

ENGL4740

Ecomedia



Wild River, 1960

Office hours: TR 8-9 a.m. and 11:15-12:15 and by appointment

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Course Description: This course centers on mid to late twentieth and early twenty-first century American films that explore conflicts between culture, the environment, and technology. We will study the paradox of “ecomedia” which is that although such films depict “the environment” they are ultimately technological achievements. As we will see, this paradox is explored in Sean Cubit’s recent book *Ecomedia* in which he argues that “Technology has a unique position in mediating between the human world and the natural.” To create a more inclusive environmentalism, we will take that one step further and explore ways in which ecomedia construct notions of nation, race, class, sexual orientation, and gender. As we study non-print media as it applies to environmental discourse and action we will ask if our films and stories have held us back? If so, how could they move us forward? This will be a central question of the course.¹

Goals: Through reading, viewing, discussion, research and writing we will gain a critical and theoretical vocabulary in ecomedia studies. This will allow us to 1) understand film as a storytelling medium – through the categories and terminology specific to film studies 2) survey and compare a wide variety of film genres, including horror, comedy, and documentary 3) understand environmental debates and discourse as they appear in film, 4) further develop your analytical, writing, and communication skills. Ultimately, our goal will be to challenge accepted views on media and the environment and to explore ways in which new media offers challenges and opportunities for environmental discourse and action. Through reading, viewing, discussion, research and writing we will gain a critical and theoretical vocabulary in ecomedia studies.

Requirements:

One oral presentation on a film, technique or context: 10%
One midterm: 20%
One short analytic film analysis: 15%
One final exam: 20%
One final project: 20%
Participation, quizzes, in-class writing: 10%
Film journal: 5%

Readings and Film Viewing:

No textbook is required for this class although all assigned readings must be read online or via a handout by the day they appear on the syllabus.

Likewise, films must be viewed on your own and must be viewed before coming to class on Thursday. All of our films but a very few may be accessed on through Amazon.com's "Instant Video," which allows you to watch a film for \$2.99. Go to Amazon.com, search the film's title, and look at the options.

In the rare case a film is not available we will watch it in class or it will be put on reserve in the library.

*****IMPORTANT NOTES ON FILM VIEWING:*****

You MUST watch the films listed for each week before Thursday. Be prepared for quizzes on each film just as you would expect reading quizzes in a lit class.

You MUST take notes while watching in your film journal; please consult the Film Analysis handout under “Content” on Canvas and consult the glossary of terms we will be building this semester for some help. Bring your journal with you to class in hard copy or have it available to you electronically (such as in your email account). If you do not do so, your participation grade will suffer. Journals will be collected at random, at midterm, and at the final exam.

Please keep in mind that it will take you longer than the film’s running length to view it, as you will be taking notes, pausing, rewatching scenes, etc. Add at least 30 minutes to the running length to be safe.

Class Policy Statements:

Late Work: Late work will be penalized 10 points per business day

Email Policy: Emails will be returned as soon as possible, usually within one business day. Please include your course section number in your subject line. Email is advised for quick questions about class business. To discuss absences, your writing assignments, or literature please come to my office.

Plagiarism and Classroom Policies: All work is expected to be the student’s own work. This class follows the Please refer to the Tiger Cub for the university policy on plagiarism. All portions of the Auburn University Student Academic Honesty code (Title XII) found in the Student Policy eHandbook at http://www.auburn.edu/student_info/student_policies/ will apply to this class. All academic honesty violations or alleged violations of the SGA Code of Laws will be reported to the Office of the Provost, which will then refer the case to the Academic Honesty Committee. The AU Classroom Behavior Policy is strictly followed in the course; please refer to the Student Policy eHandbook at http://www.auburn.edu/student_info/student_policies/ for details of this policy.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Students who need accommodations are asked to electronically submit their approved accommodations through AU Access and to make an individual appointment with the instructor during the first week of classes – or as soon as possible if accommodations are needed immediately. If you have not established accommodations through the Office of Accessibility, but need accommodations, make an appointment with the Office of Accessibility, 1228 Haley Center, 844-2096 (V/TT).

Class Attendance: Students are required to attend all classes and to come on time and prepared. Absences will be excused only if original documentation is produced promptly upon return to class. Instructor reserves right to confirm documentation with originating office. After three unexcused absences, each following unexcused absence will result in a one-point penalty off of your final grade. Three tardies are equal to one absence. If you are absent, you must arrange to perform all work assigned on that day by the scheduled due date (often this is the by the next class session). Please be aware that appropriate documentation may exempt you from attending the class, but not from performing assigned work by assigned due dates. Quizzes or writing assignments must be made up upon return to class. Please make an appointment with me to make up this work or forfeit grade.

