Expressive Cultures: Art and Politics in 20th Century Germany

**Course Number: Instructor Contact Information**

**Fall 2016** Dania Hückmann, PhD

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NYU Berlin

Kulturbrauerei

Schönhauser Allee 36, Haus 2, Aufgang F

10435 Berlin – Room: TBD

Course Description:

This course examines the relation between cultural narratives and radical shifts in German national identity. We will focus on the 20th-Century, which is shaped by both the diversity of modern art and the violent politics leading to Auschwitz. Rich with historical and cultural sites, Berlin offers an ideal context to study the complex relations between Modernism and politics. We will examine the “scandalous” past of texts and art that we consider canonical today. How did the World Wars change art and literary forms? What divides art from propaganda? What kind of cultural identity does Modernism construct in opposition to dominant culture? Special attention will be paid to modes of socio-political censorship as well as to the subversive power of art and literature (Mann, Libeskind, Scharf).

The course is organized around historical ruptures in 20th-Century Germany: the World Wars, the turmoil of the Weimar Republic, and its division. We will focus on how art depicts the effect of these violent events on cultural identity. Students will discuss texts, which have generated public outrage (Schnitzler, Wolf) as well as the use and abuse of art by the state (Lang, Cohen). We will explore how violence affects modes of representation (Nolde, Benn, Améry) and the analysis of (national) identity (Freud, Arendt, Adorno).

This interdisciplinary course introduces students to a range of methods and combines the analyses of cultural narratives with walking tours, visits to historical museums and art galleries. We will work with a variety of written genre (novels, essays, political theory, journalistic non-fiction), as well as visual art, architecture, and film. The course is designed to provide students with the ability to gain insights into how personal and collective identities are constructed and problematized through art and culture. We will take a cultural studies approach to understanding how to read effectively and interpret textual and visual materials.

Course Objective:

Expressive Culture offers an introduction to the study of arts as a way to understand and analyze politics and culture in the context of 20th-Century Germany. We will consider how your cultural background influences your interpretation of the course materials and how in turn the experience at the global site and the critical engagement with Berlin culture informs your own studies. By introducing you to formal methods of interpretation and to understanding the role of artistic expression, the course helps you to apply a humanities framework to the analysis of culture and politics at the global site and beyond. As part of the College Core Curriculum, the course is designed to extend your education beyond the focused studies of your major and to further your critical engagement with socio-political challenges at home and abroad.

Requirements:

*Participation 15%*

*Midterm 25%*

*4 short Papers 20%*

*2 short assignment for field trips 10%*

*Final Papers 30%*

**Attendance & Participation (15%):**Active participation in class. This means that you need to bring the assigned texts to class, ready to discuss them. Prepare 2-3 questions about the assigned text or film and email them to me by 9 am on the day of each class. In addition, each student must give a 10-15 minute introduction to a text and lead class discussion. Leading a session includes 1) a brief general introduction; 2) a presentation of passages to discuss; and 3) most importantly engaging questions that facilitate a discussion.

**Midterm (25%):**The midterm will be based on a current exhibition (TBD) in a museum in Berlin; it has a written and an oral component. Written component: A 4-5pp long essay that discusses an artwork in relation to the course material including a) a thesis about a motif or theme that connects the chosen artwork and text; b) a brief introduction to artist, historical context; c) a *close reading* of artwork and selected passages from a text. Oral component: 10-minute presentation of your interpretation followed at an in-class mini-conference.

**Papers (20%):**Students will write four 2-3-page critical analysis on the readings. The papers are an exercise in *close reading* and formulating a thesis. Pick 1-2 passages, scene(s), or image(s) and make a close analysis of their form and content. Formulate a short thesis statement that ties your analysis to the themes of the course.

**Field Trips (10%):** Students will prepare a 2-3 pp paper on the topic of each walking tour/museum visit. Exact assignment TBD.

**Final Paper (30%):**One final 5-7 pp final paper. Chose a topic and two works (text, film, art) that we discussed in class. Your final paper may be an expansion of one of the shorter papers you wrote during the semester. Exact assignment TBD. We will have a workshop for the final paper.

Course Materials:

All films will be uploaded to the course website and have to be watched before class. Books can be bought at Saint Georges in Wörther Straße 27 near NYUB. All texts marked *Title*\* are in the course reader, which can be purchased at Sprintout behind Humboldt University (Georgenstraße/Universitätsstraße – S-Bahn-Bogen 190 - please allow five hours between booking and collecting readers).

