

AH212
Utopia and Despair:
German Art and the Question of National Identity

Module: Art and Artists in Context

Credits: 8 ECTS, 4 U.S. credits

Course Times: Wednesdays 14:00 – 17:15 (several additional week-end excursions, dates TBC)

Seminar Leader: Prof. Dr. Aya Soika

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Office Hours: by email appointment

Course Description

Questions of national identity and belonging constitute a particularly complex issue in German art and culture. In the early 1800s painters such as Caspar David Friedrich – hoping for national unity in response to Napoleon’s conquests – looked back to the Gothic period and promoted the ideal of the Holy Roman Empire. With the development of Germany into an industrial powerhouse and a unified national-imperial state, artists felt the need to explore new ways of seeing. At the same time, they continued to struggle with questions of identity: was it ‘appropriate’ to look for aesthetic inspiration to Paris, to the ‘enemy nation’ defeated in 1870/71? How were artists to relate to modern ‘German’ society? Such questions intensified in the early decades of the twentieth century which witnessed cataclysmic conflict and collapse: the First World War, revolution, the end of monarchy, and the emergence of a liberal but fragile democracy which only lasted until 1933. Some artists responded to the highly partisan construct of ‘national identity’ of these decades with radical iconoclastic scepticism. After the catastrophe of Nazi dictatorship with its war and genocide, the relationship between art and its societal meaning became even more contested: Theodor Adorno proclaimed that it was barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz. Collective memories of the German past, and the Cold War conflict between capitalist democracy and socialist dictatorship, continued to influence artistic production. This class offers an introduction to Germany’s difficult history through the examination of artistic positions from early 19th century Romanticism to the memorial discourses in the post-reunification period of the 1990s. Field trips to museums and memorials are an integral part of the course.

Requirements

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Syllabi should note that, instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, an absence from a double session will not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Beyond that, unexcused absences will affect the participation grade. Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

In light of the special situation caused by the pandemic, students must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Please get in touch with me via email to discuss how best to catch up.

Punctuality

Punctuality is also essential. Turning up late will therefore also affect the participation grade. For off campus visits please make sure you depart early in order to reach the museums and please lock in your coats and bags before the beginning of class. The itinerary can be checked on www.bvg.de; in addition, it may be helpful to be equipped with a city map, digital or on paper.

Class Etiquette

In the case of unavoidable absence, a short notification via email sent before the beginning of class is appreciated. Please keep your bathroom breaks to a minimum. Also note that the use of smartphones and notebooks is not allowed during seminars on campus. When off campus you should stay with the group whilst the conversation is still going on. Please do your best to stay focused on the object of our discussion: This includes listening to students' presentations. In case of online teaching, you should stay in front of your screen, refrain from eating and avoid multitasking.

Making up for missed classes

Should you have had to miss a Thursday class we can try and schedule a shorter zoom session to go through some of the key issues that have been addressed. It may also be possible to record the class for you (TBC). In addition, missed sessions can be compensated by submitting a written response to our reading of that week, of ca. 500 words, to be uploaded on the drive. In case of a missed excursion, you will be asked to visit the place individually and submit a written response which addresses both, a text read in preparation and a response to your experience as visitor.

Weekly Readings

Weekly readings and other specific assignments will be confirmed in an email by the beginning of each week. Please check your bard emails and read my emails carefully.

Assessment

The course assessment consists of the overall seminar work (occasional response papers, presentations, regular class participation and preparation of individual tutorials) and two essays. See also "Grade Breakdown."

Responses, Presentations and Visual Quiz

Students are asked to regularly submit short responses and presentations to works and/or texts which are uploaded via the class padlet. The responses and presentation count into the overall participation grade. **Grading Criteria:** Structure, Relevance to the topic; Awareness of context and key debates, during the presentation and in the Q&A session afterwards; timing; relevance and structure.

