

Dr. Guido Kirsten

Questions of Social Class in Film

Room 1322, Wednesday 9:00–11:00

In this seminar, we will examine cinematic discourses on issues related to social class, such as precarity and poverty, unemployment, housing, exploitation, social hierarchy and social shame. Whilst drawing on a range of theories about class, the main focus will be on the ways these issues are narrativized and presented through filmic devices and techniques. We will watch and analyse many films (or scenes from films) and discuss the implications of their aesthetic and narrative structures (such as optical and narrative point-of-view), of their construction of characters, and of how they engender sympathy for and empathy with those characters. While the majority of works discussed here will be fiction films, we will also take a look at documentary or semi-documentary films, and TV-series.

The course language is English but advanced language skills are not required.

Seminar Requirements: preparation of films and texts, regular participation in seminar discussion, seminar presentation. ECTS: 3.

Program

19.10.22

Introduction to Questions of Class in Film and Related Concepts

Excerpts from *Strike* (S. Eisenstein, SU 1925) and *Fish Tank* (A. Arnold, UK 2011)

Introduction to Concepts and Approaches

26.10.22

Approaches: How to Analyse Aspects of Class in Film

Texts: Erik Olin Wright: "Understanding Class: Towards an Integrated Analytical Approach", in: *New Left Review* 60, 2009, pp. 101–116;

Stephen Pimpare: "Conclusion: The Propertied Gaze", in: *Ghettos, Tramps, and Welfare Queens: Down and Out on the Silver Screen*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 288–296.

Film: *Sommer vorm Balkon* (*Summer in Berlin*, A. Dresen, GE 2005).

02.11.22

***Fish Tank*, Class Unconsciousness and Emancipation**

Text: Pierre Bourdieu, "What Makes a Social Class? On The Theoretical and Practical Existence Of Groups", in: *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* Vol. 32 (1987), pp. 1–17.

Fish Tank (A. Arnold, UK 2011)

09.11.22

Precarious Work and Class Shame in *Ressources humaines*

Texts: Lauren Berlant, Chap. 6, „After the Good Life, an Impasse: *Time Out, Human Ressources*, and the Precarious Present", in: *Cruel Optimism*, Durham: Duke UP, 2011, pp. 191–222;

Martin O'Shaughnessy, French Film and Work: "The Work Done by Work-Centered Films", in: *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 53, 1 (2012), pp. 155–171.

Film: *Ressources humaines* (Laurent Cantet, FR 1999).

16.11.22

Retour à Reims (Fragments): Autosociography in Filmic Form

Text: Didier Eribon, Chap. I.2 & I.3, in: *Returning to Reims* [2009], Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2013, pp. 25–47.

Film: *Retour à Reims (Fragments)* (Jean-Gabriel Périot, FR 2021)

23.11.22

Housing Problems, Solidarity and Direct Action in *L'onorevole Angelina* and *Il tetto*

Text: David Graeber, Chap. 5, "Direct Action, Anarchism, Direct Democracy", in: *Direct Action: An Ethnography*. AK Press, 2009, pp. 201–237.

Films: *L'onorevole Angelina* (*Angelina*, Luigi Zampa, IT 1947); *Il tetto* (*The Roof*, Vittorio De Sica, IT 1956)

30.11.22

**Sidelined Histories – Labor Struggle and Strike in the Reproductive Sphere in *Nightcleaners* (1974)
Guest Lecture by Hanna Prenzel**

Texts: Claire Johnston, *The Nightcleaners* (part one): Rethinking political cinema, in: *Jump Cut* 12/13, reprinted from *Spare Rib*, No. 40, Oct. 1975. U.S. (1976), pp. 55–56;

Rowbotham, Sheila, 'Jolting Memory: Nightcleaners Recalled',

http://www.workandwords.net/uploads/files/S_ROWBOTHAM_NightCleaners_ENG_.pdf Originally in *Plan Rosebud: On Images, Sites and Politics of Memory*, ed. Maria Ruigo. Santiago: Xunta de Galicia (2008), pp. 1–19.

Film: *The Nightcleaners* (Berwick Street Film Collective, UK 1975)

07.12.22

In Time and Allegories of Class and Exploitation

Text: Matt Zwolinski, Benjamin Ferguson & Alan Wertheimer (2022), *Exploitation* [2001], in: Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/exploitation/>]

Film: *In Time* (Andrew Niccol, US 2011)

14.12.22

Gig Economy and Care Work in *Sorry, We Missed You*

Texts: Paula England, *Emerging Theories of Care Work*, in: *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 31 (2005), pp. 381–399; Colin Crouch, Chap. 1 "The Rise of Precarious Work", in: *Will the Gig Economy Prevail?* Cambridge, UK & Medford, MA: Polity, pp. 1–11.

Film: *Sorry, We Missed You* (Ken Loach, UK/FR/BE 2019).

11.01.23

A New Look at an Old Classic: Questions of Class in Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (*Der letzte Mann*, 1924)

Text: Sighard Neckel, *Sociology of Shame: Basic Theoretical Considerations*, in: Liz Frost et al. (eds.), *Shame and Social Work*, Cambridge UP, 2020, pp. 39–54.

Film: Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (*Der letzte Mann*, 1924)

18.01.23

Guest Lecture: Christoph Büttner on *Maid* (Netflix, 2021)

25.01.23

Open Session (tbd)

Class and Audience in Action Cinema?

TV-Series, e.g. *Shameless*?

Upper and Lower Class in *Gosford Park*?

01.02.23

Class in the Cinema: Final Discussion