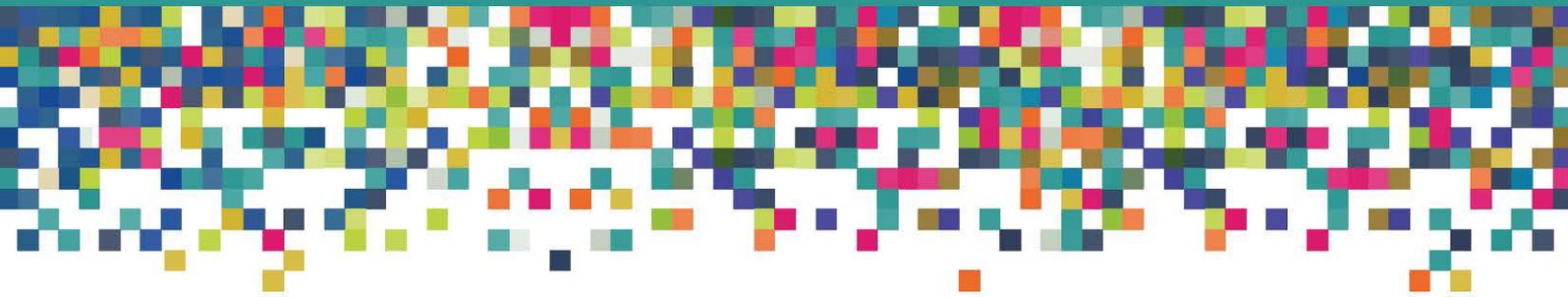




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FRENCH ECOCINEMA AND YOUNG AUDIENCES ENVIRONMENTAL MOBILISATION

An Exploration of the Intersection Between Film and Politics

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ABSTRACT

Between dystopias and utopias, ecocinema narratives are art productions eminently charged with a socio-political vision. From fiction (Goliath, dir. Frédéric Tellier, 2022; Red Soil, dir. Farid Bentoumi, 2020; The Crusade, dir. Louis Garrel, 2021...) to documentary (Above Water, dir. Aïssa Maïga, 2021; Tomorrow, dir. Cyril Dion et Mélanie Laurent, 2015; Bigger Than Us, dir. Flore Vasseur, 2021...), French filmmakers bring to the screen the environmental disasters of the contemporary world and raise essential questions about the economic and political system of our time. This dissertation explores the role of French ecocinema in engaging and mobilizing the youth towards environmental activism. By analyzing the intricate interplay between cinematic representation, cultural imaginaries, and active youth engagement, this paper investigates the potential of ecocinema to communicate environmental concerns effectively and shape collective environmental consciousness.

The primary aim of this research is to uncover how French ecocinema navigates the ideological landscape to resonate with young audiences, influence their perceptions of imminent environmental challenges, and mobilize them for political action. To address these objectives, a qualitative approach involving focus group interviews was employed, drawing inspiration from Barker's perspective (2006) on text/audience relations and complex media interpretations.

The findings highlight that cinematic representation fosters a shared environmental consciousness among young audiences by evoking emotions, transforming viewership into immersion, and sparking dialogue. While ecocinema serves as a platform for discourse, the tension between entertainment and ecological themes prompts discussions on the extent of cinema's power in driving tangible ecological action. Participants acknowledge cinema's potential to raise awareness but note its limitations in translating it into concrete change. The analysis also underscores the significance of utopian and dystopian narratives in stimulating discussions about alternative futures.

In conclusion, this research reveals the critical role of French ecocinema in mobilizing young people towards environmental activism. By translating complex scientific concepts into relatable cinematic experiences, ecocinema becomes a powerful catalyst for dialogue and introspection, ultimately contributing to the youth's active engagement in addressing the impending environmental crisis.

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INTRODUCTION

Driven by curiosity to explore the latest Disney production, a film described as an inclusive, idealistic, and environmentally conscious adventure, I suggested that my little brother join me in watching the film. With anticipation in the air, we nestled onto the sofa, ready to immerse ourselves in the animated adventure *Strange World* (2022), directed by Don Hall. After the film, with a gleam in his eyes, he turned to me and said, "It's kinda like our world too... we should stop making the Earth sick by taking all its resources...". This innocent reflection from my 11-years-old brother ignited a spark within me. In that intimate moment, I realized the power of storytelling and the potential of cinema to shape our environmental consciousness. It was then that I started a profound quest to unravel the intricate relationship between French ecocinema films, young audiences, and their political mobilization. By examining the intertwined dynamics of cinema and social engagement, this dissertation seeks to uncover the transformative potential of film as a powerful medium that prompts reflection, elicits emotional responses, and potentially initiates young people to participate in societal change. Drawing upon a multidisciplinary approach, encompassing film studies, sociology, and environmental studies, this paper aims to unravel the complex interplay between political ideology, imaginaries, and the collective unconscious within the context of ecocinema. By exploring the stories told on the silver screen, I seek to understand how these films resonate with young audiences, shaping their political ideologies and imaginaries in relation to ecological challenges.

As reflected in the Cannes Film Festival's 2021 initiative to propose the 'Cinema for the Climate' selection or the creation of the 'Newtopia' production company by Magali Payen, Cyril Dion and Marion Cotillard, French ecocinema is in vogue. Its objective is to make visible the imminence of ecological disaster and to propose fictional sketches of what the world of tomorrow could be like while respecting planetary limits. Within this context, I explore the extent to which French ecocinema, despite its integration into a popular commercial circuit and its adoption of conventional codes to enhance visibility, maintains a counter-narrative to the dominant ideology. This cinematic movement aims to cultivate an "environmental imagination," as aptly phrased by Buell (1995), which facilitates projection, mobilization, and

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the awakening of youth activism. Films classified as ecocinema aspire to inspire “progressive eco-political discourse *and* action among viewers”, as highlighted by Willoquet-Marcondi (as cited by Kaplan, 2010: 3). To contribute to the flourishing field of film studies dedicated on the ecocinema genre I opted for a qualitative research approach, specifically through audience research, that placed emphasis on conducting in-depth interviews with focus groups. After analysing the discourse of the directors and producers of ecocinema films in a previous research project, I wished to have a closer look at the other side of the silver screen. The decision to focus on young audiences¹ stemmed from the recognition of the crucial role they played in shaping the future of environmental consciousness and political mobilization. Recognizing the importance of engaging with the voices of the younger generation in discussions on contemporary and upcoming environmental challenges, it seemed clear to me that the aim of this research would be to sketch a portrait of this singular young audience that these films are targeted at – the ‘climate generation’, as it is referred to in the media.

Through this exploration, I strive to motivate meaningful discussions, foster environmental consciousness, and catalyse the collective action needed to safeguard our planet for generations to come. Let the journey begin, as we embark on a captivating exploration of the transformative power of ecocinema and its potential to shape the political landscape through the impassioned voices of young audiences.