Towards the end of the semester there will be a 60-minute visual quiz, designed as a revision of a range of works discussed during excursions and in the seminar room. Relevant information on the works (artist, date and subject matter as well as further contextual information as encountered in our readings or brought up during class discussions) should be given in the form of bullet points. This revision quiz too will count into the overall participation grade. **Grading Criteria:** Factual correctness, relevance, scope a discussion, analytical depth.

Writing Assignments

There are two essays for this course, one mid-term essay and one final essay (ca. 2000 words each). A range of prompts will be provided in advance.

The mid-term essay is due on 15 October (Friday), midnight.

The final term essay is due on 15 December (Wednesday), midnight.

Essays should include footnotes/references, bibliography and a list of illustrations. The structure and draft of your essays can be discussed in individual tutorials. Please note that prior consultation with the Bard in Berlin Writing Centre may be recommended in order to reflect upon writing and structure. Here are some basic points you should bear in mind:

Title and Topic: How does the title of your essay as well as your introduction reflect your objectives?

Background Reading: Have you researched the particular object (art work, building or historical event) sufficiently? What kinds of sources/articles have you found so far and where else could you try to find out more?

Facts and contextual information: Have you acquired sufficient foundational knowledge - e. g. are you aware of the object's date of origin, its technique/materials, size and location, subject-matter etc, and are you aware of further information which requires reading around the subject matter and topic, acquiring a sense of cultural and political debates at the time, of the work's public reception?

Interpretations and overview of scholarship: What kinds of interpretations have you encountered so far? How would you distinguish them in terms of the questions they ask and the methods they apply? How does your own line of argument relate to them? Don't be afraid to engage with and quote from articles you have read, this can show an awareness of the complexity of the topic, or quote from some primary sources such as artists' statements

or contemporary reviews. Quotes should be accompanied by an annotation providing the source reference.

Grading Criteria: Line of argument with regard to essay question; Awareness of context and existing literature on the topic; structure and format (consistent use of annotations, bibliography & list of illustrations is desirable)

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Essays that are more than 24 hours late cannot receive a grade of higher than C (see also policy on late submission in the Bard College Berlin Student Handbook) and must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Students are welcome to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and/or feedback. They will also receive written feedback on their mid-term and final essays.

Grade Breakdown

Listed below is the percentage grade allotted to each essay, and to classroom participation and assignments.

Seminar Grade = Attendance (participation/preparation of art works and texts, occasional responses/tasks and presentations)

Seminar Grade: 33,3% (16,5% / 16,5%)

Essay 1: 33,3 %

Essay 2: 33,3 %

Schedule

Scheduled class times will be available online under the relevant course heading:

<https://berlin.bard.edu/academics/courses/>

Week 1

01.09.2021, Wednesday, 14:00-17:15

BCB, Lecture Hall

Utopia or Despair: Artists' responses to the "German" Past

- Foundation Myths; Romanticism and Wars of Liberation; 1st, 2nd and 3rd Reich
- Ruptures in German 20th century History
- Unity and Fragmentation

Mini-presentation for all participants:

Prepare one of the below images in greater detail (e. g. take notes when reading Stephanie D'Alessandro's article and do a bit of additional reading around them). Be prepared to say a few words on the picture that has been allocated to you. Most of these works discussed in D'Alessandro (for this class selection):

- Anselm Kiefer, Varus, 1976, Oil on acrylic on burlap, 200 x 270 cm
- Hermann the Great, Teutoburg Forest Memorial (inaugurated in 1875)
- Anselm Kiefer, Ways of Worldly Wisdom, Woodcut with additions in acrylic and shellac on ivory wove paper, 1980 (various versions)
- Katharina Fritsch, Monk, 1997-1999, Polyester and paint
- Anselm Kiefer, Deutschlands Geisteshelden, 1973, Oil on Canvas
- Anselm Kiefer, Ways of Worldly Wisdom, Woodcut with additions in acrylic and shellac on ivory wove paper, 1980 (various versions)
- Ernst Wilhelm Nay, Small Figural Form Painting, 1948, Oil on Canvas, 45 x 65 cm, Museum am Ostwall, Dortmund
- Günther Uecker, Vast Ocean, 1964, Painted nails and wood, 175 x 175 cm, Private Collection
- Joseph Beuys, Sled 1969, Wooden sled, felt, belts, flashlight, fat, and rope
- Gerhard Richter, Onkel Rudi (Uncle Rude), 1965, Oil on Canvas, The Czech Museum of Fine Arts, Memorial Museum Lidice
- Sigmar Polke, Watchtower with Geese, 1987-88, Artificial resin and acrylic, 290 x 208 cm
- Reinhard Mucha, Weimar 1993, Wood, Glass, aluminium, Steel, Lead
- Thomas Ruff, Untitled (Portraits), 1986-1988, Chromogenic color Print

