

Berlin in the Twentieth Century: A Cultural Topography

Semester:	Summer semester 2018
Course instructor:	Dr. Rositza Alexandrova (Email: rositza.alexandrova@hu-berlin.de)
Subject area:	Cultural Studies / Literature and Language Studies
Credits:	5 ECTS
Time:	Wednesday 14:00 – 18:00 c.t. (c.t. – starts at 14:15)
Room:	0323-26

Course description:

Taking Andrew J. Webber's eponymous recent study on Berlin as our updated travel guide to the physical localities of literature, art, political strife and philosophical resignation in the German capital, we will explore the constant interpretative effort that is encapsulated in a walk and consider perambulation itself as a scriptural paradigm. To this end, we will alternate our intensive seminar sessions with journeys to significant "Schauplätze der Evidenz", libraries, museums, commemorative facades and relegated clubs, but also authors' lived interiors, street corners and kiosks, as well as iconic urban areas and architectural emblems. In preparation for these field trips, we will read each time a chapter from our primer in English and decide on short German-language excerpts from the works addressed in this particular chapter, which we will then read and discuss in class. Such close textual and sometimes film analysis in this dual linguistic modality will allow us to reflect not least on theories of translation and intercultural transfer, in which accented expression, infelicities of meaning and even irritant code switching combine to strengthen and enrich the process of academic integration.

Learning objectives:

The objective of this Bachelor-level course is to equip students with an in-depth understanding of 20th century Berlin using approaches from art history, critical theory, and creative writing.

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

Knowledge

- Understand and contextualise major historical developments in Berlin's long twentieth century
- Identify key literary figures, cultural culprits, inner circles and outliers
- locate their respective legacies and topographical bearings not simply on the map but in intimately experienced topography

Academic/Transferrable Skills

- close textual analysis, academic research and reference, writing skills
- creative output and communication

Competencies

- Long Walks: Short Prose
- Mnemonically opportune meanderings of the mind

Assessment portfolio:

Students will be encouraged to keep a travel journal throughout the course, which they may use as the basis for their final project. A travelogue connecting desperate topographical benchmarks or an oral account of a clearly defined urban quarter in the style of Janet Cardiff's Berlin audiobooks are some of the suggested outcomes, the best examples of which may be featured on our seminar's blog PERAMBULATIONS.

Although walks are often construed as solitary undertakings and, in the writerly imagination, as a resolute analogue bulwark against incursions of the digital, participation is paramount in these joint class perambulations (as reflected in the grade percentile). Engagement in discussions are important not least so all may mutually benefit from the multilingual classroom.

- Regular attendance, active participation — 40%
- Presentation (no longer than 10 minutes / with questions for the audience / drawing on academic literature) — 20%
- Final research project/essay/multimedia project with written reflection etc. (Deadline: 13.06.2018 / Format: 6-8 pages / double-spaced, Times New Roman ft.12) — 40%

Language requirements:

English B2 and German A1-A2: a high level of academic spoken and written English is required for this course (at least B2). Some basic German (A-level) is recommended for some of the readings in class.

In preparation for our field trips, we will read each time a chapter from our primer in English and decide on short German-language excerpts from the works addressed in this particular chapter, which we will then read and discuss in class (a list of key terms will be provided in advance). Such close textual and sometimes film analysis in this increasingly dual linguistic modality will allow us to reflect not least on theories of translation and intercultural transfer, in which accented expression, infelicities of meaning and even irritant code switching combine to strengthen and enrich the process of academic integration.

Although English (and sometimes German) will be the spoken lingua franca, written work may be submitted in English, German, French, Italian, Russian (and several other Slavic languages).

Timetable:

The following is a preliminary schedule of our sessions. Final course materials together with the most up-to-date version of the syllabus as well as details on field trips and guest speakers will be posted on Moodle as they become available.

