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Landscapes in the frame: Anthropocene screens

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The world is ending; yet, at the same time, we keep making new worlds. In his discussion of the ‘Third Nature,’ the Marxist geographer [Neil Smith \(2008\)](#) presaged such a paradox wherein human-fabricated simulacra of the (un)natural world around us via technological means (analogue, digital, cinematic, televisual, AI-generated) would function as part of a continuance of capitalist-neoliberal exploitation of all resources, whether human, fauna, flora or elemental. This special issue of *Critical Studies in Television* (CST) focuses on the ways in which the New Human Epoch features on our small screens. Our contributors, who represent a diverse cross-section of academic disciplines, from aesthetics to media studies, from cultural studies to cultural geography, offer the readers of *CST* a series of treatises that employ the screened landscape as a meditation on humanity’s geographical, geopolitical, and geological agency. Unsurprisingly, we do not present a pretty picture (even when what we analyse might enter into the realm of the sublime).

Given the massive transformation of the environment, or what some have deemed the ‘terraforming’ of the planet, we are especially interested in anthropogenic interventions in the natural world and how these convey meaning in the era of the so-called ‘Anthropocene’. Scholars from across the arts, humanities, and social sciences are increasingly investigating and critiquing the ways in which the geological impact of humans on the planet is performed, imagined and visualised ([Chaudhuri, 2015](#); [Lorimer, 2017](#); [Matless, 2017](#)). Taking our cue from the assertion that the crisis in human-environment relations is first-and-foremost a crisis in imagination ([Buell, 1995](#); [Ghosh, 2016](#)), we argue that it is becoming undeniably evident that when representations of climate change and other forms of Earthly violence make their way into cultural production, it is meaningful, even bordering on agentic. Moreover, these aesthetic choices tell us much about the visions, codes and logics of the creators behind the artefact: not only novelists, showrunners and filmmakers, but also funding bodies such as public service broadcasters (PSB), film agencies and media conglomerates.

Scholars continually debate which popular culture medium currently commands primacy as the most efficacious, meaningful, and profound world-making and world-revealing techne. While cinema continues to rank as the top contender, long-form

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television series are seen as a stalking horse, if not the outright victor in this fight for influence (Hanich, 2014; Morley, 2004; Shapiro, 2015), although it is possible that both will fall to social media in the near term, with whatever brand of the Metaverse that emerges next assuming the throne thereafter. Because of the emergence of global streaming platforms combined with a vibrant competition-cum-collaboration amongst corporate media players (Netflix, Amazon, Disney, HBO) and public service broadcasters (e.g. BBC, Denmark's DR, Brazil's EBC, Japan's NHK), the television industrial complex is becoming increasingly deterritorialised, hybridised and commercialised in ways that allow consumers a plethora of ways to see, hear, and feel the world around them. Consequently, the stories that present on 'small screens'—from cathode ray tube receivers and 85" QLED flat-screens to tablets and smartphones—help us navigate our reality. In so doing, we turn attention to the most pressing issue of our time: planetary crises.

Televisual landscapes

By focusing on televisual landscapes in this special issue, we emphasise both television series and landscape as separate but interlocking mediums, each with their own production structures, visual rhetoric and consumption modalities. We present a television-specific approach to the understanding of landscapes in screen media, as well as a landscape-specific approach to understand the variegated fictional worlds and narratives in television series. Since around 2000, quality long-form television drama has demonstrated a profound attraction to geopolitical topics, from *Homeland's* (2011-20) interrogation of post-9/11 American foreign policy, to *Occupied's* (2015-2020) imagining of a Russian invasion of Norway, to *Game of Thrones'* (2011-2019) fantastical metaphors of nuclear war and climate change (Cupples and Glynn, 2020; Moïsi, 2016; Saunders, 2019). As International Relations scholar Jack Holland argues, fictional television is a key factor in the individual and societal establishment of 'ontological, epistemological, and normative parameters of political life', ultimately sculpting what 'can, could, and must happen' in the world (2019: 56). The aesthetics of place and space has become central to the storytelling process of geopolitically inflected TV series such as those mentioned above. The screening of meaningful—even agentic—landscapes thus functions as an indispensable enhancement to the aforementioned politico-sensory feedback loop enabled by the advent of Television 3.0 (Jenner, 2016). As television outpaces film as the primary *dispositif* through which individuals imagine and understand the world around them, a better understanding of how showrunners treat the challenges of the anthropogenic impacts on the planet is critical for those scholars operating within the popular culture-world politics nexus, as well as researchers in the fields of cultural and social geography, screen studies and aesthetics.