Readings:

Stephanie D'Alessandro, „History by Degrees: The Place of the Past in Contemporary German Art“. In: *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 66-81, 110-111 **READ pp. 67-69 ONLY**

Mary Fulbrook, "The Course of German History", Chapter 1 in: Mary Fulbrook, *A History of Germany 1918-2014. The Divided Nation*, Wiley Blackwell, Chichester 2015, pp. 1-12

Readings for Friday:

- 1.) *** Please read the Syllabus carefully and familiarize yourself with the drive and the course-book(s) ***

Saturday: Visit of Beuys Exhibition at Hamburger Bahnhof TBC

Week 2

08.09.2021, Wednesday, 14:00-17:15

Visit of Alte Nationalgalerie, City Palace and Berliner Dom

Debates surrounding the formation of Germany's national identity

Meet at 14:00 in front of Old National Gallery

Readings:

Forster-Hahn, Françoise, „Art without a National Centre. German Painting in the Nineteenth Century“, in: *Spirit of an Age*, pp. 19-39 (**available as scan but also as coursebook in multiple copies, for those who prefer the hard-cover edition**)

Additional:

Catalogue Entries on Works in the Alte Nationalgalerie: “Romantic Landscape”, in: *Spirit of an Age. Nineteenth-Century Paintings from the Nationalgalerie, Berlin*, London 2001, pp. 58-77

Also if interested on German national identity and architecture please find the article of Iain Boyd-Whyte on the drive (filed under Week 2) with a section on the Berlin Dom (Cathedral) that we will visit

Week 3

15.09.2021, Wednesday, 14:00-17:15

**Unity through Architecture? The Reichstag Parliament Building in Berlin (Visit TBC)
Citational Architecture and Historical Authenticity**

Meet at 14:00 in front of Brandenburg Gate. Bring your Passports / ID cards along

Holocaust Memorial / Memorial to Sinti and Roma
Reichstag Tour

- The “New Berlin” and its Prussian Legacy
- Paul Wallot, West Façade of the Reichstag, Berlin, Completed 1894
- Norman Foster, The Reichstag, Berlin, 1990s
- Chaldej, Photography of May 2 1945
- 1995: Christo & Jean Claude’s Wrapped Reichstag
- The Berlin Stadtschloss Debate

Readings:

Rolf J. Goebel, Berlin’s Architectural Citations: Reconstruction, Simulation, and the Problem of Historical Authenticity, in: *PMLA*, vol. 118, no. 5, Oct. 2003, pp. 1268-1289;

Brian Ladd, Center and Periphery in the New Berlin: Architecture, Public Art, and the Search for Identity, in: *A Journal of Performance and Art*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Berlin 2000, pp. 7-21

Additional:

Rosalyn Deutsche, Hans Haacke and Miwon Kwon, „Der Bevölkerung: A Conversation“, in: *Grey Room*, no. 16, 2004, pp. 60-81

Week 4

22.09.2021, Wednesday, 14:00-17:15

German Expressionism, "Primitivism", Responses to World War One

Neue Nationalgalerie Collection

Readings:

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Readings:

Jill Lloyd, German Expressionism. Primitivism and Modernity, Introduction (10 pages, I – X)

Shearer West, "Rural and urban: seeking the Heimat" / "The spiritual in art" / "The invention and dissemination of Expressionism" in: Shearer West, *Utopia and Despair. The Visual Arts in Germany, 1890-1937*, Manchester 2000, pp. 33-106 (you can skip pages 1-32, but of course are very welcome to read the book right from the start...)

