
Airliner [Carbon Trail](#)

CLIMATE CHANGE: VIEWS FROM THE HUMANITIES

A NEARLY CARBON-FREE CONFERENCE

JUMP DOWN FOR [KEYNOTE TALKS](#) AND [CONFERENCE PANELS](#)

This conference, which took place from May 3-24, 2016, was unusual in two respects. First, because it approached the issue of climate change from the perspective of the humanities, rather than, as might be expected, from that of the sciences. Second, it was also more than a little unusual because of the conference format: it was an international academic conference with over 50 speakers from eight countries, yet it had a nearly nonexistent carbon footprint. Had this been a traditional fly-in conference, our slate of

speakers would have had to collectively travel over 300,000 miles, generating the equivalent of over 100,000 pounds of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the process. This is equal to the total annual carbon footprint of 50 people living in India, 165 in Kenya. A conference that takes up the issue of climate change while simultaneously contributing to the problem to such a degree would be simply unconscionable.

In contrast, we took a digital approach. Because the conference talks and Q&A sessions reside on this website (the talks are prerecorded; the Q&As interactive), travel was unnecessary. Scroll down for links to the [opening remarks](#), the four [keynote talks](#), and the fourteen [panels](#), each of which has three talks and its own Q&A. As these are all standard features of a traditional conference, our hope is that the online experience will be relatively intuitive. Note that while the conference is now closed, all of the talks and Q&A sessions are archived here. Please feel free to watch the talks, as well as explore the extensive Q&A sessions, which are similar to online forums.

In order to make them as accessible as possible, the talks can also be viewed on [YouTube](#), which provides an important service: voice-recognition software that automatically generates closed captioning for the talks. While the accuracy is by no means perfect, closed captioning nonetheless provides an important option for deaf or hard of hearing individuals. The talks are also available as audio podcasts on SoundCloud, which makes them easy to listen to on the go. More importantly, our SoundCloud conference playlist brings all of the talks together in one relatively convenient place for the blind or visually impaired. Podcasts are available on the [SoundCloud](#) website, as well as through free [iOS](#) and [Android](#) apps for mobile devices.

Note that a discussion of the conference rationale and format can be found in the [Q&A session for the opening remarks](#), as well as in other Q&As here.

The Environmental Humanities Initiative (EHI) at the University of California Santa Barbara is the coordinator of this conference, which is housed on the EHI website. While here, please feel free to explore the EHI site, perhaps starting with our [Intro](#) and [Home](#) pages.



3.3 billion people fly annually; by 2035 it is expected to be well over 7 billion

OPENING TALKS

Opening Remarks

Ken Hiltner, *Academic Conferences 2.0*

Ken Hiltner is a Professor of the environmental humanities at UC Santa Barbara (UCSB). The Director of the Environmental Humanities Initiative (EHI), Hiltner has appointments in the English and Environmental Studies Departments. He has published five books, including *Milton and Ecology*, *What Else is Pastoral?*, *Renaissance Ecology*, and *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader*, as well as a range of environmentally oriented articles. Hiltner has served as Director of UCSB's Literature & Environment Center, its Early Modern Center, the English Department's graduate program, and as the Currie C. and Thomas A. Barron Visiting Professor in the Environment and Humanities at Princeton University's Environmental Institute. Prior to becoming a professor, for many years he made his living as a furniture maker. A second-generation woodworker, he received commissions from five continents and had collections featured in major metropolitan galleries.

Keynote Talks

Peter Singer, *The Ethical Challenge of Climate Change*

Peter Singer is the DeCamp Professor of Bioethics in the University Center for Human Values at Princeton University. In 2005, *Time* magazine named him one of the 100 most influential people in the world. He is known especially for his work on the ethics of our treatment of animals, for his controversial critique of the sanctity of life ethics in bioethics, and for his writing on the obligations of the affluent to aid those living in extreme poverty. He first became well-known internationally after the publication of *Animal Liberation* in 1975. In 2011 *Time* included *Animal Liberation* on its “All-TIME” list of the 100 best nonfiction books published in English since the magazine began, in 1923. Singer has written, co-authored, edited or co-edited more than 40 books, including *Practical Ethics*; *The Expanding Circle*; *How Are We to Live?*, *Rethinking Life and Death*, *The Ethics of What We Eat* (with Jim Mason), *The Life You Can Save*, *The Point of View of the Universe* (with Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek), and *The Most Good You Can Do*.

