

environmental cinema

*a course exploring cinema's
unique capacity to reveal the world*

Program in Film and Media Studies
Johns Hopkins University
Fall 2019



Instructor Information

Kyle Stine, PhD
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Hours: Wednesday, 1–3 p.m. and by appt.
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Course Information

AS.061.321 Environmental Cinema, 3 credits
Parkway Theater 2
T 10:00 a.m.–12:20 p.m.
JHU/MICA Film Centre, Room 206
Th 10:00 a.m.–12:20 p.m.

Course Description

An exploration of cinema's unique capacity to reveal the world, this course presents an international and richly historical survey of environmental films. Examples come from narrative, documentary, and experimental filmmaking, including blockbusters, exposés of waste and pollution, guerrilla media projects, and poetic contemplations of landscapes and oceans. Filmmakers and artists include Andrei Tarkovsky, Angès Varda, Jia Zhangke, Lucy Walker, Ai Weiwei, Edward Burtynsky, and Werner Herzog.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

- Acquire an understanding of the history of artistic representations of the environment from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day in the arts of painting, photography, and film.
- Gain facility with the terms environment, ecology, and Anthropocene as presented in contemporary media and as used to describe the sphere of media production itself, as in the term "media ecology."
- Open a consideration of cinema as an environment-explicating technology and appreciate the crucial role of "framing" in our understanding of the environment.
- Come to understand the environmental impacts of contemporary media production.
- Distinguish between the formal devices of narrative, documentary, and experimental filmmaking.
- Engage with a broad selection of literature on the environment from the humanities and social sciences.
- Develop critical writing skills for engaging with a topic of ongoing social, economic, and cultural importance.



Course Materials

The course will draw on recent essays on the environment, sustainability, and media from major scholarly publications. Because libraries keep usage statistics for their materials, I believe in the importance of having students download articles directly from the online repositories, and in this way giving credit where credit is due. Doing this will also give you valuable experience in research, where finding and accessing materials is half the battle. At the end of the syllabus I have listed links to the JHU proxy for articles available on JSTOR, Project MUSE, EBSCO, etc. You will be responsible for tracking down these articles. If you have any difficulties, try searching for the article using the author name and article title in Google Scholar before coming to me. If you are still having trouble, please let me know.

Films on DVD are on reserve at the library and can be checked out for four hours at the Service Desk. If you anticipate missing a screening, you are responsible for watching the film on your own before our Thursday meeting. Most weeks, I will need the film to prepare clips between the screening and our class period, so please write to me if you need to catch up on a screening in the middle of the week. Two times during the semester, for *Avatar* and *Stalker*, the film will run approximately 20 minutes over our screening time. We have a window to finish the film in the screening room, but I understand that some of you will need to leave to go to other classes or attend other meetings and events. Please do take the time if possible to watch the rest of the film on your own.

Evaluation

Grades will be based on completion of all assignments, active and constructive participation in class discussions, and high-level creative and academic thought.

A (93–100): Exemplary
A- (90–92): Excellent
B+ (87–89): Strong
B (83–86): Good
B- (80–82): Satisfactory

C+ (77–79): Adequate
C (73–76): Acceptable
C- (70–72): Minimally Acceptable
D (60–69): Unsatisfactory
F (59–0): Failure

Assignments

Attendance and Participation (20 points)

Attendance is required for all discussions and screenings, and students earn participation points for attending class and engaging in discussions. Collective screenings are an important part of the cinema experience and a topic that I hope to thematize at various points in the semester. For certain films like *Leviathan*, *Our Daily Bread*, *Still Life*, and *Stalker*, there simply is no substitute for watching in a theatrical setting, which is why I insisted on having our screening in the Parkway. That said, you will have two free opt-outs for the screenings on the condition that you watch the film on your own before class on Thursday. Each missed screening after two will require a written response paper for that week's film. Students who have flu symptoms should not attend class and should isolate themselves to the extent possible until they have been fever-free for twenty-four hours. Religious holidays are valid reasons to be excused from class. Students who must miss a class because of a religious holiday must inform the instructor as early in the semester as possible to be excused from class or to make up any work that is missed. Students who must miss class should contact a classmate for lecture notes and information before contacting the instructor with any questions.

Reading Questions (5 points)

To help guide our discussion, each week one student will be responsible for providing 3–5 reading questions focused on the main readings listed on the schedule. Questions should be geared toward fostering discussion: exploratory, connective, and open-ended. Please email me your questions the night before class.

