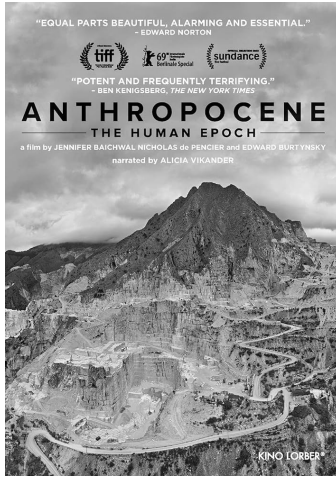


Jennifer Baichwal, Edward Burtynsky, Nicholas de Pencier, *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch*, Mercury Films, 87' - 2018



The term *Anthropocene* refers to the current geological era in which human activities have significantly altered Earth's conditions and processes. This mutation has become more pronounced since the Industrial Revolution, leading us away from the Earth System state, typical of the Holocene Epoch that post-dates the last glaciation. Although the Anthropocene is not currently a formally defined geological unit within the Geological Time Scale – officially we still live in the Meghalayan age of the Holocene Epoch – many phenomena suggest an irreversible change in our relationship with the Earth. These phenomena have occurred significantly since industrialization, including: a massive increase in erosion and sediment transport; disturbances of elements such as carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, and various metals along with new chemicals; environmental changes generated by these disturbances, such as global warming, sea level rise, ocean acidification, and the expansion of dead zones in the oceans; rapid

changes in the biosphere, both on land and at sea, due to habitat loss, predation, invasions, or extinctions of animal species; the proliferation and dispersal of many new minerals and other materials, such as techno fossils produced by humans. Science, art, and cinema are collectively contributing a diverse range of experiences and creations to help define the peculiar era in which we currently exist. Filmmakers Jennifer Baichwal, Edward Burtynsky, and Nicholas de Pencier have contributed to the debate producing the documentary *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch*, a journey across six continents to investigate the various ways in which humans are exploiting Earth's resources and altering our planet like never before. The documentary supports the theses of the Anthropocene Working Group, an interdisciplinary research group established in 2009 as part of the Subcommittee on Quaternary Stratigraphy and a constituent body of the International Commission on Stratigraphy, which is attempting to demonstrate the transition to a new epoch through scientific evidence. Presented in World Premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2018 and included into its annual year-end TIFF's Canada's Top Ten list, the work is a prominent feature of the *Anthropocene Project*. The project encompasses exhibitions at renowned institutions such as the Art Gallery of Ontario, the National Gallery of Canada, and, among other places in Italy at MAST, in Bologna. Additionally, two books – one consisting of essays and the other of photography – have been published as part of this groundbreaking visual initiative. Through the work of landscape photographer Edward Burtynsky, the film is conceived as a plural and impressively splendid and terrifying journey around the world through deserts, mountains, forests, and the depths of the oceans where the

increasingly incise signs of human loom: rampant deforestation, large industry, uncontrolled urbanization, indiscriminate exploitation of land and people. It shows the side effects of human dominance over 85% of the landmass not covered by glaciers, which occurs through agriculture, industrialization, urbanization, massive exploitation of fossil fuels, production of synthetic products, and nuclear testing. The journey shows 43 places in 20 different countries: each stop represents one of the worst global environmental disasters. It begins in Kenya, where poachers kill thousands of elephants to obtain ivory. It continues to Norilsk, in Siberia, one of the most polluted cities in the world, which hosts nickel mines and other metals. The journey then takes us to the Chilean desert of Atacama, where lithium, essential for cell phone batteries, is processed. Meanwhile, in Immerath, Germany, historical architectures are demolished to expand open-pit coal mines. The documentary reveals the structure of an essay film divided into thematic chapters supporting a clear thesis. With a didactic, educational, and politically-oriented approach, it is by far both a transparent analysis and a denunciation. The film displays a sovereign survey of the planet's overall body, focusing on its fundamental features, from the geophysical and environmental to the economic and productive, from the socio-demographic to the anthropological and cultural. The narrative unfolds through touching landscapes and struggling voices: while the linearity of the journey is held together by Oscar-winning actress Alicia Vikander's voiceover, the testimonies of the indigenous people represent the complexity and multiplicity of the disasters. The languages of storytelling are many: English, Russian, Mandarin, Cantonese, Italian, German. A global fresco

