



READINGS IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES

Graduate Seminar Spring 2018

Yale University

An interdisciplinary graduate reading seminar to explore the “environmental humanities.” Readings and discussion focus on a series of conceptual terms and ideas shaping how humanities scholars write about the environment and society. The class draws on a range of disciplines, and engages students in defining the field, including designing possible future courses in the environmental humanities. Over the course of the semester, we will explore how humanities disciplines can best contribute to a broad societal and scholarly conversation about humanity and the fate of the planet. We will discuss how environmental problems and questions might reshape humanities teaching and research. And we’ll investigate what humanities scholars can learn through greater collaboration with social and natural scientists.

The course syllabus was designed in partnership with an interdisciplinary group of Yale graduate students and facilitated by Paul Sabin. Seminar participants helped to lead weekly seminar discussions.

For additional resources related to environmental humanities at Yale, including public talks, conferences, courses, and research materials, visit: <http://environmentalhumanities.yale.edu/>

OUTLINE OF COURSE SCHEDULE, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

Wednesday, January 17: COURSE INTRODUCTION

In this time of profound environmental transformation and human dominance of most aspects of planetary life, humanities perspectives are urgently needed to help interpret and give meaning to the rapidly changing world around us. What are the “environmental humanities” and how should we study them? We’ll discuss the collaborative origins of this graduate seminar and the activities of the new [Yale Environmental Humanities Initiative](#).

Wednesday, January 24: SCALE

Environmental issues are marked by geographic and temporal sprawl, from planet-spanning climate change to energy sources like fossil fuels stretching through millennia from prehistoric origins to the present. The readings in this unit offer a guide on how to conceive of extreme scale.

Readings:

- Chris Tong, "Ecology without Scale: Unthinking the World Zoom," *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 9.2 (2004): 196-211.
- Timothy Morton, Introduction to *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 1-24.
- Rob Nixon, Introduction to *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 1-44.
- Jayson Lusk, "Industrial Farms Have Gone Green," *New York Times*, September 25, 2016, SR4.
- “The Dizzying Grandeur of 21st-Century Agriculture,” *New York Times*, October 5, 2016.



**** Assignment:** During this second class session, we will introduce ourselves and consider how the environmental humanities relate to our scholarly work and to our personal interests. Accordingly, please bring an OBJECT to class this week that represents a theme from the course and expresses a personal interest. We will share these objects as part of our introductions. ******

Wednesday, January 31: NARRATIVE

Environmental change is represented through stories that we tell about our relationship to other species and to each other, and about historical cause and effect. How might these narrative choices shape scholarly writing in the humanities?



Readings:

- Ted Steinberg, “Down, Down, Down, no more: Environmental history moves beyond Declension,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 2 (2004): 260–66.
- Ursula K. Heise, [*Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species*](#) (University of Chicago Press, 2016), chapter 1.
- Raymond L Bryant and Michael K Goodman, [“Consuming Narratives: the political ecology of ‘alternative’ consumption.”](#) *Trans Inst Br Geogr* NS 29 (2004): 344–366.
- William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," *Journal of American History* vol. 78, no. 4 (1992): 1347-1376.

Additional Assignment: During this class session, we will discuss approaches to teaching and organizing the environmental humanities. In preparation, review at least one of the sample syllabi or conference agendas and come prepared to share your thoughts on the disciplinary approach, theoretical positioning, and methods of engaging their audience.

Wednesday, February 7: JUSTICE

From the local to the planetary scale, environmental change has profoundly unequal consequences and often is driven by social conflict and inequality. How might ideas about justice and ethics shape the environmental humanities?