While landscape has enjoyed broad critical appeal across art history, geography and literary and film studies, its consideration in fictional television series remains comparatively underdeveloped, with some notable exceptions (see Agger, 2017; Byrnes, 2015; Fletchall et al., 2012; García Avis, 2015; Mrozewicz, 2020; Radstone, 2017; Roberts, 2016; Saunders, 2020; Souch, 2020; Toft Hansen and Waade, 2017; Williams, 2017). Yet, the complex and often contested notion of landscape has been central to

creating production value and transnational currency of many recent television drama series, from big-budget ‘Hollywood’ fare such as *Lost* (2004-2010), *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) and *The Wire* (2002-2008), to highly popular non-English language offerings like *Bron|Broen* (2011-2018), *Zone Blanche* (2017-2019) and *La Casa de Papel* (2017-2021). The articles in this issue explore how landscape in television drama serves the chronotopic world-building process (Tischleder, 2017), specifically by screening an environment, ecosystem and/or planet under threat. As the articles that follow demonstrate, the seriality of television series includes a strong element of affective imaginative involvement in the fictional world.

Temporal continuity condenses into depth and spatial expansion, and the duration of watching a show over many episodes and seasons fosters a sense of intimacy with fictional characters that relies on a growing familiarity with the world and specific situations rather than on spontaneous sympathies or identification. (Tischleder, 2017: 123)

In the words of geographer Elena dell’Agnese, the landscape is ‘a complex idea, expressing the link between human beings and their context’, and it possesses both a ‘cultural and subjective dimension’ (2021: 78). For us, landscape—as a tool for affirming and/or privileging the importance of place—constitutes an intrinsic part of those series that employ built and natural environments that transcend the banal descriptor of ‘setting’, instead serving as a visual—and sometimes *more-than-visual*—manifestation of the geophysical embodiments of these texts’ various themes. Building on and moving beyond Martin Lefebvre’s seminal *Landscape and Film* (2007) distinguishing between setting and cinematic landscape, we extend and enhance previous work in assessing the importance of landscapes as a modus for interrogating identities, experiences and power relations in ‘quality’ (McCabe and Akass, 2007), ‘new’ (Shuster, 2017), ‘complex’ (Mittell, 2015) or ‘concept’ (Bandirali and Terrone, 2021) TV.

Human action is always situated within landscapes: what we see—whether in the form of coastlines, forests, fields, mountains, deserts, caves or urbanscapes—is not only a setting, but a part of ‘us’ (as we are a part of ‘it’): a force that shapes who we are and what we are capable of at any given time. Due to globalisation, landscapes and mediated places have, over the last couple of decades, been an object for comprehensive research across different disciplines. In relation to television drama, we see a development where landscapes have moved from serving simply as backdrops for the action (i.e. scenery) to a more explicit use of landscapes in the narratives and cinematic aesthetic of the series. More recently, there has been a shift towards landscapes serving as the key element in television drama, wherein the physical setting and geographical environs become the *primary focus* of the story, thus moving landscape to the *foreground* in select serial narratives. Recognising such trends, we examine symbiotic versus antagonistic gazes, setting up our approach for how we look at natural and human-built landscapes and how such visions inform the lifeworlds of the seer/gazer/viewer. Consequently, the tactical positioning of certain bodies against certain topographies, panoramas, vistas and skylines is increasingly part of contemporary long-form television drama. Across this special issue, our contributors view landscape not only as an aesthetic choice or a convenient backdrop,

but also as a language of signs and symbols that weave layers of meaning into the narrative investing it with particular resonance in these times of planetary distress.

One might argue that such landscape foregrounding within the narrative should result in the screened space/place being considered a character in the story, a driving force, almost a protagonist. Instead of relating to characters in a narrative, we argue that it is more precise to see the role of landscape in the same line as music and other soundscapes in film and television series. Music relates closely to the action in specific scenes and helps advance the plot of screened interventions, representing a *paraphrasing* relationship to the narrative; however, music can also be characterised as having a *parallel* relationship to the narrative, or finally, a *contrapuntal* relationship to the plotline (Seitz, 2024). Looking specifically at crime series/police procedurals, landscapes can paraphrase the narrative and action in specific scenes (e.g. a dark forest or an underground bunker); they can work as a parallel plotline or visual imagery not directly relating to the narrative (i.e. arctic mountains or grey seascapes); or counteract the plot serving as a contrapuntal to the narrative (e.g. summery beaches or a field of blossoming flowers). In the cases that are presented in the articles in this special issue, the various landscapes play pivotal roles in the narratives, not always as setting and paraphrasing landscapes, but sometimes as parallel and contrapuntal narrative elements. In the most extreme cases, the environment in which the story unfurls becomes the key material agent, marginalising all other (other-than-human) actors.

