Culture in Exile: Berlin/New York/L.A.:
how the daring live performance, arts, and design of German Expressionism and
the Weimar period made its way to America.

Course description:
1920’s Berlin saw an incredible cultural renaissance in theater, music, literature, film, architecture, and design. This historical period, known as the Weimar Republic, came crashing down with Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor of Germany in 1933. The daring, subversive, political, progressive artists of the period, many of whom were Jewish, began an exodus West: to New York, and onward to Hollywood. This course will examine the American flowering of these artists, and their work in exile. We will read two of the seminal chroniclers of the period, Stefan Zweig and Christopher Isherwood, study the work of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, composer Alban Berg, and examine the films of artists such as Ernst Lubitsch, Michael Curtiz, Billy Wilder, Max Ophuls, Erik von Stroheim, and Fritz Lang. The course will also focus on contemporary work which is clearly connected to the Weimar ethos: The films of Wes Anderson, underground cabaret artists such as Taylor Mac, choreographers Bob Fosse and Pina Bausch, the television work of Jill Soloway (Transparent), David Bowie, and more.

Learning objectives:

- To gain a historical perspective and understanding of the Weimar Period: a highly significant time between WWI and WWII in which there was a great flowering of the Arts.
- To gain an understanding of the political and social forces that contributed to the exile of many of the Weimar Artists and to trace their post-Weimar careers in the United States.
- To understand the role of the Artist in shaping cultural norms and challenging political and social status quo.
- To examine the innovators: those who broke the mold and challenged their own contemporary performance practice paradigms and how each generation of artistic innovation is driven by the past and hurled into the future.
- To research and write about Weimar artists and contemporary artists whose work is fueled in some way by the Weimar Artistic movement.
- To enhance students abilities to critically interpret an Artist’s work through writing and discussion.
In the Dark Times, tell me:
Will there still be singing?
Yes, there will be singing:
About the Dark Times ....Bertolt Brecht

Weeks one and two: What was the Weimar Republic?

War/Sanctions/Depression/Inflation: History and Background of Germany's first Republic. What led to its formation in 1918 and its ending in 1933. Why were these 15 years so significant for the Arts and Culture? *How external factors like war, upheaval, and social change can rob an artist of the ability to freely pursue their inner calling, and cause them to use art as a vehicle to record and attempt to contextualize the chaos enveloping him.*

Urban Life in the Weimar Republic
The role of Women – a changing reality.
The role of the Artist: why art matters in times of upheaval.

Readings:


https://www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-4


Peter Gay: Weimar Culture: Chapter 1

Viewing: Excerpts: Babylon Berlin

Assignment: Research the following isms of the early Weimar (and the period just before):

Dadaism
Expressionism
Modernism
Fauvism
Social Realism

Weeks three, four, five: Theater/Film/Popular Arts
Reading: (on Lang)


(on Dietrich and Riefenstahl)

https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/10/19/bombshells-a-critic-at-large-pierpont

Viewing: Three Penny Opera (GW Pabst, 1931)
Viewing: M, (Fritz Lang, 1931)
Viewing: To Be or Not to Be (Lubitsch, 1942)
Viewing: A Foreign Affair (Billy Wilder, 1948)

Artists Discussed: Theater

Bertolt Brecht
Max Reinhardt
Erwin Piscator

Artists Discussed: Film

Marlene Dietrich
Fritz Lang,
Billy Wilder,
Ernst Lubitsch
Peter Lorre,
Hedy Lamarr
Paul Henreid.

Weeks Six, seven, eight: Art and Architecture

The Bauhaus School
Max Beckman
Felix Nussbaum
Wassily Kandinsky
Georg Grosz
Otto Dix
**Weeks eight, nine:**

Music – composers/themes/genres: influence of American Jazz and Broadway
The Songspeil and Cabaret

Attend: Concert with Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird: Punk Klezmer Cabaret. Flynn Space, details to be announced in class

Hanns Eisler
Kurt Weill
Schoenberg
Korngold

**Week 10 – Literature and writing:**

Hannah Arendt
Erich-Maria Remarque
Christopher Isherwood
Stephan Zweig

**Week 11 and 12**

Contemporary Work influenced by Weimar Artists: All genres.

**Imitative vs Influenced Art**

Max Raab
Wes Anderson
Cabaret (the show and film)
Gabriel Kahane
Karyn Levitt
David Bowie

**Viewing:** Grand Budapest Hotel, Wes Anderson

Selections: Berlin Alexanderplatz, Babylon Berlin, Cabaret

**Selections:** Transparent, Jill Soloway

Wim Wenders: Pina

**Final Project:** Topic approved by Professor:
Details to follow.

**Grade Assessment:**

- discussion participation – 20% of grade
- Midterm paper on Brecht, or a Film artist of your choice – 20% of grade
- Attendance* in class and at required event – 20% of grade
- Final project – 40% of grade