

Media/Ecologies [UGST4298]

BA Program *Culture, Politics and Society* | 2.0 Credits | AY 2026-2027 | Winter term | Day, 00:00-00:00

Instructor: Ulrich Meurer

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The instructor will be available for individual questions immediately after every class. You can book additional OFFICE HOURS via email.

Access to all readings, videos, web-resources via e-learning platform MOODLE:

<https://ceulearning.ceu.edu/login/index.php>

Link for selecting a date/topic for your impulse PRESENTATION (*see below: section on "assignments"*):

<https://nuudel.digitalcourage.de/xxxxxx>

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Over the last decades, vast imbalances in the global ecosystem have increasingly been impacting human communities, their modes of life, their politics, technologies, and ideas of the future. At the same time, the surging forces of the 'natural world' prove to be notoriously hard to represent. Since climate change, pollution, rising sea levels or carbon dioxide concentrations are what Timothy Morton calls "hyperobjects" – viscous, massively distributed, interrelated things – they elude direct visualization (just like their entangled historical, economic or cultural causes and effects).

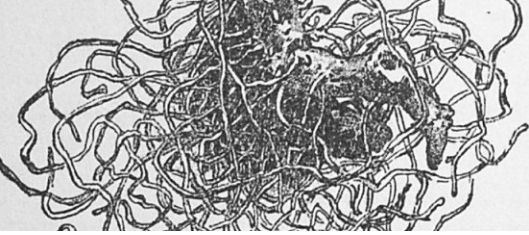
In light of this discrepancy between urgencies and invisibilities, it is crucial to discuss (or even invent) possible audio/visual strategies as well as notions of mediation that can not only reflect contemporary ecological conditions but also generate new kinds of eco-political thinking. In this sense, the course will address activist, artistic, scientific and popular imaginations of the biosphere – and beyond that, it traces current debates in media and visual studies, in political and cultural theory, that think about alternative concepts of the natural lifeworld: after all, 'medium' and 'environment' have always maintained close relations, from Aristotle's τὸ μεταξύ, the *in-between* that links the human eye to its surroundings, to Marshall McLuhan's "media ecology" or recent models of "elemental ecocriticism" and "environmental media".

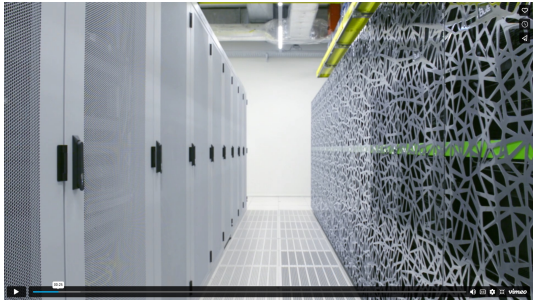
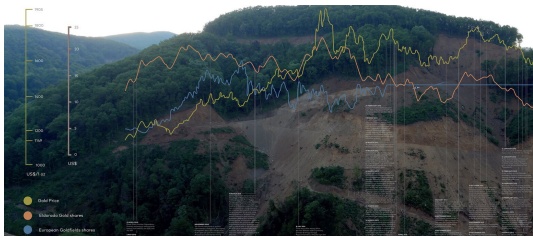
LEARNING OUTCOMES:

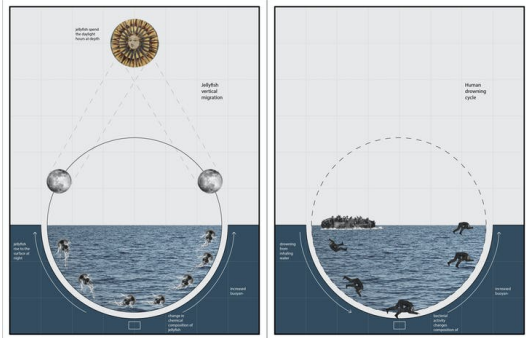
Students will be introduced to ► historical and contemporary AUDIOVISUAL WORKS (videos, installations, films, soundscapes, graphic and land art, virtual environments) that deal with environmental issues. They will get insight into ► CURRENT DEBATES at the intersection of ecology and media studies. They will develop ► their SKILLS IN THE COMBINED INTERPRETATION of visual sources and conceptual readings. They will learn ► how to operate with IMAGES IN THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES. Participants will train their ► ability to STRUCTURE, FORMULATE, AND EVALUATE ARGUMENTS through in-class discussions, short presentations, and written papers. They will have the opportunity to ► APPLY THEIR PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE in the form of audio/visual course works.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE + READINGS:

- ▶ Participants are expected to prepare mandatory readings and audiovisual resources (printed in black) prior to the respective class.
- ▷ Grey font indicates optional readings/material: it serves as additional basis for your presentations, further explorations of the topic and as inspiration for your final course works ...

