



NOIR  
or  
HARD-BOILED  
?

## Author Megan Abbott on Hardboiled...

Hardboiled is distinct from noir, though they're often used interchangeably. The common argument is that hardboiled novels are an extension of the wild west and pioneer narratives of the 19th century. The wilderness becomes the city, and the hero is usually a somewhat fallen character, a detective or a cop. At the end, everything is a mess, people have died, but the hero has done the right thing or close to it, and order has, to a certain extent, been restored. *Law and Order* is a great example of the hardboiled formula in a contemporary setting.

<https://lithub.com/megan-abbott-on-the-difference-between-hardboiled-and-noir/>

## And on Noir

Noir is different. In noir, everyone is fallen, and right and wrong are not clearly defined and maybe not even attainable. In that sense, noir speaks to us powerfully right now, when certain structures of authority don't make sense any longer, and we wonder: Why should we abide by them? Noir thrived in the 40s after the Depression and World War II, and in the 70s, with Watergate and Vietnam, for similar reasons.

EXAMPLE: *Law and Order*

# LA

In postwar Los Angeles, the putative birthplace of noir, there was rampant corruption in the police, rampant racism, these appalling “sex crimes” that dominated headlines. A low hum of hysteria in the air. We can feel it now. Even if crime is, say, here in New York City, at a historic low, the threat of domestic terrorism—school shootings, lone gunmen—feels palpable. In eras tinged with chaos in the popular imagination, noir thrives.

## Noir, sex and desire

At the same time, noir is also weirdly ahistorical. Regardless of national mood, people respond on a visceral level to certain essential drives: wanting things we can't have, wishing for things that are forbidden. I'm talking, now, about taboos, which noir has always depicted, especially in the realm of the sexual: incest, or adultery, or, when it was still considered a perversion, same-sex desire. Noir has always been a place where these desires run amok.

# Hard-boiled

Extension of the WILD WEST narratives of the 19th century.

