From the Constitution to the Cabaret:

Art and Politics in the Weimar Republic, 1918-1933

For many observers, the period in German history between 1918 and 1933 (called the Weimar Republic after the city where the constitution was signed) symbolizes political failure that led inevitably it seems, to Hitler’s Third Reich. Germany’s experiment with democracy, so the argument goes, brought about instability and discontentment that created a climate in which the Nazi party could thrive. But it would be a mistake to reduce the Weimar years to a chapter in the prehistory of National Socialism. The legacies of the Weimar Republic—as a center for intellectual and artistic innovation, political experimentation, and social change—have endured until the present day, defining our ideas of what it means to be modern.

This seminar is intended as an introduction to the sources and methods of historical interpretation and analysis. As it is an introductory seminar, it assumes students have no prior experience with German history. For this reason, the course includes secondary literature to supplement the student’s knowledge. Most of the reading and writing assignments, however, involve working with primary materials in order to develop the critical skills of the historian. Reading paintings, films, and novels “as historical texts,” students will confront the challenges of using cultural artifacts to interrogate the past. Students will do history instead of reading about history, exploring the emancipatory ideas of the “golden twenties” as well as ordinary voices struggling to come to terms with profound change.

Course Requirements

Students are expected to read weekly assignments closely and critically before class. Reading critically means actively engaging with the text. Remember to ask questions and take notes while reading. Consider the context in which the document was formed and the intentions of the author. Think about the audience and how the document might have been received.

- A one page response to the assigned readings is due at the beginning of class each Monday.
- Attendance and participation are mandatory and having more than one absence and/or persistent silence during class discussions will lower the student’s grade.
- At least one visit to office hours during the course is also required. Office hours will be held on Tuesdays from 1-3 pm at the Stanford Bookstore Café. Please do not hesitate to make an appointment to meet at a different time.

There are two writing assignments:

- The first assignment is a 5-7 page analysis of one primary source from the course. It is due on the day that the document is discussed in class. Students may select a document from week 3, 4, 5, or 6.
- The second assignment is an 10-12 page analysis of a primary source from outside of class. It is due the last day of class, June 1. **This source must be pre-approved by the instructor.** Students may select from a number of sources: a work of fiction, government document, memoir, film, or work of art. (Tip: A class visit to the
Hoover Archives is scheduled for April 18, where director Elena Danielson will guide students through the poster collections from the Weimar Republic.) Students are required to submit a 2-3 page outline on May 11, three weeks prior to the due date of the assignment.

All papers must be in hard copy. Emailed papers will not be accepted. All papers must be double spaced with good margins.

There will be two film screenings. On Wednesday, April 27: Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* at 7:30 pm and on Wednesday, May 18: *The Blue Angel* at 7:30 pm. Locations t.b.a.

**Honor Code**

Students are responsible for fully understanding and complying with the Honor Code. Please visit the Honor Code at: [http://judicialaffairs.stanford.edu](http://judicialaffairs.stanford.edu).

**Grading Breakdown**

- Attendance and participation = 30%
- Paper 1 = 35%
- Paper 2 = 35%

**Required Texts**

The following books are available at the Stanford Bookstore and on two-hour reserve at Green Library:

- Bertolt Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera.*

Other readings can be found in the course reader, available through Copy America. A representative from Copy America will be selling readers immediately after the first two class sessions. Copies of the course reader are also available on reserve at Green Library.

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I. INTRODUCTION: WAR AND DEFEAT

March 30: In class examination of World War One memoirs, photographs, and propaganda.

II. CIVIL WAR, COMPROMISE, AND NEW BEGINNINGS

April 4, 6

- Peukert, 3-51.
- Mary Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 17-35.

**Primary Reading #1**

- Versailles Treaty
- Erich Ludendorff, “On Overcoming the Consequences of the Lost War.”
- Selections from “A Documentary History of the German Revolution.”
- Novembergruppe, “Draft Manifesto 1918” and “Open Letter 1919.”
- George Grosz, “Home to Berlin.”
- The Constitution of the German Republic.

III. THE REPUBLIC SURVIVES

April 11, 13
Primary Reading #2
Thomas Mann, “Disorder and Early Sorrow.”

IV: THE PROMISES AND TASKS OF DEMOCRACY
April 18, 20: Class tour of Hoover Archives.
Peukert, 129-163.
Fulbrook, 35-43.

Primary Reading #3
Max Weber, “Politics as Vocation.”
SPD Party Program
Center Party Program
Efraim Frisch, “Jewish Sketches.”
Joseph Roth, Wandering Jews, 68-79.
Kurt Tucholsky, The World Is a Comedy, selections.
Carl von Ossietzky, “Anti-Semitism.”

V: LIFE IN THE METROPOLIS
April 25, 27 (Film: Fritz Lang’s METROPOLIS)
Peukert, 164-190.

Primary Reading #4
Brecht, The Threepenny Opera.

VI: NEW ART FOR NEW TIMES
May 2, 4
Maud Lavin, Cut with a Kitchen Knife: The Photomontages of Hannah Höch, selections.
John Willett, The New Sobriety: Art and Politics in the Weimar Period, 118-123.

Primary Reading #5
Walter Gropius, “The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus.”
Carl von Ossietzky, “Cultural Bolshevism.”

VII. WAS THERE A NEW WOMAN?
May 9, 11

**Primary Reading #6**

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**VIII. VOICES OF DISSATISFACTION**
May 16, 18 (Film: *THE BLUE ANGEL*, starring Marlene Dietrich)

Peukert, 222-246.

**Primary Reading #7**
Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, selections.
Joseph Goebbels, “Knowledge and Propaganda.”

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**IX. THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND THE COLLAPSE OF DEMOCRACY**
May 23, 25

Peukert, 249-257.

**Primary Reading #8**

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**X: THE TWISTED ROAD TO JANUARY 30, 1933**
May 30 (no class), June 1

Peukert, 258-272.

**Primary Reading #9**
Fallada, finish.
Bruno Heilig, “Why the Weimar Republic Fell.”