

Constructing History: The Berlin Wall on Screen, Paper and Display

Fall term 2022: 5 September – 9 December 2022

CATEGORY

History

COURSE STRUCTURE

3 contact hours à 45 min per week (14 weeks)

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Time

Day: Thursday, 12.30 – 3.00 pm

Place

t.b.a.

COURSE LANGUAGE

English

Language requirements (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)
English B2

TARGET GROUP

The course welcomes international exchange students of all subjects and areas of study with a strong interest in the course topic, who want to gain academic knowledge as well as some practical experience in the field of culture and history. Humboldt Perspectives Study Abroad courses are designed for undergraduate students, but Master students may participate if their home university agrees.

The course requires a high level of spoken and written English. Students should be prepared to read and discuss academic as well as fictional texts in English and to regularly work in groups or be partnered with a fellow student to complete a task and present the results. They should also be willing to not only attend the sessions at university but the planned excursions, which are essential to the course and thus mandatory.

CREDITS = 6 ECTS

All courses are accredited according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Registration on Moodle (HU's e-learning platform)

in case of online classes

- 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.

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

Commitment: pay particular attention to the lecturer and respect differences of opinions (classmates', lecturers).

Academic guidelines: Comply with academic integrity policies (such as no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical) especially the academic honor code and the student code of conduct.

Attendance policy: Students must contact their class teachers to catch up on missed work – to excuse absence please contact the lecturer.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

If you know where to look, you can still find traces of the Berlin Wall even today, more than 30 years after its fall and the reunification of Germany. Not only in the urban image of Berlin but in society, politics, and culture all around the globe. Hollywood Movies such as *Bridge of Spies* and *Atomic Blonde* continue to address the iconic quality of the Wall being a symbol for the cold war, while original segments of the Wall have been turned into monuments and put on display worldwide. What constitutes this continued interest? How has the Wall been interpreted in art? What was it like to live in a divided city? And what is still left of it in Berlin? The seminar will introduce books and movies portraying the Berlin Wall and include several excursions to memorials and museums, even offering a practical glimpse into the world of museum communication. We will reflect about connections between sociopolitical developments and art and discuss history as a mirror and construct of the present.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The course will teach about the history, development, and significance of the Berlin Wall within a national and global context, about its consequences for the city and for people's lives. It will analyze fictional as well as non-fictional portrayals of the Berlin Wall from past and present, discuss their differences and meanings and thus explore how history is no unchangeable constant but continuously being constructed anew, reflecting not only individual opinions and memories but generational and social developments at large. Students will learn and/or practice key skills required for independent academic work as well as basic skills in the field of museum communication.

Practical Knowledge

- Culture and history of Germany and Berlin in the 20th century
- Sociopolitical conditions and developments in East and West Germany during the cold war
- Purpose, development, layout, and history of the Berlin Wall
- Literary, cinematic and museal portrayals of the Berlin Wall from past and present
- Places of Remembrance and Exhibitions in Berlin
- Academic, political, and aesthetic vocabulary

Transferrable Skills and Competencies

- Identifying, reflecting on, and discussing issues of aesthetics and the possible connections and interferences between art, society, and politics
- Analyzing and interpreting different works of art and their relation to reality
- Researching, selecting, and collecting secondary literature
- Assessing, challenging, and quoting primary and secondary materials
- Developing and formulating adequate scientific questions
- Abstracting and summarizing information
- Identifying and focusing on central ideas
- Designing and performing museum tours
- Conducting and moderating interviews and discussions

READINGS

- Uwe Johnson: *Two Views*, Penguin Books, London 1971 (English translation of *Zwei Ansichten*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1965)
- Peter Schneider: *The Wall Jumper. A Berlin Story*, University of Chicago Press 1998 (English translation of *Der Mauerspringer*, Luchterhand, Darmstadt 1982)

- Aleida Assmann: *Shadows of Trauma. Memory and Politics of Postwar Identity*, Fordham, New York 2016 (English translation of *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, C.H.Beck, München 2006)
- Aleida Assmann: "Four Formats of Memory: From Individual to Collective Constructions of the Past", in: *Cultural Memory and Historical Consciousness in the German-Speaking World Since 1500*, Edt: Christian Emden and David Midgley, Peter Lang, Bern 2004
- Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree, Jay Winter (Edt.): *Performing the Past. Memory, History, and Identity in modern Europe*, Amsterdam University Press 2010
- Nick Hodgkin, Caroline Pearce (Edt.): *The GDR remembered. Representations of the East German state since 1989*, Camden House, Rochester 2011
- Arthur McAdams: *Germany Divided. From the Wall to Reunification*, Princeton University Press 1993
- Philip Broadbent, Sabine Hake (Edt.): *Berlin. Divided City 1945-1989*, Berghahn Books, New York 2010
- Hans-Hermann Hertle, Martin Ahrends: *The Victims at the Berlin Wall 1961 – 1989. A Biographical Handbook*, Links, Berlin 2011

ASSIGNMENT INFO

Workload and assignments

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

- actively attend all sessions (a minimum of 75% attendance is required for classroom/online sessions and excursions)
- prepare and revise the classroom/online sessions
- prepare the following **assignments**:
 - a guided tour through a memorial or museum for your fellow students (group work; written concept with key points and oral presentation)
 - a page for a guidebook about the Berlin Wall with pictures and short text passages with key information (approx. 400-500 words)
 - a short review on one of the novels or movies discussed in the seminar (approx. 800-1000 words)

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

Plagiarism results in failing an assignment.

