Colloquium in the History of Technology & Nature | 510:535
Fall 2017
Mon. 9:50 AM-12:50 PM
Van Dyck 011

Prof. Jamie Pietruska
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Office hours: Mon. 9-9:45 AM; Wed. 12-1, 2:30-4 PM (or by appointment)

Course Description
This STEH graduate colloquium will examine the historical intersections of nature and technology and trace the historiographical emergence of an area of inquiry recently identified as “envirotech.” The entangled histories of nature and technology have been examined across multiple disciplines and fields, especially environmental history and the history of technology, but also STS, sociology, and geography, among others. We will read widely across time and place, with an emphasis on recent monographs and articles that adopt global, comparative, transnational, and US-in-the-world perspectives. This course is designed for graduate students in History who are preparing for a major or minor field in STEH, as well as students concentrating in US, European, Global/Comparative, and other fields whose interests relate broadly to industrialization and its ecological consequences, capitalism and the commodification of nature, agriculture, empire, energy, discourses of modernization, networks of technoscientific and commercial exchange, knowledge production, and embodied experiences of technologies. (Our reading list is not comprehensive but rather designed to introduce a range of approaches and topics that students may pursue in more depth in their qualifying exam lists and/or their own research.)

The course will focus on these major questions: How have the concepts of technology and nature changed over time, particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries? How have the historical interactions of technology and nature unfolded differently across time and place? How have technologies historically reshaped non-human nature, and how has the natural world resisted and redirected technological change? How and why have scholars shifted away from a binary opposition between technology and nature toward a hybrid framework of envirotech? How do national, comparative, and global frameworks shape narratives of ecological and technological change? How is the history of envirotech narrated differently at different scales, from the macro-level of the infrastructural to the meso-level of the institutional to the micro-level of the individual organism? How have histories of race, class, and gender intersected with histories of technology and nature?

The course is divided into four thematic units (on energy, agriculture, knowledge production, and bodies), and specific topics will include energy infrastructures; nuclear power and toxicity; industrialization and public health; industrial agriculture and discourses of modernization; climate modeling; technologies of war and empire;
timekeeping; seismology and citizen science; pharmaceutical production; mobilities and innovation; and race, gender, sexuality, and technologies of the quotidian.

**Course Requirements & Policies**

Coursework consists of weekly readings, short weekly response papers of 500 words (to be posted to our course Sakai blog by 7 PM each Sunday), thoughtful and sustained engagement in our class discussions, a short book review (5 pages), and a final historiographical essay (12-15 pages). In addition, students will take turns introducing the readings and starting the discussion each week. I will provide more detail about each assignment as the course gets underway.

The success of our intellectual community will depend on your attendance (and on-time arrival) at every class meeting, careful reading of all assignments, intellectual engagement, and collegial participation in our scholarly conversations. Please note that computers and tablets may be used for note taking only and that mobile phones may not be used during class. Email is the best way to reach me, and I answer emails within 24 hours.

**Required Books**

Required books are available for purchase at the Rutgers Bookstore and online, as well as on course reserve at the Alexander Library. Additional readings will be posted on Sakai.


**Grading**

- 25% Response papers
- 25% Participation
- 10% Book review
- 40% Historiographical essay

**Schedule**

**Unit 1: Energy and Infrastructures**

**Week 1 (Sept. 11): Definitions and Debates**

*No response paper due*


**Week 2 (Sept. 18): Nuclear Politics and Envirotechnical Disasters**


Week 3 (Sept. 25): Technopolitics and Empire

Week 4 (Oct. 2): Transportation Infrastructures
Christopher Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (University of Washington Press, 2013), prologue & chap. 4. [Sakai]

Unit 2: Agriculture and Commodifying Nature

Week 5 (Oct. 9): Networks of Exchange

Week 6 (Oct. 16): Ideologies of Progress and Development
*Book review due (no response paper due)*
Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (Yale, 2010), introduction and chap. 1. [Sakai]

Unit 3: Knowledge Production and Technoscientific Expertise

Week 7 (Oct. 23): Predicting and Engineering Disaster
Week 8 (Oct. 30): Temporalities of Capitalism and Globalization

Week 9 (Nov. 6): Epistemologies of Weather and Climate

Unit 4: Bodies, Labor, and Technologies of the Quotidian

Week 10 (Nov. 13): Mobilities

Week 11 (Nov. 20): Industrial Toxicity

Week 12 (Nov. 27)
*No class (reading week)*

Week 13 (Dec. 4): Sexuality, Race, and Technoscience

Week 14 (Dec. 11): Bioprospecting and Biomedicine

*Final paper due on or before Wednesday, Dec. 20 (to be submitted in hard copy to my mailbox in Van Dyck)*