DR/CU 344 – THEATER IN BERLIN:
EXPLORING THE CITY'S PERFORMANCE SPACES
IES Abroad Berlin

DESCRIPTION
Theater has long been a defining feature of Berlin's cultural identity. This course explores the city through its theater, introducing students to its diverse cultural institutions, experimental performance spaces, and dynamic artistic communities. Moving beyond the classroom, we attend plays and performances—from renowned institutions such as the Deutsches Theater and the Berliner Ensemble to experimental venues such as Theater Thikwa. Throughout the course, students develop analytical tools to examine theater in Berlin as a cultural practice. Drawing on perspectives from cultural studies, we investigate how performances engage with public space and cultural memory, and how artistic practices respond to questions of identity, cultural and social change across a wide range of theatrical forms and themes. Regular visits to theaters across Berlin, in-depth discussions, and conversations with theater professionals encourage students to connect their experiences of performance with broader discourses on German culture. Students from all academic disciplines are welcome. No prior knowledge of theater is required.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: German

ADDITIONAL COST: none

PREREQUISITES: Four semester college-level German language studies completed or placement in GR 351 German language course (high intermediate or low advanced).

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:
- Field trips
- Short lectures
- Discussions in class
- Talks with professionals from the local theater scene
- Moodle will be used to enhance students' learning experiences.

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:
- Course participation – 10%
- Scene analysis – 20%
- Response papers – 20%
- Midterm – 20%
- Final research paper – 30%
  (research paper topic presentation –10%; research paper –20%)

Course Participation
Course participation includes participation in class discussions and familiarity with the assigned texts and the topics covered in class. The grading rubric for participation can be found in the IES Berlin Academics Manual on Moodle.

Response Papers
Over the course of the semester, you will write four short response papers (minimum 250 words each) based on a play or performance we have seen and discussed together. In each response paper, you should:
- choose one moment or scene that stood out to you and briefly describe it.
- explain why you think this scene is important and how it responds to cultural topics or discourses
- end with two questions that could inspire further discussion in class.

Response papers are due in Weeks **2, 4, 7, and 8.**

Scene Analysis
In addition to one of your response papers, you will write a scene analysis (minimum 1500 words). Choose one of the plays or performances we have seen and focus on 2 key theatrical elements (for example: stage and costume design, or lighting concept). Analyze how these elements shape the overall impact of the production. As you develop your analysis, consider the following guiding question:

- What seems to be the director's central idea or artistic intention?

The scene analysis is due in **Week 9.**

Midterm Exam

During midterm week, you will complete a take-home exam based on the field trips and class discussions from the first half of the semester. You will have 48 hours to respond to four essay-style questions.

Final Paper (30%)
Part I: Research Paper Topic Presentation (10%)
During session 21-22, you will give a 5-10 minute presentation on your research topic and introduce the three secondary texts you will use (for more details, see below) . You will receive feedback from the instructor and from your peers.
Part II: Research Paper (20%)
You will write a 2,500-word final research paper on a topic related to the course. You may build on one of your previous scene analyses or develop an individual research topic connected to the themes of the seminar. At least three secondary texts are required in your bibliography: they can relate directly to the text/play under consideration, or to its cultural and historical backgrounds, or to a theory that helps you interpret the text/play. You will discuss your proposed topic and thesis with your instructor in advance. Your paper should demonstrate two core skills:
• the ability to offer a close and well-argued interpretation of a performance or play.
• the ability to situate your analysis within existing academic debates and research fields.
The final research paper is due **by the end of Thursday of finals week.**

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

- demonstrate an overall understanding of Berlin theater.
- analyze plays and performances by using methods from cultural studies theories.
- critically reflect on plays and performances in their aesthetic, urban, and socio-political contexts.
- examine how theater negotiates questions of identity, migration, disability, technology, and cultural memory within Berlin's cultural landscape.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Attendance and punctuality are mandatory for all classes, site visits, excursions, and exams. Students may miss up to 10% of the course contact hours without penalty but are expected to notify their instructor in advance of any absence. Additional unexcused absences and excessive lateness will reduce the final course grade by 1 point per missed contact hour. Students who miss more than 30% of class contact hours may fail the course. Missed exams and extensions for late assignments are granted only in cases of documented illness or approved personal emergency. Students are responsible for making up all missed work. Please refer to the full IES Abroad Berlin Attendance Policy on Moodle for complete details.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:
Students are expected to abide by the IES Abroad Academic Integrity Code.