THEORETICAL CHAPTER

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Mapping the Critical Media and Communication Theories: Unveiling the Nexus of Ideology, Imaginaries, and Collective Unconscious

In the realm of Critical Media and Communication Theories, a deeper exploration of the underlying concepts of ideology, imaginaries, and the collective unconscious becomes

¹ For practical reasons, I refer to ‘young people’ as 18-24-year-olds, according to the canonical categorisation established by INSEE – the French Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies. However, bearing in mind Bourdieu’s words that “youth is just a word” (Bourdieu, 1978), I recognize the theoretical limits of this arbitrary classification.

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imperative in understanding the intricate tapestry of these cinematic works. Drawing upon the insights of prominent theorists such as Althusser, Žižek, Taylor, and various psychoanalytic thinkers, this literature review aims to analyze the interconnectedness of ideology, imaginaries, and collective unconscious constituting the social imaginary. By delving into these concepts, we seek to unravel the nuanced ways in which these films engage with environmental discourse, shape viewers' perceptions, and potentially mobilize young audiences towards political action.

In the 1980s, the ideological dimension of social movements was brought into the core of political sociology with framing theory. Focused on how individuals construct and interpret reality through social interactions, Goffman's framing theory (1974) posits that people use "frames" or mental structures to organize and make sense of their experiences and interactions. In the context of social movements, Benford and Snow (1986) argue that frames pertain to the interpretive frameworks through which these movements seek to shape perception of the social world. A social movement achieves its goals when there is alignment between the convictions of the mobilization and the values held by individuals. They focus on how mobilization entrepreneurs strategize to align these frames, thereby crafting a distinct reading of reality. In their view, the genesis of political mobilisation is not due to the existence of injustices per se, but rather to ideological discourses produced by social movements. Indeed, at the heart of all political upheaval lies a specific reading of reality underpinned by an ideology based on an imaginary construct shared by the collective unconscious. To quote Althusser's definition, ideology is "a determinate (religious, ethical, etc.) representation of the world whose imaginary distortion depends on their imaginary relation to their conditions of existence, in other words, in the last instance, to the relations of production and to class relations" (Althusser, 1971: 145). Reusing the Marxist theory of state apparatus, he argues that the function of ideology is to constitute "concrete individuals as subjects" (Althusser, 1971: 166) through the process of "interpellation" (Althusser, 1971: 166). In Foucault's perspective, as in Althusser's theory of the ideological apparatuses of the state, individuals subjected to disciplinary power tend to incorporate the apparatus of subjection (Foucault, 2006). However, drawing on Foucault's critique of the extreme determinism of this idea, Žižek underlines the weakness of this definition of ideology: individuals are not dupes; we have a high degree of

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agency in this “fantasy structuring our social reality” (Sloterdijk quoted by Žižek, 2009: 30) that we shape almost deliberately, by keeping “an ironical distance” (Sloterdijk quoted by Žižek, 2009: 30) between our beliefs and our actions. Ideology is first and foremost an “unconscious illusion” (Žižek, 2008: 30) – what Žižek refers to as “ideological fantasy” (Žižek, 2009: 30) – that endlessly perpetuates “our real, effective relationship to reality” (Žižek, 2009: 30). Similarly, Arendt believes that ideology imposes “a ‘truer’ reality” (Arendt, 2017: 618), a fiction that rejects everything that does not comply with it. Hence, “Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our ‘reality’ itself: an ‘illusion’ which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel.” (Žižek, 2009: 15-16).

The reality of the contemporary world is rooted on an inherently dysfunctional capitalist system, but its apparent realism and efficiency are upheld by an ideology so alienating and so deeply embedded in the collective unconscious that it is almost impossible to challenge: “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism” (Jameson quoted by Fisher, 2018: 7). Based on Freud’s early reflections on the relationship between man and nature (1989) and Searles’ work on the unconscious and the non-human environment (1972), Schinaia suggests the existence of “defence mechanisms and intrapsychic tactics” (Schinaia, 2019: 277) to explain human indifference to the pernicious consequences embedded in capitalist ideology: “Unconsciously identifying ourselves with what we perceive as omnipotent and immortal technology, we do not want to see the dark side of our societal wellbeing and Western lifestyle; we protect ourselves against intolerable feelings of insignificance, deprivation, loss, fear of death, and the sense of guilt that would result from acknowledging our implicit connivance or cohabitation with the blind exploitation of natural resources, the underestimation of the costs and destructive repercussions that arise from it, reacting with a severe and pervasive apathy.” (Schinaia, 2019: 277). In essence, the concept of “defence mechanisms and intrapsychic tactics” offers an insight into the psychological underpinnings to explain why people might turn a blind eye or show apathy towards these negative aspects. It suggests that individuals might unconsciously use these defence mechanisms to shield themselves from the uncomfortable feelings of guilt, insignificance, or

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fear that might arise if they were to fully acknowledge and confront the dark side of the capitalist system. The shift from a Marxist social analysis to a psychoanalytic framing within this context represents a transition from a primarily socio-economic perspective to a psychological perspective in understanding human behaviour and its relationship to capitalist ideology and its detrimental effects on the environment. It involves moving from a focus on economic structures, power dynamics, and class struggle, which are central to Marxist tradition, to delving into the individual and collective unconscious, defence mechanisms, and psychological mechanisms proposed by psychoanalysis. These two perspectives intersect and enrich each other in explaining human behavior and offer a more holistic understanding of why individuals might be indifferent or apathetic toward ecological concerns within a capitalist framework. The Western “social imaginary” in Taylor’s words (2003) is deeply entrenched in an anthropocentric vision of the world, presenting inertia as the only alternative, and making it unthinkable to take account of an undeniable reality: the depletion of planetary resources, the destruction of the biosphere, global warming and, more generally, the limits to growth.

While Taylor’s perspective too is Western-centric and based on what I consider to be a mistaken view of modernity, he rightly emphasises the performative power of the collective imaginary “carried in images, stories and legends” (Taylor, 2003: 23). Similarly, Burke echoes this notion by asserting that creative and contemplative works don’t merely provide responses to inquiries posed by their context, but rather are deliberate and stylized responses, functioning strategically to assess the context’s nature, its predominant elements, and to encapsulate an attitude towards them (Burke quoted by Eagleton, 1994: 289). Thus, it seems to me that the media, eminently “involved in the production of social meaning” (Hesmondhalgh, 2018: 42), exercise power over reality by “[fixing] the premise of discourse, [deciding] what the general populace is allowed to see hear and think about.” (Chomsky and Herman, 1988: 1). Influenced by Gramscian thought, Hall adds: “people live and experience within discourse in the sense that discourses impose frameworks which limit what can be experienced or the meaning that experience can encompass, and thereby influence what can be said and done.” (Hall quoted by Purvis & Hunt, 1993: 485). Nonetheless, far from the hypodermic needle theory suggesting that the mass media have the power to infuse messages and an ideological

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framework onto a passive audience (Croteau & Hoynes, 2014), Appadurai advocates the selective perception theory: “contrary to the theory of media as the opium of the masses, there is enough evidence to show that the consumption of mass media has produced among ordinary people its own instruments of agency in the form of irony, selectivity or resistance” (Appadurai quoted by Kazmi, 1999: 59). This theory posits that the consumption of mass media doesn’t uniformly stupefy the masses, as indicated by the opium analogy. Appadurai highlights a dynamic in which audiences engage with media content with a sense of discernment and individual agency. Overall, the evolution between these paradigms and traditions in Media and Communication Theories signifies a progression from deterministic models that cast audiences as passive recipients of media messages to more dynamic models that recognize audiences as active participants who engage with media content in multifaceted ways. This shift reflects a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between media, discourse, and individual agency, emphasizing the diverse and often unpredictable nature of media influence on human perception and behavior.

