Expressive Culture:
Art and Politics in 20th Century Germany

Course Number
CORE-UA.9763001

Wed 1:30 – 4:15pm

Course Details
NYU Berlin
AC at Kulturbrauerei
Schönhauser Allee 36, Haus 2, Aufgang F
10435 Berlin

Prerequisites – None
Units earned – 4

SAMPLE SYLLABUS

Lecturer Contact Information
Dania Hückmann – dania@nyu.edu

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 was 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 separates art from propaganda? Special attention will be paid to modes of socio-political censorship as well as to the subversive power of art and literature.

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 effects of these violent events on cultural identity. Students will discuss texts which have generated public outrage (Schnitzler, Wolf) as well as the (ab-)use of art by the state (Cohen). We will explore how violence affects representation (Adorno, Améry, Celan) and the analysis of (national) identity (Freud, Arendt).

This interdisciplinary course introduces students to a range of methods and combines the analyses of cultural narratives with walking tours and visits to museums. We will work with a variety of written genre (novels, essays, political theory, plays), 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 Objectives:
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 as well as contemporary 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.

Assessment Components:

Participation 15%
Midterm 20%
4 short papers 20%
3 short assignments for field trips 15%
Final Paper 30%

Participation (15%): Active participation in class. This means that you need to read and bring the assigned texts to class, ready to discuss them. Prepare 2-3 questions about the assigned text or film and post them in the “forum” section on NYU Classes by 9 am on the day of each class.

Midterm (20%): The midterm will be based on our visit to the museums and discussion of Expressionism. You are asked to reflect on how modern art (Bauhaus, DADA, Expressionism) has been interpreted in the past and how it is presented in cultural institutions today (i.e. how are the exhibitions/stages curated?). The midterm has a written and an oral component. Written component: Write a 4-5pp long essay discussing 1-2 artworks – you can also choose a painting and a passage from a text or a scene from Architecture of Doom.: a) develop a thesis about a motif or theme; b) include a brief introduction to the artist and historical context; c) a close reading of the artwork. Oral component: 5-7-minute presentation of your interpretation in class, including a PPT presentation. We will debate methods of interpretation of works of art in the context of their creation and their current presentation within an exhibition.

Papers (20%): Students will write four 2-3-page critical analyses 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. Use the questions for each essay as a guideline and formulate a short thesis statement that ties your analysis to the themes of the course.

Field Trips (15%): Students will prepare a 2-3 page paper on the topic of each of the 3 museum and theater visits.
Final Paper (30%): One final 5-7 pp paper. Choose 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.

Assessment Expectations:

Grade A: The student makes excellent use of empirical and theoretical material and offers well-structured arguments in his/her work. The student writes comprehensive essays / answers to exam questions and his/her work shows strong evidence of critical thought and extensive reading.

Grade B: The candidate shows a good understanding of the problem and has demonstrated the ability to formulate and execute a coherent research strategy.

Grade C: The work is acceptable and shows a basic grasp of the research problem. However, the work fails to organize findings coherently and is in need of improvement.

Grade D: The work passes because some relevant points are made. However, there may be a problem of poor definition, lack of critical awareness, poor research.

Grade F: The work shows that the research problem is not understood; there is little or no critical awareness and the research is clearly negligible.

Grade Conversion:
Your instructor may use one of the following scales of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

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<th>Grade</th>
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<td>B+</td>
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<td>B-</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>C</td>
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Alternatively:

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Attendance Policy
Participation in all classes is essential for your academic success, especially in courses that meet only once per week. Your attendance in both content and language courses is required and will be checked at each class meeting. As soon as it becomes clear that you cannot attend a class, you must inform your professor by e-mail immediately (i.e. before the start of your class). Absences are only excused if they are due to illness, religious observance or emergencies. Your professor or NYU Berlin's administration may ask you to present a doctor's note or an exceptional permission from NYU Berlin's Director or Wellness Counselor as proof. Emergencies or other exceptional circumstances must be presented to the Director. Doctor's notes need to be submitted to the Academics Office, who will inform your professors. Doctor's notes need to be from a local doctor and carry a signature and a stamp. If you want the reasons for your absence to be treated confidentially, please approach NYU Berlin's Director or Wellness Counselor.

Unexcused absences affect students' grades: In content courses each unexcused absence (equaling one week's worth of classes) leads to a deduction of 2% of the overall grade and may negatively affect your class participation grade. In German Language classes two or three (consecutive or non-consecutive) unexcused absences (equaling one week's worth of classes) lead to a 2% deduction of the overall grade. Three unexcused absences in one content course and five unexcused absences in your German language course may lead to a Fail in that course. Furthermore, your professor is entitled to deduct points for frequent late
arrival or late arrival back from in-class breaks. Being more than 15 minutes late counts as an unexcused absence. Please note that for classes involving a field trip, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive in time at the announced meeting point.

