

# **ONE WITH(IN) THE NATURE: THE DICHOTOMIZATION OF HUMAN - NON-HUMAN WORLDS IN ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTARIES**

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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis I discuss the articulation of human – non-human relationship in environmental documentaries. I argue that, despite their attempts to draw attention to climate change as a worldwide problem, eco-docs tend to dichotomize human and nature, to represent human as a subject which is primary to other forms of life. The relationship between human and nature is often seen as oppositional, confrontational and dichotomic. Such a take is problematic since it focuses on the *separation* of human and nature and refuses to embrace the complexity of the interconnections, entanglements and dialogical encounters between humans and other forms of life. Such approach fundamentally limits the ways of dealing with and thinking of global warming presenting human as oppositional to nature.

Drawing on complexity theory, I discuss a different way of approaching human and its body in relation to nature in the context of climate change, specifically in the eco-documentary medium. Inspired by such thinkers as Bennett, Cudworth and Hobden, Latour and Fagan, I suggest embracing the non-hierarchical worldview which sees the world as complex, entangled and heterogeneous. I suggest re-visiting the established understanding of human as vital, animated subject in comparison to unanimated, material ‘things’ engaging with Bennett’s concept of *vital materiality*. Complexity approach to human and its role in global warming invites to think differently of other species and our relation to them. I believe that thinking differently will bring in new, probably more productive and creative ways of dealing with climate change issue.

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## INTRODUCTION

*“Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world,  
since the world is flesh?”*  
Maurice Merleau-Ponty<sup>1</sup>

Multiple channels and mediums draw attention to the issue of global warming, the environmental documentaries or eco-docs being among the most significant ones. We tend to think that eco-docs are a trustworthy source of information that aims at making the world a better place through informing population about the urgent issues. However, if we look closer, we will notice that the pedagogy and aesthetics of documentaries is more complex than that of a one-dimensional channel through which knowledge is transmitted. As *representations*, eco-docs do not reflect pre-existing truths about the pre-formed nature but partake in the formation of the subjective and the objective *within* discourse – that is, they quite literally *make* sense of how issues such as climate change come to make sense for us.<sup>2</sup> Like other forms of representation, eco-docs are *political*<sup>3</sup>, but the evacuation of politics, or rather traces of it, is inherent to the genre, for documentaries make us forget their representational form by claiming to provide access to truth, the issue of "truth" and "science" being especially pertinent in the case of eco-docs.

Working as visual narratives that aim at convincing the audience of the “truths” about climate change through non-fictional style, eco-docs set the direction of people’s opinion on environmental degradation through taking a certain angle, emphasizing certain aspects and

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 138.

<sup>2</sup> Roland Bleiker, “The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 30, no. 3 (2001): 512-515.

<sup>3</sup> In this thesis I follow Jacques Rancière's understanding of politics, which has been widely taken up by the scholars of aesthetics in IR. For Rancière politics is the struggle over the "distribution of the sensible," the process articulating the gap between the worlds where the subject can speak, and where it is non-existent. In the case of visual representations, their politics happens on the level of sensation – they participate in shaping what and who comes to be seen by us, and so who and what comes to have place in "our" world at all. For a detailed elaboration of Rancière's philosophy of politics and aesthetics see Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

suggesting certain solutions – eco-docs participate in delimiting what can and cannot be seen as a part of the problem by representing it in a particular way.<sup>4</sup> Being widely broadcasted on popular platforms such as YouTube or Netflix and therefore easily accessible for wide public, eco-docs represent and popularize their take on environmental degradation and influence the way people think of it and the actions that they (do not) take upon watching. Eco-docs are a powerful tool of reaching out to public and therefore it is important to look closer at their representations of global warming. Drawing on the studies of aesthetics and world politics, this thesis interrogates eco-docs as aesthetico-political objects participating in the making of meaningful and sensible *worlds*.<sup>5</sup> It problematizes these aesthetic realms by looking closely at the internal relations established within the world-orders of climate change the eco-docs represent and convey.

Among many possible relations and connections drawn in the eco-docs, one remains central across possible focal points – the relation between human and non-human world. Eco-docs can focus on the pollution of air or oceans, show global scale of the problem or a local case, talk about the loss of forests, coral reefs or the extinction of sharks, they can be silent or consist of a set of interviews of politicians and scientists. While discussing global warming, eco-docs represent the interaction between animals, fish, plants, humans and other species and forms of life. A wide variety of eco-docs tend to focus on the scale of the looming environmental catastrophe and show as many aspects and as many displays of it as they can. Other films focus on the anthropogenic reasons for pollution of the planet and define those who should be blamed for it within human society. Some eco-docs emphasize the unity, interconnectedness and internal bond between human, nature and other species and focus on acknowledging and keeping these bonds. *Yet, despite the diversity of subjects, human presence*

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<sup>4</sup> Bleiker, “The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory.”

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 27; Anna M. Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling, *Transforming World Politics: From Empire to Multiple Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

*within this system and the role that humans play in environmental degradation is the cornerstone of each film, although the perspectives on human and their role in this system are different.*

It is this relationship between humans and the world we inhabit and the way this relationship is articulated, framed and given to the spectators in eco-docs that I focus on in this thesis. My research question is

*How do environmental documentaries articulate the relationship between human and non-human world?*

Specifically, I look at how eco-docs represent human and its role in global warming? How do they portray human in relation to nature and other species? *I argue that, while aiming at informing spectators about the scale of the issue and facilitating change in spectator's thinking and behaviour, eco-docs tend to reproduce the human-nature dichotomy where human is depicted as detached from and dominating over nature, human as a 'modern' and 'rational' subject.*<sup>6</sup>

Such a dichotomic thinking of the world where 'bad', destructive humanity is the main threat to the 'pure' nature fundamentally limits the ways of approaching ecological crisis and ignores the complexity of the relationships within the world.<sup>7</sup> It engages with the causal logic of representing global warming where human is a reason, an active, moving, *doing* part whose activity leads to the degradation of passive, non-moving, inert nature.<sup>8</sup> In such a worldview everything that ever happens is *all about, because of and for us* - humans. Despite the desire to strengthen the spectators' sense of responsibility, majority of the eco-docs fail to account for

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<sup>6</sup> R.B.J. Walker, "On the Protection of Nature and the Nature of Protection," in *The Politics of Protection: Sites of Insecurity and Political Agency*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 191; Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Jon Barnett, *The Meaning of Environmental Security: Ecological Politics and Politics and Policy in the New Security Era* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2001), 67-68.

<sup>8</sup> Emilian Kavalski, "Introduction. Inside/Outside and Around. Observing the Complexity of Global Life.," in *World Politics: At the Edge of Chaos*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 13.

the nature's active responsiveness, and so to articulate more caring, dialogical and democratic world of human-nature mutual entanglement, co-creation, harmony and ultimately love. Similar anthropocentric logic, with the ensuing lack of alternative imaginary about the world we live in is reproduced in many academic accounts of climate change, especially in the discipline of IR.