The detective-hero is fallen but some kind of order prevails at the end

# Noir

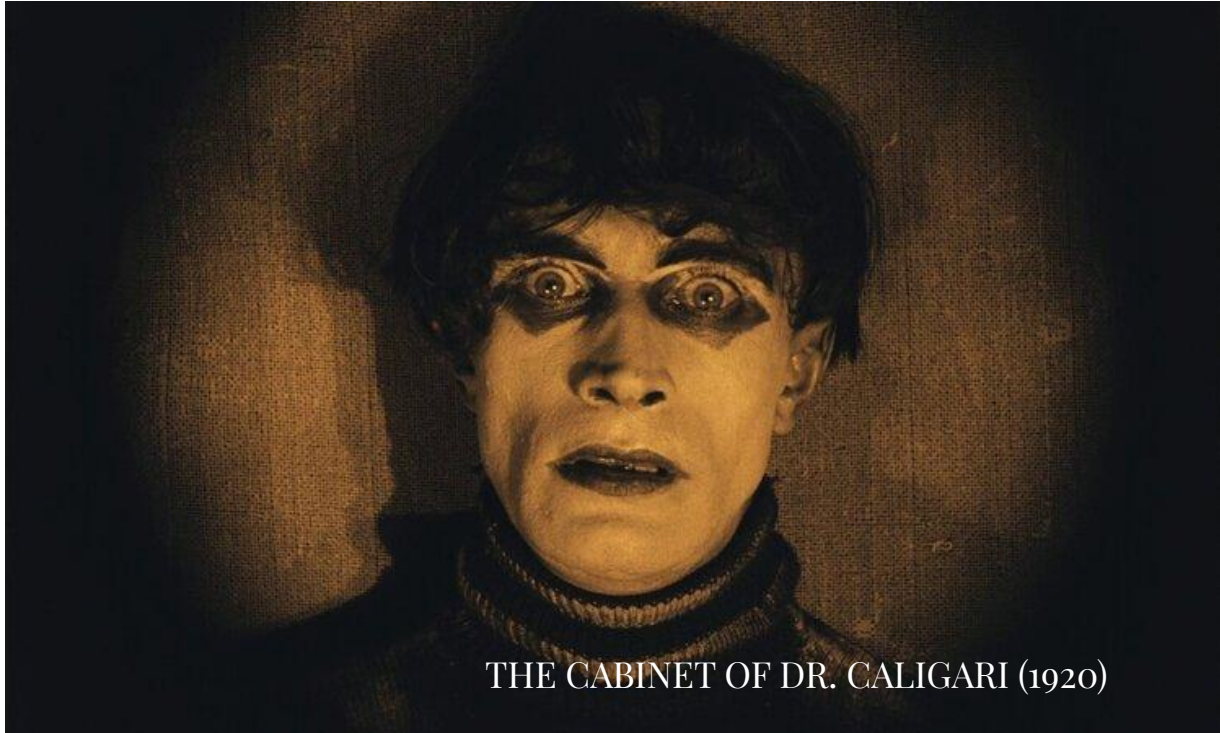
Everyone seems fallen

Right and wrong are hard to define.



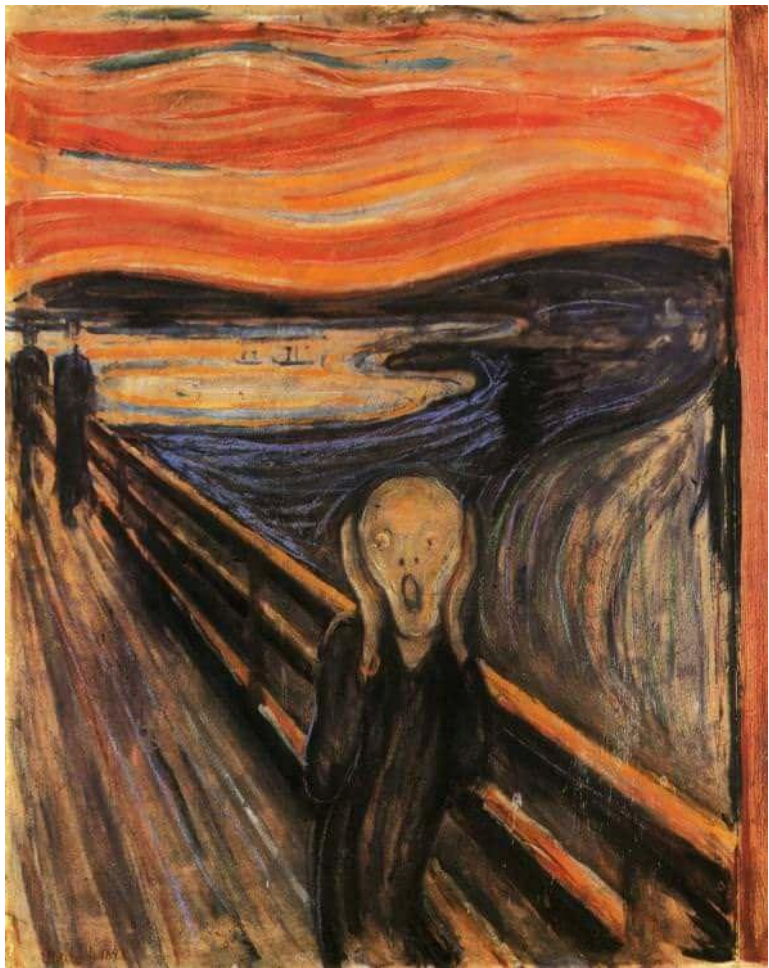
# German Expressionism

early 20th century (1919–1931)



THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI (1920)

As the name suggests, German expressionist filmmakers used visual distortion and hyper-expressive performance to show inner turmoils, fears and desires of that era. German Expressionism reflects the inner conflicts of its 1920s German audience by giving their woes an inescapably external presence. By rejecting cinematic realism, expressionist films showcase dramatic, revolutionary interpretations of the human condition.