Exams, tests and quizzes, deadlines, and oral presentations that are missed due to illness always require a doctor's note as documentation. It is the student's responsibility to produce this doctor's note and submit it to the Academics Office; until this doctor's note is produced the missed assessment is graded with an F and no make-up assessment is scheduled. In content classes, an F in one assignment may lead to failure of the entire class.

**Attendance Rules on Religious Holidays**

Members of any religious group may, without penalty, excuse themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Students who anticipate being absent due to religious observance should notify their lecturer AND NYU Berlin's Academics Office in writing via e-mail one week in advance. If examinations or assignment deadlines are scheduled on the day the student will be absent, the Academics Office will schedule a make-up examination or extend the deadline for assignments. Please note that an absence is only excused for the holiday but not for any days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. See also [http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/university-calendar-policy-on-religious-holidays.html](http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/university-calendar-policy-on-religious-holidays.html)

**Late Submission of Work**

(1) Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.

(2) Late work should be submitted in person to the lecturer or to the Academics Office, who will write on the essay or other work the date and time of submission, in the presence of the student. Another member of the administrative staff may also personally accept the work, and will write the date and time of submission on the work, as above.

(3) Work submitted late receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100 point scale for each day it is late (excluding weekends and public or religious holidays), unless an extension has been approved (with a doctor's note or by approval of NYU Berlin's administration), in which case the 2 points per day deductions start counting from the day the extended deadline has passed.

(4) Without an approved extension, written work submitted more than 5 days (excluding weekends and public or religious holidays) following the submission date receives an F.

(5) End of semester essays must be submitted on time.

(6) Students who are late for a written exam have no automatic right to take extra time or to write the exam on another day.

(7) Please remember that university computers do not keep your essays - you must save them elsewhere. Having lost parts of your essay on the university computer is no excuse for a late submission.

**Provisions for Students with Disabilities**

Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see their website
Plagiarism Policy
The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism. Proper referencing of your sources avoids plagiarism (see as one possible help the NYU library guide to referencing styles: http://nyu.libguides.com/citations).

NYU Berlin takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. Your lecturer may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form.

It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor.

For a summary of NYU Global's academic policies please see: www.nyu.edu/global/academic-policies

Required Texts:
All films will be uploaded to the course website and have to be watched before class. Books can be bought at Dussmann in Friedrichstrasse 90, where books are pre-ordered for students. All texts marked Title* are available on NYU Classes.


Supplemental Texts (not required to purchase; available in the NYU library)
Session Plan:

**SCANDALS**

**Session 1 – February 1:**  
**“Scandalous” Art – An Introduction**  
This session will give you a brief overview of the history and prominent art movements of 20th century Germany. What constitutes an art scandal? To what extent is art critical and/or complicit in political movements?  
Johann Wolfgang Goethe, “Prometheus” – handout in class

**Session 2 – February 8:**  
**Theater Scandal**  
Arthur Schnitzler’s *Hand Around* provoked a scandal for its casual depiction of sexual relations at the onset of the 20th century. We will discuss Schnitzler’s perception of his play as “unsellable,” the representation of love and the body as well as the dramatic structure of the play.  
Arthur Schnitzler, *Hands Around [Reigen]* (1898)

**Session 4 – February 15:**  
**Hysteria & Society**  
Sigmund Freud revised his understanding of hysteria being caused by sexual abuse to resulting from fantasies. How does the historical context factor into this shift? Does the case of Freud’s change of mind tell us something about how society generally deals with (sexual) trauma?  
**RESPONSE PAPER I DUE IN CLASS – Is a scandal an act of interpretation?**

**Session 5 – February 17:**  
**THEATER: BERLIN ALEXANDERPLATZ**  
**REALITY / REPRESENTATION**

**Session 6 – February 22:**  
**Expressionism**  
With its emphasis on subjective perspectives and informed by the experience of World War I, Expressionism was a defining art movement of the Weimar Republic. We will look at Expressionist literature (Döblin), theater (Sebastian Hartmann), poetry (Benn), and selected works of art (Nolde) and discuss the aesthetics and politics of Expressionism.  
Selected poems by Gottfried Benn  
**FIELD NOTES I DUE in class: How is the everyday reality of Berlin represented in the play?**

**Session 7 – March 1:**  
**Art in the Age of Capitalism**  
How does art affect us? Does the possibility of reproducing art affect its impact or its aura as Benjamin calls it? Is the effect of art informed by its institutional context, i.e. museum, gallery, store?  

