

Clark University

Clark Digital Commons

Syllabi

Robert Tobin Collection

Spring 2012

German Film and the Frankfurt School (Spring 2012)

Robert D. Tobin
Clark University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.clarku.edu/tobinsyllabi>



Part of the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#), and the [German Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Tobin, Robert D., "German Film and the Frankfurt School (Spring 2012)" (2012). *Syllabi*. 5.
<https://commons.clarku.edu/tobinsyllabi/5>

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Robert Tobin Collection at Clark Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syllabi by an authorized administrator of Clark Digital Commons. For more information, please contact larobinson@clarku.edu, cstebbins@clarku.edu.

CLARK UNIVERSITY
GERMAN 250:
GERMAN FILM AND THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL
SPRING 2012

Tuesdays, 2:50-5:50
Lasry 355

Prof. Robert Tobin
Estabrook 309
Office: Tu/W/Th 1:30-2:30

German Film and the Frankfurt School is an introduction to German cinema and media criticism. It will introduce students to important German films that have had a global impact, significant theoretical approaches to those films (especially those from the “Frankfurt School”), and the historical and cultural contexts in which these films and film theories arose.

The class is cross-listed in German, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and Screen Studies. It provides a survey of an important art-form in German cultural history. Although National Socialism, the Holocaust and the Second World War are not the only themes of the course, they are central to twentieth-century German cultural production and will frequently be topics of discussion. As one of the great national cinematic traditions, German film will provide screen studies students with access to many iconic moments in global cinema. The focus on the Frankfurt School will provide an important theoretical base for discussing film and culture more generally.

At the same time, the class will bring students in contact with many of the leading scholars in German film studies and the philosophy of the Frankfurt School. The hope is that students will gain access to interpretative research skills that will benefit them no matter what career choice they make. Some of the specific skills addressed in this class include:

- Careful observation and study of cinematic and literary texts.
- Bibliographic and research skills.
- Skills in writing and speaking publically.

In terms of content, students will learn an overview of twentieth-century central European cultural and political history. They will become familiar with the great works of German cinema. They will become familiar with a number of significant essays in German cultural studies. And they will work with important German film scholars from around the country.

Assignments:

Participation	20%
Prepare for Visitors	10%
“What We’re Missing”	15%
Secondary Lit Report	15%
Blog	15%
Final Paper	15%
Variable Projects	10%

Participation:

This is a small seminar course, so we all need to be involved in the discussion! You don’t want to listen to me, or one or two other people, for three hours straight!!

Prepare for Visitors:

We will have several prominent guest speakers come to this class. Each of you will be part of a group who will become especially well prepared on the speaker’s research and topic. Each group will prepare the class for the speaker, introduce the speaker, and moderate the discussion with the speaker.

“What We’re Missing”

In most classes, student will prepare fairly extensive presentations on an important film figure or film that it is not on our main list of films. The presentation could be a powerpoint presentation and should include biography, clips, important aspects of the film or the director. Try to keep the clips to a total of 5 minutes, with an additional 5 or 10 minutes of your own discussion. Your presentation and discussion should be designed to encourage participation by the class.

Secondary Literature Annotated Bibliography

There is a plethora of academic literature available on classic and canonical German film. This assignment is designed to encourage you to take advantage of the scholarly writing on the subject. Find five scholarly academic essays on a film of your choosing. Prepare a bibliography, giving the complete citation, plus a one or two paragraph summary of the main points of the argument. *The grading on this will focus heavily on the mechanics of citation and punctuation!*

Blog

Our class will create a blog. For each week, someone will be the “blog master,” whose job it will be to provide content—at least two significant entries. But everyone should feel free to add content. And everyone is obligated to at least respond at least once a week. Content should be freely and loosely related to German film, but be as intellectually flexible as you can! Obviously, links to interesting sites about the films and directors and critics we are reading would be important. But also links to relevant news stories that perhaps relate to some of the same issues that the films discuss would be excellent.

Final Paper

This will be a five-page research paper on a film, director, actor or cinematic theme that relates to the class. Include some aspect of the Frankfurt School theorists that we have been studying in your analysis.

