

English 381: Film, Media, and Culture – Ecocinema

Winter 2014; Classroom: MCK 214, M/W 4-5:50pm; CRN 25698; Instructor: Dr. Stephen Rust
Office: PLC 239; Office Hours: M/W 2:15-3:45pm; Contact: srust@uoregon.edu, 541-346-0058

This class will explore the intersections that exist between film, media, and culture through a specific focus on the intersections between cinema and the broader social, scientific, and political concerns of global environmental change. The class is built around film screenings and readings that examine the cultural, aesthetic, and industrial aspects of film and media through the disciplinary framework of ecocriticism – a rapidly growing interdisciplinary field of study dedicated to examine the multifaceted relationships between nature and culture. By combining readings in the field with a range of Hollywood and transnational film texts we will discuss how films work to create textual space that both masks and unmasks real world environmental issues. Through screenings, readings, lectures, discussions, group presentations, and written assignments, students will learn how to analyze the cultural, historical, industrial, and aesthetic dimensions of film and media.

Required Textbooks:

Ecocinema Theory and Practice, Eds. Rust, Monani, and Cubitt (Routledge/AFI, 2012)

Transnational Ecocinema, Eds. Gustafsson and Kääpä (Intellect, 2013)

Access to Blackboard for Additional Course Reading

Optional/Recommended Textbook:

A Short Guide to Writing About Film, Corrigan (Bedford/St. Martin) – Any edition

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will learn to apply theoretical, critical, and historical concepts to the analysis of cinema as an aesthetic medium, technological industry, and cultural form.
- Students will learn to recognize and critique the relationships between the film industry, popular film texts, and the cultural contexts – including local, national, and transnational contexts - in which these film texts are situated with particular attention to ecological issues.
- Students will learn to research, gather, and synthesize information from primary and secondary sources and apply this information to the analysis of film and media texts.
- Students will learn to develop and present original arguments supported by evidence from multiple sources in both group presentations and individual essays.
- Students will learn to discuss their insights into class readings and film screenings and respond thoughtfully to the insights of their peers during class discussion.

Assignments/Grading: A = 93-97%, A- = 90-92%, B+ = 88-89%, B = 83-87%, B- = 80-82% etc.

10%: Group Presentation and Class Participation

10%: Annotated Keywords and Bibliography

20%: In-Class Midterm

30%: Reading Responses

30%: Take-Home Final Exam

Reading Responses: You are responsible for completing six 1-2 page single-spaced responses to the assigned readings and films. Type these in 12 point font and use double-sided printing. Responses should both summarize and analyze the reading. I want to tell that you not only completed the reading but are thinking critically about the readings and applying them to the media texts. In other words, your first couple of paragraphs should summarize the entire reading(s), your next paragraph or two should

analyze specific passages and keywords in the reading(s), and your last couple of paragraphs should use the reading to analyze specific sequences, film techniques, characters, and plot elements in the film(s). Use formal prose. If you have personal opinions about the films or readings, save these for the very end of your response. Directly cite from the readings when necessary and use MLA or Chicago citation style. The goal of these responses will be to generate an ongoing discussion about and bring these ideas into play in class discussions. Responses are due in class on Wednesdays of the weeks indicated. I do not generally like to accept assignments by email but if you will be absent you may email your assignment to me before class. Late responses are accepted up to one week late at a 40% penalty.

Presentation: Each student must sign up for a group presentation during the term. Presentations will take place on the day listed on the course schedule. There will be six presentation groups consisting of 6-7 students each. Each student will be individually responsible for a 3 minute presentation on a topic related to the week's film. Each student will write a 300-word summary/outline of their research (plus citations) and bring this to class on the day you present. Each group should cover the following topics: **a)** Production, **b)** Reception, **c)** Cast and Crew, **d)** Scientific/Environmental references, **e)** Cultural/Historical references, **f)** Related film/media texts. The group should meet twice: once to divide topics and again to practice. Your group will have approximately 20 minutes to present 20 slides using Prezi, Microsoft PowerPoint, Google Docs or similar software. Slides should be filled primarily with images, not text. Do not simply read from your slides. Your group may also include a video clip. It is YOUR responsibility to make sure our classroom technology can support the media you plan to show. Get to know your fellow presenters as you will need to be in contact with them before your presentation. Get contact information in class or via our Blackboard site.

Annotated Keywords: For Week 5 instead of a reading response you will turn in a list of five annotated keywords that any student new to the study of environmental criticism should have in their scholarly toolkit. Keywords are words that academics use to represent important concepts, theories, tropes, and movements within a particular field of study. One example is the keyword "ecorealism" – a term I have coined in my research to identify the ways that filmmakers represent real-world ecological issues within the fictional space of narrative films. Other examples include terms like globalization, postmodernism, new media, cultural studies, etc. You may invent your own keywords, or simply identify them in the course readings or other introductory texts in ecocriticism that I will put on reserve at the Knight Library. For each annotation you will provide: **a)** a concise but complete definition of approximately 10-25 words; **b)** a 100-150 word description providing important background information about the term and/or how the term applies to the study of film/media texts; **c)** a visual example or representation of the keyword with a 100-150 word analysis of how/why the visual image is useful for making sense of how the term applies to the study of film/media texts; and **d)** a citation for the source of the term and/or one or two sources for further information on the keyword.

