

AH281 Contemporary Art and the Anthropocene: Creating Alternative Ways of Conceptualising and Inhabiting the Planet

Seminar Leader: Laura López Paniagua
Tuesdays 9-12:15
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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

At a time in which habitability is becoming increasingly difficult, can art provide alternative ways of thinking and being in the world? This course will examine how contemporary art exhibitions, such as “May You Live in Interesting Times” (Venice Biennale 2019), “Down to Earth” (Gropius Bau, 2020), or Sun Rise / Sun Set (Schinkel Pavillon, 2021), and artists like Tomás Saraceno, Pierre Huyghe, Tino Sehgal, or Laure Provost, are approaching these issues.

“Anthropocene” was the term proposed in 2000 by scientists Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, to designate the new geological epoch starting in the 18th century, in which “the global effects of human activities have become clearly noticeable”. Though the destructive effects of our actions have been addressed by artists for decades, the topic has acquired a central importance during the last years, in which the effects of climate change and other global upheavals have become apparent, as well as a permanent source of controversy and political animosity. Aided by thinkers such as Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway, we will define the basic theoretical framework of this discourse in art, and apply it in the analysis of anthropocene-related works of contemporary artists and curators. The seminar will be enriched by multiple field trips to contemporary art exhibitions in museums and galleries.

Week 1

31.08.2021, Tue 9-12:15

Introduction to the course

Anthropocene Lecture: Bruno Latour (HKW Anthropocene, May 4, 2018)

Discussion

Artists: Tomás Saraceno, Olafur Eliasson

Reading: “Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime”, Bruno Latour (2018), pp. 1-25 and 38-45

Week 2

7.09.2021, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Discussion of reading

“Atmospheric Homeostasis By and For the Biosphere: the Gaia Hypothesis”, James Lovelock, Lynn Margulis (1973)

“Gaia: an Interview with James Lovelock”, Naked Science (2007).

Artists: Cyprien Gaillard, Margaret and Christine Wertheim

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Reading:

Group 1: “Gaia is Alive”, S. Dutreuil (2020)

Group 2: “Distinguishing Gaia from Earth Systems”, T. Lenton, S. Dutreuil (2020)

Group 3: “What Exactly is the Role of Gaia?”, T. Lenton, S. Dutreuil (2020)

Week 3

14.09.2021, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Presentation/Discussion of Gaia papers

“Symbiotic Earth: How Lynn Margulis rocked the boat and started a scientific revolution”, John Feldman (2017) PART I

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Reading: Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Week 4

21.09.2021, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Discussion of Reading

Artists: Ai Weiwei, Mel Chin

“Symbiotic Earth: How Lynn Margulis rocked the boat and started a scientific revolution”, John Feldman (2017) PART II

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Reading: texts on curator Agnes Gryczkowska

Week 5

28.09.2021, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Agnes Gryczkowska lecture

Discussion

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Reading: “Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene”, Donna Haraway, 2016.

Sections: Introduction, Tentacular Thinking.

Week 7

05.10.2021, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Discussion of reading.

“Storytelling for Earthly Survival”, Fabrizio Terranova (2016).

Artists: Mary Mattingly, Pierre Huyghe

---- Discuss midterm paper---

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Reading: “What is Dark Ecology”, Tim Morton (2015)

Week 8

12.10.2021, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Discussion of reading

Artists: Laure Prouvost, Karrabing Film Collective

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Reading: Introduction to “Critical Zones: the Science and Politics of Landing on Earth”, Bruno Latour (2020)

The mid-term essay is due on 15th October, midnight.

-----Midterm Break-----

Week 9

26.10.2021, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Discussion of reading

Terrestrial University with Bruno Latour (2020)

Exploration of Critical Zones I

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Reading: “Observatories for Terrestrial Politics: Sensing the Critical Zones”, M. Guinard, B. Korintenberg (2020)

Week 10

02.11.2021, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Discussion of reading

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Preparation for Visit: Scratching the Surface / Works from the Nationalgalerie Collection, the Friedrich Christian Flick Collection im Hamburger Bahnhof and Loans

Week 11

09.11.2021, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

VISIT:

Scratching the Surface / Works from the Nationalgalerie Collection, the Friedrich Christian Flick Collection im Hamburger Bahnhof and Loans

Reading:

Group 1: “Around the Pluriverse in Eight Objects”, J. Tresch (2020)

Group2: “Ancient and New Theatres of the World”, F. Ait- Touati (2020)

Week 12

16.11.2019, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Presentation and discussion groups 1 and 2.

Artists: Natalie Jeremijenko, Jimmie Durham

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Reading: material for Studio for Propositional Cinema lecture

Week 13

23.11.2021, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Studio for Propositional Cinema lecture

Discussion

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Reading: "Down to Earth", Dorothea von Hantelmann, (2020).

Week 14

30.11.2021, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Discussion of reading

Guided Tour Critical Zones Exhibition (virtual)

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Week 15

14.12.2021, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Wrap-up session

Course conclusions

Habitability logbook art-theory project conclusions

Comments on final paper

Week 16

13.12.2021, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Completion Week

The final essay is due on 15th December, midnight.

Requirements

The use of laptops or tablets is compulsory during seminars (this course is organized through Google Classroom).

Please also make sure you depart early in order to reach the museums and exhibition spaces in time.

This course requires the active participation of students in the form of:

- Participation in group discussions
- Museum visits
- Attendance to lectures
- Development of a "Sustainability Logbook"
- Research and presentation of results in class

The students will be required to hand in two essays for midterm and final evaluation.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent

(e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Please also make sure you depart early in order to reach the museums and exhibition spaces in time.

If absent, a short notification via email, sent before the beginning of class, is expected. Please note that punctuality is essential.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2021: Some students may need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Instructors should make efforts to offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

Assessment

The course assessment consists of the overall seminar work (including active class participation, research, and presentations), the development of a “Sustainability Logbook”, plus two essays. See also “Grade Breakdown”.

Assignments

There are two essays for this course, one mid-term essay (ca. 2500 words).

The essays will be divided into the habitual sections of academic writing. The students will be required to write about a topic of their choice that is linked to the artists and/ or theoretical literature studied in class.

Essays should include footnotes/references, bibliography and a list of illustrations. The structure and draft of your essays can be discussed in individual tutorials.

The mid-term essay is due on 15th October, midnight.

The final essay is due on 15th December, midnight.

Students will be required to develop a “Sustainability Logbook” throughout the course, whose content shall also be evaluated.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late.

Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors’ office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are

entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Midterm Grades (September-October):

Seminar Grade: 25%

(attendance, preparation of texts/participation in discussions, presentation during visits)

“Sustainability Logbook”: 25%

(ongoing collection of notes, reflections, sketches, and experimental models)

Midterm Essay: 50%

Second Grades (November-December):

Seminar Grade: 25%

(attendance, preparation of texts/participation in discussions, presentation during visits)

“Sustainability Logbook”: 25%

(ongoing collection of notes, reflections, sketches, and experimental models)

Second Essay: 50%

Final grades: 50% midterm grades, 50% second grades