

Climate Change, Environment, and Film Draft Syllabus

“Cinema is not only about making people dream. It’s about changing things and making people think.” – Nadine Labaki

Course Description:

This course offers an interdisciplinary exploration of the profound and multifaceted relationship between climate change, environmental issues, and the medium of film. Through an engaging blend of theory, analysis, and cinematic experiences, students will examine how cinema has portrayed, critiqued, and shaped public understanding of climate change and environmental challenges. In this course, we study the medium of “film” as a broad construction. You will engage with dramas, animations, documentaries, short films, Reels/TikToks, sci-fi, and tv episodes.

Course Objectives:

1. Explore how various environmental issues, including climate change, deforestation, pollution, and biodiversity loss, are portrayed in different film genres and styles.
2. Critically assess the impact of film on shaping public perceptions and attitudes toward environmental problems.
3. Investigate the political dimensions of climate change and environmental policies as represented in film.
4. Examine how cinematic narratives reflect and sometimes challenge political ideologies and policy decisions related to the environment.
5. Study the representation of environmental justice and activism in films.
6. Analyze how films engage with issues of inequality, displacement, and grassroots movements in the context of environmental crises.
7. Cultivate skills in visual literacy, film analysis, and critical thinking through close examination of cinematic texts.
8. Engage in discussions and writing assignments that foster the ability to critically assess the messages conveyed by films.
9. Explore the potential of film as a tool for raising awareness, advocacy, and social change in the context of climate and environmental issues.
10. Evaluate the effectiveness of environmental documentaries, advocacy films, and storytelling in mobilizing public action.

Assignments and Evaluations:

Participation (10%)

The classes each week will have two different purposes. In the first meeting of the week, we will have a more traditional set of discussions, lectures, and activities to unpack the topic or theme for the week. The second meeting each week will be dedicated to lab time for the final project, simulation activities, and other hands-on or experiential learning tasks. Your attendance in class is critical. I grade participation on both quantity and quality. This means that shallow, yet frequent, contributions will not receive as high of a grade as moderate and meaningful contributions to the course. I encourage all students to ensure that they attend class regularly, fully read and watch each weeks' content, and come prepared with questions and insights to contribute to the classroom discussion.

Weekly Quote-Comment-Questions (QCQs) (20%)

Each week, students will submit a QCQ for the week where they will include one quote that resonated with them from the assigned texts or films, one comment on the themes for the material for the week, and one question about a text, theme, or concept from the week. These are due 24 hours ahead of class to Brightspace. The purpose of this assessment is to check for understanding of the weekly materials and to help me structure discussion for our course to address lingering questions from the material and provide space to engage with quotes or ideas.

Comparative Film Analysis (2 due; 15% each)

The topics we will explore in class have been approached in various ways by filmmakers as a method of speaking to different audiences, eliciting different emotions and responses from viewers, and to highlight various perspectives on issues. In the comparative film analysis assignment, you will choose two films from the course (they do not necessarily need to be from the same week) and discuss how these films differ and overlap in their approaches to highlighting an environmental or climate change theme. One of these will be due in Week 4 and the final one will be due in Week 11.

Final Assessment: Film Creation (40%)

Students will work in pairs, groups, or individually to produce a short film (10 minutes or less) about an environmental or climate change topic of their choice. Students may use any style of film they choose. We will screen these films in our final two class periods of the course (aka: a class film festival) to celebrate the final products and share learnings with each other. You will have three deliverable deadlines for this project: a pitch and briefing of your film topic (10%), a

storyboard of your film (15%), and the final film product (25%). More detailed instructions about this assignment and the rubric can be found on Brightspace.

A logistics note:

While there is no assigned textbook for this course, you will likely need to have access to a few streaming services to watch all the films required for the course. There are some films available for free on Kanopy or Hoopla! as well. The three most commonly used streaming services we will use for the course are:

- Netflix (standard with ads, \$6.99 a month)
- Apple TV (\$8.99 a month)
- Disney+ (\$11.99 a month)

There are also a small handful of films that are between \$4-\$10 assigned throughout the course. I have marked these films throughout the course outline and I have also tried to identify which platforms each of these listed films are on. If these present a hardship or complication for you, please reach out to me via email, Discord, or during office hours to discuss some strategies for overcoming this barrier to your participation in the course.

Course Outline:

Note: readings and films must be completed 24 hours in advance of each week of class.

