

**Nazi Cinema**  
**CMST 22118/32118, GRMN 22118/32118**

In this course, we will examine a broad range of films produced under the National Socialist regime in Germany, from mass spectacles to domestic melodramas, from comedies to hagiographic bio-pics to dramatized propaganda. Throughout we will seek to explore the national, formal, and ideological particularity of these films and to trace their conceptual logic. What, we will ask, constitutes the National Socialist (film) aesthetic? Readings in film history and cultural theory. While there are no prerequisites for this class, a commitment to close readings – of films and criticism – as well as a commitment to lively, thoughtful engagement will be essential. All course materials will be made available in English. If there is sufficient interest, we may add a German language discussion section.

**Assignments:**

- Micro-dramaturgical analyses, due in 2-3 week intervals. Every few weeks during the quarter, I will ask you to prepare a brief and detailed consideration of the film (e.g., an assessment of something you have noticed, been puzzled by, wondered about – something that the film does or seeks to do, and how it goes about it). I will explain this in greater detail as we get underway. These analyses, which will range from 250 words (a single page) at the outset of the quarter to 1000 words near the end of the quarter will afford you an opportunity to set out your thinking about the films we will be watching. In each case, I will ask you to engage in careful description and detailed, speculative analysis, focusing on a particular scene or a problem in a given film at the outset of the quarter, and then thinking comparatively and across genres as the quarter draws to a close. *Please note: I will be asking for your impressions, based on a careful analysis; not a summary of what the experts tell us.* Ideally, these contributions will serve as a springboard not only for your own thinking but for our in-class discussions. I do not expect to ask undergraduates enrolled in the class to prepare any additional writing assignments for the class. Graduate students will be expected to prepare a final project.
- I *may* ask you to present an introduction to one of our weekly screenings.
- I am open to assigning a midterm and/or a final exam in lieu of some of the bi-weekly writing assignments. (However, I would be surprised if we ended up going that route.)

**Course materials:**

**Readings:** I am asking you to purchase Eric Rentschler's *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996) which will serve as a primary source for our work. We will also read a good deal of scholarship beyond Rentschler's study. The additional readings will generally be available via the Weekly Modules in Canvas.

All **films** will be screened at a weekly screening session. I also expect to make them available for viewing via the Panopto link in our Canvas site. Since our discussions will involve close readings of the films, I will expect you to come to class having watched and thought about each week's assigned film(s) with care.

**Guest Lectures/Conversations.** At various points during the quarter, we'll be joined by a guest – for example, the filmmaker Yael Hersonski, who will join us from Tel Aviv for a discussion of her film *A Film Unfinished* at the end of the quarter, as well as the film scholars Johannes von Moltke (U Michigan) and Emily Dreyfus (Film University Babelsberg, Germany).

**Policies:**

This syllabus is not only *subject to change, I am certain that it will change*. Put otherwise: I will want to adjust the syllabus based upon what ends up intriguing and preoccupying us as a group. More than 1,000 feature films were produced during the 12 years of the National Socialist regime. And there is a great deal of insightful and provocative scholarship on this body of work. We have a mere 9 weeks to engage with this material. The syllabus reflects a proposed path for us to pursue, but I will want to adjust it to reflect the pace, direction, proclivities and intellectual energies of our discussions.

→ *If spontaneous changes to the syllabus make you anxious or unhappy, please do not take this course.*

- Please show up for our class sessions on time and ready to work. You may miss 2 of our class meetings without explanation; any further absences will require permission.
- Stay involved in our discussions and class exercises – both actively listening and participating.
- I will expect you to be *thoughtful* and *rigorous* in engaging this material, *considerate* in engaging your colleagues in class discussion, and *generous* in putting up with everyone's fallibility (including mine).
- We're all in this learning environment together. If you have suggestions about how to improve the class, (e.g., am I assigning too much [reading/writing/viewing]? too little? is the format right?) please let me know.
- Please make prudent use of technology: Put away your cell phone and computer & try to minimize distractions while we're in class.