Additional:

Shearer West, "Unity and Fragmentation: Institutions, Secessions, Jugendstil", in: Shearer West, *Utopia and Despair. The Visual Arts in Germany, 1890-1937*, Manchester 2000, pp. 12-32

Sherwin Simmons: Ernst Kirchner's Streetwalkers: Art, Luxury, and Immorality in Berlin, 1913-16. In: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (Mar., 2000), pp. 117-148 (jstor)

Week 5

29.09.2021, Wednesday, 14:00-17:15

BCB Lecture Hall

The interwar period: Dada and Weimar Photomontage

Bauhaus

Readings on Dada:

Richard Hülsenbeck, First German Dada Manifesto, 1918; Hülsenbeck/Raoul Hausmann, What is Dadaism and what does it want in Germany?, in: *Art in Theory. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. by Charles Harrison et al., Oxford: Blackwell 1994, pp. 253-257

Shearer West, *Utopia and Despair*: Chapter 5: "Community and personality: art on the left", pp 107-133

On Bauhaus:

Walter Gropius, Bauhaus Program, 1919

Shearer West, Chapter 6: "Commodity and Industry: From the Werkstätte to the Bauhaus", in: *Utopia and Despair*

Week 6

06.10.2021, Wednesday, 14:00-17:15

Art in Berlin. 1900 – ca. 1960, Berlinische Galerie

Alte Jakobstraße 124-128, 10969 Berlin

Week 6: WEEKEND

09. or 10.10.2021

EXCURSION: Trip to the Bauhaus in Dessau (TBC)

10 Euros student contribution

Readings:

New York Times Article (published 24th May 2021): Alexandra Lange, "Was the Founder of the Bauhaus a Doctrinaire Bore or a Brilliant Innovator?"

Shearer West, Chapter 6: "Commodity and Industry: From the Werkstätte to the Bauhaus", in: *Utopia and Despair* (see also Week 6)

Oskar Schlemmer: Diary Extracts, 1922-23. In: *Art in Theory, 1900-2000*, pp. 306-309;

Walter Gropius: The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus, 1923. In: *Art in Theory, 1900-2000*, pp. 309-314

Week 7

13.10.2021, Wednesday, 14:00-17:15

NO CLASS BECAUSE OF BAUHAUS EXCURSION

*** 20.10.2021: NO CLASS FALL BREAK ***

Week 8

27.10.2021, Wednesday, 14:00-17:15

BCB, Lecture Hall

Rise of Nazism: Walter Benjamin on the Aesthetization of Politics

Art and Culture in Nazi Germany

German Modernism during the Nazi Period

The "Degenerate Art" Exhibitions and Campaign

In class:

Hitler's Speech at the Opening of the House of Art in Munich, July 18th 1937, in: *Art in Theory. An Anthology of changing ideas*, ed. by Charles Harrison et al., Oxford: Blackwell 1994, 423-426

Walter Benjamin, Preface and Epilogue of his Essay "The Art Work in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936)

Readings:

Shearer West, "Reaction: 'degenerate art'" in: Shearer West, *Utopia and Despair. The Visual Arts in Germany, 1890-1937*, Manchester 2000, pp. 181-206

Additional:

Peters, Olaf, "Genesis, Conception, and Consequences: the "Entartete Kunst" Exhibition in Munich in 1937", in: *Degenerate Art. The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937*, exh.cat., New York/Munich/London: Prestel 2014, ed. by Olaf Peters, 106-125

Neil Levi: "Judge for Yourselves!"-The "Degenerate Art" Exhibition as Political Spectacle. In: *October*, Vol. 85, (Summer, 1998), pp. 41-64 (jstor)

