

The Golden Age of German Cinema (1918-1933)

Dr. Philipp Stiasny

Email Address:	info@fubest.fu-berlin.de
Time Slot:	Mondays, 4:30 p.m.
Language of Instruction:	English
Contact Hours:	45
ECTS Credits:	6

Course Description

Never before or again has German film and cinema culture been as vivid and cutting-edge, liberating and socially engaged, experimental, commercially successful and internationally renowned as in the years between 1918 and 1933. The revolution of 1918 and the creation of the first German republic inspired writers and artists, film makers and producers, many of them Jewish, to try something entirely new.

This outburst of creativity ended abruptly in 1933 when the Nazis violently destroyed the democratic state and erected a dictatorship. A hundred years on, what do films from the Golden Age of German Cinema still tell us? Why is it worth studying these old 'Classics'? How can they enrich our view of history, the arts, political debate? And how do they create knowledge, controversy, excitement?

This course centers on close readings of 'canonical' works, including examples of popular, avantgarde and documentary filmmaking. For instance, we will study early monster films, psychological thrillers and political propaganda, the invention of the 'unchained camera' and modern editing techniques, the creative use of sound and music, stardom and the appearance of the New Woman on screen.

The course introduces students to fundamental elements of film and film analysis; it fosters a critical understanding of how film functions both as entertainment and as an art form; it explores the developments within German film in light of specific historical and cultural frameworks. The course assumes no prior knowledge of German, German films, or film theory in general. It is taught in English and all sound-films have English subtitles.

Please note: Students will watch each film individually before class, e.g. on the internet, or via specially arranged viewing sessions on campus.

Learning Objectives

Students will learn about fundamental elements of film and film analysis. They will develop a critical understanding of how film functions both as entertainment and as an art form. They will learn about major developments within German film in light of specific historical and cultural frameworks.

Student Profile

Should be in their fourth semester of college/university education or beyond.

Assignments and Grading

Attendance, participation, homework: 200 Points

Weekly writing assignment: 250 Points

Independent Project Report: 100 Points

Midterm Exam: 200 Points

Final Exam: 250 Points

FU Grade	Points of 1,000
1.0	980-1,000

1.3	950-979
1.7	900-949
2.0	850-899
2.3	800-849
2.7	750-799
3.0	700-749
3.3	650-699
3.7	600-649
4.0	500-599
5.0	< 500

Literature

Digitized readings posted on the online learning platform Blackboard.

