

Language Laboratory Film Collection

Wagner College: Campus Hall 202

German and Austrian Films (updated April 2011)

Four Minutes/ Vier Minuten (2006) Chris Kraus. Germany

In *Four Minutes*, or *Vier Minuten*, Monica Bleibtreu has been numbed by decades of teaching piano to the inmates of a women's prison. Her creative juices start flowing again when Hannah Herzsprung arrives at her bench. Though incarcerated for murder, this young, beautiful, and prodigious inmate has the requisite skills and the stern mentor needed to get her out of lock-up, if temporarily, to play in competition. However, the girl's violent streak repeatedly sabotages this goal. Winner of two German Lola Awards, including Best Picture.

71 Fragments of a Chronology/ 71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls (1994) Michael Haneke. Austria

The third film in Michael Haneke's provocative "glaciation trilogy" is a profoundly disquieting reflection on the numbing nature of modern life. The formally rigorous work is comprised of 71 film tableaux, including clips of an Austrian student's shooting spree, a homeless man's travels through Vienna, and a young couple's struggles with their newly adopted daughter. Each of these snippets is jumbled and presented out of context, with the persistent presence of a TV newscast shadowing the events in an eerie, foreboding manner. Reminiscent of Haneke's excellent, later work *Code Unknown*, this film remains "one of the most challenging narrative works of the 1990s" (*Senses of Cinema*).

The Castle/ Das Schloß (1997) Michael Haneke. Germany

Haneke's adaptation of Kafka's last, unfinished novel is a dutifully complex and appropriately alienating work of near genius. In an austere, dystopian world, a surveyor known only as "K" (Ulrich Muehe, *The Lives of Others*) is summoned to a distant village by "The Castle," which refers to both the local government and its allegorical mountain stronghold. However, the villagers scoff at his title and Castle authorities only assist K by running him through absurd bureaucratic twaddle.

The Edukators/ Die fetten Jahre sind vorbei (2004) Hans Weingartner. Austria

A trio of young idealistic activists in present day Germany break into houses of the wealthy, not to steal or inflict much damage but rather to rearrange the furniture in odd designs and leave haunting messages such as "Your life of Plenty will not go on for long" as a form of protest against the inequalities of capitalism. When on one occasion they are caught by a rich home owner, they kidnap him in order to avoid arrest but don't really know what to do with him. So, they abscond with him to an uncle's mountain cabin where they hope to devise how to proceed.

Funny Games (1997) Michael Haneke. Austria

An unnerving, controversial exploration of violence from the director of *The Seventh Continent* and *Benny's Video*. A wealthy couple and their young son arrive at their seemingly peaceful summer home and soon find themselves at the mercy of a pair of inexplicably calm and cruel young men, who torment them with their "funny games." The perspective of the film shifts to suggest second-hand audience participation in the horror. "It's an uncomfortable, distressing, and altogether provocative take on the global culture of media violence that not only draws the hapless viewer in, but also forces them into the role of *fait accompli*, like it or not" (Marc Savlov, *The Austin Chronicle*). Winner for Best Director at the 1997 Chicago International Film Festival. In German with English subtitles.

The Lives of Others/ Das Leben der Anderen (2006) Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck. Germany

This Academy Award winner for Best Foreign Language Film, *Das Leben der Anderen* is writer-director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's seductive and suspenseful recreation of an East Berlin under heavy government surveillance. The Stasi, a secret police and intelligence agency, is trying to create computer files on every citizen, most importantly opponents of the ruling party. It's customary for Wiesler (Ulrich Muehe), a stoic Stasi operative, to collect information on artists, intellectuals, and, in this case, playwright Dreyman (Sebastian Koch) and his actress-girlfriend (Martina Gedeck). However, in documenting their passionate lives, Wiesler's objectivity is irrevocably compromised. "Supremely intelligent, unflinchingly honest movie" (A.O. Scott, *The New York Times*). Features the handsome, desaturated photography of Hagen Bogdanski.

