

# Cinema of the Weimar Republic

Fall 2017



## Meetings:

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## Screenings:

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## Instructor:

Erik Born  
erikborn@gmail.com

## Office Hours:

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## Course Overview

This course introduces the cinema of the Weimar Republic (1918–33), a golden age of German cinema comparable to the classical Hollywood era. During this period, the German film industry developed a variety of influential aesthetics, from the Expressionism of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* to the New Objectivity of *Berlin – Symphony of a Great City*.

Situating the classic films, directors, and stars of the Weimar era within the cultural upheavals of the period, we will discuss the aftereffects of WWI; representations of class and gender; discourses of nature and technology; relationships between aesthetics, spectatorship, and politics; and processes of industrialization, urbanization, and globalization.

To explore these discourses of cinema, we will put readings of early film theory in dialogue with early silent films that address similar concerns. The course will consist of screenings (🎬), readings (📖), presentations (🗣️), and several writing assignments (✍️). Motivated students will also have the opportunity to contribute to the collaborative website for our sourcebook.

Students without experience in film studies are welcome. The course will also serve as an introduction to discussing and analyzing film. All readings and discussions will be in English, and all films will include subtitles or intertitles.

## Course Text

All of our readings will come from the following sourcebook, which is on order at the bookstore and on reserve at the library:

### Required:

Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan, eds. *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory, 1907–1933*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0520219083. \$65.00

### Please Note:

Most texts in *The Promise of Cinema* are only 1–3 pages long. So, there will be **ca. 40 pages of reading material** per week, with more reading over the weekend than during the week.

Additional resources for oral presentations will be made available on Blackboard.

# Course Schedule



## **I. The Pre-History of Weimar Cinema, 1895–1918**

### **1. The Origins of Moving Images**

**8/22** Introduction to Course

**8/24** 📖 *Promise of Cinema* User's Guide, Introduction, #1  
🗣️ Tom Gunning: "The Cinema of Attractions"

### **2. Intermedia: Film vs. Literature vs. Theater**

**8/28** 🎬 *The Student of Prague*

**8/29** ✍️ Keywords for Film Studies  
📖 *Promise of Cinema* #78–80, 82, 85–86, 88

**8/31** 📖 *Promise of Cinema* #15, 32, 49, 83, 89  
🗣️ Erwin Panofsky: "Style & Medium in Motion Pictures"

### 3. Aesthetics, Spectatorship, Politics

9/4 🎬 NO SCREENING: LABOR DAY

9/5 📖 *Promise of Cinema* #62–68

9/7 📖 *Promise of Cinema* #73–77  
🗨️ Siegfried Kracauer: “Cult of Distraction”

## II. The Emergence of Expressionism, 1919–26

### 4. The Aesthetics of German Expressionism

9/11 🎬 *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*

9/12 ✍️ Close Reading of a Film Sequence  
📖 *Promise of Cinema* #189–192, 194–196

9/14 📖 *Promise of Cinema* #51, 193, 197, 200, 220, 224  
🗨️ Selected Poems in *The Dawn of Humanity*

### 5. Gestural Language and Visual Storytelling

9/18 🎬 *The Last Laugh*

9/19 📖 *Promise of Cinema* #218–219, 221–223, 227

9/21 📖 *Promise of Cinema* #10, 52, 229–230  
🗨️ Bela Balázs: *The Visible Human*, excerpts

### 6. Bodies in Motion – Movement and Dance

9/25 🎬 *The Holy Mountain*

9/26 ✍️ Close Reading of a Historical Source  
📖 *Promise of Cinema* #29, 38, 42, 47–50

9/28 📖 *Promise of Cinema* #55, 56, 58, 181  
🗨️ Siegfried Kracauer: “The Mass Ornament”

## 7. Industrialization, Urbanization, Globalization

10/2 🎬 *Metropolis*

10/3 📖 *Promise of Cinema* #41, 59, 174, 199, 226, 228

10/5 ✍️ Take-Home Mid-Term

## 8. Film Technology and Media Change

10/9 NO SCREENING: FALL BREAK

10/10 NO CLASS: FALL BREAK

10/12 📖 *Promise of Cinema* #83, 92, 180, 262–263, 278  
🗣️ Rudolf Arnheim: “Film and Reality,” excerpts

# III. The Rise of New Objectivity, 1927–33

## 9. Montage, Revolution, and Class Conflict

10/16 🎬 *Battleship Potemkin*

10/17 ✍️ Film Criticism vs. Film Analysis  
📖 *Promise of Cinema* #158–164

10/19 📖 *The Promise of Cinema* #166–170  
🗣️ Sergei Eisenstein: “Methods of Montage”

## 10. The Avant-Garde and the City Film

10/23 🎬 *Berlin – Symphony of a Great City*

10/24 📖 *The Promise of Cinema* #201–207

10/26 📖 *The Promise of Cinema* #45, 208–209, 213, 216  
🗣️ Hans Richter: “Easel–Scroll–Film”

## 11. Haunted Media

10/30 🎬 *Nosferatu*

10/31 ✍ Discourse Analysis

📖 *Promise of Cinema* #87, 91, 94, 96, 99, 100, 106

11/2 📖 *Promise of Cinema* #13, 16, 39, 57, 176

🗣 Sigmund Freud: “The Uncanny”

## 12. Animation and Advertising

11/6 🎬 *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*

11/7 📖 *Promise of Cinema* #211, 235, 240, 243–245, 249

11/9 📖 *Promise of Cinema* #72, 100, 120, 237, 246

🗣 Siegfried Kracauer: “Photography”

## 13. Melodrama, Sexuality, Movie Stars

11/13 🎬 *Pandora’s Box*

11/14 ✍ Titles, Arguments, Sources

📖 *Promise of Cinema* #143–146, 150, 152, 155, 157

11/16 📖 *Promise of Cinema* #71, 102, 104, 173

🗣 Irmgard Keun, *The Artificial Silk Girl*, excerpts

## 14. The Politics of Realism

11/20 🎬 *People on Sunday*

11/21 📖 *Promise of Cinema* #28, 45, 97–98, 148, 215

11/23 NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING RECESS

## IV. The End of an Era?

### 15. Sound Film and the Legacy of Weimar Cinema

11/27 🎬 *The Blue Angel*

11/28 ✍️ Final Paper Workshop

📖 *Promise of Cinema* #60, 142, 153, 154, 232, 247, 254, 274

11/30 Concluding Discussion

Student Presentations of Creative Work

