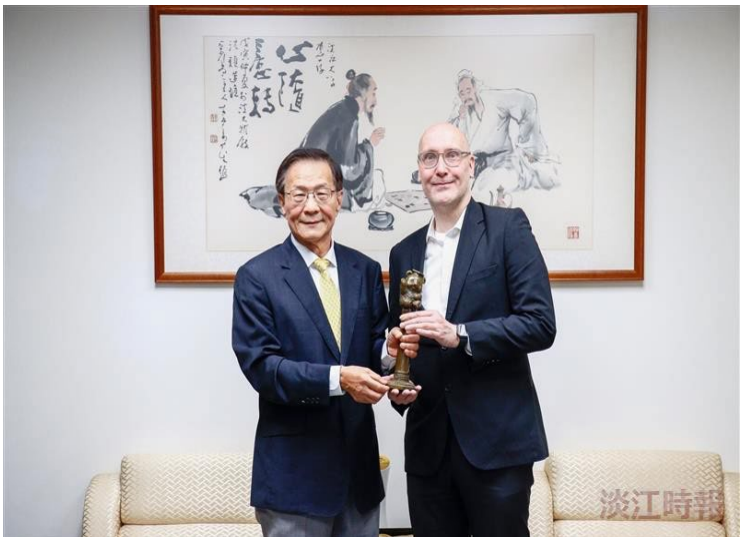
Tamkang Clement and Carrie Chair

LECTURE 34



Professor Dr. Jussi Parikka

1. Professor in Digital Aesthetics and Culture, Aarhus University. 2022-
2. Visiting Research Professor, Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton. 2022-
3. Visiting Professor, FAMU, Prague. 2021-2024
4. Member of Academia Europaea (Film, Media & Visual Studies section). 2021

Date: 2025. 5. 29

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Information and Communication of the College of Liberal Arts invited Professor Jussi Parikka as the Tamkang Clement and Carrie Chair for a campus-wide talk on May 29th, 2025. Professor Parikka is a world-renowned Finnish new media theorist who holds the professorship in Digital Aesthetics and Culture at Aarhus University, Denmark, where he leads the Digital Aesthetics Research Centre (DARC) and serves as a founding co-director of the Environmental Media and Aesthetics research program in the School of Communication and Culture.

Professor Parikka's academic credentials include a Ph.D. in Cultural History from the University of Turku (2007). He previously held a professorship at the Winchester School of Art (University of Southampton). In recognition of his significant contributions to the field, he was elected as a member of the Academia Europaea in the Film, Media & Visual Studies section in 2021. Professor Parikka is known for his groundbreaking scholarly work in media archaeology, environmental humanities, and digital culture. His publications include the acclaimed media ecology trilogy: Digital Contagions (2007/2016), the award-winning Insect Media (2010), and A Geology of Media (2015), along with The Anthrobscene (2014). His recent works include Operational Images (2023) and Living Surfaces: Images, Plants, and Environments of Media (2024). The global impact of his scholarship is evidenced by the translation of his books into 11 languages, including Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Czech, Italian, French, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Beyond his academic writing, Professor Parikka is an accomplished curator who has contributed to significant exhibitions including transmediale 2023, Helsinki Biennial 2023, and 'Motores del Clima' (Laboral, Gijon, 2023-2024). His interdisciplinary approach uniquely bridges technological, environmental, and cultural discourses, offering innovative frameworks for understanding our technologically mediated world.

The overall faculties and students attended the talk were close to 200, including undergraduate students from the Department of Information and Communication, as well as undergraduate and graduate students from the Department of Information and Library Science, Department of History, Department of Mass Communication, Department of Chinese Literature, and the librarians and staff from the University Library. There were also attending guests traveled from off campus, including researchers and students from various academic institutions. The keynote speech was very well received.

Topic: Environments of Digital Culture: The Humanities in the Anthropocene

Jussi Parikka

ABSTRACT

This talk will elaborate on why digital culture and computing need to be understood as part of our environmental questions and struggles. Environments of digital culture are approached in two ways: as the locations and places where digitality is visible in the changing landscapes; and how this environment is also our ecological situation and the ecological stakes of understanding computation.

