



The Department of Anthropology
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

presents a seminar

by

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on

Ecological Legacies: Generational Conflict and Environmental Dispossession

Friday, 5 October 2018

1:00 – 2:30 pm

Room 12 Humanities Building

New Asia College, CUHK

A light lunch will be served at 12:30 pm. First come first served.

"What sort of world are we leaving to our children?" "Why have you not taken better care of the environment? You are passing a ruined planet on to us!" These are rhetorical claims, though hardly idle ones, that have become commonplace in discussions of climate change and ecological damage. On both sides of a putative generational divide, a notion of ecological inheritance frames speculative futures, as well as diagnoses of what currently ails an Earth now conceived on a planetary scale. This talk examines the revival of a transmission model of inheritance in environmental politics and everyday encounters across North America, offering as illustrative evidence a series of vignettes centered on four pieces of "material culture": a plastic bag, a sparrow's nest, a bumper sticker, and a totem pole. What assumptions about possession, ownership, responsibility, and succession inform the trope of bequeathing an ecologically compromised world? What sorts of exclusions are embedded in depictions of ecological inheritance for those who already apprehend themselves as dispossessed? Does it matter that ecological inheritance presents itself discursively as a kinship-mediated legacy that, like debt bondage, can neither be renounced nor refused? Theoretically speaking, to the degree that this discourse imagines ecological inheritance as a strictly human enterprise, with only humans positioned to give or receive, what does this say about the perpetuation of split nature/culture thinking and the limitations of recent ontological critiques?

Kath Weston is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Virginia and the author of seven books, including *Animate Planet: Making Visceral Sense of Living in a High-Tech Ecologically Damaged World*; *Traveling Light: On the Road with America's Poor*, and *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. Weston is a Guggenheim Fellow who has conducted research in the United States, India, Japan, and the United Kingdom, and served as a Visiting Professor at Tokyo University and the University of Cambridge. Her current work focuses on kinship, ecology, finance, and science studies, with an emphasis on embodied engagements with the world around us.

ALL INTERESTED ARE WELCOME