

BERLIN PERSPECTIVES

Gardens of Berlin: Transdisciplinary Ecology

- Semester:** Winter Semester 2020-2021
- Course instructor:** Shelley Etkin <shelley.etkin@hu-berlin.de>
- Subject area:** Kultur & Gesellschaft / Culture & Society
- Credits:** 5 ECTS
- Time:** Wednesdays, 12:00 - 14:00
- Room:** Zoom (Please note: This semester, all classes take place online. If however the general conditions allow it, the seminar room 0323-26 (3rd floor) at Hausvogteiplatz 5-7 can be used by the courses.)

Moodle and Zoom links will be provided to students upon their registration in the course.

Course description:

Gardens of Berlin: Transdisciplinary Ecology situates questions of planetary change through the study of Berlin as a diverse and complex ecosystem, focusing on several urban gardens. Asking “what can a garden be?” we will study relations between the many human and nonhuman communities that compose each garden. The course proposes ecological thinking as a frame for engagement with the multiple disciplines that inform the field of ecology ranging from environmental and economic, to social and political, artistic and spiritual. As a digital course, sites will be introduced through virtual tours created in collaboration with local organisers from each of the projects, elaborating on their approaches and practices. A range of materials will contextualise each project, offered in various media from text to audio and video. In-person site visits or excursions may be included as the situation allows. Students will be supported with resources and prompts to work autonomously and collaboratively. Students will be asked to conclude the course by designing a speculative garden. The course embraces the wide range of cultural and academic backgrounds that students bring to the class, emphasising multidisciplinary creative thinking and critical reflection. There is no requirement for students to have previous familiarity with the subject, only a willingness to engage.

Learning objectives:

This course will introduce the notion of ecology as a transdisciplinary field, based on an inclusive understanding of ecology as a whole made of many inter-related systems. As such, we will address environmental, social, political, relational, artistic and spiritual aspects of ecology, through specific Berlin gardens. This approach challenges hegemonic binaries of human and non-human, nature and culture, urban and rural. The course supports students to expand and articulate their own perspectives, interests, and learning processes in regards to ecological thinking. This course will provide the following:

Knowledges:

- Be familiar with several urban garden projects in Berlin and their relationships to the city.
- Acknowledge key concepts across a range of aspects in transdisciplinary ecology including sociopolitical and environmental concerns.
- Deepen their English skills in speaking, reading, and writing forms while learning contemporary discourses and vocabulary concerning transdisciplinary ecology.

Ecological Thinking:

- Consider the internal and external dimensions of ecological projects in the context of urban and cultural development.
- Expand their perceptions of the city of Berlin, observational and perceptual skills, and ecological perspectives, which can be applied to their places of origin and other locations.

Competencies:

- Students will be supported to articulate personal experiences of Berlin's gardens through their particular cultural, linguistic, and academic viewpoints.
- Students will develop their abilities to conceptualise and articulate various approaches to urban gardens. They will develop their own approach to designing a potential garden, with considerations for its contextual needs.

Assessment Portfolio:

- Communication i.e. engagement in Moodle discussion forums, participation in Zoom sessions, exchange within study groups, other correspondences: 40%
- Short Assignments (to be submitted periodically throughout the course): 15%
- Midterm Assignment 'Framing a Garden': 15%
- Garden design project in small groups: 20%
- Final reflection paper on personal development in course and garden design project (Due March 5th, 2021 Format: 2-4 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman ft.12): 10%

Language requirements:

This course will be held primarily in English. A minimum English B2 level is required. The class will adapt to the range of English skills present. Class time will prioritise verbal skills in English, through speaking, engagement in discussions with classmates, and conversations with invited guest speakers. Students are welcome to pause or clarify language used at any time. When possible, key terms will be gathered to build a growing lexicon of vocabulary. We will also address language's role in shaping thought and understanding within cultures. The course will offer various spoken formats including large and small group discussions and brief individual presentations. Reading and writing skills will be developed through assigned readings and comprehension activities throughout the course, along with written reflections, in English. Reading content can be adapted for those who require more time or support and suggestions can be offered to those who wish to pursue specific topics further. Translations will be found whenever needed, however proficiency in English is a necessary element for involvement in this course.

Timetable:

Due to the semester taking place digitally, the course consists of synchronous (Zoom discussions, guest lectures, etc) and asynchronous (independent assignments, readings, Moodle forums, etc) elements. *Please regularly check the Moodle page* for all materials, information, and scheduled Zoom sessions, with the understanding that some aspects may shift as we navigate the course together. We may have some excursions and small group meetings in person, if possible.

