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

Course Title

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

Instructor Contact Information
Dr. Axel Bangert
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Course Details
Lecture: Tuesdays, 3:30pm to 4:45pm
English Recitation: Tuesdays, 5:00pm to 6:15pm
German Recitation: TBA
Location: NYUB Academic Center, Room TBA

Screenings: Mondays, 8:15pm to 10:15pm (starting 8 February 2016)
Location: NYUB Academic Center, Room TBA

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 Scene Analyses (500 to 750 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 response paper 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 16 February, 23 February, and 1 March 2016 (either by email or printed out before the session).

2 Critical Essays (1750 to 2000 words): 40% of total grade

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 22 March and 3 May 2016 (either by email or printed out before the session).

1 Final In-Class Exam (2 hours): 30% of total grade

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 meeting in the week commencing on 4 April 2016, 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:

- $B+ = 87-89$
- $C+ = 77-79$
- $D+ = 67-69$
- $F = \text{below 65}$
- $A = 94-100$
- $B = 84-86$
- $C = 74-76$
- $D = 65-66$
- $A- = 90-93$
- $B- = 80-83$
- $C- = 70-73$

Alternatively:

- $A= 4.0$
- $A- = 3.7$
- $B+ = 3.3$
- $B = 3.0$
- $B- = 2.7$
- $C+ = 2.3$
- $C = 2.0$
- $C- =1.7$
- $D+ = 1.3$
- $D = 1.0$
- $F = 0.0$

**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. Doctor's notes need to be submitted to the Assistant Director for Academics or the Arts Coordinator, who will inform your professors.

Unexcused absences affect students' grades: In content courses each unexcused absence (equalling 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 two or three (consecutive or non-consecutive) unexcused absences (equalling 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 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 Assistant Director for Academics; until this doctor's note is produced the
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 their instructor AND NYUB’s Academic Office in writing via e-mail one week in advance before being absent for this purpose. 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. 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.

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.

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 (http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html) 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: http://nyu.libguides.com/citations).

NYUB takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your
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-policies

**Required Text(s)**
Course Reader

Books can be bought at *Saint Georges* bookshop in Wörther Straße 27 near NYUB, where the books are pre-ordered for students. Students can re-sell their used books at the end of the semester to *Saint Georges* (with the exception of German language books). Additionally, one copy of each book is kept in the Reading Room of NYUB's Academic Center, for you to read in the center but not to take out.

Readers can be bought at *Sprintout* copy-shop (situated under the railway arches in front of Humboldt University's main library, the Grimm-Zentrum, in 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

**Session 1 – Tuesday, 2 Feb 2016**
*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, 8 Feb 2016

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

Session 3 – Tuesday, 9 Feb 2016

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 mise-en-scène.

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

Session 4 – Monday, 15 Feb 2016

Screening
*Divided Heaven* (1964), dir. Konrad Wolf

Session 5 – Tuesday, 16 Feb 2016

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.

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

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

*deadline for first clip analysis*

Session 6 – Monday, 22 Feb 2016
Screening
The Legend of Paul and Paula (1973), dir. Heiner Carow

Session 7 – Tuesday, 23 Feb 2016
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:
Bordwell and Thompson, Film Art, chapter on editing.
Berghahn, Hollywood behind the Wall, 194-203.

Reading for the German recitation:
Ingrid Poss and Peter Warnecke (eds), Spur der Filme: Zeitzeugen über die DEFA (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2006), 282-87.
Dagmar Schittly, Zwischen Regie und Regime: Die Filmpolitik der SED im Spiegel der DEFA-Produktionen (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2002), 177-198.

*deadline for second clip analysis*

Session 8 – Monday, 29 Feb 2016
Screening
Solo Sunny (1980), dir. Wolfgang Kohlhaase and Konrad Wolf

Session 9 – Tuesday, 1 Mar 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 Comer (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:
Brockmann, A Critical History, 275-82.

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

*deadline for third clip analysis*

Session 10 – Monday, 7 Mar 2016
Screening
Berlin Alexanderplatz (1980), dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder (Episode 1)

Session 11 – Tuesday, 8 Mar 2016
Berlin Alexanderplatz
Produced for West German television, Fassbinder's monumental adaptation of Alfred Döblin's modernist novel is one of the most distinctive and influential Berlin films ever made. In addition to analyzing the film's dark vision of Weimar Berlin, we will also use Berlin Alexanderplatz as a pathway into the life and work of Fassbinder as the central figure of the New German Cinema until his premature death in 1982.

Reading for the English recitation:

Reading for the German recitation:

Session 12 – Monday, 14 Mar 2016
Screening
Wings of Desire (1987), dir. Wim Wenders
Session 13 – Tuesday, 15 Mar 2016
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.

Session 14 – Monday, 21 Mar 2016
Screening
Life Is All You Get (1997), dir. Wolfgang Becker

Session 15 – Tuesday, 22 Mar 2016
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 had 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.

*deadline for first critical essay*

25 Mar to 3 Apr 2016 – Spring Break – No Classes
Session 16 – Monday, 4 Apr 2016
Screening
*Run Lola Run* (1998), dir. Tom Tykwer

Session 17 – Tuesday, 5 Apr 2016
Celebrating Movement
A surprise success, nationally as well as internationally, *Run Lola Run* arguably was 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.

Reading for the English recitation:

Reading for the German recitation:

Session 18 – Monday, 11 April 2016
Screening
*No Place to Go* (2000), dir. Oskar Roehler

Session 19 – Tuesday, 12 April 2016
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:
Interview with the director taken from the film’s press kit.

Session 20 – Monday, 18 Apr 2016
Session 21 – Tuesday, 19 Apr 2016
Nostalgia for the East
Like several other films produced around the turn of the millennium, Good Bye, Lenin! deals with the everyday lives of East Germans, and how profoundly these were transformed in the wake of reunification. Becker's partly sentimental, partly humoristic portrayal of the rapidly changing German capital after 1990 will serve as a starting point for discussing what has been termed “Ostalgie” (nostalgia for the East).

Reading for the English recitation:
Brockmann, A Critical History, 469-77.
Paul Cooke, Representing East Germany since unification: from colonization to nostalgia (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 103-40.

Reading for the German recitation:

Session 22 – Monday, 25 Apr 2016
Screening
Ghosts (2005), dir. Christian Petzold

Session 23 – Tuesday, 26 Apr 2016
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 24 – Monday, 2 May 2016
Screening

Session 25 – Tuesday, 3 May 2016
Lives under Surveillance
Winner of the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 2007, The Lives of Others was not only an extremely successful German production, but also, in terms of its portrayal of life in Socialist Germany, a controversially debated one. Much more so than the (n)ostalgic GDR comedies, the film visualizes state surveillance through the East German Ministry of State Security (“Stasi”). Presenting Berlin in a desaturated look that has become typical of filmic portrayals of the period, von Donnersmarck confronts us with the vulnerability of private space during the GDR.

Reading for the English recitation:
Brockmann, A Critical History, 489-500
Anna Funder, Stasiland (Melbourne: Text, 2002), 10-53.

Reading for the German recitation:

*deadline for second critical essay*

Session 26 – Monday, 9 May 2016
Screening
Victoria (2015), dir. Sebastian Schipper

Session 27 – Tuesday, 10 May 2016
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. In analyzing the production’s approach and style, 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 – Tuesday, 17 May 2016
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
We will be undertaking several visits to the Berlin Film Festival taking place from 11 to 21 February 2016.

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.