



HL3037
APPROACHES TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES
SEMESTER 1, AY2018-2019

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Imagine waking up to learn that coastal cities globally are underwater and yours is next. Imagine that your favorite animal does not exist. Are such thoughts too close for comfort? Unthinkable, perhaps? What if I told you instead that glaciers far away are melting, species you haven't heard of will go extinct in the future, and people you don't know will have to deal with it? Would you even care? Human-caused impacts on the natural world today are unprecedented, leading scientists to use the term "Anthropocene" to describe our current geological epoch. Although there is widespread scientific consensus about climate change and global warming, public and political conversations around these issues remain highly polarized.

How are international writers and artists representing environmental concerns? What imaginative strategies do they use to influence public perception and policymaking? In this class, we look closely at the role of the humanities in current environmental debates. We approach climate change holistically by analyzing contemporary creative sources – including literature, films and documentaries, and visual art – alongside environmental history, public science writing, and climate communications research.

Aims:

To expose you to current global environmental concerns through literary and nonfiction texts, art, and media; teach you to place primary and critical sources across disciplines into conversation; get you to inspect your roles as readers, critics, and actors contributing to sustainable decisions.

Outcomes:

You will learn how to draw on perspectives across fields of study to talk to colleagues, friends, and family members about the environment. You will gain the skills to critically engage interdisciplinary sources in assignments that integrate written and practical components. Assessments incorporating practical and public engagement will let you contribute to current debates and understand how you can shape sustainable outcomes.

As a result of taking this seminar, you should be able to:

- Analyze the role of the arts across geographic regions in molding perception and public participation, with reference to topics including biodiversity, climate change, water, and energy
- Interpret primary and secondary sources in comparative oral and written assignments that integrate engagement with other disciplines
- Employ perspectives across fields of study to relate and evaluate environmental concerns
- Identify how social and economic factors such as race, class, and gender inform environmental debates
- Apply the strategies that practitioners and communicators use to influence environmental consciousness

Course Materials:

Texts

- Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016)
- Andrew J. Hoffman, *How Culture Shapes the Climate Change Debate* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015)
- Emmi Itäranta, *Memory of Water* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014)
- Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Henry Holt, 2014)

Graphic Novel

- Sarnath Banerjee, *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* (Noida: HarperCollins India, 2016)

Films & Documentaries

- *Anthropocene: The Movie*, dir. Steve Bradshaw (2015)
- *Chasing Ice*, dir. Jeff Orlowski (2012)
- *Even the Rain*, dir. Icíar Bollaín (2010)
- *The Island President*, dir. Jon Shenk (2012)
- *Petropolis*, dir. Peter Mettler (2010)

****Films will either be made available online or screened in class. All remaining essays, literary excerpts, and articles listed in the course schedule will be available online.***

Assessment:

Review & Comparative Analysis: 25%

Branching Out & Participation: 10%

Presentation: 25%

Presentation Topic Rationale: 40%

Review & Comparative Analysis: choose one primary text or film covered in class to date and write a two-page review. Then, write a two-page comparative analysis placing this source in conversation with a sustainability project in Singapore; this may be an art object/exhibit, architectural site, or environmental initiative at NTU.

Branching Out: sit in on or view a recording of a lecture, seminar, or public event on environmental concerns in another discipline. Write a two-page report analyzing what you learned and placing the topic in conversation with one primary and one secondary source from our syllabus.

Presentation: prepare a five-minute presentation on an environmental topic that interests you most, accompanied by either a poster or PowerPoint. Presentations need to be accessible to a non-specialist audience. You will present to your fellow classmates on the last day of our seminar.

Presentation Topic Rationale: presentations must be accompanied by a *four-page rationale* explaining your choice of content, the argument you are trying to make, why you think this issue needs addressing, and how your topic is an important intervention. In this rationale, place your topic into conversation with two of our sources that you did not use in other assignments.

Course Policies:

Attendance and Participation: you are expected to attend all sessions of this seminar, barring illness and emergency. Arrive on time, having done the readings and ready to participate in discussions and activities. Failure to do these things will result in a lowered participation grade. Please notify me ahead of time via email if you cannot make it to that week's class.

