

# Tracing the Anthropocene in Southeast Asian film and artists' moving image

## Introduction

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- 1 Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, 'The Anthropocene', *Global Change Newsletter*, no. 41 (2000), pp. 17–18. Stoermer had been using the term 'Anthropocene' since the 1980s, but it was not until the publication of their article in 2000 that it became popularized.
- 2 Barbara Creed, *Stray: Human-Animal Ethics in the Anthropocene* (Sydney: Power Publications, 2017); Jennifer Fay, *Inhospitable World: Cinema in the Time of the Anthropocene* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018); Selmin Kara, 'Anthropocenema: cinema in the age of mass extinctions', in Shane Denson and Julia Leyda (eds), *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film* (Falmer, REFRAME Books, 2016); Jennifer Peterson and Graig Uhlin (eds), 'In focus: film and media studies in the Anthropocene', *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, vol. 58, no. 2 (2019), pp. 142–79; William Brown

The term 'Anthropocene', first proposed by the atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen and biologist Eugene Stoermer,<sup>1</sup> refers to a new geological epoch in which humans are perceived to be the singular driving force of the Earth's system. Despite being popularized as a critical framework in the sciences in the early 2000s, and subsequently embraced by the social sciences and the arts and humanities, the term has only relatively recently been adopted in film studies, with the publication of influential texts by Barbara Creed and Jennifer Fay, as well as various other monographs, academic dossiers, journal articles and screening programmes.<sup>2</sup> That said, one could argue that the relationship between film studies and the Anthropocene is not really new, as the field of ecocinema studies and studies of animals in visual media have tackled similar questions and concerns.<sup>3</sup> In a way, the intersection of film studies and Anthropocene scholarship can be seen as a continuation of the same journey.

What has changed, however, is both the scale and the focus. The idea of the Anthropocene brings to film studies (or, to be more precise, ecocinema studies) a specific emphasis on the planet's spatiality and temporality. If globalization as a concept redefined film studies scholarship in the 1990s, resulting in the popularity of world, national and transnational frameworks, the Anthropocene presents a strong argument for today's film scholars to urgently rethink the relationship

and David H. Fleming, *The Squid Cinema from Hell: Kinoteuthis Infernalis and the Emergence of Chthulumeia* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020); Julia Leyda and Diane Negra (eds), 'Dossier: Television in/of the banal Anthropocene', *Screen*, vol. 62, no. 1 (2021), pp. 78–115; 'Anthropocene observatory' (2013–14), a project by Armin Linke, Territorial Agency and Anselm Franke at Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

- 3 See for example Sheldon H. Lu and Jiayan Mi (eds), *Chinese Ecocinema: In the Age of Environmental Challenge* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009); Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt (eds), *Ecocinema Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2013); Anat Pick, *Creatively Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011); Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway (eds), *Screening Nature: Cinema Beyond the Human* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013); Laura McMahon (ed.), 'Dossier: Screen animals', *Screen*, vol. 56, no. 1 (2015); Michael Lawrence and Laura McMahon (eds), *Animal Life and the Moving Image* (London: British Film Institute/Palgrave, 2015); Laura McMahon, *Animal Worlds: Film, Philosophy and Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).
- 4 See also Kevin Chua, Nora Taylor and Lucy Davis (eds), 'Uncontainable nature: Southeast Asian ecologies and visual culture', *Antennae: Journal of Nature in Visual Culture*, vols. 1 & 2, nos. 54 & 55 (2021).
- 5 Glenn Albrecht et al., 'Solastalgia: the distress caused by environmental change', *Australasian Psychiatry*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2007), pp. 95–98.
- 6 Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2014).
- 7 Ursula K. Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

between cinema, nation and the Earth in the face of environmental crisis. Forcing us to perceive time on a geological scale, the Anthropocene challenges us to correlate the histories of humans, nonhumans, cinema and the Earth. If we accept that the new geological epoch could be said to have begun in the 18th century, we might ask whether film studies itself can be seen as the study of the moving-image culture of this new epoch. This dossier responds to the urgent need to centre Southeast Asian film and artists' moving image within these debates.<sup>4</sup>

As an inherently interdisciplinary field of study, the Anthropocene has led to several new lexica that are used to define contemporary human and nonhuman lives, as well as the ways that humans, nonhumans and environments relate to and affect each other: 'solastalgia', for example, denotes the distress of people whose habitat has been radically altered by environmental change;<sup>5</sup> 'sacrifice zone' refers to an area permanently damaged as a result of the land being made toxic through various industrial processes such as mining;<sup>6</sup> extinction is considered in relation to 'rewilding' – the term for the process of restoring the environment through the reintroduction of endangered species.<sup>7</sup> These terms resonate across each of the contributions to this dossier.

