

Winter 2019 | University of Toronto | Department of Geography & Planning  
**GGR1411: Nature and Justice in the Anthropocene**

**COURSE OUTLINE**

**Course Instructor:** Prof. Neera Singh  
Room 5025A Sidney Smith Hall  
Phone: 416-971-2658  
Email: neera.singh@utoronto.ca

**Class Meetings:** Room: SSH 5016G (Sid Smith Hall)  
Tuesdays 5-7 PM

**Office Hours:** Room: SSH 5023  
Tuesdays 1-3 PM (or by appointment)

**Course Overview:**

The ‘Anthropocene’, a proposed epoch, signals an era when human action is marking Earth’s geology and ecosystems and is likely to diminish conditions for life (as we know it) on the planet. ‘Anthropocene’ is a contested term that obscures the fact that not all humans are equally implicated in the planetary ecological crisis. Regardless of the name that we use for the current era, it is clear that the current times of ecological precarity challenge us to rethink our ways of being and belonging to the world. The course draws from Indigenous ontologies and philosophies and Western social theory, especially theories of affect, new materialism, more-than-human geographies, and posthumanism to rethink socio-nature relationality. We will explore how these theoretical resources help us think anew human ways of relating to the rest of the world and provide tools for enacting alternate socioecological futures. Topics covered include: environmental thought and activism, environmental and climate justice movements, post-capitalist economic practices and transition discourses.

This seminar will be guided by the following questions: 1) How do we begin to comprehend the current moment of ecological crisis (what has brought us here?); 2) How can we better understand collective human dominance without obscuring power differentials and inequities within and between human societies?; 3) How do we reconfigure nature-society relations to address the ecological crisis?; 4) How do we conceptualize justice not only in terms of intra-species justice (for humans present and future generations) but also for more-than-humans and beyond human-scale?; and 5) What theoretical and methodological tools enable us to rethink the human and reconfigure our ways of living on the planet and support socially-just transitions?

In the seminar, I will work with you to foster engaged and active learning, guided by principles of collaboration, mutual support, and ethics of care. Course assignments and grading scheme reflect a commitment to these principles. Our collective learning will depend on everyone’s engaged participation and commitment to respectful and collaborative learning environment.

## Course Requirements and Marking Scheme Summary

		<b>Due Dates</b>
Reading Responses	30%	Ongoing, Commentaries due on Monday @noon
Seminar Contributions	12%	Ongoing
Seminar Facilitation	15%	
Final Paper proposal	8%	February 26, 2019
Final Paper	35%	Last day of Class

### Reading Responses (30%)

You will post at least 8 weekly commentaries (about 400-500 words) on the Blackboard by Monday at 12 PM (for weeks other than the ones in which you are facilitating). Please do not be late in posting them as we all need to read them before class. Please read and be prepared to engage with the commentaries of at least three other seminar participants. Your response to the weekly readings should ideally include:

- A concise paraphrase of the key argument of the pieces you have read, the evidence used, and the general structures of the arguments. As you read, try and figure out the argument the author is making and if it stands in its own terms and then see if it can be read critically from your own research standpoint or from the point of other critics.
- As you evaluate and think through these readings, you may want to pose questions to the author, to yourself, and to the rest of us. This critical dialogue with the author may include: How and why the argument works or does not work, and most importantly what work do these ideas do? Does thinking with these ideas help you and if yes, how?
- Raise questions for discussion and clarification in seminar.

### Seminar Contributions (12%)

The quality of our collective learning will depend on the contributions that each one of us makes to collective learning and to nurturing learning environment. If you miss a class, or are not fully present, others will miss you and your contribution. Mutual respect and care for each other and for the learning space – the readings, engagement on Quercus and in class - is critical for the success of the seminar. In addition to assigned weekly readings, please read as many ‘reading responses’ on Quercus as you can, prior to class – but do not read them before you have done the readings. Remember that your perspective and how you engage with the readings is unique – do not interpret the readings through the lenses used by your colleagues. Your participation in class will be assessed not on the basis of how much you speak, but on the basis of the quality of your contributions – your engagement with the readings and with your colleagues and your contributions to creating an environment where we all feel respected and cared for.

