Environmental Media Syllabus
IIT Humanities

COM 380-02/COM 580-05
117 Wishnick Hall
Mondays from 6:25-9:05
August 25 - December 6, 2014

Dr. Mél Hogan
Email: mhogan7@iit.edu
Office: Seigel Hall 207
Office hours: by appointment

Blackboard: All course related materials will be posted here unless otherwise specified. Some of the 'Optional' readings are made available only upon request. You may also be expected to watch online videos; those links will be provided.

Course Description
This environmental media course focuses on the various facets at which 'media' and the 'environment' intersect. As a class we will explore various theoretical frameworks including media ecology, new materialism, environmental communication, ecofeminism, and media studies more generally.

Readings for this class range from theoretical academic journal articles, interviews, blog entries, documentaries, keynote addresses, and so on, and offer a variety of styles and formats that contribute differently to the discussion of what constitutes “environmental media.” Readings marked as ‘optional’ are intended for graduate students who want to expand on the assigned readings for the week. Some screenings are planned for the class but will depend on availability and time. Because of this, some titles may differ from those proposed.

*** You must read the week’s assigned readings prior to coming to class. Bring those weekly readings with you to each class, on paper or on your iPad. Bring your charger.

Goals of the class
→ to understand various media as modes of communication through categories and terminology
→ to demonstrate an ability to read and interpret texts in the humanities
→ to describe how communication plays a significant role in the framing and discussion of environmental problems and solutions historically
→ to survey and compare a wide variety of media (podcasts, print ads, documentaries, websites, etc) for the way they tell a story about the environment
→ to demonstrate knowledge of how linguistic and discursive practices interrelate to other human practices and processes
→ to identify the role of discourse, rhetoric, and representation in shaping the way we think about the ‘natural’ world and ‘the environment’
→ to produce written and oral discourse appropriate to the humanities
→ to further develop your analytical, writing, and communication skills
→ to work cooperatively in groups and become familiar with methods of peer evaluation

Course and Teaching Style
The learning focus in this course is on student-driven exploration. While we use a variety of learning approaches – including lectures, student presentations, brainstorms, and independent research projects – this course is essentially discussion-based and experiential. This sort of learning requires active individual and group participation. Each of you will get out of this class what you put into it. And your experience will be a collective one. To foster valuable experiential learning:
→ prepare yourself by reading and involving yourself in the concepts and ideas generated
→ engage in the class and actively participate in discussion and exercises
→ always do your readings prior to coming to class

Academic Honesty Statement
Unless collaborative work is specifically called for, work on assignments and exams is expected to be your own. Please refer to the Code of Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook for details concerning sanctions. If you are uncertain about how to properly cite sources, ask a librarian, or book an appointment with me to meet during office hours.

IIT Code of Academic Honesty:

Appropriate sanctions to plagiarism include:
→ Expulsion from a course. The student is assigned a punitive failing grade of ‘E’ for the course and can no longer participate in the course or receive evaluation of coursework from the instructor.
→ Reduction in grade. A reduction in grade for the assignment or exam involved or for the course may be applied. All violations of academic integrity will be reported to academichonesty@iit.edu.

Attendance
Attendance is required for every class. The only exceptions to the attendance policy are religious observance and participation in IIT-sanctioned events and activities. Contact me immediately if these exceptions apply to you, and please note that you must, by the end of the semester, make arrangements to make up any assignments you have missed. Absences cannot be excused for work-related or family-related
reasons. It is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate, come to my office hours, and/or check the syllabus if you want to know what you missed, and to get any graded assignments back from me when you return. I will likely not respond to emails that fall into either or both of these categories.

**Assignments, Due Dates and Grades**

For all papers and projects you hand in to me, please write the name of the assignment, your name, student # and the date in the top right corner. Use: Times, 12pt font, double spaced, with default Word margins. Spell-check your work. Please print out your papers (unless otherwise indicated) and bring them to class on the due date (always due at the beginning of class).

* Please hand in all assignments in print. No email copies will be accepted.

