

Freie Universität Berlin
FU-BEST Program
Dr. Philipp Stiasny

German Cinema before 1945

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

German Cinema to 1945 offers an overview of the development of film in Germany from World War I through the end of the National Socialist period. Although this course centers on close readings of works that belong to the canon of German film, it also includes examples of popular, experimental, and documentary filmmaking. The course hopes to achieve three interrelated aims: 1) to introduce students to fundamental elements of film and film analysis; 2) to foster a critical understanding of how film functions both as entertainment and as an art form; 3) to explore the developments within German film in light of specific historical and cultural frameworks, but also to make students aware of the complicated issues involved in defining any unified national cinema, specifically, the pitfalls inherent in ready conceptions of German cinema. This course assumes no prior knowledge of German language, German films, or film theory in general. It is taught in English and all sound-films have English subtitles.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Independent Course Projects: In order to fulfill the requirements of this course, each student has to complete 2 short reports (1-2 pages each) on assigned topics to be written after individual field-trips to a selection of relevant sites. Turning in 2 such brief reports is mandatory.

Attendance and Participation: 20%

Attendance is required and will be taken into consideration for grading purposes. Assignments are to be read before coming to class. Each student will prepare brief commentaries and questions on the assigned readings to demonstrate that he/she has reflected upon the content of the readings. Also included in this percentage are in-class discussions. For each session, one student will be asked to chair the discussion.

Oral Presentation in class: 10%

Presentation of a core text (ca. 10 to 15 minutes) that will be assigned at the first session of our class. Each member of the class will be given a finished outline on the day of the presentation (1-2 pages).

Midterm Exam (in-class): 20%

One longer essay: topic of the essay may be selected from several questions that will be given to the students.

Final Exam (in-class): 20%

Short questions that require brief explanations of topics discussed after the midterm.

Term Paper: 30%

Research paper (8-10 pages, double-spaced) on a topic chosen by the students themselves but discussed and approved by the teacher. The student may work on one particular film or filmmaker, or on a wider topic from the time period. Topics and ideas may be generated by an examination of course readings. Additional bibliographical information will be given by the teacher.

COURSE READINGS:

Readings for individual sessions (see below) will be assembled in a course reader.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Introduction

Week 1 **German National Cinema**

Reading: Siegfried Kracauer, 'Introduction to *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (1947),' in Richard W. McCormack and Alison Guenther-Pal (eds.), *German Essays on Film* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 180-188.
Lotte H. Eisner, 'Introduction to *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (1952),' in Richard W. McCormack and Alison Guenther-Pal (eds.), *German Essays on Film* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 189-194.

Viewing: CINEMA EUROPE: GERMANY (1995, dir. K. Brownlow / D. Gill, 60 Min.)
THE OYSTER PRINCESS (1919, dir. E. Lubitsch, 60 Min.)

A. Weimar Cinema: Silent (1919-1919)

Week 2 **Paul Wegener and the Early Fantasy Film**

Reading: Thomas Elsaesser, 'Germany: The Weimar Years,' in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (ed), *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 136-151.
Kristin Thompson, 'Im Anfang war...: Some Links between German Fantasy Films of the Teens and the Twenties', in Paolo Cherchi Usai and Lorenzo Codelli (eds.), *Before Caligari: German Cinema, 1895-1920* (Pordenone: Edizioni Biblioteca dell'Immagine, 1990), pp. 138-161.

Viewing: THE GOLEM (1920, dir. P. Wegener / C. Boese, 84 Min.)

Week 3 **Expressionism in the Cinema**

Reading: Thomas Elsaesser, 'Social Mobility and the Fantastic: German Silent Cinema', in Mike Budd (ed.), *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 171-189
Mike Budd, 'The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari: Production, Reception, History', in Peter Lehman (ed.), *Close Viewings. An Anthology of New Film Criticism* (Tallahassee: The Florida State University Press, 1990), pp. 333-352.

Viewing: THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI (1919/20, dir. R. Wiene, 71 Min.)

