

Archive of the Social Science Seminar



2022-2023 | Climate Crisis Politics

Cover Art: Diane Burko. *Summer Heat 1, Summer Heat 2*. 2020. Mixed media on canvas.

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2022-2023

Founded in 1973, the School of Social Science is the most recent and smallest of the four Schools of the Institute for Advanced Study. It takes as its mission the analysis of contemporary societies and social change. It is devoted to a pluralistic and critical approach to social research, from a multidisciplinary and international perspective. Each year, the School invites approximately twenty-five scholars who conduct research with various perspectives, methods and topics, providing a space for intellectual debate and mutual enrichment. Scholars are drawn from a wide range of disciplines, notably political science, economics, law, sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, and literature. To facilitate intellectual engagement among the visiting scholars, the School defines a theme for each year.

Besides the informal conversations that take place all year long, the scientific activity of the School is mostly centered on two moments. The weekly Social Science Seminar offers the opportunity to all members to present their work, whether it is related to the theme or not. The Theme Seminar meets on a bimonthly basis and is mostly based on discussion of the literature and works relevant to the theme. In 2022-2023, the theme was “Climate Crisis Politics.” The program was led by Wendy Brown, UPS Foundation Professor, and Visiting Professor Tim Mitchell, William B. Ransford Professor of Middle Eastern Studies Columbia University, in collaboration with Didier Fassin, James D. Wolfensohn Professor and Alondra Nelson, Harold F. Linder Professor.

School of Social Science
2022-2023

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Social Science Seminar

RETHINKING POLITICS AND FREEDOM IN THE (LATE) ANTHROPOCENE

Wendy Brown

In the context of the climate emergency, critical science studies scholars have subjected to critique epistemologies and ontologies of human and non-human life, science, nature, agency, and the earth. Dipesh Chakrabarty has done the same with history and historicity, temporalities, the earthly, the global and the planetary. Tim Mitchell is doing something parallel with economy. I join a handful of other political theorists in seeking to do this with politics and freedom. My speculative hypothesis is that foundational understandings and practices of politics in the West harbor consequential estrangements, exclusions, and conceits in relation to both human and non-human activity. These understandings and practices in turn position freedom as 1) a practice of mastery and domination (freedom as the right to dominate, exploit, or subjugate charted by feminist, postcolonial, and critical race theory); or 2) as against politics (freedom as the right to be let alone charted by liberal theory); or 3) as the dissolution of politics (freedom as the withering away of the state iterated in emancipatory Marxist and anarchist traditions). Politics founded on different grounds, taking its bearings from the climate crisis and founded in the distinctive human capacity to generate systemic powers with history making and geo-thermal effects, could gestate other practices of freedom.

My point is not the obvious one that the origins of Western politics were bound up with patriarchy, slavery, imperialism, and propertied wealth, or that in these origins, most of humanity and all non-human life were figured as what Aristotle termed instruments for “the sake of man” where Man is a synecdoche for the elite served by these instruments. Rather, careful study of these origins reveal an ontology contributing both to the process of earthly destruction today *and* our felt helplessness before it. Yes, distinctly *modern* oppositions between culture and nature, reason and feeling, subject and object, science and politics, all intensify this problem. Thus do Latour and others rightly indict European modernity for these intensifications, not only its twinning with capitalism’s birth. But to address the stymied politics of the climate crisis, we have to address this deeper and longer legacy of politics in the West, its institutionalization of elite domination, objectification of what it imagined as nature, imbrication of freedom with this domination and objectification, spurning of responsibility for the human powers crafting histories and the earth, and conceit of autonomy from its constitutive basis.

I argue further that freedom, far from merely a culprit in the climate emergency, is central to turning it—and us—back from the edge of the cliff. This requires resituating an understanding and practice of freedom in a formulation of politics that brings it closer to every form of “life” and all that conditions and sustains it. In short, it requires treating freedom in relation to the distinctive powers that humans generate and our distinctive capacity govern—steer, steward, control or rework—these powers. This claim runs against the contemporary discursive grain that identifies politics with freedom’s limit rather than its realization, and is at odds with the commonplace that freedom is incompatible with addressing climate change. But recasting the understandings and practices of politics in which freedom is grounded, and replanting freedom in this ground, allows other possibilities to emerge. Far from a semantic or conceptual change, or a paradigm shift, which remain at odds with any historical materialist account, these possibilities would be imminent to the crises of the present. They are born from the crisis of freedom’s extant modalities and they promise to redeem freedom from its implicatedness with both planetary impoverishment and human injustice.

September 26, 2022

THE STRUGGLE THAT REMAINS BETWEEN WORLD AND INTERNATIONAL

Samera Esmeir

A new word entered the English language in 1789, soon spreading to other vernaculars. This word was “international.” Its powers were significant but hardly appreciated. First coined by Jeremy Bentham, international named and described a new branch of law that had until then been represented under the “law of nations,” or *ius gentium*. Soon, international would become interchangeable with a more familiar noun—world. It would also gain a socialist revolutionary itinerary. In its juridical itinerary, international was at the heart of at least two significant ruptures. First, there was the nineteenth century consolidation of a distinct international sphere of governance and action. Second, in some political discourses, juridical internationalism crystalized world as an interstate planetary political system; world emerged as international. In the twentieth century, these ruptures would present anticolonial struggles with particularly modern conundrums. For “the wretched of the earth,” becoming of the world soon required internationalizing their causes; internationalization became the medium of worldly legibility and the telos of the colonized. But the centrality of this telos also meant that exclusion from international institutions amounted to becoming less of the world, losing one’s place among others. This threat of wordlessness, which only heightened further internationalizing desires, is critical. It constitutes the dark side of world-as-international. *The Struggle that Remains* theorizes the advent of this darkness as it has been entangled with anticolonial desires for liberation and freedom. The inquiry unfolds from one site of lasting struggle: modern Palestine from 1834 to decolonization.

This lecture zooms on decolonization. I recount how national liberation movements, including the Palestine Liberation Organization, successfully campaigned in the 1970s to reclassify their revolutionary struggle as international armed conflict on par with inter-state war. Henceforth, all freedom fighters would cease to be abandoned to colonial powers, and would, at least in theory, receive legal protections similar to state-soldiers. I ask: What did the new discourse of international armed conflict entail? What political horizons did it enact and how did it rupture the concept of revolution in its relationship to war? And were there practices of struggle in excess of the juridical concept of “international armed conflicts”? I argue that the rubric of international armed conflict reinforced the centrality of sovereign power, the modern state, as well as the international family of nations; anticolonial revolution as a constellation of *nonsovereign* struggles receded in these discourses. Instead, under international law, all war, including revolution, had to become war of division or war that maintains divisions between sovereigns on the surface of the earth. Along parallel lines, theorists critical of the cold war and its nuclear threat, such Reinhardt Koselleck, depicted these revolutionary struggles, along with other wars, as amounting to a global civil war between members of the international family of nations. These legal and theoretical discourses testify to the hegemony of a critical political sensibility under which there could no longer be an anticolonial revolution unfolding outside the international community.

October 3, 2022

HISTORICAL THINKING AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE PERSPECTIVES FROM COLOMBIA

Catalina Muñoz

In 2016, in an effort to put an end to the longest-running conflict in the western hemisphere which has resulted in over nine million victims, the Colombian government and the FARC-EP, the biggest guerrilla group in the country, signed a peace agreement. Praised internationally for opening the frontier of restorative justice by going beyond criminal accountability to include the enforcement of victim's right to truth, redress, and guarantees for non-repetition, the implementation of the agreement has faced many obstacles. In the October 2016 referendum to ratify it, 50.2% of the voters rejected the deal. Accountability remains contentious.

In this context, my research and practice as a public historian enquires about the relationship between on the one hand, the efforts (governmental or not) to transition from pasts characterized by atrocity to futures of social justice, and on the other hand History, understood in the two senses that Michel-Rolph Trouillot addresses in his book *Silencing the Past*: history as what actually happened, and history as that what is said to have happened. There is a—for the most part—undisputed sense that transitions from violent pasts require societies to “deal” in some way with that past. What different shapes has this “dealing” with the past taken? What has worked and what has not? How does this tie into epistemological questions around history as a discipline? And very importantly, can history be an agent for change? How to critically conceptualize an epistemological intervention that can contribute to such a transition?

The notion of transitional justice has changed in time. Initially, in the Nuremberg Tribunal for example, justice as the search for justice focused on retribution through the criminal prosecution. In the 1980s and 1990s a broader approach incorporated the right to truth which made the state responsible for thorough investigations of human rights violations. More recently, critical assessments of the transitional justice systems of the late twentieth century are proposing the need to address not only human rights violations as such, but also the longer histories of economic, social, ethnic, territorial, and gender inequalities that underlie social discord and can potentially reproduce it.

Yet, the participation of historians has been limited, or tied to conceptions of history's role as the safeguarding of remembering vs. forgetting, and as the search and establishment of objective truth, notions tied to a positivist paradigm of the discipline rooted in the nineteenth-century. Based on my research and public history work in Colombia, I suggest that history can provide a critical perspective that illuminates the economic interests, social divisions and political struggles that produce violence and that have made it constitutive of the historical construction of liberal democracy, but that beyond that, politically engaged history can also provide critical action to bring about change.

