CULTURES & CONTEXTS: GERMANY

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course introduces students to modern German culture from the 18th century to the present based on thought, literature, and film. There are three central aspects: (1) knowledge and critical thinking, (2) aesthetics, the modern metropolis, and theories of totalitarianism, and (3) divided stories. 1) Before the background of Kant’s question “What is enlightenment?,” we will analyze Lessing’s call for tolerance in Nathan the Wise, the desire for knowledge in Goethe’s Faust, Nietzsche’s genealogy of morals, Freud’s notion of the “unconscious,” and Kafka’s analysis of modern formations of knowledge and power. 2) The German culture of the 20th century was shaped by major tensions. The experimental aesthetics of “Weimar Cinema,” which explores the modern metropolis among other things, came to an abrupt end with Hitler's seizure of power in 1933. We will discuss the dynamics of crowd psychology, which contributed to the rise of National Socialism, as well as the self-alignment of aesthetics with the totalitarian politics of Nazi Germany as shown in the films by Leni Riefenstahl. Seminal theories of totalitarianism include Adorno/Horkheimer’s Dialectic of Enlightenment and Hannah Arendt’s The Origins of Totalitarianism – both of which were written in the U.S., since their authors had been forced to emigrate from Nazi Germany. 3) Numerous films and literary texts address the division of Germany into West and East Germany following the end of the Second World War. In the course, we will analyze the different cultures of the two German states (left wing terrorism in West Germany in the 1970s; censorship and the culture of surveillance in the German Democratic Republic) as well as post-wall Germany after 1989.

Students will read principally primary sources. Literary, philosophical, and other texts will be supplemented by works of art 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 films in the recitation sections.

REQUIREMENTS and GRADING

1. Attendance at lectures and attendance and active participation at recitations: 20% of course grade. In order to follow the lectures and participate in the recitations it is necessary and required to complete all readings before the relevant lectures/recitations.
2. Museum assignment: visit exhibition “Before the Fall: German and Austrian Art of the 1930s” at Neue Galerie New York, 1048 Fifth Avenue (at 86th Street) (March 8–May 28, 2018), write paragraph describing one work of art: 5%
3. Three 4-5 page essays on readings: first essay 10%, second and third essay 15% each.
4. Midterm exam: 15%
5. Final exam: 20%

COURSE MATERIAL:

Franz Kafka, The Trial, Oxford World’s Classics (available for purchase at NYU Bookstore)

Other readings available as PDFs in “Resources” section of course website on NYU Classes.

Movies for streaming on Kanopy, youtube or on DVD on reserve at NYU Bobst Avery Fisher Center

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Tuesday, January 23: Introduction

A) Knowledge and Critical Thinking

Enlightenment: Kant, Lessing, Herder

Thursday, January 25: Immanuel Kant: What is Enlightenment?

Friday recitation: Kant: What is Enlightenment?

Tuesday, January 30: The Idea of Humanity:
Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Nathan the Wise

Thursday, February 1: Scenes of Conversation:
Lessing: Nathan the Wise (continuation)

Friday recitation: Lessing: Nathan the Wise

Desire for and Tragedy of Knowledge: Goethe’s Faust

Tuesday, February 6: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Faust I, 1-52

Thursday, February 8: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Faust I (continuation), Faust II, Act V, 279-298

Friday recitation: Goethe: Faust I + Faust II, Act V, 279-298
**Critique of Morality: Nietzsche**


**Unconscious Knowledge: Freud**

Thursday, February 15: “The unconscious is structured like a language” (Lacan):

Friday recitation: Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*: Preface; Third essay

Tuesday, February 20: Freud’s Studies on Hysteria: The Hysterical Narrative and the Speaking Body

Thursday, February 22: Repetition, Trauma, and Death Drive in Psychoanalysis:


**B) Power – Institution - Suspicion**

Tuesday, February 27: The Medical Gaze: Death in the Clinic and in Modern Literature
Gottfried Benn, *Morgue cycle* (“Little Aster”, “Beautiful Youth”, “Requiem”, “Man and Woman Go through the Cancer Ward”), *Brains*

*first essay due in lecture on Tuesday, February 27*

Thursday, March 1: Georg Büchner, *Woyzeck*

Friday recitation: Büchner, *Woyzeck*

Tuesday, March 6: Franz Kafka, *The Trial*
Thursday, March 8: Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (continuation)

