

Fall 2017

English 2501: Environmental Humanities, Literature, and “the Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet”

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Stories . . . are all we have, you see, / all we have to fight off / illness and death.—Leslie Marmon Silko

We need the language of science and poetry to save us from ignorant irresponsibility.—Ursula Le Guin.

Western literary and art traditions have given us a rich, powerful, seductive cultural vocabulary of “place,” “wilderness,” “nature,” and (nonhuman) animals, but they have also facilitated a gendered and raced way of seeing humans’ relationship to other species, environmental resources, and to each other, often through the anthropocentric and colonial lenses. South African artist William Kentridge recalled not being able to “see” the South African land around him because the British landscape-painting tradition made the actual polluted South African landscape “unreal,” invisible.

And yet, in our own times of ongoing environmental crises, scientists and poets alike are insisting on the key role of the arts, storytelling, and not just science alone, “for the Earthly survival” (Donna Haraway; Ann Lowenhaupt Tsing). This fall, therefore, we will pay special attention to the speculative and civic power of literature and transmedia storytelling to “imagine what exists” and what can be (Stefano Harney and Fred Moten). We will explore the way in which storytellers engage diverse audiences in debates about ecology, and we will participate in several such public debates ourselves. Our job will be to work to develop an understanding of several environmental issues (climate change, fossil extraction, species extinction, toxicity, food/water security, human exceptionalism, and the varied timeframes of environmental violence) through the interdisciplinary prisms of not only literature, film, mixmedia arts, but also environmental (and) indigenous studies, law, anthropology, and biology. While we will begin our investigation in the North American environmental and literary contexts, our intellectual journey will continue across times, disciplines, and geopolitical spaces in recognition of literary studies and the environmental humanities’ planetary and interdisciplinary scope. At the same time, we will leave ample space to consider the environmental concerns of our local space and time, in Trondheim, and in Norway during the Sami Centennial (TRÅANTE 2017).

At the end of the semester, and in addition to the goals listed on the web (strengthening your narrative, writing, and presentation skills for interdisciplinary, critical and creative inquiry), you are expected to be familiar with several examples of environmental storytelling in diverse genres and media; to develop a theoretical and critical vocabulary relevant to the environmental humanities; to recognize the importance of collaborative public humanities work; to reflect on the role of literature in shaping views about the environment; and, last but not least, to recognize the role of critical reflection in your own writing, reading, and research. To facilitate such interdisciplinary learning, our workshop-based course will be taught in partnership with the Kunsthall Trondheim, the Academic Guest Network / NTNU for Refugees, the Trondheim Kommune, the Falstad Center, and several local and international guest artists and scholars ([Sissel Bergh](#), [Krista Caballero](#), [Marco Armiero](#), [Henry Mainsah](#), and [Carl Martin Faurby](#)). Therefore, we will depend on interdisciplinarity *and* collaboration to build our course, and your active participation in all classes, screenings, Kunsthall seminars, workshops, and online debates is indispensable to the success of English 2501.

Keywords: Nature, Environment, Storytelling, Extraction, Extinction, Waste, Toxicity, Violence, Time, Science, Technology, Indigenous Knowledge, Justice

Required Texts

Books

- *Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities* (excerpts on reserve; you don't need to buy it)
- Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Word for World Is Forest* ISBN-10: 0765324644
- Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* ISBN-10: 0374527075
- Richard McGuire, *Here* ISBN-10: 0393339645
- Helon Habila, *Oil on Water* ISBN-10: 0393339645
- Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Windup Girl* ISBN-10: 1597808210
- Karen Tei Yamashita, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* ISBN-10: 091827382X (optional)

Short Stories, Essays, Poetry (available online or in the Dragvoll library)

