



Utrecht University



香港大學
THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

The Lives of Deltas

A Research Exchange on Sustainability and the Imaginary

The University of Hong Kong– Utrecht University

Bill McKibben wrote, 'We live in a post-natural world.' But did 'Nature' in this sense ever exist? Or was it rather the deification of the human that gave it an illusory apartness from ourselves? Now that non-human agencies have dispelled that illusion, we are confronted suddenly with a new task: that of finding other ways in which to imagine the unthinkable beings and events of this era.

Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*

Serving a small group of carefully selected Master students from Utrecht University and the University of Hong Kong, with an interest in the arts, sciences, humanities and in the Earth, this transdisciplinary Honours programme aims to do research on the *Lives of Deltas*. It combines insights from contemporary academia with state-of-the-art technological and artistic research. Together with prominent scientists, scholars and artists, the students jointly explore and experiment the *Lives of Deltas* ecologically, technologically and creatively through site visits (in the Netherlands and Hong Kong), workshops, and close reading sessions, at two of the top research institutes in the world.

Engage in research and creative thinking right where the 21st century matters

Deltas, the thresholds where water and land meet, have always been the place where human and non-human life flourished. Today, water and land have transformed into harbour and city, and once again, both are at the forefront of the changing times. At the delta, the power of industrialization, digitalization and urbanization, food scarcity and issues of food safety, sea level rise, extreme heat, heavy storms and other consequences of global warming, can be felt like nowhere else. At the delta, the most complex, or 'wicked' problems arise, and creative, 'out of the box' solutions, have to be found.

In our times, places like the Netherlands/the Rhine Delta, and Hong Kong/the Pearl River Delta, reveal the crises of the contemporary in very different ways. Located at the opposite sides of the Eurasian continent, formed by very different (geological, meteorological, humanistic) powers, their realities show many differences, but also unexpected similarities. Doing scientific and artistic research at both locations, we make ourselves familiar with the complexities of these 21st century crises, how they are reflected in social, political and environmental uncertainties, and how they lead to civic action. We will negotiate on what challenges the current state of academic knowledge (what we consider the thinkable and the unthinkable, as Ghosh calls it), and call upon all of our creative and speculative capacities to imagine society differently, to question its Modernist or Capitalist systems of production and consumption. It is important to stress that all of this will be done by placing centre not the human being, but the entire Delta with its multiple networks: its human *and* non-human inhabitants, the elements, and all of the powers engaged in its complexity. The current technological, speculative, and artistic experiments may inspire new perspectives on these crises, both in Hong Kong and in the Netherlands. Our transdisciplinary approach, therefore, teams up with a series of technological and artistic initiatives in both sites, it engages with local communities and stakeholders, and searches for ways to involve them actively in the research that we undertake. The *Lives of Deltas* is a unique transdisciplinary, transnational and inclusive program, firmly rooted in the urgent matters of today.

The Programme

The *Lives of Deltas*, in its European context, is a selective 15 EC programme at the post-graduate level, which can be taken on top of your Master's programme or be used to replace an internship or a MA thesis (after close consultation with your MA coordinator). In its HKU context, credit for the collaborative research and seminar programmes will be determined by each Master's programme. The programme is accessible only to Master's students from Utrecht University and The University of Hong Kong. The program features:

- A strong peer-to-peer learning community with motivated students from both The University of Hong Kong and Utrecht University.
- Excursions and (creative) research projects with professors and artists on site.
- Depending on what is possible we organize a research stay abroad. If possible to Hong Kong, otherwise to a 'Critical Zone' in Europe (last year we did field work in Venice for a week). The travel costs will be paid for by this program.
- Specially developed, research-driven classes at two globally acclaimed universities by specialists from the multiple faculties involved.
- A close collaboration will be developed with prominent artists, curators and contemporary art institutes that pay close attention to the creative relations between the arts, humanities, and the sciences.

The project will conclude with a livestream symposium at both Utrecht University and the University of Hong Kong, as well as with a continuing online platform where the students present their final projects, and professors, artists, and other community members will share their ideas, anxieties, and prospects for the future.

Program Schedule

- Module 1: Eight close reading tutorials on the theme
- Module 2: Eight guest lectures and workshops on the theme (by university professors, professionals, curators, artists, policy makers)
- Module 3: Research Lab/ Excursions (in cooperation with arts organizations)

During May 2022 (for a period of 4 weeks) the programme is coordinated from the Netherlands

During June 2022 (for a period of 4 weeks) the programme is coordinated from Hong Kong

The aim is to do fieldwork in Hong Kong during the last two weeks of May, and to do fieldwork in the Netherlands during the last two weeks of June.

Of course we don't know if this is possible due to covid regulations. Last year, instead of going to Hong Kong, the Utrecht team went on a one week field trip to Venice with visits to *Ocean Space*, the Architecture Biennial (themed: How will we live together?), to the Environmental Humanities program at Ca 'Foscari Universiteit, and excursions to the Venice lagoon (with artists, geologists and historians). If a visit to Hong Kong is impossible we will search for an alternative location.

Final Symposium (online) will be scheduled in the final week of June/first week of July 2022

At the final symposium all participants present their creative research project by means of a multimedia product of their choice. Parts of these products can be co-authored, but in the end it is an individual project anchored in the visual, sonic, scientific and textual contexts of the MA/MS programme in which the student is enrolled. After successful completion the students will receive a certificate with the seals of both universities, signed by the program coordinators.

