Berlin: Experiment in Modernity

Seminar Leader: Dr. Florian Becker,
Associate Professor of German and
Comparative Literature, Bard College

Times: Monday 17:00 – 18:30
       Wednesday 15:15 – 16:45
Friday Excursions 15:10 – 19:00 (approx.)
Location: Seminar Room P98
Office: 010, P24
Email: f.becker@berlin.bard.edu
Phone: 030-43733-122

“Berlin ist mehr ein Weltteil als eine Stadt.”
“Berlin is not so much a city as a slice of the world.”
Jean Paul

“Berlin, ein Trümmerhaufen bei Potsdam.”
“Berlin, a pile of rubble near Potsdam.”
Bertolt Brecht

Course Description

More than any other city, Berlin has been a source and a theater for the forces shaping Western modernity. The city’s importance and its by turns glorious and catastrophic role in European culture and history have their origins in its peculiar development. Built on a swamp, in a poor duchy surrounded by more powerful states, it was remade during the Enlightenment as a center not only of military discipline and administrative control but also of learning and innovation. Increasingly characterized in the later nineteenth century by almost uncontrolled growth, it rose to the status of capital of the German Empire and became a center of science and technology. With rapid industrialization came sharp social polarization and bitter political conflict, but also the birth of aesthetic modernism and avantgarde culture. After the clamor for imperial power and colonial expansion culminated in the cataclysm of World War I, Berlin witnessed the unparalleled artistic explosion of the Weimar Republic. During the Nazi dictatorship the city became the point of origin of political terror, war and genocide. Still reduced to little more than “a pile of rubble near Potsdam” (Brecht), Berlin found itself after World War II on the frontline of the Cold War and remained forcibly divided for more than four decades between two radically different political and economic systems.

Through a combination of historical sources, literature, philosophy, and a wide range of artifacts—from paintings over photographs to film, from archival to contemporary—we shall seek to understand Berlin’s significance and its current position at the heart of Europe. And we will speculate about its possible futures as a place of gathering and experiment for a population from across the world.
Class Format
Although “Berlin: Experiment in Modernity” is a single-credit course (4 US credits/ 8 ECTS), you should expect to spend more time on this course than you would for a “regular” course, e.g. a US junior seminar or Bard College Berlin elective. In addition to the two 90-minute seminar meetings each week (on Mondays and Wednesdays), we will go on excursions almost every Friday afternoon. Excursions may involve student presentations, lectures or discussions. Most of them will take us to places in central Berlin. Excursions farther afield may take place on Saturdays. There is one overnight trip, to Dresden, from Friday, December 6 to Sunday, December 8. All excursions are an integral and mandatory part of the course.

Required Texts (available for pickup at the Library)
Course Reader
Bertolt Brecht, The Threepenny Opera (Penguin Classics, 2007)
Wladimir Kaminer, Russian Disco (Ebury Press, 2009)
David Clay Large, Berlin (Basic Books, 2000)
Frank Mecklenburg and Manfred Stassen (eds.), German Essays on Socialism in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Continuum, 1990)
Peter Weiss, The Investigation (Marion Boyars, 2000)
Additional texts are available on your Bard College Berlin "Google Drive" for download.
Please print double-sided whenever possible, get a binder for the course, and bring paper copies of all readings to class.

Requirements
• Weekly email responses. (Please use your new Bard College Berlin email account for all correspondence.)
• Three essays (draft and final versions).
• Informal writing assignments and quizzes.

Participation
This course is a seminar. Your consistent, vociferous, and thoughtful participation in our discussions is crucial to your success. Class sessions may include brainstorming and writing periods, in which you may work alone or with a partner. You are expected to take an active part in all activities.

***Please note: The use of laptop computers, tablets, smartphones or other electronic devices in the classroom is prohibited.***

Seminar Preparation and Email Responses
Please come prepared to seminar meetings and excursions. Upon reading the assigned texts every week, formulate a question or observation that you want the group to address and send it to all of us via email, no later than Sunday, 16.00h. Before our meeting on Monday, please read everybody else’s questions and prepare responses to some of them. Your notes should help you
present your thoughts coherently in class.

**Essays and Tutorials**
All essays must be submitted both through the Bard College Berlin online system and in hard copy. Students write two versions of each essay. The first version has to be a complete and coherent essay. For the first paper: After handing in the first version, students will have individual tutorial meetings with me. For the second and final essays: Students bring two paper copies to class, one for me and one for a writing partner of their choice. Writing partners are expected to provide critical questions, comments, and suggestions for each other and to bring these, in writing, to the next seminar meeting. It is worth spending a substantial amount of time on revisions for your final version. For this process to function, hard copies of both the first and second versions have to be handed in on time. Extensions can only be granted in medical or other emergencies.

**Please note: All electronically submitted papers have to be in the European “A4” format. In the MS Word “file” menu, choose “page setup” and change the “paper size” from “US letter” to “A4”!***

**Academic Honesty**
Bard College Berlin does not tolerate plagiarism. Intellectual honesty is at the heart of academic ethics, and plagiarism is the most serious offence against it. Penalties include failure of the course, suspension from the university and expulsion. Please cite the ideas of others properly. See me if you have any questions about when or how to acknowledge your sources.