In addition to contributions in class, you are also encouraged to post reflections on class discussion after class on Quercus. These reflections will be optional – to make the process of sharing spontaneous and not forced. You can use seminar reflection discussion board as a way of continuing seminar discussion online. This thread can also be used to post additional resources that you may want to share with colleagues. We will discuss modalities of ‘discussion’ on Quercus in class. In-class and online contributions together will comprise 10% of your grade.

**Seminar Facilitation (15%)**

In pairs, you will take the responsibility of leading the seminar at least once, between weeks 3- week 12. Please feel free to be creative in your class facilitation. Your facilitation should highlight key issues raised by the readings (questions it generated for you, critiques of the arguments made by the authors, points that need further clarification) and raise questions that could generate valuable discussion during the seminar. Seminar facilitation should not be presentation-heavy. The idea is to create a generative learning environment. Please send me your ideas for seminar facilitation by Friday at noon – so that I can provide inputs. In week 2, we will work out a schedule for seminar facilitation in class.

**Final Paper/ Project (Proposal 8% and Final paper 35%)**

The final paper can take different forms. In addition to traditional research paper, I am open to dissertation proposal, annotated bibliography for comps, as well as creative writing projects as the final project – as long as it draws from the conceptual resources from the course. You may choose a topic and option that fits your research interests and contributes to furthering your program requirements (comps, dissertation proposal, grant application, thesis chapter).

I am also open to your working together in teams (or 3-4) to write a collaborative paper (it is expected that this paper will be more ambitious in scope than an individually written paper). Creative forms of writing – a multi-layered text using personal voice interspersed with scholarly writing, autoethnographic writing, a personal manifesto for how you intend to ‘live the anthropocene’, are also welcome. In all cases, I will expect scholarly depth and engagement with the conceptual material of the course.

Possible options include:

*Option A – Research Essay/Proposal/Grant/Comp:* This paper should **not exceed 6500 words, plus bibliography**. I recommend this for students who are clear of their research topics/questions (advanced MAs and PhDs).

***Option B - Annotated Bibliography***

For those who are beginning to fine-tune their research question and theoretical focus, this may be a good option. The length should not exceed 6000 words and could include 2-4 books and 15-20 articles. The annotated bibliography should have an introduction of 1000 -1500 words discussing the question/s that you aim to address/explore in the bibliography and why you selected the list of texts you did. The introduction will be followed by critical discussion of the reading list, approximately 500 words for each reading.

***Option C – Creative Writing***

I am open to ideas! Give a detailed proposal of what you would like to do!

**Final Paper Proposal (8%) Due February 26, 2019**

For all the above options, you will submit a 2-page proposal stating your research questions (or goal), citing relevant literature, theoretical tools, possible case studies and some sample readings that you intend to use. Time permitting we will have discussion on your paper ideas in class.

**Assignment Submission and Late Penalty**

All assignments for this class are to be submitted electronically via Quercus. There will be a late

penalty of 5% for each day late. No assignments will be accepted more than one week after the due date unless you have obtained prior permission from me, or in the case of documented illness or other extenuating circumstances.

### **Academic Integrity/ Plagiarism**

Please familiarize yourself with what counts as academic misconduct:

<http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/The-rules/what-is-academic-misconduct>

Also, check out the rules relating to how to document the sources of information that you use and how to avoid plagiarism:

<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>

### **Accessibility Needs:**

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible, and let me know how I can help!

For details see: <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/as/>

### **Required Books**

Tsing, A. L. (2015). *The mushroom at the end of the world: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Princeton University Press.

Moore, Jason (ed.) (2016). *Anthropocene or capitalocene?: Nature, history, and the crisis of capitalism*. Pm Press.

Bennett, J. (2009). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Duke University Press.

de la Bellacasa, M. P. (2017). *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds*. University of Minnesota Press.

Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed Editions.

Recommended:

Kirksey, E. (2015). *Emergent ecologies*. Duke University Press.

