



Exeter College Summer Programme

Anthropology & Climate Change: Exploring Collective Futures in the Anthropocene

Course Description

Climate change exemplifies the sort of planetary challenge facing humankind in the twenty-first century. In this course, you will interrogate how that kind of challenge can be understood as a scientific, political, social and moral problem, to better understand our place in the world under conditions of multiple and interlocking crises. The course will introduce the 'Anthropocene', as both a proposed geological phenomenon and a critical tool to rethink the relationship between humans and the planet. Pursuing this question will require us to question some established distinctions—between human/animal, nature/culture, biology/society, life/nonlife and Globe/Earth. Rethinking, and possibly unsettling these distinctions, is key to building a more just collective existence. Through anthropological materials, historical and contemporary accounts of life in the aftermath of industrial transformation, colonisation and anthropogenic change, we will consider the types of knowledge, forms of collaboration, political engagement, and social practice that might help us better apprehend the fragility of the planet and articulate a shared responsibility to its future.

Course Objectives

This course is for anyone interested in how humanity relates to the environment and concerned with our future existence in the face of climate change and other Earth-defining anthropogenic changes. No prior knowledge of anthropology is required. Drawing from a range of contemporary and classical critical resources across anthropology, the environmental and geo-humanities, the social and natural sciences, and the arts, we will explore how the relationship between humans and their natural environment (as an economic resource, site of exploration and home-making, a matter of concern and object of care) has changed over time. Students will be introduced to a range of theories and models from anthropology, biology, ecology, and geology (e.g., kinship, niche construction, entanglement, critical zone, sustainability) from which we can build a critical lexicon to engage with 'planetary imaginaries'. By the end of this course, students will be equipped with key analytical skills and technical proficiency to engage with contemporary debates about how best to mitigate, pre-empt and adapt to the impacts of climate change, and to critically ascertain the opportunities and risks of appeals to technological solution, existential crises, and economic degrowth.

Teaching Methods and Assessment

- 12 x 1.25hr Lectures (15hrs)
- 6 x 1.25hr Seminars (7.5hrs)
- 4 x 1.25hr Tutorials (5hrs)

Lectures, taught in two session blocks, with a ten minute break in between, will introduce key themes in the scholarship and current debates around climate change and related planetary challenges in the Anthropocene.

The Seminars will open with a short summary of the key theme, followed by an in-depth discussion of the readings. Each week, a pair of students will be asked to help chair that discussion, preparing two to three critical questions (submitted a day in advance) regarding the issues the readings raise for how we understand the relationship between humanity and the planet and what that relationship should become.

Tutorials are 2-1 sessions in which students will respond to an essay prompt or some other creative format. Prompts will relate to the readings, lecture, and seminar discussions of the given week and cumulatively of past weeks when relevant. The tutorial essays are informal and unmarked. Feedback, in written and verbal form, will be provided by the tutor and the tutorial time will be a chance to discuss in more depth the critiques, suggestions, and approach of the student's writing. Tutorials are meant to prepare students for the Final Essay and the Exam by honing students' writing skills, creative capacities, and critical grasp of the concepts and topics of this course.

Assessment:

- An essay of between 3,000—4,000 words (45%) **Due: Friday, August 1st**
- A final 3hr written examination (45%)
- Participation in seminar and tutorial discussions (10%)

The Final Essay (45%)

The essay topic is of the student's own choosing and critically engage with course themes and texts. Time will be given in seminars and tutorials to develop topics that speak to students' interests.

The Exam (45%)

The final exam will consist of six essay questions, from which students will be asked to answer three. Exam questions will correspond to lecture themes and debates discussed in seminar and are intended to test your critical grasp of the different ways in which climate change has been understood as a contemporary problem.

Participation (10%)

Students are expected to attend and actively engage in all sessions. In addition to volunteering to co-chair a seminar, students should come prepared with their own critical questions and reflections from the readings.