Late Work and Extensions: hand in all work on time, for your own sake. Your essay will be marked down by one third of a grade for each day that it is late. Extensions will only be granted under exceptional circumstances, such as documented illness or serious emergency.

Academic Integrity: avoid plagiarism at all costs. If I find that you have used someone else's work as your own, you will fail the assignment and possibly the course. If you are unsure of how to cite a source, please review the university's academic integrity resources or ask me directly.

Seeking Help Outside of Class: I am always happy to meet to discuss your questions and concerns, and to go over written assignments. I want you to do well, so please consider my door open! Additional sources of aid are the coaches at the LCC Communication Cube (writing) and subject librarians (research).

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Environmental Crisis and the Anthropocene (Aug 16 – no class)

- Documentary: *Anthropocene: The Movie*
- Essay: Ted Gostomski, "Grief and Change," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 21:1 (2014), pp. 137-142

Week 2: Glaciers: An Endangered Species? (Aug 23)

- Documentary screening: *Chasing Ice*
- Poem: Percy Shelley, "Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni" (1817)
- Art: public ice sculptures by Nele Azevedo, Marc Coreth, and Olafur Eliasson & Minik Rosing
- Article: Mark Carey, "The History of Ice: How Glaciers Became an Endangered Species," *Environmental History* 12:3 (2007), pp. 497-527

Week 3: Rising Sea Levels (Aug 30)

- Documentary screening: *The Island President*

- Essay: Naomi Klein, “Let Them Drown,” *London Review of Books* 38: 2 (2016), pp. 1-15

Week 4: Water Scarcity and Security (Sep 6)

- Film screening: *Even the Rain*
- Graphic novel: Sarnath Banerjee, *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*
- Article: Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, “A Graphic Novelist Captures the Paradoxes of Living in the ‘New India,’” *New Yorker* (2016)

Week 5: Water Scarcity and Security II (Sep 13)

- Novel: Emmi Itäranta, *Memory of Water*
- National Geographic blogs: Basia Irland, “What the River Knows”

Week 6: Slow Violence, Deforestation, and Gender (Sep 20)

- Rob Nixon, “Slow Violence, Gender, and the Environmentalism of the Poor,” *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, pp. 128-149
- Memoir: Wangari Maathai, “Beginnings,” *Unbowed* (2006), pp. 3-28
- Article: Rachel Fritts, “Mothers vs. loggers: the destruction of Białowieża Forest splits Poland,” *Mongabay: News & Inspiration from Nature’s Frontline* (19 July 2017), pp. 1-10

Week 7: Oil & Petrocultures (Sep 27)

- Documentary: *Petropolis*
- Short Fiction: Warren Cariou, “An Athabasca Story,” Joanna Kavenna, “Barthelme,” & Mohammed Hasan Alwan, “Oil Field”
- Photography: Edward Burtynsky’s *Oil* & Louis Helbig’s *Beautiful Destruction*
- Article: Frederick Buell, “A Short History of Oil Cultures: Or, the Marriage of Catastrophe and Exuberance,” *Journal of American Studies* 46 (2012), pp. 273-293

Review & Comparative Analysis due via email by midnight on Friday, Sep 28

Recess Week

Week 8: Imagining Climate Change (Oct 11)

- Literary nonfiction: Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* – part 1

Week 9: Imagining Climate Change II (Oct 18)

- Literary nonfiction: Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* – part 2

Week 10: Biodiversity Loss (Oct 25)

- Public science writing: Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction*

Week 11: Communicating Climate Change (Nov 1)

- Social sciences: Andrew J. Hoffman, *How Culture Shapes the Climate Change Debate*

Branching Out assignment due via email by midnight on Friday, Nov 2

Week 12: Case Study: Singapore (Nov 8)

- Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, "Some Islands Will Rise: Singapore in the Anthropocene," *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* 4:2-3 (2017), pp. 166-184
- Simon Guy, Victoria Henshaw & Oliver Heidrich, "Climate change, adaptation and Eco-Art in Singapore," *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* 58:1 (2015), pp. 39-54

Week 13: Review & Presentations (Nov 15)

Presentation Topic Rationales due via email by midnight on Friday, Nov 16