BERLIN PERSPECTIVES

Magical Urbanism – Visions of the Metropolis in Literature and Film

Semester: Summer semester 2019

Course instructor: Dr. Mareen van Marwyck, m.vanmarwyck@web.de

Subject area: Kultur und Gesellschaft / Culture and Society

Credits: 5 ECTS

Time: Thursday 12-14 c.t.
+ Wednesday, 29th of May, 18-20 c.t., instead of 30th of May (holiday)

Room: 0323-26 (HVT 5-7)

Course description:

The literary and cinematic reception of the metropolis is often marked by the mysterious, the uncanny and the surreal. Urban experience seems to reject and transcend a „realistic“ way of perception. Magical urbanism reflects both, the threatening aspects of modernity as well as its utopian promises. The comparative and interdisciplinary seminar explores the history of urban fantasies in Berlin and London literature and discusses its aesthetical and political implications. We will read Chloe Arjidis’ celebrated surreal Berlin novel Book of Clouds and short excerpts of Walter Benjamin’s Berlin Childhood around 1900 and Alfred Döblin’s Berlin Alexanderplatz as well as the short story The Man of the Crowd by Edgar Allen Poe in English language. In German language, we will read two short stories Von einem, der alles doppelt sah by Martin Stade and Schlüssel by Rudolph Herzog. Reflecting the cinematographic tradition, we will discuss Fritz Lang’s movie Metropolis and the Matrix trilogy by Lana and Andy Wachowski. As theoretical background, we will read excerpts from Lucy Huskinson (ed.): The Urban Uncanny. A collection of interdisciplinary studies and Enda Duffy’s and Maurizia Boscagli’s introduction to Joyce, Benjamin and Magical Urbanism. European Joyce Studies 21 (2011).
Learning objectives:

The objective of this Bachelor-level course is to equip students with an in-depth understanding of urbanism and the tradition of the uncanny, the sublime and the surreal and enable them to read, understand and critically reflect on the most recent theoretical and empirical research in the field.

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

Knowledge

- Understand, describe and identify the core theories of the urban sublime, the uncanny and the surreal.
- Provide an overview of historical developments and recent social developments in Berlin.
- Understand and identify patterns and traditions of Urban Literature.

Academic/Transferrable Skills

- Analyze and critically reflect on main theories of the uncanny, the sublime and the surreal.
- Analyze and discuss literary texts based on theories.

Competencies

- Read theoretical literature on the uncanny, the sublime and the surreal.
- Apply relevant theories and concepts in independent work to analyze urban literature.

Attendance and Assessments

- Regular attendance, active participation
- Presentation (no longer than 10 minutes)
Language requirements:

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

The course will be taught in English and German language. Most German texts will be read in English translation. Two short stories will be read in German. The presentations are given in English language, at least B1 level in English is required. The essays can be written in English or German language. At least B1 level in the chosen language is required.

The course follows a two language strategy. It will be mostly taught in English language, short parts of the discussions (five to ten minutes per session) will take place in German language. In the German discussions we will work on language skills. Key terms are provided in class. Reading the two short stories in German we will translate parts of the stories into English.

Timetable:

Session 1: 11.04.2019 Introduction

Introduction into the topic. Explanation of the syllabus and assessments. Organization of the presentations.

Session 2: 18.04.2019 Edgar Allen Poe: The Man of the Crowd

Presentation: The Flâneur as Protagonist, Group Work and Discussion of Edgar Allen Poe: The Man of the Crowd with regard to the topic of the presentation.

Reading for the lesson: Edgar Allen Poe: The Man of the Crowd

Session 3: 25.04.2019 The Urban Uncanny

Group puzzle and discussion: Lucy Huskinson: Introduction: The Urban Uncanny

Reading for the lesson: Lucy Huskinson: Introduction: The Urban Uncanny
Session 4:  02.05.2019   Alfred Döblin: *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (excerpt)

Group Work and discussion: Alfred Döblin: *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (excerpt)

Reading for the lesson: Alfred Döblin: *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (excerpt)

Session 5:  09.05.2019   Magical Urbanism

Group puzzle and gallery walk: Enda Duffy and Maurizia Boscagli: *Introduction: Joyce, Benjamin and Magical Urbanism.*

Reading for the lesson: Enda Duffy and Maurizia Boscagli: *Introduction: Joyce, Benjamin and Magical Urbanism*

Session 6:  16.05.2019   Walter Benjamin: *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (excerpt)

Group Work and Discussion: Walter Benjamin: *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (excerpt)

Reading for the lesson: Walter Benjamin: *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (excerpt)

Session 7:  23.05.2019   Fritz Lang: Metropolis (alternative date)

Presentation: The Urban Sublime

Discussion of Fritz Lang’s: *Metropolis* with regard to the topic of the presentation.

Task for the lesson: Please watch the film Fritz Lang: *Metropolis*

Session 8:  (Wednesday!) 29.05., 18-20 (no class on 30th of May (holiday))

Chloe Arjidis: *Book of Clouds*

Group Work and discussion: Chloe Arjidis: *Book of Clouds*, analysing the novel with regard to the discussed theories.

Reading for the lesson: Chloe Arjidis: *Book of Clouds*
Session 9: 06.06.2019  Chloe Arjidis: *Book of Clouds*

Group Work and discussion: Chloe Arjidis: *Book of Clouds*, analysing the novel with regard to the discussed theories.

Reading for the lesson: Chloe Arjidis: *Book of Clouds*

Session 10: 13.06.2019  Rudolf Herzog: *Schlüssel*

Presentation: Gentrification, group work and discussion of Rudolf Herzog’s *Schlüssel* with regard to the topic of the presentation.

Reading for the lesson: Rudolf Herzog: *Schlüssel*

Session 11: 20.06.2019  Martin Stade: *Von einem, der alles doppelt sah*

Presentation: Writing and authorship in the GDR, group work and discussion of Martin Stade’s *Von einem, der alles doppelt sah* with regard to the topic of the presentation.

Reading for the lesson: Martin Stade: *Von einem, der alles doppelt sah*

Session 12: 27.06.2019  Lana and Andy Wachowski: *Matrix*

Group Work and discussion of Lana and Andy Wachowski’s movie *Matrix*, analysing the movie with regard to the discussed theories.

Task for the lesson: Please view the film Lana and Andy Wachowski: *Matrix*

Session 13: 04.07.2019  Lana and Andy Wachowski: *Matrix Revolutions*

Group Work and discussion of Lana and Andy Wachowski’s movie *Matrix Revolutions*, analysing the movie with regard to the discussed theories.

Task for the lesson: Please view the film Lana and Andy Wachowski: *Matrix Revolutions*
Comparison of the discussed texts. Summary of results. Final conclusions.

**Literature:** Primary Literature


Movies

Fritz Lang: Metropolis (1927)


Secondary literature


The novel Chloe Arjdis: *Book of Clouds* needs to be bought for the course. All other texts are provided on moodle.

Remarks:

Attendance policy: 80% attendance is needed in order to pass the course; absences need to be excused and backed up by doctor’s certificate.