**Default Due Dates**
Unless announced otherwise, papers are due at the following times:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essay 1, First Version</th>
<th>Monday, September 23</th>
<th>12.30h</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essay 1, Final Version</td>
<td>Wednesday, October 2</td>
<td>23.59h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 2, First Version</td>
<td>Monday, November 4</td>
<td>12.30h</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay 2, Final Version</td>
<td>Monday, November 13</td>
<td>23.59h</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Essay, First Version</td>
<td>Wednesday, December 11</td>
<td>12.30h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay, Final Version</td>
<td>Wednesday, December 18</td>
<td>23.59h</td>
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**Grading**
Seminar Participation: 25% (quality and quantity of preparation and contributions)
Essay 1: 20%
Essay 2: 20%
Final Essay: 25%
Excursion Participation: 10% (visual analysis exercises; quality and quantity of preparation and contributions)

**Please note: At Bard College Berlin, professors submit midterm grades for essays and participation to the Registrar, from whom students can then retrieve them.***
Absences
In accordance with the Academic Statutes of Bard, you are allowed no more than three unexcused absences (for seminars and excursions) during the semester. I will notify you after your third unexcused absence. Excused absences are limited to documented health problems or emergencies, certain close family functions or emergencies, and observance of major religious holidays. Whenever possible, please inform me about any potential absence in advance.

***Any additional unexcused absence results in automatic failure of the course.***

Finally, please be punctual and considerate. Switch off your mobile phone and keep bathroom breaks to a minimum.

This syllabus is subject to change. You remain responsible throughout the semester for knowing where and when we meet for classes and outings, and what your assignments are for each meeting.

Semester Overview

Orientation Week

**August 31**
Visit to Potsdam (with all students at Bard College Berlin)

Week One

**September 2**
2013: Where Are We Now? (Introduction to the Course)
David Bowie, “Where Are We Now?” (Video, January 2013)

**September 4**
1237-1871: Berlin, Brandenburg, Prussia
With Dr. Aya Soika, Professor of Art History.
“Chronology: Germany, 1800-1990,” in Mary Fulbrook (ed.), *German History since 1800* (London: Arnold, 1997), pp. 585-595
Architecture: Berlin City Palace
Carl Gotthard Langhans (1732-1808), Brandenburg Gate (1788-1791)
Johann Gottfried Schadow (1764-1850), *Quadriga* (1793)
Friedrich August Stüler (1800-1865), Old National Gallery (1876)
Paul Wallot (1841-1912), Reichstag Building (1884-1894)

Week Two

September 9

1870-1890: Berlin, Capital of the German Empire

September 11

1888-1914: Berlin under Wilhelm II

Friday Excursion: Deutsches Historisches Museum (German Historical Museum, Unter den Linden 2)

Week Three

September 16

The Metropolis and the Arts I
With Professor Soika.
Large, Berlin, “World City?” pp. 62-81
Shearer West, The Visual Arts in Germany, 1890–1937: Utopia and Despair, Chapter 1, pp. 12-32
Adolph Menzel (1815-1905): Departure of King Wilhelm I for the Army, July 31 1870 (1871), Iron Rolling Mill (1872-1875)
Anton von Werner (1843-1915): A Billet outside Paris, October 24, 1870 (1894), The Proclamation of the German Empire (18th January 1871) (1885)
Robert Köhler (1850-1917), The Socialist (1885), The Strike (1886)
Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945), Misery (1895-1896), The Weavers’ Revolt (cycle of six prints, 1895-1897)
Max Liebermann (1847-1935), Cobbler’s Workshop (1881), The Net Menders (1887-1889)
Walter Leistikow (1865-1908), Lake Grunewald (1895)
Lovis Corinth (1858-1925), Self-Portrait with Skeleton (1896), The Blinded Samson (1912)

September 19

1891-1918: The German Empire and German Imperialism
Exberliner 108: “Africa in Berlin” (September 2012)
Otto von Bismarck, Speech on “Pragmatic” Colonization (June 26, 1884), PDF
Wilhelm II., The “Hun Speech” (1900), PDF
Friday Excursion: Alte Nationalgalerie (Museum Island)

Week Four

September 23

The Metropolis and the Visual Arts II: Expressionism
With Professor Soika.

Large, Berlin, pp. 136-146 (“Keep Hittin’ ‘Em”), and reread p. 73
Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903), in Donald N. Levine (ed.) Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms (University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 174-185
Shearer West, The Visual Arts in Germany, chapter 2, pp. 48-58
Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1937), Berlin Street Scene (1913), Street Scene (1913), Potsdamer Platz (1914)
Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884-1976), Three Nudes (Nidden) (1913)
Erich Heckel (1883-1970), Glassy Day (1913)
Max Pechstein (1881-1955), The Yellow and Black Tricot (1910); On Nidden Beach, Portrait of his Wife Lotte (1911)
Emil Nolde (1867-1956), Papua Boys (1914)

Essay 1, First Version Due.