- David Pellow, "Toward a Critical Environmental Justice Studies: Black Lives Matter as an Environmental Justice Challenge." *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 13: 2 (2016): 221-236.
- First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, [“Principles of Environmental Justice.”](#) Washington, DC, 1991.
- Kristin Shrader-Frechette, *Environmental Justice: Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy*, Oxford University Press, 2002, chapter 2.
- Kirsten Jenkins, et al., “Energy Justice: A Conceptual Review,” *Energy Research & Social Science* 11 (2016) 174–182.
- Emily Anne Epstein, [“We Fear the Water”](#) *Atlantic*, February 7, 2016.
- Prolific the Rapper, [“A Tribe Called Red”](#) [video](#); [lyrics](#).

Wednesday, February 14: Kate Brown -- Remembering Landscapes of Disaster

Class visit with Kate Brown, University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

Readings: Excerpts from Kate Brown, *Plutopia*, *Dispatches from Dystopia*, and other writings.

** Professor Brown will offer a public lecture, "[A Manual for Disaster: Health, Ecology and Survival in the Chernobyl Zone](#)," at 4:00pm on February 14 in Luce 202. **



Wednesday, February 21: LIFE

In the context of environmental humanities, “life” refers to ongoing entanglements between humans, non-human animals, and non-animate nature. It is the assemblage of normative and non-normative ecological relationships that shape everyday lives and landscapes. As critical tool, life is the constellation of practices that aim to disrupt dominant discursive and institutional articulations of nature. The readings for this keyword interrogate the discursive and conceptual distinctions that bound what is “life” from lively matter to how the other-than-human “thinks.”

Readings:

- Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Princeton University Press, 2015. [Enabling Entanglements; Preface; Introduction; Part I -- pp. vii-52]
- Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Duke University Press, 2012. [Introduction; Part II/Section 1 (Queer Animality); Afterward -- pp. 1-20; 89-126; 223-237]
- Kohn, Eduardo. "How dogs dream: Amazonian natures and the politics of trans-species engagement." *American Ethnologist* 34(1) : 3-24, 2007.
- Stefan Helmreich and Sophia Roosth, “Life forms: a keyword entry.” *Representations*, 112(1): 27-53, 2010.
- Catriona Sandilands, “Queer Ecology” in *Keywords for Environmental Studies*, eds. Joni Adamson, William A. Gleason, and David N. Pellow. New York: NYU Press, 2016. [\[LINK\]](#)



Wednesday, February 28: NATURE / ENVIRONMENT

What are the ethical and political consequences of a spatiality that is founded on the reified, externalized, even divinized “Environment”? And what is involved in the Humanities taking this spatial and moral paradigm on as a disciplinary or thematic focus?



Readings:

- Raymond Williams, “Ideas of Nature,” *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. Verso, 1980.
- Jakob Von Uexküll, Marina von Uexküll, and Joseph D. O’Neil. *A foray into the worlds of animals and humans: With a theory of meaning*. U of Minnesota Press, 2010. (Forward, Introduction, and Conclusion).
- Arturo Escobar, “After nature: Steps to an Antiessentialist Political Ecology.” *Current Anthropology* 40.1 (1999): 1-30.
- William Cronon, “Introduction: In Search of Nature,” in William Cronon, ed. *Uncommon Ground* 1995.
- Oxford English Dictionary, “Nature” and “Environment.”

**** Snow Day (canceled class) and Spring Break ****

Wednesday, March 28: SPACE

How are scholars rethinking concepts of landscape and space, and the ways that people mark specific places by human use and memories?

- Thomas Andrews, “Dying with their boots on,” *Killing for Coal*, 122-156.
- John Wylie, *Landscape*. Routledge, 2007, 1-16.
- Christine DeLucia, “Locating Kickemuit: Springs, Stone Memorials, and Contested Placemaking in the Northeastern Borderlands,” *Early American Studies* (Spring 2015): 467-502.
- David Harvey, “Space as a Keyword,” in Castree and Gregory, *David Harvey: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, 2006.
- Mark Dowie, “Conservation Refugees,” *Orion*, 2005.