# From the Arts to Film

The Scream, 1893 by Norwegian artist  
Edvard Munch

PROTO-EXPRESSIONISM

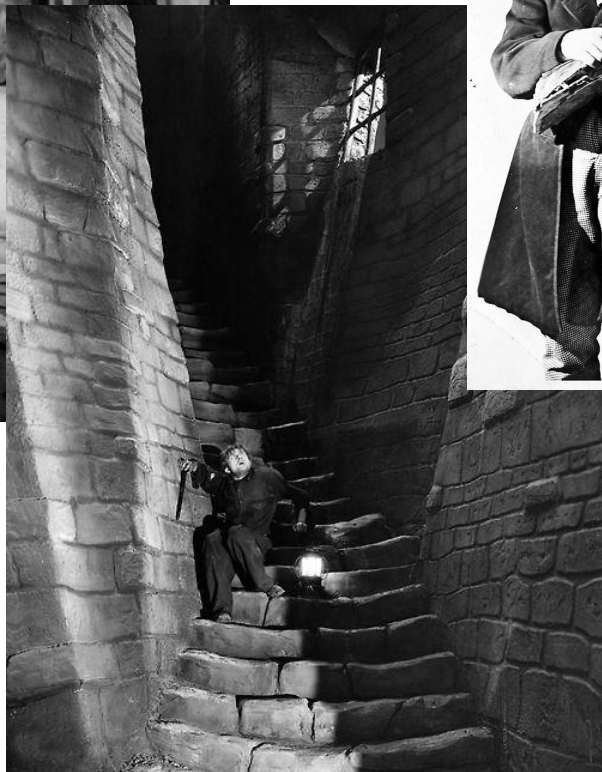
# Among the first Expressionist films:

The Student of Prague (1913),  
The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920), From Morn to Midnight (1920), The  
Golem: How He Came into the World (1920), Genuine (1920), Destiny  
(1921), Nosferatu (1922), Phantom (1922), and Schatten (1923)

highly symbolic and stylized.

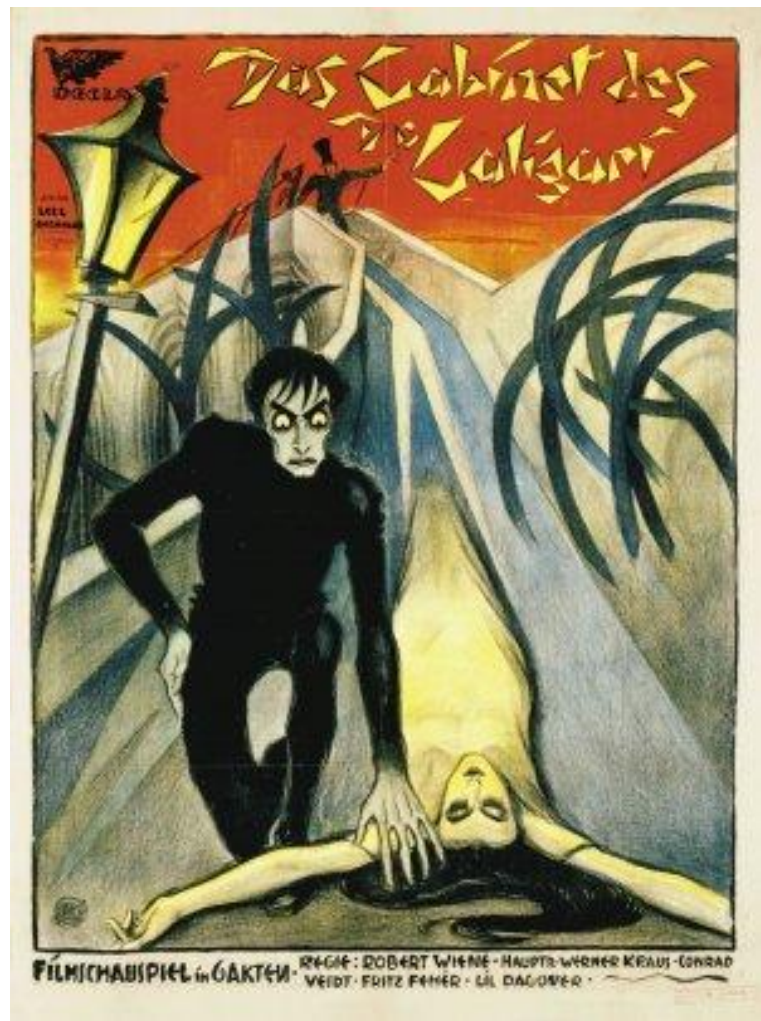
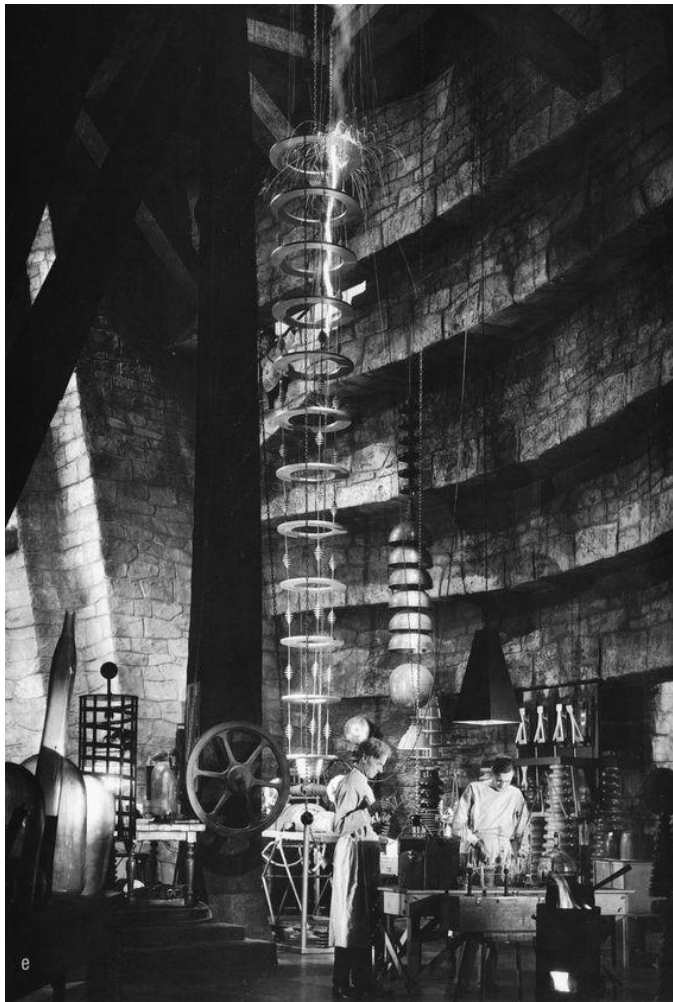