The popular Anthropocene

While global warming commands the lion's share of humanity's collective angst about what we have done to our one and only home—*Terra*, we must also consider other breaches of planetary boundaries, including unending perpetuation of technofossils, ocean acidification, massive habitat destruction, cascading losses of biodiversity, phosphorus/nitrogen pollution and so on. The planet is in pain, and we are in danger, just as we endanger countless other species as well as various forms of nonlife. Indeed, as the recent blockbuster *Oppenheimer* (2023) demonstrated, 1945 represented an inflection point in human history wherein *Homo sapiens* achieved something no other species even approached: a biogeochemical alteration of the planetary milieu that will be forever etched in the stratigraphy of Earth. Less explicit in its critique of the Anthropocene, its fandom-led cultural twinning with *Barbie* (2023) pointed us towards another aspect of the Great Acceleration of the second half of the twentieth century: plasticity. Taken together, these cinematic interventions lay bare how deeply penetrating science, technology and capitalism are when it comes to the natural environment. Whether we like it or not, our fears about the Anthropocene are bubbling to the surface of our everyday existence.

By way of an introduction to the themes explored in this issue, we offer a brief provocation via the first season of the Apple TV+ climate fiction (cli-fi) series, *Extrapolations* (2023). While *The Guardian* described it as a 'convoluted, chaotic, overly worthy plod' (Mangan, 2023), the star-studded anthology nonetheless serves as a paragon of where long-form television drama is moving, even if viewers are not necessarily inclined to wallow in anthropogenic environmental nightmares as 'public despair about

the end of the world' grows (Lioi, 2016: 217). Despite the purported un-readiness of audiences to embrace realistic screenings of climate chaos, *Extrapolations*, the brainchild of *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) producer Scott Z Burns, charged forward with a vision of a broken world to come, one replete with haunting vistas of lifeless oceans, burning rainforests, deluged metropolises, toxic ghettos and desertified realms of human desolation. *Extrapolations* moves through time with the pilot set in 2037 and the series finale 'Ecocide' taking place in 2070; likewise, it moves across space, screening a panoply of landscapes impacted by humanity's abuses of the environment, featuring representations of Arctic Russia, Miami, Israel, Colombia, Djibouti, India, London, San Francisco, and finally Earth's exosphere, where the series' villain, über-industrialist Nicholas Bilton (Kit Harington) is ultimately imprisoned for crimes against the planet.

Performatively normative in its approach to planetary ecology, *Extrapolations*' narrative vilifies those who would profit from the Anthropocene, while showing us a host of (mostly) Western victims of its ever-worsening outcomes. Every episode begins with contemporaneous data on global temperature rise, deaths from extreme heat events, global population growth, atmospheric carbon dioxide, sea-level rise and other extrapolations about our heating planet. Left mostly off-screen (obscene) are the unfortunate billions who have either perished due to climate change-linked pandemics, starvation and war, or have fled the tropics only to become third-class citizens in the new world order wrought by skyrocketing temperatures and neoliberalism run amok. Apropos, Jorge Cotte notes in his review in *The Nation*

Outside of a rare episode set on the roads of the Indian subcontinent, in which the characters depend on clouded oxygen masks and sun shields to stay a step ahead of their physical exposure, the series' vision of the future follows the lucky few who can avoid the toxic atmosphere by remaining safely behind their windows. (2023)

Extending the metaphor of the window here, the series acts as a potential lens for seeing the Anthropocene, but one designed by the selfsame corporate interests *Extrapolations* visually, discursively and affectively condemns (Bilton's company Alpha combines elements of Apple, Microsoft and Tesla). As Robert A Saunders recounts in his article in this issue, Apple—the world's largest company by market capitalisation as of 2023—has chosen to highlight the problems of the New Human Epoch through its proprietary streaming service Apple TV+, even while it contributes to ever-greater anthropogenic impacts on the planet via its supply chain-based emissions, mining associated with the rare earth metals that go into its products and the company's collective contributions to a global culture of conspicuous consumption associated with its vast array of popular devices (phones, computers, tablets and wearables) and services (music, news, books, podcasts, gaming, fitness, films and television series).

Yet, *Extrapolations*' particular engagement with the Anthropocene is only one of many. Just as there is a limitless plurality of Anthropocenes around the globe (Yusoff, 2019), there are distinct and highly differentiated Anthro(s)cenes, each with a (more-than) visual story to tell. Since its introduction by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene Stoermer in 2000, the term Anthropocene has been questioned by many

humanities scholars for its appropriateness as a label given the generalisation involved in identifying ‘Anthropos’ as the geological agent of the massive changes underway. The debates have generated numerous counter-terms, with the ‘Capitalocene’ (Arons, 2023; Malm and Hornborg, 2014; Moore, 2016) being the alternative appellation that has gained the most traction in debates within the critical humanities; however, competing nomenclatures include ‘Chthulucene’ (Haraway, 2016), ‘Necrocene’ (McBrien, 2016), ‘Plantationocene’ (Tsing, 2015), ‘Eurocene’ (Grove, 2019) and ‘Anthrobscene’ (Parikka, 2014). In particular, postcolonial scholars have strongly interrogated the discourses of Anthropocene as prioritising a particular kind of European scientific knowledge production. Elizabeth M DeLoughrey, for one, contends