In this research I do not focus on the threats to the safety that global warming brings to the world. Instead, I reflect on what are the other, probably more effective ways of *thinking of and communicating* global warming problem. In particular, I focus on the ways we articulate human, its role in global warming and its relation to other forms of life such as animals, plants, rivers, stones and other, seemingly static and non-lively 'things'. I argue that through re-visiting our established understanding of climate change, human and its relation to nature, through embracing a more complex and entangled approach to the world, we can come naturally to new, probably more creative ways of thinking and resolving the issue of global warming.

By turning attention to the ways in which global warming is represented in eco-docs, I contribute both to studies of environmental degradation as discourse,<sup>9</sup> and to studies of popular culture as one of the registers of world politics.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, by engaging with complexity perspective I contribute to the studies of global warming which problematize discursive and poststructuralist approach and develop an alternative take on environment and the place of human in it.<sup>11</sup> I contribute to the posthumanist literature which criticizes the representations of human as a modern subject, and which engages with more-than-human way of thinking.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Betsy Lehman et al., "Affective Images of Climate Change," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019): 1–10; Astrida Neimanis and Rachel Loewen Walker, "Weathering: Climate Change and the 'Thick Time' of Transcorporeality," *Hypatia* 29, no. 3 (2014): 558–75.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Kyle Grayson, Matt Davis, and Simon Philpott, "Pop Goes IR? Researching the Popular Culture-World Politics Continuum," *Politics* 29, no. 3 (2009): 155–63; Kyle Grayson, "How to Read Paddington Bear: Liberalism and the Foreign Subject in A Bear Called Paddington," *British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 15, no. 3 (2013): 378–292; Jutta Weldes, "Going Cultural: Star Trek, State Action, and Popular Culture," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 28, no. 1 (1999): 117–34.

<sup>11</sup> Erika Cudworth and Stephen Hobden, *Posthuman International Relations: Complexity, Ecologism and Global Politics* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2013); Madeleine Fagan, "Security in the Anthropocene: Environment, Ecology, Escape," *European Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 2 (2017): 292–314; Kavalski, "Introduction. Inside/Outside and Around. Observing the Complexity of Global Life.," Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*.



In this paper I proceed as follows.

In the first chapter I discuss the major existing ways of articulating human – non-human relationship in IR literature. I explain how security approach to environment tends to see human and why I consider this to be problematic. I then introduce the complexity theory approach which is intertwined with the posthumanist take and discuss how their articulation of human in relation to nature, other species and forms of life is different. This chapter serves as a foundation for the film analysis in the third chapter.

In the second chapter I explain why it is important to research popular culture and films in particular grounding my arguments in the aesthetic turn of IR. I discuss the lack of studies of documentary films and environmental documentaries in particular and explain why IR scholars should engage with such films more deeply. I then cover the specific aspects that I pay attention to while looking at eco-docs that I chose for this thesis.

In the third chapter I start with discussing my sources of inspiration for the analytical framework and explain the methodology of film analysis. I proceed by looking closely at four eco-docs using the analytical apparatus from chapter 1.

In conclusion I summarize my thesis, discuss its limitation and the directions for further research.

# CHAPTER 1. WAYS OF ARTICULATING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN

In order to discuss the ways of articulating relationship within human and non-human world in eco-docs, it is important to first understand how it can be articulated in literature. In this chapter I cover two major ways of discussing human in relation to nature in IR literature. The first one is the security approach which tends to see environmental degradation as a safety threat either to humans or to the nature itself.<sup>13</sup> I discuss the features of this perspective and explain why I consider them to be problematic. Then I introduce the complexity theory approach which is closely connected to the posthumanist take on IR. Complexity theorists path a way to different thinking of the world and of human in it. I define the main features of this perspective and explain how it challenges the human – non-human dichotomy in IR literature.

## *1.1 Security approach*

Detraz defines three main branches of security approaches to environment: environmental conflict, environmental security and ecological security.<sup>14</sup> Environmental conflict take mainly focuses on how the future scarcity of natural resources caused by environmental degradation can lead to violent conflicts and therefore threaten states' stability.<sup>15</sup> This approach, as well as other two, are seen as an alternative to conventional IR.<sup>16</sup> Still, it is widely criticized, for example, by ecofeminists for being state-centric and therefore similar to

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<sup>13</sup> Jon Barnett, *The Meaning of Environmental Security: Ecological Politics and Politics and Policy in the New Security Era* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2001), 67-68.

<sup>14</sup> Nicole Detraz, "Environmental Security and Gender: Necessary Shifts in an Evolving Debate," *Security Studies* 18 (2009): 346.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Barnett, *The Meaning of Environmental Security: Ecological Politics and Politics and Policy in the New Security Era*.

<sup>16</sup> Fagan, "Security in the Anthropocene: Environment, Ecology, Escape."

conventional IR, as well as anthropocentric since it considers natural resources as something made primarily for the satisfaction of human's needs.<sup>17</sup>

The environmental security take mainly focuses on how global warming puts the safety of humans at risk. Scholars often suggest embracing sustainable development goals (SDG) in order to reduce the dangers for humans.<sup>18</sup> However, this perspective is criticized for reproducing the hierarchical, top-down logic of human-nature relationship: for seeing human as a rational, wise subject superior to nature and capable of domesticating it through using tools which will allow for more accelerated, safe and efficient manipulation of nature.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, the ecological security take discusses how human's activity threatens the safety of environment. Fagan criticizes the viewpoint that either human or nature can constitute a 'security threat' to each other and explains that such a perspective re-produces human-nature relationship as indetermined and conflictual, where human exists *in confrontation* with other species rather than *in co-existence*.<sup>20</sup>

Although seen as an alternative to conventional IR, these approaches mostly discuss the ways of a more effective manipulation of nature and therefore present nature as an object to be controlled by humans.<sup>21</sup> Through claiming human and nature to be threats for each other's security, through seeing the world divided in fragments such as states, security studies reproduce the image of relationship within human and nature worlds as fragmented, conflicting or even dichotomic.<sup>22</sup> Seeing the world in fragmented parts is often claimed to be intrinsic to

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<sup>17</sup> Olivia Bennett, *Greenwar Environment and Conflict* (Washington, DC: Panos Pubns Ltd, 1991); Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Dennis Clark Pirages and Theresa Manley DeGeest, *Ecological Security: An Evolutionary Perspective on Globalization* (Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> John Barry, Arthur P.J. Mol, and Anthony R. Zito, "Climate Change Ethics, Rights, and Politics: An Introduction.," *Environmental Politics* 22, no. 3 (n.d.): 370. Donald Worster, "The Shaky Ground of Sustainability," in *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995), 417–27.

<sup>20</sup> Madeleine Fagan, "Security in the Anthropocene: Environment, Ecology, Escape.," *European Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 2 (2017): 293, 300.

<sup>21</sup> Fagan.

<sup>22</sup> Fagan, 293, 306.