## The cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920)











# NOSFERATU

Regie Friedrich-Wilhelm Murnau  
Ein Meisterwerk des Expressionismus  
Hier gedreht im Jahre 1921

1927

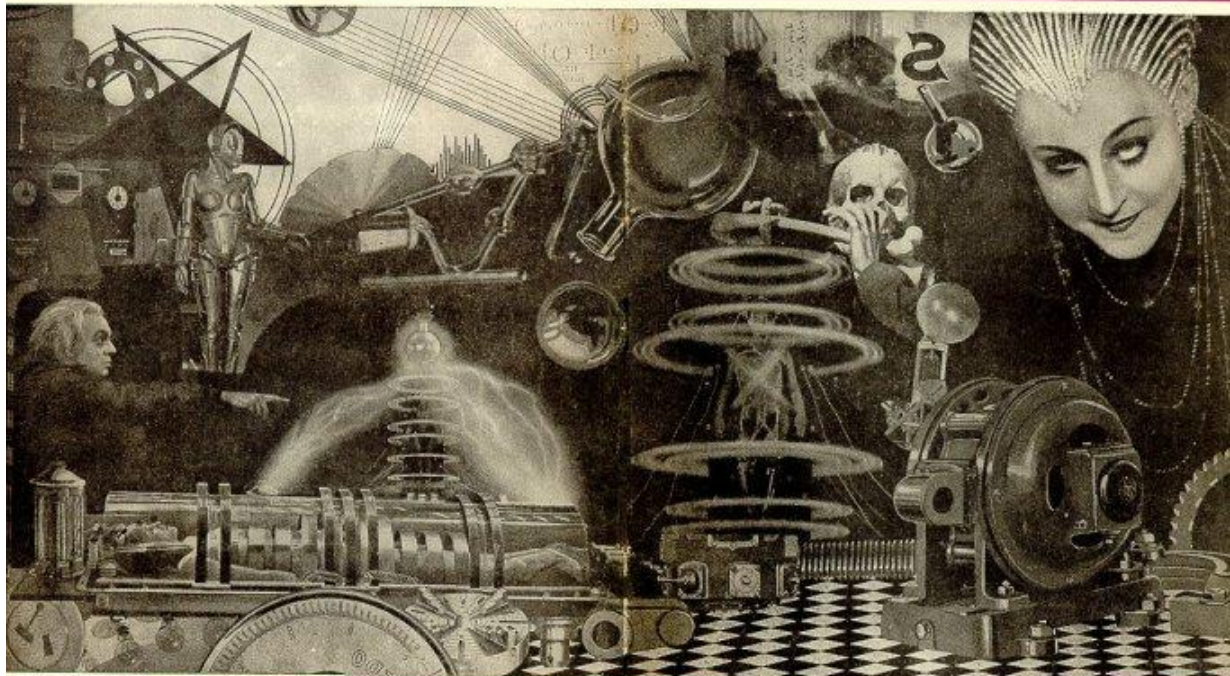


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1<sup>er</sup> NOVEMBRE 1927.

