



GREEN GAME STUDIES COURSE PACKAGE 6

CGL
Cologne Game Lab

Technology
Arts Sciences
TH Köln



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Course: "Green Media"

Module: Media Studies III (M.A. 3D Animation for Film & games, Semester 3)

Institution: TH Köln, Cologne Game Lab, Germany

Timeframe: Winter Term 2022 (September 2022-February 2023)

This course package is based on a syllabus of a course delivered in the M.A. 3D Animation for Film & Games program within the Media Studies III module taught at Cologne Game Lab, TH Köln, and IFS Köln in winter term 2022. The package includes the following:

- Course description
- Learning outcomes
- Requirements and assignments
- Grading criteria
- Mandatory sources
- Course structure

This educational material has been created within the framework of the project "Greening Games. Building Higher Education Resources for Sustainable Video Game Production, Design & Critical Game Studies" (2021-2024) funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in Germany *within the framework of the* Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union (KA220-HED – Cooperation Partnerships in Higher Education).

More information may be found at: <https://greeningames.eu>.



Course description

From dying bee colonies to raging forest fires to plastic-contaminated oceans: the signs of global climate change and environmental pollution are not only taking up increasing space in the news but also in contemporary art. Present-day media arts reflect human fears but also futuristic fantasies about the rapidly changing environment. At the same time, however, the media – their production and distribution chains – also have a negative impact on nature.

Within this course, we will look at artworks from different media — paintings, film, games, installations — to investigate the relationship of humankind with Planet Earth. We will evaluate current media practices as well as their ecological effects. Additionally, we will examine the consciousness-raising power of the arts and animation in particular by analyzing aesthetics and narratives. Central to our discussions will be the aspect of communication: how to talk about climate change from the individual's, academic's or artist's point of view?

We will approach this complex subject area of climate change, arts and academia using different methodologies. The individual teaching sessions consist of a mixture of interactive lectures, discussions, research exercises as well as concept workshops – both in small groups and in plenary sessions.



Learning outcomes

The participants of this course will:

- communicate and critically discuss environmental concepts and concerns in a) academic writing, b) works of art, and c) through their own media production.
- assess the role of media in the dissemination of information relevant to environmental issues.

Assessment & Grading criteria

Requirements and assignments

- All students have to actively participate in the sessions.
- All students have to study and analyze the assigned reading material in a way that enables them to actively and creatively participate in the seminar discussions; i.e., developing their own thoughts and theoretical insights.
- 4 short academic essays, one on each session of the course, each essay should contain 500 words excluding bibliography and is due within 8 days after the respective session. Submission via the designated online platform.
- 1 artist's statement in the form of a post consisting of 200 words foregrounding the personal learning and development of the thinking process during the course of the semester. Students will also need to give feedback to two artist's statements by your classmates. Submission via the designated online platform.

Grading

Academic short essays (accumulate for 80% of the grade): The essays have to follow academic standards in all aspects (quality of research, of writing, and of content). The goal of the essays is to prove that students can adequately work on and answer a research question in a fixed period of time. The topic of each essay has to be related to the content of each individual session. In the essay, students need at least two references of academic standard. The rest can be works of art or originate from magazines, blogs, etc.. Each essay will be graded and will equally contribute to the overall grade for the essays. The latter will make up 80% of the grade for media studies.

Artist's statement (20% of the grade): The goal of the artist's statement is for students to critically reflect on their learning process and the implications of these learnings for their artistic practice, self-awareness as an artist and as a member of today's society. The artist's statement plus feedback posts to their classmates will make up 20% of your grade for Media Studies III.