IR studies which rely on Newtonian understanding of the world where world is seen as ordered and reduced to its component parts while systems are seen as closed.<sup>23</sup> However, such an approach to humans and their relation to nature is problematic for several reasons.

First of all, dichotomic and causal representation of human in relation to environment reduces the complexity of climate change to the human's role in it. By doing this, it represents biosphere as reaching for stable, unchanging, motionless state and ignores the intrinsic dynamics of nature, such as constant change of climate long before human.<sup>24</sup> On the contrary, approaching systems and things as having “differential periods of stability, being and relative equilibrium in this or that zone while coming to terms with periods of real disequilibrium and becoming” invites to think of biosphere among other things as vibrant, dynamic and lively.<sup>25</sup>

Second, such an approach is problematic because it represents human as an active party and nature as a passive party and therefore disempowers the latter, frames it as an object of human control. Moreover, it builds the relationship between these parts through the logic of causality: human is the one actively polluting and destroying nature while nature is passively accepting this; it is human who should ensure the security of both environment and humanity through the “accelerated and more conscious manipulation” of the nature.<sup>26</sup> Such logic creates limitations of the ways of thinking of and dealing with climate change and reproduces the anthropocentric and hierarchical take on the world. Finally, the problem with such logic of

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<sup>23</sup> Elina Penttinen, “Potential of Posthumanist Onto-Epistemology for the Study of International Relations,” in *Posthuman Dialogues in International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 72–73. Cudworth and Hobden, *Posthuman International Relations: Complexity, Ecologism and Global Politics*, Chapter 1.

<sup>24</sup> I believe that ways of speaking about climate change should not be reduced to a binary of Trump-like denial of human role in it, and the habitual focus on human as the only actor involved. While this thesis does not aim at denying the role of human in the accelerating pace of climate change, and attempts to draw attention to the better ways of representing it, it also articulates climate change as a more complex process. For a reference see Fagan, 302.

<sup>25</sup> William E. Connolly, “The ‘New Materialism’ and the Fragility of Things,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 41, no. 3 (2013): 400.

<sup>26</sup> Fagan, “Security in the Anthropocene: Environment, Ecology, Escape,” 293.

separation and individualism is that it counterposes human and nature and makes their co-constitution and co-existence seem unnatural and unsustainable in the first place.

## ***1.2 Complexity theory approach***

An alternative take on the role of human in environmental degradation is advised by complexity theory which invites to accept the pluralism and complexity of the world.<sup>27</sup> This perspective is an important contribution to the discussion about human-nature relationship as it widely engages with the posthumanist take on IR and invites to think differently of human, its body and its relation to other forms of life. Complexity approach criticizes hierarchical distinction between human and non-human and suggests seeing human in the context of other things, animals, insects, air, plants or viruses with which we share our place of habitation. It also suggests re-thinking the very concept of ‘environment’, because it re-entrenches human-nature dichotomy – where the world exists as an environment *of* a human, orbiting around it. Cudworth and Hobden advise substituting the word ‘environment’ with ‘*complex ecologism*’, while Bennett proposes the concept ‘*vital materiality*’ which will acknowledge both materiality and liveliness of all the variety of forms of life on Earth including those that we usually see as solely material (such as stone).<sup>28</sup>

One prominent method that complexity and posthumanist studies engage with is letting go of the established concepts and attempt to *think differently*. Following posthumanist tradition, complexity theorists suggest re-thinking our approach to human as rational, modern subject who is prior to other forms of life and rather engage with the image of a complex, multi-layered and non-hierarchical world.<sup>29</sup> As Kurki argues, in order to bring change, “we should

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<sup>27</sup> Emilian Kavalski, “Introduction. Inside/Outside and Around. Observing the Complexity of Global Life”, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Cudworth and Hobden, *Posthuman International Relations: Complexity, Ecologism and Global Politics*; Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*.

<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*; Kavalski, “Introduction. Inside/Outside and Around. Observing the Complexity of Global Life.”; Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*; Fagan, “Security in the Anthropocene: Environment, Ecology, Escape.” Cudworth and Hobden, *Posthuman International Relations: Complexity, Ecologism and Global Politics*.

think – more and hard – on how we ‘think thoughts’”.<sup>30</sup> This also implies letting go of the established vocabulary and the regular understanding of human body in relation to other ‘things’.<sup>31</sup> Complexity and posthumanist theorists suggest re-visiting our understanding of human body as solely lively and vibrant by thinking of its material, non-moving components such as our bones, our skin or, on the microlevel, the metal of our blood.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, complexity scholars look at the ‘vital’ components within human body and question their ‘humane’ nature in the first place: for instance, they think of thousands of bacteria that inhabit our bodies, make it move, live, breathe but which we tend to associate and fuse with our bodies.<sup>33</sup>

One important feature of complexity approach is that it avoids thinking in terms of causality when it comes to human in relation to climate change.<sup>34</sup> Outside of the complexity theory we are used to seeing an image of human as a destroyer of nature, as the one who should be blamed for the climate change while nature is seen as a passive victim which should be saved from any kind of human intrusion.<sup>35</sup> In complexity theory the Anthropocene argument is not at the forefront. The question of climate change becomes the question of complex relationship between humans, other species and natures; the alteration of climate is no longer the inevitable consequence of human activity but a part of a broader system of reasons and events where environmental change is not solely a negative phenomenon and is no longer caused by one major reason.

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<sup>30</sup> Milja Kurki, *International Relations in a Relational Universe* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Kurki, 3-5.

<sup>32</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*.

<sup>33</sup> Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

<sup>34</sup> Cudworth and Hobden, *Posthuman International Relations: Complexity, Ecologism and Global Politics*, Chapter 7.

<sup>35</sup> Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism* (Open Humanities Press; meson press, 2015), 20. Detraz, “Environmental Security and Gender: Necessary Shifts in an Evolving Debate.”, 350.

Here it is important to acknowledge that I do not reject anthropogenic reasons of climate change and the problem of global warming itself. Instead, in my research I am seeking to engage with different, probably more productive ways of representing and dealing with the problem of environmental change. Most importantly, rather than repeating that more actions are required to resolve this issue, I want to reflect on how we can *think differently* of global warming through thinking differently of human and its body in relation to other things and forms of life; how we, as humans, can inhabit the planet, *live differently* from that place of altered thought.

Another crucial feature of complexity theory is that it does not simply claim universality and non-differentiated wholeness as an alternative.<sup>36</sup> Connolly emphasizes that complexity approach towards the world is not only (or not at all) about seeing the world as a whole but also about acknowledging its heterogeneity and non-linearity of connections.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, seeing the world differently is not only about acknowledging its wholeness but also acknowledging the differentiations within it.

One way of affirming heterogeneity is to apply the concept of inequality of power within human and nature worlds. For example, Cudworth and Hobden suggest post-Marxist approach of *differentiated complexity* that allows to distinguish between social and natural systems acknowledging different levels of processes and relations (sometimes exploitative) within and between these systems.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Bennett distinguishes between human and non-human participants in political ecology acknowledging differences in the types and degrees of power that they have.<sup>39</sup> Fagan has a different approach and argues that rather than understanding the world as “a prior singularity of which plurality is derived” we should approach it as “an originary plurality that forms a singularity.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, rather than seeing human and

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<sup>36</sup> Fagan, “Security in the Anthropocene: Environment, Ecology, Escape.”, 305.

