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Humboldt Perspectives
Study Abroad



Fall term 2021: 6 September – 11 December 2021

Gardens of Berlin: Transdisciplinary Ecology

Instructor

Shelley Etkin

Schedule

weekly

Time

Monday, 12:30-15:00

Room

tba

This course includes several site excursions to the garden projects we will study. Please note that two of the sessions (weeks 4 and 5) are scheduled as double sessions to allow for ample time at those sites. Class sessions are discussion based and will take place in presence or digitally depending on the situation and decision of the Humboldt International Campus.

Course Level & Target Group

Humboldt Perspectives Study Abroad courses are designed for undergraduate students.

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

Language requirements

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 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 may be possible, however proficiency in English is a necessary element for involvement in this course.

ECTS

6 ECTS

Course Description

Gardens of Berlin: Transdisciplinary Ecology 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?" this 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. 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 practices and contextualized with multi-media materials. In-person site visits or excursions may be included as the situation allows. Students will be supported to work autonomously and collaboratively in creative, critical, and reflective ways, embracing transdisciplinarity, concluding the course by designing a speculative garden.

Course Objective & 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.

Course Schedule

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

Week One: **Introductions & Orientations**

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. We will explore different forms of maps and cartographical mark-making to consider them as forms of story-telling.

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 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: **A Common Place: 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 Three: **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. 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.

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*

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

Week Four: **Climate Care: Excursion to Floating University (double 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. During this longer session, students will also have time to meet with their 'micro-climate' study group who will also be collaborators on the final design projects. These groups will begin by reflecting on notions of 'care' amongst themselves. Each group will host a roundtable discussion addressing the different kinds of 'we' gardens may centralise and provide for, focusing on one of the texts provided.

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*

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 Five: **Ecology's 'oikos': Excursion to EWERK (double 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 center in Luckenwalde, producing 'kunststrom/'art electricity.' This will allow us to address the relationship between urban and rural areas, access to resources, economic models and regenerative, self-sustaining approaches to ecological projects.

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

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

Week Six: **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 explore possible applications of this mode of perception through a group walk around the university area.

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

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 Seven: **Gardens as Schools: Excursion to Prinzessinnengarten**

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 a guided tour with a member of the collective as well as the opportunity for some hands-on learning.

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 Eight: **Excursion: The Green Library**

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. While there, we will dig deeper into various notions of the commons and its role in relation to different social/cultural contexts, engaging with meaningful intersectional perspectives proposed in these readings. 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? Furthermore, what does it mean for this 'we' to include more-than-humans? How does this expand our understanding of commons? Of ownership and belonging? Of stewardship?

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*

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 Nine: **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

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 Ten: **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) Video: "Tour of the Impossible Forest" & 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 Eleven: **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) "Cyrcl: Enginning and Bend", *Garden Design Project Summer Semester 2020*

Week Twelve: Garden Design Presentations

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 class session will be for ten-minute presentation by each group, including time for questions and discussion. Depending on the number of students participating, we may take extra time for the presentations during the class session in week 13 as well. We will close with collective considerations about how these speculative projects could mutually support one another, share resources, or be connected.

Personal Reflection: 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)?

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 several short individual assignments throughout the course, including a mid-term creative task and a final personal reflection essay.

- Engage with their 'microclimate' study group, which will be assigned into groups of three or four students.
- Complete a final garden design project with this study group and present it to the class.

Assessment Components

The final grade will be composed of

- 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 (Format: 2-4 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman ft.12): 10%

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

Expectations & Policies

Engagement and Accountability to the Class Culture: Be on time, complete the required readings and 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 schedule including submission 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.

Academic guidelines: Comply with academic integrity policies (such as no plagiarism or cheating.)

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

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 while keeping social distancing.

Your Instructor

Shelley Etkin is an educator, artist, and gardener. She has enjoyed facilitating this course through the Berlin Perspectives program since 2019. Shelley holds an M.A. in Ecology and Contemporary Performance (Finland) and a B.A. in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (USA) and has been based in Berlin since 2012. Her artistic and academic

research explores relations between bodies and lands, exploring methodologies for decolonisation and transformation of socio-ecological health.

The course and its syllabus are subject to change.

Last update: 25.11.2020