



U niversiteit Stellenbosch

• Stellenbosch University

**Departement Sosiologie & Sosiale Antropologie •
Department of Sociology & Social Anthropology**

Honours/MAPSA elective (2022)

**CRITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS:
PUBLIC SOCIOLOGIES & ANTHROPOLOGIES IN A WORLD OF CRISIS**

We live in a world of multiple and overlapping crises. or what Joseph Masco refers to as “crises within crises” and others describe as “nested crises”. This course aims to examine how we can better understand the concept of ‘crisis’ in relation to a number of contemporary spectacular and chronic problems, including racialised inequality, structural poverty and unemployment, violence, war, disease (Covid-19, Ebola etc), climate change and so on. What is becoming increasingly clear is that countries with poor infrastructural systems are likely to experience climate change – floods, cyclones, storms, droughts, diseases, heat waves etc - in much more devastating ways. So how should we be thinking about vital infrastructures in a time of planetary crisis and everyday life in a ‘broken world’.

The Marxist and Postcolonial scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty has noted that his academic training and intellectual background did not prepare him for the kinds of social, economic, and political questions that have been thrown up by the multiple, planetary-scale crises of the Anthropocene/Capitalocene. It is quite possible to say the same about the challenges of Covid-19 and so many other crises currently unfolding. This module will expose you to readings by public intellectuals, anthropologists, and sociologists, with different perspectives and understandings of development, growth, infrastructure and the environmental/climate crises that the planet currently faces. The course will focus on how anthropology and sociology can engage with these challenges in the public domain. It will also engage with different ways of writing about public issues, including academic and popular styles and genres of representation.

You will need to make sure you come to class having **read the required readings: 2-3 of the yellow highlighted readings and an additional one of your own choice.** Do not feel intimidated by the number of readings as they are there to give you exposure to a wider literature. Come to class prepared with questions and issues that you would like to raise for discussion. This class depends upon active participation and critical engagement.

For some of you who may have already done SA354: Anthropology of Development, some of the issues examined in this module may be familiar. However, we will be investigating these concerns in much more depth, and there are a number of new readings that will help to facilitate this deeper engagement.

Assessment information:

You will need to come to class prepared to discuss the readings. For **each session**, you will need to hand in an 800-word assignment in op. ed. newspaper style format (1.15 spacing, Times New Roman, font 12). These assignments will need to include at least **three of the long readings** (the course outline also has many short articles from popular publications such as op ed newspaper articles). There is a second version of the course outline that contains numerous useful additional readings, please consult this. All submissions will need to be tightly edited and carefully proofread, and in a format and writing style that could be submitted to a newspaper or journal for publication.

You are advised to closely examine examples of the writing styles of The Jacobin, <https://www.africasacountry.com> The Conversation, Limn, Somatosphere, Public Anthropology (in the American Ethnologist), and The Guardian op eds. Etc (see list below). While the style of writing you follow will not be prescribed, your submission will need to demonstrate a clear and logical line of argument backed up with evidence and proper referencing. The assignments will also need to demonstrate an engagement with styles of writing that straddle both academic and “popular” styles and genres.

You will also need to come to each session prepared with ‘talking points’ that address key themes in the readings, and these will be used to generate discussion in the class. All assignments (the 800-word assignment and the talking points) will be submitted **electronically to SunLearn before 9:00 on Thursdays**). They should be more than simply summaries of the readings. Instead, the talking points and the 800-word assignments need to critically engage with the key themes addressed in the readings and the module.

Evaluation Breakdown:

- For each lecture you will need to submit a 800 word op-ed. All of these submissions will count **10%** of your final grade, respectively. = **70%**
- The final essay will count **20%** of your final grade.
- The last 10% of your grade will be determined by your class participation (**5%**) and the talking points that you submit (**5%**). = **10%**

Class Schedule:

Lecture 1: Thursday (21st July 2022) @ 09:30-12:00

The crisis of capitalist growth, again: Degrowth in an age of ecological crisis

Lecture Question:

Rostow’s “Stages of Economic Growth” concept captured an unbridled confidence in the mid-20th century capitalist development paradigm and its notion of limitless economic growth. Although these ideas remain deeply influential, new thinking about ‘degrowth’ has emerged in recent years to address the catastrophic environmental problems (climate crisis, mass extinction etc). This lecture will address these competing ideas of economic growth and degrowth. What

are the challenges that degrowth thinking faces in attempting to convey its ideas to wider publics?

