

Dystopic Urban Architecture

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*Dystopic Urban Architecture and Landscapes as a Reflection of Anxiety in Weimar
Cinema and American Film Noir*

Sigmund Freud, in a lecture on anxiety, noted that “One thing is certain, that the problem of anxiety is a nodal point, linking up all kinds of most important questions; a riddle, of which the solution must cast a flood of light on our whole mental life.”¹ During the Modern Era, Germany and the United States survived two world wars, rapid industrialization, and many incredible advances in areas such as technology, science, medicine, and psychology. With so many changes going on in the world around them, including the destruction and rebuilding of cities in Germany and the rapid urbanization of the United States, the populations of these two nations began to feel like they were losing control. The world had become a confusing and chaotic place where destruction seemed imminent and no one could be trusted. This sense of loss, disillusionment, and anxiety is reflected in many arts of the modern era –especially cinema.

The urban landscape in both the films of post-World War I Weimar Cinema and American film noir from the 1940s and 1950s show a sense of loss and anxiety through the architecture found in both of these genres. The German Expressionists used sharp angles and strange depths of sets to further the confusion the characters are feeling. These sets would mirror what the German people were seeing and experiencing with regards to the destruction of their historic cities. There is nothing friendly or warm about the buildings seen in most of these films, especially *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) and *Metropolis* (1927). In *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, director Robert Wiene uses angular sets, heavy, high contrast make-up, and mise-en-scene to create a mood of chaos and confusion. In *Metropolis*, Fritz Lang creates an entire city made out of machines with a beautifully reconstructed Tower of Babel at the center of it all. The

¹ David Barlow, “Unraveling the Mysteries of Anxiety and Its Disorders From the Perspective of Emotion Theory,” *American Psychologist* 55 (no. 11): 1248, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/42427657?accountid=13158> (accessed May 2, 2011).

above ground city is cold, impersonal, and confusing while the underground city is simple and filled with tenement-style buildings.

Film noir from 1940s Hollywood uses the urban landscape of cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco to add to the anxiety and sense of loss felt by many of the characters. Most of these movies were filmed on location, which shows the urban sprawl of these rapidly growing cities and the insignificance of the people that live in them. This insignificance is shown through crowded streets, tall buildings, and the ability to “lose oneself” among them. In films like *D.O.A.* by Rudolph Mate and *Double Indemnity* by Billy Wilder there are untrustworthy characters, people trying to constantly harm others, and protagonists who stray from being the typical “hero.” Distrust, murder, and deceit are played out against the backdrop of large cities that seem to be the perfect dystopic landscape for these events.

The dystopic feelings that were felt by those who lived in and visited urban areas can be seen through the architecture, landscapes, and sets in the films of the Weimar Cinema and American film noir. This anxiety is a direct result of post-war fears both in Germany and the United States, as well as populations trying to cope with rapidly growing technology and industry. With sharp angles and highly stylized sets, the films of the German Expressionists make the cities seem like an unfriendly, confusing, and chaotic place. Film noir presents the city as an oppressive character in the background of many movies. The tall, geometric buildings and the on location shots lend themselves to a sense of being lost and alone, even though the characters are constantly surrounded by other people.

To many, the city is a place of endless possibilities and fascination. The urban landscape is a modern utopia with tall buildings, shops containing shiny new things, tall smoke stacks signaling productive industry, and crowded city blocks full of people. However the dystopic

nature of the city eventually reveals itself and the architecture that seems so fantastic appears in Modern Era films as confining, chaotic and anxious.

New Historicism, Anxiety, and the Uncanny

By looking at the history and political climate surrounding Germany in the 1920s and America in the 1940s and 50s it is apparent that there were amazing events taking place which would cause anxiety in any human being. John Brannigan, in his book *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*, states that New Historicism “best serves literary studies as a critical practice in placing literary texts in an unprivileged exchange with the historical forces in the time of their production.”² Following the logic of New Historicism, it can be concluded that this anxiety will be reflected in the literature and art of the time, including the cinematic arts.

