

ENG 4133: Cinematic Cartographies: Theory and Practice of the Moving Image

**meeting times: MW, 10:30-1 p.m.**

**professor: Roger Beebe**

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**office hours by request**

**description:**

This is a film production course, but its approach is primarily theoretical rather than technical.

How do we locate ourselves within the new global economic system? What connections can we make between our local environment and the bigger stage of multinational capitalism? These are the big questions that this course hopes to begin to answer by the end of the semester, but it will start more modestly with a series of mappings of more local areas and structures (specific buildings, streets, neighborhoods, etc.) before building to representations of the city itself and then finally tackling the more abstract issues of nation and the world system of global capital. We will be looking at various historical attempts at representing the world on these different scales (mostly in experimental film and video), but we will also look at some of the more ambitious literary and theoretical attempts at such mapping, including Fredric Jameson's work on "cognitive mapping," the Situationists' radical urbanism, contemporary architectural theory, etc.

Practically, the course will focus on aesthetic approaches to this project of cognitive mapping. Students will be produce a series of short exercises designed to tackle these progressively larger scales of representation while simultaneously exploring the basics of moving-image work. The course should provide a good way of engaging with Berlin, its geography, its history, and its people while concurrently developing a set of technical and aesthetic strategies. While the primary focus will be on super 8mm filmmaking, students may elect instead to do photo-essays, write fictions, or experiment in non-traditional essay forms instead.

**books:**

All of the readings will be available online through the library's course reserves. While the class is primarily a production course, these theoretical readings will provide the underpinnings of all of the aesthetic work we'll be doing. One of the major premises of the class is that film can be as articulate as any piece of writing, and with both the screenings and your own assignments we will be engaged in an attempt to explore and to validate that premise.

**assignments:**

Over the course of the semester, you will produce a series of two film projects as well as one "sequence" project. Each will engage with the attempts at mapping that we've been exploring. As the semester progresses, the projects will be more expansive both in terms of their length and in terms of the scale of mapping they ask you to engage in. The first project will consist of a sequence of still images. The second project will be comprised of a single roll of super 8 (3 minutes and 20 seconds at 18 frames per second) edited entirely in-camera and will ask you to engage with your immediate surroundings (a building, your neighborhood). The final project will also be just a single roll of film, but it may involve editing, and in terms of scope it will ask you to explore bigger spaces like the city of Berlin, the German nation or that bigger space of global capital. All of these assignments will be accompanied by short papers (1-2 pages) where you explain the theory behind your practice.

For students interested in pursuing non-film alternatives to these assignments (whether that be photo-essays, works of fiction, etc.), alert me as early in the semester as possible and we'll work out together what an appropriate length for these parallel assignments will be.

**grading:**

Final grades will be determined according to the following formula:

project 1	15%
project 2	25%
project 3	40%
class participation	20%

Class participation does not refer to attendance, but rather to both the quantity and quality of in-class comments. You should not feel afraid to make "dumb" comments in class, but try to make your comments productive and keep the discussion flowing. Because experimental practice can be a highly variable experience for different people, you may learn as much from your classmates as you will from me. This is, finally, your class, and I'll expect you to carry much of the weight of discussion. I cannot stress enough how important this aspect is—perhaps the fact that it accounts for 1/5 of your final grade will make that clear.

**attendance:**

Because of the intensive nature of this program, all absences are significant. I'd ideally like to see you not miss any classes over the five weeks of our time together in Berlin. However, all students are allowed one unexcused absence. Unexcused absences include all absences that are not accompanied by either a note from a dean or doctor. If you have a cold and don't feel like coming to class—that counts as unexcused unless it's severe enough to merit a trip to the hospital. For each absence after the first, I will subtract 1/3 letter grade from your final grade per additional absence (e.g., an A- becomes a B+, a C becomes a C-). There is no easier way to fail my class than by not showing up. Don't put yourself in that position.

Just because we're in Berlin doesn't mean there will be extra leniency about the attendance policy, so be prepared to come to class prepared every day. If you routinely come to class late, unprepared, or so exhausted that you fail to participate, I will start counting these as absences. Don't push me to find out how quickly that will begin.

**late work:**

The basic policy is NO LATE WORK. Period. If you don't turn your assignments in on time, they won't go to the lab for developing with everyone else's assignments, and then we won't have a chance to see them and discuss them together. The class moves forward at a pretty brisk pace, and there won't be much room for making up work. The only exception to my no-late-work policy is for medical reasons—again only with a doctor's excuse—and must be brought to my attention BEFORE the assignment is due (and even then this may cause problems so START EARLY on every project.) Handing in work late is another very easy way to get a very bad grade.