October 10, 2022

HOMESTEADING AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

K-Sue Park

The long marginalization of conquest and the ongoing claims of Native nations in American history has produced mythical popular conceptions of land and the ideal of homeownership in America. The historical record shows, however, that the American land system developed through the racial project of colonization to convert land into property in unprecedented ways that have shaped the landscape of real estate, housing, and homelessness today. Many of the novel colonial laws and institutions that created property value through colonization and enslavement still constitute the basic elements of the United States' system of property in land, which remains one of the nation's greatest sources of wealth today. Further, the scale of dispossession of Native nations' lands during the colonial period—the possibility of accumulating estates of hundreds of thousands of acres-- also created the impetus for growing the chattel slave trade, deeply entangling the subordination and commodification of people with the extraction and commodification of land. After the abolition of property in enslaved persons, the antiblack racism entrenched by slavery remade the real estate market in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by revitalizing segregation as a way of producing monetary value in land.

The opening chapter of my book manuscript, which tells this story, is entitled "Homesteading and the American Dream." It recounts how laws incentivized the individual pursuit of property ownership and a home of one's own. The homesteading principle this tradition encoded blossomed through a history that begins with the headright systems colonies used to recruit settlers in America in the seventeenth century, continued through the famous Homestead Act of 1862 and its progeny, and persists in municipal urban homesteading acts in the present day. By requiring that private citizens perform the work of conquest and enslavement that was so crucial to establishing and expanding the nation's sovereign territorial jurisdiction, it long invested white families personally in the racial violence required to displace non-white communities and create monetary value in "property" in expropriated lands and human beings.

October 17, 2022

URBANIZING CLIMATE JUSTICE

Kian Goh

How does climate change change our ideas and understandings of cities? Interrelated conditions of globalized urbanization and global climate change have animated conversations about cities and environments around the world. But central debates in urban studies often appear to neglect the most urgent issues confronting cities and regions. These discourses rarely take intertwined global climate change and urban change as a primary object of analysis. This paper challenges such omission by explaining how a focus on climate change is essential to understanding emerging urban processes and can clarify key points in these central debates.

Central debates in urban studies, including those around generalized urban processes and historical difference (see, e.g., Scott and Storper 2015 and Roy 2016), or the debates around planetary urbanization (see, e.g., Brenner and Schmid 2015 and Peake et al. 2018) involve theoretical considerations about generalization, particularity, history, and difference. Climate change is often considered generalized, affecting everyone everywhere. But its impacts are unevenly distributed and experienced (Adger et al. 2006; Roberts and Parks 2007), and can be considered in both immediate and world-historical terms. Climate change, therefore, links generalized processes and particular impacts and actions, with deep implications for urban theory.

This paper builds on theories of multiscalar urban research and the politics of location and history to develop a conceptual framework of urban change through the lens of climate justice. It looks to the organizational formation and the key spatial and temporal justice claims of the globalizing climate justice movement to bring into relational view the conceptual levels of urban theory involved in understanding climate change impacts and responses. It explains how the urban can be understood as, first, the process and scale through which generalized political-economic systems that cause climate change are produced, and place-particular climate justice struggles are incited; and, second, the process and scale through which challenges to such systems are articulated across different sites, bodies, and histories, and made general and comparably legible through generalized political-economic systems and globalized processes of urbanization and institutions of urban governance.

The paper ends with outlines of two concepts of urban climate justice: how urban environmental challenges link community, place-based struggles and urban regional processes; and how emerging formations of global and urban climate justice governance are formed and refracted across scales.

October 24, 2022

THE JUDGE AND THE ETHNOGRAPHER

RECOUNTING A POLICE KILLING AND REVISITING ITS DISMISSAL

Didier Fassin

It's a simple story. Somewhere in France, a man from the travelling community is sought after he fails to return from home leave to the prison where he has been serving time for a number of robberies that did not involve violence. As he is visiting with his parents at the family farm, an elite unit of the gendarmerie, the GIGN, heavily equipped and armed, launches a major operation. Hiding in the dark in a lean-to, the man is discovered and killed. The officers who shot him assert that he attacked them with a knife and they were obliged to fire in legitimate self-defense, after having announced their presence and attempted to bring him under control without the use of weapons. Five members of his family who are present outside the lean-to, held handcuffed on the ground at machine gun point a few yards from the site of the events, maintain that the shots came only a few seconds after the gendarmes entered the lumber room, without warning and with no sound of a struggle. Eighteen months later, the examining judge dismisses the case. The family lodges an appeal. It ends with the same ruling. The two perpetrators will therefore never be brought to trial. A simple story, then. A minor incident, that did not even merit a mention in the national media. But one that combines all the elements present in numerous similar incidents that take place every day throughout the world: young men belonging to ethnic minorities who die as a result of encounters with the police, prosecutors and judges who decide not to pursue the case and accept their claim of legitimate self-defense, and families who call for truth and justice.

Having learnt about this tragedy by the victim's sister, the ethnographer conducts his own inquiry, getting access to all documents and meeting with those involved. Then, to account for what happened, he proceeds in two steps. First, he narrates in parallel the various contradictory versions of the event, as if they were all true or rather as if all protagonists were telling the truth. Second, he carries out a counter-investigation, confronting the statements and analyzing the forensics, which leads him to an entirely different interpretation of the facts. The writing strategy is therefore experimental. On the one hand, it seeks to avoid the false objectivity of any unequivocal account, as it gives space to discordant voices and incompatible narratives. On the other hand, it also makes it possible to do away with a comfortable relativism that would be limited to parsing each individual's argument, since in his conclusions he proposes a distinct plausible version of the events. But the case cannot be reduced to the lethal acts of two officers; it has to be placed in the broader political context of the militarization of enforcement institutions and of the racist abuses of travellers' communities.

The question raised by this research is that of truth-telling and truth-making. The prosecutor says that the court has come to the judicial truth. In response, the social scientist claims that his is an ethnographic truth, which is distinct because unlike the other it pays the same attention to all protagonists, it uses all the available information and it is not bound by power relations between institutions. It is not absolute, but in Pierce's pragmatic formulation, it is the end of the inquiry. In light of Nietzsche, Foucault and Ginzburg, the talk questions the limits of ethnography and the risks taken by the ethnographer.

October 31, 2022

MORAL AUTOPSY
A CRITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF RECKONING
WITH THE COMMUNIST PAST IN THE EUROPEAN EAST

Saygun Gökarıksel

Revolutions and regime changes are often fraught with the accusations of treason or “collaboration” with the former regime. These accusations of collaboration place past words and deeds under new description, as they redraw the boundaries of political community. Postsocialist East European countries have been no exception to this trend. A number of well-known public figures – politicians, artists, judges, and worker activists such as Lech Wałęsa, Milan Kundera, Istvan Szabo, and Christa Wolf were publicly accused or “revealed” as a secret communist agent/spy. Most East European countries have initiated transitional justice processes to regulate the accusations of collaboration, reckon with the communist past, and facilitate the transition to neoliberal democracy in the margins of Europe. Three decades after the fall of state communism these transitional justice processes continue to raise crucial questions concerning the boundaries of political community and the legal-constitutional order. This is especially the case in Poland and Hungary, where transitional justice has become the centerpiece of nationalist authoritarian populist politics of purification and security since the 2000s.

My book project aims to offer a critical legal and political anthropology of reckoning with the communist past in Poland by focusing attention on the transitional justice process called lustration. Derived from the Latin word *lustratio*, “purification by sacrifice,” lustration refers to the public examination, disclosure, and ban of the secret communist agents from holding public office or profession. Based on my archival and ethnographic research in Poland that involves the observation of lustration court trials and the analysis of legal decisions and media coverage, as well as life history interviews with the people who were lustrated or accused of being a secret communist agent (judges, writers, worker activists, lawyers, and academics) since mid-2000s, my work explores the contentious legal, social, and political life of the Polish lustration process, which is marked by the widespread concerns for lustration’s violation of civil and political rights and by the pervasive suspicions of the political manipulation of law and history.

The trajectory of lustration that I examine in my research interrogates the following two major assumptions about transitional justice: the liberal teleology of transitional justice, that is, the idea that transitional justice measures would necessarily lead to liberal-democracy and moral progress; especially, the idea that more transparency means more justice. Instead, my work shows how transitional justice could well function as part of a nationalist authoritarian populist politics that feeds on a world of conspiracy and secrecy. Second, my research critically engages the instrumentalist understanding of transitional justice that sees it as merely a legal and political response to past authoritarian or mass violence, a response to a violence that is in the past. My work instead interrogates the linear progressive understanding of time and explores the forms of power and violence that transitional justice exercises in its own right by forming a regime of truth, memory, and sensibility, what I call “moral autopsy.”