Brannigan defines new historicism as “a mode of critical interpretation which privileges power relations as the most important context for texts of all kinds. As a critical practice it treats literary texts as a space where power relations are made visible.”³ New Historicism argues that there is no distinction between literature and social life and that literary (and cultural) texts are part of a general social and political discourse.⁴ Germany, trying to recover financially and emotionally from World War I and trying to cope with a rapidly changing industrious world, found an expressive outlet in Expressionism. America, reeling from World War II, suffering from the paranoia associated with the beginning of the Cold War, and coping with rapid urbanization found a mirror in film noir. The anxiety of war and rapidly developing industry and technology manifests itself on screen through the architecture and urban landscapes that the characters inhabit.

²John Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 12.

³Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*, 6.

⁴ Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*, 56-63.

Dr. David Barlow, professor of Psychology and Psychiatry at Boston University, suggests that at the heart of anxiety is a sense of “uncontrollability focused largely on possible future threats, danger, or other upcoming potentially negative events, in contrast to fear, where the danger is present and imminent. Thus, anxiety could be characterized roughly as a state of helplessness, because of a perceived inability to predict, control, or obtain desired results or outcomes in certain upcoming personally salient situation or contexts.”⁵ The characters found within the four films examined in this paper not only display this type of anxiety about their personal situations, but they also mirror the anxieties of their respective countries. This anxiety is not only portrayed by the actors within the film, but also through the architecture, landscapes, and sets that serve as a backdrop which promotes the sense of helplessness and loss of control that Barlow discusses. In a city one is surrounded by people, but most of them are strangers. The city, on the outside, looks beautiful, but within the walls of mirrored skyscrapers and in the alleyways in between, villains are found.

Weimar Cinema and German Expressionism

After World War I, Germany was a shell of its former self. Of the 11 million soldiers called to duty, 7 million were either killed, injured, or missing. There was massive political instability with the formation of a new democratic parliament and a complete collapse of the German economy due to the costs of the war and the massive amounts that they owed the Allies.⁶ Luckily, the German film industry thrived during this time. Expressionism, as a movement, began as a response to the rapid change developing at the beginning of the 20th century.

Paul Cooke gives the following definition of Expressionism:

⁵ David H. Barlow, “Unraveling the mysteries of anxiety and its disorders from the perspective of emotion theory” in *American Psychologist* (Nov 2000), 55 (11), 1249.

⁶ Paul Cooke, *German Expressionist Films* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 2002), 11.

They rejected the nineteenth-century aesthetics of ‘realism’ and ‘naturalism,’ which attempted to give objective snapshots of reality, claiming that such schools of art only gave a partial picture – one fifth of the iceberg above the water, if you like. What the Expressionists wanted to show was the other four fifths, that part of the world which lies beneath the visible, beyond the knowable. Rather than giving simply an objective view of the world, they wanted to explore the individual’s subjective psychological reaction to this new and rapidly changing world.⁷

Expressionists were not interested in trying to depict the world in a natural or even real way; they were more concerned with describing what emotions and psychological feelings might look like in paint or literature. In Germany “‘secessionist’ groups, which were seeking to break with established traditions of artistic representation within their national schools,”⁸ began to spring up. In Munich, the *Blaue Reiter* (Blue Rider) group was formed by Franz Marc, Gabriele Munter, and Wassily Kandinsky in 1911. This group displayed its “trademark image of brightly and unrealistically coloured paintings of animals and landscapes – a kind of hyperreality which finds echoes in the expressionist films of the Weimar Republic.”⁹ However, Expressionism as a movement was mostly over after World War I, leaving filmmakers like F.W. Murnau, Fritz Lang, and Robert Wiene to continue the Expressionism movement for just a few more years.

Roberts explains:

It seems as if German cinema and Expressionism found each other at a particularly opportune moment: using the distinctive style of the pre-war expressionists, Weimar’s directors could portray the horrors abroad in the world which threatened to oppress and overwhelm the weary individual; depictions of the individual ground down by the twin beasts of capitalism and industrialization; and explorations of the human psyche and its extreme states.¹⁰

Even though artists, authors, and filmmakers had no more use for Expressionism, for a brief period of time this art movement was able to reflect, through cinema, painting, and literature the

⁷ Cooke, *German Expressionist Films*, 14.

