

SE222 Performing the Anthropocene

Seminar Leader: Dr. Ramona Mosse

Email: r.mosse@berlin.bard.edu

Course Times: Thursdays, 2pm – 5:15pm. Room E43-0 (Workshop Space) and E43-1 (Seminar Room)

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 12:30-1:30pm, and Thursdays, 1-2pm

Course Description

This seminar explores how the performing arts have engaged with ecological crisis, climate change and offer sites of intervention to reconfigure our social imaginaries in the age of the Anthropocene. How can theatre and performance stage the relationship between humans and nature or perform the non- and posthuman? How can performance find a way of allowing us to relate to abstract sets of scientific data and the often invisible relationships between globalization and Climate Change? We will take a comparative approach by exploring the radically different formats theatre and performance makers around the world have found to explore life in the Anthropocene aesthetically, ranging from new playwriting to conceptual multi-media pieces, from applied theatre projects to political activism that focuses on the relationship between aesthetic and democratic representation. We will ask further how making theatre about the Anthropocene can have an impact on the current socio-political debates. The course includes work by contemporary playwrights such as Caryl Churchill, Ella Hickson, Clare Duffy, and Duncan MacMillan, by theatre makers such as Complicité, Rimini Protokoll, or the Philippine theater ensemble PETA, as well as organisations such as Climate Change Theatre Action and Theater Without Borders. The seminar will include a practical workshop that concludes in a scrap performance of a new short Climate Change play, part of the Climate Change Theatre Action Initiative 2019 that stages new plays around the world between September - December 2019.

Learning Outcomes

- Knowledge of the history of environmentalism in modern theatre and contemporary performance practices.
- Understanding the concepts and theories of Climate Change and the Anthropocene in scientific, political and philosophical discourses.
- Analytical skills to frame the role of media and other forms of representation in processes of political and cultural transformation.
- Ability to translate theoretical concepts into creative responses in performance.
- Awareness of how the arts contribute to implementing action on Climate Change.
- Ability to frame and express arguments clearly in written and oral form.

Readings

The following books are required. Please purchase them at a local bookseller or online. A copy of each of these books will also be on the Library Reserves Shelves:

Henrik Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People* (978-1635960358)

Ella Hickson, *Oil* (978-1848426030)

All other readings will be provided in a Course Reader or in a separate Xerox.

Requirements

- Engaged and informed participation in all class sessions
- Two written essays
- Completion of Performance Project (including smaller assignments in groups)

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is expected. More than one absence (of a weekly three-hour seminar block) in a semester will affect your participation grade for this course. In accordance with the Student Handbook, a failing grade for the course will be given if absences reach 30% of the course meetings.

Please make sure that you come to class prepared, willing to actively participate, to formulate questions, to challenge ideas that are presented and to engage with the material on multiple levels, be it in class discussion, close reading and argument analysis, informal written exercises or by working as part of a group. All of these aspects contribute vitally to your class participation grade. In order to prepare adequately for class, you need to read the material thoroughly and critically, highlight important passages and write your own questions and responses in the margins. Please always bring your Course Reader to class. For the Performance Project, it is not relevant for you to be an experienced performance maker; just be willing to collaborate with others in a team and be willing to experiment with finding creative responses to the materials provided.

Essay Assignments

This course has two written analytic essay assignments. The first should be approximately 1000-1500 words (3-4 pages double spaced) and the second approximately 2000-2500 words (5-7 pages double-spaced). You will receive a more detailed handout in advance of each essay.

Performance Project: Climate Change Theatre Action 2019

As part of the seminar assignments, we will work in groups to participate in the Climate Change Theatre Action Initiative 2019, which stages scratch and full performances as well as play readings as part of a global festival to raise awareness and motivate action on Climate Change. The Performance Project will have three stages:

- Divide into small groups to select and introduce a potential play for performance from the CCTA short playwriting portfolio for our scratch performance. Finalize play selection in class
- In groups, brainstorm and rehearse performance ideas for the play in in-class workshop sessions; intermittently present progress to the rest of the seminar for feedback.
- Perform 1-2 short plays from the CCTA playlist in the final week of the semester (TBC: in a Berlin performance space; as part of Bard "Open Studios")

Some Climate Change /Environmental Resources

- United Nations Climate Change: <http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/climate-change/>
- The Climate Reality Project: <https://www.24hoursofreality.org>
- Umweltbundesamt Germany: <https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/en/topics/climate-energy>
- Anthropozän Project & Curriculum (House of World Cultures /Max Planck Institute for the History of Science):
https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2014/anthropozaen/anthropozaen_2013_2014.php
- Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research: <https://www.pik-potsdam.de/pik-frontpage>
- WWF Carbon Footprint Calculator: <https://www.wwf.de/themen-projekte/klima-energie/wwf-klimarechner/>
- The Guardian Environmental Defenders:
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/series/the-defenders>

