

Department of English & Writing Studies
Film Studies Program

Film 3335G (001)
Contemporary German Cinema
Winter 2026

Instructor: Dr. Terrance H. McDonald

Antirequisites: Film Studies 2242F/G, if taken in 2016-2017, German 2261F/G, or Comparative Literature and Culture 2292F/G, if taken in 2015-2016.

Prerequisites: At least 60% in Film Studies 1020E or Film Studies 1022 or permission of the Department.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Description

This course introduces students to Contemporary German Cinema after unification. Topics include the "Berlin School" and transnational film production, Ostalgie, European identity, migration, and historical memory. The relationship to the auteurism of post-war New German Cinema will also be examined. Beginning with key cinematic movements and films from the 1960s, students will map the lineages of German film history through Young German Cinema and New German Cinema as well as in the final years before unification. With this foundation in place, the course focuses on canonical and important films, filmmakers, and movements after unification. Films and filmmakers to be studied include: Werner Herzog, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Margarethe von Trotta, Helma Sanders-Brahms, Tom Tykwer, Wolfgang Becker, Christian Petzold, Fatih Akin, Maren Ade, and Jan Ole Gerster.

Objectives

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- to gain a foundational knowledge of Contemporary German Cinema in the context of German and European film history
- to advance comprehension of Contemporary German Cinema through aesthetics, narrative form, and socio-cultural contexts
- to become familiar with diverse methodologies for studying Contemporary German Cinema within the context of film history and theory
- to improve research and writing skills for knowledge mobilization at a third-year level
- to learn critical perspectives within the scholarly discourse that examines Contemporary German Cinema which can be applied to other films and periods within the field of film studies

Course Materials

- Readings - linked or posted to Brightspace (OWL).
- Films - screened online (asynchronous) linked to Brightspace (OWL).
- There are no additional costs required for course materials.

Methods of Evaluation

The grade for the course will be arrived at as follows:

Participation (10%): Students will be evaluated through contributions made to lecture discussions each Tuesday. To achieve an above average participation mark, students: participate each week; actively engage in the lecture discussion; volunteer questions about or points of interest from films and assigned readings; offer ideas willingly and make thoughtful contributions during the lecture discussion; respond to the ideas of other students by asking questions or building on their points. In addition, students will have the opportunity to contribute to the participation component through the submission of written comments at the end of lecture. This ensures that all students have the ability to gain participation marks regardless of any difficulties that they may have with public speaking. See the detailed assignment outline available online for more information. Important: there are no opportunities to complete this component outside of lecture each Tuesday.

Discussion questions (20%): This component will be evaluated through discussion posts in response to questions posted each Tuesday (beginning 13 January 2026). Students will have the opportunity to answer questions each week online within the "Discussions" section following the lecture discussion each Tuesday (posts are due by 5:00pm on Sunday following each lecture discussion). Questions will be presented by the instructor and there will be opportunities to work on these questions during lecture (individually or in small groups – please list all student participants in a group when posting online). These assignments will be graded out of 2.0 (i.e., 2.0, 1.0, or 0.0 out of 2.0). Discussion questions should be 200 to 250 words in length and focus on a specific scene from the assigned film from the lecture discussion each week. There will be 8 opportunities to complete these assignments and the best 7 will be used to calculate this component (dropping the lowest grades for one week). See the detailed assignment outline available on Brightspace for more information. Important: there are no opportunities to make-up these assignments once the deadline has passed.

Scene analysis (3 x 10% = 30%): There will be three in-person written assignments to be completed within lecture on select Tuesdays throughout the semester (*Germany Pale Mother* on 3 February 2026, *Good Bye Lenin!* on 3 March 2026, and *Toni Erdmann* on 24 March 2026). Students will be asked to write an extended analysis of a specific scene (there will be several options) from the film screened for the module. The three scene analysis assignments will replace the discussion question post for select modules and each scene analysis will be worth 10% (for a total of 30%). Each scene analysis must be completed individually and students will be given a total of 30 minutes to complete each of the assignments within this component – additional time will be available for students with accommodations. To prepare for this assignment, students should watch the film assigned for the module, complete assigned readings, and attend the corresponding lecture on Tuesday. Note: an assignment outline and marking rubric will be posted online. Important: there are no opportunities to make-up these assignments outside of lecture.

Research paper proposal (10% - 1 March 2026 - flexible deadline = 4 March 2026): Students may choose to opt out of the research paper proposal and have the 10% from this component added to the weight of the research paper which would be worth 40% in lieu of a proposal (not available for students that wish to complete a creative assignment – see below). The research paper proposal will focus on an issue related to Contemporary German Cinema and should be composed of an abstract of approximately 500 words and an annotated bibliography (approximately 150 to 200 words for each entry) consisting of three sources – two of which must be from outside of our assigned readings (double-spaced and 12-point font). Students may choose to focus on films from the course or explore other films (approval must be sought to include films from outside the syllabus in the proposal). As opposed to a research paper, students may opt to outline a creative assignment (such as a film, a film script, or video essay) in the proposal – approval for a creative assignment must be received through a proposal. Research for a creative assignment will still be required and students will need to complete an artistic statement to accompany the submission of a creative assignment (see research paper component below). If students choose the creative assignment option, the 500-word abstract will focus on the creative work and the subsequent annotated entries will relate to the artistic statement that outlines the theoretical or critical concepts to be mobilized by the creative work. The proposal is due to be uploaded online by 1 March 2026 (5:00pm deadline) with a flexible deadline of 4 March 2026 (5:00pm deadline). Students may wish to submit their proposals in-advance of the deadline and may do so as soon as the submission folder is open online. Note: an assignment outline and marking rubric will be posted online.