Intro: Media (&) Ecology	
1.	Media Ecology Discussion of the course topic + organization and assignments  ▶ Casey Man Kong Lum: "Introduction: The intellectual roots of media ecology", in: <i>New Jersey Journal of Communication</i> 8/1 (Spring 2000), 1-7. ▷ Carlos A. Scolari: "Media Ecology: Exploring the Metaphor to Expand the Theory", in: <i>Communication Theory</i> 22 (2012), 204-225. ▷ Lance Strate: A Media Ecology Review (<i>Communication Research Trends</i> 23/2 (2004), 3-48.
2.	Media and/as Nature  ▶ John Durham Peters: <i>The Marvelous Clouds</i>. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press 2015, 1-12; 46-62. ▷ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Lowell Duckert (eds): <i>Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire</i>. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press 2015, 1-26. ▷ Tim Barker, Conor McKeown: "Unearthing Techno-Ecology: On the Possibility of a Technical Media Philosophy of Ecology", in: <i>Digital Culture & Society</i> 1/1 (2015), 21-37.
I. Air	
3.	Atmosphere Michel Serres on William Turner Translation of environment into image Art (history), science and eco-philosophy Polluted images ... ▶ Michel Serres: "Science and the Humanities: The Case of Turner", in: <i>SubStance</i> 26/2-83 (1997), 6-21. 

	▷ James Nisbet: "Environmental Abstraction and the Polluted Image", in: <i>American Art</i> 31/1 (March 2017), 114-131. ▷ Christopher Watkin: <i>Michel Serres: Figures of Thought</i>. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP 2020, 1-31.
4 .	Clouds ... ▶ <i>Mount Fuji – The Movement of Clouds</i> (Masanao Abe, 1929) https://m.vk.com/video-136471876_456240991?list=76ea305f60c444a373&from=wall-136471876_11677  ▶ Lorraine Daston: "Cloud Physiognomy", in: <i>Representations</i> 135/1 (Summer 2016), 45-71. ▶ John Ruskin: <i>The Storm-Clouds of the Nineteenth Century</i>. Moscow: Dodo Books 2009, 1-28. ▷ Marie Rebecchi: "Time-Lapse Machine. Plants, Crystals and Clouds", in: Antonio Somaini, Eline Grignard, Marie Rebecchi (eds): <i>Time Machine: Cinematic Temporalities</i>. Parma: Skira 2020, 197-210. ▷ Brian Dillon: "Traditions of Air", in: <i>Suppose a Sentence</i>. New York: New York Review Books 2020, 60-71.
5 .	and Cloud Computing ▶ <i>The Cloud Is More than Air and Water</i> (Audiovisual Installation / Matt Parker, 2014): https://www.earthkeptwarm.com/the-cloud-is-more-than-air-and-water/ ▶ <i>The People's Cloud</i> (Art Doc Series / Matt Parker 2020): https://www.earthkeptwarm.com/the-peoples-cloud/  ▶ Anthony M. Levenda, Dillon Mahmoudi: "Silicon Forest and Server Farms: The (Urban) Nature of Digital Capitalism in the Pacific Northwest", in: <i>CultureMachine</i> (2019), 1-14: https://culturemachine.net/vol-18-the-nature-of-data-centers/silicon-forest-and-server-farms/ ▶ Jayn Verkerk: <i>Cloud Computing as Digital Imaginary</i>. (Doctoral Thesis, Faculty of Architecture and Design Innovation, Victoria University of Wellington, 2021), 37-57.
II. Earth	
6 .	Gold ▶ <i>Unearthing Disaster I+II</i> (Angela Melitopoulos, Angela Anderson, 2013/2015): https://www.angelaolgaanderson.net/unearthing-disaster  ▶ T. J. Demos: <i>Beyond the World's End</i>. Durham: Duke University Press 2020, 43-67.

