

Georgia State University
ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

Philosophy Honors Theses

Department of Philosophy

12-16-2015

Faust on Film: A Hegelian Modern Art

Sarah Kathryn Murphy
Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/philosophy_hontheses

Recommended Citation

Murphy, Sarah Kathryn, "Faust on Film: A Hegelian Modern Art." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2015.
https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/philosophy_hontheses/14

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Philosophy at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophy Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.

FAUST ON FILM: A HEGELIAN MODERN ART

By

SARAH KATHRYN MURPHY

Under the Direction of Sebastian Rand, PhD

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between German Expressionist film and Hegel's system of aesthetics. Through an analysis of the aesthetic qualities of Hanns Ewers' *The Student of Prague* (1913) and F.W. Murnau's *Faust*, I believe we have evidence to believe that the subjectivity that German Expressionist film sought to capture is aligned with the 'interiority' that Hegel believes Romantic art expresses. Further, I will consider whether these two films indicate that film as an artistic medium falls within Hegel's characterization of Modern art. I believe that because both *Student of Prague* and *Faust* use elements of Romantic art in an effort to convey the melancholy spirit, and that the melancholy spirit is reflection and product of a uniquely modern Germany, these films indicate that film as a medium fulfill the requirements Hegel sets for Modern art.

INDEX WORDS: Hegel, Modern Art, Film, German Expressionism, *Student of Prague* (1913), *Faust* (1926), Melancholy

FOUST ON FILM: A HEGELIAN MODERN ART

By

SARAH KATHRYN MURPHY

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy with
Undergraduate Advanced and Research Honors
In the College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University

2015

Copyright by
Sarah Kathryn Murphy
2015

FOUST ON FILM: A HEGELIAN MODERN ART

By

SARAH KATHRYN MURPHY

Committee: Sebastian Rand, PhD
Honors Thesis Advisor

Sarah Cook, PhD
Honors College Associate Dean

Electronic Version Approved:

GSU Honors College

Georgia State University

December 2015

DEDICATION

To the stellar ones.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to acknowledge and express my sincerest thanks Dr. Sebastian Rand, not only for his assistance and patience throughout the completion of this project, but for teaching the class on Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics that started it all. It was in this class that I discovered my love for the German Aesthetic tradition, and without the opportunity to marshal the depths of Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, this project would never have happened.

I would also like to thank a few members of GSU's Department of Communication: Christopher Minz, for his lecture that first brought my attention to the unique relationship between film, Romantic literature, and modernity; Dr. Angelo Restivo, whose knowledge and interest in the relationship between film and philosophy has encouraged me to develop my niche; and Maria Corrigan, who offers both her unending passion for film theory, and many sincere words of encouragement. Without their passion for film and supportive conversations, my project could not have succeeded.

Finally, I want to acknowledge those who have kept me grounded most throughout the process—a dear friend, and my supportive parents. This project would not be nearly as comprehensible without their encouragement, patience, and insight. To you I owe a very sincere and many thanks.

And to the *many* other teachers, family members, friends, and acquaintances who have taken interest not only in this project, but also in my academic career as a whole, your time, support, and patience has been invaluable, and wholeheartedly appreciated. Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
Introduction	1
Hegel and Romantic Art	3
<i>Expressionist Film and Faust</i>	5
A Note on Theater	6
Architecture	10
<i>Independence and Purposiveness</i>	10
<i>Enclosure</i>	13
Painting	18
<i>Dimensionality</i>	19
<i>Rejecting “Natural” Images</i>	20
<i>Special Effects</i>	21
<i>Light and Shadow; Chiaroscuro</i>	23
Film and Hegelian Modern Art	27
<i>Symbols of Melancholy</i>	28
<i>Romantic Melancholy</i>	32
<i>The Modern art of German Melancholy</i>	33
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	36

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1— <i>Wegner as Balduin</i>	7
Figure 2— <i>Classical Style in ‘Student of Prague’</i>	12
Figure 3— <i>Balduin overlooks cathedral</i>	12
Figure 4— <i>Looming Mephisto</i>	13
Figure 5— <i>Faust and Cathedral</i>	13
Figure 6— <i>Faust’s Study 1</i>	15
Figure 7— <i>Faust’s Study 2</i>	16
Figure 8— <i>Balduin’s Study</i>	16
Figure 9— <i>Street scene in ‘Student of Prague’</i>	18
Figure 10— <i>Mephisto in Shadow</i>	18
Figure 11— <i>‘Student of Prague’ Mirror Illusion</i>	21
Figure 12— <i>‘Student of Prague’ Body Double</i>	21
Figure 13— <i>‘Faust’s’ Flying Spawns of Mephisto</i>	22
Figure 14— <i>‘Faust’s’ Disappearing Bodies</i>	22
Figure 15— <i>‘Faust’ Chiaroscuro</i>	24
Figure 16— <i>Mephisto in Hiding</i>	26
Figure 17— <i>Faust Looking Toward Light</i>	26
Figure 18— <i>Albrecht Dürer’s ‘Melancholia I’ (1514)</i>	29
Figure 19— <i>Faust and Saturn</i>	30
Figure 20— <i>Scapinelli’s Coin Purse</i>	31
Figure 21— <i>Balduin, Hand on Cheek</i>	32
Figure 22— <i>Faust, Hand on Cheek</i>	32

Introduction

When Eadweard Muybridge created *Sallie Gardner at a Gallop* (1878), he introduced the world to the motion picture in nascent form—still photos of a galloping horse, projected in rapid succession and totaling all of eight seconds. In light of overwhelming criticism that early film was just low-brow entertainment, few during Muybridge's time could have imagined that the motion picture would become what some may now consider *the* art form of modernity. Many countries began investigating not only the aesthetic qualities of film as a new art medium, but film's potential for political messages. This was particularly the case in Germany after WWI, where, like many other countries, the new government gained control of film studios. Weimar cinema boomed, and Germany became one of the leading producers of film in the 1920s. However, what is interesting about these films is their distinctive style, modeled in light of the Expressionist artistic movement, which rejected the realism of the 19th century in favor of depicting more abstract, emotional moods.

Undoubtedly, there are many contemporary theories about film and its status as art, as well as how film finds a place within modernity. But what I want to consider is the way that film fits into Hegel's aesthetic system, particularly his understanding of Romantic and Modern art. Given that German Expressionist films were concerned with presenting 'interiority' and the 'subjective mood,' I believe there is a link between this ideology and the aesthetic theory that Hegel explained in his lectures nearly one hundred years earlier. In particular, I believe that German Expressionism has close ties to Hegel's Romantic art.