Graiwoot Chulphongsathorn's essay 'Apichatpong Weerasethakul's planetary cinema' considers how Apichatpong's short films and installation works address multispecies survival and precarity across vastly different scalar registers, from the life of the planet to that of a single insect. It pays close attention to the presence of a firefly shown against a backdrop of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, an environmental catastrophe that resulted in the spread of radioactivity far beyond Japan's borders. Fukushima is an important reference point for our dossier, as the spectre of nuclear power plant construction in the region also connects the works discussed by May Adadol Ingawanij and Philippa Lovatt.

Kiu-wai Chu's essay, 'Screening vulnerability in the Anthropocene: *Island of the Hungry Ghosts* and the eco-ethics of refugee cinema', shares Graiwoot's focus as it addresses the film's representations of displaced human and nonhuman subjectivities, similarly revealing trans-scalar perspectives and multispecies interconnectedness while considering how cinema can address questions of collective fatigue in media representations of global suffering. The question of multispecies survival and an ethics of care is addressed in Olivia Khoo's 'A voice for elephants: Kirsten Tan's *Pop Aye* and environmental dialogue in Southeast Asia', which discusses the film's treatment of precarity in relation to the threat of extinction for the elephant, the eponymous central character in Tan's film. Khoo describes how Creed's use of the term 'stray'<sup>8</sup> is understood as a mode of existence in the new epoch for both humans and animals in the context of precarity. All three of these articles consider how films, video and installation works take up the urgent call for ethical responsibility that is at the core of Donna Haraway's argument in her book *Staying With the Trouble*. Through their analyses, Graiwoot, Khoo and Chu explore the affective and aesthetic qualities of these

- 8 Creed, *Stray*.
- 9 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).
- 10 Anna L. Tsing, Jennifer Deger, Alder Keleman Saxena and Feifei Zhou (eds), *Feral Atlas: The More-Than-Human Anthropocene* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021) <<http://doi.org/10.21627/2020fa>>, accessed 21 September 2021.
- 11 Jason W. Moore (ed.), *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press 2016); Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*; T. J. Demos, *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017); Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).
- 12 Jason W. Moore, 'The Capitalocene Part I: on the nature and origins of our ecological crisis', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 44, no. 3 (2017); Moore (ed.), *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?* See also Donna Haraway, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Platationocene, Chthulucene: making kin', *Environmental Humanities*, no. 6 (2015), pp. 159–65.
- 13 Leah Zani, 'Bomb ecologies', *Environmental Humanities: Living Lexicons*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2018), pp. 528–31.

depictions of Anthropocene encounters, and the notion of 'making kin', in Southeast Asia.<sup>9</sup> They argue that as well as offering a critique of the environmental justice issues brought about by profit-led decision-making by governmental institutions as well as global corporations, these films invite us to reflect on questions such as the role of wonder, care and companionship in learning how to 'stay with the trouble' and create liveable futures.

Khoo's contribution also discusses the term 'feral' in its relation to ecosystems that have responded to human activity, shaping how humans and nonhumans interact with each other. For Anna Tsing et al., 'feral ecologies' are those 'that have been encouraged by human-built infrastructures, but [...] have developed and spread beyond human control. These infrastructural effects', they argue, 'are the Anthropocene'.<sup>10</sup> Having said this, even the term 'Anthropocene' has been challenged by other alternatives such as Capitalocene, Chthulucene and Platationocene, in order to redirect the narrative and crystallize the issues for encountering environmental crisis, something that both Ingawanij and Khoo address here.<sup>11</sup> The Capitalocene, a concept introduced by Jason W. Moore that refers to the 'Age of Capital', regards the climate crisis as a manifestation and direct result of the exploitation of natural and human resources by European capitalists following the agricultural revolution of the late 15th century.<sup>12</sup> Ingawanij's essay, 'Cinematic animism and contemporary Southeast Asian artists' moving-image work', in particular considers how the Capitalocene is an especially useful term for understanding and addressing the relationship between the entangled histories of colonialism and extractivist capitalism in the context of the region's post-independence forms of disaster-capitalist authoritarian regimes. These terms are just a few examples of a new lexicon for film studies scholarship.

