gender, justice, and the environment
Yale University, Spring 2015
WGSS 365 / EVST 358
Tuesdays 2:30-4:20pm, LC 103
Professor Vanessa Agard-Jones (vanessa.agard-jones@yale.edu)
Office hours by appointment: http://agardjones.youcanbook.me

course description

What do the massive global crises that humans have wrought in “the age of the Anthropocene” (extinction, pollution, natural resource depletion, and climate change—among others) have to do with bodily-bound ideas about sex, gender, and sexuality?

How have academics and activists understood the relationship between gendered beings (both human and non-human) and the environments in which they live?

What can feminist thinking contribute to visions for environmental justice, at both local and planetary scales?

Building from these essential questions, this course offers a framework for thinking about the intersections between feminist theory and environmental justice. Through readings, discussions, film screenings, and conversations with guest speakers, we will ask questions about the relationships among humans, non-human animals, and the material world in the construction of ideas about the environment and its futures. The main themes to be considered include: feminist theories of nature and materiality, bodies and environmental toxicities, how we might think about interspecies connections, and the sociopolitical contexts of environmental disasters. We approach these questions from the vantage of several different disciplinary traditions, including anthropology, history, science studies, literary criticism, and of course—women’s, gender, and sexuality, as well as queer, studies. Inspired by a growing body of work that reconsiders older ecofeminist interventions and proposes that we think in terms of newer posthuman futures, our critical, interdisciplinary conversations will allow us to investigate the possibilities and challenges of thinking gender in and through the environment.

required texts

- One “material memoir” of your choice:

Additional articles are either linked below (logon through the Yale network) or will be posted to
Course Reserves. Films are available at the Whitney Film Study Center. For those of you without a background in women’s, gender, and sexuality studies (or for those of you who want a refresher), this volume will be on reserve at Bass:


**Assignments and Evaluation**

(All page counts below presume 12-point font, 1” margins, and double-spacing)

*Digital Engagements* 20% (Submit via email, to Prof. A-J + your colleague)

By noon on alternating Mondays you will post at least three contributions to our collective Tumblr: [http://genderjusticeenvironment.tumblr.com](http://genderjusticeenvironment.tumblr.com). Be sure to also include at least three generative tags for each post, including #genderjusticeenviro as a hashtag and your initials.

- REQUIRED: One image or .gif + quote from the reading per week. Must have attribution for image AND quote.
- REQUIRED: One thing you didn’t know/had to do some outside reading to understand from the reading. Crowd-source!
- CHOOSE: One other artifact (or more!) that relates to the reading.

*By noon on alternating Tuesdays* you will write a 2-3pp. response to your colleague’s interventions, cc-ing me.

Feel free to post on weeks that are not your own, if you’re moved to!

NB: Late, incomplete, or underdeveloped submissions will be automatically docked 1 point (of 2).

*Material Memoir Review* 25% (Submit under “Assignments” on Classesv2)

For your midterm project, you will read one of three memoirs on your own: *Body Toxic* (Antonetta), *Refuge* (Williams), or *Full Body Burden* (Iversen). In 7-8 pages, bring your chosen text into conversation with Alaimo’s essay, Steingraber’s memoir/documentary, and at least one other thinker on our syllabus. How do these authors narrativize body burden? What is successful? What is not?

**Due Friday, 6 March at noon.**

*Visualizing Body Burden* 20% (Submit under “Assignments” on Classesv2)

For your final presentation, you will each present a 4-5 minute (and NO LONGER) edited video that derives from, gives us a sense of, and/or sums up your *Body (Auto)Biography*. You must specify which body and environment/s you have chosen to understand, and how gender/sexuality figure into your analysis. Otherwise: anything goes with this! You might create something reflective or documentary or animated or conceptual or didactic—or some mash-up thereof. Your work will be assessed entirely upon how creatively and imaginatively you use this medium to develop an engaging and informative presentation about how we might visualize body burden. If you need help with this project beyond our in-class workshop, contact media.techs@yale.edu to set up an appointment with a Media Tech in Bass Library. More resources here: [http://www.yale.edu/bassmedialab](http://www.yale.edu/bassmedialab)

In order to submit your video for evaluation and screening, you will upload it to Youtube, then send me the link to your project. Please opt for an “unlisted” rather than a “private” status if you choose to limit access to your video. The difference is parsed here.

**Due Monday, 20 April at noon.** (Submit for WIP workshop: Friday, 3 April at noon.)
Narrativizing Body Burden: 25% (Submit under “Assignments” on Classesv2)

For your final project, you will submit a Body (Auto)Biography: your own attempt at narrativizing body burden. In this assignment you will consider a body (your own, or someone else’s) and its relationship to the various environments with/in which it has lived. While the format of this narrative is open, you must specify which body and environment/s you have chosen to understand, and how gender/sexuality figure into your analysis. In 10-12 tightly crafted pages, your task is to mobilize our readings as well as your own external research to write a deeply contextualized history of a body’s multiscalar entanglements with the world.

Recommended Reading:
- Dumit, Joe. “Writing the Implosion: Teaching the World One Thing at a Time.” Cultural Anthropology 29, no. 2 (2014)

Due Friday, 1 May at noon. (Submit for WIP workshop: Friday, 10 April at noon.)

