

Fall 2014

Culture and the Environment

Anthropology 070:302

(prerequisite: Anthropology 101 or permission of instructor)

Lectures: Mondays and Thursdays 10:55-12:15
in Biological Sciences Building, room 205 (Douglass)

Instructed by:
Professor David M. Hughes
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office hours: Mondays 2-4pm
in Biosciences Building, room 201 (Douglass)

Course summary

Culture shapes the environment, and the environment shapes culture. This emerging consensus has been hard-fought – not least in anthropology. The course will trace debates leading up to and beyond the notion of ecological and social interdependence. We will begin by explaining the particular origins the debate itself: dating from the Enlightenment and earlier, Europeans' distinction between nature and culture gave rise to our entire field of study. By the mid-20th century, such scholarship had persuaded many of environmental determinism, or that climate is destiny. We will explore and criticize these increasingly shaky propositions. Then, we turn to a middle ground: domestication. For agriculture, entertainment, and other purposes, societies are still domesticating animals and plants. Finally, we explore the ways in which political relations become ecological and vice versa. More and more, the powerful dominate others with and through the control of species, ecosystems, and pollution. Indeed, the unfolding catastrophe of climate change – where we end the course – is reconfiguring nature and culture profoundly.

Course objectives

The attentive, serious student will, by the end of the course, will gain an understanding of;

1. Environmental determinism;
2. The cultural construction of the environment;
3. The concept of nature;
4. Tenure and property;
5. Political ecology.

Graded Work

Students are expected to do all the weekly reading by the class meeting. Students are also responsible for the material in films listed on the syllabus. These will be shown in class and will be available for reviewing at the Douglass Media Library (in the basement). At each class meeting, two students will present the reading, summarizing it, interrogating it, and offering questions for further discussion (see below). Finally, attending the class and contributing to discussions therein contribute to the final grade.

I will calculate final grades as follows:

- 25% for in-class participation
- 25% for reading reports or the presentation
- 25% for the midterm exam
- 25% for final exam or final paper

Students who wish to carry out a major research project, in lieu of the final exam, must discuss this option with the professor by the end of week 4.

Reading Reports

Students may opt to do six reading reports or one presentation. You must make this irrevocable choice at the first class meeting, on 24 January. Students should have completed the week's reading by the Thursday class meeting. Beginning with Week 2, students will submit "reading reports" regarding each week's reading. Students need not do a report every week, but they must complete a total of six reports: three before the midterm and three more between the midterm and the final exam. You must email the reading reports to hugheteach@aesop.rutgers.edu by 5pm on the Wednesday of the given week. Late reading reports will receive no credit. Please put your name (last name, first name) in the subject line of the message. Please include the reading report in the body of the message, rather than attaching it. An acceptable reading report adheres to the following format:

1. Begin by stating a question that one author addresses and answers (put that author's name in the question). In a paragraph, answer that question in the way that the author does.
2. Begin by stating a question a question that a *different* author does *not* address or answer (put that author's name in the question). In a paragraph, answer that question using your own knowledge, opinion, or speculation.

For Weeks 2, 6, 9, 11, 12, and 13 you may use the same author for Parts 1 and 2 of the reading report.

Presentation

Students may opt to do six reading reports or one presentation. You must make this irrevocable choice at the first class meeting, on 24 January. Held on the second class meeting of the given week, a superior presentation will accomplish the following objectives:

1. summarize the important points of the reading assigned;
2. relate that reading to previous reading, lectures, and/or discussions in the course;

3. relate that reading to some aspect of our everyday lives and/or to current events;
4. discuss a gap, flaw, or limit to the argument of the author of the reading;
5. pose three questions to the class regarding the reading.

Reading

For greater ease of comprehension, please read each week's selections in the order they appear on the syllabus. Almost all the reading materials are available in electronic form on the Sakai site for the course (see below). Where I have assigned more than one third of a book, however, copyright laws prohibit loading it onto this system. Therefore, the books listed immediately below are only available on reserve as hard copies – rather than as electronic files – at the Douglass Library. If you wish, you may also purchase these books at NJ Books or at the Barnes and Noble Store on the Cook/Douglass or College Avenue campuses.

- Auyero, Javier and Déborah Alejandra Swistun. 2009. *Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Basso, Keith. 1996. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Harris, Marvin. 1989[1974]. *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches: The Riddles of Culture*. New York: Vintage. \$15
- Hughes, David M. 2010. *Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape, and the Problem of Belonging*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McKibben, Bill. 2010. *Eaarth: Making Life on a Tough New Planet*. New York: Times Books.
- Thorsheim, Peter. 2006. *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.

Sakai Site

You will submit written work through the “Assignments 2” section of the Sakai course website. Sakai automatically compares all such texts with each other and with the entirety of the web.

Course policies

Absences: Students are expected to attend all classes. I will only excuse absences for medical, legal, or military causes and upon the student's presentation of relevant documents. If you must miss a class, try to borrow the notes of a fellow student. Also, please use the University absence reporting website (<https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>) to indicate the date and reason for your absence. Using this procedure alone does not excuse the absence.

Classroom etiquette: Class begins punctually. Late arrival indicates disrespect to the instructor and to the other students. In order to minimize disruptions, late students should settle themselves as quietly as possible in the back of the classroom. Texting, emailing, and web surfing is similarly disrespectful and undermining. Those engaging in these activities will be asked to leave the lecture hall for the rest of the period. Finally, regarding cell phone rings, they are to be avoided at all costs.