<sup>37</sup> Connolly, “The ‘New Materialism’ and the Fragility of Things.”, 407.

<sup>38</sup> Cudworth and Hobden, *Posthuman International Relations: Complexity, Ecologism and Global Politics*, Chapter 1.

<sup>39</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 108-109.

<sup>40</sup> Fagan, 306.

non-human as one whole in the first place, we should first acknowledge human and other species as distinguishable parts that all together form one wholeness, one singularity. Fagan finds it problematic to simply erase the line between human and nature and says that we must be:

“wary, that is, of the temptation to respond to the demands of the anthropocene by seeking a simple transcending or erasure of the boundary between the human and natural that might finally allow us to escape the violences entailed by such boundary drawing <...> because to theorize an outside to this is to inscribe an oppositional system once again; to posit an interconnected whole as an alternative is itself a violent move.”<sup>41</sup>

Complexity approach invites us to re-think our understanding of environmental degradation through re-thinking the very understanding of ourselves and our bodies in relation to the rest of the world. It suggests avoiding reducing the world to simple, digestible concepts and embrace the logic of ontological entanglement, unpredictable aliveness of matter and complexity thinking.<sup>42</sup> It re-imagines the hierarchical take on human-nature relationship where human is active and acting, creative and creating, lively and vibrant while non-human is inert, passive, non-actant and non-creative.

In this chapter I covered two major approaches to human and its relation to nature. I discussed security perspective and explained why it reproduces the dichotomic take on human in relation to nature. I then discussed the complexity theory approach and explained how it is different. This chapter is crucial for my thesis as it introduces the dominant ways of thinking about human and nature which will be a foundation for the film analysis in the third chapter. In the next chapter I explain why I believe popular culture and environmental documentaries in particular are Important and relevant sites to research the representational politics of climate change and the existing ways of thinking, feeling and speaking about oneself and nature.

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<sup>41</sup> Fagan, 308.

<sup>42</sup> Elina Penttinen, “Potential of Posthumanist Onto-Epistemology for the Study of International Relations”, 75.



## CHAPTER 2. HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIP IN POPULAR CULTURE

In the previous chapter I discussed two major approaches towards human-nature relationship in literature. In this chapter I explain why it is important to research environmental documentaries drawing on aesthetic turn in IR. I start with introducing aesthetic turn and proceed to explain why visual representations, especially documentaries are a valuable source to study. I conclude by discussing the significance of eco-docs in the study of human-nature relationship within the climate change framework.

### 2.1 *Aesthetic turn in IR*

Aesthetic turn in IR has drawn attention to popular culture as the site of politics and as a part of our everyday. Popular culture, and art in particular, does not aim at the authentic depiction of the world but acts as its representation which shapes political events itself and brings new readings into it.<sup>43</sup> The gap between the representations and what they represent is of special interest for a researcher as it shows which sides of the politics are highlighted in pieces of popular culture and which are left unnoticed or invisible.<sup>44</sup> In that sense, popular culture is a subject for interpretation, both cultural and political.<sup>45</sup> It challenges the epistemological certainties of the political and brings new meanings to the political phenomena.<sup>46</sup> In short, popular culture *participates* in politics as a process of redistributing the limits and boundaries of seen and unseen, meaningful and meaningless, intelligible and non-existent.<sup>47</sup>

Visual representations and films in particular are important to research for a number of reasons. Films reach wide public in a short period of time and help people make sense of IR,

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<sup>43</sup> Roland Bleiker, "The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 30, no. 3 (2001): 511.

<sup>44</sup> Bleiker, 512.

<sup>45</sup> Lola Frost, "Aesthetics and Politics," *Global Society* 24, no. 3 (2010): 433–43.

<sup>46</sup> William A. Callahan, "The Visual Turn in IR: Documentary Filmmaking as a Critical Method," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 43, no. 3 (2015): 898.

<sup>47</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 12–19.

they change opinions and beliefs of the public and condition how people act.<sup>48</sup> Bleiker sees films as “a more diverse but also more direct encounter with the political,” meaning that it is at this level where the contestation over our everyday styles of living takes place, where normalized as well as alternative scripts of thinking and acting are made possible.<sup>49</sup> Film reflects the directions of the everyday politics, «depicts the rhythms and temporality of the everyday and the hidden dimensions of politics that cannot be captured by the written word».<sup>50</sup>

By making things visible or invisible, films can reproduce the hierarchical structures of the world.<sup>51</sup> For instance, Opondo and Shapiro argue that films act as an intervention that interrupts or re-does the everyday and chooses who is entitled to speak and whose voice will be heard.<sup>52</sup> Looking closely at films can help to uncover such hierarchies and hidden relations of power.<sup>53</sup> In short, films establish visual connections with what they represent and shape the ways of thinking about phenomena and the ways of reacting to it. They do so through making associations and forming emotional predispositions. Bleiker formulates this as the possibility of images to stay “engrained in our collective consciousness” and, as a result, influence the way “audiences perceive, understand and respond to crises”.<sup>54</sup>

Climate change is one of the notable topics to study among scholars of aesthetic turn. For instance, Hobbs-Morgan looks closer at films-apocalypses *The Day after Tomorrow* and *Half-Life* and reflects on how they popularize the problem of global warming in the everyday life.<sup>55</sup> They argue that through evoking the mixture of senses, cultural artefacts can provoke

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<sup>48</sup> Roland Bleiker, *Visual Global Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>49</sup> Bleiker, “The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory.”, 511.

<sup>50</sup> Harman, *Seeing Politics: Film, Visual Method, and International Relations*, 15.

<sup>51</sup> Anna Leander, “Digital/Commercial (in)Visibility: The Politics of DAESH Recruitment Videos,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 20, no. 3 (2017): 352.

<sup>52</sup> Sam Okoth Opondo and Michael J. Shapiro, “Introduction: The New Violent Cartography: Geo-Analysis after the Aesthetic Turn,” in *The New Violent Cartography: Geo-Analysis after the Aesthetic Turn* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 1–12., 3.

<sup>53</sup> Harman, 15.

<sup>54</sup> Bleiker, 4,9.

<sup>55</sup> Chase Hobbs-Morgan, “Climate Change, Violence and Film,” *Political Theory* 45, no. 1 (2017): 76–96.

building a relationship to climate and nature on a more embodied level, despite still acting as representations and constructing meanings. Still, despite their illumination of the specific ways in which popular culture contributes to shaping the problem of climate change, the aesthetic turn studies mostly focus on fiction genres of representations of global warming rather than on popular genres of meaning-making like documentaries that claim to provide access to ‘truth’.<sup>56</sup> In accordance with van Munster and Sylvest, who argue that documentaries are powerful in conditioning people’s actions and beliefs, I state that documentaries and discourses they (re)produce should be studied more in IR.<sup>57</sup> In the next section I explain why documentaries constitute an important site of politics and in which ways their representations of the everyday are significant for research.

