

The Right Use of the Earth
International Conference
on
Knowledge, Power and Duties within a Finite Planet

Le bon usage de la Terre
Conférence internationale
sur
Savoirs, pouvoirs et devoirs sur une planète finie

Paris, École normale supérieure
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<https://rightuseofearth.sciencesconf.org/>

Call for Papers

Scientific Committee:

Christophe Bonneuil (Cnrs & EHESS, PSL) - Luca d'Ambrosio (Collège de France, PSL)
- Magali Reghezza (ENS, PSL) - Stefan Aykut (Universität Hamburg)
- Peder Anker (New York University)

This conference is part of the Paris Sciences et Lettres Research University PSL-Environment Research Project on “Environmental Humanities in the age of Anthropocene”, and is supported by the NYU-PSL Global Alliance.

A. Context and goals

The acknowledgement of the Anthropocene as a new epoch after the Holocene in the geological history of the Earth provides a fruitful platform to think together Earth processes, life history and societies' dynamics into a comprehensive framework. If humans act as a telluric force altering the geology of the earth and if the alteration of the earth system out of the Holocene transforms geopolitics and how we act, feel and think, then, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued, the understanding of geological history and the understanding of human history cannot be kept separated.

The advent of the Anthropocene concept and Earth system sciences – putting forward upscaled temporalities in the public sphere, the dramatization of warnings on planetary limits and boundaries and on the human impacts of climate change (Steffen *et al.*, 2004; Rockström *et al.*, 2009; IPCC, 2013, Steffen *et al.*, 2015) – provide a challenging context for the humanities and social sciences. *In history*, the Anthropocene has led to news converging grounds between world history and environmental history (Parker, 2013; McNeill, 2000; Bonneuil & Fressoz, 2016; Tyrell, 2015). *In social and political sciences*, it has led to new researches on the socio-historical construction of the global environment, the role of knowledge networks, numbers and images as well as on the power/knowledge deployed to govern the Earth as a system (Miller, 2004; Hulme, 2010; Biermann, 2014; Foyer, Aykut & Morena, 2017) and to govern (through) limits. *In anthropology*, it has stimulated an ontological turn, fertile multispecies ethnographies and cosmopolitics (Descola, 2005; Tsing, 2015). *In human geography*, it has stimulated new works on the politics of scale and the processes of “planetarization” (Swingedouw, 2004, 2014; Reghezza, 2015). *In the field of legal studies*, the Anthropocene theme, as well as planetary boundaries concept, have recently stimulated the reformulation of foundational legal concepts and the conceptualization of new legal process at the crossroads of national and international levels (Neyret, 2015; Cabanes, 2016; Delmas-Marty, 2016; Kotzé, 2016; Viñuales, 2016).

Cropping up these developments and at the crossroad of world and connected histories, environmental history, human geography and social, political and legal studies, this conference will examine how ideas of a global, unified and limited earth played a role in human reflexivity, and how the ‘right use’ of the Earth as a whole has become and is increasingly becoming an object of knowledge making and government practices.

Keynote speakers include Katherine Richardson (University of Copenhagen); Erik Swyngedouw (University of Manchester); Jorge Viñuales (University of Cambridge); Anna Tsing (Aarhus University Research on The Anthropocene).

B. Main themes

The international conference will be organized around 4 main themes.-

1. A History of ‘Geopower’: from the 15th to the 21st Century

While the Anthropocene is often heralded as a new intellectual event, a first theme of the conference will explore the centuries-long history of societies' global environmental reflexivity and the evolving forms of *power/knowledge of the Earth as a whole*.

Early modern thinking on climate, civilization and government as well as Victorians' use of geology in their narrative of British global/imperial superiority represent two instances for a longer historical understanding of geological reflexivity of human societies. Then comes the task of analyzing and comparing how ideas of "a right use of the Earth" evolved since 1492, how the Earth as a whole was turned into an object of representation (from globes to blue marble), knowledge (from early modern investigation on human induced climate change to earth system sciences) and government (from the Treaty of Tordesillas to the Paris Climate Agreement).

The conference will illuminate the fabrics of geopower/geoknowledge in history, and special attention will be given to

- i) the changing forms of accounting the Earth and its resources, such as counting the wealth of the land; measuring temperatures or ecosystems functions; surveying flora, fauna and coal "reserves"/"resources"; managing forests and fisheries, etc.;
- ii) the changing forms of governing supra-national natures and resources, such as constructing and claiming godly, common, public, imperial or private global goods; establishing state control, markets mechanisms, undoing/supporting community management; making the global environment and resources legible; predicting future resource stocks and environmental states; and
- iii) the transnational circulations among professional communities, such as East India companies, Imperial bureaus', global consultancy experts, etc., that performed this "globalization" of the Earth.

Papers focusing on any time period from the 15th to the 21th centuries will be welcome.

2. Governing a limited Earth / governing by limits

The second theme of the conference focuses on the emergence of the idea that the Earth is finite and that its "limits" – in terms of resource use and absorption capacity – can be determined scientifically and institutionalized politically. Already at work in imperial discourses such as *L'exploitation rationnelle du globe* (Clerget, 1912; Kidd, 1898) or in the seminal *Only One Earth* report prepared for the Stockholm conference in 1972, this view has been recently reaffirmed forcefully through the adoption of a 2°C global warming threshold in climate governance, and the definition, by an international group of scientists, of several "planetary boundaries", concerning, *inter alia*, climate, biodiversity, freshwater use and the perturbation of global biogeochemical cycles. We will focus on the ways in which such global limits are – and have historically been – construed, and on specific forms of government built on the idea of limits. Thus, the idea that the Earth is a limited whole has been salient in public arenas already around 1900, around 1948, and around 1972. What can we learn from a cross-period comparison of these "limits discourses" and "limits controversies"? Can we convincingly find earlier intense debates on the limits of the Earth?

