

Anthropocene Feminisms

Sex, Gender, Race, and Environmental Justice on a Damaged Planet

Ellen Jewett - Corvids I, II & III (Sculpture, 2014)



course description

A specter is haunting the world, the specter of the Anthropocene. Global warming, floating garbage patches of the size of entire countries in the Pacific Ocean, environmental catastrophes, and mass extinction. We are indeed in the midst of "the Age of Man". The Anthropocene marks a geological era in the history of the planet in which humans as a collective are said to have become a geo-physical force on a planetary scale, crossing multiple planetary boundaries and, in doing so, affecting the functioning of the Earth system as a whole.

As novel as the concept and discourse of the Anthropocene might seem, it has its own history and genealogy. Feminist scholars and scholars of color have for the last three decades been at the forefront of challenging the nature/culture binary, foregrounding the need for social and environmental justice in academia and activism. Thus, in a sense, feminist theory has long been concerned with the anthropogenic impact of humans on the environment.

In this course, we will explore the links between feminist theory and environmental thinking. We will get introduced to feminist and queer accounts on the relationship of sex, gender, race, and the environment. We will unwrap the many

historically contingent meanings of nature, the environment, ecology, the human, and species. We will ask how questions of sex, gender, race, democracy, and justice figure in relation to Anthropocene discourses. We will examine how the concept of the Anthropocene impacts feminist theory, and how feminist and queer theory, in turn, shape the concept and discourse of the Anthropocene. What characterizes mass extinctions and how does the current one differ from the past ones? What is environmental racism? And how and why are race, gender, and class in their entanglement with one another playing a determining role in questions of social and environmental inequality? We will engage with the epistemology and biopolitics of waste, and ask what it means to understand waste as a social process, or even as a natural-cultural relation, rather than an a-political object. What is more, we will get an understanding of how new materialist and posthumanist feminist approaches reframe the notion of 'the human', along with the question of social and environmental justice as multi-species justice in a more-than-human world.

methods and goals

This course will be run as a reading and discussion intensive seminar. Preparation for class discussion by careful reading of the week's literature is required. Through a close reading of the literature, discussions, and group work, participants who take this course will:

- get introduced into feminist theories and approaches on the concept of the Anthropocene
- discuss different takes on how sex, gender, and race are deeply shaped by ideas of nature, and how they in turn shape ideas and representations of nature
- develop a broad understanding of the multi-layered and historical contingent relationship of nature, culture, politics, technology, and science
- reflect upon issues of environmental racism
- discuss and develop own strategies for analyzing questions of environmental, social, and multispecies justice

requirements

The classroom should function as a forum for intellectual exchange wherein participants have read the material, critically reflected upon the content, and are willing to engage in discussion with fellow scholars. Since we will learn together as a group, each participant is expected to

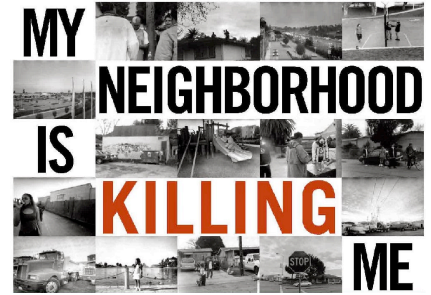
- attend the classes and participate in ongoing discussions,
- present the key arguments of a paper (~30 min.) and lead the class discussion on that paper,
- prepare a short critical commentary (3 pages) as well as 2-3 discussion questions on the presented paper, and
- write a final term paper (15 pages) in which the readings are related to each other or used for a research project.

Alternatively, participants can write three short essays (each 5 pages) on the papers to be read for the course.

grading

- Attendance and participation (including short commentaries, discussion leading, and group work): 20%
- Co-chairing and presentation of a paper: 25%
- Short critical commentary (3 pages): 15%
- Final term paper (15 pages) OR three short essays (each 5 pages): 40%

All requirements must be met in order to pass the course.



Environmental racism "is the deliberate targeting of people-of-color communities for hazardous waste facilities, such as landfills and incinerators." (Lynn Norment 1993)



According to climate science, we are in the midst of the sixth mass extinction, losing about 100 species a day. (Photo: Ruth Marten "La Loutre Marine", ink on found print, 2007)



Dead albatross filled with lethal quantities of plastic waste. (Photo: Chris Jordan)



"If there is to be multispecies ecojustice, which can also embrace diverse human people, it is high time that feminists exercise leadership in imagination, theory, and action to unravel the ties of both genealogy and kin, and kin and species." (Haraway 2015)

Photo: Ellen Jewett "Strange and Gentle", sculpture, 2015.

class schedule and readings

Week 1

Introduction

Week 2

Welcome to the Anthropocene

Readings:

Crutzen, Paul. 2002. "Geology of Mankind." *Nature*, 415 (January 3, 2002): 23.

Crist, Eileen. 2013. "On the Poverty of Our Nomenclature." *Environmental Humanities*. 3: 129–147.

Week 3

Feminist Genealogies of the Anthropocene

Readings:

Carson, Rachel. 2000 (1962). *Silent Spring*. London: Penguin Classics.

Shiva, Vandana. 2014. "Reductionism and Regeneration: A Crisis in Science." In *Ecofeminism*. Eds. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva. London and New York: Zed Books. 22–35.