This planetary scale focus on computational culture starts from specific places: corporate server farms in South-East Finland to tech industries in Taiwan to other locations across the planet where the impact of the transformation can be seen and where media studies investigates questions of water and energy as much as it does traditional themes concerning human communication.

Recent years of environmental media research have started to focus on such aspects of geography of the Anthropocene and in a similar vein, I want to address what the field of media and communications, as well as the Arts and Humanities in general, can contribute. How do our ways of knowledge production change when we look at our own material footprint, and how do emerging new research fields, such as the datafication of agriculture, link to the biggest topics discussed in the Humanities, namely indeed the Anthropocene, the epoch of mass-scale environmental change.

Vice President for Academic Affairs Prof. Hui-Huang Hsu presents the Panda trophy

Pro. Dr. Jussi Parikka delivers the lecture

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Group photo of faculty members of the College of Liberal Arts and Dr. Jussi Parikka

The Clement and Carrie Chair Giving a Public Talk on ‘Environments of Digital Culture: The Humanities in the Anthropocene’ on May 29th, 2025

MINUTE

Professor Jussi Parikka opened his keynote lecture by posing the central question: what are, in most concrete terms, the environments of digital culture? Where does 'digital culture' exist?

He began with a personal story about his Finnish hometown in south-east Finland, where he witnessed the transformation of a once-booming paper mill factory area that went through industrial decline and is now experiencing a new kind of industry boom with data centers, including Google's facility in nearby Hamina, and green transition industries like e-battery production facilities occupying old factory buildings. Parikka described this transformation as part of what he calls 'banal datafication' - box-like data center architectures that represent a different mood from the hype of AI revolution, yet signify fundamental changes in land use and geographies of automation.

He concluded this opening section by questioning whether, parallel to discussions of smart cities, there should be a term that speaks to the countryside, proposing the concept of 'data ruralism'.

The lecture was structured around three key themes. First, Parikka revisited his book and concept of *Geology of Media*, arguing that understanding digital culture requires examining its material basis in minerals, energy infrastructures, and geological processes. He emphasized that to comprehend media culture, we must recognize how it is fundamentally made of earth materials and dependent on energy systems. Parikka highlighted the historical coincidence that the peak period of mass media aligns with the peak period of fossil fuel cultures, creating a paradoxical situation where media technologies serve as the very tools through which we scientifically understand planetary conditions and environmental change, while simultaneously being major contributors to planetary-scale environmental costs.

Second, Parikka addressed methodological questions about knowledge production in computational culture. He discussed the concept of 'collapse informatics'—originally from computer science—to examine the sustainability of digital humanities practices. This framework questions whether current computational methods and energy-intensive platforms represent justifiable costs for humanities research, particularly when considering global scalability. Parikka advocated for experimental approaches like Solar Protocol, which shifts server locations based on solar radiation availability, demonstrating alternative models for environmentally conscious digital design.

Third, the lecture explored 'data ruralism'—the datafication of agricultural landscapes through precision agriculture, smart farming technologies, and agricultural surveillance systems. Parikka examined how sensors transform fields into 'data skins', while corporate consolidation creates platform dependencies in food production. He termed this phenomenon 'abstract agriculture', where soil, crops, and livestock become integrated into computational systems and financial markets.

Throughout, Parikka argued that the Anthropocene represents not just an environmental crisis but a fundamental challenge to humanities methodology. He questioned what constitutes sustainable computational thinking and how universities might function as energy systems rather than merely knowledge institutions. The lecture concluded by comparing data centers and agricultural plots as conceptually adjacent spaces—both representing environments of datafication that reshape landscapes while sustaining planetary systems.

The lecture successfully demonstrated how environmental media studies expands beyond traditional media analysis to encompass broader questions of planetary boundaries, energy justice, and the material conditions of knowledge

production. Parikka's approach offers a compelling framework for understanding digital culture's environmental implications while proposing more sustainable alternatives for humanities research and technological design.

*This keynote lecture report was compiled and written by Assistant Professor Hui-Lan Chang, Department of Information and Communication, who served as the moderator for this international lecture, presenting an opening introduction titled 'Anthropocene and Media Ecology' that introduced Parikka's media ecology trilogy: *Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technology*, *Digital Contagions: A Media Archaeology of Computer Viruses*, and *A Geology of Media*.