

# IS 331: Berlin Internship Seminar: Working Cultures, Urban Cultures

Seminar Leader: Agata Lisiak & Florian Duijsens

Course Times: Thursdays, 2-3:30 pm

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Office hours: by appointment

## Course Description

The Berlin Internship Seminar accompanies third-year students' undertaking of an internship. The seminar offers a range of theoretical and analytical tools for thinking critically about how and why we work, and how work affects our daily lives and the places where we live. Over the course of the seminar, we will talk about contemporary ways of working and living in Berlin and beyond, asking: What do we mean when we talk about work? Do we need to love what we do? What renders work in/visible? How is work gendered and classed? What does it mean to inhabit the somatic norm of the workplace? How is work organized temporally and spatially, and how does that, in turn, affect a city and its residents? What distinguishes the spaces where we live and work today? Which new forms of work have emerged in Berlin recently? Which of them seem to thrive? What is the future of work?

One of the major issues we will tackle in class is the very phenomenon of unpaid internships and what it means for you to be working for free. We will address this question by discussing the precariat, creative industry, and affective labor. Drawing from Kathi Weeks' writing, we will consider what the problem with work actually is, and why we tend to define and value ourselves through what we do professionally. We will dissect Steve Jobs' "Do what you love" mantra and discuss how work and love are interwoven. We will approach contemporary working cultures from an intersectional perspective, remaining sensitive to the workings of inequalities in structural, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains.

Besides in-class discussions and invited lectures, the seminar offers a platform for the regular exchange of observations, reflections, and comments on students' internships. The assigned readings, too, will be discussed in class in the context of students' internships. Students are required to keep an internship journal and provide regular updates on the progress of their internship.

## Requirements

### Attendance and participation

Regular attendance is essential to the collaborative work of learning in seminar format and forms part of the participation grade. Please complete the required readings, be on time for each class, and contribute energetically and meaningfully to the discussions. A class participation mark will be awarded on the basis of your preparedness and engagement in class discussions. Attendance and participation make up 30% of the final grade. A self-assessment rubric will be distributed in class and completed at the end of the semester. As we meet only once a week, missing more than one session may certainly affect your participation grade. If more than one absence is unavoidable, please be in touch with the instructor before the class to determine whether you need to provide documentation to excuse the absence. Every unexcused absence lowers the participation grade by one step (i.e., from B+ to B). Please consult the Student Handbook for more details on BCB's attendance policy.

In Spring 2021, some students may need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. Also, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill or exhibit any symptoms linked to COVID-19. Hence, the assignments for this course are conceived in a way that allows all students to complete them remotely. More details on the specific format of each session will be shared via email on a weekly basis to accommodate any changes that may occur.

### **Readings**

On a weekly basis, you will be expected to devote 2-3 hours to complete the readings and 15-20 minutes to update your internship journal. It may be possible for you to get both done during your commute to the internship. Though most of the texts you will be required to read are included in the syllabus, the highly topical nature of this course means that I will also be sending around up-to-date articles, essays, and videos to enrich our discussions. Students are encouraged to do the same.

### **Assignments**

This class will include several graded assignments that will add up to your final grade for this class alongside your participation grade: 1) regular entries in your internship journal (10%); 2) a take-home midterm exam (25%); 3) an 800-word interview with your internship mentor (10%); and 4) a 1500-2000 word final paper (25%). See below for deadlines and grading criteria. All assignments and papers are to be submitted to your instructor by email.

### **Internship Journal**

All students are required to keep an internship journal in which they regularly (at least once a week) reflect on their work experiences and respond to prompts related to that week's readings. The journal should be kept in electronic form on Google docs and shared with the seminar instructor. The goal of this journal is twofold: not only does it provide students with important material with which to reflect back on their internship experience when they are writing their final papers, but it also provides the instructor with a discreet way to make sure the internships are going well (or step in should issues arise). Each week's entry should be completed at the latest the night before the class in question. Failing to update the journal regularly will negatively affect your grade. For more details (and examples) see the Internship Journal Handout.