Week 4

The Epistemology and Politics of Waste

Readings:

Hird, Myra. 2012. "Knowing Waste: Towards an Inhuman Epistemology." *Social Epistemology*, 26 (3–4): 453–469.

Stacy Alaimo. 2017. "The Anthropocene at Sea: Temporality, Paradox, Compression." In *Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*. Eds. Jon Christensen, Ursula K. Heise, and Michelle Niemann. New York and London: Routledge.

Week 5

Biopolitics and Contamination

Readings:

Murphy, Michelle. 2008. "Chemical Regimes of Living." *Environmental History*, 13 (4): 695–703.

Haraway, Donna. 1996. *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium: Feminism and Technoscience*. New York: Routledge. (Chapter: "FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™. Mice into Wormholes", 49–118).

Week 6

Capital and Extinction

Readings:

Kolbert, Elizabeth. 2014. *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*. New York: Holt and Co. (Chapter: "The Sixth Extinction", 1–22)

Dawson, Ashley. 2016. *Extinction: A Radical History*. New York and London: O/R Books. (Chapter: "Capitalism and Extinction", 38-62)

Week 7

Toxic Bodies

Readings:

Ah-King, Malin, and Eva Hayward. 2014. "Toxic Sexes: Perverting Pollution and Queering Hormone Disruption." *O-zone: A Journal of Object Oriented Studies* 1: 1–12.

di Chiro, Giovanna. 2010. "Polluted Politics? Confronting Toxic Discourse, Sex Panic, and Eco-Normativity." In *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*. eds. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 199–230.

Week 8

Environmental Racism and Justice

Readings:

- Cole, Luke W. and Foster, Sheila. 2001. *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*. New York and London: NYU Press, 19–33.
- Taylor, Dorceta. 2014. *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility*. New York: NYU Press. Chapters: “Environmental Justice Claims” and “Toxic Exposure: Landmark Cases in the South and the Rise of Environmental Justice Activism”, 1–32.

Week 9

Postcolonial Anthropocenes

Readings:

- Deckha, Maneesha. 2012. “Toward a Postcolonial, Posthumanist Feminist Theory: Centralizing Race and Culture in Feminist Work on Nonhuman Animals.” *Hypatia* 27 (3): 527–545.
- Rangarajan, Swarnalatha. 2016. “Women Writing Nature in the Global South: New Forest Texts from Fractured Indian Forests.” In *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*. Ed. Hubert Zapf. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 438–458.
- Whyte, Kyle. 2017. “Our Ancestor’s Dystopia Now: Indigenous Conservation and the Anthropocene.” In *Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*. Eds. Ursula K. Heise, Jon Christensen, and Michelle Niemann. New York: Routledge.

Week 10

Posthumanities and “the Human”

Readings:

- Bondre, Ninad, and Sabine Wilke. 2014. “Beyond the Anthropocene’s Common Humanity.” *Geocritique*, May 2014, <<http://www.geocritique.org/beyond-anthropocenes-common-humanity-politicizing-anthropocene/>>
- Neimanis, Astrida, Cecilia Åsberg, and Suzi Hayes. 2015. “Post-Humanist Imaginaries.” In *Research Handbook on Climate Governance*. Eds. Karin Bäckstrand and Eva Lövbrand. Edward Elgar: Cheltenham and Northampton, Mass. 480–490.

Week 11

Queering Nature and the Nonhuman

Readings:

- Alaimo, Stacy. 2015. “Nature.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*. eds. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth. New York: Oxford University Press. 530–550.
- Barad, Karen. 2012. “Nature’s Queer Performativity.” *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* (1–2): 25–53.
- Hird, Myra, and Celia Roberts. 2011. “Feminism Theorises the Nonhuman.” *Feminist Theory*, 12 (2): 109–117.

Week 12

Multispecies Relationalities: Sympoiesis and Inhuman Colonialisms

Readings:

- Haraway, Donna. 2016. *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press. (Chapter: “Symbiogenesis and the Lively Arts of Staying with the Trouble”, 58–98)
- Hird, Myra, and Alexander Zahara. 2015. “Raven, Dog, Human: Inhuman Colonialism and Unsettling Cosmologies.” *Environmental Humanities*. 7: 169–190.

Week 13

Art in the Anthropocene

Readings:

Davis, Heather, and Etienne Turpin. 2015. "Art & Death: Lives Between the Fifth Assessment & the Sixth Extinction." In *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*. Eds. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin. London: Open Humanities Press, 3–30.

Heartney, Eleanor. 2014. "Art for the Anthropocene Era." *Art in America*, February 6.

<<http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/art-for-the-anthropocene-era/>>

Week 13

Storytelling in the Anthropocene

Readings:

Attwood, Margaret. 2009. "Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet." *The Guardian*, September 26, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/sep/26/margaret-atwood-mini-science-fiction/>>

Heise, Ursula K. 2017. "Planet, Species, Justice—and the Stories We Tell about Them." *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*. Eds. Ursula Heise, Jon Christensen, and Michelle Niemann London and New York: Routledge.

Veland, Siri, and Amanda H. Lynch. 2016. "Scaling the Anthropocene: How the Stories We Tell Matter." *Geoforum*, 72: 1–5.

Week 14

Course Wrap-Up and Reflection

Final remarks and discussion.