⁸ Ian Roberts, *German Expressionist Cinema* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2008), 13.

⁹ Roberts, *German Expressionist Cinema*, 14.

¹⁰ Roberts, *German Expressionist Cinema*, 17.

inner feelings and psyche of a nation torn apart by war and burdened by industry and economic difficulties.

Of all of the films that fall under the umbrella of expressionism, Robert Wiene's *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, released in 1920, is the best example – especially when it comes to sets, space, and architecture.¹¹ The film, being released only two years after the end of World War I, show many sharp angles (see Figure 1) which are confining and mostly triangular in shape. Wiene, obviously being aware of the Expressionist movement, would most definitely have been aware of the Cubist art movement going on at the same time, which would explain many of the sharp angles and shallow sets. According to Sabine Rewald:

The Cubist Painters rejected the inherited concept that art should copy nature, or that they should adopt the traditional techniques of perspective, modeling, and foreshortening. They wanted instead to emphasize the two-dimensionality of the canvas. So they reduced and fractured objects into geometric forms, and then realigned these within a shallow, relieflike space. They also used multiple or contrasting vantage points.¹²

According to Sabine Hake, author of the article “Expressionism and Cinema: Reflections on a Phantasmagoria of Film History” the most ambitious attempt made to define Expressionist film was made by Rudolph Kurtz, the editor of the prestigious trade-paper *Lichtbild-Bühne*.¹³ Like cubism, Kurtz argued, “Expressionism mediates between art and technology and seeks transcendence through an aestheticization of physical reality. However, these processes require the presence of a true film artist who transforms the images into visions.”¹⁴ Wiene was just that film artist. It can not be denied that the definitions of expressionism and cubism run parallel to each other. If, as one would suspect, Wiene was familiar with cubism, this could account for the

¹¹ Robert Wiene, *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (Germany: Decla-Bioscop AG, 1920), from Netflix, digital video, 71 minutes, http://movies.netflix.com/WiMovie/The_Cabinet_of_Dr._Caligari/342780?trkid=496624#height1829.

¹² Sabine Rewald, “Cubism” in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cube/hd_cube.htm (accessed May 3, 2011).

¹³ Sabine Hake “Expressionism and Cinema: Reflections on a Phantasmagoria of Film History” in *A Companion to the Literature of German Expressionism*, ed. Neil Donahue (Rochester: Camden House, 2005), 329.

¹⁴ Hake, “Expressionism and Cinema”, 329.

triangular angles found throughout the architecture and landscapes in the film used to reflect German anxiety.

The extreme angles found in the architecture of the *Dr. Caligari* portray a sense of confusion and chaos. The buildings always seem to be leaning, or even on the verge of falling over (see Figure 2). This could be a reflection of how the cities of Germany looked after or felt during the bombings that occurred during World War I. Ian Roberts argues that there is a cyclical theme running through the film. Roberts states that Wiene ensured that the “revised story-frame should be echoed in repeated circular imagery (in a film better known for its harsh angles and jagged lighting effects), points towards a very deliberate attempt to reflect the pattern of events unfolding on Germany’s streets.”¹⁵ Although he does refer to the sharp angles, Roberts is concentrating wholly on the story and ignoring the amazing visuals this film has to offer. He is ignoring the fact that the buildings in this film, although complete, resemble the jagged remains of Germany’s cities and the shallow sets reflected a sort of claustrophobia that was probably felt when walking through the burnt rubble that was once Berlin or Munich (Compare Figure 2 and Figure 3). The angular buildings also represent the inner psyche of those that lived through the bombings of World War I. It is a reflection of the chaos that ensued. The anxiety of the population of post-World War I Germany can be seen in the angular buildings and shallow landscapes of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.

Sigmund Freud would have called this feeling the uncanny, which is defined as an “instance where something can be familiar, yet foreign at the same time, resulting in a feeling of it being uncomfortably strange.”¹⁶ Andrew Webber points out that the “late nineteenth century was not only the age of electrification that mobilized the city and its images, but also the age of

¹⁵ Roberts, *German Expressionist Cinema*, 31.