Academic integrity: Cheating lowers the value of a Rutgers degree and the learning experience for all students. No form of cheating will be tolerated. When take-home exams are submitted, the Sakai site automatically screens each for evidence of plagiarism. One commits plagiarism when one represents the text or ideas of others as one's own creation. Please visit the website of the Rutgers Office of Academic Integrity (<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>) for a fuller explanation of plagiarism and of the penalties for it. Proved plagiarists will receive a disciplinary F in the course and possibly faced expulsion from the University.

Syllabus

Week 1 (4 September): Introduction: What and where is the environment

Week 2 (8,11 September): Determinism

Harris, Marvin. 1989[1974]. *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches: The Riddles of Culture*. New York: Vintage. Pp. v-vii, 1-50, 94-132.

Week 3 (22,25 September): The cultural production of nature

Thomas, Keith. 1983. *Man and the Natural World: a History of the Modern Sensibility*. New York: Pantheon. Pp. 17-41, 242-287, 300-303.

McKibben, Bill. 2010. *Eaarth: Making Life on a Tough New Planet*. New York: Times Books. Preface and Chapter 1 (pp. xi-xv, 1-46).

II. Germplasm and other essences

Week 4 (11,14 February): At its beginning

Harris, David R. 1989. "An evolutionary continuum of people-plant interaction. In David R. Harris and Gordon C. Hillman, eds. *Foraging and Farming: the Evolution of Plant Exploitation*. London: Unwin. Pp. 11-26.

Harlan, Jack R. 1989. "Wild-grass seed harvesting in the Sahara and Sub-Saharan of Africa." In Harris and Hillman, eds. Pp. 79-98.

Shipek, Florence C. 1989. "An example of intensive plant husbandry: the Kumeyaay of southern California." In Harris and Hillman, eds. Pp. 159-170.

Week 5 (29 September, 2 October): Ownership

Scott, James C. 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed: an Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Chapter 6 (pp. 178-219).

Kloppenborg, Jack Ralph. 1988. *First the Seed : the Political Economy of plant biotechnology, 1492-2000*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 7 (pp. 152-90).

Heatherington, Tracey. 2012. "From ecocide to genetic rescue: can technoscience save the wild?" In Genese Marie Sodikoff, ed. *The Anthropology of Extinction: Essays on Culture and Species Death*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press. Pp. 39-66.

Week 6 (6,9 October): Taking commodities seriously

West, Paige. 2012. *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive: the Social World of Coffee from Papua New Guinea*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Chapters 1,4,7 (98 pages).

Week 7 (13,16 October): the case of oil

Watts, Michael. 2001. "Petro-violence: community, extraction, and the political ecology of a mythic commodity." In Nancy Lee Peluso and Michael Watts, eds. *Violent Environments*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Mitchell, Timothy. 2009. "Carbon democracy." *Economy and Society* 38(3): 399-43.

Week 8 (20,23 October) Review and exam

There will be a review session on Monday 20 October. The exam is a take-home, open-book test. Students may collect the test from the door of my office (201 Biosciences Building, Douglass) on Tuesday 21 October 11am onwards. I will advise students on complete draft essays during the class on Thursday 23 October. Only students who have completed draft essays should come to this meeting. Exams must be turned in to the Sakai site (under "Assignments 2") and as hard copies by 11am on Friday 24 October at the Anthropology Department office (301 Ruth Adams Building, Douglass). Be aware that the Ruth Adams Building is only open 9am-4pm.

Spring break

I. Landscapes

Week 9 (27,30 October): Wilderness and whiteness

Hughes, David M. 2010. *Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape, and the Problem of Belonging*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. 1-100.

Week 10 (3,6 November): Evil places

Zerner, Charles. 2003. "The viral forest in motion: ebola, African forests, and emerging cartographies of environmental danger." In Candace Slater, ed. *In Search of the Rain Forest*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Pp. 246-84.

Taussig, Michael. 1987. *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: a Study in Terror and Healing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 1 (pp. 3-36).

Week 11 (10,13 November): Place as identity

Basso, Keith. 1996. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press. Pp. 3-70, 105-29, 151-52.

IV. Struggles

Week 12 (17,20 November) : Ecology becomes political

Thorsheim, Peter. 2006. *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press. Chapters 1,3,5,9,10, and Conclusion (100 pp).

Week 13 (24,25 November): Toxic Body

Auyero, Javier and Déborah Alejandra Swistun. 2009. *Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. Entire book except Chapter 3.

Note: Thursday classes meet on Tuesday this week, due to Thanksgiving.

Week 14 (1,4 December): Climate of Catastrophe

Crate, Susan A. 2009. "Gone the bull of winter?: contemplating climate change's cultural implications in northeastern Siberia, Russia." In Susan A. Crate and Mark Nuttall, eds. *Anthropology and Climate Change: from Encounters to Actions*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast press. Pp. 139-52.
McKibben, Bill. 2010. *Eaarth: Making Life on a Tough New Planet*. New York: Times Books. Chapter 4 (pp. 151-212).

Week 15 (8 December): Review and exam

We will hold a review session on Monday 8 December.. The take-home midterm will be distributed from my door at 201 Biosciences Building beginning at 11am on Tuesday 9 December. Exams must be turned in to the Sakai site (under "Assignments 2") and as hard copies by 11am on Friday 12 December to the Anthropology Department Office on the 3rd floor of the Ruth Adams Building. Please note that the Ruth Adams Building is only open during business hours.