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Course title:	20 th Century Berlin: People, Places, Words
Track:	B-Track
Language of instruction:	English
Contact hours:	72 (6 per day)
ECTS-Credits:	6

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 recent history.

Structured largely chronologically, the course will work with films and novels whilst building on a clear historiographical base provided in class seminars. The teaching will be augmented by physical excursions into Berlin to trace the stories we encounter and class discussions 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.

Student profile

This course is for university level students with open minds and incurable curiosity about the world around them.

Prerequisites

Interest in Berlin, and its extraordinary recent past.

Required language skills

The language of instruction is English. Language proficiency on an advanced Intermediate level (Mittelstufe II) is a prerequisite for participation. For orientation purposes, you can assess your language skills here (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168045bb52>)

Course Requirements

Attendance in class and the careful reading of the assigned course materials are most important. The reading pack will be divided into compulsory and supplementary readings. Furthermore, the course will require participation in the field trips, engaged discussion of the material in class that shows you have completed the required reading, and the completion of a final paper on a topic related to the course but decided by yourself in discussion with the lecturer. Guidelines for the papers as well as suggested topics will be distributed during the first session. The instructor will be available for student consultations should any further guidance be required.

Grading

Class participation: 20%
Short presentation: 20%
Research paper: 60%

'Class Participation' will include participation in field trips and engagement in discussion in class. 'Short Presentation' will be a brief presentation whereby students will describe the topic they have chosen for their research paper, and link their choice to themes in the course that they have found interesting. It will provide a useful chance for feedback and discussion within the group as a whole.

Reading

A course reader will be provided at the orientation meeting

Course schedule

Date	Program*
Tuesday, June 02, 2020	Introduction Session: Setting the Scene End of the Monarchy and Revolutionary Berlin
Friday, June 05, 2020	The Artist and the Revolutionary: Käthe Kollwitz and Rosa Luxemburg <i>Class Trip: Kollwitz Museum</i>
Tuesday, June 09, 2020	The Weimar Years 1919 - 1933: Wild and Brokenhearted Berlin
Friday, June 12, 2020	Weimar's Literary Witnesses: Joseph Roth and Christopher Isherwood <i>Class Trip: Scheunenviertel and Museum Island</i>
Tuesday, June 16, 2020	The Actress and the Filmmaker in Nazi Berlin: Leni Riefenstahl and Marlene Dietrich <i>Class Trip: West Berlin Glamour on the Kurfürstendamm/ Potsdamer Strasse</i>
Friday, June 19, 2020	The Divided City Part I: Berlin after WWII and before the building of the Berlin Wall
Tuesday, June 23, 2020	The Divided City II: The Berlin Airlift <i>Class Trip: Tempelhof Airport</i>
Friday, June 26, 2020	The Divided City III: Building the Wall <i>Class Trip: Bernauer Strasse Wall Memorial</i>
Tuesday, June 30, 2020	The Divided Heaven: Literature as Resistance in East Germany through the writings of Christa Wolf
Friday, July 03, 2020	Dreamers and Dissidents in West Berlin <i>Class Trip: Oranienstrasse and Bethanien Kreuzberg</i>
Tuesday, July 07, 2020	After the Wall: Rebuilding the Derelict City <i>Class Trip: Potsdamerplatz and Kulturforum</i>
Friday, July 10, 2020	The Gentrification Wars: 2000 – Present Wrap up Session

*Field trips are subject to change depending on the availability of appointments and speakers. On field trip days, class hours may be adjusted.