Additional Resources

Podcasts/Youtube

- **The Henceforward:** a podcast that considers relationships between Indigenous Peoples and Black Peoples on Turtle Island: <https://www.thehenceforward.com/>
- **Theory, Culture, Other-** Heatwave politics with Adrienne Buller
https://youtu.be/6HgF335J3jQ?si=2IrrN_3MKWtAUGin
- **Hot take** - <https://drilled.media/podcasts/hot-take>
- **Your Brain on Climate** – <https://www.yourbrainonclimate.com/>
A smart, lively podcast exploring climate change through psychology, behaviour, and storytelling.
- **For the Wild** – <https://forthewild.world/>
Interdisciplinary conversations on ecological renewal, Indigenous land relations, and post-humanist ethics.
- **Drilled** – <https://drilledpodcast.com/>
Investigative reporting on climate disinformation, fossil fuel lobbying, and the political economy of delay.
- **The Climate Question (BBC)** – <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w13xtvp7>
Brief episodes on climate challenges and responses from around the world.
- **Inhabiting the Anthropocene** –
<https://inhabiting-anthropocene.podcasts.ox.ac.uk/>
Academic interviews on living ethically and politically in the Anthropocene.
- **Cultures of Energy** – especially the [episode](#) with Vanessa Agard Jones

Journals

- **Anthroposphere:** The Oxford Climate Review –
<https://www.anthroposphere.co.uk/> A student-led journal featuring essays, interviews, and commentary at the intersection of climate and society.
- **Edge Effects** (Center for Culture, History, and Environment, UW-Madison) –
<https://edgeeffects.net/> Blog and podcast on environmental humanities with accessible writing on multispecies worlds, land, and culture.
- **Uneven Earth** – <https://unevenearth.org/> Resource for political ecology, degrowth, extractivism, and radical climate justice writing.

Newsletters & Blogs

- **Heated (Emily Atkin)** – <https://heated.world/> Investigative climate journalism with a sharp edge; connects climate policy to social justice.
- **Anthropocene Magazine** – <https://anthropocenemagazine.org/> Reports on science and policy with a focus on sustainable futures.
- **Generation Anthropocene Archive** –
<https://www.stanford.edu/group/anthropocene/cgi-bin/wordpress/> Podcast and blog archive of interviews on Anthropocene topics from early pioneers in the field.

- **Journal of the first Outernational** – <https://alienocene.com/> urates texts, sounds, and images that seek to reshape the relation between the human and the inhuman, the terrestrial and the extra-terrestrial,
- **Engagement** - AAA Anthropology and Environment Society - <https://aesengagement.wordpress.com/>
- **Weather Matters (Oxford's InSiS)**- <https://www.weathermatters.net/>

Films & Video content

- **"Feral Atlas: The More-than-Human Anthropocene"** (Interactive video essays) – <https://feralatlasing.org>
- **Smart Forest** – a living archive compiling multiple knowledges and forms of data about forests [Smart Forests Atlas](#)
- **The Herds** - Public art and climate action, puppets moving through cities from Africa to Europe <https://www.theherds.org/events>
- **The Anthropologist** (2015, dir. Kramer, Miller & Newberger) – a documentary following the anthropologist Susan Crate and her teenage daughter across Siberia, Kiribati and the Andes;. Kanopy <https://www.kanopy.com/en/ox/>

Art & Design Projects

- [Cloud Studies](#) (Forensic Architecture)
- Samia Heny [Performing Colonial Toxicity](#)
- Morehshin Allahyari's [She Who Sees the Unknown](#).
- David Attenborough, Blue Planet II: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p04tjbtz/blue-planet-ii>

Background Texts & Further Reading

- Latour, B. 2018. *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*. Wiley.
- Ghosh, A. 2018. *The Great Derangement*: University of Chicago Press.
- Thomas, Julia Adeney, eds. *Altered Earth*. University of Cambridge.
- Cronon, W, ed. 1996. *Uncommon Ground*. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Clark, N. & Szerszynski, B. 2020 *Planetary Social Thought*. Wiley
- Butler, O. 1993. *Parable of the Sower*. Four Walls Eight Windows Press
- Wallace-Wells, D. 2019. *The Uninhabitable Earth*. Penguin Press.
- Powers, R. 2020. *The Overstory*. W.W. Norton
- Robinson, K.S. 2020. *The Ministry for the Future*, Orbit Books.
- McKibben, B. 1989. *The End of Nature*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.
- Madeleine Thien, M. 2025. *The Book of Records*. Norton & Company, Inc.

