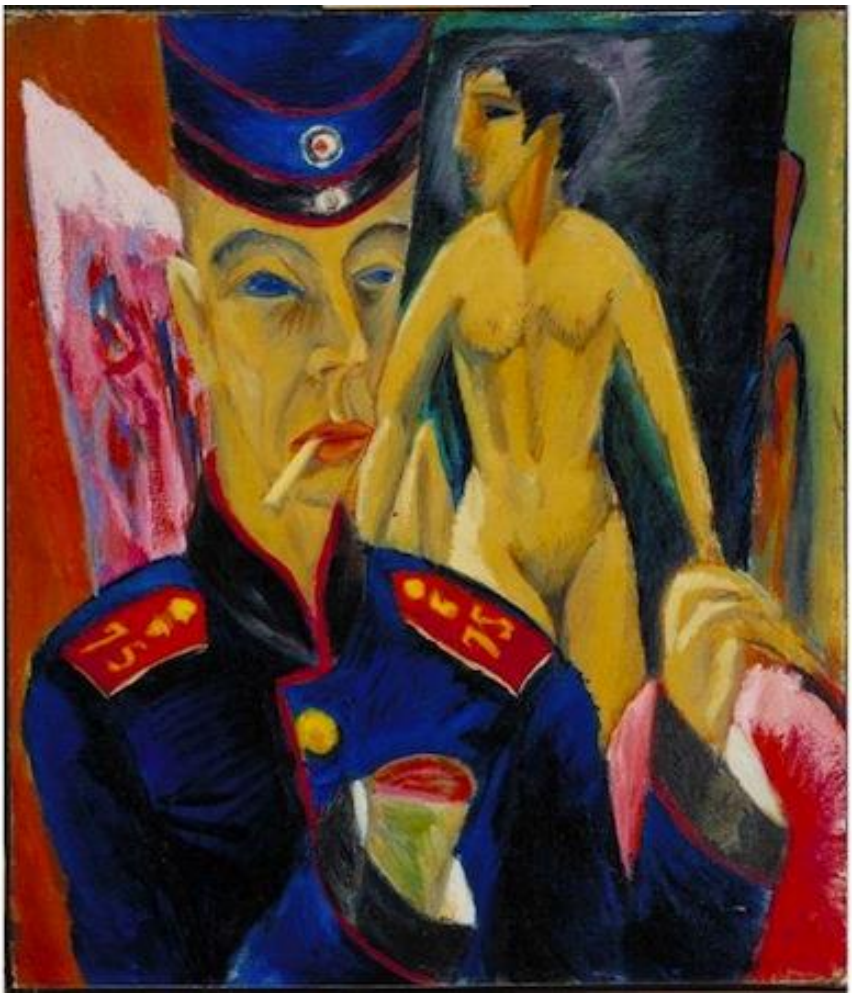

Fig. 1. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. (1915). *Self-Portrait as a Soldier.*

Otto Dix's self-portraits seem to try and fend off anyone that would attempt to approach him. There is a cold stare when looking into Dix's eyes, a look of indifference and annoyance making his demeanour uncomfortable for the viewer to look at them. These examples of self-portraits suggest that the works illuminate many of the situations the painter finds himself in. Very often, portraits express the mood that dominates the artist's life (Gordon, 2009).

It is important to acknowledge that, while German Expressionism was an anti-realist movement as mentioned before, its where surrealism follows afterwards that we see photography being produced where the uncanny and Expressionist could be seen. Rene Magritte, born in 1898 in Belgium, was a surrealist painter and also a keen photographer. Although not known during his lifetime, his collection of work was found ten years after his death (Moma.org). The collection was a mixture of curious self-portraits and using his own famous iconography to replicate his paintings. One of the photographs Magritte shot in 1937 entitled "Edward James in front of 'On the Threshold of Liberty'" was produced when Magritte had visited poet Edward James in London. As James stands so close to the painting, he is seemingly unaware of the artillery that looks as if its behind him. Magritte's work often had repetitive themes of faces hidden behind various masking objects and alluded to themes of death.