Note: All readings will be made available via Moodle.

Week One: 04.11.2020 **Introductions & Orientations [Zoom Session]**

The course begins with an opening session via Zoom, to introduce ourselves to one another and orient towards the approach to transdisciplinary ecology that we will be exploring. We will create a digital

class map to situate the places we are learning about as well as learning from, with an acknowledgement of how this informs our perspectives and perceptions.

Collectively written and signed (2018) “Urban Gardening Manifest”,
www.urbangardeningmanifest.de

Ali Fitzgerald (2018) “In the postwar 'death zone', new life: Berlin by Ali Fitzgerald – an urban comic”, *The Guardian: The Illustrated City*

Robert Macfarlane (2010) “Atlas of Remote Islands by Judith Schalansky and Infinite City by Rebecca Solnit: Review”, *The Guardian*

[optional] Senate Department for the Environment, Transport, and Sanitary Protection, “The History of Berlin’s Urban Green Spaces”

Assignment: Class Map - Due by 09.11.2020: Where we learn from is just as important as what we learn about. Situate yourself through the digital map on Moodle by dropping a pin in the area where you are located, with a brief (1-3 sentence) description giving a picture of the surroundings.

Week Two: 11.11.2020 A Common Place Tempelhofer Feld [Zoom Session]

This place which has undergone immense transformations from a former airfield and Nazi power base to reclaimed public park advocated for by citizens, including community gardens and many social and ecological projects promoting open space and shared resources. We will learn about the layers of history and different actors who have been involved in shaping this space as well as the contemporary situation of Tempelhofer Feld through a guest presentation by an organiser of 100% THF, a group advocating for maintaining the field as a public commons.

Christa Müller (2012): “Practicing Commons in Community Gardens: Urban Gardening as a Corrective for Homo Economicus”, *Wealth of the Commons: A World Beyond Market and State*, pp 219-224

Goethe-Institut Washington (2018): Video: “Tempelhofer Feld”

Ciarán Fahey (2015): “How Berliners refused to give Tempelhof airport over to developers”, *The Guardian*

Jo Blason, Basia Cummings and Ciarán Fahey (2015): “Nazis and candy drops: Tempelhof airport through history – in pictures”, *The Guardian*

Week Three: 18.04.2020 Linguistic Ecologies

How we speak is just as important as what we speak about. Language reveals a vastly complex web of cultural associations, thought forms, and expressions. Language is alive and evolving. We will explore the ecologies of language to speak of relationships among human and non-humans.

Robert Macfarlane (2019): “The Understory”, *Emergence Magazine*, Issue 5

Robin Kimmerer (2017): “Speaking of Nature”, *Orion Magazine*

Alicia Escott, Heidi Quante (2014) “Neologisms”, *The Bureau of Linguistical Realities*

Assignment: Personal Glossary - Due 20.11.2020

Using the Moodle glossary tool, note 1-2 terms that have come up so far, in our readings/discussions or in the discourses you connect with this course from your own backgrounds. Write a one-paragraph statement elaborating on this term (why you are drawn to it, what it means to you, etc). This will evolve as a living document with opportunity to comment, respond, and develop the working understandings.

Week Four: 25.11.2020 Floating University & Climate Care [Zoom Session]

The Floating University is an offshore campus for cities in transformation, in a rainwater basin in Kreuzberg. This project has constructed a multi-story 'urban forest' around the water filtration system to host a variety of structures and programming dedicated to climate care. We will look at the growing lexicon developed through this project as well as the digital archives of Climate Care, exploring correlations between environment, urban practice, and education for climate challenges.

Gilly Karjevsky editor, multiple contributors (2018): "Lexicon", *The Floating University*

Gilly Karjevsky editor, multiple contributors (2018) "VOILÀ, IT'S NOT FLOATING AND IT'S NOT A UNIVERSITY!", *Floating University Berlin 2018 – an illustrated report*

Joanne Pouzenc (2018) "Some Questions Around the Floating University", *Floating University Berlin 2018 – an illustrated report*

Bayo Akomolafe (2019) "What climate collapse asks of us", *The Emergence Network*

[optional] Floating University, multiple contributors (2019) "Climate Care Digital Archive"

Assignment: Micro-Climates/Study Groups - Due 30.11.2020: Students will be placed into smaller groups, approximately by their placement in the class map. These groups will accompany the learning process (and work together to create the final garden design projects.) To begin with, each group is asked to reflect on the framework of 'care' amongst yourselves and submit documentation from your discussion.

