

New York University  
Department of Media, Culture, and Communication  
**The Nonhuman: Aesthetics and Politics of Personhood (MCC-GE 3010)**

SPRING 2017

Professor Alexander R. Galloway  
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Office Hours: Tue 5-6pm; Wed 11-12pm

Time: Tuesdays, 2 - 4:50pm  
Location: East Building 712

From climate change and infrastructure to objects and animality, the nonhuman realm exerts a growing influence on contemporary life. In this seminar we consider persons as things and things as persons, but also peer beyond the human into a world devoid of humanity. What does personhood mean in the age of the posthuman? Themes include proletarianization, animality, new materialism, posthumanism, pessimism, and the commons.

### **Books & Readings**

The syllabus contains articles and books. Articles will be distributed electronically. The following books are available at the NYU Bookstore:

- Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
- Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, trans. Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kono (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).
- Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
- Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone, 2015).
- Claire Fontaine, *Human Strike Has Already Begun & Other Writings* (London: Mute, 2013).
- Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).
- Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (New York: Autonomedia, 2013).
- Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do With Our Brain?*, trans. Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). [Note: publisher out of stock.]
- Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of this Planet: Horror of Philosophy, Vol. 1* (Alresford, UK: Zero Books, 2011).
- Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

## PART I -- FOR US

### Jan 24 -- Course Introduction.

### Jan 31 -- Where Are We Now?

Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*.

### Feb 7 -- Neoliberalism and “Economic Man”

Brown, *Undoing the Demos*.

### Feb 14 -- Orientations

Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*.

### Feb 21 -- The Human I

Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics” (PDF).

Achille Mbembe, “God's Phallus” (PDF).

Jasbir Puar, “Queer Times, Queer Assemblages” (PDF).

### Feb 28 -- The Human II

Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

## PART II -- IN ITSELF

### Mar 7 -- Animality I

Donna Haraway, “Companion Species Manifesto” (PDF).

Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, 39-62 (PDF).

Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like To Be a Bat?” (PDF).

### Mar 14 -- Spring Break

### Mar 21 -- Animality II

Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*.

### Mar 28 -- New Materialism I

Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*.

### Apr 4 -- New Materialism II

Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

### Apr 11 -- Life Resistance

Malabou, *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* (PDF).

Catherine Malabou, “One Life Only: Biological Resistance, Political Resistance” (PDF).

Karen Barad, “Nature's Queer Performativity” (PDF).

### **PART III -- Without Us**

#### **Apr 18 -- Cosmic Pessimism**

H.P. Lovecraft, "From Beyond" (PDF).

Thacker, *In the Dust of this Planet*.

#### **Apr 25 -- Pessimism and Futurity**

Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson, III, "The Position of the Unthought" (PDF).

Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness" (PDF).

Lee Edelman, "The Future Is Kid Stuff" (PDF).

Lauren Berlant, "Cruel Optimism" (PDF).

#### **May 2 -- Prometheanism, Speculation, Human Strike**

Claire Fontaine, *Human Strike Has Already Begun & Other Writings*.

Martine Syms, "Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto" ([web](#); [video](#) [optional]).

Srnicek and Williams, "#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics" (PDF).

Laboria Cuboniks, "Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation" (PDF).

#### **Monday, May 8, 5pm**

All papers due.

## **Course Assignments**

*Reading* -- Students are expected to read the assigned texts in advance of class.

*Discussion Leaders* -- Students are required to act as a discussion leader for two different weeks during the semester.

*Writing* -- Students are required to write 20 pages total for the semester, preferably split between a midterm paper and a final paper, although the combination is flexible. Suggested paper topics will be provided. Papers should adhere to standard format (12 point font, double spaced, one inch margins, no spaces between paragraphs, etc.) and follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*. All writing should demonstrate a close reading of the required materials and exhibit a method of critical analysis.

## **Grade Formula**

Papers	80%
Class participation	20%

## **Laptop Policy**

I discourage the use of laptops, tablets, and phones in class and consider them to be detrimental to the social and pedagogical climate of the classroom. Exceptions can be made for readings that have been distributed in electronic form, and for students with special learning needs.