

Foundations of Environmental Humanities

Yale-NUS College, YID 2208, Classroom 3

Mondays and Thursdays, 4:30 – 5:50

Instructor: Matthew Schneider-Mayerson

Email: schneider-mayerson@yale-nus.edu.sg

Office Location: Elm College, 01-01D

Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:00 to 12:00, 1:00-2:00, and by appointment

Schedule office hours meetings at www.schneidermayerson.youcanbook.me

Course Description

Though understanding and responding to contemporary environmental problems requires a knowledge of science, technology, and policy, the early twenty-first century has seen a dawning awareness that fundamental cultural shift is required to adequately address pressing issues such as climate change. Culture is studied, expressed, and potentially shaped through the arts and humanities. This course offers an introduction to the foundations of what is known as *the environmental humanities*, an umbrella term that describes the interdisciplinary humanistic study of environmental issues. These issues involve not only climate change but pollution, waste, environmental injustice, activism, non-human animals, extinction, and desire. The question we will come back to over the course of the semester is an important one: What is the role of the arts and humanities in appropriately responding to the environmental challenges of the Anthropocene, our current geologic epoch?

One could easily spend four years studying the environmental humanities, so this course is necessarily selective, intended to provide an introduction primarily oriented towards majors in Environmental Studies and Literature. The primary disciplines that we will examine are history, religious studies, philosophy, anthropology, art, and literature. The field of environmental humanities developed primarily in North America and Europe, and we will study these theoretical origins and foundational interventions. However, our focus, especially in our textual examples, will be on material from Southeast Asia, South Asia, and East Asia.

Your main assignment for this course will be to write a compelling 4000 to 6000 word ecocritique of some aspect of Singaporean culture. You will be required to conduct independent research, and together we will compile a list of relevant resources that you might consult. You will submit a short proposal, write a first draft, receive feedback from the instructor and your peers, and polish the piece to the best of your ability. If we have enough interest and high-quality essays, I will be happy to work with you beyond the semester to publish these essays.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Identify the contribution of the environmental humanities to both environmental studies and the humanities
- Recognize and summarize the primary concerns, developments, and subfields in the environmental humanities
- Analyze discourses around various contemporary environmental issues
- Engage in critical analysis of any 'text,' including literature, art, and film
- Write a clear, compelling, and polished essay

What to Expect

Expect to attend class. Active attendance in every class is mandatory and crucial to your success in the course. Participation in class discussions forms a significant part of your final grade.

Expect to do a fair amount of reading. You will need to set aside time outside of class every day and start earlier on assignments than you might think you need to. Keeping up with the reading and writing is your responsibility.

Expect to succeed. If you apply yourself to doing the work in this class, you can expect to learn. On the other hand, if you don't commit to doing the work or attending class, don't expect to learn what the course is designed to teach.

Expect to learn new things. This course is a survey of different disciplinary contributions to the study of contemporary environmental issues. You will be more familiar with some of these perspectives and less familiar with others. Expect to be surprised, confused, and even inspired.

Course Materials

The following books are required:

- Thomas van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction*
- Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*
- Indra Sinha, *Animal's People*
- Wu Ming-Yi, *The Man with the Compound Eyes*

All other readings can be found on the course's Canvas site.

Course Assessment Breakdown

Class Participation: You should read any assigned materials before class and be prepared to participate in class discussions. You may ask about your participation grade (which includes attendance) at any point during the semester, and you will receive a preliminary evaluation of your class participation five weeks into the semester. Additionally, each student is expected to meet one-on-one with the instructor for approximately 15 minutes outside of class during the first six weeks of the semester. Setting up this meeting will be your responsibility.

Reading Responses: Each student will write a total of five reading/viewing responses over the course of the semester, in which you will formulate your own questions or thoughts regarding the material and/or issues we're engaging in this class. These will be posted on our blog *and* uploaded to Canvas before the class meeting in which we will be discussing that reading (by 10:00 AM). The responses should go into detail on a specific reading or viewing (without summarizing excessively), or use it as a springboard to explore a subject we're covering in more detail than class time allows. Connecting our subjects to issues you've covered in other Environmental Studies or humanities courses is encouraged.

Blog Participation: You will be expected to post five substantive comments on your classmates' blog posts over the course of the semester. (In this case "substantive" means that you actually engage with the substance of the post.) You may post up to a week after the blog post. (If you post more than a week after a blog post, your comment will not be counted.) At least two of these five comments must come in the first half of the semester. Best to think of it as "one comment every other week."