The idea that German Expressionist films borrow many characteristics from Romantic painting and theater comes to fruition most notably in Lotte Eisner's book, *The Haunted Screen*.¹ Here, she investigates the influence of Max Reinhardt's theater on the lighting and staging that came to define German Expressionism in its attempt to explore the world of subjective mood and

¹ Eisner, Lotte H. *The Haunted Screen; Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*. Berkeley: University of California, 1969. Print.

experience. Many of the observations about the qualities of German Expressionist films are those that Eisner also sees. But the aim of my paper is to build upon Eisner's work by considering how many of the 'Romantic' elements we see in German Expressionist films are distinctly Hegelian. Both Hegel's Romantic art and German Expressionism share a similar goal—the investigation of subjectivity.

Since 'subjectivity' is such an abstract concept, the first goal is to evaluate whether the subjectivity of Hegel's Romantic art is the same kind of subjectivity portrayed in German Expressionist films. This will first involve a closer look at the way Hegel defined and characterized Romantic art. Then, I will explore three forms of Romantic art— theater, architecture, and painting—in comparison to the aesthetic qualities of two German Expressionist films, Ewers' early German film *The Student of Prague* (1913), and F.W. Murnau's *Faust* (1926).² I believe both films provide evidence that the subjectivity they are attempting to capture is the same expression of subjective 'interiority' Hegel sees in Romantic art.

My second goal is to consider whether, since German Expressionism seems so closely linked to Hegel's Romantic art, these two films also fit the qualifications that Hegel sets for Modern art. Since film is a distinctly modern medium, it would seem unjust to call it a Hegelian Romantic art, since Hegel distinguishes between Romantic and Modern art. I believe that by portraying the melancholy spirit, a subjective mood that mirrors a uniquely *modern* feature of German culture, *Student of Prague* and *Faust* leave us with reason to believe that film might qualify as a Hegelian Modern art, one of which intentionally and necessarily draws heavily from Romantic art.

² *Der Student von Prag/The Student of Prague*. Directed by Hanns Heinz Ewers and Stellan Rye. Performed by Paul Wegener. 1913. *Faust*. Directed by F.W. Murnau. Performed by Emil Jannings. 1926.

Hegel and Romantic Art

Before evaluating the connections between German Expressionism and Hegel's Romantic art, we must first discuss what Hegel takes the role of art to be in general. In his own words, Hegel suggests that art has as its goal:

[To display] even the highest [reality] sensuously, bringing it thereby nearer to the senses, to feeling and to nature's mode of appearance [...] it is the freedom of intellectual reflection which rescues itself from the *here* and now, called sensuous reality and finitude.³

This passage indicates that there is some "highest reality" that is not currently visible to us in the here-and-now of reality, and that art's goal is to make this reality as sensuous possible. But what is this "highest reality"?

For Hegel, the highest reality is what he calls the *Absolute*, or the total unity and freedom of *spirit*. We might think of spirit as what distinguishes humans from nature—for Hegel, this is not only the fact that we are rational beings, but that we are conscious of our intellect and reasoning abilities. Since it is the goal of art to present the *Absolute* sensuously, and spirit involves a certain consciousness that only human beings have, we see why Hegel believes true art must depict more than nature; it must sensuously depict something distinctly human.

Contrasted with external nature there stands the subjective inner life, the human mind as the medium for the existence and appearance of the Absolute. With this subjective life there enters at once the multiplicity and variety of individuality, particularization, difference, action, and development, in short the entire and variegated world of the reality of the spirit in which the Absolute is known, willed, felt, and activated.⁴

But Hegel places great emphasis on the idea that just because there is something distinctly human about spirit, does not mean that art that depicts the human form thereby *succeeds* as an expression of the Absolute. This is because the Absolute itself is infinite, which is why it cannot be expressed sensuously. So for Hegel, the aim of art seems to be rather the expression the spirit in its

³ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art ; Vol 1*. Ed. Thomas M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988. Print. p. 7-8, see also p. x-xi. The term 'reality' appears bracketed in original text; all other brackets are my own.

⁴ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art ; Vol. 2*. Ed. Thomas M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988. Print p. 624.

sensuous journey *toward* the Absolute, the non-sensuous ideal, rather than the (impossible) sensuous depiction of the Absolute itself. In other words, art must express the spirit as a particular, sensuous, human form in its journey to being in unity with itself as the infinite, non-sensuous Absolute.

Spirit becomes infinite through a process of (1) seeing itself as ‘inner,’ (2) coming to terms with the limits of its finitude (and in particular its bodily form and earthly environment), and (3) withdrawing back into its interiority from that exteriority, recognizing that the Absolute does not exist in the world of sensuous reality. For Hegel, each type of art (Symbolic, Classical, and Romantic) captures part of the spirit’s journey. Unlike Symbolic and Classical art, which sensuously present only the spirit’s initial negation of itself (e.g. the abstract ideas presented in Symbolic art), and its journey into sensuous form (e.g. the ideal of Classical sculpture), Romantic art expresses the spirit’s journey back inward after recognizing the limits of its exteriority.

Romanticism has as its principle the inner life, the return of the intellectual life into itself, but the inner life is to be reflected in the external world and to withdraw into itself out of that world.⁵

So the subjectivity and ‘inwardness’ of spirit that Hegel believes Romantic art depicts involves the process of the spirit facing the limits of its bodily form, thereby recognizing that its totality cannot be achieved in sensuous form, and so retreats back inward to transcend toward the Absolute.

If we turn now to a discussion of German Expressionist film, we should consider how these filmmakers also sought to present ‘subjectivity’ and the the inner parts of our psychology that exist beyond the reality of nature. Brad Prager explains the way that “Expressionism retreats and projects inner psychology” as the “show the perceptual distortions that are part and parcel of [the protagonists’] despair”—a description that I believe sounds distinctly Hegelian.⁶

⁵ Hegel, *Aesthetics Vol 2*, p. 696.

⁶ Prager, Brad. "Taming Impulses: Murnau's Sunrise and the Exorcism of Expressionism." *Literature Film Quarterly* 28.4 (2000): 284-293. Web. p. 285, 288

Expressionist films sought to capture this subjectivity through distinctive stylistic methods which represented “subjectivity through a distorted image,” and through the “gesture of a body.”⁷ Sets also contained distorted perspectives that tried to mirror the anxiety and disorientation of the inner psychology of its characters as they interacted with an equally disorienting environment. Already, we see the similarities between what German Expressionism claims to be doing, and what Hegel believes Romantic art does. So in my forthcoming discussion, I will consider the specific visual elements of German Expressionism that overlap with the characteristics of some of Hegel’s Romantic art forms—particularly theater, architecture, and painting.

Expressionist Film and Faust

Although the title of “German Expressionist” films refers primarily to the films created during the post-war Weimar era (1919-1931), earlier German films laid the groundwork for what would become some of the most distinguishing features of later German Expressionism.