Teaching Outline

Lectures 1 & 2 (30 June, 1.45-4.30 Kloppenburg): *Welcome to the Anthropocene, Welcome to the Course*

This opening session introduces the course and its central aim: to critically examine how climate change reshapes our understanding of the planet and our place within it. We begin by exploring the term Anthropocene, tracing its scientific origins and examining its use as a framework for thinking about the scale and intensity of human impact on Earth systems. What does it mean to suggest that humans have become a 'geological force'? Are we all equally responsible for the climate emergency? What kinds of responsibilities—ethical, political, and practical—follow from this contention? What are the limitations of the Anthropocene for imagining those responsibilities, and what are we to make of the decision of the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS) to reject the term as a formal designation of a new geological epoch? In the second half of the lecture, we turn to how this framing informs our own research and opens up new lines of inquiry, from rethinking the boundary between human and non-human life to grappling with the ethical challenges of living on a damaged planet.

Aims:

- Introduce the course structure, themes, and learning expectations
- Define the concept of the Anthropocene and its implications
- Explore how climate change challenges conventional categories such as nature/culture and human/environment
- Reflect on the ethical questions posed by life in a time of planetary crisis

Essential Readings:

- Gibbard, P., Walker, M., Bauer, A., Edgeworth, M., Edwards, L., Ellis, E., Finney, S., Gill, J.L., Maslin, M., Merritts, D. and Ruddiman, W., 2022. The Anthropocene as an event, not an epoch. *Journal of Quaternary Science*, 37(3), pp.395-399.
- Gergan, Mabel, Sara Smith, and Pavithra Vasudevan. "Earth beyond repair: Race and apocalypse in collective imagination." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, no. 1 (2020): 91-110.
- Salih, R. and Corry, O. (2021) 'Displacing the Anthropocene: Colonisation, extinction and the unruliness of nature in Palestine', *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 5(1), pp. 381–400.
- Additional: Brand, D., 2020 *On narrative, reckoning and the calculus of living and dying*
https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/dionne-brand-on-narrative-reckoning-and-the-calculus-of-living-and-dying/article_47884274-07ad-561a-973b-027ef2cbc8fb.html

Seminar 1 (2 July, 11.45-1, Maddicott):

Originally proposed to describe a new geological epoch marked by the scale of human impact on Earth systems, the Anthropocene now functions as both a scientific hypothesis and a cultural provocation. In this seminar, together we will trace the contours of this provocation: What are its implications? Does it help us understand the planetary crisis, or does it obscure responsibility by flattening global inequalities into a single "human" actor? Who is the *Anthropos* in the Anthropocene? And just as importantly, who is left out? We will also explore how the Anthropocene opens—and perhaps limits—ways of thinking about responsibility, ethics, and planetary survival in an era of overlapping social, environmental, and political challenges: How might climate change destabilize the boundary between nature and culture, human and non-human? How can we study a world ever more 'out-of-joint'—shaped by rising seas, wildfires, unpredictable weather patterns, and biotic scrambling? And finally, how do we conduct research ethically on a damaged planet?

To answer these questions you are encouraged to bring an object of your choice to the seminar which captures your own personal experience of sense-making in the Anthropocene.

Lectures 3 & 4 (6 July, 8.45-11.30, Maddicott): *Making Climate Change Knowable*

This session explores how climate change—vast, uneven, and experienced in radically different ways—has been made legible and actionable through scientific and technical practices. We examine the emergence of climate change as a measurable and governable object, shaped through instruments like satellite sensors, climate models, carbon accounting, and temperature graphs. These ways of knowing don't just describe global warming; they help determine which interventions are imagined as possible, urgent, or effective. They also introduce blind spots, privileging certain perspectives and sidelining others. In the second part of the session, we turn to some of the controversies that have emerged around these dominant forms of knowledge. How has the authority of climate expertise been questioned—and by whom? We consider how the technocratic framing of climate change can provoke backlash, fuelling populist distrust of elites, and examine what this tells us about the contested role of science in democratic societies.

