

Weimar Cinema GERM 373

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Office hours: Monday 13:00-15:00, SH 688, Rm 483

M/W 8:35-9:55
SH 688, Rm 361

Weimar Cinema brought to the screen a world populated by monsters, lunatics, workers vamps, strangers, and doubles. These figures embodied the tensions and fears of the Weimar period (1919-1933) in a manner that continues to attract audiences today. One of the most influential arguments about these films is that they anticipated the rise of the Third Reich. This thesis – put forward by Siegfried Kracauer in *From Caligari to Hitler* – dominated the study of Weimar cinema until the 1980s when a new generation of scholar (Thomas Elsaesser, Miriam Hansen, Tom Gunning, and others) attempted to both retrieve these films’ pre-WWII historical context, as well as investigate their relevance for a new set of cinematic and social concerns related to gender, affect, and embodied forms of perception. This course explores these different takes on Weimar cinema in order to understand what makes these films seem so prophetic and what – if anything – makes them relevant today. It aims to introduce the student to the fundamentals of film analysis, especially formal analysis and textual analysis.

Screenings

There are no screenings for this class. All films are available on Kanopy, YouTube, or Netflix (see course schedule for links). Students are responsible for watching films prior to each week’s courses. For example, if we’re discussing Murnau’s *The Last Laugh* the week of October 12th, then you are expected to have already watched it *before* October 12th.

Required Reading

- Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael J Cowan (eds) *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory, 1907-1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016). Digital edition available through McGill’s library:
https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/search/detail/938890898?datasource=library_web&search_field=all_fields&search=true&database=all&scope=wz%3A12129&format=&clusterResults=on&func=find-b&q=&topLod=0&queryString=The%20Promise%20of%20Cinema&find=Go
- Timothy Corrigan, *Short Guide to Writing About Film* (Pearson: 2014). On My Courses.
- All other texts will be provided on My Courses.

Recommended Reading

- Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2007.

Requirements:

Participation

10%

- Class Attendance
 - Up to three unexcused absences
 - Notes regarding absences after the fact will not be accepted

Scene Analysis 20%

- Based on Yale Film Analysis Guide
- Due Date: Submit on My Courses on Wednesday, September 28th.
- Grading: I do not give comments on scene analyses unless there are serious problems. The assignment is essentially Pass/Fail.

Midterm Paper (3-4 pgs) 30%

- Topic: Pick **one** film that we watched for class thus far. Explain how it uses **one** of the formal cinematic devices – e.g. montage, close-ups, editing speed, camera movements, rhythm, etc. – discussed in the Yale Film Analysis Guide.
- At least two sources from readings in the class. (Please note that Corrigan and Yale Film Analysis Guide **do not count** as sources). These can be two different books/articles by the same author, or two books/articles from different authors. More sources are fine but won't necessarily get you a better grade. Independent sources are fine too but must be in addition to sources from class readings.
- Due Date: Friday, October 21 by 11:59 pm.
- 12-point font, Times New Roman, double spaced.
- Save your document using the following format: "Last Name, First Name, Paper Title"
 - E.g. "Smith, John, Eisenstein's Montage"
- Submit on My Courses as a Word Document!
- For grading, see the grading rubric posted on My Courses.

Final Paper (4-6 pages) 40%

- Topic: Pick **two** or more films that we watched in class thus far. **At least one of the films must be from a post-midterm class.** Compare how these films use **one** of the formal cinematic devices – e.g. montage, close-ups, editing speed, camera movements, rhythm, etc. – discussed in the Yale Film Analysis Guide. Make sure to justify your comparison, ideally as part of your thesis.
- At least three sources from readings in class. (Please note that Corrigan and Yale Film Analysis Guide **do not count** as sources). These sources can be three different books/articles by the same author, or three books/articles from different authors. At least two sources must be from readings after the midterm. More sources are fine but won't necessarily get you a better grade. Independent sources are fine too but must be in addition to sources from class readings.
- Due Date: Monday, December 5 by 11:59 pm
- 12-point font, Times New Roman, double spaced
- Save your document using the following format: "Last Name, First Name, Paper Title"
 - E.g. "Smith, John, Eisenstein's Montage"
- Submit on My Courses as a Word Document!
- For Grading, see the grading rubric posted on My Courses.

