

Autumn 2018 | SIGN 26014, ENGL 12520, ENST 12520

Professor Benjamin Morgan

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Office Hours: Walker 512; Wednesday 12:30-1:30pm and Friday 11am-12pm

Course Website: <https://uchicago.box.com/v/climate18>

Climate Change in Literature, Art, and Film

If meteorological data and models show us that climate change is real, art and literature explore what it means for our collective human life. This is the premise of many recent films, novels, and artworks that ask how a changing climate will affect human society. In this course, we will examine the aesthetics of climate change across media, in order to understand how narrative, image, and sound help us witness a planetary disaster that is often imperceptible. Our approach will be comparative: what kind of story about climate change can a science fiction novel about a dystopian future tell, and how is this story different than, say, that of an art installation made of melting blocks of Arctic ice? Do different media tend to emphasize different aspects of ecological crisis? Readings and discussions will introduce students to some of the ways that humanities scholarship is contributing to climate change research.

The units of this course address aesthetic responses to four major climate impacts: Arctic warming, sea-level rise, climate refugees, and mass extinction. Within each unit we will study how different media--drama, art installations, art or documentary photography, fiction, etc.--represent and frame these impacts.

What is the purpose of this course?

You should be able to get a few things out of this course. By the end, you'll know more about how and why writers, artists, and filmmakers are focusing on climate change, and you will develop your own critical perspective about this contemporary development. You will also learn or strengthen techniques for analyzing various media: close reading, film analysis, and visual analysis. These skills will be portable to other humanities classes you might take, and may help you become an even more critical audience of contemporary culture. The assignments will give you a chance to explore and express your creative as well as critical responses. Please note: there are no prerequisites of any kind; anyone who commits to seriously engaging with the course material will succeed in this class.

Course materials

Online:

- Films: <https://uchicago.box.com/v/morgan18film> password: climate
- Online Reader (image and sound): <https://uchicago.box.com/v/climate18>
- David O'Reilly, *Everything*, available to download (\$14.99) on the Steam platform [Mac/PC] at <https://store.steampowered.com/app/582270>. Note: You can buy the game in pairs or groups and share access.

At the Humanities Center mailroom (Walker Museum 003; in the basement):

- Course reader (texts)

At the Seminary Co-op (or another bookstore). Please purchase physical copies, not ebooks:

- Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140*
- Jeff VanderMeer, *Annihilation*
- Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner *Iep Jaltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*

Requirements

Working groups	You'll be divided into small groups to share ideas and work on projects throughout this class. These groups will occasionally present to the class; they will also discuss assignments and projects.
Section	Section attendance is mandatory; if you miss more than one section, your final grade may drop a half grade per absence. You'll be given a handout with section requirements at your first meeting.
Assignments	<u>Review</u>: Write a 2-3-page review of an artwork/film/text. <i>Due 10/19</i> <u>Translation</u>: Choose one of our objects of study and write 2-3 pages about how you would "translate" it into a different medium (e.g. translate a dramatic work into a photograph, or a soundscape into a literary work). Carry out the translation if you wish. <i>Due 11/16</i> <u>Syllabus</u>: Individually or with a group of up to three, design one or two more weeks of readings for this class. Identify some art or literature you would teach, and explain why. <i>Due 11/30</i>
Final project	A project in any medium that shows sustained critical engagement with course-related ideas and texts. This project may take the form of a final paper (length: 8-10 pages). Or you may draw on your own interests and capacities to produce some other object: a website, a portfolio, a bibliography, an artwork, a curated collection of texts and images. Projects other than papers will be accompanied with a 3 to 4-page statement.
Screenings	Screenings will take place on the following dates/times. Let me know if you have a lab or class that conflicts. Location Cobb 310 (Film Studies Center). 10/12, 2pm: <i>Chasing Ice</i> 10/26, 2pm: <i>Beasts of the Southern Wild</i> 11/16, 2pm: <i>Snowpiercer</i>