## ***2.2 Studying documentary films***

Documentaries are usually approached as reality-based and reliable source of information: as Krzych argues, documentaries possess an ‘aura of credibility’ which makes them especially trustworthy among spectators.<sup>58</sup> Being seen by audience as speaking ‘truths’, documentaries popularize certain representations of political and condition people’s beliefs. Still, Shapiro argues that, despite the seeming ‘truthfulness’ of documentaries, the lines between them and fiction movies are blurred.<sup>59</sup> Documentaries still choose which aspects should be shown and which should remain unseen, which perspectives are covered and which alternatives are hidden, and this makes them valuable for research.

The topic of human-nature relationship is central to environmental documentaries and to the discourse of climate change in general. While discussing the role of humans in climate change, eco-docs embrace human’s relationship with other species and forms of life such as

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<sup>56</sup> Rens van Munster and Casper Sylvest, “Documenting International Relations: Documentary Film and the Creative Arrangement of Perceptibility,” *International Studies Perspectives* 16 (2015): 229–45.

<sup>57</sup> van Munster and Sylvest.

<sup>58</sup> Scott Krzych, “The Price of Knowledge: Hysterical Discourse in Anti-Michael Moore Documentaries,” *The Comparatist* 39 (2015): 81.

<sup>59</sup> Michael J. Shapiro, *Cinematic Geopolitics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 75.

rivers, plants or animals. In my thesis I conduct the visual analysis of environmental documentaries and look specifically at the representations of relationship between humans and non-humans. Eco-docs are a valuable source for my research since documentaries engage spectator across various dimensions of perception: through image, sound, narrative and emotions. Filmmakers choose to focus on the feeling of guilt and frustration, hope and motivation, or all of these simultaneously. Emotional memory of the film might be long-lasting and ‘sticky’, so it is important to pay attention to the emotions that film provokes.<sup>60</sup> These emotions together with the narrative repetitively reinforce certain take on global warming and therefore are important to study.

While doing film analysis in the third chapter, I will not solely look at the meaning-making and narratives produced in eco-docs that I chose but will pay attention to several dimensions of documentaries. Firstly, I look at the visual aspect of the film and pay attention to the juxtaposition and sequence of images that we see.<sup>61</sup> Are images of human’s activity and nature’s calmness counterposed in this film? Is human activity represented solely as unnatural and harming to the nature? Do we see the images which represent the co-existence of human, plants, animals and other species? Second, I look at the intensity, tone and speed of sounds and music in the film.<sup>62</sup> Which emotions do they provoke? Which associations with climate change and human’s relationship with the nature do they anchor? Which language music speaks? Third aspect that I pay attention to is the narrative of the film. Here I look at how the articulation is happening through words and emotions.<sup>63</sup> Is there a causality in the film that reflects human as a reason, a subject and nature as an object? Is nature presented as an active party, does it ‘respond’ to human’s activities? Does the film suggest any solutions on the

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<sup>60</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 45.

<sup>61</sup> Shapiro, *Cinematic Geopolitics*, 70.

<sup>62</sup> Harman, *Seeing Politics: Film, Visual Method, and International Relations*; Shapiro, *Cinematic Geopolitics*.

<sup>63</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 13.

global/state/individual level? Are individual actions encouraged? What are the emotions and feelings that film focuses on: guilt, hopelessness, threat, inevitability, responsibility, hope, unity? Is there a focus on the scale and globality of the problem of climate change? How is spectator positioned in respect to the scale of the problem?

In short, eco-docs act as cultural artefacts that participate in the making of global warming as a recognizable and comprehensive problem, and which delimit the ways in which relationship between human and nature, as well as the role of human in this problem is seen and approached in everyday life. Therefore, it is important to study eco-docs to understand which views on human – non-human relationship they promote and whether these views are limiting or preventing different ways of thinking of and resolving global warming.

In this chapter I outlined the main ways in which popular culture, visual representations and documentaries in particular are political and why it is important to inspect and approach their pretenses to ‘truth’ with a degree of suspicion. In the next chapter I look closely at four environmental documentaries. I further elaborate on the specific tools that I use while studying eco-docs to slow down the flow of visual narrative and think of the visual politics of climate change in eco-docs in depth.

## CHAPTER 3. OBSERVING THE CLIMATE, EMBODYING THE CHANGE:

### HUMAN AND NATURE IN ECO-DOCS

In this chapter I look closer at four environmental documentaries: *Before the Flood* (2016) by Fisher Stevens starring Leonardo DiCaprio, *Chasing Ice* (2012) by Jeff Orlowski, *Home* (2009) by Yann Arthus-Bertrand and *Green: Death of the Forests* (2009) by Moez Moez and Patrick Rouxel. I chose these films because they are award-meaning, top-rated documentaries whose main focus is global warming, its reasons and consequences across the world. In this chapter I start with discussing the methodology of film analysis. I proceed by looking specifically at how these four films articulate the relationship between human and other forms of life and discuss these articulations using analytical apparatus from Chapter 1 and methodology of visual analysis outlined in the end of Chapter 2. I define *Before the flood* and *Chasing Ice* as more ‘conventional’ eco-docs and criticize their tendency to dichotomize human and nature explaining why I believe such dichotomization is problematic. I then argue that *Home* and *Green: Death of the Forests* are environmental documentaries which fall at least partly under the complexity theory approach towards human and global warming and explain how their approach is different.

#### 3.1 Drawing the lines

Eco-docs articulate human and nature relationship in several ways, one of the most prominent being dichotomization and separation between these two worlds. I argue that a wide variety of eco-docs tend to draw *lines of separation* between human and nature where the former is represented as active, moving and destructive while the latter is seen as passive, non-moving and inert. Thinking in terms of line-drawing reflects how the repetition of similar articulations of human and nature relationships across a number of environmental documentaries establishes and normalizes a certain take on human’s relation to nature.

In doing this, I follow the poststructuralist tradition of discourse analysis in IR and its turns into the studies of environmental discourses. Specifically, I follow Walker who explains how through line-drawing practices human is separating oneself as a ‘modern’ and ‘rational’ subject from nature.<sup>64</sup> Walker argues that

“he [human] once insisted on drawing a similar line between himself and the world outside of himself, the world he constructed as the exterior of his own interiority, the world we know, in part, as nature. Now, it seems, that nature is in need of protection by that very same man, that abstract archetype of the rational being who needs that exterior as a guarantor of its own being”.<sup>65</sup>

Similarly, some eco-docs depict human as all-mighty capable of causing global warming by its destructive activity as well as reversing this trend by following SDG and turning to innovative tools, sustainable decisions and progressive thinking.<sup>66</sup> In contrast to modern and progressive human, there is a tendency to depict ‘true’ nature as pristine, wild, authentic, genuine and with no sign of human’s habitation.<sup>67</sup>

Another source of analytical inspiration for me is Campbell who explains that the logic of drawing lines is made use of when it comes to identity building. Campbell demonstrates how “the constitution of identity is achieved through the inscription of boundaries which serve to demarcate an ‘inside’ from an ‘outside,’ a ‘self’ from an ‘other,’ a ‘domestic’ from a ‘foreign.’”.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, human dichotomizes oneself with the nature as a way of understanding oneself and one’s place in this world. In film analysis I draw on Walker and Campbell to complement methodology of visual analysis with an interpretative frame that helps to understand how the elementary building blocks of sensory and narrative articulation form larger representations of

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<sup>64</sup> Walker, “On the Protection of Nature and the Nature of Protection.”, 190.