1.1.2 Screening Political Ideologies and Imaginaries: Understanding the Film’s Influence on Audience Perspectives

Produced by global cultural industries deeply embedded in a neoliberal logic of capital-accumulation, the discourses and representations conveyed by films affect our imaginaries by reflecting or subverting mainstream ideology. The media, and more specifically films, have the power to shape and inflect the political beliefs and imaginative frameworks of viewers, influencing their perspectives and attitudes towards societal issues. This review is intended to provide a comprehensive analysis of the dynamic relationship between film and its influence on audience political beliefs, exploring the ways in which cinematic narratives, visuals, and characters intersect with audiences’ pre-existing ideologies and imaginaries.

Embedded within the British Cultural Studies movement, Turner (2002) emphasizes the importance of examining culture within its production-consumption system and the complex network of social interactions. Grounded in the tenets of the Marxist tradition, Turner defines ideology as follows: definition of ideology, “we can say that implicit in every culture is a ‘theory of reality’ which motivates its ordering of that reality into good and bad, right and

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wrong, them and us, and so on. For this 'theory of reality' to work as a structuring principle it needs to be unspoken, invisible, a property of the natural world rather than of human interests. 'Ideology' is the term used to describe the system of beliefs and practices that is produced by this theory of reality" (Turner, 2006: 181). Throughout this dissertation, I will utilize Turner's ideology theory as the core conceptual framework. He also highlights the omnipresence of ideology in cinematographic texts and aesthetics, noting that the aesthetic characteristics of individual film works are never neutral or unbiased. Instead, ideologies are inherently present within film narratives, whether consciously or subconsciously interpreted by audiences. Furthermore, the connection between each film and its cultural context can be traced back to underlying ideological foundations (Turner, 2006: 197-198). De facto, "Films, then, both as systems of representation and as narrative structures, are rich sites for ideological analysis" (Turner, 2006: 181). He refers to the relationship between film and culture as "reflectionist" (Turner, 2006: 181): "[j]ust as film works on the meaning systems of culture – to renew, reproduce, or review them – it is also produced by those meaning system" (Turner, 2006: 178). Based on audience research conducted with young Hindi film viewers, Banaji also asserts that all the interviewees "negotiate meaning from an intersection of identity positions, via myths and experiences, calling on their own knowledge, beliefs, understanding of family or community opinion, and media consumption" (Banaji, 2008: 174). According to Banaji, the negotiation of the meaning of a film is shaped and inflected by the young viewers' political ideologies and ambivalent cultural imaginaries: "Some of them do use Hindi film imaginaries (...) as a means for shoring up pre-existing worldviews, confirming or undermining suspicions about 'the other'. Other viewers use these same sequences as a means for critiquing and challenging current social norms and contexts" (Banaji, 2008: 174). Turner and Banaji argue for a culturalist-ideological approach to film studies and audience studies "to examine and rethink culture by considering its relationship to social power" (Hesmondhalgh, 2018: 64); "like any other medium of representation [film] constructs and 're-presents' its pictures of reality by way of the codes, conventions, myths, and ideologies of its culture as well as by way of the specific signifying practices of the medium" (Turner, 2006: 178). And vice versa, audience members possess an array of informal knowledge and social abilities that shape their reactions to media and cultural expressions, even if they are not consciously aware of it. Our involvement with media and culture intricately involves our identities in diverse manners

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(Barker, 2006: 126). Hence, if I synthesise what has been discussed so far, the analysis of film and audiences must be thought of as a reciprocal dynamic process: viewers constantly negotiating the meaning of what they see with their social and political realities and identities; and shaping and interpreting their reality through multiple lenses that are part of both their empirical experiences and their imaginaries.

This vision of audience research transcends Hall's useful but generic encoding/decoding model and draws more on Barker's concept of "viewing strategy" (Barker, 2006: 133). Indeed, "[t]he concept of a viewing strategy was developed as an alternative to, in many ways, in opposition to, the encoding/decoding approach. This approach perforce privileges readings that stand away from a 'text' (whether the preference is for 'resistant' or 'negotiated' readings), because distanced readings are seen as more active." (Barker, 2006: 135). Barker suggests that an audience that embraces encoded meaning must be thought of as lacking historical context or genuine viewing circumstances. In this context, he envisions the act of "viewing" (and by extension, reading, listening, or engaging in other ways) as a purpose-driven activity. This approach centres on understanding the motivations behind why individuals choose to watch a film, considering their hopes, apprehensions, anticipations, and existing knowledge (Barker, 2006: 136). Investigating these aspects is crucial because they are regarded as the factors contributing to an individual's process of 'making sense' of a film (Barker, 2006: 134). Barker then criticises the universal dimension of Althusser's theory of 'interpellation': "'Investment' is a term developed in and through the previous project on audiences for Judge Dredd. It draws attention to all the ways in which audiences care about the experience they seek. It treats as crucial variables how much they care, and the manner of their caring." (Barker, 2006: 136). When referring to audience research on the impacts of mass media, the data obtained revealed an influence of cinema on viewers' beliefs, opinions, and attitudes on their social imaginaries (among others, see Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008; Perciful & Meyer, 2017). Regarding political issues, the conclusions are mixed (Butler et al., 1995; Pautz, 2015) and it is difficult to quantitatively assess the effects observed at the end of the study over the long term. Yet when it comes to the themes of global warming and environmental disasters, research on ecocinema films has emphasised their positive effects on audiences (Lowe et al., 2006; McGreavey & Liendfield, 2008) ; for example, the article by Lowe et al. (2006) shows that "after watching the

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film 'The Day After Tomorrow' (2004), viewers recognized their responsibility for the Earth's ecology and the need to change consumer attitudes towards nature" (Kubrak, 2020: 3).

1.1.3 Unearthing Ecocinema's Imaginary Landscape: Exploring the Roots, Concept, and Influential Thinkers of Ecocinema

The field of ecocinema has emerged as an interdisciplinary domain that examines the intricate relationship between film and environmental concerns. As the urgency of environmental issues grows, understanding the foundations and intellectual influences of ecocinema becomes paramount. Through this review, I aim to shed light on the evolution of ecocinema as a discipline, tracing its roots and identifying the intellectual currents that have contributed to its development. By analyzing the works of these influential thinkers, we gain valuable insights into the ways in which ecocinema intertwines film aesthetics, environmental ethics, and socio-political engagement.

