Course Title

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

Course Number
GERM-UA.9253001, SASEM-UG.9102001

Instructor Contact Information
Dr. Axel Bangert
axel.bangert@nyu.edu

Course Details
Lecture: Wednesdays, 1:30pm to 2:45pm
English Recitation: Wednesdays, 3:00pm to 4:15pm
German Recitation: Wednesdays, 4:30pm to 5:15pm
Location: NYUB Academic Center, Room "Spandau"

Screenings: Tuesdays, 8:15pm to 10:00pm (starting 8 September 2015)
Location: NYUB Academic Center, Room "Spandau"

Please note that there will be a screening and discussion of the film We Are Young. We Are Strong. (2014) on 27 October 2015 at 7pm replacing screening and recitation for that week. Writer/director Burhan Qurbani and his co-author Martin Behnke will be joining us for the discussion.

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

Units earned
4

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, reading responses, 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 Response Papers (500 to 750 words): 15%**

The aim of the response papers is to develop your skills in film analysis. You will be asked to provide three brief discussions of cinematic features, each based on a scene from a different Berlin film. The first response paper will focus on mise-en-scène, the second on cinematography and the third on editing. Guidance on how to prepare your response papers will be given as part of the introduction to film analysis during session one. The deadlines for submission are 16, 23, and 30 September 2015 (either by email or in paper before the session).

**2 Critical Essays (1750 to 2000 words): 40%**

In each of your critical essays, you will be asked to undertake slightly broader surveys of two to three films each. These can be chosen from the syllabus or – after consultation with the course leader – 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 the course leader. You will be required to consult and reference the relevant scholarly literature. The deadlines for submission are 14 October and 25 November 2015 (either by email or in paper before the session).

**1 Final In-Class Exam (2 hours): 30%**

In the exam, you will be asked to discuss two questions about the course on the whole, one focusing on Berlin in film, the other on German cinema more broadly. There will be various questions to choose from.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required component may result in failure of the class, regardless of grades achieved in other assignments. There will be a mid-term appraisal in the week commencing on 26 October 2015, and another appraisal meeting shortly before the exam.

**Assessment Expectations**

**Grade A:** The student makes excellent use of empirical and theoretical material and offers well-structured arguments in his/her work. The student writes comprehensive essays / answers to exam questions and his/her 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 instructor may use one of the following scales of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

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Attendance Policy
Participation in all classes is essential for your academic success, especially in NYU Berlin's content courses that, unlike most courses at NYU NY, meet only once per week in a double-session for three hours. 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. If you want the reasons for your absence to be treated confidentially and not shared with your professor, please approach NYUB's Director or Wellness Counselor. Your professor or NYUB's administration may ask you to present a doctor's note or an exceptional permission from the 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. Three unexcused absences in one course may lead to a Fail in that course. In German Language classes three (consecutive or non-consecutive) unexcused absences (equaling one week's worth of classes) lead to a 2% deduction of the overall grade. Five unexcused absences in your German language course may lead to a Fail in that course. Furthermore, faculty is also entitled to deduct points for frequent late arrival to class or late arrival back from in-class breaks. Being more than 15 minutes late for class counts as an unexcused absence. Please note that for classes involving a field trip or other external visit, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the announced meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion.

Exams, tests, deadlines, and oral presentations that are missed due to illness require a doctor's note as documentation. It is the student's responsibility to produce this doctor's note;
until this doctor's note is produced the missed assessment is graded with an F. In content classes, an F in one assignment may lead to failure of the entire class.

**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 because of any religious observance should notify the Director or Assistant Director for Academics in advance of the anticipated absence. If examinations or assignment deadlines are scheduled on the day the student will be absent, the Director or Assistant Director will re-schedule a make-up examination or extend the deadline for assignments.

**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 instructor or to the Assistant Director for Academics, 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. Unless an extension has been approved (with a doctor's note or by approval of the Director or Assistant Director), work submitted late receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100 point scale for each day it is late.

4. Without an approved extension, written work submitted more than 5 weekdays following the session date fails and is given a zero.

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.

**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: [http://nyu.libguides.com/citations](http://nyu.libguides.com/citations)).

