

THE POLITICS OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

Geography 157

575 McCone Hall, Thursday 11-2

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Globally, this year was the warmest year in recorded history. Alarming, the record it broke was set last year. One-fifth of all humanity, a billion people, live in communities that do not meet the World Health Organization's air quality standards for air pollution. Rates of extinction are purported to be 1000 times higher than historic background rates, ocean acidification level exceed *any* historical analogs, and by 2050 there will be more plastic by weight than fish in the ocean. Moreover, there is not a person, soil, plant, or body of water on this planet that does not bear the radioactive traces of the nuclear industrial complex. In this context, it is not surprising that geologists have defined a new epoch called the Anthropocene that puts human agency at the level of glaciers, massive meteors, and catastrophic volcanic eruptions in terms of its ability to transform the geophysical properties of the earth and the atmosphere. While the dangers of apocalyptic predictions are not new, the intensity and scale of geophysical transformations and the related proliferation of discourses, institutions, and subjectivities warrant an attentive and critical engagement with the concept.

This course seeks to trace the rise of the anthropogenic epoch as a political epistemology, changing material milieu, and amorphous and contested political signifier. In many ways, the notion of the Anthropocene challenges the very boundaries of nature and culture that have plagued and defined modernity. Natural forces and inanimate objects from storms and bodies, ocean flows and river currents, soil layers and chemical reactions are more and more commonly understood as always already natural/cultural. What does this purported new epoch portend, not only for how we think about resource degradation, wilderness, and environmental conservation but also the definitions of humanity, temporality, species, sexuality, etc.? What are the differential ways that the universal categories of the human at the heart of the concept of the Anthropocene mask the differential responsibility and liability for these epochal changes? How might we understand the vast unevenness of its effects across geography and difference? Finally, how do we both refuse and undermine the conditions of this epoch's most violent harbingers — capitalism, racism, war etc. — and their destructive legacies while at the same time inhabiting and exploring the forms and beings that are the conditions and kin of modern existence?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course is designed to run as an intensive seminar. You are expected to read ALL of the material for class. Weekly commentaries of 400 to 500 words will make up 25% of your grade, class presentation 15 %, participation in discussions 25%, and a final 10-12-page paper 35%.

Short Papers

You will be expected to write a short paper of 10-12 pages. This assignment will be on a topic of your choosing, but it should be closely related to class readings, lectures, and our in-class discussions. Details will be discussed in class. A hard copy of the paper is due in my box in McCone hall by noon on Monday May 9th.

Class Participation

As a seminar, this class requires your attendance and engaged participation. Everyone is allowed two free, no-questions-asked absences during the semester. Each subsequent absence will negatively affect your participation grade. You are responsible for bringing the readings with you to class. This is an unplugged seminar; electronic devices aren't allowed in class. After the second week, we will be working with the app Slack Chat to post and communicate outside of class.

Required Texts for Course

The course reader will be available at Vick Copy and online by the end of the second week.

PART I: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY STUDIES

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

January 21th

Goals, expectations, and course relevance

WEEK 2: THE ANTHROPOCENE

January 28th

Crutzen, P. & Stoermer, E. 2000. The Anthropocene. *Global Change Newsletter* 41: 17-18.

Crutzen, P. 2002. Geology of Mankind. *Nature* 415(31): 23.

Steffen, W., Crutzen, P., & McNeill, J. 2007. The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming The Great Forces of Nature? *Ambio* 36(8): 614–621.

Waters, Colin N. et al. 2016. The Anthropocene Is Functionally and Stratigraphically Distinct from the Holocene. *Science* 351(6269): 1-10.

Economist. 2011a. A Man-made World. *The Economist* 399: 81–83 & Economist. 2011b. Welcome to the Anthropocene. *The Economist* 399: 13.

WEEK 3: THE POLITICS OF NATURE

February 4th

Williams, R. 1980. Ideas of Nature. In *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays*. London: Verso. 67–85.

Daston, L. & Vidal, F. 2004. *The Moral Authority of Nature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1-37.

Clark N. 2011. *Inhuman Nature*. London: SAGE. 1-22.

Clark, N. 2014. Geo-politics and the Disaster of the Anthropocene. *The Sociological Review* 62(S1): 19–37.

WEEK 4: SCIENCE, STANDARDS AND CERTAINTY

February 11th

Latour, B. 1987. Opening Pandora's Box. In *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. 1-17.

