

HU | P S A

Humboldt Perspectives  
Study Abroad



**Fall term 2021: 6 September – 11 December 2021**

## **Topographies of Jewish Identity in Berlin in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries**

### **Instructor:**

Dr. Russell ALT-HAAKER

### **Schedule**

This course will meet weekly for the duration of the semester.

### **Time**

Tuesday, 9:00-11:30

### **Room**

tba

### **Course Level & Target Group**

Humboldt Perspectives Study Abroad courses are designed for undergraduate students. Master students may participate if their home university agrees.

### **Language requirements**

This course is taught in English, including readings in English. For understanding the texts and the discussions in class, a language level B2 (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) is required. Basic knowledge of German (A-level) is welcome, but not required.

### **Credits**

6 ECTS

### **Course Description**

Over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Berlin has been home to a heterogeneous Jewish community whose members have addressed what it means to identify as Jewish—or to be forced to identify as such—from many angles. Through essays, memoirs, poems, photographs and graphic novels, we will discuss how Jewish identity has been negotiated

against Berlin's sociopolitical landscape. In addition to mapping the literary terrain of Jewish identity in Berlin, we will pay special attention to urban sites that have played an important role in this process. This course pairs written works with a physical exploration of the city for a more detailed picture of our readings. Each week, you will be asked to visit a site to explore the spaces that feature in the texts or provide historical context for our discussions. By scratching the layers of history around us, we will also look at our own identity as elective Berliners and how we inhabit this city as members of the international community.

### **Course Objective & Learning Outcomes**

The objective of this Bachelor-level course is to equip students with a solid understanding of theoretical concepts of personal and social identity from the fields of psychology and sociology while also providing them with deep insight into important works by writers from Germany and elsewhere who explore notions of hybridized Jewish identity. Students will come away with a firm knowledge of key sociopolitical events in Germany from the past century and a half, and they will be able to situate the development of Jewish identity in German lands against these events and changes. By the end of the course, students will be able to do the following:

#### Knowledge

- Perform critical literary analysis of individual texts as viewed through specific prisms
- Understand, describe and identify key factors that contribute to the construction of identity
- Provide a detailed overview of the sociopolitical developments in Berlin and Germany that have contributed to changing configurations of Jewish identity

#### Academic skills

- Reflect on how style and genre influence the way in which information is presented and readers respond to it
- Possess and use critical vocabulary for discussing texts, images, and themes
- Analyze the role of historical and cultural context regarding how texts are written and received

#### Competencies

- Write discursively about literature at a more advanced level of proficiency
- Apply the latest relevant theories and concepts in independent work to engage self-reflexively with constructs of identity

### **Course Schedule**

(14 weeks, 3 hours à 45 min. per week)

#### **Week 1**

Content/topic: Introduction to the course

Discussion of expectations / Seeing Berlin's cityscape as a **palimpsest**, as a text, and as a site of future and past projection.

Required Reading: Syllabus, view images from Shimon Attie's series *The Writing on the Wall*, especially "Mulackstraße 37"

Group activity / assignment: In-class discussion of the tenets behind theories of personal vs. social identity

## **Week 2**

Content/topic: Basics of Jewish identity and assimilation

Discussion of factors that contribute to Jewish identity. Examination of Jewish emancipation in Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and assimilation of German-Jewish bourgeoisie in the Wilhelmine era.