November 7, 2022

POWER AND LIGHT
PUBLIC LANDS AND THE ENERGY TRANSITION

Hillary Angelo

We are told that the climate crisis has brought us to the cusp of a societal transformation as great as the industrial revolution in both material and cultural terms. But to what degree coming changes— paradigmatically the energy transition away from fossil fuels—will deeply restructure material relations and reflect truly new forms of socio-ecological consciousness or simply incorporate new energy sources into existing paradigms is an open question. This research examines the cultural dimensions of this transformation at one of its key sites: America’s 610 million acres of public lands, which epitomized the ‘domination of nature’ in the 20th century and which are a nexus of struggles over alternatives in the 21st. Long left to right-populist sentiment and ranching and mining interests, public lands’ uses and users are now changing dramatically. Biden has promised to quintuple renewable energy production on public lands by 2025, while climate justice movements, environmental NGOs, and indigenous activists offer alternative land use paradigms and cosmologies. At this moment of epochal change, I trace transforming political fractures and alliances, expert and popular epistemologies, and infrastructure and land use decisions across three sites: the build-out of renewable energy infrastructure in central Nevada; new forms of conservation and stewardship amidst a growing tourist economy in southern Utah; and the use of public lands for formal and informal housing in a to-be-determined location. In so doing, I explain how new forms of environmental knowledge, experience, and politics emerge as the material and cultural formations in which they are physically embedded change; how these sentiments subsequently impact land use and policy; and decipher the path that current sentiments and decision-making are laying out.

November 14, 2022

PLOT
ON BLACK SPATIAL INSURGENCY

JT Roane

This paper is indebted to Sylvia Wynter's theorization of the plot and its genealogy in the context of the Caribbean for helping to elucidate social-spatial relations underwriting Black life and politics in the US context. Various interrelated iterations of the plot—the site of the body's interment, the garden parcel, a roving imaginary of the potential for connection in land and waterscapes outside of control, and hidden insurrectionary activity—fostered a vision of de-commodified water and landscapes as well as resources. Evolving in dialectic with mastery and dominion especially as expressed in the social-spatial form of the plantation, enslaved and post-emancipation communities plotted a set of communal resources within the interstices of plantation ecologies, constituting the Black commons. The paper examines the plot's and the Black commons' reorganization as living logics, as hybridized cultural praxes with capacity for incremental and radical transformation, translation, and translocation prompted by intracommunal dynamics and their expression in dialogic relation with the forces that impinge upon Black placemaking from outside. Translated to the city in the context of the Great Migrations beginning at the turn of the twentieth century, this imaginary continued to underwrite a diverse array of visions for personal and collective urban social formation askew from the locations of gendered racial capitalism. In the rural context, it continued to evolve underwriting an explicit ecological otherwise, in the local context of the Jim Crow enclosure.

November 21, 2022

THE COMPLACENCY OF THE CHINESE DREAM

MOBILITY AND CITIZENSHIP IN FRACTION

Minhua Ling

A growing number of activists and scholars have shown how borders function as a technology of spatial control that upholds regimes of racialized exploitation and dispossession. Controlling the movement of certain people functions to maintain global capitalism and geopolitical order. Within China, millions of rural-to-urban migrants essential to sustaining the country's "World Factory" status and rapid economic growth since the 1980s have been subject to systematic discrimination and deprivation. Although they are not crossing national borders, their journeys from villages to towns and cities require traversing not just multiple geographic, linguistic, and sociocultural realms but also substantial internal borders imposed by state regulations.

This talk first draws on my longitudinal research project on migrant youth grown up in Shanghai to show how policies, institutions, and discourses relating to educational eligibility, land ownership, family planning, residential status, and employment structure intertwine to accommodate migrant youth just enough to guide them through the schooling system toward manual labor but refuse to give them the same opportunities enjoyed by their local peers. Administrative regulations work in tandem with both market mechanisms and cultural criteria to offer social citizenship only to subgroups that rise to the desired thresholds of economic, social, and cultural capital in the name of urban development. The case of Shanghai exemplifies the intensification, rather than reduction, of inequality against the backdrop of China's unprecedented economic growth. Place-specific citizenship functions similarly to the ways racial and ethnic labels do elsewhere in forming the basis of prejudice and discrimination. The Chinese Dream, as the party-state advocates, remains fragmented and illusive so long as the invisible yet tangible interior borders and barriers guarded by place-specific institutions (re)produces division within unity.

China's highly unequal citizenship regime has also been pushing most low-income migrants back to their registered villages and towns when they get unpaid, injured, pregnant, sick, or old. Such state-imposed geospatial separation between production and reproduction significantly restricts migrant families' socioeconomic mobility and structures their strategies of building an increasingly translocal households. The second part of the talk draws on my ongoing book project to discuss how material and nonmaterial aspects of such state-orchestrated return have been changing the physical, ecological, and sociocultural landscapes in the countryside even before or in place of the return of migrants. It demonstrates how symbols of return such as big empty houses are emblematic of the contradictions embedded in the Chinese Dream and its politics of inclusion and exclusion. I argue that these householding efforts ironically reinforce state-sanctioned structural inequality as they internalize, instead of challenging, the bifurcating citizenship regime and its territorial logic of governance, in which local state agencies are not held responsible to provide for migrants. The more embedded migrants become in their home villages in preparation for state-orchestrated return through remittances and investments in houses and household goods, the more the state transfers responsibilities to individual households, and the more entrenched the rural-urban, local-non-local divides become. The Chinese case reminds us how states that rule by dividing and discriminating its own people can equally render return uncertain, incomplete, and sometimes impossible.

November 29, 2022

INHUMAN TIME

THE ETHICS OF EXTINCTION IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Lynne Huffer

In 2009 by a team of earth scientists at the Stockholm Resilience Center presented a “Nine Planetary Boundaries” model for tracking the effects of our current climate crisis. The model identifies the processes that regulate the stability and resilience of the Earth system, with each of the nine wedges tracking risk levels in relation to what they call humanity’s safe operating zone. Extinction stands out as an area of high risk for biosphere integrity. This has led scientists to assert that we are now in a mass species extinction event that rivals the planet’s five great extinctions.

This project asks about the ethics of extinction. Specifically, it asks a basic ethical question—how should we live?—as we face a current extinction rate that is 100 to 1000 times the background rate. The project frames ethics through the lens of the Anthropocene, a term proposed in the early 2000s that has come to saturate scholarly discourse across the disciplines as well as popular media. Initially proposed as a geological term to name anthropogenic impacts on earth systems, here the Anthropocene functions as a mental shortcut, or catachresis, for the existential dread many feel when faced with the reality that we have breached the extinction boundary. The Anthropocene catachresis names the psychological shock that attends this recognition, one that fuels outrage and a sense of urgency.

Crucial to the project’s ethical frame is the concept of inhuman time—the geological time of what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls our “planetary age”—as it interfaces with human time, what Chakrabarty calls the globe. Poised on the cusp of globe and planet, the project explores the earth as a historical archive. Michel Foucault’s genealogical method, grounded in archives, brings together the scientific and philosophical strands of this inquiry. A deep dive into the history of paleontology, from its 18th-century European beginnings through its modern position at the “high table” of evolutionary theory, exposes how archives, fossils, and ethics can be thought together in the face of today’s mass species extinction.

At the heart of the project’s ethical inquiry is the problem of the human—anthropos or man—and a history of humanism that has failed much of humanity. Sylvia Wynter complicates Foucault’s well-known critique of the human-as-Man, identified by him as a 19th-century invention, by doubling Foucault’s post-Darwinian Man with the post-medieval Man of the Columbian Exchange. The genocidal and ecocidal impacts of Wynter’s 15th-century Man are reflected in scientific claims about the evidence of that violence in arctic ice. Like the fossil record, the 1610 “golden spike” of reduced CO₂ levels in the Law Dome ice core suggests, for some, that the Columbian Exchange marks the beginning of the anthropogenic violence the Anthropocene names. An ethics of extinction can bring to the fore the interface between human and inhuman registers of violence. In doing so, such an ethics can inform specific transformations in human thinking, behavior, and ways of being together. Such transformations begin to articulate surprisingly practical responses to the question: how should we live in the midst of the Sixth Extinction?

December 5, 2022

ODYSSEUS' SCAR

BODIES AND BORDERS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Lorenzo Alunni

In the tension between the protection of borders and the protection of people on the borders, what place does the protection of bodies have? This is the question posed by this talk about bodies, doctors, health, and borders in the context of migration on the Central Mediterranean route, the deadliest in the contemporary world. Based on extensive ethnographic research in the island of Lampedusa, the talk explores, on the one hand, the medical apparatus on the border as an instrument of migration governance and, on the other, the corporeal experience of the border and its forms of embodiment. The dialectic between these two dimensions is the fundamental tension in the ways in which, in the contemporary world, bodies shape and, at the same time, are shaped by borders.

Today's Mediterranean Sea is the liquid theater of the movements of people who attempt to cross its invisible borders, despite the fact that European states do not grant them permission. That's how those same states turn people into "illegal," "undocumented" migrants. And, most importantly, that is how they turn a journey which would be decidedly easy and secure in a ship or plane into one that's extremely dangerous, often deadly, run by traffickers and militias, controlled by ambiguous authorities, and made venturesome and tragic both by the unpredictability of the sea and the weather and by the precarious nature of the old vessels used. At the time of this talk, migration along the Mediterranean routes in 2022 has killed 1,900 people, a number to which we must add those who've died in invisible shipwrecks, the people about whom we do not know and whose bodies arrive periodically on Lampedusa's coasts as macabre reminders of what happens in the sea and remains invisible.