Firstly, what does the term *ecocinema* really mean? The term was coined for the first time in MacDonald's pioneering work *Towards an Ecocinema* (2004), to describe avant-garde film productions that provide "something like a garden—an 'Edenic' respite from conventional consumerism—within the machine of modern life, as modern life is embodied by the apparatus of media." (MacDonald, 2004: 109). MacDonald also directs eco-cinematographic research towards issues of reception, examining the capacity of films to affect the audience: the slow contemplation of the world is posited as an essential quality of what can define an ecocinema. In other words, it inaugurates an ecocritical approach: "The job of an ecocinema is to provide new kinds of film experience that demonstrate an alternative to conventional media-spectatorship and help to nurture a more environmentally progressive mindset." (MacDonald, 2012: 20). Ingram (2000) explores the intersection of environmentalism and mainstream Hollywood cinema, focusing on how Hollywood films, intentionally and unintentionally, engage with environmental concerns and portray ecological issues. Over time, the understanding and application of the *ecocinema* category have grown more nuanced. While earlier iterations of ecocriticism primarily aimed to determine whether a film had a positive ecological message or not, ecocinema has now broadened its scope to include films that may not overtly appear to be about nature and environmental concerns. Eco-critics then began to

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extend their analysis to a wide catalogue of films, including both avant-garde contemplative cinema and conventional commercial blockbusters:

ecocinema studies is not simply limited to films with explicit messages of environmental consciousness, but investigates the breadth of cinema from Hollywood corporate productions and independent avant-garde films to the expanding media sites in which producers, consumers, and texts interact” (Rust & Monani, 2012: 2).

In the discourse surrounding ecocinema, it is crucial to acknowledge that the division between avant-garde contemplative cinema and conventional commercial blockbusters doesn't neatly align with a straightforward categorization of Western versus non-Western perspectives. Ecological concerns are universal and transcend geographical boundaries. Filmmakers from outside the West have created compelling narratives that reflect their own unique perspectives on ecological issues (Kääpä & Gustafsson, 2013). These productions may employ distinct cinematic languages, storytelling techniques, and cultural references that enrich the narrative landscape of ecocinema and resonate on a global scale². Willoquet-Marcondi defines ecocinema films as those that inspire “progressive eco-political discourse and action among viewers” (Willoquet-Marcondi as quoted by Rust & Monani, 2012: 3). “In short, environmentalist filmmakers and ‘ecocinema’ critics must not miss the opportunity to build upon film’s long engagement with ecological concerns.” writes Jacobson in his book *Toward a History of French Ecocinema* (Jacobson, 2017: 53). These definitions provide a solid foundation for understanding ecocinema as an area of study that explores the cinematic representation of environmental themes, human-nature relationships, and the ethical dimensions of ecological concerns. Expanding upon this idea, cinematographic texts exert an indirect influence on the environment through their impact on audience perspectives. According to eco-film scholars, the study of cinema and ecocinema offers an opportunity to acknowledge alternative ways of perceiving the world that extend beyond the limited scope of the anthropocentric viewpoint,

² See, for example: *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile*, dir. Tunde Kelani (Nigeria - 1993); *Papilio Buddha*, dir. Jayan K. Cherian (India - 2013); *Embrace of the Serpent*, dir. Ciro Guerra (Colombia - 2015).

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which places human desires as the central focus of moral consideration (Rust & Monani, 2012: 11).

In the age of the Anthropocene, cinema assumes a significant role with a psychological resonance in navigating the impending climate change catastrophe (Kaplan, 2016: 407). In fact, the environmental dilemmas that threaten the human species are increasingly represented on screen in the form of dystopian narratives: “Julia Kristeva puts it, ‘Films remain the supreme art of the apocalypse, no matter what the refinements, because the image has such an ability to ‘have us walk into fear’” (Kristeva as quoted by Kaplan, 2016: 409). But people’s anguish and inaction in the face of ecological disasters can have several origins: “Dodds wonders if the central dynamic inherent in repression may consist in a growing anxiety as a response to the enormity of the problem, the unbearableness of which we need to defend ourselves against, or if the anxiety increases in relation to a problem which is so enormously abstract that it remains incomprehensible on the human emotional scale.” (Schinaia, 2019: 278). In the manner of catharsis in ancient theatre, contemporary dystopian narratives are like “a kind of pretraumatic experience for viewers” (Kaplan, 2016: 409) – bringing to the screen repressed fears and anxieties, “individual and cultural trauma” (Kaplan, 2016: 409) haunting victims and societies. To illuminate this phenomenon at the intersection of cultural and psychological studies, Kaplan coined the concept of ‘pre-trauma’, a fearful futurist emotion: “subjects are haunted by what they fear is coming from the future” (Kaplan, 2016: 409). From documentaries to fantasy dystopias, ecocinema acts as a futuristic experimental imaginary for the audience, giving “the possibility of humanity already experiencing the worlds shown in the films” (Kaplan, 2016: 410). In the editorial of the special-issue of the French magazine *Socialter* entitled “Le Réveil des Imaginaires” (“The Awakening of the Imaginary”), Vion-Dury argues: “The imaginary is the invisible inner world that pours into the collective unconscious of our societies to shape our common future. It is what transforms the normal into the abnormal and the abnormal into the normal, what arouses support or provokes repulsion, what mobilises our desires and enriches our reasoning, models otherness and embodies hope (...) The conflicting plurality of imaginations is also what underpins politics, which cannot feed on uniformity and ensures that a society does not die from being just itself.” (Vion-Dury, 2020: 3).

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Thinkers such as Latour (1993) and Bennett (2010) assert the need to think in new paradigms (among others, see Morton, 2010; Todd, 2015) on and off screen.

1.2 Summary Statement of Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework of this dissertation revolves around the exploration of the interplay between ideology, imaginaries, and the collective unconscious in the context of Critical Media and Communication Theories, ecocinema, and audience reception. The integration of these themes aims to decipher the intricate connections between cinematic narratives, individual and collective mental frameworks, and the potential for fostering environmental consciousness and political mobilization. The investigation begins by delving into the ideological underpinnings of cinematic works, particularly focusing on how ideology functions as a lens through which individuals perceive and interpret reality. The theoretical perspectives of Althusser, Žižek, and Schinaia, along with insights from Freud and Searles, offer a nuanced understanding of how capitalist ideology shapes human indifference towards ecological concerns. The shift from Marxist social analysis to psychoanalytic framing reflects a transition from socio-economic analysis to a more psychological exploration, revealing the intricate ways in which individuals interact with and respond to capitalist-driven environmental challenges.

Furthermore, the study integrates the perspectives of Cultural Studies, framing theory, and selective perception theory to comprehend the dynamics of audience reception. By acknowledging the agency of audiences, the analysis moves beyond the hypodermic needle model, recognizing that audiences engage with media content with discernment, irony, and resistance. Turner's ideology theory provides the overarching framework for understanding how culture, ideology, and discourses intersect with film, emphasizing that films embody and propagate specific ideological orientations. This leads to the notion that films possess the potential to influence audience political beliefs and imaginaries. The study also explores the emergence of ecocinema as an interdisciplinary field, tracing its evolution and defining its scope. Ecocinema is seen as a medium that reflects ecological concerns and engages audiences in contemplative ways. From MacDonald's pioneering work on ecocinema to the broader perspective embraced by contemporary scholars, this perspective is integrated with the

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ecological turn in media studies, acknowledging the reciprocal relationship between films and their reception. The concept of 'pre-trauma' is introduced to explain how dystopian narratives in ecocinema evoke and address repressed fears and anxieties related to ecological crises.