Article Summary and Film Analysis (5 points)

Similarly, each week one student will engage with analysis of the film by reporting on an additional article. I have listed at least two recommended readings that directly engage with each film or that are related in some important way to the film. Choose at least one of those articles to gain some additional perspective on the history, style, form, narrative, argument, or message of the film. Plan a short, informal presentation (around five minutes) that opens up discussion of film style and narrative focusing the article or a scene analysis or a combination of the two.

Analysis Papers: Documentary and Fiction, 4–5 pages each (20 points each)

Two film analysis papers are due during the semester, one on a documentary and another on a narrative fiction. The due dates are September 27 and November 8. To allow you the greatest opportunity to write about the films of your choice, it is up to you which paper you turn in first. Each paper should engage with a different theoretical lens by citing at least one of the scholarly articles assigned as primary reading. The reading need not come from the same week as the film.

Final Essay, 6–8 pages (30 points)

Students will propose a paper topic by November 21 in consultation with the instructor. Papers will take the form of either an extended piece of film criticism or a creative essay on film dealing with the topics and readings from the semester. Outside research is encouraged but not required. The final paper will be due on Blackboard on the day of the regularly scheduled final exam by 5 p.m. (TBD).

Academic Integrity

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. Report any violations you witness to the instructor. You may consult the associate dean of student conduct (or designee) by calling the Office of the Dean of Students at 410-516-8208 or via email at integrity@jhu.edu. For more information, see the Homewood Student Affairs site on academic ethics: (<https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/student-life/student-conduct/academic-ethics-undergraduates>) or the e-catalog entry on the undergraduate academic ethics board: (<http://e-catalog.jhu.edu/undergrad-students/student-life-policies/#UAEB>).

Disability Services

Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class must obtain an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services, 385 Garland, 410-516-4720, studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu.

The Counseling Center

If you are struggling with anxiety, stress, depression or other mental health related concerns, please consider visiting the JHU Counseling Center. If you are concerned about a friend, please encourage that person to seek out their services. The Counseling Center is located at 3003 North Charles St. in Suite S-200 and can be reached at 410-516-8278 and online at <http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/counselingcenter/>.

Schedule

Framing the Environment

W1 Systems

strategies for representing totality

Sept. 3 Screening:	<i>Koyaanisqatsi</i> , dir. Godfrey Reggio, USA, 1982, 86m
Sept. 5 Discussion:	Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," 197–222; Bruno Latour and Timothy Lenton, "Extending the Domain of Freedom, or Why Gaia Is So Hard to Understand," 659–680
Recommended:	Gregory Stephens, " <i>Koyaanisqatsi</i> and the Visual Narrative of Environmental Film"; Gary Matthew Varner, " <i>Koyaanisqatsi</i> and the Posthuman Aesthetics of a Mechanical Stare"

W2 Folds

understanding the intertwined

- Sept. 10 Screening: *Avatar*, dir. James Cameron, USA, 2009, 162m
- Sept. 12 Discussion: Bruno Latour, "A Collective of Humans and Nonhumans," 174–215 (Blackboard); Latour, "An Attempt at a 'Compositionist Manifesto,'" 471–490
- Recommended: Bron Taylor and Adrian Ivakhiv, "Opening Pandora's Film" (Blackboard); Aylish Wood, "Where Codes Collide: The Emergent Ecology of *Avatar*"

W3 Flows

picturing migrations, crossings, and zones of indistinction

- Sept. 17 Screening: *Human Flow*, dir. Ai Weiwei, Germany, 2017, 140m
- Sept. 19 Discussion: Hannah Arendt, "The Decline of the Nation State and the End of the Rights of Man," 267–290, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Blackboard); Giorgio Agamben, "Introduction," 1–12, in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Blackboard); Ai Weiwei, "Borders," 35–46, in *Humanity* (Blackboard)
- Recommended: Georges Didi-Huberman, "From a High Vantage Point"; Eszter Zimanyi, "*Human Flow*: Thinking with and through Ai Weiwei's Defamiliarizing Gaze"

W4 Storms

recognizing the uneven impacts of climate change

- Sept. 24 Screening: *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, dir. Benh Zeitlin, USA, 2012, 93m
- Sept. 26 Discussion: Zoe Todd, "Indigenizing the Anthropocene," 241–254 (Blackboard); Rob Nixon, "Introduction," 1–22, in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Blackboard); Greta Gaard, "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism," 114–137
- Recommended: Tavia Nyong'o, "Little Monsters: Race, Sovereignty, and Queer Inhumanism in *Beasts of the Southern Wild*"; Natalia Cecire, "Environmental Innocence and Slow Violence"

Paper 1 due September 27 by 5 p.m.