¹⁶ Dictionary.com (accessed April 15, 2011).

the birth of psychoanalysis as a theory of and therapy for modern humanity...One of the key concepts of psychoanalytic thinking, the uncanny or the un-homely, is a recurrent feature of the treatment of architectural and topographical forms in urban film in both its modernist and postmodern forms.”¹⁷ The people of Germany would have felt this anxiety of the uncanny as they were walking through the remains of what may have been their home for generations, their historical church, or the school that their children went to.

A different type of anxiety is revealed in Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*, which was released in 1927.¹⁸ The anxiety reflected in this masterpiece is related to the rapid global industrialization witnessed the world over. Paul Cooke describes *Metropolis* as a “nightmarish vision of the future, in which the processes of modernity, well underway by the 1920s, have been allowed to reach their natural conclusion unchecked. Machines dominate the world and all human individuality has been lost.”¹⁹ The audience is introduced to two cities - the Worker’s City, which is underground where the working class resides and where the machines are located that run the city, and Metropolis, the beautiful, sparkling utopian city that looks idyllic in regards to its high rise buildings, bridges, and people. There is even a Tower of Babel that dominates the skyline – perhaps this is Lang’s warning to his fellow Germans not to become overzealous in their creation of industry and technology lest it destroy them.

There are a few key scenes in which this anxiety over industrialization is conveyed. When the main character, Freder (Gustav Frohlich), ventures down to the Worker’s City, his first experience is watching one of the machines that runs Metropolis kill some of the workers (See

¹⁷ Andrew Webber, *Cities in Transition: the Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis*, ed. Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson (New York: Wallflower Press, 2008), 6.

¹⁸ Fritz Lang, *Metropolis Restored (The Complete Metropolis)* (Berlin, Germany: Universum Film, 1927), from Netflix, digital video, 184 minutes, http://movies.netflix.com/WiMovie/Metropolis_Restored/70132372?trkid=496624#height2475.

¹⁹ Cooke, *German Expressionist Films*, 47.

Figure 4). Freder has a vision of the machine becoming Moloch, a being who demands sacrifice in the form of the consumption of unwitting laborers. Once Moloch is appeased, a new shift takes the place of the dead workers, representing the idea of an easily replaceable work force, or in a related Marxist terms, alienated labor. Those in power do not know or care about the loss of these individuals. This mirrors a quote by Lord Acton, “All power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely,” which I would argue is a theme of the film, as well as the main contributor to the anxiety felt not only by Freder, but also by the working class laborers.

Lang “originally got the idea for his image of Metropolis when he first saw the New York skyline from the boat on his trip to the States in 1924.”²⁰ However, I would argue that Lang must have not only seen the beautiful skyscrapers that make up New York City, but also the tenements that Jacob Riis wrote about and photographed. The shiny and beautiful buildings of Metropolis not only reflect what Lang witnessed, but perhaps he even saw the future of city skylines (compare Figure 5 and Figure 6). Lang’s vision not only copied the beauty he saw in New York City, it could be argued that he modeled the Worker’s City after the tenements. A comparison of shots from the film depicting the lower-city and photographs taken by Jacob Riis of tenement buildings in New York City yields similar results. The plain, grey-looking exterior, the small rectangular windows, and the small stature (small when compared to the glorious skyscrapers and shiny exteriors of the city) of the buildings all portray humble abodes where the working class population resides.

The anxiety between Lang’s two cities is played out by the workers, who feel they are being treated unfairly, and Joh Fredersen (Alfred Abel), who has absolute power in Metropolis. This tension reflects the new issues arising in a rapidly developing global economy where a select few people have all of the power and money, and workers are exploited for their gain. The

²⁰ Cooke, *German Expressionist Films*, 46.

final inter-title of the film, said by Maria (Brigitte Helm), states “The mediator between the head and the hands must be the heart!” *Metropolis* addresses the anxieties felt by a population (and portrayed by the landscape and architecture) by assuring them that there is an answer, which includes some understanding on both parts to make the global industrial machine continue to work and grow.