The theoretical foundations and perspectives reviewed will be instrumental in informing the empirical analysis of French ecocinema films and their role on young audience perspectives. These theories and concepts will converge to unravel the ways in which cinematic works engage with environmental discourse, shape viewers' perceptions, and potentially mobilize young audiences towards political action. The examination of film narratives and aesthetics will be guided by the concepts of ideology, imaginaries, and the unconscious, offering insights into the intricate dynamics at play in the realm of media influence. By grounding the analysis in this robust conceptual framework, this research aims to uncover the nexus between cinematic representations, audience engagement, and the broader socio-political landscape, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between media, ideology, and collective consciousness.

1.3 Statement of Research Questions

Considering the relatively limited extent of existing literature on French ecocinema, my research endeavours to contribute in a rather innovative manner. Specifically, my empirical investigation centres on a relatively unexplored realm: the examination of the performative power of audio-visual representations within their audience, while also assessing the profound impact of the cultural sector's creation of imaginaries on public discourse. Focusing on the unique perspective of young audiences, I would like to explore the role and political resonance of French films that critically address the environmental crisis. In other words, what role does French ecocinema play in the political mobilisation of the youth to fight against the imminent environmental disaster? How does French ecocinema navigate the ideological landscape to effectively communicate environmental concerns to young audiences, and how does this influence their perception of the impending environmental crisis? To what extent does the intersection of cinematic representation, cultural imaginaries, and youth engagement contribute to the construction of a shared environmental consciousness among young people?

2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

While youth has always been one of the favourite themes of French cinema – think of François Truffaut’s seminal film *Les quatre cents coups* (1959) or, more recently, the success of Ladj Ly’s *Les Misérables* (2019) – little research has been devoted to capturing the experiences of young audiences of French films. This, in essence, is what a thorough review of the existing literature on the study of French audiences and the influence of cinema on political engagement revealed to me. The literature review served as the foundational stage of the research design, providing a solid theoretical framework relating to ecocinema, environmental discourse and its artistic representations, youth political engagement, and intertwined fields. By outlining the various stages of the research design process, this section aims to provide a clear and transparent overview of the methodology employed in this study. By delving into the explanation of the different stages of the methodology, the reader will be able to better understand the systematic approach employed in this study and its implications for the findings and outcomes.

2.1 Purposive Sampling Strategy: Focus Group of Young Audiences

The second phase of the research design process focused on striking a balance between capturing diverse perspectives and maintaining a manageable research process through the selection and recruitment of interviewees. In thinking about sampling, the decision to have 3 panels of 4-5 participants each is rooted in the aim of creating a healthy group dynamic that facilitates in-depth discussions while enabling me to delve into the research topic comprehensively. The research design follows a purposive sampling technique, targeting individuals in the specified age range, and ensuring gender parity. The nature of the research topic benefits greatly from the interactive and collective nature of focus group discussions. In the context of data collection, it aims to recreate the social context of the cinema and the experiential conditions associated with watching a film, thus creating a simulated audience environment. To quote Barker,

“Being an audience is ordinary, something that people commonly do as a routine activity (. . .) What we choose to engage in as audiences, from the most routine to the most devoted, is a part of how we conceive of ourselves. Our identities are

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engaged in multifarious ways in our media/cultural engagements” (Barker, 2006: 125-126).

Furthermore, in analysing the data, it offered me the opportunity to examine not only group dynamics, but also shared imaginations and cultural values; and lastly, the way in which people form and change their opinions, and whether they reach a consensus. These social interactions contributed to a more holistic understanding of the research topic and shed light on the ways in which young audiences collectively engage with and interpret these films.

It is important to acknowledge and address the potential biases that can arise both within the small panel size and through the purposive sampling technique employed in this research study. With only 4-5 participants in each panel, there is a possibility of certain viewpoints dominating the discussions, while others may be underrepresented. The utilization of purposive sampling introduced certain limitations, as the interviewees who participated in the survey were those who willingly agreed and made themselves available. This selection process typically indicates a pre-existing interest in environmental issues, thereby potentially introducing a certain predisposition or inclination towards the topic. It is crucial to acknowledge that their perspectives may not be fully representative of the entire population of young audiences. Moreover, since I mainly contacted acquaintances, I must admit and regret the lack of variety of social backgrounds and ethnic representativeness in this sample. Hence, as Barker said,

“The emphasis in cultural studies research into audiences is on the specificity of responses – what kind of generalization can that sustain? (. . .) some critics [suggest] that audience research never transcends clever description. We ‘tell interesting stories’ of particular texts and audiences and contexts.” (Barker, 2006: 129).

Following Beaud’s recommendations, I decided to assume the ‘unrepresentative’ nature of the interview (Beaud, 1996: 233). Beaud noted that restricting intensive work to a limited number of interviews means, in a way, trusting the heuristic power of the interview, in particular that of revealing the coherence of attitudes and social behaviour (Beaud, 1996: 234).

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2.2 Data Collection: From Film Selection to Semi-Directive Group Discussion

The third stage revolved around the process of data collection. Prior to commencing the interview, a comprehensive briefing was conducted, wherein I elucidated the overarching objectives of the research and provided an overview of the interview process to the participants. Subsequently, interviewees had the opportunity to exercise their agency and select the film they wished to watch from a curated list. I, rather painfully, compiled a catalogue comprising 31 French ecocinema films, informed by Macdonald's (2004) expansive definition of the genre. The film sampling drew upon an array of sources, including in-depth documentary research, digital exploration, consultations with acquaintances and a review of previous interviews with filmmakers familiar with ecocinema. These multiple sources have combined to ensure a comprehensive selection process, although I'm well aware that some films are probably missing – which is deplorable. The resulting list was then categorized into 3 principal genres: fiction, documentaries, and animated films. Within each genre, an audiovisual content analysis was conducted to classify films into thematic sub-categories (e.g., agricultural narratives, biopics, depictions of childhood, among others). The intention was to furnish each discussion group with a curated selection of 11 films, comprising 5 fictions, 5 documentaries, and 1 animated film – I assumed that providing the full list would make choosing a film excessively time-consuming. This pivotal decision-making juncture not only launched the interview process but also unveiled its inherent value as an integral component of data collection.

