

Machines, Monsters, Moonscapes: Industrialization and Nature in 20th-21st Century Culture

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Course Description

The technological advances of the last 100 years are nothing short of mind-boggling, both regarding what we have achieved and with how close we have brought our planet to the brink of destruction. Since 1925, we have gone from silent movies to Artificial Intelligence, and from biplanes to spaceships. At the same time: the more powerful our machines become, the less we can anticipate the effects of our usage of them.

How is all this reflected in culture? How has technology transformed our understanding of nature? What happens when industrial civilization creates behemoths who, literally and metaphorically, represent our anxieties about the other and on environmental destruction? How does devastated nature, e.g. the moonscapes that surface lignite mining leaves behind, become a cultural symbol of modernity's relationship to the natural world?

Machines. Monsters. Moonscapes examines how industrialization and modern environmental imagery have shaped 20th and 21st-century culture across German, American, and Asian contexts. Located in Bonn, we will explore how the impact of industrial modernity on nature takes "monstrous" forms in cultural expression—from Godzilla's radioactive emergence to the urban dystopias of Metropolis, from Charlie Chaplin's mechanized worker to the apocalyptic landscapes of Watchmen.

On field trips to the Ruhrgebiet (Germany's former industrial heartland), the contested Hambacher Forest, Paris's industrial heritage sites, and Brussels's EU environmental policy centers, students will connect cultural representations with lived environmental realities. The course investigates how artists, writers, and filmmakers have responded to the environmental consequences of modern society. We will also discuss the economic costs and benefits of energy production and the political dimensions of environmental policy-making in Europe. Special

attention will be paid to German environmental movements, EU energy transitions, and transnational environmental politics.

Discussions with climate activists, politicians from the region and film makers as well as virtual sessions with environmental economists and ES faculty from Gettysburg College are integral parts of the course.

This course counts towards the German major and minor, the MI Humanities requirement as well as the Interdisciplinary requirement.

Learning Goals

Students will

1. Analyze cultural representations of industrialization and environmental transformation in diverse media forms including film, literature, visual art, and popular culture.
2. Apply environmental humanities methodologies to interpret how cultural objects reflect and shape environmental consciousness across German, American, and Asian contexts.
3. Evaluate the concept of the “monster” as a symbolic expression of otherness in general and of the destructive collateral damage of the progress of civilization.
4. Compare cross-cultural perspectives on industrialization, technology, and nature through careful analysis of works from different national and cultural traditions.
5. Analyze economic and political dimensions of environmental issues through case studies of German and European energy policy, understanding costs and benefits of different energy production systems.
6. Synthesize interdisciplinary approaches that combine environmental studies with cultural analysis, drawing from history, philosophy, literature, film studies, environmental studies, economics and political science.
7. Engage with field experiences to connect theoretical and cultural analysis with direct observation of environmental landscapes, industrial heritage sites, and policy-making institutions.
8. Understand European environmental movements and policy frameworks, particularly German ecological politics and EU environmental governance.

Grading Distribution

<i>Participation</i>	20%	Active class discussion, reading preparation
<i>Field Trip Reports</i>	15%	Reflective analyses of field experiences
<i>Short Response Papers (2)</i>	20%	3-4-page analytical responses to course materials
<i>Midterm Essay</i>	20%	6-page comparative analysis
<i>Final Project</i>	25%	8-10-page Research paper / creative project with reflection
<i>Presentations (2)</i>	10%	2 short presentations on chosen cultural object

Course Materials

Syllabus, Course Materials, Homework Assignments, Readings

All academic texts necessary, syllabus and course plan, course materials, and homework and essay assignments will be available via Microsoft Teams. Please use the code **mnmhx24** to enroll.

Field Trip Materials

Additional field trip materials will be provided in preparation for the field trips.

