Ger 355
Special Studies in German Cinema
Winter 2011
Prof. Kenneth S. Calhoon

**Enchanted Light: German Cinema of the Weimar Period**

The “Tale of the Three Brothers” sequence from the recent *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* attests to the enduring influence and abiding appeal of films made in Germany during the Weimar Republic (1918-1933). Designed and directed by Ben Hibon, this film-within-a-film is a conspicuous citation of Lotte Reiniger’s *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* (1926), itself indebted to the traditions of Javanese theater, in which the silhouettes of intricate puppets are projected onto a screen using candlelight. At first blush, this cinematic incorporation of so archaic a technique may surprise us, and yet the cinema perpetually masks its mechanical apparatus through forms of expression considered “primitive” (a term we apply with care). This effacement of technology goes hand in hand with the embrace of the primitive that is one of Modernism’s defining gestures (as exemplified by the African masks that appear in paintings by Pablo Picasso or Ernst Ludwig Kirchner). That the cinema—the most thoroughly technological of artistic media—should tether itself so closely to earlier forms of projection has the effect of restoring the word “animation” to its more literal and original sense of bringing the dead (back) to life. Filmmaking in particular engages with an order of belief in which this “magical” restoration is possible. Cinema emerges and matures alongside Freudian psychoanalysis—a perspective from which film may be thought to satisfy desires or address fears discredited by “civilization” (a term we likewise apply with care). To this we may add that a great many of the films of this era confront us with objects of horror—vampires, ghosts, and creatures or robots that turn against their masters. James Whale’s *Frankenstein* (1931), an amalgam of motifs from German films of the previous decade, is emblematic in its display of the terrifying consequences of the dream of defying death—a dream this film and its German predecessors expose as taboo. This returns us to “Tale of the Three Brothers,” in which three young men who have cheated death are each granted a wish, the fulfillment of which, for at least two of them, is tantamount to dying.

Our plan is to examine a wide selection of mostly German films from this era—to analyze their structure, composition, history and artistry with an eye to the manner in which, both in form and content, they characteristically mount a resistance to their own modernity by staging encounters between disparate historical moments. A range of readings will be essential to a careful analysis of the formal and discursive particulars of the films under discussion. A good deal of time will be spent dissecting frames and sequences, to which end certain technical concepts fundamental to film-analysis will be covered. In the end, however, our approach may be thought of as a kind of cultural anthropology aimed at understanding the particular place of cinema, given its technological saturation, within a modernity that ultimately fortified the impulses it sought to master and contain.
Required Readings. The following readings are required for the course. Those marked with an asterisk (*) are available at the University Bookstore. The remaining readings are part of a packet to be purchased at The Copy Shop, 539 E. 13th.


Class Meeting Times. The scheduling for this class is somewhat irregular. We meet Mondays for two hours (2:00 – 4:00 p.m.), Wednesdays and Fridays for a single hour each (2:00 – 3:00). The room is 246 Gerlinger. The extra time on Monday is to facilitate the screening of films, though I wish to emphasize here that we will seldom view a film in its entirety during class. More typically we will use this extended meeting time to compare sequences from different films or to view sequences repeatedly for the purpose of careful scrutiny.
Requirements. Regular, prepared attendance is the minimal requirement for doing well in GER 355. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each meeting. There will be two mid-terms and a final, as well as one analytical essay (four to five printed pages) due at the beginning of week eight. No knowledge of German is required.

Grades. Final grades are broken down as follows: two in-class exams (20% each); one essay (25%) and one comprehensive final (25%); attendance, preparation and participation (10%).

Exams. Exams should be taken using a green book, which can be purchased for about 25 cents at the UO bookstore. One will probably suffice, but bring two per exam to be sure. Exams will be based on both films and readings. An identification section will ask you to identify perhaps five of eight terms or names, each of which will have been addressed and emphasized in class. You will be asked not only to identify each item but also to say something about its significance for our discussion. Example: “Ernst Ludwig Kirchner—German artist of the ‘Expressionist’ school whose paintings and woodcuts bear a marked similarity to the visual style of Robert Wiene’s The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.” I will also show one or two film clips and ask you not only to identify the example but also to analyze it with respect to certain key concepts. Finally, you will be asked to write an essay demonstrating your understanding of assigned readings. Students who pay attention during class will receive ample clues concerning the content of these exams. No books or notes during exams.

