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What's Wrong with the World? What Can We Do about It? (INT 133B)  
Perspectives and Solutions from the Environmental Humanities and Social Sciences

This course is an experiment. It begins with the assumption that global climate change is real and that its causes are anthropogenic (i.e. human caused). Consequently, solutions will not be just technological, or even mostly so, but will also need to involve profound changes to human beliefs, practices, and styles of life. The difficulty in bringing this about is not only that a broad swathe of Americans deny that our climate is changing, even if this is acknowledged, the causes and solutions to the problem are being fiercely debated on the public stage. It has also, sadly, become a political issue dividing our nation. This course will carefully look at the rhetoric of these debates.

Together, we will piece together and analyze contemporary political and environmental discourses to begin addressing this rhetoric. To do so, we will abandon the traditional instructional model. This is not merely a syllabus setting out an "agenda" for the class: it is a tentative blueprint for our collective investigation of contemporary problems and their potential solutions.

Essential to this project is a collaborative model of discovering, curating, and analyzing material on the following factors of anthropogenic climate change.

*Week 1,*

Wednesday: Introduction  
Thursday: Film: *Before the Flood*

*Week 2, Energy, Part I: Fossil Fuels*

Wednesday: 1) Coal & 2) Oil  
Thursday: 1) Natural Gas, Fracking & 2) Other fossil fuel issues (Tar Sands, Pipelines, etc.)

*Week 3, Energy, Part II: Renewables & Nuclear*

Wednesday: 1) Wind (onshore, offshore, & decentralized) & 2) Solar (rooftop & commercial solar farms)  
Thursday: 1) Hydropower, Geothermal & 2) Nuclear

*Week 4, Cultural, Part I*

Wednesday: 1) Plant-based diet & 2) Food Waste  
Thursday: 1) Transportation (mass transportation, electric cars, pedalecs, etc.) &  
2) Housing (McMansions, micro apartments, eco-villages, etc.)

*Week 5, Cultural, Part II*

Wednesday: 1) Personal Consumables (clothing, consumer electronics, etc.) & 2) Cities  
Thursday: 1) Family Planning, Education (esp. of women), the Population/Consumption relationship &  
2) Land use (tropical and temperate forests, peatlands, afforestation, regenerative agriculture, etc.)

*Week 6, Conclusion*

Wednesday: Conclusion  
Thursday: Conclusion

In this course, we will be critically reading a variety of contemporary texts that deal with the issue of climate change. In the process, we will be honing our skills as critical, active readers. One of the keys to effective reading, regardless of whether the text at hand is a Victorian novel or content on a website, is that the process be active. When reading for pleasure, it is perfectly fine to enter into an imaginative world and just enjoy your time there. However, in reading critically—which is, or at least should be, an essential skill taught in university literature departments—it is necessary to carefully consider what an author and text are doing. Authors have enormous power, as they can, one word at a time, influence each step of a reader's experience of a text. In this sense, an author is like a guide walking you through what may be unknown territory. They not only decide what you see (and don't) and when you see it, they are also in a position to influence how you see it through their careful representations. The more skillful the author, the more power they have over the representation and hence also over the reader. (Note that for our purposes a "text" can be a written work (like on a website), a photograph or painting, a film or video, a musical composition, or a range of additional creations and that any of these can be "read" in our sense of being actively studied.)

*Obligations: Class Participation 20%, Presentation 30%, Bibliography 20%, Final Project 30%*

*Participation:* In this course, we will address a variety of media and texts dealing with complex, contemporary environmental issues. As such, participation in class discussion and activities are required of all students. You should come to class ready to discuss the material that your classmates have distributed by Gauchospace. All comments and questions should demonstrate consideration and respect for the other students in the class. Your participation grade will consider your attendance (see below), your contribution to class discussion, and the quality of your engagement with the material. Daring, risky, and insightful comments are all welcome; use section as a place to test your ideas and interpretive methodologies. To earn an A in Participation you will: have consistently done the reading, regularly speak in class to share thoughts, actively engage with comments made by your classmates, and be on time to every class. In short, you should demonstrate your sustained engagement in the course.

