Keynote Abstract: Jussi Parikka

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Cinema at a Large-Scale, and Other Art and Media for Environmental Humanities

In *Geostories*, a book by the architectural studio Design Earth (Rania Ghosn and El Hadi Jazairy), the current planetary scale environmental transformation is mapped through architectural and visual forms. Part tradition of speculative design, part relating to an arts and humanities focus on environmental issues, it is an example of recent work where architecture, design, media studies, and environmental (humanities) meet in fruitful ways to narrate the material and geopolitical contexts of ecological issues. For us in media studies, such an approach presented in architectural and artistic projects offers interesting methodological cues including speculative design and visualisation, while being already been incorporated in the same universe of references as current intensive debates about the environment and the Anthropocene (and its variations): Haraway, Latour, and many others. While there is an increasing awareness how media studies can respond to the climate crisis as a media event and a mode of representation with awareness of the ideological and political economic questions related to the fossil fuel industry lobbies for example, there is further potential in paying attention to sensing systems, petro-cultural landscapes, and material infrastructures in ways that benefits from the methodological insights in for example architecture, speculative design, and art practice.

In this talk I want to investigate how such transdisciplinary exchanges can work to unfold methodologically interesting and creative ways of looking at environmental questions. Hence, besides examples such as the artistic and design work of Design Earth, I will discuss the Geocinema audiovisual art project that I collaborated with last year under the support of Digital Earth fellowship programme. I will address their work on the Chinese Digital Belt and Road Program (DBAR) as it relates to large-scale
remote sensing systems, infrastructures of science and their geopolitical connections, and the media aesthetic discourses of operational images (a term originating in the work of Harun Farocki). Here, questions of scientific policy discourse, infrastructure, architecture, large-scale infrastructures, and environmental sensing are framed through audiovisual aesthetics and this develops a sense of the multiple mediations of environmental issues framed as models, projects, and projections, but also incorporating issues of multiple conflicting histories and embodied situations.

Less a straightforward analysis of such creative works, I want to outline how they contribute to media studies too. While architectural discourse has successfully incorporated part of this discussion under the broad term of “speculative design” (see e.g. Bratton 2016), also media studies is prompted to investigate what are the methodological potentials in working through art and design projects in excavating a sense of situated, yet experimental politics of ecological sites and their infrastructures.