**English 580 Spring 2023**

**Aesthetic Environments**

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:00-4:00; colloquium Fridays 2:00-3:00; and by appointment, in 2002University Hall

This seminar studies the environmental capacities of the novel and film, including probing the inclusions and exclusions of the genre deemed “cl-fi”: climate fiction and climate film. Pushing beyond more literalistic conceptions of that genre, we will work with theories of medium and form and the history of urbanization to develop an understanding of the aptitudes for world-building in these setting-driven modes, privileging aesthetic mediations of causality and totality, defamiliarization and projection over sociological immediacies associated with clifi, and acquainting ourselves with “climate humanities” paradigms like infrastructuralism and ecomarxism. Questions will include: how does the novel as the literary form unique to capitalism conceptualize petromodernity? How does film intervene in the invisibility of oil and of infrastructure? What alternative energy regimes can novels and films help us design and implement? What art forms engage the political specters of degrowth, “fully automated luxury gay space communism,” and authoritarian scarcity?

**Required Novels (available at the UIC bookstore):**

Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights*

Zora Neal Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Chibundu Onuzo, *Welcome to Lagos*

Kim Stanley Robinson, *Ministry for the Future*

Helena Viramontes, *Their Dogs Came With Them*

**Required articles and book sections available in our course dropbox:** <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/mwam4zvz6vynef7rn9dq3/h?dl=0&rlkey=3va24cmxw0b4l1o050ay87oxu>

**Required Films on Kanopy:**

Alfonso Cuaron, *Children of Men*

Roland Emmerich, *The Day After Tomorrow*

Michael Mann, *Miami Vice*

Roland Polanski, *Chinatown*

Steven Soderbergh, *Logan Lucky*

**Required Film on Vimeo:**

Myron Dewey, *Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock*

<https://vimeo.com/213791250>

**Requirements**

* active seminar participation: careful reading, thoughtful contribution to discussion
* discussion facilitation, one session
* discussion wrap-up, one session (informal summation of that day’s discussion)
* seminar paper peer review
* seminar paper

**Guidelines**

**Readings and Discussion Preparation:** This is an intensive seminar, with a heavy reading load of complex texts. We will approach the seminar space as a laboratory for experimenting with collective reading and discovering as much as we can about aesthetic environments, ecomarxist debates, and how novels and films think. Our methods will therefore be first and foremost formalist, and students should read or with an eye for distinctive formal elements of any given works, as well as common formal elements across disparate works. Discussions will address how forms produce unique ideas; preparation for discussion should involve reflecting on aspects like narrative structure, plot, focalization, description, beginnings and endings, style, mode, cinematography. Seminar sessions will often commence by asking every student to indicate ideas or forms or phenomena in the readings that call for unpacking, and to supply page numbers where possible. Discussion participation is key to a strong seminar and an important basis for your evaluation.

**Discussion Facilitation:** Lead a chunk of discussion time in a given session. Take pedagogical liberties as far as activities, discussion plan, etc, but be sure to include at least these 3 steps. First step: substantive paraphrase aimed at educing the value of the critical arguments or the ideas in the creative works. Second step: highlight at least 1 passage of interest / vexation for further unpacking. Third step: pose 3 questions for discussion pertaining to theoretical questions in the course, aesthetic examples in the course, or other avenues of inquiry that strike you.

**Discussion Wrap-up:** At the end of a seminar session, spend 5 minutes extemporaneously reviewing what emerged as key themes during that session’s discussion. No advance preparation is necessary; simply attend to the flow of that session’s conversation and select a few central points for recapitulation and carry-over to the next discussion.

**Seminar Paper**: 12-15 pageessays should respond to and elaborate the theoretical issues raised by the seminar, and may so by way of readings of novels or films not on our syllabus. Papers should reflect / incorporate research conducted using the MLA database. All seminar participants will submit a draft of their seminar paper before the last class session; all seminar participants will read the draft of 2 other participants and offer feedback in partner conversations during the last seminar session.

