Topics in German Cinema: Berlin in Film – Histories, Lives, and Images since 1945

Course Number
GERM-UA.9253D01, SASEM-UG.9102D01

SAMPLE SYLLABUS

Lecturer Contact Information
Dr. Axel Bangert
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Course Details
Screenings: Mondays, 8:15pm to 10:00pm (starting 10 September)
Lecture: Tuesdays, 3:30pm to 4:45pm (starting 4 September)
Recitation: Tuesdays, 5:00pm to 6:15pm (starting 4 September)

Please note that there will be a mandatory excursion to the festival of festivals “Around the World in 14 Films” on 26 and 27 November 2018. Further information will be given during the first lecture/recitation on 4 September 2018.

Location
Rooms will be posted in Albert before your first class. Please double check whether your class takes place at the Academic Center (BLAC) or at St. Agnes (SNTA).

Prerequisites
Critical interest in German cinema, motivation to engage with prescribed films and texts, willingness to contribute to seminar discussions.

Units earned
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Course Description
Berlin is one of the most well-known film cities in the world. This course wants to introduce you to the study of German cinema by looking at changing images of the city since the postwar period. The course will begin with an introduction to film analysis, which pays special attention to the relationship between film and city. We will then go on to discuss a number of influential productions from East, West and reunified Germany, and draw comparisons to other German
as well as non-German city films. Through seminar discussions, scene analyses, and critical essays, you will gain an understanding of how the cinema has engaged with the city of Berlin and its transformations since the end of the Second World War.

**Course Objective**

To analyze key works of German cinema, explore the relationship between film and city and trace the transformations of Berlin since 1945 through cinema.

**Assessment Components**

**Class participation: 15% of total grade**

Students are expected to productively contribute to discussions in class and to demonstrate knowledge of the pertinent films and texts.

**3 Scene Analyses (750 to 1000 words): 15% of total grade**

The aim of the scene analyses is to develop your skills in dealing with film in a scholarly way. You will be asked to provide three brief discussions of cinematic features, each based on a scene from a different Berlin film. The first scene analysis will focus on mise-en-scène, the second on cinematography and the third on editing. Guidance on how to prepare your scene analyses will be given as part of the introduction to film analysis during session one. The deadlines for submission are 11, 18, and 25 September 2018 (either via NYU Classes or printed out before the session).

**2 Critical Essays (1750 to 2000 and 2750 to 3000 words): 30% and 40% of total grade, respectively**

In each of your critical essays, you will be asked to undertake broader surveys of two to three films each. These can be chosen from the syllabus or – after consultation with your lecturer – go beyond it. Comparative in nature, the essays are also an opportunity to bring non-German films into the discussion. The topics of your essays will be based on your own suggestions in consultation with your lecturer. You will be required to consult and reference the relevant scholarly literature. The deadlines for submission are 16 October and 18 December 2018 (either via NYU Classes or printed out before the session).

There will be a mandatory mid-term appraisal in the week commencing on 8 October 2018, and another appraisal meeting shortly before the end of term.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required component may result in failure of the class, regardless of grades achieved in other assignments.

**Required Text(s)**


There are also several copies available in NYU Berlin's Reading Room (note though that these copies cannot be taken out of the library).

Relevant sections will be made available via NYU Classes

All other texts will also be made available via NYU Classes.

[NYU Berlin Library Catalogue](#) or follow the link on NYU Berlin’s website (Academics/Facilities & Services).

**Supplemental Text(s) (not required to purchase)**

For an introduction to German cinema, see:

- Thomas Elsaesser and Michael Wedel, *The BFI Companion to German Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1999).

All titles are available in NYU Berlin’s Reading Room.

**Internet Research Guidelines**

To be discussed in class.

**Additional Required Equipment**

n/a

**Session 1 – Tuesday, 4 Sep 2018**

**Introduction**

Using excerpts from key works of German cinema, the first session will give you an introduction to film analysis. We will also debate the question of how city films can be read in terms of their historical, social and cultural significance. Influential productions from the Weimar Republic when the city film was born in Germany will supply the historical background for our discussion.

**Reading:**


**Session 2 – Monday, 10 Sep 2018**

**Screening**

*The Murderers Are Among Us* (1946), dir. Wolfgang Staudte (85min)

**Session 3 – Tuesday, 11 Sep 2018**

**A City Destroyed**

*The Murderers Are Among Us* is the first and most well-known example of the so-called “Trümmerfilm” (rubble film), the name given to roughly a dozen films shot and set in devastated post-war Germany. Staudte’s film will provide the basis for discussing the situation of German film after 1945, the challenges of – physical as well as moral – reconstruction, and the mise-en-scène of destroyed Berlin. A point of comparison will be Italian Neorealism, in particular, Roberto Rossellini’s *Germany Year Zero* (1948).
Reading:
Bordwell and Thompson, Film Art, chapter on mise-en-scène.