Research paper (30% - 10 April 2026 - flexible deadline = 13 April 2026): Students are asked to write an essay (2000 to 2500 words, 12-point font, double-spaced, 2.5cm margins) that examines an issue related to Contemporary German Cinema, which may focus on course themes or extend our discussion to a consideration of related issues. Students wishing to analyze films from beyond the course must get approval from the instructor. Alternatively, students may complete a creative assignment (such as a film, a film script, or a video essay) after receiving approval through the submission of a research paper proposal – see above. For students completing the creative assignment option, there must be an artistic statement that accompanies the submission of the creative work (800 to 1000 words, 12-point font, double-spaced, 2.5cm margins) which outlines the theoretical or critical concepts to be mobilized by the creative work (the same conditions apply for secondary sources). The research paper will require students to conduct research on their selected subject and incorporate at least three secondary sources into their paper (beyond required course readings, which should also be referenced). Students will also need to take a position in order to demonstrate, support, and clarify their argument. Students are encouraged to follow the suggestions received from the evaluation of their research paper proposal. The research paper is due online by 10 April 2026 (5:00pm deadline) with a flexible deadline of 13 April 2026 (5:00pm). Note: an assignment outline and marking rubric will be posted online.

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>.

Additional Information

Late penalties: course work must be submitted by the assigned date (or flexible deadline). A penalty of 2% per day for lateness up to and including work submitted on the last day of the term will be applied by the instructor. Work will not be accepted beyond one week after the due date (unless granted an extension due to special considerations). All such requests must be

submitted to the instructor within 48 hours from the date of the missed assignment.

Submitting assignments: students are responsible for submitting readable copies of files. Please check to ensure documents uploaded are readable. Any unreadable copies submitted will be deemed incomplete submissions with late penalties applied until a readable copy is received.

Statements

Academic Consideration

Students may request academic consideration in cases of extenuating circumstances – that is, personal circumstances beyond the student's control that have a **substantial but temporary** impact on the student's ability to meet essential academic requirements.

1. Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of the student's Faculty of Registration.
2. Requests for academic consideration include the following components:
 - a. Self-attestation signed by the student;
 - b. Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
 - c. Supporting documentation as relevant.

Requests without supporting documentation are **limited to one per term per course**.

Instructors may designate one assignment or assessment as exempt from this allowance. In this course, requests for academic consideration pertaining to the scene analysis, research paper proposal, film reflection, and research paper **must** be accompanied by supporting documentation.

Assignments with flexible deadlines and any term work that does not count towards the course grade are **not** eligible for additional consideration.

Documentation for medical illness, when required, includes the completion of a [Western Student Medical Certificate \(SMC\)](#) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation, by a health care practitioner.

Requests linked to examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods as well as practice laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled in the last week of term **always** require formal supporting documentation.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades. Unless other policies dictate a different set of penalties in specific English and Writing Studies programs, this will apply to all department programs.

Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the Western Multicultural Calendar.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support & Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

The use of generative AI is not permitted in this course.

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Plagiarism Checking

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

Week One: At the Zero Hour - Postwar and Young German Cinema

6 January 2026

Read: Hester Baer, "Dismantling the Dream Factory"

Eric Rentschler, "Specularity and Spectacle in Schlöndorff's *Young Törless* (1966)"

Watch: *Young Törless* (Schlöndorff 1966)

Recommended films: *Murderers Among Us* (Staudte 1946), *Frauenschicksale* (Dudow 1952), *Roman einer jungen Ehe* (Maetzig 1952), & *Yesterday Girl* (Kluge 1966)

Week Two: New German Cinema I - Out of the Past

13 January 2026

Read: Sabine Hake, "West German Cinema 1962-90"

Judith Mayne, "Herzog, Murnau, and the Vampire"

Watch: *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (Herzog 1979)

Recommended films: *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (Herzog 1972), *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (Fassbinder 1979), & *The Tin Drum* (Schlöndorff 1979)

Assignment: discussion question one due online (by Sunday at 5:00pm)

Week Three: New German Cinema II - Into the Future

20 January 2026

Read: Marco Abel & Jaimey Fisher, "New German Cinema and Its Global Contexts"

Elena Gorinkel, "Impossible, Impolitic"

Watch: *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (Fassbinder 1974)

Recommended films: *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum* (Schlöndorff & Von Trotta 1975), *Fox and His Friends* (Fassbinder 1975), & *The American Friend* (Wenders 1977)

Assignment: discussion question two due online (by Sunday at 5:00pm)

Week Four: Images of East Germany

27 January 2026

Read: Stephen Brockmann, "Postwar East German Cinema 1949-1989: Historical Overview"
Larson Powell "The Desire to Be Desired?"