Week Five: 02.12.2020 **Social Ecologies**

Expanding on various approaches to the social that we have encountered so far, we will challenge the assumptions underlying the notion of 'we' that often excludes non-humans as well as oppressed and marginalised human communities. What kinds of 'we' might a garden include? Whose needs does a garden address and how? Who has access?

Assignment - Who are 'We': Due 04.12.2020: Submit a brief 1-2 paragraph response to the question of what kinds of 'we' are addressed in one of these specific texts or in the film. Who are these gardens for and how do they provide for them?

Ella von der Haide (2006) Film: "Community Gardens in Berlin", *Another World is Plantable*

Frisch, Tracy (2019) "To Free Ourselves, We Must Feed Ourselves", *The Sun Magazine*

Barry Yoeman (2018): "The Hidden Resilience of 'Food Desert' Neighborhoods", *Civil Eats*

The Ron Finley Project (2015) Video: "Ron Finley Gangsta Gardener in South Central LA", *Game Changers*

Kenneth Helphand (2006): "Defiant Gardens: Making Gardens in Wartime" (excerpts), *San Antonio: Trinity University Press*

Jennifer Atkinson (2020): "The Impulse to Garden Has Deep Roots" *The Conversation*

Week Six: 09.12.2020 **Ecology's 'oikos' [Zoom Session]**

Considering the term ecology comes from the Greek 'oikos' referring to house, family, and property, we will address the element of economy in the city's urban gardens and green spaces, including a former coal power plant turned arts centre in Luckenwalde, producing 'kunststrom'/'art electricity.' This will allow us to address the relationship between urban and rural areas, access to resources, and regenerative, self-sustaining models of approaching ecological projects.

Kate Connolly (2019): "'Art electricity' revives old German power station", *The Guardian*

Robin Wall Kimmerer (2014): "Returning the Gift", *Minding Nature*

Week Seven: 16.12.2020 **Perceiving Gardens [Zoom Session]**

Considering an expanded understanding of what defines a garden, we will explore the role of perception. What might a garden consist of, beyond the typical understanding? How might the recognition of a garden be a form of reading? How might we attend to a particularised environment as a kind of gardener? How can we sense and frame this? Students will be asked to acknowledge a 'garden' that may not be publicly named as such.

Mark Pagel (2011): "Cities as Gardens", *Edge*, pp. 1-7

Brian Eno (2011): "Composers as Gardeners", *Edge*, pp. 1-5

J.B. Jackson (1980): "Gardens to Decipher and Gardens to Admire", *The Necessity for Ruins and Other Topics* pp 37-53

Mid-term Assignment: Framing a Garden - Due 04.01.2021 [details will be provided]

Week Eight: 06.01.2021 Gardens as Schools [Zoom Session] Prinzessinnengartens

The Prinzessinnengarten was originally sited at Moritzplatz since 2009, a place that is currently stewarded by Common Grounds, advocating for a 99-year contract while developing the 'neighbourhood academy.' Branching from there, the collective Nomadisch Grün created a garden inside a transitioning cemetery in Neukölln since 2018.

Hanna Burckhardt (2020) Virtual Guided Tour: Prinzessinnengarten Kollektiv

Åsa Sonjasdotter, Marco Clausen (2019) "Growing from the Ruins of Modernity", *Nachbarschaftsakademie*

Wulff, Gabriel (2014): "Collective Counter Cartography from Prinzessinnengarten, Berlin", *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 23, Article 6, pp. 74-77

Kito Nedo Interview with Marco Clausen (2013): Urban Gardens: Sowing the City of Tomorrow, *The Social Design Public Action Reader*, SLUM Lab – Sustainable Living Urban Model, Issue 8, pp. 1-3

Hosie Wulff (2013): Drawing: The History of Space, Prinzessinnengarten

Anstiftung (2010): Video: Prinzessinnengarten Berlin Urban Farming, architekturclips.de

Week Nine: 13.01.2021 Questions of 'Who(se)' [Zoom Session]

We will dig deeper into various notions of the commons and its role in relation to different social/cultural contexts, including the concept of the undercommons, engaging with the meaningful intersectional perspectives proposed in these readings. Expanding upon our previous considerations of what forms of 'we' gardens might include, we will ask if this 'who' includes the more-than-human, how does this expand our understanding of commons? Of ownership and belonging? Of stewardship?

