



Pieter Bruegel the Elder, "The Corn Harvest," 1565

ANT 391: Nature, Culture, Power

SAC 5.118, Thursday 1:00pm-4:00pm

Instructor: Jason Cons

jasoncons@utexas.edu

Office: SAC 5.138

Office Phone: 512.232.3832

Course Description

To say that "nature" is a pivotal category of the contemporary moment is to profoundly understate the case. Ecology, environmental degradation, and climate change have become the watchwords of contemporary politics. The always tenuous and constructed boundaries between "nature" and "culture" now appear profoundly eroded. How do, and how have, thinkers in the environmental social sciences engaged with these issues? And what do ethnographies at the intersections of nature, culture, and power contribute to our understandings of both epochal and everyday environmental change? This graduate seminar explores these questions and the rich theoretical and methodological debates opened in environmental anthropology and related fields. It traces debates over nature, culture, and power back through cultural ecology, political ecology, agrarian studies, and science and technology studies. It traces them forwards through ethnographies of the socio-natures of sustainability, water, race and ethnicity, resistance, material politics, and human/animal/plant relations.

Course Aims and Learning Outcomes:

For a multitude of more and less obvious reasons, questions related to environmental change, the relationship between nature and culture, and the power and politics that both undergird and flow from these relationships have emerged as central concerns in anthropology and, more broadly, the environmental social sciences and humanities in recent years. There is much new, cutting edge theoretical and empirical research emerging from this trend which has and will continue to shape critical debates in coming years. Much of this work highlights the emergent (ecologies, worlds, lives, etc.). Yet this new work also implicitly and explicitly builds on work, agendas, and questions that have framed disciplinary and interdisciplinary debates for decades. This course does not promise to survey all of the current or historical debates around nature/culture/power (indeed, to do this would require a full and extended curriculum, not a single course). What it *does* aim to do is introduce students to the broad contours of these debates, old and new.

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Trace the lineages of fields such as cultural ecology, political ecology, agrarian studies, environmental history, etc. in contemporary work on environmental change.
- Understand the ways that new environmental ethnographies both build on and diverge from these more classic agendas.
- Engage with a series of critical issues in contemporary work on nature/culture/power
- Outline and deploy different methodological and theoretical approaches to environmental change in their own work.
- Gain confidence in discussing and writing about the intersections between ecology, theory, and ethnographic and other approaches to the environmental humanities and social sciences.

Course Format, Expectations, and Procedures:

- This is a seminar course. The bulk of the class will be devoted to class discussion, not lectures. I expect everyone to be an active, regular, and respectful participant of course discussion.
- This is a reading intensive course. I expect students to arrive in class having done the readings and prepared to engage in active class discussion.
- I reserve the right to treat this syllabus as provision. That is: if I or course participants identify other readings that will be helpful, I reserve the right to swap them in for readings listed here as needed. The amount of reading listed in this syllabus will remain approximately the same.
- I ask everyone to complete eight reading responses over the course of the semester. I will provide more information about how to complete these in class, but I find that these are enormously helpful at pushing class discussion forward. In order for everyone to have an opportunity to read these in advance, I ask that the reading responses be posted by midnight the night before class.
- Everyone will have an opportunity to lead class discussion twice. We will discuss the format for this more in class.
- Your final project should be productive for you. While this project should draw on themes and readings from the course, the format is open ended. It could be a standard research paper, an article, a dissertation research or grant proposal, a portfolio, etc. It should be the equivalent of an approximately 20-page paper.
- Some classes have, in addition to required readings, suggested readings. The suggested readings are just that: suggested materials that you are more than welcome to pursue for further grounding in a given week's materials.

Required Material:

All course materials with the exception of books are available on the course's Canvas site. This includes framing pieces and suggested readings (again, with the exception of books). The following books are required reading for the course and may be purchased at a location of your choosing.