Films, TV (all films are available with English subtitles for streaming via Panopto)

- Fritz Lang: *Metropolis* (1927)
- Charlie Chaplin: *Modern Times* (1936)
- Ishiro Honda: *Godzilla* (1954)
- Kurt Tetzlaff: *Erinnerung an eine Landschaft – für Manuela* (1983)
- Ridley Scott: *Blade Runner* (1982)
- Bong Joon Ho: *The Host* (2006)
- Jakob Verbruggen: *Black Mirror: Man against Fire* (2016)
- Vergiss Meyn nicht (2023)

Books

- Alan Moore: *Watchmen* (1987)
- Richard Powers: *The Overstory* (2016)

Course Policies

Field Trips

This course will integrate several field trip experiences:

- Brussels and Paris
- Berlin
- Hambacher Forst
- Afsluitdijk Wadden Center, Kornwerderzand, Netherlands
- Essen (Zeche Zollverein) and Ruhrgebiet in general

Freedom of Expression

“We expect that diverse views and opinions will create conflict and disagreement among us at times, but the genuine sharing of ideas, perspectives, and values presupposes both freedom and responsibility. Consequently, we expect all members of the community to engage in civil discourse, reasoned thought, sustained discussion, and constructive participation.” Full statement: <https://www.gettysburg.edu/offices/diversity-inclusion/freedom-of-expression-policy>

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to be in class on time and ready to participate in the day’s discussion. Missing more than three classes without a legitimate justification (such as being sick) will result in deductions from the overall grade. Please notify me whenever you will need to miss a class, and take responsibility for any missed work, notes, and assignments.

Late work

Assignments are expected to be submitted by the due date. Response papers submitted late without a legitimate reason approved by the instructor will suffer letter grade deductions: half letter if submitted within the following week or a full letter thereafter.

Academic Integrity

The Gettysburg College Honor Code will apply to all work for the course. All written and orally presented work should be your own. It is fine to borrow and use someone else's words and/or ideas, but then you must explicitly acknowledge their source, whether you are directly quoting or loosely paraphrasing. Failure to do so amounts to plagiarism, which is a severe violation of the College's policy on academic integrity. If you have any questions on what is and how to maintain academic integrity, do not doubt to consult the instructor.

Generative AI

I understand the value (and the temptation) of Large Language Models. We will, in fact, discuss some of the issues surrounding AI in our class. Please feel free to use Claude, ChatGPT or their siblings to brainstorm, to get a first overview, to critically discuss ideas.

You must acknowledge your use of ChatGPT/AI and attach a paragraph explaining the information you use in your work that has been produced by AI and the overall contribution that it has made to your project (e.g. what prompts you used, which data/information you used and how you revised it and why). Otherwise, it will be considered plagiarism, as much as if you copied ideas and sentences from a website or a published work.

You cannot use AI to generate text for written assignments or tests.

Accommodations

If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact your class performance, please be in touch. With the help of as VAL or IEAP we will make sure that this class is a positive and productive experience for you.

Course Schedule

Unit I: Foundations of Environmental Humanities (Weeks 1-2)

Week 1: Introduction to Environmental Humanities

Day 1: *Course introduction; What are the Environmental Humanities?*

Reading: Robert Emmett, David Nye, "The Emergence of the Environmental Humanities"

Day 2: *German Environmental History*

Reading: Dominick, "The Environmental Movement in Germany"; City of Bonn on its Environmental Efforts: <https://www.bonn.de/themen-entdecken/umwelt-natur/index.php?form=translationDisclaimer-ODg0MTE5Njc1&action=submit#translationDisclaimer-ODg0MTE5Njc1>

Week 2: Methodology and Industrial Memory

Day 1: *Reading Cultural Objects as Environmental Texts*

Lawrence Buell, Ursula K. Heise, Karen Thornber: "Literature and Environment" or: Buell: Introduction. In: *The Environmental Imagination*, Garrard, "Pollution" (from *Ecocriticism*)

Day 2: *Industrial Heritage and Cultural Memory*

Reading: Edensor, "Industrial Ruins"; Marx, "The Machine in the Garden" (excerpts)

Unit II: Machines and Mechanization

Week 3: The Mechanized Body and Soul

Day 1: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927)

Reading: Kiessel, Stubbs: *Urban Dystopia on Screen*, Kaes, "The Cold Gaze: Notes on Mobilization and Modernity"; Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine"

Day 2: Field Trip to Essen: Visit Zeche Zollverein
Response Paper 1 Due

Week 4: Industrial Comedy and Critique

Day 1: Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936)
Reading: Gunning, "Chaplin and the Body of Modernity"
Day 2: Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"
Field Trip Report 1 due

