

course description

A specter is haunting the world—the specter of the Anthropocene. Floating garbage patches in the oceans, ecological disasters, and mass extinction. It seems that we have indeed entered a new geological era in the history of the planet in which humans as a collective have become a geo-physical force on a planetary scale, 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 not only the need for social but also for environmental justice. In doing so, a rich body of work has emerged not only in science, history, and philosophy but also in literature and fiction.

This course offers a framework for thinking with feminist literature and theories on questions of ecological crisis and environmental justice. We will ask how the theories and stories rethink the relationship between nature and culture, humans and nonhumans, the material and the discursive, as well as between theory and practice. We will read and discuss feminist literature and fiction on the Anthropocene as an avenue to understand the meaning of ecological uncertainty, apocalypse, technological optimism, and human persistence on a damaged planet. A particular attention will lie on examining the relationship between the historical and political moment of the text's production and the speculative imagining of the world/s that the text offers.

How does feminist literature respond to ecological crisis and the Anthropocene? How does our perspective on the Anthropocene, global warming, and extinction change when the categories of sex and gender are taken into account? And what does it mean to rethink sex and gender in and through the notion of ecology? What might be the function of literature and of theory in the Anthropocene? What can feminist critical thinking contribute to questions of environmental justice? Why does an undifferentiated use of the notion of the Anthropocene not only reproduce the privilege of being “unmarked” but also what Donna Haraway (1991) has problematized as “the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere”? We will approach these and

other questions from an interdisciplinary perspective that brings together insights and inspirations from literary studies, history, philosophy, political theory, art, and the environmental humanities.

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, the participants will:

- get introduced to historical and contemporary feminist theories and literature on nature, ecology, and the Anthropocene;
- be able to apply a variety of methods for appreciating and analyzing the meaning and power of exemplary texts;
- develop a broad understanding of the multilayered and historical contingent relationship of nature, culture, gender, knowledge, and power.

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. Each participant is expected to (a) attend the classes and participate in ongoing discussions, (b) present the key arguments of a paper (~30 min.) and lead the class discussion on that text, (c) prepare a short (3 pages) critical commentary as well as 2-3 discussion questions on the presented text, and (d) write a term paper (15-20 pages).

grading

- Attendance and participation: 20%
- Presentation of a paper: 25%
- Short critical commentary (3 pages): 15%
- Final term paper (15-20 pages): 40%

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

“Literature is the power of fiction itself: not making a claim about what the world is, but about the imagination of a possible world” — Claire Colebrook (2002)

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- Haraway, Donna. 2016. *Staying With the Trouble*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. Chapters: “Sowing Worlds” and “The Camille Stories”, 117–125 & 134–168.
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- Ruffin, Kimberly N. (2010): *Black on Earth: African American Black Literary Traditions*. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press. Chapter: “‘I Got the Blues’ Epistemology: Thinking a Way out of Eco-Crisis”, 136–157.
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