

## **FLM609 Ecocinemas**

Nature, Animals, and the Moving image

(Level 6, Sem. B, 2016-17)

Dr Anat Pick

Arts One 1.41a (office hours: Wednesday 1-3pm; by appointment)

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**Screening:** Monday 12-3pm, Arts One G.34

**Lecture:** Tuesday 11am-12, Arts One G.34

**Seminars:** Tuesday 12-1pm (Bancroft G.07); 1-2pm,  
(Arts 2, 3.20)

### **Module themes & rationale**

This advanced final year option module examines the intersections of film studies and the emergent fields of critical animal studies and ecocinema. We explore some of the historical, formal, political and ethical aspects of the relationship between cinema, the natural world, and nonhuman animals.

The recent environmental and ‘animal turn’ in film forges new ways of understanding cinema, its theorization, production and reception in a broadly ecological context. Building on existing approaches to film (such as cinematic realism, film’s industrial context, or film as a tool for social change), we will look at film not simply as representing the world in image and sound, but as *part of the world*: film as an environmental practice in its own right, or as a vehicle for addressing—and even transforming—humans’ relationship to ourselves and our fellow creatures.

Our focus will be on the act of looking at, and constructing, ‘the animal’ and the natural world in film. We begin with the historical role of animals in the development of the cinematic medium and continue to films that place animals and the natural world at their centre. Along the way, we will debate cinema’s environmental impact, and film as a tool for reflection and advocacy in an age of ecological crisis.

### **Module aims**

(1) Introduce students to the fields of ecocinema and critical animal studies: develop an understanding of the environmental dimensions of film, explore key issues in the representation of animals and the natural world on screen, engage students with the history and form of wildlife cinema, animals in fiction films, and animal activist cinema.

(2) Add to students’ theoretical knowledge by introducing ‘eco-critical’ and post-anthropocentric approaches to film theory. Building on existing knowledge acquired in previous modules, Ecocinemas will enrich students’ theoretical tool kit by providing a new set of critical terms with which to analyze and make films.

### **Assessment**

2 pieces of coursework:

Essay 1: textual analysis (1,500 words, 40%).

Essay 2: research essay (2,500 words; 60%).

### **Essay 1: Textual analysis**

Produce a short close reading of a film *not covered in class*, addressing one of the following themes: ecology, the relationship between humans and the natural world, the representation of animals, or the human/animal divide. You may choose any film—documentary or fiction—in which animals, nature, or ecological concerns are of significance. **Please let me know in advance which film you intend to use as your case study.**

As a close reading exercise, please include at least one **sequence analysis**, as well as a minimum of **TWO relevant scholarly sources**. Do not exceed 1,500 words (+/- 10%). Submission is via QM+.

**Essay 1 due: Sunday 13 November 2015, by 23:55.**

**Essay 2: Research essay**

Focusing on up to two key concepts explored in the module—including but not limited to: ecocinema, the human-animal divide, anthropomorphism, (non-) anthropocentrism, the wildlife film, intersectionality, speciesism, ecological or animal activist documentary, the animal other, animal ethics—write an analytical essay on one of the films covered in class.

You are asked to illustrate a deep understanding of the field of ecocinema and/or critical animal studies, demonstrate your theoretical grasp of the key concepts and your ability to apply them coherently to the film of your choice. Your essay will include a minimum of **THREE scholarly sources**. Do not exceed 2,500 words (+/- 10%). Submission is via QM+

**Essay 2 due: Sunday 18 December 2016, by 23:55.**

**Publishing opportunity!** Essays can be edited and submitted for publication to the ZooScope archive, <https://zooscope.english.shef.ac.uk/>. ZooScope is the Animals in Film Archive, written by students and hosted by the University of Sheffield. Contributions are welcome, so please consider submitting your work.

**Reading**

You have **1-2 key readings per week. Please bring the reading to the seminar.** All key readings are available on QM+ or as handouts. Each week lists additional readings and viewings, listed in the weekly schedule. In addition to the compulsory weekly reading, you are expected to conduct a significant amount of independent learning. The library has a variety of relevant books and films that you are encouraged to consult. A selected bibliography is provided at the end of the module guide to assist you in your research.