Academic Integrity & Plagiarism

Academic study is both an intellectual and ethical enterprise; it is important to keep that in mind as you enter into a scholarly discussion with scholarly work. You are encouraged to build on the ideas and texts of others; that is a vital part of academic life. At the same time, it is your obligation to document every occasion when you use another's ideas, language, or syntax. When you use another's ideas or language—whether through direct quotation, summary, or paraphrase—you must formally acknowledge that debt by referencing it. To do so, please use the MLA parenthetical citation format (<http://www.mla.org/style>). If you are uncertain about any aspect of citation practices, please feel free to stop by my office hours. The importance of correct citation cannot be overstressed! Even one occasion of academic dishonesty, large or small, on any assignment, large or small, will result in reporting of the offense to the Exam Board and may result in failure for the entire course.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Please ensure to submit your essays in a timely manner. 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 I agree to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, you will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Grade Breakdown

Mid-term Essay: 30%

Final Essay: 40%

Performance Project: 15%

Participation: 15%

Schedule

Please note that this schedule is subject to change (note the TBC for guest speakers and potential theatre outings) and it is your responsibility to keep up with the latest assignments and deadlines. Please also note that classes may be rescheduled for Completion Week so you must plan to stay on campus until December 20, 2019

Week 1: Thursday, September 5, 2019: Introduction – The Nature/Culture Divide
(shorter 1.5h session → make-up on Wed., Oct. 9)

Reading:

From Ovid: *Metamorphoses* (Xerox)

From Alan Weisman: *The World Without Us* (CR)

PART I: Thinking the Anthropocene

Week 2: Thursday, September 12, 2019: What is the Anthropocene?

Reading:

Steffen, Crutzen, McNeill: “The Anthropocene – Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?” (CR)

Timothy Morton: “Poisoned Ground: Art and Philosophy in the Time of the Hyperobjects” (CR)

- **Assignment:** Please visit the Berlin Museum of Natural History’s Special Exhibition “ARTEFAKTE” **before the first session of the seminar** and choose one image from the exhibition that you found particularly striking. Write a short reflection of ca. 350 words) on how your chosen photograph incorporates the idea of the Anthropocene.
(<https://www.museumfuernaturkunde.berlin/en/museum/exhibitions/artefacts>)

Week 2: Thursday, September 12, 2019, 18:30-19:30 – additional session: Ecology and Cultural Expression

Lecture at the HKW - J. Henry Fair “The Anthropocene and Me – Images of the World on the Edge”

Week 3: Thursday, September 19, 2019: Ecology and Cultural Expression II

Reading:

Ursula Heise: “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to Ecocriticism” (CR)

Dipesh Chakrabarty: “The Climate of History: Four Theses” (CR)

!! Friday, September 20, 2019: Fridays for Future Global Strike !!

Week 4: Thursday, September 26, 2019: Civic Engagement and Climate Change

Arctic Cycle Initiative (<http://www.climatechangetheatreaction.com>)

Reading:

Carl Lavery, “Introduction: Performance and Ecology: What Can Theatre Do?” (CR)

W. Arons, and T.J. May, “Introduction” in *Readings in Performance and Ecology* (CR)

- **Introducing the Performance Project/ Organizing Play Selection**
- **Midterm Essay Assignment**

Week 5: Thursday, October 3, 2019 : German Reunification Day - No class

Week 6: Wednesday, October 9, 2019, 6pm – 7:30pm: Guest Lecture Sudesh Mishra

Reading:

Sudesh Mishra, "On Seeing a Bull's Skull on a Bicycle Seat: Innovative Archaism" (CR)

- **Assignment: Please prepare 1-2 questions based on your reading that you post via email to the seminar ahead of the lecture and that you can contribute to the joint discussion following the lecture.**

PART II: Environments of the Theatrical Imagination

Week 6: Thursday, October 10, 2019: Ecology and the Theatrical Tradition

Reading:

Henrik Ibsen: *Enemy of the People*

Una Chaudhuri: "There Must be a Lot of Fish in That Lake: Towards an Ecological Theatre" (CR)

- **Performance Project: Play Presentation Group I**

Week 7: Thursday, October 17, 2019: New Materialisms, New Temporalities

Reading:

Ella Hickson: *Oil*

Jane Bennet: "The Force of Things" (CR)

Performance Project: Play Presentation Group II

!!Midterm Essay due: Friday, October 24, 2019!!

Week 8: Thursday, October 24, 2019: Landscapes of the Anthropocene – The Arctic and Antarctic

Reading:

Duncan Macmillan, *2071* (CR)

Stuart MacRae: *The Anthropocene* (Scottish Opera)

<https://operavision.eu/en/library/performances/operas/anthropocene-scottish-opera>

- **Performance Project: Play Presentation Group III**

Week 9:

----- **Midterm Break** -----

Week 10: Thursday, November 7, 2019: Landscapes of the Anthropocene II – The Amazon Rainforest

Reading

Complicite: *The Encounter*

The Encounter Resource Website: <http://www.complicite.org/encounterresource/>

Anna Tsing: "The Arts of Noticing" (CR)

- **Performance Project: Presenting Staging Ideas**

Week 11: Thursday, November 14, 2019: Performance Project – Practical Workshop

Week 12: Thursday, November 21, 2019: Ecology and Justice

Reading: Ciptet, Roberts, Khan – "Trading a Livable World" (CR)