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<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Attendance, participation, and in-class quizzes and assignments</td>
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<td>20%</td>
<td>Presentation on readings (done in groups, presented in class each week)</td>
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<td>20%</td>
<td>Techno-Trash assignment (1000 words + images) <strong>DUE OCT 20, 2014</strong></td>
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<td>10%</td>
<td>Case study: Water (350 words) <strong>DUE NOV 3, 2014</strong></td>
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<td>30%</td>
<td>EXAM: Research paper (300 words - proposal / 3000 words - full paper) <strong>DUE NOV 10, 2014</strong></td>
<td><strong>DUE NOV 24 / DEC 1, 2014</strong>: Feedback from peers, in class <strong>DUE DEC 8, 2014</strong>: Final Exam / print copy due (9:30pm)</td>
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**The Writing Center** (SH 232 and 233) provides free one-on-one consultation, both by appointment and on a walk-in basis, as available. Consultants are all highly trained in working with writers who are not native speakers of English. Adaptation of methods and materials for students with documented disabilities will be made in consultation with the **Center for Disability Resources**.
AUG 25 INTRO

**Welcome and Introductions!**

**Syllabus and BlackBoard overview**

**Sign up for weekly presentations**

**Media Ecologies Assignment due NEXT class (Sept 8)**

**What is environmental media?**
In this introductory class, we will explore the various facets that constitute environmental media. I will give a short lecture laying down the foundations of the field, and how it relates to this class.

SEPT 8 ECOLOGIES

**Media Ecologies Assignment due**
Done in groups, in class. This counts toward your participation grade.

Read:
  ***Read this article closely. We will do an in-class group assignment based on this reading.***
SEPT 15 WILDERNESS

Presentation on readings

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Read:


Optional:
  → Chapter 6 Going Wild: The Contested Terrain of Nature pp.111

SEPT 22 ELECTRONICS

Guest speaker: Tamara Shepherd (*London School of Economics*)

Start thinking about your Techno Trash Assignment due Oct 20

Read:
  → “Chapter 3. Shipping and Receiving: circuits of disposal and the “social death” of electronics” pp.74

  → Introduction: The Materiality of Media and Waste
- Sabine LeBel (2012) “Wasting the Future: The Technological Sublime, Communications Technologies, and E-waste” communication +1 Volume 1 Futures of Communication [http://scholarworks.umass.edu/cpo/vol1/iss1/7](http://scholarworks.umass.edu/cpo/vol1/iss1/7)

### SEPT 29 WASTE

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**Screened in class**

*Manufactured Landscapes* (2006)

Read:


Optional:

### OCT 6 LANDFILLS

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*** Techno Trash Assignment due NEXT class (Oct 20)***

**Galvin Library assignment** at 6:35-7:35 pm
Read:

- Vicki Mayer and Clare Cannon (2015) “A Greener Screening Future: Manufacturing and Recycling as the Subjects of Television Studies” Forthcoming in: Handbook of Television Studies, Milly Buonano, Herman Gray, and Toby Miller, eds., Routledge, 2015. (this article will become available as a draft is released by its authors)

  → Chapter 5. Media in the Dump: salvage stories and spaces of remainder 127

Optional:

- Jane Bennett (2011) Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter | The New School [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q607Ni23QjA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q607Ni23QjA)


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**OCT 20 HUMANS**

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Read:


Optional:


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**OCT 27 ANIMALS**

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<th>Screened in class Grizzly Man (2005)</th>
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<th>*** Water Case Study due NEXT class (Nov 3)</th>
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Read:


Optional:


## NOV 3 WATER

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<th>Water Case Study due</th>
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Read:
- Janine MacLeod (forthcoming) “Holding Water in Times of Hydrophobia” (*dissertation chapter draft*)

## NOV 10 OIL

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<th>Proposals presented in class / feedback session from peers</th>
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**NOV 17 CLOUD**

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Feedback (from me) on proposals for final research papers

Screened in class

*Bundled, Buried & Behind Closed Doors*

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Read:

- Jennifer Holt and Patrick Vonderau (forthcoming) ““Where the Internet Lives:” Data Centers as Cloud Infrastructure.” University of Illinois Press.


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**NOV 24**

The last two classes serve you toward your final exam. In these two classes, each of you will present a draft of your paper to your classmates. We may do class-wide presentations or a small group feedback sessions (TBD). At this stage you should have a solid draft of your final research paper. The further along you are this point, the more precise feedback you will be able to garner from your peers.

