

Core-UA 566, Fall 2021

CULTURES & CONTEXTS: GERMANY

Prof. Elisabeth Strowick, Department of German
19 University Place, R. 334; strowick@nyu.edu

Lecture (L): MW 9:30am-10:45am, CANT Room: 102

Preceptors and Recitations (R):

Rahel von Minden (rvm271@nyu.edu)

T 8am-9:15am, TISC Room: LC7

T 9:30am-10:45am, 25 W 4 Room: C-3

Anneke Rautenbach (ahr318@nyu.edu)

T 8am-9:15am, 12 WV Room: L114

T 9:30am-10:45am, 60 5th Ave, Room: C14

Lauren K. Wolfe (lkw268@nyu.edu)

T 9:30am-10:45am, 12 WV Room: L113

T 11am-12:15pm, TISC Room: LC1

T 2pm-3:15pm, 12 WV Room: L111

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 Neue Galerie New York, 1048 Fifth Avenue, 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 on NYU Brightspace.

Movies for streaming on Kanopy (via Bobst library) or online.

Wednesday, 09/08 – L: Introduction

A) Knowledge and Critical Thinking

Enlightenment: Kant, Lessing, Herder

Monday, 09/13 – L: Immanuel Kant: *What is Enlightenment?*

Tuesday, 09/14 – R: Kant: *What is Enlightenment?*

Wednesday, 09/15 – L: The Idea of Humanity:
Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: *Nathan the Wise*

Monday, 09/20 – L: Scenes of Conversation:
Lessing: *Nathan the Wise* (continuation)

Tuesday, 09/21 – R: Lessing: *Nathan the Wise*

Desire for and Tragedy of Knowledge: Goethe's Faust

- Wednesday, 09/22 – L: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Faust I*, 1-52
- Monday, 09/27 – L: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Faust I* (continuation), *Faust II*, Act V, 279-298
- Tuesday, 09/28 – R: Goethe: *Faust I* + *Faust II*, Act V, 279-298

From Enlightenment to Darkness: German Romanticism

- Wednesday, 09/29 – L: E.T.A. Hoffmann: *The Sandman*

Unconscious Knowledge: Psychoanalysis

- Monday, 10/04 – L: “The unconscious is structured like a language” (Lacan):
Sigmund Freud: *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Vol. IV: 277-284,
305-309, Vol. V: 525
- Tuesday, 10/05 – R: Sigmund Freud: *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Vol. IV: 277-284,
305-309, Vol. V: 525
- Wednesday, 10/06 – L: Hysteria, the Speaking Body, and Transference:
Josef Breuer/Sigmund Freud: *Studies on Hysteria*, Vol. II: 3-17
 (“On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena:
Preliminary Communication”), 135-181 (“Fräulein Elisabeth von
R.”)
- Monday, 10/11 Fall break

*** first essay due in lecture on Wednesday, 10/13 ***

B) Power – Institution - Suspicion

- Tuesday, 10/12 – L: The Medical Gaze: Death in the Clinic and in Modern Literature
(Legislative Day) Gottfried Benn, *Morgue cycle* (“Little Aster”, “Beautiful Youth”,
“Requiem”, “Man and Woman Go through the Cancer Ward”),
Brains
- Wednesday, 10/13 – L: Georg Büchner, *Woyzeck*
- Monday, 10/18 – L: Franz Kafka, *The Trial*
- Tuesday, 10/19 – R: Franz Kafka, *The Trial*
- Wednesday, 10/20 – L: Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (continuation)

- Monday, 10/25 – L: Hermeneutics of Suspicion – Modern Self-discipline:
Nietzsche – Foucault
- Tuesday, 10/26 – R: Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Genealogy of Morality*: Preface; Third
essay: what do ascetic ideals mean?; *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-
Moral Sense*
- Wednesday, 10/27 – L: **MIDTERM EXAM**
- Monday, 11/01 – L: Epistemology of Suspicion
Kafka, *The Burrow*
- Tuesday, 11/02 – R: Kafka, *The Burrow*

** second essay due in lecture on Monday, 11/08 **

C) Modernism

- Wednesday, 11/03 – L: no lecture; visit Neue Galerie New York: Museum for German and
Austrian Art; <https://www.neuegalerie.org/>
(open: Thursday–Sunday; don't miss the book store)
- Monday, 11/08 – L: Lecture by Rahel von Minden: “I am writing a manifesto and
there's nothing I want”: DADA's (Anti-)Manifestos
Hugo Ball, “Dada Manifesto“
Tristan Tzara, “Dada Manifesto 1918“
- Tuesday, 11/09 – R: Dystopian Images:
Metropolis (1927, dir. Fritz Lang) (on kanopy)
- Wednesday, 11/10 – L: Weimar Cinema and the Modern Metropolis:
Berlin: Symphony of a Great City (1927, dir. Walter Ruttmann) (on
kanopy)

D) Crowd Psychology, Nazi Propaganda and Totalitarianism

- Monday, 11/15 – L: Crowd Psychology and the Authoritarian Personality:
Thomas Mann, *Mario and the Magician*
Adorno, *Freudian Theory and The Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*
- Tuesday, 11/16 – R: Thomas Mann: *Mario and the Magician*; Adorno, *Freudian Theory
and The Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*
- Wednesday, 11/17 – L: Language of Propaganda and “Fascist Aesthetics” (Susan Sontag):
Victor Klemperer: *The Language of the Third Reich*, 1-21, 52-56,
97-111, 200-208, 229-233, 263-265;
The Triumph of the Will (1935, dir. Leni Riefenstahl)

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6uajey>

- Monday, 11/22 – L: Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Chapter: “Totalitarian Propaganda”)
- Tuesday, 11/23 – R: Hannah Arendt, “Totalitarian Propaganda”
- Wednesday, 11/24 – L: Lecture by Anneke Rautenbach: What is a Lie to Politics?
Hannah Arendt: “Truth and Politics”; Hannah Arendt: “Lying in Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers”

E) Divided Stories: East and West Germany

- Monday, 11/29 – L: 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
- Tuesday: 11/30 – R: Uwe Johnson, “Berlin, Border of the Divided World,” 181-192;
Uwe Johnson: “Postscript on the S-Bahn,” 63-65
- Wednesday, 12/01 – L: West Germany: 1968 and its Aftermath
Ulrike Meinhof, Columns from *konkret* (Hitler within you; Human dignity is violable)

*** third essay due in lecture on Monday, 12/06 ***

- Monday, 12/06 – L: East Germany: The Stasi-Complex
Christa Wolf, *What Remains*
- Tuesday, 12/07 – R: Christa Wolf, *What Remains*

F) Germany from 1989 to Today

- Wednesday, 12/08 – L: Lecture by Lauren Wolfe: Voices Lost and Recovered: Women Poets of Color Before and After Reunification
Poems by Semra Ertan and May Ayim
- Monday, 12/13 – L: The Berlin School, *Yella*, and Berlin Today
Yella (2007, dir. Christian Petzold) (on Kanopy)
- Tuesday, 12/14 – R: final exam preparation

*** FINAL EXAM: MONDAY 12/20 10AM-11:50AM***

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 Rahel von Minden, Anneke Rautenbach 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 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>.