	► Katja Kwastek: "Capitalocene Art: Entanglements of Technology, Economy, and Geopolitics in works of Femke Herregraven, Angela Melitopoulos, and Hito Steyerl", in: Oliver Grau, Inge Hinterwaldner (eds): <i>Retracing Political Dimensions: Strategies in Contemporary New Media Art</i>. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter 2021, 194-210. ▷ Angela Melitopoulos: <i>Lecture-Screening</i> (Conference 'Where Are We Going, Walt Whitman?', Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam, 2013): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZIAMnVeMAk ▷ Félix Guattari: <i>The Three Ecologies</i>. London, New Brunswick: Athlone Press 2000.
7.	Marble ► <i>Quarry</i> (Amie Siegel, 2015): AMIE SIEGEL Quarry (2015) ONCE UPON A TIME INCONCEIVABLE "Amie Siegel's video, Quarry (2015), traces the source of marble from the largest underground..." By Protocinema Facebook [Trailer – full movie accessible via MOODLE]  ► Tom McDonough: <i>Amy Siegel: 'Quarry'</i> (VDrome Online Cinema Website): http://www.vdrome.org/amie-siegel-quarry/ ► <i>Artist Talk / Amie Siegel: Quarry</i> (SFU Galleries, January 2017): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7v13Jqq7LU ▷ <i>Amie Siegel</i> ('Medium Cool' Talk, Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation / GSAPP, 2019): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gz1UxuFyFzY [esp. 26:50-42:05] ▷ Catherine Elwes: "Performing the Landscape", in: <i>Landscape and the Moving Image</i>. Bristol: Intellect 2022, 193-203.
III. Water	
8.	Interspecies Alliances ► Ala Tannir: <i>Blood in the Water: Tracing an Interspecies Alliance between At-risk Humans and Jellyfish in the Mediterranean</i>. (Master Thesis, Rhode Island School of Design) Providence, Rhode Island 2017.  ► Donna J. Haraway: <i>Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene</i>. Durham, London: Duke University Press 2016, 30-33; 51-67. ▷ Stacy Alaimo: "Jellyfish Science, Jellyfish Aesthetics: Posthuman Reconfigurations of the Sensible", in: Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, Astrida Neimanis (eds): <i>Thinking with Water</i>. Montreal, Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press 2013, 139-164.
9.	Black Atlantic <i>Vertigo Sea</i> (John Akomfrah, 2015) https://vimeo.com/579924367 [Intro Video – full movie can be accessed via MOODLE]



- ▶ T. J. Demos: *Beyond the World's End*. Durham: Duke University Press 2020, 23-42.
- ▷ Jakob Nilsson: "Capitalocene, clichés, and critical re-enchantment. What Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea* does through BBC nature", in: *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 10/1 (2018), 1-10.
- ▷ Jill H. Casid: "Landscape Vertigo", in: *Huntington Library Quarterly* 84/3 (Autumn 2021), 635-656.

IV. Fire

10.

Ground Zero

- ▶ *The Dome – Foreign Correspondent* (Mark Willacy, ABC-TV, 2017):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=autMHvj3exA>



- ▶ Karen Barad: "After the End of the World: Entangled Nuclear Colonialisms, Matters of Force, and the Material Force of Justice", in: *Theory & Event* 22/3 (July 2019), 524-550.
 [Video of Barad's lecture given at the *Reading Matters* Conference, Princeton University 2018]:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFmeXJR4Clk&t=6s>
- ▷ Michel Serres: *Hominescence*. London, New York et al.: Bloomsbury 2019, 37-38; 139-147; 192-196.
- ▷ Timothy Morton: *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2013, 1-24.
- ▷ Paul Boyer: *By the Bombs Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. New York: Pantheon 1985, 275-287.

11.

