

**ST297J A: Views of a Changing Planet: History and Philosophy of the Environment
through Film and Fiction**

(Mon-Weds-Thurs, 9am-12pm, DIAM 242)

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Course Description: How can we understand changes in our environment? How can we powerfully speak about those changes? Why do some narratives speak to us more than others? This class draws on history and philosophy as a background to answer these questions and to analyze how the future of our planet has been conceptualized in film and fiction. By engaging with narratives (told through various media including: film, speculative fiction, audio, etc.), this course allows students to think critically about the changing world and possible environmental futures. This discussion will be deepened by an investigation of the relationship between science, technology, and society, which both limit and promote certain directions of environmental change. We will explore how topics such as uncertainty, distributive justice, authority, and personal/national identity shape both our understanding of the environment and our narratives about it. By the end of the course, students will create their own narratives and will have a chance to publically share that narrative using a digital medium of their choice.

Course Expectations and Evaluation: Since our daily discussions make up an integral part of answering the course's main questions, students are expected to participate actively. We also want to provide a space for students to think more deeply about some of the course's themes so, each week, students will be asked to write a short response (around 300 words) on one of the day's materials. Students are asked to consider the following questions in order to prepare for discussion when reading or watching film:

1. What concepts, facts, ideas, techniques serve as the scientific underpinning of this particular narrative piece? What role do they play in the ideal of the future presented?
2. How do the scientific underpinnings of the narrative (including technologies employed or invented within the story) inform the view of humanity and the environment adopted by the narrators, characters, and authors?
3. How do they shape the understanding of environmental futures?
4. Do the authors, filmmakers, characters, or narrators adopt a particular view or philosophical position within the narrative? Are these positions in tension with those held by others in the narrative (or even yourself)? Do they change as the narrative develops?
5. What is similar and what is different about this piece compared to others?
6. Why and how do various authors or filmmakers use scientific knowledge of the time in their stories?
7. How are science and scientists portrayed in the narratives?

A big component of the class is the final project. As a basis for the project, students will be asked to evaluate the narratives explored in class in light of the historical and philosophical background provided. While thinking about these narratives, students will be asked to develop their own, which will be shared at the end of the course. Since we want students to be free to experiment and develop powerful and original narratives, a larger percentage of the grade will be based on the project's grounding in the themes of the class, with a smaller portion allocated to the final execution. This breakdown should also allow students to experiment with different media. We will discuss appropriate formats, directions, and topics (and where students can get help for their

project), during the second class. A proposal, due at the beginning of the second week, will provide feedback about the feasibility of final projects.

The course breakdown is as follows:

Participation: 20%

Thematic Responses: 25% (4 responses; response 1: 4%, responses 2-4: 7% each)

Final Project: 55% (10% for proposal, 25% for concept and 20% for execution and presentation)

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

Day 1 (Jan 5th 2015): Conflicting views of planetary change: who, what, when, where, why, and so what?

As an introduction, we will screen trailers and excerpts from a number of films, which will allow us to start thinking about some of the science involved in documenting planetary change, and the portrayal of that science and/or the environment. These films will help bring out what is at stake for society in this conversation and who is involved. Films include: “An Inconvenient Truth,” “The Day After Tomorrow,” “Chasing Ice,” and “The Great Global Warming Swindle.”

Day 2 (Jan 7th): What is global environmental change?

“Introduction: Documenting Global Change,” in Libby Robin, Sverker Sorlin, and Paul Warde (eds.), *The Future of Nature: Documents of Global Change*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013): 1-14.

Will Steffen, Jacques Grinevald, Paul Crutzen and John McNeil, “The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives,” *Philosophical Transactions of The Royal Society* 369 (2011): 842-867.

We will introduce the final project here, including expectations for proposal (due Jan 12).

Day 3 (Jan 8th): How has environmental change been imagined?

David Mitchell, “The Siphoners,” in Mark Martin (ed.), *I’m with the Bears: Short Stories from a Damaged Planet*, (New York: Verso, 2011): 129-142.

Paolo Bacigalupi, “The Tamarisk Hunter,” in Mark Martin (ed.), *I’m with the Bears: Short Stories from a Damaged Planet*, (New York: Verso, 2011): 171-190.

IPCC, “AR5: Summary for Policy Makers,” (2013).

http://www.climatechange2013.org/images/report/WG1AR5_SPM_FINAL.pdf

In class: Screening of Ramin Bahrani, “Plastic Bag,” (2009).

Film available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuJ31bu01mM>

WEEK 2: DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

Day 4 (Jan 12th): Winners and losers in planetary change

Chris Armstrong, *Global Distributive Justice*. (2012): Introduction and Chapter 1

Your final project proposal is due today; Instructor feedback will be provided by Jan 14th.

In class: Screening of Kimi Takesue, “That Which Once Was,” (2011),

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sN1ixEDMG7A&feature=youtu.be>

Day 5 (Jan 14th): Making the unequal visible? The Global and the Local

Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*, 1988.

Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995): Preface and Chapter 1.

Day 6 (Jan 15th): Responsibility: Who Pays?

Excerpts from Indra Sinha, *Animal's People*, (2007).

Rob Nixon, "Slow Violence, Neoliberalism, and the Environmental Picaresque," in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011): 45-67.

In class: Screenings about Bhopal Gas Explosion [BBC's BBC One Night In Bhopal 2004, Yes Men "Dow Does the Right Thing"]

WEEK 3: AUTHORITY, AND COUNTER-NARRATIVES

Day 7 (Jan 19th): Who Gets to Decide? A Case Study of Geoengineering

Clive Hamilton, "Preface; Chapter 1: Why Geoengineering?; and Chapter 7: Ethical Anxieties" in *Earthmasters: The Dawn of the Age of Climate Engineering*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

James R. Fleming, "Chapter 8: The Climate Engineers," in *Fixing the Sky: The Checkered History of Weather and Climate Control* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

Dale Jamieson, "Ethics and Intentional Climate Change," *Climatic Change* (1996): 323-336.

In class: Screening of Robert Greene, *Owning the Weather*, Fourth Row Films and Prewar Cinema Productions, 2009.

Day 8 (Jan 21st): Re-Gaining Authority

Luis Sepulveda, *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories*, Peter Bush (trans.), London: Souvenir Press, 1989.

Arundhati Roy, "The Greater Common Good" in *The Cost of Living*, (New York: The Modern Library, 1999).

In class: Screening of *Black Mirror "Fifteen Million Merits"*

Day 9 (Jan 22nd): Final Project Check-in

There are no readings for today, but please come with whatever you have been working on for the final project. This will give the instructors and your classmates a chance to provide feedback and to help you work through any problems you are having.

WEEK 4: UNCERTAINTY

Day 10: (Jan 26th): Uncertainty

Stephen H. Schneider and Kristin Kuntz-Duriseti, "Chapter 2: Uncertainty and Climate Change Policy," in S.H. Schneider, A. Rosencranz, and J.O. Niles *Climate Change Policy: A*

Survey (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2002): 53-87.

David Biello, "Climate Change's Uncertainty Principle," *Scientific American* (Oct 25 2007).
<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/climate-changes-uncertainty-principle/>

Day 11 (Jan. 28th): Student Choice (Animals, Risk, Food, etc.)

Day 12 (Jan. 29th): Final Project Presentations

Come prepared to hand in your short story and present your audio project to your classmates.
We'll bring the popcorn.