*Collaborative Presentation:* typical class consists of two 20- minute presentations followed by discussion. *Each person will be responsible for one 20- minute presentation in the course of the term.*

Your presentations should distill the most important information from the bibliography. It should include handouts or an audio/visual presentation. In small, 2-student teams we will research, analyze, and offer presentations on our findings. Beginning in the second week, each team will present on one of the above topics. Each team will have the following tasks:

- 1) Each team member should research the issue and generate their own bibliography (see below) to be shared on Gauchospace. The bibliography should be eclectic, containing news sources, blog-posts, videos, movies, etc.
- 2) From that bibliography, select the most interesting items to circulate to the class 48 hours before the "discussion" classes and email them to Sydney. Ideally, this list will be short (~6 items) and attest to the diversity of your findings, both in terms of political position but also source and media. Please select one—and no more than one—of these sources that you would like the entire class to read and mark this with an asterisk (\*). Note that each team member should be creating their own bibliography.
- 3) Present your findings to the class in a brief (~20 minute per person) presentations and as a team offer the class some opening questions.

Each team will make a 40-minute joint presentation (consisting of one 20-minute presentation by each of the two team members) on each of these components.

Person 1) Advocating for the position and its rhetorical approach.

Person 2) Present the counter position and its rhetorical approach.

Notes:

- 1) Even though the 20-minute presentations are individual projects, the two team members should meet and consult in order to orchestrate a more effective overall presentation.

2) Feel free to creatively structure the presentations and to think of them as performances if you like. In other words, you can either simply layout the position (i.e. "this is why coal is problematic...") or give your presentation a performative element ("I, like our great President Donald Trump, believe that coal is our future...").

*Bibliography:* The bibliography will serve as a record of each groups' collective research. As you begin, you should keep in mind three guidelines: breadth of media, diversity of opinion, and impact. At minimum, your bibliography should contain 10 items.

*Breadth of media:* The rhetorical and discursive strategies central to environmental activism and policy appear in films, novels, poems, blogs, newspapers, pamphlets, tweets, Facebook posts—the list goes on. Your bibliography should be attentive to how each of these media offer different rhetorical opportunities. At minimum, your bibliography should contain items from five (5) different media (e.g. at least one item from a Blog, a New York Times article, a documentary film, a poem, and a white paper from a think-tank).

*Diversity of opinion:* This class begins from the premise—supported by the overwhelming majority of scientists—that climate change is real, and human caused. Because this class is about the cultural construction and rhetorical deployment of a diversity of environmental views and claims, your bibliography should reflect this political spectrum. While it is not necessary to capture the entire spectrum of opinion on, say, solar energy, your bibliography should at minimum have items that are for and against solar.

*Impact:* When selecting items to include on the bibliography, be attentive to how they have impacted the broader discussion. For instance, if you are want to select a "Twitter war" between an activists and deniers, a Twitter account with many followers (say, Bernie Sanders or Earth First! combating Breitbart News) is better than your friend arguing with their uncle.

*Essay/Final Project:* The essay is the most exhaustive, complete document of your findings. Each student will write an essay of their own. While only eight (8) pages in length, you should attempt to give your reader a sense of the rhetorical situation across multiple media platforms. Your emphasis should not be on "proving" one side or the other— after all, climate change is real. Rather, you should attempt to understand the logical and rhetorical positions taking by all sides of a debate, and then offer a compelling synthesis of the data. Note that you need not focus on themes from either of your presentations, as your essay can take up any of the issues raised in class. Creative projects are encouraged.

