

# **POLITICAL THEORIES OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

Lent Term 2023

## **Course Description**

What is nature, and what remains of nature today? What is the relationship between humans and the environment? Why should we care? In response to such questions, this course will introduce ideas of the good life and strategies for political action in the era of climate change. Specifically, we will

- (1) Reconsider conventional political concepts (such as agency, democracy, humanity, and sovereignty) in light of both the environmental crisis and theories of material agency;
- (2) Examine connections between sexism, racism, historical inequalities, and environmental destruction;
- (3) Reimagine sustainable forms of living-together on earth that acknowledge shared agency between human beings, nonhuman organisms, and inorganic materialities.

The course combines readings in political theory, environmental humanities, eco-feminism, and media studies. It also includes various artworks in the discussions.

## **Instructor**

Dr. Franziska Strack

[Email]

**Office Hours:** [Day, Time, Location]

I will also be available to speak after each class. If neither option works for you, please send me an e-mail and we will decide on another time to meet.

## **Organization**

**Seminars:** Friday, 5–7 PM, [Location]

**Accommodation:** If you require additional accommodation, please contact me.

## **Assessment**

**Preparation and Active Participation (10%):** You are asked to prepare the mandatory readings prior to each session and actively partake in the discussions. Active participation includes critically analyzing texts, making comparisons between them, and engaging with your classmates' comments in a respectful manner.

**Responses (30%):** Each week, you will pick a quote which, in your opinion, captures a core aspect of one of the texts. You then formulate a short response (in form of a question, discussion, critique, ...) that explains I) why the aspect caught your attention, and II) why you think it is important to talk about it in the context of our course. The response should not be longer than one page and be sent to me before noon on the day of the session.

**Final Essay (60%):** At the end of the term, you will write an essay of about 3,0000 words about a topic of your own choosing that relates to the course topic. Please meet with me if you would like to develop a topic together. The essay is due on [Date] March 2023.

## SESSIONS

### **Session 1) Earth, Ecology, and the Elements**

#### Mandatory Readings

- Latour, Bruno. *Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion*, Lecture 3: “The Puzzling Face of a Secular Gaia,” 21 February 2013.
- Macauley, David. 2010. “Introduction” and “Philosophy’s Forgotten Four.” *Elemental Philosophy: Earth, Air, Fire, Water as Environmental Ideas*, SUNY Press, pp. 1–9, 13–50.
- Bennett, Jane. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, pp. 1–13, 110–122.

#### Further Readings

- Berleant, Arnold. 1995. *Aesthetics of Environment*, Temple University Press.
- Kolbert, Elizabeth. 2015. *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, Henry Holt and Company.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2009. “The Climate of History: Four Theses.” *Critical Inquiry* 35(2), pp. 197–222.
- Meyer, John. 2001. *Political Nature: Environmentalism and the Interpretation of Western Thought*, MIT Press.
- Cannavò, Peter & Lane, Joseph, eds. 2014. *Engaging Nature: Environmentalism and the Political Theory Canon*, MIT Press.
- Coole, Diana & Frost, Samantha, eds. 2010. *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, Duke University Press.

### **Session 2) Theories of Nature**

#### Mandatory Readings

- Thoreau, Henry. “The Ponds.” *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*.
- Sullivan, Robert. 1998. “Snake Hill” and “Walden Swamp.” *The Meadowlands: Wilderness Adventures at the Edge of a City*. Anchor Books, pp. 13–34, 75–91.
- Cronon, William. 1995. “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature.” *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. Cronon, W.W. Norton & Co. pp. 69–90.
- Plumwood, Val. 1993. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Routledge, pp. 1–27.

#### Further Readings

- Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvard University Press.
- Dobson, Andrew. 2007. *Green Political Thought*, Routledge.
- Iovino, Serenella & Oppermann, Serpil, eds. 2014. *Material Ecocriticism*, Indiana University Press.
- Merchant, Carolyn. 1990. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, Harper Collins.
- Warren, Karen, ed. 1997. *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture and Nature*, Indiana University Press.
- Mortimer-Sandilands, Catriona & Erickson, Bruce, eds. 2010. *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, Indiana University Press.
- Gaard, Greta. 1997. “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism.” *Hypatia* 12(1), pp. 114–37.
- Gaard, Greta. 2011. “Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism.” *Feminist Formations* 23(2), pp. 26–53.

### Session 3) Earth, Land, and Stones

#### Mandatory Readings

- Cohen, Jeffrey. 2015. "Geophilia: The Love of Stone." *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman*, University of Minnesota Press, pp. 19–66.
- Smithson, Robert. 1996. "A Sedimentation of the Mind" (pp. 100–13), "The Spiral Jetty" (pp. 143–53), and "Earth" (pp. 177–87). *The Collected Writings*, University of California Press.
- Parikka, Jussi. 2015. "Dust and the Exhausted Life." *A Geology of Media*. University of Minnesota Press, pp. 83–107.

