

FA292 Animism. Nature as Self

Seminar Leader: Dr. Andreas Weber
Course Time: Fridays 14:00 - 17:15
Office Hours: by appointment
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Course Description

Our worldviews are undergoing fundamental change. In the “Anthropocene,” boundaries between the human sphere and animals and plants, stones and waters, the atmosphere and the whole “earth system” are dissolving. There are many emerging working hypotheses trying to come to terms with this. One that is gaining particular traction in both the humanities and the natural sciences is animism, the cosmology of indigenous cultures which hold that the world is made of *persons*—not *things*—with whom humans must act in togetherness. This seminar will explore prominent articulations of animism in anthropology, philosophy, biology and the arts. Students will engage with these viewpoints on theoretical, practical and artistic levels. We will discuss, among others, ideas of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Philippe Descola, Edoardo Kohn, Freya Mathews, Bayo Akomolafe, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Bruno Latour, Francisco Varela and Karen Barad. In practical terms, we will experiment with animistic processes through guided embodied experiences and reflection, also in outdoor settings and in direct contact with the non-human living world. In animistic cultures, the human participation in the broader “society of being” needs to be expressed and enhanced through painting, sculpture, dance and song (all of which from a western perspective are called “art”), the participants will develop their own artistic ways of reflecting on the experiences and the content of the seminar. For mid-term and end-of-term grades, students can choose to either write an academic essay but can also devise open-media artistic projects (e.g. fiction and non-fiction narratives, paintings, videos, podcasts or visual essays) in this class.

Schedule

Week 1

04. 02. 2022, Fr 14–17.15

Check-in

Introduction to the Course

Reading: Ailton Krenak, *Ideas to Postpone the End of the World*, 2020

Video: Flecha 3 – *Metamorfose* (Selvagem)

Week 2

11. 02. 2022, Fr 14–17.15

Walking Exercise, Brainstorm in small groups about topics of assignment

Reading: Gary Snyder, “Language goes two ways”, 2002

AV-Intro with Janina

Week 3

18. 02. 2022, Fr 14–17.15

Reading: Descola, “Beyond Nature and Culture”, 2014;
Enrique Salmón, “Kincentric Ecology”, 2000

Week 4

25. 02. 2022, Fr 14–17.15

Reading: Monica Gagliano, *And thus spoke the plant*, 2020;
Reading: Steve Paulson, Plants, Collective Metaphysics, and the Birthright of Kinship: An interview with Monica Gagliano, 2020

Week 5

04. 03. 2022, Fr 14–17.15

Reading: Tim Ingold, “Being alive to a world without objects”, 2014
Being seen exercise

Week 6

11. 03. 2022, Fr 14–17.15

Reading: Edoardo Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 2013;
Zaria Gorvett, “Why insects are more sensitive than they seem”, 2021
Shapeshifting exercise

Week 7

18. 03. 2022, Fr 14–17.15

Reading: Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 2013
Guest: Gavin Van Horn, *What does Kinship mean?* (Life lecture and Q&A over Videolink)

20.03.

Midterm assignment due

Week 8

25. 03. 2022, Fr 14–17.15

Walking Exercise, Brainstorm in small groups
Wrap-up
Presentations

Week 9

01. 04. 2022, Fr 14–17.15

Reading: Bayo Akomolafe, *I, Coronavirus. Mother. Monster. Activist*. Chennai, 2020
Guest: Bayo Akomolafe, *Human Existence, Love, and "Post-activism"* (Life lecture and Q&A over Videolink)

Week 10

08. 04. 2022, Fr 14–17.15

Reading: Lucie Lippard, *Overlay* (1983), Introduction
Joseph Beuys, *I love America and America Loves me* (Video/Performance)

SPRING BREAK

Week 11

22. 04. 2022, Fr 14–17.15

Readings: Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, 2018;
Danowski, Déborah, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The ends of the world*, 2016
Art works: Pierre Huyghe, *Untitled* (2012); *The Host and the Cloud* (2010)

Week 12

29. 04. 2022, Fr 14–17.15

Reading: Peter Sutton; *Dreamings: The art of aboriginal Australia*, 1988
Art work: David Malangi, *Sacred Places at Milmindjarr'* (1982)

Week 13

06. 05. 2022, Fr 14–17.15

Readings: Freya Mathews, “Invitation to Ontopoetics”, 2009;
Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand talk*, 2020

Week 14

13. 05. 2022, Fr 14–17.15

Reading: Val Plumwood, “Nature in the Active Voice”, 2014
Presentations

18.05.

Final assignment due (please note that final assignments for Spring 2022 graduates will be due 11.05)

Scheduled class times will be available online under the relevant course heading:

<https://berlin.bard.edu/academics/courses/>

Requirements

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

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

- Participation in group discussions
 - Presentations of reading materials
 - Attendance to lectures
 - Research and presentation of results in class
- The students will be required to hand in / present two essays / art works / performances 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.

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 SPRING 2022: 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.

Assessment

The course assessment consists of the overall seminar work (including active class participation, research, and presentations), plus two essays / artistic works. See also “Grade Breakdown”, “Assignments” and “Schedule” for due dates for assignments.

Assignments

There are two assignments for this course, one mid-term and one at the end of the course. The assignments can be academic essays or artistic projects (“works of art” in various disciplines).

Essays (ca. 2500 words) 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.

Artistic projects will be divided into the artistic execution (the work), which should be documented by images and/or recording, and a written/documented explanatory part with reference to the material used in the course or other sources. Students choosing artistic projects for their assignments are encouraged to present them to the class.

The mid-term assignment is due on March 20th, 2022.

The final assignment is due on May 18th, 2022.

Please note that final assignments for Spring 2022 graduates will be due on May 11th, 2022.

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 by contacting the instructor personally or via e-mail.

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 (weeks 1-7):

Seminar Grade: 15%

(attendance, preparation of texts/participation in discussions)

Midterm assignment: 35%

Second Grades (weeks 8-14):

Seminar Grade: 15%

(attendance, preparation of texts/participation in discussions)

Second Assignment: 35%