[P]art of the academic work in defining Anthropocene is not just the stratigraphic claims, but the use of *geologic* as a way to authorize specific and select cultural histories. While claiming the scale of the planet, they continue to be exceedingly provincial, not to say masculinist and ethnocentric. (2019: 20)

In referencing the term ‘Anthropocene’ in this special issue of *CST*, we are not suggesting that the above-mentioned debates are settled, nor that this term will ultimately prove the most adequate one for assembling and describing a number of interrelated and cascading phenomena that provide evidence for the far-reaching consequences of human action. There is merit in noting that ‘for scientists the designation of a single species as an agent [of global environmental change] is a specifying move rather than a universalizing one’ (Menely and Oak Taylor, 2017: 9), insofar as ‘Anthropos’ identifies our species’ distinctive role in bringing about novel phenomena like climate chaos, warming seas, widespread eutrophication, biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse more generally. Yet, while using the term as a marker of agency, one should be aware of the risk of obfuscating different levels of socio-economic responsibility for the current environmental crises and multiple breachings of planetary boundaries. Indeed ‘Anthropos’ can also oversimplify the complex, trans-species feedback systems involved in such changes to bolster Promethean fantasies of *Homo sapiens*’ management of problems such as climate change through exclusively technological solutions.

With these caveats in mind, this special issue employs the ‘popular Anthropocene’—i.e., the idea that we live in a geological epoch shaped by ‘Man’ (Moore, 2016)—as a lens for examining humanity’s geological impact on Earth, as well as a way to conceive of planetary despoiling as a form of *Homo sapiens*’ self-abuse. As the collected articles demonstrate, humanity’s planetary agency wreaks havoc in many ways, inflicting irreparable damage that ranges from the geological and ecological to the social and cultural. Our interest is in how televisual representations of the variegated forms of Earthly violence reveal our ‘Anthropocene unconscious,’ allowing our troubled relationship with *Terra* and its various forms of life and nonlife to ‘emerge into visibility’ (Bould, 2021: 43).

Landscape-centric drama series screening the Anthropocene

Our research identifies two planks of television production contributing to the increasing relevance of the Anthropocene landscape on the small screen. PSB-produced Nordic noir, Brit-noir and noir-adjacent series, as well as subsequent variations on the theme appearing on for-profit platforms like Viaplay and Sky Atlantic, serve as one of the fonts of this new attention to the endangered Earth. Here, we see such treatments as a reflection of PSB's government-mandated commitment to interrogate problems produced by the state, society and corporations. Transnational streaming services like HBO (now Max), Apple TV+, Disney+ and Netflix account for the second source of landscape-heavy series, with stories aiming for sublime depictions of real and unreal realms where the planet's pain is on display. Here, we identify a profit-driven approach to existential questions and societal angst, one which reprises approaches that characterised analogous fare associated with impending nuclear doom during the Cold War. Taken together, these purveyors of worlds wield an outsized influence on how various viewing publics are coming to see the Anthropocene, something that philosopher Timothy Morton (2013) argues is too big to see, despite other thinkers' injunction that we must begin to see what is already all around us (see Saunders' article on *See [2019-2022]* in this issue).

As we argued in our essay 'Screening Arctic Landscapes in Nordic Television Drama: Anthropocenic Imaginaries, Ecological Crises, National Identities', series like *Fortitude* (2015-2018), *Trapped* (2015-), *Thin Ice* (2020-) and *Twin* (2019-) employ a common visual rhetoric depicting landscapes of the High North as despoiled, damaged and depleted by humans' 'desperation, greed, lust, and the hunger for power' (Saunders et al., 2023: 257). Waade's (2020) work on the Nordic noir series, *Midnight Sun* (2016), extends previous analyses of the 'double storytelling' practices (Redvall, 2016) inherent to the genre to add a third element, the land itself wherein the environment (via landscape representation) emerges as geophysical milieu that is as important to the narrative, fabula and diegesis as is the primary plot (the actual crime) or the secondary plot (societal, political and/or economic criminality).