***deadline for first scene analysis***

Session 4 – Monday, 17 Sep 2018
Screening
Berlin, Schönhauser Corner (1957), dir. Gerhard Klein (81min)

Session 5 – Tuesday, 18 Sep 2018
Rebels With(out) A Cause
Gerhard Klein's Berlin, Schönhauser Corner is often seen as East Germany’s answer to 1950s Western films about a disillusioned youth, beginning with Nicholas Ray’s Rebel Without A Cause (1955) which inspired the West German production Teenage Wolfpack (1956). Klein’s film portrays a GDR youth torn between East and West, in a Berlin shortly before the erection of the Wall, when the borders between the Allied sectors could still be crossed. We will discuss the film’s ideological mapping of Berlin as well as its place within GDR film history.

Reading:
Bordwell and Thompson, Film Art, chapter on cinematography.

***deadline for second scene analysis***

Session 6 – Monday, 24 Sep 2018
Screening
Divided Heaven (1964), dir. Konrad Wolf (116min)

Session 7 – Tuesday, 25 Sep 2018
A City Divided
Written in collaboration with Christa Wolf, Divided Heaven is regarded as a classic of East German cinema. Its modernist style has been likened to West European auteur film, above all to Alain Resnais’s Hiroshima mon amour (1959), which will be presented in class. Taking a closer look at Divided Heaven’s cinematography and editing, we will analyze how Wolf sought to both convey and reflect the experience of living in a divided city, and how his film combines aesthetic innovation with political commentary.

Reading:
Bordwell and Thompson, Film Art, chapter on editing.
***deadline for third scene analysis***

Session 8 – Monday, 1 Oct 2018  
Screening  
*The Legend of Paul and Paula* (1973), dir. Heiner Carow (105min)

Session 9 – Tuesday, 2 Oct 2018  
Searching for Happiness  
Produced in the relative freedom of Erich Honecker’s early years as General Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party, *The Legend of Paul and Paula* brought the search for personal fulfilment to GDR screens, becoming one of the most popular films of the decade. Our focus will be on how Carow and his writer Ulrich Plenzdorf use Berlin as a backdrop for a tale of love and eroticism, dream and fantasy. Moreover, we will discuss the political implications of the film’s depiction of gender and sexuality, considering its reception East as well as West Germany.

Reading:  

***deadline for essay topic proposal***

Session 10 – Monday 8 Oct 2018  
Screening  
*Solo Sunny* (1980), dir. Wolfgang Kohlhaase and Konrad Wolf (100min)

Session 11 – Tuesday, 9 Oct 2016  
Performing the Everyday  
An atypical film compared to Wolf’s other works, *Solo Sunny* became an unexpected success for East German cinema after its main actress, Renate Krößner, won the Silver Bear at the 1980 Berlin Film Festival. Together with Kohlhaase, known for the youth drama *Berlin, Schönhauser Corner* (1957), Wolf created not only a compelling story of female self-determination but also – as we will discuss – a rare image of everyday Berlin during GDR times.

Reading:  

Session 12 – Monday, 15 Oct 2018  
*The All-around Reduced Personality* (1977), dir. Helke Sander (98min)

Session 13 – Tuesday, 16 Oct 2018  
Feminist Film and the Public Sphere  
*The All-around Reduced Personality* was the first feature-length film by writer/director, author, actress and feminist activist Helke Sander. Her film portrays Edda – a single mother, freelance photographer and artist – who works hard to balance her private, professional and political
lives. When she and a group of female photographers are commissioned to take pictures of West Berlin, they push a critical perspective that challenges their client’s intentions, as their pictures emphasize the similarities rather than the differences between East and West Berlin. We will discuss how Sanders film portrays the desire for political change in a city marked by ideological oppositions.

Reading:

***deadline for first critical essay***

20 Oct to 28 Oct 2018 – Fall Break – No Class

Session 14 – Monday, 29 Oct 2018
Screening Wings of Desire (1987), dir. Wim Wenders (127min)

Session 15 – Tuesday, 30 Oct 2018
City of Angels
Co-written by dramatist Peter Handke, Wender’s poetic film powerfully interweaves Berlin’s traumatic history with a search for new forms of storytelling and selfhood. We will explore the film’s image of the city by discussing Wender’s use of space as well as his unique blending of subjective and objective points of view through the angel figures Damiel and Cassiel.

