

## “Anthropogenic Landscapes” — Course outline and readings

The parameters and limits of human agency are changing very rapidly. Some claim the planet has entered a new geological age, the Anthropocene, defined by the imprint of human beings in the geological record.

**The overall aim of this course** is to get you thinking about human agency, set against a broad canvas of the Anthropocene and “deep time”; to consider the heft, liveliness and materiality of landscapes in your analyses; and to reflect on how to describe, conceptualise and critique the role of humans in the landscapes they inhabit and create. The course is based on close reading and discussion of selected texts. Group discussions during the day form a key part.

The readings cover a range of issues, across a number of disciplines and genres. Some of the texts are quite difficult, and all of them are open to critique. The idea behind the selection is to introduce you to various ideas, literatures and possible approaches, and give you some pointers for how you might pursue these ideas further on your own if you are interested. Feel free to contact me if you want suggestions for further reading.

### Class Presentations

The class presentations are a key part of the course. The class will be divided into three groups, and each group will be assigned a reading for each of the four days. On each day, prior to the evening class, you should organise within your group to meet up, discuss your assigned text and prepare a presentation.

The structure of the presentation is up to you, so feel free to experiment. You’re encouraged to use multimedia (video, audio), draw on personal anecdotes and experience, bring in your own research interests and so on.

The presentation should introduce and summarise the text to your classmates, present its key concepts and arguments, and share your own discussion and reflections about the text. What is the text about, what are its disciplinary angle and assumptions, what is it trying to do? Was there anything you found particularly striking, that surprised you or changed your idea about something? What parts of the text did you find confusing? Did you agree or disagree with the key points? Are there counter-arguments? How does the text relate to other things you have read, or covered in other courses? Try to specify some questions that the text leaves you with, and issues or questions that you would like to address to the rest of the class.

Each presentation will be followed by a period of discussion. The length of the presentation is up to you, but 15 to 20 minutes is probably about right. The aim of the exercise is to get you talking to each other, give you some practice of group-work and group presentation *and* sharpen your time-keeping—a useful but often neglected academic skill.

## Day 1. Introduction

Overview of the course, divide into groups, explain tasks for the remaining days, allocate texts.

**Film screening:** *Into Eternity* (2010).

**Brief Discussion:** What issues does the film raise for you? Discuss some of the key points and concerns.

**Preparatory Exercise:** Think about a landscape you're familiar with and that you would like to use for the written exercise (see below). Consider how that landscape has been shaped and modified by humans.

## Day 2

**Short video:** "Welcome to the Anthropocene," <https://vimeo.com/39048998>

**Texts:**

Nathan Sayre, "The Politics of the Anthropogenic," *Annual Review of Anthropology* (2012): 57-70.

William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, getting back to the wrong nature," *Environmental History* Vol 1 No 1 (1996): 7-28.

Kent Lightfoot et al, "European Colonialism and the Anthropocene: A case study from the Pacific coast of North America," *Anthropocene* Vol 4 (2013): 101-115.

**Group Exercise:** Your group will plan and deliver a presentation to the class, based on your assigned text.

**Individual Exercise:** Reflect on the landscape you intend to write about. How has it been shaped by human agency? How and why does that matter?

## Day 3

**Video:** "Midway — Message from the Gyre," <https://vimeo.com/25563376>

**Texts:**

Anna Tsing, "More-Than-Human Sociality: A call for critical description," in Hastrup ed, *Anthropology and Nature* (New York: Routledge, 2014): 27-42.

Thom van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and loss at the edge of extinction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014; read chapter "Urban penguins").

Elizabeth Povinelli, "Do Rocks Listen? The cultural politics of apprehending Australian Aboriginal labor" *American Anthropologist* Vol 97 No 3 (1995): 505-518.

**Group Exercise:** Your group will plan and deliver a presentation to the class, based on your assigned text.

**Individual Exercise:** Reflect on your landscape. Who are the nonhumans, where are they, what do they do, how do they matter to humans or to each other?

## Day 4

**Video:** "The Last Farmer in Fukushima," [first three minutes] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gs-q-2893uw>

### Texts:

Glenn Albrecht, "Solastalgia: A new concept in health and identity," *PAN: Philosophy Activism Nature* No 3 (2005): 41-55.

Rebecca Scott, *Removing Mountains: Extracting nature and identity in the Appalachian coalfields* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010; read "Introduction").

Eben Kirksey et al, "Hope in Blasted Landscapes," *Social Science Information* Vol 52 No 2 (2013): 228-256.

**Group Exercise:** Your group will plan and deliver a presentation to the class, based on your assigned text.

**Individual Exercise:** Reflect on your landscape. What kinds of violence can you see in it?

## Day 5

**Short video:** "Could We Use Terraforming to Colonize Mars?" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKkYTcrYv38>

**Added during the course:** "Run for your life (Jenni Laiti)" <http://www.facebook.com/1616624401911988/videos/1655111708063257/>

### Texts:

Matthew Chrulew, "Reversing Extinction: Restoration and resurrection in the Pleistocene rewilding projects," *Humanimalia* Vol 2 No 2 (2011): 4-27.

Richard Irvine, "Deep Time: An anthropological problem," *Social Anthropology* Vol 22 No 2 (2014): 157-172.

Joe Masco, "Terraforming Planet Earth" in Deloughrey et al eds, *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities* (New York: Routledge, 2015): 309-332.

**Group Exercise:** Your group will plan and deliver a presentation to the class, based on your assigned text.

**Individual Exercise:** Reflect on your landscape. What will it look like in a thousand years?

### Assessment: Written Essay

The course is assessed by a written essay. The text will be an essay on your chosen landscape, relating it to some of the issues and cases you have discussed during the course.

The set question is "Anthropogenic is a useful concept: yes or no? Why?"

Your answer to this should be based on a discussion of your chosen landscape, as a case study, plus at least one landscape or landscape type discussed in the course readings. You're welcome to use references from outside the course, but make sure you refer to at least one or two texts from the course.

Feel free to be inventive with regard to the form, structure, genre and writing style of your answer. If you prefer you are also welcome to write out your own question or theme, but make sure you check in and confirm the topic with me as early as possible. Whatever your topic is, your essay should contain a discussion of your chosen landscape, plus at least one landscape or landscape type discussed in the course readings.

Also:

- Don't plagiarize. Plagiarism is bad. If you're not sure what plagiarism is, ask me.
- Make sure you address the question. Don't just describe your chosen landscape, use it to make an argument.
- Use your own words. I want to see how you think.
- Double-check spelling, grammar and formatting. Good presentation is an easy way to get a better mark.
- Stay at or near the word limit. Not too long, not too short.
- Don't copy and paste from other coursework.
- Don't plagiarize. Really. Think of the kittens.