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*** Final paper due Friday, Dec 8.
Assignment Details

Presentation on readings
(groups of 2)
(done in class each week)
(20%)

Each of you will be responsible for at least one class presentation (20 minutes) on one of the weekly readings designed to provoke and facilitate discussion. Class size will determine whether this is done individually or collectively in small groups. Rather than provide an overview of the week’s readings, presentations should be concise and conceptually oriented. Clarify key arguments, critically engage readings, and pose questions that open up material for discussion. To lead the discussion, prepare questions.

You will be graded on three components:
→ Preparation (being on time, organized, etc.)
→ The quality of your work (do you demonstrate critical thinking, do you show strong knowledge of the week’s concepts and analysis?)
→ Your ability to lead discussion (to ask meaningful questions, to keep discussion going, etc.)

If it is not your week to present, come to class with a question on the weekly topic for your fellow presenters. This counts toward your participation grade.
Media Ecologies Assignment due Sept 8  
(done in groups, in class)  
(counts toward your participation grade)


http://w.media-ecology.org/publications/MEA_proceedings/v1/postman01.pdf

Based on the reading above, answer the following questions, with no more than three sentences per answer:

→ Who is the author(s)?
→ What is the context in which the piece is written? when was the piece written? from where? for what occasion?
→ What is the format of the piece? what does this format communicate? what is the tone and style of the piece?
→ What is the method?
→ What is the theoretical framework?
→ What is the author trying to convey? what is the main argument?
→ What is missing from the piece?
→ Who is the intended audience?
→ After reading this, how would you define... “media ecology”?

Be brief and precise. Work in groups. Designate a note-taker. Report back to the class as a group once the questions are answered.

This is an assignment intended to help you approach texts of all kinds, including blog posts, academic articles, journalistic texts, and so on. You can use these questions to guide you through all the readings for this class. These questions should also prepare you for your presentation on the readings, for which you will lead a Q & A.
**Techno Trash Assignment due Oct 20**  
*(1000 words / media intervention)*  
*(20%)*

Write a 1000 words, or the equivalent in video document, audio recording, photographic essay, etc., about one or more of your personal electronic devices.

Questions to address in your essay (in text/audio/video) are:

→ What technological communication devices do you use on a daily basis?
→ How did you acquire these devices? (purchased, given, etc?)
→ How often do you change/update your phone/laptop/ipad?
→ What usually makes you want to change your device?
→ What devices are you no longer using, but haven't disposed of?
→ How have you disposed of your devices?
→ Where do you dispose of your devices?
→ Have you encountered obstacles or been made to disregard disposal?
→ Thinking about the readings for ‘Electronics’, ‘Waste’ and ‘Landfills’ weeks, do you consider the social and environmental impacts of your devices? (**Cite/reference at least 2 of the readings for this part)**

Please look at the [technotrash.org](http://technotrash.org) website for examples by undergraduates at other institutions.

http://technotrash.org/2014/08/antonietta-perretta/
http://technotrash.org/2014/07/eva-allouche/
http://technotrash.org/2014/07/alexandra-allen/
http://technotrash.org/2014/07/garo-ekserci/

Print copy of your project, or equivalent media file, is due in class Oct 20. You will also present your project in class Oct 20. These presentations are delivered in 7 to 10 minute summaries of your findings, including a reflections on your process.

With your permission, selected stories will be featured on the [technotrash.org](http://technotrash.org) website.
**Case Study: Water (350 words) due Nov 3 (10%)**

Research a case study of a particular environmental justice problem related to water and write a short (350 words) report.

Find a topic that is of personal interest, and/or of political importance/urgency, and/or of historical impact (or, of notable absence.) Decide which aspect of the story – who, what, when, where, why, how – is most important.

Report on it in four steps:
1. briefly describe the conflict
2. contextualize the issue historically
3. outline efforts toward resolving the issue (or identify the lack thereof)
4. explain how the story is mediated

Your topic can be on a news report on a ‘natural’ disaster, on a design concept, on a film screened in class, etc.
EXAM: Research Paper due Dec 8
(3000 words)
(30%)

Write a 300 word proposal outlining your idea for your final research paper (3000 words, Times font, 12 points, default Word margins).