The first film that I will consider in detail is Ewer’s 1913 *The Student of Prague* (*Der Student von Prag*), which is both a rendition of the typical Faustian tale and a reworking of Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “William Wilson.” Balduin is a stellar student and gifted swordsman, but he finds himself discontent with his lack of love and money. Balduin meets Scapinelli, who promises riches and requited love in exchange for anything of Scapinelli’s choosing. Symbolized by Scapinelli taking Balduin’s mirror reflection, Scapinelli essentially chooses to take Balduin’s soul, which leads to fatal ends for the protagonist. Kracauer characterizes *The Student of Prague* as an example of the psychological duality plaguing the collective German soul—it presents “the foundations of the self.”⁸ In a similar fashion, Eisner claims that *The Student of Prague* introduced film as “the perfect medium for Romantic anguish, dream-states, and those hazy imaginings which shade so easily into

⁷ Aitken, Ian. *European Film Theory and Cinema: A Critical Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001. p. 17.

⁸ Kracauer, Sigfried. *From Caligari to Hitler*. Ed. Leonardo Quaresima. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. Print. P. 30

the infinite depths of that fragment of space-outside time, the screen.”⁹ Although the elements of Romanticism in this film are not as developed as its Weimar counterparts, I believe there is enough groundwork to warrant a comparison to Hegel’s Romantic art.

The second film I want to consider is F.W. Murnau’s *Faust* (1926), which closely follows Goethe’s version of the tale. We see Faust introduced as a man who is highly intelligent; he lives among his stacks of books and teaches the other village people the findings of his research. When a deadly plague strikes the town, Faust takes it as his responsibility to find the cure. But his traditional dependence upon science and alchemy fail him. He then makes a deal with Mephisto, who promises a cure for the plague in exchange for Faust’s soul. Unlike the fatal end that Balduin meets in *Student of Prague*, Faust is able to escape Mephisto’s pact after Gretchen saves him through true love.

So my goal is not to suggest that these Faustian films are Romantic in their narrative subject matter simply because they retell Goethe’s famous Romantic epic, but I instead want to illuminate how and why we find some specifically *Hegelian* Romantic aesthetic characteristics in a modern artistic medium. This will first involve a systematic comparison of the qualities of the particular Romantic arts that Hegel finds to reveal the inwardness of spirit that German Expressionism takes itself to be doing.

A Note on Theater

The idea that German Expressionist film is highly theatrical is widespread. Eisner considers the way that light and shadow of the Expressionist’s highly stylized sets are distinctive features drawn from the stage designs of Max Reinhardt’s theatre. Further, she considers that the majority of prominent Expressionist actors (and directors) had a theatrical background:

⁹ Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p 40.

The links between Max Reinhardt's theatre and the German cinema were obvious as early as 1913, when all the main film actors – Wegener, Bassermann, Moissi, Theodor Loos, Winterstein, Veidt, Krauss, Jannings, to mention but a few – came from Reinhardt's troupe.¹⁰

Since directors like Ewers (*Student of Prague*) and Murnau (*Faust*) were also familiar with both the writing and production of German theater, it is no surprise that many of their films incorporate distinctively theatrical elements. In the case of *The Student of Prague*, the film opens with an introduction to each of the characters in a curtain-call style (Figure 1). Additionally, the film is divided into acts (indicated by intertitles), much like a theatrical performance.

As Expressionist film progresses into the post-war Weimar era, the kind of explicitly formal theatrical elements like we see in *The Student of Prague* diminish. Instead, extensive and elaborate costume and set design become the most salient features of German Expressionism, and the only lingering evidence of the fact that German Expressionism had its roots in theater.



Figure 1—Wegener as Balduin

Even looking beyond any specific ties between German Expressionism and theater, if we consider film as a medium in comparison to all other mediums of art, we might still be inclined to associate its features most with those of theater. Most obvious is the fact that, like theater, film displays the movement of its characters through both space and time. So whereas a 'fixed' piece of

¹⁰ Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p. 44

art like painting places its characters in space, the characters do not interact with more than a single space or event.¹¹ Of course, this movement or progression through space and time in theater and film is the result of both mediums being literary at their cores; both are the visualization of a written narrative.

In fact, German Expressionists acknowledged the “literariness” of film when, “as early as 1913...started campaigning for the *Autorenfilm*, that is, the idea of film being judged as the work of an author.”¹² Similarly, Hegel describes both opera and theater as subcategories of poetry—lyric and dramatic, respectively—rather than individual performance arts distinct from literature. Hegel even has his own praise for Goethe’s rendition of the Faustian tale:

[Goethe’s *Faust*] is the one absolutely philosophical tragedy. Here on the one side, dissatisfaction with learning and, on the other, the freshness of life and enjoyment in the world, in general the tragic quest for harmony between the Absolute in its essence and appearance and the individual’s knowledge and will. All this provides a breadth of subject-matter which no other dramatists has ventured to compass in one and the same work.¹³

Given that both Ewers and Murnau were undoubtedly aware of the status of *Faust* as one of Germany’s most well-known pieces of literature, it is not surprising that in their efforts to affirm the “literary” status of film, they chose to recreate such an emblematic story. This might also give us reason to consider the merits of *Student of Prague* and *Faust* in light of Hegel’s discussion of dramatic poetry.

For Hegel, poetry is the ideal form of Romantic art. In other words, he finds that poetry is most capable of expressing the totality of the spirit as it withdraws into itself from its exteriority. Whereas arts like painting and sculpture focus on visualizing the exteriority of inner spirit, the arts of *feeling* like music and poetry explore the inner spirit withdrawing from its external form—these arts present “self-apprehension of the inner life as inner,” rather than the principle of “inner life as

¹¹ See also Hegel, *Aesthetics Vol 2*, p. 961-962.

¹² Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p. 39.

¹³ Hegel, *Aesthetics Vol 2*, p. 1224.

outer.¹⁴ On the one hand, music expresses the inner spirit through symbolic and abstract sounds moving in time. When we listen to a piece of music, we might feel the abstract inner spirit as it moves temporally without tangible form or shape. We may think Bach's sonatas feel sad, or Mozart's joyous. However, the specific details of these feelings are not determinable—the abstraction of musical notes and melodies does not carry any specific subject matter, but rather just point to the subjectivity of the inner spirit.