Ways of Perceiving the Environment

W5 Foraging

in search of food for body and thought

- Oct. 1 Screening: *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse (The Gleaners and I)*, dir. Agnès Varda, France, 2000, 82m
- Oct. 3 Discussion: James J. Gibson, "Part 1: The Environment to Be Perceived," 1–38, in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Blackboard); John Durham Peters, "Introduction: In Medias Res," 1–12, in *The Marvelous Clouds* (Blackboard)

Recommended: Homay King, "Matter, Time, and the Digital: Varda's *The Gleaners and I*"; Allan Stoekl, "Agnès Varda and the Limits of Gleaning"

W6 Breathing

toward an awareness of the background

Oct. 8 Screening: *Safe*, dir. Todd Haynes, USA, 1995, 119m

Oct. 10 Discussion: Peter Sloterdijk, "Gas Warfare—or: The Atmoterrorist Model," 9–46, in *Terror from the Air* (Blackboard)

Recommended: Nicole Seymour, "'It's Just Not Turning Up': Cinematic Vision and Environmental Justice in Todd Haynes's *Safe*"; Joshua Trey Barnett, "Impurities: Thinking Ecologically With *Safe*"

W7 Sensing

the worlds of insects, animals, and machines

Oct. 15 Screening: *Leviathan*, dir. Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Verena Paravel, USA, 2012, 87m

Oct. 17 Discussion: Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Animal and Man*, 39–62 (Blackboard); Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, 5–22 (Blackboard)

Recommended: Alanna Thain, "A Bird's-Eye View of *Leviathan*"; Matthew Battles, "Technology at Sea: Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel, *Leviathan*"

Environmental Infrastructures

W8 Aqueducts

the circulatory systems of modern cities

Oct. 22 Screening: *Chinatown*, dir. Roman Polanski, USA, 1974, 131m

Oct. 24 Discussion: Paul N. Edwards, "Infrastructure and Modernity: Force, Time, and Social Organization in the History of Sociotechnical Systems," 185–225 (Blackboard)

Recommended: Patrick Carroll, "Water and Technoscientific State Formation in California"; Mike Wilmington, "Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*"

W9 Farms

the subjection of land and animals

Oct. 29 Screening: *Unser täglich Brot*, dir. Nikolaus Geyrhalter, Austria/Germany, 2005, 92m

Oct. 31 Discussion: Jane Bennett, "Edible Matter"; Jason W. Moore, "Cheap Food and Bad Climate: From Surplus Value to Negative Value in the Capitalist World-Ecology"

Recommended: John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?" (Blackboard); Sarah O'Brien, "Why Look at Dead Animals?"; Helen Hughes, "Arguments without Words in *Unser täglich Brot*"

W10 Dams

intended and unintended consequences of diverting flows

- Nov. 5 Screening: *Still Life*, dir. Jia Zhangke, China, 2006, 112m
- Nov. 7 Discussion: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Introduction: Rhizome" (Blackboard)
- Recommended: Jennifer Fay, "Still Life," from *Inhospitable World: Cinema in the Time of the Anthropocene* (Blackboard); Sheldon H. Lu, "Gorgeous Three Gorges at Last Sight: Cinematic Remembrance and the Dialectic of Modernization" (Blackboard); Hunter Vaughan, "500,000 Kilowatts of Stardust: An Ecomaterialist Reframing of *Singin' in the Rain*" (Blackboard)

Paper 2 due November 8 by 5 p.m.

