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Spring 2009

### German Film and the Frankfurt School (Spring 2009)

Robert D. Tobin

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**Clark University**

**German Film and the Frankfurt School**

*Communications and Culture 249*

*Screen Studies 250*

*German 250*

**Spring 2009**

Professor Tobin

M, W 12:00-1:15

Movie Screenings: Tuesday, 7-9:30 pm

My office: Estabrook 309

Tel: x-5393

e-mail: rtobin@clarku.edu

This course is an introduction to German cinema. We will study masterpieces of German film, important critical and theoretical discussions of them, and the contexts in which they were produced and received. As a critical lens, we will rely heavily on psychoanalytic and Frankfurt School criticism, focusing on writings by Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer and Theodor Adorno. By the end of the semester, students should know the history of German film, have a better understanding of German culture, and have developed a critical understanding that is useful for their appreciation of all cinematic forms.

On a broader level, some of the goals in this course include:

- *Increasing communication skills.* There will be extensive discussions, student presentations, papers, and work in new media, all with the goal of improving oral and written communication.
- *Deepening critical thinking.* Film is a medium that has such vast audiences—and it can affect those audiences so powerfully—that it is especially imperative that we learn demystify it, to think critically about our responses and reactions to it.
- *Preparing for a global society.* The focus in this class will be on German film and film theory. Through the media of film, we will be able to analyze important aspects of German history, culture and society. This can enrich our understanding of other cultures.
- *Understanding technological media better.* In an increasingly technological world, it is important to become familiar with technological media through intellectual analysis and hands-on practice.

Required Reading (aside from assorted hand outs):

GE German Essays on Film, ed. Richard W. McCormick and Alison Guenther-Pal (New York: Continuum, 2004).

Siegfried Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).

GCtF Robert Reimer, Reinhard Zachau and Margit Sinka, German Culture through Film: An Introduction to German Cinema (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2005).

<b>Requirements</b>	<b>Percentage of grade</b>
Assignments	10%
Pre-1945 paper	20%
Final Project Presentation	10%
Final Project	20%
Blog managing	10%
Blog responding	10%
Student-led discussion	10%
Participation	10%

### Discussion leading

This will usually be on Wednesday. Generally, you can use German Culture through Film as the basis for your work. Give fellow students a little background, come up with questions about the film, and generally incite a productive critique of the film. You might want to read one of the commentaries suggested in German Culture through Film, and report back to us on the main ideas of the commentary.

### Assignments

Throughout the semester, there will be short assignments due. These are generally indicated in bold on the syllabus.

### Blog managing

For a week, you will run our class weblog. In the weblog, I'd like you to briefly summarize class discussions and report on information that relates to the topics under discussion.

### Blog responding

All students not managing the blog need to read it at least once a week and respond to at least one of the entries or contribute an entry of their own.

### Pre-1945 papers

This paper should be a scholarly research paper, incorporating secondary literature, on a film released prior to 1945. If it is not one of the films that we have screened, contact me first. It should be between 6 and 10 pages.

### Final project

Your final project may be another research paper, of roughly ten pages.

Or you may do some kind of media project. In this multimedia final project, you will highlight aspects of German film or critical theory that you think are most important for others to know about. This could be a dvd with significant film clips, a web page with a variety of important documents, or even a short film.

Especially if you do a media project, you will need to be in contact with me early so we can make sure you get the technical assistance that you need!

### Presentation of projects

Whether you do a traditional research paper or a media project, you will give a short presentation of your work, ideally not more than 5-8 minutes.

Film Screenings: Films will be shown at 7 on Tuesday. If you cannot make this screening, you may watch the films at your own leisure in Goddard. The videos/DVDs are generally not to leave the library, however, so that other students may also have access to them.

Disabilities: If you have a disability, please contact me early in the semester so that we can make reasonable accommodations.

## **Grading**

### **Overall Idea of Grading:**

This is my basic overall idea of what grades mean:

- A:** excellent, superlative, rare!
- A-:** a little bit less excellent than an A
- B+:** better than really good!
- B:** really good!
- B-:** a little bit less than really good.
- C+:** OK, with problems, but with some redeeming points too
- C:** OK, but with problems
- C-:** OK, but with lots of problems
- D:** actually not OK, but still passing
- F:** not passing

### **Grade Structure for Papers:**

**A:** An “A” paper will have a clear and original thesis. It will be well written, with a lively sophisticated style. Arguments will be comprehensive, take into account obvious objections, and buttressed by strong evidence. There will be virtually no errors in grammar, punctuation or spelling.