Silvia Federici (2012): "Feminism and the Politics of the Commons", *Wealth of the Commons A World Beyond Market and State*

Jack Halberstam (2013): "The Wild Beyond: With and for the Undercommons", Stefano Harney, Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, pp 5-12

Week Ten: 20.01.2021 The Green Library [Zoom Session]

Before shifting into the final design projects, we will consider the ways that gardens may also be seen as archives. From the information stored in seeds saved over generations to the social network that grows through community garden projects, these spaces also maintain memory throughout continual change in the city. The 'Grüne Bibliothek' or 'Green Library' in Berlin offers a platform for strengthening ecological and social sustainability in libraries and information facilities. We will engage with their resources and learn more about this initiative.

The Tree Conference (2018) Video: "Interview with Ayana Young", Edited by Angel Fish Films

Dan Barber (2019) "Save Our Food. Free The Seed." *New York Times*

Rowen M White, Ayana Young (2020) “On Seed Rematriation and Fertile Resistance”, *For the Wild Podcast*

Week Eleven: 27.01.2021 **Inner and Outer Relations [Zoom Session]**

To address the outer world of gardens, we must also address the inner world of our own embodied systems. We will discuss notions of health, on personal, social, and ecological levels and their inter-relations. This includes systemic understandings of the ways that colonialism, racism, ableism, and other forms of oppression shaped these relations.

Eli Clare (2015): “Notes on Cure, Disability, and Natural Worlds”, excerpt from public talk at University of New Hampshire

Georgina Kenyon (2019): “‘If the land is sick, you are sick’: An Aboriginal approach to mental health in times of drought”, *Scroll.in Magazine*, pp. 1-11

Leah Penniman (2019): “By Reconnecting With Soil, We Heal the Planet and Ourselves.” *Yes! Magazine: The Dirt Issue*

Vanessa Watts (2013): Indigenous place-thought & agency amongst humans and non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!)” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp 20-34

Week Twelve: 03.02.2021 **The Impossible Forest**

We will be introduced to the Impossible Forest, a garden in the centre of the Uferstudios complex in the neighbourhood of Wedding, home to ateliers, studios, and the Berlin dance community. This unique space bridges artistic and spiritual inquiry with social art and choreography. We will have a virtual tour and guided meditation offered by artist-gardener Jared Gradinger, who will share his approach to co-creative gardening.

Michael, Pollan (2013): “The Intelligent Plant”, *The New Yorker*

Jared Gradinger (2020) Video: “Tour of the Impossible Forest” & Audio: “Elemental lecture and heart meditation”

Assignment - Due 05.02.2021: After experiencing the tour and guided meditation, take time to freely write or draw an intuitive response and submit via Moodle.

Week Thirteen: 10.02.2021 **Design Thinking [Zoom Session]**

Moving towards the final design projects, we will reflect on all the different understandings of garden that we have encountered throughout this course. Support in the form of listening, feedback, note-sharing, and brainstorming will be offered between peers, to support creative thinking. We will clarify any questions regarding the design projects and look at several maps and models as sources of inspiration, including a project created by a student group in the previous semester.

Bonnie Fortune, Brett Bloom (2018) “ACRES Deep Map”, *Library of Radiant Optimism for Let’s Remake the World*

Kamel, Louafi (2014): *Green Islands in the City: 25 Ideas for Urban Gardens*, Jovis Publishers, pp 6-11, 14-17, 24-25, 32-33, 40-41, 48-49, 58-59, 70-71, 74-75, 86-87, 98-99, 114-115, 130-131

“Permaculture Ethics and Design Poster”, *Permaculture Principles Pty Ltd*, [Licensed](#)

“Permaculture Flower”, *Permaculture Principles Pty Ltd*, [Licensed](#)

Anna Maria Dufke, Arvid Matthes, Martin Wettig (2020) “Cyrle: Enginining and Bend”, *Garden Design Project Summer Semester 2020*

Week Fourteen: 17.02.2021 **Garden Design Presentations [Zoom Session]**

Week Fifteen: 24.02.2021 **Garden Design Presentations [Zoom Session]**

Garden Design Final Group Projects: To complete the course, students will create a speculative garden design together with their small study groups. Each group will be assigned to a general area of the city. Each project should include a proposed specific location in Berlin, a time period (past/present/future), which communities (human and non-human) the garden is intended to provide for and how, the overall purpose or intention of the garden, and what takes place there (what is grown, what kind of events are hosted, etc.) Gardens can take any form, based on realistic or speculative conditions, with the appropriate context provided. Design presentations must include some kind of visual aide (images, maps, drawings, mood board, etc) and outline the information that addresses the above aspects.

Our final two zoom session will include a ten-minute presentation by each group, with time for questions and discussion afterwards. Depending on the time needed, the last class sessions will be divided into these group garden design presentations and collective considerations about how these speculative projects could mutually support one another, share resources, or be connected.

