Deliberative reason in Weimar and Nazi Germany.

What does democracy require of citizens cognitively, affectively, and aesthetically? Very broadly speaking, this research agenda explores the interplay between philosophy, religion, propaganda, ideology, art and rival Weltanschauungen (worldviews) in Germany between 1914 and 1945. I am interested in documenting, on the one hand, some of the ways in which intellectuals and artists sought to defend and bolster the liberal-democratic institutions and values of the new Weimar Republic and, on the other, the extent to which Nazism was itself intended as an intellectually compelling authoritarian aesthetic order. My particular focus, however, is on the communicative uses of humor and laughter (in essays, cartoons, plays, films, operas, and so on). I am testing a positive claim: that democratic humor communicatively and deliberatively enabled reflection upon and accommodation of multiple tolerable political perspectives, and a negative claim: that Nazism involved a programmatic desire to have the 'last laugh'. We will work with significant intellectuals and artists, such as Carl Schmitt and John Heartfield, and primary texts (in various genres) from the period in German and/or in translation in English.