Friday recitation: Kafka, *The Trial*

SPRING BREAK
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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, March 20</td>
<td><strong>MIDTERM EXAM</strong></td>
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<td>Thursday, March 22</td>
<td>no lecture; visit exhibition “Before the Fall: German and Austrian Art of the 1930s” at Neue Galerie New York</td>
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<td>Friday recitation:</td>
<td>no recitation</td>
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<td>Tuesday, March 27</td>
<td>Hermeneutics of Suspicion: Foucault – Nietzsche – Thomas Mann Thomas Mann, <em>Death in Venice</em></td>
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<td>Thursday, March 29</td>
<td>Aporias of Suspicion: Kafka, <em>The Neighbor, The Burrow</em></td>
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* second essay due in lecture on Thursday, March 29 *

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<tr>
<td>Friday recitation:</td>
<td>Mann, <em>Death in Venice</em> and Kafka, <em>The Burrow</em></td>
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<td>Tuesday, April 3</td>
<td>Anti-Autobiography and Modern Disciplinary Power: Thomas Bernhard, <em>In the Cold</em></td>
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**C) The Modern Metropolis: Weimar Cinema**

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<tr>
<td>Thursday, April 5</td>
<td>Urban Experience: The City on Film: <em>Berlin: Symphony of a Great City</em> (1927, dir. Walter Ruttmann) (on kanopy)</td>
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<td>Friday recitation:</td>
<td>Dystopian Images: <em>Metropolis</em> (1927, dir. Fritz Lang) (on kanopy)</td>
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**D) Crowd Psychology, Nazi Propaganda and Totalitarianism**

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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, April 10</td>
<td>Crowd Psychology and the Authoritarian Personality: Thomas Mann, <em>Mario and the Magician</em> Adorno, <em>Freudian Theory and The Pattern of Fascist Propaganda</em></td>
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<td>Thursday, April 12</td>
<td>Language of Propaganda and “Fascist Aesthetics” (Susan Sontag): Victor Klemperer: <em>The Language of the Third Reich</em>, 1-21, 52-56, 97-111, 200-208, 229-233, 263-265; <em>The Triumph of the Will</em> (1935, dir. Leni Riefenstahl) (on youtube: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HVCUsKkXq3Y">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HVCUsKkXq3Y</a>; DVD on reserve at NYU Bobst Avery Fisher Center)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday recitation:</td>
<td>Thomas Mann: <em>Mario and the Magician</em>; Adorno, <em>Freudian Theory and The Pattern of Fascist Propaganda</em></td>
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E) Divided Stories: East and West Germany

Tuesday, April 24: Topographies of Division: The Berlin Wall (1961-1989)
Uwe Johnson, “Berlin, Border of the Divided World,” 181-192
Uwe Johnson: “Postscript on the S-Bahn,” 63-65

Thursday, April 26: West Germany in the 1970s: Left Wing Terrorism
Ulrike Meinhof, Columns from konkret (Hitler within you; Human dignity is violable; Water Cannons: Against Women, Too)

Friday recitation: Ulrike Meinhof, Columns from konkret (Hitler within you; Human dignity is violable; Water Cannons: Against Women, Too)

Tuesday, May 1: East Germany: The Stasi-Complex
Christa Wolf, What Remains

* third essay due in lecture on Tuesday, May 1 *

F) Post-Wall Germany

Thursday, May 3: Yella (2007, dir. Christian Petzold) (DVD on reserve at NYU Bobst Avery Fisher Center) and Berlin today

Friday recitation: Christa Wolf, What Remains

* FINAL EXAM: THURSDAY, MAY 10, 12PM-1:50PM *

Attendance Policy

Your attendance is required and will be checked at each class meeting (lectures and recitations). Absences are only excused if they are due to illness (documented by a note from NYU health service or a physician), religious observance or emergencies. As soon as it becomes clear that you cannot attend a class you must inform Jacob Denz or Lauren Wolfe by e-mail (i.e. prior to your
absence). You are responsible for making up all readings, assignments, and materials covered in class during your absence. Your final course grade will be lowered by one grade for each unexcused absence after the second.

**Academic Integrity**

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. This is especially relevant in cases of plagiarism. For a complete description of the academic integrity expectations and standards, see http://cas.nyu.edu/page/ug.academicintegrity.