World Ecocinema: The movement of life (6 wk. summer course)
Instructor: Ted Geier

Much has been written about cinema and environment. This junction often addresses documentary nature films or environmentalist themes in blockbuster eco-disaster (*The Day After Tomorrow*) or eco-horror films (*Jaws*). Ecocinema is an established field of study that, much like Ecocriticism, tends then to be viewed as part of a political or, at least, practical social agenda. This course is interested in that particular frame, as well as the incredible breadth of studies in World Cinema—perhaps a concept that in itself opens cinema studies to the “eco” of homes around the globe and the tensions between collective space and threatened places.

The course, throughout, will also focus on an immanent historical study of cinema and of cinematics—the movement and technique of film—that can accommodate the incredible diversity of cinematic *thought* about the human and the nonhuman produced since film’s invention. Ecocinema is a compound term combining the now-ubiquitous “eco,” from the Greek *oikos* (community), and a twentieth-century French linguistic invention, “cine” taken by the film pioneers, the Lumiere brothers, from the Greek *kinema* (movement). We will attend to the formal and theoretical possibilities of these etymologies while also addressing the strong traditions in Ecocinema as, indeed, an environmental studies field.

Students will learn formal film terms they can apply to any film from any period, and we will study important historical developments in film technologies and styles in order to speak and write from an informed position about the narrative, thematic, and philosophical content communicated through cinematic technique. Students will leave the class understanding the four primary levels of film analysis (mise en scene, sound, editing, and cinematography) and with a general knowledge of important Ecocinema works and theories. Because this is a film class, students will be responsible for both readings and viewings. Some of the films will be readily available via online resources and in the public domain in some cases. All films will be available for viewing on Library Reserve, but do bear in mind that you may not be the only student attempting to view the film. Consider viewing together in small groups at the library or elsewhere, and I will try to facilitate this aspect of the class as best I can per student requests. I have kept readings relatively short to allow you time to view more films.

All readings are available on the course website except for the class film textbook:  

**Assignments & Grading**
Students will take two Examinations on formal film technique and basic environmental studies concepts covered in class lecture and readings, including an essay component on one of the Ecocinema films. One component of this examination takes a page from Art History and Music studies, asking students to consider a film clip they have not encountered in assigned class materials and to present their best critical evaluation of the scene at the levels of form, story, and theory/theme using terms and concepts covered in class. Examination 2 is not cumulative.
The Scene Analysis Paper will also ask students to analyze one scene in terms of narrative, theme, and technique ("scene" will be defined in lecture) and submit a scene shot log with the paper. The Ecocinema Study Paper will be a longer paper with some research but primarily student film analysis of no more than two class films. More details on the papers to be distributed in class.

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<tr>
<th>Attendance &amp; Participation:</th>
<th>20%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scene Analysis Paper (2-3pp)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examination 1</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>Examination 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecocinema Study Paper (4-5 pp)</td>
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**Class Schedule**

**Week 1:** **Introductions to cinema and cinematics**  
Early cinema examples (in class), basic film terms  
“The Greatest Movie of All Time” (and why), *Citizen Kane*  
**Introductions to the “eco” in ecocinema**  
Four “Ecocinema” films in the top 10 for all-time Documentary box office gross: *March of the Penguins, Earth, Chimpanzee, An Inconvenient Truth*  

Readings: Bordwell/Thompson, Ch. 1: Film as Art: Creativity, Technology, and Business  
Rust/Monani, “Cuts to dissolves—defining and situating ecocinema studies”  

**Week 2:** **Mainstream ecocinema, Hollywood narrative, and CGI**  
Why is the most popular film EVER an Ecofilm? *Avatar*  
**Agricultural and anti-industrial trends in cinema**  
Dovzhenko’s *Earth* (1930) and Jia Zhangke’s *Still Life* (2006)  

Readings: Bordwell/Thompson, Ch. 3: Narrative as Formal System  
Monani, “Evoking Sympathy and Empathy: The Ecological Indian and Indigenous Eco-activism”  
Dovzhenko, “Writing Screenplays About the Earth”  
Lu, “Gorgeous Three Gorges at Last Sight: Cinematic Remembrance and the Dialectic of Modernization”  

**Assignment:** Scene Analysis Paper due on course website by Friday evening.  

**Week 3:** **Focus on Film Form**  
Classic films with environmental themes and new works on Ecocinematics
Roman Polanski’s *Chinatown* and Terrence Malick’s *Tree of Life*

**Readings:** Bordwell/Thompson, Ch. 9: Film Genres & Ch. 5: Cinematography

**Assignment: Midterm Examination**

**Week 4:** All Cinema is Ecocinema? “Community Movement”
Themes of equality and injustice, transgression, and postcolonial ecocinematics
Ousmane Sembene’s *Le Noir de…*, Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers*, and Claire Denis’ *Chocolat*

**Readings:** Bordwell/Thompson, Ch. 4: Mise-en-Scene
Weaver-Hightower, “New Perspectives on Postcolonial Film”

**Week 5:** Animals and other nonhumans in cinema: Do we even care? Can we even?
Disney’s *Bambi*, Iñárritu’s *Amores Perros*, and Alfredson’s *Let the Right One In*

**Readings:** Burt, “Film and the Visual Animal”
Singer, “Tools for Research”
Brief excerpt from Rust & Soles on Ecohorror

**Assignment: Examination 2**

**Week 6:** Who’s Watching the Environment?
Towards an Eco-Cinema, Concepts and Problems
Reggio’s *KOYANISQATSÍ*, Hitchcock’s *Psycho*

**Readings:** Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”
Ivakhiv, “What Can a Film Do? Assessing Avatar’s Global Affects”
McDonald, “The Eco-Cinema Experience”

**Assignment: Ecocinema Study Paper**