Session 1: 18.04.2018

READ 'Prologue: Berlin is worth a journey'

Welcome, course overview, introduction of key concepts, outline of practicalities and grading requirements. Taking stock of language abilities and personal travel trajectories, topical interconnections.

KEYWORDS Entstellung, Baustelle, Schaustelle, Stolpersteine, Kiez, (Haus)Besetzung, Weltstadt, Trümmerstadt, Wende, chronotopos, common place, Bioskop, Wirtschaftswunder

WALK to Koppenplatz to see 'Der verlassene Raum' (The Abandoned Room/Space) by Karl Biedermann and Christian Boltanski's 'The Missing House' nearby. Time permitting, 'Orte des Erinnerns' im Bayerischen Viertel

Session 2: 25.04.2018

READ 'Berlin chronicle: thresholds and boundaries'

Excerpts in German from Benjamin's *Berliner Kindheit* and Hessel's *Spazieren in Berlin*.

KEYWORDS Halle&Hof, Schauplatz, Kaiserpanorama, city of lights, Litfaßsäule, Weimar surfaces, Bannraum, Ausnahmezustand, 'Dialektik im Stillstand'

VISIT Buchhandlung Walther König for an overview of travel guides to Berlin.

Walk through Hackesche Höfe and Humboldt-Forum. Time permitting, KaDeWe

Session 3: 02.05.2017

READ 'Berlin ensemble: inhabitations and accommodations'

Watch excerpts from Peter Hadnke's *Publikumsbeschimpfung* (subtitled), read the poem "Von armen B.B."

KEYWORDS Verfremdung, Gestus, Aufhebung, 'Red Berlin', Kuhle Wampe, ante portas, Berliner Requiem, Rosa Luxembourg

VISIT Berliner Ensemble for a behind the scenes tour.

Session 4: 09.05.2017

READ 'Berlin symphonies: movements and stills'

KEYWORDS Walther Ruttmann, Maholy-Nagy's *Berliner Stilleben*, Umbo's 'Rasender Reporter', Neue Sachlichkeit, Mietkasernen, Heinrich Zille, August Sander

VISIT Bauhaus-Archiv, Mossehaus

Session 5: 16.05.2017

READ 'Berlin Alexanderplatz: alterations and reconstructions'

Excerpts from Fontane's *Irrungen, Wirrungen*

KEYWORDS Döblin, Fassbinder, Platzangst, Bildungsroman, Berolina, Plattenbau, 'House of the Electro Industry', Alex/amputations, angelus novus, Berlin-Babylon, 'Wenn Berlin Biarritz wäre'

VISIT Alexanderplatz and Rosenthaler Platz

Session 6: 23.05.2017

READ 'Berlin Wall: divisions and falls'

KEYWORDS Ingeborg Bachmann, "Ein Ort für Zufälle" (1964), Christa Wolf, 'BERLIN WIRD', Germania Anno Zero

WATCH Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* (1987)

Session 7: 30.05.2017

READ '**Berlin marathon: openings and closures**'

KEYWORDS *Lola Rennt*, Sonnenallee, ostalgie, Kutlug Ataman, 'greek love', 'Ich hab noch einen Koffer in Berlin'

VISIT Olympia Stadium, (optional) Berghain.

Literature: We will avail ourselves of all digital modes of distribution in order to make available in-class or electronically the short German primary texts which means that the only textbook students will need to independently source is our English-language primer:

Andrew J. Webber, *Berlin in the Twentieth Century: A Cultural Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Remarks:

Mobility should be no hindrance to participating in this class, and in the walks. Should you have accessibility concerns, don't hesitate to contact me at rositza.alexandrova@hu-berlin.de.

Please let me know ahead of time if you must miss a class so we could arrange for a suitable substitute or catch-up activity. Bear in mind that two unexcused absences will result in failure of the course as will, most imperatively, plagiarism of any proportion:

'The presentation of another person's words, thoughts, ideas, judgements, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.'