All this danger and precarity of the attempted crossings of the Mediterranean is reflected in a tragically faithful mirror: the bodies of those migrants. And the mechanism of control and management of that border is reflected in another reliable and merciless mirror: the border's medical apparatus, the work of the doctors and nurses who operate in the border space; everything that the treatment of bodies does at the border is itself a border.

At the heart of this talk is the analysis of the clinical gaze *at* the border and *on* the border, and the forms of embodiment *at* the border and *of* the border. It's through the telling of an exploration carried out with all of the people who are the protagonists of these phenomena that in this talk I discuss the ways in which borders mark bodies, the ways in which the subjective experience of the border is first of all a corporeal experience and, lastly the ways in which it is also those same bodies that shape the borders as we know them today.

Taking "Odysseus' Scar", the first chapter of *Mimesis*, German philologist Erich Auerbach's masterpiece, as its initial starting point, and connecting to Auerbach's stay at the IAS in 1949/1950, in this talk I try to grasp the contemporary forms of body politicization, subjectivation-through-the-body and the border experience. And I explore the possibility to observe the state of the contemporary world from a privileged point of view: that of the borders and the corporeal experience of whoever attempts to "illegally" cross them.

December 12, 2022

THE ECONOCON

CLIMATE CRISIS AND THE ALIBI OF GROWTH

Tim Mitchell

The climate catastrophe demands that we develop new conceptions--of freedom and the political, of human and non-human worlds, of justice between generations and peoples--to provide better tools for coping with the unfolding crisis. But it also asks us to account for the political failure to have acted in time. Why have existing conceptions of collective life appeared so impervious to critique? One concept stands out for its resistance to repeated calls for its recasting or abandonment: the idea of the economy. We are urged to escape the economy, with its narrow definition of well-being, replace it with a more ecological conception of our material needs and limits, and break with its logic of limitless growth. But the term economy, and the public preoccupation with its continued growth, have been largely immune to such criticisms. Why is that so?

The answer is that we have lacked an understanding of what the economy does. The economy should be approached, not as an object in itself, nor as a set of conventions for measuring and governing material life, but as a mode of subjection-- what I call the "econoCon."

Our era has been defined by the idea of economic growth. But what is growth and how is it related to carbon energy? The obvious answer, tracing the development of energy use in industrial society over the last two hundred years, is not a useful one and will not provide a basis for climate politics. We should begin instead where the climate crisis itself begins, in the mid-twentieth century and locate the problem of growth not in the burning of fossil fuels or the history of technical apparatuses that demanded them, but in the invention of a different technical apparatus, "the economy." Economists began to use this term widely only in the 1950s. The economy was not just a new word for what already existed. It designated a new object of politics and calculation, understood for the first time as an entity in itself, a stable domain composed of identifiable and measurable relations.

The economy made possible a new conception of growth, through its measurement by GDP. This measurement normalized--and disguised--the distinctive nature of our contemporary capitalist, or rather capitalizing, mode of life. Capitalism is characterized not by the accumulation of wealth from the past, but the capture of income from the future, through the capitalization and control of future assets. The "growth" of the economy was something forced, by the operation of such modes of capturing from the future. This growth has the character of an alibi, for it actually occurs as impoverishment. The economy is the structural effect required to both stabilize, and disguise, the mode of living at the expense of the future. It does so by inscribing in the very object of politics (the economy) the apparent separation between the "real" and the "financial", through which the capture of the future operates.

This is the key to the EconoCon, to understanding the economy as an apparatus of control. It is an apparatus that orders human action in partial ways—as producer, consumer, householder, business owner. But it operates at a more molecular level, generating relations between the economic and non-economic; between the real and the financial; and between past, present and future.

January 23, 2023

THE COST OF BORDERS

Heba Gawayed

Today one in every 95 people are displaced due to longstanding injuries of colonialism, ongoing economic exploitation, and newer realities of environmental degradation. While the vast majority remain in their own countries, or in countries nearby, millions will attempt journeys to wealthier countries that are both the source of their injuries and coveted destinations.

These wealthy countries, however, particularly those at the frontier with the Global South, spend exorbitantly on brutal tactics of enforcement to repel the displaced. Though the pursuit of asylum is a right sanctioned by international law, people on the move are cast as rule-breakers and criminals. They are in turn forced to make incredible sacrifices —emotionally, physically, and financially — which differ at intersections of inequalities like race, gender, or physical ability.

This multi-method project draws on ethnographic observations, interviews, and quantitative data on human mobility and state expenditures to ask *what are the costs of borders?* Focusing on the frontiers between Global North and South where, as Gloria Anzaldua put it, “the third world grates against the first and bleeds,” I examine borders as a series of transactions that are always costly and often deadly.

January 30, 2023

PLANETMAKING
NATURE AS CAPITAL

Alyssa Battistoni

The planet Earth is made by many kinds of beings: as Anna Tsing argues, “all organisms make ecological living places, altering earth, air, and water.” These activities are not only worldmaking but planetmaking: they make the Earth itself habitable to humans and many other forms of life. These vital activities, however, are typically not represented in a form visible to capitalism, today the dominant political economic system on the planet—they are not, in other words, typically represented in terms of price. “The value of natural entities such as mangroves, wetlands, and coral reefs,” the economist Partha Dasgupta observes, “don’t appear in the marketplace.” Two common strategies have emerged seeking to rectify this disparity: one which calls to value and put a price on nature; the other, which calls to recognize that it is priceless, emphasizing the incompatibility of nature’s *true* value with market valuation. I examine these two rival strategies of “worldmaking” aimed at recognizing the value of what are frequently termed “ecosystem services” and “natural capital.” I argue that both are *failed* worldmaking projects. Projects to price nature have largely failed to make nature valuable on economic terms, however impoverished those terms may be: ecosystem services, I show, have not actually been commodified. *Contra* the view of capitalism as a commodification engine bulldozing everything in its path, it turns out that money really *can’t* buy certain things—or perhaps more accurately, really *won’t*. Critiques of pricing, meanwhile, have failed to establish nature as truly *priceless*. Frequent ruminations on the gap between what nature’s value *should be* and what it *is* nevertheless index a critique of capitalism’s form of value even where capitalism is not invoked directly. Even the valuation of ecosystems and natural capital can serve to disclose the unequal relations which structure global capitalism, as deployed in invocations of “ecological debt” and calls for “ecological reparations.” The limits to commodification, I suggest, raise new questions. Ecosystem services have been provided by the state (if at all) as public goods—often as forms of infrastructure for production, but also potentially as infrastructures for human and nonhuman life. This calls our attention not only to what capitalism is doing to commodify or destroy ecosystems, but to the kinds of “ecosystem public services” we should demand. I therefore emphasize the need not only to consider the moral questions of valuation but to critically interrogate how ecosystem services are defined, asking what work they do and for who.

February 6, 2023

THE ASIAN AMERICAN ASSIMILATION PARADOX

Jennifer Lee

The fastest growing ethnoracial group in the United States, Asian Americans are the most highly educated, the highest earning, and the most likely to intermarry. Once deemed diseased, morally bankrupt, unfit for citizenship, and unassimilable, Asian Americans have attained unprecedented racial mobility, now boasting educational and economic outcomes that surpass those of native-born Whites. Their socioeconomic attainment has led some social scientists to speculate that Asians are rapidly assimilating into American mainstream and remaking it in the process. While Asian American attainment defies theories of racial disadvantage, their experiences with xenophobia, racism, and anti-Asian violence vex theories of assimilation—pointing to an *assimilation paradox*. At no recent time has the paradox become more apparent than during COVID-19 pandemic which has made anti-Asian violence more frequent, and anti-Asian racism, more visible. I argue that the paradox reflects three tensions: the ahistorical nature of sociologists' research on Asian American assimilation; the tautology of using indicators of socioeconomic attainment acquired from immigrants' countries of origin as measures of structural assimilation in their country of destination; and the disjuncture between the way sociologists *normatively measure* assimilation and the way ethnoracial minorities *experience* it. The gap between the normative and the subject-centered occupies the epistemological space between canonical assumptions of assimilation and the lived experiences of Asian Americans. By integrating legacies of exclusion into theories of Asian American assimilation, addressing the tautology, and incorporating a subject-centered approach, I challenge oft-held assumptions, advance theory and research, and enable Asian Americans to reclaim narratives.

February 13, 2023

GREENING KEYNES

MONEY, TIME, AND DEMOCRACY

Stefan Eich

Calls for “Green Keynesianism” have become a standard reference in debates over climate politics. These range from pleas for green public investment to more radical visions of a Green New Deal. This hopeful investment in Green Keynesianism as a seductive blueprint for “saving the planet” should not surprise us if we follow Geoff Mann in appreciating Keynesianism as a distinctly liberal politics of saving civilization by using the tools of political economy.

And yet Green Keynesianism is characterized by a series of deep antinomies. First, the very same features that invest it with progressive hope for action—not least its appeal to wise technocrats—easily cut against a mass-based progressive politics. Green Keynesianism might be able to save capitalism once more from itself but it is no path to climate justice. Second, many of the very tools Keynesianism wields in the face of crisis—namely ultimately growth—are uniquely ill-equipped to respond to the climate impasse. It is no coincidence that the Keynesian revolution maps onto the Great Acceleration. Keynesianism’s commitment to avoiding class conflict through expansion tacitly turns on the very possibility of green growth as a new kind of secular theodicy. The result is a deep tension between the productivist rhetoric of Green Keynesianism and a simultaneous vision of degrowth.