Required Reading: de Lange – “The Jews in the world” pp. 1-25; Benjamin – Selections from *A Berlin Chronicle* pp. 5-7 (“I have long, indeed for years,” to “...and you went out with steps that nodded to the frozen ground”); 25-26 (“Language shows clearly that memory” to “and in the old ones delve to ever-deeper layer”); 52-53 (“In one of the streets” to “...it was later to render to my awakened drive”); 56-57 (“Anyone can observe that the duration” to “decades have passed between the seconds in which I think of it”); 59-60 (“The *déjà vu* effect has often been described” to end of text)

Group activity / assignment: Reading guide, journal response

**Site visit:** New Lake (Neuer See) in Tiergarten

## **Week 3**

Content/topic: Class concerns

Discussion of the supposed isomorphism of space, place, and culture. Examination of Roth’s journalistic observations of the city during the Weimar era and the differences between neighborhoods and social classes (bourgeoisie vs. immigrants and working class in the Spandauer Vorstadt/Scheunenviertel)

Required Reading: Gupta and Ferguson – “Beyond ‘Culture’: Space, Identity, and Politics of Difference” pp. 33-51; Roth – “The Kurfürstendamm” (1929) pp. 147-50; Goebbels – “Around the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church” (1928) pp. 338-40

Group activity / assignment: Reading guide, journal response

**Site visit:** Stroll down the Ku’damm (around U-Bahnhof Kurfürstendamm)

## **Week 4**

Content/topic: Immigration

Discussion of the so-called *Ostjude* (Eastern European Jew) and Berlin as a destination or layover for Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. Examination of linguistic differences (German vs. Yiddish).

Required Reading: Bergelson – “Among Refugees” pp. 21-44

Group activity / assignment: Reading guide, journal response

**Site visit:** Max-Beer-Straße 5, formerly the site of das Jüdische Volksheim in the 1910s and 1920s

## **Week 5**

Content/topic: Warning signs

Discussion of the response by German society and German Jews to the rise of the Nazi regime in the 1930s. Examination of satire as a genre and the notion of boundaries in defining otherness.

Required Reading: Tucholsky – “Herr Wendriner Under the Dictatorship” pp. 56-59; Tucholsky – “The Creed of the Bourgeoisie” pp. 60-62

Group activity / assignment: Reading guide, journal response, discussion forum (presentation of a satirical program of publication from students’ own countries/language of origin to compare them with Tucholsky’s use of satire)

**Site visit:** Bebelplatz – memorial of the Nazi book burnings in May 1933

## **Week 6**

Content/topic: Rise of National Socialism

Discussion of life for German Jews during the first years of the Nazi regime and coping techniques in the Jewish community.

Required Reading: Deutschkron – Chapters 1-4 from *Outcast: A Jewish Girl in Wartime Berlin*

Group activity / assignment: Reading guide, journal response, discussion forum (our reading for this week concludes with the pogrom known in English as the Night of Broken Glass [German: *Reichspogromnacht, Reichskristallnacht*]. Research online newspaper archives from your country/language of origin to find articles from the November 1938 that report on the Night of Broken Glass and present them to your peers. That way we can see how the world understood the state-sanctioned pogrom against Jews in Germany as it occurred and consider the [lack of] response by most foreign governments.)

**Week 7:** Further exploration of Inge Deutschkron’s survival in Berlin during the Second World War

Excursion: Museum Otto Weidt’s Workshop for the Blind (Rosenthalerstr. 39 – 10178 Berlin, in the Hackesche Höfe)

Guided tour of the museum where last week’s writer, Inge Deutschkron, worked in the 1940s.

## **Week 8**

Content/topic: Deportation

Discussion of the author’s forced reckoning with Jewish identity as a child due to Nazi racial policies and her deportation to concentration and death camps. Examination of the role of genre and myth (compared with the memoir of Deutschkron).

Required Reading: Edvardson – Memoir *Burned Child Seeks the Fire*

Group activity / assignment: Reading guide, journal response

**Site visit:** Heinz-Galiski-Straße 1 (Jewish Hospital)

## **Week 9**

Content/topic: Coping with the aftermath: art and poetry after genocide

Discussion of the aporetic condition "after Auschwitz" and how survivors coped with life in a post-Holocaust world.