**Content Note**

Occasionally, during our sessions we will view and discuss images and events that may be difficult or distressing. If you have concerns about class content, please come see me. You are encouraged to research the films we will be watching and topics we will be addressing in advance.

**Please see the weekly schedule below—**

Week	Topic	Screening
1	<p><b>Why Look at Animals? Animals and the emergence of cinema</b>            We discuss the fundamental role of animals in the development of the cinematic medium. From pre-historic cave paintings to the modern fairground, animals have been an essential part of proto- and early cinematic attractions. Animals have been an engine of moving image technology, and its raw material. The session addresses the convergence of <i>movement</i>, <i>spectacle</i>, and <i>violence</i> in early animal films, in conjunction with John Berger’s foundational essay ‘Why Look at Animals?’ (1980), on the importance of the human-animal connection.</p> <p><b>Shorts &amp; clips:</b>  <i>Electrocuting an Elephant</i> (Edison, 1903)            The last Tasmanian tiger (1932), <a href="http://aso.gov.au/titles/historical/tasmanian-tiger-footage/clip1/#">http://aso.gov.au/titles/historical/tasmanian-tiger-footage/clip1/#</a></p> <p><b>Key Reading:</b>            John Berger, ‘Why Look at Animals?’ in <i>About Looking</i>. London: Bloomsbury, 2009.</p> <p><b>See also:</b>            Jonathan Burt, ‘The Illumination of the Animal Kingdom: The Role of Light and Electricity in Animal Representation’, <a href="http://www.animalsandsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/burt.pdf">http://www.animalsandsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/burt.pdf</a></p> <p>Akira Mizuta Lippit, <i>Electric Animal: Toward A Rhetoric of Wildlife</i>. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.</p>	<p><b>No screening in Week 1</b></p>
2	<p><b>Unnatural Histories I</b>            We are all familiar with big-budget natural history films like <i>Planet Earth</i> and <i>Frozen Planet</i>. In appealing to big audiences with pristine spectacles of nature, what are these films failing to show? To what extent do the iconic natural history films of Disney and the BBC ‘produce’ the nature they depict? How do they communicate knowledge about the natural world, and where, if anywhere, is human culture located in relation to wild nature? Mark Lewis’ films challenge the conventional natural history film by mixing the wildlife genre with eco-horror and comedy, and by critiquing ‘anthropocentrism’—the human-centred-perspective of much natural history cinema.</p> <p><b>Key reading:</b>            Morgan Richards, ‘Cane Toads: Animality and Ecology in Mark Lewis's documentaries,’ in <i>Rethinking Invasion Ecologies from the Environmental Humanities</i>, Jodi Frawley and Iain McCalman, eds. New York: Routledge, 2014, pp. 139-149.</p> <p>Simpson, Catherine. ‘Tales of Toad Terror and Tenacity: What Cane Critters Can Teach Us.’ <i>Australian Humanities Review</i> 57 (2014), pp. 81-100.</p> <p><b>See also:</b>            Rust and Monani, ‘Introduction: cuts to dissolves—defining and situating ecocinema studies’, <i>Ecocinema Theory and Practice</i>. New York: Routledge, 2013.</p> <p>Scott Macdonald, ‘Toward an Eco-cinema’, <i>Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment</i> 11.2, 2004, pp. 107-132.</p> <p>Derek Bousé, <i>Wildlife Films</i>. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,</p>	<p><i>Cane Toads: The Conquest</i>            (Mark Lewis, 2010)</p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PxxLtiAYdw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PxxLtiAYdw</a></p>

