

Metropolis: Culture of the City

GRMN-1050-401

Fall 2022

MW 3:30 PM – 4:50 PM

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Office Hours: MW 2:00–3:00 PM and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS:

With the unprecedented expansion of cities in the nineteenth century, distinctive new modes of perception and experience connected to the metropolis gave shape to literary works. Cultural critics began examining the impact of cities on the psyches and bodies of their inhabitants. The city also demanded new ways of seeing and reading. Innovative technological media such as photography and film captured the realities of urban life in stunning detail, while traditional media such as painting attempted to depict the convulsive movements of the city. The course focuses on the emergence of the modern metropolis in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While there is a special focus on Berlin, we will also visit other destinations, such as Paris, London, and Manchester.

The course examines, among other topics:

- the city as site of novelty and avant-garde experimentation
- the city as utopia or as hellish dystopia
- the impact of technology on culture
- the crowd, social order and disorder
- traffic, speed, and film
- city figures such as the criminal, the detective, the flaneur, the dandy, the window-shopper
- the city as a site of pleasure
- queer subcultures
- metropolis vs. colony

REQUIRED TEXTS

Walter Benjamin, [*Berlin Childhood around 1900*](#). Translated by Howard Eiland. Harvard University Press. ISBN 978-0674022225.

Alfred Döblin, [*Berlin Alexanderplatz*](#). Translated by Michael Hoffmann. New York Review Books Classics. ISBN 978-1681371993

Imgard Keun, [*The Artificial Silk Girl: A Novel*](#). Translated by Kathie von Ankum (Other Press), ISBN 978-1590514542

Christopher Isherwood, [*Goodbye to Berlin*](#). New Directions. ISBN 978-0811220248.

Emile Zola, [*The Ladies' Paradise*](#). Translated by Brian Nelson. Oxford World's Classics. ISBN 978-0199536900

The books can be purchased online from abebooks.com or amazon.com. Check both sites for availability and best prices. They will also be on reserve at the Van Pelt Library.

All other readings will be on Canvas.

We will also watch 4 films over the course of the semester:

- *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (Walter Ruttmann, 1927)
- *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927)
- *People on Sunday* (Robert Siodmak, 1930)
- *M – A City in Search of a Murderer* (Fritz Lang, 1931)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

Active Participation	20%
Guided Reading	25%
Oral Presentation	15%
3 Essays	40%

Assignments

You will submit guided reading responses weekly. Each essay consists of a synthesis summary a critical response to the week's readings and in-class discussion. The critical response will be based on content-specific questions I provide, or, alternatively, you might brainstorm implications of a particular opinion or sketch out a preliminary interpretation of a passage.

In addition, you will write three essays (5–7 pages). These formal essays provide a forum in which to demonstrate in-depth understanding of our readings, to take a stand on what you have read, and to refine an argument. At the conclusion of our discussion of a given text or, you will read through the text again to brainstorm a topic and examine the material again to gather textual evidence to support your central claim or interpretive insight. Some of the essays will be peer reviewed.

Finally, you will do an oral presentation (10 minutes). In consultation with the instructor, you will select a presentation topic related to the course. You will conduct enough secondary source research to position your thesis within scholarly debates on your topic. Oral expression is subject to revision like our written work. You will identify a peer and work with the oral presentation peer-editing worksheet. Your peer will give you feedback on your presentation. You will then take these comments into consideration, and then share your improved oral presentation with everybody in class. Your classmates and I will provide you with feedback on your presentation's content and written form.

Participation and Preparation

Regular attendance and active preparation will help you do well in this course. Attendance will be recorded. Please make sure to be in class on time. I will give you a warning if you have 2 or more unexcused absences. If your absence is excused for a religious holiday or an official activity, please let me know in advance. In case of serious emergencies, including health emergencies, we'll work together to find alternatives for completing the required work for this course.

Deadlines

All relevant due dates are listed in the syllabus. I expect that all papers will be turned in on time on or before the day they are due. **Each student is entitled to ONE 48-hour extension** during the semester. You do not need to provide a reason for the requested extension.

Course Schedule

Week 1	
W 8/31	Introduction Metropolis: A Very Brief History
Week 2	Views of the City
M 9/5	Labor Day
W. 9/7	Readings: Adred Wolfenstein, "City Dwellers"; Ernst Stadler, "Closing Time". Paintings by Georg Grosz, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Ludwig Meiner, and others.
Week 3	
M 9/12	Readings: E.T.A. Hoffmann, "My Cousin's Corner Window"; Edgar Allan Poe, "The Man of the Crowd"
W 9/14	Film: <i>Berlin: Symphony of a Great City</i> (1927)
Week 4	"Modernity" and the City
M 9/19	Reading: Charles Baudelaire, <i>The Painter of Modern Life</i> (excerpts)
W 9/21	Reading: Walter Benjamin, "Some Motifs on Baudelaire" (excerpts)
Week 5	Capitalism, Technology, and the Body
M 9/26	Reading: Karl Marx, <i>Capital</i> (excerpts)
W 9/28	Film: Fritz Lang's <i>Metropolis</i> Reading: Siegfried Kracauer, <i>The Mass Ornament</i> (excerpts)
Week 6	Class
M 10/3	Reading: Friedrich Engels, <i>The Condition of the Working Class in England</i> (Introduction and Ch. 2)
W 10/5	Walter Benjamin, <i>Berlin Childhood Around 1900</i>
Week 7	Leisure
M 10/10	Reading: Emile Zola, <i>The Ladies' Paradise</i> (1883) Thorstein Veblen, <i>The Theory of the Leisured Class</i> (1899) (excerpts)
W 10/12	Reading: Emile Zola, <i>The Ladies' Paradise</i> (1883)
Week 8	
M 10/17	Reading: Emile Zola, <i>The Ladies' Paradise</i> (1883)
W 10/19	Reading: Emile Zola, <i>The Ladies' Paradise</i> (1883)
Week 9	
M 10/24	Film: <i>People on Sunday</i> (1930)
W 10/26	Nerves & The Body in Pieces

	Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903); Jakob van Hoddis, "The End of the World" (1910)
Week 10	Fear, Hopes, Pain, and Pleasure
M 10/31	Reading: Georg Kaiser, "From Morning to Midnight"; Siegfried Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction"; Joseph Roth, "The Berlin Pleasure Industry"
W 11/2	Alfred Döblin, <i>Berlin Alexanderplatz</i> (1929)
Week 11	
M 11/7	Alfred Döblin, <i>Berlin Alexanderplatz</i> (1929)
W 11/9	Alfred Döblin, <i>Berlin Alexanderplatz</i> (1929)
Week 12	
M 11/14	Alfred Döblin, <i>Berlin Alexanderplatz</i> (1929)
W 11/16	Alfred Döblin, <i>Berlin Alexanderplatz</i> (1929)
Week 13	
M 11/21	Reading: Irmgard Keun, <i>The Artificial Silk Girl</i> (1933)
W 11/23	Reading: Irmgard Keun, <i>The Artificial Silk Girl</i> (1933)
Week 14	
M 11/28	Christopher Isherwood, <i>Goodbye to Berlin</i> (1939)
W 11/30	Christopher Isherwood, <i>Goodbye to Berlin</i> (1939)
Week 15	Children in the Metropolis
M 12/5	Erich Kästner, <i>Emil and the Detectives</i> (1929)
W 12/7	Fritz Lang, <i>M – A City in Search of a Murderer</i> (1931)
	15. 12. – 22. 12. Final Examinations