Of particular relevance to Southeast Asia is the term 'bomb ecologies', which refers to 'zones in which war profoundly shapes the ecological relations, political systems, and material conditions of living and dying'.<sup>13</sup> The anthropologist Lah Zani has coined the concept from her field research in Laos, a country bombed by the Americans during the Vietnam–American war after it became a battleground during the Cold War. In this war, as in all wars, the victims are not only humans but the entire natural habitat. As Lovatt describes in her contribution to the dossier, 'Foraging in the ruins: Nguyễn Trinh Thi's mycological moving image practice', as part of military strategy during its war with Vietnam, the USA carried out the ecocidal campaign 'Operation Ranch Hand', which involved the spraying of 20 million gallons of toxic herbicides over Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, with the aim of destroying the forests that gave cover to the North Vietnamese troops and the Viet Cong. First used in Southeast Asia by the British army in Malaya during the Malayan Emergency in the 1950s, the highly toxic ingredient dioxin, here mixed with other herbicides, defoliants and diesel fuel, obliterated the forests and fauna, poisoned the land, water and crops, and caused long-term health problems including cancer, neurological issues and birth defects

- 14 On the former war correspondent Trần Tô Nga's lawsuit against the multinational corporations responsible for producing and selling Agent Orange, see 'Vietnamese French citizen's long standing battle for justice carries on', *Vietnam Net Global*, 1 June 2021, <<https://vietnamnet.vn/en/society/vietnamese-french-citizen-s-long-standing-battle-for-justice-carries-on-741563.html>> accessed 21 September 2021. See also Barry Weisberg (ed.), *Ecoicide in Indochina: The Ecology of War* (San Francisco, CA: Canfield Press, 1970).
- 15 See also Viêt Lê, *Return Engagements: Contemporary Art's Traumas of Modernity and History in Sài Gòn and Phnom Penh* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).
- 16 Gene Ammarell, 'Whither Southeast Asia in the Anthropocene?', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 73, no. 4 (2014), pp. 1005–07.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 1006.
- 18 Ronald C. Estoque et al., 'The future of Southeast Asia's forests', *Nature Communication*, no. 10 (2019), p. 1829.
- 19 Jenna R. Jambeck et al., 'Plastic waste input from land into ocean', *Science*, no. 347 (2015), p. 769.
- 20 Mayuri Mei Rin and Rafki Hidayat, 'Jakarta, the fastest-sinking city in the world', *BBC News*, 12 August 2018, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-44636934>>; Raharee Mahomed, 'Most of Jakarta's coastal areas could be submerged by 2050', *Aljazeera*, 11 January 2020, <<https://www.aljazeera.com/vid eos/2020/1/11/most-of-jakartas-coastal-areas-could-be-submerged-by-2050>> both accessed 21 September 2021.
- 21 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*; Tsing, at al., *Feral Atlas*.

that continue to affect both human and animal life.<sup>14</sup> The effect on the environment was devastating, as the toxicity of land and water led to the near extinction of many different species and the destruction of fragile ecosystems across the region. Meanwhile, as Ingawanij explains in relation to Tuan Andrew Nguyễn's *The Boat People* (2020), the US defeat in Indochina that brought about the end of the war in 1975 (which also saw the end of the Civil Wars in Cambodia and Laos) led to a mass migration crisis, with millions of refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos fleeing their homes.<sup>15</sup>