Required Reading: Sachs – "O the chimneys" (poem); Sutzkever – "Brandenburg Gate" (poem); Adorno – "Cultural Criticism and Society" (essay); Bak – "Adam and Eve and the Celebration of Promise" (painting)

Group activity / assignment: Reading guide, journal response

### **Week 10**

Content/topic: Reconciling Jewish identity in post-war (West) Germany

Discussion of one woman's reflections on growing up in West Germany after the Second World War and the possibility of a German-Jewish identity in post-war society. Exploration of societal pressure to perform Jewish identity as a way of ensuring group distinction.

Required Reading: Dischereit – "A very young girl encounters Nelly Sachs" (essay); Dischereit – "I won't profess" (essay)

Group activity / assignment: Reading guide, journal response

### **Week 11**

Content/topic: Reconciling Jewish identity in post-war (East) Germany

Discussion of Jewish life in East Berlin and ways that East Germany addressed or erased the Nazi past.

Required Reading: Honigmann – "Portrait of Myself as a Jew" (essay) and "Novel of a Child" (prose); Barthes – *Camera Lucida* (excerpts)

Group activity / assignment: Reading guide, journal response

**Site visit:** Synagoge at Rykestraße 53

### **Week 12**

Content/topic: Leaving the legacy of the Holocaust behind?

Discussion of the struggle between individual agency and societal forces in determining a person's identity.

Required Reading: Becker – "My Way of Being a Jew" (essay)

Group activity / assignment: Reading guide, journal response

### **Week 13**

Content/topic: After trauma: a new beginning

Discussion of one Holocaust survivor's attempt to come to terms with her son's decision to leave home and move to Berlin. Examination of the rehabilitation of German identity against the many memorials in the city.

Required Reading: Katin – *Letting It Go* (graphic narrative) pp. 1-73; history of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

Group activity / assignment: Reading guide, journal response

**Site visit:** Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

## **Week 14**

Content/topic: After trauma: a new beginning

Discussion of differences in the way that survivors and their children look at and understand the past. How present is the past today and from whose perspective? Can the past ever really be “let go,” as the work’s title suggests?

Required Reading: Katin – *Letting It Go* (graphic narrative) pp. 74-148

Group activity / assignment: Close readings of the panels (discussion forum), reading guide, journal response

**In-class presentation of the final projects**

## **Assignments**

In order to be granted 6 ECTS, participants will be asked to

- actively attend all classes (a minimum of 80% class attendance is required),
- complete weekly reading guides that will steer students’ focus to key questions and considerations each week
- engage with their peers and the course instructor in substantive and meaningful dialog in several (3) virtual discussion forums
- complete weekly journal responses that are designed to develop and hone students’ textual analysis skills so they may engage with readings more critically
- complete a final project (*Jewish Places*) and in-class presentation.

## **Assessment Components**

The final grade will be composed of

- Regular attendance and active participation = 20%
- Journal responses, discussion forums, and reading guides = 40%
- Site visits = 10%
- Final project and presentation = 30%

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

## **Site visits:**

Most of the readings have been paired with a specific site within the city that you are required to visit before we discuss the reading. You will be asked to photograph the site

with your phone and send it to me electronically **before** class meets (by email to russell.alt-haaker@hu-berlin.de). The purpose of these visits is to add another dimension to the spaces and places described in the texts. They are also an opportunity for you to get to know the city and examine your relationship to it, much as the figures in the readings do. You should draw on these reflections in the journal responses (see below).

### **Writing assignments:**

**Reading guides:** For each assigned reading, I have created a reading guide with comprehension questions that you must complete and submit to me. The questions are meant to draw your attention to important aspects of the texts we read.

