Course Title

City as Text: Berlin

Promise and Legacy of 9 November 1989

Course Number
CAT-UF.9301D01

Fall 2019

Syllabus last updated on: 3-Sep-2019

Lecturer Contact Information
Dr Axel Bangert
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Course Details
Tuesdays, 3:30pm to 6:15pm (starting 3 September)

Location: Rooms will be posted in Albert before your first class. Please double check whether your class takes place at the Academic Center (BLAC – Schönhauser Allee 36, 10435 Berlin) or at St. Agnes (SNTA – Alexandrinenstraße 118–121, 10969 Berlin).

Please note the site visits taking place throughout semester, as mentioned in the session descriptions. Detailed information on itineraries and timetables will be given in class.

Prerequisites
This course is reserved for students of Global Liberal Studies in their junior year.

Units earned
4

Course Description
For many people across the world, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 raised hopes for a global order based on freedom, democracy, civil rights and the rule of law. As the German capital prepares to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the event, what remains of this promise? What is the legacy of 1989, and how can this legacy inform debates about citizenship and community in our globalized present? This course will introduce you to the city of Berlin by examining the reverberations of the fall of the Berlin Wall: the event’s historical significance, social impact, political uses as well as reflections in art and media. Thirty years on, how are the peaceful protests of GDR citizens against the Socialist regime interpreted and remembered on the local, national as well as international level? How is the history of German division and its overcoming inscribed into Berlin’s topography, and what is the role of that history in the city’s
contemporary life? Combining site visits with a variety of media for preparation, contextualization and discussion (texts, photography, film, VR), this course will guide you to develop interdisciplinary perspectives on Berlin’s multi-layered identity as a city. Last not least, the commemorative events being held at historical sites across Berlin in November 2019 will offer numerous opportunities for faculty-guided independent research.

**Course Objective**
- understand theoretical concepts of place
- develop an interdisciplinary understanding of the local, regional, national, and global forces that have shaped the character of the city
- engage the cultural and social practices of the city through firsthand experiences
- advance research skills and sharpen ability to analyze and interpret the surrounding environment

**Assessment Components**

1. **Class Participation: 15% of total grade**
   Students are expected to productively contribute to discussions in class and demonstrate knowledge of the pertinent texts. On occasion, students may be asked to mediate class discussion or set the discussion agenda.

2. **Critical Excursion Attendance and Participation: 15% of total grade**
   It is required that students read the pertinent texts before site visits. Moreover, students should actively engage with a respective site or space and take notes of their impressions for discussion in class.

3. **4 Reflection Writings (approximately 500 words each): 20% of total grade**
   In their reflection writings, students will engage more closely with an aspect of a site that they find particularly interesting. This may include the history of a site, its architecture and memorialization, voices of testimony, as well as reflections in literature, film, and art. These reflections may be academic in character, or they may use different forms of writing such as journalistic or literary.

   Students interested in image-based enquiry may articulate up to two of their reflections through works of photography. In each case, this would involve creating a series of 2 to 4 images accompanied by a statement of purpose (approximately 300 words).

4. **“Through the Lens” Concentration Assignment (1500 words): 20% of total grade**
   This assignment allows students to approach their experiential study of place through the lens of their concentration. Students will be required to investigate a site, space, or place using the critical methodologies of the concentration field. The topic of the assignment will be identified and refined by the students, with instructor approval and guidance.

   The assignment may be produced in any form of scholarship (digital or print), and it may also take the form of a class presentation.
5. Final Project (2500 words): 30% of total grade

The topic of the final project will be developed independently by the students and formally proposed to the instructor. There will be individual meetings with the instructor to discuss and approve each topic. In any case, the final project should reflect one, or more, of the course’s learning objective whereby students achieve:

a. an interdisciplinary understanding of the local, regional, national, and global forces that have shaped the character of the city;
b. an understanding of the theoretical conceptions of place
c. a meaningful first-hand experience of the cultural and social practices of the city
d. advanced ability to analyze and interpret the surrounding environment.

The project may be produced in any form of scholarship (digital or print). Students interested in audiovisual media may produce a short documentary film or brief VR presentation as part of their final project. Information on the technology available and its usage will be provided by the instructor.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required component may result in failure of the class, regardless of grades achieved in other assignments.