This is just one among countless examples of the impact of the Anthropocene on Southeast Asia. In a roundtable dedicated to the intersection of Asian Studies and the environment, anthropologist Gene Ammarell has pointed out that Southeast Asia is often omitted from the narrative of the Anthropocene because the perception of Asia is often exclusively represented by East Asian countries.<sup>16</sup> Ammarell calls for the much needed acknowledgement that 'Southeast Asia as a whole is one of the regions of the world that will bear some of the most significant damage from climate change'.<sup>17</sup> Without doubt, several of the urgent, overlapping ecological crises facing Southeast Asia will extend beyond the region to the rest of the world. Scientists indicate that 'Southeast Asia is home to nearly 15% of the world's tropical forests', yet there has been widespread deforestation across many parts of the region.<sup>18</sup> Deforestation destroys natural habitats (leading to zoonotic diseases such as COVID-19) and affects the biodiversity of animals and plants, as well as the quality of air. As Graiwoot notes in his discussion of the works of Apichatpong, toxic smog and industrial pollution are also major problems in the region, alongside sand dredging, rising water levels, flooding and contaminated water. As each of the contributions to this dossier highlights, ecological and political histories in Southeast Asia are inseparable. Reports have shown that of the top ten nations with the highest levels of plastic waste entering the ocean due to waste mismanagement, five are in Southeast Asia.<sup>19</sup> The ocean is not only polluted, but its level has risen. The BBC has reported that Jakarta, Indonesia's capital city, is 'the fastest sinking city in the world', while Aljazeera has published research by Indonesia's Bandung Institute of Technology that predicts that '40% of the entire city could be under water by 2050'.<sup>20</sup>

How to live with catastrophe? While scholars such as Haraway and Tsing propose that the answer lies in the way humans must learn to live with other species and forces, placing humans within the web of relations in the more-than-human worlds, our dossier asserts that over the last decade, Southeast Asian artists and filmmakers have responded similarly to environmental crisis through narrative and aesthetic explorations of animism.<sup>21</sup> As Ingawanij discusses in detail, although animism is largely perceived as a belief system that attributes the notion of souls to inanimate objects and nonhuman beings – plants, animals, earth, rivers – a theoretical understanding of animism within the field of anthropology has recently taken a new turn in relation to ecology through the work of

- 22 Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013). See also Kaj Århem and Guido Sprenger (eds), *Animism in Southeast Asia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016); Juno Salazar Parreñas, *Decolonizing Extinction: The Work of Care in Orangutan Rehabilitation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018). On the relationship between cinema and animism, see Teresa Castro, 'An animistic history of the camera: filmic form and machinic subjectivity', in Diego Cavallotti, Federico Giordano and Leonardo Quaresima (eds), *A History of Cinema without Names: A Research Project* (Milano-Udine: Mimesis International, 2016), pp. 247–55.
- 23 Shoko Yoneyama, *Animism in Contemporary Japan: Voices for the Anthropocene from Post-Fukushima Japan* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), p. 19.
- 24 See also Philippa Lovatt and Jasmine Nadua Trice, 'Introduction: theorizing film and video cultures in Southeast Asia', *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, vol. 60, no. 2 (2021), pp. 158–62.
- 25 See Graiwoot Chulphongsathorn, 'The cinematic forest and Southeast Asian cinema', *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, vol. 60, no. 2 (2021), pp. 182–87.
- 26 On capitalization and indigeneity in a Southeast Asian context, see Juno Salazar Parreñas, 'From decolonial indigenous knowledges to vernacular ideas in Southeast Asia', *History and Theory*, vol. 59, no. 3 (2020), pp. 413–20.
- 27 See <<http://mayadadol.info/index.php/project/animistic-apparatus/>>; <<http://theforestcurriculum.com/>>; <<https://factoryartscentre.com/en/programs/re-aligning-the-cosmos/>> both accessed 21 September 2021.
- 28 Heather Swanson, Anna Tsing, Nils Bubandt and Elaine Gan (eds), *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
- 29 With the exception of the Australian filmmaker Gabrielle

Philippe Descola, Kaj Århem, Guido Sprenger, Juno Salazar Parreñas and others.<sup>22</sup> The sociologist Shoko Yoneyama has studied the role of animism in the Anthropocene in the context of post-Fukushima Japan. Yoneyama argues that new animism is repurposed through the elimination of the colonial prejudice usually associated with studies of animism in the past, and is now regarded as 'a critical tool to reflect on modernity [...] with a view of bringing about a better world'.<sup>23</sup> Instead of animism being perceived in a negative light as a superstitious belief in the supernatural, from this perspective it is understood as a way to acknowledge a different mode of ontology and cosmology, a way of being in the world where humans are not superior or centred – this is a crucial thread that can be traced throughout our dossier.