Applied to our landscape-centric approach to Anthropocene television series, we can identify some specific landform topographies that regularly figure in televisual cli-fi: these include oceans, mountains, glaciers, woodlands, fields, deserts, coastlines, subterranean realms and urban landscapes defined by their opposition to the natural world. The Swedish series, *Jordskott* (2015-2017), for example, capitalises on the symbolic function of the forest landscape to claim its material status and to direct viewers' attention towards the economic and political issues of development and exploitation of natural resources. The sylvan realm here emerges as a critical agent in the unfolding drama of invasive logging and silver mining operations that threaten the already-precarious environmental balance. Many Nordic noir and noir-adjacent series employ waterscapes to question Nordic governments' green self-image. The constitutive qualities of water, both for human life and subjectivity, are brought into focus in *Occupied*, *Trapped*, *Thin Ice*, *Follow the Money* (2016-2019) and *Deadwind* (2018-2021). While most of the above-mentioned series can be described as speculative fiction within the domain of the 'real', *The Rain* (2018-2020) integrates elements of apocalyptic horror, while the Norwegian

production *Ragnarok* (2020-2023) introduces motifs of Nordic folklore and eco-gothic imagery to drive the ecological message home (with both prominently featuring ‘corrupted’ water in their narratives). Waterscapes are also present in the credit sequence of the Danish political thriller *Borgen—Power and Glory* (2022), where the aerial shots of the Arctic Ocean are superimposed upon an image of water steadily submerging the protagonist Birgitte Nyborg’s (played by Sidse Babett Knudsen) head. Later, this theme reappears at the plot level when the risk of the destabilisation of the biochemical balance of the Arctic Ocean’s fragile ecosystem is used by the Danish government as a last-minute abrogation of a large-scale oil extraction project in Greenland/Kalaallit Nunaat. In the same vein, but in another geographical setting, water plays the pivotal role in the Dutch-language limited series, *The Swell* (2016). The series centres on a storm surge that lays waste to human-built urban centres and terraformed landscapes alike, evoking a host of plausible outcomes for the near-future of the Lowlands of north-western Europe (i.e. Belgium and the Netherlands). Although *The Swell* does not contain any explicit mention of ‘climate change’, the dystopian vision of a catastrophic flood vividly demonstrates concrete, tangible consequences of climate disruption related to anthropogenic abuses of the planet.

HBO has made heavy investments in filming spectacular landforms that lend meaning to their marquis series, particularly those which lean into issues associated with the Anthropocene (as explored in-depth with McCabe’s article on *Chernobyl* [2019] in this special issue). Recent examples include the first and fourth seasons of the anthology *True Detective* (2014, 2024), *Westworld* (2016-2022), *Raised by Wolves* (2020-2022) and the limited series, *The Third Day* (2020).¹ The original series of *True Detective* uses its swampy southern Louisiana setting to establish connections between fossil-fuel refining, cancer clusters, worsening hurricanes and global warming, highlighting a part of the country which has already seen its first recognised climate refugees, the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw. Conversely, *True Detective: Night Country* (2024) shifts the setting to the dayless frozen tundra of Bering Sea coast,² folding Iñupiat (Indigenous Alaskan) activism, settler colonialism, extractivist pollution, corporate malfeasance and gendered violence into a murderous tapestry that transcends the genres of crime drama, eco-thriller and supernatural horror. *Westworld* features vistas of the American Southwest; yet, the sublime landscape of the frontier is *unreal*, instead being the output of continental-scale 3D printers. The series urges the viewer to consider a future where the effects of sea-level rise might be mitigated by simply building new lands where and when corporations decide they are profitable—a potential ‘Fourth Nature’ wherein AI-abetted supercomputers actually *make* the land. A dystopian reflection on off-world settlement following a nuclear apocalypse on Earth, *Raised by Wolves* is filmed on the stark veldt abutting the iconic mountains of South Africa’s Western Cape, presenting a geography that recalls imperial land transformation (via plantations and mining), religious fanaticism and colonial abuses of the indigenous African population, echoing key elements of the fabula. The folk horror series, *The Third Day*, links the social collapse of Osea Island, narratively framed as the world’s navel, to planetary degradation, offering a more homely if still uncanny rumination on the

Anthropocene. The series' landscape representation becomes particularly poignant through the frequent screening of the real-world tidal submersion of the sole causeway linking the island to the English mainland, a visual conjuring of our drowned world(s) to come.

Complementing the aforementioned *Extrapolations* and *See*, Apple TV+ aired two seasons of a televisual adaptation of *The Mosquito Coast* (2021-3), with an Anthropocene-centric storyline that departs from both Paul Theroux's novel (1981) and the 1986 motion picture. While portions of the family dynamic and elements of their flight from American 'civilisation' to the coastal wilds of Central America are retained, disruptions of avian flightpaths due to climate change, exploitative tourism economies, extractive violence and eco-terrorism emerge as the drivers of the altered narrative. Filmed in the arid farmland of southern California, the inhospitable Sonoran Desert, and the picturesque rainforests of Riviera Nayarit, landscape—and particularly humanity's transformation of it—is key to the programme's visual rhetoric. *Silo* (2023-), Apple's adaptation of Hugh Howey's novel *Wool* (2013), takes this trend into the underworld, wherein a post-dystopian society lives isolated in a 144-level silo below the Earth's surface. The Anthropocenic and Third Nature landscape collapse upon one another, forming the pivot of the series' narrative as major criminal offenders and suicidal citizens are sent out to 'clean' the silo's single view of the outside (surface) world. From inside the silo, the residents see a lifeless panorama seemingly ravaged by a nuclear holocaust, but when one goes out to clean, they are shown (via a computer-generated image in their protective helmet) a bucolic vista filled with living flora and fauna. Only at the end of season one does the intrepid protagonist pierce the un-reality, escaping both visual myths to witness what the surface world actually looks like. Lastly, we identify one more recent series that engages the landscape-Anthropocene bind: *Monarch: Legacy of Monsters* (2023-), which advances the Godzilla narrative of nuclear fission triggering a global plague of kaiju that threaten humanity's very existence. With landscape representations that span the jungles of Philippines, the steppes of Kazakhstan, frozen wastes of Alaska, and the tropical environs of Bikini Atoll, as well as the urban expanse of contemporary Tokyo, *Monarch* reminds a global viewing what the Japanese have long known: our unleashing of the atom shook the world and continues to do so.