The Western American City and Film Noir

America, in the 1940s and 50s, witnessed an attack on US soil, entrance into World War II, the invention of the nuclear bomb (as well as witnessing the damage), and the beginning of the Cold War and the paranoia associated with this time period. Anxiety concerning uncontrollable events was widespread and the film noir genre was a hit at the box office. Mark Shiel gives the following account of the Hollywood studio system when he states that “in the heyday of film noir, from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s, the utopian aspirations that had driven the foundation and meteoric rise of the Hollywood studio system since World War I suddenly seemed fragile and liable to collapse.”²¹ As Shiel demonstrates, the studio system was facing a crisis however Los Angeles, by all accounts, was thriving during the same period as a result of “prioritized investment by the federal government that had begun under the New Deal and continued with the expansion of the city’s vibrant defense, aircraft, and automobile industries, as well as its maritime trade.”²² Los Angeles was a thriving city due to the huge rise in industry after World War II, however this and many other California cities were represented much differently in the cityscapes of the film noir.

The film noir undercut the rise of Los Angeles by presenting the city as a “disjointed network of nondescript commercial streetscapes, pretty but morally corrupt suburbs, and an

²¹ Mark Shiel, “A Regional Geography of Film Noir: Urban Dystopias On- and Offscreen,” in *Noir Urbanisms: Dystopic Images of the Modern City*, ed. Gayan Prakash (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 75.

²² Shiel, “A Regional Geography of Film Noir,” 76.

increasingly dilapidated downtown as urban jungle” and presenting stories that “emphasized betrayal, mental breakdown, or inevitable doom and were frequently recounted through the use of flashbacks accompanied by introspective and maudlin voiceovers.”²³ Shiel’s argument of a disjointed network was not only a result of the crisis of the Hollywood studio system, but could also be attributed to the mass influx of people moving to the cities of California in the years following World War II. In 1940, Los Angeles had a population of 1.5 million people, making it the fifth most populous city behind Detroit, Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York. By 1950, Los Angeles had moved up to the fourth most populous city and by 1960, it reached third with a population of 2.5 million and was exceeded only by Chicago and New York.²⁴ And, as Shiel points out, when one considered the population of Los Angeles as a “sprawling five-county region, comprising Los Angeles, Riverside, Ventura, San Bernardino, and Orange counties, it had a total population of 7.75 million, putting it in competition with the Big Apple itself.”²⁵ Anxiety would have no doubt been prevalent, not only in relationship to the failing studio system, but also in regards to the massive amounts of people that were coming into the cities every day over a twenty year period and not finding their “American Dream” as they hoped they would.

In a city, especially one such as Los Angeles, one is constantly surrounded by crowds of strangers. This gives the characters found in film noir a sense of loneliness, as well as providing a sense of anonymity to plot evil deeds. It’s no wonder cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco became the backdrop for so many film noir. As the graph in figure 9 demonstrates, “the vast majority of film noirs set in the United States featured urban settings, no doubt reflecting the significant increase in urbanization that characterized the nation during and after

²³ Shiel, “A Regional Geography of Film Noir,” 76-77.

²⁴ Shiel, “A Regional Geography of Film Noir,” 76.

²⁵ Shiel, “A Regional Geography of Film Noir,” 76.

World War II.”²⁶ The anxieties related to rapid urbanization, the mass migration of the U.S. population to Western cities, the sense of feeling all alone when surrounded by so many people, and the evil deeds that are plotted among the city streets and businesses are all found in Billy Wilder’s *Double Indemnity* from 1944 and Rudolph Mate’s *D.O.A.* from 1950.

Double Indemnity is an Oscar winning film that does not include one likeable character.²⁷ Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray), who is supposed to be the protagonist throughout the film, isn’t on screen five minutes before he is flirting with the married femme fatale of the story, Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck). At times of course, the audience can almost admire Walter, but after he plots and kills Mr. Dietrichson (Tom Powers) under the supervision of Phyllis, they are at a loss of who to look at as a hero. Is Walter the best the city can provide in terms of a protagonist? The antagonist, Phyllis, explains to Walter that she was born and raised in Los Angeles. Phyllis is an evil product of the city who has killed more than one person just to make a little money. Walter, on the other hand, explains that he is from San Bernardino, which could explain his somewhat likeable characteristics. The film noir portrays those who live within the city limits as the corruptors, and those who come in from the outside as corruptible.