Essays. Prompts will be distributed well in advance of the due date. These will provide you with themes and guidelines for your essays.

Academic Dishonesty. Instances of suspected plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will be pursued vigorously. Students caught cheating or simply failing to cite sources risk failing the course and may face additional sanctions from the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. This issue will be addressed in greater detail when you receive your essay assignment.

Cell Phones and Related Issues. If you bring a cell phone to lecture, please have it turned off and put away by 2:00. If you wish to use a laptop for taking notes, you must sit at the front of class. Students reading The Daily Emerald, text messaging, surfing or simply talking during class will be asked to leave. Students who walk out before class is over may not rejoin the course until they have met with me privately to explain their sudden loss of interest. (Please imagine this conversation now.) If you know in advance that you will have to leave early, please tell me before lecture. Do not hesitate to silence a loud neighbor who is preventing you from getting the most out of lecture or discussion. I will be more than happy to assist you.

Blackboard Site. The Blackboard site for GER 355 contains materials and resources relevant to the course, including clips from films (under “course documents”). The syllabus is posted there (should you misplace your copy), and I will use the site to make routine assignments (and alert you via email when there is something new to look at).

Office Hours. I am happy to meet with you to discuss any aspect of this course. My office hours are Wed. 11:00–12:00 and Fri. 12:30–1:30 (315 Villard). My email is kcalhoon@uoregon.edu; office phone: 346-4060.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
Schedule of Readings, Assignments and Exams

Week 1
Theme: Two Kinds of Doubles
Films: The Street (Joe May, 1923); The Student of Prague (Stellan Rye, 1913)

Week 2
Theme: Mask, Surface and Screen
Film: The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (Robert Wiene, 1919)
Readings: Burch, Life to Those Shadows; Elsaesser, Weimar Cinema and After; Monaco, pp. 152-225.

Week 3
Note: In recognition of Martin Luther King there is no class Monday, Jan. 17th.
Theme: Expressionism and the “Language” of Cinema
Film: Nosferatu: A Symphony of Terror (F. W. Murnau, 1922)
Readings: Review Metz; read Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics (packet); Eisner, pp. 95-145.

Week 4
Theme: Light and Shadow
Films: Warning Shadows (Arthur Robison, 1923); The Adventures of Prince Achmed (Lotte Reiniger, 1926).
Readings: Schivelbusch, Disenchanted Night (packet)
Friday, Jan 28th: First In-Class Exam (bring green book)

Week 5
Theme: Horror and/or Modernity
Films: The Golem: How He Came Into the World (Paul Wegner, 1920); Metropolis (Fritz Lang, 1927); Frankenstein (James Whale, 1931); Fantasia (Disney 1940)
Readings: Marx, The Communist Manifesto (packet); Moretti, “Dialectics of Fear” (packet)

Week 6
Theme: Cinema/Carnival
Films: Faust (F. W. Murnau, 1926); Fantasia (Disney, 1940)
Readings: Kracauer, “Cult of Distraction” (packet);

Week 7
Theme: Cinema/Theater
Film: The Three Penny Opera (Dr. G. W. Pabst, 1931)
Readings: Benjamin, “What is Epic Theater”; Weimann, “The Mimus” (packet)
Friday, Feb. 18th: Second In-Class Exam (bring green book)

Week 8
Theme: Mechanism and Montage
Films: Battleship Potemkin and Strike (Eisenstein, 1925); The Man With a Movie Camera (Vertov, 1929)
Readings: Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”; Eisenstein, Film Form (packet); “re-read Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics (packet)

Week 9
Theme: New Objects/New Objectivity
Films: Berlin Alexanderplatz (Phil. Jutzi, 1931); M (Fritz Lang, 1931)
Friday, March 4th: Essay Due

Week 10
Theme: America and the Aftermath
Films: The Blue Angel (Joseph v. Sternberg, 1930); A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Max Reinhardt, 1935)

Thursday, March 17th, 3:15 – 5:1 Final Exam (bring two green books)
The schedule of final exams is set by the University Registrar and may not be altered. Students with conflicting exams must, in a timely fashion, make arrangements to take the exam at an alternate time.

Nosferatu: A Symphony of Terror