Watch: *Solo Sunny* (Wolf & Kohlhaase 1980)

Recommended films: *The Divided Heaven* (Wolf 1964), *The Rabbit Is Me* (Maetzig 1965), *Heißer Sommer* (Hasler 1968), & *Die Legende von Paul and Paula* (Carow 1973)

Assignment: discussion question three due online (by Sunday at 5:00pm)

Week Five: Women Filmmakers - Feminist Aesthetics and Women's Cinema

3 February 2026

Read: Julia Knight, "Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?"
Erica Carter & Claudia Sandberg, "Feminism and Women's Cinema"

Watch: *Germany Pale Mother* (Sanders-Brahms 1980)

Recommended films: *Under the Pavement Lies the Strand* (Sanders-Brahms 1975), *Marianne & Juliane* (Von Trotta 1981), *Men* (Dörrie 1985), & *Rosa Luxemburg* (Von Trotta 1986)

Assignment: scene analysis one written in lecture

Week Six: The German War Film - A Return of Many Pasts

10 February 2026

Read: Hester Baer, "Producing German Cinema for the World"
Jaimey Fisher, "Affective Geographies of the Fading Genre"

Watch: *Das Boot* (Petersen 1981)

Recommended films: *Westfront 1918* (Pabst 1930), *Morgenrot* (Ucicky 1933), *The Bridge* (Wicki 1959), *Downfall* (Hirschbiegel 2004), *Phoenix* (Petzold 2014), & *The Captain* (Schwentke 2017)

Assignment: discussion question four due online (by Sunday at 5:00pm)

Week Seven: Reading Week

16 February 2026 to 20 February 2026

Week Eight: Post-Unification - Cinema Images of a New (Old) Germany

24 February 2026

Read: David Clarke, "In Search of Home: Filming Post-Unification Berlin"

Owen Evans, "Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run*: Postmodern, Posthuman or 'Post-Theory'?"

Watch: *Run Lola Run* (Tykwer 1998)

Recommended films: *Wings of Desire* (Wenders 1987), *Life is All You Get* (Becker 1997), *In July* (Akin 2000), & *The Princess and the Warrior* (Tykwer 2000)

Assignment: research paper proposal due online (1 March 2026)

Assignment: discussion question five due online (by Sunday at 5:00pm)

Week Nine: Memories of East Germany

3 March 2026

Read: Paul Cooke, "Heritage Cinema, Authenticity and Dealing with Germany's Past"

Nick Hodgin, "Aiming to Please?"

Watch: *Good Bye Lenin!* (Becker 2003)

Recommended films: *The Lives of Others* (Donnersmarck 2006), *Barbara* (Petzold 2012), *Balloon* (Herbig 2018), & *The Silent Revolution* (Kraume 2018)

Assignment: scene analysis two written in lecture

Week Ten: Diasporic Images: Turkish-German Cinema and Fatih Akin

10 March 2026

Read: Sabine Hake & Barbara Mennel, "Turkish German Cinema"

Daniela Berghahn, "Caught up in Identity Politics"

Watch: *Head-On* (Akin 2004)

Recommended films: *Kebab Connection* (Saul 2004), *The Edge of Heaven* (Akin 2007), & *When We Leave* (Aladag 2010)

Assignment: discussion question six due online (by Sunday at 5:00pm)

Week Eleven: Queer and Trans Cinemas - Interrogating Representation

17 March 2026

Read: Alice A. Kuzniar, "Introduction: *The Queer German Cinema*"

Keeley Saunders, "Gender-Defined Spaces, Places and Tropes"

Watch: *Romeos* (Bernardi 2011)

Recommended films: *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (Fassbinder 1972), *Fox and His Friends* (Fassbinder 1975), *In a Year with 13 Moons* (Fassbinder 1978), & *Aimee & Jaguar* (Färberböck 1999) & *Free Fall* (Lacant 2013)

Assignment: discussion question seven due online (by Sunday at 5:00pm)

Week Twelve: Global Germany - New Images and Cinematic Explorations

24 March 2026

Read: Hester Baer, "Conclusion: German Cinema in the Age of Neoliberalism"
Muriel Cormican, "Willful Women in the Cinema of Maren Ade"

Watch: *Toni Erdmann* (Ade 2016)

Recommended films: *Mostly Martha* (Nettelbeck 2001), *The Forest for the Trees* (Ade 2003), *The Edukators* (Weingartner 2004), *Yella* (Petzold 2007), & *Revanche* (Spielmann 2008)

Assignment: scene analysis three written in lecture

Week Thirteen: What is Contemporary German Cinema?

31 March 2026

Watch: *A Coffee in Berlin* (Gerster 2012)

Recommended films: *Victoria* (Schipper 2015) & *In the Fade* (Akin 2017)

Assignment: discussion question eight due online (by Sunday at 5:00pm)

Assignment: research paper due online (10 April 2026)