	<p>2000.</p> <p>Morgan Richards, 'Greening Wildlife Documentary', <i>Environmental Conflict and the Media</i>. Libby Lester and Brett Hutchins, eds. New York: Peter Lang, 2013, <a href="http://www.abc.net.au/cm/lb/5617726/data/greening-wildlife-documentaries-data.pdf">http://www.abc.net.au/cm/lb/5617726/data/greening-wildlife-documentaries-data.pdf</a></p> <p>Gregg Mitman, <i>Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film</i>. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009.</p> <p>Cynthia Chris, <i>Watching Wildlife</i>. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.</p>	
3	<p><b>Unnatural Histories II</b></p> <p>We continue to examine revisions of the conventional wildlife film, this time in the work of the maverick German director Werner Herzog. <i>Grizzly Man</i> poses important questions about the human-animal boundary, the relation between nature and civilization, and the possibility of connection across species lines.</p> <p><b>Key reading:</b> Thomas Austin, '... To Leave the Confines of His Humanness', in <i>Rethinking Documentary</i>, pp. 51-66.</p> <p><b>See also:</b> Dominic Pettman, 'Bear Life: Tracing an Opening in Grizzly Man', in <i>Human Error: Species-Being and Media Machines</i>, pp.37-59.</p> <p>Brad Prager, <i>The Cinema of Werner Herzog: Aesthetic Ecstasy and Truth</i> (Columbia University Press, 2007).</p>	<p><i>Grizzly Man</i> (Werner Herzog, 2005)</p>
4	<p><b>Institutional Animals</b></p> <p>Animals are often seen in captivity. How does captivity shape, frame, even create the animal? What do the institutions of the zoo, the menagerie, or the laboratory tell us about the ways we relate to other animals? How are these institutions complemented by the institution of cinema that similarly frames, interrogates, and displays animals?</p> <p><b>Key reading:</b> Barbara Creed, 'Nenette: Film theory, animals, and boredom', <i>Necsus</i> 3 Spring 2013 <a href="http://www.necsus-ejms.org/nenette-film-theory-animals-and-boredom/">http://www.necsus-ejms.org/nenette-film-theory-animals-and-boredom/</a></p> <p><b>See also:</b> Donna Haraway, 'Introduction: The Persistence of Vision', in <i>Primate Visions</i>, pp. 1-15. <i>Project Nim</i> (Marsh, 2011) <i>Primate</i> (Wiseman, 1974)</p>	<p><i>Nenette</i> (Nicolas Philibert, 2010)</p>

5	<p><b>Environmental Documentary</b>  <i>Our Daily Bread</i> includes no commentary and no interviews. We ask whether and how observational documentary constructs its argument, and how ecological issues are framed in comparison to mainstream, more expository, environmental documentaries.</p> <p><b>Key reading:</b>  Helen Hughes, <i>Green Documentary</i>, ‘The Contemplative Response’, pp. 43-82.  Nadia Bozak, <i>The Cinematic Footprint</i> (excerpt).</p> <p><b>See also:</b>  <i>Our Daily Bread</i> online resources:  <a href="http://www.ourdailybread.at/jart/projects/utb/website.jart?rel=en&amp;content-id=1130864824950">http://www.ourdailybread.at/jart/projects/utb/website.jart?rel=en&amp;content-id=1130864824950</a></p>	<p><i>Our Daily Bread</i> (Nikolaus Geyrhalter, 2006)</p>
6	<p><b>Unnatural Disasters</b>  <i>Beasts of the Southern Wild</i> is loosely based on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina that hit New Orleans in 2005. The film has divided viewers. Some accused it of being racist, while others hailed it as an original and powerful example of community-based filmmaking. This week is a little different in that we host a debate on the film, addressing questions on the links between the discourses of racism, animality, ecocinema, and environmental justice. In preparation, you will research and summarize arguments for and against the film, and present them in class. As resources, we will defer mainly to the lively conversations on the blogosphere triggered by the film.</p> <p><b>Key Reading &amp; viewing:</b>  Rebecca Solnit, an excerpt from <i>A Paradise Built in Hell</i> (Penguin, 2010).  <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/21/books/excerpt-paradise-built-in-hell.html">http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/21/books/excerpt-paradise-built-in-hell.html</a></p> <p>Thomas Hackett, ‘The Racism of <i>Beasts of the Southern Wild</i>’, <i>New Republic</i>, February 19, 2013,  <a href="https://newrepublic.com/article/112407/racism-beasts-southern-wild">https://newrepublic.com/article/112407/racism-beasts-southern-wild</a></p> <p>bell hooks, ‘No Love in the Wild’,  <a href="http://www.newblackmaninexile.net/2012/09/bell-hooks-no-love-in-wild.html">http://www.newblackmaninexile.net/2012/09/bell-hooks-no-love-in-wild.html</a></p> <p>Travis Bean, ‘A response to bell hooks' critique of <i>Beasts of the Southern Wild</i>’,  <a href="http://cinemabeans.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/beasts-of-the-southern-wild.html">http://cinemabeans.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/beasts-of-the-southern-wild.html</a></p> <p>Rebecca Solnit on Democracy Now:  <a href="http://www.democracynow.org/2009/8/31/a_paradise_built_in_hell_rebecca">http://www.democracynow.org/2009/8/31/a_paradise_built_in_hell_rebecca</a></p>	<p><i>Beasts of the Southern Wild</i> (Behn Zeitlin, 2012)</p>
<p>7 <b>READING WEEK</b>  <b>Essay 1 is due on Sunday 13 November by 23:55 (end of reading week), by 23:55 (on QM+)</b></p>		
8	<p><b>Intersections I: Animality and Race</b>  Is the struggle for animal rights necessarily antithetical to the struggle for the rights of human minorities? How might we think of different social justice campaigns in complementary rather than competing ways? This session introduces the notion of ‘intersectionality’ as a way of considering the commonalities between different forms of oppressions, and the ways in which species and race can be viewed together rather than in</p>	<p><i>The Cove</i> (Louie Psihoyos, 2009)</p>

