

HIST SCI 350 / ENVIR ST 402 / COM ARTS 469  
**Green Screen: Environmental Film in History and Action.**

Fall 2007

Friday, 9-11:30am, 202 Bradley Memorial

**Instructors:**

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**Course Description:** How has film shaped past and present interactions between humans and the environment across different cultures and landscapes? The success of *An Inconvenient Truth* and *March of the Penguins* and the impact, in all of its myriad meanings, of *Blue Vinyl* and *The Real Dirt on Farmer John* are recent reminders of the extent to which film can inform and engage the public in critical environmental issues that affect human and animal lives across the globe. And, yet, the very different conventions of these films also remind us, as the French film critic, André Bazin, once noted: “The bounds of the science film are as undefined as those of the documentary. But, after all, who cares!”

We take Bazin’s dilettantish attitude toward scientific cinema in exploring the history and theory of an amalgam of films that, for better or worse, might be labeled environmental cinema. As this seminar reveals, however, what we call environmental cinema is itself shaped by the changing cultural and social meanings of nature and the environment over time. From travelogue-exploration films of the 1920s, to the experimental avant-garde of surrealist scientific filmmakers such as Jean Painlevé, from the worlds of Walt Disney to those of Jacques Cousteau, from the social documentaries of John Grierson and Pare Lorentz to more contemporary cinema documenting the struggles of peoples confronting issues of environmental injustice across the globe, this seminar will call students to rethink the ways in which cinema has shaped how we see, think about, consume, and politicize nature in both past and present societies.

**Course Requirements:**

Discussion (25%): This seminar is primarily designed as a reading/viewing/discussion seminar. Each one in class needs to assume the responsibility of an active participant and learner. Success in the class depends largely upon the time, energy, and commitment you invest. You will be required to arrive at class having attended the required film screening on Thursday evening, read the material assigned for the day, and be prepared to engage in a thoughtful and constructive conversation that is respectful of others in the classroom and takes seriously the issues and themes presented in the films and readings. You need to post

at least one comment or question on the films screened to the course webpage at <https://uwmad.courses.wisconsin.edu/d2l/orgTools/ouHome/ouHome.asp?ou=539576> before the start of the class session in which the films will be discussed.

**Attendance is mandatory.** You are allowed one excused class and screening absence before it starts to jeopardize your grade. For every missed class after that, we will deduct your final grade by 5%.

If any problem arises, either academic or personal, that might jeopardize your performance in the course, you must try to inform me of the problem at the next available office hour, or by leaving a message with the Department of Medical History and Bioethics (262-1460).

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, I urge any student in this course with a disability to inform me as soon as possible, so that I may make any necessary accommodations to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational opportunities. All such requests are confidential.

Students are expected to familiarize themselves with the UW policies on plagiarism and to assume responsibility for honesty in all course work.

Film Review (15%): Choose a film, either screened in class, or one approved in consultation with us, and write a 1,000 word review essay that discusses how the film was received during its time. Can you provide evidence of how the film effected change, either in people's response to the film or in their actions. What was the venue and context in which the film was screened? **Due, October 12**

Film Festival (20%): You are required to attend the film festival, *Tales From Planet Earth* (<http://www.nelson.wisc.edu/tales>) from Nov. 2-4, and see at least five films. We will have a sign up sheet at each of the screenings for you to sign. In addition, you are to watch one of the following films at the festival: *Return of Navajo Boy*; *The Silent Enemy*; or *Ten Canoes*. Write a 1,000 word essay that discusses the film in relation to the material we read and discussed on the ethical and political issues involved in the filming and representation of indigenous peoples. **Due, November 9.**

Research Paper (40%): You are to choose a recent or historical environmental film and write a 15-20 page essay analyzing its myriad impacts—economic, cultural, political, and social. Who made the film and why? In what context was the film shown and seen? What was its audience? How was the film received by critics and the public? Did the film alter public attitudes toward nature or the environment in significant ways? What kinds of evidence can you draw upon for measuring a film's impact? These are the kinds of questions you will be pursuing in this essay. **Due, December 14.**

### **Required Readings:**

The following required books are available at the University Bookstore:

Gregg Mitman, *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film* (Cambridge:

Harvard University Press, 1999).

Fatimah Tobing Rony, The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Film (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

A course packet (CP) is also available in the Department of History of Science, 7143 Social Science Building for purchase. The articles will also be placed on reserve at Helen C. White College Library.