Week	Topics/Themes	Readings and Filmssd	Deadlines
Week 1	Course introduction	No pre-assigned readings for this week. We will do some in-class readings together this week.	QCQ 1 due Sunday at 11:59pm EST
Week 2	The Habitability Crisis	<u>Readings:</u> Carbon Brief Explainer: Will global warming 'stop' as soon as net-zero emissions are reached? (Hausfather 2021)	QCQ 2 due Sunday at 11:59pm EST

		Global temperature projections (Climate Action Tracker 2022) IPCC Summary Report for Policymakers (Allan et al. 2021) <u>Required Films:</u> Extrapolations: Episode 1, A Raven Story (Apple TV) Don't Look Up (Netflix) The Day After Tomorrow (Disney+) <u>Optional Films:</u> An Inconvenient Truth (Available on Kanopy) David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet (Netflix)	
Week 3	Biodiversity and human-nature environmental relationships	<u>Readings:</u> Global Biodiversity Outlook 5 Summary for Policymakers (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity 2020) Environmental Policies Must Manage Climate Change and Biodiversity as One (McElwee 2023) Selections from Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer <u>Optional Reading:</u>	QCQ 3 due Sunday at 11:59pm EST Film topic selection and group/pair declaration due

		Are We in the Middle of a Sixth Mass Extinction? (Gibbons 2011) <u>Required Films:</u> Extrapolations: Episode 2, Whale Fall (Apple TV) Collision (Vimeo rental-\$6.86 CAD) Princess Mononoke (Netflix) <u>Optional Films:</u> Bambi (Disney+) Koyaanisqatsi (Apple TV \$4.99) Prophecy (Apple TV or Amazon Prime \$4.99) Strange World (Disney+)	
Week 4	Environmental Justice	<u>Readings:</u> The unbearable heaviness of climate coloniality (Sultana 2022) Selected readings from Pollution is Colonialism (Liboiron 2021) Air pollution and climate change: two sides of the same coin (United Nations Environment Programme 2019) Blocking pipelines, unsettling environmental justice: from rights of nature to responsibility to	QCQ 4 due Sunday at 11:59pm EST Comparative Film Analysis #1 due

		territory (Temper 2018) <u>Required Films:</u> Extrapolations: Episode 3, The Fifth Question (Apple TV) Erin Brockovich (Netflix) Wastewater: A Tale of Two Cities (Vimeo) Beasts of the Southern Wild (Amazon Prime, Apple TV, Google Play \$4.99) <u>Optional Films:</u> Plastic China (rent on Vimeo for \$4.03 CAD) Conviction (Vimeo)	
Week 5	Climate change, environment, and technology	<u>Readings:</u> Geoengineering, climate change and ecological security (McDonald 2023) My Continent Is Not Your Giant Climate Laboratory by Chukwumerije Okereke <u>Required Films:</u> Extrapolations: Episode 4, Face of G-d (Apple TV) The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind (Netflix) Snowpiercer (film; Netflix)*	QCQ 5 due Sunday at 11:59pm EST Film pitch and topic briefing due

		<i>*you could also watch a few episodes of the TV series on Netflix instead</i>	
Week 6	Conflict and climate change	<u>Readings:</u> Millions on the move: What climate change could mean for internal migration (Voegele 2021) Podcast: when people move. Understanding how climate change creates the movement of people (Randall 2015) Beyond internal conflict: The emergent practice of climate security (Busby 2020) <u>Required Films:</u> Extrapolations: Episode 5, Part II: Night Birds (Apple TV) Honeyland (Amazon Prime) <u>Optional Film:</u> Children of Men (Amazon Prime, Apple TV, Google Play \$4.99)	QCQ 6 due Sunday at 11:59pm EST
Week 7	Temporality— linking past to present in the environment and climate change	<u>Readings:</u> Selections from Fresh Banana Leaves <u>Required Films:</u> Extrapolations: Episode 6, Lola (Apple TV) Gather (Netflix)	QCQ 7 due Sunday at 11:59pm EST Film storyboard due

		Beasts of the Southern Wild (Amazon Prime, Apple TV, Google Play \$4.99)	
Week 8	Temporality—considering future(s) of the environment and climate change	<u>Readings:</u> Our Common Future (aka: “Brundtland Report”) Postapocalyptic narratives in climate activism: their place and impact in five European cities (de Moor 2022) Assessing the impact of the securitization narrative on climate change adaptation in Nigeria (Oramah et al 2021) <u>Required Films:</u> Extrapolations: Episode 7, The Going-Away Party (Apple TV) Wall-E (Disney+) Interstellar (Amazon Prime, Paramount+) <u>Optional Films:</u> Soylent Green (Amazon Prime, Apple TV, Google Play \$4.99)	QCQ 8 due Sunday at 11:59pm EST
Week 9	Responsibility and climate change	<u>Readings:</u> Responsibilities for just transition to low-carbon	QCQ 9 due Sunday at 11:59pm EST

