

## *BERLIN PERSPECTIVES*

### **“A knife of history” – The Berlin Wall and its Portrayal in the Arts**

<b>Semester:</b>	Winter semester 2020/21
<b>Course instructor:</b>	Carolin Sibilak / carolin.sibilak@hu-berlin.de
<b>Subject area:</b>	History and Literature
<b>Credits:</b>	5 ECTS
<b>Time:</b>	Thursday, 10-12 c.t. (10.15-11.45)
<b>Room:</b>	Zoom (Please note: This semester, all classes take place online. If however the general conditions allow it, the seminar room 0323-26 (3 <sup>rd</sup> floor) at Hausvogteiplatz 5-7 can be used by the courses.)

#### **Course description:**

“It was incomprehensible to such an extent, that immediately upon its emergence it became a symbol”, German-born author Bernd Wagner reflected about the Berlin Wall some time after its fall in 1989. During the 28 years of its existence the Wall, being a heavily guarded military border isolating half a city as well as an icon of the national and global post-war era, had inspired all kinds of artistic involvements. While many international artists took an interest in the Berlin Wall and what it represented, obviously it was even more important for artists from both parts of Germany and Berlin. How has the Wall been interpreted in art? Does the portrayal differ between East and West? What does it tell us about people’s lives and feelings? And how are the artworks still relevant today? The seminar will mainly focus on German literature (Uwe Johnson, Peter Schneider et al.) but also look into music (esp. Wolf Biermann), visual and performing arts. It traces connections between sociopolitical developments and art and addresses topics like artistic purpose, responsibility, freedom and censorship. The course will be taught online in synchronous and asynchronous sessions, but shall also include live meetings and an excursion if the pandemic situation allows for it. As most of the materials will be provided in German, a high level of reading and listening competence is required (at least B2).

#### **Learning objectives:**

By focusing on different artistic portrayals of the Berlin Wall, the course will teach about its history, development and significance within a national and global context. It will reflect about its consequences for the city as well as people’s lives, thus also addressing more general questions about human nature and society and discussing contemporary relevance. By researching, reading, watching, comparing, analyzing and discussing different pieces of art as well as non-fictional material and secondary literature students are to learn and/or practice key skills required for independent academic work.

### Practical Knowledge

- Culture and history of Germany and Berlin in the 20<sup>th</sup> century
- Sociopolitical conditions and developments in East and West Germany during the cold war
- Purpose, development, layout and history of the Berlin Wall
- Literary, musical and visual portrayals of the Berlin Wall
- Leading German artists of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their lives and works
- Academic, political and aesthetic vocabulary

### Transferrable Skills and Competencies

- Identifying, reflecting on and discussing issues of aesthetics and the possible connections and interferences between art, society and politics
- Analyzing and interpreting different works of art and their relation to reality
- Researching, selecting and collecting secondary literature
- Challenging, assessing and quoting primary and secondary materials
- Developing and formulating adequate scientific questions
- Abstracting and summarizing information
- Identifying and focusing on central ideas

### **Assessment portfolio:**

- Regular attendance (at least 80 % of the sessions), active participation and preparation of online and/or homework assignments: 20 % of the final grade
- Informative video or audiovisual presentation of 10-15 minutes in English or German (Deadline 7<sup>th</sup> January 2021): 40 % of the final grade
- Original written academic essay of approx. 1200-1400 words in English or German (Deadline 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021): 40% of the final grade
- Plagiarism will lead to failing an assignment

### **Language requirements:**

The course requires a high level of German (at least B2) and a middle level of English (B1). During the seminar students are supposed to practice speaking and writing German, but in speaking are encouraged to supply missing words or phrases in English and to draw on each other for help. The course instructor will also mainly talk in German, but continuously give and explain central concepts and terms in English where necessary. Important vocabulary will be provided and trained in both languages, assignments and organizational information will always be announced in both languages.

Primary and secondary literature as well as audiovisual material will mostly be provided in German language only, but accompanied by surtitles, written lyrics or vocabulary lists where necessary. Students should be prepared to read and understand theoretical, historical and artistic texts in German. Questionnaires, tables of content, vocabulary sheets and exercises as well as online chats, boards and commentaries will be used continuously during the seminar to facilitate communication, discussion and understanding.

## **Timetable:**

### Session 1: 05.11.2020 Introduction and overview (Zoom)

In the first session we will get to know each other (previous knowledge, study paths, areas of interest, language skills), talk about organizational questions and the seminars' structure and content.

### Session 2: 12.11.2020 History, course and layout of the Berlin Wall (Moodle)

Studying diverse documentary materials and secondary literature, we will learn more about the history of the separation of Germany and of the Berlin Wall, which existed from 1961 until 1989.

### Session 3: 19.11.2020 "Keiner kommt durch, Genossen" – Propagandistic poetry and poetical propaganda from the GDR (Zoom)

Professional East German authors as well as poetry-writing soldiers and officers, whose works were published in two collections in the GDR, justified the building and the existence of the Berlin Wall in their writings and described guarding it as an honorable and responsible duty. We will read excerpts from the collections and poems by Volker Braun, Helmut Preißler and Karl Mickel.