Kim Stanley Robinson, *Climate Change Forces Post-Capitalism*

Kim Stanley Robinson is likely the most respected cli-fi (climate-fiction) novelist writing today. He has published nineteen novels, including the *Mars* trilogy, *2312*, *Fifty Degrees Below*, *Forty Signs of Rain*, *The Years of Rice and Salt*, and *Antarctica* – for which he was sent to the Antarctic by the U.S. National Science Foundation as part of their Antarctic Artists and Writers' Program. A number of these works take up the issue of climate change in detail. He has been recipient of the Hugo, Nebula, World Fantasy, and Heinlein awards, among others. *Time Magazine* named Robinson a “Hero of the Environment” for his optimistic focus on environmental issues. In an article for the *New Yorker*, Tim Kreider suggested that Robinson may be our greatest political novelist, as he explores alternatives to capitalism in a range of his novels.

E. Ann Kaplan, ‘*Getting Real About the Anthropocene*’: *Pretrauma and Cultural Politics in Futurist Dystopian Film*

E. Ann Kaplan is Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies at Stony Brook University, where she also founded and directed The Humanities Institute for twenty-seven years. She is Past President of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies. A number of Kaplan's many monographs, edited collections and articles on cultural studies, media, and women's studies, from diverse theoretical perspectives, have been translated into six languages. Kaplan's pioneering research on women in film continues to be in print and influential in the United States and abroad, from *Women in Film: Both Sides of the Camera and Motherhood and Representation* to *Looking for the Other and Feminism in Film*. Her recent research focuses on trauma as evident in her co-edited book, *Trauma and Cinema* (2004) and her 2005 monograph, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*. Her book on *Climate Trauma: Foreseeing the Future in Dystopian Film and Fiction* (2015) continues her research on trauma.

Ashley Dawson, *The End of the World As We Know It*

Ashley Dawson is Professor of English at the City University of New York's Graduate Center and at the College of Staten Island/CUNY. He is the author of *Extinction: A Radical History* (O/R Press, 2016), *The Routledge Concise History of Twentieth-Century British Literature* (2013) and *Mongrel Nation: Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Michigan, 2007). He is also co-editor of four essay collections: *Against Apartheid: The Case for Boycotting Israeli Universities* (Haymarket, 2015), *Democracy, the State, and the Struggle for Global Justice* (Routledge, 2009); *Dangerous Professors: Academic Freedom and the National Security Campus* (Michigan, 2009); and *Exceptional State: Contemporary U.S. Culture and the New Imperialism* (Duke, 2007). A former editor of *Social Text Online* and of the AAUP's *Journal of Academic Freedom*, he is currently completing work on a book entitled *Extreme City: Climate Change and the Urban Future* for Verso Books.

Closing Remarks

Ken Hiltner, *The Little Conference That Could*

Recorded a few days after this unusual conference ended, in this talk Hiltner considers what had already been learned about the conference, such as 1) the fact that its carbon footprint was approximately 1% of what it would have been if this had been a traditional, fly in conference and 2) the fact that the Q&A sessions generated between 2 and 10 times more (depending on the particular session) discussion than conventional Q&A sessions. See above for Hiltner's bio.



flying (even coach) is a practice of privilege; as little as 3-6% of the earth's population flies annually

PANELS

(To view talks and Q&A sessions, click on the panel title. Select the speaker's name for abstract and bio.)

1. Flying and Focusing on the Everyday

The Inner Lives of Climate Scientists, Peter Kalmus

The Nature of the "Less than Meaningless" and "Self-righteous, Self-referential, Ascetic Bullshit" in the Anthropocene, Joseph Nevins

A Strategy for Flying Less in Academic Communities, Parke Wilde

2. The Digital/Environmental Intervention

Communicating Beyond Borders: The opportunities and challenges of digital communication to further the climate conversation, Ann Dale & Jaigris Hodson

Online Architectural Education as a Facilitator of a Sustainable Future, Samuel Fardoe

Adapting to Changing Climates – Towards Teaching in Digital Environments, Danen Poley

3. The Anthropocene

"The Cloudflower Blossoms:" Doctor Atomic and Sublime Repetition in the Anthropocene, Patrick Milian

Vanua in the Anthropocene: Fijian Ontologies and Climate Change, Maebh Long

Climate Change, AIDS, and Queering the Anthropocene: Tony Kushner's Angels in America, Kristen