Men/ Männer (1985) Doris Dörrie. Germany

Julius Armbrust, a successful young executive, has been cheating on his wife Paula for years. But when he discovers on his birthday that she's got a lover of her own – a bohemian artist named Stefan—his ego is shattered. He starts to spy on Paula and Stefan, and then, carrying his jealousy to lunatic extremes, Julius takes a leave from his job, goes undercover, and moves into his wife's lover's house. Winner of 4 German Oscars, *Men* is a brash, high-spirited and gleefully ironic exploration of the male mystique.

The Princess and the Warrior/ Der Krieger und die Kaiserin (2000) Tom Tykwer. Germany

Tom Tykwer reunites with his *Run Lola Run* star, Franka Potente, for another memorable, highly stylized story about unexpected twists of fate. Potente plays a mental hospital nurse who crosses paths with a thief on the run, who saves her life after a terrible accident. The chance encounter turns into a permanent connection, and a dangerous bank robbery triggers a chain of events that draws them closer and closer together. "The Princess and the Warrior is one astonishment after another" (Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun-Times*). Germany.

Revanche (2008) Gotz Spielman. Austria

A happily married couple becomes unlikely friends with a man whose life has been marked by chaos and violence in this drama from Austria. Alex (Johannes Krisch) is a small-time criminal who, after a stretch in prison, finds himself working for Konecny (Hanno Pöschl), who runs a grimy house of prostitution; unknown to Konecny, Alex is also involved with Tamara (Irina Potapenko), one of his whores. Wanting to raise some quick cash, Alex robs a bank in a nearby small town and hides out on a farm owned by his grandfather (Hannes Thanheiser) while he waits for the heat to cool down. Alex tries to keep a low profile in the country, and he's troubled by boredom and despair, but his mood brightens when he strikes up a friendship with Susanne (Ursula Strauss), a cheerful and generous woman who lives nearby. But Alex's new friend happens to be married to Robert (Andreas Lust), a member of the local police force. *Revanche* was screened as an official entry at the 2008 Berlin Film Festival

Run Lola Run/ Lola rennt (1998) Tom Tykwer. Germany

This stylish cinematic exercise and art house box-office smash is an exciting, non-stop affair in which the flaming-red-haired Lola is given twenty minutes to get \$100,000 to her boyfriend before the mob kills him. The film plays out this scenario three different ways, each building in visceral suspense to a different outcome. A thrill ride with an abundance of visual flair. Audience Award winner, Sundance Film Festival.

The Seventh Continent/ Der siebente Kontinen (1989) Michael Haneke. Austria

This challenging, widely acclaimed film by Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke is based on a true story. It charts the unusual progress of a family that seems utterly conventional: life holds no challenge or interest for them--they simply go through the motions of living. *The Seventh Continent* unsentimentally records their descent into despair and joint suicide. Modern life emerges as the ultimate culprit in this obsessive tale of extreme indifference.

Sophie Scholl—The Final Days/ Sophie Scholl - Die letzten Tage (2005) Marc Rothemund. Germany

2005 Academy Award Nominee for Best Foreign Language Film, *Sophie Scholl – The Final Days* is the true story of Germany's most famous anti-Nazi heroine brought to thrilling, dramatic life. Sophie Scholl's stars Julia Jentsch in a luminous performance as the fearless activist of the underground student resistance group, *The White Rose*. Armed with long-buried historical records of her incarceration, director Marc Rothemund expertly re-creates the last six days of Sophie Scholl's life: a heart-stopping journey from arrest to interrogation, trial and sentence in 1943 Munich.