### Sessions 4 and 5: 26.11. & 03.12.2020 "Seelen- und Grenzlandschaften" – The Berlin Wall in paintings and sketches (Moodle & Zoom)

Paintings and sketches of the Berlin Wall show how it actually divided the city, but also tell us about the consequences for people's lives and feelings. We will be studying works by eastern and western artists and talk about the differences and similarities, about recurring topics and motifs.

### Sessions 6 and 7: 10.12. & 17.12.2020 "Eine Stadt in zwei geteilt" – Uwe Johnson's novel *Zwei Ansichten* (Moodle & Zoom)

Many authors addressing the Berlin Wall wrote about people wanting to escape from the GDR and about the risks of it. Uwe Johnson, who himself had left East Germany before the building of the Wall, interviewed western escape helpers for his novel *Zwei Ansichten*, which was published in 1965. We will read excerpts from his book as well as transcriptions of his actual interviews.

### Sessions 8 and 9: 07.01. & 14.01.2021 "In diesem zerrissenen Land" – The songwriter, singer and poet Wolf Biermann (Moodle & Zoom)

At the age of 16 the artist Wolf Biermann immigrated to the GDR, believing in its ideas and ideals. Because of his critical and frank observations he was banned from appearing on stage several times and finally deprived of his eastern citizenship in 1976 – which caused a huge uproar in both parts of Germany. We will listen to his songs addressing the separation of the country and the feelings of inner conflict and read about his expatriation and its consequences.

Sessions 10 and 11: 21.01. & 28.01.2021 "Ich bin der Weggehetzte" – Works of expatriated writers (Moodle & Zoom)

Like Wolf Biermann many other critical artists left the GDR or were expatriated after 1976. We will be reading prose and poetry by authors like Thomas Brasch, Peter Huchel, Bernd Jentzsch und Ulrich Schacht (who wrote one of the very few poems commemorating an actual victim of the Berlin Wall).

Sessions 12 and 13: 04.02. & 11.02.2021 "Die Mauer im Kopf" – Peter Schneider's novella *Der Mauerspringer* (Moodle & Zoom)

Peter Schneider was one of very few western writers, who addressed the Berlin Wall even after it had already existed for more than two decades. We will read excerpts from his narration *Der Mauerspringer*, which was published in 1982 and contains realistic as well as fictional elements.

Sessions 14 and 15: 18.02. & 25.02.2021 "Die Mauer in Stücke als Souvenir" – The fall of the Berlin Wall in art (Moodle & Zoom)

In the final sessions we will be studying portrayals of the fall of the Berlin Wall in different art forms and compare them to each other. We will also read and talk about how eastern artists were involved with the fall itself and about their hopes and expectations.

Additional session (if possible; date and time to be announced): Excursion to the Berlin Wall Memorial

**Literature:**

Listed below is some secondary literature we will rely on during the seminar and which can be useful as reference books. However, every single text the participants are required to read, including all of the above mentioned primary sources, will be supplied via Moodle.

- A. Kuhrmann, D. Liebermann, A. Dogerloh: *Die Berliner Mauer in der Kunst*, Christoph Links Verlag, Berlin 2011
- K-D. Henke (Ed.): *Die Mauer. Errichtung, Überwindung, Erinnerung*, Dt. Taschenbuch-Verlag, München 2011
- H-J. Veen (Ed.): *Das Bild der DDR in Literatur, Film und Internet: 25 Jahre Erinnerung und Deutung*, Böhlau-Verlag, Köln 2015
- M. Harder, A. Hille (Ed.): *„Weltfabrik Berlin“. Eine Metropole als Sujet der Literatur*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 2010
- P. Mast (Ed.): *Einig Vaterland. „Deutschland“ – ein Thema der Nachkriegsliteratur?*, Kulturstiftung der dt. Vertriebenen, Bonn 1992
- B. Frech: *Die Berliner Mauer in der Literatur. Eine Untersuchung ausgewählter Prosa-werke seit 1961*, Ergon Verlag, Darmstadt 1992
- F. Rutzen: *Film als Spiegel gesellschaftlicher Konflikte in der DDR*, AVM-Verlag, München 2011
- F. Nentwig u.a. (Ed.): *Fallmauerfall. Grenzüberschreitungen und Grenzerfahrungen im Spiegel der Kunst*, G + H Verlag, Berlin 2009
- K. Kösters: *Geschichtsbilder. Deutsche Geschichte im Spiegel der Kunst*, Aschendorff Verlag, Münster 2014
- F. Pleitgen (Ed.): *Die Ausbürgerung. Anfang vom Ende der DDR*, Ullstein Verlag, München 2001

**Remarks:**

No matter if taught online or with live sessions, active participation of all students is absolutely essential to the course and at times everybody will be asked to supply a short comment, thought, question or an idea. Thus, be ready to always prepare the given homework assignments and to listen and talk to your fellow students with politeness and tolerance, keeping in mind that you all have different backgrounds and language skills.

To pass the course students are required to attend at least 13 out of 15 regular seminar sessions and any absences must be excused beforehand. Receiving ECTS not only requires attending but also handing in the two main assignments.