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Expressionism, Impressionism & Soviet Montage Cinema
German Expressionism

- In the 1920s German cinema was second only to Hollywood
- Expressionism: art where reality is distorted in order to express emotions or inner vision
- *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920)
- Expressionist films are distinctive for their use of mise-en-scène
- Distorted and exaggerated sets, highly stylised acting, strong shadows
- Fantastic elements motivate uncanny mise-en-scène
Franz Marc – Deer in the forest
Some Expressionist Films

Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari (Wiene, 1920)
Der Golem (Wegener & Boese, 1920)
Genuine (Wiene, 1920)
Der Müde Tod (Lang, 1921)
Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler (Lang, 1922)
Nosferatu (Murnau, 1922)
Schatten (Robison, 1923)
Die Niebelungen (Lang, 1924)
Faust (Murnau, 1926)
Kammerspiel and the New Objectivity

• *Kammerspiel* = The chamber drama
• The chamber drama concentrates on few characters and explores their life in great detail
• Slow action, emphasis on details and emotions
• Small number of settings
• Many artists moved towards social criticism and began a trend known as *the new objectivity*
• Filmmakers explored life as it was lived on the streets
• These films exploit social ills
French Impressionism

• Hollywood imports dominated French film market and local production was in a crisis in the 1920s
• Many French filmmakers worked for their own small production companies
• A new generation of filmmakers explored the cinema as an art (impressionism/avant-garde)
• They were interested in pictorial beauty and psychology
• Impressionism aims to capture the visual impression made by a scene (a movement in the 19th century)
• *La Dixième symphonie* (1918)
Claude Monet - Sunrise
French Film Theory

- Art creates an experience and that experience leads to emotions
- Artworks are evocative and suggestive
- What is the essence of cinema? Is it the synthesis of all other arts? Is there something unique in cinema?
- *Photogénie* as the basis of the cinema
- The cinema lends an object a new expressivity by giving the viewer a fresh perception of it
- Films should be based on *visual rhythms*
Formal Traits of Impressionism

- The impressionist films contain various visions, memories and dreams
- Filters used to affect the look of the images
- Superimpositions
- Reflecting surfaces like windows and mirrors
- Images out of focus
- Slow motion
- Camera movements
- Rapid editing (since 1923)
- Realistic mise-en-scène
Some Impressionist Films

La Dixième symphonie (Gance, 1918)
J’Accuse (Gance, 1919)
El Dorado (L’Herbier, 1921)
La Roue (Gance, 1922)
Coeur fidèle (Epstein, 1923)
Crainquebille (Feyder, 1923)
L’Inondation (Delluc, 1924)
La Fille de l’eau (Renoir, 1925)
Menilmontat (Kirsanoff, 1926)
Napoléon vu par Abel Gance (Gance, 1927)
The Soviet Montage Cinema

• After the October revolution one section of Russian film industry went into exile
• Soviet filmmakers strove to broke with the heritage and wanted to create a new cinema
• A state film school was established in 1919
• *The Kuleshov effect*: the meaning of a montage sequence in cinema is determined not by the content of the montage elements, but their juxtaposition
• Cinema as a tool for propaganda and education
• *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925)
Vladimir Tatlin
– Monument for the third international
Constructivism and Film Theory

- Constructivism is an aesthetic, which is based on the futurist cult of the machine
- Art inevitably fulfils a social function
- Artist as an engineer
- An artwork is like a machine (put together from parts)
- An artwork can be calculated to elicit a certain reaction
- Montage was seen as the basis of revolutionary cinema
- Soviet filmmakers had different montage conceptions
- Sergei Eisenstein: in montage antithetical elements clash and produce a synthesis that goes beyond both
Formal Traits of the Montage Cinema

- Many montage films downplay individual characters
- These are films about masses and crowds
- Rapid editing speed
- Individual actions are often broken into shots
- Overlapping editing
- Elliptical editing
- Low-angel framings and blank backgrounds
- Realistic mise-en-scène
- Stylise acting (characters are often types)
Some Montage Films

Strike (Eisenstein, 1925)
The Battleship Potemkin (Eisenstein, 1925)
Mother (Pudovkin, 1926)
The House on Trubnoya Street (Barnet, 1927)
The End of St. Petersburg (Pudovkin, 1927)
October (Eisenstein, 1928)
Lace (Yutkevich, 1928)
Man with a Movie Camera (Vertov, 1929)
Earth (Dovzhenko, 1930)