<sup>65</sup> Walker, 191.

<sup>66</sup> See, for instance, Cyril Dion and Mélanie Laurent, *Tomorrow*, 2015.

<sup>67</sup> William Cronon, *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (WW Norton & Co, 1995), page number TBA; For critical discussion of the text see Peter Coates, “Review: Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature by William Cronon,” *History* 83, no. 272 (1998): 647–48; John A. Saltmarsh, “Review: Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature by William Cronon,” *The New England Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (1996): 680–82; Steven E. Silvern, “Review: Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature by William Cronon,” *Geographical Review* 86, no. 4 (1996): 613–16.

<sup>68</sup> Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 8.

*relations* in the films and pay attention to whether and how human is depicted as a modern subject and whether human is articulated through juxtaposition with ‘nature’ and ‘non-human’ forms of life.

Some eco-docs do not focus on separating human and nature and rather articulate their relationship in the framework of mutual and beneficial *co-existence*. This means that eco-docs picture how different forms of life co-exist as non-oppositional but complementary, balancing and interconnected parts. This approach follows the posthumanist tradition which avoids putting human at the center of the narrative and represents it as an equally important part among other species. Here the focus is not on showing the destructions, separations, degradations but on emphasizing the potential, the inner bonds, re-thinking our relation to other species. In the next sections I define documentaries that follow the logic of either *lines of separation* or *co-existence* and explain why I believe so.

### ***3.2 Dichotomic representations in eco-docs***

I argue that the award winner and nominee eco-doc *Before the flood* (2016) starring Leonardo DiCaprio re-entrenches the dichotomic imagining of the world and draws the line of separation between human and nature.<sup>69</sup> In this documentary we mostly observe how DiCaprio is revealing the consequences of global warming and is finding the guilty ones through talking to experts, entrepreneurs and government representatives. *Before the flood* starts with the story about the deadly sins of humans who destroy the planet: the line of separation between human and nature is drawn as the human is being blamed for its very existence on this planet. The film dichotomizes human and non-human worlds since nature is presented as god-like, pristine and pure while human is seen as evil-like destroyer whose intervention in the life of nature is unnatural and non-intrinsic. The images of calm nature are followed by the images of noisy and polluting factories and traffic jams counterposing the figure of ‘pure’ nature and destructive

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<sup>69</sup> Fisher Stevens, *Before the Flood*, 2016.



human. The feeling of guilt for human's actions on Earth is sustained through images of human activity, music and the narrative: "we know that we are doing this".<sup>70</sup>

Hatred comes together with the guilt as the film proceeds to blame big players - multinational food, beverage and oil corporations, as well as states like China and USA – for contributing the most to environmental degradation. The spectator is overwhelmed by the hatred towards big players who are destroying the planet by its activity. Spectator sees the images of massive destructions and observe climate change consequences in Canada, Greenland, USA, India, China, at the bottom of the ocean and in faraway ices. The interviews with powerful people such as Elon Musk, Barack Obama, UN General Secretary and the very figure of Leonardo DiCaprio as the main character further distance and disempower spectator who sees the globality of the problem and the power of people dealing with this. These intrinsic hierarchies within the movie are reproduced by the very positionality of spectator as a 'little man' in comparison to 'big players': actors, famous people, big companies.

The separation and representation of human as a destroyer of pure nature further aggravates as the narrative is turning to biblical associations. It is hard to ignore the biblical reference in the title of the film *Before the flood* as well as in its contents. The film starts with the story about the deadly sins of humans and proceeds to demonstrate how humans have lost their wisdom in the race for money. Humans could exist together with nature but decided to surrender to the deadly sins, become animal-like, inferior beings. Humans, as evil-like creatures, intervene and destroy the peace of nature. The looming climate catastrophe is like an Apocalypse or the last judgement where all the sins of humanity will be remembered.

Being overwhelmed with the scale of the catastrophe, hatred to big players and the sinfulness of human's activity, spectator is left confused upon watching. How should a spectator proceed if one is too small to resist multinational corporations and states? How can recycling

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<sup>70</sup> Stevens.

plastic or switching off electricity by one or even several spectators bring a change if their contribution to pollution is thousands time less than the one of big players? As Stengers argues, people feel the need to do something, but are “paralyzed by the disproportionate gap between what they are capable of and what is needed”.<sup>71</sup> These questions that a spectator may pose in response to the visual narrative provided in *Before the flood* hardly contribute to the creative thinking and positive approach to resolving global warming. As a result, despite drawing attention to capitalism's appetite for reckless expropriation of profit and exploitation, *Before the flood* leaves spectators feel confused and distanced from the future catastrophe and at the same time not connected to other forms of life.

The award-winning documentary *Chasing Ice* (2012) turned out to be so successful that its director Orłowski decided to shoot another, but very similar in terms of its narrative and approach eco-doc *Chasing Coral* (2017) which discusses the problem of dying corals. In *Chasing Ice* we observe how scientists and environmental activists try to capture the visual evidence of melting ices of the Arctic. The main character of a film is a former scientist who becomes a photographer after realizing that people need something that would ‘grab them in their guts’, some visual, more tangible and experiential proof rather than abstract graphs and statistics. The scientist sacrificed his time, profitable job, relationship and time with his family as well as his own health in order to capture ice melting on video. When the moment of ice splitting and detaching from the Arctic is finally captured, the scientist-photographer surrounded by the group of assistants become emotional: “and we humans are causing it”.<sup>72</sup> The splitting of the ice, the moving of ice blocks, the changing of the Earth's appearance is presented in *Chasing Ice* as something abnormal. The film demonstrates how much abnormality human activity has caused in nature.

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<sup>71</sup> Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, 22-23.

<sup>72</sup> Jeff Orłowski, *Chasing Ice*, 2012.

Here we see how a line of separation between human and non-human is drawn. Nature is presented as something *intrinsically stable*, as non-actant, immobile, unchanging and unanimated in comparison to human-actant. The difference between these two worlds is radical, and human is approached as an intervener, whose animated activity and presence is unnatural to the world of unanimated nature. In *Chasing Coral*, as well as in *Chasing Ice*, a significant part of the film is dedicated to demonstrating how difficult it was for environmental activists to install the cameras in the ices or at the bottom of an ocean: there were multiple attempts throughout several years which were mostly unsuccessful. This emphasis of the movie once again reminds us of how protective nature is from any kind of human's unnatural and unwelcome intervention.