**B:** A “B” paper will have a clear thesis and be solidly written.

**C:** A “C” paper will lack a clear thesis. Many arguments will not follow from the evidence given, or will be asserted, rather than proven. There will be errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

**D:** A “D” paper will have a topic, but no thesis. Many arguments will lack structure and not be to the point. Others will not follow from the evidence given or will be asserted rather than proven. There will be numerous errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

**F:** An “F” paper will scarcely have a topic. Arguments will lack structure and not be to the point. There will be numerous errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

### **Grade Structure for Participation:**

**A:** advances the discussion; contributes complex insights; will be articulate and engaging; and enhances and encourages the participation of others.

**B:** expresses text-based, substantial ideas; stays with the topic and continues the discussion; actively volunteers; asks good questions; shows genuine effort; but might fluctuate between “A” and “C” behavior.

**C:** shows acquaintance with the text if called on; tends to offer personal opinions without textual references; does not advance discussion; actively listens, but does not participate.

**D:** continued refusal to participate in discussion; exhibits signs of disengagement, such as sleeping, zoning out, or non-attendance; and reveals no evidence of having done the reading.

**F:** “D” behavior carried to the extreme.

### **Grade Structure for Blogging:**

While managing the blog:

- A: original, clever links, well-written, snappy commentary, useful information
- B: useful information, clear and lucidly presented
- C: just the most basic information, showing little original thought
- D: some important information lacking
- F: little or no information provided

While responding to the blog:

- A: frequent, insightful, in-depth comments, cleverly and amusingly written
- B: clear, thoughtful responses to entries
- C: response tends to rely heavily on the entries of others, without adding much original
- D: very cursory, not well-thought out, response
- F: no response, very curt response (such as “I agree” or “right on”), flaming.

### **Grade Structure for Multimedia Project**

- A: Clear thesis, clear allusions to course material, original thought, effort that has paid off with technical proficiency, enjoyable to watch.
- B: Thesis, some allusions to course material, more predictable ideas, less proficiency with project.
- C: More of a topic than a thesis, fewer allusions to course material, unclear ideas, frequent difficulties with technology.
- D: No real thesis, few connections to course material, unclear ideas, severe breakdown in technology.
- F: Not even a topic, no connections to course material, few ideas, failure of technology.

### **Two Final Notes:**

Attendance: Attendance is vital for a seminar class. More than three absences may result in the lowering of your final grade by a whole letter.

Lateness: Late assignments complicate the grading process. Therefore, I will take off a half grade for each day of lateness. I leave the calculation up to you whether the extra work you put into a paper will be worth the grade erosion caused by lateness.

## SYLLABUS

- Jan 12 Introductions  
 Jan 13 Film: The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari  
 Jan 14 Informed film watching: Screening of Student of Prague in class.
- Jan 19 Martin Luther King Day: Holiday  
 Jan 20 Film: Nosferatu. Symphony of Horror  
 Jan 21 A procession of tyrants? Discuss Caligari, Student of Prague, and Nosferatu. Reading: Kracauer, 28-34, 61-88 (chapters 2, 5, 6). GCtF, 7-24. Recommended: essays by Ewers, Lang and Murnau in GE, 22-24, 60-68. ***Bring to class a short (one-page) response to Kracauer's arguments. Hand in your notes on Caligari, Student of Prague and Nosferatu.***
- Jan 26 Step back: Origins of German Film. Kracauer's assumptions. Discussion of film resources on internet and in library. Reading: Kracauer, introduction, chapters 1, 3, 4 (3-27, 35-60).  
 Jan 27 Film: Berlin: Symphony of a Great City  
 Jan 28 Music and film. Abstract and avant-garde film (Richter). Reading: GCtF 25-32. Kracauer, 165-191, especially chapter 15.
- Feb 2 Student reports on current representations of the Holocaust and the Third Reich in contemporary film (The Reader, Valkyrie, Defiance, etc.). **Bring in a brief review of your film.**
- Feb 3 Film: The Blue Angel  
 Feb 4 *Student-led discussion of The Blue Angel.* Discuss Dietrich. Clips of Morocco and Destry Rides Again. Arrival of sound films. Discuss The Blue Angel. Reading: GFtC 33-42; Kracauer, chapter 18 (215-222)
- Recommended: Over the weekend, watch Metropolis
- Feb 9 Set up Lang. Discuss Metropolis The Big Heat. Reading: Kracauer, 131-164.  
 Feb 10 Film: M  
 Feb 11 *Student-led discussion of M.* Discuss Lang. Lorre. Reading: GFtC 43-50; Kracauer, chapter 18 again (215-222). ***Bring a one-page response to Kracauer to class.***
- February 15: Workshop on film music. Try to attend at least one session and bring a one-page write-up of what you heard. If you cannot attend a session, write up a page on film music in the films we have heard so far.
- Feb 16 Film music follow-up. ***Bring your page on film music to class.***  
 Feb 17 Film: Triumph of the Will  
 Feb 18 *Student-led discussion of Triumph of the Will.* Gender and directors. Riefenstahl's influence: Roland Emmerich, Independence Day. Hans