Rene Magritte. (1937). *Edward James in front of "On the Threshold of Liberty".*

Another European Surrealist is Hans Belmar, born in Germany in 1902. Bellmar was opposed to the Nazi regime and moved to Paris in the 1930s, where he began his work in Surrealism. The artist photographed a figure known as 'The Doll', although when examining the images, it appears more to be a dismembered body. Photographed in many different scenarios, the doll presents the viewer with themes of abuse and torture. Similar to what we see in German Expressionist paintings after the war, 'The Doll' image plays into the viewer's fears of pain

and torture. There is an unsettling uncanny element to using a doll in such a way, when traditional dolls are seen to be an innocent children's toy. Belmar horrifies the object by turning it into something more sinister.

Hans Belmar. (1936). *The Doll.*

When we examine the nightmarish self-representation, we can look further on from Expressionism and to the start of its influence. Although this diverts from photography, it is crucial to discuss the work of Francis Bacon.

He was born to an English family in Dublin on 28 October 1909. Sadly, his childhood was blighted by the asthma from which he suffered throughout his life. With the outbreak of war in 1914, his father took the family to London. His authoritarian father, repelled by Bacon's burgeoning homosexuality, threw him out of the family home for wearing his mother's clothes. Bacon arrived in Berlin in 1926 with little schooling, but with a weekly allowance of £3 from his mother (Tate.org).

He visited Weimar Berlin in 1927, just after Expressionism had ended in Germany. As New Objectivity grew from Expressionism, artists such as Otto Dix became associated with it.

Critics have noted in the past Bacon's link to German Expressionism, although this disgusted Bacon, who regarded himself as merely "a realist".

To consider Bacon's work within the same framework of German Expressionism, there must be a dual exploration of both aesthetics and subject matter. The hallucinating realism of Expressionist theatrics have been perceived as obscenely horrific to the general public, yet hailed as a thing of beauty to critics. David Sylvester's interview with Bacon highlights that, although Bacon's peers and critics attempted to categorise him as an Expressionist, he never thought of himself as one:

> I'm just trying to make images as accurately off my nervous system as I can. I don't even know what half of them mean. I'm not saying anything. Whether one's saying anything for other people, I don't know. But I'm not really saying anything, because I'm probably much more concerned with the aesthetic qualities of work than, perhaps, Munch was. But I've no idea what any artist is trying to say, except the banalest artists. (Sylvester, D., *Guardian*, 2007)

In light of this, it is fascinating to note that the artist Bacon mentions is Edward Munch, one of the first artists associated with and considered to be "Expressionist". Munch's paintings deal with symbolism, focusing on the emotional and psychological aspects of the work rather than concerned with the exterior. Akin to Bacon, Munch's works depict life and death scenes, love and terror, and the feeling of isolation. These emotions were depicted by using darker colours, sombre tones, with disfigured form. If we are to look firstly at *The Scream* purely on visual terms, we perceive a garish, ghost-like figure with heavily painted brush strokes, the screaming figure directly staring at its viewer. Then take Bacon's *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, a distorted form in the guise of a man screaming, hands tightly grabbing the chair. The lone character at the centre of the canvas is covered by thickly painted slanted lines, further disfiguring the pictorial space.

Furthermore, Bacon here appropriates a common Expressionist trait by using contrasting black-and-white paint together with sharp edge-painting gestures. Both *The Scream* and *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* paintings communicate to the viewer recognisable psychological themes of angst and turmoil. The figures within both Bacon's and Munch's paintings appear rigid in fear, their terror howling throughout the paintings' compositions.

The essential elements of both images are consistent with German Expressionist tropes, with a focus on the distortion of the human form typical of Expressionist aesthetics. Expressionism is

often a reaction to personal experience, and the writhing, half-human, half-animal forms Bacon paints suggest this method and process of communicating, which was so essential to Expressionism. To the viewer, the inner turmoil that was integral to the fundamentals of German Expressionism is repeated throughout his work. The repetition of existential angst that echoes within Bacon's violent images reflects an awareness of human conditions of loneliness and a will to endure; in this context, Bacon's work meditates on the dominant early period of Expressionism, mixed with an updated, challenging and tortured humanistic imagery.