Wednesday, April 4: Caitlin DeSilvey -- Heritage and Preservation in a Changing World

Class visit with Caitlin DeSilvey, University of Exeter.

Readings:

- Caitlin DeSilvey, *Curated Decay*, 1-95, 155-188.
- Marcy Rockman, Marissa Morgan, Sonya Ziaja, George Hambrecht, and Alison Meadow, “[Cultural Resources Climate Change Strategy](#),” Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2016.



- Cornelius Holtorf, “Averting Loss Aversion in Cultural Heritage,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 21: 4 (2015): 405-421.

**** Professor DeSilvey will give a public talk, “[Curated Decay: Inevitable Loss and Other Opportunities](#),” in Hastings Hall on Tuesday, April 3 at 6:30pm.****

**** [The Environmental Film Festival at Yale](#) will run April 4-7. ****

Wednesday, April 11: ANTHROPOCENE

Although its periodization and characteristics are widely debated, most concepts of the Anthropocene characterize it broadly as an epoch when human activity profoundly alters geologically significant conditions and processes. As a large-scale development with both local and global meanings, the Anthropocene engages with other historical and contemporary processes, such as colonialism, capitalism, and globalization. This section engages critically with the term and asks what does this framing do for how we (across all disciplines) think of life on earth?



Readings:

- Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses” *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 35, No. 2 (Winter 2009): 197-222
- Clive Hamilton, “Define the Anthropocene in Terms of the Whole Earth.” *Nature News* 536 (7616): 2016: 251.
- Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* Durham: Duke University Press (2016), Chapter 2.
- Bruno Latour. “Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene.” *New Literary History* 45 (1): 1–18. 2014
- Zoe Todd, “Indigenizing the Anthropocene.” in Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin, eds., *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, (2015): 241-254.

**** [“New Perspectives in Environmental History”](#) conference will be held Saturday, April 14. ****

Wednesday, April 18: REPRESENTATION

Class meets this week in the Beinecke Library.

Representation, across media and contexts, is central to our understanding of nature, environment, climate, and human culture, and shapes our public discourse around climate change and ecology. What is the political or social efficacy of language, aesthetic objects, or demonstrative images in shaping that discourse? While art and visual culture have long been dedicated to documenting the entanglement of “nature” and “culture,” what are the possibilities and limitations at the frontier of the environment and

representation, and how can the environmental humanities foster critical engagement with environmental representation both past and present?

Readings:

- Timothy Morton, "The Art of Environmental Language," in *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 29-78. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Visualizing the Anthropocene," *Public Culture* 26, no. 2 (2014): 213-232.
- Jennifer L. Roberts, "Audubon's Burden: Materiality and Transmission in 'The Birds of America,'" in *Transporting Visions* (2014), 59-116.



Wednesday, April 25: HOPE

Should we have hope for human prosperity in the Anthropocene? What kinds of stories are being told, and using what evidence, to justify hope or, its opposite, despair? At our final seminar meeting, we will reflect on lessons from the course and on the ways that environmental humanities scholars might consider integrating hope (and fear or despair) into their work.

Readings:

- Rebecca Solnit, "[Hope is an Embrace of the Unknown.](#)" *The Guardian*, July 15, 2016.
- Nathaneal Johnson, "[Is the Anthropocene a world of hope or a world of hurt?](#)," *Grist*, July 7, 2014.
- David Wallace-Wells, "[The Uninhabitable Earth- Annotated Edition.](#)" *New York Magazine*, July 14, 2017.
- Hans Rosling, "[200 Years in 4 minutes.](#)" BBC News, 2010.
- David Roberts, "[Does hope inspire more action on climate change than fear? We don't know.](#)" Vox, December 5, 2017.
- Skim [Our World in Data](#) pages for [greenhouse gas emissions](#), [global health](#), and food.



**** Thursday, May 3, [Environmental Humanities Spring Symposium](#) and Reception, Whitney Humanities Center, 10:15am-5:00pm ****