September 25

The German Empire and the Labor Movement

Paul Göhre, Three Months as a Factory Worker and Journeyman (Leipzig, 1891)

Friday: Individual Tutorials on Your Essays

Week Five

September 30

1918-1923: Defeat, Revolution, Inflation

Photographic documents of Berlin, 1918-1919
October 2

“Wer gegen Dada ist, ist Dadaist”
Richard Huelsenbeck and Raoul Hausmann, “What is Dadaism and What Does It Want in Germany?” (1919), in Motherwell (ed.), pp. 41-42
Hannah Höch, Cut With the Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany (1919)
Georg Grosz and John Heartfield, Life and Activity in Universal City, 12:05 pm (1919)

—Fall Break—

Week Six

October 14

1924-1932 The Glittering Thing
Film: Walter Ruttmann, Berlin Symphony of a Great City (1927)
Alfred Döblin, “East of Alexanderplatz,” in Constantine (ed.), Berlin Tales

October 16

Bertolt Brecht, The Threepenny Opera (1928)

Friday Excursion: Brecht-House, Chausséestraße 125.

Week Seven

October 21

Bertolt Brecht, The Threepenny Opera

October 23

The New Architecture: Modernism for the Masses
Reread Large, Berlin, pp. 206-207, 241
“Weimar Housing,” images in PDF

Friday Excursion: Berlinische Galerie

Week Eight

October 28

1933-1939: Terror, Persecution, Acquiescence
With Professor Soika.
Nazi architecture: Ernst Sagebiel: Imperial Aviation Ministry (1935), Tempelhof Airport Terminal (1935-1941)
Werner March: Olympiastadion (1936)
Plans for “Germania”: Albert Speer, model of the “Great Hall” (ca. 1940), model of the “North-South Axis” (ca. 1940)
Wilhelm Kreis, model of the “Soldiers’ Hall” (ca. 1943)

**October 30**

1939-1945 War and Genocide
Large, *Berlin*, “Now People, Arise, and Storm, Break Loose!,” pp. 319-367

Friday Excursion: The Topography of Terror

**Week Nine**

**November 4**


Essay 2, First Version Due.

**November 6**

Peter Weiss, *The Investigation*

Friday Excursion: Bundestag (Reichstag Building): Art and Architecture Tour

**Week Ten**

**November 11**

1945-1961 Four-Power Occupation and “Denazification”
Large, *Berlin*, “Coming into the Cold,” pp. 369-417 (to “…Marx-Engels-Platz.”)
Film: Wolfgang Staudte, *The Murderers Are among Us* (1946)
The Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany (1949)

Essay 2, Final Version Due.

**November 13**

“Berlin, Capital of the German Democratic Republic”
Large, *Berlin*, “Coming into the Cold,” pp. 418-443
Stalinallee (now Karl-Marx-Allee): Herbert Henselmann, Straußberger Platz and Frankfurter Tor; Richard Paulick, Residential Block

Friday Excursion: Professor Aya Soika’s Kreuzberg

**Week Eleven**

**November 18**

1961-1989 The Wall
Large, *Berlin*, “The Divided City,” pp. 445-460 (to “…size and beauty.”)

**November 20**

Film: Beyer, *The Trace of Stones*

Friday Excursion: Former Ministry of State Security (“Stasi”) Headquarters, Normannenstraße (U5 Magdalenenstraße)
Week Twelve

**November 25**

**West Berlin: The City as Theater**

Large, *Berlin*, “The Divided City,” pp. 460-466 (to “over the wall.”), 469-495

Ulrike Meinhof “Napalm and Pudding,” “Vietnam and Germany,” in Meinhof (ed. Karin Bauer), *Everybody Talks About the Weather... We Don't: The Writings of Ulrike Meinhof* (Seven Stories Press, 2008)


**November 27**

**1989-1994 Revolution and Reunification**


**Friday Excursion:**

Christian Boros Collection. Guided tour for 12 starts at 16.00, from the railway bunker’s entrance on Reinhardtstr. 20.

Week Thirteen

**December 2**

**1961-2013 Berlin, City of Immigration**


Emine Sevgi Özdamar, “My Berlin,” in Constantine (ed.), *Berlin Tales*


**December 4**

Kaminer, *Russian Disco*

**December 6-8**

**Weekend Excursion to Dresden**

Leave: Berlin Hbf, Friday, 16.30, Return: Hbf Berlin on Sunday in the late evening.

Week Fourteen

**December 9**

**1990-2013: Berlin and the Future of Europe**


**December 11**

With Professor Soika.

Andreas Huyssen “The Voids of Berlin,” *Critical Inquiry* 24:1 (Fall 1997), pp. 57-
81

Completion Week

Wednesday, December 18

Final Essay, First Version Due.

Final Essay, Final Version Due.

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Date  Signature

I have read this syllabus carefully and I understand my responsibilities.