UN Climate Change, Paris Agreement:

https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf

- **Performance Project: In-class rehearsal (1.5h)**

Week 13: Thursday, November 28, 2019: Staging Global Democracy

Donna Haraway: "Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene" (CR)

- **Performance Project: In-class rehearsal (1.5h)**
- **FINAL ESSAY Assignment**

Week 14: Thursday, December 5, 2018:

Milo Rau: *The General Assembly* (Schaubühne Berlin, 2017)

Watch Session on "The Natural Global Commons" : <http://www.general-assembly.net/en/>

- **Performance Project: In-class rehearsal (1.5h)**

Week 15: Thursday, December 12, 2019: Performance Project – Final Rehearsal & Concluding Discussion

Week 15: Friday, December 13, 2019: Scratch Performance (Location tbc)

- **!! Final ESSAY due on December 19, 2019!!**

Facility Guidelines:

“The Factory” – Eichenstrasse 43

The Factory Policy Agreement

- 1) “The Factory” at BCB (Eichenstrasse 43) has space and facilities available to BCB students with an academic purpose for using the building. Mandatory in-class orientations are required to retain chip access to the Factory. Chip access to The Factory is from 7am to 10pm everyday during the semester. At 10pm students will be asked to leave the building by BCB security personnel.
- 2) Students agree to only use the common spaces that are available for their needs, and must respect private spaces that are off-limits. For requesting to reserve the dance / theater space and / or Seminar Room 6, please fill out the online [Factory Reservation Form](#). The Factory Staff will get back to you within two weekdays. (Monday - Friday).
- 3) No smoking is allowed anywhere inside the building. There are to be no projects using open flames (such as candles, torches, lanterns, fireworks, etc.) inside any part of the building.
- 4) Fire exits and lanes must be kept clear of any obstructions.
- 5) Spray painting and handling of any hazardous (chemical or combustible) material is not allowed inside the building. Contact the Studio Arts Manager concerning working with these materials. All work surfaces (indoor and outdoor) must be properly protected with a drop cloth or a packing paper provided by the workshop.
- 6) No sandals, flip-flops, or bare feet will be allowed inside the workshop and studio 6.
- 7) Students must make sure all lights are turned off and doors are closed when leaving the building. No windows or doors are to be left opened or cracked. All electrical items must be unplugged when not in use.
- 8) If BCB workshop tools must be borrowed for a purpose outside of the building, please contact The Studio Arts Manager (by appointment).
- 9) There are to be no architectural changes to studios or any areas inside or outside of the building without first speaking with the Studio Arts Manager.
- 10) During completion week, any space used by a student must be returned empty with clean walls and floors. All garbage must be bagged (or boxed) and properly disposed of. Final grades may be penalized and / or fines imposed if items are left (or renovations unfinished) by the inspection deadline.
- 11) Contact Studio Arts Manager directly with any questions: j.park@berlin.bard.edu

AV Facilities – Eichenstrasse 43 (upstairs)

- 1) BCB’s AV (Audio / Visual) facilities provide a limited quantity of AV equipment to support Admin, Faculty as well as those students enrolled in arts classes that require specific items. AV facilities do not include any black and white or color printing services for students.
- 2) The opening times may change every semester to adapt to specific course times. Once these times are established they will stay consistent throughout the semester, with possible exceptions. AV facilities are ONLY available during days when classes are held (closed during official BCB holidays).
- 3) All items checked out are due back during AV hours the following day, unless other

arrangements have been made in advance directly with AV Staff.

- 4) Items to be reserved on a specific date should be requested at least one week in advance. Without reservation, availability is limited to a first-come, first-serve basis.
- 5) The AV Staff may exclude students from borrowing items at any time, if the student:
 - failed to return items in time
 - failed to return items in person (pick up and/ or return by friends is not allowed)
 - returned items with missing pieces
 - returned items damaged or in poor shape
- 6) AV equipment will be given out only to those students responsible in organizing, picking up as well as returning their items IN PERSON. No exceptions.
- 7) All items returned late, regardless of patron's position at BCB, will be subject to a 1 Euro fine, per day.
- 8) Any item returned without accessories (such as cables, SD card, batteries, tripod head, lens cap, etc) will be subject to a 1 Euro fine, per day (the same as late returns).
- 9) Any items missing will be subject to patron reimbursement for its value (or under special circumstances, replacement, at the discretion of AV Staff). Any items damaged or malfunctioning are expected to be reported to Staff upon check-in.
- 10) Please use the AV email to inquire about equipment or policy, as well as to reserve (av@berlin.bard.edu). Do not contact AV Staff through their personal emails.
- 11) We strongly suggest personally visiting the facilities to inquire and reserve before borrowing equipment!
- 12) AV equipment is limited at BCB. Whenever possible students are encouraged to use their own devices (computers, cameras) for production purposes.
- 13) Contact AV Staff directly with any questions: av@berlin.bard.edu

MacLab and Photo Darkroom Facilities – Platanenstrasse 98 (downstairs)

** Guidelines to be offered during orientations.