

Special Issue of Australian Journal of Environmental Education

Screening the Anthropocene:
Film and Environmental/Climate Change Education

Guest Editors: Joseph Paul Ferguson (Deakin University), Hannah Brasier (RMIT University), Chris Speed (RMIT University)

The guest editorial team invites you to write for this Special Issue exploring film as text, practice, and/or pedagogy, in relation to environmental and climate change education in the Anthropocene.

In this Special Issue, we aim to showcase contributions that: theorise the moving image's distinct role in environmental and climate change education (EE/CCE); investigate innovative interdisciplinary research that engages with climate and environmental film (both documentary and fiction forms); and/or present film as creative practice-as-research, including documentation of student-, community-, or artist-made screen work. We welcome contributions that explore what is distinctive about film within the broader field of cultural production for enacting regenerative futures, especially where duration, image, sound, and collective viewing do unique transformative work.

Timeline

- **Call for papers:** August 2026
- **Abstract proposals due:** November 2026 Email abstracts (300-400 words) to Joe Ferguson (joe.Ferguson@deakin.edu.au)
- **Manuscripts due:** May 2027 Submit to AJEE (See Author Instructions, 6 – 7000 words, note Special Issue)
- **Publication of Special Issue:** September 2027 (articles published asap on FirstView)

What is Climate/Environmental Film?

Environmental and climate-themed cinema has been recognised as a critical field for over two decades, gathering under various labels (Rust et al., 2013; Willoquet-Maricondi, 2010). These include: documentary and fiction filmmaking, including environmental, climate crisis, and nature documentary; ecocinema, ecomedia, climate trauma cinema, and eco-trauma cinema; as well as petroculture and energy humanities (Leyda, 2023). As with climate fiction and documentary forms more broadly, these are contested terms (D'Avanzo, 2018). Some scholars treat ‘ecocinema’ as a genre defined by explicit environmental (as entangled with humans) subject matter, others as a

broader ethical or formal orientation - a way of making and watching film that attends to ecological relation, including the materiality of film products and processes, regardless of a film's explicit topic.

Film is distinguished within this wider field by its distinctive formal characteristics (Ivakhiv, 2013). Duration, the long take, sound design, and the collective conditions of exhibition and viewing produce an address to the body, mind and senses which make it distinct from print and still-image forms. Environmental film scholarship has increasingly turned from a focus on narrative and speculative world-building toward questions of form: what does a slow, durational, or non-narrative cinema make possible that a faster, more conventionally plotted apocalyptic narrative cannot (Pringle, 2024)? This question connects to wider conversations in performance studies around 'slow dramaturgy' — durational, non-human-centred artistic responses to ecological crisis — suggesting a productive alignment between slow cinema traditions and ecological pedagogy. In addition, increasing attention is paid to the materiality of the film making and viewing process; if making an environmental documentary then this ought to be produced and viewed in an environmentally responsible way (Aitchison et al., 2021; Bozak, 2012; Kääpä & Hunter, 2022).

Environmental film carries with it some critical, and problematic, inheritances (Ginn, 2015). Scholars have pointed to the whiteness and wealth often centred in mainstream climate and apocalyptic film, and to the ways popular disaster and dystopian cinema can erase Indigenous experiences and settler-colonial history from its account of ecological catastrophe — even as Indigenous and decolonial screen practice offers other ways of narrating environmental relation, temporality, and futurity (Williams, 2023). A Special Issue on film and EE/CCE should hold both threads together: film's distinctive formal capacities, and the same questions of whose futures, whose grief, and whose knowledge are made visible on screen.

Documentary, essay film, participatory and community video, and screen-based creative practice sit alongside narrative and speculative fiction film. Contributions might explore any of these modes, or the tensions and connections between them.

These could include:

1. Environmental and climate activism in documentary, narrative film, television, and screen-adjacent media.
2. Examples of film used in environmental or climate change education, from primary through tertiary contexts, and informal contexts.
3. Histories and futures of environmental/climate film and ecocinema.
4. Film as practice-as-research, including student, community, or artist-made screen work.
5. Film as participatory action research.
6. Documentation of screen-based creative practice, including essay film, documentary, and moving-image art.
7. Ecocinema, climate trauma cinema, eco-trauma cinema, slow cinema, and related genres and formal traditions.
8. The role of film in translating scientific research and data into public or classroom understanding.

Why is Film Important in Environmental/Climate Change Education?

Environmental Education (EE), and increasingly Climate Change Education (CCE), is concerned with imagining possible futures — utopian and dystopian — and with helping young people engage not only in futures thinking but futures *feeling* (Auld et al., 2023; Ott, 2023; Verlie, 2019). Film has a particular role to play here, given its capacity to hold an audience in duration, silence, and image in ways that ask something different of attention and affect than other forms (e.g., text-based forms). Film can have an almost magical power of transporting and transforming the viewer, even if only for the duration of the film, but sometimes long after. And those involved in the film making process may experience even more intense shifts in their being in the world.

This is not only about the consumption of environmental film, but its creation and critique as part of understanding and re-imagining the world. Student and community filmmaking, participatory video, and screen-based creative practice offer forms of agency-building that complement more traditional EE/CCE pedagogies — inviting all members of the public, in particular children and young people, to become makers of environmental narrative and documentary, not only its audience (Diller, 2024; Pesch, 2024; Towfighnia, 2024)..

Film also has a distinctive role at the intersection of science and public understanding, which is particularly important in a world full of mis/dis-information as regards the polycrises and the broader metacrisis in which we are all entangled. Where scientific research and data can often remain abstract or inaccessible, environmental and climate film — whether documentary, dramatised, or essayistic — offers a means of translation: making complex socio-ecological systems perceptible, felt, and communicable across disciplinary and public boundaries (Esmail & Matthews-Roper, 2022). This connects EE and CCE to broader questions about how scientific research and design can be represented, and to whom, in ways that build both public and classroom understandings.

Reimagining coexistence between the more-than-human through film also offers relational perspectives on the environment that make possible processes of decolonisation and ecocentric advocacy, which underpin what an intersectional EE/CCE ought to be (Everth et al., 2023; Walker & van Holstein, 2023). Film, whether documentary, participatory, dramatised, or experimental, has the potential to enhance EE/CCE by exploring the cognitive and affective dimensions of climate change in ways that engage both mind and body for the individual and their communities (Rousell et al., 2017; Verlie, 2021).

The Invitation

This special issue calls for contributions in three sections:

1. Manuscripts theorising film and its application in EE/CCE.
2. Research practices that investigate and respond to environmental/climate film.
3. Actual creations of environmental/climate film (e.g., documentary, essay film, or documentation of screen-based creative practice). These should be no more than 10 minutes in duration and accompanied by a 1,500 word research statement which positions the work within film and environmental/climate change education. Longer filmic forms are welcome, in which case the author submits an extract (of no more than 10 minutes).

Please indicate in your proposal which section you are writing for.

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Guest Editor Biographies

Joseph Paul Ferguson is a Lecturer in Science and Environmental Education at Deakin University. He is an Associate Editor of the Australian Journal of Environmental Education. His current research explores the synergies between film and science/environmental education and putting pragmatist methodology into practice for regenerative futures.

Hannah Brasier is a Lecturer in Media, RMIT University; Co-Lead Editor Sightlines: Filmmaking in the Academy; creative-practice researcher on ways of making media with and for so-called Australian waterways in the climate crisis.

Chris Speed is Professor of Design for Regenerative Futures and Director of the Regenerative Futures Institute at RMIT University. His work explores how design and emerging technologies can support regenerative, more-than-human futures across research, education, and industry engagement.