



# OEOLOGIES: INHABITING PREMODERN WORLDS

## NEW INTERDISCIPLINARY SERIES

This series gathers scholars from the humanities living and working along the North American Pacific coast to investigate the idea of “oecology,” an older spelling of the modern concept “ecology”. The spelling is retained so the speakers might rethink “ecology” through the study of premodern natural history, taxonomy, hierarchy, and categorization, and ask what conceptual or metaphorical resources might help us – as located moderns – reorient our perceptions about the premodern past and our present and future moments. The invited speakers will discuss the relations among terms such as nature, landscape, ecology, economy, environment, and technology, and will ask how our regionally and temporally specific conceptions draw / differ from premodern inhabitations of the world.

ALL TALKS ARE HELD AT GREEN COLLEGE'S COACH HOUSE FROM 5-6:30PM AND ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC WITHOUT CHARGE



October 23: **Household Habitats and the Medieval Ecological Imaginary, Allan Mitchell (English, University of Victoria)**. Medieval English household texts reveal the extent to which complicated ecologies underpin even the tidiest economies. Gestation and growth in particular expose the human to the vast universe, showing that persons become fleshed out in impersonal modes less anthropocentric than commonly assumed. Our sense that human creatures are entangled in dense material networks has been reinvigorated by recent theory. What is needed is a longer historical perspective. Recovering early notions of animacy, infancy, virtuality, and maturity, Mitchell traces the inheritance of modern speculative and scientific concepts too often considered in isolation from the past.

November 27: **Being a Good Relative, Becoming a Good Ancestor: Other-than-Human Kinship and the Decolonial Imperative, Daniel Heath Justice (First Nations Studies Program and English, UBC)**. From the nineteenth-century decimation of prairie bison herds and the imposition of patriarchal farming techniques to the decline of fisheries and narrowed concerns of familial obligation, Eurowestern colonialism has consistently targeted Indigenous kinship relations with the other-than-human. While variously dismissed by colonial agents as pagan, primitive, or illusory, such expansive familial relations are in fact substantive to Indigenous practices of cultural, intellectual, and political self-determination. This presentation considers the other-than-human as a vital concern in Indigenous decolonization and resurgence politics today, while critically engaging the potential consequences of its absence.



January 29: **Don't Panic: The Unknowability of Early Modern Nature, Louisa Mackenzie (French and Italian Studies, University of Washington)**. Post-Romantic Anglophone ideals of nature include an absolute “beyond” of culture, including what we now call wilderness. Many scholars have started to question the assumptions that make these ideals thinkable. Mackenzie argues that early modern cultures can help us further these critiques. Working with texts from sixteenth-century France, she will show that early modern mentalities considered wildness to be not just frightening but literally unrepresentable. Wild areas inspired a kind of epistemological panic. This etymologically-understood “panic” (pertaining to Pan the god of wild places) perhaps invites us to a more humble appraisal of our cognition of the non-human.

February 26: **Different Models of the Natural World?, Lisa Shapiro (Philosophy, Simon Fraser University)**. Two models of the natural world can be found within seventeenth-century philosophy. One model conceives of the “natural world” as an intricate clock and dominates efforts to explain natural phenomena through efficient causes. The second provides a background to utopian visions, imagining lush, textured landscapes where social problems vanish and human beings flourish and live peaceably together. Do these models present distinct, competing visions of the natural world? Or is there a way of reconciling them? Considering how each situates human beings within the natural world suggests they can be reconciled.



March 26: **“Rule Britannia! Rule the Waves”: The World of the Ship and the Quest for Global Time, Renisa Mawani (Sociology, UBC)**. Recent accounts of the creation and imposition of a global and standardized time – through nineteenth-century developments, most notably the railway and telegraph – have only reinforced the primacy of land. Written at the juncture of law, science studies, and empire, this talk shifts optics from land to sea, and in so doing tells a different history of global time that centres on the world of the ship and on imperial and maritime struggles over longitude. Ultimately, it argues that the standardization of time, to which naval navigation and the ship were central, formed a crucial register of British imperial governance.



April 16: **European Concepts of Nature and Economic Growth in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, Margaret Schabas (Philosophy, UBC)**. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the word “oeconomy” was used to denote frugality in the management of one’s household. Only rarely was it conjoined with the state or polity. The concept of an economy as we know emerges only gradually, arguably by the early nineteenth century. Until then economic phenomena were studied as part of the natural order. Schabas traces the historical trajectory by which the economy as we now know it came into existence as a theoretical construct.



See [www.greencollege.ubc.ca/index/spotlight495.php](http://www.greencollege.ubc.ca/index/spotlight495.php) for more detail.