Required reading:

Rostow, W.W. 1960. *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Chapter 2, pp.4-16)

Hickel, J. 2020. "Introduction" and Part I (Ch1-3). *Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World*.

Hickel, J. 2020. Part II (Ch 4-6). *Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World* - read as much as you can.

Review of Hickel's *Less is More*: <https://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue/issue-31/less-more-how-degrowth-will-save-world>

The IPCC Fact Sheet:

2021 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Regional fact sheet - Africa

2021 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report on Climate Change for Policymakers: Summary of the Physical Science Basis

"A Hotter Future Is Certain, Climate Panel Warns. But How Hot Is Up to Us", *New York Times*, August, 2021. <https://nyti.ms/3rZG2YU>

"World's climate scientists to issue stark warning over global heating threat", *The Guardian*, August, 2021.

https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/aug/08/worlds-climate-scientists-to-issue-stark-warning-over-global-heating-threat?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Email

Additional readings:

Hickel, Jason (2018). "Is it possible to achieve a good life for all within planetary boundaries?" *Third World Quarterly*, <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ctwq20>

Mike Davis, 2018. "The case for letting Malibu burn." <https://longreads.com/2018/12/04/the-case-for-letting-malibu-burn/> Excerpted from *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* by Mike Davis. 1998. Published by Metropolitan Books.

Lecture 2: Thursday (28th July 2022) @ 09:30-12:00

'A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None': Confronting the crises

Lecture Question:

In the introduction to the course, it was noted that Dipesh Chakrabarty acknowledges that his academic training and intellectual background did not prepare him for the kinds of social, economic, and political questions that have been thrown up by the multiple, planetary-scale crises of the Anthropocene/Capitalocene. What are these challenges and how do scholars such as Dipesh Chakrabarty and Katherine Yusoff seek to address them? How do we understand this new

geological era, and are terms such as Anthropocene, Capitalocene, the Plantationocene etc adequate for understanding the state we're in?

- Yusoff, K. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. 2018. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Chakrabarty, D. 2009. "The Climate of History: Four Theses." *Critical inquiry* 35:197-222.
- Chakrabarty, D. 2021. "Introduction". *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Moore, J.W. 2016. Introduction and Ch.3. Jason W. Moore ed. *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History and the Crisis of Capitalism*. Kairos. Read as much as you can.
- Fraser, N. "Climates of Capital: For a Trans-Environmental Eco-Socialism." *New Left Review* 127 January 2021.

Additional readings, films and YouTube interviews

Malm, A. and A. Hornborg, 2014. The geology of mankind? A critique of the Anthropocene narrative. *The Anthropocene Review*, Vol. 1(1) 62-69.

Maslin and Lewis, 'Why the Anthropocene began with European colonialisation'
<https://theconversation.com/why-the-anthropocene-began-with-european-colonisationmass-slavery-and-the-great-dying-of-the-16th-century-140661>

Welcome to the Anthropocene: <http://www.anthropocene.info/short-films.php>

Latour, Bruno. 'Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene', *New Literary History* 2014, 45: 1-18.

Latour, Bruno, 2014. "Anthropology at the Time of the Anthropocene – a personal view of what is to be studied."

[Lecture 3: Thursday \(4th August 2022\) @ 9:30-12:00](#)

The art of noticing: Living in a world of 'slow violence' & multiple, overlapping crises

Assignment: How should we think about the concept of "crisis" in a world of multiple, overlapping including Covid-19, climate change, wars, structural racism and poverty, financial crises etc? Rob Nixon discusses the challenges of trying to render the "slow violence" of environmental disasters politically legible in a world where it is the instant media spectacle (war, natural disasters, dramatic violence etc) that draws the attention of governments, journalists and citizens. Nixon challenges us to think about how to engage conventional media and academic ways of representing "crises" in a world where millions of people, especially in the global South, experience long-term, enduring and intersecting, "chronic crises" on a daily basis?