## People

9/7 A Place for Stories

William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," Journal of American History 78 (1992): 1347-1376. CP, 1-30.

William Stott, Documentary Expression and Thirties America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 5-25. CP, 31-42.

Robert Coles, The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), pp. 1-30. CP, 43-58.

Finis Dunaway, Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 60-86. CP, 59-76.

9/14 Capturing Place

John Grierson, "Flaherty" and "First Principles of Documentary," in Grierson on Documentary, edited and compiled by Forsyth Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 139-156. CP, 77-88.

Paul Rotha, Documentary Film (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), pp. 115-120. CP, 89-94.

Fatimah Tobing Rony, The Third Eye, pp. 99-126.

Brian Winston, "Documentary: How the Myth Was Deconstructed," Wide Angle 21 (March 1999): 70-86. CP, 95-110.

9/21 Imagining Indians

Shepard Krech, III, The Ecological Indian: Myth and History (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), pp. 15-28. CP, 111-122.

Mick Gidley, "'From the Hopi Snake Dance to *The Ten Commandments*: Edward Curtis as Filmmaker," Studies in Visual Communication 8 (1982): 70-79. CP, 123-132.

Gregg Mitman, Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 26-58.

Fatimah Tobing Rony, "Victor Masayeevsa, Jr., and the Politics of *Imagining Indians*," Film Quarterly 48 (1994-1995): 20-33. CP, 133-148.

Faye Ginsburg, "Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village?," Cultural Anthropology 6 (1991): 92-112. CP, 149-170.

See, also, <http://www.onf.ca>

9/28 First Person Toxic

Barbara Allen, "Telling Stories about the Environment," in Uneasy Alchemy: Citizens and Experts in Louisiana's Chemical Corridor Disputes (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), pp. 19-49. CP, 171-190.

Judith Helfand, Interviewed by Adina Back and Pennee Bender, "Connecting the Dots: Workers, Families, and Toxic Exposure, Past and Present," Radical History Review 80 (2001): 121-133. CP, 191-204.

Patricia Thomson, "The Catalytic Role of Documentary Outreach," unpublished ms. CP, 205-216.

"A Healthy Baby Girl," Study Guide. CP, 217-248.

Judith Helfand, "When the Personal is Environmental: The Legacy of *Blue Vinyl*," July 17, 2007, MediaRights.org. CP, 249-254.

## **Wildlife**

10/5 Animal Attractions

John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?" in About Looking (New York: Vintage, 1980), pp. 3-28. CP, 255-270.

Jonathan Burt, "The Illumination of the Animal Kingdom: The Role of Light and Electricity in Animal Representation," Society and Animals 9 (2001): 203-228. CP, 271-284.

Hannah Landecker, "Cellular Features: Microcinematography and Film Theory," Critical Inquiry 31 (2005): 903-937. CP, 285-320.

Akira M. Lippit, Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 1-26, 162-197. CP, 321-362.

10/12 The Stories We Tell

Derek Bousé, "Science and Storytelling," in Wildlife Films (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), pp. 84-126. CP, 363-390.

Scott MacDonald, "Up Close and Political: Three Short Ruminations on Ideology in the Nature Film," Film Quarterly 59 (2006): 4-21. CP, 391-408.

- Bill McKibben, The Age of Missing Information (New York: Random House, 1992), pp. 68-85. CP, 409-418.
- Sarita Siegel, "Reflections on Anthropomorphism in *The Disenchanted Forest*," in Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism, edited by Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 196-222. CP, 419-434.
- 10/19 The Culture of Nature
- Donna Haraway, "Apes in Eden, Apes in Space," in Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 133-185. CP, 435-464.
- Gregg Mitman, "Hunting with the Camera," in Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 5-25.
- Griselda Pollack, "Empire, identity, and place: masculinities in Greystoke: the legend of Tarzan," in Me Jane: Masculinity, Movies and Women (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 128-147. Available on course website.
- Fatimah Tobing Rony, "King Kong and the Monster in Ethnographic Cinema," in The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 157-191.
- 10/26 The Media of Conservation
- David Ingram, Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 1-10, 73-87, 119-136. CP, 465-494.
- Gregg Mitman, "Pachyderm Personalities," in Thinking With Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism, edited by Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 175-195. CP, 495-506.
- Charles Siebert, "Are We Driving Elephants Crazy?" New York Times Magazine (8 October 2006): 42-48, 64, 71, 72. CP, 507-514.
- Tom Veltre, "The Slums of the Global Village," BBC Wildlife (May 1990): 328-329. CP, 515-516.
- Stephen Mills, "Pocket Tigers," Times Literary Supplement (21 February 1997): 6. CP, 517-518.
- Richard Brock, "FFC Conservation Filmmaker of the Year Award," 4 pp. CP, 519-522.
- Chris Palmer, "Successful Environmental Filmmaking," 27 March 2004, 4 pp. CP, 523-526.
- 11/2 NO CLASS