This is where the project enters as an attempt to relate the rise of Green Keynesianism to John Maynard Keynes himself in order to reconstruct Keynes’s ambivalent and paradoxical political thought with a particular attention to those dimensions that are usually displaced or eclipsed in Keynesianism. More specifically, four aspects are brought to the fore by turning from Green Keynesianism to “Greening” Keynes: (1) the historicization of particular crises and the need for situated thinking from within them, (2) the importance of reconceiving of the nexus of money and time, based on Keynes’s insight that money is the battlefield of clashing conceptions of the future, (3) an engagement with speculative futures and imagined possibilities as performative acts of the political imagination, and (4) and interest in institutional experimentation based on a pragmatist conception of democracy as a never-ending gambit.

In reconstructing Keynes’s political thought along these four themes, the point is not to turn to him in search for right answers. Nor is the point to reject the policies of Green Keynesianism, many of which are evidently vastly superior to non-action. But turning to Keynes sends us away from a set of confident policy prescriptions and toward a more reflective inquiry into the nature of modern politics under conditions of uncertainty and the ambivalent status of the economy in such considerations. Attending to Keynes’s incomplete, hesitant, and often paradoxical thought can help us to move beyond the ready-made answers of Green Keynesianism by attuning us to the more open-ended and vastly more ambitious questions posed by Keynes to which we still don’t have any satisfactory answers.

February 21, 2023

CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IN THE FUNGIBLE SPACES OF EMPIRE

Christina Dunbar-Hester

This talk surveys the complex relationships among commerce, empire, environment, and the nonhuman life forms of San Pedro Bay over the last fifty years, coinciding with the era of modern environmental regulation in the United States. Approximately 40% of containerized goods that enter the United States make landfall in San Pedro Bay, which houses the contiguous but separately administered Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, with a steep uptick in volume since the 1970s. The port complex also contains petroleum extraction, refining, and transshipment, and a long shadow of militarism. The project takes up the association between trade, somatic metaphor, and logistics technoscience. Local stories emanating from the port complex can be traced outward to illustrate deep linkages and conflicts between the life of trade and organismic life, and between conservation and the industrial use of coastline in San Pedro Bay.

San Pedro Bay is ecologically rich. The port complex is built atop a land- and waterscape of vital importance to wildlife, the heavily industrialized Los Angeles Harbor contains estuarial wetlands, the L.A. River mouth, and a marine ecology where colder and warmer Pacific Ocean waters meet. According to the United States Army Corps of Engineers, this area is one of the most threatened “biodiversity hotspots” in the world. The talk presents the case of conservation of the California sea otter, an endangered subspecies that dwells in a curious contradiction: first industrially commodified, and now protected and conserved within a context of an even greater scale of state and industrial relations that are known to cause endangerment. Since its identification as both an endangered species and a “keystone” species, the otter has been coaxed to, contained within, and curtailed from different spaces along the coast, as wildlife managers task it with supporting ocean ecosystems while staying out of the way of trade and oil. Using historical data from the past half-century of goods movement, environmental regulation, and conservation science, this project *denaturalizes* the infrastructural and economic “vitality” of a set of *systems in which the San Pedro Bay port complex is a node*, with implications for activist formations around logistics, especially environmental and anticolonial activism. If logistics is “constantly confronted by events and processes that exceed its own logic,” it is in the interest of those who wish to live in more just relation to hasten and intensify these confrontations.

February 27, 2023

PANDEMIC TIMES
THE STATE OF THE HINDU RASHTRA
Nayanika Mathur

In May 2014 The right-wing, Hindu majoritarian BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) led by Narendra Modi won a stunning – in all senses of the term – electoral majority in India’s general elections. In 2019 this was repeated with an even higher majority. This talk considers some of the specific ways in which the rise of Modi and the BJP has changed the Indian state. I am interested, in particular, in the question of how we track the formation of a Hindu *Rashtra* (nation) in and through mundane bureaucratic practices; through an anthropological account of the state.

Building upon my longstanding work on the Indian state, I study the state as an affective set of quotidian social relations and material practices. If we continue to understand the state through its mundane bureaucratic practices, and its embodiment in people, places, and things – then how has this changed post-2014. And what is distinctly saffron about it, how do we come to see Hindutva – or do we?

I trace these shifts through a focus on three key moments in India since 2014: the demonetization policy of November 2016; the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of December 2019; and the third is the Covid bureaucracy that was in place over two years, especially the devastating second wave of May-June 2021. All three moves were couched in a language of governance and, in many ways, were in conversation with global trends. Yet, all three of them also permeated with Hindutva in ways that are instructive.

I argue that we need to understand the power of Hindutva through its seepage into spaces and practices that are generally considered unchanging. I also argue for placing Hindutva and the formation of the Hindu Rashtra in India within a wider global literature on fascism, populism, and authoritarianism. At its core this paper strives to move between that which is distinctly about the ascendance of the Hindu Rashtra in India and the displacement of a secular vision (however imperfect it might have been) within the state apparatus, and more general discussions on how right-wing politics are profoundly reshaping lives through the violence of bureaucracy.

March 6, 2023

DUTIES OF WATER
BUREAUCRATIC LABOR AND THE POSTCOLONIAL PROMISE

Maira Hayat

Anthropological studies of bureaucracies, as well as popular conceptions, approach them as sites of corruption, structural violence, anti-politics, and simplification. Recently, ethnographic attention has been directed towards the material artifacts populating bureaucracies. This talk turns to bureaucrats themselves and argues that bureaucracies are uniquely important sites to study ethical labor. In conceptualizing everyday bureaucratic activity as “ethical labor,” it attends to the bureaucrats, artifacts, laws, temporalities, metrics, and ways in which God is enrolled in everyday ethical labor in an Irrigation Department in Pakistan—home to the world’s largest irrigation network. Detailing how bureaucrats’ striving to be “good bureaucrats” intersects with striving to be “good Muslims,” it articulates anthropological insights on Islam and ethics with those on bureaucracy, demonstrating why greater anthropological attention to idioms of the ethical is necessary. It shows that more productive than locating the site of the ethical or tracing its provenance, as in many anthropological accounts, is attending to particular problem-spaces and the ethical labor they occasion. The yield is a finer account of bureaucratic politics and histories. The analysis has wide resonance in enabling us to understand how state officials anywhere might navigate the pull of the ‘private’ in everyday ‘public’ work, and how this in turn impacts public goods distribution.

March 13, 2023

PETRO-TIME
ON THE TEMPORAL POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Heather Davis

Climate change and the saturation of petrochemicals are bringing about novel forms of temporal destabilization, where the synchronizations that have developed over the course of the Holocene are now radically misaligned. If fossil fuels are understood to be the compression of time, then their release results not only in acceleration but in forms of temporal disjuncture. I put forward the concept of petro-time as a gathering concept to think through metatemporal instability in climate change. Through the examples of plastic and coral reef restoration, I examine lag, delay, deferral, looping, latency, and stuckness as less examined temporal orientations within climate change.

Plastics, I argue, plasticize time. They are at once connected to deep time through their links to the ancient beings that make up fossil fuels, just as they also scramble linear conceptions of time through delay and functional permanence. This is seen in the way that plastic is chronophagic, eating time through plastic packaging or other goods that are used briefly in comparison to the very long life-cycles of plastic. But they also operate through temporal distension, where the effects of chemicals that are a part of plastic products often appear with a delay. For example, some endocrine-disrupting chemicals are known to alter the gametes of fetuses, meaning that a person two generations removed could be affected by chemical exposure. Due to the recalcitrance of plastic and its associated petrochemicals, it is deeply conditioning the possibilities of intergenerational time. The beings to come will inherit plastic and its associated legacies. This is not acceleration, then, but the slowing of time, time as delay, or time-eating.

If plastics plasticize time through latency, intergenerational conditioning, and the problem of too much time, corals exist within a temporal framework where the future is rapidly disappearing. Corals are now facing devastating and immediate threats, primarily from ocean warming due to climate change. The four-channel video installation *Swirling* by Hope Ginsburg (2019) depicts the efforts of a team of divers off the coast of St. Croix rebuilding coral reefs by hand. The process involves cutting corals, which provokes a dramatic increase in their growth rates. After growing in nurseries on land or in the ocean, corals are “outplanted” onto damaged reefs. *Swirling* focuses on the mundane repetitive labor that the scientist-divers perform. I argue that the temporality that the divers and corals operate within is one of ‘pooling’ time, a term I borrow from Lisa Baraitser. It is the time, she argues, where repetition comes to matter, attending to slow growing processes, with a desired but unpredictable outcome. Pooling time opens to the radical not-knowing of the future, where the future is neither the endless deferral of catastrophe nor as a time that operates solely as progressivism or betterment.

The temporality of climate change is often figured through the ticking clock, an impending deadline, or smooth graphs that show acceleration in the form of massive increases of greenhouse gases. While these are necessary to understand how dire the situation is, they also and unintentionally participate in a universalization of time that serves to reify a logic of progression where the future is known in advance. Pooling and looping are temporalities that embraces process and contradiction, even, or especially when it is uncomfortable. This kind of temporality allows for the attending to of what is there, regardless of what the future might bring.