Required readings:

Baumgardt, L and S. Robins, “Crises within Crisis: South Africa’s Governmental Responses to Covid-19 in Times of ‘Slow Crises’” (forthcoming)

- Masco, J. “Crisis in Crisis”. In Hetherington, K. (ed). 2019. *Infrastructure, Environment and Life in the Anthropocene*.
- Arundhati Roy The Pandemic is a Portal <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca?What>
- Nixon, R., 2011. ‘Introduction’. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. New Haven: Harvard University Press. You can also look for reviews of the book to give you a sense of responses to Nixon’s key concept: slow violence.
- Barlow, Matt & Georgina Drew (2020), “Slow infrastructures in times of crisis: unworking speed and convenience”, *Postcolonial Studies*. To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2020.1804105>
- Robins, S. “Beyond the emergency: Slow catastrophes after Covid-19.” <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-04-20-beyond-the-emergency-slowcatastrophes-after-covid-19/#gsc.tab=0>

Millington, N. and S. Scheba, “Day Zero and the Infrastructures of Climate Change: Water Governance, Inequality and Infrastructural Politics in Cape Town’s Water Crisis”. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research. Open Access Journal*

Additional readings

- Hendrik Vigh. “Crisis and Chronicity: Anthropological Perspectives on Continuous Conflict and Decline.” *Ethnos*, Vol. 73:1, March 2008 (pp.5-24).
- Davies, T. 2019. Slow violence and toxic geographies: Out of sight, to whom? *Politics and Space*, 0(0): 1-19.
- Satgar, V. 2021. “The Other Side of Ecocide”. <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/survivance/399213/the-other-side-of-ecocide/>
- Organ, H. 2016. Flint, Environmental Racism, and Racial Capitalism. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 27(3): 1-16.
- Purdy, J. 2015. “Environmentalism’s Racist History”. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/environmentalisms-racist-history>
- Fennell, C. Are we all flint? Available: <https://limn.it/articles/are-we-all-flint/>
- *Ahmann, C. Waste to Energy: Garbage prospects and subjunctive politics in late-industrial Baltimore. *American Ethnologist*, 46(3): 328-342.

- **YouTube interviews & lectures**

- Matthew Gandy May 2021 Colloquium “Urban Natures in the Anthropocene”. Rachel Carson Center
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7OVIR1ZjNQ&ab_channel=RachelCarsonCenter
- Ash Amin, On “Lively Infrastructures”. Harvard 2015.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYi02XvwJi8&ab_channel=bb2040
- Ash Amin, DIAGNOSE! Interview series with German students from TU-Berlin on urban natures, infrastructures and political ecology.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWIICtQf4CI&ab_channel=bb2040

Lecture 4: Thursday (4th August 2022) @ 9:30-12:00

Infrastructure breakdown and repair in a ‘broken world’

Assignment: Make use of the readings for this lecture, plus any additional course readings, to write an 800-word newspaper-style op ed article that engages with questions of infrastructural breakdown and repair in a ‘broken world’ (Jackson, 2014). Feel free to focus on a topic that interests you but make sure you refer to at least 3 of the readings below

Required readings

- Larkin, B. 2013. “The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42: 327–343. (this is a very comprehensive review article on the anthropology and politics of infrastructure for those who are not familiar with this literature)
- Graham, S and N Thrift. (2007). “Out of Order. Understanding Repair and Maintenance”. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24(3), 1-25.
- Jackson, S. (2014). “Rethinking Repair”. In: T Gillespie, P Boczkowski, K Foot (Eds.) *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, Cambridge/MA: MIT Press.
- Anand, N. (2020). “After Breakdown: Invisibility and the Labour of Infrastructure Maintenance.” *Review of Urban Affairs* Vol. 55, Issue No. 51.
- Howe, C, Lockrem, J, Appel, H, Hackett, E, Boyer, D, Hall, R, Schneider-Mayerson, M, Pope, A, Gupta, A, Rodwell, E, Ballestero, A, Durbin, T, el-Dahdah, F, Long, E, Mody, C. (2016). “Paradoxical Infrastructures: Ruins, Retrofit, and Risk”. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 1-19.
- Schwenkel, C. 2015. “Spectacular infrastructure and its breakdown in socialist Vietnam.” *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 42, No. 3, pp. 520–534.

