Bildung: Education and Formation

Seminar Leader: Matthias Hurst
Times: Thursday 15:15 – 18:30
*Wednesday (September 25, and October 2 - 17:00 – 18:30)
Location: Lecture Hall P98a/Seminar Room P98
Email: m.hurst@berlin.bard.edu
Course Description

This seminar is dedicated to the exploration of the ideals that guide our pursuit of knowledge and understanding. One focus will be on Bildung, a concept that has played a key role in German thought from the 18th century to today, and has become the cornerstone of German academia as well as the central preoccupation of an influential literary genre, the Bildungsroman. The term Bildung has no equivalent in English, but possible translations are “education,” “formation,” “self-cultivation” or “culture.” It describes not only a process of education, but also its result: a state of maturity and cultural refinement that is supposed to reconcile the needs of the individual with the demands of the world. Bildung seeks, claimed Wilhelm von Humboldt, “the true end of Man,” “the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole.”

As a concept of ideal education and self-cultivation fuelled by the principles of European Enlightenment, Bildung encompasses understanding, knowledge, reflection, aesthetic consciousness and competence in social judgment and political action; it addresses issues of liberation and emancipation in both individual and social perspective. The concept of Bildung has a wide variety of connotations and dimensions, not only pedagogical, but philosophical, psychological, political and cultural. The aim of the class is to build up a critical understanding of the ideals and implications of Bildung by studying some of the classic authors who helped articulate and establish it (Humboldt, Fichte, Schiller) and by discussing examples of the Bildungsroman from its beginning (Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 1795) to later variations (Musil’s The Confusions of Young Törless, 1906, and Hesse’s Demian, 1919). The novels describe and analyze the possibilities and problems of education and formation and the clash between the individual and society, between formal education and living experience. We will also take a look at the development of the concept of Bildung in the 20th century, the transformation of its ideals (in response to the crucial cultural changes of modernity) and the problems arising from the apparent disappearance of a classical canon of Bildung. A series of films supplement the discourse on education and self-cultivation and broaden our perspective and approach.

Requirements

Attendance is mandatory for all seminars and screenings. Reading assignments have to be done in advance of class for it is on those readings that each seminar discussion is based.

Absences are registered in all classes, and lateness is registered as absence. Illness leading to inability to attend classes, or submit work, must be reported promptly to the Residential Life Coordinator and/or the College Registrar. Absences can only be excused if a medical note is submitted to the Registrar’s office.

Presentation in class

For each seminar one or two students will prepare a presentation to introduce the assigned readings and to facilitate the discussions.
Writing Assignments

Short in-class writing assignments; mid-semester essay of 1500-2000 words (deadline: end of week 6, Saturday, October 19, 13.00); final essay of 3500-4000 words (deadline: end of completion week, Friday, December 20, 13.00)

All written work must be submitted electronically and on time. Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Evaluation / Grade Breakdown

Seminar Grade (i.e. Participation & Presentation): 33.4 %
Mid-semester Essay: 33.3%
Final Essay: 33.3%
Syllabus

**Week 1: Thursday, September 5, 2013, 15.15 – 18.30**
Introduction: Bildung and Bildungsroman

**Week 2: Thursday, September 12, 2013, 15.15 – 18.30**
Immanuel Kant & Moses Mendelssohn: *What Is Enlightenment?* (1784)

**Week 3: Thursday, September 19, 2013, 15.15 – 18.30**
Wilhelm von Humboldt: The Limits of State Action  
[Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staats zu bestimmen, 1792/1851]

**Week 4: Wednesday, September 25, 2013, 17.00 – 18.30**
Film: *Kynodontas / Dogtooth* (2009, Yorgos Lanthimos)

**Week 5: Wednesday, October 2, 2013, 17.00 – 18.30**
Johann Gottlieb Fichte: The Vocation of the Scholar  
[Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten, 1794]

**Break: Monday, October 7 – Friday, October 11, 2013**

**Week 6: Thursday, October 17, 2013, 15.15 – 18.30**
Friedrich Schiller: On the Aesthetic Education of Man. In a Series of Letters  
[Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, in einer Reihe von Briefen, 1793/1795]
* Deadline mid-semester essay: Saturday, October 19, 13.00

**Week 7: Thursday, October 24, 2013, 15.15 – 18.30**
Film: *Dead Poet’s Society* (1989, Peter Weir)

**Week 8: Thursday, October 31, 2013, 15.15 – 18.30**
Nietzsche, Friedrich: Schopenhauer as Educator  
[Schopenhauer als Erzieher, 1874]

**Week 9: Thursday, November 7, 2013, 15.15 – 18.30**
Ernst Jünger: *On Pain*  
[Über den Schmerz, 1934]

**Week 10: Thursday, November 14, 2013, 15.15 – 18.30**
Robert Musil: The Confusions of Young Törless  
[Die Verwirrungen des Zöglingens Törleß, 1906]

**Week 11: Thursday, November 21, 2013, 15.15 – 18.30**
Film: *If …* (1968, Lindsay Anderson)

**Week 12: Thursday, November 28, 2013, 15.15 – 18.30**
Hermann Hesse: *Demian*  

**Week 13: Thursday, December 5, 2013, 15.15 – 18.30**
Charles P. Snow: *The Two Cultures*. (1959/1963)
**Week 14: Thursday, December 12, 2013, 15.15 – 18.30**

Peter Sloterdijk: Critique of Cynical Reason [Kritik der zynischen Vernunft, 1983]

**Week 15: Completion Week**

* Deadline final essay: Friday, December 20, 13.00

**Literature**


Schneider, Käthe (ed.): Becoming oneself. Dimensions of Bildung and the facilitation of personality development. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2012.

