

20th Century Berlin: People, Places, Words

Dr. Lauren van Vuuren

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| Email Address: | fubest@fu-berlin.de |
| FU-BEST Course Number: | - |
| Live Sessions: | Monday, 8 – 9:30 p.m. CET (Berlin time) |
| Duration: | Feb. 8 – May 10, 2021 |
| Language of Instruction: | English |
| Contact Hours: | 30 |
| ECTS Credits: | 4 |

Course Description

This course is about Berlin, and the story of its tumultuous and epoch defining twentieth century. We examine this history through various lenses: the biographies of individuals, the words of writers who bore witness to the vertiginous social, political and physical changes the city underwent, and buildings and monuments whose physical construction, destruction and reconstruction reflected the ideological turmoil and conflict of twentieth century Berlin.

Famous Berliners we will meet include the murdered Communist leader Rosa Luxemburg, the artist Käthe Kollwitz, the actress Marlene Dietrich, the Nazi filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl, the adopted Berliner David Bowie and the famous East German dissident musician Wolf Biermann. The contextualized stories of these individuals will offer us unique perspectives politically, artistically and socially into the tumult and struggle that marked their times in the city. These figures occupy a range of different position(s) as Berliners, as radicals, as artists of resistance to or collaboration with Nazism, and Communism, as drifters and exiles whose stories reflect Berlin's unique position in the twentieth century as 'no man's land, frontier, a city adrift in the sands of Central Europe.'

In a similar way, we will examine the words of writers who bore witness to the extremism and societal upheaval that marked twentieth century Berlin. From the witnessing of Roth and Isherwood to life in Weimar and Nazi Berlin, to the social and political commentary by Christa Wolf on the moral struggles of life lived on different sides of the Berlin Wall, we will assess their writings in their historical contexts. We will assess their words as evocations of Berlin, but also as potential or overt acts of resistance to the extremism they lived under, that attempted to maintain a solidarity with the idea of Berlin as a place of artistic and social freedom and permissiveness.

Finally, we will discover the story of places in Berlin whose physical building, destruction and rebuilding can be situated in the wider systems of ideology, power and social relations that so cataclysmically defined the physical landscape of Berlin after 1933. In this, we will focus on the story of Potsdamer Platz, the Palace of the People and as an opposite postscript to Berlin's twentieth century, the Holocaust Memorial in Mitte.

This course does not seek to provide a 'grand narrative' of Berlin's twentieth century history. Instead, it follows a thread that weaves through the history: the thread left behind by those who bore witness to their times. By tracing the stories of contemporary witnesses, left for us in books, films and songs, and in the physical construction of the city, we open up a human dimension that enriches and challenges our understanding of Berlin's traumatic re-cent past.

Structured largely chronologically, the course will work with films and novels whilst building on a clear historiographical base provided in class seminars. Guest speakers, class discussion, assigned reading work and individual research will form the basis for a seminar paper that students will be required to submit at the end of the course. This history course approaches the story of Berlin through the reflections and refractions of individual humans' lives who struggled upon the immense stage of a city at the very symbolic and literal heart of the catastrophes of the twentieth century.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to locate Berlin's immense historical, symbolic and ideological significance in the history of the twentieth century in the following ways: as the epitome of modernism, as the nerve-centre of the struggle

between communism and capitalism (before World War II, and after), as the reinvention/reconstruction of the European world in the shadow of two catastrophic global wars and as the capital, tenuous and contested, of a reunited Germany in the post-Cold War world.

Furthermore, assessing remembrance culture is an important aspect of the course, and through engagement with film, writing, and built memorials in post-unification Berlin, students will be given the chance to encounter and critically assess the traces of the city's past in their own written work.

Student Prerequisites

Students should have completed at least three semesters of higher education when the course starts and need to possess English language abilities in speaking and writing on the Upper Intermediate Level (at least B2, preferably above).

General Requirements

Attendance of the weekly live sessions is mandatory (for the specific time slot, see above). These live sessions will be combined with recorded video lessons and intensive work through the online course platform, both individually and in groups. Please see course requirements for the various formats and weight of the course assignments as well as forms of assessment.

This course features a certain amount of independent coursework and thus expects you to be able to set up a self-disciplined study routine. We recommend that you make sure to have a quiet and appropriate working space. To ensure a comfortable learning environment for all, please adhere to our [Code of Online Conduct](#).

Technical Requirements

Stable internet connection.

Fully functional device, such as computer, laptop or tablet (use of smart phones is not recommended) with camera and microphone, headset recommended.

Recommended operating systems: Windows 7 or higher or MacOS 10.13 or higher. Avoid using a VPN.

Software: Webex Meetings.

Course Requirements

Paper: 350 Points (35%)

Exam: 250 Points (25%)

Class Presentation: 200 Points (20%)

Live Online Attendance (min. 75% required) & Participation: 200 Points (20%)

Grading

| FU Grade | Points of 500 | Points of 1,000 |
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| 1.0 | 490-500 | 980-1,000 |
| 1.3 | 475-489 | 950-979 |
| 1.7 | 450-474 | 900-949 |
| 2.0 | 425-449 | 850-899 |
| 2.3 | 400-424 | 800-849 |
| 2.7 | 375-399 | 750-799 |
| 3.0 | 350-374 | 700-749 |
| 3.3 | 325-349 | 650-699 |
| 3.7 | 300-324 | 600-649 |
| 4.0 | 250-299 | 500-599 |
| 5.0 | < 250 | < 500 |

Literature

Provided online.