### **Policy on Plagiarism and Late Submission of Papers**

As specified in the Student Handbook, "Bard College Berlin students are expected to adhere to the highest standards of integrity and intellectual engagement in their academic work. Attendance and thorough preparation for class, as well as commitment to the pursuit of excellence in written work, are fundamental requirements of Bard College Berlin's programs." Acts of academic misconduct (plagiarism, self-plagiarism, collusion, cheating) will be reported and result in a disciplinary process.

Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. If we agree to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade higher than a C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

### **Grade Breakdown and Deadlines**

Class participation: 30%  
Regular entries in your journal: 10% // all semester  
Assignment 2 (midterm): 25% // 18-19 March  
Assignment 3 (interview): 10% // 20 April  
Assignment 4 (final paper): 25% // 17 May

### **Grading criteria for the midterm**

A = Extraordinary. The exam demonstrates student's full command of the material and reflects in-depth engagement with the readings.

B = Good to very good. The exam demonstrates student's general familiarity with the material and some engagement with the readings, but lacks critical engagement and close reading of the texts.

C = Acceptable. The exam demonstrates student's selective familiarity with the material; it contains misreadings or gaps in understanding of the texts that have been discussed in class.

D = Very poor. The exam demonstrates student's lack of engagement with the readings and lack of familiarity with the key concepts discussed in class.

F = Unacceptable. The exam demonstrates student's unfamiliarity with basic concepts discussed in class and/or fails to adhere to the academic standards as set out in the Student Handbook.

### **Grading criteria for the final**

A = Extraordinary. The paper demonstrates a full command of the material, reflects the author's in-depth engagement with the selected readings, clear and compelling thinking, and skillful writing.

B = Good to very good. The paper has a solid, consistent focus and demonstrates clear argumentation, but some paragraphs are not fully developed and at times the paper doesn't quite know why it does what it does. The paper contains occasional stylistic, grammatical, and spelling mistakes.

C = Acceptable. The paper fulfills the minimum required by the assignment. It might lack skillful argumentation, offer irrelevant evidence, and rely on generalities (and generalizations), but shows basic understanding of the material. The paper contains multiple stylistic, grammatical, and spelling mistakes.

D = Major deficiencies in writing and argumentation, the paragraphs are not logically organized, and the paper lacks overall cohesion.

F = Unacceptable, fails to follow the basic points of the assignment and/or fails to adhere to the academic standards as set out in the Student Handbook.

**Note:** Students are advised to visit BCB's Learning Commons before turning in their final papers.

## Schedule

### Class 1

#### 4 February 2021: Your Internship: Practicalities & Expectations

We will go over the internship documents for the semester: your Internship Agreement and the Internship Time Sheet. We will discuss the course content, pedagogical goals, and grading requirements. You will also be introduced to the internship journal. No readings are required.

### Class 2

#### 11 February 2021: Work: Terms and Concepts

- Andrea Komlosy, *Work: The Last 1000 Years* (2018). Excerpts.
- Bartleby, dir. Laura Naylor. (2018) <https://vimeo.com/290539530>

### Class 3

#### 18 February 2021: The Elephant in the Room: The (Many) Problems with Unpaid Internships

- Ross Perlin, *Intern Nation* (2011). 23-41.
- Madeline Schwartz, "Opportunity Costs: The True Price of Internships," *Dissent* (2013).
- Sarah Kendzior, *The View from Flyover Country: Dispatches from the Forgotten America* (2018). Excerpts.

### Class 4

#### 25 February 2021: The Problems with Work

- Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (2011). Excerpts.
- Miya Tokumitsu, "In the Name of Love," *The Jacobin* (2014).

### Class 5

#### 4 March 2021: Precarization of Work

- Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009). Excerpts.
- Heike Geißler, *Seasonal Associate* (2018). Excerpts.

### Class 6

#### 11 March 2021: The Forms of Capital and the Creative Class

- Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" (1986).
- Richard Florida, "Cities and the Creative Class" (2003).

