

Rutgers University  
Department of Anthropology  
Spring 2021

## **Urban Ecologies**

01:070:342 (3 credits)  
Weds 2:15-5:15pm, via Zoom  
Meeting ID: 991 1793 3146  
Password: urban

Instructor: Prof. Bridget Purcell  
Contact: [bridget.purcell@rutgers.edu](mailto:bridget.purcell@rutgers.edu)  
Office hours: Thursday 2-3pm, or by appointment. Use this link:

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In the face of the many established (dis)orders, we need to practice saying ‘none of the above.’ There can be an elsewhere, not as a utopian fantasy or a relativist escape, but an elsewhere born out of the hard (and sometimes joyful) work of getting on together [and] working for earthly survival” - Donna Haraway

**Course Description:** Our planet is now primarily urban—a fact that spurs epochal thinking, generates new anxieties, and organizes political movements and identities. In this moment, it is urgent that we rethink both “nature” and “the city,” and the relationships between them. In the first half of the course, we will question our taken-for-granted understandings of nature, modernity, capitalism, the city, and the “other.” In the second half, we will explore a range of contemporary issues concerning urbanism and the environment: neoliberalism and globalization; disasters and responses; resources and their distribution; planning and sustainability. Focusing on questions of social experience, we will ask how ecological issues are shaped by legacies of inequality and injustice; shifting dynamics of power and governance; and culturally specific ideas about nature, culture, and the human.

**Assignments and Grading:** The success of this seminar relies on your commitment to complete all required readings, to participate actively in class discussions, and to creatively engage with course themes and concepts in your written work. Grading will be based on:

- **Attendance and participation (20%):** Your lively, thoughtful participation in class is both encouraged and expected. By class time, you should be prepared to discuss your understanding of the readings, to articulate the author's key arguments, and to pose questions on points of particular interest or confusion.
- **Weekly Reading Responses (20%):** Each Tuesday by 11:59pm, you are expected to post a 1-2 paragraph reaction to that week's readings. The next day (Weds) by noon, you must respond to a classmate's post. Your posts should demonstrate your close reading of course materials. They can be used to develop your own evolving questions, and to draw creative connections among readings and themes. Claims and arguments should be supported, with clear writing and organization. This only works if everyone commits to posting by the agreed-upon deadlines.
- **Midterm Essay (30%):** Your midterm paper (5-7 pages) will explore a key debate that we covered in the first six weeks of class. The paper should draw on three major texts from the first half of the semester. Prior to the assignment, I will distribute a handout with several questions and topics for you to choose among. The midterm is due at class time week 8, Weds 3/10 at 5pm.
- **Final Essay (30%):** For the final essay, you will choose a contemporary ethnography about urban/ecological issues, and write a book review that evaluates it in light of our course themes and discussions. You must have selected your ethnography by week 12 (4/14). You must have read it by our final class, week 14 (4/28). On that day you will tell the class about the ethnography and discuss some of your evolving ideas for the final essay (5%). The essay itself (25%) is due on Friday, May 8 at 11:59pm.

**Course Materials:** You are required to have a hard copy of the following book (which we will read for week 13). All other readings can be found on Canvas.

Tsing, Anna. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press.

Week 1 (1/20)  
**Introduction & Overview**

Cronon, William. 1991. "Cloud Over Chicago" in *Nature's Metropolis*. pp. 4-19.

Kroeber, A.L. 1917. "The Superorganic." *American Anthropologist* 19(2), pp. 1-4.

Week 2 (1/27)  
**Capitalism, Production, Progress**

Chibber, Vivek. 2020. "Understanding Capitalism." *Jacobin*.

Marx, Karl. From *Karl Marx: A Reader*. Ed. Jon Elster. Selections on Canvas.

Week 3 (2/3)  
**Conquering Nature, Forging Human Hierarchies**

Scott, James C. 1999. "Nature and Space" in *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, pp. 11-52.

Arnold, David. 2000. "Illusory Riches: Representations of the Tropical World, 1840-1950." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 21(1), pp. 6-18.

Week 4 (2/10)  
**Romanticism, Primitivism, Wilderness**

Clastres, Pierre. 1967. "Society Against the State" in *Society Against the State*. pp. 189-218.

Levi-Strauss, Claude. 1996. *Saudades do Brasil: A Photographic Memoir*. Preface, pp. 1-6.

Conklin, Beth and L. Graham. "Shifting Middle Ground: Amazonian Indians and Eco-Politics."

In-class film selections: *The Gods Must Be Crazy*.

Week 5 (2/17)  
**Socio-Natures**

Raffles, Hugh. 1997. "Engineers of Amazonia," pp. 1-3.

Cronon, William. 1995. "The Trouble with Wilderness." *Uncommon Ground*, pp. 7-28

Mitchell, Timothy. 2002. "Can the Mosquito Speak?" in *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*. pp. 19-53.

Week 6 (2/24)  
**Cyborgs and Companion Species**

Haraway, Donna. 2004. "A Kinship of Feminist Figurations" in *The Haraway Reader*. pp 1-3.

Haraway, Donna. 2008. "Introduction" in *When Species Meet*. pp. 3-24.