Reading:

Session 16 – Monday, 5 Nov 2018
Screening Ostkreuz (1991), dir. Michael Klier (84min)

Session 17 – Tuesday, 6 Nov 2018
Ostkreuz tells the episodic story of 15-year-old Elfie who literally and metaphorically inhabits a no man’s land between the two Germanys shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The film deploys a neorealist aesthetic to reinforce the difficulties confronting the girl, and by inference, Germany. Produced for television, Ostkreuz is not only a stylistically impressive meditation on post-Wall Berlin, but also, from today's perspective, a rare portrait of a city that would soon undergo rapid change.

Reading:

Session 18 – Monday, 12 Nov 2018
Run Lola Run (1998), dir. Tom Tykwer (81min)
Session 19 – Tuesday, 13 Nov 2018
Celebrating Movement
A surprise success, nationally as well as internationally, *Run Lola Run* was arguably the film to most strongly shape the (cinematic) image of 1990s Berlin. And the film's heroine, Lola, was soon regarded as allegorical for a youthful and energetic German capital. Using fluid cinematography and dynamic editing, Tykwer turns the formerly divided city into a playground for a fast-paced thrill ride. We shall discuss to what extent *Run Lola Run* represents a turning point in cinematic dealings with post-1990 Berlin as well as in German film more broadly.

Reading:

Session 20 – Monday, 19 Nov 2018
Screening
*Ghosts* (2005), dir. Christian Petzold (86min)

Session 21 – Tuesday, 20 Nov 2018
Filming Phantoms
Petzold is the most well-known and successful director of the so-called Berlin School, a loosely connected group of filmmakers whose works are marked by a heightened, at times poetic realism. In this example, Berlin, more specifically the area between Tiergarten and Potsdamer Platz, becomes the site of ghostlike encounters that suggest traumatic loss, both past and present.

Reading:

***deadline for essay topic proposal***

Sessions 22 and 23 – Monday, 26 Nov and Tuesday, 27 Nov 2018
Please note that there will be a mandatory excursion to the festival of festivals “Around the World in 14 Films” on 26 and 27 November 2018. Further information will be given during the first lecture/recitation on 4 September 2018.
Session 24 – Monday, 3 Dec 2018
Screening
Victoria (2015), dir. Sebastian Schipper (138min)

Session 25 – Tuesday, 4 Dec 2018
Total Immersion
Shot in a single take lasting 140 minutes, Victoria plunges us into a Spanish girl's crazy experience of a single night in Berlin. A success with critics as well as audiences, Victoria was hailed as the new quintessential Berlin film. But how can we define the 21st century Berlin of Victoria, and how can we account for the film's success in Germany and abroad?

Session 26 – Tuesday, 11 Dec 2018
Berlin in Film, from 1945 to the Present Day
In the final session, we will try to summarize the transformations of Berlin's cinematic image as discussed over the duration of the course. What kinds of (dis-)continuities can we discern? What are the themes and sites that have characterized filmic engagements with the city since 1945? Instead of readings, preparation for the final session will consist of formulating notes and questions for the final discussion.

Exam Week – Tuesday, 18 Dec 2018
***deadline for second critical essay***

Classroom Etiquette
No laptops allowed during class. Mobile phones are to be switched off. Drinks are allowed in the classroom, but food is not.

Suggested Co-Curricular Activities
To be discussed in class.

Your Lecturer
Axel Bangert graduated from Humboldt University Berlin in 2006, with an M.A. thesis on contemporary Holocaust film. From 2004 to 2006, he worked as a research assistant at the Holocaust Memorial Foundation in Berlin. This was followed by a PhD in German film at the University of Cambridge. Since then, Axel Bangert held post-doctoral fellowships at Homerton College, the University of Cambridge, and the University of Leeds. His main research interests are German cinema and television, in particular portrayals of the Third Reich, European heritage film as well as transnational moving image production. His monograph The Nazi Past in Contemporary German Film: Viewing Experiences of Intimacy and Immersion appeared with Camden House in December 2014.
Academic Policies

Assessment Expectations

Grade A: The student makes excellent use of empirical and theoretical material and offers well-structured arguments in their work. The student writes comprehensive essays / answers to exam questions and their work shows strong evidence of critical thought and extensive reading.

