

Harvard University  
Department of Visual and Environmental Studies  
**The Nonhuman: Aesthetics and Politics of Personhood (VES 232)**

FALL 2016

Professor Alexander R. Galloway  
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Office Hours: Thu 4-5pm & Fri 10-11am

Time: Thursdays, 2 - 4pm  
Location: Carpenter Center 401

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 Coop:

- Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
- 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).
- Gilles Châtelet, *To Live and Think Like Pigs*, trans. Robin Mackay (New York: Sequence/Urbanomic, 2014).
- 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).
- Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (London: Verso, 2015).
- 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**

### **Sept 1 -- Course Introduction.**

### **Sept 8 -- Where Are We Now?**

Châtelet, *To Live and Think Like Pigs*.

Razmig Keucheyan, "The Defeat of Critical Thinking (1977-93)" (PDF).

### **Sept 15 -- Neoliberalism and Postfordism**

Brown, *Undoing the Demos*.

### **Sept 22 -- Orientations**

Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*.

### **Sept 29 -- The Human**

Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

## **PART II -- IN ITSELF**

### **Oct 6 -- Animality**

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).

### **Oct 13 -- New Materialism I**

Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*.

### **Oct 20 -- New Materialism II**

Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

### **Oct 27 -- Life Resistance**

Malabou, *What Should We Do With Our Brain?*

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

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

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

### **Nov 3 -- Cosmic Pessimism**

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

Thacker, *In the Dust of this Planet*.

**Nov 10 -- 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).

**Nov 17 -- Accelerationism, Prometheanism, Speculation**

Srnicek and Williams, *Inventing the Future*.

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

**Nov 24 -- Thanksgiving Recess**

**Dec 1 -- The Commons**

Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*.

Lauren Berlant, "The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times" (PDF).

**Friday Dec 9, 5pm**

All papers due.

### **Evaluation & Grade Formula**

All course work should demonstrate a close reading of the required materials and exhibit a method of critical analysis. You are required to write 20 pages total for the semester, preferably split between a midterm paper and a final paper, although the combination is up to you. 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*.

Papers	80%
Class participation	20%

### **Attendance Policy**

You are required to attend class and participate. Assigned readings are mandatory. Your final grade will be lowered for unexcused absences. Absences are excused with a note from Harvard University Student Health Services.

### **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.

### **The Harvard College Honor Code**

Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.