### Tips for Active Reading

Below are some initial things to consider when actively approaching a text. While it may seem that investigative digging of this sort is not something that we normally do in literary analysis, it is in fact one of its cornerstones. For example, knowing that the author of a Victorian novel was an outspoken racist or misogynist can be of great help in approaching the text. Conveniently, literary scholars have already done much of this work for many of the texts that we read in literature programs. In the case of the works for this class, however, this obligation falls to you, as you will often be taking on the role of lead critical reader. Here are five things to initially consider:

1. *Author.* What do we know about the author or authors of a text? While it can only take a minute (literally) to do an online search to learn about a person, the results can be revealing. Do they have expertise in the area? What are their credentials? Do they seem credible? What else have they written? Where have their other texts appeared? What are their affiliations (groups or companies with which they may be involved)? Are they funded? If so, by whom? Finally, do we even know the author? If not, then many of these questions can be addressed to the publication venue.
2. *Publication.* What do we know about the place (periodical, website, publishing house, etc.) where the text appeared? As with learning about the author, a quick online search can be eye-opening. For example, is a publication or website sponsored by, or affiliated with, a particular group or organization (as this can be somewhat unclear, you might have to do some investigative digging)? If sponsored, does the sponsor have a vested interest in this subject? What other sort of texts does the venue publish? Is there anything that links the various texts that appear in this publication? What do you know about the reputation of the publication? For example, while both the *Wall Street Journal* and *Los Angeles Times* are major newspapers, the former is generally politically conservative while the later tends toward the liberal.

3. *Audience*. Most authors (and publications) have an imagined audience, which is the group that they both imagine will read them and hope will be moved in some way by what they read. Speculate, what is the imagined audience of the text at hand? Does it seem likely to influence this group? Why or why not? Specifically, how is the text vectored toward this audience?
4. *Supervision*. Has the text been vetted in any way? For example, major publication houses employ seasoned editors to carefully scrutinize books before publication. Major newspapers do the same and go one step further by having fact-checkers carefully research each article's claim and reference. Similarly, scholarly texts are generally peer-reviewed before appearing in print. In contrast, many blogs are entirely written by a single person without any oversight.
5. *References*. Does the author(s) supply a list of references or refer to other works? Are the references credible? Who are the authors of these references and where do they appear? Are the references appropriate? In other words, does the reference in fact support what the author claims? Authors will sometimes reference a very credible source but it may have little or nothing to do with their argument. As with the author and publication, some digging into the references may be necessary.

Authors can use a variety of different techniques and appeals to sway or influence readers. Here are ten to be on the lookout for:

1. *Commonsense*. Be wary of appeals to commonsense when not supported by facts. An example would be the argument that because meteorologists cannot accurately forecast weather even a week or two in advance it thus follows that attempting to predict climate change decades in the future is simply impossible. Even a cursory look into the subject reveals that climate modeling and meteorology are separate fields with completely different methodologies. As a careful reader, your job is to look into such facts.
2. *Logic*. Be careful not to be swayed by logical fallacies, such as confusing correlation for causality. For example, most children in the U.S. showing signs of autism have received a series of disease immunizations. This simple *correlation* does not prove that these immunizations are the *cause* of autism. In fact, study after study has shown that immunizations are in no way causally related to autism.
3. *Emotion*. Authors will often make appeals to emotion as much as they do to logic and reason. Is this being done? Why? What is gained? How, exactly, are emotions being leveraged by the author?
4. *Facts*. An author will often make a number of statements of fact. Are they in fact facts? How do you know? Can they be corroborated? A little online searching should reveal if they are accurate or not.
5. *Inclusions*. Why has the author(s) included what they have? Do the inclusions all line up in support of the author's position? If so, it may suggest that they are being cherry-picked in order to support the position.
6. *Emphasis*. Related to what an author includes is what they emphasize. How and why has the author emphasized what they have? Specifically, what do they gain by this maneuver?
7. *Omissions*. What has the author(s) omitted? In some cases, omissions can be glaring. Often, however, it will again require some digging to find what the author desires to keep in the dark.
8. *Downplaying*. Related to omissions, authors will sometimes mention a glaring issue only to downplay its significance. What is the author downplaying and why? Is this maneuver successful?
9. *Misdirection*. Is the author staying on point or directing you to something else?
10. *Conspiracy*. Be cautious of conspiracy and other oddball theories that help make an author's case. For example, the notion that climate change is a hoax perpetrated by China in order to become more competitive in the world market or by liberals in the U.S. to give more power to the federal government. These theories have no factual support. For example, it has never been shown that China is either directly producing climate change denial literature or is funding it indirectly. To the contrary, the primary producers of this literature are conservative U.S. groups that generally take a strong stand against China.