The White Ribbon/ Das weiße Band - Eine deutsche Kindergeschichte (2009) Michael Haneke. Austria- Germany

From July, 1913 to the outbreak of World War I, a series of incidents take place in a German village. A horse trips on a wire and throws the rider; a woman falls to her death through rotted planks; the local baron's son is hung upside down in a mill; parents slap and bully their children; a man is cruel to his long-suffering lover; another sexually abuses his daughter. People disappear. A callow teacher, who courts a nanny in the baron's household, narrates the story and tries to investigate the connections among these accidents and crimes. What is foreshadowed? Are the children holy innocents? God may

be in His heaven, but all is not right with the world; the center cannot hold. According to Haneke, the film is about "the origin of every type of terrorism, be it of political or religious nature."

Winter Sleepers/ Winterschläfer (1997) Tom Tykwer. Germany

Made before *Run Lola Run*, Tom Tykwer's second feature has all the visual excitement of his breakthrough film, but it is put to use in a far more enigmatic, and in many ways richer, story. A car crash following a spur-of-the-moment joyride leads to unexpected consequences for five residents of a small skiing village. As their lives connect, their needs, motivations and secrets come to the surface. Ultimately it is each character's self-knowledge or lack thereof, that decides their fate. A strange and compelling film, with strong performances from a charismatic cast.

A Woman in Berlin/ Anonyma - Eine Frau in Berlin (2008) Max Färberböck. Germany-Poland

A nameless woman keeps a diary as the Russians invade Berlin in the spring of 1945. She is in her early 30s, a patriotic journalist with international credentials; her husband, Gerd, a writer, is an officer at the Russian front. She speaks Russian and, for a day or two after the invasion, keeps herself safe, but then the rapes begin. She resolves to control her fate and invites the attentions of a Russian major, Andreij Rybkin. He becomes her protector of sorts subject to pressures from his own fellow soldiers and officers. Dramas play out in the block of flats where she lives. Is she an amoral traitor? She asks, "How do we go on living?" And what of Gerd and her diary?

Films on German/Austrian Issues (in English)

Death in Venice (1971) Luchino Visconti. Italy.

Visconti's adaptation of the classic Thomas Mann novella was a tremendous triumph; Dirk Bogarde plays an aging artist who, in Venice, becomes obsessed with the ideal beauty of a young boy. With stunning cinematography and Visconti's elegant, operatic touch. In English and Italian with English subtitles.

Klimt (2000) Documentary. Greats Artists Collection. USA.

Gustav Klimt was an unlikely artist rebel, but in early 20th century Vienna, the work of this mild-mannered painter created a scandal in his home city. Having enjoyed a conventionally successful early career, Klimt's art changed radically in his mid-thirties. He became the leader of the Vienna Secession, a group of avant-garde artists who would change the conservative Viennese art scene. Commentary and analyses from leading authorities, art historian and scholars.

Some Letters to a Young Poet (1986) Richard Story. Canada

Inspired by the writings of the Austrian poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, *Some Letters to a Young Poet* is the debut work from the Canadian writer/director Richard Story. Shot in sensuously rich black and white and utilizing a combination of video technology and film-camera lenses, this micro budget production boasts over eighty locations highlighting the rugged landscape of British Columbia. This simple story of friendship and tender beginnings unfolds with a beautiful symmetry.

Vienna 1900 (Documentary, dir. Jean-Louis Fournier, 1986). France

Vienna in 1900 appeared as the most carefree place in the world. It was “La Belle Époque”, and everything ran smoothly: the hackney cabs, the Spanish Riding School – even the whipped cream. The middle class took up art, theater, and music, and the waltz was king. Beneath this polished veneer, however, the seeds of unrest had been sown by iconoclasts such as Arnold Schoenberg, Gustav Mahler, Adolf Loos, Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, and Sigmund Freud. These innovators challenged the values of Vienna’s decadent and self-satisfying society.

Wittgenstein (1993) Derek Jarman. Great Britain

Born into the same stressful Central European world which generated Freud, Schoenberg and Hitler, Wittgenstein emerged from Vienna to transform contemporary philosophy. His eccentricity only sharpened his critique of the absurdities of language and other aspects of Western culture. This experimental biographical film shows the stresses which afflicted this closeted homosexual man as he propounded a new philosophical tradition.