Table 1. Table Categorizing Ecocinema Films Proposed to Each Focus Groups by Genre and Theme through Audiovisual Content Analysis

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Film (original title)	Director	Release year	Genre	Thematic sub-categories	
Goliath	Frédéric Tellier	2022	Fiction	Environmental Justice and Industrial Impact	
Rouge	Farid Bentoumi	2020			
La Petite bande	Pierre Salvadori	2022		Youth Activism	
L'heure de la sortie	Sébastien Marnier	2018			
La Croisade	Louis Garrel	2021		Ecological Disasters and Survival	
Dans la brume	Daniel Roby	2018			
La Nuée	Just Philippot	2020			
La Belle Verte	Coline Serreau	1996		Ecological Utopia	
Au nom de la terre	Édouard Bergeon	2019			
La Terre des hommes	Naël Marandin	2020		Rural Issues	
Le vent tourne	Bettina Oberli	2018		Biopics and Exploration of the Wildlife	
L'Odyssée	Jérôme Salle	2016			
Donne-moi des ailes	Nicolas Vanier	2019		Documentary	Narratives of Environmental Disaster Victims
Marcher sur l'eau	Aïssa Maïga	2021			
140 km à l'ouest du paradis	Céline Rouzet	2022	Sustainable Solutions and Initiatives		
Demain	Cyril Dion et Mélanie Laurent	2015			
Solutions locales pour un désordre global	Coline Serreau	2010	Youth Activism and Global Awareness		
Une fois que tu sais	Emmanuel Cappellin	2020			
Poumon vert et tapis rouge	Luc Marescot	2020			
Animal	Cyril Dion	2021	Exploration of Natural Worlds and Ecosystems		
Bigger Than Us	Flore Vasseur	2021			
La Glace et le Ciel	Luc Jacquet	2015	Environmental Activism and Corporate Impact		
Il était une forêt	Luc Jacquet	2012			
La Panthère des neiges	Marie Amiguet	2021	Animation		
Planète Océan	Michael Pitiot et Yann Arthus-Bertrand	2012			
Le Monde selon Monsanto	Marie-Monique Robin	2008			
Nos enfants nous accuseront	Jean-Paul Jaud	2008			
Severn, la voix de nos enfants	Jean-Paul Jaud	2010			
Tante Hilda !	Jacques-Rémy Girerd et Benoît Chieux	2013			
Minuscule. La vallée des fourmis perdues	Hélène Giraud et Thomas Szabo	2013	Animation		
La prophétie des grenouilles	Jacques-Rémy Girerd	2003			

Focus group	Colour
1	Green
2	Yellow
3	Blue

Once the film selection was made, the research progressed to the screening phase, where participants had the chance to engage with the chosen film in preparation for the subsequent interview discussions. Influenced by the methodology of ethnography (Moore, 1993; Marx, 2014; de la Palva Vélez, 2017), I also attended the film screening, diligently documenting the audience's reactions and comments. Subsequently, I initiated a semi-directive group interview with the participants, aiming to engage in an in-depth discussion regarding the film's significance as perceived by the young audience. The interview guide was structured into 4 distinct sections. The first section revolved around the film itself, exploring its themes, messages, and impact on the participants. The second section delved into the perspectives of young people on ecology, addressing their inclinations towards or detachment from environmental political activism. The third section focused on the intersection of cinema and the environment, examining the participants' perceptions of how films can raise awareness and inspire political action on environmental matters. Lastly, the fourth section explored, more broadly, the relationship between art and political commitment, investigating the participants' perspectives on the role of art in fostering political engagement and advocating for environmental causes.

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In line with the constructivist perspective of Berger and Luckmann (1984), Bauer and Gaskell state:

“The first point of departure is the assumption that the social world is (. . .) actively constructed by people in their everyday life, but not under conditions of their own making. It is assumed that these constructions form people’s paramount reality, their life world. Using qualitative interviewing to map and understand the respondents’ life world (. . .) The objective is a fine-textured understanding of beliefs, attitudes, values and motivations in relation to the behaviours of people in particular social contexts.” (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000: 38-39).

The interview process has been carefully designed to create a supportive and open environment, allowing participants to express “how, through the whole encounter, [they] arrive at a combination of experiences (surprise, delight, frustration, dislike, etc.) and judgments (‘not as good as I’d hoped,’ ‘a blast,’ ‘appalling’ etc.)” (Barker, 2006: 135). Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that certain obstacles may have arisen throughout the research process. One such obstacle pertains to my pre-existing familiarity with some of the interviewees. This familiarity could potentially influence my interpretations of their responses. In addition, due to time constraints, there might have been instances where I was unable to delve deeper into certain reflections or considerations, potentially limiting the thoroughness of my analysis.

2.3 Interpretation of the Interview Data: Between Critical and Thematic Discourse Analysis

The fourth stage involves the meticulous analysis of interview data, to identify patterns, themes, and connections within interviewees’ responses. In this empirical research, critical and thematic discourse analysis methods are deemed the most appropriate for analysing the collected interview data, driven by several considerations. Firstly, these methods prioritize the text of the interviews, focusing on the meaning within the language used by the respondents. Secondly, the chosen methods explore the audience’s capacity for agency, interpretation, and meaning-making through their own audio-visual analysis. By considering the active role of the participants in engaging with the films, these methods capture their individual and

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collective perspectives and reactions. Furthermore, these methods allow for an exploration of the power dynamics embedded in these representations (Hall, 1997). I critically analysed the discourses and themes present in the films and considering the social positioning of the audience members. This process was facilitated by the utilization of MaxQda software, which assisted in organizing, coding, and exploring patterns within the interview responses. Finally, the fifth stage entails the interpretation and synthesis of findings, allowing for the generation of meaningful insights that aim to contribute to the broader field of ecocinema research and inform future discussions on youth engagement and environmental consciousness.

The main challenge encountered in this empirical research lay in the delicate task of maintaining an objective investigative position throughout the study, ensuring that the analysis of the interviews does not succumb to the temptation of producing a politically correct discourse solely aligned with environmental causes. To address this challenge, I have continually attempted to oscillate back and forth between my own point of view and that of the respondents. It was essential to approach the data analysis with a balanced and rigorous perspective, avoiding any inclination to bias the findings towards predetermined outcomes that align solely with pro-environmental viewpoints. As a researcher committed to addressing environmental challenges, it was crucial to uphold the principles of scholarly integrity and maintain a critical stance. This meant being vigilant against confirmation bias and actively seeking diverse perspectives within the collected data to embrace the complexity of opinions expressed by the participants, even if they challenge or deviate from conventional environmental narratives. I tried to adopt a neutral and open-minded approach during the analysis process, to ensure that the findings would accurately reflect the participants' perspectives and experiences, without imposing personal or ideological biases.