March 20, 2023

GREEN EXTRACTIVISM AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Philippe Le Billon

Long justified by the need for ‘economic development’, resource extraction is now taking an environmental turn. ‘Digging *for* the planet’ is widely promoted by energy think tanks, development banks, governments, and corporations. Conceived as a much needed ‘green transition’ from fossil fuels to renewable energies paired with widespread electrification, the decarbonization of industrialized societies will demand massive amounts of mineral resources. Rooted in anthropocentrism and colonialism, this ‘green extractivism’ risks reproducing high-intensity extraction and wealth accumulation, with strongly gendered and racialized outcomes mostly benefiting already privileged classes. From the on-shoring of lithium mining to the grinding of deep-sea mineral deposits, new ‘resource frontiers’ are being opened-up to obtain so-called ‘green metals’ essential for the production of electric vehicles, wind turbines, and power networks. Many of these extractive projects take place in the territories of Indigenous and traditional agrarian communities, and expose workers to health risks. Banking on this ‘green transition’, speculative ventures are targeting some of the most biodiverse places on earth, the deep ocean’s seafloor, and celestial bodies. The ‘green transition’, thus imagined, also requires the mobilization of vast areas for renewable energy production and extensive new energy corridors, with land and water being reallocated to biofuels, dams, solar panels, wind farms, or transmission lines. Many of these schemes impose the burden of climate mitigation on some of the people least responsible for ‘historical’ emissions while concentrating rents from a decarbonized but unjust future in the end of a few. This project asks why is this path taken, how is it unfolding, across different sectors and places, who wins and who loses, and how to bring about more progressive social and environmental outcomes?

The ‘green transition’ frames the climate crisis as resolvable through resource-intensive technocapitalism, and reaffirms a developmentalist ethos in pursuit of limitless ‘green growth’. Although the priority is clearly to bring ‘fossil capitalism’ to end, it should not be simply replaced by a ‘green’ version reproducing exploitative relations. This requires building coalitions capable of challenging the dominant socio-environmental order and advancing a deeper ‘ecological culture’.

March 27, 2023

POWER MADE CONCRETE
THE LABOR POLITICS OF DECARBONIZATION

Natasha Iskander

April 3, 2023

IRAQ AND THE MORAL MANDATE, OR THE BRITISH TRIBAL CODE IN THE WEB OF LIFE

Sara Pursley

In 1916, the British occupying army in Ottoman Basra and Baghdad issued the Tribal Criminal and Civil Disputes Regulation (TCCDR), which would become known as the Iraqi tribal code. In 1926, it became part of the Iraqi constitution. The code claimed to facilitate the “speedy settlement of disputes, whether of a civil or criminal nature, between tribesmen in accordance with tribal custom.” The prevalent analysis in histories of Iraq is that the code instituted a split in Iraqi territory and Iraqi subjecthood, separating urban and rural space and excluding rural subjects from the domain of the civic. I show instead that the TCCDR was a highly mobile technology of colonial rule and state formation that both generated and obscured striking porosities across these very boundaries. Once it is no longer analytically confined to the “outside” of Iraqi civil or state law, the TCCDR shows up everywhere—in land redistribution schemes, the extraction of taxes and coerced labor, the regular criminal codes and courts, military campaigns to destroy or starve entire villages, transportation of political prisoners to internment camps across the Indian Ocean, forced resettlement of populations inside Iraq, and the disciplining of secondary school protestors in Baghdad, to name but a few. Yet notwithstanding the code’s promiscuous wanderings outside any domain that could plausibly be called “tribal,” the concept of the tribal did important work in its operations.

According to Henry Maine, the 19th-century jurist often seen as the founding philosopher of indirect rule, primitive societies and laws were characterized by their “confounding” of persons and things. In this account, the trajectory of Western society from status to contract originated in a transformative distinction between the laws of persons and the laws of things, allowing the development of private property, freedom of contract, and individual right against claims of kinship. But all societies were not destined to follow this trajectory. Rather than forcing such peoples down a path leading from status to contract, Maine argued that their patriarchal, status-based, kinship relations should be strengthened by the colonial power. After World War I, Frederick Lugard’s *The Dual Mandate* further developed the philosophy of indirect rule, as instituted in the League of Nations mandate system. The first part of the dual mandate was the “material mandate,” or “economic development”: the exploitation of what would otherwise be the “wasted bounties of nature.” The second was the “moral mandate,” or “development along native lines”: the protection of the welfare of the natives under the authority of their traditional chiefs and laws. Lugard’s moral mandate pointed to a zone, earlier theorized by Maine, in which the primitive indistinction between persons and things would be deliberately encouraged by colonial policy.

The operations of the TCCDR highlight both the impossibility and the generativity of this distinction between the material and the moral, in which the former was supposed to recognize and the latter not to recognize the distinction between persons and things. As a mechanism of the “moral” mandate, the code situated various *material* processes inside a racialized domain of the tribal, thereby helping to evacuate the conflicts around these processes of political legibility. What remained on the side of the “material” mandate were the oil concessions, since oil was a gift to universal rather than racialized mankind, and all of the infrastructure needed for the extraction of both oil and agricultural products. The “bounties of nature” were thus freed from the material labor, including the coerced “tribal” labor, used to extract them. The dual mandate did not yet mark the emergence of “the economy” as a discrete sphere and object of governance in Timothy Mitchell’s sense. But—with nods to Roberto Esposito and Jason Moore—it might be seen as a different and antecedent way of immunizing capitalism from the web of life.

April 10, 2023

POLLUTED PROPERTY. FOSSIL FUELS AS ASSET AND LIABILITY

Andreas Folkers

Fossil fuels are key materials of modern societies, but they are so in different ways: as resources and residuals. As sources of energy, raw materials for fertilizers, pesticides, and plastics, they enabled hitherto unknown rates of economic growth, created novel patterns of mobility and consumer culture, provoked new modes of governance and economic life, helped to enact abstract understandings of time and space, and provided a new material foundation for modern values. The use of these resources goes along with the proliferation of residuals like CO₂, plastic waste, and petrochemical runoff. They bring about damages like soil degradation, the toxification of organisms and ecosystems, and, of course, global heating. They confront contemporary societies with problems that upset many of the temporal, spatial, political, social, and economic structures that modern societies became attached to. Residuals exceed, undermine, and threaten practices, calculations, values etc. premised on the certainty of the ontology of resources. That is why they become problems that demand problematizations and strategies to process them. However, the dominant problematizations that respond to the ecological and social affordances of residuals often reframe them in the terms of an ontology of resources. This becomes particularly visible in economic framings of ecological problems and attempts to govern them through the introduction of property rights for pollution, and/or by internalizing the cost of negative environmental externalities. The talk illuminates the economic logic of contemporary climate politics by looking at the ways the legal-economic institution of property and the value-form of the financial asset. Property and the asset are challenged by the material force of the residual, but utterly both rely on and enact the ontology of resources.

The physical appropriation of fossil fuels is premised on different kinds of property rights that allow access to these resources as well as on their capitalization to fund the extractive infrastructure to pull fossil fuels out of the ground and thus turn them into resources in the first place. This implies that fossil materials do not first exist as resources waiting to become financial assets later. Rather, the process of capitalization is the condition for fossil materials to become resources at all. The financial leap into the future of expected returns precedes the extractive leap into the geohistorical past stored in coal, oil, and gas. However, the moral economy of property also comes with responsibilities for the effects and spill overs of property. The talk shows this by looking at a current German court case in which the Peruvian farmer Saúl Luciano Lliuya sues the German energy company RWE to get compensation for the damages of his house as an effect of climate change. The case shows how the legal and economic register of liability allows to reckon with residuals in a way that turns them into indexes of historical injustice.

The talk thus highlights the material, economic, and legal life of fossil fuels in their dual guise as resource and residuals. Its analytical aim is to chart the maneuvering space that economic framings (like asset and liability) and social apparatuses (finance, law) allow to reckon with the affordances of fossil matter. Its critical goal is to illuminate the insufficiency of modern resource ontologies and their associated capitalistic avatars to open spaces for thinking about the ecological challenges of residuals beyond resource and property.

April 17, 2023

ACCOUNTING FOR CARBON

TARGETS, INVENTORIES AND RISKS

Julia Dehm

Accounting can refer both to the process of qualifying, counting and measuring, but it also refers to obligations that are owed to another: to call someone to account is to require them to explain a mistake or poor performance. This seminar seeks to think through the concept of accountability in relation to the climate crisis and to critically unpack how technical questions of metrics and measurement have political effects and thereby open up or foreclose different forms of responsibility.

There is, at present, an acute concern about how existing climate accounting frameworks are being manipulated by various “accounting tricks”. However, reforms that seek to redress these problems through more comprehensive and more transparent rules and frameworks generally fail to take seriously how calculative practices are technologies of government that shape social and economic relations. Rather than trying to “fix” accounting frameworks, this talk draws attention to the political effects of accounting practices, and the ways in which control is exercised through processes of measuring, monitoring and making things calculable and comparable. It interrogates accountability, considered by some to be the “the buzzword of modern governance”, as a closely tied to the emergence of a managerially orientated style of governance and the neoliberal “good governance” agenda. It suggests we need to pay attention to how demands for accountability have specific effects and how practices of accounting produce specific subjects and render them responsible in particular ways. Additionally, it highlights the crucial need to distinguish between “an obligation to publicly explain or justify conduct” and actual obligations or duties owed to another. Beyond the language of accountability, there is I suggest, a need to ask broader question about *who* owes obligations to *whom*, to do *what*, and based on *what underlying claim to authority* and the institutional means by which these obligations are or could be enlivened.