Ecocritique Proposal: This proposal is similar to the proposal you will submit for your capstone, though much shorter. It should explain the primary subject of your ecocritique, contextualize your research within existing scholarship, and briefly outline your methodology. It should also contain a list of references. Due February 22.

Ecocritique First Draft: The first draft of your environmental humanities essay on some element of Singapore, which might include its geography, history, literature, film, advertising, treatment of non-human animals, architecture, industries, etc. The first draft should be complete – 4000 to 6000 words, including footnotes. It should not be a 'rough draft' but the best draft you are able to produce. Due March 30.

Ecocritique Final Version: The final version of the ecocritique. As such, it will be evaluated in part on your revisions in response to peer and instructor feedback, and in part its merits as a standalone essay. Due May 3.

Evaluation Guidelines:

Participation	20%
Reading Responses	20%
Blog Participation	5%
Ecocritique Proposal	10%
Ecocritique Draft	25%
Ecocritique Final Version	20%

If your performance shows significant improvement over the course of the semester, the instructor reserves the right (but assumes no obligation) to raise your final grade.

Grading

To calculate your final grades, your numerical scores will be converted to letters grades as follows:

A	93.3 – 100
A-	90 – 93.2
B+	86.6 – 89.9
B	83.3 – 86.5
B-	80 – 83.2
C+	76.6 – 79.9
C	73.3 – 76.5
C-	70 – 73.2
D+	66.6 – 69.9
D	63.3 – 66.5
F	0 – 63.2

Academic Integrity

When you submit assignments via Canvas, you will be required to check a box that confirms that all of your work is your own, and that all sources, quotations, and paraphrasing are noted and cited appropriately. Be especially diligent in this regard, and feel free to approach the instructor with any questions or concerns about how to ensure that all the work you submit is truly “your own.”

By a vote of the faculty of Yale-NUS College, professors must refer any suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Academic Integrity Committee for assessment and adjudication. In this regard, I reproduce here a passage on Academic Integrity from the Yale-NUS website:

Yale-NUS College expects its students to abide by the highest standards of academic integrity as a matter of personal honesty and communal responsibility. Acting with academic integrity requires that (a) students do their own work, (b) students not interfere with the work of others, (c) students accurately and honestly represent the content of their work, and (d) students properly attribute others’ work. Violations of the College’s academic integrity standards undermine both the community and the individual growth of students. Accordingly, they will be addressed with the utmost seriousness and sanctions ranging from grade penalties to expulsion. Examples of violations of academic integrity include plagiarism, copying or sharing homework answers, submitting work completed for one course as ‘new’ work for another course, or fabricating or falsifying research data. Professors are obligated to refer suspected lapses in academic integrity to the Academic Integrity Committee, which follows a set of policies and procedures approved by the faculty when investigating and adjudicating cases.

Class Participation

A significant portion of your overall course grade flows from your contributions to seminar discussion. I will provide guidelines for the successful completion of writing assignments as part of each essay or research assignment, but here I offer guidelines and criteria for the successful completion of the discussion component of the course:

A: An A grade class participation is awarded when students regularly initiate discussion. This means coming to class thoroughly familiar with the assigned reading and, therefore, prepared to raise questions, to open discussion, to identify topics of interest in the reading, and to engage other students in the discussion. (Obviously, this does not mean monopolizing a discussion, shutting others out, or talking for its own sake rather than to make a point about the topic under discussion.)

B: A B grade for class participation is awarded to students who participate regularly and productively in class discussion, who are prepared, and who are willing to engage. B discussants differ from A students in that the latter are self-starters who do not rely on the instructor's questions to set the agenda for discussion.

C: A C grade for class participation is awarded to those who participate on a regular basis, though less frequently than the B student. C discussants will be prepared for class, but their contributions will indicate that less thought has been given to assigned materials.

D: A D grade for class participation is given to those who contribute only infrequently to the discussion and whose contributions do not appear to arise from thoughtful consideration of the assignments.

F: An F grade results from non-participation in class discussion or any pattern of behavior that interferes with responsible and mature group discussion. Of course, participation is impossible if the putative participant is not in class. Frequent absences mandate F grades.

