



<b>Course Title</b>	<b>What do Germans laugh about? – a Cultural History of German Comedy from 1945 until Today</b>
<b>Category</b>	Language, Literature & Writing
<b>Class Time</b>	<b>Session 2, July 22<sup>nd</sup> – August 16<sup>th</sup> 2019</b> <b>Track C</b> <b>Weekly schedule</b> Tuesday: 1.30 pm – 3 pm & 3.30 pm – 5 pm Wednesday: 1.30 pm – 3 pm & 3.30 pm – 5 pm Friday: 9 am – 10.30 am & 11.00 am – 11.45 am
<b>Course Level &amp; Target Group</b>	This course is designed for undergraduate and graduate students as well as for Ph.D. candidates who have a general academic interest in German culture. Our seminar investigates the complex and deep rooted relationship between German humor (if there is such a thing?) and the historical crime of the Holocaust. Students who attend this course should therefore be familiar with basic historical facts and cultural phenomena like WWII, German shame and guilt discourses, the Student Revolution, Cold War Feelings, the Reunification and the so called Welcome culture and refugee crisis. This course offers not only a theoretical but also an artistic and practical reflection on German humor and its underlying relations to the Holocaust. This ranges for example from the reenactment of comedic film scenes, the imitation of the body languages of a comedian to the acting out of humoristic subtexts. Students should not only enjoy academic but also performance related research methods and should be open to the weirdness and peculiarities of German humor and its relation to trauma, tragedy and Nazi Germany. This class is not a fun class but it is fun to analyze German humor in its strange moves. Course related departments and faculties are: German Departments, Cultural Studies, Performance and Theatre Studies.
<b>Course Language</b>	This course is taught in English, including readings and discussions in English. For the understanding of the texts and in-class-debates a language level of B2+ (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) is required.
<b>ECTS</b>	5 ECTS (45 contact hours)
<b>Instructor</b>	Dr. Susann Neuenfeldt

## Course Description

Recently, the comedy „Er ist wieder da“ („Look, who's back!“) was released to German cinema (Director: David Wnendt, 2015). The movie imagines – with historical irony – the reappearance of Adolf Hitler in contemporary, digitalized Germany, bringing the German audience to the very (!) limits of what is permissible and acceptable to laugh at.

The course departs from the grounding thesis that the Holocaust (as being committed by Germans) changed the cultural history of German humor, comedy and everyday forms of laughter in a radical and not reversible way.

This paradigmatic change has been internalized and passed on from the Nazi-Generation to their great grandchildren and has had a remarkable effect on comedic cultural texts of all kinds in literature, film, theater, TV after 1945.

Accordingly, Germany, in the aftermath of WWII and the historical crimes of the Holocaust, has therefore developed a very specific sense of humor and comedy which is not easily to relate to. In our course we will have a closer look on German comedy, which has – both in the GDR and FDR as well as in the

reunified country – produced specific formats and traditions (un/consciously) tied to the Holocaust and Nazi Germany.

Through various texts from popular culture (cinema, TV, video and stand up comedy) we will ask for the relations between what is funny for Germans and how this is related to taboos and trauma in the German culture unconscious. Of special interest are questions like: which actors (may) embody that which is humorous and transgressive for Germans and what kinds of laughter are produced in the German audience (e.g. open laughter, embarrassed laughter, hidden laughter, laughter that gets caught in one's throat)? The course's aim is to give a historical and a cultural overview of what Germans laugh(ed) about at certain times, the limits of that laughter, and the historical, political and traumatic significance of these limits.

The course also offers practical parts. In a workshop we will develop and produce small performative research units, in which we practice research methods like reenactment, imitation and improvisation. All students who'd like to engage theoretically and performatively with the special case of German comedy and humor and its underlying relations to the historical crimes of the Holocaust are very welcome to the course.

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## Course Objective & Learning Outcomes

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

- reflect on German humor at different historical times
  - to draw a relation between German humor, the Holocaust and Nazi Germany
  - to develop theoretical conclusions on West and East German and reunited forms of humor
  - to restage and reenact German humor
  - to unfold a cultural history of German humor from 1945 until today
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## Readings

**Required** – The following reading material will be handed out at the beginning of the course:

Brockmann, Stephen: The Politics of German Comedy, in: *German Studies Review*, Vol 23, No 1, 2000, pp. 33-51.

David Penner: *Can the Nazis be Funny? Can we Laugh at the Holocaust?* In: Examining Comedic representations of the Nazis and their Contexts from World War II to the Present, 2014.

Hanni Meirich: *A Laughing Matter. The Role of Humor in Holocaust Narratives*, 2013.

## Suggested

Jill Suzanne Smith: Reviving German'Jewish Comedy: Dani Levy's Family Farce GO FOR ZUCKER. In: Journal of Jewish Studies Vol. 13, No 2, 2014.

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## Course Schedule

### Week 1:

Deep Analysis of the new German genre of „Hitler-Drag“ in movies after the Millenium (e.g. “Er ist wieder da / Look who's back!”, „Der Untergang / The Downfall“)

Theorization of transgressive forms of laughter, German Comedy and its relations to the Holocaust and Nazi Germany

### Week 2:

Deep Analysis of the so called “Reunification Comedy” in the 90s (e.g. “The German Chainsaw Massacre”, “Good bye, Lenin!” and “Go Trabi Go!”)

