Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics: Artists Reimagine the Arctic and Antarctic is a teachable book, clear enough for undergraduates and challenging enough to use with graduate students. The book engages feminist, Black, Indigenous, and non-Western perspectives to address the exigencies of the experience of the Anthropocene and its attendant ecosystem failures brought on by the burning of oil, gas, and coal that has led to polar ice and glacial melt, rising sea levels, deadly floods, fires, and climate-led migrations. The book addresses the way contemporary artists, activists, and filmmakers are devising a new polar aesthetics that challenges the dominant narrative of mainstream media, which equates climate change with apocalyptic spectacles of melting ice and desperate polar bears, and green capitalism with masculinist imagery of sublime wilderness and imperial heroics.

In what follows I present many different threads that you can use to connect the book to an already existing syllabi in a diverse range of courses. For those who have already taught my earlier books or articles but especially Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions (1993), you might also be interested in teaching this one as some of the artists were influenced by my earlier writings.

For feminist art history, visual culture or design classes, teachers might be interested in teaching Chapters 1 and 2. Though at first glance climate art and film on the polar region and the Circumpolar North might seem gender and race neutral, the feminist intersectional analysis of representation of the Arctic and Antarctic in these chapters suggests that this welcome reemergence of interest in polar narratives and art often comes wrapped in a colonial nostalgia for white male heroism. Chapter 1 on Antarctica focuses on four contemporary women artists — Anne Noble, Judit Hersko, Connie Samaras, and Joyce Campbell — whose work collectively creates a specifically feminist critical aesthetics that counters such an approach, since their art addresses the historic
exclusion of women altogether from the continent until the 1960s and 1970s and the way the visual tropes of Antarctica as the last great wilderness on earth contribute to maintaining the perception that Antarctica is still an all-male continent or a living memorial to this earlier moment when only men could populate the continent.

Chapter 2 might also be of interest since it complicates official polar exploration art by creating plausible, yet fictional, accounts based on the historical record to address the climate crisis. Isaac Julien’s reformulation of the African American polar explorer Matthew Henson (1866 – 1955) not only makes Henson’s accomplishments part of northern polar exploration but creates a new fictional persona for him that challenges mainstream homophobic narratives of imperial heroics. Swedish artist Katja Aglert, in her conceptual project *Winter Event — Antifreeze*, uses a variety of media and aesthetic techniques to unsettle colonialist and nationalist masculinist history as the major mode of engagement in the Arctic till this day.

In Chapter 3 there is work on the new polar aesthetics that addresses questions of memory and what it means to make art and film about a warming Arctic without sentimentalizing or spectacularizing Indigenous suffering. Film and media studies scholars might be interested in my discussion of three innovative short films on the Arctic that call forth new representations of the climate crisis that focus on a world beset by uncertainty. An online documentary by Zacharias Kunuk and Ian Munro, titled *Qapirangajuq: Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* (2010), takes the perspective of an Igloolik community highly affected by climate change. It puts front and center communities from Canada’s Circumpolar North, who craft a decolonial method of knowledge production through filmmaking.

Chapters 4 and 5, cowritten with Elena Glasberg, suggests that the category of art continues to change as artists create new aesthetic arrangements of visibility capable of comprehending the material and representational aspects of climate breakdown (Roni Horn, Amy Balkin, Lillian Ball, Andrea Bowers and Annie Pootoogook). Artists and art historians might be interested in teaching these chapters as artists discussed in this section focus on some of these new aesthetic practices and the way they sensitize us to the unfolding process of climate breakdown. They also might be adopted in more general classes that include the iconic photography of Yosemite by Ansel Adams and Carleton Watkins and coverage of the pieces of land art or environmental art from the 1960s or 1970s. Teachers could juxtapose these earlier works with those emerging from Indigenous, feminist and non-western contexts in the Circumpolar North (Subhankar Banerjee, Andrea Bowers, Amy Balkin, amongst others) to consider a wider range of new directions in art, photography, and conceptual art that engages landscape, environment and ecology. Such approaches contest older romantic views of pristine
nature in the Arctic that continues to be used to justify Indigenous absence rather than presence.

Again scholars of visual culture, film and media studies might be interested in Chapter 6 that focuses on innovative new-media films that take into account increased development by the oil industry, local knowledge, and the resilience of Indigenous communities. Combining strategies from documentary and speculative fiction genres, while incorporating scientific fact, these films demonstrate the challenges of representing the built-in invisibilities of climate change as well as the corporate obfuscations of the damage caused by extractivism. The chapter discusses experimental projects by the Swiss video artist Ursula Biemann and the Canadian filmmaker Brenda Longfellow to bring awareness to what is not otherwise fully visible by creating new forms of perception and representational framings that capture the intricacies of visibility.

Chapter 7 focuses on more collaborative and participatory forms of art and film to move students past the psychic numbing of being overwhelmed by climate change while demonstrating their own political agency as central to imagining and constructing a better world. Activist artists such as Liberate Tate, the British Platform collective, Not an Alternative, and the Yes Men express a desire for change within the museum system of sponsorship, governance, and finance. Their work aims at holding Western art, natural history, and science museums to account for their complicity through the solicitation and acceptance of corporate sponsorship, in enabling climate change and perpetuating the colonial narratives that underlie it.

The later chapters might be taught in a wider range of courses since they show how historically under-represented groups are also pioneering new forms of environmental justice work in their resistance, and this, too, applies to Arctic Inuit women activists discussed in this book, such as Sheila Watt-Cloutier who movingly demanded “the right to be cold.” Watt-Cloutier has been instrumental in shaping an environmental justice campaign and has been widely recognized for suggesting that climate change is a matter of both Indigenous and multispecies survival (chapters 6, 7 and epilogue). For her “if we don’t have our environment, we cannot survive.” Artists, writers, activists, and filmmakers in *Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics* share her vision in creating an alternative voice for the future, one opposed to the seemingly inevitable colonial imaginary for which the environment is a means that supports the ends of unregulated capitalism and hyperextractivism.

*Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics: Artists Reimagine the Arctic and Antarctic* is available from Duke University Press. Request an exam copy on our website. Students can save 30% on their purchase with coupon E22BLOOM.