

Benh Zeitlin Breaks the Ice

Kerem Ak



*Through his movie, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012), Benh Zeitlin thaws the ice between humankind and nature and provides a unique and heartfelt perspective about how to come to terms with the more-than-human world. Watch the video essay here: <https://flowcasts.uni-bannover.de/nodes/JNOWr>.*

Creator's Statement

My video essay, titled “Benh Zeitlin Breaks the Ice,” endeavors to make sense of the complex, ongoing, evolving, and destructive global phenomenon: climate change. Examining the movie itself, the essay takes a closer look at the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change. This perplexing phenomenon occupies a serious presence across various media outlets, and the news about the current state and developments of Earth’s climate tends to generate a profound sense of loss, hopelessness, and grief. To put it another way, representations of the ecological crisis in mainstream media seem to only exacerbate the fracture between humanity and nature. This prompts contemplation whether there is a potential to alleviate and process the distressing feelings associated with the ongoing climate catastrophe. Cinema, with its potential to demonstrate alternative perspectives and effectively address climate distress, emerges as a powerful medium capable of addressing the issue. Therefore, cinema functions not only as an effective tool to tackle

the problem but also as a platform to offer an opportunity for a renewed connection between individuals and the natural world. In this video essay, I reference Benh Zeitlin's film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012) to illustrate cinema's capacity to grapple with climate change and instill sentiments of love and hope in these times of ecological chaos.

Beasts exemplifies the destructive facets of climate change by making use of distinctive montage techniques, reminiscent of those commonly found in Sergei Eisenstein's cinema. These unique techniques serve to amplify the emotional and intellectual impact of the shots on the audience. The imagery in these shots varies from tangible elements like icebergs to poignant representations of extinct cattle species such as aurochs. Furthermore, Zeitlin intentionally employs unsteady, wobbly camera movements throughout the film, crafting a documentary-like effect that captures the perspective of a child experiencing climate change. These stylistic choices proved useful in allowing me to touch not only the devastating impacts of climate change but also one's intimate contact with the more-than-human world.

In this video essay, I initially conceptualize climate change using the term "hyperobject," interpreting it as a phenomenon that "involves profoundly different temporalities than the human-scale ones" (Morton 1). Through an examination of stylistic preferences, visual portrayals, and the conceptual framing of climate change as a "hyperobject," the essay seeks to deepen our comprehension of the nuanced and intricate relationship between cinema and environmental issues. I articulate this concept through a voice-over and support it with the film's compelling footage illustrating the consequences or effects of climate change. I also make use of split-screen techniques in order to demonstrate the types of human interaction with nature, aiming to reinforce the notion of building up a more constructive relationship with the natural world.

Author Biography

Kerem Ak is a student of the North American Studies Master's program at Leibniz University Hannover. His study interests include fantasy literature, utopias and dystopias, nature writing, climate fiction, festival movies, and podcasts. He also contributed to the *T-Litcon: 1st Annual International Conference on Literature: "Human Rights & Literature"* (2023) with his abstract on Gilbert Imlay's epistolary novel, *The Emigrants* (1793).

Works Cited

Beasts of the Southern Wild. Directed by Benh Zeitlin, Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2012.
Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. U of Minnesota P, 2013.