Assessment Components

The final grade will be composed of the three above-mentioned assignments, each of them accounting for 25% of the final grade, with an additional 25% for active participation in class and preparation of homework assignments.

YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Carolyn Sibilak studied musicology, media science and English at Humboldt University and is currently writing a PhD thesis about art in the divided Germany at the Berlin University of the Arts. She has been working in the field of museum communication for several years, performing guided tours as well as lectures, workshops, and other interactive formats, mainly

at the Berlin Wall Memorial and the Humboldt Forum. She regularly teaches university courses about art and history for national and international students.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction and Overview

In the first session we get to know each other (previous knowledge, study paths, areas of interest, language skills), talk about organizational questions and the seminars' structure and content. We also learn more about the history and layout of the Berlin Wall and collect important vocabulary with regards to the subject matter.

Week 2: Excursion – The Allied Museum

We take a guided tour with a professional tour guide at the Allied Museum in Berlin Dahlem, which tells the history of the Western Powers in Berlin from 1945 to 1994.

Week 3: History on Display – Constructing the Past

We discuss the previous museum visit, the exhibition, and the given tour as well as the general purpose and types of exhibitions, how they shape and at the same time reflect our understanding of the past. We will also talk about what is considered important in museum communication today and how to best prepare and perform a guided tour.

Week 4: “When a City was Divided in Two” – Uwe Johnson’s Novel *Two Views* (1965)

German born author Uwe Johnson, who himself had lived in the GDR until moving to West Berlin in 1959, wrote a unique fictional document about the building of the Wall in 1961 and how it affected people on both sides. We will read excerpts and talk about the characters, their thoughts, and decisions and how Johnson’s style of writing contributes to story and atmosphere.

Week 5: Excursion – The Berlin Wall Memorial

Some of the students from the seminar take us on a tour at the Berlin Wall Memorial in Bernauer Straße, where a part of the original border strip has been preserved.

Weeks 6 and 7: The Celluloid Curtain – Western Spy Movies from Past and Present

Due to the Cold War, spy movies (often depicting the Berlin Wall) were a flourishing artistic genre especially in the 1960s, but apparently have not lost their appeal until today. We will watch and discuss movies such as *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (Great Britain 1965), *Funeral in Berlin* (Great Britain 1966), *Bridge of Spies* (USA/Germany 2015) and *Atomic Blonde* (USA 2017) and analyze how east and west are being portrayed.

Week 8: Excursion – Museum about Everyday Life in the GDR and Walk through East Berlin

First, some of the students from the seminar give us a tour through a museum about everyday life in the GDR (Museum in der Kulturbrauerei) and afterwards we take a guided walk with a professional tour guide through Oderberger Straße in Prenzlauer Berg and learn

about its rich history in connection with the Berlin Wall.

Week 9: Living in a Divided City – Interviews with Contemporary Witnesses

We will invite two (English speaking) guests to the seminar who lived in East resp. West Berlin during the time of the Wall and interview them about their experiences and memories.

Weeks 10 and 11: "The Wall in Our Heads" – Peter Schneider's Novella *The Wall Jumper* (1982)

Peter Schneider was one of very few west German writers, who addressed the Berlin Wall even after it had already existed for more than two decades. We will read his narration *The Wall Jumper*, which contains realistic as well as fictional elements, and discuss differences, similarities, and conflicts between people from east and west.

Week 12: Excursion – Tränenpalast and East Side Gallery

First, some of the students from the seminar give a tour through the museum at a former border station in Berlin Mitte (Friedrichstraße), afterwards another group of students takes us on a tour along the East Side Gallery, where the longest preserved piece of the Berlin Wall has been transformed into an open-air gallery in 1990.

Weeks 13 and 14: Wind of Change – Post-Wall Comedy Movies

At the end of the course, we will learn more about the peaceful revolution in East Germany, about the involvement of artists and the events that led up to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and talk about how the division has affected Germany until today. We will watch and discuss German movies (with English subtitles) such as *Sonnenallee* (1999), *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003) and *Bornholmer Straße* (2014) and their comedic portrayal of the GDR and the fall of the Wall.

The course and its syllabus are subject to change. Last update: 9 January 2022