Aims:

- Examine how climate change has been rendered visible, measurable, and actionable
- Reflect on how specific techniques shape climate policy and political imagination
- Identify controversies over expertise, evidence, and authority in climate politics
- Anticipate how technocratic framings may provoke resistance or populist challenge

Core Readings:

- Meyer, John M. 2024. Power and truth in science-related populism: Rethinking the role of knowledge and expertise in climate politics. *Political Studies*, 72(3), 845–861.
- Walker-Crawford, N., 2023. Climate change in the courtroom: an anthropology of neighborly relations. *Anthropological Theory*, 23(1), pp.76-99.
- Callison, C. 2014. *How Climate Change Comes to Matter: The Communal Life of Facts*. Introduction.
- Dearing, A. 2023. <https://daily.jstor.org/should-we-just-listen-to-the-scientists/>
- Optional: Brain on Climate: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/7qqiW6809DMWyoj6jggObH>

Seminar 2 (7 July, 3.15-4.30, Madicott): *Evidencing Climate Change*

In this seminar we will collectively explore the sense-making techniques, introduced in the lecture, that are used to render climate change visible and sensible. What kinds of authority do these technical systems claim? What do they make visible—and what do they obscure? Whose perspectives are foregrounded, and whose are excluded? These are important questions to critically reflect upon in an era of ever growing climate skepticism. In asking them, we will reflect on broader themes of trust, authority, expertise, and, more broadly speaking, the politics of knowledge production and contestation.

Lecture 5 & 6 (9 July, 8.45-11.30, Ashdown): *Who are we? More-than-Human Resilience*

Climate change unsettles inherited ideas about where “the human” ends and other beings begin. This lecture asks how living with and through global warming prompts us to rethink relationships—between people, animals, microbes, and damaged environments. We begin with ethnographic work on feral landscapes: post-plantation forests, abandoned mines, flood-prone suburbs and other ruins where diverse species make unexpected livings. These “patchy” ecologies reveal entanglements that classic ideas of restoration or resilience often miss. What kinds of care, indifference, or survival emerge in these shared ruins? In the second half of the lecture, we follow this thinking into the ocean. Oceans are home to vast multispecies relations, but also increasingly sites of extraction, enclosure, and speculative climate solutions. From sand mining and coral bleaching to blue carbon and beach renourishment, we ask how oceans are made valuable—and for whom. Can ocean care resist commodification, or is it being folded into new forms of climate capital?

Aims:

- Identify how feral/ruined landscapes illuminate multispecies entanglements under climate change.
- Introduce key concepts (Capitalocene, Plantationocene) for linking climate histories to unequal natures.
- Assess One Health and planetary-health programmes in light of multispecies justice and care.

Essential Readings:

- Todd, Z. 2014. Fish pluralities: Human-animal relations and sites of engagement in Paulatuq, Arctic Canada. *Études/Inuit/Studies* 38(1-2): 217-238.
- Schoemaker, K. (2025). Sand-Hungry: Accumulations, Erosions, and the Self-Feeding Logic of Beach Renourishment. *Antipode*, 57(3), 1105-1125.
- Chao, S., & Celermajor, D. (2023). Introduction: multispecies justice. *Cultural Politics*, 19(1), 1-17.
- Tsing, A.L., Deger, J., Saxena, A.K. and Zhou, F., 2022. A feral atlas. In *The new Routledge handbook of political ecology* (pp. 417-426). Routledge. (Have a play with the <https://feralatlas.org/>)
- Suggested optional film: *All That Breathes* (<https://www.allthatbreathes.com/>)

Seminar 3 (9 July, 11.45-1, Ashdown):

Seminar three invites us to sit with the tension between damage and life; between exploitation and care. It asks how climate change forces us to rethink the relational world we inhabit—and to consider what kinds of futures are possible, or desirable, on a damaged planet. We will reflect upon the emergent more-than-human, multispecies ecologies which can be located in the patchy landscapes of the Anthropocene. What forms of care or neglect emerge in these ruined landscapes? How do different species make a living in places shaped by extractive histories and climatic instability? And what does it mean to think *with* these multispecies communities, not just *about* them?