On the other hand, poetry particularizes the spirit through sound via *speech*, which Hegel claims, “is the entire world of ideas.”¹⁵ So even though poetry still depends upon sounds moving in time like notes in music, these sounds are formed into words that convey very specific subject matters, some of which are more suited to expressing the totality of the spirit.¹⁶ And as mentioned before, Hegel praises the Faustian story for its appropriate subject matter. Hegel then considers the form of poetry in greater depth:

The thing in hand, the subject matter, is to be objectified in poetry for the spirit's apprehension, yet this objectivity exchanges its previously external reality for an internal one and it acquires an existence only within consciousness itself as something spiritually presented and intuited.¹⁷

What Hegel means to say is that regardless of whether we hear or read poetry, it still lacks the external and visual component of sculpture or painting. The words of poetry are only signifiers of inner spirit. To put this idea in concrete terms, if we read the word ‘tree,’ we mentally envision the form of a tree. But even abstract terms like feelings and events can be mentally envisioned in a similar way—if we hear or read the word ‘love,’ we envision our own subjective experience with the term. And because this inner imagination remains entirely subjective, Hegel believes that words are thereby most capable of expressing the magnitude of the particularities of the inner spirit. Therefore,

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 960.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 963.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 695 for a closer look at the appropriate subject matter and composition of poetry.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 964.

since beautiful art (and specifically the *ideal* Romantic art) must best express the spirit in its totality, which includes both interiority and the spirit's retreat from exteriority, Hegel deems this inner imagination the "proper external object" for poetry.¹⁸

Even in the case of dramatic poetry performed on stage, Hegel still posits "the sensuous side of the communication always has only a subordinate part to play."¹⁹ In other words, the external elements of the performance of poetry (like set design, actors, music, etc.) are secondary to the act of speech itself. All of these elements only *add* to speech's ability to present the inner spirit, rather than present the inner spirit in their own right. But if we look at both *Student of Prague* and *Faust*, even though their subject matter is poetically appropriate, both films occur before the advent of sound technology in film—they are silent films. And since German Expressionism lacks the quality by which Hegel believes dramatic poetry is best able to portray the totality of the spirit (speech), I believe we must restrict our discussion to a comparison of German Expressionist film to Hegel's purely visual arts—and in particular, to Romantic architecture and painting.

Architecture

A defining feature of German Expressionist films is the stylization of the sets, particularly in abstract, asymmetrical, and Gothic style. I believe Hegel's understanding of Romantic architecture provides evidence as to why the Expressionists incorporated such distinctively Gothic elements into their set designs, and so I will consider these architectural elements first.

Independence and Purposiveness

Although for Hegel painting is better suited to presenting the totality of spirit, he does admit a place for architecture as an important aesthetic category. If we consider first the objects of Symbolic

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 964.

¹⁹ Ibid.

architecture such as obelisks or monuments, Hegel finds that these structures “carry their meaning in themselves, and not in some external aim and need.”²⁰ These structures hold meaning in themselves and are constructed as symbols rather than the *means* to another external purpose. In this way, Hegel characterizes Symbolic architecture as *independent*. In contrast, Classical architecture like Greek temples or Protestant churches are constructed *only* in consideration of their external aim—in each case, to provide a structure for worship. The significance of these buildings in Classical architecture thereby depends on the purpose for which it was built apart from its form.

For Hegel, Romantic architecture is most beautiful because it successfully unifies both the independence of Symbolic architecture, and the purposiveness of Classical architecture. He praises Gothic cathedrals for the way they “transcend any specific end and, as perfect in themselves, stand there on their own account. The work stands there by itself, fixed, and eternal.”²¹ But the reason that Romantic architecture differs from the independence of Symbolic architecture is that its exterior is *determined* by its interior, and vice versa. Hegel explains, “The external shape, the decoration and the arrangement of walls, etc., are determined from within outwards, since the exterior is to appear as only an enclosing of the interior.”²² So the exterior details of Gothic cathedrals, like flying buttresses and pointed arches, are not merely decorative or symbolic but rather a necessary product of the cathedral’s interior construction and purpose.

Hegel identifies the purpose of these Gothic cathedrals as a place where subjects can retreat from the “external world of nature and the distracting activities and interests of finite existence.”²³ In other words, if the spirit is to reconcile itself with the limitations of exteriority, the interiors of Romantic architectural structures are best suited to the purpose. Given the fact that the German Expressionist filmmakers so desperately wanted to construct a world distinct from nature, one in

²⁰ Ibid, p. 633.

²¹ Ibid, p. 684.

²² Ibid, p. 693.

²³ Ibid, p. 686.

which inner, subjective moods took precedence, it begins to make sense why they might have turned toward recreating Gothic-style architecture in their set designs.

As an early Expressionist film, *Student of Prague* contains fewer extreme stylizations that we see in films like *The Cabinet of Caligari* (Weine, 1920) or *Nosferatu* (Murnau, 1922). In fact, most of the architectural elements we see in *Student of Prague* are distinctly Romanesque, and thus more akin to Hegel's characterization of Classical architecture (Figure 2). However, there are still elements of and references to Gothic architecture throughout the film that seem to foreshadow later Expressionism's revival of this distinctive style. Perhaps most notably, we can easily decipher the steeple of a Gothic-style church from the cityscape background when Balduin stands on the balcony overlooking the village (Figure 3).



Figure 2—Classical Style in 'Student of Prague'



Figure 3—Balduin overlooks cathedral

As Expressionism became more stylized during the Weimar period, references to Gothic architecture became more pronounced and intentional. In *Faust*, we see handful of shots that mirror the shot above from *Student of Prague*. For example, when Mephisto descends over the city, we see that the tallest building is the church steeple, featured prominently in the center of the shot (Figure 4). Additionally, almost every scene in *Faust* that does not take place indoors features this iconic

image of a steeple or some other aspect of Gothic architecture. In one example, we can make out the outline of the Gothic steeple in the background as Faust ascends the stairs (Figure 5).



Figure 4—*Looming Mephisto*



Figure 5—*Faust and Cathedral*

That the majority of the shots of the characters in these films interacting with an external environment include the Gothic steeple or other Gothic-style architecture first presents the contrast between the “natural” exterior world, and the place of refuge where characters can retreat into their interiority. In other words, it seems as though the cathedrals exist in these films as if to beckon the Faustian characters to this interior retreat. At the same time, the fact that the characters are not inside the cathedral indicates another dimension of Hegel’s Romantic art—namely, the idea that the inner spirit can only see its interiority after having been exterior and retreating back inward. Like the spirit in Romantic art, the characters on film must first explore the exterior world before retreating to the enclosure of the cathedral (or other structures as will be discussed below) to investigate their interiority.

Enclosure

A notable aspect of both German Expressionism and Hegel’s description of Gothic architecture is the idea of enclosure. According to Hegel, the pointed arches and “upward

movement” of the walls in Gothic cathedrals symbolize the “elevation of the soul above the restrictions of existence.”²⁴ Like the eye travels up the heights of the arch, the “worshipping heart, restless and troubled at first, rises above the territory of finitude and finds rest in God alone.”²⁵ But it is not just that the arches themselves *symbolize* the movement the heart takes in transcending its corporeal limitations. For Hegel, the construction of the vaulted arches also adds to the idea that the church focuses on enclosing and exploring interiority. When considered in comparison to Romanesque architecture, Hegel explains the virtues of the asymmetry and cave-like feeling of Gothic churches:

The movement of the spirit with the distinctions it makes and its conciliation of them in the course of its elevation from the terrestrial to the infinite, to the loftier beyond, would not be expressed architecturally in this empty uniformity of a quadrilateral.²⁶

If we consider again that Classical architecture takes only into consideration its external purpose, rather than the inner experience of a subject, the square room with Roman-style columns and tall, flat walls, confines the spirit in such a way that does not lead it in any particular direction. In contrast, the vaulted arches and spaces of enclosure we see in Gothic architecture guide the spirit upward toward a transcendent goal. The enclosed feeling of Romantic architecture thereby becomes a necessary element of a spirit wishing to transcend its corporeal limitations.