Coordination

Maxime Decoudin (landscape architecture, the University of Hong Kong) maximed@hku.hk

Rick Dolphijn (Media and Culture Studies, general coordination, Utrecht University) r.dolphijn@uu.nl

Kei Otsuki (International Development Studies, Geosciences, Utrecht University) k.otsuki@uu.nl

Winnie Yee (Comparative Literature, general coordination, the University of Hong Kong) yeelmw@hku.hk

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PROGRAM (example!)		
THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG		
	Module 1: Tutorial	Module 2: Lectures
		Module 3: Research Lab

	Mo 10-13 (CET)/16-19 (HKT)	Wed 12-14 (CET)/18-20 (HKT)	TBD (depending on Covid regulations)
WEEK 1 (May 2): URBANIZING NATURE	<p>Ursula Heise (2016) "Terraforming for Urbanists." <i>Novel: A Forum on Fiction</i> 49:1, p. 10-25</p> <p>Andrew Ross and Michael Bennett (1999) "The Social Claim on Urban Ecology." <i>The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban Environments</i>, p. 15-32.</p>	<p>Guest Lecture by Dr. Pan Lu: Aesthetics and Poetics of Infrastructure</p> <p>Assistant Professor and Undergraduate Programme Leader, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University</p> <p>Dr. Pan is an active curator and video artist. Her film, <i>Many Undulating Things</i> (2019), (co-directed with Bo Wang) has been nominated and selected in numerous international film festivals.</p>	
WEEK 2 (May 9): OBJECTIFYING NATURE	<p>Jane Bennett (2010) "The Agency of Assemblages." <i>Vibrant Matters: A Political Ecology of Things</i>, p. 20-38</p> <p>Karen Barad, (2003) "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter?" <i>Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society</i> 28:3, p. 801-830.</p>	<p>Guest Lecture by Mr. Morgan Wong: Morgan Wong's Artistic Practice - Temporality of His Own and Its Beyond</p> <p>Artist & Senior Lecturer of Visual Arts, Lingnan University</p> <p>Morgan Wong's artistic practice unfolds his contemplation on time. In 2019, Morgan Wong has been awarded the Asian Cultural Council New York Fellowship.</p>	
WEEK 3 (May 16): AFFECTIVE NATURE AND ART	<p>Brian Massumi (2014) "What Animals Teaches Us about Politics" <i>What Animals Teach Us about Politics</i>, p. 1-54.</p> <p>Brian Massumi (2011) "Introduction: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts." <i>Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts</i>, p. 1-28.</p>	<p>Guest Lecture by Mr. Fredie Ho-lun Chan: Exploring the Island and Border in Hong Kong</p> <p>Documentary filmmaker</p> <p>Fredie Chan's works focus on grassroots communities and their struggles with the environment.</p>	<p>Fredie Chan's films:</p> <p><i>Open Road After Harvest</i> (2015) https://youtu.be/q20CcJPLupg</p> <p><i>Rhymes of Shui Hau</i> (2017) https://youtu.be/2rmFSdIH8so</p> <p><i>The Fishermen's Discourse</i> (2013) https://youtu.be/ISQHbMKWxzQ</p>
	Rob Nixon (2011) "Slow Violence, Gender, and the	Guest Lecture by Mr. Maxime Decaudin : Hong	

WEEK 4 (May 23): DOING NATURE JUSTICE	Environmentalism of the Poor," <i>Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor</i> , p.128-149. Ursula K. Heise (2016) "Biodiversity, Environmental Justice, and Multispecies Communities," <i>Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species</i> , p.162-201	Kong's Nature: Landscape Histories and Practices Lecturer, Division of Landscape Architecture, the University of Hong Kong	
UTRECHT UNIVERSITY			
	Module 1: Tutorial Mo 10-13 (CET)/16-19 (HKT)	Module 2: Lectures Wed 12-14 (CET)/18-20 (HKT)	Module 3: Special Screening
WEEK 1 (May 30): IMAGINING NATURE	Amitav Gosh (2017) <i>Stories in: The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable</i> (Berlin Family Lectures). University of Chicago Press. (pp. 1-84) Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2015) <i>Autumn Aroma; the Arts of Noticing</i> . in: <i>The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins</i> . (pp. 1-25)	Workshop with Susanne Winterling. Susanne M. Winterling is an artist, artistic researcher and Professor currently at Trondheim Academy of Fine Arts, NTNU, Norway.	
WEEK 2 (June 6): NATURE ACCORDING TO CAPITALISM	Karl Marx (1858) <i>Grundrisse Notebook v: The Chapter on Capital (continuation)</i> Gilles Deleuze (1990) <i>Postscript on Control Societies</i>	Workshop with Raviv Ganchrow . His work researches the interdependencies between sound, place, and listening, aspects of which are explored through installations, writing, and the development of pressure-forming and vibration-sensing technologies.	
WEEK 3 (June 20): RETHINKING NATURE (CREATIVELY)	Donna Haraway (2016) <i>Making Kin; Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene</i> . In: <i>Staying with the Trouble; Making Kin in the Chthulucene</i> (pp. 99-103)	Prof. Maarten Hajer : <i>Enacting Sustainable Futures</i> Professor at Geosciences. Director Pathways to Sustainabilities/Urban Futures	

	Michel Serres (1990) <i>Natural Contract</i> in the Natural Contract p.27-50		
WEEK 4 (June 27): ANOTHER FUTURE	Isabelle Stengers (2015) <i>The Intrusion of Gaia, Capitalism, Not Paying Attention</i> Bruno Latour (2017) <i>How to govern struggling (natural) territories?</i> In: Facing Gaia. Eight Lectures on the New Climate Regime.	Roundtable with Christian Alonso (curator, University of Barcelona); Daniel Ho (curator Tai Kwun, Hong Kong); Lucas van der Velden (curator Sonic Acts); You Mi (Curator Shanghai Biennial, Aalto University).	