Petropoulos, Jonathan, "Artists under Hitler. Collaboration and Survival in Nazi Germany", New Haven: Yale University Press & London 2014, chapter 13 on Albert Speer, 279-302;

Schlenker, Ines, "Defining National Socialist Art: The First "Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung" in 1937", in: *Degenerate Art. The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937*, exh.cat., New York/Munich/London: Prestel 2014, ed. by Olaf Peters, 90-105

Week 9

03.11.2021, Wednesday, 14:00-17:15

Topography of Terror

Niederkirchnerstrasse 8, 10963 Berlin (off U-/S-Potsdamer Platz)

Historical Introduction with focus on documentary Photography / Session on Propaganda in Nazi Film with Sebastian Gerhard

Readings:

Eric Rentschler, „The Legacy of Nazi Cinema: Triumph of the Will and Jew Süß Revisited“, in: *The Arts in Nazi Germany. Continuity, conformity, change*, ed. by Jonathan Huener and Francis R. Nicosai, New York: Berghahn 2006, pp. 63-83

Additional / On historical background:

Ian Kershaw, „Hitler and the Uniqueness of Nazism“, in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 239-254

Week 10

10.11.2021, Wednesday, 14:00-17:15

Art after Auschwitz: Theodor Adorno and Hannah Arendt

- May 8th 1945: Day of Defeat or Liberation?
- De-Nazification in West-Germany / Nuremberg Trials
- Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials
- Eichmann Trial / Adolf Eichmann and the Machinery of Power
- Hannah Arendt, *On the Banality of Evil* (Reading extracts in Class)
- Theodor Adorno's Dictum
- Paul Celan, *Todesfuge* (Death Fugue), 1944-1945
- Anselm Kiefer, *Dein goldenes Haar, Margarete* (Your Golden Hair, Margarete), 1981, Oil, Emulsion, and Straw on Canvas, 130 x 170 cm, Collection Sanders, Amsterdam
- Anselm Kiefer, *Shulamite*, 1983, Oil, acrylic et al
- Gerhard Richter's Early Paintings: *Christa and Wolfi*, *Uncle Rudi*, *Tante Marianne*
- *Massacre of Lidice* and 1967 *Homage to Lidice* in René Block Galerie in Berlin (West)
- Gerhard Richter, *Birkenau Series* and the Debate surrounding them
- *Germany's Nazi Past: A historical Overview of Remembrance Debates*

Readings:

Listening: Eichmann on Trial, Witness History, BBC Podcast

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00q89dy>

Judith Butler, Hanna Arendt's Challenge to Adolf Eichmann, in: *Guardian*, 29.8.2011

Hannah Arendt, Excerpts from *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

In our Time: Hannah Arendt, BBC Radio 4, podcast

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08c2ljg>

Readings:

Paul B. Jaskot, *Gerhard Richter and Adolf Eichmann*, in: *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2005), pp. 459-478

Week 11

17.11.2021, Wednesday, 14:00-17:15

Art and Culture in post-war West Germany

Deutsches Historisches Museum, DHM: Documenta. Art & Politics; Die Gottbegnadeten
Visit of one or two temporary exhibitions

Week 12

24.11.2021, Wednesday, 14:00-17:15

„Vergangenheitsbewältigung“

Works by Anselm Kiefer, Joseph Beuys, Gerhard Richter, Hans Haacke

Readings:

Andreas Huyssen, „Figures of Memory in the course of Time“. In: *Art of Two Germanys. Cold War Cultures...*

Additional Readings:

Peter Weibel, „Repression and Representation: The RAF in German Postwar Art“. In: Exhibition catalogue *Art of Two Germanys*, 2009, pp. 257-260

Svea Bräunert, „The RAF and the Phantom of Terrorism in West Germany“. In: Exhibition catalogue *Art of Two Germanys*, 2009, pp. 261-273

„Who’s afraid of the ivory Tower?“ A Conversation with Theodor W. Adorno, in: *Monatshefte*, vol. 94, no. 1.