	<p>competition with one another.</p> <p><b>Key reading:</b> Alison Suen, ‘Racializing Cruelty: Dehumanization in the Name of Animal Advocacy’, <i>The Speaking Animal: Ethics, Language and the Human-Animal Divide</i>. London: Rowman &amp; Littlefield, 2015, pp. 97-119.</p> <p><b>See also:</b> Claire Jean Kim, <i>Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species and Nature in a Multicultural Age</i>. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.</p>	
9	<p><b>Intersections II: Animality and Gender</b> John Huston’s <i>The Misfits</i>, starring film stars Marilyn Monroe and Clark Gable poses questions about human morality and human exceptionalism in an unusual revision of the traditional western.</p> <p><b>Key reading:</b> Robert McKay, ‘Animal Life and Moral Agency in Post-War Cinema: Velma Johnston, Marilyn Monroe, Arthur Miller and John Huston’s <i>The Misfits</i>’</p> <p><b>See also:</b> Carol J. Adams, <i>The Sexual Politics of Meat</i> (University of California Press, 2010).</p>	<i>The Misfits</i> (John Huston, 1961)
10	<p><b>Activist Documentary I: Spectacle, and Animal Resistance</b> The recent flourishing of politically and socially engaged documentaries links film and social change. This lecture examines some of the modes of address and formal strategies used by activist films to transform its audience.</p> <p><b>Key Reading:</b> Carrie Packwood Freeman and Scott Tulloch, “‘Was Blind but Now I See’: Animal Liberation Documentaries’ Deconstruction of Barriers to Witnessing Injustice,” in <i>Screening Nature: Cinema Beyond the Human</i>. Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway, eds. Berghahn, 2013.</p> <p><b>See also:</b> Jason Hribal, <i>Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance</i> (AK Press, 2010). <i>The Animals Film</i> (Schonfeld and Alaux, 1982) <i>Earthlings</i> (Monson, 2005)</p>	<i>Blackfish</i> (Gabriela Cowperthwaite, 2013)
11	<p><b>Activist Documentary II: Politics of Sight</b> Part II on activist film follows the photographer Jo-Anne McArthur as she reveals the realities of animal life and death around the world. We consider the relationship between political advocacy and the ‘politics of sight’—revealing hidden truths in order to encourage social transformation—that is the main strategy of activist cinema. We also return to Berger’s</p>	<i>The Ghosts in Our Machine</i> (Liz Marshall, 2013)

	<p>basic question: “Why look at animals?” at the heart of animal film.</p> <p><b>Key Reading:</b>  Dinesh Wadiwel, ‘The War Against Animals: Domination, Law and Sovereignty’, <i>Griffith Law Review</i> 18.2 (2009), pp. 283-297.</p> <p>Timothy Pachirat, ‘A Politics of Sight’, in <i>Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight</i>. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.</p>	
12	Revision & review: essay 2 writing surgery (individual tutorials in Arts One 1.41a).	** <i>No Screening</i> **
<b>Essay 2, Sunday 18 December, by 23:55 (on QM+)</b>		