#### Further Readings

- Schweninger, Lee. 2008. *Listening to the Land: Native American Literary Responses to the Landscape*, The University of Georgia Press.
- Tsing, Anna. 2005. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, Princeton University Press.

### Session 4) Air and Atmosphere

#### Mandatory Readings

- McCormack, Derek. 2018. "Envelopment" and "Sounding." *Atmospheric Things: On the Allure of Elemental Envelopment*, Duke University Press, pp. 17–34, 121–43.
- Adams, John Luther. 2009. "In Search of an Ecology of Music" (pp. 1–10) and "An Ecosystem of Sound and Light" (pp. 110–16). *The Place Where You Go to Listen: In Search of an Ecology of Music*, Wesleyan University Press.
- Neel Ahuja, 2015, "Intimate Atmospheres Queer Theory in a Time of Extinctions." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21(2–3), pp. 365–85.

#### Further Reading

- Herzogenrath, Bernd. 2009. "The 'Weather of Music': Sounding Nature in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries." *Deleuze/Guattari & Ecology*, ed. Herzogenrath, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 216–32.

### Session 5) Water

#### Mandatory Readings

- Zalasiewicz, Jan & Williams, Mark. 2014. "Oceans in Crisis." *Ocean Worlds: The Story of Seas on Earth and Other Planets*, Oxford University Press, pp. 163–92.
- Jue, Melody. 2020. "Introduction." *Wild Blue Media: Thinking Through Seawater*, Duke University Press, pp. 1–28.
- Starosielski, Nicole. 2015. *The Undersea Network*, Duke University Press, pp. 1–10, 26–63.

#### Further Readings

- Gumbs, Alexis. 2020. *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, AK Press.
- Alaimo, Stacy. 2016. "Oceanic Origins, Plastic Activism, and New Materialism at Sea." *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*, University of Minnesota Press, pp. 111–41.

## Session 6) Fire and Fossil Fuels

### Mandatory Readings

- Peters, John. 2015. "The Fire Sermon." *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media*, The University of Chicago Press, pp. 115–64.
- Nixon, Rob. 2011. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Harvard University Press, pp. 1–10, 17–22, 68–102.
- Daggett, Cara. 2018. "Petro-Masculinity: Fossil Fuels and Authoritarian Desire." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 47(1), pp. 25–44.

### Further Readings

- Daggett, Cara. 2019. *The Birth of Energy: Fossil Fuels, Thermodynamics, and the Politics of Work*, Duke University Press.
- Mitchell, Timothy. 2013. *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, Verso Books.

## Session 7) Of Metals, Futures, and the Cosmos

### Mandatory Readings

- Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix. 2014. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, pp. 342–47, 380–416.
- Klee, Paul. 2013. "Genesis of Form" (pp. 18–23), "Ways of Nature Study" (pp. 63–68), "Creative Credo" (pp. 76–80), "Survey and Orientation in Regard to Pictorial Elements and Their Spatial Arrangement" (pp. 81–95), "Line" (pp. 103–15), "Line, Plane, and Orientation in Space" (pp. 123–25), "The Central Opposition" (pp. 237–46), "Rhythms and Rhythmic Structures" (pp. 267–70), and "Earth, Water, and Air" (pp. 313–22). *Notebooks, Vol. I: The Thinking Eye*, Wittenborn Art Books.
- Klee, Paul. 2013. *Notebooks, Vol. II: The Nature of Nature*, Wittenborn Art Books, pp. 45–47, 257, 283–84.
- Manavis, Sarah. "Eco-Fascism: The Ideology Marrying Environmentalism and White Supremacy Thriving Online." *New Statesman*, 21 September 2018.

### Further Readings

- Herzogenrath, Bernd, ed. 2009. *Deleuze/Guattari & Ecology*, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Grosz, Elisabeth. 2008. *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*, Columbia University Press.
- Bennett, Jane. 2010. "A Life of Metal." *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, pp. 52–61.
- Barad, Karen. 2015. "Transmaterialities: Trans\*/matter/realities and Queer Political Imaginings." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21(2–3), pp. 387–422.
- Mann, Geoff & Wainwright, Joel. 2020. *Climate Leviathan: A Political Theory of Our Planetary Future*, Verso Books.
- Connolly, William. *Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and the Politics of Swarming*, Duke University Press.
- Alaimo, Stacy. 2016. *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*, University of Minnesota Press.
- Zimmerman, Michael. 1995. "The Threat of Ecofascism." *Social Theory and Practice* 21(2), pp. 207–38.