One of Bacon's largest exhibitions to date was a 1990 retrospective at MOMA, which celebrated his eightieth birthday. Sam Hunter's essay within the exhibition publication states that Bacon's "preoccupation with terror was both instinctively theatrical and deeply disturbing in its psychological impact. Often it seemed siphoned directly from the most memorable and catastrophic media events, as he incorporated in his art grim reminders of the Holocaust and its death camps." In reference to German Expressionism portrayal of the events of World War I, Hunter acknowledges the similarities and goes on to say that, "With his sense of Surrealist menace and images blurred as if in motion, Bacon stated the case for post-war European despair with vehemence and originality that earned him a special place among his contemporaries."

Bacon's works are often quoted as being a reflection on World War II and its impact on society. The series of paintings, *Three studies for the figures of the base of the crucifixion,* was exhibited in the final weeks of World War II. The figures in the painting are alien-like in form, rather than human. The title of this work refers to figures at the foot of the crucifix in early Christian paintings depicting the death of Jesus; Bacon later related them to the Eumenides, vengeful goddesses from Greek mythology. The creatures in each frame are intended to evoke the anguish of primal guilt and appear to be screaming, as in the figure in *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (Fig. 1). With bodies bent into strange, constricted formations, making the figures almost unidentifiable, Bacon pushes the human form to a level of contortion to the point that the image becomes disturbing.

Fig. 2. Francis Bacon. (1953). *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*.

In German Expressionism, the distortion of the human form was an important trait, and the alteration of the human form was used to convey anxiety, trauma and stress. There are several repeated traits of Bacon's work that connect him to Expressionism: distinct, heavy brushstrokes, great use of colour, and the disfigurement of the human form and turning it into an emotive configuration. Psychological and physical trauma of the painting forms and pictorial spaces are critical elements in both Bacon's and Munch's work. Conditioned by both the horrors of World War II and vivid memories of a violent and troubled childhood in revolution-torn Ireland, Bacon presents a complex web of intriguing contradictions, with the critical element of German Expressionism giving a voice to those who experienced World War I and its after-effects. The revelation in Bacon's work remains how much it has in common with German Expressionism. The monstrous representations of the human form give viewers an interior view of Bacon's psychological state. His distortion of the fugitive form shows a

sense of heightened emotion. The violence we see in Expressionism and in Bacon's work connects them further as they both use it to express deeper personal issues within the frame. There is also no doubt that Bacon's work takes inspiration from Expressionist horror – the monsters on canvas, screaming at the viewer and surrounded by darkness, could be taken straight out of a scene from *Nosferatu*. Like many of Sherman's Film Stills surrounded by darkness, both Bacon and Sherman find themselves creating monsters, yet within them the viewer can see something so identifiable. It is interesting to note that both of these artists, despite one being a painter and one being a photographer, create these over-the-top grotesque identities within their work. Bacon's monsters are more akin to aliens, yet the way in which he disguises them can relate to the garish costumes that Sherman masks herself in. Bacon's monsters are also far more grotesque compared to Sherman's. The way they both deal with identity transforms it into quite literally a monstrous form. Both artists have also denied the contextualisation within their own work; as noted before, Bacon considered himself a realist, whereas Sherman has always ignored the over-contextualisation of her work by critics.

However, both Cindy Sherman and the German Expressionists used horror to create new identities. In the 1920s, sexual imagery within German Expressionism included scenes of murder and sexual violence which grew more uninhibited, to the point where it was named "Lustmord", meaning "sex murder". Born from the frustration and emasculation of the lost war and the cultural shift change that gave women an increased prominence within society, women were given the power to be seen as something else (Figura, 2011). Sherman's "Centre Fold" series takes the traditional poses of women seen in adult magazines such as *Playboy* and replaces them with characters looking frightened. Some of the characters appearing as corpses, Sherman uses Lustmord to change how society sees the sexist centrefold imagery. By increasing the visibility of the female and replacing the sexual element with horror, Sherman's portraits bring into question social consciousness concerning the treatment of women as objects. Her series 'Pure Horror' consisted of masks, dolls and grotesque prosthetics that explored psychological suffering and violence. Sherman's work is successfully Expressionist because she disposes of any attempts to represent a literal 'being', thus she is anti-realist, just as Expressionism was. Her work subverts the fundamental understanding that the purpose of a portrait is to affirm a person's identity. Here, Graham Clarke further explains how, by bending reality, Sherman enforces questions about identity:

> Sherman embarked on an exhaustive visual analysis of the very meaning of identity in terms of its significance as an image. Her pictures feature both social and sexual

> stereotypes fed by a consistent sense of individual ambiguity and self-questioning. The subject is always Cindy Sherman. She is equally everywhere and nowhere – a continual presence suggesting meaning through her constant absence. In the end, there is no literal reality. (Clarke, Graham. 1997, p.119)

As addressed in Chapter Four, 'Film Stills' was Sherman's most significant body of work and has been canonised by critics and theorists time and time again. Yet, Sherman has made it very clear in the past that her work isn't for the elite. Like the Expressionists before her, Sherman made her work accessible for all. Of Film Stills, she has said:

> I was getting disgusted with the attitude of art being so religious or sacred, so I wanted to make something that people could relate to without having to read a book about it beforehand… So that anybody off the street could appreciate it, even if they couldn't fully understand it; they could still get something out of it. (Sherman, MOMA, 2012)

Sherman's work is heavily linked to performance art, and she acknowledges that. Whenever she appears in front of the camera, we recognise the characters as we are conditioned to do so from seeing them previously in cinema and television. The more we see the stereotypes as Sherman presents them, the more we see the façade fall, and the false identities come to bear. There is an honesty in the work as we are presented with over-statured feminine identities. When Sherman made 'Film Stills', photography and contemporary art had been an issue for critics; there was still an elitist element with photography not being classified as contemporary art by some critics and curators. What Sherman showed critics and audiences was that photography was not made of natural truths, but man-made fictions, showing us cues we all recognise but are disguised in our own uncanniness (Galassi, 1991)

This is where Cindy Sherman's and Gregory Crewdson's works become interlinked with German Expressionism. The public and the media inspire the tableaux they created. The imagery is drawn from fiction that is recreated continuously and which draws upon themes from the clichés we see in domesticity. From advertising and television, the two artists used an unreality to reflect a culture crisis. Much like the Expressionists before them, they had used art to reflect the identity crisis in society at that time.

Carl Einstein, an art historian who knew many of the Expressionists, wrote extensively on Expressionism's new modes of perception. His mode of seeing Expressionism was termed as:

> *Vision, Wunder, Totalität, das Absolute* (vision, miracle, totality, the absolute), or any tautological combination of these, is intuitive and transcendent, and hence is offered as an alternative to the rationalism. (Williams, 2006)

He saw Expressionism as an alternative to the Renaissance that had dominated Western culture. With *Vision and Wunder* being the alternative and the creation, the *das Absolute* and *Totalität* are the stripping away of the bourgeois values. Einstein emphasised that the distortion of Expressionism created an underlying reality. That, despite (or, because of) the distortion, the artist remains a realist; a third possibility embodies an oscillation between these two approaches. It created a new way of seeing, depicting underlying social realities (Williams, 2006). The *das Absolute* and *Totalität* for Sherman and Crewdson were the reflections they created of the media and modern domesticity. The new modes were created from how we perceived women, and the isolation of modern society became Sherman's and Crewdson's das *Absolute* and *Totalität*.

In 1991, both artists were featured in the Museum of Modern Art's 1991 exhibition entitled 'Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort'. The photography exhibition, curated by Peter Galassi, shows the current state of the American Dream of domestic happiness and challenged the ideals of all that was devoted to life at home. The exhibition was a brilliant exploration of post-modern photography that, instead of presenting documentary photography, presented the unfamiliar and the uncanny. The theme of alienation was present throughout, showing photographs of Middle American and its monotonous décor, all the subjects seeming dreary looking. The exhibition showcased a range of different classes and households, diversity being one of its biggest strengths. In his book that accompanied the exhibition, Galassi explained that the collection of photographers for the exhibition was psychologically exploring art also.

> A positive expression of independence from the gang mentality of artistic progress, in which a few artists mark the one true path for all others. If that is so, then shared concerns, when they do coalesce, may be explored more broadly, perhaps also more deeply. It appears that something of the sort is now happening as dozens of American photographers explore the life of the home. (Galassi, 1991, p.7)

On Crewdson's and Sherman's work, Galassi explained that the artists were unapologetic in their fictions of popular culture, and they had discovered a psychological bomb of photography narrative. They remained loyal to the aesthetic of documentary photography, yet presented subjects as characters in a complex plot and not as trapped specimens (Galassi, 1991).

