Being Watched : Surveillance and Selfhood in the Digital Age

25 July – 19 August 2022

CATEGORY Social Sciences, Politics & History

COURSE STRUCTURE

You will receive a total of 45 hours of academic lessons (one lesson equals 45 minutes; 15 hours per week). Lessons will comprise lectures, group work, discussion sessions, and excursions.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE (Track B)

- Monday: 9 am – 10.30 am & 11 am – 12.30 pm
- Wednesday: 9 am – 10.30 am & 11 am – 12.30 pm
- Thursday: 1.30 pm – 3 pm & 3.30 pm – 4.15 pm

COURSE LANGUAGE

This course is taught in English, including the readings. For the understanding of the texts and the discussions in class, a language-level of B2 (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) is required.

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 = 5 ECTS

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

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Learning extends beyond your course! As a participant in HUWISU, you are invited to join our cultural and social programs. We offer a fine selection of interesting extra-curricular activities that aim to give all participants an unforgettable stay in Berlin. Through excursions, social gatherings, and sport activities, we are providing you with the opportunity to get to know the city, the university, and your classmates and to meet students from all parts of the world. The costs for these offers are included in the program fee.

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*)
- German Parliament (*Bundestag*)
- House of Representatives (*Abgeordnetenhaus*)
- Topography of Terror exhibition
- Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office

CULTURAL GUIDED TOURS

- Kreuzberg Tour
- Museum Island (*Museumsinsel*)
- Berlin Cathedral (*Berliner Dom*)
- Daytrip to Potsdam
- Exhibitions

SOCIAL GATHERINGS

- Welcome Get-Together
- Beach Volleyball
- Farewell Party

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 the schedule including handing them over to the lecturer.

Commitment in class: 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: 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.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

How have surveillance technologies transformed culture and identity in post-9/11 worlds? As Jonathan Finn has stated, through digitalisation as well as public space cameras, surveillance has become a "way of seeing, a way of being" (2012). Social media users contribute by sharing their personal information in the online public domain – today's "Funopticon" (Lewis 2017) is all about self-exposure. This course will examine the impact of surveillance technology on society by looking at the multifaceted ways technologies and societies interact. We will explore how surveillance is represented in contemporary art, literature, film and popular culture. The omnipresence of surveillance jeopardizes the hard-fought enlightened right to privacy, individuality and freedom. The course will map out important themes revolving around surveillance and its repercussions (e.g., visibility, identity, privacy and control as essential elements of today's culture of surveillance). The course provides an overview of the interdisciplinary field of surveillance and covers the latest research in the following major areas: 1. Relationship between surveillance, power and social control; 2. The concept of privacy; 3. Surveillance in the arts and popular culture. The first unit of the course offers an introduction into the history and theory of surveillance and surveillance technology (e.g., close-circuit television (CCTV) in public and quasi-public spaces, biometrics, data mining, monitoring technologies in cyberspaces, workplaces and private spaces). The second unit investigates films, novels, art and popular culture (e.g., Reality Television and Social Networking Sites) that prominently address the subject. Readings will be drawn from the social sciences, contemporary fiction and popular media. Several films will be shown to facilitate critical inquiry.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

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

- understand the origins of surveillance in contemporary society.
- critically assess the changing social processes and the cultural production as repercussions of surveillance technologies.
- employ surveillance theories.
- examine the effects of surveillance on individuals, social organization, cultural production through analysing artwork, novels and films.

READINGS

You will be provided with a Reader at the beginning of the course

ASSIGNMENT INFO

In order to be granted 5 ECTS, participants will be asked to attend all sessions and to contribute to lively discussions, to prepare individual mini-presentations throughout the course and one long presentation (15 minutes), as well as to write an academic paper (2000 words) on the topics discussed in class. Submission deadline: last course day.

The final grade will be composed of a presentation (20%), final academic paper (50 %) and active participation in the class discussion and mini-presentations (30%).

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

YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Betiel Wasihun is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham, working on the project "Knowing the Secret Police: Secrecy and Knowledge in East German Society." Previously, she was an IPODI Marie Curie Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for the History of Philosophy, Literature, Science and Technology at the TU Berlin, where she is still a visiting scholar and lecturer. She is currently researching the topic of surveillance in contemporary literature. Before coming to Berlin, she was at Lincoln College and a member of the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages at Oxford University. She completed her Master degree in 2005 and received her PhD in 2009 (German Studies) from the University of Heidelberg. From 2006 to 2008, she was a Research and Teaching Fellow in the German Department at Yale University.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Part I: Histories of Surveillance and the "Watched World Today"
1. Introduction "Defining Surveillance" and course outline
2. "Surveillance and Data Protection" □ Excursion: Spy Museum
3. GDR & Stasi □ Excursion: GDR Museum
4. Surveillance now and then: Comparative Approaches

Part II: Histories of Surveillance and the "Watched World Today"
1. Surveillance Technologies and their Social Impact
2. Surveillance Theories and Key concepts: Panopticon and Societies of Discipline and Control (Michel Foucault; Gilles Deleuze); Corporate Surveillance and Surveillance Capitalism (Shoshana Zuboff); Liquid Surveillance (Davin Lyon and Zygmunt Bauman); Surveillant Assemblage (Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson)
3. Drones and Social Media
4. Changing Notions of the Private and The Public: How does Privacy change in the Age of the Internet?
5. Guest lecture by Arthur Michel Holland (Bard College, New York State): "Eyes in the Sky: Public Space as Privacy's Final Frontier"
6. Excursion Stasi Museum

Part III: Representations of Surveillance: Literature, Film, Visual Arts
1. Surveillance and Dystopian Novels
2. Dystopian literature – What is it? Understanding the genre.
3. Close reading exercises: George Orwell's 1984; Dave Eggers's The Circle (2013); Gary Shteyngart's Super Sad True Love Story (2010).
4. How is Surveillance represented on the level of content and narrative?
5. Who watches and who is watched in Surveillance narratives?
6. What is the message underlying contemporary Surveillance novels?
7. Guest lecture (tba)

Part IV: Representations of Surveillance: Literature, Film, Visual Arts
1. Screening of Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's film The Lives of Others (2006)
2. Guiding discussion question: What makes surveillance totalitarian?
3. Compare surveillance practices in a totalitarian socialist regime and the tendency towards digital totalitarianism in contemporary society. What are the differences? Are there any similiarities?
4. What does it mean to be constantly observed? Webcams, TV-Reality Shows, Social Media and Mobile Phones.
5. Guest Lecture by Karen Louise Grova Søilen (University of Copenhagen): "Resistance and Surveillance Art"
6. Guest lecture (tba)
7. Wrap-up and evaluation.

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