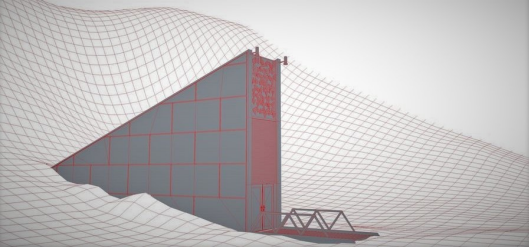
Radiation

- ▶ *Sound of a Million Insects, Light of a Thousand Stars* (2 min., Tomonari Nishikawa, 2014):
<https://vimeo.com/117525500>



- ▶ Tess Takahashi: "Fukushima Abstractions: Sound of a Million Insects, Light of a Thousand Stars as Analog Data Visualization", in: *ASAP/Journal* 6/1 (Jan. 2021), 67-77.
- ▷ Thomas Pringle: "Photographed by the Earth: War and Media in Light of Nuclear Events", in: *NECSUS. European Journal of Media Studies*, 3/2 (2014), 131-154:
<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/15153>
- ▷ Gregory Zinman: "Echoes of the Earth: Handmade Film Ecologies", in: Scott MacKenzie, Janine Marchessault (eds): *Process Cinema: Handmade Film in the Digital Age*. Montreal et al.: McGill-Queen's University Press 2019, 108-124.

12.	Lightning ► Dia Art Foundation: Walter De Maria, <i>The Lightning Field</i> / Western New Mexico: https://www.diaart.org/visit/visit-our-locations-sites/walter-de-maria-the-lightning-field  ► James Nisbet: "A Brief Moment in the History of Photo-Energy: Walter De Maria's Lightning Field", in: <i>Grey Room</i> 50 (Winter 2013), 66-89. ▷ Elizabeth Cavicchi: "Earth Grounds and Heavenly Spires: Lightning Rod Men, Patent Inventors, and Telegraphers", in: <i>Transactions of the American Philosophical Society</i> 99/5 (2009), 181-205.
V. Life	
13.	Virus ► Roberta Buiani: "Innovation and Compliance in Making and Perceiving the Scientific Visualization of Viruses", in: <i>Canadian Journal of Communication</i> 39 (2014), 539-556.  ► Colette Gaiter: "Visualizing the Virus", <i>The Conversation</i> (09 April 2020): https://theconversation.com/visualizing-the-virus-135415 ► Olaf Breidbach: "Representation of the Microcosm: The Claim for Objectivity in 19th Century Scientific Microphotography", in: <i>Journal of the History of Biology</i> 35/2 (Summer 2002), 221-250. ▷ Jennifer Tucker: "Chapter IV: Photography of the Invisible", in: <i>Nature Exposed: Photography as Eye Witness in Victorian Science</i>. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 2005, 159-193. ▷ Joost van Loon: "A Contagious Living Fluid: Objectification and Assemblage in the History of Virology", in: <i>Theory, Culture & Society</i> 19/5-6 (2002), 107-124.
14.	Fungi ► <i>Gaia</i> (Jaco Bouwer, 2021): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unqpFw9PdGQ&t=98s [Trailer – full movie can be accessed via MOODLE]  ► Lynn Margulis: <i>Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution</i>. London: Phoenix 2001, 141-161. ▷ Michelle Krasovitski: "Ben Wheatley's In the Earth Finds Horror in Fungi", in: <i>The Verge</i> (May 4, 2021): https://www.theverge.com/2021/5/4/22410283/in-the-earth-ecological-horror-movies-ben-wheatley ▷ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing: <i>The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins</i>. Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press 2017, 227-240.

15.	Flora The <i>Svalbard Seed Vault</i> Archiving Life in Face of Ecological Loss Materiality, Architecture and Environment Acting Against (Historical) Time ► <i>Svalbard Global Seed Vault</i> (Official Website): https://www.seedvault.no/ ► <i>Inside the Svalbard Seed Vault</i> ('Veritasium'-YouTube Channel, May 2016): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_OEsf-1qgY  ► Leon Wolff: "The Past Shall Not Begin: Frozen Seeds, Extended Presents and the Politics of Reversibility", in: <i>Security Dialogue</i> 52/1 (2021), pp. 79-95. ▷ Franziska von Verschuer: "Making Post/Anthropocentric Futures in Agrobiodiversity Conservation", in: <i>Nature and Culture</i> 16/1 (2021), pp. 47-64. ▷ Susi K. Frank, Kjetil A. Jacobsen (eds.): <i>Arctic Archives: Ice, Memory and Entropy</i>. Bielefeld: Transcript 2019. ▷ Jussi Parikka: "Planetary Goodbyes: Post-History and Future Memories of an Ecological Past", in: Ina Blom, Trond Lundemo, Eivind Rossaak (eds.): <i>Memory in Motion: Archives, Technology, and the Social</i>. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2017, pp. 129-151.
VI. Aesthetics	
16.	The Sublime ► <i>La nature</i> (Artavazd Pelechian, 2019): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqeUi5ELwk0 [Trailer – full movie can be accessed via MOODLE]  ► Immanuel Kant: <i>Critique of the Power of Judgement</i>. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 2000, 128-162. ► Ruairí McCann: "Cinema Has Never Been Modern: Artavazd Pelechian's Nature", in: <i>Photogénie</i> 13 (April 2022): https://photogenie.be/cinema-has-never-been-modern-artavazd-pelechians-nature/
17.	Animal Vision ► <i>In the Eyes of the Animal</i> (Marshmellow Laser Feast, 2015): http://intheeyesoftheanimal.com/#home ► <i>In the Eyes of the Animal</i> (on Docubase / MIT Open Documentary Lab, 2016): https://docubase.mit.edu/project/in-the-eyes-of-the-animal/ ► <i>In the Eyes of the Animal – on Gear VR</i> (created with YouTube Video Editor, 2017): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=li08SD7cETE 