Extra Credit: 1/3 letter grade.

- Maximum three-minute short film based on the style of a director of your choice (from this class, obviously).
- Students can work alone or in groups of up to four people.
- Each student must submit a one-page written assessment of their film explaining its style and its relationship to the director that inspired it.
- Due Date: November 28th (email, Dropbox, Google Drive, or WeTransfer).
- In class screenings on Monday, December 5th.

Late Work

- All late work will receive an automatic deduction of a 1/3rd letter grade unless you have a certified reason for an extension.
- You must contact me in advance if you think you need an extension regardless of whether you have a certifiable reason – e.g. you're feeling overwhelmed by work, etc.
- If you need a further extension, you will be penalized another 1/3rd letter grade. You must contact me in advance about extending your extension.
- If you turn in late work without an extension, you will be penalized one full-letter grade. In this case, it is your responsibility to contact me if you turned your paper in late. Do not wait for me to contact you. If you submit a paper late without an extension, make sure I acknowledge that I received it.
- Students who wait until the end of the semester to turn in all of their work will be penalized two full-letter grades for each assignment they turn in. This means the highest grade you can receive on each assignment is a C.

Grades

- Please note that I do not revise grades unless there has been a calculation error – i.e. I did not add right. Grades are not negotiable based on extenuating circumstances.

Language of Submission:

“In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.”

« Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue). »

Academic Integrity:

“McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures” (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information). *(Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)*

« L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).»

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodation please email me or speak with me after class or during office hours.

Trigger Warnings

I do not give trigger warnings for specific films or content since what people find triggering varies greatly from person to person. In general, films in this class include violent episodes and scenes of animal suffering. Please consult each film's IMDB page for more information. If you think a film will trigger you, I will do my best to find an alternative film for you to watch. That said, if you think a significant portion of the films in this class will be triggering, I suggest you take a different course.

Power Points

To ensure class attendance, I do not share my Power Points or lectures. The main exception is if a student has a certifiable reason – e.g. extended absence due to medical issues (not one or two absences). Feel free to photograph my lecture slides.

Course Schedule

Week One: Introduction

August 31

- Introduction to Weimar Cinema and Culture
- Go over syllabus

Week Two: Lunatics and Strangers

Film: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920, 76min).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gpn49rUuOGU>

Monday, September 5: No class, Labor Day.

Wednesday, September 7

- Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, "Caligari," 61-77
- *The Promise of Cinema* documents #63, 72, 73, 240
- Read all parts and sections of the Yale Film Analysis Guide: <https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/>
- Timothy Corrigan, "Film Terms and Topics for Film Analysis and Writing," in *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, 36-71

Week Three: Horror

Film: *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Terror* (F.W. Murnau, 1922, 81min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCT1YUtNOA8>

Monday, September 12

- *The Promise of Cinema* documents #190-196
- Jeffery Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses).” My Courses

Wednesday, September 14

- *The Promise of Cinema* documents #197-200, 220

Week Four: Gender Bending

Films: *I Don't want to be a Man* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1919, 45 mins); *The Doll* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1919, 66 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCmwaXkf8Xg> (*I Don't Want...*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXWwvxBnphs> (*The Doll*)

Monday, September 19

- *The Promise of Cinema* documents #89, 90, 96, 97, 98

Wednesday, September 21

- Timothy Corrigan, “Six Approaches to Writing About Film,” focus on “Kinds of Formalism and “Ideology” sections (91-96)

Week Five: Homosexuality

Film: *Different from the Others* (Richard Oswald, 1919, 50 mins)

To be distributed via Drop Box or My Courses, or watched in class.