CONTENT:
Please note: The following syllabus is intended as a sample schedule. Theater visits may be adjusted depending on the performance schedules and programming of Berlin's theaters. For each field trip, selected press reviews will be discussed alongside the required readings.

Week	Content	Readings/Assignments
Week 1 **Berlin and Theater**	**Session 1:** Introduction	**Required readings:** Erika Fischer-Lichte: „Der Begriff des Performativen“ & „Der Begriff der Aufführung“, in: *Ästhetik des Performativen*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2021, pp. 31-62 (31 pages). Marion Linhardt: „Berlin als Raum für Theater“, in: *LiTheS. Zeitschrift für Literatur- und Theatersoziologie* 10 (2017), Sonderband 5, pp. 41–120 (79 pages). **Optional Reading:** Jörg Dünne / Kirsten Kramer: „Einleitung. Theatralität und Räumlichkeit“, in: *Raum und Theatralität*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009, pp.15-34 (19 pages).
	Session 2: Field trip to Deutsches Theater, play "Hospital der Geister" (2025), director: Jan Joseph Gockel	
Week 2 **Feminist Theater**	**Session 3:** Female body politics	**Required readings:** Hans-Thiess Lehmann: „Theater und Performance“, in: *Postdramatisches Theater*, Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag der Autoren, 1999, pp. 241-254 (13 pages). Sophia Firgau: „Einleitung“, in: *Das emanzipatorische Potential der Performance Art*, Stuttgart: ibidem, 2020, pp. 7-11 (2 pages). Angelika Richter, „Feministische Interventionen im Kunstdiskurs“, in: *Das Gesetz der Szene*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2019, pp. 145-192 (47 pages). **Optional Reading:** Ekaterina Trachsel: „Wenn die Körper Position beziehen“, in: *Thewis* 9.1 (2022), pp. 78-90 (12 pages).
	Session 4: Field trip to Berliner Volksbühne, „Ophelia's got talent" (2025), director: Florentina Holzinger	**1st Response paper due**

Week 3 **Postmigrant Theater**	**Session 5:** Postcolocial theater	**Required readings:** Azadeh Sharifi / Lisa Skwirblies: „Ist die deutsche Theaterwissenschaft kolonial?“, in: *transcript-open.de* (2023), pp. 27-60 (33 pages). Nora Haakh: „Das Postheimat Netzwerk als Contact Zone“, in: *Theatre Studies* 147 (2025), pp. 189-212 (23 pages). **Optional reading:** Ludwig Haugk: „Das Exil Ensemble im Maxim Gorki Theater“, in: *Postheimat*, hg. von Ruba Noah & Jonas Tinius, Bielefeld: transcript, 2025, pp. 43-50 (7 pages).
	Session 6: Field trip to Maxim Gorki Theater, play: "Carmen" (2025), director: Esra Rotthoff	
Week 4 **Pop Theater**	**Session 7:** Epic theater and popular culture	**Required readings:** Franziska Schößler: „Brechts episches Theater“, in: *Einführung in die Dramentheorie*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 2017, pp. 67-93 (26 pages). Annabel Ramerth: „Von der Entfremdung zur Verfremdung. Das epische Theater zwischen Kunst und marxscher Sozialtheorie“, in: *Sozialmagazin* 16.1 (2020), pp. 41-64 (23 pages). **Optional reading:** Christian Rakow: "Poptheater", in: *POP. Kultur und Kritik*, No. 1 (2017), pp. 87–93 (6 pages).
	Session 8: Field trip to Berliner Ensemble play: "It's Britney, Bitch!" (2025), director: Lena Brasch	**2nd response paper due**
Week 5 **Midterm Reflection**	**Session 9:** Participation as an immersive tool	**Required readings:** Jens Schneider: „Authentizität und Diversität im Stadttheater“, in: *transcript-open.de* (2024), pp. 1-40 (39 pages). Johannes Kap: „Partizipation in der Kunst- und Theaterwissenschaft“, in: *Das Theater der Teilhabe*, Uckerland: Schibri, 2019, pp. 83-120 (37 pages).
	Session 10: Field trip to Ramba Zamba Theater, play: „Musikantenstadl“, director: Rainald Grebe	
Week 6	Midterm week	Take home exam

