This upper-level undergraduate seminar seeks to investigate totalitarianism as a contested term and understand its application in historical texts and current scholarship. Focusing on officially sanctioned visual cultural projects the course will explore theories of propaganda and dictatorship as they pertain to the cultures of the Third Reich and German Democratic Republic. It will stress the ways in which these two regimes, relying on the promise of technology and mass politics, used visual productions, art and media, as tools of seduction. The course takes its primary examples from painting, sculpture, architecture, posters, photography, literature, and film, as well as collective experiences that emphasize presence, such as sports events, inaugural ceremonies for public monuments, speeches, marches, and art exhibitions. Course topics include the role of terror, the importance of a cult leader, the depiction of the male hero in Nazism and Stalinism, and the reception and resistance to these models. Key questions framing the course material concern, then, the idea of governing through images and society in toto: How did the regimes attempt to portray complete subservience to the system? What is the relationship between form and content in transmitting a controlled message? And, finally, how might we reframe the concept of totalitarianism today?

No knowledge of German is required for this course. The course will be taught in English and students of German will be able to conduct their readings in German.