**Session 8 – March 8:**  
**Visit to Berlinische Galerie**  
We will visit the archive of the Berlinische Galerie and look at art works by the DADA artist Hannah Höch.
Ralf Burmeister, “‘Slashes through the thickest skin’ – Dada Berlin between provocation and enlightenment,” (pp. 150-57) and Valentine Plisner, “Non-Western art in Dada photography and photomontage,” (pp.191-197), in dada Africa, ed. by Ralf Burmeister, Michaela Oberhofer, and Esther Tisa Francini (Berlin: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2016).


Also have a look at Höch’s Photocollages from Hannah Höch. Aller Anfang ist DADA ! ed. by Ralf Burmeister (Berlinische Galerie, 2007).

RESPONSE PAPER II DUE IN CLASS – Pick 1 Topic and give a specific example: a) How is art affected by technology? b) chose an artist (Nolde, Benn, Döblin) and discuss how Expressionism can be defined through their work.

*** Spring Break – No Class ***

Session 9 – March 22: Visit to Bauhaus Archive
The Bauhaus movement exemplifies artistic collaboration. Before leaving Germany under the Nazi regime, Bauhaus developed its own pedagogy based on their own vision of a Gesamtkunstwerk. We will visit the Bauhaus archive and consider how the institution represents and remembers the movement.


FIELD NOTES II DUE in class: a) Pick a work of art from the Berlinische Galerie and discuss how it represents Berlin; b) reference the historical context of the work and the artist; and c) discuss the relation between style and content.

WAR / CULTURE

Session 10 – March 29: Art in Nazi Germany & midterm presentations
We will begin by discussing how the Nazis framed Modern art in their so-called Degenerate Art exhibitions. During this session, you will present the key argument from your midterm paper in an oral presentation (5-7 min.), including a PPT. The topic of the Peter Cohen: Architecture of Doom (1989), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bx22HDTvJ4A “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. *

Midterm paper due & brief in-class presentation of your interpretation of Modern art (Expressionism, DADA, Bauhaus).

FIELD NOTES III DUE in class: How does the Bauhaus archive represent the memory of the Bauhaus movement? Pick 1-2 examples and discuss how curation and/or architecture aid memory.

MIDTERM PAPER DUE in class

Session 11 – April 5: Theater in Nazi Germany
Heinrich von Kleist’s Battle of Herman was the play most often staged in Nazi Germany. Does Kleist’s play have a nationalist dimension or does it have subversive elements that undercut its use as propaganda?

Session 12 – April 12: Poetry after Auschwitz

Adorno’s dictum, “writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,” pinpoints the question of if and how art can represent the horrors of the holocaust. To explore the complicated relation between violence and aesthetics, we will read Adorno’s dictum and how he altered it over time alongside the poetry of Celan, Domin, and Bachmann.


Selected poems by Paul Celan, Hilde Domin and Ingeborg Bachmann

RESPONSE PAPER III DUE IN CLASS – How do historical shifts affect the production and/or interpretation of art? Give concrete examples.

Session 13 – April 19: Homeland & Human Rights

This session deals with the conception and experience of Heimat [home(land)] in the face of expulsion and refuge. The two thinkers highlight the existential need for a home through a political (Arendt) and literary (Améry) lens; reading them alongside one another unfolds the legal, social, and linguistic dimensions of the politics of belonging.


CULTURE/ CENSORSHIP

Session 14 – April 26: East & West

Divided Heaven(1964) depicts Berlin right before the wall was built in 1961. The film went on and off the GDR censor list repeatedly. We will discuss how (national) identity and belonging are depicted in Wolf’s film as well as in Biermann’s famous song, which led to the loss of his GDR citizenship in 1976. What aesthetical strategies do artists develop to produce art in the face of state censorship?

Konrad Wolf, Divided Heaven (1964).


Wolf Biermann, “Prussian Icarus” (1976)

Session 15 – May 3: Surveillance

Wolf’s text “What Remains,” written before and published after the fall of the wall in 1990, caused a bitter public debate about Wolf’s role as prominent GDR writer. When and how does outer censorship become internalized? We will consider a passage from Foucault’s Discipline and Punish to analyze the workings of surveillance.


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


WRITING WORKSHOP (peer-review of abstracts for the final paper) December 7

Session 16 – May 10: Final Discussion

May 15 Submission of Final Paper by noon (email a version to dania@nyu.edu and drop off a hard copy at my office)
Your Lecturer:
Dania Hückmann is a faculty member at New York University in Berlin. Her research interests include discourses of law in literature and film, narratology, censorship and representations of trauma and violence, from German Classicism to the post World War II period. In her first book project, she examines revenge in German Realist literature. She has published on metaphor in Jean Améry, Heinrich von Kleist and revenge, Thomas Bernhard’s Extinction, Quentin Tarantino’s Inglourious Basterds, and edited a volume on Containment in Realism for the The Germanic Review.