

Waterscapes: Visual Imaginaries and Ecological Futures

Course Description:

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, thinkers began to term the period in which we now live the ‘Anthropocene.’ From the Greek *anthropos* meaning ‘human’ and *kainos* meaning ‘new,’ the term describes our current geological age in which human activity has become the dominant influence on our climate and environment. Scholars across the humanities have theorized things like climate change, extreme weather events, and the material effects and financial imperatives of such forces through the Anthropocene. Over the semester, we will explore how aesthetic theory and art practices can, likewise, speak to these material conditions. Drawing upon Anthropocene studies in the humanities, as well as research out of critical race theory, gender and sexuality studies, postcolonial theory, and performance studies, we will explore the relationship among critical theory, artistic practice, and the environment.

This course is divided into two parts. In Part I, students will be introduced to a variety of critical frames through which to understand our relationship to ecology, the natural world, and urban spaces. In Part II, we will focus on water, a resource many argue will determine the trajectory of the 21st century. In this course, we will explore water as not simply a commodity or resource but as ideologically, culturally, and symbolically circumscribed. Throughout Part II, we explore how the availability or paucity of water does not affect communities equally. Rather, access is tied to racial and economic privilege and is intertwined with considerations of gender, language, ethnicity, and sexuality. We will examine a variety of different forms of aesthetic production: film, performance, public art, painting, and sculpture that offer ways to engage with our current moment and with water.

Course Objectives:

1. To gain an introductory understanding of critical theory, particularly focusing on a cross-disciplinary foundation in theory across the humanities, including fields like visual studies, art history, performance studies, critical race theory, and gender and sexuality studies.
2. To gain an understanding of how theorists and artists understand the relationship among the environment, environmental change, built landscapes, human intervention, and artistic practice.
3. To gain an understanding of the importance of water for cities, artists, and the 21st century, paying particular attention to how race, gender, class, and sexuality inform our relationship and access to water.
4. To articulate how theory and artistic practice inform or challenge each other that is useful for a student’s own research and artistic interests.
5. To practice close reading, locating an author’s project, thesis, and argument development, as well as the urgency of their argument—i.e. why did it matter to write this text?
6. To learn how to effectively use and integrate academic research into a final paper.
7. To practice and improve critical writing skills, with an emphasis on developing a thesis-driven essay.
8. To participate in class discussions, sharing ideas and responding to other students’ contributions.

Course Requirements and Expectations:

SITE VISITS

Throughout the semester, we will visit four museums and art spaces in New York. These visits are key to the course’s methodology and are designed to a) give you the opportunity to learn about particular institutions in the city and b) frame your understanding of course materials and art practice through these first-hand experiences.

Together, we will visit: Battery Park; Snug Harbor on Staten Island, including the New York Chinese Scholar’s Garden; the Museum of the City of New York; and the Whitney Museum of American Art. If

you are unable to attend class during one of our schedule site visits for whatever reason (i.e. your class schedule), consult with the instructor to make individual plans to visit a site on a later date.

WRITING

Throughout the semester, you will be responsible for a variety of different assignments designed to strengthen and rehearse your critical writing skills. All assignments (drafts, proposals, and final essays) should be:

- Turned in as hard copies in class;
- Typed and clearly indicate your name, the date, assignment, and have a title;
- Margins: 1 inch on all sides. Font: Times New Roman. 12 point, double-spaced, page-numbered;
- All references must be cited and papers should follow the Chicago Manual of Style.

Response Papers

Response papers are designed to encourage close reading, clarify understanding of course readings, and can serve as a starting point for your final paper. Over the course of the semester, you will turn in five responses:

- Four responses for Week Two, Three, Four, and Five, and
- One edited response based upon instructor feedback received on one of these four responses.
- Review syllabus schedule for specific dates.

A successful paper will: follow the conventions of an academic paper, begin with a simple thesis that relates the week's readings to each other and/or to our class topics, summarize the author(s) key argument, and end with a question(s) you might ask of a text.

