

# Critical Ecologies: Theory in the Anthropocene

GERM 294-01 cross-listed with ENVI 294-02  
satisfies requirements for CT concentration  
**no prerequisites (suitable for all students)**

*Meets:* M W, 07:00 pm - 08:30 pm in HUM 216

*Seminar Leader:* Ross Shields

*Email:* rshields@macalester.edu

*Office Hours:* tba

## Course Description

With the advent of anthropogenic climate change and widespread species extinction, ecology must become critical no less than theory must become ecological. Among other things, this implies a thorough reevaluation of the concepts of nature and the environment, which—as their fraught history suggests—are anything but natural. In this seminar, we will examine the complex development of ecological thinking, focusing on its intersection with the critical theoretical tradition and relevance for the contemporary situation. We will ask: How do present-day concerns challenge us to reevaluate traditional distinctions between history and nature, organism and environment, human and non-human? In what way do our received notions reflect and/or support relations of capital and dominion? What resources can critical theory offer for developing alternative paradigms of interconnection among living and non-living agents? Assigned texts include nonfiction, fiction, and film.

## Required Texts

- Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2009)
- Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climate Regime* (2017)
- All other readings will be made available as pdfs

## Requirements

- Thoughtful preparation of reading assignments and engaged participation in class discussions
- Weekly postings
- Midterm essay, with possibility of revision (4 pages)
- Final essay (8 pages, this may be an extended version of the midterm essay)

## Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of this seminar. To account for minor circumstances, two absences should not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Unexcused absences will lead to a significant reduction of the participation grade. No course credit can be offered for students who miss more than 30% of classes.

## Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

## Grading

- Thoughtful preparation of reading assignments and engaged participation in class discussions (30%)
- Weekly postings (20%)
- Midterm paper (30%)
- Final paper (30%)

## Schedule

Introduction	
9/6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary" (1972)</li></ul>
9/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jane Bennett, <i>Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things</i> (excerpts) (2009)</li></ul>
9/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jane Bennett, <i>Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things</i> (excerpts) (2009)</li></ul>
9/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jane Bennett, <i>Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things</i> (excerpts) (2009)</li></ul>
Four Models of Deep Ecology	
9/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Spinoza, <i>Ethics</i> (excerpts) (1677)</li></ul>
9/25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bruno Latour, <i>Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climate Regime</i> (2017)</li></ul>

9/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bruno Latour, <i>Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climate Regime</i> (2017)</li> </ul>
10/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: <i>Principles of Nature and Grace Based on Reason</i> (1714)</li> </ul>
10/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Donna Haraway, <i>Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene</i> (excerpts) (2016)</li> </ul>
10/9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Georg Christoph Tobler, "Nature" (attributed to Goethe) (1782)</li> <li>• Friedrich Schlegel <i>et al.</i>, <i>Atheneum Fragments</i> (excerpt) (1798)</li> </ul>
10/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, <i>1000 Plateaus</i> (excerpts) (1980)</li> </ul>
10/16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>NO CLASS</b></li> </ul>
10/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alfred North Whitehead, <i>Nature and Life</i> (1934)</li> </ul>
<b>Nature and Enlightenment</b>	
10/23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Francis Bacon, <i>The New Organon</i> (front matter) (1620)</li> </ul>
10/25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Robert Boyle, <i>A Free Enquiry into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature</i> (excerpts) (1686)</li> </ul>
10/30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immanuel Kant, <i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i> (excerpts) (1790)</li> </ul>
11/1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immanuel Kant, <i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i> (excerpts) (1790)</li> </ul>
11/6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alexander von Humboldt, <i>Views on Nature</i> (excerpts) (1808)</li> </ul>
11/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "The Experiment as Mediator between Object and Subject" (1792).</li> <li>• Goethe, selected poems</li> </ul>
11/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Karl Marx, excerpts on "progress"</li> </ul>
11/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, "Should Environmentalists Reject the Enlightenment?" (2001)</li> </ul>
<b>Environment and Critical Theory</b>	
11/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John Bellamy Foster, <i>Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature</i> (excerpts) (2000)</li> </ul>
11/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kohei Saito: <i>Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism</i> (excerpts) (2023)</li> </ul>
11/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>NO CLASS</b></li> </ul>
11/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adorno "The Idea of Natural History" (1932)</li> </ul>
10/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adorno "On Nature and Freedom" (excerpts) (1965-1966)</li> </ul>
10/6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses" (2009)</li> </ul>
10/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Humanities in the Anthropocene: The Crisis of an Enduring Kantian Fable" (2016)</li> </ul>
10/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kim Stanley Robinson: <i>The Ministry for the Future</i> (excerpts) (2020)</li> </ul>
10/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Film: TBA</li> </ul>

## **Additional Services and Information**

### **Disability Services**

In some circumstances, course design may pose barriers to a student's ability to access or demonstrate mastery of course content. Reasonable academic accommodations can be implemented in such circumstances. If you need an accommodation for a disability, please contact the Office of Student Affairs at 651-696-6220 to arrange for an appointment with the Dean of Students, Kathryn Kay Coquemont, or the Associate Dean of Students, Andrew Wells. Additional resources and information regarding the accommodations process for students with disabilities can be found at:

<https://www.macalester.edu/disabilityservices/>

### **Health and Well-Being**

Investing time into taking care of yourself will help you engage more fully in your academic experience. It is important to acknowledge any stressors you may be facing, which can be mental, emotional, physical, financial, etc., and how they can have an academic impact. Sleeping, moving your body, and connecting with others can be strategies to help you be resilient at Macalester. If you are having difficulties maintaining your well-being, please reach out to one of the resources listed here:

<https://www.macalester.edu/healthandwellness/>

### **Academic Integrity**

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty in their college work. Forgery, cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses and students found guilty of any form of academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary action. Use of artificial intelligence (such as large language models including but not limited to Chat GPT and GPT 4) to generate thesis questions, generate outlines, or draft text that you present as your own (with or without subsequent editing) is considered a form of plagiarism. For more information on what precisely constitutes these breaches of integrity and what the consequences of such breaches are, please visit the Academic Programs website:

<https://www.macalester.edu/academicprograms/academicpolicies/academicintegrity/>

### **Library Resources and MAX center**

Working to integrate the disciplinary literature into your research can be a complex process. Consulting with the research and instruction librarians for the discipline(s) in which you are studying will save you time and help you discover better, more scholarly sources. You can make an appointment using the Ask Us page on the library website, which can be accessed at <https://www.macalester.edu/library/askus/>, or email your librarian(s) directly.

The MAX Center is Macalester's academic resource center. I strongly encourage you to take full advantage of any and all of the excellent resources they provide there, as they are committed to supporting all students to succeed at Macalester.

### **Intellectual Property**

Course materials of published work posted on Moodle and distributed in class are intellectual property belonging to the author. Students are not permitted to buy or sell any course materials without the express permission of the instructor.