Bruno Latour, who came up with the term *actant*, explains that an actant is “any entity that modifies another entity in a trial”.<sup>73</sup> Bennett further elaborates on this notion saying that an actant “is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events”.<sup>74</sup> Complexity theorists suggest giving up the idea of human bodies as moving, actant bodies and other bodies (for instance, a stone, a wooden stick) as stable, non-actant ones. For example, Bennett argues that a seemingly stable body of a stone is also a living, dynamic and changing body but its speed of life and pace of change are different from those of human.<sup>75</sup> Things, she argues, are also ‘actants’ and can alter the course of events.<sup>76</sup> As an example she brings in foods which can generate human tissue and influence human's mood, or worms which are an essential and crucial part of the ecosystem in soils.<sup>77</sup> Through presenting nature as non-actant one risks falling into the anthropocentric assumption

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<sup>73</sup> Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2004), 237.

<sup>74</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, viii.

<sup>75</sup> Bennett, 57-58.

<sup>76</sup> Bennett, viii.

<sup>77</sup> Bennett, 40,95.

that, since human is the one who is animated, then human is also the one who is ‘modern’, empowered and the only one in capability of bringing change.

Bennett suggests not only acknowledging the vitality of the seemingly non-animate and non-vital things like a stone and the agency of smaller creatures like worms but also admitting the materiality of human bodies. We are used to approaching human body as lively, but what makes them lively? For instance, thousands of bacteria inhabit our bodies, sustain our life, our vision and digestion, and yet we tend to associate them with ourselves, appropriate them as if they are dissolved or non-existent separately from our bodies: “if we were more attentive to the indispensable foreignness that we are, would we continue to produce and consume in the same violently reckless ways?”<sup>78</sup> Bennett challenges the established understanding of body not only through drawing attention to the vitality of things and bacteria inside our bodies, but also to the materiality of human bodies themselves. How our perception of human body will change if we start to think of it in terms of its material, seemingly non-lively components like our bones which seem to be as non-moving as a stone? Bennett draws attention to the material parts inside us like “the minerality of our bones, or the metal of our blood, or the electricity of our neurons”, and through this makes us re-think the established understanding of human body as first and foremost lively, vibrant phenomenon rather than material and static.<sup>79</sup>

Acknowledging these ways of thinking might bring us closer to giving up sharp distinction between humans as active, creative, lively, progressive, vibrant and constantly changing and non-humans as material, inert, passive, singular, static and non-lively.<sup>80</sup> Avoiding human-nature dichotomization and admitting how much complex our interconnections are might not only emancipate or democratize nature but also create a natural respect and love for it in humans.

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<sup>78</sup> Bennett, 112-113.

<sup>79</sup> Bennett, 10.

<sup>80</sup> Fagan, “Security in the Anthropocene: Environment, Ecology, Escape.”, 304.

### 3.3 Co-existence of human and other forms of life in eco-docs

The environmental documentary *Home* (2009) engages with a very different way of storytelling about global warming. *Home* demonstrates a drastically different perspective on environmental documentaries and, most notably, it does not put human in the center of the narrative still being able to discuss the reasons and consequences of global warming and the role of human in it. Rather than drawing the lines of separation, *Home* portrays human and other forms of life in the process of co-cocreation. This co-constitution or co-creation is happening across several dimensions.

Three aspects of this eco-doc are drastically different from more ‘conventional’ ones. First aspect is the voicing of the film: this is one of the few (and the only one among those eco-docs that I got a chance to see) films where the voice of the film is female. Second aspect is music: the music is mostly non-western, melodic, and the lyrics are not in English or any other European language. In ‘conventional’ eco-docs the music is more dynamic, even aggressive which creates the attitude of confrontation with the nature, war with the climate, the atmosphere of danger and looming catastrophe. Third aspect is the emotional component: the emotions and feelings that *Home* puts at the forefront are not hatred towards multinational corporations or guilt for human activity.<sup>81</sup> The focus is rather on feeling connected to other forms of life, understanding that we are one with nature, changing the way we think of other species. The focus is on the inter-species links that have been broken: “fire and water are now where they are not supposed to be”.<sup>82</sup> The narrative of non-confrontation, co-existence and interconnection is re-occurring throughout the film: it is made notable that without other species, plants, bacteria – other forms of life - humans cease to exist too. *Home* does not discourage spectator from taking individual, even small actions towards resolving global warming: they argue that each

<sup>81</sup> See, for instance, Ali Tabrizi, *Seaspiracy*, 2021; Lorna Baldwin, *The Plastic Problem*, 2019.

<sup>82</sup> Yann Arthus-Bertrand, *Home*, 2009.

person has a possibility to change the way things are, it is in each person's ability to be a responsible consumer, to "think about what we buy".<sup>83</sup> At the same time, this encouragement is not done too persistently: "listen carefully, and then decide what you want to do with this".<sup>84</sup> Rather than aiming to provoke some immediate action, the film mixes together the neoliberal drive for individual responsibility and the elements of contemporary "slow" culture<sup>85</sup>, thereby first and foremost aiming at building alternative *sensibility* towards nature and climate change.

The film avoids concentrating on human as the main character or the center of the film. The storytelling begins before the emergence of human on Earth. We are told about the processes that the Earth experienced while it was only forming and becoming: how merger and separation between "matter and water", "soft and hard" was happening which eventually created necessary conditions for *life* in its various forms to emerge. In *Home* it is not human but various forms of life and connections between them that are at the center of narrative. *Home* acknowledges the differences in power between animals, plants, humans but also draws attention to the undeniable interconnection of everything with everything: "The engine of life is linkage. Everything is linked. Nothing is self-sufficient".<sup>86</sup> When humans are introduced in the narrative, they do not become central to it however take a considerable part of it. Human is incorporated in the chain of life which implies balance between all its equally important parts: "Our earth relies on a balance in which every being has a role to play and exists only through the existence of another being".<sup>87</sup> Through representing nature, other species and things as animated and moving, through emphasizing and showing how soils, waters, and the atmosphere

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<sup>83</sup> Yann Arthus-Bertrand.

<sup>84</sup> Yann Arthus-Bertrand.

<sup>85</sup> Isabelle Stengers, *Another Science Is Possible: A Manifesto for Slow Science* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018).

<sup>86</sup> Yann Arthus-Bertrand.