Zimmer, Gladiator. Discuss Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism.” Is there a fascist aesthetic? Where does Schwarzenegger, in, say, Terminator, fit in? Clips of The Blue Light and Olympia. Clips of The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl. Reading: GE 153-160. Reading: GCTF, 59-66; Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism” (hand out).

**By February 20: Paper due on prewar film.**

- Feb 23 Discuss Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” Reading: Benjamin “The Work of Art” (hand out). **Bring a one-page response to Benjamin to class.**
- Feb 24 Film: Murderers are Among Us.
- Feb 25 *Student-led discussion of Murderers are Among Us*. Reading: GCTF 75-85

Spring Break!

- Mar 9 Adorno and the Culture Industry. Reading: GE 169-179. **Bring a one-page response to Adorno to class**
- Mar 10 Film: The Marriage of Maria Braun.
- Mar 11 *Student-led discussion of Marriage of Maria Braun*. Clips of various films. Discuss Maria Braun. Reading GCTF 141-148; GE 229-235.
- Mar 16 Further discussion of Fassbinder. **Groups report back on secondary literature about Fassbinder.**
- Mar 17 Film: The Tin Drum
- Mar 18 *Student-led discussion of The Tin Drum*. Clips of The Handmaid's Tale. Discuss Grass and The Tin Drum. Reading GCTF 149-158; Schlöndorff, “Rereading Kracauer’s From Caligari to Hitler” (hand out).
- Mar 23 Manifestos in postwar West German film. Readings: various manifestos (hand outs). **Write your own manifesto and bring it to class.**
- Mar 24 Film: Head On.
- Mar 25 *Student-led discussion of Head On*. Multiculturalism in Germany. Fatih Akin.
- Mar 26 Possible lecture by Zafer Senocak, German-Turkish author. Please attend! Concert by Q X, the quartet in residence. They will be performing the new score to Berlin: Symphony of a Great City by Clark’s own Matt Malsky. Please attend!
- Mar 30 Free day, because of required outside activities.
- Mar 31 Film: The Einstein of Sex
- Apr 1 *Student-led discussion of Einstein of Sex*. Clips of Anita: Dance of Vice, A Virus Knows No Morals, Silence = Death, I Am My Own Woman. Reading: Rosa von Praunheim, “Gay Film Culture,” “Erika von Würzburg,” “With Fond Greetings,” “From Beast to Beast” (hand outs).



- Apr 6 Other queer movies: Taxi zum Klo, All of Me, Salmonberries, Via Appia, Westler, Coming Out, Summer Storm. Lesbian film. Reading: Kuzniar, "The Pink Peril" (hand out).
- Apr 7 Film: Run Lola Run!
- Apr 8 *Student-led discussion of Run Lola Run!*
- Apr 13 contemporary German film
- Apr 14 Film: Goodbye Lenin
- Apr 15 *Student-led discussion of Good Bye Lenin*. Reading GCtF 249-254.
- Apr. 20 Final presentations
- Apr. 22 Final presentations.
- Apr. 27 Final presentations
- We may have to schedule at least one evening for presentations as well.
- Apr. 30 Final paper/project due