- Shannon Lee Dawdy. 2016. *Patina: A Profane Archeology*. University of Chicago Press.
- Radhika Govindrajana. 2018. *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas*. University of Chicago Press.
- Elizabeth Povinelli. 2016. *Geontologies: A Requiem for Late Liberalism*. Duke University Press.
- Eyal Weizman. 2017. *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability*. Zone Books
- Kath Weston. 2017. *Animate Planet: Making Visceral Sense of Living in a High-Tech Ecologically Damaged World*.

Grading

- Course participation: 20% (based on regular and active participation in class)
- Reading Responses: 30% (based on completion of all 8 required responses)
- Course leadership: 20% (based on your two opportunities to lead a course)
- Final Research Paper: 30%

Classroom Policies

Policy on late work: Unexcused late papers will receive 1/3 of a letter grade deduction if less than 12 hours, a full letter grade deduction if between 12 and 24 hours late, two full letter grade deductions between 24 and 48 hours late, and will not be accepted if more than 48 hours late. Reading responses must be posted the night before class.

Policy on absences: I expect you to attend each class. I also recognize that things happen. Please contact me in advance if you will be missing class. Missing more than 2 classes will be grounds for failing the course.

Framing Socio-Nature

Class 1: August 30—Course Introduction

- *In-Class Film:* Les Blank. 1982. *Burden of Dreams*.

Suggested:

- Werner Herzog. 1982. *Fitzcarraldo*. Film.

Class 2: September 6— Troubling Wildness, Wilding History

- William Cronon. 1995. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." In *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human place in Nature*. WW Norton.
- Donna Haraway. 1984. "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936." *Social Text*. 11.
- Dipesh Chakrabarty. 2008. "Climates of History: Four Theses." *Critical Inquiry*. 35.
- Bruno Latour. 2017. "On the Instability of the Notion of Nature." In *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*. Polity Press.

Suggested:

- William Cronon. 1992. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. WW Norton.
- Donna Haraway. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.
- Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubant. 2017. *Art of Living on a Damaged Planet*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Richard Grove. 1996. *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens, and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*. Oxford University Press.
- Mike Davis. 2001. *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World*. Verso.

Class 3: September 13— Cultural and Political Ecologies

- Michael Watts. 2015. "Now and Then: The Origins of Political Ecology and the Rebirth of Adaptation as a Form of Thought." In *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*. Routledge.
- Roy Rappaport. 2007. "Ritual Regulation of Environmental Relations Among a New Guinea People." In *Environmental Anthropology: A Historical Reader*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Michael Watts. 1983. "On the Poverty of Theory: Natural Hazards Research in Context." In *Interpretations of Calamity from the Viewpoint of Human Ecology*. Allen and Unwin.
- Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing. 2000. "Inside the Economy of Appearances." *Public Culture*. 12(1).

Suggested:

- Michael Watts. 2013. *Silent Violence: Food, Famine, and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria*. University of Georgia Press.
- Michael Watts and Richard Peet. 2004. *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*. Routledge.
- James Scott. 1976. *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. Yale University Press.
- Michael Dove. 2011. *The Banana Tree at the Gate: A History of Marginal Peoples and Global Markets in Borneo*. Yale University Press.

Class 4: September 20— Land, Enclosure, Frontier

- Karl Marx. 1977. "So-Called Primitive Accumulation (Chapters 26-28)." *Capital, Volume 1*. Vintage.
- David Harvey. 2003. "Accumulation by Dispossession." In *The New Imperialism*. Oxford U. Press.
- Tania Li. 2014. "What is Land? Assembling a Resource for Global Investment." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 39.
- Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing. 2003. "Natural Resources and Capitalist Frontiers." *Economic and Political Weekly*. 38(48).

