Overview & Objectives

Prerequisites
None

Course Description
Few forms represent the effect of humans on their landscapes as powerfully as the city. Indeed, in the enduring dichotomies of “man” and nature, the former finds its pinnacle in the urban: the city as achievement, domination, destruction. Yet, to what extent is the city the accomplishment of human beings? In this course we will engage that very question, unsettling ideas about what is “natural” with respect to the urban. We will critically interrogate the proposition that cities are exclusively, or even primarily, the products of a distinct human agency by exploring the role of nonhuman beings in making a city. In this course we will engage work in urban and more-than-human geography, urban political ecology, and multispecies ethnography in order to examine the city as a co-creation of human and nonhuman beings—as “more-than-human.” Students will learn how everything from pet dogs to feral cats, honeybees to microbiota, street trees to sedum, have exerted agency in the ways we create and inhabit cities. As part of this course, students will also be asked to identify and represent the contours of their “more-than-human” city. Through lecture, reading, and discussion, we will engage with ways of interrogating and de-centering the representation of human beings and cities and ask what different conceptualizations of urban nature can offer us.

Course Goals
At the end of this course, you should be able to:

● Identify different theoretical and methodological approaches to studying multispecies relations in cities.
• Articulate the ways these relations intersect with other social, political, economic, ecologic, and spatial relations in the city.
• Critically analyze representations of human and more-than-human agency in scholarship on the city.

Learning Outcomes
This course will help you:
• Develop critical thinking skills through,
  o Identification of the ways different theoretical and methodological approaches are used to interrogate multispecies relations in the city;
  o Analysis of scholarly research and representations/obfuscations of human and more-than-human agency in urban environments;
  o Evaluation of the evidence presented in support of these arguments and their intersection with key axes of urban abundance, precarity, and inequality.

• Develop communication skills through,
  o Articulating critical evaluations of arguments and evidence;
  o Creating discussion questions and facilitating small and large group discussion;
  o Creating and presenting original analyses of complex problems.

Course Materials
All course materials will be provided as PDFs through a shared Google Drive folder. The folder is available here: “ENVST-UA 450.005 Nature & the City Spring 2021.”

Course Procedures & Policies

Classroom Procedures
This course is designed to be a combination of lecture and discussion. Depending on the topic to be covered that session, I will devote a portion of time at the beginning of class to covering the sessions’ key concepts, main themes of the assigned course materials, and questions from students. These mini-lectures are designed to ensure that students are able to identify the key points from each material and to set up the questions which we will engage with during the discussion portion.

For most of this course the majority of class time will be devoted to discussion. Discussion will be facilitated in a variety of ways. For most of the course, discussion will be guided by student generated questions, supplemented with instructor provided questions and facilitation. Discussion will take place within the full class and in breakout rooms. Additional facilitation tools may be experimented with, and SUGGESTIONS
FROM STUDENTS ARE MOST WELCOME. You know what works for you and I look forward to learning how we can have productive and lively discussion together online.

With that in mind, please come prepared to each class meeting with the following:

● Your thoughts on what the materials’ main arguments are.
● Your questions and comments regarding these arguments.
● Your insights on how these arguments relate to one another, to the main themes of the course, and to your own experiences.

Attendance, Participation, and Inclusion
This course relies heavily on classroom discussion to explore each sessions’ topic, identify the questions raised by the session’s readings, and articulate responses to these points. As such participation is an important component of this course. Each student is expected to attend class and to participate in discussions. We learn from each other and it is very important that each student both contribute their unique insights and work to make the classroom a place where all students feel comfortable and welcome giving their contributions. To that end, I ask that students do five things:

1) Attend class.
2) Participate in class discussions (points are assigned to participation—see below—and unexcused absence results in forfeiture of all points for the session).
3) Ask yourself what you are doing to make the classroom a place where everyone’s ideas are welcome. For example, do you ask questions? Do you monopolize class time? Do you use evidence to back up your arguments? Do you listen to others’ statements and respond to their questions?
4) Take risks. Share your ideas. Ask questions. Tell us your experiences. Write in a different way.
5) Talk to me if you do not feel comfortable participating for any reason. Again, we all benefit from sharing our knowledge with each other. If you do not feel you can do this, then please come to me so we can identify the problem and fashion a solution. Your contributions are valuable and desired; I want to make sure they are included in this course and will work with you to attain that goal.