		societies: a role-based framework (Kortetmäki and Huttunen 2022) What Does Loss and Damage Mean at the Country Level? A Global Mapping Through Nationally Determined Contributions (Calliari and Ryder 2023) <u>Required Films:</u> Extrapolations: Episode 8, Ecocide (Apple TV) Dark Waters (Apple TV, Google Play, Amazon Prime) I Heart Huckabees (Disney+)	
Week 10	Climate and Environmental Activism	<u>Readings:</u> Selections from Fighting to Breathe: Race, Toxicity, and The Rise of Youth Activism in Baltimore (Fabricant 2023) Selections from Effective Advocacy Lessons from East Asia's Environmentalists (Haddad 2021) Coal, Climate Justice, and the Cultural Politics of Energy Transition (Brown and Spiegel 2019) <u>Required Films:</u> Woman at War (Amazon Prime)	QCQ 10 due Sunday at 11:59pm EST Film Submission due on Brightspace

		FernGully (Amazon Prime) The Territory (Disney+) We are Still Here (YouTube) <u>Optional Films:</u> To the End (rent on Google Play or YouTube for \$4.99 or Apple TV for \$6.99) Riotsville, USA (rent on Apple TV for \$6.99) How to Blow Up a Pipeline (rent on Google Play or YouTube for \$4.99 or Apple TV for \$6.99)	
Week 11	Class Film Festival	No readings or films assigned for this week	Comparative Film Analysis #2 due
Week 12	Class Film Festival	No readings or films assigned for this week	

Film Descriptions (Alphabetical; summaries taken from various internet sources):

An Inconvenient Truth (2006):

This is a wake-up call that cuts through myths and misconceptions to deliver the message that global warming is a real and present danger. AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH brings home Al Gore's persuasive argument that we must act now to save the earth.

Bambi (1942):

The animated story of Bambi, a young deer hailed as the 'Prince of the Forest' at his birth. As Bambi grows, he makes friends with the other animals of the forest, learns the skills needed to

survive, and even finds love. One day, however, the hunters come, and Bambi must learn to be as brave as his father if he is to lead the other deer to safety.

Beasts of the Southern Wild (2012):

Hushpuppy, an intrepid six-year-old girl, lives with her father, Wink, in the Bathtub, a southern Delta community at the edge of the world. Wink's tough love prepares her for the unraveling of the universe; for a time when he's no longer there to protect her. When Wink contracts a mysterious illness, nature flies out of whack, temperatures rise, and the ice caps melt, unleashing an army of prehistoric creatures called aurochs. With the waters rising, the aurochs coming, and Wink's health fading, Hushpuppy goes in search of her lost mother.

Children of Men (2006):

The film is set in 2027, when two decades of human infertility have left society on the brink of collapse. Asylum seekers seek sanctuary in the United Kingdom, where they are subjected to detention and refoulement by the government. Owen plays civil servant Theo Faron, who tries to help refugee Kee (Clare-Hope Ashitey) escape the chaos.

Collision (2023):

A worldwide increase in shipping traffic is threatening our oceans, its inhabitants and the planet. Collision is a powerful feature documentary which highlights the severely under-reported issue of fatal ship strikes on whales, a threat which is endangering their very existence. Working with leading scientists, NGO's and worldwide authorities Collision is an accurate and scientifically based account of the realities of the harsh impact of marine traffic on ocean life. The film not only highlights the issues but also presents clear and available solutions to encourage governments, authorities and global shipping companies to make vital changes.

<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/collision2023>

Conviction (2019):

After a high-profile bribery scandal led to the convictions of the three powerful conspirators, the community they targeted is left in the dust to find relief from decades of toxic air and soil pollution. Community members in the North Birmingham neighborhoods of Collegeville, Harriman Park and Fairmont tell their personal stories and share their struggles, as they seek a healthier life for the generations of the future.

<https://www.southernexposurefilms.org/films/conviction>

Dark Waters (2019):

A corporate defense attorney takes on an environmental lawsuit against a chemical company that exposes a lengthy history of pollution.

David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet (2020):

David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet is a 2020 British documentary film narrated by David Attenborough and produced and directed by Jonnie Hughes. The film acts as a "witness statement", through which Attenborough shares first-hand his concern for the current state of the planet due to humanity's impact on nature and his hopes for the future. It was released on Netflix on 4 October 2020, along with a companion book *A Life on Our Planet*.