Angierski4. Fossil Fuels

Red, White, Blue, Green, Magenta?: Possibilities of Solidarity in the Anti-Fracking Movement, Corrie Ellis

The Aesthetic Disvalue of Burning Fossil Fuels, Ewan Kingston

"Keep It In the Ground": Global Warming and the Challenge of Redefining Hydrocarbons, Bart H. Welling

5. Climate Justice

The Paradox of Activist Capital: Stumbling Our Way Toward Climate Justice?, Bobby Wengronowitz

The Climate Justice Movement and the Economy since 2000, Stefan Gaarsmand Jacobsen

Coping with the COPs, and the Search for Climate Justice, Emily Williams

6. Art and Poetry

Creek Walking Dialogue: Art and Environmental Activism, Brogan Bunt, Lucas Ihlein, Kim Williams

'As climate changes I order a salad': contemporary poetry and the strange times of climate change, Sam Solnick

Teaching the Anthropocene with Graphic Novels, Laura Perry

7. Ecocriticism I

Once but Not Now: Environmental Degradation in Thomas King's "The Back of the Turtle", Olivia Pellegrino

Ecology and the Critique of "History": The God of Small Things as a Humanist Text, Abhay Doshi

Petrodystopia in Karen Tei Yamashita's "Tropic of Orange", Olivia Chen

8. Ecocriticism II

Literary Studies and the Geography of Climate Change: Towards a Transpacific Network of Disaster, Danielle Crawford

An Environmental Utopia: Black Mirror and the "Trouble with Wilderness", Ben Van Overmeire

Seeing Whole: Ed Roberson's Radical Ecology of Vision, Jessica Eileen Jones

9. Ecocriticism III

Towards a Benjaminian Environmental Historiography: Shattering the Anthropocene, [Molly Hall](#)

The Rills Not Taken: Hydropower in Early National Science and Poetry, [Michael Ziser](#)

10. [Justice, Injustice, and Activism](#)

Valuing Histories of Activism: Empowering Us in the Battle Against Climate Change, [Alex Ketchum](#)

Can Environmental Law Work for the People Who Need It Most?, [Tamara L. Slater](#)

11. [Environmental Communication](#)

Al Gore's Armageddon? The Persuasive Binary of Apocalyptic Rhetoric within Climate Change Discourse, [Matthew Fledderjohann](#)

Snap, Tag, Share: Seeing the Small Picture of #OurChangingClimate
[www.ourchangingclimate.us](#), [Sheryl-Ann Simpson](#), [Bret Snyder](#), [N. Claire Napawan](#)

Let's NOT Talk: Silencing the Climate, [Roberta Laurie](#)

12. [Intergenerational Ethics](#)

The Extinction Paradox, [Martin Bunzl](#)

Risk, Uncertainty, and Climate Change, [Richard Cohen](#)

Ontological Problems in Intergenerational Climate Ethics, [Matthias Fritsch](#)

13. [Theory](#)

What Might Critical Plant Studies Contribute to Climate Change Discourse?, [John Ryan](#)

Public Folklore and Environments, Environmental Folklore: Methods in Documenting Vernacular Cultures of Response to Ecological Change, [Jess Lamar Reece Holler & Bethani Turley](#)

14. [Ecopsychology](#)

Paradoxical Perspectives on Cultural Psychotherapy: What is a Cultural Intervention?, [Chris Robertson](#)

Against Anthropocene and for the Ecocritical Psyche, [Susan Rowland](#)

On the Brink of Extinction, [Jon Mills](#)



Carbon Trails

They are typically called “contrails,” short for water “condensation trails.” The problem with this term is that it imagines the exhaust spewn by jet engines as being little more than water vapor, making them seem as benign as the billowy white clouds they resemble. However, the vapor gives shape to what would otherwise escape our attention, though should concern us most: a trail of chemicals released from the burning of a fossil fuel at a frenetic rate. Chief among these emissions is carbon dioxide, a potent greenhouse gas – even more so when released high in the atmosphere. Hence, a far better term for these wispy exhausts is indeed “carbon trail.” How big, not in width or length but in impact on our planet’s climate, are carbon trails? As Peter Kalmus, a climate scientist and one of the speakers at this conference, noted in a recent piece in Grist, “if you fly coach from Los Angeles to Paris and back, you’ve just emitted three tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere.”

