

"THEORY AT THE END OF THE WORLD": ECOCRITICISM, APOCALYPSE, AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

Engl 610 Theory and Criticism (32877D)

Tuesdays, 2-4:20 with Devin Griffiths

How do we think the end of our world? How might our writing shape the world to come? These questions will be central to our seminar, which will examine major works of ecocriticism, systems thinking, and organic theory to explore how a variety of writers have conceived the world as an integrated ecology, and how such conceptions of the world system inform our attempts to deal with climate change and the dawn of the Anthropocene.

Amy J. Elias and Christian Moraru, in their recent account of the new "planetary turn" in ecocritical and postcolonial writing, argue that planetarity is fast becoming the fundamental condition of aesthetic production, because, "for the first time in human history, one single commonality involves all those living on the planet: environmental deterioration as the result of the human consumption of natural resources." In confronting the implications of climate change at the dawn of the Anthropocene, a range of writers have called for new ways to think collectively and interactively about our place in the world, which means grappling with the complex integration of that world as a dynamic system we share with the other species, things, and forces. To articulate this collective, these writers build (sometimes unreflectively) on ecology's organicist formulations, a way of theorizing the "ecosystem" which is derived from Romantic organicism. Our seminar will explore that longer history of thinking about biological and social collectivity, in light of current work by writers like Donna Haraway, Andreas Malm, and Jason Moore, in order to ask: what other forms of collectivity are available today, but also, what forms of *anticollective*, *unintegrating*, and *inorganic* organization were excluded from organic thinking? How might more open models for ecology help us to understand the Anthropocene and what Tim Morton has recently termed the "dark ecology" of our present?

- **Week 0 (Aug. 22)** -- (Introductions and Framing the Class) Griffiths, "Romantic Planet: Science and Literature within the Anthropocene"; Kyla Wazana Tompkins, "Some Notes on How to Ask a Good Question"
- **Week 1 (Aug. 29)** -- (The Problem of Anthropocene): Giyatri Spivak, "Planetarity"; Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses"; Rob Nixon, "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism"; Elias and Moraru, "Introduction: The Planetary Condition"; Bruno Latour, "Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene"
- **Week 2 (Sept. 5)** – (Early Modern Organicism): Leibnitz, "Monadology"; Abraham Tucker, "The Light of Nature Pursued" 2:2, "The Vision" – skim pp. 118-264, read pp. 265-289 more carefully); Immanuel Kant, selections from both *The Critique of Pure Reason* (read first) and *The Critique of the Power of Judgement*.

- **Week 3 (Sept. 12)** – (Romantic Organicism & Vitalism): Goethe, *The Metamorphosis of Plants* (selections); Denise Gigante, *Life* (Intro); Donna Haraway, *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields* (selections); Catherine Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism* (Intro & Conclusion); Anahid Nersessian, *Utopia, Limited* (Prologue & Intro)
- **Week 4 (Sept. 19)** – (General and World Systems): Clifford Siskin, *System: The Shaping of Modern Knowledge* (selections); John Stuart Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism* pp. 1-30, 125-32, 140-42, 160-72, 190-97; Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (selected); Immanuel Wallerstein, *World Systems Analysis: An Introduction*; **Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (selections)**; John Law, “After ANT”; Laszlo & Pattee, *The Relevance of General Systems Theory* (Intro & ch. 2); Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century* (Intro & Chap. 1)
- **Week 5 (Sept. 26)** – (C19 Organicism & Systems): John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, Intro & pp. 1-18); Robert C. Stauffer, “Haeckel, Darwin and Ecology”; Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (chaps. 4, 14), *Variation under Domestication* (Vol. 2, chap. 27 “Provisional Hypothesis of Pangenesis”; Arabella Buckley, *The Fairyland of Science* (Lectures 1, 8, & 9); Ernst Haeckel, *The Evolution of Man* (chaps. 1-2, 5-6); Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Biology* (vol 1, pp. 40-81, 175-81; 248-56).
- **Week 6 (Oct. 3)** – (Ecologies): Frederic E. Clements, *Research Methods in Ecology*, (pp. 1-23, 199-226); Arthur Tansley, “The Use and Abuse of Vegetational Concepts and Terms”; Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Intro, chaps. 15-16); Victoria Davion, “Is Ecofeminism Feminist?”; Naess et al. *Deep Ecology* (selections); Elizabeth Wilson, *Gut Feminism* (Intro, Chap. 2).
- **Week 7 (Oct. 10)** – (Ecosystems & General Ecology): Eugene Odum, *Fundamentals of Ecology* (selected); Elena Esposito, “An Ecology of Differences”; Bernard Stiegler, “General Ecology, Economy, and Organology”; Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence* (Intro).
- **Week 8 (Oct. 17?)** – (New Ecologies): Donna Haraway, “When Species Meet”; *Staying with the Trouble* (Intro + Chap. 2); Tim Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (selected); Monique Allewaert, *Ariel’s Ecology* (Intro); Mel Chen, “Toxic Animacies, Inanimate Affections” (possibly)
- **Week 9 (Oct. 24)** – (Organicism & Genealogy): Matteo Pasquinelli, “What an Apparatus is Not”; Mark Olssen, “Foucault as Complexity Theorist”; Cuillinguim, *Machine and Organism*, Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” “What is Critique,” selections from *Discipline and Punish*, *The Order of Things*, *The History of Sexuality*, and *Archaeology of Knowledge*.