Crewdson's work, in particular, has always concerned itself with portraits of domesticity. His work brings personal pasts, fantasies, and denials into life (Banks, 2009). Aesthetically, his images are technically perfect, being filled with beautifully saturated colours that give great depths to the photographs, and even minor details are in sharp focus while his subject melancholy bleeds through the frame. The boredom and underlying anxiety of American culture is expressed entirely through his work. The link to the German Expressionists lies within Crewdson's fantastical use of light and how he uses it to create drama. As we have discussed before in earlier chapters, using a high contrast of light to dark can evoke certain feelings of unease; Expressionism has long been associated with gothic horror. Crewdson's highly staged sets, which are designed as in cinematography, are used to create complicated narratives. Nothing ever appears normal in the traditional sense, and characters appear depressed and unconnected, which again recounts Expressionist tales of alienation and isolation; we can see how, with these universal themes where Sherman's work is so intertwined with Crewdson's. Repeated use of German Expressionist aesthetics, as well as the psychological turmoil, then weaves its connections through cinema and television.

German Expressionism's influence in modern cinema can be frequently seen, in particular within the work of Tim Burton. The director, who was born in 1958 in Burbank, California, studied at the California Institute of the Arts. Whilst working in amination he discovered his interest in directing dark tales. Burton is most famed for his gothic take in *Beetlejuice* (1988), *Batman* (1989), *Sleepy Hollow* (1999) and *Alice in Wonderland* (2010). Anyone familiar with Burton's work knows that it celebrates the grotesque and gothic, holding a mirror up to a dark side of reality. His films celebrate the idea of the lone hero against society and visually they bask in the darker side of cinema. Famed for using key tropes from Expressionist cinema, his dark and fantastical tales are a classic example of the gothic male protagonist. The depth and complexity that he brings to these otherworldly sets evokes the dark scenes of *Dr. Caligari* and *Nosferatu*. The tale of Alice in Wonderland, in particular, has sparked the creativity of many artists; in Lewis Carroll's story, Alice falls asleep in a meadow. She dreams that she goes down a rabbit hole where she meets bizarre characters, and strange occurrences happen to and around her, such as a Mad Hatter's tea party and a potential beheading for a queen. It is interesting to note the more sinister tone and history behind the tale: in recent years, Carroll's obsessions with the real Alice Liddell (whom he met when she was five-year-old through her family) have been heavily questioned by critics, particularly due to the nature of Carroll's photography of Alice Liddell, where, in some instances, she isn't fully dressed. Viewed in this

context, the tale of Alice in Wonderland changes from a children's tale to something altogether more unsettling. Anna Gaskell's work heavily features the tale of Alice in Wonderland; looking at Gaskell's work and her sinister take on the story, it is as if she is making a commentary on the history behind the tale.

Born in 1969, Gaskell studied at Bennington College for two years before attending the Art Institute of Chicago; she received an MFA from Yale University in 1995. Gaskell is best known for her series *Wonder* (1996–97) and *Override* (1997). It is interesting to note that Gaskell studied under Crewdson, at Yale, considering that her artwork is renowned for its cinematic style. Gaskell took inspiration from Lewis Carroll's tale *Alice in Wonderland* and created haunting tableaux where a strange world is created within the photographs. The young girls are distorted by unusual camera angles and sharp, distorted lighting with pronounced shadows cast onto the characters, eerie and sinister. The fresh young faces are familiar to us, but strike an uncomfortable chord of personal horrors of adolescence (Demos, 2006).

> Rather than restage these parables of the female coming of age, Gaskell merely uses them as a reference for the isolated frames that tell a new, partial, inconclusive tale. (Heartney, 2008, p.122)

The tableaux Gaskell creates are so similar to what we see in German Expressionism; her chilling version of *Alice in Wonderland* comes across more like a nightmare than a children's story. The photographs are menacing when we consider sexuality and childhood imagery (Dalton, 2000). In Gaskell's images, the characters are well disguised by their costumes, and everything appears dreamlike. There are scenes of girls pulling each other's hair and fighting, disturbing and unsettling scenes which break conventions of the stereotypical portraits of young girls. Several critics have compared Gaskell's and Sherman's works with the use of narrative alongside the robust construction. Gaskell has been compared to Sherman, and she has welcomed it. Even Gaskell herself has said on Sherman, "If it wasn't for Cindy I could not be doing what I do" (Gaskell, *The Independent*, 12 February 2000).