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Music by GUSTAV HARTUNG. Produced by ERICH POMMER. Directed by FRITZ LANG

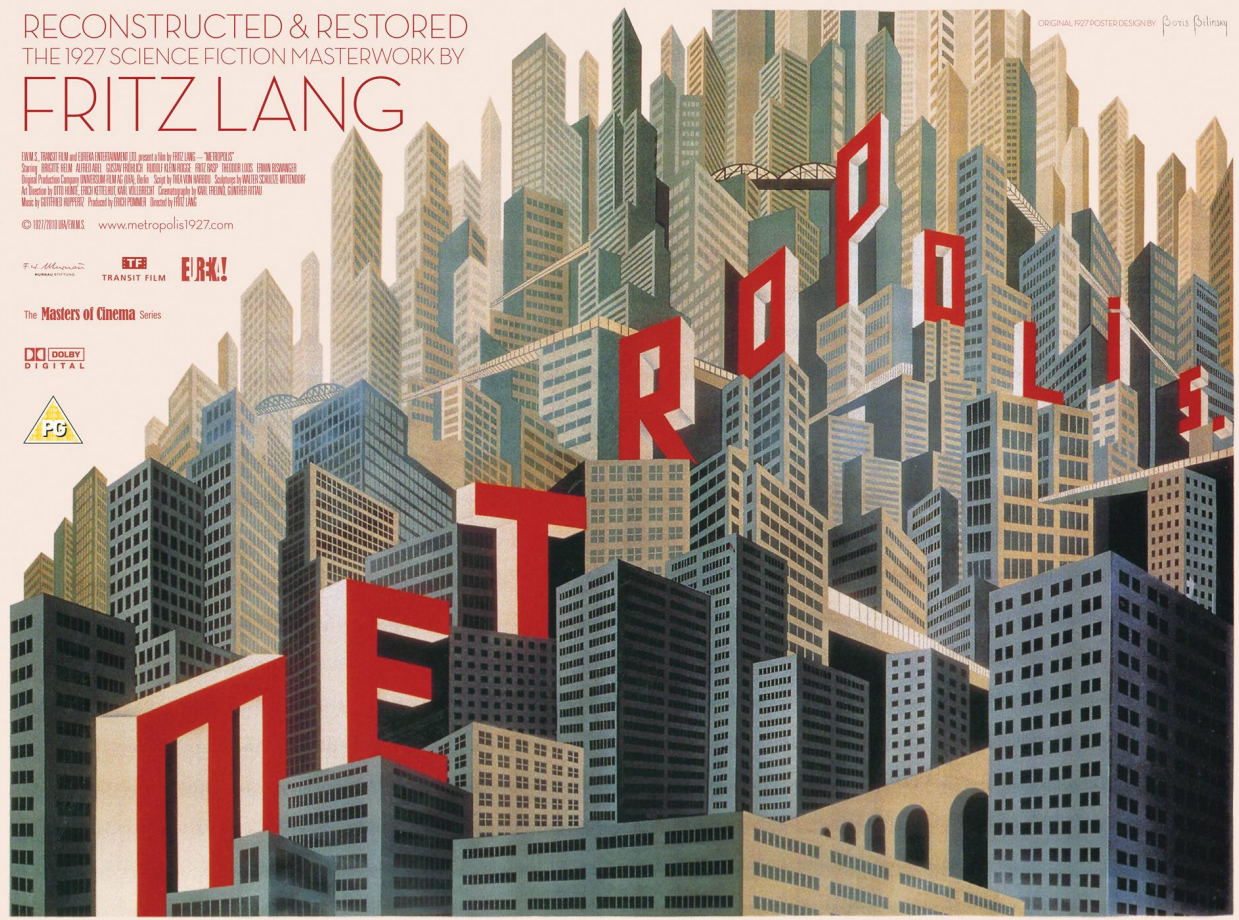
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