Core Curriculum: Cultures and Contexts: Germany
Fall 2015

Lectures: Tuesday/Thursday .......
Recitations: ......

TEACHING STAFF
Prof. Christopher Wood
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COURSE DESCRIPTION
The Germans used to describe themselves as the “land of poets and thinkers.” German philosophers from Immanuel Kant to G.W. F. Hegel to Arthur Schopenhauer, from Friedrich Nietzsche to Martin Heidegger to Theodor Adorno, reframed the problems of knowledge, ethics, and politics for the modern world. Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Walter Benjamin permanently recalibrated European thinking about the economy, the mind, technology, and history. The achievements of German and Austrian writers (Goethe, Hölderlin, Kafka, Mann) composers (Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, Mahler, Schoenberg), and artists (Friedrich, Runge, Menzel; Expressionism, Dada) shaped the sensibilities of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In 1933 the German people, by a democratic election, entrusted power to the National Socialist party under Adolf Hitler. The Nazis initiated a catastrophic world war and a massive genocide. In the decades since the defeat of the Nazis in 1945, the German nation has rebuilt its economy and its society. But the disaster of the so-called Third Reich casts a permanent shadow on the image and the self-image of the German nation. The susceptibility of the German people, steeped as they were in learning and culture, to Hitler's brutal and apocalyptic rhetoric raises basic questions about the value and effectiveness of civilization.

This course is an introduction to the achievements and the paradoxes of modern German history and culture. Crucial historical background is the invention of the printing press by Johann Gutenberg in the 1450s, the Protestant Reformation catalyzed by Martin Luther in 1517, and the Thirty Years' War of the seventeenth century. But the emphasis in this course will be on the shaping role that German art and thought have played within European modernity from the late eighteenth century to the present. The course will culminate in the regeneration of German literature and art since the 1960s, involving such figures as Heinrich Böll, Christa

Students will read principally primary sources. Literary, philosophical, and other texts will be supplemented by works of art, architecture, music, and film. The lectures will provide an historical framework as well as guidelines to interpretation of the texts and other works. Students will read, analyze, and discuss the texts and works of art in the recitation sections.

**REQUIREMENTS and GRADING**

1. Attendance at lectures and recitations: 10% of course grade
2. Reading assignments (75-100 pp./week)
2. Three 2-3 page essays on readings (“reading responses”): 10% each
3. Midterm exam: 10%
4. Final paper, 10-12 pp.: 25%
5. Final exam: 25%

**BOOKS AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE at NYU Bookstore:**

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**WEEK ONE: Introduction**

**Thursday, September 3**

The Third Reich; the idea of a German empire; the rediscovery of Tacitus’ *Germania* in the Renaissance; Germany and Rome.

Readings:

Tacitus, *Germania*

Conrad Celtis, Ingolstadt Address, 1492

**WEEK TWO: The Protestant Reformation and its consequences**

**Tuesday, September 8**
Gutenberg and the printing press; Martin Luther and the challenge to the Papacy; the Peasant Rebellion of 1525; the artists Albrecht Dürer, Matthias Grünewald, and Hans Holbein

**Thursday, September 10**

The confessional division of Europe: Protestant and Catholic; the Thirty Year’s War; the Prussian state and the absolutist model; Lutheran piety and Johann Sebastian Bach

Readings:

- Martin Luther, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, 1520
- Twelve Articles addressed by the peasants to the Swabian League, 1525
- Albrecht Dürer, *Diary of Journey to Netherlands*, 1522, and other autobiographical texts

**WEEK THREE: The Sentimental Revolution**

**Tuesday, September 15**

J. W. Goethe and his ambiguous hero “Werther”; Goethe and Schiller; “Storm and Stress,” a literary movement

**Thursday, September 17**

J. G. Herder and the voice of the German folk; Immanuel Kant and the problem of morality after God

Readings:

- Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 1774
- Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 1794

**WEEK FOUR: Romanticism 1: Poetry, self, and history**

**Tuesday, September 22**

The French Revolution; the apotheosis of the ego; Novalis and Hölderlin

**Thursday, September 24**

The image of the Christian middle ages: the art and piety of the Nazarenes

Readings:
texts and lyrics by Novalis ("Hymns to the Night") and Hölderlin ("Hyperion")