Week 7 **Inclusive Theater**	**Session 13:** Ability, ableism, and mixed-abled ensembles	**Required readings:** Evelyn Kiok: „Einleitung“, in: *Inklusion vor, auf und hinter der Bühne*, Berlin: Timme, 2021, pp. 9-20 (11 pages). Linda Stegemann: „Inklusives Theater und die Rolle der Translation“, in: *trans-kom* 7.1 (2014), pp. 64-98 (34 pages).
	Session 14: Field trip to Theater Thikwa, play "Bauchgefühl" (2025), director: hansjana collective	**3rd response paper due**
Week 8 **Dance Theater**	**Session 15:** Dance as knowledge of the Body	**Required readings:** Hans-Thiess Lehmann: „Postdramatische Körperbilder“, in: *Postdramatisches Theater*, Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag der Autoren, 1999, pp. 361-398 (37 pages). Claudia Jeschke: „Einleitung“, in: *Tanz als Bewegungstext*,Tübingen: DE Gryuter, 2011, pp. 1-54 (53 pages). **Optional reading:** Rika Schulze-Reuber: „Einleitung“, in: *Das Tanztheater Pina Bausch: Spiegel der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Verlag, 2006, pp. 8-13 (5 pages).
	Session 16: Field trip to Radialsystem, play: "Kreatur" (2025), choreographer: Sasha Waltz & company	**4th response paper**
Week 9 **Techno Theater**	**Session 17:** Techno, Theater, and 160 BPM	**Required readings:** Johannes Windrich: „Einleitung“, in: *Technotheater*, Paderborn: Brill, 2019, pp. 9-17 (8 pages). Martina Leeker: „Theater, Performance und Digitalität“, in: *Transdisziplinäre Begegnungen zwischen postdigitaler Kunst und Kultureller Bildung*, hg. von J. Ackermann & B. Egger, Wiesbaden: Springer, 2021, pp. 177-196 (19 pages). Hans-Thiess Lehmann: „Medien im postdramatischen Theater“, in: *Postdramatisches Theater*, Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag der Autoren, 1999, pp. 416-433 (17 pages).
	Session 18: Field trip to techno club about blank, play: "TreuhandTechno" (2025), director: PKRK collective	**Scene analysis due**

Week 10 **Pre-presentation reflection**	**Session 19:** Lost Places in Berlin Theater	**Required readings:** Kristin Westphal: „Landschaft als Mitspielerin“, in: *Landschaft. Performance. Teilhabe*, hg. von Jens Oliver Krüger et.al., Bielefeld: transcript, 2021, pp. 35-54 (19 pages). Birgit Althans: „Zugänge zu affektiven Landschaften“, in: *Landschaft. Performance. Teilhabe*, hg. von Jens Oliver Krüger et.al., Bielefeld: transcript, 2021, pp.175-198 (23 pages).
	Session 20: Expert talk	Guest Lecture by Prof. Dr. Doris Kolesch (Free University Berlin): Technologies of Immersion in Contemporary Berlin Theater
Week 11 **Student presentations**	**Sessions 21-22**	Short presentations of final paper topics
Week 12 **AI Theater**	**Session 23:** Artificial Intelligence Theater	**Required readings:** Tobias Hochscherf: „KI und Kultur. Eine Einführung“, in: *KI und Kultur. Chimäre oder Chance?*, hg. von Tobias Hochscherf et.al, Hamburg: Wachholtz, 2023, pp. 1-18 (17 pages). David Ritterhaus: „Nach dem Hype. Routinen künstlicher Intelligenz in Tanz, Choreografie und Vermittlung“, in: *transcript-open.de* (2026), pp. 1-32 (31 pages).
	Session 24: Field trip to Theater Thikwa, play: "Und Tschüss" (2026), director: Turbo Pascall Collective	
Week 13	**Session 25:** Final discussion	Final discussion with a guest speaker from Turbo Pascall Collective: ***What comes next in Berlin theater?***
	Session 26: Final paper due	

COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:

- Deutsches Theater: This fieldtrip serves as an illustration of Berlin’s tradition of classical spoken-word theater.
- Berliner Volksbühne: This fieldtrip serves as an illustration of Berlin’s postdramatic theater.
- Maxim Gorki Theater: This fieldtrip will help us think about postcolonial theater in Berlin.
- Berliner Ensemble: This theater trip will serve as an example of theater in the tradition of Bertolt Brecht.
- Ramba Zamba Theater: The Ramba Zamba Theatre serves as an example of inclusive theater in Berlin.

- Theater Thikwa: The Theater Thikwa will serve as an example of independent inclusive theater in Berlin.
- about blank: This space will allow us to think about site-specific theater outside of established theater institutions.

READING MATERIAL: All texts will be available on Moodle.