Discussion Guidelines

1. *Come to class with things to say* – this implies careful reading and reflection beforehand.
2. Another version of #1: *Make notes as you read, and as you reflect on discussion.* Draw on these notes while in class.
3. Aim to contribute to discussion at least once a class meeting. This may be difficult in a class this large, but it's a good goal to have.
4. Don't go more than two class meetings without saying something.
5. *The name of the game is quality, not quantity.* Too many less-than-useful contributions are worse than saying too little.
6. *Listen carefully to what others are saying. Don't dominate.* Forget this, and you won't do well. A good discussion is like a free-flowing conversation with friends that you value and respect. It is not "sequential opinion expression." It is characterized by building on what others have said and drawing your colleagues out with your comments.
7. Therefore, a promising contribution might begin with "I want to second what Lin said, but also add the following..." or "I see Bing's point, but another way to look at it is..." or "to build on Matt's ideas a bit more..."
8. Try not to focus on the professor when you're talking. *Address the entire class.*
9. *Questions for the group* are often a provocative way of framing discussion. For example, "it seems to me that Plato is obsessed with caves, and here's why – did others read him the same way?" Indeed, *asking good questions is usually more valuable than offering good answers.*
10. As others are talking, *resist the urge to rehearse in your own mind what you're going to say next.* You'll miss nuances that you need to hear.
11. Tolerate Silence. People need time to think. Tolerate Silence.
12. Try to organize your thoughts before speaking. Sometimes jotting a few notes down helps. Thinking aloud is occasionally OK, but too much of it detracts from your ability to formulate and communicate your ideas. Resist saying the first thing that pops into your head.
13. Do your best to ensure that certain groups of students are not dominating discussion. If you find yourself dominating discussion, be willing to hold back, and endeavor to include students who have not been as active.
14. *Don't be excessively polite.* I won't be. It's not personal. If someone says something with which you disagree, or that makes you uncomfortable (personally or intellectually), you owe it to them to say so. You'd expect nothing less.
15. Nevertheless, don't confuse effective seminar discussion with knock-down, drag-out debating. *Your aim isn't to score points, but to help the entire group explore the material and respectively identify areas of agreement and disagreement, and domains of "truth" and "ambiguity."*
16. *Wherever possible, draw from and refer to course material.* Demonstrate your command of the material.

Attendance

- You are expected to attend all classes. If you will miss class, you are expected to let the instructor know in advance.
- Permission to be absent from class for reason of extra-curricular activities is not automatic, and will rarely be granted.
- You are entitled to one "free pass" per semester – this includes classes missed for illness without a VR note.
- A VR note is required if you will be missing class (beyond the one "free pass").
- Beyond the "free pass," every unexcused missed class will result in a 5% reduction in your participation grade (i.e. from 85 to 80).

Late Work

- All work should be turned in on time. Exceptions to the deadline policies will (rarely) be made at the instructor's discretion, but only when there are extenuating circumstances such as a personal

emergency or an illness requiring professional medical attention. These circumstances must be documented and brought to my attention before the deadline for a paper arrives.

- If permission is not granted, late work will be penalized by a 5% grade reduction for every 24 hours. This means that if you turn in an assignment three days late, your grade will be reduced by 15%.
- You are advised to start assignments early so that if an issue arises which prevents you from finishing on time but cannot be satisfactorily documented, you will still have something to turn in by the deadline and thus avoid receiving no credit at all.

Additional Information

- **Laptop and Social Media Usage.** The only material on your laptop during our class meetings should be our readings. As such, *I ask that you disable WiFi at the beginning of each class.* If I notice a student checking the web during class, it will affect your participation grade.
- **Nondiscriminatory Language and Conduct:** This course has a policy of non-discriminatory language and conduct. Students should not use racist, sexist, homophobic or other discriminatory language in class discussions or written work. If you have any questions about what constitutes discriminatory language or conduct, feel free to speak with me – or, better yet, bring it up during class.
- **Learning Disabilities:** Students with learning disabilities should contact the Vice Rector's office for support and guidance.

Schedule

What is the Environmental Humanities?

January 15

- Deborah Bird Rose et al, "Thinking Through the Environment, Unsettling the Humanities" (5)
- Robert S. Emmett and David E. Nye, *The Environmental Humanities: A Critical Introduction*, "The Emergence of the Environmental Humanities" (20)
- Sverker Sorlin, "Environmental Humanities: Why Should Biologists Take the Humanities Seriously" (2)
- *Optional:* Libby Robin, "Environmental Humanities and Climate Change: Understanding Humans Geologically and Other Life Forms Ethically"

Understanding the 'Great Derangement'

January 18

- Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, "Stories" (82)

January 22

- *The Great Derangement*, "History" and "Politics" (73)

Environmental History

January 25

- Donald Worster, "Doing Environmental History"(19)
- William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness" (21)
- Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses" (26)

January 29

- Tony O'Dempsey, "Singapore's Changing Landscape Since c. 1800" (31)
- Timothy P. Barnard and Corinne Heng, "A City in a Garden" (25)
- *Optional:* Timothy P. Barnard and Mark Emmanuel, "Tigers of Colonial Singapore" (25)
- *Discussion with environmental historian Timothy Barnard*