Schedule

[CR] = course reader | [BX] = box weekly folders

Week 1

10/1 Introduction

- 10/3** [BX] Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140* pp. 1-36
 [BX] William Pickens, "Art and Propaganda" (1924)
 [BX] TJ Demos, "[Playful Protesters Use Art to Draw Attention to Inadequacy of Paris Climate Talks](#)" *truthout.org*, December 2015
 [BX] Zoë Lescaze, "[12 Artists on: Climate Change](#)," *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, August 2018

10/5 4:30-6pm: Lecture, Kim Stanley Robinson on "Communicating Climate Change" at Regenstein Library JRL 122-A

1. ARCTIC WARMING

Week 2

- 10/8** [CR] Chantal Bilodeau, *Sila* [drama]
 [CR] Mark Maslin, "Climate Change Impacts" and "Climate Surprises" in *Climate Change: A Very Short Introduction*
 [CR] Close Reading Handout
- 10/10** [CR] Chantal Bilodeau, *Sila*
 [BX] Olafur Eliasson, *Ice Watch* (2015) [installation]
 [BX] Chris Wainwright, *Red Ice - White Ice* (2009) [photography]
 [CR] Phillipe Squarzoni, excerpts, *Climate Changed: A Personal Journey Through the Science* pp. 38-70
 [CR] Visual Analysis Handout

10/10 *New York 2140*: read through p. 62

10/12, 3pm: Screening: James Balog, *Chasing Ice*

Week 3

- 10/15** James Balog, *Chasing Ice* [documentary film]
 [BX] Chris Watson, "Vatnajökull," *Weather Report* (2003) [edited field recording]
 [CR] R. Murray Schafer, "The Soundscape"
- 10/17** [BX] Jana Winderen, *Energy Field* (2010) [field recording/experimental music]
 [BX] USGS Repeat photography project [photography]
 [BX] Justin Brice Guariglia, *Topographies* [visual art]
 [BX] Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey, *Polar Diamond* [sculpture]

10/17 *New York 2140*: read through p. 136

10/19, 5pm: Review assignment due

2. SEA LEVEL RISE

Week 4

- 10/22** Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140* [novel] pp. 1-210
 [CR] Amitav Ghosh, “Stories,” *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) pp. 7-24
- 10/24** Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140* pp. 211-298
 [BX] Maya Lin, *Pin River – Sandy* (2013) [visual art]
 [CR] Terms for film analysis (handout)

10/26, 3pm: Screening: Benh Zeitlin, dir., *Beasts of the Southern Wild*

Week 5

- 10/29** Benh Zeitlin, dir., *Beasts of the Southern Wild* [feature film]
 [BX] ArtSpot Productions and Mondo Bizarro, *Cry You One* [performance]
 [CR] Mary Jane Jacobs, “An Unfashionable Audience,” *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (1995)

10/29: *New York 2140*: read through p. 375

- 10/31** Benh Zeitlin, dir., *Beasts of the Southern Wild* [feature film]
 [BX] John Luther Adams, *Become Ocean* [music]

Week 6

- 11/5** Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140* pp. 299-534
 [BX] Eve Mosher, *HighWaterLine* (2007) [public art]
- 11/7** Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140* pp. 535-613
after class: “concrete steps” check-in; due: an email saying what steps are for each group member

3. CLIMATE REFUGEES

Week 7

- 11/12** Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, *Iep Jaltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter* [poetry]
- 11/14** Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, *Iep Jaltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*
 [BX] Collectif Argos, *Climate Refugees* [documentary photography]
 [BX] Amy Balkin, et al., *A People’s Archive of Sinking and Melting* [art installation]
after class: “follow-up” check-in; due: 1 ungraded page of writing that is either part of the project you’re working on or that describes the progress you’ve made