Haraway, Donna. 1992. "Otherworldly Conversations: Terran Topics; Local Terms." *Science as Culture* 3(1), pp. 64-98.

In-class film selections: *Storytelling for Earthly Survival*.

Week 7 (3/3)  
**Midterm**

Midterm essay due. In-class film and discussion.

Week 8 (3/10)  
**Urban Underworlds**

Heynan, Nik, Maria Kaika, and Erik Swyngedouw. 2006. "Urban Political Ecology," pp. 1-19.

Kaika, Maria and Erik Swyngedouw. 2000. "Fetishizing the Modern City," pp. 120-138.

**\*\*SPRING BREAK\*\***

Week 9 (3/24)  
**Environmental Justice and Planetary Urbanization**

Brenner, Neil. 2014. "Urban Theory Without an Outside" in *Implosions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*. pp. 14-30.

Wong, Andrew. 2018. "Cities around the world should prepare for running out of water, experts say." CNBC.

Harvey, David. 1974. "The Political Implications of Populations-Resources Theory."

Harvey, David. 2005. "A Brief History of Neoliberalism." Oxford University Press, pp. 1-4.

Albro, Robert. "'The Water is Ours, Carajo!' Deep Citizenship in Bolivia's Water War." 249-265.

Week 10 (3/31)

**Environmental Racism and “Natural” Disasters**

Bullard, Robert. 2003. “Confronting Environmental Racism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” Pp. 49-52

Pulido, Laura. 2017. “Geographies of Race & Ethnicity II.” *Progress in Human Geography* 41(4), pp. 524-533.

Adams, Vincanne. 2013. *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina*. Ch 1, 2, 4, 8.

Week 11 (4/7)

**Sustainability and Gentrification**

McDonough, Gary et al. 2011. "Sustainability in the City." *City and Society* 23(2), pp. 113-116.

Checker, Melissa. 2011. "Wiped out by the Green Wave: Environmental Gentrification and the Paradoxical Politics of Urban Sustainability." *City and Society* 23(2), pp. 210-229.

Truitt, Alison. “The Viet Village Urban Farm and the Politics of Neighborhood Viability in Post-Katrina New Orleans.” *City and Society* 23(2), pp. 321-338.

Week 12 (4/14)

**Carbon, Climate Change, Infrastructures**

Mitchell, Timothy. 2009. “Carbon Democracy.” *Economy and Society* 38:3, pp 399-432.

Boyer, Dominic. 2016. “Revolutionary Infrastructure” in *Infrastructures and Social Complexity*. Eds P Harvey, C Bruun Jensen, and A Morita. Taylor and Francis. pp. 1-21.

Week 13 (4/21)

**Arts of Living in a Damaged World**

Tsing, Anna. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press. Selections.

Week 14 (4/28)

**Concluding Discussion**

Your reading assignment for this week is your chosen ethnography. In class, you will summarize the book you read, highlight some course themes/concepts that arise therein, and discuss your evolving ideas for the essay (5%). The paper itself (25%) is due 1 week later, on Friday May 8, at 11:59pm.

Appendix A  
**Weekly Schedule**

<b>Mon</b>	<b>Tue</b>	<b>Weds</b>	<b>Thurs</b>	<b>Fri</b>	<b>Sat</b>	<b>Sun</b>
-reading-	-reading-	<p><b>12pm</b> reply post due</p> <p><b>2:15-5:15pm</b> class meets</p>	<p><b>2-3pm</b> bp office hours</p>	<p><b>2pm</b> bp sends weekly e-mail w/ pages &amp; discussion prompts</p>	-reading-	-reading-
	<p><b>11:59pm</b> discussion post due</p>					

Appendix B  
**Learning Goals**

**Course specific learning goals:**

- To gain a working knowledge of key theories and concepts in both urban and environmental anthropology
- To practice applying that knowledge through ethnographic methods and reflection
- To gain familiarity with urban and environmental issues in local and global contexts
- To develop students' proficiency in speaking critically and effectively about nature, culture, urbanism, and the human
- To develop students' ability to write cogent and persuasive arguments for an anthropology audience
- To encourage students to integrate an anthropological approach to ecology and urbanism into their everyday lives

**Departmental learning goals:**

- Students are able to demonstrate proficiency in the use of critical thinking skills
- Students are able to demonstrate proficiency using current methods in their major fields, including library research
- Students are able to express themselves knowledgeably and proficiently in speaking and writing about central issues in their major field

Appendix C  
**Additional Course Policies**

**Accommodations:** Students seeking accommodations should consult the Office of Disability Services at <http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu>, [dsoffice@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:dsoffice@rci.rutgers.edu), or (848) 445-6800. You should do this as soon as possible, but definitely before assignments are due. Students who suspect they may have an undiagnosed learning disability or other disability may visit the Office of Disability Services for assessment and guidance.

**Absence reporting:** If you should need to miss class for any reason, please let me know prior to the class meeting. This is a courtesy, but it does not excuse the absence. In some circumstances (religious observance, serious illness, certain athletic events), your absence may be formally excused, given appropriate documentation.

**Academic Integrity:** Please, familiarize yourself with the principles and policies of academic integrity. <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>. If you have questions, ask me. I cannot tolerate plagiarism or intellectual dishonesty.