

Fall 2025

PL203: Seeing and Being Seen

Instructor: Prof. Dr. Katalin Makkai
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Office hours: By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Theorizations of human relationships often rely on fundamentally visual vocabulary. Consider, for example, the notion of the “male gaze”, which has become mainstream while it has also prompted the mobilization of the term “gaze” to analyze and critique other forms of social and political wrongs and to consider possible forms of resistance. This course explores a range of ways in which tropes of seeing and being seen—along with refusing to see and invisibility—have been used to understand our encounters with each other, with society at large, and with our own selves. We examine how thinkers have articulated the stakes in seeing and being seen in terms of recognition and the desire or need for recognition, objectification, and the Other or Othering. Works are drawn from philosophy, cultural criticism, feminist theory, psychoanalysis, visual art, and fiction. Authors include Hegel, Lacan, Sartre, Beauvoir, Fanon, Mulvey, hooks, and Lugones.

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.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or

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a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, for this course **one** absence will not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Any further absences should be discussed with the instructor. Partial absences (e.g. arriving late or leaving early) count toward the absence total.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes (=more than 3.9 classes for this course), 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

Participation

Seminar discussion

Contributions to seminar discussion should be productive as well as regular, and should engage responsively and respectfully with the contributions of others.

Reading posts

Students may be asked to post on readings ahead of class meetings.

Preparation for class

Each student is expected to be prepared for class. This means: having carefully read the assigned texts in the assigned editions, having a copy at hand during class together with writing materials, and being ready to initiate and to contribute to seminar discussion.

Lateness

Repeated and/or significant lateness will affect the participation grade.

Assignments

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

BCB 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 feedback

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

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instructors' office hours. Students receive 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 AND DATES

participation	30%
midterm exam, in class F Oct 31	25%
<i>EITHER</i>	
final essay, due F Dec 19	45%
<i>OR</i>	
final essay presentation, in class F Dec. 12	10%
and final essay, due F Dec 19	35%

SCHEDULE

*Once the semester has started, please consult Google Classroom for the current schedule as the syllabus on the website may be outdated

*The schedule is subject to revision during the semester

*Readings to be downloaded from Google Classroom

F Sept 5	G. W. F. Hegel, from <i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i>
F Sept 12	Jean-Paul Sartre, from <i>Being and Nothingness</i>
F Sept 19	Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the <i>I</i> Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience"
F Sept 26	Simone de Beauvoir, from <i>The Second Sex</i> Filipa Melo Lopes, "What Do Incels Want? Explaining Incel Violence Using Beauvoirian Otherness"
F Oct 3	no class (federal holiday)
F Oct 10	Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Alfred Hitchcock (dir.), <i>Vertigo</i>
F Oct 17	Painting and beholder Images and texts TBA
F Oct 24	no class (fall break)
F Oct 31	14:00-15:30 midterm exam 15:30-17:00 in class: watch and discuss Chris Marker (dir.), <i>La Jetée</i>
F Nov 7	Frantz Fanon, from <i>Black Skin, White Masks</i> Paul Taylor, from <i>Black is Beautiful</i>

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- F Nov 14 bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators"
- F Nov 21 María Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception"
- F Nov 28 William Shakespeare, *King Lear*
- F Dec 5 Stanley Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*"
- F Dec 12 presentations
- F Dec 19 **final essay** due