This talk shares some initial investigations on the theme of “targets”. Targets or objectives are expression of goals that set out what is aimed at or sought to be achieved through action. They thus frame what type of action is pursued, and how success or failure is measured. Throughout the 30-year history of the international climate regime its targets have been reframed and reconstructed various times, and articulation of these targets reflect the co-evolution of politics with climate science, climate modelling and technological development.

This talk unpacks the historical struggles over three interrelated questions concerning targets in the international climate regime: (i) how the objectives of climate policy were framed, including how supply-side policies to address fossil fuel dependency has been sidelined in favor of a focus on reducing “emission reductions”; (ii) how climate targets were quantified, that is into specific temperature targets, such as the objective to limit warming to “well below” 2 degree Celsius and “pursue efforts” to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius included in the Paris Agreement; and (iii) how flexibility is introduced into how these targets are achieved, through the notion of “net zero”.

The hope underlying this project, is that by thinking about these questions of accounting and accountability it will be possible to repoliticize what have come to be seen as technical questions of measurement and monitoring, and that in doing so, it may become possible to identify strategic points of leverage to push for more ambitious climate action. By deepening current debates on accounting, accountability and responsibility, I hope to develop more critical theoretical tools to engage with the complex questions raised by “climate crisis politics”.

April 24, 2023

THE FOGGY CRYSTAL BALL

WHAT WE CAN PREDICT, WHAT WE CAN'T PREDICT AND HOW WE TELL THE DIFFERENCE

Matthew Salganik

This research is motivated by rapid technological changes and strong claims about the power of machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) to improve science and society. Among some researchers and policy makers, there is a view that with enough data and the right algorithms everything will become predictable. This view is based in part on recent progress made on tasks such as image recognition (e.g., is this picture a cat?). For these tasks, there have been truly large and surprising improvements in performance in recent years due to new techniques and vast increases in computing power and data. Based on these successes, some people believe that social outcomes—such as, what will happen to a child or whether a country will fall into civil war—will likewise become predictable. However, I think this view is flawed. My project seeks to develop a more appropriate theoretical framework for predictability and unpredictability in social systems, assess this framework empirically, and enrich debates about the fairness and ethics of using AI for high-stakes decisions.

In this talk, I will begin by describing the origins of this project, as well as its goals. The project covers three types of estimands: individual outcomes, group rates, and collective outcomes. This talk will focus on individual outcomes. The talk presents the results from the Fragile Families Challenge, a recent scientific mass collaboration involving hundreds of researchers. Next, the talk will present a theoretical framework---rooted in a well-known mathematical decomposition in machine learning---that helps explain the origins of unpredictability in life trajectory prediction tasks. This framework is illustrated with examples from in-depth, semi-structured, life history interviews involving 40 families. The talk concludes with a discussion of next steps for the project.

May 1, 2023

II

Theme Seminar

Climate Crisis Politics

The climate crisis generates novel political questions and predicaments. The novelty arises from the crisis's emergency quality, its global dimensions yet unequally distributed effects, and its severe indictment of existing ways of human life. The crisis challenges conventional formulations of justice, freedom, sovereignty, progress, belonging and even understandings of humanity, ontology, historiography, temporality, power, and generational and collective responsibility. It raises questions about disciplinarity, methods and modeling, about realism and incrementalism, about nation-states, capitalism, colonialism and technology. How do these challenges and questions reorient twenty-first century political, social and economic thought and practice? What kinds of theory meet these challenges?

The climate crisis also raises concrete questions for social scientists. There are issues of political economy: Is sustainable capitalism oxymoronic? Can capitalism's dependence on fossil fuels and growth in consumption be eliminated (in time)? Can renewable energy sources avoid new depredations of vulnerable peoples and places, such as those entailed in extracting rare earth minerals? Can "pricing nature" and other market instruments stem the crisis *and* yield climate justice? What are the alternatives? There are issues of power and rule: What are the most effective governing levels (global, regional, national or subnational) and forms (autocratic, technocratic or democratic) for addressing the crisis? What are the roles of non-governmental entities, such as banks, corporations and social movements? Can anti-democratic "global government" be avoided while achieving significant global agreements and cooperation? How can legacies of imperialism, colonialism, and unequal development be redressed rather than reinforced in responses to the climate emergency? What are the virtues and limitations of decentralized responses, such as shutting down extractivist industries or establishing stringent local standards? Can these be effectively "scaled up" or multiplied?

The theoretical and concrete questions above are suggestive and do not exhaust the concerns of the year-long seminar on climate crisis politics.

Introductory Meeting – September 27, 2022

October 11, 2022

Readings:

- Timothy Mitchell, “Infrastructures Work on Time,” Draft

October 25, 2022

Readings:

- Andreas Folkers, “Fossil modernity: The materiality of acceleration, slow violence, and ecological futures,” *Time & Society*, Vol. 30(2), 2021, pp. 223-246
- Alyssa Battistoni, “No Such Thing as a Free Gift: The Violent Paradoxes of Social Cost,” Draft

November 8, 2022

Readings:

- Lynne Huffer, “The Ethics of Extinction: 99 Anthropocene Fragments,” Draft

November 21, 2022

Readings:

- Heather Davis, “Waiting in Petro-Time”

December 6, 2022

Readings:

- Stefan Eich, *Space Expedience, Horizon of Experimentation*

January 24, 2023

Readings:

- Julia Dehm, “Addressing Loss and Damage: The Unheard Call for Climate Reparations”, “Reconsidering Reparations”, questions

Archive:

- Julia Dehm, “Climate Change, ‘Slow Violence’ and the Indefinite Deferral of Responsibility for ‘Loss and Damage’”
- Sarah Mason-Case and Julia Dehm, Redressing Historical Responsibility for the Unjust Precarities of Climate Change in the Present

February 7, 2023

Readings:

- Maira Hayat, “Never on time: Climate Change and its Third World Problem”

Archive:

- Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.35, No.2 (Winter 2009), pp. 197-222
University of Chicago Press
- Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Planetary Crises and the Difficulty of Being Modern” *Millennium Journal of International Studies* 2018, Vol. 46(3) 259-282
- Maira Hayat, “Price”, *Anthropocene Unseen: A Lexicon*, Punctum Books, 2020.
- Maira Hayat, “Storage as security: Damming water in Pakistan”

February 28, 2023

Readings:

- Nayanika Mathur, “Crooked Cats: Beastly Encounters in the Anthropocene” (introduction and conclusion)

Archive:

- Nayanika Mathur, “Beastly identification in India: The government of big cats in the Anthropocene”
- Nayanika Mathur, “‘It’s a conspiracy theory *and* climate change’: Of beastly encounters and cervine disappearances in Himalayan India”
- Eva Haifa Giraud, “Animal Studies”

March 7, 2023

Readings:

- Kian Goh, “Planet at the End of the City: Climate Changes the Nature of Urban Theory”
- Hillary Angelo, “Infrastructure of Modernity: Hydraulic Society, the Climate Crisis and Trajectories of Social Change”
- Hillary Angelo and Kian Goh, “Out in Space: Difference and Abstraction in Planetary Urbanization”

March 21, 2023

Readings:

- Philippe Le Billion, “Green Extractivism and the Climate Crisis” (draft chapters 1-3,9)

April 11, 2023

Readings:

- Christina Dunbar-Hester, “Oil Lives Matter: Civil Rights and the Appropriative Aesthetics of US Petroleum Supremacy”
- Kim Fortun, James Adams, Tim Schütz, and Scott Gabriel Knowles, “Knowledge infrastructure and research agendas for quotidian Anthropocenes: Critical localism with planetary scope”
- Nanita Vgontzas, “Toward Degrowth: Worker Power, Surveillance Abolition, and Climate Justice at Amazon”

April 25, 2023

Readings:

- David Bond, “St.Croix”

Archives:

- David Bond, Frandelle Gerard, Sommer Sibilly-Brown, Jennifer Valiulis, “Opinion: Refining Reality-What Really Happened Last Year”
- David Bond, “Opinion: Can the Refinery Save St. Croix?”

May 2, 2023

Readings:

- Hillary Angelo, “Boomtown: A solar land rush in the West”
- Julia Dehm, “Reconfiguring Environmental Governance in the Green Economy”

Archives:

- Bill McKibben, “Yes in Our Backyards”
- Phillipe Le Billion, “Crisis conservation and green extraction: biodiversity offsets as spaces of double exception”

III

Film Series

Climate Film Series

In parallel with the seminar, and in collaboration with Librarian Marcia Tucker and the School of Historical Studies, we organized a Film Series, screening fictional films and documentaries from around the world to enrich our discussion.