Rereading Adorno (Spring 2002), pp. 10-23

Rainer Usselman, „18. Oktober 1977: Gerhard Richter’s Work of Mourning and its new audience“, in: *Art Journal*, vol. 61, no. 1, Spring 2002, pp.4-25

Works:

- Anselm Kiefer, *Ways of Worldly Wisdom: Hermann’s Battle*, 1980, Woodcut with additions in acrylic and shellac, 335 x 529 cm
- Anselm Kiefer, *Innenraum (Interior)*, 1981
- Anselm Kiefer, *Unternehmen “Seelöwe” / Operation Sea Lion*, 1975, Oil on Canvas, 220 x 300 cm
- Anselm Kiefer, *Varus*, 1976, Oil on acrylic on burlap, 200 x 270 cm
- Anselm Kiefer, *Maikäfer flieg (Cockchafer Fly)*, 1974, Oil, acrylic, 220 x 300 cm
- Anselm Kiefer, *Eisen-Steig (Iron Path)*, 1986, Oil, acrylic et al, 220 x 380 cm

Readings:

Andreas Huyssen, „Figures of Memory in the course of Time“. In: *Art of Two Germanys. Cold War Cultures...*;
Frank Trommler, „Germany’s past as artifact“. In: *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 61, no 4, 1989, pp. 724-735;

Andreas Huyssen, „Anselm Kiefer: The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth“, In: *October*, vol. 48, Spring 1989, pp. 25-45

Week 13

01.12.2021, Wednesday, 14:00-17:15

RAF Terrorism in Western Germany

Mourning in the Work of Gerhard Richter

Visual Quiz

- Katharina Sieverding, *Schlachtfeld Deutschland XI/78 (Battlefield Germany XI/78)*, 1978

- Joseph Beuys, Dürer, ich führe persönlich Baader & Meinhof durch die Dokumenta V, (Dürer, I'll guide Baader & Meinhof through Documenta 5 personally, J. Beuys), 1972
- Gerhard Richter, October 18, 1977, various paintings: Oil on canvas, The Museum of Modern Art New York
- Martin Kippenberger, Ich kann beim besten Willen kein Hakenkreuz erkennen (With the Best Will in the World I Can't See a Swastika), 1984, Friedrich Christian Flick Collection

Readings:

Peter Weibel, "Repression and Representation: The RAF in German Postwar Art". In: Exhibition catalogue *Art of Two Germanys*, 2009, pp. 257-260;

Svea Bräunert, "The RAF and the Phantom of Terrorism in West Germany". In: Exhibition catalogue *Art of Two Germanys*, 2009, pp. 261-273;

Rainer Usselman, „18. Oktober 1977: Gerhard Richter's Work of Mourning and its new audience“, in: *Art Journal*, vol. 61, no. 1, Spring 2002, pp.4-25

Film: Blackbox BRD?

Week 14

08.12.2021, Wednesday, 14:00-17:15

The Jewish Museum: Philosophy meets Architecture

- Discussion of Architecture and Conception of the museum
- Modern Art and Artists that were left out of the post-war canon of German Art of the 20th century (Painting section in the new permanent exhibition)

Readings:

Andreas Huyssen, "The Voids of Berlin". In: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 57-81

Essay Deadlines

The mid-term essay is due on 15 October (Friday), midnight.

The final term essay is due on 15 December (Wednesday), midnight.

For further information on essay guidelines and grading criteria see above (pp. 2-3)

Library and Book Purchase Policies

The key readings are accessible through a special folder on google drive, additional background readings will be provided in scan or hard cover upon request.

You may take out the exhibition catalogue from the library (ca. 10 copies available, plus copy on reserve shelf) for better illustrations of works by the Romantics:

Spirit of an Age. Nineteenth-Century Paintings from the Nationalgalerie, Berlin, London 2001

Another art historical overview you may want to read along class is:

Shearer West, *Utopia and Despair. The Visual Arts in Germany, 1890-1937*, Manchester 2000 (2 copies at the BCB library, reserve shelf)