## Part I: The Anthropocene and the Anthro-not-Seen<sup>1</sup>

---

### Week 1: January 8, 2019

#### Introductions & Stage Setting

- Steffen, W. (2016). Welcome to the Anthropocene. *Australasian Science*, 37(2), 28.
- Klein, N. (2015). Introduction: One Way or Another, Everything Changes. In *This changes everything: Capitalism vs. the climate*. Simon and Schuster. pp. 1-28.
- Margaret Atwood. 2009. Time Capsule found on a Dead Planet. Reproduced in “I’m with the Bears: Short Stories from a Damaged Planet”. Verso. 2011
- Unearthing the Capitalocene: Towards a Reparations Ecology--  
<https://roarmag.org/magazine/moore-patel-seven-cheap-things-capitalocene/>

### Week 2: January 15, 2019

#### Our Current Ecological Crisis: What got us here

- Tsing, Anna. *Mushroom at the End of the World*—Part I: “What’s Left?” (pp. 1-54).
- Moore, J. W. (2017). The Capitalocene, Part I: On the nature and origins of our ecological crisis. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 44(3), 594-630.
- Crist, E. (2013). On the poverty of our nomenclature. *Environmental Humanities*, 3(1), 129-147.
- “Anthropocene: What’s in a Name?” (Ian Angus, Ecosocialist Notebook blog of Climate & Capitalism, an ecosocialist journal)  
<https://climateandcapitalism.com/2015/11/09/anthropocene-whats-in-a-name/>

#### Recommended:

- Steffen, W., Rockström, J., Richardson, K., Lenton, T. M., Folke, C., Liverman, D., ... & Donges, J. F. (2018). Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(33), 8252-8259.
- Lorimer, Jamie. “The Anthro-Scene: A Guide for the Perplexed.” *Social Studies of Science* 47 (October 2016): 117–142.

### Week 3: January 22, 2019

#### The Anthropocene or the Anthro-not-Seen

- Tsing, Anna. *Mushroom at the End of the World*—Part II “After Progress: Salvage Accumulation” (pp. 57-144)
- Davis, H., & Todd, Z. (2017). On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 16(4).
- de la Cadena, M. (2015). Uncommoning Nature. *E-Flux Journal 56th Biennale*.
- Escobar, A. (2016). Thinking-feeling with the Earth: Territorial Struggles and the Ontological Dimension of the Epistemologies of the South. *AIBR. Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana*, 11(1).

#### Recommended:

- Stengers, I. (2015). Accepting the reality of Gaia. *The Anthropocene and the global environmental crisis*. London: Routledge, 134-144.

---

<sup>1</sup> The course readings are tentative. I will modify the readings based on students’ interests and backgrounds.

## Part II: Towards a New Earth and a New Humanity

---

### Week 4: January 29, 2019

#### Reanimating the World I: Indigenous Ontologies & New Materialism

Jane Bennett. *Vibrant Matter*: Chapter 1-3 & Preface

Parts of Robin Kimmerer book. [1-71, 105-140]

Lorimer, J. (2011). Nature—Part II. *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Human Geography*, 197-208.

Ingold, T. (2006). Rethinking the animate, re-animating thought. *Ethnos*, 71(1), 9-20.

Recommended:

Braun, B. (2008). Environmental issues: inventive life. *Progress in Human Geography*, 32(5), 667-679.

### Week 5: February 5, 2019

#### Reanimating the World II: Kincentric Ecology

Parts of Robin Kimmerer Book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*. [pp. 204-215; 310-340; 360-384]

Salmon, E. (2000). Kincentric ecology: indigenous perceptions of the human–nature relationship. *Ecological Applications*, 10(5), 1327-1332.

Haraway, Donna. "Anthropocene, capitalocene, plantationocene, chthulucene: Making kin." *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2015): 159-165.

Suchet-Pearson, S., Wright, S., Lloyd, K., & Burarrwanga, L. (2013). Caring as Country: Towards an ontology of co-becoming in natural resource management. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 54(2), 185-197.

Engagement Blog: What the Seed Knows of Soil

<https://aesengagement.wordpress.com/2016/01/27/what-the-seed-knows-of-the-soil/>

Recommended:

Lorimer, J. (2007). Nonhuman charisma. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 25(5), 911-932.

Thrift, N., & Dewsbury, J. D. (2000). Dead geographies—and how to make them live. *Environment and planning D: society and space*, 18(4), 411-432.