Course Schedule

Calendar	Topics, Readings, etc.
Session 1	<p>Topic: Introduction to Weimar Cinema and its theories</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • Bobby E. Lüthge, 'The Oyster Princess' [1919], in Laurence Kardish (ed.): Weimar Cinema 1919-1933: Daydreams and Nightmares (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), p. 73. • 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. <p>Viewing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THE OYSTER PRINCESS (1919, dir. Ernst Lubitsch, 60 Min.), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rH-lqSrcFNo
Session 2	<p>Topic: How to Depict Jewishness in a Monster Film?</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maya Barzilai, The Golem, How He Came into the World (Rochester: Camden House, 2020), pp. 1-67. • Eugen Tannenbaum, 'The Golem, How He Came into the World' [1920], in Laurence Kardish (ed.), Weimar Cinema 1919-1933: Daydreams and Nightmares (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), p. 80. <p>Viewing</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THE GOLEM (1920, dir. Paul Wegener / Carl Boese, 84 Min.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Li7Hqytn57E or https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6dvWPN8OMA (different music and different editing) • CINEMA EUROPE: GERMANY (1995, dir. Kevina Brownlow / David Gill, 60 Min.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7aVHA40T-jo
<p>Session 3</p>	<p>Topic: Expressionism in the Cinema</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gertrud David, 'The Expressionist Film' [1919], in Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, Michael Cowan (eds.), <i>The Promise of Cinema. German Film Theory 1907-1933</i> (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), pp. 420-421. • J.B., 'Expressionism in Film: The New Art in Film' [1920], in <i>ibid.</i>, pp. 422-424. • Ernst Angel, 'An "Expressionist" Film' [1920], in <i>ibid.</i>, pp. 424-426. • Robert Wiene, 'Expressionism in Film' [1922], in <i>ibid.</i>, pp. 436-438. • Walter Reimann, 'An Afterword to Caligari' [1925], in <i>ibid.</i>, pp. 438-440. • Rudolf Kurtz, 'Limits of Expressionist Film' [1926], in <i>ibid.</i>, pp. 440-442. • David Robinson, <i>Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari</i> [1997] (London et al: Bloomsbury, 2019). <p>Viewing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI (1919/20, dir. Robert Wiene, 71 Min.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IP0KB2XC29o or https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLmccWlqqd0
<p>Session 4</p>	<p>Topic: The Invention of the 'Unchained Camera' and Subjective Realism</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marc Silberman, 'The Modernist Camera and Cinema Illusion: Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's <i>The Last Laugh</i>', from <i>German Cinema: Texts in Context</i> (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), pp. 19-33. • Siegfried Kracauer, 'Mute Chaos', from <i>From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film</i> (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 96-106. • F.W. Murnau, 'The Ideal Picture Needs No Titles: By Its Very Nature the Art of the Screen Should tell a Complete Story Pictorially' [1928], in Richard W. McCormack, Alison Guenther-Pal (eds.), <i>German Essays on Film</i> (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 66-68. • Robert Herlth, 'With Murnau on the Set' [1973], in Laurence Kardish (ed.), <i>Weimar Cinema 1919-1933: Daydreams and Nightmares</i> (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010). <p>Viewing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THE LAST LAUGH (1924, dir. Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, 90 Min.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Spp9MHvFc2M.
<p>Session 5</p>	<p>Topic: New Objectivity and Montage Cinema</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Siegfried Kracauer, 'Montage', from <i>From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film</i> (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 181-189 • Walter Ruttmann, 'How I made my Berlin Film' [1927], in Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, Michael Cowan (eds.), <i>The Promise of Cinema. German Film Theory 1907-1933</i> (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), pp. 463-4. <p>Viewing</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BERLIN – SYMPHONY OF A BIG CITY (1927, dir. Walter Ruttmann, 65 Min.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LdFasmBJYFg.
Session 6	MIDTERM EXAM
Session 7	<p>Topic: Ufa, The Coming of Sound and the Star System</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S.S. Prawer, <i>The Blue Angel (Der blaue Engel)</i> (London: BFI Publishing, 2002), pp. 10-76. • Elsa Herrmann, 'This is the New Woman' [1929], in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimdenberg (eds.), <i>The Weimar Republic Source Book</i> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 206-208. <p>Viewing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THE BLUE ANGEL (1930, dir. Josef von Sternberg, 106 Min.).
Session 8	<p>Topic: The Urban Thriller and the Threats of Modernity</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anton Kaes, <i>M</i> [2001] (London et al: Bloomsbury, 2021). • Interview with Fritz Lang about <i>M</i> [1963], in Laurence Kardish (ed.): <i>Weimar Cinema 1919-1933: Daydreams and Nightmares</i> (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), p. 188. • Gabriele Tergit: 'Fritz Lang's <i>M</i>. Filmed Sadism' [1931], in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimdenberg (eds.), <i>The Weimar Republic Source Book</i> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 632-633. <p>Viewing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>M</i> (1931, dir. Fritz Lang, 105 Min.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0C2Te59egQ.
Session 9 & 10	Double Session: Excursion / Field Trip
Session 11	<p>Topic: The Proletarian Film</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marc Silberman, 'Whose Revolution? The Subject of <i>Kuhle Wampe</i> (1932)', in Noah Isenberg (ed.), <i>Weimar Cinema. An Essential Guide to the Classic Films of the Era</i> (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 311-330. • Willi Münzenberg: 'Conquer Film!' [1925], in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimdenberg (eds.), <i>The Weimar Republic Source Book</i> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 228-229. • Bruce Murray, 'The KPD and Film: From Stubborn Perseverance to Eleventh-Hour Experiments with Alternative Forms of Production and Reception', from <i>Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic: From Caligari to Kuhle Wampe</i> (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 186-224. <p>Viewing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KUHLE WAMPE OR WHO OWNS THE WORLD (1932, dir. Slatan Dudov, 71 Min.)

Session 12	Topic: Film noir: German Cinema's Historical Imaginary? Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gerd Gemünden, 'The Insurance Man Always Rings Twice: Double Indemnity (1944)', from <i>A Foreign Affair. Billy Wilder's American Films</i> (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), pp. 30-53.• Hans Kafka, 'What Our Immigration Did for Hollywood – and Vice Versa' [1944], in <i>New German Critique</i> 89 (2003), pp. 185-189.• Thomas Elsaesser, 'A German Ancestry to Film Noir? Film History and its Imaginary', in <i>Iris</i> 21 (1996), pp. 129-143 Viewing <ul style="list-style-type: none">• DOUBLE INDEMNITY (1944, dir. Billy Wilder, 103 Min.)
Session 13	FINAL EXAM