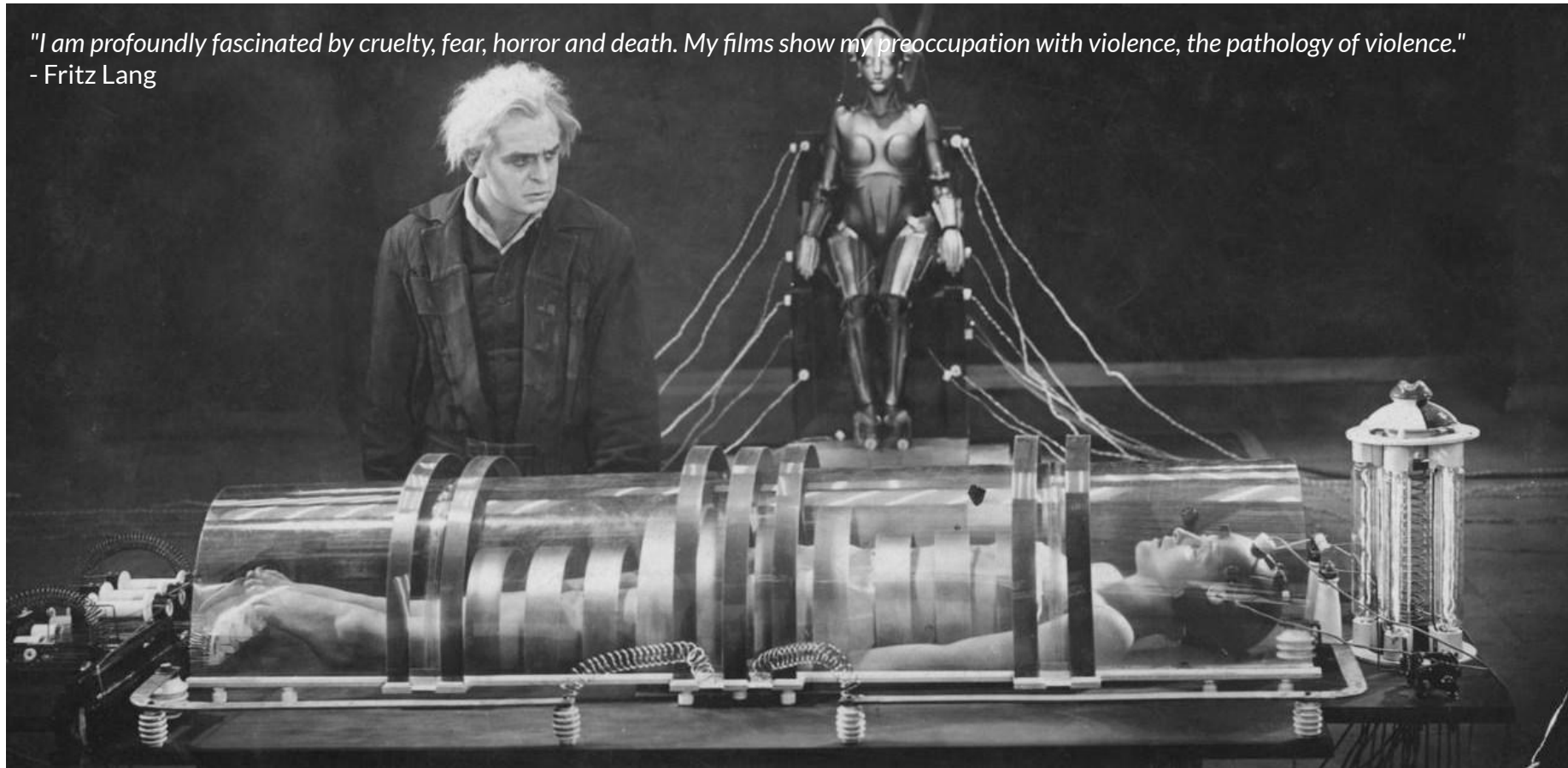


PARUFAMET

„Metropolis“



*"I am profoundly fascinated by cruelty, fear, horror and death. My films show my preoccupation with violence, the pathology of violence."*  
- Fritz Lang