Suggested:

- E. P. Thompson. 1975. *Whigs & Hunters: The Origins of the Black Act*. Breviary Stuff Productions.
- Nancy Peluso. 1994. *Rich Forests, Poor People: Resource Control and Resistance in Java*. University of California Press.
- Paige West. 2006. *Conservation is Our Government Now: The Politics of Ecology in Papua New Guinea*. Duke University Press.
- Tania Li. 2014. *Land's End: Capitalist Relations on an Indigenous Frontier*. Duke University Press.
- Jason Cons and Michael Eilenberg. 2019. *Frontier Assemblages: The Emergent Politics of Resource Frontiers in Asia*. Wiley. (NOTE—Available on Request).

Class 5: September 27— Anthropology's Natures

- Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. 2013. "The Relative Native". *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*. 3 (3).
- Marilyn Strathern. 2013. "Appendix 3—Environments within: An Ethnographic Commentary on Scale." In *Learning to See in Melanesia*. Hau Books.
- Philippe Descola. 2014. "Modes of Being and Forms of Predication." *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*. 4 (1).
- Tim Ingold. 2016. "A Naturalist Abroad in the Museum of Ontology: Philippe Descola's *Beyond Nature and Culture*." And "Philippe Descola. "Biolatry: A Surrender of Understanding." *Anthropological Forum*. 26 (3).

Suggested:

- Claude Levi-Strauss. 1966. *The Savage Mind*. University of Chicago Press.
- Philippe Descola. 2014. *Beyond Nature and Culture*. University of Chicago Press.
- Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. 2017. *Cannibal Metaphysics*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Marisol de la Cadena. 2015. *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds*. Duke University Press.
- Eduardo Kohn. 2013. *How Forests Think: Towards an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. University of California Press.
- Arturo Escobar. 2018. *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*. Duke University Press.

Class 6: October 4— Decentering Humans

- Timothy Mitchell. 2002. "Can the Mosquito Speak?" In *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*. University of California Press.
- Jane Bennett. 2005. "The Agency of Assemblages & the North American Blackout." *Public Culture*. 17(3).
- Michel Callon. 1986. "Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay." In *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?* Routledge
- Bruno Latour. 2014. "How Better to Register the Agency of Things." *Tanner Lectures, Yale*.
- Timothy Morton. 2013. "A Quake in Being." In *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. University of Minnesota Press.

Suggested:

- Bruno Latour. 2004. *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Harvard Univ Press.
- Jane Bennett. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke University Press.
- Andrew Barry. 2013. *Material Politics: Disputes along the Pipeline*. Wiley.

Class 7: October 11— Rethinking Landscape

- Philip Steinberg and Kimberley Peters. "Wet Ontologies, Fluid Spaces: Giving Depth to Volume through Oceanic Thinking." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 33.
- Stuart McLean. 2011. "Black Goo: Forceful Encounters with Matter in Europe's Muddy Margins." *Cultural Anthropology*. 26 (4).
- Stefan Helmreich. 2011. "Nature/Culture/Seawater." *American Anthropologist*. 113 (1).
- Gastón Gordillo. 2018. "Terrain as Insurgent Weapon: An Affective Geometry of Warfare in the Mountains of Afghanistan." *Political Geography*. 64.

ANT 391: Nature, Culture, Power

- Franck Billé. 2017/2018. "Speaking Volumes." *Cultural Anthropology—Theorizing the Contemporary*. NOTE—just pick a few to read and explore.
<https://culanth.org/fieldsights/1247-speaking-volumes>

Suggested:

- Ashley Carse, Jason Cons, and Townsend Middleton. 2018. *Limn 10: Chokepoints*. <https://limn.it/get-stuck-in-issue-no-10-chokepoints/>
- Kimberly Peters Philip Steinberg and Elaine Stratford. 2018. *Territory Beyond Terra*. Rowman and Littlefield.
- Ashley Carse. 2014. *Beyond the Big Ditch: Politics, Ecology, and Infrastructure at the Panama Canal*. MIT Press.
- Nikhil Anand. 2017. *Hydraulic Publics: Water and the Infrastructures of Citizenship in Mumbai*. Duke University Press.