### Class 7

#### 18 March 2021: Emotional Labor

- Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart* (1983). Chapter 1.
- Jessa Lingel and Kate Crawford, "Alexa, Tell Me about Your Mother?": The History of the Secretary and the End of Secrecy", *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 6.1 (2020): 1-25.
- Sandra, Episode 1: Hope Is a Mistake. 2018. <https://gimletmedia.com/shows/sandra/76h5jo/1-hope-is-a-mistake>

#### **ASSIGNMENT 2** (20% final grade)

For this take-home midterm, you'll be handed the questions at the end of Class 6. The mid-term will be made up of three shorter questions about the readings so far, plus one longer critical response to one of three quoted statements. The midterm is due **3:30 pm, 19 March at the latest**.

### Class 8

#### 25 March 2021: Space Invaders

- Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders* (2004). Intro + Chapter 5 (till page 97).
- Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (2017). Chapter 5.

- *Read and listen:* 4 Ways To Make Your Workplace Equitable For Trans People: <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/02/867780063/4-ways-to-make-your-workplace-equitable-for-trans-people>; Out at Work: <https://project.wnyc.org/nancy/out-at-work/>.

**ASSIGNMENT 3** (10% of final grade)

For this assignment, read all the interviews from Studs Terkel's *Working* (1978) in the reader. Though Terkel's questions have mostly been edited out, what do you think they were? How did he get these people to open up about their work? What would you change about his questioning and approach? Then prepare and execute a short (500-800 words) interview with one of your mentors, write it up along the lines of Terkel's *Working* (see handout), sending it in no later than **20 April**.

**SPRING BREAK**

Class 9

**8 April 2021: Making a Living in Creative Industries – GUEST LECTURE (TBA)**

- Readings to be selected by the guest lecturer.

Class 10

**15 April 2021: Gig and grind**

- Jia Tolentino, "The Gig Economy Celebrates Working Yourself to Death", *New Yorker* (2017).
- John Patrick Leary, *Keywords: The New Language of Capitalism* (2019). Selected keywords.
- Anonymous, "Delivery Workers, Trapped in the System", *Renwu* (2020): <http://chuangcn.org/2020/11/delivery-renwu-translation/>

Class 11

**22 April 2021: Gentrification: Who owns Berlin?**

- Henrik Lebuhn, "Neoliberalization in Post-Wall Berlin: Understanding the City through Crisis", *Critical Planning* 22 (2015): 99-118.
- Andrej Holm, "You Have To Do Everything Yourself...": Tenants in Berlin protest against gentrification and displacement. *The Fine Art of Living*, ed. Ina Wudtke (2018).

Class 12

**29 April 2021: The Future of Work: Beyond the Office?**

- Nikil Saval, "New Trends in Office Design", *n+1* (2014).
- Ling Ma, *Severance* (2018). Excerpt.

Class 13

**6 May 2021: The Future of Work: Beyond Bullshit Jobs**

- David Graeber, "On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs: A Work Rant", *Strike* (2013).
- Nick Srnicek & Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future. Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (2016). Excerpts.

**ASSIGNMENT 4** (30% of final grade)

Your final paper will be a 1,500-2000-word essay or a creative project (a video, a visual essay, a game, etc.) reflecting critically on (a particular aspect of) your internship experience that is anchored in, and informed by, at least two readings we have covered during the semester (at least one from after Class 6!). It should investigate a concept, paradox, or question from the readings through your own internship experience. In other words, the readings should provide the lens, the internship the material. Go through your journal and your reader, asking yourself: Which texts did you annotate most extensively? Which seem to resonate most with your internship? Which questions would you like to explore?

If you choose to submit a creative response rather than a standard academic essay, please pitch your idea latest by the end of April and make sure to include a 500-word statement in which you explain how the project relates to the readings.

Deadline for submission of the final essay is **midnight of 17 May 2021**. Please be in touch by 6 May if you wish to apply for an extension.