

Fall 2026

PL203: Seeing and Being Seen

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Office hours: by appointment
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores how seeing shapes human and nonhuman relations—not simply as a sensory modality, but as a structured and contested field of attention, interpretation, and response. We begin with questions of double consciousness and social visibility, and then consider accounts of cinematic, ethical, and relational forms of perception. Working with philosophy, feminist theory, cultural criticism, and film, we examine how seeing may be shaped, distorted, and reworked through power, desire, mediation, and acknowledgment. Along the way, we encounter the concepts of recognition, othering and the Other, the male gaze, and objectification (among others). Figures such as Du Bois, Beauvoir, Mulvey, Cavell, and others help us ask not only what it means to be seen, but what it means to see—and to fail, refuse, or learn to see otherwise.

REQUIREMENTS

Texts

All readings will be provided as PDFs via Google Classroom.

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](#).

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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, 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

Students are expected to arrive to class on time and prepared. Being prepared means: having carefully read the assigned texts in the assigned editions, bringing the readings to class along with writing materials, and being ready to initiate and to contribute to seminar discussion. Lack of preparation will affect the final grade, as will repeated and/or significant lateness.

Students may be required to post responses to readings as part of preparation for class.

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 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 AND DATES

a) participation	30%
b) midterm exam, in class Oct 12	25%
c) student's choice: <i>EITHER</i>	
i) final essay (2500-3000 words), due Dec 18	45%
<i>OR</i>	
ii) final essay presentation, in class Dec. 7	10%
and final essay (2500-3000 words), due Dec 18	35%

The midterm exam and the final essay must be completed in order to pass the course.

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SCHEDULE

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has started, please consult Google Classroom for the current schedule as the syllabus on the BCB website may be outdated

*The schedule is subject to revision during the semester

Aug 31	W. E. B. Du Bois, from <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>
Sept 7	Simone de Beauvoir, from <i>The Ethics of Ambiguity</i>
Sept 14	Jean-Paul Sartre, from <i>Being and Nothingness</i>
Sept 21	Simone de Beauvoir, from <i>The Second Sex</i> Nancy Bauer, "Beauvoir on the Allure of Self-Objectification"
Sept 28	Alfred Hitchcock (dir.), <i>Vertigo</i>
Oct 5	John Berger, from <i>Ways of Seeing</i> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"
Oct 12	midterm exam
Oct 19	no class (fall break)
Oct 26	Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'" Andrea Weiss, "A Queer Feeling When I Look at You" bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze"
Nov 2	Marilyn Frye, "In and Out of Harm's Way: Arrogance and Love" María Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception"
Nov 9	Stanley Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging"
Nov 16	Preston Sturges, <i>The Lady Eve</i>
Nov 23	TBD
Nov 30	John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?" Vicki Hearne, from <i>Adam's Task</i>
Dec 7	final essay presentations
Dec 18	final essay due