Required Text(s)
All texts will be made available electronically via NYU Classes/NYU Libraries.

Please follow this link for the NYU Berlin Library Catalogue or the link on NYU Berlin’s website (Academics/Facilities & Services).

Supplemental Text(s) (not required to purchase)
To be discussed in class.

Internet Research Guidelines
To be discussed in class.

Additional Required Equipment
n/a

Session 1 – 3 Sep 2019
Introduction
Some scholars have described Berlin as a palimpsest, a cityscape overwritten time and again by successive states and societies, confronting visitors with the task of disentangling conflicting layers of meaning. Others have emphasized the gaps and voids in Berlin’s topography, characterizing the city as a site of traumatic loss caused by dictatorship, war, and division. Presenting these frequently used paradigms in relation to the Berlin Wall and its memorialization, the first session will introduce you to the city text of Berlin as well as the course aims. At the same time, it will prepare the discussion of theories of space and place in session 3, and how such theories may help us to explore Berlin’s historical and contemporary character. Moreover, detailed information will be given on the organization of the course, site
visits, the use of audio-visual media for coursework as well as opportunities for faculty-led independent research.

**Session 2 – 10 Sept 2019**
**Information on Internship Applications/Opportunity for Interview Training**
In preparation of “Experiential Learning” in Spring 2020, there will be two visits by external partners. First, Will Maier and Patricia Pahlke from the agency Cultural Vistas Berlin will present the application process for the Spring 2020 internships. Second, business coach and television journalist Tina Dauster will give a presentation on interview strategy. Students will have the opportunity to sit a mock interview with her and receive feedback outside of class.

**Session 3 – 17 Sept 2019**
**Theorizing (Berlin) Space**
We may be familiar with reading a city in terms of its past, but what other kinds of perspectives may we develop on the spaces and sites of a city? How can we understand urban space as a text, and what kinds of questions can we direct at it to explore a city’s political, social, and cultural life? What particular challenges as well as opportunities does the city text of Berlin pose to attempts at theorizing? This session will introduce you to some fundamental approaches and concepts in studying the semantics of the urban which we will refine throughout the semester, above all with regard to questions of community and identity at the intersection between local, national, and global.

**Readings:**

**Session 4 – 24 Sep 2019**
***Site Visit***
**From Hated Symbol of Division to Experiential Learning Environment: The Berlin Wall Memorial**
Only a short walk from NYU Berlin, the Berlin Wall Memorial on Bernauer Straße is the city’s main memorial to the German division. Its 1.4 kilometers of former border strip are an ideal opportunity for understanding how the wall cut through the city and how its structure developed over the decades. As a mixture of historical site, open-air exhibition, space for commemoration, and modern architecture, the Berlin Wall Memorial is a kind of experiential learning environment, inviting discussion about the mediation of historical knowledge through space. Moreover, the memorial’s incoherent structure and design betrays how the fall of the Wall was followed by conflicts about the ownership, significance, and use of urban space. Tracing these conflicts on site, we will get to know some of the political, social, and cultural debates characterizing the city post-1989.

**Readings:**
Session 5 – 1 Oct 2019
Remapping the Berlin Wall
Sharing our experiences of visiting the Berlin Wall Memorial, this session will explore the political, social, and cultural implications of the memorial’s use of space. How is the death strip of the Wall turned into an area for movement and exploration? How does the memorial organize our perspective on a structure formerly marked by antagonism, the surveillance of the Eastern watchtowers, on the one hand, and the voyeurism of Western viewing platforms, on the other? And how does the memorial – a major tourist hub due to its central position – function as a site of encounter between locals and visitors from all over the world? Locating the memorial in Berlin’s memorialization of division more broadly, we will understand how a much hated, quickly dismantled symbol of oppression became an object of preservation as well as a place for illustrating acts of protest, resistance and moral courage.