The office building where Walter works reflects corporatism and the stagnant job at which he has worked for many years. Of course he seems to enjoy his job, but he is also willing to put it all on the line for Phyllis and the promise of a large amount of money. In shots of his office building, a modular coordination is repeated in the office building of Walter Neff. The salesmen and managers are on the top floor with shared, square offices and below, in an open floor pattern are the modular desks of the secretaries and other paper-pushers. With this claustrophobic, repetitive feel to the building and workplace, perhaps his mundane job and

²⁶ Shiel, “A Region Geography of Film Noir,” 79.

²⁷ Billy Wilder, *Double Indemnity* (Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures, 1944), DVD.

repressive work environment is part of the reason Walter agrees to go along with Phyllis's plan of murdering her husband. The city promises much more than it could ever give to working drones, however if an opportunity presents itself, sometimes the corruptible drone will listen to the promise of the city and take advantage – just as Walter did.

The city, with its millions of inhabitants, provides a sense of anonymity where murder plots can be discussed, plotted, and carried out. Walter lives alone in a small city apartment. From the story, it would appear that he has no close friends or family and may even like it that way. This distance from others enables him to blend in, as well as allows a late night visit from Phyllis with no interruption. At one point, Phyllis remarks how nice it must be to not know your neighbors or have to speak to them regularly to keep up appearance. Phyllis, who lives in a wealthy suburban Los Angeles neighborhood, is jealous of the way Walter, who resides in what viewers can assume is a large apartment complex close to the city center, is able to blend in.

Walter and Phyllis meet “accidentally on purpose” in a crowded supermarket to plan the murder of Mr. Dietrichson. They pretend to shop and rarely look each other in the eye while they discuss intricate details of their plan. They are intermittently interrupted by other shoppers who are going about their business and could care less about who Walter and Phyllis are and why (at least to the audience) they look so suspicious. When questions arise about the validity of Phyllis's accidental death claim on her husband, no one from the market offers any information to the insurance company or to the police. The crowded city market, full of strangers, provides the perfect setting for plotting a murder. Everyone who is in there is busy getting what they need and then moving on to the next errand, with little thought or notice of the people around them.

The city also provides a dark alley where Walter and Phyllis actually kill Mr. Dietrichson. Phyllis is taking her husband to the train station in a car with Walter hidden in the

back seat. When Phyllis turns down the poorly lit street, she slows down and hits the horn three times. This is the signal that all is clear for Walter to strangle Mr. Dietrichson. If this were done on a street in a small town, someone probably would have noticed a car stopping short, and hitting the horn three times, however since the city is a bustling, busy, and noisy place, this even takes place without being noticed by anyone.

D.O.A. has a very different ambiance from *Double Indemnity*.²⁸ After the initial scene of the film, the story begins in the small town of Banning, California. The main character, Frank Bigelow (Edmond O'Brien), has decided to go on vacation to San Francisco to let loose, have a great time, and put some space between him and his girlfriend Paula (Pamela Britton). In fact, Frank must have heard the promising call that Jacob Riis mentions when writing 60 years earlier in regards to the mass influx of political and economic refugees to the United States: The metropolis is to lots of people like a lighted candle to the moth. It attracts them in swarms that come year after year with the vague idea that they can get along here if anywhere; that something is bound to turn up among so many.²⁹ Frank makes it very clear to Paula that any answers he is seeking will be found on vacation in San Francisco.

There are two bar scenes found in this film – one that takes place in Banning and the other that takes place in San Francisco. The bar scene in Banning feels open and quiet. There are only four people in the bar – the bartender, the local sheriff, Frank, and Paula. It is a quiet place where the couple can discuss the reason for Frank's sudden vacation and Paula's feelings about it. Frank puts music on for Paula, however it is a slow orchestral serenade that does not intrude on the couple's conversation. The bar scene that takes place in San Francisco is wildly

²⁸ Rudolph Mate, *D.O.A.* (Los Angeles, CA: Cardinal Pictures, 1950), from IMDB Internet Archive, digital video, 81 minutes, <http://www.imdb.com/video/internet-archiv/vi1402733081>.

