

AR210

New Materialisms in Philosophy and Art

Seminar Leader: Dr. Nisaar Ulama

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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

“Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters.

There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter.”

Karen Barad

In this seminar we explore, re-think and revisit relationships between the human and nature. Recent attempts to do this have followed criticism of Western thinking (and acting) as being rooted deeply in a violent division: a sovereign *human* subject on the one hand with non-human, natural objects as merely passive material on the other. Alongside this critique, we want to read proposals for a different understanding of what human or nature could possibly mean – after all, climate change and the Anthropocene have fundamentally challenged a hierarchical idea of the relation between these two categories.

Understanding matter and materialities as the non-human will be of crucial interest. With this aim in mind, we examine the perspectives of philosophy, science and arts. For example, Karen Barad proposes learning from quantum physics to overcome the idea of fixed oppositions defining subjects and objects. Instead, *entanglements*, *intra-actions* and *diffractions* should open up a relational space in which agency is situated. Ultimately, humans are not the only beings in the world who can act. We consider artistic and curatorial practices as well as theoretical approaches to the potential of matter. Readings for our seminar will include texts by Sara Ahmed, Rosi Braidotti, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Achille Mbembe, and Nancy Tuana.

Requirements

Students are required to come to class prepared and with the relevant materials and texts, as well as to take part in a fieldtrip off-campus. This may involve allowing for extra-time for making the way to and from BCB campus.

Participation consists in contributing productively to class discussion in a respectful manner, and in demonstrating a sound knowledge of the texts assigned. Reading materials will be made available through Google Classroom prior to classes dedicated to these texts and subjects.

All assignment must be completed to pass the course. Assignments and deadlines are specified in the schedule below.

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 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, 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 & Assignments

Each student must give one classroom presentation and write two papers. The mid-term essay (2000 words) is due on **March 20th**, midnight. The final essay (3000 words) is due on **May 15th**, midnight. Essays should include footnotes/references, bibliography and, if needed, a list of illustrations. The structure and draft of your 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 will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. 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): 35%

Midterm essay (2000 words): 25%

Participation (including one classroom presentation): 40%

Schedule

Week 1

January 26th, 14-17.15h

Introduction

Week 2

February 2nd, 14-17.15h

Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Polity Press 2013: chap. 2, “Post-Anthropocentrism: Life beyond the Species“.

Week 3

February 9th, 14-17.15h

Achille Mbembe, *The Earthly Community. Reflections on the Last Utopia*, V2_Publishing 2022: chap. 2 “the second creation” & chap. 4, “crossing the mirror”.

Week 4

February 16th, 14-17.15h

Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, University of Minnesota Press 2018: chap. 2, “Golden Spikes and Dubious Origins“.

Week 5

February 23rd, 14-17.15h

Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Perfomativity. How Matter Comes to Matter,” in: *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, Indiana University Press 2008, 120–154.

Week 6

March 2nd, **15h**

Field trip: Exhibition visit **Pierre Huyghe**, *Liminals* at LAS Art Foundation at Halle am Berghain

Week 7

March 9th, 14-17.15h

Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology. Orientations, Objects, Others*, Duke University Press 2006: chap. 1, “Orientation towards objects”.

Week 8

March 16th, 14-17.15h

Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*. Polity Press 2017: chap.6, „A world of people“.

Week 9

March 23th, 14-17.15h

Guest lecture: **Epona Hamdan**, Haus der Kulturen der Welt

Spring Break

March 30th - April 5th

Week 10

April 6th

Easter Monday (No Class)

Week 11

April 13th, 14-17.15h

Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times. Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, Open Humanities Press 2015: chap. 1-5.

Week 12

April 20th, 14-17.15h

Group Working Session: Arts in the Anthropocene. How do exhibitions and artworks manifest the *new materialism* and the *post-human* condition?

Week 13

April 27th, 14-17.15h

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press 2010, chap. 1: “The Force of Things” & chap. 7: “Political Ecologies”

Week 14

May 4th, 14-17.15h

Wrap-Up and Reflection.