READINGS:

- Althans, Birgit. „Zugänge zu affektiven Landschaften“. In *Landschaft. Performance. Teilhabe*, edited by Jens Oliver Krüger et.al., 175-198. Bielefeld: transcript, 2021.
- Dünne, Jörg. „Einleitung. Theatralität und Räumlichkeit“. In *Raum und Theatralität*, 15-34. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009.
- Firgau, Sophia. „Einleitung". In *Das emanzipatorische Potential der Performance Art*, 7-11. Stuttgart: ibidem, 2020.
- Fischer-Lichte, Erika. „Der Begriff des Performativen“ & „Der Begriff der Aufführung“. In *Ästhetik des Performativen*, 31-62. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2021.
- Haakh, Nora. „Das Postheimat Netzwerk als Contact Zone“. In *Theatre Studies* 147 (2025): 189-212.
- Haugk, Ludwig. „Das Exil Ensemble im Maxim Gorki Theater“. In *Postheimat*, edited by Ruba Noah & Jonas Tinius, 43-50. Bielefeld: transcript, 2025.
- Hochscherf, Tobias. „KI und Kultur. Eine Einführung“. In *KI und Kultur. Chimäre oder Chance?*, edited by Tobias Hochscherf, 11-18. Hamburg: Wachholtz, 2023.
- Jeschke, Claudia. „Einleitung“. In *Tanz als Bewegungstext*, 1-54. Tübingen: DE Gryuter, 2011.
- Kap, Johannes. „Partizipation in der Kunst- und Theaterwissenschaft“. In *Das Theater der Teilhabe*, 83-120. Uckerland: Schibri, 2019.
- Kiok, Evelyn. „Einleitung“. In *Inklusion vor, auf und hinter der Bühne*, 9-20. Berlin: Timme, 2021.
- Lehmann, Hans-Thiess. „Körper. Postdramatische Körperbilder“. In *Postdramatisches Theater*, 361-398. Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag der Autoren, 1999.
- —: „Medien im postdramatischen Theater“. In *Postdramatisches Theater*, 416-433. Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag der Autoren, 1999.
- —: „Theater und Performance“. In *Postdramatisches Theater*, 241-254. Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag der Autoren, 1999.
- Leeker, Martina. „Theater, Performance und Digitalität“. In *Transdisziplinäre Begegnungen zwischen postdigitaler Kunst und Kultureller Bildung*, edited by J. Ackermann & B. Egger, 177-196. 2Wiesbaden: Springer, 2021.
- Linhardt, Marion. „Berlin als Raum für Theater“. In: *LiTheS. Zeitschrift für Literatur- und Theatersoziologie* 10 (2017), Sonderband 5: 41–120.
- Rakow, Christian. "Poptheater". In *POP. Kultur und Kritik*, No. 1 (2017): 87–93.
- Ramerth, Annabel. „Von der Entfremdung zur Verfremdung. Das epische Theater zwischen Kunst und Marxscher Sozialtheorie“. In *Sozialmagazin* 16.1 (2012): 41-64.
- Richter, Angelika. „Feministische Interventionen im Kunstdiskurs“. In *Das Gesetz der Szene*, 145-192. Bielefeld: transcript, 2019.
- Ritterhaus, David. „Nach dem Hype. Routinen künstlicher Intelligenz in Tanz, Choreografie und Vermittlung“. In *transcript-open.de* (2026): 1-32.
- Schneider, Jens. „Authentizität und Diversität im Stadttheater“. In *transcript-open.de* (2024): 1-40.
- Schößler, Franziska. „Brechts episches Theater“. In *Einführung in die Dramentheorie*, 67-93. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2017.
- Schulze-Reuber, Rika. „Einleitung“. In *Das Tanztheater Pina Bausch: Spiegel der Gesellschaft*, 8-13. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2006.
- Sharifi, Azadeh et al. „Ist die deutsche Theaterwissenschaft kolonial?“. In *transcript-open.de* (2023): 27-60.
- Stegemann, Linda. „Inklusives Theater und die Rolle der Translation“. In *trans-kom* 7.1 (2014): 64-98.

- Trachsel, Ekaterina. „Wenn die Körper Position beziehen“. In *Thewis* 9.1 (2022): 78-90.
- Westphal, Kristin. „Landschaft als Mitspielerin“. In *Landschaft. Performance. Teilhabe*, edited by Jens Oliver Krüger et.al., 35-54. Bielefeld: transcript, 2021.
- Windrich, Johannes „Einleitung“. In *TechnoTheater*, 9-17. Paderborn: Brill, 2019.

10/2026