

Responding to Climate Change: Poetics, Politics, Participation

Seminar Leader: Dr. Ramona Mosse
Course Times: Monday, 3:45-7pm
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Office Hours: Mondays 1:45-3:45pm

Course Description

Climate change is a pressing global issue today that engages the natural sciences as much as politics, economics and contemporary culture at large. Still, the question of how to respond to climate change reveals a gap between the scientific data available and the social and political action taken. Drawing on the environmental humanities, this course examines how we respond or fail to respond to climate change by exploring how different cultural discourses on climate change shape both our imagination and our sense of political agency. We will focus on the role affect/empathy have in shaping concepts such as the Anthropocene and posthumanism, and in generating political participation/activism. Throughout, we will intertwine thinking critically about specific political, philosophical and cultural perspectives on climate change while also examining a select group of local and international institutions – e.g. the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, Climate Change Theatre Action (CCTA), *Berlin 21*, *The Guardian's* “Environmental Defenders Stories” – that offer sites of action on climate change. We will ourselves respond by creating our own radio podcast series that explores the diversity of possible actions on climate change in and beyond Berlin. Furthermore, our discussions in class will be supplemented by visits to local organizations and cultural events, as well as discussions with guest speakers. The course materials draw on a range of genres from fiction to non-fiction and take into account film, video, and online sources.

Learning Outcomes

- Understanding the history and theory of the concepts of environmentalism, Climate Change and the Anthropocene.
- Understanding the complex interplay between economics, politics, and science in shaping Climate Change.
- Developing approaches for how to translate theoretical ideas into practical action.
- Framing ideas for how the Humanities and Liberal Arts could contribute to developing responses to Climate Change.
- Ability to formulate arguments clearly in both written and oral form.

Readings

The following books are required. Please purchase them at a local bookseller or online. A copy of each of these books will also be on the Library Reserves Shelves:

- Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (since this is a longer novel, please start reading it well ahead of the class session)
- Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us*
- Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*
- Mark Maslin, *Climate Change – A Very Short Introduction*

Further readings will be provided via a Dropbox Folder and/or online links where listed in the syllabus.

Some Climate Change /Environmental Resources

- United Nations Climate Change: <http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/climate-change/>
- The Climate Reality Project: <https://www.24hoursofreality.org>
- Umweltbundesamt Germany: <https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/en/topics/climate-energy>
- Anthropozän Project & Curriculum (House of World Cultures /Max Planck Institute for the History of Science):
https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2014/anthropozaen/anthropozaen_2013_2014.php
- Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research: <https://www.pik-potsdam.de/pik-frontpage>
- WWF Carbon Footprint Calculator: <https://www.wwf.de/themen-projekte/klima-energie/wwf-klimarechner/>
- Climate Change Theatre Action: <http://www.climatechangetheatreaction.com>
- The Guardian Environmental Defenders:
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/series/the-defenders>

Requirements

(including expectations regarding participation and course assignments)

- Engaged and informed participation in all class sessions
- Two written essays
- Completion of Group Project and smaller assignments
- Participation in Debating Finale

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is expected. More than one absence (of a weekly three-hour seminar block) in a semester will affect your participation grade for this course. In accordance with the Student Handbook, a failing grade for the course will be given if absences reach 30% of the course meetings.

Please make sure that you come to class prepared, willing to actively participate, to formulate questions, to challenge ideas that are presented and to engage with the material on multiple levels, be it in class discussion, close reading and argument analysis, informal written exercises or by working as part of a group. All of these aspects contribute vitally to your class participation grade. In order to prepare adequately for class, you need to read the material thoroughly and critically, highlight important passages and write your own questions and responses in the margins. Please bring a copy of the readings to class. In the interest of reducing paper waste, you may choose to bring your readings on an e-reader, laptop or tablet to class. However, you should use the commenting and highlighting functions provided by the applications to mark up the readings with your own marginalia, questions, and comments. You may only use technology to access your readings while in class. **Should you surf on the web or use other apps or social media while in class, I will ban all technology from the classroom.**

Essay Assignments

This course has two written essay assignments. The first should be approximately 1000-1500 words (3-4 pages double spaced) and the second approximately 2000-2500 words (5-7 pages double-spaced). You will receive more detailed instruction handouts about the focus/scope of each essay.