The following issues will be particularly addressed:

- i) *Governing by rationing*, i.e. the definition of a maximum use of a given resource (e.g. "maximum sustained yield" in forestry & fishery). How were/are such approaches justified or challenged, quantities determined and visualized?
- ii) *Governing through markets*, i.e. the establishment of cap-and-trade or ecological taxation schemes to incite actors to respect global limits. What are (historical) examples of such instruments? How are "limits" translated into a market logic?

- iii) *Governance by targets*, i.e. the 2°C threshold in climate governance or objectives in CSR schemes. How were/are such approaches justified scientifically and politically? How were/are instruments designed to ensure compliance?
- iv) *Equity in a finite world*. The very idea of “limits” begs questions about the distribution of the ‘remaining’ resources or development space, thus touching on questions of global equity. What are historical and contemporary examples of such debates, their scientific and political underpinnings, and practical consequences?

3. Only one Earth? The politics of scale in the construction of the « global » environment

A third theme of this conference will address processes of composition and re-compositions of the « global » as the scale at which socio-environmental issues are to be studied and managed (Cosgrove, 2001; Hulme, 2010; Grevsmühl, 2014). Interfering with and additional to « globalization » (Lussault, 2013), we attend a process of « planetarization », in as much as the *world* gets more and more understood as a *planet*, i.e. as a physical body, unique and limited, which serves as habitat for all living beings seen as members of a same community of destiny. This shift in representations is linked with the acknowledgement of global environmental teleconnections linking local places and associated potential threats, and of the existence of limits and boundaries in earth resources and processes. *Planetarization* hence situates human becoming within an *earth system*, and requires the government of humans-nature interaction to be managed in trans-scalar (rather than multi-scalar, in the sense that planetary norms may put new responsibilities on local levels and communities or even individuals) and trans-national (rather than inter-national) perspective. This part of the conference will therefore focus on the past and present processes of up-scaling and down-scaling in the construction of the « global » environment, i.e. on scalar imaginations (Coen) the politics of scale (Swingedouw, 2004, 2014) in a planetarized earth governance.

The conference will address more specifically four issues:

- i) At world scale, the discrepancy between the international geopolitical order and the management of global threats which are intrinsically transnational and hence transcend national boundaries and national interests. In other words, we want to address the possibility and the shift towards a global governance in absence of a world government.
- ii) At national and supra-national scale, the reference to local level and the process of rescaling as a strategy to build, maintain and reinforce dominant powers.
- iii) At local scale, the consequences of the transfer of responsibility and cost towards global environmental protection from national level to communities and individuals.
- iv) Political and ethical consequences of politicizing and naturalizing scales and rescaling.

Communication on competing and alternative (esp. non-occidental or non technoscientific) ways of constructing environmental globalities are most welcome.

4. “Planetarization” of Law? Legal concepts and normative process

In the straight line of the above-mentioned themes, the following question will be raised during the conference: to which extent Law is being involved in the so-called process of “Planerization”? In the legal field, this concept may be apprehended from a double

perspective. On the one hand, it may be apprehended as a new theoretical framework implying the adjustment or the redefinition of fundamental legal categories (property, responsibility, sovereignty, subjective right, etc.) to overcome the historical dualism between human and nature and guarantee intergenerational equity (Viñuales, 2016). On the other hand, it may be apprehended as a set of legal dynamics emerging and expanding at the crossroad of domestic and international case law and regulation to prevent large-scale threats to the Planet and to Humanity (Neyret, 2015; Kotzé, 2016).

The following issues will be more specifically addressed during the Conference:

- i) The adaptation of the concept of responsibility/liability of state and private actors to the up-scale of current environmental damages and futures threats posed by climate change, biosphere degradation and land grabbing.
- ii) The attribution of new rights to “future generations”, to “ecosystems” and to “humanity” in legal texts and practices both at the national and international level.
- iii) The adjustment of the fundamental legal category of property to limit individual power and prerogatives and take into account the needs of present and future generations inter-generational equity.
- iv) The emergence of the notion of “climate justice” pointing to the strong connection between climate issues and social justice.

The conference will place emphasis upon the analysis of legal dynamics and concurrent actors and normativities (economic and scientific) which participate, at the crossroad of international, regional and national case law and regulation, to this process of “Planetarisation of Law”. Emphasis will be also placed upon the risk of “securization” that may underlie these legal dynamics.

C. Submissions of Paper Proposals

The Organizing Committee welcomes abstracts from academics as well as practitioners, including staff of adjudicatory institutions and international organizations. Beyond papers addressing one of these four main conference themes, transversal papers are also welcome.

The submission deadline is December, 20, 2017, **Extended to January 15, 2018.**

Papers acceptance will be announced to submitters before **January, 25, 2018.**

Proposals should be sent to: christophe.bonneuil@cnrs.fr and include an abstract (about 300 words + bibliography + a short author’s biography, including the author’s contact details and main publications.

D. Financial assistance

A limited amount of financial assistance is available to support the travel and/or accommodation costs of speakers with financial hardship.

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