Grade B: The candidate shows a good understanding of the problem and has demonstrated the ability to formulate and execute a coherent research strategy.

Grade C: The work is acceptable and shows a basic grasp of the research problem. However, the work fails to organize findings coherently and is in need of improvement.

Grade D: The work passes because some relevant points are made. However, there may be a problem of poor definition, lack of critical awareness, poor research.

Grade F: The work shows that the research problem is not understood; there is little or no critical awareness and the research is clearly negligible.

Grade Conversion

Your lecturer may use one of the following scales of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

A = 94-100 or 4.0
A- = 90-93 or 3.7
B+ = 87-89 or 3.3
B = 84-86 or 3.0
B- = 80-83 or 2.7
C+ = 77-79 or 2.3
C = 74-76 or 2.0
C- = 70-73 or 1.7
D+ = 67-69 or 1.3
D = 65-66 or 1.0
F = below 65 or 0

Attendance Policy

Participation in all classes is essential for your academic success, especially in courses that meet only once per week. Your attendance in both content and language courses is required and will be checked at each class meeting. As soon as it becomes clear that you cannot attend a class, you must inform your professor by e-mail immediately (i.e. before the start of your class). Absences are only excused if they are due to illness, religious observance or emergencies. Your professor or NYU Berlin's administration may ask you to present a doctor's note or an exceptional permission from NYU Berlin's Director or Wellness Counselor as proof. Emergencies or other exceptional circumstances must be presented to the Director. Doctor's notes need to be submitted to the Academics Office, who will inform your professors. Doctor's notes need to be from a local doctor and carry a signature and a stamp. If you want the reasons for your absence to be treated confidentially, please approach NYU Berlin's Director or Wellness Counselor.
Unexcused absences affect students' grades: In content courses each unexcused absence (equaling one week's worth of classes) leads to a deduction of 2% of the overall grade and may negatively affect your class participation grade. In German Language classes two or three (consecutive or non-consecutive) unexcused absences (equaling one week's worth of classes) lead to a 2% deduction of the overall grade. Three unexcused absences in one content course and five unexcused absences in your German language course may lead to a Fail in that course. Being more than 15 minutes late counts as an unexcused absence. Furthermore, your professor is entitled to deduct points for frequent late arrival or late arrival back from in-class breaks. Please note that for classes involving a field trip, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student's responsibility to arrive in time at the announced meeting point.

Exams, tests and quizzes, deadlines, and oral presentations that are missed due to illness always require a doctor's note as documentation. It is the student's responsibility to produce this doctor's note and submit it to the Academics Office; until this doctor's note is produced the missed assessment is graded with an F and no make-up assessment is scheduled. In content classes, an F in one assignment may lead to failure of the entire class.

Regardless of whether an absence is excused or not, it is the student's responsibility to catch up with the work that was missed.

**Attendance Rules on Religious Holidays**

Members of any religious group may, without penalty, excuse themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Students who anticipate being absent due to religious observance should notify their lecturer AND NYU Berlin's Academics Office in writing via e-mail one week in advance. If examinations or assignment deadlines are scheduled on the day the student will be absent, the Academics Office will schedule a make-up examination or extend the deadline for assignments. Please note that an absence is only excused for the holiday but not for any days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. See also [University Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays](#).

**Late Submission of Work**

1. Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.

2. Late work should be submitted in person to the lecturer or to the Academics Office, who will write on the essay or other work the date and time of submission, in the presence of the student. Another member of the administrative staff may also personally accept the work and will write the date and time of submission on the work, as above.

3. Work submitted late receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100 point scale for each day it is late (excluding weekends and public or religious holidays), unless an extension has been approved (with a doctor's note or by approval of NYU Berlin's administration), in which case the 2 points per day deductions start counting from the day the extended deadline has passed.

4. Without an approved extension, written work submitted more than 5 days (excluding weekends and public or religious holidays) following the submission date receives an F.

5. End of semester essays must be submitted on time.
(6) Students who are late for a written exam have no automatic right to take extra time or to write the exam on another day.

(7) Please remember that university computers do not keep your essays - you must save them elsewhere. Having lost parts of your essay on the university computer is no excuse for a late submission.

Provisions for Students with Disabilities
Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see their website for further information.

Plagiarism Policy
The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism. Proper referencing of your sources avoids plagiarism (see as one possible help the NYU library guide to referencing styles).

NYU Berlin takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. Your lecturer may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form.

It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor.

For a summary of NYU Global’s academic policies.