

FILM STUDIES H670 / GERMAN H670– Cinema and the Historical Avant Garde

Professor John E. Davidson

Office Hours:

Brown 109

Room

Meeting Times: T&R ?

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Film Studies H670 / German H670, “Cinema and the Historical Avant Garde,” investigates the vital connection between new possibilities in representation, art, social philosophy, and politics in the early phases of the age of mass culture. The technological and social conditions that gave rise to the film apparatus were very much on the minds of thinkers and artists in the early twentieth century, and they were understood to signal fundamental shifts in areas ranging from society’s make up to human perception. After beginning with an overview of these conditions and discussions of early films, this class will take up the notion of the “avant garde,” a term used to describe those at the progressive forefront of military, political, or artistic activity. One important marker of European modernism is that many saw these aspects of the avant garde as being aligned. To understand this, we will start out from Peter Bürger’s notion of the “historical avant garde,” which seeks to historicize this complicated relationship between art, the institutions of art, and politics. We will test his ideas, and those of others, using examples from films of the day. Such avant-garde film practices that were quite widespread until “realism” became the primary aesthetic mode of the industry that came to dominate cinema. These alternate conceptions of what a film is, or might do, have largely been eliminated from standard notions about movies today, and the course concludes by considering the consequences of that narrowing in the cinematic spectrum.

NB: Although this class is slated for two meetings per week, it will function much like a seminar. Much of one weekly meeting will be taken up with the introduction to and viewing of films; the other session will be devoted primarily to the discussion of the reading and viewing material for that week. When films appear on both days in any given week they will be short enough to allow for ample discussion and analysis.

FS H670 assumes no prior knowledge of German or German films and is taught in English. Students registering for FS H670 must either have completed FS 250 or Eng. 263 or have permission of the instructor.

Students registering for Ger H670 will be required to read assignments in German where appropriate and write the final essay in German. They should already have completed at least one German course at the 300 or above.

GOALS

- 1) To introduce students to the historical conditions giving rise to modern mass culture.
- 2) To foster an understanding of how film has been conceived to function both as an art form and as political representation.
- 3) To foster a greater awareness of the inherent and often unexamined limitation of possibilities regarding the “film” culture with which students interact every day.

The class discussions, oral presentation, exams, and, especially, the final paper should provide evidence of students’ ability to apply critical thought to both artistic and intellectual material pertaining to the class topics and to express that thought clearly.

REQUIRED TEXTS (at SBX; also on reserve in the Main Library Closed Reserve)

Bürger, Peter *Theory of the Avant Garde*
Kuenzli, Rudolf ed. *Dada and Surrealist Film*
Course packet (Cop-Ez at Tuttle)

Where no page numbers appear below, German and English texts will be made available.

REQUIREMENTS

<u>Item</u>	<u>% of Grade</u>
Class preparation, attendance, and participation	15
Oral Presentation	10
Midterm & Final Exam (15% each)	30
Final Paper	45

Description

Preparation, attendance & participation are mandatory. Students receive a mark (3, 2, 1, 0) after each class, with the total for the quarter divided by 4 to provide 15% of the final grade. After 2 unexcused absences, each subsequent absence will result in a 3% reduction of the *final* grade.

The oral presentation, usually 10 minutes in length, will provide fellow students a gloss on one or more reading assignments, as well as questions for further discussion.

The examinations will be short take-home tests on the films and texts from the first and second parts of the quarter respectively.

The paper, using analysis of primary and secondary material, must explore a topic approved by the instructor and developed during the second half of the quarter in stages: thesis statement (3%); outline & bibliography (7%); final paper of 8-12 pages (30%); final discussion in fifteen minute individual meeting with instructor (5%).