Theorization of reunited and reuniting laughter and the role of dramatic irony

**Workshop:** Acting out Dramatic Irony in *The Lives of Others*

### Week 3:

Deep Analysis of comedies and TV-series in the 60s and 70s  
(e.g. „Ein Herz und eine Seele“, LORIOT, „1-2-3“, Jakob der Lügner / Jacob, the liar“)

Theorizing hidden and self-deprecating forms of laughter, Galgenhumor (gallow's humor) and the zero existence of comedy in the 50s

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**Field Trip:** Stand Up Comedy Scene in Berlin

**Week 4:**

Group presentation of a research project

Wrap-up % theoretical Reflection

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## Assignments

Active Participation in class discussions.

Theoretical or performative presentation on a chosen subject within the course frame carried out individually or in groups.

Short final paper

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## Assessment Components

The final grade will be composed of: In-class presentation 30%; In-class responses 20 %, class participation: 10%; final paper: 30%

A minimum of 80% class attendance is required. Failure to fulfil one of the mentioned components results in failure of the class.

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## 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, local constituents engaged with on the visits).

Academic guidelines: Comply with academic integrity policies (such as no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical), especially the academic honour code and the student code of conduct (see *FAQs* on [www.huwisu.de](http://www.huwisu.de)).

Attendance policy: No unexcused absences are permitted. Students must contact their class teachers to catch up on missed work – to excuse absence please contact the HUWISU office (80% class attendance are required).

Field trips: if classes involve a field trip or other external visits, these require attendance as well as appearance in time – transportation difficulties are never valid reasons for an excused absence.

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## Cultural Extra-curricular Activities

HUWISU offers a fine selection of interesting extra-curricular activities and aims to give all participants an unforgettable stay in Berlin. Your program includes excursions, sport activities and social gatherings providing you the opportunity to get to know the city, the university and your classmates better and to meet students from all parts of the world. The costs for these offers are included in the course fees.

Below, you find examples of previously offered cultural activities. You will be informed about the respective cultural program after your enrolment via email as well as during the course period.

Political and historical guided tours:

- **Federal Chancellery (Bundeskanzleramt):** It's the central coordination point for the entire government policy. The office is in constant contact to departments and other authorities.
- **German Parliament (Bundestag):** As the highest organ of the legislative in Germany it's elected by the German people. In practice Germany is governed by a bicameral legislature, of which the Bundestag serves as the lower house and the Bundesrat equals the upper house.
- **House of Representatives (Abgeordnetenhaus):** It's the state parliament (Landtag) of Berlin and located in the center of the reunified city. Together with the Martin Gropius Bau, the Topography of Terror and the Bundesrat, it presents an arresting contrast to the flair of the new Potsdamer Platz.
- **Topography of Terror:** A permanent exhibition with focus on the central institutions of the SS and police during the "Third Reich" and the crimes they committed throughout Europe. With the help of mostly photographic material, visitors are led through the major themes of the exhibition's five main segments.
- **Political Archive:** As the "memory" of the Federal Foreign Office it preserves the files on German diplomacy since 1867, as well as the international treaties signed by the Federal Republic of Germany

and its predecessors in title. The records are preserved, processed and made available for academic research.

#### Cultural guided tours:

- **Kreuzberg Tour:** Kreuzberg has emerged from its history as one of the poorest quarters in Berlin in the late 1970s to a cultural center of today's Berlin. A unique area and one of the hippest neighborhoods in Berlin with many bars, pubs and clubs.
- **Museum Island (Museumsinsel):** was awarded UNESCO World Heritage Status in 1999 and is an ensemble of five museums: Old Museum, New Museum, Old National Gallery, Pergamon Museum and Bode Museum.
- **Berlin Cathedral (Berliner Dom):** Berlin's largest and most important Protestant church is located on the Museum Island.
- **Daytrip to Potsdam:** Be inspired by the illustrious attractions of the UNESCO's World Heritage while underway through the city of Potsdam. Immerse yourself in the history and present of Potsdam and discover many palaces, gardens, and historic quarters such as the "Holländisches Viertel" or the "Nikolaikirche".
- **Exhibitions:** Berlin is known for its unique galleries and exhibitions, that is why we will visit at least one during the Summer University.

#### Social gatherings:

- **Welcome Get-Together:** We invite you to meet all participants as well as the HUWISU staff in a relaxed atmosphere.
- **Boat trip:** Get to know Berlin from a completely new perspective and see Berlin's famous sights while floating along the river Spree.
- **Beach Volleyball:** A fun outdoor sport activity on long warm summer evenings for those who love to play and everyone who just want to enjoy watching the others play, lying in the sand, meet friends for some drinks, or simply relax in the middle of Berlin.
- **Biergarten:** You cannot leave Berlin without having experienced a Biergarten. The perfect place to finish off your busy day with a cool "Feierabend" drink.
- **Farewell Party:** At the end of the Summer University we will come together to celebrate the exciting time with HUWISU.

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## Your Instructor

Dr. Susann Neuenfeldt studied German, English and American Studies at the Humboldt University Berlin. She did her doctoral thesis „Schauspiele des Sehens: Die Figur der Flaneurin, Voyeurin und Stalkerin“ at the Institute for American Studies on the political relations between visibility and gender.

As a postdoctoral researcher, she is currently working on a performative research project on German humor and the Holocaust, working as a director in the Berlin theatre collective Panzerkreuzer.Rotkaeppchen, partnership with HUWISU since 2012.

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Please note that the course and its syllabus are subject to change. Last update: January 2019