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Visual representation of data derived from thematic analysis using MaxQda software

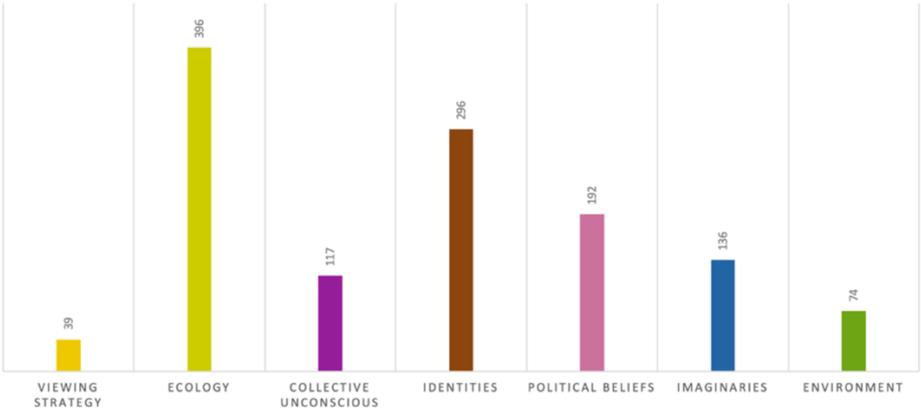


Figure 1. Bar Chart Illustrating the Occurrence Frequency of Parent Codes in Interview Data

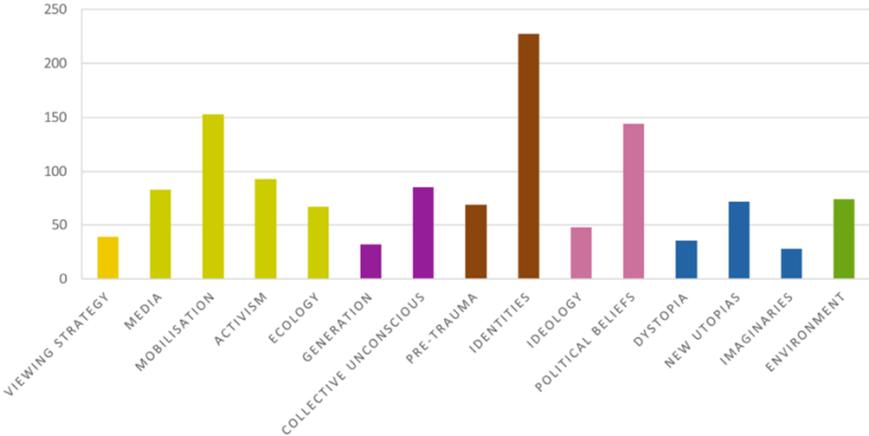


Figure 2. Bar Chart Illustrating the Occurrence Frequency of Parent and Sub-Codes in Interview Data



Figure 3. Word Cloud: Visualizing Parent and Sub-Codes

3. INTERVIEW DATA AND ANALYSIS

This section highlights the key findings of the empirical research stemming from in-depth interviews with focus groups, which provided valuable insights into the perspectives and experiences of the participants. I begin by presenting the key findings from my research, providing a comprehensive overview of the participants' views in relation to the film they opted to watch during the interview and, more broadly, to French ecocinema films. Subsequently, I delve into the analysis and interpretation of these findings, offering nuanced insights into the ways in which ecocinema influences political ideologies and imaginaries among young audiences. Through this exploration, I aim to uncover the complex dynamics between cinema, youth activism, and the environmental movement.

3.1 Exploring Audience Viewing Strategy and Perceptions of EcoCinema: A Thematic Analysis of Interview Data

In the following section, I undertake a rigorous exploration of the data collected during the interviews, using the lens of thematic analysis. The thematic analysis involved identifying recurring patterns, themes, and codes within the interview narratives. Our analysis centres around key codes, notably 'viewing strategy', 'ecology', 'collective unconscious', 'identities', 'political beliefs', 'imaginaries', and 'environment'.

'Ecology' (396 times):

The significant occurrence of terms related to 'ecology' throughout the interview data underlines a strong thematic emphasis on environmental concerns and the intricate interrelation between media, society, and the natural world (Rust & Monani, 2012). The prevalence of 'ecology' over the other themes signifies the profound impact of environmental issues on media content and audience perceptions, extending to collective imaginaries (Kaplan, 2016; Kubrak, 2020). Moreover, it underscores the evolving role of media in shaping public discourse, political beliefs, and potential solutions. In this analysis, sub-codes including

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'media,' 'mobilization,' and 'activism' were appended to the 'ecology' parent code, revealing additional dimensions of ecocinema's role in political mobilisation for the environment.

'Identities' (296 times):

The frequent use of expressions and phrases linked to the theme of 'identities' draws attention to the diverse social and cultural backgrounds that individuals bring to their media interactions. This reflects the ongoing engagement of viewers in the process of interpreting the films they see in relation to their individual identities (Barker, 2006; Banaji, 2008). The concept of 'identities' underscores the intricate interplay between personal experiences, cultural settings, and media engagement. This aligns with the overarching theme of 'viewing strategy,' highlighting the multiplicity of perspectives audiences contribute to media analysis. In this analysis, the sub-code 'pre-trauma' was integrated into the 'identities' parent code. Indeed, the notion of 'pre-trauma', as conceptualized by Kaplan (2016), finds resonance within the interview data, even though it might not have been explicitly articulated as such. This concept, revolving around a sense of fearful anticipation of future events, aligns with the interviewees' affects emerging from the interviews, demonstrating that ecocinema offers a unique avenue for audiences to engage with the potentiality of humanity already experiencing the worlds depicted in the films.

'Political Beliefs' (192 times):

The recurrent mention of 'political beliefs' within the interview data underscores the mutual acknowledgment of media's impact on shaping individuals' political viewpoints. This aligns closely with the central theme of media's role in constructing and reinforcing ideology as discussed by thinkers such as Chomsky and Herman (1988), and more recently Turner (2006) and Hesmondhalgh (2018). The inclusion of the sub-code 'ideology' to the 'political beliefs' parent code enhances the exploration of media's ideological dimensions.

'Imaginaries' (136 times):

The significant presence of terms akin to 'imaginaries' suggests that media content contributes to the construction of shared cultural narratives, influencing individual perceptions of reality. The concept of 'imaginaries' has recurred consistently in response to inquiries about the

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transformative role of ecocinema within political systems, particularly its capacity to introduce alternatives through compelling visual narratives. Notably, this overarching concept has been further nuanced with the inclusion of two sub-codes: 'dystopia' and 'new utopias'. This extension arises from a predominant theme evident in the interviews. On one hand, the interviews highlighted the potent influence of dystopian narratives in driving shifts in audience behavior. On the other hand, they also expressed a collective call for the emergence of innovative cinematic utopias as agents of change.

'Collective Unconscious' (117 times):

The recurring mention to the 'collective unconscious' within the interview data highlights a shared understanding of the underlying psychological factors that influence individual perceptions and behaviors. The prominence of the collective unconscious in this analysis accentuates its role in forming social imaginaries and influencing audience engagement with media messages. Noteworthy, the addition of the sub-code 'generation' under the 'collective unconscious' parent code reflects the recurring references to generational differences in collective perceptions.

'Environment' (74 times):

Beyond the ecological concerns, the interviews data encompassed the broader theme of the 'environment' – signifying the intricate interplay between humanity and the non-human world. This facet surfaced repeatedly throughout the discussions. While certain films didn't explicitly tackle ecological crises like climate change or pollution, the inclusion of animals and insects, and their portrayal on screen frequently provoked contemplation among the audience regarding humanity's influence on its surroundings.