Week 4 **The *Kammerspielfilm* and Subjective Realism**

Reading: F.W. Murnau, 'The Ideal Picture Needs No Titles: By Its Very Nature the Art of the Screen Should tell a Complete Story Pictorially', in Richard W. McCormack and Alison Guenther-Pal (eds.), *German Essays on Film* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 66-68
Marc Silberman, 'The Modernist Camera and Cinema Illusion: Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's *The Last Laugh*', from *German Cinema: Texts in Context* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), pp. 19-33.

Viewing: THE LAST LAUGH (1924, dir. F.W. Murnau, 90 Min.)

Week 5 **New Objectivity and the 'Cross Section Film'**

Reading: Siegfried Kracauer, 'Montage', from *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 181-189.
David Macrae, 'Ruttman, Rhythm and "Reality": A Response to Siegfried Kracauer's Interpretation of BERLIN. SYMPHONY OF A BIG CITY,' in Dietrich Scheunemann (ed.),

Expressionist Film: New Perspectives (Rochester: Camden House, 2003), pp. 251-270.

Viewing: BERLIN – SYMPHONY OF A BIG CITY (1927, dir. W. Ruttmann, 65 Min.)

Deadline: Independent Course Project: Report 1

Week 6 Midterm exam (in-class)

B. Weimar Cinema: Sound (1929-1932)

Week 7 Ufa, The Coming of Sound and the Star System

Reading: Gertrud Koch, 'Between Two Worlds: von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (1930)', in Eric Rentschler (ed.), *German Film and Literature: Adaptations and Transformations* (New York and London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 60-72.
S.S. Praver, *The Blue Angel (Der blaue Engel)* (London: BFI Publishing, 2002), pp. 10-76

Viewing: **THE BLUE ANGEL** (1930, dir. Josef von Sternberg, 106 Min.)

Week 8 The Urban Thriller and the Threats of Modernity

Reading: Lotte Eisner, 'M (1931)', from *Fritz Lang* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1976), pp. 111-128.
Anton Kaes, *M* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999, revised edition 2001), pp. 7-76.

Viewing: M (1931, dir. F. Lang, 105 Min.)

Deadline: Independent Course Project: Report 2

Week 9 The Proletarian Film

Reading: Marc Silberman, 'Whose Revolution? The Subject of *Kuhle Wampe* (1932)', in Noah Isenberg (ed.), *Weimar Cinema. An Essential Guide to the Classic Films of the Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 311-330.
Bruce Murray, 'The KPD and Film: From Stubborn Persistence to Eleventh-Hour Experiments with Alternative Forms of Production and Reception', from *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic: From Caligari to Kuhle Wampe* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 186-224.

Viewing: KUHLE WAMPE OR WHO OWNS THE WORLD (1932, dir. S. Dudov, 71 Min.)

C. 'Third Reich' Cinema (1933-1945)

Week 10 Avant-garde and/as Propaganda

Reading: Eric Rentschler, 'Germany: Nazism and After', in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (ed), *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 374-382.
Thomas Elsaesser, 'Leni Riefenstahl: The Body Beautiful, Art Cinema and Fascist Aesthetics', in Pam Cook and Philip Dodd (eds.), *Women and Film: A Sight and Sound Reader* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), pp. 186-197.

Viewing: THE TRIUMPH OF THE WILL (1935, dir. L. Riefenstahl, 122 Min.)

Week 11 The Spectacle of Self-Destruction: Popular Cinema and Ideology

Reading: Eric Rentschler, 'Self-Reflexive Self-Destruction: MÜNCHHAUSEN', from *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 193-213.
Sabine Hake, 'Popular Cinema, National Cinema, Nazi Cinema: A Definition of Terms', from *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich* (Austin: Texas University Press, 2001), pp. 1-22.

Viewing: MÜNCHHAUSEN (1943, dir. J. v. Baky, 110 Min.)

Deadline: Term Paper

D. Film Emigration and Film Noir

Week 12 Film noir: German Cinema's Historical Imaginary?

Reading: Lutz Koepnick, 'Berlin Noir: Robert Siodmak's Hollywood', from *The Dark Mirror: German Cinema between Hitler and Hollywood* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 164-200
Thomas Elsaesser, 'Caligari's Legacy? Film Noir as Film History's German Imaginary', from *Weimar Cinema and after: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 420-444.

Viewing: THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE (1945, dir. R. Siodmak, 81 Min.) [DVD]

Week 13 Final exam (in-class)