²⁹ Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), 69. First published 1890 by Charles Scribner's Sons.

different. In fact, once Frank arrives in the city, not only he, but the audience as well, is bombarded with sights and sounds unlike those in Banning – beautiful women, jazz music, and neon lights. Frank decides to go to a local jazz club with some salesmen who are in town for the week. The music is loud and the bar is packed with obnoxious people. Frank is visibly annoyed with not only the noise, but also his choice of companionship. He discreetly takes his leave and heads to the bar where he has a discussion with the bartender about the noise and crowds. Frank's annoyance is the first sign of trouble in the film – the city is not as fun and promising as he thought it would be.

When Frank wakes up the next morning he is not feeling well. At first he thinks he may have had too much alcohol, but when he doesn't feel better he goes in search of a doctor. The first doctor he sees explains to him that he has been poisoned and has at the most twenty-four hours to live. Unhappy with this diagnosis Frank searches the city for another doctor and a second opinion. When the first doctor's prognosis is confirmed, Frank leaves the medical building immediately and begins a frantic (not to mention beautifully filmed, on location) run through the crowded streets of San Francisco (see Figure 12). During this scene, Frank is surrounded by people – all strangers – pushing them out of the way. He runs by shops, markets, corporate buildings, and across busy streets. Frank is all alone in his misery and panic and the people of the city go blissfully on with their lives. The city provides no solace for those who seek it. At one point Frank stops by a new stand. A ball rolls towards him; he picks it up, hands it to a little girl and smiles sadly. A beautiful woman waves at her boyfriend or husband nearby, they embrace and move on happily away from Frank. This is what Frank could have had if he resisted the call of the city, stayed in Banning, and married Paula – love and a family. However

at this point the cityscape is now taunting him with the relationships he will never have. Frank must deal with his misery, and his revenge, all alone.

Anonymity is also provided in the Los Angeles cityscape of *D.O.A.* Frank is being taken by Chester (Neville Brand), who works for Majak (Luther Adler), a local gangster, to be killed so he will not speak to the police about the illegal shipment of uridium (the chemical used to poison Frank). Frank manages to escape from the car and blend into the crowd inside of a drug store. Chester comes in after him and, because Frank is a stranger he is able to blend in with the crowd. In a small town, everyone would have known Frank at the drug store, which would have meant certain death for him. His friends and neighbors may have greeted him, called him by name, or waved at him signaling Frank's location to Chester – there would have been nowhere to hide. Also, the store would have been smaller and there certainly would have been less people milling around. Frank also escapes Majak by using the same logic – he gets off of a bus right near a police officer who then tells Majak and his crew to move along. We know from the beginning of the film that Frank knows the local law enforcement agents from a scene at the local bar. If this incident took place in Frank's home town the local sheriff would have interrogated Frank and those following him, putting not only Frank in danger, but the sheriff as well. Unfortunatley, this same anonymity also provides the opportunity for Frank to be poisoned in the first place at the crowded bar towards the beginning of the film. Frank realizes, too late, that the call of the city was too much for him to resist. The urban landscape provided nothing but murder and regret for him, as well as a reflection of the frantic pace of the film.

Conclusion

The comparison between film and architecture is not new, neither is the idea that the urban landscape reflects the anxiety of those who live within its limits. Sergei Eisenstein was the

first to compare film and architecture in his essay “Montage and Architecture” written in 1938.