Come with some stories or reflections about your own experiences of relating to, or indeed struggling to relate to, the more-than-human world!

Lecture 7 & 8 (July 14th, 8.45-10; 11:45-1, Kloppenburg): *Toxic Lives, Chemical Relations*

As a framework to account for the scale of human impact on the planet, the Anthropocene draws attention to particulate matter beyond immediate view. In this lecture we move to relations with chemicals and toxic lives to interrogate the scales of the Anthropocene. We begin by exploring how toxicity was initially cast in the public imaginary as a problem linked to isolated crises, bounded in time, or discrete communities marked by environmental injustice. Yet, this understanding relies on a particular model of the chemical. We turn to the ways in which contaminated waters, soils, seas or airs show chemicals to be relations of their own; pervasive, ubiquitous, distributed even if highly uneven. Chemical relations can become routes through which lines of accountability for anthropogenic change at large to be drawn, tracking from molecule to militarisation, capitalism, and colonialism. Such relations also allow us to interrogate the forms of belonging, personhood, and action that arise in response. When chemicals are ubiquitous, however uneven, what forms of activism, care, or wider relations take shape? If the mechanism of a chemical can index a factory, financial markets, or the reach of the state, how must we reimagine Anthropocene scales?

Aims:

- Introduce concepts of the alterlife and chemical relations.
- Reflect on questions of scale in the Anthropocene to connect toxicity to wider forces of capitalism, colonialism, militarisation, racialisation.
- Interrogate what we mean by activism when considering forms of action that people take in response to the ubiquity of chemicals in daily life.

Essential Readings:

- Tironi, M. 2018. 'Hypo-interventions: Intimate activism in toxic environments', *Social Studies of Science*, 48(3), pp. 438–455.
- Dewan, C. 2024. Toxic residues in fluid commons: More-than-economic dispossession and shipbreaking in coastal Bangladesh. *Ethnos* 89.3: 459-479.
- Giggs, R. 2020. *Fathoms: The World in the Whale*. Simon and Schuster. (Chapter 1: Whalefall)
- Bruno, T. 2024. More than just dying: Black life and futurity in the face of state-sanctioned environmental racism. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 42(1), 73-90.

Lecture 9 & 10 (July 21, 11.45-1; 1.45-3 Kloppenburg): *The Convivial Commons*

This lecture invites us to think about the commons not merely as a shared resource to be managed, but as an infrastructure that sustains both human and more-than-human life on Earth. Moving beyond accounts of the commons as a shared resource managed by community groups, and the dilemmas of their governance, we approach commoning as a set of *relational practices* through which living beings—people, animals, plants, landscapes, and the wider ecologies they inhabit—are bound together in mutual dependence. This will involve considering the affective, material world which underpins human and nonhuman life, as a common good. In doing so, however, we confront some critical questions: Is it possible to develop convivial relations between humans and nonhumans given existing knowledge frameworks and political economic systems which have been built on the often violent separation of human and nonhuman life? In posing this question, this lecture offers both an invitation and a provocation: to imagine the commons as a ground for shared flourishing in the so-called Anthropocene, all while remaining attentive to the difficulty of realising such a vision.

Aims:

- Introduce the concept of the commons as an infrastructure for human and more-than-human life.
- Assess the extent to which commoning practices offer a means of cultivating convivial relations in the Anthropocene.
- Reflect on the challenges of commoning within existing frameworks of knowledge and political economic systems.

Essential Readings:

- Berlant, L., 2016. The commons: Infrastructures for troubling times. *Environment and Planning D: Society and space*, 34(3), pp.393-419.
- Er, Y., 2023. A commons beyond the human. *Environmental Humanities*, 15(2), pp.162-180.
- Hardin, G. 1968. The Tragedy of the Commons. *Science* 162, 3859: 1243–48.
- McCabe, T. 1990. 'Turkana Pastoralism: A Case against the Tragedy of the Commons'. *Human Ecology* 18(1): 81–103.