Netflix, as the global behemoth of screened entertainment, has likewise demonstrated a penchant for greenlighting series that engage our Anthropocenic unconscious, from the German-language series, *Dark* (2017-2020), which interrogates the transgenerational impact of nuclear power gone awry, to *The Rain*, the Swedish-Danish treatment of a viral apocalypse brought on by corporate bioweaponry, from the Norwegian-language, *Ragnarok*, a contemporary telling of Norse mythology focused on environmental abuse of the fictional town of Edda to the imminently original, *Green Frontier* (2019), set in the Colombian-Brazilian borderlands, where a rogue Nazi seeks to draw power from the eternal jungle, pitting him against rapacious loggers and Indigenous people bound to Mother Jungle. Each of these TV series makes more-than-ample room for the viewer to gaze upon guilty landscapes transformed by science and technology yoked to human avarice and corporate perfidy. The world of *Dark* experiences a nuclear meltdown, reminiscent of the Chernobyl disaster, but in this case occurring in the heart of Europe

causing birds to fall from the sky and Germany's iconic woodlands to become devoid of animal life. *The Rain* shows the viewer a broken Norden, a realm where a bioweapon rides on precipitation making life outdoors nearly impossible. For Danes and Swedes who value the healing power of *friluftsliv* ('open-air life'), the paradoxical blending of a rewilded Scandinavia with the land being inaccessible due to neoliberal malfeasance speaks volumes. Situated amongst the sublime fjords of Norway, *Ragnarok* pits a group of teen-aged environmental activists, who are also modern-day avatars of the Norse gods, against a cadre of *jötnar*, evil giants who have long profited from by poisoning the land, leading inexorably towards a Ragnarök when the sky will burn, and the world will flood: the ultimate apocalypse. Set at the edge of the Amazon Basin, *Green Frontier* sculpts a lawless never-where outside of time where abuses of the sustaining rainforest bring into conflict a disturbed detective from the capital (displaced from her jungle origins as a child), corrupt law enforcement, Indigenous defenders of the land and a host of 'white men' bent on drawing power and wealth from 'heart of the world'. Besides the aforementioned networks' contributions, we might also consider interventions by Showtime such as the long-awaited third season of *Twin Peaks* (2017), which linked the splitting of the atom in the buttes of New Mexico to an unleashing of a demonic evil in our universe (Kosmina, 2021), and Amazon Prime's *The Rig* (2023-), which offers up an extractivist eco-horror tale about 'fossils mining fossils' deep beneath the blue- and greyscapes of the North Sea (Tate, 2022).

Researching televisual landscapes in the era of climate crises

This special issue contributes to the field of critical television studies in four distinct ways. First, the articles contained herein establish a baseline approach for interrogating televisual landscapes in the era of climate crises via interdisciplinary approaches that draw upon recent academic works on the Anthropocene. Second, this collection introduces the mediated landscape in television drama series as a distinct research field, highlighting its unique status as part of Smith's (2008) Third Nature. Third, this collaborative intervention presents an in-depth analysis of four recent series, each of which considers distinct and specific geographical regions, landscapes, climate issues and production contexts, as well as engaging different theoretical and analytical perspectives on the themes explored within their respective narratives. Finally, the four articles demonstrate how researching televisual drama in the era of planetary precarity exemplifies various interdisciplinary challenges and opens up new perspectives. The first and second aspect discussed above are elaborated in this introduction and further explored in each of the articles. The authors contributing to this special issue represent different disciplinary approaches to landscapes, although each approaches their subject from a solid understanding of the arts and humanities. In general, to fully understand the relevance and importance of televisual landscapes in the era of climate crises, it is important that the studies include and invite scholarly contributions, orientations and methodologies from disciplines other than television studies. Our special issue aims to provoke a flowering of interdisciplinary viewpoints on Anthropocene screens, and we welcome future contributions to the field

from scholars drawn from the social, behavioural and natural sciences as well as environmental studies.