composed of testimonies that live beyond the atlas of wonders begins to take shape through fragments. The three directors of *Anthropocene* had previously worked together on the same themes. Photographer Edward Burtynsky traveled the world observing changes in landscapes due to industrial work and manufacturing to realize *Manufactured Landscapes* (2006) directed by Jennifer Baichwal. Burtynsky and Baichwal later directed the documentary *Watermark* (2013), which shows how the essential element for human existence has been used, while at the same time being wasted. Like *Anthropocene*, the narrative unfolds through a bold journey, from China to Bangladesh, from the United States to India, showing us how human action has been capable of exploiting the presence of water, but also the greed that has depleted its value to the detriment of some areas of the world. *Anthropocene* is the latest work by Burtynsky and Baichwal together with Nicholas de Pencier, previously producer, representing the completion of the trilogy of documentaries, devoted to the impact of human activities on our planet.

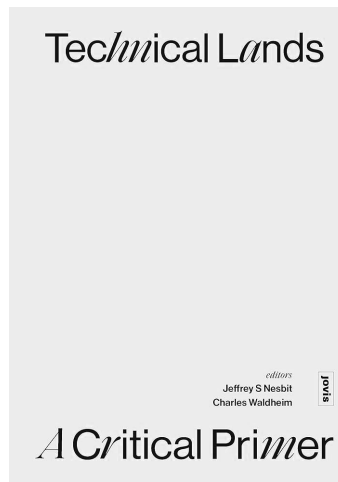
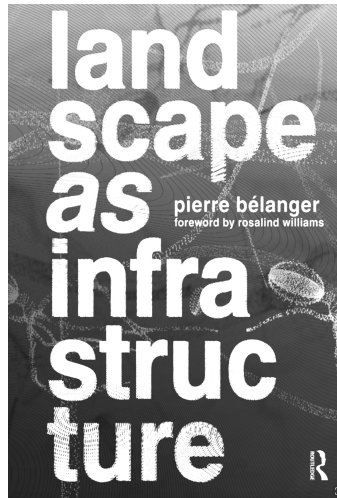
Laying within the fragile intersection of art and science, the trilogy shows how humans have marked territories with strong inequalities: the advantage of one area has always led to the impoverishment and condemnation of a second one. As the final chapter, *Anthropocene* seems like a dystopian feature about the dark side of prosperity, started from consumerism and the reckless consumption of Earth's resources. The film serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need to acknowledge and address the destructive forces at play in our quest for dominance.

Alessandra Lancellotti
Politecnico di Torino

Pierre Bélanger, *Landscape as Infrastructure: A Base Primer*, Routledge, 2017, 508 pp.

Paperback: € 63,50 - ISBN 9781138643925

Jeffrey S. Nesbit, Charles Waldheim, *Technical Lands: A Critical Primer*, Jovis, 2023, 252 pp. Paperback: € 32,00 - ISBN 9783868597042



How do infrastructures and technicalities articulate (and perhaps confuse) our conventional understanding of land(scape)? How do they act as a reframing of nature, through culture, value and capital? What implications does this hold in

a so-called regime of modernity? According to the planetary urbanization hypothesis, geographical spaces have become so interconnected that nature has transformed into what Jason Moore defines as “cheap nature” through power dynamics, wealth distribution, and labor. Hence, making its way is a “capitalism in nature” indicating that nature is now intricately woven into the economic circuits of capital. Right after Modernism, some scholars acknowledge this epistemic shift by recognizing the value of nature as an object of design and so nature becomes landscape and urban design recognizes landscape through the discipline of “landscape urbanism.” Especially following a post-structuralist perspective, there have been attempts to discuss these positions looking progressively at nature as a device.

Landscape as Infrastructure: A Base Primer, curated by Pierre Bélanger in 2017 and *Technical Lands: A Critical Primer*, edited by Jeffrey S. Nesbit and Charles Waldheim in 2023 present themselves as two examples of this reconceptualization. While *Landscape as Infrastructure* stands among the earliest works in the tradition of Landscape Urbanism, arguably acting as one of its manifestos, *Technical Lands* seeks to deliver a critical re-reading of the idea, encouraging dialogue with more recent literatures and presenting some forms of what have been defined as operational landscapes. This connection between the two volumes is reflected in their subtitles, which strongly suggest, despite an obvious six-year gap, a discernible continuity, if not an enhancement of the theory. Together, they reach the intent to grasp the metabolic interactions within the dynamics of a planetary urbanization.

Landscape as Infrastructure dismantles any romanticized view of the landscape: it should not be looked at as a setting, instead being reduced to nothing more than infrastructure. As a collection of essays spanning more than a decade, this