Abstract:

How does the materiality of the “body” shape thinking and being in the world? We take a wide view of the body, including human bodies, animal bodies, plants, and machines, but also institutions and structured processes.

In this seminar, we will start at the beginning of visual arts in cave paintings, read foundational texts about embodied perception, then move to machines and read key sections from James Bridle's book “Ways of Being” (2022), in which he uses his own artistic practice alongside natural and social sciences, philosophy, and speculation to investigate the shifting boundaries of what we call 'intelligence.' We will visit an exhibition on “more than human design” and look at water as a different materiality as a form of computation, both within a Western and a Chinese tradition.

Requirements:

- 80% Presence
- Participation in readings, group presentations, and discussions

Further Resources:

- Pad for Notes

Mon 11.05.2026

09:00–18:00, ZT 4.T37

On the birth of art, religion, and politics by neurologically modern humans, Upper Paleolithic (50'000-12'000 BC)

Lewis-Williams, David, E. Thomas Lawson, Knut Helskog, David S. Whitley, and Paul Mellars. 2003. “Review Feature: A Review of The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art by David Lewis-Williams.” Cambridge Archaeological Journal 13 (2): 263–79. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959774303000155.

- Overview, David Lewis-Williams, 263-267

Lewis-Williams, J. David. 2002. The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art. Thames & Hudson.

- Chapter 7: An Origin of Image Making, read: 180-196
  PDF

Watch: Werner Herzog: Cave of Forgotten Dreams, 89 min 2010, watch: 01:05:40 - 01:22:50

Afternoon

“Umwelt”: Relationship between subject and world

- Uexküll, Jakob von. 1992. “A Stroll through the Worlds of Animals and Men: A Picture Book of Invisible Worlds (1934).” Semiotica 89: 319–91, Read, 319-32 (PDF)
- Nagel, Thomas. 1974. “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” The Philosophical Review 83 (4): 435. (PDF)
- Thomas Thwaites: Goat Man, 2016,

https://www.thomasthwaites.com/a-holiday-from-being-human-goatman/
    - Becoming a goat to avoid existential dread (with Thomas Thwaites), Clearer Thinking Podcast, (August 8, 2024), Start at 57:14, https://podcast.clearerthinking.org/episode/222/thomas-thwaites-becoming-a-goat-to-avoid-existential-dread/
    - Thwaites, Thomas. 2016. GoatMan: How I Took a Holiday from Being Human. First edition. Princeton Architectural Press.

Tue 12.05.2026

09:00–18:00 ZT 3.K08

Analog institutions, AI systems, and Biology

- Alain Resnais. All the Memory in the World (Toute la mémoire du monde). 1956, 21 min, https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/all-the-worlds-memories-alain-resnais/
- Somaini, Antonio, ed. 2025. “A Theory of Latent Spaces.” In World through AI: Exploring Latent Spaces, with Quentin Bajac, Ada Ackerman, Noam Milgrom Elcott, and Tim Trombley. Jean Boite Editions. (read sections, I, II, IV, VI, VII)

PDF

- Bridle, James. 2022. *Ways of Being: Beyond Human Intelligence.* Allen Lane. (Epub)
    - all: Introduction
    - Group 1: Thinking Otherwise
    - Group 2: Seeing like a planet
    - all: Solidarity

Brian Eno and James Bridle on Ways of Being, 2022, 60 min

Wed 13.05.2026

09:00–18:00 ZT 3.K13

Plant Intelligence

- How Trees Talk to Each Other, Suzanne Simard, 2016 Ted Talk
- Finding the Mother Tree, Suzanne Simard, 2021
- How ‘heretical’ science revealed the intelligence of Nature | Monica Gagliano, 2022, 13 Min,
- Volkart, Yvonne. 2025. Editorial. Plant Intelligence – Towards a Vegetal Aesthetics / Editorial. Plant Intelligence – Towards a Vegetal Aesthetics. June 29. https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.15768364. (read 1-10)
- Fuller, Matthew. 2025. Days Are as Grass. On Karel Miler’s “Felt by Fresh Grass,” Plant Intelligence and Expanded Aesthetics. June 29. https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.15768436.

Afternoon

Exhibition: More than Human—Designing with Nature
https://museum-gestaltung.ch/en/exhibition/more-human-designing-nature

Task: Choose one work. Make a short presentation: How is the non-human modeled? What materialities are involved? What role do they play?

Thu 14.05.2026

official holiday, school closed

Fri 15.05.2026

09:00–12:00 ZT 6.F01

Water/flow-based Computation

Bridle, James. 2022. Ways of Being: Beyond Human Intelligence. Allen Lane

- Chapter 7: Non-Binary Machines (start with “soft robotics”)

Vanessa Bosch

- hydrofeminist manifesto, https://hydrofem-manifesto.xyz/

Ioana Vreme Moser

- Fluid Anatomy, sound installation with water & air / acryl glass plates, 2024
- Pirouette Machines. Fluid Components, Talk at 38c3, 2024 (start at 12:20)

Mi, You. 2025. “A Different Endpoint Qian Xuesen and Cosmotechnics.” In Machine Decision Is Not Final: China and the History and Future of Artificial Intelligence, edited by Benjamin H. Bratton, Anna Greenspan, Amy Ireland, and Bogna Konior. Urbanomic.

Yuk Hui, 2017. Cosmotechnics as Cosmopolitics, e-flux, issue #86

Shi Qing (石青), Qian Xuesen and the Yangtze River Computer (钱学森和长江计算机), single-channel video, 2021.

Review, Feedback, End

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