To illuminate the four articles' distinct contribution to the field of critical television studies, we focus on how the analyses include different perspectives. These are as follows: (a) representations of geographical regions, landforms and landscapes across time as well as space; (b) production contexts and delivery platforms; and (c) theoretical and analytical perspectives on the screened Anthropocene. In general, the four articles analyse television drama series that take place in specific geographical/geopolitical contexts in which the landscapes are much more than just backdrops; in each instance, the landforms on screen play an active part in the narrative itself as well as the overall premise of the series. In Robert A Saunders' examination of *See*, we are introduced to western Canada's mountain ranges, rock formations, glaciers, waterfalls, lakes, rivers and forests as a stand-in for a dystopian 26th-century Pennsylvania. In her intervention on *White Wall* (2020), Irina Souch takes us to the underground mining landscapes of Sweden (filmed in neighbouring Finland), where complex human/non-human relations trigger a planetary cataclysm. In Janet McCabe's meditation on the HBO/Sky five-part miniseries, *Chernobyl*, we are transported (via vistas filmed in Lithuania) to Ukraine's radiation-poisoned urban landscapes (now rewilded due to human abandonment), resurrecting traumatic memories of the nuclear power plant disaster of 1986. And, in Anders Grønland and Anne Marit Risum Waade's article about the Nordic political thriller *Borgen—Power and Glory*, we encounter Greenland's Arctic landscapes (mostly filmed in Iceland) as a contested zone besieged not only by global warming, but also by postcolonial power grabs, competing international economic interests and the struggle for Indigenous rights. One might argue that Canada, Sweden, Ukraine and Greenland are all places located solidly within the Global North, sites ensconced in the modern Western world (and its accompanying epistemologies), even though the landscapes, which are emphasised via slow-panning cinematic depictions, exist at the edges of the political and societal centres – peripheral to global nodes of power and influence like New York, London, and Moscow. Both *See* and *White Wall* are speculative fiction that tell grim stories about a future where humans must deal with the planetary-wide disasters; however, their temporal bearings are quite different: *See* is set more than 500 years in the future, while *White Wall's* world-building suggests the events take place in the mid-21st century (if not sooner). Conversely, *Borgen—Power and Glory* takes place in an ostensibly contemporary setting with realistic climate, economic, cultural, social and political challenges elaborated via a fictional story. Lastly, *Chernobyl* is set in the recent past, showing the viewer a key historical Anthropocene catastrophe in the age of climate emergency. Taken together, these four series provide a fruitful examination of different ways of looking at the New Human Epoch, both in terms of time and space.

Each of the collected articles sheds light on various aspects of the production context, delivery platform and critical reception of recent drama productions; as such, these studies illustrate a common interest in landscape-centric drama series that screen some aspect of the Anthropocene. *See* is produced for Apple TV+, *Chernobyl* for HBO Max/Sky Atlantic and *Borgen—Power and Glory* for Netflix (in collaboration with the Danish public service broadcaster, DR); together they represent the general significance that television

drama plays in contemporary culture, but also the fact that popular Anthropocene is a selling point on the highly competitive streaming market. Furthermore, *White Wall* and *Borgen—Power and Glory* demonstrate another general production tendency in the way that the series are based on international collaboration and co-productions between public service broadcasters (such as Yle and SVT1) and between national broadcasters and international streaming services (DR and Netflix). Stories about ecological catastrophes and climate crises are global by nature, and as such work well for international television markets and audiences.

However, the most important and unique contribution to the field is how these different authors provide theoretical and analytical perspectives on Anthropocene screens. Saunders employs *See* to critically reflect the contradiction between seeing and not seeing what is happening with our Earthly home – via plastic pollution, planetary surface concretisation and unrepentant extractivism. The author illustrates the general limitations of ecocritical series and how we as viewers can grapple with the ecological crises and our ‘inability to *unsee* the very scopic regime that defines the contemporary way of being which has wrought the Anthropocene’ (Saunders, this issue). Based on his background in international politics and cultural geography, he demonstrates a potential avenue for addressing advanced theoretical concepts and perspectives about the Anthropocene based on fictional stories and spatial imaginaries. Saunders emphasises televisual landscapes as geographical, geopolitical and contested spaces: vistas scarred by anthropogenic violence and stained by humanity’s guilt that can help the viewer to sense, feel and behold the Anthropocene conditions of their own lived worlds.