### Week 6: February 12, 2019

#### Rethinking the Human I: Nurturing Other-than-Capitalist Subjectivities

Ruddick, S. M. (2017). Rethinking the subject, reimagining worlds. *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 7(2), 119-139.

Singh, N. M. (2013). The affective labor of growing forests and the becoming of environmental subjects: Rethinking environmentality in Odisha, India. *Geoforum*, 47, 189-198.

Terranova, T. (2014). The (European) Posthuman Predicament. Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman and the Future of the Humanities*. *ANGLISTICA AION AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL*, 19(1), 193-200.

Fletcher, R. (2017). Environmentality unbound: multiple governmentalities in environmental politics. *Geoforum*, 85, 311-315.

Recommended:

Rosi, B. (2013). *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity. Chapter 1: Post-Humanism: Life beyond the Self (page 13-54) and Chapter 2: Post-Anthropocentricism: Life beyond the Species (page 55-104).

Peter Sterling, "Why We Consume: Neural Design and Sustainability," *Great Transition Initiative* (February 2015), <http://www.greattransition.org/publication/why-we-consume>.

**Reading Week: No Class: February 19, 2019** (Optional Meeting to discuss Final Paper ideas?)

### **Part III: Nurturing “Life-in-Common”: Towards a Pluriversal world**

---

#### **Week 7: February 26, 2019**

##### **Justice and Value**

Sen, A. (2006). What do we want from a theory of justice?. *The Journal of philosophy*, 103(5), 215-238. Or some chapters of the book, *The Idea of Justice*

Schlosberg, D. (2013). Theorising environmental justice: the expanding sphere of a discourse. *Environmental Politics*, 22(1), 37-55.

Deneulin, S. (2012). Justice and deliberation about the good life: The contribution of Latin American buen vivir social movements to the idea of justice.

Schlosberg, D., & Carruthers, D. (2010). Indigenous struggles, environmental justice, and community capabilities. *Global Environmental Politics*, 10(4), 12-35.

Graeber, D. (2013). It is value that brings universes into being. *HAU: Journal of ethnographic Theory*, 3(2), 219-43.

#### **Week 8: March 5, 2019**

##### **Ethics of Care and Human Co-Becomings**

Chapters from the book de la Bellacasa, M. P. (2017). *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds*. University of Minnesota Press.

Graham, J. K., & Roelvink, G. (2010). An economic ethics for the Anthropocene. *Antipode*, 41(s1), 320-346.

Gibson-Graham, J. K., & Miller, E. (2015). Economy as ecological livelihood. *Manifesto for Living in the Anthropocene*, 7-16.

Singh, *Becoming a Commoner*.

Jax, K., Calestani, M., Chan, K. M., Eser, U., Keune, H., Muraca, B., ... & Wittmer, H. (2018). Caring for nature matters: a relational approach for understanding nature’s contributions to human well-being. *Current opinion in environmental sustainability*.

Recommended:

Jackson, S., & Palmer, L. R. (2015). Reconceptualizing ecosystem services: Possibilities for cultivating and valuing the ethics and practices of care. *Progress in Human Geography*, 39(2), 122-145.

Weber, A., & Kurt, H. (2015). Towards cultures of aliveness. Politics and poetics in a postdualistic age—An anthropocene manifesto. *Solutions*, 5, 58-65.

Barua, M. (2016). Lively commodities and encounter value. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 34(4), 725-744.

**Week 9: March 12, 2019****Affective Political Ecology**

- Escobar, A. (2010). Postconstructivist political ecologies. *The international handbook of environmental sociology*, 2, 91-105.
- Singh, N. M. (2018). Introduction: Affective Ecologies and Conservation. *Conservation and Society*, 16(1), 1-7.
- Carolan, M. (2015). Affective sustainable landscapes and care ecologies: getting a real feel for alternative food communities. *Sustainability Science*, 10(2), 317-329.
- Hayes-Conroy, J., & Hayes-Conroy, A. (2013). Veggies and visceralities: A political ecology of food and feeling. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 6, 81-90.
- Barua, M. (2019). Animating capital: Work, commodities, circulation. *Progress in Human Geography*, 0309132518819057.
- Lorimer, J. (2012). Multinatural geographies for the Anthropocene. *Progress in Human Geography*, 36(5), 593-612.