Academic Integrity
Academic integrity means that the work you submit is original. Obviously, bringing answers into an examination or copying all or part of a paper straight from a book, the Internet, or a fellow student is a violation of this principle. But there are other forms of cheating or plagiarizing which are just as serious — for example, presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written); writing a sentence or paragraph which, despite being in different words, expresses someone else’s idea(s) without a reference to the source of the idea(s); or submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both instructors have given their permission in advance). Receiving or giving help on a take-home paper, examination, or quiz is also cheating, unless expressly permitted by the instructor (as in collaborative projects).
Accommodations
Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd). Please contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

If you have concerns or issues accessing online classroom, course materials, office hours, etc. please reach out to me for assistance.

Course Evaluation

Evaluation will be based on demonstrated knowledge of course themes and creative engagement with the course material through participation in class discussions and written assignments.

*Note: all written assignments should be double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font, with 1” margins. Assignments should be submitted via email as a Word or Google doc. Written assignments are due by 9:30am of due date unless otherwise specified.*

Participation [50 points/5%]
Students will be assigned one point for attending a class session and another for participating in discussion activities, with a “pass” for two class sessions.

If you have an excusable reason for missing class (including but not limited to: personal illness, family/pet emergency, social/political protest action, something we have discussed together, this pandemic is too damn much), points will not be docked.

Discussion Questions [100 points each/20% total]
Students will be responsible for preparing a 15-minute summary of the session readings and 4 discussion questions for two separate class meetings. Points will be awarded based on completion of the assigned task, as well as quality of summary, originality of questions, and connections made to prior course readings or lectures.

Essay 1: What is a city? [100 points/10%]
Students will be responsible for writing a 100–200 word essay (500 words, maximum) in response to the prompt “What is a city?” Students should draw on personal experience, previous reading or coursework, and their own preconceived ideas or assumptions to present a brief narrative description. The point of this exercise is not to be correct (there is no correct answer!) but to practice narrative-based argumentation and make explicit our starting point for interrogating nature in the city.

Essay 2: Theory Response [100 points/10%]
Students will be responsible for writing a 200–300 word essay (500 words, maximum) in response one or more of papers/chapters read February 1–March 1. Students should respond to the author(s) argument, elaborating points of agreement, disagreement, and/or further questions or provocations. Students are encouraged to put one or more authors in conversation with each other to draw out particular points of interest or interrogation.

Note: Both essays will be evaluated on the basis of clarity of writing, fulfillment of stated requirements, and originality of questions/analysis/reflection.

Mini-presentation [50 points/5%]
Students will give a 5-minute presentation on some interesting/provocative/confusing aspect of their more-than-human city. Presentations should be brief, focused on one or two points, and creative/curious in tone. The goal is to have a space to share about our ongoing explorations. Visual aids welcome but not required. Points awarded solely on completion.

Final Paper
Students will submit a 10-page research paper on some aspect of their more-than-human city. Papers will draw on observation-based research and review of existing literature, and present some component of original analysis. Topics should be some more-than-human component of the city—dogs, birds, trees, flowering plants, water, bedrock, shoreline. Pick something that provokes your interest, inspires curiosity. Students are encouraged to spatially delimit the topic for purposes of observation and mapping (e.g. if your topic is dogs, your observational component could be dogs at a particular park). Observation and mapping should (a) encourage consideration of the city from a nonhuman perspective and (b) provide a point of engagement with existing literature/research. Students are encouraged to engage one or more of the theoretical framings we explore in class (abolition ecology, biopolitics, etc.). They are also encouraged to consider the ways their particular aspect of the more-than-human city intersects with other social, political, economic, ecologic, and spatial relations in the city.

Final Paper Topic [25 points/5%]
Students will submit 100-200 words describing the topic of their final paper and the spatial area under consideration (what city, what area of observation/mapping). It is understood that this will be subject to change; the purpose is to get you started. Points will be awarded based on thoughtfulness of proposal and quality of presentation.

Final Paper Outline [25 points/5%]
Students will submit a 1–2 page outline of their final paper. Outlines should include a prospective title, the theoretical approaches used, a thesis, summaries of proposed or conducted observation activities, and summaries of at least 5 scholarly papers on the
topic. Points will be awarded based on thoroughness of outline and quality of presentation.

