Climate change exposes the territorial nation-state as insufficient to address the crisis. With the surface of the globe covered in a chaotic and lumpy arrangement of adjacent but supposedly distinct and non-overlapping parcels, each with some capacity to contribute to everyone else’s calamity, it is clear to global elites that no individual or subgroup of contemporary states are up to the task. What is obviously necessary is a means of governance that is not beholden to modern state sovereignty, a necessity that is at the same time rejected by some of those very sovereign states. For a solution to the problem of catastrophic climate change, the problem of the state resolves itself only in its inescapable lack of resolution. The regulatory and decision-making role of the state, not to mention the form it takes, is completely and utterly indeterminate. The scale of the problems is so great, it seems impossible to confront them without the state, but it seems just as impossible that the state as currently constituted is going to get the job done. We face a situation in which there is, under current geopolitical and geoeconomic arrangements, no right answer. To address its contradictions—including the ecological contradiction that capital’s growth is destroying the planet—capitalism needs a planetary manager, a “green Keynesian” world state. But elites have proven reluctant to build it, and it appears unlikely to miraculously realize itself. So, the only apparent capitalist solution to climate change is presently impossible.

Geoff Mann is the Director of the Centre for Global Political Economy and an Associate Professor of Geography at Simon Fraser University. He is the author of Climate Leviathan (with Joel Wainwright), In the Long Run We Are All Dead: Keynesianism, Political Economy and Revolution, Disassembly Required: A Field Guide to Actually Existing Capitalism and Our Daily Bread: Wages, Workers and the Political Economy of the American West.

Friday, October 27th - 3:30 pm
Refreshments starting at 3:00pm
ENR2 Building, Room S107