**SCHEDULE**

**Jan 11** **Aesthetic Environments**

Keywords for Environmental Studies “Anthropocene”

David Wallace Wells, “The Uninhabitable Earth”

Jason Moore, “Anthropocene or Capitalocene”

Ajay Chaudhary, “The Extractive Circuit”

Stephanie Foote and Jeffrey Cohen, “Climate Change/ Changing Climates”

Tobias Boes and Kate Marshall, “Writing the Anthropocene”

Nicholas Mirzoeff, “Visualizing the Anthropocene”

Imre Szeman, “Art, Activism, and the Politics of Pipelines”

**Jan 18 The Novel as Environmental Medium**

Georg Lukacs, *Theory of the Novel* “Epic and Novel”

Frank Kermode, *The Sense of An Ending* excerpt

Fredric Jameson, “The Realist Floor Plan”

Robert Tally, “The Space of the Novel”

David Cunningham, “Capitalist Epics”

Nathan Hensley and Philip Steer, “Ecological Formalism”

Min Hyoung Song, “What’s Wrong With Narrative? The Promises and Disappointments

of Climate Fiction”

**Jan 25 Cinema as Environmental Medium**

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, “The Shot: Mise-En-Scene”

Mary Ann Doane, “The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity”

Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* Introduction

Miriam Hansen “Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere”

Jonathan Beller, “Paying Attention”

Jennifer Fay, “Do I Know The Anthropocene When I See It?”

Dahlquist and Vondereau, *Petrocinema* intro

Julia Leyda and Kathleen Locock, *Climate Fictions* video essay

<https://filmstudiesforfree.blogspot.com/2022/06/in-nick-of-time-on-cli-fi-and-ecocinema.html?m=1>

**Feb 1 Mise-en-scene**: *Wuthering Heights*

David Alworth, “The Site of the Social”

Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital* Chapter 1

Jesse Oak Taylor, “Atmosphere as Setting”

Corbin Hiday, *Heathcliff Walks*

**Feb 8 Mise-en-scene**: *Children of Men*

Mark Bould, “The Anthropocene, The Unconscious”

Ben Ogrodnik, Focalisation, Realism, and Narrative Asymmetry in Children of Men

Rebekah Sheldon, *The Child to Come* “Labor”

Robert Tally, “The End of the World as World-System”

**Feb 15 Scale**: *Ministry for the Future*

Jameson, “Cognitive Mapping”

Caroline Levine, “Literary Studies and Collective Life”

Benjamin Morgan, “Scale as Form”

**Feb 22 Scale**: *Day After Tomorrow*

Niklas Salmose, “The Apocalyptic Sublime”

Mary Ann Doane *Bigger Than Life* intro

Jennifer Lynn Peterson, “An Anthropocene Viewing Condition”

Timothy Clark “Derangements of Scale”

**Mar 1 Atmosphere**: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Gernot Bohme, “Atmosphere as a Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics”

Dora Zhang, “Notes on Atmosphere”

Brian Russell Roberts, “Archipelagic Diaspora, Geographical Form, and Hurston”

**Mar 8 Atmosphere**: *Miami Vice*

Sarah Miller, “Heaven or High Water”

Robert Arnett, “Architecture and Narrative in the Crime Films of Michael Mann”

Weihong Bao, “Hermeneutic Doubt: Atmospheric Knowing and an Ecology of the Mind”

*optional* Kornbluh, “In the Air Tonight”

**Mar 15 Scaling Capital**

Kohei Saito, *Karl Marx’s Ecosocialism* intro

Aaron Bastani, *Fully Automated Luxury Communism* excerpt

Kate Soper, *PostGrowth Living* intro

Matthias Schmelze, *The Future is Degrowth*, “Degrowth Visions”

Matt Huber, *Climate Change as Class War* intro

**Mar 22 spring break** (get ahead on Yamashita)

**Mar 29 city**: *Their Dogs Came With Them*

Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life”

Jacob Soule, “Planetary Urbanization and the Rise of the Global Novel”

Half Earth Project, “Urban Spaces Can Help Sustain the Species”

**Apr 5 city**: *Chinatown*

Kevin Lynch, The City Image and Its Elements

David Harvey, The Right to the City

Nezar Alsayyad “The Cinematic City”

**Apr 12 utopia**: *Welcome to Lagos*

Madhu Krishnan, “Contemporary Nigerian Literature”

Jameson, “Utopia Now; Varieties of the Utopian”

Phil Wegner, “The Reality of Imaginary Communities”

Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, “#accelerate”

**Apr 19 possibly no class for professional travel / possibly “What Do We Need To Read” week with student-determined assignments / possibly both**

**Apr 26 utopia**: *Logan Lucky*; *Awake: A Dream From Standing Rock*

Jameson, *An American Utopia* excerpt

Kate Aronoff et al, *A Planet To Win*, “Rebuilding the World”

Malm, *How To Blow Up A Pipeline,* “Fighting Despair”

**Final Celebrations TBD**