- Gloria Anzaldúa, "[To Live in the Borderlands Means You](#)" & excerpts from *Borderlands = La frontera* (on BB)
- Armiero, Marco, and Massimo De Angelis. "Anthropocene: Victims, Narrators, and Revolutionaries." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116.2 (2017): 345-62.
- Jennifer Egan, "[Black Box](#)"
- Louise Erdrich, "[I Was Sleeping Where the Black Oaks Move](#)"
- Arturo Escobar, "[After Nature](#)"
- Joy Harjo, "[A Map to the Next World](#)"
- Lina Hogan, [Lost in a Milky Way](#)
- Donna Haraway, "Otherworldly Conversations, Terran Topics, Local Terms," in *Material Feminisms* (157–187)
- Margaret Linley, "Ecological Entanglement of DH" in *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (ch. 34; on reserve)
- Jack London, "[The Unparalleled Invasion](#)"
- Rob Nixon, "Slow Violence," [Chronicle of Higher Education](#)
- Claudia Rankine "August 29, 2015 / Hurricane Katrina," in *Citizen: An American Lyric* (82–87)
- Tobin Siebers, "Disability Experience on Trial," in *Material Feminisms* (291–307)
- Tracy K. Smith, "Sci-Fi," in *Life on Mars* (7)
- Anna Tsing, Heather Anne Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt, Eds. *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (excerpts on reserve)
- Kyle Whyte, "[Indigenous Climate Change Studies: Indigenizing Futures, Decolonizing the Anthropocene](#)"

Online Work, Videos, and Films (available online, in the Dragvoll library, or screened at the Trondheim Kunshall)

- *Storytelling for the Earthly Survival*; [Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet talks](#); Ron Finley, "[Guerilla Gardner](#)"; [Waste Land](#); *Chinatown*; *We Come as Friends*; *An Inconvenient Truth*; *Erin Brockovich*; Maciej Ceglowski, "[Haunted by Data](#)"; *Examined Life*; Ánde Somby, "When a Predator Culture Meets a Prey Culture" and [performance](#); [Decolonizing Nature](#); *The Shining*; *Birds*; Miwa Matreyek, [Glorious Visions](#), Edward Burtynsky's *Oil*, Aida Miron's [projects](#), Ursula Biemann's [video work](#) and [here](#)

Recommended Texts

- Svetlana Alexievich, *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*
- Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley, Eds. *Postcolonial Ecologies*
- Mike Watts and Nancy Peluso, Eds., *Violent Environments*
- Theresa May, *Salmon Is Everything: Community-Based Theatre in the Klamath*
- Daniel Worden and Ross Barrett, Eds., *Oil Culture*
- Charles Darwin, [On the Origins of Species](#) & course packet on BB
- [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#)
- *The Longman Pocket Writer's Companion* (3rd Edition or later) [strongly recommended]

Other Useful Resources: [Wikipedia](#) Editing Page, Zotero, EndNote, Voyant (<http://voyant-tools.org/>)

Obligatory Assignment (OA) (ca. 2,000 words) will consist of obligatory (short) weekly reflections (c.a. 200 words), discussion questions, blog entries, digital/collaborative work, and a reflection collected in a portfolio totaling a minimum of about 2,000 words. You need to pass all parts of OA assignments on time to take the exam. **The BA Thesis Proposal** is an alternative to the OA, and it includes a 500- to 600-word proposal and a BA thesis. The submission deadline for the BA thesis is the exam date.

Exam. Specific guidelines and a detailed exam-grading rubric will be posted on BB at least 1 month before the scheduled exam.

Special Accommodations. Please talk to me as early in the semester as possible if you require special accommodations in order to succeed in our course.

