

German 8400

# Surveillance, Cinema, and Society

Prof. Davidson

***Mondays***  
**8:30-11:00**

**AU 2019**



In the last three decades, “surveillance” as both an activity and a concept has become increasingly central to cultural, social, political, and economic theories. Writers often use examples from visual culture as illustrations (and even templates) for new models. One detects a tendency to treat this topic as having first arisen in the postmodern or even the digital age; however, it has a much deeper history. “Surveillance” has been a consistent element in German film, from Weimar “street films” and Fritz Lang’s “Mabuse” series to the contemporary Berlin School. At times it has been an instrumental part of the rationale for production and distribution, accompanied by admonitions such as the Nazis’ “Beware, the Enemy is Listening,” which had Cold War counterparts in both the East and the West. In a very different way, the New German Cinema was fundamentally concerned this idea. This seminar will explore the role that surveillance has played in German cinema and set it against contemporary deployments of the term. What insights can be gained from viewing this tradition in light of contemporary theorizations and, perhaps more importantly, what can an engagement with this visual tradition contribute to a historicization of the concept? The aim will be to resist the historical forgetting that is the often hidden accompaniment to ubiquitous surveilling and archiving in the digital world.

The class will be constructed and taught to accommodate non-German speakers. Previous familiarity with German film, film history, and/or film analysis are useful but not required.