

FM 326: Time Travel in Film

Seminar Leader: Matthias Hurst
Email: m.hurst@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday, 13.30 – 15.00, or by appointment

Course Times: Monday, 19.30 – 22.00 (film screening); Tuesday, 15.45 – 19.00
Lecture Hall (P98a)

Course Description

Film is a time machine. Its invention in 1895 coincided with the publication of H. G. Wells' seminal novel *The Time Machine*, which treated time as a fourth dimension through which we can move in any direction. Film invites us to travel to the past, to revive and to experience what is long gone. It also shows us visions of the future, representing ideas and concepts of things to come. And while the very structure of filmic storytelling is based largely on "the manipulation of time" (D. Bordwell), the medium and its narrative possibilities seem to be unlimited as regards temporal explorations ... to a degree that is bewildering, even mind-bending. This course is dedicated to the variety of different filmic approaches to the concept of time and to the theme of time travel in narrative films. Our examples include *The Time Machine* (1960, George Pal), *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961, Alain Resnais), *La Jetée* (1962, Chris Marker), *Back to the Future* (1985, Robert Zemeckis), *Twelve Monkeys* (1995, Terry Gilliam), *The Butterfly Effect* (2004, Eric Press and J. Mackye Gruber), *Safety Not Guaranteed* (2012, Colin Trevorrow), *Predestination* (2014, Michael and Peter Spierig), and *Tenet* (2020, Christopher Nolan). We also discuss different theoretical and philosophical implications of these time travel films.

Module: Artists, Genres, Movements

Requirements

Basic knowledge of film history, film theory, and film analysis. Readiness to do independent research and to present in class.

Attendance is mandatory for all seminars and film screenings. Students are expected to come to seminars and film screenings punctually and prepared, to participate actively in the class discussions and to do all the course assignments on time.

*** Please, do not use laptops, cell phones, smart phones or similar electronic devices during seminars and screenings!**

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

I expect everybody to do their own work and to write their own papers, including correct MLA citation. Plagiarism or the use of AI are no options; they are an absolute no-no. Anybody who cheats will fail that particular assignment and may, depending on the severity of the case, fail the class.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

More than two absences will affect the grade for the course.

Absences are registered in all classes, and lateness is registered as absence.

Students should notify the instructor if they are unable to attend class.

Please, do not use laptops, cell phones, smart phones or similar electronic devices during seminars and screenings! When you are in class, you need to be there (and not leashed to or distracted by electronic devices). Please turn your phones off before class.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment / Assignments

Individual presentations in class, based on individual research and the film screenings, starting in week 5.

Mid-term essay (1500-2000 words), due in week 7, Friday, March 14, 2025, noon (i.e. 12:01 pm)

The topic of the mid-term essay will be a film analysis/interpretation, based on one of the films screened or discussed in the first seven weeks of the course.

Final essay (3000-3500 words), due in week 15, Thursday, May 15, 2025, midnight

* **Please note: Graduating students** – Final essay due in week 14, Monday, May 5, 2025, midnight

The topic of the final essay will be a film analysis/interpretation, based on one of the films screened or discussed throughout the semester.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Grade Breakdown

Participation:	25 %
Presentation:	25 %
Midterm Essay:	25 %
Final Essay:	25 %

If one of these components is graded F, the final course grade cannot be higher than C-.

If two components are graded F, the final grade will be F (i.e. the whole class will be failed).

Schedule

Week 1

Introduction: Cinema as time machine

Star Trek: The City on the Edge of Forever (1967, Joseph Pevney)

Brian Clegg. *Time Travel. Ten Short Lessons*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021.

No film screening on Monday, January 27, 2025!

Week 2

Different approaches to film and modes of film interpretation

Steven D. Bloom. *The Physics and Astronomy of Science Fiction. Understanding Interstellar Travel, Teleportation, Time Travel, Alien Life and Other Genre Fixtures*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company 2016, Chapter 5: "Time Travel" (pp. 121-140)

The Time Machine (1960, George Pal)

Week 3

Last Year in Marienbad (1961, Alain Resnais)

La Jetée (1962, Chris Marker)

Week 4

Slaughterhouse-Five (1972, George Roy Hill)

Week 5

Time Bandits (1981, Terry Gilliam)

Twelve Monkeys (1995, Terry Gilliam)

Week 6

The Terminator (1984, James Cameron)

Week 7

Back to the Future (1985, Robert Zemeckis)

Deadline for mid-term essay: Friday, March 14, 2025, noon (i.e. 12:01 pm)

Week 8

Memento (2000, Christopher Nolan)

Week 9

The Butterfly Effect (2004, Eric Bress & J. Mackye Gruber)

Week 10

The Time Traveler's Wife (2009, Robert Schwentke)

About Time (2013, Richard Curtis)

Week 11

Midnight in Paris (2011, Woody Allen)

Spring Break: Monday, April 14 – Friday, April 18, 2025

Week 12

No class/film screening on Monday, April 21, 2025 (public holiday)

Safety Not Guaranteed (2012, Colin Trevorrow)

Week 13

Predestination (2014, Michael Spierig & Peter Spierig)

Week 14

Tenet (2020, Christopher Nolan)

Deadline for final essay (graduating students): Monday, May 5, 2025, midnight

Week 15: Completion Week

Deadline for final essay: Thursday, May 15, 2025, midnight

Essay Deadlines

Mid-term essay (1500-2000 words): Week 7, Friday, March 14, 2025, noon (i.e. 12:01 pm)

Final essay (3000-3500 words): Week 14, Monday, May 5, 2025, midnight (Graduating students only) / Week 15, Thursday, May 15, 2025, midnight (all other students)