Unit III: Changing the Face of the Earth

Week 5: Those Spirits I have conjured

Day 1: Herman Sörgel: „Europa-Afrika: ein Weltteil“. In: Sozialistische Monatshefte. - 37(1931), H. 10, Ausg. vom 12.10. 1931, S. 983 – 987, Gall, Alexander (2006). "Atlantropa: A Technological Vision of a United Europe".
Day 2: Fieldtrip to the Afsluitdijk Wadden Center, Kornwerderzand, Netherlands
Watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADhywK_Q7xc, *Read:* Zygmunt Bauman: "Introduction: The Scandal of Ambivalence" (In: *Modernity and Ambivalence*)

Unit IV: Monsters

Week 6: Monster Theories, Monster Culture

Day 1: Weinstock, "Introduction: Monsters are the Most Interesting People", Cohen: *Monster Culture* (Seven Theses)
Day 2: Black Mirror S3E5, Manninen "Men Against Fire and Political Manipulation" (Irwin, Johnson, *Black Mirror and Philosophy*)
Field Trip Report 2 due

Unit V: Atomic Monsters and Imageries of Environmental Destruction

Week 7: The Monsters we make

Day 1: Ishirō Honda's *Godzilla* (1954)
Reading: Napier, "Panic Sites: The Japanese Imagination of Disaster"; Broderick, "Godzilla as Metaphor"
Day 2: Bong Joon-ho's *The Host* (2006)
Reading: Materials on Han River pollution; Choi, "Korean Cinema and Environmental Discourse"
Midterm due

Unit VI: Energy: Politics, Economics, Culture: Coal

Week 8: Costs

Day 1: The True Cost of Energy: Externalities and Environmental Accounting
Reading: Epstein et al., "Full cost accounting for the life cycle of coal"; carbon pricing mechanisms
Virtual Visit: Rimvydas Baltaduonis, Environmental Economist, Gettysburg College
Day 2: Erinnerung an eine Landschaft: Für Manuela (1983)
Reading: „Sad and bitter Landscapes. Ecology and the Built Environment in Czech and East German Photography and Film“

Week 9: Moonscapes

Day 1: Fieldtrip to Hambacher Forst
Day 2: Vergiss Meyn nicht (2023)
Discussion with the film makers and climate activists

Response Paper 2 due

Unit VII: Energy: Politics, Economics, Culture: Renewables

Week 10: Economic Dimensions of Energy Production (Weeks 5-6)

- **Day 1:** Renewable Energy: Investment, Jobs, and Economic Transformation
Reading: German renewable energy economics; job creation/destruction analyses
[Virtual Session with Gettysburg Environmental Studies Faculty](#)
- Day 2:** Renewable Energy in Germany
Read: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/service/archive/government-climate-policy-1779414>

Unit IX: Environmental Politics (to be combined with Paris / Brussels Field Trip)

Week 11: Environmental Politics I - German Green Movement

- Day 1:** Rise of Die Grünen and Ecological Politics
Reading: Poguntke, "The German Green Party"; environmental movement histories
- Day 2:** From Protest to Policy: Nuclear Phase-out and Energiewende
Reading: Mautz et al., "Renewable Energies in Germany"; policy analysis materials
Field Trip Report 3 due

Week 12: Environmental Politics II - European Integration

- Day 1:** EU Environmental Policy and Governance
Reading: Jordan & Lenschow, "Innovation in Environmental Policy"; EU climate directives
- Day 2:** EU Institutions, European Parliament, European Commission (DG Environment), Focus: EU Green Deal, environmental legislation, transnational governance

Unit X: Urban Futures and Industrial Aesthetics

Week 13: Cyberpunk Ecology and Urban Dystopia

- Day 1:** Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) - Excerpts and discussion
Reading: Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (excerpts); Bukatman, "Blade Runner and the Postmodern City"
- Day 2:** Watchmen
Read: Dietrich: "The Human Stain"

Unit XI: Synthesis

Week 14: Synthesis and Future Visions

- Day 1:** Student Presentations: Machines, Monsters, Moonscapes Revisited
Integration of field experiences with cultural analysis
- Day 2:** Course Synthesis: From Local to Global Environmental Cultures
Discussion of course themes; planning for final projects
Final Projects Due