Mandatory sources

- Abraham, Benjamin J.. 2022. *Digital Games after Climate Change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, chap. 4. Kindle.
- Abraham, Benjamin J.. 2022. "What kind of work is climate advocacy in the games industry?" *Greening the Games Industry*. Accessed Aug. 20, 2022. <https://gtg.benabraham.net/what-kind-of-work-is-climate-advocacy/>.
- Cubitt, Sean. 2016. *Finite Media*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, Introduction. Kindle.
- Good Energy: A Playbook for Screenwriting in the Age of Climate Change. n.d.. Accessed Aug. 20, 2022. <https://www.goodenergystories.com/playbook>.
- Helzle, Volker. 2022. "Green Screens, Greens Pixels, and Green Shooting." Accessed Aug. 20, 2022. https://animationsinstitut.de/files/public/images/04-forschung/Publications/FABW_VirtualProductionSustainabilityReport_2_22_EN.pdf.
- Naess, Arne. 1973. "The Shallow and the Deep, long-range Ecology Movement: A Summary." *Inquiry* 16, no. 1: 95 — 100.
- Nixon, Rob. 2011. *Slow Violence*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Introduction. Kindle.
- Plumwood, Val. 1993. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London: Routledge, pp. 7 – 14.
- Sørensen, Inge Ejbye and Caitriona Noonan. 2022. "Production, Policy and Power: the Screen Industry's Response to the Environmental Crisis." *Media, Culture & Society* 44, no 1: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F01634437211065697>.
- Zizek, Slavoj. 2011. *Living in the End of Times*. London: Verso, chap. 4. Kindle.



Course structure

This course has a time format attuned to the specific needs of the M.A. 3D Animation for Film & Games Program at Cologne Game Lab, TH Köln, and ifs köln. Each seminar session comprises two 90-minute-long blocks. This course has been conceptualized for eight 90-minute seminars (corresponding to four three-hour seminars). Usually, the course is attended by up to 15-20 students.

This course is tailored for students who prioritize their creative practice. From the start, it was essential to incorporate activities that enable them to apply their gained academic knowledge, even on a small scale, to their practice. The first two sessions are, therefore, academically focused to establish a foundation for the two exploratory sessions later in the semester.

Contents

Seminar session 1: The Materiality of the Digital Arts

Seminar session 2: Conceptualizing Nature

Seminar session 3: Exploration of Animated Worlds

Seminar session 4: The Artist as Advocate



Seminar session 1: The Materiality of the Digital Arts

Leading questions for the session

- What are green or eco-critical media?
- How do personal and industry-wide practices in green production impact the overall sustainability of the film and games industries?
- How can knowledge and awareness of environmental issues influence future practices and responsibilities in media production and distribution?

Preparation

For this session, students are expected to read the following sources:

- Abraham, Benjamin J.. 2022. Digital Games after Climate Change. Basingstoke: Pal-grave Macmillan, chap. 4. Kindle.
- Cubitt, Sean. 2016. Finite Media. Durham and London: Duke University Press, Introduction. Kindle.
- Sørensen, Inge Ejbye and Caitriona Noonan. 2022. "Production, Policy and Power: the Screen Industry's Response to the Environmental Crisis." Media, Culture & Society 44, no 1: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F01634437211065697>.



Seminar

Activity 1: Discussion based on personal experience with green production methods in either the film or games industry.¹ (45 minutes)

Prepare a Whiteboard with three questions the students are tasked to answer and bring sticky notes that students can use to write down their answer and attach underneath the corresponding question. If this activity is taught online, you can use a Miro board instead. While the students are answering the questions, start screening the board for tendencies, similarities and dissimilarities that you can use for the follow-up discussion.

The questions:

- How concerned are you with climate change? Does it affect your daily actions? If so, how?
- Are you aware of any climate initiatives by the film or games industry? If so, which ones?
- Are there any aspects in the intersection of climate change and digital media that you want to learn about? Which ones?

¹The MA 3D Animation for Film & Games is a further-education Master with about 70% international students so that I anticipated different levels of exposure to eco-friendly behavior in general and green production methods in particular. This activity, therefore, had the goal of making these differences in knowledge visible and of initiating a sharing process of professional insights between the students.



