



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

Visual History of the GDR - 54613

Last update 03-03-2025

HU Credits: 2

Degree/Cycle: 2nd degree (Master)

Responsible Department: Cont. German Studies:politics, Soc.&Cult

Academic year: 0

Semester: 2nd Semester

Teaching Languages: English

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Dr. Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann

Coordinator Email: tobias.ebbrecht-hartmann@mail.huji.ac.il

Coordinator Office Hours: Wednesday, 12:00-14:00 (online)

Teaching Staff:

Dr. Tobias Ebbrecht Hartmann

Course/Module description:

In recent years visual history became a new and vivid discipline within the field of contemporary history. As a result of the increasing importance of visual and audiovisual media during the 20th century and after decades of debates if and how visual sources might be used for and included into historical research contemporary history is today, according to historian Gerhard Paul, "in essence historiography of media society". Evidently also the history of the GDR is to a large extent a visual history. The ideological contest between the two Germanys was notably also fought within the sphere of visual media. GDR officials had been aware of the power of images in making and shaping the perception of the socialist state and society. Film and television as well as news photography were highly contested and controlled sectors. This led to a dense interplay of the use of visual technologies and their control, even within the semi-official public sphere. The hybrid course Image(s) of the East - A Visual History of the GDR explores the history of the East German state through its visual heritage.

Course/Module aims:

- 1.Exploring the history of the GDR through its visual heritage*
- 2.Analyzing political and social life through visual sources*
- 3.Introducing theoretical and methodological implications of visual history*
- 4.Researching a broad variety of visual documents*
- 5.Using online databases and archives for research*

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

- 1.Understanding the complexity of East German history and society*
- 2.Analytical skills to work with visual sources for research purposes*
- 3.Applying methods of visual historiography*
- 4.Using visual sources as research material*
- 5.Managing online resources*

Attendance requirements(%):

80%

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction: The course will be mostly taught online on Zoom. Based on photographs, films and paintings significant aspects of East German social, political and cultural life will be analyzed. The course introduces

the theoretical and methodological implications of visual history as well as visual historiography as interdisciplinary approaches. We utilize collaborative learning tools as well as group work and breakout sessions. Films made in and about the GDR serve as audiovisual sources for practicing visual historiography. Researching a broad variety of visual documents students conduct group research on specific focus topics (Housing, Stasi, Youth, The Wall) that offer insight into the complex history of the East German state. The research will result in class presentations and blog posts as well as in a research essay on a specific visual source.

Course/Module Content:

COURSE PROGRAM:

(The course will be mostly taught through video lectures and online on Zoom)

- 1) Introduction: Images of the GDR*
- 2) (Re-)View: Open Memory Box, Cold War Berlin and Mauerspuren*
- 3) Film: Das Haus*
- 4) Video Lecture: "Visual History and Visual Archeology"*
- 5) Focus: Housing*
- 6) Film: Radfahrer*
- 7) Focus: Stasi*
- 8) Video Lecture: The impact of East German documentary films on writing GDR History"*
- 9) Film: Wozu denn über diese Leute einen Film - 17 May 2023*
- 10) Focus: Youth*
- 11) Film: Die Mauer*
- 12) Focus: The Wall*
- 13) Conclusion*

Required Reading:

Crew, D. F. (2009). Visual Power? The Politics of Images in the Twentieth-Century in

Germany and Austria-Hungary. *German History* 27:2, 271-285.

Drechsel, B. (2010). *The Berlin wall from a visual perspective: Comments on the construction of a political media icon*. *Visual Communication*, 9:1, 3-24.

Ebbrecht-Hartmann, T. (2017) "Archives for the Future: Thomas Heise's Visual Archeology", *Imaginations - Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies* 8:1 (2017) - Special Issue "New Research on East Germany" ed. By Marc Silberman (Online: <http://imaginations.csj.ualberta.ca/?p&eq;9485>).

Gaskell, I. (2001). *Visual History*. In: *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*. Ed. by P. Burke. Pennsylvania State Univ. Pr., 187-217.

Huysen, A. (2009). "German Painting in the Cold War", *New German Critique* 37:2, 209-227.

Paul, G. (2011). *Visual History (english version): Version: 1.0*, Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, 7.11.2011, Online: http://docupedia.de/zg/Visual_History_.28english_version.29?oldid&eq;106489

Pfautsch, A. (2018). "Documentary Photography from the German Democratic Republic as a Substitute Public." *Humanities* 7, 88. doi:10.3390/h7030088.

Port, A. (2015). "History from Below, the History of Everyday Life, and Microhistory." In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* 11, 108-113. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.62156-6>.

Vowinckel, A. (2018). "Photographic Nuisance: Stern Photographers Thomas Höpker and Harald Schmitt in the GDR." *Journal of Modern European History* 16:1, 126-145.

Additional Reading Material:

A full reading list will be send out at the beginning of the course.

Grading Scheme:

Essay / Project / Final Assignment / Home Exam / Referat 60 %
Presentation / Poster Presentation / Lecture/ Seminar / Pro-seminar / Research proposal 40 %

Additional information:

Course requirements:

- Active participation
- Group research and presentation of the results in class - 40%
- Essay about a visual source (7 Pages, 12 pt., Double space) - 60%

In addition, it is possible to write a seminar paper in the course:

- a) choose topic related to the course,
- b) submit written seminar paper (30 pages).