

# HU | P S A

Humboldt Perspectives  
Study Abroad



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

## **Surveillance – The Stasi and Contemporary Culture**

### **Instructor**

Dr. Betiel WASIHUN

### **Schedule**

weekly

### **Time**

Tuesday, 12:30-15:00

### **Room**

tba

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

Undergraduate students of all subjects with an academic background and a strong interest in the various aspects of Culture, Literature, Film and Visual Arts, as well as Surveillance Studies.

### **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 does it mean to live in a surveillance society? How does the digital age challenge questions revolving around privacy, individuality and freedom? When does surveillance as care tip over into surveillance as control? And how does the Stasi system of vigilance

prefigure contemporary surveillance culture? This course will on the one hand examine the impact of surveillance on society by looking at the multifaceted ways technologies, societies and the arts interact; and on the other hand reflect on surveillance in a totalitarian context while comparing observation techniques in the GDR with contemporary surveillance methods. We will also explore how surveillance is represented in contemporary literature, film and popular culture. The course will map out important themes with regards to surveillance and its repercussions (e.g. visibility, identity, privacy and control). The course provides an overview of the interdisciplinary field of surveillance and covers the latest research in the following major areas: 1. Relationship between surveillance, power and social control; 2. Histories of Surveillance: GDR and the Stasi 2. The concept of privacy; 3. Surveillance in the arts and popular culture.

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

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

- understand the origins of surveillance in contemporary society
- be familiar with the observation methods of the Stasi
- critically assess the changing social processes in surveillance culture
- employ surveillance theories
- examine the effects of surveillance on individuals and cultural production through analysing novels and films

### **Course Schedule**

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

#### **Week 1**

Content/topic: Introduction to "Surveillance Studies" and course outline

Required Reading<sup>1</sup>:

- Lyon, David. "The Watched World Today", pp. 11-24.
- Lyon, David. "Surveillance Studies. An Overview", *Surveillance Studies. A Reader*, edited by Torin Monahan and David Murakami Wood, OUP 2018, pp. 18-22.
- Staples, William G., "Everyday Surveillance: Vigilance and Visibility in Postmodern Life", *ibid.* pp. 14-18

Assignment: Summarize both texts from Lyon, highlighting his definition of surveillance

#### **Week 2**

Content/topic: Histories of Surveillance I: Understanding the GDR.

Excursion (pandemic permitting): **DDR Museum Berlin** GmbH Karl-Liebknecht-Straße 1 10178 Berlin-Mitte. Questions will be distributed prior to the museum trip.

**Alternatively**, there will be a multi-media introduction into GDR culture.

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<sup>1</sup> A Reader will be provided.

Assignment: Individual mini-presentations (max. 5 min) on the basis of the pre-distributed questions on GDR society

### **Week 3**

Content/topic: Histories of Surveillance: Cold War-Era – *The Lives of Others*

Viewing before class: *The Lives of Others*, Dir. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006, film (available online)

Group Activity: What makes surveillance totalitarian? Discuss with reference to the film and produce videos or podcasts

### **Week 4**

Content/topic: Histories of Surveillance III: Documenting Surveillance – The Stasi Files

Required Reading:

- Funder, Anna. "Stasiland. Stories from behind the Berlin Wall", *Surveillance Studies. A Reader*, pp. 83-88.
- Darnton, Robert. "The Stasi Files" (see reader)

Excursion (pandemic permitting): **Stasi Museum**, Ruschestraße 103 "Haus 7", 10365 Berlin. Questions will be distributed prior to the museum trip.

**Alternatively**, there will be a multi-media introduction into Stasi practices and files

Assignment: Individual mini-presentations (max. 5 min) on the basis of the pre-distributed questions on the Stasi

### **Week 5**

Content/topic: Histories of Surveillance IV: What's New about the 'New Surveillance

Required Reading:

- Marx, Gary T. "What's New about the 'New Surveillance?' Classifying for Change and Continuity", *Surveillance Studies. A Reader*, pp. 22-27
- Weller, Toni. "The information state: An Historical perspective on surveillance", pp. 57-63

Assignment: Write short essay (800-1000 words); topics to be discussed

### **Week 6**

Content/topic: Surveillance Theories I: Panopticon and Societies of Discipline and Control (Michel Foucault; Gilles Deleuze)

Required Reading:

- Bentham, Jeremy. "Panopticon Or: The Inspection House"
- Foucault, Michel. "Panopticism" (from *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*)
- Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript on the Societies of Control"

Assignment: Mini-presentations (5 min); topics to be provided in due course

**Week 7**

Content/topic: Surveillance Theories II: Corporate Surveillance and Surveillance Capitalism (Shoshana Zuboff)

Required Reading:

- Zuboff, Shoshana. "Big other: surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization" (2015)

Group Activity: Organize a panel discussion on "Surveillance Capitalism – Pros and Cons"

**Week 8**

Content/topic: Surveillance Theories III: Liquid Surveillance (Davin Lyon and Zygmunt Bauman)

Required Reading:

- Bauman, Zygmunt, and David Lyon. *Liquid Surveillance. A Conversation*. Polity, 2013 (selected excerpts).

Assignment: Short essay on "'Liquid Surveillance' – what is it?"

**Week 9**

Content/topic: Surveillance Theories IV: Surveillant Assemblage (Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson)

Required Reading:

- Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard v. Ericson: "The Surveillant Assemblage" (*Surveillance Studies. A Reader*, pp. 47-51)

Group Activity: Think of examples of what Haggerty and Ericson call "Surveillant Assemblage" and depict them accordingly to present them in the following class session

## **Week 10**

Content/topic: Surveillance Theories V: "The Viewer Society"

Viewing before class: *The Truman Show*, Dir. Peter Weir, 1998, film

Required Reading:

- Mathiesen, Thomas. "The Viewer Society. Michel Foucault's 'Panopticon' revisited"

Assignment: Essay: Explain Mathiesen's concepts of the "Viewer Society" and its representation in *The Truman Show* (800-1000 words)

## **Week 11**

Content/topic: Dystopian Novels: Understanding the genre

Required Reading:

- George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, pp. 3-31
- Mike Nellis: "Since Nineteen Eight-Four: Representations of Surveillance in Literary Fiction" (*Surveillance Studies. A Reader*, pp. 394-398)

Assignment: Essay: Big Brother is watching you – Surveillance in Orwell's *1984*? (800-1000 words)

## **Week 12**

Content/topic: Surveillance Capitalism, Privacy and Fiction I

Required Reading:

- Dave Eggers's novel *The Circle* (2013; selected excerpts)
- Taddicken, Monika. "Privacy, Surveillance, and Self-Disclosure in the Social Web. Exploring the Users's Perspective via Focus Groups"

Assignment: Essay: How does Zuboff's concept of Surveillance Capitalism apply to *The Circle*? (800-1000 words)

## **Week 13**

Content/topic: Surveillance Capitalism, Privacy and Fiction II

Required Reading:

- Warren's and Brandeis's essay "The Right to Privacy" (see reader)
- Weber, Rolf: "How Does Privacy Change in the Age of the Internet" (see reader)

Viewing before class:

- *We Live in Public* (2009), Dir. Ondi Timoner, 2009, documentary (available online)

Group Activity: Exchange ideas and opinions via online discussion forum on "Privacy and Self-exposure in the Digital world" and summarize them to present in class.

**Week 14**

Content/topic: The Post-Panoptic Phase

Required Reading:

- Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010, selected excerpts)
- Bauman, Zygmunt, and David Leon. "Liquid Surveillance as Post-Panoptic"
- Wood, David Murakami. "Vanishing Surveillance: Ghost-Hunting in the Ubiquitous Surveillance Society"
- Bauman, Zygmunt, and David Leon. "Liquid Surveillance as Post-Panoptic"

**FINAL PAPER (2000 words)**

**Assignments**

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

- actively attend all classes (a minimum of 80% class attendance is required),
- regularly hand in written assignments, mini-presentations and group activities
- final paper

**Assessment Components**

The final grade will be composed of

- participation
- the portfolio of weekly assignments and the final paper.

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: 75% 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. Betiel Wasihun** is a Research Associate and Lecturer at the Institute for Philosophy, History of Literature, Science and Technology at the TU Berlin and currently conducts research on surveillance and its cultural and literary manifestations. Before coming to the TU Berlin, she was a Fellow of Lincoln College and a member of the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages at the University of Oxford. She holds an M.A. (2005) and PhD (2009) in German Studies from the University of Heidelberg and was also a Research and Teaching Fellow at the German Department of Yale University (2006-2008).

Please note that the course and its syllabus are subject to change.  
Last *update*: 30.11.2020