Although the films of German Expressionism might remain more secular than what Hegel defines as the symbolic Romantic or Gothic architecture, I believe the use of Gothic arches and vaults still symbolizes the desire for the characters to transcend some earthly limitation and achieve a higher ideal.

For example, if we look at Faust’s study, we can see how, when combined with chiaroscuro, the sloping walls and ceilings seem to create a dark and cave-like dome that encloses Faust and the

²⁴ Ibid, p. 687.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 689.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 688.

contents of his room. Unlike Balduin's study, Faust's contains no exterior windows or doors, adding to the effect of feeling as though Faust is "trapped" within the confines of the room's architecture. We know that in this room, Faust spends his time investigating matters of the intellect (hence the large stack of books encroaching upon his desk), but that these efforts have been in vain when it comes to resolving the deadliness of the plague (Figure 6). Therefore, when considered in light of the Faustian story, the use of Gothic-stylized sets in the film only reiterates the struggle Faust faces between his inner psychology and bodily limitations. The enclosure of his room and sloping walls indicates that his spirit has gone out into the world (as we see literally in the film when Faust interacts with the other people), and retreated back inward to divine the cure for the plague (Figure 7).



Figure 6—*Faust's Study 1*



Figure 7—*Faust's Study 2*

Again, since *Student of Prague* is only a precursor to the stylized film sets of later Expressionist films, the sense of Balduin's enclosure is not as visible in the composition of its interior scenes. In fact, many of both the interior and exterior shots show Balduin in a large, open space with plenty of natural lighting. However, if we look at Balduin's study, we see how the vaulted arches are more oblong in shape, indicating that they share characteristics with the traditional Romantic depiction of the room we see in *Faust*. In Figure 8, we see the groin vault in the corner of the room, although the peak of the arch it connects to is not visible in the frame.



Figure 8—*Balduin's Study*

But in German Expressionist films, the interiors of churches and buildings are not necessarily the only places where characters are confronted with their inner subjectivity and quest for a higher ideal. Sets of German Expressionist films are often designed to create a feeling that exterior buildings are closing in on the characters. Not only does this mirror the idea that the characters are tormented by anxiety and fear of the external world, but I believe it also mirrors the same effect of Gothic architecture's interior enclosure.

If we look first at the street scene from *Student of Prague*, we see how the woman is hiding in the shadows cast by the buildings (Figure 9). There is no visible horizon or sky, although the blue tint and light coming from the back of the scene indicate the scene takes place at night by light of the moon. However, the woman is a small figure in a frame overwhelmed by architecture that seems to enclose her. This sense of exterior buildings enclosing and hiding characters is also seen in *Faust*. In the scene below, we see Mephisto hiding in the shadows to the right of the frame (Figure 10). But like the scene in *Student of Prague*, tall buildings dominate the frame's composition; the tops of the buildings that might break the horizon remain out of the shot, adding to the sense that even when the characters are outside, they are enclosed and trying to reconcile their external existence with interior desires for more. So by viewing these Gothic-style set designs through a Hegelian lens, we can make sense of the way in which German Expressionism is presenting subjectivity in the way that Hegel suggests Romantic art does through architecture.



Figure 9—Street scene in ‘Student of Prague’



Figure 10—Mephisto in Shadow

Painting

Even if it is the case that features of Romantic architecture mirror the spirit’s journey back into itself and toward a higher ideal, Hegel still finds architecture, as a form of art that lacks *bodily form*, thereby incapable of expressing the totality of the spirit in the way that other Romantic art forms can. We might be able to appreciate Romantic architecture in that it is constructed with the spirit in mind, but the buildings themselves do not take the form of spirit in the way that Hegel demands of ideal art. On the other hand, sculpture, as the bodily form of inner spirit, is the ideal form of Classical art. Its form is entirely dictated by its interiority, its spirit, and thus presents spirit in a way that architecture cannot. Hegel finds Romantic painting the best of the visual arts at expressing the totality of the spirit.

Both film and painting share the characteristic that distinguishes painting from sculpture. According to Hegel, Romantic painting best expresses the spirit because it “places its figures in nature or an architectural environment which is external to them.”²⁷ Not only do painting and film portray the spirit in the form of the human body, but they also place the spirit in the context of an external environment. Hegel praises painting as a medium that presents “the inner life of the spirit

²⁷ Ibid, p. 798.

which undertakes to express itself as *inner* in the mirror of externality.”²⁸ In other words, the characters in painting and film interact with (and can thus retreat from) the exterior world of nature. No longer is the form of art itself (painting, and film) determined entirely by the inner spirit, but incorporates that spirit’s necessary interaction with an external world so that it may more completely understand itself. Because film shares the quality of placing its characters in an environment, I believe we have reason to consider first the means by which Hegel thinks painting achieves this interaction between interiority and exteriority, and second, whether or not German Expressionism uses similar techniques to the same end.

Dimensionality

Perhaps the most medium-specific characteristic of Romantic painting is the way in which the content of the painting appears three-dimensional despite the two-dimensionality of the painting surface. In other words, painting provides the spectator with an image of a three-dimensional object that may or may not really exist in three dimensions, although the spectator looks only at the flat canvas of the painting. Here we might be able to pinpoint a relevant similarity between painting and film. Like the painted image on a canvas in a frame, both the film strip itself, as well as the surface upon which the filmstrip’s images are projected, are flat. What the spectator perceives while watching a film is a three-dimensional image on a two-dimensional surface.

For Hegel, the fact that painting is limited in its presentation of the dimensional totality of an object is what makes it better at expressing the Idea than architecture or sculpture. He asserts, “This reduction of the three dimensions to a level surface is implicit in the principle of interiorization which can be asserted, as inwardness.”²⁹ In other words, the fact that the external environment with which the painting’s character interacts “collapses” into a flat surface from its real

²⁸ Ibid, p. 802.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 805.

dimensionality mirrors the spirit's retreat inward from the external world. In this way, we may believe that film is capable of expressing the same virtue of "inwardness" that Hegel ascribes to painting.