Your proposal can be for writing about anything that we touch on in the course related to the various facets of environmental media. Use one of the articles or weekly titles as your starting point, if only to identify a general theme. We will brainstorm ideas together in class as well.

In this paper, which will be your final exam, you should clearly state your research question (and possible sub questions), contextualize the issues you are exploring by providing a brief review of the literature (to demonstrate that you have read relevant work on the topic), and derive a theoretical framework, methodology, and approach. Look to the articles covered in this class to get a sense of the variety of styles and formats that your writing can take. Provide an abstract at the beginning of your paper that states your main argument and method.

Your grade will be based on the following criteria:
→ You have included a succinct abstract that clearly states my paper’s fundamental findings and conclusions.
→ Your introduction quickly engages readers’ interest because it does one of the following:
  ● provides an anecdote that then leads to the thesis statement of your paper;
  ● provides readers with a current news event that leads to a provocative scholarly question.
→ You have researched the topic thoroughly and cross-referenced sources.
→ You have made your text as concise as possible and maintained its logic and completeness.
→ You have referenced (at least) 2 articles from the course and 2 readings that you have found through an academic journal database or other reliable source.
→ You provide specific examples when needed.
→ Your conclusion provides a clear recap of your argument and thesis statement and (ideally) opens up the discussion for future debate.
→ The format of all references, bibliographic notes, endnotes, and/or footnotes is consistent throughout your document.
→ Your text has been proofread carefully more than once to eliminate all inaccuracies in fact, word choice, spelling, and grammar.
→ All words and ideas are your own unless clearly and properly quoted, cited and referenced.

For grad students in particular, this research paper is intended to lead you to a publication in a scholarly journal. A scholarly journal is usually 6000-8000 words; the final exam will help you lay its foundation.
IN-CLASS SCREENINGS

The Light Bulb Conspiracy 2010
Planned Obsolescence is the deliberate shortening of product life spans to guarantee consumer demand. As a magazine for advertisers succinctly puts it: The article that refuses to wear out is a tragedy of business - and a tragedy for the modern growth society which relies on an ever-accelerating cycle of production, consumption and throwing away. The Light Bulb Conspiracy combines investigative research and rare archive footage to trace the untold story of Planned Obsolescence, from its beginnings in the 1920s with a secret cartel, set up expressly to limit the life span of light bulbs, to present-day stories involving cutting edge electronics (such as the iPod) and the growing spirit of resistance amongst ordinary consumers. This film travels to France, Germany, Spain and the US to find witnesses of a business practice which has become the basis of the modern economy, and brings back disquieting pictures from Africa where discarded electronics are piling up in huge cemeteries for electronic waste.

Grizzly Man 2005
Grizzly Man is a 2005 documentary film by German director Werner Herzog. It chronicles the life and death of bear enthusiast Timothy Treadwell. The film consists of Treadwell's own footage of his interactions with grizzly bears before he and his girlfriend Amie Huguenard were killed and eaten by a bear in 2003, and of interviews with people who knew or were involved with Treadwell. The footage he shot was later found, and the final film was co-produced by Discovery Docs, the Discovery Channel's theatrical documentary unit, and Lions Gate Entertainment. The film's soundtrack is by British singer songwriter and guitarist Richard Thompson.

Manufactured Landscapes 2006
Jennifer Baichwal's cameras follow Edward Burtynsky (1955- ) as he visits what he calls manufactured landscapes: slag heaps, e-waste dumps, huge factories in the Fujian and Zhejiang provinces of China, and a place in Bangladesh where ships are taken apart for recycling. In China, workers gather outside the factory, exhorted by their team leader to produce more and make fewer errors. A woman assembles a circuit breaker, and women and children are seen picking through debris or playing in it. Burtynsky concludes with a visit to Shanghai, the world’s fastest growing city, where wealth and poverty, high-rises and old neighborhoods are side by side. Written by IMDb

Bundled, Buried & Behind Closed Doors
A short documentary by Ben Mendelsohn on the material infrastructure of the Internet—massive data centers like 60 Hudson Street in Lower Manhattan that serve as the physical, unseen hubs for the Internet. http://laughingsquid.com/bundled-buried-behind-closed-doors-a-documentary-about-the-massive-material-infrastructure-of-the-internet/