

HU | P S A

Humboldt Perspectives
Study Abroad



Fall term 2021: 6 September – 11 December 2021

Berlin encounter – reading and writing the city

Instructor

Dr. des. Anna Katharina NEUFELD

Schedule

weekly

Time

Thursday, 12:30-15:00

Room

tba

Course Level & Target Group

Humboldt Perspectives Study Abroad courses are designed for undergraduate students. The course is intended for students who are interested in approaching Berlin from a literary and cultural-historical perspective. Required readings are therefore obligatory. An interest in literary theory is of advantage but not necessary. Students should enjoy long walks and have pleasure in writing.

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.

Credits

6 ECTS

Course Description

What colour has Berlin asks the German author David Wagner and alludes to Berlin's manifold corners and "Kieze", that reveal the cities potential and charm to walk through. Berlin is a multilayered space that withholds a special concentration of chronicles and memories,

narratives and myths. Numerous writers and film makers have tried to capture this heterogeneity, presenting its visibilities and invisibilities and staging Berlin in diverse ways. In the seminar we want to access Berlin by two approaches. On the one hand, we want to enter the city via texts and films, following the many ways writers and film makers have seen and experienced Berlin. The attempt to read the city through the eyes of the protagonists, narrators or cameras gives us the opportunity to walk through different historical periods, imagine various perspectives and reflect these regarding the question: Was and is that Berlin? On the other hand, the course aims to expand these perceptions with our own views and experiences. Becoming a flaneur ourselves, we want to observe and encounter the urban space. Taking up excursions to a number of places and scenes we have read about, the students are assigned to write short essays on their observations, including the 'knowledge' they took from the readings we do in class.

Course Objective & Learning Outcomes

The objective of this Bachelor-level course is to equip students with an in-depth understanding of how city spaces are shaped by storytelling. Further it is supposed to provide an approach in how to acquire knowledge about Berlin, while critically reflecting the perspective and the media in which it is conveyed. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

Knowledge

- Understand the multilayeredness of urban spaces i.e. Berlin
- Obtain an insight into Berlin's cultural background
- Comprehend the interconnectedness of the different narratives the city provides
- Understand that cities are never accessible as a whole

Academic/Transferable Skills

- Discuss what happens, if borders of fact and fiction are blurred
- Discuss if authenticity is authentic
- Analyze in what way categories as class, race, gender, genre and media play a role in seeing and writing the city.

Competencies

- Connect obtained information with own experiences and transform this into an individual understanding of the city
- Discuss questions around what is fact and authentic and what is fiction
- Collect and trust own observations

Course Schedule

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

Week 1

Content/topic: **Introduction**

Assignment:

- Hana Wirth-Nesher: *City Codes: Reading the modern urban novel*. Cambridge 1996. [excerpts]
- Rose, Margaret A.: „The Berlin flaneur: from Heine to Benjamin and Hessel“. In: Margarte A. Rose (ed.): *Flaneurs & Idlers*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2007. Pp. 45–55.

Group activity / assignment: 'a sort of paper chase'

Week 2

Content/topic: **Berlin around 1900**

Required Reading: Walter Benjamin: *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (1938) [excerpts]

Group activity: DISCUSSION 'flaneur' / walking, reading and writing the urban

Week 3

Content/topic: **Berlin around 1900**

Required Reading: Theodor Fontane: *On Tangled Paths* (1888)

Group activity / assignment: DISCUSSION fact or fiction

Week 4

Content/topic **Berlin around 1920/30**

Required Reading:

- 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.
- Franz Hessel: *Walking in Berlin. A Flaneur in the Capital*. (1929) [excerpts]

Group activity / assignment: EXCURSION from Nollendorfplatz to Savignyplatz

Week 5

Content/topic: **Berlin around 1920/30**

Group activity / assignment: SCREENING Burhan Qurbani (director): *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (2020)

Week 6

Content/topic: **Berlin around 1920/30**

Required Reading:

- Christopher Isherwood (1939): "Goodbye to Berlin". In: ---: *The Berlin Stories*. New York 2008, pp. 207–226.
- Eveline Kilian: "'The mystery-magic of foreignness': Mr. Isherwood Changes Places." In: Eveline Kilian / Hope Wolf (ed.) *Life Writing and Space*. London: 2016, pp. 89-104.

Group activity / assignment: DISCUSSION Life Writing and Space

Week 7

Content/topic: **Berlin around 1930**

Required Reading: Erich Kästner: *Emil and the detectives* (1929).

Group activity / assignment: DISCUSSION capital Berlin and looming doom

Week 8

Content/topic: **Berlin around 1970**

Required Reading/Hearing:

- Dylan Jones: *David Bowie. A Life*. London 2018. pp. 250–252/262–281.
- David Bowie – Berlin Trilogy: *Low / Heroes / Lodger*

Group activity / assignment: SCREENING in parts Bob Fosse (director): *Cabaret* (1972) & DISCUSSION Bowie, Cabaret and Berlin

Week 9

Content/topic: **Berlin around 1970**

Group activity / assignment: EXCURSION Potsdamer Platz / Kulturforum / Tiergarten

Week 10

Content/topic: **Berlin around 1980**

Required Reading: Judith Schalansky (2018): "Palace of the Republic". In: ---: *An Inventory of Losses*, translated by Jackie Smith. Berlin 2019. pp. 209–224.

Group activity / assignment: EXCURSION Humboldt-Forum / Museums Island

Week 11

Content/topic: **Berlin around 1990**

Group activity / assignment: SCREENING Wolfgang Becker (director): *Goodbye Lenin* (2003)

Week 12

Content/topic: **Berlin around 2000**

Required Reading: Chloe Aridjis: *Book of Clouds*. London 2009 [excerpts]

Group activity / assignment: EXCURSION Alexander Platz / Hackescher Markt / Friedrichstraße

Week 13

Content/topic: **Berlin around 2010**

Required Reading: Jessica J. Lee: "Summer". In: Jessica J. Lee: *Turning. Lessons from Swimming Berlin's Lakes*. London 2017, pp. 3–21.

Group activity / assignment: mapping Berlin, perspectives and experiences

Week 14

Content/topic: **Goodbye Berlin**

Group activity / assignment: Final presentations & Rap up

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),
- Reading of the required texts
- active oral participation
- (weekly) assignment of short essays
- single and group presentations

Assessment Components

The final grade will be composed of

- Response in class
- (weekly) assignments of essays
- presentations

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

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.

Your Instructor

Dr. des. Anna Katharina Neufeld is a freelance curator and lecturer. She studied English and German at Humboldt-University Berlin and holds an M.A. (2004) and PhD (2020) in Literature and Cultural Studies from the Humboldt-University Berlin. She was a Research Fellow at the *Evangelische Studienwerk Villigst* (2015–2019). She has been teaching a variety of courses; among others at the *HUWISU* (since 2016), *Vielfalt der Wissensformen* and the *Institut für Kulturwissenschaft* (WS 13/14) and at the *Filmuniversität Babelsberg Konrad Wolf* (WS15/16–WS 17/18).

She has further worked for several smaller galleries and cultural institutions, the *International Literature Festival Berlin* (2005–2008), the *German Historical Museum Berlin* (2007–2008), as well as in the *Jewish Museum Berlin* (2006).

Her focus and study on narrative medicine, the present discourse on death and dying, as well as her research and experiences in museology and space open her lectures for interdisciplinary approaches. These are enriched by her interest in alternative forms of teaching and presentation.

The course and its syllabus are subject to change.

Last update: **14 December 2020**