Rejecting "Natural" Images

At the same time, we might note an important difference between film and painting as mediums. Unlike painting where the artist has the ability to "invent" figures and environments, film can only capture the image of something that already exists in nature.³⁰ And for Hegel, genuine art must do more than merely present objects as they exist in reality. The beauty in painting thus lies in its artist's ability to render an image of an object (that may in fact exist in reality) in such a way that reveals the "life" of the object beyond its sensuous form.³¹

But German Expressionists seem to acknowledge this artistic limitation of film when they assume a similarly Hegelian artistic responsibility—"We must detach ourselves from nature, say the Expressionists, and strive to isolate an object's 'most expressive expression.'"³² Even if the objects we see in film are not artistically "invented" in the same way that a painter constructs an image, I believe German Expressionism draws from other elements of Romantic painting that Hegel associates with the expression of interiority—in particular, the use and manipulation of light and shadow, or chiaroscuro. Kracauer describes German Expressionism as using "representation as a distorting mirror," which suggests that perhaps the fact that the images on camera, although "natural," are intentionally manipulated enough to artistically display interiority in a Hegelian sense.³³

³⁰ Ibid, p 798. Obviously, this remark excludes the capabilities of modern digital film technology and graphic design.

³¹ Hegel, *Aesthetics Vol 1*, p. 598-599

³² Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p. 11.

³³ Hansen, Miriam B. *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012. Print. p. 8.

Special Effects

Before I consider the distinctive use of chiaroscuro in German Expressionist films, I also want to consider a notable way that both Ewer's and Murnau attempt to create “fantastic” images that deviate from otherwise naturalistic depictions of objects and events. Although *Student of Prague* is one of the earliest films in the German canon, Ewers employed advanced special effects throughout the film. In Figure 11, Balduin's reflection appears to walk out of his mirror, giving the illusion that Scapinelli is literally walking away with Balduin's identity. When the real Balduin walks back in front of the mirror later in the scene, his reflection is missing—a “movie magic” trick that establishes film as a medium capable of rejecting “natural” laws of light and physics. For the duration of the film, Balduin's reflection becomes the dubious “twin”—Scapinelli's evil creation. ‘Reflection Balduin’ appears regularly in scenes alongside ‘Real Balduin.’ Ewers constructs this body-double illusion by seamlessly superimposing two filmstrips on top of each other—another way in which film rejects “realism” (Figure 12).



Figure 11—‘*Student of Prague*’ *Mirror Illusion*



Figure 12—‘*Student of Prague*’ *Body Double*

Many of the same techniques that we see in *Student of Prague* are utilized and amplified by Murnau in the creation of *Faust*. Whereas in Ewers's film the effects are noted but the realism of scenes takes precedent, Murnau intentionally distorts many of his scenes by superimposing film images to create the illusions of disappearing bodies, flying horses and spawns of Mephisto (See Figures 13 and 14).



Figure 13—'Faust's' *Flying Spawns of Mephisto*



Figure 14—'Faust's' *Disappearing Bodies*

So even if it is the case that the images we see on the screen are objects that exist in the natural world, both Ewers and Murnau intentionally manipulate and overlay these filmstrips to create something *supernatural*. In other words, if we consider only a shot where Balduin stands in the left-hand corner of the scene, it may be difficult to see any expression of the “life beyond the object.” But when we consider a scene where Balduin appears as himself *and* his mirror reflection, via editing techniques, we can see how filmmakers, like painters, *do* have a means by which they can add a creative element to the otherwise natural objects.³⁴ The argument that film is only a depiction of natural objects, and is thus incapable of presenting spirit in the Romantic sense, collapses when it comes to these German Expressionist films. Therefore, I believe we can proceed to consider the use

³⁴ See too Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p. 40-42 for a similar discussion of Paul Wegener on the topic of special effects in *Student of Prague*.

of light and shadow in these films as it relates to Hegel's understanding of light and shadow in Romantic painting.

Light and Shadow; Chiaroscuro

In the same way that we visually experience three-dimensional objects in nature, representational painting capitalizes on the use of light and shadow to create the illusion of depth. For Hegel, the depth and “lifelikeness” of representational painting is what distinguishes it from Symbolic art like Egyptian hieroglyphics. Whereas Egyptian hieroglyphs may incorporate a number of different colors, Romantic painting presents intentional contrast of values to mimic the visual experience of objects we see in nature. Because our ability to distinguish objects from their surroundings (which gives them depth and three-dimensionality) depends upon the use of light, objects appearing in the foreground of an image appear darker and more detailed than objects that are more distant. According to Hegel, it is light that nature is able to see itself and become reflexive; light particularizes objects from their externality.³⁵ Because Romantic painting incorporates elements of light and shadow, the art thereby becomes capable of presenting the self-conscious spirit in a way that Symbolic art cannot.

In the case of the filmic image, the projected object of the shot appears only *because* of the chemical reaction between the light cast on the object in nature and the film itself. Further, in the case of German Expressionist and other early film, color is not captured by the film—only the contrast between light and darkness. However, one of the signature characteristics of German Expressionist film is its reliance upon chiaroscuro—a particularly emphasized contrast between light and dark. Although *Student of Prague* does contain some chiaroscuro, the effect is not nearly as pronounced as we see in later German Expressionist films. Instead, Lotte Eisner champions *Faust* as

³⁵ Hegel, *Aesthetics Vol 2*, p. 808.

“The Climax of the Chiaroscuro.”³⁶ So if we look at a few still shots from *Faust*, we can see how Carl Hoffmann, the film’s cinematographer, manipulated the lighting and set design to emphasize this contrast to reveal Faust’s subjectivity.

The lighting effects we see in Figure 15 closely resemble many of Rembrandt’s portraits. Hoffmann’s intentional use of lighting places only the right half of Faust’s visage in the foreground of the shot. The other side of his face remains dark, and the outer edges blur into the background. Further, given the context of this shot in the film, we also know that Faust’s head is not floating in space; his upper body is in the frame although its outline remains indistinguishable from the dark background.



Figure 15—‘*Faust*’ *Chiaroscuro*

But, if we look at the shot above through a Hegelian perspective, we might begin to see the subjective side of Faust’s character that commits it to the “gloom” ascribed by Eisner. According to Hegel, “[Light] exists only as *one* side of what is implicit in the principle of subjectivity, i.e. as this more ideal [self-]identity.”³⁷ But this is not to say that what is illuminated is necessarily the “better” side of the object, nor is it necessarily indicative of the “spiritual” realm. Rather, the “ideal” self-identity is the one that recognizes both its particularized corporeality, and the potential for a more

³⁶ Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p. 285, 56.

³⁷ Hegel, *Aesthetics Vol 2*, p. 808.

subjective and spiritual freedom. The spirit must retreat from the darkness of the external world to find the light of its interiority.³⁸

We might initially see the chiaroscuro effects in *Faust* as symbolically representative of Faust's own struggle between following the "light" of God, and living in the "shadows" of Mephisto. Shots like Figure 16 and Figure 17 show Mephisto avoiding the light and hiding in the shadows, whereas scenes like Figure show Faust as he looks toward the light inside the cathedral. However, this initial and surface-level reading of the use of light and shadow as symbols of the distinction between good and evil fails to take into account the depth of both the film's narrative, and Expressionism's overarching goal to present subjectivity in a much more developed manner.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 626.