NYUB takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. All your written work must be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form to the instructor. Your instructor 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 please see: [www.nyu.edu/global/academic-](http://www.nyu.edu/global/academic-).
policies

**Required Text(s)**
Course Reader &

Books can be bought at Saint Georges in Wörther Straße 27 near NYUB. Readers can be bought at Sprintout behind Humboldt University (Georgenstraße/Universitätsstraße – S-Bahn-Bogen 190 – please allow five hours between booking and collecting readers).

**Supplemental Text(s) (not required to purchase)**
For an introduction to film analysis, see:

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 NYUB's Reading Room.

**Internet Research Guidelines**
To be discussed in class.

**Additional Required Equipment**

n/a

**Course Schedule**

**Session 1 – 2 Sept 2015**

**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.

Reading (follow-up):

**Session 2 – 8 Sept 2015**

**Screening**

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

**Session 3 – 9 Sept 2015**

**A City Destroyed**
The most well-known example of the so-called “Trümmerfilm” (rubble film), The Murderers Are Among Us, 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 for the English recitation:
Bordwell and Thompson, Film Art, chapter on cinematography.

Reading for the German recitation:
Please refer to the selection of contemporary reviews of Staudte's film contained in the reader.

Session 4 – 15 Sept 2015
Screening
Divided Heaven (1964), dir. Konrad Wolf

Session 5 – 16 Sept 2015
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 mise-en-scène and editing, we will analyze how Wolf sought to both convey and reflect the experience of living in a divided city.

Reading for the English recitation:
Bordwell and Thompson, Film Art, chapter on editing.

Reading for the German recitation:
Wolfgang Jacobsen and Rolf Aurich, Der Sonnensucher: Konrad Wolf (Berlin: Aufbau, 2005), 293-305.

*deadline for first response paper*

Session 6 – 22 Sept 2015
Screening
The Legend of Paul and Paula (1973), dir. Heiner Carow
Session 7– 23 Sept 2015

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 fulfillment 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 an innovative tale of love and eroticism, dream and fantasy.

Reading for the English recitation:

Reading for the German recitation:
Ingrid Poss and Peter Warnecke (eds), *Spur der Filme: Zeitzeugen über die DEFA* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2006), 282-87.

*deadline for second response paper*

Session 8 – 29 Sept 2015

Screening

Session 9 – 30 Sept 2015

Impossible Love
Rainer Werner Fassbinder was a key figure of the New German Cinema characterizing 1970s West Germany. *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, a melodramatic tale of the impossible love between a 60-year-old German woman and a young Moroccan “Gastarbeiter” (guest worker), brought him international acclaim. Fassbinder’s work will serve as a point of departure for discussing the aims of a new generation of writers and directors as well as for a cinematic excursion to Munich as Germany’s second great film city.

Reading for the English recitation:

Reading for the German recitation:
Rüdiger Graf “‘Das hinterhältigste und wirksamste Instrument gesellschaftlicher Unterdrückung’: Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft in Rainer Werner Fassbinders ‘Angst essen Seele auf,’” in Martin Baumeister, Moritz Föllmer and Philipp

*deadline for third response paper*

**Session 10 – 6 Oct 2015**

**Screening**
*Solo Sunny* (1980), dir. Wolfgang Kohlhaase and Konrad Wolf

**Session 11 – 7 Oct 2015**

**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 for the English recitation:

Reading for the German recitation:
Poss and Warnecke (eds), *Spur der Filme*, 354-56.

**Session 12 – 13 Oct 2015**

**Screening**
*Wings of Desire* (1987), dir. Wim Wenders

**Session 13 – 14 Oct 2015**

**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 angle figures Damiel and Cassiel.

Reading for the English recitation:

Reading for the German recitation:
Vogt, Die Stadt im Kino, 689-700
Wim Wenders, Die Logik der Bilder: Essays und Gespräche, ed. by Michael Töteberg (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1988), 93-104.

*deadline for first critical essay*

19 to 23 Oct 2015 – Fall Break – No Classes

*Special Event (Sessions 14 and 15 combined) – 27 Oct 2015, 7pm*  
Screening of We Are Young. We Are Strong. (2014) and discussion with writer/director Burhan Qurbani and his co-author Martin Behnke

On 24 August 1992 in the East German city of Rostock a rampaging mob – to the applause and cheering of more than 3,000 bystanders – besieged and set fire to a residential building housing more than 120 Vietnamese men, women and children. The riots became a symbol for xenophobia in recently reunified Germany. This film recounts the incident from the perspectives of three very different characters.