Responses should adhere to MLA formatting guidelines (i.e., 12 pt. font, Times New Roman, double-spaced, footnotes or endnotes, 1 inch margins). **Strict 500-word limit.**

Exhibition Proposal

This project is designed to get you thinking and looking closely at artworks and imagining how works might relate to each other. For this assignment, you will develop an exhibition proposal, an accompanying checklist, and a floor plan based upon the themes of our course. In particular, this is a chance for you to develop a question or idea you have that we have not fully explored during our class time.

You will turn in:

- An exhibition proposal, which answers a set of questions the instructor will hand out, and should include,
 - 500-word description of the exhibition that lays out the key thesis of the show and the questions you hope to explore, and perhaps answer,
 - Where in NYC you would like the exhibition to be hosted (i.e. an existing museum or institution, a particular public location), and
 - The audiences you hope to serve and why.
- A checklist with a minimum of 20 artworks.
 - Image of piece, and the
 - Registrarial information on each work.
- A simple floor plan that indicates how you would lay out your exhibition
 - A 300-500 word justification of your floor plan and exhibition design.

Final Paper

For this essay, you can choose an art exhibition currently on view in New York. The goal of the assignment is to investigate how the exhibition relates to ideas and critical frames discussed over the course of the semester.

To begin, choose an exhibition that will allow you to construct an argument on the political, ethical, or cultural impact of the work. For instance, you might begin by asking why a particular exhibition is happening now. How does the subject matter and formal choices resonate with our cultural situation? What kind of conversation does the exhibition contribute to? Who is the intended audience? Who should see the show and why? Does the art on view engage with a specific issue? How so? What does the show ask us to pay attention to and to what ends?

The point is not to criticize a show for what it does not do but to understand the implicit and explicit connections between art, aesthetic experience, and their respective relevance for our course topic. Students will consult with the instructor about their choice of exhibition and are encouraged to team up with other students to view exhibitions together.

You will turn in:

- An annotated bibliography and 300 word paper abstract,
- A rough draft (minimum of 6 pages), and
- A final draft (minimum of 8 pages, turned in on Moodle)

As the due dates for the smaller assignments approach, you will be given handouts with more specific instructions. Review syllabus calendar for specific due dates of each of these smaller assignments.

Grading will be determined based upon content, the quality of research, and clarity of writing. Final papers should adhere to MLA formatting guidelines (i.e., 12 pt. font, Times New Roman, double spaced, footnotes or endnotes, work cited page, 1 inch margins).

PARTICIPATION

Discussion Moderation

Once, over the course of the semester, you will be asked to moderate a part of our class discussion; your portion of our discussion (app. 15-20 minutes) will be grounded in a series of discussion questions you generate.

A good question for discussion will do several things:

- Engage the point an author makes,
- Open up the text for critical investigation,
- Direct our attention to a specific facet of the argument,
- And/or think about the possible consequences, outcomes, and repercussions of an argument.

Come prepared with a few different types of questions (critical, detail-oriented, outcome-related) and think about how to structure the conversation. Which sequence would be most helpful in getting people engaged? What are the dilemmas, paradoxes, and confusions you'd like to address?

Make sure **you** have something to say about and to each question but keep in mind that moderating a discussion is not a platform for a monologue. Make sure you have some follow-up questions and have considered possible complications to stir up the conversation.

In Class Participation/Attendance

You should arrive to class on time having completed the reading specified on the syllabus with questions

and ideas about the reading. You should contribute to the class discussion through thoughtful comments/attentive listening.

You will be graded based upon in-class participation as follows:

- An “A” student enlivens the classroom with her/his engaging questions and discussions. Her/his remarks are insightful and encourage fellow classmates to think differently about class materials. For example, an A student might relate course content to a recent news article she read or readings from another course.
- A “B” grade for participation is given to students who participate but who do so in a more passive fashion. For example, a “B” student might raise questions but does not always listen to peers’ contributions or waits for other students to open a discussion before speaking.
- A “C” is given to a student who may attend classes regularly, but refrains from participation.

The use of electronic devices during class time is limited to class-related activities (i.e. if your reading is on your laptop). Extra-curricular activities are cause to ask a student to leave, with the resulting absence counting as a missed class. Note that the instructor may restrict the use of personal electronic devices in the classroom.