Annotated Bibliography: For Week 8 instead of a reading response you will complete an annotated bibliography of ten sources and/or resources in the field of environmental film/media studies. You may use the bibliographies provided with the course textbook readings, the online bibliography at EcomediaStudies.org, and the Knight Library databases as starting places. For each entry in your bibliography you will include: **a)** a complete citation in MLA or Chicago format; **b)** a 100-150 word summary of the source (main arguments, key ideas, etc); and **c)** a 100-150 word evaluation of the quality and potential usefulness of the source. The focus of your bibliography is entirely up to you: for example you might focus on a specific type of media such as video games or television, a specific film or media text or important director or other person, or keywords from your keywords assignment.

Midterm Exam: Bring a green book to class on Monday of Week 6 for the in-class midterm exam. This closed-book exam will consist of two essay questions that will prompt you to think about the relationship between the class readings and films. Each answer should be approximately 750 words. Your reading response assignments will be good practice for the midterm. As you read, pay particular attention to the critical and theoretical attention that the authors use and as you watch the films in class take a lot of notes, particularly on the primary elements of media aesthetics – cinematography, mise en scene, sound, and editing. I reserve the right to alter the format of the exam to include multiple choice, matching, etc. if I deem it necessary. If I make this decision I will alert you prior to the exam.

Take-home Final: Your final exam for the class will call upon you to answer two extended essay questions and to create your own syllabus for a course on this topic. Each essay will be approximately 1500 words and the syllabus about one-page. The essay questions, which will be distributed Week 10, will ask you to integrate critical analysis of the film texts with supporting evidence from the course readings. Outside sources will be optional but not required. These essays should evidence depth of reasoning and textured writing that integrates pertinent quotations from the source material. Since this is an English department class, your essays must feature an original and engaging thesis, well reasoned claims supported by solid research from varied and reputable sources, smooth transitions, varied sentence structure, fresh diction, strong voice, appropriate tone, and original thinking. The syllabus will be a fun way for you to choose a range of films/television shows/internet videos, etc and arrange them into a ten-week schedule supported by readings of your choice from your annotated bibliography, the course textbooks, or other sources of your choosing.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Visualizing Global Environmental Change

Film: *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleischer, 1973)

Reading: Blackboard PDFs: Chapter 1 of *Ecocriticism* by Greg Garrard and Chapters 2 and 3 of *A Short Guide to Writing about Film* by Timothy Corrigan

Week 2: Nature Writes the Screenplays: Wildlife and Documentary Filmmaking

Film: *The Vanishing Prairie* (James Algar, 1954)

Reading: Claire Molloy, “Nature Writes the Screenplays” and Luis Vivanco, “Penguins are Good to Think With” in *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*

Due: Reading Response 1

Week 3: Companion Species and Wilderness

MLK Holiday Monday – No class meeting – Watch the film on your own before class on Wednesday

Film: *Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog, 2005)

Reading: Jennifer Ladino, “Working with Animals” and Pat Brereton “Appreciating the Views” in *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*

Due: Reading Response 2; Group 1 Presentation

Week 4: Eco-Horror and Environmental Justice

Film: *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Toby Hooper, 1974)

Reading: Carter Soles, “Sympathy for the Devil” in *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*

Due: Annotated Keywords; Group 2 Presentation

Week 5: What Counts as Ecocinema?

Film: *Rivers and Tides* (Thomas Riedelsheimer and Andy Goldsworthy, 2001)

Reading: Scott Macdonald, “The Ecocinema Experience” and David Ingram, “The Aesthetics and Ethics of Eco-film Criticism” in *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*

Due: Reading Response 3, Group 3 Presentation

Week 6: The Environmental Impact of Media Production

Midterm Exam: In-class exam on Monday. Bring a Green Book.

Films: *Ghana: Digital Dumping Ground* (Frontline/PBS, 2010) and *Greenlit* (Miranda Bailey, 2010)

Reading: There is no required reading this week due to the midterm but you are encouraged to read the optional PDF: Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller, excerpts from *Greening the Media*

Week 7: The Transnational Turn in Ecocinema Studies

Film: *Dirty Pretty Things* (Stephen Frears, 2002)

Reading: Pietari Kääpä and Tommy Gustafsson, “Introduction” and Pietari Kääpä “Transnational Approaches to Ecocinema” in *Transnational Ecocinema*

Due: Reading Response 5; Group 4 Presentation

Week 8: Popular Film and Ecology in China

Film: *If You Are the One* (Chinese: 非诚勿扰, Feng Xiaogang, 2006)

Reading: Corrado Neri, “China Has a Natural Environment, Too!”

Due: Annotated Bibliography; Group 5 Presentation

Week 9: Ideology and Aesthetics in Latin America

Film: *Even the Rain* (Spanish: También la lluvia, Icíar Bollaín, 2010)

Reading: Roberto Fornis-Broggi, “Ecocinema and ‘Good Life’” in *Transnational Ecocinema* and Andrew Hageman, “Ecocinema and Ideology” in *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*

Due: Reading Response 6; Group 6 Presentation

Week 10: The Big Picture: Theory and Philosophy

Film: TBA

Reading: Adrian Ivakhiv, “An Ecophilosophy of the Moving Image” in *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*

Due: No assignments are due this week in order to give you time to prep for the final.

Finals Week:

Post your Take-Home Final to Blackboard by 10 am on Tuesday, March 17