



April 2020

Hanauer Seminar 2020-21

Environments in the 21st Century: Migration, Climate, Extinction, In/humanness, Non-Humans and Beyond

This year-long seminar is structured around the idea that the concept of the Anthropocene challenges us to rethink our basic humanistic values: the centrality of speech for human expression, rational thought, the ability to reason and communicate, the demand for freedom, democracy, justice and human rights, and the creation of cultural expressions based on enlightenment values. Seminar participants will critically examine the literature and culture of humanism on select examples drawn from the Western tradition and compare them with contemporary environmental conditions that emphasize the need to rethink human exceptionalism and emphasize relationality and precarity.

In close consultation with the seminar participants, we will examine issues such as global migration, climate change, extinction, cultural and biological diversity, environmental justice, sustainability, the agency of nature, and the need for rethinking human and nonhuman relations, from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. The idea is to transcend narrow disciplinary frameworks and arrive at a greater horizon of understanding that brings the critical and self-reflexive framework of Western Civilization into full fruition. What does it mean to engage the Western tradition and its core values such as equality, freedom, justice, democracy, and the rule of law in a broader and more global context? What is the role of Western culture in an age in which humanity has been charged, by the scientific community, with geological agency, i.e., an age in which compartmentalized thinking is simply no longer adequate and where we have to solve problems on a larger and global scale?

Bi-weekly discussions of select readings and project presentations will constitute the base for intense discussions. We might also meet with visitors whose work we will read in advance on an ad hoc basis. Seminar participants will work towards the articulation of their own projects and scholarly positions, to be shared in a workshop-style colloquium at the end of spring.