Problems of Representation

W11 Duration

deep time and slow cinema

- Nov. 12 Screening: *Into Eternity*, dir. Michael Madsen, Denmark, 2010, 78m
- Nov. 14 Discussion: Timothy Morton, selections from *Hyperobjects* (Blackboard); Jussi Parikka, "The Geology of Media"
- Recommended: Karl Schoonover, "Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema's Laboring Body, the Political Spectator, and the Queer"

W12 Invisibility

the forbidden and the inaccessible

- Nov. 19 Screening: *Stalker*, dir. Andrei Tarkovsky, USSR, 1979, 163m
- Nov. 21 Discussion: Adrian J. Ivakhiv, "The Anthrobiogeomorphic Machine: Stalking the Zone of Cinema"; Geoff Dyer, "Into the Zone" (Blackboard)

W13 Depth

the inhospitable and the sublime

- Dec. 3 Screening: *Encounters at the End of the World*, dir. Werner Herzog, USA, 2007, 101m
- Dec. 5 Discussion: Wrap-up and end-of-course logistics

Final Paper due on Blackboard, date TBD.

Readings URLs*

Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses"

<https://doi-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/10.1086/596640>

Bruno Latour and Timothy Lenton, "Extending the Domain of Freedom, or Why Gaia Is So Hard to Understand"

<https://doi-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/10.1086/702611>

Bruno Latour, "An Attempt at a 'Compositionist Manifesto'"

<https://www-jstor-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/stable/40983881>

Greta Gaard, "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism"

<https://www-jstor-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/stable/3810254>

Jane Bennett, "Edible Matter"

<https://jscholarship.library.jhu.edu/bitstream/handle/1774.2/32812/edibleMatter.pdf>

Jason W. Moore, "Cheap Food and Bad Climate: From Surplus Value to Negative Value in the Capitalist World-Ecology"

<https://doi-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/10.1086/681007>

Jussi Parikka, "The Geology of Media"

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2013/10/the-geology-of-media/280523/>

Adrian J. Ivakhiv, "The Anthrobiogeomorphic Machine: Stalking the Zone of Cinema"

<https://www.eupublishing.com/doi/pdfplus/10.3366/film.2011.0007>

Recommended

Gregory Stephens, "Koyaanisqatsi and the Visual Narrative of Environmental Film"

<http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/28/koyaanisqatsi-visual-narrative-of-environmental-film.html>

Gary Matthew Varner, "Koyaanisqatsi and the Posthuman Aesthetics of a Mechanical Stare"

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/fc.13761232.0041.104>

Aylish Wood, "Where Codes Collide: The Emergent Ecology of *Avatar*"

<https://journals-sagepub-com.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/doi/full/10.1177/1746847712456261>

Georges Didi-Huberman, "From a High Vantage Point"

https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_ESPRI_1807_0065--from-a-high-vantage-point.htm

Eszter Zimanyi, "*Human Flow*: Thinking with and through Ai Weiwei's Defamiliarizing Gaze"

<https://doi-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/10.2752/175470709X12450568848090>

Tavia Nyong'o, "Little Monsters: Race, Sovereignty, and Queer Inhumanism in *Beasts of the Southern Wild*"

<https://doi-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/10.1215/10642684-2843335>

Natalia Cecire, "Environmental Innocence and Slow Violence"

<https://www-jstor-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/stable/43958483>

Homay King, "Matter, Time, and the Digital: Varda's *The Gleaners and I*"

<https://doi-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/10.1080/10509200500536322>

Allan Stoekl, "Agnès Varda and the Limits of Gleaning"

http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP_5/PDFs/Stoekl.pdf

Nicole Seymour, "'It's Just Not Turning Up': Cinematic Vision and Environmental Justice in Todd Haynes's *Safe*"

<https://www-jstor-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/stable/41240734>

Joshua Trey Barnett, "Impurities: Thinking Ecologically With *Safe*"

<https://doi-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/10.1111/cccr.12162>

Alanna Thain, "A Bird's-Eye View of *Leviathan*"

<https://doi-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/10.1111/var.12061>

Matthew Battles, "Technology at Sea: Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel, *Leviathan*"

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/546874>

Patrick Carroll, "Water and Technoscientific State Formation in California"

<https://www-jstor-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/stable/41721339>

Mike Wilmington, "Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*"

<https://search-proquest-com.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/docview/1306636336/9976EC832C5B42BAPO/2>

Sarah O'Brien, "Why Look at Dead Animals?"

<https://muse.jhu.edu/issue/33210>

Helen Hughes, "Arguments without Words in *Unser täglich Brot*"

<https://doi-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/10.1080/10304312.2013.772112>

Karl Schoonover, "Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema's Laboring Body, the Political Spectator, and the Queer"

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/468469>

* Note that all readings can also be found simply by pasting the author name and article title into Google Scholar.