Don't Look Up (2021):

Kate Dibiasky (Jennifer Lawrence), an astronomy grad student, and her professor *Dr. Randall Mindy* (Leonardo DiCaprio) make an astounding discovery of a comet orbiting within the solar system. The problem - it's on a direct collision course with Earth. The other problem? No one really seems to care. Turns out warning mankind about a planet-killer the size of Mount Everest is an inconvenient fact to navigate. With the help of *Dr. Oglethorpe* (Rob Morgan), Kate and Randall embark on a media tour that takes them from the office of an indifferent President *Orlean* (Meryl Streep) and her sycophantic son and Chief of Staff, *Jason* (Jonah Hill), to the airwaves of *The Daily Rip*, an upbeat morning show hosted by *Brie* (Cate Blanchett) and *Jack* (Tyler Perry). With only six months until the comet makes impact, managing the 24-hour news cycle and gaining the attention of the social media obsessed public before it's too late proves shockingly comical - what will it take to get the world to just look up?

Erin Brockovich (2000):

Erin Brockovich is a 2000 American biographical legal drama film directed by Steven Soderbergh and written by Susannah Grant.[1] The film is a dramatization of the true story of *Erin Brockovich*, portrayed by *Julia Roberts*, who initiated a legal case against the *Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E)* over its culpability for the *Hinkley groundwater contamination* incident. The film was a box-office success, and gained a positive critical reaction.

Extrapolations (TV series- 2023):

"Extrapolations" is a bracing drama from writer, director and executive producer *Scott Z. Burns* that introduces a near future where the chaotic effects of climate change have become embedded into our everyday lives. Eight interwoven stories about love, work, faith and family from across the globe will explore the intimate, life-altering choices that must be made when the planet is changing faster than the population. Every story is different, but the fight for our future is universal. And when the fate of humanity is up against a ticking clock, the battle between courage and complacency has never been more urgent. Are we brave enough to become the solution to our own undoing before it's too late?

FernGully: The Last Rainforest (1992):

The magical inhabitants of a rainforest fight to save their home, which is threatened by logging and a polluting force of destruction called Hexxus.

Gather (2021):

Gather is an intimate portrait of the growing movement amongst Native Americans to reclaim their spiritual, political and cultural identities through food sovereignty, while battling the trauma of centuries of genocide. Gather follows Nephi Craig, a chef from the White Mountain Apache Nation (Arizona), opening an indigenous café as a nutritional recovery clinic; Elsie Dubray, a young scientist from the Cheyenne River Sioux Nation (South Dakota), conducting landmark studies on bison; and the Ancestral Guard, a group of environmental activists from the Yurok Nation (Northern California), trying to save the Klamath river.

Honeyland (2019):

The last female bee-hunter in Europe must save the bees and return the natural balance in Honeyland, when a family of nomadic beekeepers invade her land and threaten her livelihood.

How to Blow Up a Pipeline (2022):

Set primarily in West Texas, the film follows a fictional group of eight young individuals who decide to blow up an oil pipeline at two key locations. It explores the moral validity of extreme actions in addressing the climate crisis, the question of terrorism, and the use of property damage and sabotage as activist tactics.

I Heart Huckabees (2004):

A husband-and-wife team play detective, but not in the traditional sense. Instead, the happy duo helps others solve their existential issues, the kind that keep you up at night, wondering what it all means.

Interstellar (2014):

Earth's future has been riddled by disasters, famines, and droughts. There is only one way to ensure mankind's survival: Interstellar travel. A newly discovered wormhole in the far reaches of our solar system allows a team of astronauts to go where no man has gone before, a planet that may have the right environment to sustain human life.

Koyaanisqatsi (1982):

The film consists primarily of slow motion and time-lapse footage (some of it in reverse) of cities and many natural landscapes across the United States. The visual tone poem contains neither dialogue nor a vocalized narration: its tone is set by the juxtaposition of images and music. In the Hopi language, the word koyaanisqatsi means "life out of balance."

Plastic China (2017):

This film tells a story about an unschooled 11-year-old girl Yi-Jie, she's a truly global child who learns the world through the United Nations of Wastes while working with her Yi minority parents in this recycle workshop thousand miles away from their mountain village home town.

Going to school is all she longing for. And the ambitious boss of the workshop Kun, who works so hard for trying to give his family a better life. Through the story of these two families, the film explores how these wastes recycled by the bare hands of families, and discovers their dilemma and choices of suffering irreversible damages on life just to make a living. It also observes that the world is flat and issues don't go away by changing time and location - we're all in this together.

