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POL 406
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Living and Dying in The Anthropocene

Climate Scientist Paul Crutzen has named the human geological era the Anthropocene. Never before has a single species of animal, according to Crutzen, so fundamentally altered how our planet works. In addition to the massive built up of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere since industrialization there is also the increased amounts of radioactivity in the layers of earth and ice that geologically date the splitting of the atom and subsequent nuclear tests. So we are, according to Crutzen, the first geological species. While plants would dispute such a claim, it is indisputable that humans have altered the climate patterns of the planet and accelerated the loss of non-human animal species planet wide. Furthermore, the Anthropocene marks the first era of political geology. For the first time in Human history political movements and even some governments are asking what responsibility we have to respond to these dramatic changes. We have to take responsibility for the geological future of our planet if we want humans to continue to thrive on this planet. The course will focus on how the Anthropocene and in particular 'the great acceleration' since industrialization challenges our political institutions and political imaginations. In addition to learning a great deal about these ecological and political changes we will also speculate about what kinds of futures will result from the different political options presented to us. We will draw on philosophers, political scientists, activists, anthropologist, and film makers in effort to get a sense for how we might choose to live as different groups of people or as a species or as collaborators in political movements that include human animals and non-human animals alike.

Requirements:

Attendance: This is a senior seminar that meets once a week. Therefore attendance and participation are mandatory. The class is discussion based which requires that every students come to class having complete the reading AND prepared questions to discuss in class. (10 percent of your grade is attendance and 5 percent of you grade is participation)

Assignments: This course is writing intensive.

1. You will be required to create a tumblr blog on which you will have to post a 400 word response to each weeks readings as well as 3 questions about the reading to be discussed in class. (10 percent of your grade)

2. You will write a 6 to 8 pages critical essay on a book or film from the class. The structure of a review essay will be discussed extensively in class. The idea is that you develop an original critique of one or two of the books and/or films from the syllabus. (30 Percent of your grade).

3. You will exchange your paper with an assigned peer and provide substantial feedback on your peer's paper. (10 percent of your grade)
4. You will meet with me to discuss your 6 to 8 page paper and the feedback you received from your assigned peer and from me. You will then revise and expand the paper based on the feedback. The final version will be 10 to 12 pages long and handed in as the final exam. (35 percent of your grade)

Readings and Films:

Stanley Fish, *How to Write a Sentence: and How to Read One*, 2012
Slavoj Žižek, *Event: A Philosophical Journey*, 2014
Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 2014
Timothy Pachirat, *Every 12 Seconds*, 2013
Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 2013
Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*
Eduardo Viveiros de Castro *Cannibal Metaphysics*
Matt Reeves, *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*
Annalee Newitz, *Scatter, Adapt, and Remember: How Humans Will Survive a Mass Extinction*
George Monbiot, *Feral*
John Carpenter, *The Thing*
Thomas Ligotti, *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*
Christopher Nolan, *Interstellar*

Week 1: What is an Argument? Resources for Writing. How to structure a critical book review?

Stanley Fish, *How to Write a Sentence: and How to Read One*

Week 2: What is a Political Event?

Slavoj Žižek, *Event: A Philosophical Journey*

Week 3: What is a Political Event? Part II

Slavoj Žižek, *Event: A Philosophical Journey*

Week 4: Welcome to the Anthropocene.

Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*

Week 5: The Industrialization of Food and Violence

Timothy Pachirat, *Every 12 Seconds*

Week 6: Trees are People too.

Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think*

(6 to 8 page essay due 24 hours before class via email. Essays will be exchanged with peers during class)

Week 7: The Politics of Forests

Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think*

Week 8: Accelerating Loss

Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*

(Commentary on peer's paper will be given to me via email and your assigned peer)

Week 9: Non-Industrial Forms of Life and Indigenous Cosmologies.

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Cannibal Metaphysics

(Sign up for meeting with me to discuss the revisions for your final paper)

Week 10: Comparative Cosmologies for Change.

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Cannibal Metaphysics

Week 11: After the Collapse.

Matt Reeves, Dawn of the Planet of the Apes

Week 12: Changing with the Changes.

Annalee Newitz, Scatter, Adapt, and Remember: How Humans Will Survive a Mass Extinction

Week 13: Joining Nature in the Fight for the Earth.

George Monbiot, Feral

Week 14: What if the World Doesn't Want Us?

John Carpenter, The Thing

Week 15: A World Without Us?

Thomas Ligotti, The Conspiracy Against the Human Race

Week 16: Jail Break: Humanity Beyond the Stars.

Christopher Nolan, Interstellar

(Final Paper due last day of class)