Attendance and Participation. Let me begin by emphasizing that this is OUR course. We will be building it together and you will play an active role in shaping it. In other words, our course will only be as good as we all make it. Therefore, your participation during lectures/seminars, field trips, *and* online is indispensable to the success of this class and to your own successes in English 2501. Class and online discussions provide a tremendous opportunity for all of us to get to know ourselves as readers, intellectuals, and collaborators, and to share ideas beyond what the traditional lecture format allows. Take advantage of that! At a minimum, you will have to read assigned texts and essays carefully (before each class), complete all parts of your OA in a timely manner, and pass the exam. But, I hope that you will aspire to more than just that in our course. This term, you will be encouraged to ask questions and make connections across texts, media, and disciplines. In order to succeed in English 2501—which I hope you are all aiming at—you will need to demonstrate in your OA, online and in-class discussions, and your exam that you are committed to serious but also, at times, playful, imaginative intellectual work and “cross-disciplinary curiosity” (Swanson et al. M4). Therefore, it is crucial that you come to all classes, screenings, Kunsthall exhibits, and the Falstad seminar, if possible, that you read all assigned texts carefully and generously, and that you share your thoughts with the class.

Blackboard (BB). All students enrolled in this class must use their Blackboard (BB) account on a regular basis. All homework updates will be posted on BB, and you will have to submit all parts of your Obligatory Assignment (including weekly responses, a creative assignment, a collaborative project, and the short essay) on a WordPress blog and on BB as well. (**Academic guests will receive updates via email and online blog.**) In addition, several times during the semester, you will be asked to collaborate with other course participants US (via Skype, on BB, or a blog site for our course). If you are not familiar with BB, talk to me after class and/or schedule an appointment with Tech Support at NTNU.

Guidelines for Engagement and Class Netiquette. I would like our classroom, the traditional and the electronic, to be a vibrant and safe environment where we can explore diverse ideas and conflicting points of view in an atmosphere of mutual respect. My hope is that online forums will become a site of active intellectual exchange that will provide ample fodder for in-class discussions and international collaborations, and that they will prepare you well for the exam. Don't be self-conscious about speaking up in public or in English, if it is not your first language, in my class or in anybody else's. We learn by asking questions, so do ask questions during lectures and online.

Academic Honesty. NTNU is committed to the principles of intellectual honesty and integrity, and as members of this community, you are expected to maintain complete honesty in all academic work. Throughout the semester, we will be discussing academic honesty and various strategies aimed at helping you avoid irresponsible or unethical use of sources or research. If you are not sure about proper documentation and/or use of sources, talk to me before submitting your assignment.

COURSE CALENDAR

Note that these are the main due dates only. Detailed homework OA assignments and course updates will be posted after class each week on BB together with additional sources (BB/course material). If you are an academic guest, you will be receiving updates via email. Note that readings listed under a particular date must be completed BEFORE that date.

Week	Monday, Tuesday (16.15–18.00) @ D2 & Dragvoll Library (videoconferencing room)
Week 34 August 21 Introduction to course Nature	Before-class prep: Ursula Heise, “Intro” (BB); Arturo Escobar, “ After Nature ” & Kyle Powys Whyte “Our Ancestor’s Dystopia.” Tuesday: Introduction to class; guidelines for engagement; overview of keywords, critical terms, and texts; intro to reference groups.
Week 35 August 28, 29 Ghosts, Monsters and Storytelling beyond (Human) Individuals	Monday: <i>HERE</i> ; Anna Tsing et al. intro to <i>Arts of Living</i> ; Rob Nixon, “Slow Violence”; Miwa Matreyek, Glorious Visions [on BB; read/watch before class]; Ron Finley, “ Guerilla Gardner ”. Tuesday: <i>HERE</i> + Guest visit by Sissel Bergh . September 2@11.30: Guided Tour of the Kunsthall Exhibit.
Week 36 September 4,5 Violent Environments & Colonial Landscapes	Monday: Tobin Siebers, “Disability Experience on Trial”; Peluso and Watts, “Intro” to <i>Violent Environments</i> ; poems: Claudia Rankine “August 29, 2015 / Hurricane Katrina” & Louise Erdrich, “ I Was Sleeping Where the Black Oaks Move ”; Aida Miron’s projects . Tuesday: <i>A Small Place</i> . Watch We Come as Friends (tentative screening on Wednesday at 16.00 in the videoconference room; you can also borrow the film from the library).
Week 37 September 11, 12, 14 & 15 Multispecies interdependence	Monday: <i>The Word for World is Forest</i> . Tuesday: <i>The Word for World is Forest</i> + a guest visit by Krista Caballero . [another event is @ 12.15: “Transdisciplinary Imagination: Praxis for Ecological Futures,” a guest talk by Krista Caballero / room 4402 D] Thursday: Trondheim Kunsthall “ A New We ” exhibit opening (free / time TBA). Friday: Storytelling for Earthly Survival @19.00 (Kunsthall movie screening / free).