Environments Built and Otherwise

Class 8: October 18—Ruins, Patina, and Archaeologies of the Present

- Shannon Lee Dawdy. 2016. *Patina: A Profane Archeology*. University of Chicago Press.

Class 9: October 25— Forensic Encounters

- Eyal Weizman. 2017. *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability*. Zone Books..

Class 10: November 1— Rethinking Presents

- Elizabeth Povinelli. 2016. *Geontologies: A Requiem for Late Liberalism*. Duke University Press.

More than Human Natures: Humans and Non-Humans

Class 11: November 8—Big Cats and Politics

- Nayanika Mathur. Forthcoming. *Crooked Cats*. University of Chicago Press.

NOTE—Dr. Mathur will be joining us in class to workshop her manuscript

Class 12: November 15—Interspecies Intimacies

- Rhadika Govindrajana. 2018. *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas*. University of Chicago Press.

Thanksgiving Break: November 22

Class 13: November 29—Rethinking the Animate

- Kath Weston. 2017. *Animate Planet: Making Visceral Sense of Living in a High-Tech Ecologically Damaged World*. Duke University Press.

Class 14: December 6—Course Conclusion

POLICIES & RESOURCES

University Policies

Religious Holy Days

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Q Drop Policy

If you want to drop a class after the 12th class day, you'll need to execute a Q drop before the Q-drop deadline, which typically occurs near the middle of the semester. Under Texas law, you are only allowed six Q drops while you are in college at any public Texas institution. For more information, see:

<http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/csacc/academic/adddrop/qdrop>

Student Accommodations

Students with a documented disability may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone). <http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/about/>

- Please request a meeting as soon as possible to discuss any accommodations
- Please notify me as soon as possible if the material being presented in class is not accessible
- Please notify me if any of the physical space is difficult for you

Academic Integrity

Each student in the course is expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code:

"As a student of The University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity."

This means that work you produce on assignments, tests and exams is all your own work, unless it is assigned as group work. I will make it clear for each test, exam or assignment whether collaboration is encouraged or not.

Always cite your sources. If you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in previous class), you must make that clear otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course.

You are responsible for understanding UT's Academic Honesty Policy which can be found at the following web address: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php

University Resources for Students

The university has numerous resources for students to provide assistance and support for your learning, use these to help you succeed in your classes

The Sanger Learning Center

Did you know that more than one-third of UT undergraduate students use the Sanger Learning Center each year to improve their academic performance? All students are welcome to take advantage of Sanger Center's classes and workshops, private learning specialist appointments, peer academic

ANT 391: Nature, Culture, Power

coaching, and tutoring for more than 70 courses in 15 different subject areas. For more information, please visit <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/slc> or call 512-471-3614 (JES A332).

The University Writing Center

The University Writing Center offers free, individualized, expert help with writing for any UT student, by appointment or on a drop-in basis. Consultants help students develop strategies to improve their writing. The assistance we provide is intended to foster students' resourcefulness and self-reliance.

<http://uwc.utexas.edu/>

Counseling and Mental Health Center

The Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) provides counseling, psychiatric, consultation, and prevention services that facilitate students' academic and life goals and enhance their personal growth and well-being. <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/>

Student Emergency Services

<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>

ITS

Need help with technology? <http://www.utexas.edu/its/>

Libraries

Need help searching for information? <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/>

Canvas

Canvas help is available 24/7 at <https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/633028/pages/student-tutorials>

Important Safety Information

BCAL

If you have concerns about the safety or behavior of fellow students, TAs or Professors, call BCAL (the Behavior Concerns Advice Line): 512-232-5050. Your call can be anonymous. If something doesn't feel right – it probably isn't. Trust your instincts and share your concerns.

Evacuation Information

The following recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from the Office of Campus Safety and Security, 512-471-5767, <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/>

Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when an alarm or alert is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside, unless told otherwise by an official representative.

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas

ANT 391: Nature, Culture, Power

at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.

- Link to information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: www.utexas.edu/emergency