11/15, 5pm: Translation assignment due

11/16, 3pm: Screening: Bong Joon-ho, dir., *Snowpiercer*

Week 8

11/19 Bong Joon-ho, dir., *Snowpiercer* [feature film]
[CR] Rob Nixon, "Introduction" pp. 1-22, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011)

11/21 No class - Thanksgiving

4. BIODIVERSITY AND EXTINCTION

Week 9

11/26 [CR] Juliana Spahr, "Unnamed Dragonfly Species" (2011) [prose poetry]
[BX] Chris Jordan, *Midway: Message from the Gyre* [photography]
[BX] Isabella Kirkland, *Descendant* (1999), *Ascendant* (2000), *Gone* (2004) [painting]
[BX] Anohni, "4 Degrees," *Hoplessness* (2016) [music]

11/28 Jeff VanderMeer, *Annihilation* (entire novel due)
after class: group check-in; due: proposals for each person

11/30, 5pm: Syllabus assignment due

Week 10

12/3 Jeff VanderMeer, *Annihilation*
[BX] Chris Watson, *Outside the Circle of Fire* (1998) [field recordings]
[BX] Saylor/Morris, *Eclipse* (2014) [video installation]

12/5 Final project presentations
Everything (2017) [videogame]
due: before class: 1 powerpoint describing the project/paper you are working on;
in: class, 60-second description of your project/paper to the class

12/10, 5pm: Final projects due

Course Policies

Technology Please do not use laptops or other devices in class. Phones must be turned completely off before class begins.

Assignments Assignments for this course are submitted by email. Within 2 hours of the deadline, I will send you a receipt confirming that I have received and opened your work. If you have not received a receipt within 2 hours of the deadline, contact me immediately.

Please use MLA or Chicago style.

Please contact me immediately if you anticipate turning in late work.

Grading

Working group assignments: 10%

Section: 20%

Assignments: 30%

Final project: 40%

Exceptions

Please contact me immediately if there are extenuating circumstances that prevent you from attending class or completing work on time, and we will develop a plan to help you get back on track.

Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism

It is your responsibility to ensure that all of your written work conforms to the University's standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism is not only copying others' work; any improperly documented use of ideas can constitute plagiarism. Please consult the discussion of plagiarism and academic honesty in *Doing Honest Work in College: How to Prepare Citations, Avoid Plagiarism, and Achieve Real Academic Success*. If you have not been given this book, please let me know and I will obtain a copy for you. It is crucial that you are familiar with these standards, and it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with them. If these standards are in any way unclear to you, please consult with me. Any undocumented use of another person's ideas constitutes plagiarism. This includes copying another text word for word. It also includes summarizing and paraphrasing a source without citation, or presenting as your own an argument that you heard elsewhere. Please note as well that copying non-copyrighted material (such as Wikipedia) also constitutes plagiarism. Academic dishonesty includes buying papers online, outsourcing your academic work to someone else (paid or unpaid), and submitting the same paper to more than one course. This is not an exhaustive list of the acts that constitute academic dishonesty and plagiarism. If you are uncertain about how or whether to cite your sources, please contact me. Academic dishonesty is a very serious offense, even if it is unintentional. Any form of plagiarism may result in immediate failure of this course and disciplinary action.

Accessibility

Your success in this class is important to me. If the the setup our learning environment or activities present any barriers to your full participation, please let me know as soon as possible, and together we'll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. To this end, I invite you to discuss accessibility measures with me as soon as possible. I will maintain the confidentiality of these discussions.

If you have a documented disability, I encourage you to register with Student Disability Services. If you need official accommodations, you have a right to have these met. Here is their contact information:

Address: 5501 S. Ellis Avenue
Chicago, IL 60637
Phone: (773) 702-6000

Email: disabilities@uchicago.edu
Web: <https://disabilities.uchicago.edu/>

Disclosure of disability status is always up to you, and that choice is protected by federal law. If you prefer not to disclose your disability status, we can still have a productive conversation about what specific adjustments might make our meetings and interactions more accessible.