	► Laura Lee Coles: "Landscape, Eco-Arts Practice, and Digital Technology in the Public Art Realm", in: Cameron Cartiere, Leon Tan (eds): <i>The Routledge Companion to Art in the Public Realm</i>. New York, London: Routledge 2021, 243-256. ▷ Ali Altan Yücel: "Virtual Reality Beyond Realism: A New Form of Narrative", in: <i>Parc International Interdisciplinarity in the Arts Symposiums 1, Book of Proceedings</i>, December 2017, 6-18. ▷ Giovanni Aloï: "Lost in the Post-Sublime Forest", in: Giovanni Aloï (ed.): <i>Why Look at Plants? The Botanical Emergence in Contemporary Art</i>. Leiden: Brill 2018, 39-51. "Run, Forest, Run" Representations of Nature in the Digital ..., in: <i>Migrant Journal</i> 6, 132-143
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ASSIGNMENTS :

Attendance and ACTIVE PARTICIPATION in discussions / close readings / image interpretations

15% of the final grade

- ▷ Students are expected ► to TAKE PART in the discussions, comment on other students' impulses or presentations, react to the instructor's input and questions, reflect on the readings and audiovisual material ... ► Participation is ASSESSED with respect to the relative QUANTITY AND QUALITY of the comments (targeted engagement with the concepts and readings, conclusiveness of argumentation, wider contextualization).

In-class IMPULSE

20% of the final grade

- ▷ Every participant will act as 'EXPERT' ON ONE OF THE CLASS TOPICS. They ► prepare the respective week's material (mandatory and optional readings / audiovisual sources) and present its MOST IMPORTANT / INTERESTING / PROBLEMATIC ASPECTS in a brief impulse (7-10 min. max!). They *should* ► engage with the topic in a CRITICAL WAY (*no mere summaries of the material*) and *may* give ADDITIONAL HISTORICAL OR THEORETICAL INPUT.
- ▷ The impulse should be accompanied by a ► LIST OF QUESTIONS OR ISSUES that will guide our discussion. Ideally, the 'experts' act as co-instructors for the selected session.
- ▷ Every participant ► selects a TOPIC/DATE from the syllabus for their impulse and enters their name in the respective DOODLE UNTIL DAY, MONTH DATE, 2023:
<https://doodle.com/poll/xxxxxx>
- ▷ Depending on the number of participants, every topic can be ► prepared BY 1 TO MAX. 3 STUDENTS (group impulse). *However, do not select a topic/date already assigned to another student as long as there are unallocated slots!*

1 concise IMPULSE HANDOUT

15% of the final grade

- ▷ For their impulses, the participants are required to create a written handout that shows ► the ORDER of the presented points, the MAIN ARGUMENTS, CONCLUSION, and further QUESTIONS.
- ▷ The handout ► should be structured in SHORT PASSAGES, KEYWORDS OR BULLET POINTS – no continuous text and long sentences. Ideally, the structure and central ideas of the brief presentation should become visible at first glance. It serves as ► previous INFO SHEET and afterwards as learning and memory aid for the other course participants.
- ▷ The ► handout is ASSESSED with respect to its STRUCTURE, ACCURACY, AND CLEARNESS (*visual material and critical statements can of course be included*).
- ▷ The handout ► should be submitted NO LATER THAN 36 HOURS BEFORE the respective class. Please, send it as .doc/.docx/.pdf file to the instructor who will upload the document on MOODLE.

