



Awkward Archives. Ethnographic encounters with Berlin histories and presents

Summer Semester 2023: 17 April– 21 July 2023

CATEGORY

Museums and Archives

COURSE STRUCTURE

2 contact hours à 45 min per week (summer semester: 14 weeks)

SCHEDULE

Time

Introductory sessions

Monday, 17.4. 16-18h

Monday, 8.5., 16-18h

Block session

Friday – Sunday, 2.6.-4.6. 10h-16h

Working together on the research project in small groups / Sprechstunde

Monday, 19.6. 16-18h

Monday, 26.6. 16-18h

Monday, 3.7. 16-18h

Place

All Mondays: CARMAH, M*straße 40/41, 10117 Berlin, Room 408 (4th floor)

Block session: CARMAH, M*straße 40/41, 10117 Berlin, Room 107a (1st floor)

COURSE LANGUAGE

This course is taught in English, including the readings.

Language requirements (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)

For the understanding of the texts and the discussions in class, language-level B2 is required. Some basic German (A2) is recommended for understanding some of the site-visits we will undertake.

TARGET GROUP

International exchange students of all subjects with a strong interest in the course topic. Berlin Perspectives courses are designed for undergraduate students. Master students may participate if their home university agrees. Regular degree-seeking students can select the course within the elective part of their study program (überfachlicher Wahlpflichtbereich üWP).

CREDITS = 5 ECTS

The Berlin Perspectives courses are offered by the Career Center as part of the elective program üWP. Registration takes place via Agnes.

All courses are accredited according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Archives do not just preserve the past, they allow for new questions about the present to emerge. They contain remnants of specific places and times, and they are the ground for new relations to spring and new connections to be made. In this seminar, we ask: Why archiving and for whom? How do archives shape societies and constitute knowledge? We will engage with "awkward archives" in Berlin – archives posing problems and causing disquieting frictions. In each of the seminar's modules, we address a particular modern ideology through a particular Berlin archive, including the following: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Colonial Neighbours Archive of SAVVY Contemporary, Naomi Wilzig Art Collection, Museum of Natural History, a database of German colonial punitive expeditions, and the Hahne-Niehoff Archive of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

This seminar will be offered as an interdisciplinary course through the Berlin Perspectives programme for international students. The seminar focuses on field visits with methodological exercises, which introduce students to diverse ways of doing research that they will build on to articulate their own research outcomes in a multimodal portfolio. Due to this cross-over set-up and work requirement, the course will have a limited number of possible participants of 10 students.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The objective of this Bachelor-level course is to familiarise students with Berlin, to allow them to explore the difficult questions that archives and archiving pose, and to get to know ethnographic methods.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

Knowledge

- Provide an overview of Berlin history through the different archives we encounter
- Compare and theorise concepts and histories of archives in general
- Understand the core theories and questions that archives and archiving pose
- Grasp elementary aspects of organisational and institutional fieldwork

Methods

- Employ basic ethnographic fieldwork methods
- Have a grasp of experimental and multimodal research designs

Academic/Transferable Skills

- Reflect critically on their own knowledge production
- Understand archiving and collecting practices and strategies

READINGS

The points of departure for the readings will be our own modular curriculum publication, which gathers introductions to the archives, a conversation with a practitioner who is responsible for the archive, a visual constellation of the archive, and exercises related to a particular ethnographic methods. Particular readings in relation to all of these different aspects are part of our curriculum as well (including factual texts on the archives themselves, introductory texts to theorising archives, texts on ethnographic methods).

ASSIGNMENT INFO

Workload and assignments

In order to be granted 5 ECTS, participants will be asked to

- actively attend all sessions (a minimum of 75% attendance is required for classroom and online sessions)
- prepare and revise the classroom/online sessions
- hand in the following **assignments**:
 - a presentation and discussion of one of the selected archives in written, visual, or auditive form and an evaluative conversation with Margareta von Oswald and Jonas Tinius

Failure to fulfil one of the mentioned components results in failure of the class.

Assessment Components

The final grade will be composed of the above-mentioned assignments.

YOUR INSTRUCTORS

Margareta von Oswald (Phd, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin/Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales) is a socio-cultural anthropologist and curator, based at the Centre for Anthropological Research for Museums and Heritage, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Her research is concerned with how people engage with difficult pasts, particularly colonial, in the present. She is currently the Curatorial Research Fellow of Mindscapes, initiated and funded by the Wellcome Trust (UK), an international cultural programme which aims to support a transformation in how we understand, address and talk about mental health. In her first monograph, *Working Through Colonial Collections. An Ethnography of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin*, she discusses the possibilities and limits of engaging with colonialism in ethnological museums. Other publications include *Across Anthropology. Troubling Colonial Legacies, Museums, and the Curatorial* (Leuven University Press, 2020, open-access, edited with Jonas Tinius) and *Engaging Anthropological Legacies* (special issue of *Museum Worlds*, 2018, edited with Henrietta Lidchi and Sharon Macdonald).

