

Urban Gardens of Berlin: Transdisciplinary Ecologies

Summer Semester 2023: 15 April– 19 July 2024

CATEGORY

Urban Development

COURSE STRUCTURE

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

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Time

Day: Thursday, 12:15 - 13:45 c.t.

Place

Hausvogteiplatz 5-7 10117 Berlin (classroom details coming) and site-visits.

COURSE LANGUAGE

English B2

Language requirements (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)

This course is taught in English, including readings in English. For the understanding of the texts and the discussions in class, a language level B2 (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) is required. That said, 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 and encouraged to pause or clarify language used at any time so that we can move between different language and cultural modes of understanding, discussing, and thinking together. 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 may be possible, however proficiency in English is a necessary element for involvement in this course.

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).

This course embraces the wide range of cultural and academic backgrounds that students bring to the class, emphasising creative and critical reflection. There is no requirement for students to have previous familiarity with the subject, only a willingness to engage.

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

Urban Gardens of Berlin: Transdisciplinary Ecologies situates questions of planetary change through the city of Berlin as a diverse complex ecosystem, focusing on several urban gardens. Asking “what can a garden be?” the course proposes ecological thinking to engage with multiple disciplines informing the field of ecology including environmental, economic, social, political, artistic and spiritual to study relations between many human and nonhuman communities that compose each garden. The course will include on-site visits, including guided tours and talks with local organisers from each of the projects, elaborating on their practices and contextualising within local histories. Students will be supported to work autonomously and collaboratively in creative, critical, and reflective ways, embracing transdisciplinarity, and concluding the course by designing a speculative garden situated in a location within Berlin.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

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.

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**:
 - Brief individual reflection assignments throughout the semester (noted below.)
 - Mid-term Assignment: Framing a Garden.
 - Final design project presentation including visual aide and map.
 - Final personal reflection paper on personal development throughout course.

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.

The final grade will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- Communication i.e. emphasis on engagement in class discussions, site-visit participation, and exchanges within study groups: 40%
- Short Reflection Assignments (to be submitted periodically throughout the course): 15%
- Midterm Assignment 'Framing a Garden': 15%
- Garden design project in small groups: 20%
- Final personal reflection paper on personal development in course and garden design project (Format: 2-4 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman ft.12): 10%

YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Shelley Etkin is an educator, artist, herbalist and gardener. She has enjoyed facilitating the course 'Gardens of Berlin: Transdisciplinary Ecology' through the Berlin Perspectives and Humboldt Perspectives Study Abroad programs previously, since 2019. Shelley holds an M.A. in Ecology and Contemporary Performance (Finland) and a B.A. in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (USA) as well as a Permaculture Design Certificate and has been based in

Berlin since 2012. Her artistic and academic research engages with relations between bodies and lands, exploring methodologies for decolonisation and transformation of socio-ecological health.

COURSE SCHEDULE

2 hours à 45 min per week

Week 1, April 18th: Introductions & Orientations

The course begins with an opening session, to introduce ourselves to one another and orient towards the approach to transdisciplinary ecology that we will be exploring. We will revisit the gardens of our pasts, our first associations with urban gardens, and 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.

(We will address most of these materials during the first class session.)

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

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

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

Assignment: Class Map – Due April 25th

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 2, April 25th: Seeds & Soils: Gardens as Living Archives [excursion]

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. Similarly, the foundation of any garden is its soil. The growth and health of all beings and communities of that garden depend on the constitution of the soil. In turn, they generate soil through decomposition and composting processes. By looking at the many dimensions of soil and the complex interdependencies of root systems, mycelium, minerals, ancestries, histories, and more we can dive deeper into the underworld of a garden. 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.

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

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

Ettachfini, Layla (2019) "The Woman Refusing to Let Palestine's Farming Roots Die"

Grewal, Harpal Singh (2022) "How Leftover Bombs from World War 2 Became Fertilisers for Agricultural Use"

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

Week 3, May 2nd: 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 nonhumans. We will use this session to begin creating a shared class glossary, noting terms that have come up so far in our readings/discussions or in the discourses students connect with this course from their own backgrounds. This will serve as a collection from which further conversations emerge, a living document which we will return to and further develop our understandings.