Seminar 4 (21 July, 3.15-4.30, Port Meadow):

In this seminar we will be leaving the classroom to visit Port Meadow: a large meadow of open common land beside the River Thames to the North West of Oxford. We will carry out some participatory activities in order to explore the commons as both a material infrastructure and an analytical lens in the Anthropocene. As we move through the meadow, three questions will guide us. How are shared forms of life made and held together across the boundaries of species, landscape, and ecology? What forms of belonging, dependence, and obligation emerge when human flourishing is entangled with that of more-than-human others? And what might this particular common ground reveal about how we imagine convivial relations, and their limits, in the Anthropocene?

Seminar 5 (24 July, 10:15-11:30, Ruskin):

In this seminar will discuss the material presented in Lecture 7 & 8. We will discuss toxicity as both a material reality and an analytical lens in the Anthropocene. How do people live with toxic exposure that is persistent, invisible, and uncertain? What kinds of belonging or vulnerability are produced when chemicals become part of life itself? And what kinds of activism, care, or resistance emerge in the face of the slow violence of exposure? We will spend some time discussing the questions of scale and detectability centered by the chemical realm. Are chemicals merely single molecules? Or are they more usefully seen as an index of the broader political economic system? If so, how can we re-imagine what counts as a site of action, or unit of analysis, in the Anthropocene? How do we grapple with the fact that toxicity is not equally distributed—but also not containable?

Lecture 11 & 12 (29 July, 3.15-6, Kloppenburg): *Planetary Habitability*

This closing session explores how to live well in a place—not by returning to an idealized 'natural past', but by building the conditions for livability within a damaged and rapidly transforming world. Reflecting on the key lessons of the course, we will consider what does it mean to inhabit the Anthropocene, not just as a geological condition, but as a political and ethical one? What kinds of habits, comforts, and attachments have made certain forms of life seem "normal" or "natural," and how might these be reimagined? From emerging approaches to design to planetary health frameworks, we explore how climate change invites us to rethink not just what is livable, but what lives are prioritized, sustained, or foreclosed.

In the second part of the lecture, we turn to design as a way of rethinking what it means to live well on a damaged planet. Emerging approaches to planning and design, which seek to embrace the more-than-human realm, aim to connect ecological breakdown with human well-being, but often remain limited by crisis narratives and human-centred assumptions. Here, we ask: what if design were understood as the ability to thrive in interdependence with other species and environments? This shift invites us to consider new forms of care, responsibility, and cohabitation—where the goal is not to return to a lost balance, but to build conditions for shared livability amid uncertainty.

Aims:

- Interrogate the politics of comfort in climate adaptation and how design approaches and technologies like air conditioning create “habitability” for whom and at what cost
- Explore design not just as an outcome but as a mode of cohabitation, embedded in specific ecologies and social worlds
- Reflect on the limits of resilience discourse, and cultivate speculative thinking about thriving (not just surviving) in an uneven world

Essential Reading:

- Escobar, A., 2018. *Designs for the pluriverse: Radical interdependence, autonomy, and the making of worlds*. Duke University Press.
- Wakkary, R., 2021. *Things we could design: For more than human-centered worlds*. MIT Press. Introduction.
- Dearing, A., David Branigan, D. and Lezaun, J. 2026. Reimagining cosmologies of pore space for pluriversal carbon removal futures. *Frontiers in Climate* 8: 1815866.
- Additional: Climate’s Interiors <https://limn.press/issue/climates-interiors/>

Seminar 6 (1 August, 4:45-6, Kloppenburg): *Horizoning*

This seminar will wrap up the series programme with a provocation. It asks not just what went wrong, but how we might imagine the world otherwise—drawing on anthropology, activism, and collective care to navigate the uncertainties ahead. What might it mean to live well on a damaged planet? What does that look like for you and why?