

LT304 Race and the Black Radical Tradition in Contemporary Literature and Art: A Comparative Perspective

Seminar Leader: Kathy-Ann Tan
Course Times: Fridays, 12:30pm – 3:45pm
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Office Hours: by email appointment

Course Description

In this class, we will trace the trajectory of the “Black radical tradition” (Cedric Robinson, 1983, Fred Moten, 2003) in literature and art – from its early beginnings in Black Reconstruction and W.E.B. Du Bois’ 1903 essay, “The Souls of Black Folk”, via the New Negro/Harlem Renaissance and Black Arts movements of the 1920s and 1960s respectively, to its contemporary manifestations in work inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement. We will acknowledge the transatlantic dimension of the Black radical tradition by exploring the writings of Black German scholars such as Maisha Eggers, Peggy Piesche, Fatima El-Tayeb, Sharon Dodua-Otoo and May Ayim, as well as Audre Lorde, a central figure whose work was highly influential on both sides of the Atlantic. Our readings will also include work on Afrofuturism, a visual, literary and musical aesthetic that combines elements of science-fiction, fantasy and post-humanism with Black history and culture. Finally, we will examine how the Black radical tradition is significant not only as a literary or aesthetic movement, but also as a body of critical thought that seeks to bring about a restructuring of political, economic, and social relations.

Course texts (Course reader)

All reading material will be collected in a course reader or circulated electronically.
The course reader will be available at the beginning of the semester.

Readings will include:

May Ayim. *Blues in Black and White* (2003 in English)
Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider* (1984)
W.E.B. Du Bois. “The Souls of Black Folk” (1903)
Alain Locke. *The New Negro* (1925)
Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)
Fred Moten. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003)
Jared Sexton. “The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism” (2011)
Fatima El-Tayeb. *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*

Requirements

Attendance

Attendance is required at all classes. Absences are registered in all classes. Illness leading to inability to attend classes, or submit work, must be reported to the College Registrar; a medical note should be submitted to the Registrar within one week of the absence. Bard College Berlin cannot offer credit for

any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, whether the absences are on documented medical grounds or not. More than two absences in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course. In addition, students should consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Writing Assignments

This course has two essay assignments: one mid-semester and one end of semester essay (5000 – 7000 words in total). It also has informal assignments, including giving presentations on readings and writing reading responses and/or discussion questions in advance of seminar meetings. Since this is a seminar, active and informed participation in class is a required and graded element of the course.

Essay Deadlines

Mid-term essay deadline: **Wednesday, March 20, 2019.**

Final essay deadline for senior students (because of graduation): **Monday, May 13, 2019.**

Final essay deadline for all other students: **Friday, May 17, 2019.**

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

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. Late essays (if you are allowed an extension) must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment (policy from the Student Handbook on the submission of essays).

Grade Breakdown

Class Participation: 30%

Mid-term essay: 30%

Final Essay: 40%

Classroom Etiquette/ Nature of in-class participation

Students are expected to have read all the texts scheduled for discussion in class – this will be the basis of our critical analysis and interpretation. Thoughtful, constructive dialogue is expected in this class. There will be less frontal teaching than open discussion. Students are encouraged and expected to participate and share their ideas while considerately respecting the viewpoints of other students, especially if they are different.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin has a no-tolerance policy with regard to academic plagiarism, cheating in an examination, submitting papers bought on the Internet or other source, or submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization. This amounts to academic misconduct or dishonesty

and students will be reported immediately. When you are using another's ideas, language, or syntax, whether through direct quotation, summary, or paraphrase, you must formally acknowledge this by signaling it in the MLA parenthetical format (<http://www.mla.org/style>).

Schedule

Week 1 – February 1. Introduction to the Black Radical Tradition.

Reading: Excerpt from Fred Moten's *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003)

Week 2 – February 8. The “beginnings” of the Black Radical Tradition in the USA

W.E.B. Du Bois. “The Souls of Black Folk” (1903) and Excerpt from Alain Locke. *The New Negro* (1925)

Week 3 – February 15. The Black Radical Tradition in the mid-20th Century.

Excerpt from Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)

Week 4 – February 22. The Black Radical Tradition Today: Black Lives Matter.

Week 5 – March 1. The Black Radical Tradition in American Film. Part I. 3 short Films of the L.A. Rebellion. “Hour Glass” (1971) by Haile Gerima (13 mins), “Daydream Therapy” (1977) by Bernard Nicolas (8 mins), “Rain” (1978) by Melvonna Ballenger (16 mins). Link to films will be provided.

Week 6 – March 8. The Black Radical Tradition in American Film. Part II. Excerpts from Spike Lee's *BlacKkKlansman* (2018), Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther* (2018), and Sun Ra's *The Space is the Place* (1974)

Week 7 – March 15. “Afro-Pessimism” and Black Ontologies. Theory Part I.

Jared Sexton. “The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism” (2011) and interview between Frank Wilderson and Saidiya Hartman, “The Position of the Unthought” (2003)

Week 8 – March 22. “Afro-Pessimism” and Black Ontologies. Theory Part II.

Sylvia Wynter. “On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory” (2006) and excerpt from Saidiya Hartmann's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in 19th Century America* (1997)

Weeks 9 – March 29. The Black Radical Tradition in Art.

Afro-futurism and/in the Work of Wangechi Mutu, Renee Cox, Kerry James Marshall, Mickalene Thomas, Kehinde Wiley, Kara Walker, etc. Links to artworks will be provided.

Week 10 – April 5. The Black Radical Tradition in Music.

Afro-futurism and/in the Work of Angel Haze, Mykki Blanco, Janelle Monáe, etc. Links to music and music videos will be provided.

Week 11 – April 12. Transatlantic Perspectives out of Germany, Part I.

Film excerpts from Audre Lorde – *The Berlin Years, 1984 – 1992* and excerpts from Audre Lorde’s *Sister Outsider* (1984).

Week 12 – No class. Spring Break (Monday, April 15 – Sunday, April 21)

Week 13 – April 26. Transatlantic Perspectives out of Germany, Part II.

Excerpt from May Ayim. *Blues in Black and White* (2003 in English) and Katharina Oguntoye, Maisha Eggers and Peggy Piesche , et. al. “Looking Backward and Forward: Twenty Years of the Black Women’s Movement in Germany”

Week 14 – May 3. Transatlantic Perspectives out of Germany, Part III.

Excerpt from Fatima El-Tayeb. *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*

Week 15 – May 10. Afro-German Antiracist Art and Film. Isaiah Lopaz, Berlin-based web series “Polyglot”, Documentary “AfroGermany: Being Black and German”, etc.

Week 16 – Completion week (Monday, May 13 to Friday, May 17).