As a place where animism is blended and practised in everyday life, Southeast Asia is full of animistic-oriented narratives, inspiring filmmakers and artists from across the region. Indeed this is one of the ways in which 'Southeast Asia' may be understood as a space beyond the region's framing in Cold War discourse, and in state and diplomatic conceptualizations associated with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).<sup>24</sup> As Graiwoot and Ingawanij discuss here, in the films of Apichatpong that are mostly set in the northeast of Thailand, for example, spirits do co-exist with humans, while in the slow durational cinema of Lav Diaz, earth, wind and trees are shown to bear witness to the turbulent history of the postcolonial Philippine nation.<sup>25</sup> The connection between local and indigenous<sup>26</sup> cosmologies and the region's histories of colonialism and the environment are also the focus of Lovatt's essay, which discusses how Nguyễn Trinh Thi's 'Landscape series' calls attention to the marginalization of historical accounts of indigenous peoples' experiences of dispossession in Vietnam by linking those histories to the effects of contemporary state censorship on media reporting of ecological catastrophe.

Animism is a focus and way of being in the world that has been taken up in recent moving-image curatorial and expanded cinema projects such as Ingawanij's 'Animistic Apparatus', 'The Forest Curriculum' led by Pujita Guha and Abhijan Toto, and 'Re-Aligning the Cosmos' at The Factory, Ho Chi Minh City,<sup>27</sup> all of which explore the question of how to live in our damaged world.<sup>28</sup> Our dossier works in conversation with these approaches to trace various animistic sensibilities through the entanglements of human and nonhuman agency in the context of the Anthropocene as it is lived, felt and understood in Southeast Asia. We explore these ideas through each author's detailed analysis of the aesthetic practices of filmmakers from the region,<sup>29</sup> including narrative cinema, found-footage film, video, installation and a 'hybrid documentary' about Christmas Island – an island between Singapore, Indonesia and Australia – thus expanding our Southeast Asian framework to encompass 'feral' territories that are geographically and imaginatively 'Southeast Asian', but not 'officially' so.

Animism is not only found in art cinema, but is even more popular in commercial films and television dramas of the region. It is as diverse,

Brady, who directed *Island of the Hungry Ghosts* (2018).

30 Guido Sprenger, 'Dimensions of animism in Southeast Asia', in Århem and Sprenger (eds), *Animism in Southeast Asia*.

31 See Graiwoot Chulphongsathorn, 'Trương Minh Quý: a Vietnamese on Mars', in Chua, Taylor and Davis (eds), 'Uncontainable nature', pp. 64–80.

32 Hannah Ellis-Petersen, 'Treated like trash: south-east Asia vows to return mountains of rubbish from west', *The Guardian*, 28 May 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/may/28/treated-like-trash-south-east-asia-vows-to-return-mountains-of-rubbish-from-west>> accessed 21 September 2021.

33 François Vergès, 'Capitalocene, waste, race and gender', *E-Flux Journal*, no. 100, May 2019, <<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/100/269165/capitalocene-waste-race-and-gender/>> accessed 21 September 2021.

blended and influential as the many religions and belief systems in Southeast Asia, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Taoism. However, as Ingawanij explains in more detail, the anthropologist Guido Sprenger points out two forms of relationship between animism and religion in Southeast Asia: first, the sense that animism exists for, and is practised by, people who 'do not identify with transcultural religions at all', such as tribes that live in the highlands; second, the way in which animism exists in contemporary society 'as a concern with life forces and spirits which run below, or beside, or within the seemingly world religion in place'.<sup>30</sup> We argue that certain Southeast Asian filmmakers channel both forms of animism in their narrative and aesthetic practices in order to create a speculative vision of the Anthropocene, and in so doing foreground the urgency of the environmental crisis. In his experimental documentary *Nhà Cây/The Tree House* (2019), for example, Vietnamese artist and filmmaker Trương Minh Quý combines footage of dispossessed Rục and Cor ethnic minorities with a speculative narrative about a submerged Vietnam in the year 2045.<sup>31</sup>

Southeast Asian film and artists' moving image is positioned strategically as a way of telling an alternative narrative of the Anthropocene. In ecocinema studies, stories from Southeast Asia are often relegated to the background, despite the knowledge that some of the region's economic centres, Jakarta, Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City, will be under water within the next 30 years, and that regional industrial processes such as the importation of plastic waste or industrial deforestation for palm oil, often driven by demand from the west, clearly have planetary consequences. One recent headline from *The Guardian*, 'Treated like trash', speaks volumes. The author sets out the stakes:

For the past year, the waste of the world has been gathering on the shores of south-east Asia. Crates of unwanted rubbish from the west have accumulated in the ports of the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam while vast toxic wastelands of plastics imported from Europe and the US have built up across Malaysia.<sup>32</sup>

These examples respond to the conditions of the Capitalocene and reveal that the processes of exploitation that characterized the colonial era continue today in many forms in Southeast Asia and across the global south, and include the forms of gendered domestic labour from countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand that operate on what Françoise Vergès calls an 'economy of exhaustion'.<sup>33</sup>

We assert that the Capitalocene is a highly relevant concept for understanding how the conditions of the Anthropocene are perpetuated and entrenched within the emerging economies and fast-developing nations of the region. Ingawanij and Chu argue that the Capitalocene is experienced unevenly across parts of Southeast Asia, not only with regard to economic inequality, but also in relation to economic and climate migration. Lovatt identifies how these differences are entrenched further in some cases through state censorship, which has serious and

34 See also Philippa Lovatt, '(Im)material histories and aesthetics of extractivism in Vietnamese artists' moving image', *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2020), p. 221.

35 Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), p. 87.

36 See Kathleen Stewart, 'Precarity's forms', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2012), pp. 518–25; A. Kanngieser and Zoe Todd, 'From environmental case study to environmental kin study', *History and Theory*, vol. 59, no. 3 (2020), pp. 385–93; Lisbeth Lipari, *Listening, Thinking, Being: Toward an Ethics of Attunement* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2014).

accumulatively negative impacts on questions of environmental justice that directly affect both human and more-than-human life in the region, often with catastrophic consequences. Industrial pollution, for example, leads to animal suffering and death, which in turn creates economic and food poverty for the humans and animals that depend on these fragile ecosystems for survival. In Vietnam, censorship means that protests against industrial polluters can lead to long prison sentences for bloggers and activists.<sup>34</sup>

In *The Great Derangement*, Amitav Ghosh makes the case that while accounts of the Anthropocene may turn to capitalism as 'one of the principal drivers of climate change', this perspective 'often overlooks an aspect of the Anthropocene that is of equal importance, empire and imperialism'. He writes:

To look at climate crisis through the prism of empire is to recognize, first, that the continent of Asia is conceptually critical to every aspect of global warming: its causes, its philosophical and historical implications, and the possibility of a global response to it.<sup>35</sup>

Ghosh goes on to claim that due to Eurocentrism, the implications of this are rarely considered in discussions of the Anthropocene and climate change. Our dossier addresses this concern by discussing environmental crisis not only in terms of its historical roots in colonial extractivism and the *longue durée* of the Cold War, but also the material conditions brought about by capitalism, neo-colonialism and, in some cases, state censorship. At the same time it explores the different ways in which filmmakers and artists have responded to these conditions and have offered a way forward.

Focusing on the environmental aspects of Southeast Asian film and artists' moving image requires an engagement with the specific histories and environmental politics of the region. What is distinctive about this work, we argue, is that environmental aspects are always a part, or even a main part, of the creative output of the region's innovative filmmakers and artists. In films such as *Nervous Translation* (2017) by the Filipina director Shireen Seno, and *A Land Imagined* (2018), by the Singaporean filmmaker Yeo Siew Hua, environmental problems, from the effects of tsunami to land-reclamation projects, are at the centre of their story-worlds. The purpose of this dossier is to consider how an emerging aesthetic of the Anthropocene from the perspective of Southeast Asia might look and sound. Collectively we trace how Southeast Asian film and artists' moving-image work shifts scale from the macro to the micro in its narrativization of precarity, and explores how the ongoingness of life is visualized and sonified through scenes of kin-making between humans, animals, elements and forces – foregrounding relations that require an ethical mode of attunement.<sup>36</sup> In contrast to the anthropocentric tendencies of the medium's history, the films and moving-image work discussed here juxtapose human characters and

concerns with stories about a single insect, an army of ants, an elephant, a swarm of crabs, birds, spirits, and even an amorphous haze. We see the tremendous capacity and potential of the moving image to traverse multiple temporal and spatial scales and durations, to connect human and nonhuman histories through affective and imaginative experience, and to offer us a glimpse into the possibility of a liveable future.

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