#### IMPORTANT NOTES:

- **SINCE THIS IS A CLASS ON NAZI CINEMA:** This class will deal with material that is not only offensive but nefarious in a variety of ways. The films we will study are characterized by xenophobia, misogyny, racism, sexism, anti-LGBTQism (or indeed, anti-any form of non-normative sexuality), anti-Semitism, anti-UKism, anti-Frenchism, anti-Americanism – you get the idea. The class will be interrogating the logics, rhetorics, and operations of National Socialist ideologies, but of course I fully grasp that these are very sensitive issues. *Please do not enroll in the class if you are not prepared to engage such topics and materials.* Put otherwise: by enrolling in this class, you are agreeing to engage (in the sensitive, open, rigorous, thoughtful, and considerate manner that characterizes all classwork at the University) with materials and embark on a consideration of topics that are sure to be offensive & uncomfortable. Please let me know if you have any questions about this and let's plan to maintain an open dialogue as a class about how we plan to manage this.
- **ACCESSIBILITY:** The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring equitable access to our academic programs and services. Students with disabilities who have been approved for the use of academic accommodations by Student Disability Services (SDS) and need a reasonable accommodation(s) to participate fully in this course should follow the procedures established by SDS for using accommodations. Please meet with me to discuss your access needs in this class after you have completed the SDS procedures for requesting accommodations.  
To contact SDS: [disabilities.uchicago.edu](mailto:disabilities.uchicago.edu) \* (773) 702-6000 \* [disabilities@uchicago.edu](mailto:disabilities@uchicago.edu)

**Grading:** Class Participation: 35% | Micro-dramaturgical analyses: 30% | Final Project: 35%

#### WEEKLY PLAN

##### 1. **PARTY TIME: TRIUMPH DES WILLENS / TRIUMPH OF THE WILL** (Leni Riefenstahl, 1935)

###### REQUIRED READING:

- Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism"

###### RECOMMENDED READING:

- "Entertainment and Propaganda," forward to Chapter 20: "Cinema" in Rabinbach & Gilman, eds. *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, (Berkeley: U California P, 2013), 556-559.

- Erwin Leiser, Documentation on *Triumph of the Will* in EL, *Nazi Cinema*, 134-138.
- David Welch, section on *Triumph of the Will* from chapter 5: "The Principle of Leadership (Führerprinzip)" in DW, *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933-1945*, 145-59.
- Steve Neale, "*Triumph of the Will: Notes on Documentary and Spectacle*" *Screen* 20.1 (1979): 63-86.

## 2. Martyrdom and Belonging: *Hitlerjunge Quex* (1933)

### REQUIRED READING:

- Intro & chapter 2 of Rentschler, *Ministry of Illusion: "The Power of Illusions" & "Emotional Engineering: Hitler Youth Quex (1933)"*
- Baldur von Schirach, "The National Socialist Youth Movement" in Rabinbach & Gilman, eds. *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, (Berkeley: U California P, 2013), 253-254.

### RECOMMENDED READING:

- Gregory Bateson, "An Analysis of the Nazi Film *Hitlerjunge Quex*" in Margaret Mead & Rhoda Métraux, eds. *The Study of Culture at a Distance* (Chicago: UChicago P, 1953).
- In German: Karsten Witte, "Der Apfel und der Stamm. Jugend und Propaganda am Beispiel \*Hitlerjunge Quex\*" in Willi Bucher; Klaus Pohl; Michael Andritzky, eds. *Schock und Schöpfung: Jugendästhetik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1986).

## 3. Home of the Brave: Luis Trenker's *Der verlorene Sohn / The Prodigal Son* (1934) & *Der Kaiser von Kalifornien* (1935/36)

### REQUIRED READING:

- Eric Rentschler chapter 3: "Home Sweet Heimat: *The Prodigal Son* (1934)"
- Lutz Koepnick on *Kaiser von Kalifornien*: "Siegfried Rides Again: Nazi Westerns and Modernity" in Koepnick, *The Dark Mirror: German Culture Between Hitler and Hollywood* (U California P, 2002), 99-134.

### RECOMMENDED READING:

- Jan-Christopher Horak: "How the West was Won, Nazi Style" in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 6.2 (1986) 181-188.

## 4. So Close, So Far: *La Habanera* (1937) & *Schlußakkord* (1936)

### REQUIRED READING:

- Eric Rentschler, Chapter 5 on *La Habanera*: "Astray in the New World" in *Ministry of Illusion*
- Katie Trumpener, "Puerto Rico Fever: Douglas Sirk, *La Habanera* (1937), and the Epistemology of Exoticism," in *Neue Welt/Dritte Welt: interkulturelle Beziehungen Deutschlands zu Lateinamerika und der Karibik*, ed. Sigrid Bauschinger & Susan L. Cocalis. (Tübingen: Francke, 1994), 115-39.

