Discussion Questions: Week 2

* Dixon and Foster write that French experimental filmmaker Germaine Dulac “is responsible for ‘writing’ a new cinematic language that expressed transgressive female desires in a poetic manner.” Using her film *The Smiling Madame Beudet* (1923), pinpoint examples where you believe this to be the case. How can cinema “write”? Is it appropriate to understand filmmaking as a “grammar” or do you find this metaphor lacking? If so, how? (the film can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VA8NBhipvs>)

In this film they show the dreams of the first female where she sees a car in a magazine then dreams about flying through the sky on it. She then dreams about a burly man that she may desire more than her current husband who then carries her husband away while he is nagging her. The cinema shows a new form of editing that more or less allows the viewer to understand what the women want and shows how they desire things to be in almost an odd day dreaming kind of view. Yes it is. Film making has a specific grammar that depending on what is shown allows for different interpretations of the film as a whole. Each film however is different so in general the grammar should stick to almost a specific format otherwise the viewer may become lost or confused.

* Thomas Elsaesser makes a bold claim in his essay on German cinema during the Weimar years. He says that, generally, histories of the period have looked to the present in which the films were made, with relation to German Expressionism in other art forms. Others have taken the “parade of tyrants, madmen, somnambulists, crazed scientists, and homunculi” to anticipate the subsequent horrors of Nazi Germany. But none have considered, says Elsaesser, the possibility that the works of the period “look back” by “cocking a snook at Romanticism and neo-Gothic.” Essentially, Elsaesser’s concern is one of **periodization**, or the imposing of a timeline or framework on a particular historical period. How should we go about understanding the collective emphasis of any given periodization? In other words, how might you go about determining which of these three possibilities (past, present, future) is most appropriate in the case of German cinema during the 1920s? What would *best* count as evidence?

When looking at something in the past we must also consider the fact that they too have a history and references to culture. At that point in time Elsaesser is saying that Germany as a whole shouldn't be represented by what he considers to be almost a gross sadism from the films produced but that we must look at the films from their point of view in that they referenced, as Elsaesser said, "... a snook at Romanticism and neo-Gothic." So to translate this into today’s terms it’s kind of like a throwback Thursday in that their popular culture at the time was more or less making fun of or even just displaying somewhat of a historical period in which the general population was interested in. In summary should be viewed in a historical referenced aspect rather than as an overall view as to the country at the time of the first World War.

* *M* (Germany, 1931) immediately announces itself as different from a silent film through the voice of a child, whose commands in a schoolyard game are uttered before the first image has appeared on screen. That is, this is a *sound* film. Explain how director Fritz Lang uses sound either as a supplement to images or, if appropriate, in place of a concrete image to make a narrative or thematic point. Use at least two examples. Also, name the narrative irony involving sound and hearing in place of sight that helps break the case.

Even from the beginning he uses sounds such as the car horn to show us that a car is coming and that she needs to get out of the way. Something very simple but at this time it shows a new grammar in film making. It gives the viewer hints and allows them to deduce new information about the story through auditory information. Using sound in this way allows for many more possibilities of telling a story while editing. Also near the beginning after Elsie has not yet come home it pans to a shot of an empty place at the dining table to more or less suggest she may never return. It’s almost an eerie kind of editing that gives the viewer a foreshadowing almost of what is to come. At the end its his whistling that gives him away so it’s just rather ironic that a blind beggar is the one who finally recognizes the killer.

* Siegfried Kracauer says that, in *M*, “the film’s true center is the murderer himself.” Evaluate Kracauer’s case for this statement and explain why you agree or disagree. If Hans Beckert (the murderer) is not “the film’s true center,” then who (or what) is?

There isn't really a main character in this film but rather just a bunch of people trying to figure out who in fact the killer is. The killer is the center of attention and therefore unmasking him and bringing him to justice is the entire purpose of this film. However there wasn’t any one person who became a hero or played a bigger role than the killer. Even though the murderer was in the background of the film for a very large amount of time, he never lost the spotlight and became even more of the main character so to speak whenever he was finally caught. So I agree with Siegfried in that he is the films true center. If he wasn't the true center then I would argue that the blind beggar is, as he takes on the role of the hero in identifying the murderer by his whistling.