Eisenstein explains:

Painting has remained incapable of fixing the total representation of a phenomenon in its full visual multidimensionality. (There have been numberless attempts to do this). Only the film camera has solved the problem of doing this on a flat surface, but its undoubted ancestor in this capability is – architecture. The Greeks have left us the most perfect example of shot design, change of shot, and shot length (that is, the duration of a particular impression). Victor Hugo called the medieval cathedrals “books in stone” (see *Notre Dame de Paris*). The Acropolis of Athens has an equal right to be called the perfect example of one of the most ancient films.³⁰

Just as film can be read as a social, political and historical discourse, so too can architecture be read in the same manner. Architecture, as an art, has the ability to reflect not only these ideas, but also the fears and anxieties of the time period – bomb shelters, prisons, even abandoned buildings. Filmmakers can then use architecture to help express the fears and concerns, not only of the characters within the story, but of society as well.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau famously wrote, “Cities are the abyss of the human species;”³¹ they are a hole that humans fall into and can never return from. In that respect, the city as represented in film becomes a reflection of the fears and anxieties plaguing society, especially during the Weimar Era in Germany and the twenty-odd years following World War I in America. *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* reveals leaning, jagged, and triangular buildings that reflect what the cities of post World War I Germany may have looked like. *Metropolis* shares a man eating

³⁰ Sergei Eisenstein, “Montage and Architecture (CA. 1938),” in *Assemblage* 10, December (1989): 111-131. http://cosmopista.files.wordpress.com/2008/10/eisenstein_montage-and-architecture.pdf.

³¹ <http://www.quotegarden.com/cities.html> (Accessed April 20, 2011).

machine and industry out of control. Film noirs like *Double Indemnity* and *D.O.A* show the city as an evil place where anonymity and evil deeds run rampant, along with misery and loneliness. These films, and the architecture and landscapes found within, serve as a warning to viewers. Although the city can be idyllic, a place of promise and beauty, it can also serve as a reminder of the horrors of war, the anxiety over future wars, the inability to trust others, and the growing panic over the rapidly growing industrialization found around the world during the Modern Era.

Image Index



Figure 1: Dr. Caligari in his caravan with Cesare, the somnambulist.
Image from: afilmcanoon.com



Figure 2: Casare abducts Jane after falling in love with her.
Image from: tylersaul.wordpress.com



Figure 3: Berlin after bombings
Image from: baileysagencies.com

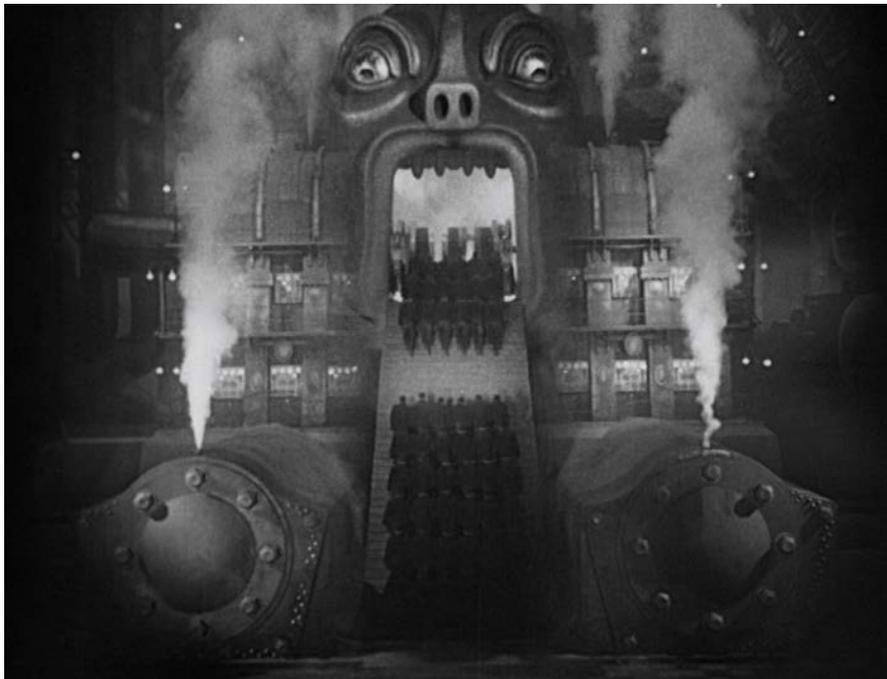


Figure 4: Moloch, the man-eating machine
Image from: dystopolitik.blogspot.com