Stimmung and Film Aesthetics  

In this course, we will trace the history of Stimmung (mood, atmosphere, attunement, tonality) as an aesthetic term from the Enlightenment to Romanticism to Realism to Modernity (Kant, Fichte, Nietzsche, Simmel, Hoffmannsthal, Heidegger) and discuss its relevance for and application to literature and art along the way (Stifter, Riegl). Our main question, however, will be the role of Stimmung for moving image aesthetics. Narrative and non-narrative films not only create their own spatiotemporal worlds, but, as a medium that works by means of sensorial impact and immersion, film also imbricates the spectator in unique ways. We will explore the recourse to Stimmungsästhetik in early film theory (Hoffmannsthal, Lukács, Balázs, Eisner) and in particular its application to expressionist and Kammerspiel films of the 1920s. In a second step, we will look at contemporary global art cinema production (Malick, Arnold, Schanelec, Petzold) and discussions of Stimmung and related terms.

Questions we will ask include:

- What is the relationship between Stimmung and narrative?
- How do elements of mise-en-scène (such as performance, décor, or framing), editing, and camerawork (camera movement, position, angle, lenses, focus) contribute to a Stimmung?
- What is the relationship between Stimmung, realism, and anthropocentrism?
- What is our conception of the spectator when we think about Stimmung?
- Finally, how does Stimmung help us think critically about past and current stylistic transformations?

Readings & films in English & German (with translations); class discussions in English.

Dr. Inga Pollmann  
Mondays 4:40 - 7:10 PM