

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

Wolf, Alexander Kluge, Ingeborg Bachmann, W.G. Sebald, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, Josef Beuys, Anselm Kiefer, Gerhard Richter, and Martin Kippenberger.

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

Adalbert 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

The Bauhaus: Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies v. d. Rohe, Wassily Kandinsky,
Paul Klee, Anni Albers

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,

Thursday, December 10: The struggles of the Federal Republic: film screening: R. W. Fassbinder, *Katzelmacher*, 1969

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