

Ecocinema: Transnational and Transcultural Studies

ASLE 2017 Pre-Conference Seminar

Tuesday, June 20, 1-5 pm

This seminar seeks global perspectives on visualizing ecological degradation in cinema, a unique medium for translating ecological crisis from one culture to another. Scott MacDonald coined the term ecocinema in 2004 in "Toward an Eco-Cinema," an article exploring the possibility of making and appreciating ecologically conscious cinema. The book-length ecocinematic studies that followed, such as *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* (2000), *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema* (2005), and *Ecology and Popular Film: Cinema on the Edge* (2009), would focus primarily on visual images in the United States. In 2009, however, Sheldon H. Lu and Jiayan Mi would expand the scope of ecocinema studies with their book *Chinese Ecocinema: In the Age of Environmental Challenge* that examines Asian feature films. They write that "In the simplest terms, ecocinema [...] articulates the relationship of human beings to the physical environment, earth, nature, and animals from a biocentric, non-anthropocentric point of view. In the final analysis, ecocinema pertains to nothing less than life itself" (2). Lu's definition embraced all films that express ecological concepts, disregarding type, genre, production company, nation, or culture. And, indeed, by 2013, *Transnational ecocinema: Film culture in an era of ecological transformation*, the first volume on transnational ecocinema, arrived with visual evidence of environmental fragility from around the physical and cinematic world.

Our seminar expands this effort to examine screened human and environmental fragility as transcultural and transnational environmental crises fluidify borders between the human and nonhuman (more-than-human) worlds. The questions we hope to discuss are:

1. How are global cinemas reacting to environmental crises?
2. How do visions of environmental degradation/rust impact self-understanding in various cultures on both individual and societal levels?
3. How does cinema interpret toxic anxiety in comparison to literature or other genres? How does the interpretation differ in various cultures?
4. How does ecological anxiety relate to cultural anxiety? How does cinema present such a connection in visual terms?
5. How does the cinematic language and technique (time-lapse photography, stop-motion, split-screen, etc.) help us understand and present the human-nature relationship?

Structure:

This seminar is divided into four parts.

1. Introductory Remarks (15 mins): Hosts will present an outline of what questions the coming presentations will raise and what films will be included.
2. Presentation (2 hours): Attendees will present in a PechaKucha style (20 slides shown for 20 seconds each--about 8 minutes) to keep presentations succinct, highly visual, and animated. In advance, participants will familiarize themselves with a presentation review rubric designed to assess their colleagues' work during 5-minute breaks between presentations.

3. Plenary Discussion (1 hour): Hosts will lead a discussion of the key questions they posed at the beginning of the seminar and how they were addressed in different presentations.

4. Feedback exchange (45 mins): We will provide time for attendees to edit their evaluations of others' work and add further thoughts that came up during the group discussion. There should also be time in this block for presenters to meet one-on-one to share impressions, provide more detailed feedback, or network with colleagues.

Seminar Leaders:

Runlei Zhai became interested in ecocritical studies more than ten years ago. In 2006, she received her first doctorate degree with concentrations on ecocritical studies of American literature. Her dissertation is an ecofeminist study of four major works by western women writers in the United States. It was published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in Beijing, PR China in 2009. In 2015, she received her second doctorate degree with concentrations on Chinese and American film studies and ecocinema. Her dissertation, "Chinese Eco-Films and their Pastoral Myth," is a comparative study of the pastoral tradition in Chinese and American ecocinemas. Runlei Zhai has also published articles and presented papers on ecocritical studies in the past several years. For details, please see her CV.

Laura Call has a long history of transdisciplinary studies evidenced by degrees in Environmental Science, French Linguistics, and French Literature. Having worked both in the field for environmental groups and in the classroom for language departments, Ecocriticism and French Literature naturally melded in her dissertation "Self & Refuse: Individual and Collective *Ecriture de Soi* in the Environment of 21st-Century France." Laura has published a paper and presented research on ecocriticism and ecocinema since 2008. Her paper and dissertation include analyses of French ecocinema, specifically the works of Agnes Varda. She also researches, teaches a graduate course, and presents on the effective incorporation of STEM in foreign language pedagogy. Please see her CV for more details.