

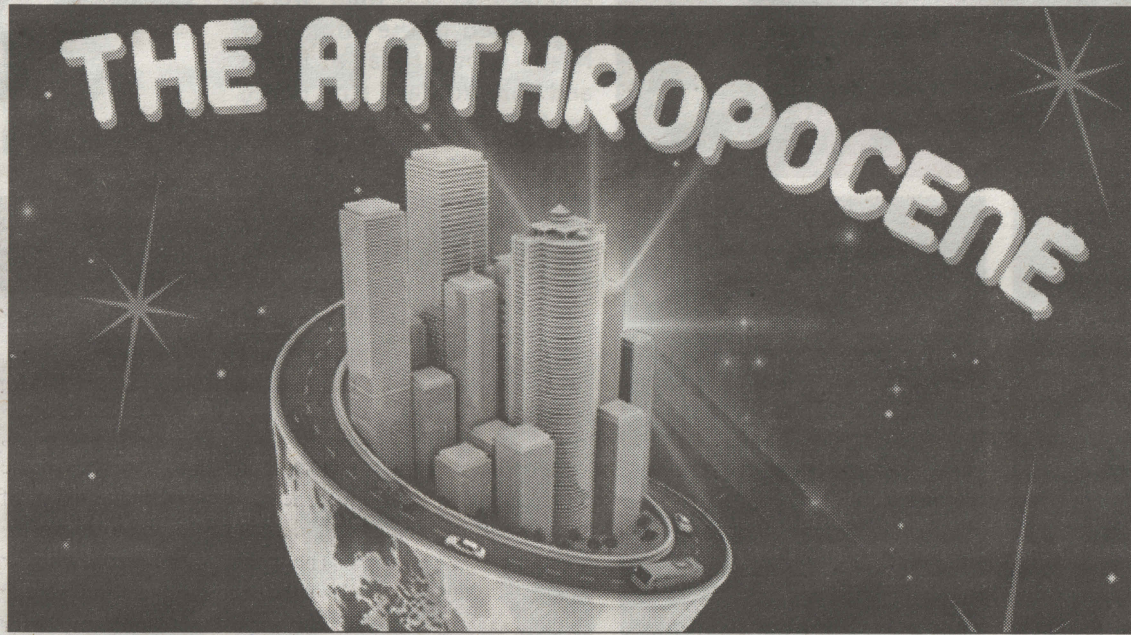
Sci-fi as a weapon against environmental crisis

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There's more reality to science fiction than one would think. Last Friday, the panel on science fiction and the environment discussed how elements of fictional worlds can influence social action for the environment in our world. This was done through using the intersection of media studies and the environment as the cornerstone of the panel, which focused on provocations that the panelists brought forward.

Summer Harrison, an assistant professor of English and environmental studies at Drew, started off the event by saying, "The ways we represent the environment and humanity's relationship to it are crucial to transforming public consciousness."

Harrison then introduced Alenda Chang, an assistant professor at the University of Connecticut. Chang's provocation included remediation (reversing or ceasing environmental damage). She touched on different methods of remediation, including phytoremediation (using plants) and bioremediation (using organisms) to help with the issue of environmental degradation.



The anthropocene is a proposed epoch indicating humanity's negative impact on the planet.

In conjunction with this, she combined the digital realm with the environmental one. Using digital tools, she showed the audience the effects of environmental issues, such as a digital renderings of the scale of oil spills (which covered much of New England) and the rise in sea level affecting coastal regions, as well as superimposing the extent of flooding in Pakistan in 2010 onto the United States (which also covered New England). Chang also talked about how gaming reflects the environment, where many games are about

resource extraction (i.e mining for gold) or post-apocalyptic areas of people trying to survive in a harsh environment.

Andrew Rose, a lecturer of environmental rhetoric and English at Christopher Newport University, was the next panelist to speak. "A major motivation for my work is thinking about the intersections between the environmental movement and social justice movements," Rose began. He noted that climate change brings the two movements together, and that the new genre

of climate fiction helps to solidify their connection. "Climate fiction stories are beginning to engage with this question of a future that is increasingly difficult to predict, where humans are in an environment that is quite different." Climate fiction, Rose hopes, can help to predict future events that are connected to the environment.

He went on to talk about Anthropocene, which is a possible epoch that marks humanity's significant impact on the Earth. Rose noted the balance of humans'

ability to control different aspects of the environment while still being helpless in other environmental events, like hurricanes and floods. Because of this agency that humans have, Rose notes, "humans need to understand themselves as a part of the ecosystem, rather than above it or outside of it."

The last panelist was Edmond Chang, assistant professor of English at Drew, whose attentions were focused on digital water in relation to the reality of the water shortage. He noted that in games, water is a simple aspect, but is also very complicated to animate. "There are very few games I play that use water as a resource," Chang noted. The irony of the focus of water in gaming compared with the shortage of it in areas of our world was a major provocation.

During the question portion of the panel, Marianna D'Aries ('17) asked about the importance of video games instead of literature when focusing on the environment. Alenda commented, "It's not to say you can't have an interactive experience with literature, but there's something about the experience of gameplay that requires conscious decision-making and assessment of your environment. That is compelling from the ethical perspective."