Robin Kimmerer (2017): "Speaking of Nature", Orion Magazine

Robert Macfarlane (2019): "The Understory", Emergence Magazine, Issue 5

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

Assignment: Lexicon — Due May 10th

Take one specific term that has appeared in the texts we have engaged with or through our class discussions so far or a term that comes from the languages you speak. Reflect on it through your own understandings in one-paragraph. This will be shared via a platform on Moodle to create a working, living lexicon that we will continue to return to and adapt throughout the semester.

Week 4, May 9th: *public holiday — no class*

Week 5, May 16th: Excursion: 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) Audio: "Elemental lecture and heart meditation"

Assignment – Plant Meditation: After experiencing the tour and guided meditation, take time to sit with a specific plant for at least 20 minutes or more and freely write or draw an

intuitive documentation to submit via Moodle.

Week 6, May 23rd: Excursion to Floating University

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"

Week 7, May 30th: The Other Garden ~ Excursion and Guest Talk with Dr. Işıl Eğrikavuk

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 questions of (bio)diversity and who is often excluded. 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? We will travel to the UdK (University of the Arts) campus to meet the staff & student co-initiators of 'The Other Garden' a project that strives to create a bio-diverse environment by not only growing wild and immigrant plants, but also talk about topics of inclusivity and diversity, ecology, and care within practical and theoretical frameworks.

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 8, June 6th: Perceiving Gardens

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, utilising this class session to brainstorm and actively explore this possibility.

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: This assignment asks students to consider the basic elements that make a specialised environment, to perceive and describe a 'garden' not called or initiated as such in their everyday environment, with a 1-2 paragraph written text and visual.

Week 9, June 13th: Inner and Outer Relations

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. This class session will explore these intersections.

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

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 10, June 20th: Commons: Excursion to Tempelhofer Feld

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 11, June 27th: Gardens as Schools ~ Excursion to 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. We will have the chance to visit both sites and understand more about their different histories and activities.

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 12, July 4th : Social Permaculture and Environmental Racism: Guest Talk with Mojisola Adebayo

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? How can gardens be embraced as spaces of difference and multiplicity for a more just world? We will be joined by guest speaker Mojisola whose work with antiracism, permaculture, theater, climate justice and healthcare offer profound insights into these questions.

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 13, July 11th: Design Thinking

Moving towards the final design projects, we will reflect on all the different understandings of garden that we have encountered throughout this course. Students will workshop their ideas

with one another, providing 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 a 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) "Cyracle: Enginring and Bend", Garden Design Project Summer Semester 2020

Week 14, July 18th: Garden Design Presentations

Garden Design Final Group Projects: To complete the course, students will create a speculative garden design individually. Each student 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 session will have ten-minute presentation by each student, with time afterwards for questions and discussion. We will close with collective considerations about how these speculative projects could mutually support one another, share resources, or be connected.

Personal Reflection, due July 23, 2023: After completing the final garden design presentations, 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)?

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. Be willing to engage in the class in ways that suit each students' learning style and interests. Students are asked to balance listening, contributing, and reflecting critically as class activities and discussions emerge.

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

Respect and Responsibility: This class 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 guest speakers.

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.

Excursions: Site visits are a core part of this course. Students are asked to find the location and arrange appropriate time for travel, arrive on time, and be mindful of the space and each other.

The course and its syllabus are subject to change. Last update: 18. March, 2024

READINGS

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"

Goethe-Institut Washington (2018): Video: "Tempelhofer Feld"

Sophie Hardach (2022): "The Power of your Garden's Hidden Half", BBC

Merlin Sheldrake (2020): [excerpts] Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds, and Shape Our Futures, Published by Random House

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

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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

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

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

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

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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

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

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

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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

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