**Recommended/ Optional (Possibility of organizing around specific research interests of seminar participants)**

- Kirksey, Stefan, and Stefan Helmreich. "The emergence of multispecies ethnography." *Cultural anthropology* 25, no. 4 (2010): 545-576.
- Lloro-Bidart, T. (2017). A feminist posthumanist political ecology of education for theorizing human-animal relations/relationships. *Environmental Education Research*, 23(1), 111-130.
- Whatmore, S. (2006). Materialist returns: practising cultural geography in and for a more-than-human world. *Cultural geographies*, 13(4), 600-609.

**Background reading on affect theory:**

- Hardt, M. (2007). What affects are good for. *The affective turn: Theorizing the social*, ix-xiii.
- Seigworth, G. J., & Gregg, M. (2010). An inventory of shimmers. *The affect theory reader*, 1-25.

**Week 10: March 19, 2019****Nature Conservation in the Anthropocene/ Green Economy and its Critique (Readings to be finalized later)**

- Büscher, B., Fletcher, R., Brockington, D., Sandbrook, C., Adams, W. M., Campbell, L., ... & Holmes, G. (2017). Half-Earth or Whole Earth? Radical ideas for conservation, and their implications. *Oryx*, 51(3), 407-410.
- Locke, H. (2014). Nature Needs Half: A necessary and hopeful new agenda for protected areas. *Nature New South Wales*, 58(3), 7.
- Cafaro, P., Butler, T., Crist, E., Cryer, P., Dinerstein, E., Kopnina, H., ... & Washington, H. (2017). If we want a whole Earth, Nature Needs Half: a response to Büscher et al. *Oryx*, 51(3), 400-400.
- Kopnina, H., Washington, H., Gray, J., & Taylor, B. (2018). The 'future of conservation' debate: Defending ecocentrism and the Nature Needs Half movement. *Biological Conservation*, 217, 140-148.
- Singh, N. M. (2015). Payments for ecosystem services and the gift paradigm: Sharing the burden and joy of environmental care. *Ecological Economics*, 117, 53-61.

Recommended:

- Lorimer, J., & Driessen, C. (2014). Wild experiments at the Oostvaardersplassen: Rethinking environmentalism in the Anthropocene. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 39(2), 169-181.
- Hinchliffe, S. (2008). Reconstituting nature conservation: Towards a careful political ecology. *Geoforum*, 39(1), 88-97. {Focus on theoretical framework and conclusions}
- Lorimer, H. (2006). Herding memories of humans and animals. *Environment and planning D: society and space*, 24(4), 497-518.
- Rose, D. B. (2011). *Wild dog dreaming: Love and extinction*. University of Virginia Press.

### **Week 11: March 26, 2019**

#### **Post-capitalist Alternatives**

- Caffentzis, George, and Silvia Federici. "Commons against and beyond capitalism." *Community Development Journal* 49, no. suppl\_1 (2014): i92-i105.
- Weeks, K. (2014, May). The Problems with Work. In *New Labor Forum* (Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 10-12). Sage CA: Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Schneider, F., Kallis, G., & Martinez-Alier, J. (2010). Crisis or opportunity? Economic degrowth for social equity and ecological sustainability. Introduction to this special issue. *Journal of cleaner production*, 18(6), 511-518.
- Muraca, B. (2012). Towards a fair degrowth-society: Justice and the right to a 'good life' beyond growth. *Futures*, 44(6), 535-545.
- Sekulova, F., Kallis, G., & Schneider, F. (2017). Climate change, happiness and income from a degrowth perspective. *Handbook on Growth and Sustainability*, 160.
- Moore, Sarah A., Jeffrey Wilson, Sarah Kelly-Richards, and Sallie A. Marston. "School gardens as sites for forging progressive socioecological futures." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 105, no. 2 (2015): 407-415.

### **Week 12: April 2, 2019**

#### **Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet**

Transition discourses, transition town movements, urban gardens, food sovereignty, Indigenous resurgence.

More open-ended exploration: The commons, peer-to-peer production, alternative currencies, time-banking, degrowth.

Chapters from the book, Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet.

Recommended:

- Macy, Joanna, and Chris Johnstone. *Active hope: How to face the mess we're in without going crazy*. New World Library, 2012.