Readings:

***deadline for first Reflection Writing***

Session 6 – 8 Oct 2019
Negotiating Identity and Community in the Wake of State Injustice
Preparing our visit to Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, East Germany’s main remand prison for political opponents, in session 8, we will discuss the site’s significance for remembering state injustice in Berlin and beyond. What is the memorial’s relationship with other, more centrally located memorials to the GDR, as well as those sites marking the fall of the Berlin Wall? How have the lives of East Germans been assessed in view of the state’s suppression of civic as well as political rights, and how has this impacted on debates about identity and community in post-Wall Berlin/Germany? Looking beyond Germany, we will ask questions about the coming to terms with state injustice and its memorialization more broadly. Following a system change, how should histories of surveillance and persecution be worked through, on the levels of politics and law, society and ethics, culture and art? Considering other, German as well as non-German memorials, we will debate different strategies of communicating histories of state injustice as well as principles of civic identity through the spaces of the past.

Readings:

***deadline for “Through the Lens” Concentration Assignment***

14 to 20 Oct 2019 – Fall Break – No Class

Session 7 – 22 Oct 2019
How Mindfulness and Challenging Situations Go Together
As another preparatory session for spring term, this workshop with Melissa Carter, Head of Mindfulness Education and Innovation at NYU's Center for Global Spiritual Life, and Linn Friedrichs, Assistant Director for Student Life at NYU Berlin, will explore how mindfulness practice can empower you in the challenging conversations that are an integral part of today’s diverse, complex, and constantly changing (work) environments.

Session 8 – 29 Oct 2019
***Site Visit***
The Architecture of State Surveillance and Political Persecution: The Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial
On official maps of East Berlin, there was a white spot: the site of the remand prison of the GDR's state security service. Our second excursion will lead us to this symbolic site of political persecution and state surveillance in East Germany. We will confront an architecture and system designed to manipulate and destroy the personalities of those deemed hostile to the Socialist state. As a memorial, the site is exceptional for its emphasis on authenticity: in many cases, guided tours are given by former inmates, and the prison building is currently being restored to its original character in a complex process. In addition to learning about the working of the prison and its significance for divided as well as unified Berlin, we will ask how the memorial uses our experience of space to mediate history. How is the prison space being re-appropriated by the presence of former inmates, and what is our position in the memorial’s immersive encounter with a violent past?

Readings:

Session 9 – 5 Nov 2019
***Site Visit***
1989 as Multimedia Experience: Projecting the Peaceful Revolution
In the run-up to the official celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 2019, we will visit one of the seven large-scale 3D video projections that will be shown in historical locations across Berlin. Combining historical images with the accounts of contemporary witnesses via sound installations, the projections are intended to transport visitors back to the period of change 1989/90. What do these projections suggest about the spirit and promise of the times, as seen from today’s vantage point? What kind of experience of history do they create by merging audio-visual sources with the spaces of the past? Apart from analyzing concept and aesthetics of this form of immersive commemoration, we will also try to get a sense of the range of public responses.

Readings:
Kaiser, Alexandra. “We were heroes’. Local Memories of Autumn 1989: Revising the Past.” Remembering and Rethinking the GDR. Edited by Saunders and Pinford, pp. 179-94.
Session 10 – 12 Nov 2019
Reviewing 9 November 1989/2019
In this session, we will collect our seminar-based as well as individual impressions of how 9 November 1989 is being remembered and celebrated in the German capital 30 years on. And, as far as possible, we will relate our impressions to national as well as international reactions to the anniversary. Based on student research to be presented in class, these reactions may include news reports, scholarly discussions, art projects et al., and thus reflect a variety of academic disciplines. How are the protests by GDR citizens, how is the fall of the Berlin Wall being viewed today, and what significance is being attributed to these events in the face of current political and social cultural challenges, be they local, national, or global?

Readings:

Other readings – and potentially viewings – for this session will consist of reactions to the 30th anniversary of 9 November 1989, as detailed above. They will be researched by students for presentation in class.

***deadline for second Reflection Writing***

Session 11 – 19 Nov 2019
***Site Visit***
Life Stories of Division: Transit and Separation at the “Tränenpalast” (Palace of Tears)
One of the crucial demands made during the 1989/90 demonstrations against the East German government was the abolishment of restrictions on travel. Visiting the so-called “Tränenpalast”, formerly one of the few border crossing points between East and West Germany, we will explore how deeply travel restrictions affected the lives of GDR citizens. Attached to Berlin Friedrichstraße station, the building derives its name from the many painful goodbyes between East and West Germans that took place there. The memorial existing at the site today illustrates the GDR’s complex procedures of border control and presents the experiences of those whose families were separated by the German division.