Religious Studies

February 1

- Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative" (27)
- Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" (5)

- Read *at least one* of the following chapters from *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*:
 - Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, “Judaism”
 - O. P. Dwivedi, “Hindu Religion and Environmental Well-being”
 - Stephanie Kaza, “The Greening of Buddhism: Promise and Perils”
 - Richard C. Foltz, “Islam”
 - James Miller, “Daoism and Nature”
 - John Berthrong, “Motifs for a New Confucian Ecological Vision”
 - John A. Grim, “Indigenous Traditions: Religion and Ecology”
- *Optional*: Read or skim Bron Taylor et al, “The Greening of Religion Hypothesis (Part Two): Assessing the Data from Lynn White, Jr, to Pope Francis” (49)
- ❖ *Reading Response 1 due*

Philosophy

February 5

- Lecture on digital academic research 101
- No readings

February 8

- Marcello di Paola, “Virtues for the Anthropocene” (21)
- William Throop, “Flourishing in the Age of Climate Change: Finding the Heart of Sustainability” (17)

February 12

- Stephen M. Gardiner, “A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics, and the Problem of Corruption” (8)
- Eric Lambin, *An Ecology of Happiness*, “Introduction,” “The Experience of Nature,” and “Conclusion” (25)

Anthropology

February 14 (makeup class)

- Thom van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction*, “Introduction,” “Fledging Albatrosses,” “Circling Vultures,” and “Urban Penguins” (82)
- *Skype conversation with Thomas van Dooren*

February 15

- Thom van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction*, “Breeding Cranes,” “Mourning Crows,” and “Epilogue” (60)

Visual Art

February 19

- Joy Y. Zhang and Michael Barr, *Green Politics in China: Environmental Governance and State-Society Relations*, “Ways of Seeing” (26)
- Edward Burtynsky, *Oil* (selections)
- Joshua Schuster, “Between Manufacturing and Landscapes: Edward Burtynsky and the Photography of Ecology” (19)
- T.R. Kover, “Are the Oil Sands Sublime?: Edward Burtynsky and the Vicissitudes of the Sublime” (20)
- ❖ *Reading Response 2 due*

February 22

- No class
- ❖ *Submit Ecocritique Proposal*

- Spring Break -

March 4

- *Screening of Avatar. 7:30 PM in Lecture Theater 1 (optional). Bring blankets and snacks!*

March 5

- Lisa Sideris, “I See You: Interspecies Empathy and *Avatar*” (16)
- Joy H. Greenberg, “*Avatar* and Artemis: Indigenous Narratives as Neo-Romantic Environmental Ethics” (14)
- Britt Istoft, “*Avatar* Fandom, Environmentalism, and Nature Religion” (15)

March 7 (makeup class)

- Group presentations on environmental art

Ecocritical History and Theory

March 8

- Elizabeth Schultz, “Odysseus Comes to Know His Place: Reading the Odyssey Ecocritically” (12)
- Ursula Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, “From the Blue Planet to Google Earth: Environmentalism, Ecocriticism, and the Imagination of the Global” (50)

March 12

- Alexa weik Von Messner, *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion, and Environmental Narrative*, chapter TBD
- Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, “Introduction” (40)

Literature

March 15

- Wu Ming-Yi, *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, chapters 1-7 (pages 1-80)
- ❖ *Reading Response 3 due*

March 19

- *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, chapters 8-15 (pages 81-152)

March 22

- *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, chapters 16-23 (pages 153-227)

March 26

- *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, chapters 24-30 (pages 228-302)

March 29

- Indra Sinha, *Animal's People*, Tape One – Tape Eight (pages 1-114)
- *Optional*: Emmett and Nye, “Unsettling the Human” (21)

March 30

- ❖ *Submit Ecocritique Draft*

April 2

- No reading
- Workshop Ecocritiques during class

April 5

- *Animal's People*, Tape Nine – Tape Fifteen (pages 115-244)
- ❖ *Reading Response 4 due*

April 9

- *Animal's People*, Tape Sixteen – Tape Twenty-Three (pages 245-366)

Open Date

April 12

- Students select topics or readings!

In Conclusion

April 16

- Brent Ryan Bellamy and Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, *Loanwords to Live With: An Ecotopian Lexicon*, "Introduction: Loanwords to Live With" (14)
- Two entries from *Loanwords to Live With: An Ecotopian Lexicon* (your choice)
- Donna Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, "The Camille Stories: Children of Compost" (34)

April 19

- No reading
- ❖ *Reading Response 5 due*

May 3

- ❖ *Ecocritique Final Version due*