### RECOMMENDED READING:

- Bruce Babbington, "Written by the Wind-Sierck/Sirk's LA HABANERA (1937)" in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 31.1 (Jan 1995), 24-36, <https://doi-org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1093/fmls/XXXI.1.24>. Published: 01 January 1995
- Sabine Hake, "Detlef Sierck and *Schlußakkord* (*Final Chord*, 1936): A Case Study of Film Authorship in Hake, *Popular Cinema of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich* (U Texas P, 2001), 107-127 + 245-248 (Notes); [or Sabine Hake, "The Melodramatic Imagination of Detlef Sierck: and its Resonances," *Screen* 38.2 (Summer 1997): 129-148.]
- Linda Schulte-Sasse, "Douglas Sirk's *Schlußakkord* and the Question of Aesthetic Resistance," *Germanic Review* 73.1 (Winter 1998): 2-31.

## 5. Anti-Semitism as Dramatic and Cinematic Program: *Jud Süß* (1940) and *Der ewige Jude* (1940)

### REQUIRED READING:

- Chapter 6 of Rentschler, "The Elective Other: Jew Süß (1940)"

- Stig Hornshøj-Møller & David Culbert, "'Der ewige Jude' (1940): Joseph Goebbels' unequalled monument to Anti-Semitism." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television* (Aug 1992) 12.3: 41-68.

## RECOMMENDED READING:

- Veit Harlan, "History and Film" (1942) and Fritz Hippler, "The Formative Power of Film," (1942) in [German Essays on Film](#)
- Erwin Leiser, documentation on public response to *Jud Süß*, in Erwin Leiser, [Nazi Cinema](#), 152-156 + chap 6 of Leiser, "No Right to Live," a reading of both films
- Linda Schulte-Sasse: "Courtier, Vampire, or Vermin? *Jew Süß's* Contradictory Effort to Render the "Jew" Other" in Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema*, 47-91.
- Benedict Anderson, "Patriotism & Racism," chap 8 in BA, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

**6. The Return of GW Pabst: *Komödianten* (1941) + *Paracelsus* (1943)**

## REQUIRED READING:

- Anke Gleber "Masochism and Wartime Melodrama: *Komödianten*" in Rentschler, ed. [The Films of GW Pabst](#)
- Rentschler, Chapter 7: "The Führer's Phantom: *Paracelsus* (1943)," 171-192.

## RECOMMENDED READING:

- Regine Mihal Friedman, "Ecce Ingenium Teutonicum: *Paracelsus* (1943)" in Eric Rentschler, ed. *The Films of G. W. Pabst : an Extraterritorial Cinema*, pp 184-197 + 264-267 (Notes).
- Linda Schulte-Sasse: "Anomaly or "Fascist Delusion of Female Autonomy"? Pabst's Neuberin Film *Komödianten*," in Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema*, 176-202.

**7. Revisitations I + II:**

- Theater as Film: *The Broken Jug* (Ucicky, 1937)**
- History as Film: *Kolberg* (Veit Harlan, 1945)**

## REQUIRED READING:

- Marc Silberman, "Kleist in the Third Reich: Ucicky's *The Broken Jug* (1937)" in Eric Rentschler, ed. *German Film & Literature: Adaptations and Transformations*, pp 87-102.
- Erwin Leiser, "Götterdämmerung" in Leiser, *Nazi Cinema*, trans. Gertrud Mander & David Wilson, 121-133.

**8. *Münchhausen* (Josef von Baky, 1943)**

## REQUIRED READING:

- Rentschler *chapter 8: "Self-Reflexive Self-Destruction: *Münchhausen* (1943),"* 193-214.
- Linda Schulte-Sasse on *Münchhausen* "Of Lies and Life," chap 10 of her *Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema*, 302-317.

**9. Yael Hersonski, *A Film Unfinished* (2010)**

## REQUIRED READING:

- Sigrid Weigel, "Probing the Limits of Visual Testimonies: a Cinematic Approach to Different Modes of Testimony from the Warsaw Ghetto in Hersonski's *A Film Unfinished*" in Sybille Kramer and Sigrid Weigel, eds. *Testimony/Bearing Witness: Epistemology, Ethics, History and Culture*, 167-186.
- Jeannette Catsoulis, review of *A Film Unfinished* in *NY Times*, August 17, 2010 accessed via <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/18/movies/18unfinished.html>