**\*\*\*Reading guides must be submitted to Moodle by 7 p.m. Berlin time each Monday before the session in question. Late submissions incur mandatory penalties. For each hour an assignment is submitted late on a given Monday, I will deduct 2%. For each subsequent day, I will deduct 10%. I do not accept any reading guide turned in more than one week after the original due date.**

**Journal Responses:** You will be responsible for producing weekly journal responses to the reading assignments over the course of the semester. These responses are designed for you to explore texts and themes on a regular basis. **Responses should be at least twelve sentences in length ( ≈ three ample paragraphs), though you should feel free to write as much as you like. They are due by 7 p.m. the day before our class discussion of the text. They should be submitted electronically via Moodle.** Think of these responses as short essays. The purpose of these assignments is for you to analyze the reactions you have while reading and to question, respond to, and discuss an aspect of the text that interests or perplexes you. You may also use these assignments as a space for analyzing the city as you explore it through the texts we read and the sites you visit. As the semester progresses, you are encouraged to draw connections between the text, material we have already discussed in class, and the sites assigned for you to visit. The responses will also provide me with insight into your questions, concerns, and the general reaction you have to the readings before we meet to discuss them in the classroom. I will be able to plan our limited time together effectively by looking through your responses beforehand.

**Jewish Places Project:** For this final project, you will create an entry for the website *Jewish Places* (<https://www.jewish-places.de>). At the beginning of the semester, you will be placed in groups, and your group's task is to perform research on an important site of Jewish life and learning or an important Jewish figure associated with Berlin. Once you have completed the research for your site/figure, you must synthesize the information and write an entry that will be posted on the *Jewish Places* website. The aim of this website, sponsored by the Jewish Museum of Berlin, among other institutions, is to make information about Jewish life in Germany readily available to people living in or visiting the country, among other interested parties. Because these entries will be posted online, the posts must be written with care, proofread carefully, and properly cited. They are due on the final day of class, when you will also present your findings to your peers in a short presentation. To ensure regular progress on these projects, certain milestones have been set up over the course of the semester when you must hand in an update on your group's progress, among other information. I will provide a list of these milestones and the relevant dates in week 3.

**\*\*\*All assignments are due on the day indicated in the course plan. Late assignments will incur a mandatory penalty and I do not accept any assignment turned in more than one week after the original due date.**

## Literature:

**\*\*\*All readings will be made available via Moodle with the exception of *Letting It Go*, which you must purchase or lend from a library.**

Adorno, Theodor W. "Cultural Criticism and Society" in *Prisms*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983. 17-34.

Becker, Jurek. "My Way of Being a Jew" in *My Father, the Germans and I. Essays, lectures, interviews*. Ed. Christine Becker. Trans. Claudia Johnson and Richard A. Zipser. Seagull Books, 2010. 1-15.

Benjamin, Walter. "A Berlin Chronicle" in *Reflections. Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. Ed. Peter Demetz. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1978. 3-60.

Bergelson, Dovid. "Among Refugees" in *Shadows of Berlin. The Berlin stories of Dovid Bergelson*. Trans. Joachim Neugroschel. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2005. 21-44.

de Lange, Nicholas. "The Jews in the world" in *An Introduction to Judaism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. 1-25.

Deutschkron, Inge. *Outcast: A Jewish Girl in Wartime Berlin*. Plunkett Lake Press, 2017.

Dischereit, Esther. "Ein sehr junges Mädchen trifft Nelly Sachs" in *Übungen, jüdisch zu sein*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998. 9-15. [Translation provided by Russell Alt-Haaker: "A very young girl encounters Nelly Sachs"]

-----". "Ich bekenne nicht" in *Mit Eichmann an der Börse*. Berlin: Ullstein Berlin Verlag, 2001. 21-27. [Translation provided by Russell Alt-Haaker: "I won't profess"]

Edvardson, Cordelia. *Burned Child Seeks the Fire. A Memoir*. Trans. Joel Agee. Boston: Beacon Press, 1997.

Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson. "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference" from *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1997. 33-51.

Goebbels, Joseph. "Rundum die Gedächtniskirche" in *Der Angriff. Aufsätze aus der Kampfzeit*. Trans. Randall Bytwerk. Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1935. 338-340.