Haraway, D. 1998. Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. In *The Science Studies Reader*, ed. Biagioli. 172-188.

Pratt, M. L. 1992. Science, Planetary Consciousness, Interiors. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.

Cram, Shannon. 2015. Becoming Jane: The Making and Unmaking of Hanford's Nuclear Body. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 33(5): 796-812.

WEEK 5: HUMANITY

February 18th

Anderson, K. 2006. *Race and the Crisis of Humanism*. London: Routledge. 1-71.

Esmeir, S. 2012. Battles. In *Juridical Humanity: A Colonial History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 149-196.

Mitchell, T. 2002. Can the Mosquito Speak. In *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Feldman, I. & Ticktin, M. 2010. In the Name of Humanity. Durham, Duke University Press, pages 1-33.

PART II. CRITIQUES OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

WEEK 6: COLONIAL CRITIQUES

February 25th

Chakrabarty, D. 2005. The Climate of History: Four Theses. *Critical Inquiry* 35: 197-222.

Chakrabarty, D. 2014. Climate and Capital: On Conjoined Histories. *Critical Inquiry* 41: 1-23.

Malm & Hornborg's *The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene*. *The anthropocene review Volume 1 (1)* 62-69.

WEEK 7: CAPITALOCENE

March 5nd

Moore, J. 2014. The Capitalocene: On the Nature & Origins of Our Ecological Crisis. Part I. Abstract Social Nature and the Limits of Capital. Part II.

Swyngedouw, E. 2010. Apocalypse Forever? Post-political Populism and the Spectre of Climate Change. *Theory, Culture and Society* 27(2-3): 213-232.

Castree, N. 2015. Unfree Radicals: Geoscientist, the Anthropocene, and Left Politics. *Antipode* 7(4): 1-23.

Braun, B. 2014. New Materialisms and Neoliberal Natures. *Antipode* 47(1): 1-14.

WEEK 8: OTHER CENES

March 10th

Haraway, D. 2015. Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin. *Environmental Humanities* 6: 159-165.

Latour, B. 2014. Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene. *New Literary History* 45: 1-18.

Watch: Anna Tsing 2015. Gender & A Feminist Approach to the Anthropocene: Earth Stalked by Man.

PART III. EMERGENCES, COLLECTIVES AND ALTERLIFES

WEEK 9: ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITIES

March 17th

Masco, J. 2010. Bad Weather: On Planetary Crisis. *Social Studies of Science* 40(1): 7-40.

Grove, Kevin. 2014. Biopolitics and Adaption: Governing Socio-Ecological Contingency Through Climate Change and Disaster Studies. *Geography Compass* 8(3): 198-210.

Lentzos, F. & Rose, N. 2009. Governing Insecurity: Contingency Planning, Protection, Resilience. *Economy & Society* 38(2): 230-254.

WEEK 10: SPRING BREAK

March 24th

WEEK 11: POLITICAL TOXICITIES

March 31th

Chen, M. 2011. Toxic Animacies and Inanimate Affections. *GLQ* 17(7): 266-286.

Argard-Jones, Vanessa. Body Burdens: Commodity and Chemical Entanglements in Martinique. *Cultural Anthropology* forthcoming.

Shapiro, Nicholas. 2015. Attuning to the Chemosphere: Domestic Formaldehyde, Bodily Reasoning and the Chemical Sublime. *Cultural Anthropology* 30: 368-393.

Rob Nixon. 2011. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Selections.

WEEK 12: INTERSPECIES ASSEMBLAGES

April 7th

Tsing, A. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of The World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Selections.

WEEK 13: PAPERS

April 14th

Redniss, L. 2011. *Radioactive: Marie and Pierre Curie: A Tale of Love and Fallout*. New York: HarperCollins. Selections.

WEEK 14: GEOENGINEERING & ALTERLIVES & THE END

April 21st

Hamilton, C. 2013. *Earthmasters: The Dawn of the Age of Climate Engineering*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Selections.

Mackenzie, A. 2014. Having an Anthropocene Body: Hydrocarbons, Biofuels and Metabolism. *Body & Society* 20(1): 3-30.

Murphy, M. Alterlife in the Aftermath. Unpublished manuscript. Selections

Stengers, Isabelle. 2014. *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*. Paris: Open Humanities Press. Selections.

Scranton, R. *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*. San Francisco: City Lights Books. Selections.

WEEK 15: REVIEW

April 28th