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German Culture Through Film

15 December 2023

### German Horror Cinema

Since it was first conceived, film has embedded itself deeply in the culture of people of all walks of life. It was a technology used to capture human emotion, and share it amongst the masses. Of this one genre has stood out against the rest in standing out amongst the rest. Horror, as a genre, is one of easiest genres to produce through film, however, it also is the most difficult to get right. When horror is done correctly it leaves you with a constant feeling of dread that lingers on and stays with you, and yet it is one people find themselves still coming back to even after the credits roll. Germany is no different in this regard, and its interesting history and less active present make it a very interesting case study to see how Horror Cinema has evolved over the years.

Horror Cinema in Germany started in the wake of World War I with the German Expressionist Movement. This was a point in German history where artists were tired of objective reality in their art, and chose to express this through surreal and symbolic environments. It also utilized large contrasts between light and darkness in a way that helped enhance the themes of Morbidity and Nihilism. This can be seen especially in the silent film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, a movie often referred to as the first German horror film. The high contrasts in light and darkness are on display in full force here. Much of the makeup used on the

performers was done to exaggerate the shadows on their faces, allowing the shadows to feel deeper and give the live performers a more cartoonish appearance. One of the most striking parts of the set, however, is its use of physical sets. Much of the set is painted in a way where the lighting is part of the design. All of this creates some of the most visually striking live action scenes seen to date that look as though they are straight out of a Dr. Seuss book.

Moving past the first world war, World War II marks a point in German Horror Cinema where there was a severe lack of this art form. In fact, no Horror films were made at all during the Nazi Regime. From 1933 to 1989 only 79 films were made from Germany that could fit the theme of “horror,” and 45 of those films were Co-Productions with other countries. After the war, however, horror movies did seem to find a level of production, however, most of these films were focused on eroticism rather than horror narrative. The reason for this isn’t fully known, but this idea of eroticism and use of sexuality in addition to disturbing visuals seems to carry itself into future forms of German Horror Cinema.

As the 80’s kicked off multiple films began to find their footing, creating their own genre of horror called German Underground Horror. This genre was considered wildly taboo due to their depiction of extremely violent behavior that would be inappropriate to name in a college paper. This image was later shed in favor of themes more similar to splatter and gore, rather than the previously unnamed topics.

A film that recently, entitled *Der Goldene Handschuh*, was released back in 2019 shares this depiction of Underground Horror. The film is actually a real life recreation of the actions of a famous German serial killer named Fritz Honka. The film is extremely gorey and downright disturbing at times, carrying a lot of those themes of sexuality and gore mentioned before.

Beyond those solitary points though, it also creates a very good character study of the serial killer. You can, at times, perfectly predict the actions of Fritz before they happen purely from the scenes preceding it. It was in those moments I found myself both fascinated and also disgusted with the film's ability to put its audience inside the mind of a serial killer so well.

One incredibly prominent name to come out of the German Underground Horror scene was a director by the name of Uwe Boll. Boll has created dozens of films, many of which are horror themed. His notoriety, unfortunately for him, does not come from a place of respect nor quality, but rather from the sheer ability he has to create poor films. Just a brief look at his IMDB page shows dozens of films that are four out of ten stars or worse. It is actually quite impressive to have that many films perform that horribly, and yet still be given countless IPs to create films with. At this point, it seems more likely that it's a joke by corporations to hand him the film rights rather than an actual attempt to create quality films.

As horror films move forward in Germany there is one glaring thing of note when it comes to the present production of these films: there hardly seems to be any. Most of the films that come out of Germany aren't horror at all, and it looks like the grandeur scene of cinema in Germany dare not dive into that world. And while that is unfortunate given Germany's visually striking start with Dr. Caligari, horror film makers from Germany have thought outside of the box in this regard. It seems as though Co-Productions have become the more realistic approach to these creatives. Though it's unfortunate that fully German films won't have the roots they need in the Horror Genre, it is good news that filmmakers that love Horror films are finding their own way to tell the stories they want to tell.