Modern German Drama: Political Theater

This seminar is devoted to modern political theater in the double sense of the phrase. Theater has long provided a privileged medium for reflecting on politics, while political theory has in turn been informed by theatrical devices and models of representation. Reading plays and works of political thought in parallel, we will explore the transformation of the modern political scene from the French Revolution to the Anthropocene. Topics to be discussed include revolution and states of emergency, biopolitics and political nature, conceptions of agency (juridical, administrative, more than human), theatricality and performativity, representation vs participation, and the politics of refusal.

Bracketed with discussions of Oedipus and Antigone, the reception of which so fundamentally informed modern political theater, the seminar focuses on a largely German archive of theatrical work – from Kleist and Schiller to Büchner and Brecht to Özdamar and Jelinek – that is political insofar as it challenges still prevalent views of the political scene. Readings from the history of political thought include Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Schmitt, Fanon, Luxemburg, Arendt, Foucault, Agamben, Butler, Honig, Stengers, and Latour. These will be supplemented with a selection of contemporary scholarship corresponding to student interest and the direction of discussion. We will consult texts in the original, but readings and discussion will be in English – no German language skills are required. For the final research papers, seminar participants will be invited to write on an aspect of political theater relevant to their own work and field of study.
GERM-GA2223 | 2 credits | F 2:00-4:45pm | In English | Meets March 24 -May 7

Marlene Streeruwitz, DAAD Chair for Contemporary Poetics at NYU

Topics in Modern German Literature and Poetics: Towards peace. Poetics.

As literature is the true life science let's take a look what that contains in respect to peace and democracy. Bring your most beloved or most hated novel. Analyze it according to one of the canonical poetics since Aristotle and put this into perspective along with the critique of "Manual against War" which I wrote after February 21, 2022 when the Ukraine Conflict evolved into the Ukraine War. The aim is to find out what literature knows about peace and what our cultures know about peace.

We will attempt to determine the role of literature in war and peace in our cultures and move towards a basic understanding of peace as the requirement for all human rights and democracy. These tentative steps should lead us towards a poetics of peace at least in literature.
It is one of the topoi of literary studies that translation presupposes interpretation and is thus bound to certain discursive premises. To investigate specifically how this connection between translation and interpretation has developed historically and is embedded in concerns of philosophy of language, the seminar reconstructs concepts (and politics) of translation from Luther to Benjamin and Buber-Rosenzweig. One of the focal points is the emergence of a modern theory of representation between 1730 and 1820 (Venzky, Breitinger, Schleiermacher), the effects of which manifest themselves in different Shakespeare translations (Wieland, Lenz, Schlegel). Finally, by including more recent theories of translation, the seminar seeks to reconsider interpretation from the standpoint of translation, and translation from that of interpretation. Taught in German.
The course explores the ravages of ingratitude and the hold of addictive lures on the entangled levels of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and literature. Readings include Jean-Luc Nancy on community and “shattered love” as well as Sarah Kofman on despotic throes of Being and Derrida on spectral lament.
Confession in German Thought: Of Guilt, Creed, and Pride

Philippe Büttgen, Eberhard Berent Goethe Professor

In English | 4 credits | W 2:00 – 4:45 pm

Contemporary theory has made confession an object for thought, problematizing both the subjectivation of subjects through the recognition of their sins (Foucault, *The Confessions of the Flesh*; Derrida, *Circumcision*) and the power of declarative statements in politics (Derrida, *The University without Condition*; Balibar, *Secularism and Cosmopolitanism*). On the other hand, the ambiguity of confession as confession of sins and confession of faith, has been a major issue in German thought, from *Aufklärung* onwards. Our inquiry will start from the question ‘What should I confess?’ (which sins and what faith?), as the question underlying all reflection especially on religion and politics on German-speaking soil. We will read and contextualize the German discussion on *Bekenntnis*, in an attempt to shed a new light on confession, forgiveness, and self-reliance in contemporary debates.

An inquiry on the power of confession will provide insights into the conditions of possibility of theoretical production in a culture that has been deeply confessionalized, i.e. overdetermined by the confessional divide since the Reformation. This divide has in turn had a radical effect on the thought of confession itself, crossing the boundaries between philosophy, literature, and law.

Readings will include texts by Lessing (*Adam Neuser*), Kant (« Was ist Aufklärung ? »), Goethe (*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*), Hegel (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*), Rosenzweig (*Der Stern der Erlösung*), Balibar, Derrida, Foucault.