Jonas Tinius is a socio-cultural anthropologist, scientific coordinator and postdoctoral researcher in cultural anthropology in the ERC project *Minor Universality. Narrative World Constructions After Western Universalism* at Saarland University. He is an associated researcher at the Centre for Anthropological Research for Museums and Heritage, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, where he completed a postdoctoral research fellowship funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. His ethnographic research grapples with the tensions between art, migration, public institutions, and difficult heritage in Europe. He has conducted fieldwork in Germany, France, and Italy on institutionalised forms of cultural production (esp. theatres, museums, and art spaces), focusing on the reflexive agency of artistic and curatorial work. He studied Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, where he also completed his PhD. His first monograph *State of the Arts. An Ethnography of German Theatre and Migration* is forthcoming with Cambridge University Press. Publications include: *Across Anthropology. Troubling Colonial Legacies, Museums, and the Curatorial* (Leuven University Press, 2020, open-access, edited with Margareta von Oswald), *Der fremde Blick. Roberto Ciulli und das Theater an der Ruhr* (Alexander Verlag, 2020, 2 vols., edited with Alexander Wewerka), and *Minor Universality* (de Gruyter, 2023, open-access, edited with Markus Messling).

COURSE SCHEDULE

Session 1: Introduction to Awkward Archives I

In this introductory session, we will get to know each other in this class, will give an introduction to the genesis and concept of the Awkward Archives curriculum in the context of our joint fieldwork research on Berlin at CARMAH, and will split up the different topics/archives amongst students, depending on their interests. For this class, we will provide copies of the curriculum so that students can also familiarize themselves with the publication.

Session 2: To Introduction to Awkward Archives II

Students will present the different archives that they have chosen to prepare and work on for the seminar. We will work in small groups to develop first research questions about these archives for the field-visits and the student presentations in the last weeks of the seminar. Depending on the students' interests, we will adapt the assignment on how to prepare the block seminar session, and discuss the parkour of our field visit, which will include encounters with the archives' makers (e.g. develop a questionnaire, prepare other ethnographic methods, such as drawing or taking fieldnotes).

Block Session: Encountering archives and their makers

For three intense days, we will visit different archives, meet those who are responsible for them, and learn in discussion about the problems and frictions that these archives pose. In breakout sessions before, in-between, and after these archival field visits in the city, we will 1) prepare the meetings together with the students, based on their assignments, 2) develop the research questions further. Students will also develop their own "fieldwork" which will provide them with material to present the archives, or to develop an approach for presenting other instances of "awkward archives" in Berlin.

Sessions 3-5: Working in small research groups

In regular meetings, we will discuss with and advise the students in the smaller research groups, working on their chosen archives, and advise on the use of ethnographic methods and the presentation of their material for the purpose of writing/creative outputs.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Registration on Moodle (HU's e-learning platform)

in case of online sessions

- Fully functional device (laptop, tablet, PC)
- Stable internet connection
- Software: Zoom (video/audio)
- *Recommended* hardware: external headset for better sound quality

EXPECTATIONS & POLICIES

Preparation for lively discussions: be on time, have at least the required readings completed, and points in mind for discussion or clarification.

Assignments: complete all assignments according to the specified requirements on the schedule including handing them over to the lecturer.

Commitment: pay particular attention to the lecturer and respect differences of opinions in this international classroom.

Academic guidelines: Comply with academic integrity policies. Plagiarism in even a small assignment will result in failing the entire course.

Attendance policy: Students must contact their class teachers to catch up on missed work – to excuse absence please contact the lecturer.

Commentary on language and methodology for a diverse group of students

As German native-speakers with extensive experiences of academic research, learning, and teaching in France, England, and the US, we have developed an inclusive language and methodological approach. We have already initiated a bilingual international project seminar together with the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and the New School (New York), which included students from design, anthropology, art history, and sociology. We regularly offer our seminars as part of the Berlin University alliance and the Berlin Provenance Studies network, which brings students from diverse disciplinary, language, and educational backgrounds to our seminars. We have each furthermore taught in a variety of institutional contexts – art schools, vocational colleges, museums, art spaces, and universities – which confronts us on a regular basis with vastly different ways of understanding theory, methods, and research. We have an open and inclusive anti-discrimination policy, which has motivated us to leave space and time for extra-curricular counselling and pastoral care.

Since our course is aimed at BA-level students, we do not assume any prior expertise or background knowledge for the course, on archives, or anthropology. At heart, the course is explicitly designed to be taught in a variety of institutional, disciplinary, and international contexts, and serves as a basic introduction to archives, to the city of Berlin, as well as to ethnographic (qualitative) methods.

The course and its syllabus are subject to change. Last update: 5 March 2023