



An artist's impression of a view from East Coast Park towards Long Island. (Image: URA, from [CNA](#))

## **HL3037: The Environment and Cultural Production**

Ada Cheong

AY 2023-2024, Semester 2

Fridays 1430h-1730h

In this module, you will explore the ways in which cultural texts can shape the way we think about the environment and environmental crises. You will consider nature and the environment through interdisciplinary perspectives, including approaches from world-ecological studies and the energy humanities. By examining a diversity of aesthetic forms - from photographs to poetry and fiction - you will think critically about dominant cultural myths and emerging counter narratives that surround specific resources, such as sand, oil and meat. Lastly, you will also evaluate the potential and pitfalls of different narrative modes such as the ecogothic, apocalypse and utopia, in the era of climate change.

### **Course Texts**

Samanta Schweblin, *Fever Dreams*, trans. Megan McDowell. Penguin Publishing Group, 2018.

Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, trans. Deborah Smith. Portobello Books, 2016.

Other readings will be made available online.

## Assessments

Final Exam	30%
Term Paper	45%
Group Presentations	15%
Preparation and Participation	10%

In the **final exam**, you will write two essays, under examination conditions, in response to any two of ten questions relating to themes central to the module. The questions will be general, and will offer you the chance to choose the texts with which to advance an argument. You will be expected to engage with three or more texts over the course of the exam. These can be primary texts or more theoretical ones. You will be assessed according to your ability to formulate a clear, organised argument and your adherence to scholarly conventions concerning presentation and grammar. There is no need to be able to produce in-text citations and a bibliography, but references to specific essays or articles must be clear.

For the **term paper**, you will write an original thesis about one or more of the works read in class - and do so by reading relevant passages in the work - and by reflecting on secondary material about the text and its cultural and historical context. You must engage with three or more relevant secondary sources. You will be assessed according to your ability to formulate a clear, organised argument, your engagement with critical discussion and/or issues of historical and cultural context, and your adherence to scholarly conventions concerning presentation, citation, and grammar.

You will prepare and deliver a **group presentation** about a topic of your choice that unpacks a cultural text at the end of the module. You are advised to bring in your knowledge of the context to inform your presentation. Your presentation need not be exhaustive, but should rather draw attention to a phenomenon or phenomena in the text, and explain them in depth. You will be assessed according to the analytical and presentation skills demonstrated. To do well on this team assessment, it is necessary for you to demonstrate positive interdependence and teamwork. In principle, you will receive the same marks as your team. However, your individual score may vary based on instructor observations and peer feedback about your contributions to the group project.

Lastly, you will be evaluated on your contribution to in-class discussion and your **preparations** before class. You will be assessed according to your responses to the readings, as well as the curiosity and questions you bring to class.

## Course Policies

**Attendance and Participation:** The success of any seminar depends on the active participation of all its members. Barring illness or emergencies, you must attend every seminar. You must arrive on time, having done the required readings and any assigned work, and be ready to participate in the class discussion. Failure to do so will reduce your participation grade significantly. If you need to miss a class you must get in touch with me before that week's meeting.

**Late Work and Extensions:** if your essay is late, it will be marked down by one third of a letter grade for each day that it is overdue (i.e. a paper that would have received a B will receive a B-). No work will be accepted more than seven days late. Extensions will be granted only in exceptional circumstances, including documented illness or genuine emergency.

**Seeking Help Outside Class:** you are encouraged to use any form of legitimate aid to help you write papers and research topics that interest you. Obvious sources of legitimate assistance include office hours, the coaches at the LCC Communication Cube, and the subject librarians at the library.

**Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty:** Don't do it! If I find that you have misrepresented someone else's work as your own you will fail the assignment and possibly the course. If you are unsure of how or when to cite a source, please ask me or refer to the university's academic integrity resources online.

**Use of AI:** This module does not allow the use of AI. You will be assessed on your ability to think critically about the texts and theories involved; as well as the ways you articulate these ideas. AI is neither required nor allowed.

## Course Structure

### 1. Ecocriticism and the environment (19 Jan)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Beauty", *Nature*. J. Munroe, 1849, pp. 13-22

Greg Garrard, "Positions", *Ecocriticism*. Routledge, 2012, pp. 16-32

Poems: "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (1807), Wordsworth; "Otter City" (2019), Cyril Wong

### 2. World-ecology and the end of Nature (26 Jan)

Jason W. Moore, "The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of our Ecological Crisis," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 44:3 (2017): 594-630

Andreas Malm, "The Anthropocene Myth," *Jacobin* (2015):

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/03/anthropocene-capitalism-climate-change/>

### 3. The Energy Humanities (2 Feb)

Patricia Yaeger, "Literature in the Age of Wood, Tallow, Coal, Whale Oil, Gasoline, Atomic Power and Other Energy Resources," *PMLA* 126.2 (March 2011): 305-310

Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer. "Introduction". *Energy Humanities: An Anthology*. John Hopkins Press, 2014, pp. 1-14.

### 4. Sand and the aesthetics of extraction (9 Feb)

Sim Chi Ying, Shifting Sands and Sand / Land

Kalyanee Mam, When your land is stolen from beneath your feet

Schuster, Joshua, "Between manufacturing and landscapes: Edward Burtynsky and the photography of ecology" *Photography & culture*, 2013, Vol. 6 (2), p.193-212

### 5. Petroculture (16 Feb)

Imre Szeman, Adam Carlson and Sheena Wilson, 'Introduction: On Petrocultures, Or, Why we need to understand oil to understand everything else', in *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture*, McGill-Queens University Press (2017), pp. 3-20.

Pauline Melville, "The Sparkling Bitch" and "Erzulie", from *The Migration of Ghosts* (1998).

Olivia Lee and Brandon Chew, "Chapter 28: Energy". *Fish Eats Lion*, Math Paper Press, 2012, pp. ?.

### 6. Slow violence and toxicity (23 Feb)

Rob Nixon, Introduction to *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. 2011, Harvard UP.

David Harvey, "Contradiction 16: Capital's Relation to Nature." *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*.

**7. Fever Dreams (1 Mar)**

Samanta Schweblin, *Fever Dreams*, trans. Megan McDowell. Penguin Publishing Group, 2018.

**Recess Week (8 Mar)**

**8. Meat, culture and affect (15 Mar)**

Tony Weis, "The Uneven Geography of Meat". *The Ecological Hoofprint*, Zed Books, 2013, pp. 53-92.

Annie Potts, "What is meat culture?" *Meat Culture*, 2016, BRILL. pp, 1-30.

Sianne Ngai, "Introduction" from *Ugly Feelings* (2007). Harvard UP, 2009, pp. 1-37.

**9. The Vegetarian (22 Mar)**

Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, trans. Deborah Smith. Portobello Books, 2016.

**10. Approaching apocalypse (29 Mar\*)**

Naomi Klein. "20: Disaster apartheid". *The Shock Doctrine*.

Noelle de Jesus, "Mirage". *Fish Eats Lion*, Math Paper Press, 2012, pp. 167-178.

Wayne Ree, "Satay". *LONTAR issue 10*. (available on z-lib)

**11. Can we imagine the future? (5 April)**

Petrocultures research group. "Energy Impasse and Political Actors". *After Oil* (2015), pp. 29-40.

Fredric Jameson. "Introduction: Utopia now" and "Progress versus Utopia, or; Can We Imagine The Future?". *Archaeologies of the Future*.

**12. Presentations (12 April)**

**13. Conclusion (19 April)**