Grades:

Grading Breakdown

Reading Responses	20%	Participation	20%
Exhibition Proposal	20%	Discussion moderation	10%
Final Paper	40%	Participation/attendance (including site visits)	10%
Abstract & Annotated Bibliography	10%		
Rough Draft	10%		
Final Draft	20%		

Readings:

Readings listed on the syllabus will be available for download as PDFs on the course website. Most books on the syllabus will also be on course reserve and available for purchase in the university bookstore. Please consult your syllabus in advance to ensure you have access to the reading materials you need to complete each week’s assignments.

Schedule (may be adjusted at the instructor's discretion)

**** Please note that readings are due the day they are listed on the syllabus. ****

Part I: Critical Frames

WEEK ONE

Seminar One

- Introduction to course, assignments, and syllabus.

Seminar Two

Anthropocene

- Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
 - "Introduction: Toward a Theory of Ecological Criticism," pages 1-28.

WEEK TWO

Seminar One

Anthropocene Feminisms

- Richard Grusin, *Anthropocene Feminism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
 - Claire Colebrook, “We have always been Post-Anthropocene: the Anthropocene Counterfactual.”
- Donna Haraway "Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," *Socialist Review*, 80 (1985): 65-108.

Seminar Two

Writing Workshop I

- How to write a successful reading response paper?

WEEK THREE

Seminar One

Visuality: Landscapes

- W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 2002).
 - Preface and Introduction, pages vii-4.
 - “Imperial Landscape,” pages 5-34.

Due in class: Reading Response Paper (on readings from Week Two)

Seminar Two

Visuality: Circulations

- Shumei Shi, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
 - Introduction, pages 1-39.

WEEK FOUR

Seminar One

Visuality: Filmic Imaginaries

- David Ingram, *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000).
 - “Introduction: Melodrama, Realism, and Environmental Crisis,” and “Development and the politics of land use.”
- Watch in class: excerpts of *Chinatown* (1974), dir. Roman Polanski.

Due in class: Reading Response Paper (on readings from Week Three)

Seminar Two

Visuality: The Ethics of Death

- Sean Metzger, “Screening Human Traffic in Nick Broomfield’s *Ghosts* and Isaac Julien’s *Ten Thousand Waves*,” *The Chinese Atlantic: Seascapes and the Theatricality of Globalization* (forthcoming).
- Jonathan Watts, “Going Under,” *The Guardian*, June 20, 2007.
<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/jun/20/ukcrime.humanrights>
- “Tide Kills 18 Cockle Pickers,” BBC News, Feb. 6, 2004.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/lancashire/3464203.stm.
- Discuss in class: Isaac Julien’s *Ten Thousand Waves* (2010).

WEEK FIVE

Seminar One

Urban Studies: Imagining New York, Part I

- Matthew Gandy, *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).
 - Introduction, pages 1-18.

Due in class: Reading Response Paper (on readings from Week Four)

Seminar Two

Urban Studies: Imagining New York, Part II

- May Joseph, *Fluid New York: Cosmopolitan Urbanism and the Green Imagination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).
 - Introduction and “Water Ecology, Island City.”

WEEK SIX

Seminar One

Site Visit

Visit Staten Island, Snug Harbor

- Meet at Whitehall Terminal 10 minutes before the start of class.

Due in class: Reading Response Paper (on readings from Week Five)

Seminar Two

Urban Imaginaries: Ecology of Fear

- Excerpts from: Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

WEEK SEVEN

Seminar One

Writing Workshop II

- Discuss Exhibition Proposal and first steps in Final Research Paper
 - How to write a paper proposal?
 - How to write a thesis statement?

Due in class: Edited Reading Response Paper

Part II: Water

Seminar Two

Why Water?

- Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).
 - Introduction: Figuring Bodies of Water, pages 1-26.

WEEK EIGHT

Seminar One

The Ocean

- Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage,” *GLQ: a Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* 14. 2/3 (2008): 191-215.

Seminar Two

In the Wake: Oceanic Memory

- Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

- “The Wake,” pages 1-23.