<sup>87</sup> Yann Arthus-Bertrand.

itself are “in the cycle of constant renewal”, *Home* does not disempower nature in all its forms, does not deprive it from the active role that it plays, does not put nature lower than human.<sup>88</sup>

This approach towards the world and human in it is similar to what complexity theorists suggest. As I explained in *Chapter 1*, one central feature of complexity theory is its insistence on distancing from thinking about human and nature as an undifferentiated mess, and the desire to build a worldview in which human and nature are differentiated yet inseparable, entangled with each other in a dynamic whole. Similarly, by focusing on relationality and connections between and among species, matter and processes rather than on any of these individually, *Home* draws attention to the interconnectedness of humans and other species but at the same time differentiates between them by making it notable that humans have more power in comparison to other forms of life, and therefore this additional power needs to be approached with caution and sensibility. It acknowledges differential and unequal power relations within this world, but instead of reproducing them through repeating the same story of environmental degradation as being only about humans, it calls first and foremost for a different kind of sensibility based on the acknowledgement of pluralism and decentredness of nature.

*Green: Death of the Forests* (2012) is an alternative silent eco-doc which was shot by non-professional directors on a non-professional camera. The film discusses the deforestation in Indonesia and the extinction of orangutangs.<sup>89</sup> It depicts the destructive consequences of human activity in Indonesia, we observe the process of deforestation, how cutting the forests leads to the extinction of orangutangs who are left without home and food. At the same time, the film shows how other humans are contributing to preserving different forms of life and reversing the degradating process: local activists pick injured, skinny orangutangs, bring them to beds with pillows and blankets, feed and treat them. This perspective gives us an understanding that humans do not only bring harm, but also bring life to the world.

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<sup>88</sup> Yann Arthus-Bertrand.

<sup>89</sup> Moez Moez and Patrick Rouxel, *Green: Death of the Forests*, 2009.

Another point that film talks about is the flaws of capitalist system. The film mocks the paradoxical fact that glossy books about the extinction of orangutangs are sold in bookshops, while these books could be an actual home and a source of living for these animals. The music is especially notable since the rest of the film is silent and has no words. While we see the glossy books, the female voice sings “I vote for money! I like to buy! It makes me happy!”, “let me spend my money”, “I need more!”.<sup>90</sup> Immediately after, this song is interrupted by a silent image of an ill orangutang lying in a bed. The film is silent and does not provide ultimate interpretation of the issue. Still, it chooses interesting sequences of shots and demonstrates the controversies of human behaviour.

This film does not focus on representing the problem solely from a blaming perspective but also shows the ambivalence and entanglement of this problem. Instead of putting all the agency on one particular actor – humans in general - *Green: Death of the Forests* demonstrates the agency of the *heterogeneous assemblage* of things where agency is not localized in human but dispersed and multidirectional across heterogeneous actors.<sup>91</sup> Such an approach better reflects the entanglement of the climate change issue and the complexity of relationships between different forms of life.

To conclude, eco-docs transmit the information about global warming to the spectator in a quick and catchy way. However, simplifying the message is not always the most productive way of doing this. It might be productive to avoid putting human at the center of narrative and embrace a new, entangled, emancipating, empowering and lively angle, to emphasize the interconnectivity of different forms of life rather than presenting them in opposition. Engaging with complexity allows to introduce non-causal and non-separating but co-constituting narrative in environmental documentaries which may be a more effective way of communicating the climate change issue.

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<sup>90</sup> Moez and Rouxel.

<sup>91</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 23.



## CONCLUSION

In this thesis I discussed the ways of articulating the relationship within human – non-human world in environmental documentaries. I argued that a wide variety of eco-docs tend to represent relationship between human and nature as confrontational and even dichotomic. Following the poststructuralist tradition in IR, I explained how *lines of separation* are drawn in eco-docs between human, and nature and why this dichotomic worldview is problematic. Making a parallel with security approach to environment in IR, I showed how *Before the Flood* depicts human as actant, vibrant, progressive and nature as passive, inert and non-lively. I discussed how *Chasing Ice* portrays any change, movement and alteration as alien to nature and human as an intervener whose destructive activity led to the unnatural and unsustainable change in environment. Depicting nature as stable in eco-docs disempowers nature and re-entrenches the hierarchical, top-down view on it. This is also a frequent problem among IR scholars who embrace the security approach to environment.

Drawing on complexity and posthumanist theories, I discussed different way of thinking of the relationship within human – non-human world. Taking inspiration from Bennett and her concept of *vital materiality*, I suggested re-visiting the established understanding of human body as vital in opposition to material things. Following the posthuman approach to IR by Cudworth and Hobden, I invite to see the world as heterogeneous and non-hierarchical, differentiated and interconnected. In this thesis I argued that by focusing on the interconnection of matter and water, soft and hard, human and other species, the eco-doc *Home* is the closest to complexity take on the world among other documentaries. I also note that *Green: Death of the Forests* embraces the ambivalence of human behavior and does not put all the responsibility solely on human but acknowledges the *heterogeneous assemblage* of actors who take part in and influence the pace and direction of global warming.

Having said this, I believe that it is important to emphasize that I do not suggest neglecting the role of human in global warming and the negative consequences of its activity on the pace of environmental degradation. Instead, I invite to engage with other, probably more productive ways of thinking of and dealing with global warming. Rather than drawing lines of separation between human and nature, I invite to see and represent world as a complex system which consist of different but interconnected and equally important parts where human is not primary to or higher than other forms of life. This way of thinking allows to focus not on the destructive potential of global warming and on the sinfulness of human activity but invites to think of the *co-constituting* and *co-existing* potential of our connection with plants, animals, water, soil, and as a result embrace more productive thinking such as genuine environmental-friendly habits, sustainable practices and the rhetoric of compassion and love towards the Earth in all its displays.

There are several limitations to this thesis. This research has only looked closely at four environmental documentaries while many more exist and serve as a great potential for future research. Despite that, I chose popular, award-winning eco-docs that are widely recognized among public and which reflect the overall trend in the field.

Another limitation is that this thesis hasn't embraced other critiques of the dominant take on human and nature, for instance ecofeminism. This, however, might be a basis for the future research in this field. The future research can also engage with other, more creative or unusual documentaries which introduce a different perspective on global warming and offer new, more nuanced ways of being with(in) the nature.

This thesis is an invitation for IR scholars to let go of the established vocabulary and to re-visit our understanding of what is human and where the boundary (if it exists indeed) between humane and non-humane, material and vital lies. This thesis shows the necessity of thoughtful, non-standard, artful and creative representations of global warming in popular

culture as well as in IR literature. These new, creative representations should not be called to convince spectator of the fact the climate change is happening, it is dangerous, and we are responsible for it. They should not re-entrench the paternalistic narrative of sinful nature of human's existence and should not generate the responsibility for humans to protect, save and take care of the Earth.<sup>92</sup> Instead, these new representations should encourage different thinking in and of human and its interconnection and intrinsic bond with other forms of life. Perhaps, the simplest but somehow the most difficult message they could convey is that we, humans, are both with, and in the nature (and of, and for it, though certainly not above), that we inhabit this planet as much as participate in its complex becoming, that even though humans are responsible for the pace of the climate change, this problem is not only of, and about humans. It is from this starting point that more complex and caring solutions to the many planetary problems may emerge.

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<sup>92</sup> Kurki, *International Relations in a Relational Universe*, 9.

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