- **Week 10 (Oct. 31)** – (The World Literature Debate): David Damrosch, *What is World Literature* (Intro & Conclusion); Emily Apter, *Against World Literature* (Intro); Haun Saussy, *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (Intro); Amir Mufti, *Forget English* (Intro); B. Venkat Mani, *Recoding World Literature* (possibly)
- **Week 11 (Nov. 7)** – (Umwelt and World): Dorion Sagan, “Umwelt after Uexküll,” Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, “Afteword”; Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (chaps. 12-16); Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (chaps. 2-4); Eric Hayot, *On Literary Worlds* (Intro).
- **Week 12 (Nov. 14)** – (Anthropocene II): Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital* (chaps. 1-2); Jason Moore, *Capitalism as World Ecology* (chaps. 1, 7); Bruno Latour, “The Puzzling Face of a Secular Gaia”; McKenzie Wark, *Molecular Red* (Introduction)
- **Week 13 (Nov. 21)** – Writing Workshop
- **Week 14 (Nov. 28)** – Writing Workshop
- **Week 15 (Dec. 5)?** – Writing Workshop Option

Assignments

(1) Weekly response (**25%**) You’ll each sign up to handle the response one week in the semester. This will consist of an analytical bibliography with 15 sources, including one entry on each of the readings for that week, that gives a short summary of additional resources on the given topic. You’ll circulate these responses to other seminars by noon the Friday before. We’ll begin each seminar with the response author giving a quick verbal account of the sources and their most interesting insights. This will help to ground our discussion.

(2) Contribution to discussions (**30%**). Each seminar period is a chance for us to have an evolving conversation about the topic at hand. At the beginning class, after the response has been summarized, we’ll go around the table quickly and each pose a question about one of the weeks readings, citing a specific page number and passage. These topics will help guide our discussion.

This portion of the course will also depend on participating in at least one of the meetings of the C19 Anglophone Collective (link to events [here](#)).

(3) Final research paper (45%). This will begin with a short abstract that we'll discuss half way through the semester and evolve into a 15-20 page critical analysis that pairs close a close study of some aspect of the class discussion, including analysis of primary works, with a bibliography of at least 20 sources. I'm happy to consult or look over drafts up through the last day of class. We will also workshop these papers in the last weeks of class. The seminar paper will be due on first day of exams.

Attendance

With only ten class sessions, attendance is clearly important. Please let me know early if you anticipate any conflicts.

STATEMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. [Website for DSP](#) and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. [SCampus](#), the Student Guidebook, contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS/COURSE CONTINUITY IN A CRISIS

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university's site on [Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness](#).