Both these two artists, although years apart, enforce the Expressionist style and use their artwork to present us with themes of the uncanny.

> In Gaskell's style of "narrative photography," of which Cindy Sherman is a pioneer, the image is carefully planned and staged; the scene presented is "artificial" in that it exists only to be photographed. While this may be similar to the process of filmmaking, there is a significant difference. Gaskell's photographs are not tied

> together by a linear thread; it is as though their events all take place simultaneously, in an ever-present. (guggenheim.org)

Fig. 2 compares two photographs of Gaskell's and Sherman's artworks. We see Sherman's character is a monster-like figure, her hands appear like claws, her teeth are exposed, and her eyes are staring off the frame. Not unlike Gaskell's image in Fig.3, we have no idea if this character is the monster or the victim. They both appear menacing and weaken the female stereotypes that we see in film and television. Expressionist aesthetic techniques are used to empower them by presenting themselves as new female characters. Instead, they appear weak, they evoke fear and anxiety in the viewer. With both of them dressed in childlike clothing, this also brings into the narrative the idea of a predator – as discussed before, Gaskell's take on *Alice and Wonderland* could be a commentary on the history behind the story and its author. Both images use Expressionist lighting techniques to further bring menace into the frame.

When we examine how Expressionism transformed portraiture, it transformed the practice of beautifying subjects, to exposing our innermost fears and anxieties.

For all its limitations, the portrait has meaning placed upon it where that play between internal and external worlds that remains one of the great subjects of the nineteenth rather than the 20th century." (Clarke, 1997, p.111)

Expressionism gave artists the freedom to convey darker psychologies that had been seen before. By doing this, a historical practice emerged that made its way to photography, in which we see examples over a hundred years later. Exposing the taboo and unspoken subjects creates space for Expressionism's exploration and exposure. It feels appropriate to conclude this chapter at this point, and examine the lasting influence of German Expressionism in the conclusion.

Fig. 3. Anna Gaskell. (1997) *Untitled #26.*

Fig. 4. Cindy Sherman. (1981). *Untitled #85*.

Conclusion

When observed separately, German Expressionism and photography are seemingly worlds apart: German Expressionism was born from repression and rebelled against the elitist bourgeois Impressionism that had come before it.

What came with German Expressionism was a completely new genre and an aesthetic that had not been witnessed before. Suddenly, the gothic that had only existed in literature previously could be seen visually. In response to a social and political crisis, Expressionist artists reflected the mentality of the masses. Expressionist paintings were statured in colour and heavy brush strokes, transcending any form of normality, often exploring our innermost fears and anxieties of death, isolation and loss of control. The haunting charcoal sketches by Otto Dix of skeleton soldiers, screaming in agony, where the black and white contrasted sharply, told of the horrors witnessed by many Expressionists artists who had served in World War I, with many of them suffering from acute mental illnesses such as depression and PTSD. Eric Heckle's woodcuts reflected the loneliness and alienation many Germans faced after World War I. While German Expressionist films transformed cinema, set design became as important to the story as the actors. The artificial sets with twisted reality, and the unusual camera angles gave the audience a different perception.

While shadows were used to frame and imply menace, spot lights were used to highlight faces covered in heavy stage make-up, giving the characters an eerie disposition. The actors were depicting hallucinations, murder and emotional distress tied to fears about losing one's control. What was so successful about German Expressionism was that it depicted an uncanny horror, one which we as an audience can all recognise. The psychology of Expressionism was a catalyst for the conversation to open up and discuss its connection to psychoanalysis. The publication in 1947 of Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* and Lotte Eisner's *The Haunted Screen* in 1952 drew from the relationship of aesthetical analysis and German Expressionism. Our more in-depth understanding of the complexities within the genre have given artworks a new purpose. The act of "expressionism" within art continued; we can see its influence in New Objectivity, Figurative Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism, and Postmodernism.