September 23, 2022

Social Science Introductory Session

September 27, 2022

Writing Seminar with Presentations. Organized by Didier Fassin, James D. Wolfensohn Professor, Social Science

Introductory Meeting for the Climate Crisis Politics Theme Seminar

September 29, 2022

Social Science Welcome Party

October 3, 2022

Social Science Seminar, *The Struggle That Remains: Between World and International** Samera Esmeir, University of California, Berkeley; Member, School of Social Science

October 10, 2022

Social Science Seminar, **Historical Thinking and Transitional Justice: Perspectives from Colombia**

Catalina Muñoz Universidad de los Andes; Member (First Term), School of Social Science

October 11, 2022

Writing Seminar with Presentations

*Organized by Didier Fassin, James D. Wolfensohn Professor, School of Social Science

Climate Crisis Politics Theme Seminar **Infrastructures Work on Time**

Tim Mitchell, Columbia University, Visiting Professor, School of Social Science

October 17, 2022

Social Science Seminar **Homesteading the American Dream**

K-Sue Park, Georgetown University, Member, School of Social Science

October 24, 2022

Social Science Seminar **Urbanizing Climate Justice**

Kian Goh, University of California

October 25, 2022

Writing Seminar with Presentations

*Organized by Didier Fassin, James D. Wolfensohn Professor, School of Social Science

Climate Crisis Politics Theme Seminar **Fossil Modernity, No Such Thing as a Free Gift**, Andreas Folkers, Justus- Liebig University Gießen, and Alyssa Battistoni, Barnard College; Members, School of Social Science

October 31, 2022

Social Science Seminar **The Judge and the Ethnographer: Recounting a Police Killing and Revisiting its Dismissal** Didier Fassin, James D. Wolfensohn Professor, School of Social Science

Climate Fiction Group **Kim Stanley Robinson's The Ministry for the Future** Organized by Hillary Angelo, University of California, Santa Cruz; Member, School of Social Science

November 7, 2022

Social Science Seminar **Moral Autopsy: A Critical Anthropology of Reckoning with the Communist Past in the European East** Saygun Gökarıksel, Bosphorus University; Member, School of Social Science

November 8, 2022

Writing Seminar with Presentations

*Organized by Didier Fassin, James D. Wolfensohn Professor, School of Social Science

November 14, 2022

Social Science Seminar **Power and Light: Public Lands and the Energy Transition** Hillary Angelo, University of California, Santa Cruz; Member School of Social Science

November 21, 2022

Social Science Seminar **Plot** JT Roane, Rutgers University-New Brunswick; Member, School of Social Science

Climate Crisis Politics Theme Seminar *Waiting in Petro- Time* Heather Davis, Emory University; Member, School of Social Science

November 22, 2022

Writing Seminar with Presentations

*Organized by Didier Fassin, James D. Wolfensohn Professor, School of Social Science

November 28, 2022

Experimental Writing Group Organized by Lynne Huffer, Emory University, Member, School of Social Science

November 29, 2022

Social Science Seminar * *The Complacency of the Chinese Dream: Mobility and Citizenship in Fraction* * Minhua Ling, Independent Scholar; Member, School of Social Science

Climate Fiction Group * Pitchaya Sudbanthad's *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* and Donna Haraway's letter to Latour in *Critical Zones* * Organized by Hillary Angelo, University of California, Santa Cruz; Member, School of Social Science

December 5, 2022

Social Science Seminar * *Inhuman Time: The Ethics of Extinction in the Anthropocene* * Lynne Huffer, Emory University; Member, School of Social Science

December 6, 2022

Climate Crisis Politics Theme Seminar * *Space of Expedience, Horizon of Experimentation* * Stefan Eich, Georgetown University; Member, School of Social Science

December 12, 2022

Social Science Seminar * *Odysseus' Scars: Bodies and Borders in the Mediterranean* * Lorenzo Alunni, EHESS-Paris; Member, School of Social Science

January 23, 2023

Social Science Seminar * *The Future of Growth* * Tim Mitchell, Columbia University, Visiting Professor, School of Social Science

January 24, 2023

Climate Crisis Politics Theme Seminar *Space of Expedience, Horizon of Experimentation* Stefan Eich, Georgetown University; Member, School of Social Science

January 30, 2023

Social Science Seminar * *The Cost of Borders* * Heba Gawayed, Boston University; Member, School of Social Science

Experimental Writing Group Organized by Lynne Huffer, Emory University; Member, School of Social Science

February 6, 2023

Social Science Seminar * *Freedom without the Free Gift: Beyond Necessity* * Alyssa Battistoni, Barnard College; Member, School of Social Science

February 7, 2023

Climate Crisis Theme Seminar *Space of Expedience, Horizon of Experimentation*Stefan Eich, Georgetown University; Member, School of Social Science

Climate Fiction Group * Chen Quifan's *Waste Tide* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* * Organized by Nayanika Mathur, University of Oxford; Member, School of Social Science

February 13, 2023

Social Science Seminar * *Reclaiming Narratives of Asian Americans: Immigration, Discrimination, and Affirmative Action* * Jennifer Lee, Columbia University; Member, School of Social Science

Experimental Writing Group Organized by Lynne Huffer, Emory University; Member, School of Social Science

February 21, 2023

Social Science Seminar * *The Price of Democratic Time: Keynes, Credit, and Carbon* * Stefan Eich, Georgetown University; Member, School of Social Science

February 27, 2023

Social Science Seminar * *The Fungible Coast? California Wildlife Conservation in the Space of Empire* * Christina Dunbar-Hester, University of Southern California; Member, School of Social Science

Experimental Writing Group Organized by Lynne Huffer, Emory University; Member, School of Social Science

February 28, 2023

Climate Crisis Theme Seminar *Space of Expedience, Horizon of Experimentation*Stefan Eich, Georgetown University; Member, School of Social Science

March 6, 2023

Social Science Seminar * *Beastly Tales from the Indian Himalaya: an Anthropology for the Anthropocene* * Nayanika Mathur, University of Oxford; Member, School of Social Science

March 7, 2023

Climate Crisis Theme Seminar *Space of Expedience, Horizon of Experimentation*Stefan Eich, Georgetown University; Member, School of Social Science

Climate Cinema Film Series **The Hottest August (Brett Story, 2019)** Discussion with filmmaker, Brett Story

March 13, 2023

Social Science Seminar * *The Material Foundation of Authority: Bureaucracy and Water* * Maira Hayat, University of Notre Dame; Member, School of Social Science

Experimental Writing Group Organized by Lynne Huffer, Emory University; Member, School of Social Science

March 20, 2023

Social Science Seminar * *Petro-time: On the Temporal Politics of Climate Change* * Heather Davis, The New School; Member, School of Social Science

March 21, 2023

Climate Crisis Politics Theme Seminar * Space of Expedience, Horizon of Experimentation * Stefan Eich, Georgetown University; Members, School of Social Science

Climate Cinema Film Series **Woman at War (Benedikt Erlingsson, 2018)* *

March 27, 2023

Social Science Seminar * *Green Extractivism and the Climate Crisis* * Philippe Le Billon, University of British Columbia; Member, School of Social Science

Experimental Writing Group Organized by Lynne Huffer, Emory University; Member, School of Social Science

March 28, 2023

Special Climate Crisis Politics Theme Seminar with Anna Tsing, University of California, Santa Cruz

Public Policy Lecture * *Patchy Anthropocene: The Feral Impacts of Infrastructure* * Anna Tsing, University of California, Santa Cruz

March 29, 2023

Special Seminar * *Patchy Anthropocene: The Feral Impacts of Infrastructure* * Anna Tsing, University of California, Santa Cruz

April 3, 2023

Social Science Seminar * *Power made concrete: The Labor Politics of Decarbonization* * Natasha Iskander, New York University; Member, School of Social Science

April 10, 2023

Social Science Seminar * *The Enclosure of Iraq: Insurgency, Territory, Law* * Sara Pursley, New York University; Member, School of Social Science

Experimental Writing Group Organized by Lynne Huffer, Emory University; Member, School of Social Science

April 11, 2023

Climate Crisis Politics Theme Seminar * Space of Expedience, Horizon of Experimentation * Stefan Eich, Georgetown University; Members, School of Social Science

Climate Cinema Film Series * *Night Moves* (Kelly Reichardt, 2013) *

April 17, 2023

Social Science Seminar * *Fossil modernity. A natural history of the present* * Andreas Folkers, Justus-Liebig University Gießen; Member, School of Social Science

April 24, 2023

Social Science Seminar * *Accounting for Carbon: Targets, Inventories and Risks* * Julia Dehm * La Trobe University; Member, School of Social Science

Experimental Writing Group Organized by Lynne Huffer, Emory University; Member, School of Social Science

April 25, 2023

Climate Crisis Politics Theme Seminar * Space of Expedience, Horizon of Experimentation * Stefan Eich, Georgetown University; Members, School of Social Science

May 1, 2023

Social Science Seminar * *The Predictability Conjecture* * Matthew Salganik * Princeton University; Member, School of Social Science

May 8, 2023

Experimental Writing Group Organized by Lynne Huffer, Emory University;
Member, School of Social Science

May 9, 2023

Climate Cinema Film Series **White Noise* (Noah Baumbach, 2022)*

May 24, 2023

Climate Cinema Film Series **All That Breathes* (Shaunak Sen, 2022)*

June 13, 2023

Climate Cinema Film Series **How To Blow Up a Pipeline* (Daniel Goldhaber, 2023)*



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