GERMAN CULTURE 1890-1989:
BERLIN IN MOTION
DOREEN DENSKY | FALL 2022
GERM-UA133 | MW 11:00-12:15

This course analyzes twentieth-century German culture through the lens of Berlin’s status as a metropolis in constant flux. Place of rapid industrialization, fertile ground for cultural experimentation in the Weimar Republic, site of rubble after the Third Reich’s fall, divided city during the Cold War, capital of reunified Germany, magnet for artists and hub for cultural diversity today: Berlin’s energy derives from its continuous readjustments. We will study a variety of texts (poetry, narrative prose, journalistic writing) and visual media (painting, photography, film) to discuss Berlin’s culture and trace its turbulent history from the late nineteenth century to the present.
Our focus will involve the question: What does it mean to go “elsewhere” in the broadest sense? What moves with the people who choose to or have to go elsewhere? (words, recipes, traditions, food, music, artifacts, etc.). How does this affect how we think of belonging? What are the political, cultural, social, and aesthetic repercussions of migrations and exiles? These are only a few questions that come to mind when thinking about displacement and its consequences. Albeit it a very timely reality in current Europe, migratory waves have a long history and therefore our course will explore migratory movements and their figurative embodiments from the 1800s to today in a variety of genres: narrative prose, poetry, theater, film, maybe opera, paintings/photos, music, popular culture, and journalism. Authors will include Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Heinrich Heine, Johann Peter Hebel, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Stefan Zweig, Thomas Mann, Fritz Lang, Marlene Dietrich, Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno, Anna Seghers, Yoko Tawada, Herta Müller, Abbas Khiidar, Yasemin Yildiz, Jenny Erpenbeck, and Fatih Akin, among others. A class excursion to the Tenement Museum in New York will hopefully be part of the course.

Taught in German.
Since the 18th century, European thinking and imagination has envisioned ‘America’ as a complex network of both positive and negative projections: With the ‘American dream’ laid down in the Declaration of Independence, the United States has represented the great model of individual freedom, democracy and modernization. At the same time, this new world has been depicted as the epitome of alienation, human degradation, and (decaying) capitalism. As both a euphoric and dysphoric vision, America has been reflected in German literature, particularly in narrative accounts of travelling, novels, stories, and essays ranging from Goethe’s Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre to Ingeborg Bachmann’s Der gute Gott von Manhattan, and beyond. The seminar will analyze the images of America in German literature of the 19th and 20th century in their historical contexts. We will further investigate concepts of identity and politics, perceptions of time and space and their aesthetic representation. Taught in German.
MARX AND THE CULTURE OF CAPITALISM

GERM-UA 242 | 4 credits | TR 3:30 – 4:45p | Fall 2022

LEIF WEATHERBY

The course serves as an introduction to the thought and legacy of Karl Marx. Marx’s theory of capitalism centers on the concept of value. Value is the interface between culture and commerce, the hinge on which Marx’s theory and Marxism turn. Although Marx sometimes distinguished between an economic “base” and a legal-cultural “superstructure,” he managed to depict the culture of capitalism as a whole. This method forms one of his crucial legacies, which we will explore in and after Marx. Organized around a slow reading of Capital, Volume 1, the course will also feature short readings from those who inspired Marx (David Ricardo, G. W. F. Hegel, Charles Babbage and Ada Lovelace) and those his work influenced (Rosa Luxemburg, Theodor W. Adorno, Stuart Hall, Donna Haraway). We will follow the trajectory that Capital itself takes, from the commodity and the concept of value to machinery, cooperation, and accumulation. Taught in English.
This course is an introduction to "New German Media Theory." It explores the roots and consequences of Friedrich Kittler's approach to media, reaching back to Romanticism and the Enlightenment and forward to the contemporary American and German media theory scenes. Kittler articulated the notion of a "media-technological a priori" that shapes meaning itself and our production of cultural and logistical networks. We will read his books Discourse Networks 1800/1900 and Gramophone Film Typewriter, along with several essays. Three threads of readings will accompany these books: the roots of Kittler's media theory in poststructuralist thought (Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan), the objects of his analysis (Romantic literature (Novalis, E.T.A.Hoffmann), Enlightenment media theory (Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Friedrich Schiller), Modernism and the analog media, and cybernetics), and the contexts and consequences of his thinking in Germany (with "cultural science" or Kulturwissenschaft: Cornelia Vismann, Bernhard Siegert, among others) and in the US (Alexander Galloway, Wendy Chun). The course provides a deep reading of two influential books in media theory as a vantage point from which to understand both the history of media thinking and the underlying frameworks of contemporary media critiques.

Taught in English.
In fin-de-siècle Vienna a distinctive kind of writing emerged that teemed with insects and vermin. It is as if the life previously confined to the margins or gutters of literature – and society – had suddenly crawled into view. Disturbing the norms of literary propriety, these distasteful sometimes disgusting figures announced themselves in unsettling gesticulations, rustlings, scratchings – scrawl. While modernist literature is often defined in relation to a “crisis of language” (Sprachkrise), it was also motivated by newfound anxieties about “forms of life” (Lebensformen). The preoccupation with vermin and other unruly life gave rise to some of the most astonishing and original writing in literary history and produced in turn probing examinations of the modern politics of life. For the project of what is called modernization has been one of sanitation and sanitization: it is about ordering, organizing, and managing the health and productivity of human and other kinds of life. We will consider how modernist literature responds to modernization in troubling ways that continue to resonate today. Readings include short scrawls by Döblin, Freud, Hofmannsthal, Kafka, Lasker-Schüler, Mann, Musil, Nietzsche, Rilke, Trakl, Wittgenstein.

Readings and discussion in German.
This course considers Kafka’s work largely in light of his preoccupations with language, and particularly with the way this preoccupation affected his writing, indeed provided one of its central topics. Our point of departure will be the experience of a “language crisis” among intellectuals and writers in turn-of-the-century Austria, which led to the radical criticism of conceptual or referential language by Fritz Mauthner, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and others, but was already foreshadowed by Nietzsche. We will then examine Kafka’s response to this crisis: his insight that conceptual/referential language and opposition/binary involves an abstraction of the “truth” or the “real,” which is only apprehensible in a space of radical undecidability between opposites, demanding a language of irreducible allusiveness, a language this is constitutive of Kafka’s texts. Key topics include: what do the “Kafkaesque,” the “monstrous,” and the “uncanny” mean? What is the “law,” and what is “judgment”? Texts to be read are “The Judgment,” “The Metamorphosis,” “A Country Doctor,” and the novel The Trial. Taught in English.