<https://www.cnex.tw/plasticchina>

<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/plasticchina>

Princess Mononoke (1997):

Princess Mononoke is set in the late Muromachi period of Japan (approximately 1336 to 1573 AD), but it includes fantasy elements. The story follows a young Emishi prince named Ashitaka, and his involvement in a struggle between the gods (kami) of a forest and the humans who consume its resources. The film deals with themes of Shinto and environmentalism. The term mononoke (物の怪, or もののけ) is not a name, but a Japanese word for supernatural, shape-shifting beings that possess people and cause suffering, disease, or death.

Prophecy (1979):

Set along the Androscoggin or Ossipee River, the film follows an environmental agent and his wife filing a report on a paper mill in the river, not knowing that the paper mill's waste made a local bear mutate, causing the bear to run amok in the wilderness.

Riotville, USA (2022):

Welcome to Riotville, a fictional town built by the US military. Using all archival footage, the film explores the militarization of the police and creates a counter-narrative to the nation's reaction to the uprisings of the late '60s.

Snowpiercer (2013):

The nations release the substance CW-7 with the intention of controlling global warming, but accidentally it results in another Ice Age destroying Earth. The only survivors live in the train Snowpiercer which is driven by a perpetual motion engine created by the millionaire Wilford (Ed Harris) that lives in the engine part. In 2031, after seventeen years, there is a fight of classes inside the train since the oppressed lower class lives in dreadful conditions in the last wagons of the train while the elite lives in the front wagons.

Soylent Green (1973):

The is the year 2022. Overcrowding, pollution, and resource depletion have reduced society's leaders to finding food for the teeming masses. The answer is Soylent Green-an artificial nourishment whose actual ingredients are not known by the public. Thorn (Charlton Heston) is

the tough homicide detective who stumbles onto the secret so terrifying no one would dare believe him.

Strange World (2022):

Walt Disney Animation Studios' original action-packed adventure "Strange World" introduces a legendary family of explorers, the Clades, as they attempt to navigate an uncharted, treacherous land alongside a motley crew that includes a mischievous blob, a three-legged dog and a slew of ravenous creatures.

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind (2019):

William Kamkwamba was born in the country of Malawi, in Africa. When he was fourteen years old, a terrible drought hit the village where he lived. People had nothing to eat. Being an excellent student and very fond of physics, William decides to save his native village from starvation. In the library he finds books on physics. After studying the books, he got an idea to build a wind generator, to provide electricity to his family.

The Day After Tomorrow (2004):

After climatologist Jack Hall (Dennis Quaid) is largely ignored by U.N. officials when presenting his environmental concerns, his research proves true when an enormous "superstorm" develops, setting off catastrophic natural disasters throughout the world. Trying to get to his son, Sam (Jake Gyllenhaal), who is trapped in New York with his friend Laura (Emmy Rossum) and others, Jack and his crew must travel by foot from Philadelphia, braving the elements, to get to Sam before it's too late.

The Territory (2022):

THE TERRITORY provides an immersive on-the-ground look at the tireless fight of the Indigenous Uru-eu-wau-wau people against the encroaching deforestation brought by farmers and illegal settlers in the Brazilian Amazon. With awe-inspiring cinematography showcasing the titular landscape and richly textured sound design, the film takes audiences deep into the Uru-eu-wau-wau community and provides unprecedented access to the farmers and settlers illegally burning and clearing the protected Indigenous land. Partially shot by the Uru-eu-wau-wau people, the film relies on vérité footage captured over three years as the community risks their lives to set up their own news media team in the hopes of exposing the truth.

To the End (2022):

Stopping the climate crisis is a question of political courage, and the clock is ticking. Over three years of turbulence and crisis, four young women fight for a Green New Deal, and ignite a historic shift in U.S. climate politics.

WALL-E (2008):

WALL-E, short for Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-class, is the last robot left on Earth. He spends his days tidying up the planet, one piece of garbage at a time. But during 700 years, WALL-E has developed a personality, and he's more than a little lonely. Then he spots EVE, a sleek and shapely probe sent back to Earth on a scanning mission. Smitten WALL-E embarks on his greatest adventure yet when he follows EVE across the galaxy.

Wastewater: A Tale of Two Cities (2021):

Critical to the environment, public health, and quality of life, wastewater infrastructure in Alabama - and throughout the country - suffers from decades of lack of investment and racial discrimination, and is increasingly threatened by the changing climate.

<https://www.southernexposurefilms.org/films/wastewater-a-tale-of-two-cities>

Woman at War (2018):

Halla is a 50-year-old environmental activist who crusades against the local aluminum industry in Iceland. As her actions grow bolder, her life changes in the blink of an eye when she's finally granted permission to adopt a girl from the Ukraine.

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