## Hybrid Landscapes

### 11/9 Great White Hunting

Donna Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936," Social Text 11 (1984-85): 20-64. CP, 527-574.

Fatimah Tobing Rony, The Third Eye, pp. 2-20, 45-73.

John C. Phillips and Harold J. Coolidge, The First Five Years: The American Committee for International Wildlife Protection (December 1934), pp. 2-15. CP, 575-582.

### 11/16 Invasive Species

Mike Davis, "Maneaters of the Sierra Madre," in Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 197-271. CP, 583-626.

Lesley Head and Pat Muir, "Suburban Life and the Boundaries of Nature: Resilience and Rupture in Australian Backyard Gardens," Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 31 (2006): 505-524. CP, 627-646.

Jake Kosek, "Smokey Bear is a White Racist Pig," in Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New Mexico (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 183-227. CP, 647-676.

Visit the website, <http://www.frogwatch.org.au/canetoads/default.cfm>

### 11/23 NO CLASS

### 11/30 From the Factory to the Farm

Visit the website and resource links for Homecoming at:  
<http://www.pbs.org/itvs/homecoming/home.html>

David Walsh, "Interview with Travis Wilkerson, director of An Injury to One," Toronto International Film Festival 2002. CP, 677-682.

Richard White, "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature," in Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), pp. 171-185, 499-501. CP, 683-694.

### 12/7 Unnatural Disaster

Eric Klinenberg, Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 14-36, 79-128. CP, 695-740.

Orin Williams, "Food and Justice: The Critical Link to Healthy Communities," in Power, Justice, and the Environment, edited by David Naguib Pellow and Rober J.

Brulle (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 117-130. CP, 741-748.

12/14 Wrap-Up

## SCREENINGS

Thursdays, 7:00-9:30 pm (Screenings in September will be held in Rm. 175, Science Hall)

- 9/6 *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940, 129 min.)  
*The River* (1937, 32 min.)  
*Let My People Live* (1938, 13 min.)
- 9/13 *The Man of Aran* (1934, 76 min.)  
*How the Myth Was Made* (1978, 58 min.)
- 9/20 PSA of Ecological Indian  
*In the Land of the War Canoes* (1914, 43 min.)  
*Intrepid Shadows* (1966, 18 min.)  
*Imagining Indians* (1992, 60 min.)
- 9/27 Helfand Screening – Sundance Cinemas, Hilldale Mall  
*Blue Vinyl* (2002, 98 min.), with selections from the Peabody award-winning prequel  
*A Healthy Baby Girl*
- 10/4 Comandon footage  
Edison's *Electrocuting an Elephant* (1903)  
Coolidge footage  
*Winged Migration* (2001, 89 min.)
- 10/11 *The Seahorse* (1934, 15 min.)  
*Beaver Valley* (1950, 32 min.)  
Siegel Screening – Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, 227 State Street  
*The Beloved* (1998, 15 min.)  
*The Disenchanted Forest* (2001, 52 min.)
- 10/18 Burden East Indian Expedition  
*King Kong*  
*Miss Jane Goodall and the Wild Chimpanzees*
- 10/25 *The Family that Lives with Elephants* (1976, 30 min.)  
*Africa's Elephant Kingdom* (1997, 40 min.)  
*Ocean Oasis* (2003, 75 min.)
- 11/8 Coolidge material
- 11/15 *Cane Toads* (1988, 47 min.)  
WWII pest or Smokey the Bear film

11/29 *Homecoming* (1999, 56 min.)  
*An Injury to One* (2002, 53 min.)

12/6 Weather Channel  
Helfand's rough cut of *Heat Wave*

12/13 Final projects of production class