Session 12 – 26 Nov 2019
1989 and the Demand for Freedom of Movement
Illustrating how the GDR restricted the mobility of its citizens, does a site such as the “Tränenpalast” point to freedom of movement as a crucial legacy of 1989? That year, participants in the protests against the Socialist regime insisted on freedom of movement as a basic human right. Simultaneously, waves of GDR citizens were trying to reach West Germany via its embassies in Prague and Budapest. In an age when more people than ever are migrating or fleeing, what can GDR history teach us about mobility, human rights, and citizenship? Or is the overcoming of German division in 1989/90, insofar as it represents a national history, inappropriate for understanding how global streams of migration are changing Western societies today? Looking at how the city of Berlin has been shaped by instances of migration and flight since 1989, we will debate impact and significance of the exodus that was the beginning of the GDR’s end.

Readings:
Session 13 – 3 Dec 2019
***Site Visit***
Recuperating the Everyday
1989/90 was not only a deep political transformation, but also strongly affected the everyday lives of East Germans, particularly after German reunification. How did East Germans experience the arrival of Western consumption, and how did they react to the disappearance of their living as well as working environments? To what extent were GDR everyday lives and social practices marginalized after reunification, and what were the social as well as political consequences? In debating these questions, we will trace attempts since the turn of the millennium to reconstruct GDR everyday lives by means of literature and film, exhibitions and museums. A case in point (and possible destination for a brief excursion) is the federal exhibition “Everyday Life in the GDR” located in the same building complex as NYU Berlin.

Readings:

Session 14 – 10 Dec 2019
Final Discussion
In 2007, the budget hotel “Ostel” opened in a former GDR housing block in Berlin-Friedrichshain. Furnished with original objects, from furniture to wallpaper, it invites guests to go on a time travel to 1970s/1980s East Germany as well as to enjoy the eccentric GDR interior design. Has the legacy of 1989 lost its relevance, being replaced with what has been termed “Ostalgie”, a nostalgia for the East? Is historical experience being superseded by the simulation of the past, defying our attempts to make the fall of the Berlin Wall meaningful for the challenges of the present? Is the emphasis on personal experience at sites such as “Ostel” fostering forgetting instead of remembrance? As a conclusion to our course, we will critically debate legacy and memory of 1989 based on our experiences and observations in the city of Berlin over the duration of term.

***deadline for fourth Reflection Writing***

Session 15 – 17 Dec 2019
***deadline for submission of Final Projects***
In case final projects involve audio-visual components, there will be an opportunity to present these.
No laptops allowed during class (exceptions will be made for students with academic accommodations from the Moses Center). Mobile phones are to be switched off. Drinks are allowed in the classroom, but food is not.

**Suggested Co-Curricular Activities**
To be discussed in class.

**Your Lecturer**
While being trained as a historian at Humboldt University Berlin, I developed an interest in the memorialization of the past and how it shapes urban environments. Working as a research assistant at the Holocaust Memorial Foundation in Berlin, I moreover began to ask questions about the role of images in mediating history. I then embarked on a Ph.D. at the University of Cambridge in which I discussed representations of the Third Reich in contemporary German cinema and television. This was the basis for my monograph *The Nazi Past in German Film: Viewing Experiences of Intimacy and Immersion* (2014). Subsequently, I have held post-doctoral positions at the University of Cambridge as well as the University of Leeds, looking at transnational moving image production as well as the connections between film and heritage industries. I have been teaching at NYU Berlin since 2015, delivering various courses in cinema studies as well as on historical and contemporary Berlin.
Academic Policies

Assessment Expectations

Grade A: The student makes excellent use of empirical and theoretical material and offers well-structured arguments in their work. The student writes comprehensive essays / answers to exam questions and their work shows strong evidence of critical thought and extensive reading.

Grade B: The candidate shows a good understanding of the problem and has demonstrated the ability to formulate and execute a coherent research strategy.

Grade C: The work is acceptable and shows a basic grasp of the research problem. However, the work fails to organize findings coherently and is in need of improvement.