- Thieme, 2021. T. A. “Beyond repair: Staying with breakdown at the interstices”. *EPD: Society and Space* 0(0) 1–

Additional readings on infrastructure

- Schwenkel, C. 2020. *Building Socialism: The Afterlife of East German Architecture in Urban Vietnam*. Durham and London: University of Duke Press.
- Hetherington, Kregg, ed. 2019. *Infrastructure, Environment and Life in the Anthropocene*. “Introduction”.
- Redfield, Peter. 2021. “Shacktopia: The Meantime Future of Humanitarian Design.” *Journal of Social Anthropology*.
- Redfield, P. and Robins, S. 2016. “An index of waste: humanitarian design, ‘dignified living’ and the politics of infrastructure in Cape Town.” *Anthropology Southern Africa* 39(2): 145-162.
- Redfield, P. and S. Robins. 2021. “Toilet Trouble: Eco Design and Sedimented Injustice in South Africa. In Richard Rottenburg et al. *A Reader on Travelling Technologies in Africa*. Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WiSER), University of Witwatersrand, South Africa (in press)
- Appel, H., Anand, N. and Gupta, A. 2015. “Introduction: The Infrastructure Toolbox”. [online]. *Cultural Anthropology* [online]. Available at: <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/714-introduction-the-infrastructure-toolbox> (Accessed 12 July 2017).
- Vinsel, R. 2016. Hail the maintainers. Aeon < <https://aeon.co/essays/innovation-is-overvalued-maintenance-often-matters-more>> (Accessed 5 September 2016).
- Masco, J. 2005. The Billboard Campaign: The Los Alamos Study Group and the Nuclear Public Sphere. *Public Culture*, 17(3): 487-496.
- Redfield, P. On band-aids and magic bullets. *Limn*, 9. Available: <https://limn.it/articles/on-band-aids-and-magic-bullets/>

Lecture 5: Thursday (18th August 2022) @ 9:30-12:00

Infrastructure and activism:

Required reading and see below for readings on the case studies

- Chu, J (2014). When infrastructures attack: The workings of disrepair in China. *American Ethnologist*, 41(2), 351-367

- Maharawal, Manissa. (2021). Infrastructural Activism: Google Bus Blockades, Affective Politics, and Environmental Gentrification in San Francisco. *Antipode*. 10.1111/anti.12744.
- Steven Robins, 2014 “Slow activism in fast times: reflections on the mass media after apartheid.” *Journal for Southern African Studies* Vol. 40, No. 1, 91–110.
- Ahmann, Chloe. 2018. “‘It’s exhausting to create an event out of nothing’: Slow Violence and the Manipulation of Time.” *Cultural Anthropology* 33 (1): 142–171. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca33.1.06>.
- Anand, N. 2011. “Pressure: The PoliTechnics of Water Supply in Mumbai.” *Cultural Anthropology* 26(4):542-564.
- Robins, S. (2019). ‘Day Zero’, Hydraulic Citizenship and the Defence of the Commons in Cape Town: A Case Study of the Politics of Water and its Infrastructures (2017–2018). *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 45(1), 5–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2019.1552424>.
- e-flux Blog articles: coloniality of infrastructure, e.g. <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/coloniality-infrastructure/411239/infrastructures-and-the-ontological-question-of-race/>
- Simone, A. (2015). “Afterword: Come on out, you're surrounded: The between of infrastructure.” *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 19(2-3), 375-383, doi: 10.1080/13604813.2015.1018070.

Additional reading

Cirolia, L, N. Ngwenya, B. Christianson, S. Scheba, “Retrofitting, repurposing and replacing: A multi-media exploration of occupation in Cape Town, South Africa.” *Next General Planning*, Open Access Journal.

Lecture 6: Thursday (25th August 2022) @ 9:30-12:00

Smart infrastructures & smart cities

Required readings:

- Baumgardt, L, S. Rabie, S. Robins and M. Wingfield, “Buried Archives: Civic Activism, Cultural Heritage, and Public Participation Discourses at the Amazon Mega-Development in Cape Town”, unpublished work-in-progress.
- See case study readings below
- Zukin, S. 2020. *The Innovation Complex: Cities, Tech, and the New Economy*. New York: Oxford University Press. “Introduction.”