Group Projects – Podcast Series on Climate Change Action

For this Group Project, you will come together in groups of 3-4 to develop an episode for a podcast series on climate change action. To start with, interview several of your fellow Bard Berlin students from across campus to find out what seems to be the greatest hindrance/challenge/question to them towards taking climate action. Choose one obstacle/question and create a podcast episode that proposes a response or suggests a way to overcome this obstacle by referring to impactful and original civic engagements from NGOs and other organizations worldwide. How could those be applied in the Bard Berlin context? Your podcast episode should be no longer than 5-7min and can employ discussions, sound experiments, narrative, citation, and music. A more detailed instruction sheet will be handed out to you in advance.

Debating Finale

For our final session of the semester, we will set up and stage two formal debates that engage with some of the challenges posed by Climate Change and the ability to translate scientific knowledge into political action. We will prepare the topics in class and divide the class into four debating teams (two pro, two con for the two topics). In preparation for the debate, write a 500-word summary of your statement and formulate potential questions you could challenge the contesting side with. More detailed instructions on formal debates will be provided on an instruction sheet ahead of the session.

Academic Integrity & Plagiarism

Academic study is both an intellectual and ethical enterprise; it is important to keep that in mind as you enter into a scholarly discussion with scholarly work. You are encouraged to build on the ideas and texts of others; that is a vital part of academic life. At the same time, it is your obligation to document every occasion when you use another's ideas, language, or syntax. When you use another's ideas or language—whether through direct quotation, summary, or paraphrase—you must formally acknowledge that debt by referencing it. To do so, please use the MLA parenthetical citation format (<http://www.mla.org/style>). If you are uncertain about any aspect of citation practices, please feel free to stop by my office hours. The importance of correct citation cannot be overstressed! Even one occasion of academic dishonesty, large or small, on any assignment, large or small, will result in reporting of the offense to the Exam Board and may result in failure for the entire course.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Please ensure to submit your essays in a timely manner. Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. If I agree to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, you will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Grade Breakdown

Mid-term Essay: 30%

Final Essay: 40%

Group Project: 10%

Participation: 20%

Debate: n/a but a FAIL will lower your final grade by a full letter grade

Course Schedule

Please note that this schedule is subject to change (note the TBC for guest speakers and excursions) and it is your responsibility to keep up with the latest assignments and deadlines. Please also note that classes may be rescheduled for Completion Week so you must plan to stay on campus until December 21, 2018

PART I: Concepts of Nature in the History of Thought

Week 1: Monday, September 3, 2018: Introduction – Nature and Political Communities

Reading: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Handout)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Handout)

Assignment: Bring an object, sound clip or image to class that best represents the idea of nature. Write a short response (1 page) that explains why you chose the object and what kind of idea of nature it projects. Be ready to present your idea to the rest of the class.

Week 2: Monday, September 10, 2018: Excursion - The Nature/Culture Divide

Excursion to Naturpark Südgelände Schöneberg (S2/S25 to Priesterweg)

On site, discuss: David Thoreau, from *Walden* (Dropbox)

Week 3: Monday, September 17, 2018: Re-imagining Nature

Reading: Alexander von Humboldt, from *Cosmos* (Dropbox)

Please also have a look at: <https://kosmos-humboldt.org/en/>

Charles Darwin, from *On the Origin of Species* (Dropbox)

Andrea Wulf: from *The Invention of Nature* (Dropbox)

PART II: Environmentalism since the 1960s: Imagining Future Place and Space

Week 4: Monday, September 24, 2018: The Beginnings of Environmentalism

Reading: Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Dropbox)

Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons" (Dropbox)

"The Gaia Hypothesis - An Interview with James Lovelock":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIFRg2skuDI>

Assignment: Visit the WWF website carbon footprint calculator and find out the size of your own carbon footprint. Bring the results to class.