Variable Projects

Each of you will decide for yourselves what this final ten percent of the grade will focus on. For some of you it might be the German language discussion group. For some of you it might be an expanded final paper (to ten pages, with five secondary sources). For some of you it could be an independently designed film, or a presentation at the Academic Spree Day.

Grading Scale

	10 point	15 point	20 point
A+	10	15	20
A	9.5	14	19
A-	9.25	13.5	18.5
B+	8.75	13	17.5
B	8.5	12.5	17
B-	8.25	12	16.5
C+	7.75	11.5	15.5
C	7.5	11	15
C-	7.25	10.5	14
D	6	9	12

Grading

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 and buttressed by strong evidence. They will take into account obvious objections. 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.

WEEK BY WEEK

January 17

Imperial Germany, Beginnings of Film
The Student of Prague
Set-up of Course

January 24

Weimar Germany
The Cabinet of Caligari
Kracauer, Introduction and Caligari
Conrad Veidt (*Casablanca*)
What we're missing: Lubitsch
Visiting Lecture: Ivan Raykoff (Eugene Lang College, The New School for the Liberal Arts),
"Expressionism in Music and Cinema"

January 31

The Devastation of WWI
Nosferatu
Kracauer on *Nosferatu*
Murnau: *Last Laugh, Faust, Taboo*
What we're missing: Pabst (*Joyless Street, Pandora's Box, Threepenny Opera, Cameradeschaft*)

Friday, February 3

4:15 Performance Lecture: Quartet in residence, "QX," performs Professor Malsky's musical setting of *Berlin Symphony of a Great City*. Razzo Hall.

February 7

Berlin in the 20s
Berlin Symphony of a Great City
Kracauer on *Berlin Symphony of a Great City*
What we're missing: *People on Sunday*
Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

February 14

Cabaret
The Blue Angel
Sternberg, Dietrich (*Morocco, Destry Rides Again, Judgment at Nuremberg*)
Women in film: Thea von Harbou
What we're missing: *Mädchen in Uniform*
Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

February 21

Rise of fascism

M

Kracauer on *M*

What we're missing: *Metropolis*

Other Lang films: *Fury*, *Dr. Mabuse*, etc.

Lorre (*Casablanca*, *The Maltese Falcon*)

Read: "Little History of Photography"

Visiting Lecture: Michael Jennings, "Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and the Invention of Weimar Criticism."

February 28

Nazi Germany

Triumph of the Will

Riefenstahl (*Olympia*); *Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*

Roland Emmerich, *Independence Day*. Hans Zimmer, *Gladiator*. *Star Wars*.

What we're missing: Other Nazi films (*Romance in a Minor Key*; *Jud Süß*)

Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism."

Prepare Isenberg.

March 2: Annotated Bibliographies due

SPRING BREAK

March 13

Postwar Germany and Austria

Shadow of a Marriage

What we're missing: *Murderers are among Us*

Visiting Lecture: Noah Isenberg (Eugene Lang College, The New School for the Liberal Arts)

"Revisiting 'The Decent German': Siegfried Kracauer's Critique of Postwar German Film"

Prepare Richter

March 20

Federal Republic of Germany, *Wirtschaftswunder*

Marriage of Maria Braun

What we're missing: Other Fassbinder

Sam Weber, "Mass Mediaurs"

Visiting Scholar: Gerhard Richter (Brown University), leading discussion of Benjamin and Weber

March 27

New German Cinema

Fitzcarraldo

More on Herzog

What we're missing: Wim Wenders, Volker Schlöndorff,
Adorno, "The Culture Industry"

April 3

Queer German Cinema

Praunheim Film

Other Praunheim: *Not the Homosexual is Perverse ...*

What we're missing: Monika Treut

April 10

East Germany in Film

Lives of Others

What we're missing: East German film: *Solo Sunny, Coming Out*

April 17

Unified Germany

Run Lola Run

More on Tykwer

What we're missing: *Das Boot*

April 24

Multicultural Germany

Head On