

## **English 381: Film, Media, and Culture – Ecocinema**

Spring 2014; Classroom: MCK 214, M/W 10-11:50 am; CRN 34684; 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 of cinema and 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 who participate fully in course activities and assignments will learn to:

- Recognize and analyze the importance of film and media texts in responding to and in some ways shaping public attitudes about the environment.
- Observe and discuss techniques and audiovisual strategies used by filmmakers to illuminate and mask ecological concerns
- Conduct close readings of ecological subtexts in a range of US and transnational films
- Research 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.

**Participation:** This is a discussion based class. As such it is absolutely vital that you complete the shared reading assignment prior to attending class. As you read, mark any passages that strike you as interesting or challenging and come to class with your texts and ready to discuss the texts.

**Screenings:** Watching films in a classroom requires you pay close attention to and take detailed notes on *how* the events unfold on screen and *why* each film takes its own specific form. If you are absent during a screening day you will need to make arrangements to see the film on your own. Several films are R rated. If this will be an issue for you please discuss it with me right away.

**Class Meetings & Procedures:** Attendance is required and checked daily. You are expected to attend all class meetings and participate in all discussions. Screening and discussing films in a group setting is vital to critical learning. If you plan to be absent on a given day you must contact me *in advance* to arrange make-up work/exams. The following attendance policy is straightforward and non-negotiable:

**FOUR** absences no questions asked. You are responsible for any missed screenings, notes, or assignments due. Starting with your **FIFTH** absence, for any reason, each absence will result in the automatic deduction of one-third letter grade from your final grade (e.g., from A- to B+).

**Academic Honesty & Plagiarism:** The University of Oregon values academic integrity. You are responsible for understanding and adhering to the standards of academic honesty outlined in the student handbook. Document ALL sources consulted in preparing your work, including TV shows, magazines, your peer, of course, anything found on the web. At a minimum, documented plagiarism will result in course failure. See the Library website for resources and information on citation styles and practices.

**Access For Students With Disabilities:** If you have a registered disability, which you believe may affect your performance in this course, please see or contact me the first week of the term so we can make the necessary arrangements for your fullest access to the course and its activities.

**Assignments/Grading:** A = 93-97%, A- = 90-92.5%, B+ = 88-89%, B = 84-87%, B- = 80-82.5% etc.  
15%: Class Participation: Including Group Presentation and Cinema Pacific Event  
20%: Annotated Keywords and Annotated Bibliography  
20%: Reading Responses  
20%: In-Class Midterm  
25%: Take-Home Final Exam

**Reading Responses:** You are responsible for completing five 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 before class on the Blackboard Discussion Board on Wednesdays of the weeks indicated. Late responses are accepted up to one week late at a 40% penalty.

**Presentation:** 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.

- Cover the following topics: **a)** Production, **b)** Reception, **c)** Cast and Crew, **d)** Scientific/Environmental references, **e)** Cultural/ Historical references, **f)** Related film/media
- 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.
- As a group, prepare six discussion questions for the class related to the week's reading.

**Annotated Keywords:** For Week 4 you will turn in a list of six 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. You may invent your own keywords, or simply identify them in the course readings or other introductory texts in ecocriticism.

- For each annotation you will provide: **a)** a concise but complete definition of approximately words; **b)** a 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 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 two-three sources for further information on the keyword.

**Annotated Bibliography:** Week 8 you will turn in 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 150 word summary of the source (main arguments, key ideas, etc); and **c)** a 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:** This closed book exam will prompt you to think about the relationship between the class readings, discussion, and films. 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. The format of the exam will include matching, multiple choice, and short essay

**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 1500-1800 words and the syllabus about two-pages. The essay questions, which will be distributed Week 9, 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. Create 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 (3/31 & 4/2)**

**Film:** *The Day After Tomorrow* (Roland Emmerich, 2004)

**Reading:** Blackboard PDFs: excerpts from *Ecocriticism* by Greg Garrard and *A Short Guide to Writing about Film* by Timothy Corrigan

**Due 4/2:** Post Reading Response 1 to Blackboard Discussion Board before class on Wednesday

### **Week 2: Nature Writes the Screenplays: Wildlife and Documentary Filmmaking (4/7 & 4/9)**

**Film:** *March of the Penguins* (Luc Jacquet, 2005)

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

**Due 4/9:** Reading Response 2 – Post to Blackboard before class

### **Week 3: Companion Species and Wilderness (4/14 & 4/16)**

**Film:** *The Cove* (Louie Psihoyos, 2009)

**Reading:** Jennifer Ladino, “Working with Animals” and Nicole Starsielski, “A Cultural History of Underwater Cinema” in *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*

**Due 4/26:** Reading Response 3; Group 1 Presentation

### **Week 4: Eco-Horror and Environmental Justice (4/21 & 4/23)**

**Film:** *The Wall* (Alan Parker, 1982)

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

**Due 4/23:** Annotated Keywords (Post to Blackboard); Group 2 Presentation

### **Cinema Pacific Assignment: Required**

**Attend:** Sunday, April 27, 2:00 p.m., Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, **Free**

The wildlife-inspired art of media and performance artists Vanessa Renwick and Deke Weaver will be discussed by the artists, joined by environmental studies scholar Ted Toadvine (head of UO Philosophy department) and artist Carla Bengtson (UO Department of Art). Renwick’s video installations *Hunting Requires Optimism* and *Medusa Smack* are on display April 25–June 29 in the Schnitzer Museum, and both Renwick and Weaver are presenting live performances creatively addressing human relationships with wolves on April 26.

### **Week 5: What Counts as Ecocinema? (4/28 & 4/30)**

**Film:** *Koyaanisqatsi* (Godfrey Reggio, 1982)

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

**Due 4/30:** Cinema Pacific Report Due – post one page single spaced review ; Group 3 Presentation

**Week 6: The Environmental Impact of Media Production (5/5 & 5/7)**

**Films:** *Ghana: Digital Dumping Ground* (University of British Columbia for Frontline/PBS, 2010)

**Reading:** There is no required reading this week due to the midterm but you are encouraged to read Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller, *Greening the Media*, 2013

**Midterm Exam Wednesday 5/7: In-Class**

**Week 7: The Transnational Turn in Ecocinema Studies (5/12 & 5/14)**

**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 5/14:** Reading Response 4; Group 4 Presentation

**Week 8: Nature, Gender, and Popular Film in China (5/19 & 5/21)**

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

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

**Due 5/21:** Annotated Bibliography Due; Group 5 Presentation

**Week 9: Latin America and Water Politics (5/26 & 5/28)**

Memorial Day Holiday 5/26: Watch this week’s film on your own or with classmates before 5/28.

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

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

**Due 5/28:** Reading Response 5; Group 6 Presentation

**Week 10: The Big Picture: Theory and Philosophy (6/2 & 6/4)**

**Film:** *There Will Be Blood* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2007)

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

**Due:** No assignments are due this week in order to give you time to work on the final.

**Finals Week:**

**Due 6/9:** Post your Take-Home Final to Blackboard by 10am on Monday June 9.