* Gottfried Benn, *Selected Poems and Prose* (Fyfield Books),

ISBN-13: 978-1847771506

* Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (Liveright; The Standard Edition), ISBN-13: 978-0871401182
* Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories* (Bantam Classics),

ISBN-13: 978-055321333

* Arthur Schnitzler, *Hands Around (Reigen). A Cycle of Ten Dialogues: Completely Rendered into English, Authorized Translation* (BiblioBazaar),

ISBN-13: 978-1113749253

* Christa Wolf: *What Remains and Other Stories* (University of Chicago Press)

ISBN-13: 978-0226904955

Scandals

Session 1: Thomas Mann: *Gladius Dei* (1902) and *Tonio Kröger* (1903), in *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, pp. 91-113 and 169-249.

Session 2: Arthur Schnitzler: *Dance Around* (1898).

Session 3: Sigmund Freud: *The Aetiology of Hysteria* (1896), in *Standard Edition*, Vol. 3, pp. 191-221.

Sigmund Freud: *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (Part III)* (1933), in *Standard Edition*, Vol. 16,lectures XV- XIX (pp. 246-303) and XXII– XXVII (pp. 339- 464).

*Response Paper I due in class*

Bottom of Form

Politics/ Poetics

Session 4: Rainer Werner Fassbinder: *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980),

episode 1 and 2; Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) (Modern Classics), Book 1 and 2, pp. 13-105.

Session 5: Expressionist poetry – Gottfried Benn: *Brains* (1916) and poems by Benn, Georg Trakl, Else-Lasker-Schüler (TBD).

Session 6: Visit to *Emil Nolde Museum*

Sigfried Lenz, *The German Lesson* (1968) (New Directions), Ch. 1-2 pp. 7-36 and Ch. 5-9, 86-192.

Session 7: Peter Cohen: *Architecture of Doom* (1989)

“Facsimile of the *Entartete Kunst* Exhibition Brochure,” in *“Degenerate Art”. The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi* Germany, ed. Stephanie Barrow, pp. 356-390.

*Response Paper II due in class*

**Session 8: Midterm: Student-Conference on Avant-Garde Art.**

War / Culture

Session 9: *Art and Capitalism*

Walter Benjamin: “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction“[1935] in *Illuminations* (Schocken Books)*,* pp. 217-253.

Theodor W. Adorno: “Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” (1944), in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford University Press), pp.137-173.

Session 10: *Homeland & Human Rights*

Jean Améry: “How Much Home Does a Human Being Need?” [1966], in *At the Mind’s Limits* (Indiana University Press), pp. 41-62.

 Hannah Arendt, “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man” [1951], in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (A Harvest book), pp. 267-305.

Session 11: *City Walk: Architecture & Memory* (Holocaust Memorial, Berlin Wall, Neue Wache, Stadtschloß).

Daniel Libeskind: *Breaking Ground* (2004) (Riverhead Books), Ch. 1, 4 & 6 (3-19, 77-105, 133-155).

 *Response Paper III due in class*

Culture/ Censorship

Session 12: *East & West*

Jan Martin Scharf: *Dessau Dancers: Breakdance in der DDR* (2015).

Ina Markovits, “Selected Memory: How the Law Affects What We Remember and Forget about the Past: The Case of East Germany,” in *Law & Society Review*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (2001), pp. 513-563.

Session 13: *Visit to Berlinische Galerie* -“Junge Wilde” [Wild Youth]; 1980s art movement in West Berlin.

 Isabelle Graw, “Martin Kippenberger––Hamburger Bahnhof––Museum für Gegenwart Berlin,” in *Artforum* (Summer 2013), pp. 350-351.

Eric Banks, “Albert Oehlen talks to Eric Banks,” in *Artforum* (Spring 2003), 182-183, pp. 244-245.

Martin Kippenberger, *Sehr Gut | Very Good / Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin,* video by Frantisek Zachoval (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5OVb3PSwdkU)

*Response Paper IV due in class*

Session 14: *Surveillance*

Christa Wolf: “Self Experiment” and “What Remains,” in *What Remains and Other Stories* (University of Chicago Press 1990), pp. 197-304.

Newspaper articles on Wolf’s relation to the GDR government (TBD)

 *Writing Workshop* (peer-review of abstracts for the final paper)

Session 15: Final Discussion