

2016

## "Media and Environment: Teaching in/about the Anthropocene" Editor's Notes and Introduction

Joy Marie Hamilton

*University of Minnesota*, hamil520@umn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://pubs.lib.umn.edu/tmq>

---

### Recommended Citation

Hamilton, Joy M.. "Media and Environment: Teaching in/about the Anthropocene" Editor's Notes and Introduction." *Teaching Media Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (2016). <http://pubs.lib.umn.edu/tmq/vol4/iss3/1>

*Teaching Media Quarterly* is published by the University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing.

## **Media and Environment: Teaching in/about the Anthropocene**

### **Editor's Notes and Introduction**

#### **Joy Marie Hamilton**

In 2000 Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer brought significant attention to the "Anthropocene" era, claiming that humans had such an impact on the environment to such an extent that we have become geologic agents in our own right. Crutzen and Stoermer's arguments have garnered a great deal of support and dialogue as evidenced by a turn to the Anthropocene in scholarship. Debates and decisions about the Anthropocene Epoch are still unfolding: some scholars and institutions follow Crutzen and Stoermer's lead and advocate for a totalizing discourse on humanity's influence on Earth's geology, whereas others argue that discussions of the Anthropocene should be rooted in power relations and cultural critique. For instance, Malm and Hornburg (2014) argue that identifiable groups of people, such as those with the means of production, have been the primary drivers of climate change. These critiques of the Anthropocene narrative are interested in the ways in which race, class, gender, and place intersect with the environment and are the inspiration for this issue's theme.

What can media studies contribute to these conversations both in/about the Anthropocene? Recently, media scholars have developed groundbreaking insights into the unjust material consequences of media technologies on structurally disadvantaged humans, nonhumans, and places. Termed "ecomedia," these perspectives work in, through, and beyond representation in order to consider the tactile component of nonprint media within the framework social and environmental justice (see Maxwell & Miller 2012; Rust, Monani & Cubitt 2015; or [ecomediastudies.org](http://ecomediastudies.org) for examples of ecomedia scholarship). Ecomedia is an important development in media critique and parallels scholars, such as Matthew C. Nisbet (2009) who interrogate U.S. news media's framing of climate change in order to unearth the connections between news media norms, policy, and public engagement. Other scholars and activists have turned to documentaries, art, music, auto-ethnography, and film as fruitful grounds for inquiry. The authors in this issue further this move towards considering the relationship between media and the environment through pedagogy. They engage with topics as diverse as food, filmmaking, popular music, and climate change.

In "When EcoMedia Gets Weird: Björk—Timothy Morton—Anthropocene," **Andy Hageman** asks students to consider performance in relation to Morton's (2013) hyperobjects. Hageman's lesson plan embraces Björk's "weird aesthetics and ideas" in order to stretch students application of Morton's complex theoretical lens. The lesson plan is varied and incorporates in-class screenings, at-home writing assignments, and discussion with plenty of room to revise if the instructor sees fit. Of particular note is day three, when students engage with Miley Cyrus and Russell Brand and draw connections between climate change, activism, and popular culture.

**Kathleen P. Hunt** and **Abby M. Dubisar** lead students on an exploration of their own role in the global agrifood system with their lesson, "Diving into Food Justice: Food Waste in the Anthropocene." Over four class sessions, students are introduced to the theoretical framework of

the Anthropocene and use food waste as a case study to understand the ways in which everyday acts like eating are connected to broader economic and environmental systems. The lesson substantially engages media, first, by using the documentary film *Dive* and a TED talk to teach key concepts, and second, by leading students in analysis and creation of social media “food feeds” focused on food waste. Students will enjoy the lesson’s multi modal style of instruction that relies heavily on student engagement and application of their own experiences with food and eating.

**Graig Uhlin**’s lesson plan, “Sustainable Filmmaking: Understanding Image as Resource,” helps students develop an understanding of the environmental impact of media industries, beyond the common concerns of environmental crisis and climate change. The lesson plan focuses on ecocinema and pushes students to engage with the materiality of moving image culture and its reliance on a hydrocarbon economy and natural resource extraction. Students consider aesthetic choices in terms of the waste and expenditure of resources as well as in terms of conservation. Conveniently, Uhlin offers two lesson plans in one: a shorter version for two class periods and a longer version for additional two class periods. Instructors will find particularly useful the provided “Calculating Your Media Carbon Footprint” activity that requires students to consider their own participation in the hydrocarbon economy. The goal here is to underline that media consumption is not only dependent on extensive material infrastructures but also linked to the policies and actions of media industries.

**David Robbins** and **Pat Brereton**’s “Claims and frames: How the news media cover climate change” is a news framing analysis assignment that culminates in a group presentation and paper. The assignment asks students to examine how climate change events are covered in the news and the range of factors that shape this coverage. Groups of six students follow the coverage of a particular climate change news event over the period of a month in both traditional and social media. Students analyze how the news event was framed across these media sites, track the kinds of reporter (e.g., science or environment correspondent, feature writer, etc.) assigned to the story and reporter’s scientific literacy, and note the range of perspectives cited in each news source, paying particular attention to whether scientists and/or activists were cited. The authors provide brief lecture notes, key terms, and citations to assist instructors outside of journalism studies in setting up the assignment.

In “Deconstructing Chipotle: Media as Environmental Education” **Antonio López** uses the concepts of media as environmental education, environmental ideologies, and ecocriticism to explore popular fast-food chain Chipotle’s sustainability claims. Culminating in a paper, Lopez’s 4-week lesson plan engages key readings, group activities, and discussions of concepts like greenwashing to guide students through relevant conversations to frame their analyses of Chipotle’s video campaigns, “The Scarecrow” and “Back to the Start.”

## Bibliography

Bodkin, A., Del Gandio, J., Handschuh, J., Larson, J., May, T., Nadir, L., ... & Todd, A. M. (2013). *Performance on Behalf of the Environment*. Lexington Books.

Malm, A., & Hornborg, A. (2014). The geology of mankind? A critique of the Anthropocene narrative. *The Anthropocene Review*, 2053019613516291.

Maxwell, R., & Miller, T. (2012). *Greening the media*. Oxford University Press

Nisbet, M. C. (2009). Communicating climate change: Why frames matter for public engagement. *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*, 51(2), 12-23.

Rust, S., Monani, S., & Cubitt, S. (Eds.). (2015). *Ecomedia: Key Issues*. Routledge.