Course Schedule

| Calendar | Topics, Reading, etc. |
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| Week 1 | <p>Setting the Scene: End of the Monarchy and Revolutionary Berlin Berlin as the epicentre of social, economic and political collapse at the end of World War I</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eric Hobsbawm, <i>Age of Extremes</i> (Abacus, 1995), pp. 54-84 David Clay Large, <i>Berlin</i> (Basic Books, 2000), introduction |
| Week 2 | <p>The Artist and the Revolutionary: Käthe Kollwitz and Rosa Luxemburg Two powerful women based in Berlin, artist and socialist politician respectively, whose lives and deaths reflected the fractures and upheavals of their time</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Claire C. Whitner, 'Käthe Kollwitz and the Krieg Cycle', <i>Käthe Kollwitz and the Women of War</i> (Yale University Press), 2016 |
| Week 3 | <p>The Weimar Years 1919 - 1933: Wild and Brokenhearted Berlin 'Babylon Berlin'? The wild twenties and the societal and political struggles of the Weimar Era</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peter Gay, <i>Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider</i> (New York 1968, W.W Norton and Company), introduction |
| Week 4 | <p>Weimar's Literary Witnesses: Joseph Roth and Christopher Isherwood Two writers whose work reflects radically different aspects of Weimar Berlin, taking us from the backstreets where Jewish immigrants struggled to survive to the morally upturned world of the clubs and cabarets of the 1920s</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extracts from Joseph Roth, <i>What I saw: Reports from Berlin 1920 - 1933</i> (London, 2013: Granta Books) |
| Week 5 | <p>The Actress and the Filmmaker in Nazi Berlin: Leni Riefenstahl and Marlene Dietrich Two actresses, two destinies in 1930s Berlin: 'Hitler's Filmmaker' and Hollywood's darling who left it all behind</p> |

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| | <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rory Maclean, <i>Imagine a City</i> (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2014), pp. 199 - 235 <p>Screening:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl (1993) |
| Week 6 | <p>The Divided City Part I: Berlin after WWII and before the building of the Berlin Wall</p> <p>As occupied Berlin becomes the epicentre of the new Cold War, what is life like for its citizens in a city devastated by war?</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extracts from Tony Judd, <i>Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945</i>, (London, 2010: Vintage Books) George Clare, <i>Berlin Days</i> (Macmillan London Limited, 1989), pp. 91 – 108 |
| Week 7 | <p>The Divided City II: The Berlin Airlift</p> <p>A battle for hearts and minds: how the Berlin airlift became the first great showdown of the Cold War</p> <p>Reading:</p> <p>TBA</p> |
| Week 8 | <p>The Divided City III: Building the Wall</p> <p>The Story of the building of the Berlin Wall from the perspective of the people on the streets of the city whose lives were irrevocably changed</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extracts from Alexander Ritchie, <i>Faust's Metropolis</i> (New York 1998, Carrol and Graf Publishers) |
| Week 9 | <p>The Divided Heaven: Literature as Resistance in East Germany through the writings of Christa Wolf</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extracts from Christa Wolf, <i>The Divided Heaven</i> (University of Ottawa Press, 2013) Extracts from Christa Wolf, <i>City of Angels, or The Overcoat of Dr. Freud</i> (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 2010 <p>Screening:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Lives of Others (2006) |

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| <p>Week 10</p> | <p>Dreamers and Dissidents in West Berlin: David Bowie and Wolf Biermann</p> <p>The strange story of Berlin in the 1970s and 1980s, where life in the shadow of the Berlin Wall created extraordinary countercultural scenes</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extracts from Stuart Braun, <i>City of Exiles: Berlin from the Outside In</i>, (Berlin 2015, Noctua Press) • Jeff Hayton, 'Härte gegen Punk: Popular Music, Western Media, and State Response in the German Democratic Republic' in <i>German History</i>, Vol. 31, No. 4, pp. 523-549 <p>Screening:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B-Movie: <i>Lust and Sound in West Berlin</i> (2015) |
| <p>Week 11</p> | <p>After the Wall: Rebuilding the Derelict City</p> <p>"Cutting through the living flesh of the city": Berlin's emptiness after 1989 and the rebuilding of the capital of reunified Germany</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extracts from Alexander Ritchie, <i>Faust's Metropolis</i> (New York 1998, Carrol and Graf Publishers) • Brian Ladd, <i>The Ghosts of Berlin</i>, (Chicago 1997, University of Chicago Press) pp. 217 – 236 |
| <p>Week 12</p> | <p>The Gentrification Wars/ From Squats to Condos: 2000 – Present</p> <p>The unique scars of War and Wall on Berlin, and the struggle for the city's identity in the 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blogs and newspaper articles to be provided |
| <p>Week 13</p> | <p>Closing discussion, final papers handed in.</p> |