GERM-UA132 | Germany:
Contemporary Society, Culture, and Media

4 credits / TR 12:30 - 1:45 pm / Doreen Densky / Spring 2023 / In German

This course surveys the major post-unification developments that have tested and continue to shape Germany. We will discuss the political structures, media landscape, cultural issues in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, contemporary social matters (including recent waves of refugees, immigration, integration, and right-wing extremism), as well as environmental issues around the country’s role as one of the leaders in the fields of renewable energy and sustainable development. A variety of established and new media (literature, music, film, journalistic writing, and web sources) respond to these issues and we will analyze how texts and images influence debates today.
GERM-UA152
Introduction to German Literature
Doreen Densky

TR 3:30 – 4:45 pm
In German | 4 credits

This course has two major goals. First, it introduces students to a selection of representative authors and exemplary texts of German-language literature from the 18th to the 21st century. Second, it helps students develop close and critical reading skills while they learn to express their analysis of literary texts in German, both in speaking and in writing. Covering the three major literary genres—poetry, prose, drama—some of the following issues will be discussed: the depiction of otherness; the representation of time and history; the uncanny; the relationship between form and content; the economy of human relationships on the basis of hierarchy, love, and authority.
GERM-UA202 / COLIT-UA202
Literature and Philosophy: Political Philosophy On Steroids

4 credits / MW 4:55-6:10pm / Avital Ronell
Spring 2023 / In English

This course looks at problems of political conditioning and the agony of our times. The themes that draw our attention are not covered by traditional perspectives of political philosophy. We shall study the roots of tyranny, patriarchal strongholds, sexual repression, national identity, and the destruction of individual freedom in terms of literary and philosophical texts that describe and undermine all sorts of political myths and beliefs. The student will have a fuller sense of the stakes and pain of political maturity and what it takes to survive restrictive laws and what psychoanalysis calls the relentless pounding of the 'reality principle.'

Readings include the works of Marx, Kleist, Kafka, Phillis Wheatley, Hannah Arendt, Kathy Acker, Sarah Kofman, Derrida.
Immanuel Kant’s 1781 *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* coined the critical terms, next to developing influential transcendental arguments, that all serious subsequent claims of reason in modern philosophical discourse have had to contend with ever since its first publication. From the Neo-Kantian and phenomenological schools of thought, via Frankfurt School Neomarxism, up to the reception of contemporary analytic philosophy (as in so-called analytic German Idealism), Kant’s theoretical and practical philosophy has remained the touchstone and central reference. This course will survey the remarkable legacy of Kant’s critical vocabulary, the so-called canon of pure reason and the architectonic or art of constructing a philosophical system, as he saw it, and investigate the ways in which this modern classic has fundamentally reoriented the philosophical imagination and debate to the present day.

Three Avant-Gardes

GERM-UA283/ ENGL-UA252

4 credits / MW 2:00 - 3:15 pm
Lytle Shaw and Christopher Wood
Spring 2023 / In English

The avant-garde is the leading edge of artistic change, and the preview of the artistic, social, and political futures. An avant-garde is the picture, sketched by a gifted few, of where the many are headed.

This course aims to rethink the modern history and concept of the avant-garde through close study of three epochal moments in modern Western art: Romanticism in Germany (circa 1800); Dada and Surrealism in Europe and the U.S. (circa 1920); and the "New York School" in poetry and art (circa 1960). We will discover that whereas progressive art is supposedly always looking forward, avant-gardes have in fact often looked backwards and compared themselves to these and other "canonical" moments. Is such meta-avant-garde consciousness compatible with true artistic freedom? Does the avant-garde model still retain its normative power in our own complex and multipolar society, where old distinctions between "high" and "low" art are ever more difficult to uphold?
This seminar offers an introduction to the work of Goethe (1749-1832) who is one of the most prominent figures in the history of German literature and thought and considered to be - as T.S. Eliot put it - "one of the wisest of men." Tracing this wisdom through selected poems, prose, plays and essays we will closely analyze the fascinating complexity of an oeuvre that reflects Goethe’s interdisciplinary interests in the aesthetic, philosophical, and scientific discourses and controversies of his time. Among other texts we will read: Prometheus, The Sorrows of Young Werther, Faust I, From my life: poetry and truth (excerpts), Metamorphosis of Plants (excerpts), Novella. Taught in German.
The course analyzes texts by Franz Kafka from a twofold perspective. In as much as his work tirelessly addresses processes of administration, law, punishment, knowledge production and family structures, it can be considered an analysis of modern institutions and forms of power by means of literature. But these forms of power also inform Kafka’s poetic practice. His literary techniques relate to modern communication systems (postal system) and media technologies used in modern bureaucracy (typewriter, phonograph/sound writer, telephone). In close readings we will examine how the specific performative, rhetorical and material character of Kafka’s texts contribute to the power of writing or what Deleuze/Guattari call a ‘minor literature.’ The course will also explore Kafka’s impact on 20th century literary theory and philosophy (Benjamin, Deleuze/Guattari). Readings and discussions in German.