Honigmann, Barbara. "Roman von einem Kinde" from *Roman von einem Kinde. Sechs Erzählungen*. Darmstadt & Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1986. 7-49. [Translation provided by Russell Alt-Haaker: "Novel of a Child"]

-----". "Selbstporträt als Jüdin" from *Damals, dann und danach*. Munich/Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1999. 11-18. [Translation provided by Russell Alt-Haaker: "Portrait of Myself as a Jew"]

Katin, Miriam. *Letting It Go*. New York: Drawn & Quarterly, 2013.

Roth, Joseph. "The Kurfürstendamm" from *What I Saw: Reports from Berlin 1920-1933*. Trans. Michael Hofmann. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 147-50.

Sachs, Nelly. "O the chimneys" in *Beyond Lament: Poets of the World Bearing Witness to the Holocaust*. Ed. Marguerite M. Striar. Trans. Michael Roloff. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998. 446-47.

Sutzkever, Avrom. "brandenburger toyr" in *poetische verk band eyns*. Tel Aviv: yoyvl-komitet, 1963. 557. [Translation provided by Russell Alt-Haaker: "Brandenburg Gate"]

Tucholsky, Kurt. "Herr Wendriner Under the Dictatorship" from *Germany? Germany! Satirical Writings: The Kurt Tucholsky Reader*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York and Berlin: Berlinica, 2017. 56-59.

## Images:

Attie, Shimon. "Mulackstraße 37" from the photographic series *The Writing on the Wall*: <http://shimonattie.net/portfolio/the-writing-on-the-wall/>



Bak, Samuel. "Adam and Eve and the Celebration of Promise," in *Adam & Eve: Recent Paintings by Samuel Bak* (exhibition catalog), eds. Destiny M. Barletta and Justine H. Chol (Boston: Pucker Gallery, 2011), cover.

## **Expectations & Policies**

Preparation for lively discussions in the classroom: 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 schedule including handing over to the lecturer.

Commitment in class: Pay particular attention to the lecturer and respect differences of opinions (classmates', lecturers, locals engaged with on the visits).

Academic guidelines: Comply with academic integrity policies (such as no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).

Attendance policy: 80% class attendance are required. Students must contact their class teachers to catch up on missed work.

Field trips: If classes involve a field trip or other external visits, these require attendance as well as appearance in time.

## **Diversity**

As an academic enterprise, a university has the responsibility to welcome and sustain multiple cultures and to promote learning and scholarship featuring multiple voices and points of view. Our international classroom is no different; it is a space that actively values diversity and it seeks to be a forum for students to engage in an exchange of different experiences, perspectives, and ways of being. Appreciating difference and practicing inclusivity are key to doing our best work. They will therefore guide our interaction. Come with an open mind, listen to one another, and engage your peers in thoughtful discussion. That does not exclude debate or disagreement. But we must remain curious, respectful, and offer reasoned arguments. Discrimination of any kind—whether based on ethnicity, national origin, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability (mental/physical), marital status, or some other characteristic—is prohibited.

## **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is not tolerated under any circumstances and will result in automatic failure of this course. If you quote someone or use another person's original ideas, be sure to provide complete citations in all instances.

## **Your Instructor**

Dr. Russell Alt-Haaker earned his PhD in Germanic Languages and Literatures from Washington University in St. Louis in 2013. His dissertation examines the use of color in representations of the Holocaust. While at Washington University in St. Louis, Alt-Haaker taught all levels of German language and literature, in addition to courses on representations of the Holocaust, for five years. Alt-Haaker specializes in research on German-Jewish literature, Holocaust literature and film, as well as National Socialist cinema. After moving to Berlin in 2010, Alt-Haaker served as a docent for the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp Memorial and Museum in Oranienburg, where he worked with human rights organizations to educate people about the history of the site and lessons that are still relevant to society today. Alt-Haaker began lecturing at

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in 2018. He also serves as a product manager for a Berlin-based academic publishing house.

The course and its syllabus are subject to change.

Last updated: *14 December 2020*