Week	Monday, Tuesday (16.15–18.00) @ D2 & Dragvoll Library (videoconferencing room)
Week 38 September 18, 19 Multispecies solidarity & postcolonial ecologies	Monday: Donna Haraway, “Otherworldly Conversations”; <i>The Word</i> ; Ánde Somby’s performance-talk . Tuesday: Trondheim Kunsthall workshop (class meets downtown). [Sign up for the free trip to the Falstad Center]
Week 39	No class /Hania at the SSASA conference Finish <i>Oil on Water</i> and blog work; watch one of the remaining films on reserve.
Week 40 October 2, 3 Bodies, archives, evidence	[Note the change of schedule & the time of the Falstad trip] Monday: All-day seminar in The Falstad Human Rights Center . Bus leaves at 8.30 from the Dragvoll parking lot. Tuesday: OA review workshop (room TBA).
Week 41 October 9, 10 Petrocultures	Monday: Hannes Bergthaller “Fossil Freedoms”; excerpts from <i>Oil Culture</i> ; Edward Burtynsky’s Oil ; intro to <i>Oil on Water</i> . Tuesday: <i>Oil on Water</i> .
Week 42 October 16, 17 & 18-19 Energy, food, & water security	Monday: <i>Windup Girl</i> . Tuesday: Screening of <i>Waste Land</i> .
Week 43 October 23, 24, 26 Hauntings, Traces, Wasteocene	Monday: Screening of <i>Chinatown</i> Read Margaret Linley, “Ecological Entanglement of DH” & Maciej Ceglowski, “ Haunted by Data ”; Marco Armiero & Massimo De Angelis, “Anthropocene”; review <i>Arts of Living</i> . No Tuesday class
Week 44 October 30, 31 Toxic Narratives and DEH	Monday: <i>Windup Girl</i> ; Armiero and de Angelis, “Anthropocene.” Tuesday: Digital Environmental Humanities workshop led by Henry Mainsah .

Week	Monday, Tuesday (16.15–18.00) @ D2 & Dragvoll Library (videoconferencing room)
Week 45 November 6 Tempos, Rhythms, Temporalities	(OA prep week / No Monday class) Read Jennifer Egan, “Black Box”; Tracy K. Smith, “Sci-Fi”; Jack London, “ The Unparalleled Invasion ”; Kyle Whyte, “ Indigenous Climate Change Studies .” Tuesday: Submit OA portfolio on BB on Nov. 8 / NTNU Academic Guests must send their OAs to my email or bring a paper version to class.
Week 46 November 13, 14 Futures Course overview and reflection	Monday: Jennifer Egan, “Black Box”; Tracy K. Smith, “Sci-Fi”; Jack London, “ The Unparalleled Invasion ”; Kyle Whyte, “ Indigenous Climate Change Studies ” and review texts by Armiero & De Angelis, intros to <i>The Arts of Living</i> , Rob Nixon, Mike Watts and Nancy Peluso; guest skype talk by Marco Armiero . Tuesday: Johannes Heldén’s extinction Encyclopedia (class meets at Trondheim Kunsthall); Joy Harjo, “A Map to the Next World”; Course Reflection and Assessment.
Week 50 Date TBA	FINAL EXAM in Trondheim /Time/Date TBA.