W. Wackenroder, "Outpourings of an Art-Loving Friar (1797)

WEEK FIVE: Romanticism 2: nature and childhood

**Tuesday, September 29**
Landscape painting: C. D. Friedrich, Ph. Otto Runge

**Thursday, October 1**
Childhood and the forest: Brentano and Arnim, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*; Grimm's *Fairy Tales*

Readings:
- Philipp Otto Runge, texts on art
- Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Fairy Tales*

WEEK SIX: Romanticism 3: storytelling

**Tuesday, October 6**
Recalibrations of self and world: Heinrich v. Kleist, Georg Büchner

**Thursday, October 8**
The mysterious tale: E. T. A. Hoffmann, Annette von Droste-Hülshoff

Readings:
- Kleist, "On the Marionette Theater," 1810
- Büchner, "Lenz," late 1830s
- Droste-Hülshoff, "The Jew-Tree," 1842

WEEK SEVEN

[Tuesday, October 13: no class meeting, Monday schedule]

**Thursday, October 15: MIDTERM EXAM**

WEEK EIGHT: 1848 and the consequences

**Tuesday, October 20**
Revolution
Thursday, October 22
New architectonics of experience: Richard Wagner, Gottfried Semper, Friedrich Nietzsche

Reading:
Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 1872

WEEK NINE: Realisms

Tuesday, October 27
The prose of the world: Hegel, Menzel, Stifter

Thursday, October 29
Nietzsche, the revaluation of all values

Reading:
G. W. F. Hegel, passages from *Lectures in Aesthetics*, 1820s
Adabert Stifter, *Rock Crystal*, 1845
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 1886

WEEK TEN: Vienna 1900: Splendors and miseries of an empire

Tuesday, November 3
The Vienna Secession: Gustav Klimt, Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos

Thursday, November 5
The inland empire: Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis

Reading:
Loos, “Ornament and Crime, 1908
Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 1929

WEEK ELEVEN: Avant-garde, war, revolution

Tuesday, November 10
The deconstruction of painting: the Blue Rider, abstraction, expressionism

Thursday, November 12
The Great War; 1918: the incomplete revolution; Zürich Dada; Hannah Höch
Reading:
Wassily Kandinsky, texts associated with the Blue Rider movement
Hugo Ball, Dada texts
* NB recitations will take place at the Museum of Modern Art

WEEK TWELVE: The Weimar Republic

**Tuesday, November 17**
Film screening: F. W. Murnau, *Nosferatu*, 1922

**Thursday, November 19**
Individual and collectivity
Reading:
Franz Kafka, “A Hunger Artist,” 1924
Thomas Mann, “Mario and the Magician,” 1929

WEEK THIRTEEN: Redesigning life

**Tuesday, November 24**
Reading:
Siegfried Kracauer, from *Caligari to Hitler*, 1947; and *The Mass Ornament*
Fritz Lang, *Metropolis* (film, available online)

* THANKSGIVING BREAK *

WEEK FOURTEEN: The disgrace of the Third Reich

**Tuesday, December 1**
The World War and the Holocaust

**Thursday, December 3**
Art, architecture, and cinema under the Nazis: spectacle and propaganda; the “New Man”; the “Degenerate Art” exhibition, 1938
Reading:
Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will*, 1935 (film, online)
Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage*, 1938
Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 1940
Viktor Klemperer, *Diaries*

WEEK FIFTEEN: Post-War

**Tuesday, December 8:** Trümmerzeit (“time of rubble”) and reconstruction (1945-1965); the German Democratic Republic; the artists Josef Beuys and Gerhard Richter,

Reading:
Paul Celan, poetry
Christa Wolf, *The Quest for Christa T.*, 1968

WEEK SIXTEEN: Germany today: art and politics

**Tuesday, December 15**
The Fall of the Berlin Wall, 1989; Germany and Europe; art and activism
Reading:
W.G. Sebald, from *The Emigrants*, 1992, or *Austerlitz*, 2001