Final Paper Map [100 points/20%]
Students will submit a map of their more-than-human city. Considering the agency and relations of their final paper topic, students will create a representation of urban space from the ‘standpoint’ of the component. What aspects of a city are of relevance to a tree? What lines of movement concern a bird? What is simply unknowable from our human vantage point? Maps may be graphical representations (drawn, drafted, GIS) or some other representational arrangement—so long as they engage the space of the city as it is ‘relevant’ to the topic. Points will be awarded for quality of presentation; creativity will not be penalized.

Final Paper Draft [50 points/10%]
Students will submit a draft of their final paper. Drafts should have clearly delineated sections. While some portion of outline (i.e. bullet points) is permissible, at least half should be narrative prose. Drafts should include at least 20 scholarly references. Points will be awarded based on completion of the assignment.

Final Paper [250 points/50%]
See above for general guidelines. Projects will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Appropriateness of topic and thesis [10 points/5%]
- Original observation and analysis [80 points/40%]
- Use of scholarly material [80 points/40%]
- Style, including grammar, formatting, punctuation, etc. [30 points/15%]

Final Paper Presentation [50 points/10%]
Students will give a 10-minute presentation on their final paper. Presentations should include some kind of visual aid, paper title and thesis, brief summary of theoretical approaches engaged and literature reviewed, brief summary of observations, and some conclusions you have drawn or further questions you wish to pursue. Points will be awarded based on completion of the assignment; creativity will not be penalized.

Course Outline

February 1: Class Introduction

February 3: Old-school Urban Theory
- Selections from Park et al. (1925). The City:
  - Ch. 1 (Park): part 1 (pp.1-12)
  - Ch. 2 (Burgess): all (pp. 47-62).
- Simmel, Georg (1903). The Metropolis and Mental Life.
• ESSAY 1 DUE

February 8: New-school Urban Theory 1

February 10: New-school Urban Theory 2

NO CLASS FEBRUARY 15

February 17: Urban Political Ecology 1
  • Swyngedouw, Erik (2005). Ch.2: Metabolic Urbanization (pp.21-40) in Heynen et al., In the Nature of Cities.

February 22: Urban Political Ecology 2
  • Tzaninis et al. (2020). Moving urban political ecology beyond the 'urbanization of nature.' Progress in Human Geography.
  • Loftus, Alex (2012). Introduction (pp. ix-xxvi) in Everyday Environmentalism.

* FINAL PAPER TOPIC DUE

February 24: Multispecies Ethnography 1
  • Todd, Zoe (2016). From Classroom to Rivers' Edge. Aboriginal Policy Studies 6(1).

March 1: Multispecies Ethnography 2
  • Alaimo, Stacy (2017). Ch.5: Your Shell on Acid (pp.89–120) in Richard Grusin, Anthropocene Feminism.

* ESSAY 2 DUE
March 3: Companion Species: Dogs
- Srinivasan, Krithika (2019). Thought experiments on street dogs as “nature”. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 44.

March 8: Companion Species: Horses
- McShane et al. (2007). Selections from The Horse in the City:
  - Introduction (pp. 1–17)
  - Ch. 3 (pp.57–83)
  - Ch. 8. (pp.157–167)

March 10: Feral: Cats

March 15: Feral: ‘Invasive’ Plants

* FINAL PAPER OUTLINE DUE *

March 17: Wild: Coyotes

March 22: Wild: Birds

March 24: Pests: Weeds
- Del Tredici, Peter (2020). Introduction (pp. 1–27) in *Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast*.

March 29: Pests: Rats
- Biehler, Dawn Day (2013). Ch. 5: The Ecology of Injustice (pp. 149–176) in *Pests in the City*.

March 31: **MINI-PRESENTATIONS**

April 5: Empire: Bees & Cows

April 7: Sprawl: Ticks & Lyme Disease
- TBA

* Guest Speaker: Dr. Pilar Fernandez

April 12: Sprawl: Corridors & Connectivity

April 14: Religion: Monkeys

NO CLASS APRIL 19

April 21: Water: ‘Contamination’
April 26: Water: Oysters

* DRAFT OF FINAL PAPER DUE

April 28: Plants: Trees
- Dümpelmann, Sonja (2019). Ch. 2: Street Tree Aesthetics (pp. 43–66) in Seeing Trees.

May 3: Plants: Gardens

May 5: Future Directions

May 10: PRESENTATIONS

May 12: FINAL PAPERS DUE (by 12pm)