WRITTEN DRAFT OF THE FINAL PROJECT

15% of the final grade

- ▷ In the midterm week, participants SUBMIT A BRIEF OUTLINE FOR A FINAL WRITTEN OR AUDIOVISUAL WORK. The draft ► describes the chosen topic and material, explains the prospective structure, method of interpretation and all relevant thematic as well as technical issues. It can also ► INCLUDE SAMPLES of the work in progress.
- ▷ The outline will be uploaded on MOODLE: it is an opportunity for the students to ► get constructive FEEDBACK FROM THEIR PEERS AND INSTRUCTOR; it should not only 'advertise' the project but also address all possible difficulties.

Final PAPER or final AUDIOVISUAL WORK

35% of the final grade

- ▷ Participants can produce either a written FINAL PAPER or an AUDIO/VISUAL RESEARCH WORK.¹
- ▷ The ► SUBJECT OF THE FINAL PAPER OR AUDIOVISUAL WORK is chosen by the student. A discussion of the subject with the instructor is not obligatory but recommended. ► The final work MUST NOT ADOPT A SUBJECT FROM THE COURSE SESSIONS. Students should choose a topic that is connected to the overall theme of "VISUAL ECOLOGIES" and treat it in an 'academic' manner, i.e., refer to scholarly literature. ► In any case, students are encouraged to DEVELOP AN EXPLICIT RESEARCH QUESTION that states their interest and goals.
- ▷ Searching for ► relevant BOOKS, ARTICLES, etc. is PART OF THE ASSIGNMENT. Students may consult the instructor, but are basically responsible for compiling their work material themselves.
- ▷ Upon consultation, ► the final work CAN ALSO BE PRODUCED IN GROUPS OF TWO – in this case, you can opt for a SHARED OR INDIVIDUAL GRADE. For individual grading, you must clearly indicate who produced which part of the work.
- ▷ The final paper ► should have a LENGTH OF ~2.500 TO 3.000 WORDS (*excl. cover sheet, list of contents, bibliography, etc.*). IMAGES should be inserted in the text (no separate section for illustrations). The STYLE FOR REFERENCING AND CITING can be freely chosen but should be consistent throughout the paper. Papers should be submitted in .doc, .docx or .pdf format.
- ▷ Papers are ► SUBMITTED VIA E-MAIL; since the instructor's deadline for the submission of grades is DATE, 20XX, the students' ► DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING THE PAPERS will be **DATE, 20XX** (*it is highly recommended that you start working on your papers early during the term*).
- ▷ Main CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION of the papers are:
 - Choice of topic (connection to course subject / adequate breadth / sufficient range of source material)
 - Originality of approach (subject, form of expression, combination of material and method that offer a 'new' perspective)
 - Clarity of structure (the order of your points, examples, arguments should be motivated and transparent / avoid redundancies and repetitions)

¹ Please take note of CEU's PLAGIARISM POLICY: <https://documents.ceu.edu/documents/p-1405-1>

- ▶ Conclusiveness of argumentation (no broad generalizations / illustrate your points with examples / verify them with scholarly sources)
 - ▶ Development of own thoughts/conclusions (ideally, your work not only assembles thoughts from your sources but adds original aspects ...)
 - ▶ Clarity of style / verbal expression (does *not* mean 'empirical', 'dry', 'academic')
 - ▶ Formal correctness (compliance with the guidelines concerning word count / consistency of footnotes and bibliography)
- ▷ Instead of a written paper, ▶ students may also prepare an AUDIO/VISUAL WORK (PHOTO ESSAY, VIDEO, PAINTING, SCRAPBOOK, INSTALLATION, PODCAST, WEBSITE, ETC.): the work can be ▶ composed of SELF-PRODUCED MATERIAL AND/OR FOUND FOOTAGE. ▶ Formal and technical issues, extent or intended length should be coordinated with the instructor.
- ▷ Final audio/visual works will ▶ not be graded according to technical criteria but based on the ORIGINALITY OF THE APPROACH AND THE POTENTIAL TO CONVEY THE MAIN ARGUMENT.
- ▷ Audio/visual ▶ works MAY BE COMPLEMENTED BY A WRITTEN COMMENT to elucidate their conceptual or theoretical approach.

Deadlines are the SAME FOR WRITTEN AND AUDIO/VISUAL works.