WEEK NINE

Seminar One

Islands

- Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, tran. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 1990, 1997).
 - “The Open Boat,” and “Errantry, Exile,” pages 5-22.
- Epeli Hau’ofa, *We are the Ocean: Selected Works* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008) .
 - “Our Sea of Islands,” pages 2–16.

Seminar Two

Island Imaginaries

- Francisco-J. Hernández Adrián, “Tomás Sánchez on Exorbitance: Still Lives of the Tropical Landfill,” *The Global South* 6:1 (2012): 15-37.
- Leah Rosenberg, “It’s Enough to Make Any Woman Catch the Next Plane to Barbados,” *Third Text* 28 (2014): 361-376.

WEEK TEN

Seminar One

Site Visit

Visit Battery Park

- Meet at Battery Park, across the street from the Skyscraper Museum 5 minutes before the start of class.

Seminar Two

The Harbor

- May Joseph and Sofia Varino, “Aquapelagic Assemblages: Performing Water Ecology with Harmattan Theater,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 45. 1, 2 (2017): 151-166.
- Discuss in class: Harmattan Theater and Yolanda Gutiérrez’s Urban Bodies Project.

Due in class: Annotated bibliography and abstract

WEEK ELEVEN

Seminar One

The River

- Gwyneth Shanks, “Adobe, Dust, and Water: Rafa Esparza and Rebeca Hernandez’s *building a simulacrum of power*,” *X-TRA* 20.2: 89-107.
- Watch in class: Kerry Tribe, *Exquisite Corpse*, 2016.

Seminar Two

Exhibition Proposals

- Informal in class presentations on exhibition proposals

Due in class: Exhibition Proposals

WEEK TWELVE

Seminar One

No class—meet with instructor individually to discuss final paper

Seminar Two

The Tap

- Andrew Highsmith, *Demolition Means Progress: Flint, Michigan, and the Fate of the American Metropolis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
 - Introduction, and excerpts from Part II: Fractured Metropolis, Epilogue: "America is a thousand Flints."

WEEK THIRTEEN

Seminar One

The Pool

- Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: a Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
 - "Introduction: 'just don't touch the water,'" "Alone in the Backyard: Swimming Pools in Recent America," and "Conclusion: the Promise and Reality of swimming pools as public spaces."

Seminar Two

The Pool

- Christopher Brown and Pam Hirsch, eds., *The Cinema of the Swimming Pool* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014).
 - Monika Keska, "Filming the splash: David Hockney's swimming pools on film,"
 - Piotr Cieplak, "Swimming in post-apartheid Cape Town: sea point days," or
 - Fernando Gabriel Pagnoni Berns, "Cartographies of desire: swimming pools and the queer gaze."
- Discuss in class: Clarissa Tossin's *Brasília, Cars, Pools and Other Modernities* (2009-2013) and Ramiro Gomez's paintings.

Due in class: Rough draft for final paper

WEEK FOURTEEN

Seminar One

The Pipeline

- Dik Roth, Rutgerd Boelens, and Margreet Zwarteveen, eds., *Liquid Relations: Contested Water Rights and Legal Complexity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).
 - David Getches, "Defending indigenous water rights with the laws of adominant culture: the case of the United States," pages 44-65.
- Using these, or other news sources, (re)acquaint yourself with the Dakota Access Pipeline protests:
 - Alleen Brown, "Five Spills, Six Months in Operation: Dakota Access Track Record Highligths Unavoidable Reality: Pipelines Leak," *The Intercept*, January 9, 2018 <https://theintercept.com/2018/01/09/dakota-access-pipeline-leak-energy-transfer-partners/>.
 - A host of pieces produced by *Democracy Now* detailing the Dakota Access Pipeline Protest actions. https://www.democracynow.org/topics/dakota_access.

Seminar Two

Site Visit

Visit Museum of the City of New York

- Meet in front of the museum 5 minutes before the start of class.

WEEK FIFTEEN

Seminar One

Writing Workshop III

- Workshop draft for final paper.
- Peer-review Interview Exercise.

Seminar Two

Site Visit

Visit the Whitney Museum of American Art

- Meet in museum lobby 5 minutes before the start of class.

Final paper due Week Sixteen