

New Materialism: An Introduction

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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

For a long time, modern western cultural tradition used to distinguish between nature and culture, between the living organic being and the technical artefact.

Under the title »new materialism« an interdisciplinary and heterogenous constellation of theories and methodologies has emerged in the past twenty years, opposing anthropocentric world views and dualisms such as active subject/passive object or nature/culture. Instead, Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Jane Bennett, and others, often with reference to the works of philosopher Gilles Deleuze, argue for an ontological re-conceptualization of the material, to which they attribute an agency of its own. They acknowledge and study the companionship of human and non-human (biological or technical) beings in complex ecologies.

In the seminar we will get to know the new materialist thinking and the inspiration it took from feminist, postcolonial, and ecological approaches through the discussion of selected key positions, concepts, and methodologies. We will study new materialism's links and differences to the »old« materialism as well as to posthumanism and the Anthropocene.

One aim of the seminar is to critically investigate the potential of new materialism for art theory and artistic practice.

Requirements

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.

Bard College Berlin may 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.

Assessment

Each student must give one classroom presentation and write two papers.

Essay Deadlines

The mid-term essay is due on October 20, midnight.

The final essay is due on December 15, midnight.

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

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 a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. 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

Final essay (3000 words): 40%

Midterm essay (2000 words): 30%

Participation (including one classroom presentation): 30%.

Schedule

Week 1

09/4, Monday 14 — 17.15 (via Zoom)

Introduction

Reading: Iris van der Tuin, "Neo/ New Materialism," in: Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (eds.), *Posthuman Glossary*, London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic 2018, 277-279.

Week 2

09/11, Monday 14 — 17.15

Historical Materialism

Reading: Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books 1998, 569-574.

Week 3

09/18, Monday 14 — 17.15

Field trip to the Garden of the Pollinator Pathmaker Project in front of the Museum für Naturkunde, Invalidenstr. 43, 10115 Berlin.

To prepare: Please visit www.pollinator.art and create your own digital garden, using the algorithmic tool of the pollinator pathmaker. Write a short description of the plants in your garden and how they change over the course of the seasons.

Week 4

09/25, Monday 14 — 17.15

What is the Anthropocene?

Readings:

- Paul Crutzen and Eugen Stoermer, “The Anthropocene,” *IGBP Newsletter* 41, 2000, 17-18.
- Paul Crutzen, “Geology of Man,” *Nature* 415, 2002, 23.
- Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History. Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry* 35, Winter 2009, 197-222.

Week 5

10/02, Monday 14 — 17.15

Criticism of the Anthropocene

Reading:

Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2018.

Week 6

10/09, Monday 14 — 17.15

“Humus Sapiens,” A Workshop with mikroBIOMIK. (tbc)

Please read: https://mikrobiomik.org/inc/About_HUMUS_sapiens.pdf

Week 7

10/16, Monday 14 — 17.15

Geophilosophy

Reading: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, London and New York: Verso Books 2009, 85-113.

- Fall break -

Week 8

10/30, Monday 14 — 17.15

Against Essentialism

Reading: Donna J. Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in: *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge 1991, 149-181.

Week 9

11/06, Monday 14 — 17.15

Thinking With Materials

Readings:

- Petra Lange-Berndt, “How to Be Complicit With Materials,” in: *Materiality: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. by Petra Lange-Berndt, 12-23.
- Bill Brown, “Materiality,” in: W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen (eds.), *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2010.

Week 10

11/13, Monday 14 — 17.15

Ecologies of Matter

Reading: Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2010.

Week 11

11/20, Monday 14 — 17.15

Media-Natures

Reading: Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2015, 1-28 and 137-140.

Week 12

11/27, Monday 14 — 17.15

Infrastructuralism

Readings:

- Susan Leigh Star and Karen Ruhleder, “Steps Towards an Ecology of Infrastructure: Design and Access for Large Information Spaces,” March 1996, *Information Systems Research* 7 (1), 111-134.
- John Durham Peters, “Infrastructuralism: Media as Traffic Between Nature and Culture,” in: Marion Näser-Lather and Christoph Neubert (eds.), *Traffic: Media as Infrastructures and Cultural Practices*, Leiden, Boston: Brill 2015, 31-49.

Week 13

12/04, Monday 14 — 17.15

Studio Visit and Conversation with Julius von Bismarck, Bessemer Str. 2-14, 12103 Berlin.

Week 14

12/11, Monday 14 — 17.15

Wrap-Up