Activity 2: *Discussion of reading materials on digital media production in small groups and via guiding questions. (45 minutes group work, 30 minutes discussion)*

Task 1: Divide the students into smaller groups (circa 4-6 persons per group) and assign them essential parts of the reading materials. Ask them to discuss the following questions with reference to their source text in their groups:

- Summary of crucial points in the assigned section of the source text.
- Choose one statement from the source text that you find insightful or surprising. What are the statement's implications for digital media production? Do you find the statement persuasive?
- After gaining an initial insight into the issue of digital media production, how would you evaluate the issue of responsibility? Where are the limitations of the individual artist? What are the responsibilities of the company leaders? Industry associations? Politics?
- Task 2: Ask the groups to come together in the plenary session again and collect the different outcomes on a Whiteboard as a visual aid.



Lecture

To complement the aspect of media production and its ecological impact on this planet, give an overview of the current research state on media distribution and its carbon footprint. (30 minutes)

Topics covered in this exemplary lecture:

- Data centers, their carbon emissions, new developments e.g., with the help of AI, European Green Deal
- Consoles and their carbon emissions, processing steps, conflict minerals

Following the lecture, have a summary discussion of this session. (30 minutes)

Start with a discussion on the responsibility of artists considering the carbon emissions tied to media dissemination. Should they include these emissions in the planning of their projects? Are these emissions the responsibility of their audience / players or do they lie with policy makers?

In a second step return to the sticky notes of the beginning of this session? Check with the group whether they have already learned something they stated they wanted to learn on the board. Ask them about their next steps of engagement with the topic. Which aspects do they want to explore further? What was surprising for them in this session? Give them a preview of topics from the sticky notes you will still cover in the course.



Seminar Session 2: Conceptualizing Nature

Leading questions for the session

- How do representations of nature shape our understanding of it and vice versa?
- What are the ethical implications for creative practice because of the existing cultural patterns of nature representation?
- In what ways can immersive digital environments challenge or reinforce anthropocentric views of nature?

Preparation

For this session, students are expected to read / watch the following sources:

- Naess, Arne. 1973. "The Shallow and the Deep, long-range Ecology Movement: A Summary." *Inquiry* 16, no. 1: 95 — 100.
- Nixon, Rob. 2011. *Slow Violence*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Introduction. Kindle.
- Plumwood, Val. 1993. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London: Routledge, pp. 7 – 14.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2011. *Living in the End of Times*. London: Verso, chap. 4. Kindle.



Seminar

Activity 1: Looking at Nature (90 minutes)

Task 1: Divide the students into smaller groups (circa 4-6 persons per group). Each group selects from a collection of in-game photographs:² one that best conveys their interpretation of “nature’s essence” and another that most accurately depicts the relation between humans and nature. Each group should share its choices with the plenum.

Input: Introduce recognized patterns of nature’s representation in Western visual culture, e.g., Christian tradition, Romantic turn. Display corresponding works of art to illustrate central themes and discuss them.³ In a more seminar-like setting, you can also opt to hand out these works of art to the smaller groups and let them analyze central patterns themselves before collecting all insights in the plenary session.

Task 2: Instruct the groups to reassess their selections from Task 1, identifying influences of traditional visual representations of nature in their choices. Compile and debate these insights collectively in the seminar.

Activity 2: Close Reading Core Texts Environmental Humanities

Task 1: Choose quotes from each of the core texts of environmental humanities (s. reading list) and use them to analyze their respective core principles, strengths, weaknesses as well as their relation to the traditional ways of nature representation. You can do so in the plenary session or create smaller groups again and assign each group a text to work on before collecting findings in the plenary session again.

Task 2: Ask students to name art works that embody this changed mode of representation of nature. To facilitate the discussion, bring some examples, too.⁴ In a second step, enquire whether students could envision a similar approach in their practice, too. What benefits or challenges do they see for their creative practice?

² For this particular session, in-game photographs of the following games were used in the discussion: *Anno 1800* (2019), *Death Stranding* (2019), *Horizon Zero Dawn* (2017), *Red Dead Redemption II* (2018).