# The Elements of Film Noir

By Tessa Chudy · December 9, 2015



<https://thescriptlab.com/features/main/3438-the-elements-of-film-noir/4/>

# NOIR and NEO-NOIR

Film Noir literally meaning dark film is the term coined by French critics to describe the creeping darkness that they saw in a cycle of American films beginning in the 1940s. This darkness was a reflection of the social and cultural uncertainty that pervaded WWII era America. The darkness was expressed visually in the dark imagery and expressionistic shadows and in the subject matter which has been traditionally crime/murder stories. Traditionally the setting of Noir has been urban, hard edged cities that never sleep. The classic era of Film Noir fell roughly between 1940 and 1960, when it morphed into Neo-Noir.

Neo-Noir falls into three distinct categories retro – recreating the setting and elements of classic era Film Noir, revisionist – where the conventions are pushed to their limits and/or transplanted into a different genre, and the straight Neo-Noir which updates the elements of Film Noir to a contemporary time and place.

<https://thescriptlab.com/features/main/3438-the-elements-of-film-noir/4/>

# Darkness

The thing about darkness in Film Noir is that it is not just a physical thing, even though it seems that much of the action in classic Film Noir occurs at night, the darkness and its expressive shadows is a reflection and manifestation of the both the psychological and emotional darkness that besets the characters and of the true nature of the treacherous reality that they inhabit as in **Out of The Past** (1947) where long stretches of the movie occur at night, but even the daylight scenes are unusually dark, and reflect the nightmarish past that the central character attempts to escape.



# Low-key lighting

Low-key lighting is a style of lighting for photography, film or television. It is a necessary element in creating a chiaroscuro effect. Traditional photographic lighting (three-point lighting) uses a key light, a fill light and a back light for illumination. Low-key lighting often uses only a key light, optionally controlled with a fill light or a simple reflector.

Low key light accentuates the contours of the subject by throwing areas into shade while a fill light or reflector may illuminate the shadow areas to control contrast





# FATALISM

This may be going a bit deep but it is important to remember that the world contained within Film Noir is a bleak one, happy endings are rare and the general mood is one of cynical pessimism in the face of an uncaring universe.



# VOICE-OVER

A common narrative device employed in Film Noir is the voice-over where one of the characters narrates their story. The voice-over gives immediacy to the story and can be seen as a way for the character to try and make sense of what has happened to them. The voice-over can be the conventional detective narrating how a blonde walked into their office or something a bit more dramatic like the corpse in the swimming pool in **Sunset Boulevard** (1950) narrating the events that led to his floating face down in that pool.



# FLASHBACKS

There is a strong sense that the past is inescapable and/or more powerful than the present and this can be underlined by the frequent use of flashbacks. The past for many Noir characters is eternally returning and they can never escape its pull. Flashbacks also serve to undermine the stability of the narrative especially when narrated by different characters presenting alternative versions of the narrative, an example of this is **The Killers** (1946) where an insurance investigator interrogates several characters and their stories told in flashback form the core of the narrative.



# Flawed Protagonist

Often the central characters of Noir are detectives, and it can be hard to separate the detective (the classic image is of Humphrey Bogart in his trench coat and hat, cigarette dangling from his lips, playing either Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe), from the Noir. But while private detectives and tough cops are common protagonists in Film Noir the general guide is imperfect. The Noir male can be flawed, weak, stupid, or a combination of all three, he can be a success or a failure, but he cannot escape his mistakes or the nightmare that they have landed him in.





# The Femme Fatale

The deadly woman at the heart of many Film Noirs is fatal to others and often to herself (in Neo-Noir this has changed somewhat). The femme fatale is seductive, beautiful and treacherous, often much stronger than the male characters, she's been around a few times and is out to get hers at any cost. The femme fatale can be completely ruthless and amoral (think **The Last Seduction** (1994)) or she can be a more of a tragic figure like Faye Dunaway in **Chinatown** (1974).



# TOP TEN NEO-NOIR FILMS

2. Chinatown (1974)

Directed by Roman Polanski, this film features a detective who is hired to investigate a woman's disappearance, only to discover a complex web of lies and corruption.

1. L.A. Confidential (1997)

Directed by John Dahl, this film follows three Los Angeles police officers as they investigate a series of murders, uncovering a dark and corrupt underworld.