Being Watched:
East Germany's Secret Police and Digital Mass Surveillance

Fall Term 2023: 4 September – 15 December 2023
(break: 23-27 October 2023)

CATEGORY
History and Politics

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

WEEKLY SCHEDULE
Time
Day: Thursday 4:00-6:30 pm
Place
t.b.a.

COURSE LANGUAGE
English

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

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.

CREDITS = 6 ECTS
All courses are accredited according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What does it mean to live in a surveillance society? How does the digital age challenge questions regarding 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. The course further encourages students to critically engage with the representation of surveillance in contemporary literature, film and popular culture and maps out important themes with regards to surveillance and its repercussions (e.g., visibility, identity, privacy and control). Furthermore, the course provides an overview of the interdisciplinary field of surveillance studies 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 (especially in the context of Berlin); 3. The concept of privacy; 4. Surveillance in the arts and popular culture.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The objective of this Bachelor-level course is to equip students with an in-depth understanding of the Stasi and the phenomenon of surveillance and enable them to read, understand and critically reflect on the most recent theoretical research in surveillance studies.

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 analyzing novels and

READINGS
Students will be provided with reading material.

ASSIGNMENT INFO
Workload and assignments

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

- actively attend all sessions (a minimum of 80% attendance is required for classroom and online sessions)
- prepare and revise the classroom/online sessions
- hand in the following **assignments**:
  - regular mini-presentations and group activities
  - weekly assignments
  - final paper (2000 words)

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

Assessment Components

The final grade will be composed of the above-mentioned assignments.

YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Betiel Wasihun is a Literary Scholar and a Cultural Theorist, as well as a Lecturer at Arden University Berlin. She was a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham (2021–2022), working on the project "Knowing the Secret Police: Secrecy and Knowledge in East-German society". She is also a Research Associate at the Institute for Philosophy, History of Literature, Science and Technology at the TU Berlin where she was employed as a IPODI-Marie Curie Postdoctoral Fellow (2017–2020). She currently conducts research on surveillance and its cultural and literary manifestations. Before reallocating to Berlin, she was a Fellow of Lincoln College (2010-15) and a member of the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages at the University of Oxford (2010-17).

COURSE SCHEDULE
14 weeks + gap week

General note: students take turns with the weekly assignments.

Week 1

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

Required reading:
- 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.

Group activity: There are cultural differences in the way people deal with surveillance. Discuss with reference to your own experience.

Week 2

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

Excursion: **Tränenpalast**, Reichstagufer 17, 10117. Questions will be distributed prior to the museum trip.

Assignment: Prepare individual mini-presentations (max. 5 min) on the basis of the pre-distributed questions on GDR society (for class in week 4). And please prepare 3 questions for the session with the Contemporary GDR witness in week 3.

Week 3:

Content/topic: Histories of Surveillance II: Getting more Insight

Class with a **Contemporary GDR witness.**

Week 4

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

Viewing in class (parts for the film) and discussion: *The Lives of Others*, Dir. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006, film

Week 5

Content/topic: Histories of Surveillance IV: Berlin Wall and Stasi Methods

Required reading:

- Funder, Anna. "Stasiland. Stories from behind the Berlin Wall", *Surveillance Studies. A Reader*, pp. 83-88.

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

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

Week 6

Content/topic: Guest lecture (tbc)

Week 7

Content/topic: Surveillance Theories I: Panopticon and Societies of Discipline (Bentham, Foucault)

Required Reading:

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

Assignment for next week: Read the Foucault texts and highlight important aspects of Foucault's panopticism theory.

Week 8

Content/topic: Surveillance Theories II: Societies of Control (Deleuze)

Required Reading:

- Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript on the Societies of Control"

Week 9

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

Required Reading:

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

<u>Group activity</u>: How does Zuboff's concept of Suveillance Capitalism apply to *The Circle*? Discuss.

Week 10

<u>Content/topic</u>: Surveillance Theories V: Surveillant Assemblage (Haggerty and Ericson) & "The Viewer Society"

<u>Viewing before class</u>: *The Truman Show*, Dir. Peter Weir, 1998, film

<u>Required Reading</u>:

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

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

<u>Group Activity in class</u>: 1) Think of examples of what Haggerty and Ericson call "Surveillant Assemblage" and depict them accordingly to present them in the following class session. 2) Discuss Mathiesen's concept of the "Viewer Society" and its representation in *The Truman Show*

Week 11

<u>Content/topic</u>: Guest lecture (tbc)

Week 12

<u>Content/topic</u>: Dystopian Novels: Understanding the genre

<u>Required Reading</u>:

- George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* pp. 3-31
- Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, pp. 1-29
- Mike Nellis: "Since Nineteen Eight-Four: Representations of Surveillance in Literary Fiction" (*Surveillance Studies. A Reader, pp. 394-398)*

<u>Group activity</u>: 1. Discuss the role of Big Brother in Orwell's *1984* 2. Shift of perspectives: Gender and Surveillance in Atwood's "speculative fiction"

Week 13

Content/topic: Stasi Infiltration of the Prenzlauer Berg Underground Literary Scene I

- Berlin writer Sascha Anderson: former collaborator (IM) of the East German Stasi

Week 14

Content/topic: Stasi Infiltration of the Prenzlauer Berg Underground Literary Scene II & Wrap-Up

- Berlin writer Wolfgang Hilbig's novel *Ich* – Observation, Experience and Imagination

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

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

in case of online sessions

- 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 in this international classroom.

Academic guidelines: Comply with academic integrity policies, especially the academic honor code and the student code of conduct. Plagiarism in even a small assignment will result in failing the entire course.

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

The course and its syllabus are subject to change. Last update: 23 March 2023