Session 16 – 3 Nov 2015  
Screening  
Life Is All You Get (1997), dir. Wolfgang Becker

Session 17 – 4 Nov 2015  
Lives under Construction  
Becker’s popular comedy shows 1990s Berlin in a state of transformation: Everyday characters navigate a city that seems to change as quickly as their own lives. Made by X-Filme Creative Pool, Life Is All You Get is part of a production venture that made a lasting impact on images of Berlin, from Tom Tykwer’s Run Lola Run (1998) to Becker’s GDR comedy Good Bye Lenin! (2001).

Reading for the English recitation:
Brockmann, A Critical History, 413-34.

Reading for the German recitation:
Vogt, Die Stadt im Kino, 724-32.
Session 18 – 10 Nov 2015
Screening
*No Place to Go* (2000), dir. Oskar Roehler

Session 19 – 11 Nov 2015
From Euphoria to Alienation
Roehler’s stylish neo-noir is both an intimate portrait of his mother, the writer Gisela Elsner, and a provocative take on the fall of the Berlin Wall. Showing the euphoria of 1989 through the eyes of an ideological outsider, *No Place to Go* is a Berlin film characterized by disorientation and disillusionment.

Reading for the English recitation:
Johannes von Moltke, “Terrains Vagues. Landscapes of Unification in Oskar Roehler’s *No Place to Go*,” in Jaimey Fisher and Brad Prager (eds), *The Collapse of the Conventional: German Film and Its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 157-85.

Reading for the German recitation:

Session 20 – 17 Nov 2015
Screening
*Berlin Is In Germany* (2001), dir. Hannes Stöhr

Session 21 – 18 Nov 2015
Remapping the Capital
In a way similar to the GDR comedies *Good Bye Lenin!* and *Sonnenallee* (1999), Stöhr's feature film debut stages – and challenges – perceptions of East and West Germany after 1990. The film's portrayal of the rapidly transforming German capital will serve as a starting point for discussing what has been termed “Ostalgie” (nostalgia for the East).

Reading for the English recitation:

Reading for the German recitation:

Production notes and statement by the director taken from the film's press kit.
Session 22 – 24 Nov 2015
Screening
Head-On (2004), dir. Fatih Akin

Session 23 – 25 Nov 2015
A Multicultural Homeland?
Towards the end of the 1990s, Turkish-German cinema entered the mainstream. Akin’s Head-On (2004) became the first German production since Fassbinder’s Veronika Voss (1982) to win the Berlin Film Festival. Set in Hamburg, the film will introduce us to another city of great importance for German cinema. Moreover, we will ask how Head-On negotiates ideas of belonging and place while reflecting changes in German society more broadly.

Reading for the English recitation:

Reading for the German recitation:
Andrea Wienen und Holger Twele, Gegen die Wand (Berlin: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2004), 19-20.

*deadline for second critical essay*

Session 24 – 1 Dec 2015
Screening
Ghosts (2005), dir. Christian Petzold

Session 25 – 2 Dec May 2015
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 for the English recitation:

Reading for the German recitation:
Director’s note and interview available on the film’s official website http://www.gespenster-der-film.de.
Session 26 – 8 Dec 2015
Screening
*Three* (2010) dir. Tom Tykwer

Session 27 – 9 Dec 2015
Unexpected Discoveries
More than ten years after *Run Lola Run*, arguably the film to most strongly shape the image of post-1990 Berlin, Tykwer returned to the city to shoot a romantic comedy of sorts. Life in contemporary Berlin is portrayed through a love triangle leading to the discovery of hidden sides of self and desire. In analyzing the film’s address and audience, we will also consider 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.

Session 28 – 16 Dec 2015
Exam

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

Required Co-curricular Activities
n/a

Suggested Co-curricular Activities
You might consider a visit to the Deutsche Kinemathek, Museum for Cinema and Television, located on Potsdamer Straße 2, or the Filmmuseum Potsdam. Both museums would also give you a sense of German film before 1945 and the importance of the UFA studios outside Berlin.

Your Instructor
I graduated from Humboldt University in 2006, with an M.A. thesis on contemporary Holocaust film. From 2004 to 2006, I 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, I have held post-doctoral fellowships at Homerton College, the University of Cambridge, and the University of Leeds. My 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. My monograph *The Nazi Past in Contemporary German Film: Viewing Experiences of Intimacy and Immersion* appeared with Camden House in December 2014.