- Bank, L. 2022. *Placing the Smart City: Innovation and Inclusive Urban Development in South Africa*. ECSECC policy research monograph (read the introduction by Bank and any other chapters)
- Orit Halpern, Jesse LeCavalier, Nerea Calvillo, and Wolfgang Pietsch 2013. “Test- Bed Urbanism”. *Public Culture* 25:2
- Also have a look at the work of Orit Halpern - <https://d4disruptingdesign.net/>
<https://speculativelife.com/orit-halpern> ;

Assignment: Drawing on readings from the course, write an op. ed.-like document that discusses what is at stake in the tensions between ‘smart city’ infrastructures and development and the protection of public green space and the environment. In this assignment you can also reflect on the kinds of activist and media narratives, lines of argument, writing styles and tropes used by these activists fighting against development. In your talking points and the assignment draw on at least three of the readings below.

Case Study readings on the Amazon Development in the Two Rivers Urban Park (TRUP) in Cape Town

(Read at least 3-4 of these short newspaper op ed readings and look at the website and Public Lecture by Leslie London)

- Jens Horber, “Before the flood: What’s really going on at the River Club and why it’s the wrong place.” Daily Maverick, 4 August 2021.
<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-08-04-before-the-flood-whats-really-going-on-at-the-river-club-and-why-its-in-the-wrong-place/?fbclid=IwAR1kXur-9YwIGszmZ8R2R0MNNf89QIPb-GwRtD8TdH2EUrOiqJF1JBlu6Js>
- Robins, S. 2021. “Amazon in Africa: A walk through history in the Two Rivers Urban Park.” 16 December 2020. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-12-16-amazon-in-africa-a-walk-through-history-in-the-two-rivers-urban-park/>
- Two Rivers Urban Park Association (TRUPA) Website:
<https://www.facebook.com/trupacapetown/>
- Observatory Civic Association (OCA) Website: <https://obs.org.za/>
- Public Lecture by Leslie London on the River Club Development (on SunLearn)
- Leslie London, July 2021, The Two Rivers Urban Park is of National Heritage Significance. https://www.change.org/p/department-of-environment-affairs-and-development-planning-voice-your-opposition-to-the-river-club-redevelopment-preserve-environment-and-heritage/u/29372196?cs_tk=Aq-K_rpQyt2tOwJyBGEEAAXicyyvNyQEABF8BvOKBiEfGkkBSkDNIMFHRZiw%3D&utm_campaign=485f861007d4450ba30e1035619e6d06&utm_content=initial_v0_5_0&utm_medium=email&utm_source=petition_update&utm_term=cs

- Leslie London update on TRUP Change.org petition:
<https://www.change.org/p/departement-of-environment-affairs-and-development-planning-voice-your-opposition-to-the-river-club-redevelopment-preserve-environment-and-heritage/u/29414458>
- City encourages residents to move towards making Cape Town more climate resilient. <https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/city-encourages-residents-to-move-towards-making-cape-town-climate-resilient-f18472d3-54ff-446a-8348-3e060bc66206>
- TRUP Court papers

Lecture 7: Thursday (1st September 2022) @ 9:30-12:00

Ethnographies of Planetary Ecological Crisis

Assignment: *What are the implications of Julia Livingstone’s “Devouring growth” for ‘developing countries’ in the global South such as South Africa? How does the concept of ‘self-devouring growth’ and ‘degrowth’ inform and relate to state and civil society responses to the environmental crisis, and what are the implications for modernist approaches to “development” and growth?*

Required content:

- Livingstone, J. 2019. *Self-devouring Growth: A Planetary Parable as Told from Southern Africa*. Durham: Duke University Press. (Read as much as possible) Also see <https://www.africasacountry.com/2019/09/self-devouring-growth>
- Günel, Gökçe. 2019. “Introduction.” *Spaceship in the Desert: Energy, Climate Change, and Urban Design*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Additional material

- Livingstone, J. Self-Devouring Growth. Short article available: <https://www.africasacountry.com/2019/09/self-devouring-growth>
- Petryna, A. 2018. “Wildfires at the edge of Science: Horizoning Work amid Runaway Change.” *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 33, Issue 4, pp. 570–595.
- Mike Davis, 2018. “The case for letting Malibu burn.” <https://longreads.com/2018/12/04/the-case-for-letting-malibu-burn/>
- YouTube video of Matthew Gandy, May 2021 Colloquium “Urban Natures in the Anthropocene”. Rachel Carsen Center

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7OVIR1ZjNQ&ab_channel=RachelCarsonCenter