

The Climate Unconscious: Contemporary Screen Cultures of the Banal Anthropocene

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Public understanding of climate change is driven by popular media such as television and film, through deployments of overt themes as well as aesthetic and affective strategies. Despite exciting recent work in other areas of environmental humanities (EH), the tools and techniques of critical media studies in the analysis of media aesthetics and affects have been insufficiently mobilized within EH. To remedy this, *The Climate Unconscious* (TCU) pursues new media-interpretive strategies that attend to the affective ecologies of both climate change and fossil fuel dependence. TCU extends media studies analysis to unexamined affective regimes in everyday media experiences to uncover how our psychologically evasive relationship with Anthropocene realities means that environmental issues constitute a baseline awareness unremarked by media audiences. Bridging the central concerns of EH and critical intermedial analysis, TCU addresses a major challenge to the future of humankind: climate change. The project, in its creation of new understandings of and approaches to everyday media experiences, will offer insights into the climate unconscious as a submerged yet significant component in popular media.

This book project brings a much-needed critical media studies lens to the transdisciplinary field of environmental humanities, proceeding from EH's central premise that imagining and enabling alternative futures in the Anthropocene demands innovation and mobilization, not only from scientific and technological fields, but also from the humanities and the arts. TCU sets out to answer those demands facing the cultural sectors by pioneering new aesthetic categories and new reading strategies that meet the need for today's media citizens to understand our changing realities both intellectually and imaginatively. The project takes up popular forms of media—film and television—because these crucial aesthetic and affective engines saturate our everyday lives and will continue to do so in the future. TCU targets Norwegian cultural productions, exceeding the heretofore US/UK contexts of recent EH scholarship in film and television studies. Broadening the scope of research thus introduces a comparative aspect to map alternatives to globally dominant US cultural production, a nation responsible for not only a lion's share of carbon emissions but also much of the world's supply of popular media. Norway serves as a productive and under-studied contrast case because it embodies the key contradictions and paradoxes of the Global North: a sincere commitment to sustainability principles alongside a heavy dependence on the continuation and growth of the global trade in fossil fuels.

The inherently transdisciplinary nature of EH offers a space for pioneering work in media studies staking new claims for the crucial role of imagination and creativity in comprehending and adapting to the everyday experiences of the Anthropocene, now and in the future. Consumption of media is culturally encoded as an unconscious process. By placing the notion of the banal at its center of inquiry, TCU seeks to illuminate the unremarked and taken-for-granted ways in which contemporary life is predicated on unsustainable structures and practices. TCU insists upon the importance of the banal representational and affective repertoires associated with climate change, focusing on quotidian media forms with broad cultural exposure. While it may appear that “banal” applies somewhat unevenly to the choice of focal texts, which include popular culture such as films and television. However, its application is appropriate in the sense that Billig (1995) has advanced the notion of “banal

nationalism;" in other words, the project will argue that although concepts of climate crisis are, as Shohat argues about ethnicity in US cinema, "culturally ubiquitous and textually submerged" (1991), they infuse everyday experience as it is depicted in a wide range of settings. By foregrounding previously understudied media texts and introducing media-theoretical tools into environmental humanities work, this project promises to contribute new knowledge and pioneer advancements in the state of the art in EH.