Souch raises another contradiction, namely landscapes as not only surface topographies but also subterranean environments. Historically, the term landscape has been characterised by its visibility, being part of larger scopic regime where the viewer/gazer/spectant typically contemplates the countryside as a setting whereby some particular agent or action is staged. Based on her background in literature, aesthetics and visual culture, Souch refers to the historical fascination for subterranean spaces within art and literature, especially when these underground realms are exposed by geological disruptions such as volcanoes or earthquakes or via human agency (especially mining). In *White Wall* the viewer is introduced to a vast underground mining landscape, presenting as a dismal, claustrophobic and hellish domain, even before the anthropogenic burrow becomes a site of radioactive waste disposal and increasingly dangerous scientific experiments. The author illustrates how the series critically develops the human imagination of the Anthropocene via its double visual regime of landscapes—respectively viewed from above via drone shots and aerial panoramas representing a satellite gaze, installing ‘human viewers in a position of superiority over Earth, ensuring their scopic and epistemological privilege’ (Souch, this issue), and a subterranean view from inside the human-made depths marked by inky blackness and a loss of orientation. Juxtaposing the chthonic with the terrestrial, the author demonstrates how horizontal and vertical ways of seeing *and* thinking about human/non-human relations triggers new insights about the Anthropocene.

McCabe’s treatment of *Chernobyl* brings another perspective to televisual landscapes and Anthropocene screens by focusing on landscape as a *site of memory*. With reference to

the extensive academic works on mediated memory, historical materialism and remediation, the author compellingly demonstrates how the Anglo-American miniseries from 2019 works backwards as a collective memory of the human/environmental trauma that occurred in Ukraine, formerly part of the Soviet Union in 1986. The remediation includes both using a 'real' place, Pripjat (though the series is shot in Lithuania), as well as a historical event, but also the fact that the series employs photographs, contemporary forms of screened media and audiovisual archival materials. By employing 'authentic' locations and splicing in archival images, *Chernobyl* 'remediates this contaminated landscape as a mnemonic TV devise' (McCabe, this issue), an Anthropocenic inheritance that we do not want, but cannot deny. Based on her background in television and film, critical theory and cultural studies, the author offers critical insight into various aspects of mnemonic television, both how the series bring new insights to, and emotional engagement with, the historical power plant catastrophe, but also assesses how new transborder TV enterprises with commercial interests work, including through attracting new audiences and promoting dark tourism via the screen.

The last article in this special issue—*Screening Greenland* by Grønlund and Risum Waade—adds another dimension to the analysis of Anthropocene screens and televisual landscapes by including empirical location studies. The article illustrates how Greenland is a contested land, both in the way that the landscapes are displayed in the political thriller, *Borgen—Power and Glory* and how space and place are negotiated in the production process itself. The study includes an interview with the location manager on the set, and thus contributes to the location study-as-method approach by focusing on location management as a distinct aspect of producing mediated vistas for popular consumption. The authors describe Greenland as a land and landscape where various disputes continue to rage, due to postcolonial tension between Copenhagen and Nuuk, growing international competition for the country's natural resources and the looming transformation of the arctic terrain due to rising temperatures. Based on the authors' background within screen studies, place branding and tourism, they also critically reflect the fact that internationally recognised series distributed by key industry players such as Netflix can be used to attract tourists and brand the country, something that will inevitably conflict with ambitions of protecting the island's climatic condition, ecology and political independence.

From Greenland's melting ice shelves to the threatened old-growth forests of British Columbia, from the penetrated depths of the Finnish lithosphere to the radiated environs of Pripjat, the four interventions in this special issue address a panoply of ways that our Earthly violence troubles society, culture, economics and politics. However, these articles (and the series they interrogate) provide little more than a snapshot in time of how our Anthropocene unconscious manifests on the small screen. By design, the present collection speaks to multiple disciplines and operates across a variety of scholarly literatures: media studies, visual culture, aesthetics, cultural studies, philosophy, anthropology, history, languages and literature, environmental humanities, international politics, geography, Earth systems science, area studies, place branding and tourism. We endeavoured to achieve this via a single medium of audio-visual communication, but one with a long and storied history: landscape. At its core, the aim of this undertaking is to advance

new lines of sight in the field of television studies vis-à-vis the Anthropocene. Moreover, it is our ambition that if industry trends continue apace, i.e. moving towards ever-more meaningful engagement with the cascading, overlapping and interrelated planetary crises, these early salvos will provide signposts for future studies, particularly from colleagues beyond the Global North.

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Notes

1. We might also consider the network's recent series *Station Eleven* (2021) and *The Last of Us* (2023-present), both of which screen a rewilded world following the mass die-off of *Homo sapiens* following global pandemics, each of which can be attributed to anthropogenic interventions in planetary affairs. Likewise, the allegory that presented in *Game of Thrones* via the white walkers as agents of complete annihilation of higher forms of life and climate change should also be indexed.
2. Due to a lack of cinema industry infrastructure in northern Alaska, the series producers filmed in Iceland, therein linking off-screen production practices to on-screen narrative and visual elements of Nordic noir series such as that referenced above, including via employing Greenlandic Inuit actors as stand-ins for Alaskan Native people.

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