Photography's relationship with postmodernism played a critical role in transforming its purpose. Like German Expressionism, postmodernism was born from scepticism but was obsessed with themes of greed and power. It advocated an individual's experience rather than

a collective experience, making the artworks more personal than ever. Peter Galassi's 1991 exhibition 'Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort' celebrated postmodernist photography and its work, exploring the underlying anxieties within the home. A central tenet of postmodernism is that photographs are not fundamental truths but man-made fictions, the mechanisms of which can be exposed (Galassi, 1991). As Galassi explains:

> It relies all the more deeply on the narratives we can imagine. The pictures collected here are full of delight and dilemma for the eye and the mind, full of wit and feeling, full of experience. But it would defeat them to claim that they make sense of life. Photography isn't perfect, but then life isn't either. (Galassi, 1991, p.23)

When looking at the visual examples of the work of Sherman, Crewdson and Gaskell, this thesis has shown that we are met with a set of German Expressionist tropes that recur continually. The expressive use of lighting that reveals a stark contrast of light to dark creates the same drama we see in Expressionist films such as *Nosferatu* and *Dr. Caligari*. The mise-en-scène we see that runs throughout the movie and photography enhances the narrative the artists are creating. The mise-en-scène then carries itself in the discussion of Hitchcock and his influence over Sherman and Crewdson. The master of suspense, Hitchcock inspires Sherman's femme fatale whilst she exhibits perfect examples of film aesthetics that seem to be taken right from a Hitchcock film. Crewdson draws from Hitchcock's perfect staging of the uncanny moment, taking a perfect scene and unsettling the viewer with out-of-place incident. The term 'staged photography' refences the artificial construction of a scene to capture a staged image. Artists such as Jeff Wall and Cindy Sherman became well known throughout the 1980s by creating tableaux. Wall described his work as cinematography, boiling it down to preparation, doing things in advance before taking the picture, and collaboration, having contact with the people being photographed (Martinque, 2006).

One of the main factors that bind Sherman's, Crewdson's and Gasksell's work is that they use staging to emulate cinema depicting alienation and horror. The staging within the tableaux is consistently giving the viewer a production which is familiar to them, but far removed from day-to-day reality.

The themes of the uncanny and horror that are critical to German Expressionism's uniqueness are also retold through the tales of tableaux photography and Hitchcock's work. It is not a single set of ideas that link Expressionism, Sherman, and Crewdson together, but rather a collection of stimuli and inspiration that celebrate one another.

What comes to the fore with linking German Expressionism to photography is that, when we pick apart different traits and characteristics of the artists that are discussed, they have more in common with each other than the viewer first realises. While the Expressionist's task was to reclaim art for the masses and give representation to the oppressed, we can now see the same in Sherman's and Crewdson's work. By Sherman subverting female stereotypes we see in a film from horror, she empowers women by dismantling tired clichés, and demands a change. Crewdson's narrative of Middle American gives a voice to the middle and working classes by expressing their fears and anxieties. The capacity for all these narratives shows that combining the real and the imagined creates a platform for the viewer to question the society around them.

When we examine past influences, we can understand more about contemporary work and the deeper psychological meanings. At the beginning of this study, I posed the question as to whether a movement over a hundred years old had influenced contemporary photography. The five chapters have firstly covered the history and the psychological understanding of German Expressionism, leading to the examination of visual evidence, tracing the thematic theories together. The devotion shown by Crewdson, Sherman and Gaskell to the Expressionist cinematography is apparent throughout the thesis. Artists today use narrative as a powerful means for human expression.

German Expressionism has and will influence contemporary art and cinema. A movement so groundbreaking in its goals will never simply fade into the background; it will, from time to time, enjoy a resurgence, for example with advances in technology. It has never been easier to access the work of German Expressionism to view prints in galleries and online, to watch the films directly in one's home. What we are left with is a lasting narrative of artists being able to express one's inner fears and horrors, whether that be through tableaux in photography or experimental cinema. We have German Expressionism to thank for giving the isolated in society a louder voice; the artists of German Expressionism changed the world with their horrifying honesty, giving the oppressed a platform. To conclude, the thesis is also an appreciation of all that is macabre and strange within the genre of German Expressionism: by celebrating the isolated protagonist, we also empower those who are brave enough to stand alone in their individuality and create artwork that unites the masses rather than divide them.

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CHAPTER 3

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CHAPTER 4

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CHAPTER 5

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