Figure 16—Mephisto in Hiding



Figure 17—Faust Looking Toward Light

Recalling Murnau's version of the Faustian tale, the character Faust elects to sign a pact with Mephisto in exchange for the cure to the plague—a disease which attacks and limits the human body. So Mephisto, and the darkness shrouding Faust in the film after their pact, becomes representative of the limitations of corporeality in achieving true freedom of the spirit. Faust longs for a cure, a higher ideal, but remains stuck in his finite existence where the cure to the plague remains out of his own power. So perhaps it is not the case that Mephisto is “hiding” from the light of God, so much as he is committing to the necessary dualism between objective corporeality and subjective spirituality. The excessive contrast between light and dark symbolizes a spirit coming to terms with its external finitude and the freedom of reaching a higher spiritual ideal. Therefore, the

use of light and shadow in German Expressionist film is used to intentionally emphasize the same duality that Hegel believes allows Romantic painting the ability to present interiority.

Film and Hegelian Modern Art

Now that we have compared these films and their aesthetics to Hegel's description of Romantic architecture and painting, I believe it is apparent that *Student of Prague* and *Faust*, at the very least, fit some Hegelian description of art. But then the question of whether the similarities between these films and Hegel's Romantic art reveal something about the status of film as a Hegelian Modern Art remains.

First, we must consider how Hegel distinguishes Modern art from Romantic art. When Hegel discusses the 'end of art' after Romantic art, it is not the case that he believes Modern art will be "redundant" or "irrelevant."³⁹ Instead, he believes that Modern art will *not* need to adhere to "a particular subject matter" or "mode of portrayal" in order to present human freedom.⁴⁰ Instead, only more intellectual things like philosophy and religion will reveal more of the truth of the spirit's journey toward the Absolute. However, Modern art might still add its own contributions to this investigation of the spirit's journey.

Hegel contends that so long as the modern artist continues to *transcend* what already appears in nature through some artistic rendering, Modern art is capable of being true and beautiful art. Hegel also notes that Modern artists may incorporate elements of past forms of art (including Symbolic, Classical, and Romantic art), so long as the use of these elements are intentional and necessary in conveying whatever aspect of the modern human spirit the artist is trying to capture. Further, Hegel believes that Modern art must create a feeling of "being at home" for the spirit—the

³⁹ Rutter, Benjamin. *Hegel on the Modern Arts*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. Web .p. 9

⁴⁰ Hegel, *Aesthetics Vol 1*, p. 605.

particular journey of the spirit must be conveyed in such a way that is a true representation of human life.⁴¹ These qualifications that Hegel places on Modern art are by no means exclusive—he seems optimistic that there are many ways in which Modern art can depict the spirit.

So if it is the case that there is some *particular* element of the human spirit that these two German Expressionist filmmakers are attempting to capture (beyond the same *kind* of subjectivity Hegel believes Romantic art has to depict), we might consider what kind of uniquely *modern* spirit might arise via elements of Romantic art. I believe that in the case of *Student of Prague* and *Faust*, there is a more specific and salient subjective mood that the Expressionists are trying to capture—the melancholy spirit.

Symbols of Melancholy

Medieval definitions of ‘melancholy’ were primarily influenced by the medical and humoral traditions associated with alchemy. Black bile, old age, and Saturn as the ruling planet were all symbols associated with the melancholy temperament. Albrecht Durer’s 1514 engraving, *Melancholia I* encapsulates many of these ancient symbols of melancholy into a single image (Figure 18). We see the keys and coin purse that indicate a link between the engraving’s character and the avariciousness and power of the typical melancholic spirit.⁴² Additionally, the drooping head, supported by a single hand with clenched fist is distinctive of the melancholy character.⁴³ The last notable element is the way in which the melancholy character’s face is often hidden behind a shadow, and how shadow and light are used strategically to highlight the character’s gaze.⁴⁴ And indeed, these symbols all appear in *Student of Prague* and *Faust*. However, this is more than just a coincidence.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 607.

⁴² Klibansky, Saxl, and Panofsky. *Saturn and Melancholy*. Cambridge: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd, 1964. Print. p. 284.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 286, 290, 319.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 290, 319, 320.

The first visual indication that Murnau's *Faust* might concern matters of the melancholy spirit comes in the introduction to Faust's character. Like Goethe's version of Faust, Murnau chooses to describe Faust specifically as an alchemist, rather than just a typical scholar, who learns and teaches the ways of science. We see Faust standing behind what appears to be a diorama of the planet Saturn—the ruling planet of the melancholy in alchemist's terms (Figure 19). At the very least, this provides us with some indication that Murnau was familiar with the association between Faust and the melancholy spirit.



Figure 19—*Faust and Saturn*

The second notable symbol from *Melancholia I* is in the scene from *Student of Prague* where Scapinelli explains to Balduin the terms and conditions of their contract. Here, we see that Scapinelli pulls out a coin purse and pours the contents onto Balduin's desk (Figure 20). In analyses of Durer's engraving, the symbol of the coin purse is said to affirm that "those who rule and subdue others to their sway" is also "beloved of noble people, and counts the mightiest among his friends."⁴⁸ In other words, the person with the coin purse holds the power that others envy. The Faustian character in *Student of Prague*, Balduin, is greedy for the power, wealth, and prestige that

⁴⁸ Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 285.

Scapinelli has and offers. Balduin thereby displays the sort of avariciousness associated with a typical melancholy character.



Figure 20—*Scapinelli's Coin Purse*

The most distinguishable similarity between Durer's engraving and the melancholy we see in *Student of Prague* and *Faust* is the posture of Balduin (Figure 21) and Faust (Figure 22). If it is the case that “The primary significance of [the cheek resting on one hand...] is grief [...], but it may also mean fatigue or creative thought [meditation],”⁴⁹ then it seems as though the symbolism behind this posture has less to do with specific alchemical or physical ailments, and more to do with a mental state. In Balduin's case, we see him resting in this posture before Scapinelli appears. He seems to grieve the lack of love in his life, yearning for something more than he has. In contrast, Faust sits in the same position when he faces the reality of his pact with Mephisto; he seems regretful of his decision and wishes only to return to normal. So the external position of the Faustian characters symbolizes their inner mood of grief, regret, and longing for something other than their life at present.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 286-287.