Personal Reflection - Due 05.03.2021 Each student is asked to write a 2-3 page written reflection on their personal development in the course, including the garden design project, to be submitted by Moodle. Consider addressing the following prompts: How do you see your learning process over the semester, in this course? How did the course inform your thinking, making, and interests? What was challenging for you (this can be in terms of content, structure, participation, speaking, reading, etc)? What sparked your interest and how might you further explore this? How might this course be relevant to your life moving forward (in terms of your studies or in general)?

Notes:

As this course will take place in a mixed format, digitally with some opportunity for excursions and small group meetings, we will need to stay flexible. I ask for your understanding, engagement, and communication navigating this process together. A digital classroom has its challenges and benefits, we will do our best to embrace it creatively in this course. Students are asked to be responsible for their learning process, to take care of themselves, and to stay in communication.

This class is intended to be built around site visits to the gardens we will study. Although group gatherings may not be possible at the moment, I strongly encourage those in Berlin who can access those sites and who feel comfortable to do so, taking the necessary precautions for health and safety. We will have virtual tours and exchanges with organisers from each project, but the experience of being there physically in person is unique and will inform a lot. I will provide information about opening hours and we will of course continue to follow the situation regarding regulations, etc.

Assignments for the course should be submitted via Moodle by the deadline provided, unless otherwise arranged. Alternatives and make-up assignments can be arranged. If you come across extenuating circumstances, for personal or health reasons, please communicate directly via email.

No plagiarism will be tolerated in this course.

Please familiarise yourself with the interfaces of Zoom and Moodle. If you need any tech support please send an email and we can arrange it with the help of HU's IT department. Moodle will be our main source of information and communication as a class. Here you can have a sense of the flow of the course, but *keep checking Moodle regularly*, at least weekly! Details may change and some materials are not yet posted. All Zoom sessions are linked through the Moodle and can be accessed with the password 'gardens'.

This classroom strives to be as safe a space as possible for the diversity of thought, culture, age, race, gender, sexuality, and ability. Differences and multiplicity of perspectives within our international classroom are welcome assets to the learning process. Critique or disagreement will be handled with integrity. Our class culture will make space for all that is present with respect and openness towards one another and in our encounters with local sites and guests.

Please feel very welcome to reach out and contact the teacher, Shelley Etkin, at any time: shelley.etkin@hu-berlin.de. I am available by email for support with English language aspects,

questions and clarifications, to discuss your learning process or anything related to the course content. Individual meetings related to personal study interests can be arranged in regards to these topics. Arrangements can be made to support each students' needs as long as they are communicated and agreed upon.

Literature:

Ali Fitzgerald (2018) "In the postwar 'death zone', new life: Berlin by Ali Fitzgerald – an urban comic", *The Guardian: The Illustrated City*

Alicia Escott, Heidi Quante (2014) "Neologisms", *The Bureau of Linguistical Realities*

Anstiftung (2010): Video: Prinzessinnengarten Berlin Urban Farming, architekturclips.de

Anna Maria Dufke, Arvid Matthes, Martin Wettig (2020) "Cyrle: Enginning and Bend", Garden Design Project Summer Semester 2020

Åsa Sonjasdotter, Marco Clausen (2019) "Growing from the Ruins of Modernity", *Nachbarschaftsakademie*

Barry Yoeman (2018): "The Hidden Resilience of 'Food Desert' Neighborhoods", *Civil Eats*

Bayo Akomolafe (2019) "What climate collapse asks of us", *The Emergence Network*

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Brian Eno (2011): "Composers as Gardeners", *Edge*, pp. 1-5

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Floating University, multiple contributors (2019) "Climate Care Digital Archive"

Frisch, Tracy. "To Free Ourselves, We Must Feed Ourselves." *The Sun Magazine*, July 2019. <https://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/523/to-free-ourselves-we-must-feed-ourselves>.

Georgina Kenyon (2019): "'If the land is sick, you are sick': An Aboriginal approach to mental health in times of drought", *Scroll.in Magazine*, pp. 1-11

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Jennifer Atkinson (2020): “The Impulse to Garden Has Deep Roots” *The Conversation*

[Jo Blason](#), [Basia Cummings](#) and Ciarán Fahey (2015): “Nazis and candy drops: Tempelhof airport through history – in pictures”, *The Guardian*

Joanne Pouzenc (2018) “Some Questions Around the Floating University”, *Floating University Berlin 2018 – an illustrated report*

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Robin Kimmerer (2017): “Speaking of Nature”, *Orion Magazine*

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