Week 5: Monday, October 1, 2018: Landscapes between Science and Myth: The Arctic/Antarctic

Duncan Macmillan, *2071* (Dropbox)

Edmund O. Wilson, "The Serpent" (Dropbox)

Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* (pp. 3-84)

--- Midterm Essay Assignment ---

THEATRE OUTING: *Welche Zukunft? Let them Eat Money!* - Deutsches Theater -- Tuesday, October 3, 2018

Week 6: Monday, October 8, 2018: Landscapes between Science and Myth II: Rivers and Oceans

Watch: Benh Zeitlin (D), *Beasts of the Southern Wild*

Ursula Heise: from *Imagining Extinction* (Dropbox)

--- Group Project Podcast Series Assignment ---

Week 7: Monday, October 15, 2018: Staying Earthbound versus Reaching for Spaces Beyond?

Margaret Atwood: *Oryx and Crake*

Bruno Latour: from *Facing Gaia – Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (Dropbox)

“For a Terrestrial Politics – An Interview with Bruno Latour” (<https://www.eurozine.com/terrestrial-politics-interview-bruno-latour/>)

Week 8: Monday, October 22, 2018: Excursion

Visit to the Potsdam Institute of Climate Impact Research (TBC)

<https://www.pik-potsdam.de/institut>

Mark Maslin: from *Climate Change – A Very Short Introduction*

--- Midterm Essay due: October 22, 2018 ---

Week 9: ----- Midterm Break -----

PART III From Space to Time: Transforming Knowledge and Civic Action in the Anthropocene

Week 10: Monday, November 5, 2018: Thinking the Anthropocene

Dipesh Chakrabarty: “The Climate of History: Four Theses” (Dropbox)

Steffen, Crutzen, McNeill: “The Anthropocene – Are Humans Now Overwhelming The Great Forces of Nature?” (Dropbox)

“Anthropocene Curriculum” Website: <https://www.anthropocene-curriculum.org>

TBC: Guest speaker from Max Planck Institute for the History of Science on the Anthropocene Project (in co-operation with the House of World Cultures)

Week 11: Monday, November 11, 2018: Non- and Posthuman Perspectives

Alan Weisman: *The World Without Us* (pp. 1-87; 101-144; 245-267)

Julian Rosefeldt: *In the Land of Drought* (2015/17)

https://www.julianrosefeldt.com/film-and-video-works/the_creation_2015/

--- Group Project Podcast Series Due ---

Week 12: Monday, November 18, 2018: Economics, Technology and the Anthropocene

The Ecomodernist Manifesto –

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5515d9f9e4b04d5c3198b7bb/t/552d37bbe4b07a7dd69fcdcb/1429026747046/An+Ecomodernist+Manifesto.pdf>

Bill Tomlinson: *Greening Through IT: Information Technology for Environmental Sustainability* (Dropbox)

Conservation through Virtual Reality: <https://www.conservation.org/stories/vr/pages/default.aspx>

TED Talk Chris Milk “How virtual reality can create the ultimate empathy machine”

https://www.ted.com/talks/chris_milk_how_virtual_reality_can_create_the_ultimate_empathy_machine

--- **Debating Finale – Groups and Assignment** ---

Week 13: Monday, November 26, 2018: Civic Engagement & Climate Change

Watch Al Gore: *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power*

Naomi Klein: from *This Changes Everything* (Dropbox)

<https://thischangeeverything.org>

Jeffrey D. Sachs, “The Power of One” (Dropbox)

--- **Debating Finale Topic Brainstorming** ---

--- **FINAL ESSAY Assignment** ---

Week 14: Monday, December 3, 2018: Global Democracy

Milo Rau: *The General Assembly* (Schaubühne Berlin, 2017)

Watch Session on “The Natural Global Commons”

<http://www.general-assembly.net/en/>

UN Climate Change, Paris Agreement:

https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf

Week 15: Monday, December 10, 2018: Conclusion

Debating Finale

Assignment: Look over the syllabus and revisit the materials and discussions we have engaged with.

Prepare a 500-600 word statement in preparation for the debate and formulating 3 questions with which to challenge the opposing team.

Week 16: - Completion Week –

--- **FINAL ESSAY DUE on Thursday, December 20, 2018** ---