Syllabus: Instructor reserves right to change as needed.

R 1/15 Orientation and Introductions

Part One: Southern Ecologies

T 1/20ⁱⁱ Terms: visuality, ecomedia, environmental racism: [Tennessee River Valley Authority Act 1933](#), [“Wild River and the Flood Plains of Missouri and Illinois,”](#) and [“The Great Flood, The River, Wild River and Environmental Racism”](#)

R 1/22 *Wild River*, Elia Kazan,(1960)

T 1/27 Terms: Ecological burden and ecological alienation, Handout: Ch 1, *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions*, Kimberley Ruffin, Athens: University of Georgia, 2010.

R 1/29 *Daughters of the Dust*, Julie Dash, (1991)

T 2/3ⁱⁱⁱ Terms: New South; localism; white privilege; Read review [Sage: Expanding Environmentalism](#)

R 2/5 *Eating Alabama*, Andrew Beck Grace (2012)

T 2/10 Terms: Documentary, Feminist geographies. Read handout from: McDowell, Linda. *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies*. Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis Press, 1999

R 2/12 *Atchafalaya Houseboat: My Years in the Louisiana Swamp*, Gwen Roland (2011)

T 2/17 Terms: ecology, geomorphism, deterritorialization, cinematic tourism; Read article via link: [Anil Narine, "Global Trauma at Home: Technology, Modernity, Deliverance," *Journal of American Studies*. Volume 42: Special Issue 3, December 2008, pp. 449-470..](#)

R 2/19 *Deliverance*, John Boorman, (1972)

Part Two: Eco-Apocalypse

T 2/24 Read, ["Al Gore's An Inconvenient Truth and Its Skeptics: A Case of Environmental Nostalgia," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*. #49 \(Spring 2007\).](#)

R 2/26 Midterm Review

T 3/3 *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore

R 3/5 Midterm

T 3/10 Introduction, Rob Nixon, [Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor](#). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.

R 3/12^{iv} *The Day after Tomorrow*

T 3/17 Selection from Ursula Heise, "[Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism](#)." *PMLA* 128.3 (May 2013): 636-643. Review site: [Introduction to Post-colonial Studies](#)

R 3/19 *Snowpiercer*, Bong Joon-ho, 2013

T 3/24 Spring Break

R 3/26 Spring Break

Part Three: Dirty Ecologies

T 3/31 Term: dirty ecology, environmental racism revisited; Read, "[Beasts of the Southern Wild and Dirty Ecology](#)" *Southern Spaces*, 2/13/13

R 4/2 *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, Benh Zeitlin, 2011

T 4/7 Terms: Masculinities, Sustainable Kids, Eco-criminality, suburban and urban ecologies; Read: Francisco Vivoni, "Waxing Ledges: Built Environments, Alternative Sustainability, and the Chicago Skateboarding Scene" in *Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability*, Volume 18, Issue 3, 2013, pp. 340-353.

R 4/9 *Dogtown and Z Boys*, Stacy Peralta (2001)

- T 4/14 Term: Queer ecologies, privatization; *Brokeback Mountain*, ["Q&A with Strange Natures author Nicole Seymour."](#) Interview. And handout, *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination*. University of Illinois Press, 2013.
- R 4/16 Term: Ecomedia: *The Lord of the Rings*, Read: Selections from Sean Cubitt, *Ecomedia*. Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2005
- T 4/21 Final Presentations
- R 4/23 Final Presentations
- T 4/28 Final Presentations
- R 4/30 Review for Final Exam

Final Exam: Monday May 4th at 12:00 noon

ⁱ Special thanks to the Association for Studies in Literature and the Environment (ASLE) which makes a bank of syllabi available to members. Their resources make possible dialogue and consultation between faculty around the world. In particular, I would like to thank Nicole Seymour, Assistant Professor at University of Arkansas and current Carson Fellow, Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, for sharing her syllabus through ASLE.

ⁱⁱⁱ Note: January 15-29: Dropping a course during these days will result in a \$100 Drop Fee per course dropped.

ⁱⁱⁱ Note: January 29th is 15th class day. Last day to drop course with no grade assignment. Last day for potential refund for dropped classes.

^{iv} 41st class day. Student deadline for request to move finals to Associate Deans.