COURSE OVERVIEW

Week 1 Introduction

A) Modernity/Modernism

Reading -- Begin Bürger

B) Introduction to Film History

Week 2 Notions of the Avant Garde

Reading: Complete Bürger

A) Pen and Sword -- Historical Avant Garde

Reading: Handout – selections from *The Weimar Sourcebook* / “Kinodebatte”

B) The Effects of Film -- Kino Debates

Week 3 Introduction to Montage

Reading: Kuenzli pp159-75 & 199-219;

A) DADA / Documentary

Reading: In Reader – selections from Jack Ellis, *History of Film* pp.1-70

B) *Birth of a Nation*

Week 4 Montage Theory & Materialism

Reading: In Reader – selections from Eisenstein, *Toward a Theory of Montage* pp.2-69;
from Polan *Political Language of Film & the AvG* pp33-53

A) Eisenstein’s Revolutions on Film

Reading: In Reader – selections from Vertov, *Kino-Eye* pp20-62;
Prunes on Vertov: pp1-14.

B) *Three Songs of Lenin*

Week 5 Surrealism / Absolute Film / Constructivism

Reading: Kuenzli pp 28-45 & 99-127

A) *Ballet mécanique; L'Etoile de mer*

Reading: In Reader -- *Hans Richter : activism, modernism, and the avant-garde* pp. 72-121

B) Richter films / Russian Constructivists' Films

MIDTERM DISTRIBUTED

Week 6 Music as Structural Concept

MIDTERM HANDED IN
SUGGESTED PAPER AREAS DISTRIBUTED

A) *Symphonie diagonale* – Visit by composer Sue Harshe

Reading: In Reader – Martin Brady: “... Adorno's transparencies on film” (pp218-30)
From Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, pp61-106

B) *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City*

Week 7 Sound and Power

Reading: Handout -- selected “Songs of Eisler & Brecht”
Handout -- Eisler, “Ask me more about Brecht”;

PAPER THESIS STATEMENT HANDED IN

A) *Kuhle Wampe*

Reading: In Reader – from Polan *Political Language of Film & the AvG* pp79-99
Handout – Brecht et al on making *Kuhle Wampe*

B) Left Cinema in the 1930s

THESIS STATEMENT RETURNED

Week 8 Away from “word culture”

PAPER OUTLINE & BIBLIOGRAPHY HANDED IN

A) *The Blue Light*

Reading: Handouts – Balazs from *The visible human*; Arnheim from *Film*

B) Physiognomy and film

Week 9 Reactionary Modernisms and the Avant Garde

Reading: In reader: Herff from *Reactionary Modernism* pp1-48 & 189-237

OUTLINE & BIBLIOGRAPHY RETURNED

A) Riefenstahl Excerpts

B) *The Steel Beast*

Week 10 Modernism / Postmodernism: The Great Divide?

Reading: In Reader – Huyssen, “Mapping the Postmodern” (pp105-57)
From Zurbrugg, *Parameters of Postmodernism* pp18-27 & 129-37

A) *Koyaanisquatsi*

PAPER HANDED IN

B) Final Session, Evaluations

FINAL EXAM HANDED OUT

Exam Week (Regular Exam Period)

FINALS HANDED IN

Meet individually with professor to discuss paper.

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ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT

***Academic Integrity* means earning credit honestly through your own efforts. Academic Integrity should be the number one priority for students, as the punishments for violating it are severe and embarrassing.**

The most common forms of academic dishonesty are the following:

1. **Plagiarism.** Plagiarism is the act of taking ideas, writings, or visual art of another person, including a tutor, and presenting them as your own. In writing, this could take the form of word-for-word copying, paraphrasing, or even taking the structure of someone else’s work and presenting it as your own. This includes material available on the internet. In visual arts, this could take the form of copying ideas, actual structures, or entire works and presenting them as your own. If unsure, take the work to your instructor or a tutor and ask for help.
2. **Cheating on exams.** This could take the form of having someone else take the exam for you, looking on someone else’s paper or letting someone look on yours, using electronic devices, and taking crib notes into the exam.
3. **Cheating on Assignments.** Copying another person’s work, working too closely with a tutor or another student, giving your work to another student, splitting tasks on an assignment that is not CLEARLY designed as a collaborative one, turning in the same work for two different classes, and buying or borrowing papers.

These and other forms of academic misconduct will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct.

DISABILITY STATEMENT

Any student who feels that s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me personally to discuss specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) in Room 150 Pomerene Hall, (614) 292-3307, to coordinate reasonable accommodations for those with documented disabilities.