Monday, September 26: Class Cancelled, Rosh Hashanah

Wednesday, September 28

- *The Promise of Cinema* documents #102-106, 174, 178-179
- Timothy Corrigan, “Style and Structure in Writing,” 108-126

Thursday, September 29: Optional Make Up Class on Zoom. 8:35 am. Register via Email.

Week Six: The Mobile Camera

Film: *The Last Laugh* (F.W. Murnau, 1924, 101mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7yiZM-SlwI>

Monday, October 3

- *The Promise of Cinema* documents #222-223, 226-227, 229-230
- Sigfried Kracauer, “The Hotel Lobby” (My Courses)

Wednesday, October 5: Class Cancelled, Yom Kippur

Thursday, October 6: Optional Make Up Class on Zoom. 10:05 am. Register via Email.

Week Seven: Epic Architecture

Film: *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927, 2h 33 mins)

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/114333> OR

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BBnMCAIuQg>

Monday, October 10: Canadian Thanksgiving

Wednesday, October 12: Reading Break

Thursday, October 13: Mandatory Make Up Class, Monday Schedule

- Le Corbusier, “The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning” (My Courses)
- *The Promise of Cinema* documents #224, 228
- Andreas Huyssen, “The Vamp and the Machine: Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*.” My Courses.

Week Eight: Documentary and the Avant-Garde

Film: *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* (Walter Ruttmann, 1927, 65 mins)

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/158794> OR

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LdFasmBJYFg>

Monday, October 17

- *The Promise of Cinema* documents #45, 201-210.

Wednesday, October 19

- Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life.” My Courses.

Week Nine: The Femme Fatale

Film: *Pandora’s Box* (G.W. Pabst, 1929, 133 mins)

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/112969> OR

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhSgbw_BviU

Monday, October 24

- Mary Ann Doane, “The Erotic Barter.” My Courses.

Wednesday, October 26

- Barbara Hales, “Blonde Satan: Weimar Constructions of the Criminal Femme Fatale” (My Courses).

Week Ten: Transition to Sound

Film: *People on Sunday* (Robert Siodmak, Edgar G. Ulmer, 1930, 73 mins)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Li1w_MnjZ0

Monday, October 31

- Elodie A. Roy, “Broken Records from Berlin: The Place of Listening in *People on Sunday*,” *Sound Studies* 3,1 (2017).

Wednesday, November 2

- Ian Boyd Whyte and David Frisby (eds), *Metropolis Berlin*, “Mass and Leisure,” 508-511 and 533-536 (Documents #197-198)

Week Eleven: Women’s Community

Film: *Girls in Uniform* (Leontine Sagan, 1931, 90 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0s0WWmx3J0U>

Monday, November 7

- *The Promise of Cinema* documents #232, 247-250

Wednesday, November 9

- Weiss, “Female Pleasures and Perversions in Early Sound Cinema” (My Courses)

Week Twelve: Class and Revolution

Film: *Kuhle Wampe, or Who Owns the World* (Slatan Dudow and Bertolt Brecht, 1932, 69 mins)

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/170556> OR

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrtsAloTNEU>

Monday, November 14

- *The Promise of Cinema* documents # 107, 158-162, 172, 257

- Bertolt Brecht, “Texts and Fragments on the Cinema.” My Courses

Wednesday, November 16

- Bertolt Brecht, “The Kuhle Wampe Film” (Synopsis)
- Ian Boyd Whyte and David Frisby (eds), *Metropolis Berlin*, “The Proletarian City,” 134-37 and 163-171 (Documents #51-53)

Week Thirteen: Hysteria

Film: *M: A City Searches for a Murderer* (Fritz Lang, 1931, 1h 39 mins)

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/112965>

Monday, November 21

- *The Promise of Cinema* documents #251-254

Wednesday, November 23

- Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema* (PDF, My Courses)

Week Fourteen

Film: *The Three Penny Opera* (G.W. Pabst, 1931, 1h 44 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P32z8Quvfeg>

Monday, November 28

- *The Promise of Cinema* documents #171, 258-261

Wednesday, November 30

- No readings, paper writing.

Week Fifteen

Film: *In Class Screening of Student Films*

Monday, December 5