³ Paintings discussed in this particular session: Jan Breughel II's *A Paradise Landscape with the Fall of Man* (1612-1615), Adolph von Menzel's *Iron Rolling Mill* (1872-75), Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818), Thomas Cole's *A Distant View of Niagara Fall* (1830).

⁴ Short list of examples to support the discussion: Kehine Wiley's *The Prelude* (2021), Susan Schupli's *Arctic Archipelago* (2021), Disney's *Moana* (2016), Ghost Animation's *Wade* (2020), *Jump over the Age's In Other Waters* (2020), Stray Fawn Studio's *The Wandering Village* (2022).



Seminar Session 3: Exploration of Animated Worlds

Preparation

For this session, students are expected to watch / play the chosen media artifact. In this case:

Princess Mononoke (Ghibli Studios 1997, O: Hayao Miyazaki)



Seminar

You can find a detailed description of this workshop in the Green Game Studies Workshop for Games Cultures, namely Activity 1: Lego for a Green Analysis. Overall, students analyze a game / movie / TV series, etc. in teams with regard to the represented human-nature-relationship via Lego building blocks. This visual-haptic, co-creative method allows them to examine represented conflicts, participants, motives, and power dynamics represented in a media artifact more concretely than traditional classroom discussions.

The goal of this session is for students to closely analyze a piece of art that already follows a non-standardized depiction of nature, ultimately highlighting the potential these new approaches have on a socio-cultural but also on an artistic level.



Seminar session 4: The Artist as Advocate

Leading questions for the session

- What are the key motivations for artists to engage with climate change topics in their work, and how persuasive are these motivations?
- What practical steps can media professionals take to contribute to a carbon-zero industry, and what can be learned from existing activist approaches?
- What challenges and opportunities arise when integrating climate activism into creative practices within the media industry?

Preparation

For this session, students are expected to read the following sources:

- Abraham, Benjamin J.. 2022. "What kind of work is climate advocacy in the games industry?" Greening the Games Industry. Accessed Aug. 20, 2022. <https://gtg.benabraham.net/what-kind-of-work-is-climate-advocacy/>.
- Good Energy: A Playbook for Screenwriting in the Age of Climate Change. n.d.. Accessed Aug. 20, 2022. <https://www.goodenergystories.com/playbook>.
- Helzle, Volker. 2022. "Green Screens, Greens Pixels, and Green Shooting." Accessed Aug. 20, 2022. https://animationsinstitut.de/files/public/images/04-forschung/Publications/FABW_VirtualProductionSustainabilityReport_2_22_EN.pdf.



Seminar

Activity 1: *Screening and discussion of Thijs Biersteker's TED talk Turning facts into feelings (screening 15 minutes plus 15 minutes discussion)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8X4TfjiWD7U>

Reflect with the students on Thijs Biersteker's reasons for artists to get involved in climate change topics with their art. Do these reasons convince the students to follow a similar approach?

Activity 2: *Divide the students into smaller groups and ask them to discuss the activist examples from the reading list (discussion in small groups 30 minutes plus 30 minutes gathering insights in plenary session)*

Guiding questions for their discussion:

- How are these approaches trying to contribute to a hopefully carbon-zero industry or try to fight climate change in general?
- What are identified challenges or blocking points?
- What is the team set-up or the support network?
- How would the students evaluate these approaches and are there any learnings for their own professional practice?

Activity 3: *Climate story for series (70 minutes story development, 20 minutes sharing in plenary session)*

Divide the students into smaller groups again and task them to create a rough draft of a story for an episode of an established TV show of their choosing. If they have problems coming up with a basic idea, they can refer to the already published loglines of the Good Energy Playbook: <https://www.goodenergystories.com/playbook/climate-loglines>
Give out material for the students to work with, e.g., flipchart paper, pens in various colors, etc..



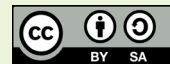
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The project "Greening Games. Building Higher Education Resources for Sustainable Video Game Production, Design & Critical Game Studies" (2021-2024) supports educators in addressing the interdisciplinary nature of green digital gaming.

More information may be found at: <https://greeningames.eu>.

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