Figure 21—*Balduin, Hand on Cheek*



Figure 22—*Faust, Hand on Cheek*

Romantic Melancholy

Here, we might consider how, even if it was the case that Romantic art and literature, particularly Goethe's version of Faust, incorporated these medieval symbols of melancholy (which thus appeared in the filmic versions of the story), the Romantic understanding of the term shifted significantly. Instead of categorizing melancholy as a physical condition rooted in the science of alchemy, the melancholy spirit of Romantic art and literature became more psychological—it described a “transitory, impermanent, [...] poetic” mood transferable to “objects... spaces, light, notes or landscapes.”⁵⁰ According to even later interpretations of melancholy, the disposition arises due to the loss of an object that may be material, or “an abstraction... such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on.”⁵¹ The characters feel a sense of melancholy because they come to terms with the loss of an object or ideal that they believed they once had.

In the narrative of both *The Student of Prague* and *Faust*, we see why the Faustian characters have reason to feel this kind of melancholy. They both wish for something beyond themselves—love for Balduin; power and knowledge for Faust. We might consider again the way that Hegel

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 365 n. 283.

⁵¹Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. James Strachey. Ed. Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson. Vol. XIV. London: Hogarth, n.d. 243-58. Web. P 243.

designates the content of the Faustian story as an exemplary work of poetry in that it addresses the spirit's quest for unity with the Absolute—the spirit expresses its desire for something transcendent, that earthly and natural conditions do not permit. Both Balduin and Faust develop a melancholy spirit after coming to terms with the fact that the limits of their earthly bodies cannot grant them the spiritual fulfillment that they desire. At this point, it seems apparent that Ewers and Murnau in some way captured the same kind of interiority in their Faustian characters that we would find Hegelian Romantic art attempting to do. So at the very least, we have reason to believe that the subjectivity that these two German Expressionist films sought to investigate is akin to the inner spirit Hegel seeks in other forms of art.

On the one hand, we might be inclined to accept that perhaps German Expressionism is simply a continuation of the essence of Romantic art—these films provide evidence that Modern art is redundant and cannot capture anything more of the spirit than Romantic art could have. However, I believe that if we consider German Expressionist film as *self-reflexive products* of modernity, we might see that they capture the melancholy spirit in a uniquely modern sense. Therefore, film maintains its status as a Modern art that intentionally draws most heavily upon elements of Hegel's Romantic art.

The Modern art of German Melancholy

After World War I, Germans struggled to regain their sense of national identity and intellectual esteem they had enjoyed in the 18th and 19th centuries. Cultural critics describe the German cultural sentiment as a sense of being “lost” and caught in a psyche of permanent “anxiety” and “disenchantment.”⁵² After WWI, the expansion of technology and industry lead to a rapidly materializing Germany. As the economic mindset shifted towards modes of efficiency and production, the intellectual ideologies of the culture began to change as well. Whereas before the

⁵² See Aitken, Hansen, Rutter, Trifonova

war intellectual thought drew from German idealism and other post-Enlightenment theory, the foundation of these ideologies depended on beliefs seemingly incompatible with the modernist hegemony of scientific, rational thought.

The German “spirit,” so closely tied to its intellectual identity, had been predicated on the belief in the “natural right to freedom and self-determination... the improbability of mankind... [and] a commitment to virtue.”⁵³ In other words, there was an expectation that the modern era would evoke a certain “freedom” promised by the idealism of the 19th century; modernity defined “the failure of the promise to become autonomous.”⁵⁴ Yet when these idealistic thoughts were replaced with a much more deterministic “unfree” rationalism, a spirit of discontent and anxiety overtook Germany. Miriam Hansen summarizes this sentiment: the “anxiety” associated with modernity comes from the development of a “perverted rationality” that replaces the idealism destroyed by WWI.⁵⁵

If we consider this post-war situation of Germany in light of the conditions that give rise to the melancholy spirit, we see that the cultural identity Germany longed to recover after WWI soon became the “lost object” that engendered their own melancholy spirit.

If we consider the fact that Ewers and Murnau both chose to recreate the Faustian tale—which we have seen deals explicitly with the idea of a melancholy spirit—we can understand why so many film theorists describe German Expressionism as uniquely self-reflexive and concerned with “explorations of the conditions of possibility for any kind of identity.”⁵⁶ Aware of the cultural identity crisis facing their own country, German Expressionist filmmakers sought to capture their own melancholy with the recognition that they could not enjoy the freedom of the modern era for which they had hoped.

⁵³ Pippin, Robert. *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*. 2nd ed. Wiley-Blackwell, 1999. Print. P. 4

⁵⁴ Ibid p. 3

⁵⁵ Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 7

⁵⁶ Trifonova, Temenuga, ed. *European Film Theory*. New York and London: Taylor & Francis, 2008. Print.p. Xiv.

As Kracauer argues, “film is material expression—not just representation—of a particular historical experience.”⁵⁷ In the case of *Student of Prague* and *Faust*, the historical experience is not just a recreation of the melancholy of the Faustian character, but an intentional product of the melancholy experienced by the entire German identity, particularly during the Weimar era. German Expressionist filmmakers like Ewers and Murnau recognized the ways in which film could incorporate elements of many other art forms, including theater, architecture, and painting, to capture the inner subjectivity experienced by a melancholy spirit—a spirit modeled after that of Modern Germany. I believe that Hegel would find the incorporation of elements of Romantic art both a necessary and intentional means by which these filmmakers sought to capture a particular dimension of the human spirit that was unique to modernity. In this way, I believe *Student of Prague* and *Faust* leave us with reason to believe that film, and German Expressionism in particular, warrants a status of a Hegelian Modern art.

⁵⁷ Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 10.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aitken, Ian. *European Film Theory and Cinema: A Critical Introduction*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001. Print.
- Bohm, Arnd. *Goethe's Faust and European Epic: Forgetting the Future*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007. Print.
- Eisner, Lotte H. *The Haunted Screen; Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*. Berkeley: U of California, 1969. Print.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. James Strachey. Ed. Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson. Vol. XIV. London: Hogarth, n.d. 243-58. Web.
- Hansen, Miriam. *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno*. Berkeley: U of California, 2012. Print.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art ; Vol 1*. Ed. Thomas M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988. Print.
- *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art ; Vol. 2*. Ed. Thomas M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988. Print.
- Klibansky, Raymond, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl. *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*. London: Nelson, 1964. Print.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. Ed. Leonardo Quaresima. Revised and Expanded ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2004. Print.
- Pippin, Robert B. *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA, USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999. Print.
- Prager, Brad. "Taming Impulses: Murnau's Sunrise and the Exorcism of Expressionism." *Literature Film Quarterly* 28.4 (2000): 284-293. Web.

Rutter, Benjamin. *Hegel on the Modern Arts*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. Web.

Trifonova, Temenuga, ed. *European Film Theory*. New York and London: Taylor & Francis, 2008.

Print.

FILMOGRAPHY

Der Student von Prag/The Student of Prague. Directed by Hanns Heinz Ewers and Stellan Rye.

Performed by Paul Wegener. 1913.

Faust. Directed by F.W. Murnau. Performed by Emil Jannings. 1926.