Class Participation 10%

Attendance at class sessions and informed participation in discussions are requirements for both your individual and our collective success in this course. This also includes engagement with our speakers and on our field trips. Anything beyond one unexcused absence must be explained (or forewarned) in writing, accompanied by a Dean’s Excuse.

course policies

*Academic Integrity: If you have any questions about what might constitute plagiarism, please don’t hesitate to ask. A shorthand definition is this: the submission of written work that either is (or contains samples of) work that is not your own and lacks recognizable citations. If you have questions about how to cite sources, please see me during my office hours. One resource for you is Yale’s statement on academic honesty. I ask that all students take the Writing Center’s Plagiarism Quiz (and take note of conventions for citing sources) by the end of the first week of term.

*Attendance: Punctual (and faithful) attendance, as well as active participation in class discussions, are requirements for both your individual and our collective success in this course. You must submit a Dean’s Excuse to secure an excused absence or authorization to submit late work. Incompletes will not be granted, except in extraordinary circumstances. Students are responsible for any material missed due to absence from class. If any course assignments are difficult to fulfill because of conflicts with days of observance, please let me know to make alternative arrangements.

*Classroom Community: This course will take on challenging questions about gender, sex, and sexuality, and we will endeavor to discuss both the course materials and our responses to them in a candid manner. In this community of thinkers demonstrating your maturity will be paramount, as will an agreement to respect our classroom as a productive space for expression, respectful challenge, and careful critique. As we attempt to work and speak across our differences, I ask that you contribute your ideas in a mode that seeks to advance our conversations. As you participate, you should think not only about your own contributions, but also about the overall classroom dynamic: who is speaking more, who less? How might you contribute to an atmosphere that enables everyone to participate meaningfully?
*Required Readings: All of our weekly readings should be completed (and digested!) before our class meetings. Come prepared to lay out the authors' basic arguments and key points, as well as to answer any questions posed to structure your reading. Also be prepared to tell us what you think about what you've read: have an opinion! I expect that you read critically, that is, with an eye to the assumptions, claims, and conclusions of the authors. In other words, I expect you to derive from your reading not simply a knowledge of its content, but also the ways in which these authors understand and work with broader concepts. As the semester progresses, you will be encouraged to draw earlier readings into your written work and class discussions. My strong suggestion is that you take notes on the materials you read to aid you in this task.

*Technology: This is your chance to unplug from the multitasking grind—use it! Silence your mobile phones before entering our classroom. Laptops and tablets are permitted, but only for use as an aid in note-taking and other course related activities—i.e. for purposes that advance rather than obstruct our collective goals. Non-course-related email, IM-ing, social networking, etc. are not acceptable uses of technology in our classroom. Prepare to have your class participation evaluation suffer should these be the uses to which you put your tech devices.

resources

*Office Hours: I will be available to meet with students by appointment. Sign up for a slot here.

*Communication: Please feel free to send me questions via email; I will attempt to respond to all electronic communication sent Monday-Thursday within 24 hours. Do be mindful of appropriate standards for professional communication (modes of address, formal writing conventions, etc.) when you drop a line. You don’t have to have an earth-shaking reason to communicate with me—in fact, I welcome feedback on how our class is going or conversations about topics that we haven’t had time to address during class.

*Accessibility: Yale College’s Resource Office on Disabilities facilitates accommodations for students with documented disabilities. You can find more information on their services here. Beyond that office’s specific interventions, I am committed to principles of universal learning, meaning that I strive to make our seminar experience as inclusive as possible. Please talk to me about your individual learning needs and about how this course can best accommodate them.

*Writing Assistance: You have a variety of resources available to you to support you in your writing, including your peers/colleagues, your residential college’s Writing Tutor, and the Writing Partners at the Yale College Writing Center. Use these resources! Do. Not. Submit. A. First. Draft… Ever.

course outline

introductions
13 January

Film Screening: *American Experience: Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring* (1993)
a (north american) origin story
20 January
Group A posts/Group B responds

from ecofeminism to feminisms in the anthropocene
27 January
Group B posts/Group A responds
Recommended:

3 February
Group A posts/Group B responds

toxic bodies + big chemical
10 February
Group B posts/Group A responds
Workshop: Gwyneth Crowley, Yale University Libraries, on our course guide/final projects

17 February
Group A posts/Group B responds
Guest lecture: Professor Nicole Deziel, on exposure science + environmental health

SPECIAL EVENTS 18, 19, 20 February: Dipesh Chakrabarty at the Whitney Humanities Center.

**narrativizing body burden**
24 February
Group B posts/Group A responds
Workshop: Edward O'Neill, Yale University Libraries, on visual communication

SPECIAL EVENT 25 February: Lisa Paravisini-Gebert at the Whitney Humanities Center, 5pm.

3 March
NO POSTS/RESPONSES

Film Screening: *Living Downstream* First Run Features (2010)

**inter-species entanglements**
24 March
Group A posts/Group B responds
Guest lecture: David Skelly, Peabody Museum, on amphibian intersex
MEET AT GREELEY LAB, Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies
• Hayes, Tyrone B. "There Is No Denying This: Defusing the Confusion About Atrazine." Bioscience 54, no. 12 (2004): 1138-1149.

31 March
Group B posts/Group A responds
• Zimmer, Carl. “Can Hermaphrodites Teach Us What It Means to be Male?” This View of Life, January 4, 2015.

7 April
Group A posts/Group B responds
Workshop: Visualizing Body Burden, Works in Progress

posthuman futures?
14 April
Group B posts/Group A responds
Workshop: Narrativizing Body Burden, Works in Progress
• Adams, Carol J. "Why Feminist-Vegan Now?" Feminism & Psychology 20, no. 3 (2010)

final conversations
21 April
NO POSTS/RESPONSES
Presentations: Visualizing Entanglement, Imagining Justice
Guest Respondent/s TBA