Grade D: The work passes because some relevant points are made. However, there may be a problem of poor definition, lack of critical awareness, poor research.

Grade F: The work shows that the research problem is not understood; there is little or no critical awareness and the research is clearly negligible.

Grade Conversion

Your lecturer may use one of the following scales of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

A = 94-100 or 4.0
A- = 90-93 or 3.7
B+ = 87-89 or 3.3
B = 84-86 or 3.0
B- = 80-83 or 2.7
C+ = 77-79 or 2.3
C = 74-76 or 2.0
C- = 70-73 or 1.7
D+ = 67-69 or 1.3
D = 65-66 or 1.0
F = below 65 or 0

Attendance Policy

Participation in all classes is essential for your academic success, especially in courses that meet only once per week. Your attendance in both content and language courses is required and will be checked at each class meeting. As soon as it becomes clear that you cannot attend a class, you must inform your professor by e-mail immediately (i.e. before the start of your class). Absences are only excused if they are due to illness, religious observance or emergencies. Your professor or NYU Berlin's administration may ask you to present a doctor's note or an exceptional permission from NYU Berlin's Director or Wellness Counselor as proof. Emergencies or other exceptional circumstances must be presented to the Director. Doctor's notes need to be submitted to the Academics Office, who will inform your professors. Doctor's notes need to be from a local doctor and carry a signature and a stamp. If you want the reasons for your absence to be treated confidentially, please approach NYU Berlin's Director or Wellness Counselor.
Unexcused absences affect students' grades: In content courses each unexcused absence (equaling one week's worth of classes) leads to a deduction of 2% of the overall grade and may negatively affect your class participation grade. In German Language classes two or three (consecutive or non-consecutive) unexcused absences (equaling one week's worth of classes) lead to a 2% deduction of the overall grade. Three unexcused absences in one content course and five unexcused absences in your German language course may lead to a Fail in that course. Being more than 15 minutes late counts as an unexcused absence. Furthermore, your professor is entitled to deduct points for frequent late arrival or late arrival back from in-class breaks. Please note that for classes involving a field trip, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive in time at the announced meeting point.

Exams, tests and quizzes, deadlines, and oral presentations that are missed due to illness always require a doctor's note as documentation. It is the student's responsibility to produce this doctor's note and submit it to the Academics Office; until this doctor's note is produced the missed assessment is graded with an F and no make-up assessment is scheduled. In content classes, an F in one assignment may lead to failure of the entire class.

Regardless of whether an absence is excused or not, it is the student's responsibility to catch up with the work that was missed.

Attendance Rules on Religious Holidays
Members of any religious group may, without penalty, excuse themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Students who anticipate being absent due to religious observance should notify their lecturer AND NYU Berlin's Academics Office in writing via e-mail one week in advance. If examinations or assignment deadlines are scheduled on the day the student will be absent, the Academics Office will schedule a make-up examination or extend the deadline for assignments. Please note that an absence is only excused for the holiday but not for any days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. See also University Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays

Late Submission of Work
(1) Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.

(2) Late work should be submitted in person to the lecturer or to the Academics Office, who will write on the essay or other work the date and time of submission, in the presence of the student. Another member of the administrative staff may also personally accept the work and will write the date and time of submission on the work, as above.

(3) Work submitted late receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100 point scale for each day it is late (excluding weekends and public or religious holidays), unless an extension has been approved (with a doctor's note or by approval of NYU Berlin's administration), in which case the 2 points per day deductions start counting from the day the extended deadline has passed.

(4) Without an approved extension, written work submitted more than 5 days (excluding weekends and public or religious holidays) following the submission date receives an F.

(5) End of semester essays must be submitted on time.
(6) Students who are late for a written exam have no automatic right to take extra time or to write the exam on another day.

(7) Please remember that university computers do not keep your essays - you must save them elsewhere. Having lost parts of your essay on the university computer is no excuse for a late submission.

Provisions for Students with Disabilities
Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see their website for further information.

Plagiarism Policy
The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism. Proper referencing of your sources avoids plagiarism (see as one possible help the NYU library guide to referencing styles.

NYU Berlin takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. Your lecturer may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form.

It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor.

For a summary please follow the link to NYU Global's academic policies.