'Viewing Strategy' (39 times):

While the frequency of terms associated with 'viewing strategy' is relatively modest, it accentuates the mutual acknowledgment of audience engagement as proactive and interpretive, challenging conventional perceptions of passive receptivity. This alignment with dynamic frameworks of media impact, elucidated in the literature review, indicates a departure from deterministic viewpoints towards a more nuanced comprehension of the

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cognitive and psychological intricacies during media consumption. Notably, the unprompted articulation of their individual motivations, perspectives, and methods of decoding the viewed films by the interviewees is particularly striking.

Thematic Analysis Coding Grid

Table 2. Code System and Frequency Parent Codes in Interview Data

	Parent code	Code. seg. (all documents)
●	Viewing Strategy	39
●	Ecology	396
●	Collective unconscious	117
●	Identities	296
●	Political beliefs	192
●	Imaginaries	136
●	Environment	74

Table 3. Code System and Frequency Parent and Sub-Codes in Interview Data

	Parent code	Code	Code. seg. (all documents)
●	Viewing Strategy	Viewing Strategy	39
●	Ecology	Media	83
●	Ecology	Mobilisation	153
●	Ecology	Activism	93
●	Ecology	Ecology	67
●	Collective unconscious	Generation	32
●	Collective unconscious	Collective unconscious	85
●	Identities	Pre-trauma	69
●	Identities	Identities	227
●	Political beliefs	Ideology	48
●	Political beliefs	Political beliefs	144
●	Imaginaries	Dystopia	36
●	Imaginaries	New utopias	72
●	Imaginaries	Imaginaries	28
●	Environment	Environment	74

3.2 Decoding the Dynamics of Film Selection: Exploring Approaches for Choosing Films

In the process of conducting interviews, the selection of a film for participants to watch becomes a pivotal moment. This choice not only sets the stage for subsequent discussions but also shapes the overall experience and engagement with the research subject. In this section,

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we explore the intricate process of choosing a film during interviews, delving into the various methods employed to match individual tastes and foster shared consent. By understanding the significance of this selection and its impact on subsequent discussions, we gain valuable insights into the dynamics of audience reception.

Overview of Key Data.

Table 4. Table Showing Participant Overview and Key Information Summary

Focus group	Preferred name	Age	Gender	Occupation/activity	Interview details
1	Victoria	21	Female	Art student	Face-to-face
1	Pablo	18	Male	High school student	Face-to-face
1	Mathilde	21	Female	Political science student	Face-to-face
1	Samuel	20	Male	Architecture student	Face-to-face
1	Émile	19	Male	Drama student	Face-to-face
2	Chloé	22	Female	Medical student	Face-to-face
2	Mila	23	Female	Communication student	Face-to-face
2	Aurélien	25	Male	Engineering student	Face-to-face
2	Nael	24	Male	Film technician	Face-to-face
3	Lily	20	Female	Drama student	Face-to-face
3	Alexandre	21	Male	Singer	Face-to-face
3	Théo	22	Male	Music producer	Face-to-face
3	Félicie	24	Female	Cultural management student	Face-to-face
3	Mathilde	18	Female	High school student	Face-to-face

Table 5. Table Displaying Films Selected by Participant Groups for Screening During Interviews

Focus group	Film viewed	Director	Release year	Genre	Poster
1	The World According to Monsanto	Marie-Monique Robin	2008	Documentary	
2	Minuscule: Valley of the Lost Ants	Hélène Giraud & Thomas Szabo	2014	Animation	
3	Raining Cats and Frogs	Jacques-Rémy Girerd	2003	Animation	

Three distinct film selection moments, each lasting around 10, 5, and 17 minutes, were observed among the three groups. In groups 1 and 3, a *democratic* decision-making process

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prevailed, where participants shared their individual film preferences, and the group collectively selected the most mentioned film to screen. Alexandre said: “I suggest that we make a list of 3 each, then select the films with the most points and then vote on them.” Conversely, in group 2, an entirely different method emerged, where participants decided to base their choice solely on the film’s title that resonated with them emotionally:

Aurélien: I like the title! (laughs) I’m in favour of choosing only based on the title, because I think you have to give credit to titles (. . .) In my experience, that’s the best way to choose a book when you’re a bit lost.

The role of chance in film selection was also highlighted, where participants embraced the mystery and unpredictability that comes with watching a film based on its title alone. Moreover, the methods of film selection seemed to be associated with the participants’ degree of investment in each of the 3 groups. Remarkably, group 2 participants ultimately chose to watch an animated film, driven by their desire to avoid complex considerations and simply relax. Chloé expressed this clearly: “Oh, I’m glad! I thought we were going to watch a film where I was going to have to think a lot.”

The participants sought various means to discover more about the content of the films listed for selection. Some consulted film pitches on the Internet, others asked me for opinions and recommendations, while one participant relied solely on viewing film posters. The difficulty of this task was evident, often becoming a question of intuition and “feeling” rather than exhaustive research. For example, Théo stated: “I’m too lazy to do all the research, so I’ll just go with my gut feeling, and with the director’s name too if I know someone”. Trailers were avoided to preserve the element of surprise during the viewing experience. Throughout the film selection discussions, certain elements emerged as critical criteria that influenced the participants’ choices and contributed to building consensus. These factors included the names of actors and directors, prior viewings of certain films, the film’s availability on specific platforms, and the overall atmosphere of the film. Additionally, films’ popularity, opinions of friends, and personal familiarity with the film’s content played a role in shaping preferences.

Notably, some interviewees positioned themselves as “opinion leaders” in the words of Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944), actively influencing and shaping the film selection

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discussions. These individuals played a role in providing information, synthesizing options, and guiding the decisions of other participants. On the other hand, some participants preferred a more passive role, leaving the decision-making process to others. To quote Nael: "I'll let you choose the film, I don't give a damn". One intriguing conversation during the interviews highlighted the political dimension of reaching consensus within a group. One participant was disappointed with the choice of film, and another responded:

Alexandre: Oh, we've voted, that's all right, it's democracy... You're not going to change your vote in the ballot box, that's not the principle.

Théo: Democracy sucks when you leave the others out. We don't feel represented here. (laughs)

Alexandre: Go to demonstrations, take part in riots, burn buses!

The concept of "democracy" emerged as a symbolic representation of collective decision-making. However, the conversation also revealed the inherent limitations and frustrations associated with the democratic process, which in today's world cannot be ignored. Here, the participant expressed feelings of not being fully represented, calling into question the idealized notion of democracy in the context of film selection.

3.3 Film Reflections: Audience Perspectives on Ecology and Environmental Issues

The first part of the interview guide is centred around the viewed film, encompassing discussions on the audience's interpretation of the plot, the director's artistic approach, the visual aesthetics, and the emotional responses evoked. As the interview unfolds, the focus shifts to the audience's perceptions and understanding of how ecological narratives are portrayed on screen. Subsequently, the guide's second part investigates participants' individual rapport with ecology. It initially explores their individual interest and engagement with ecological matters and gathers their viewpoints on current environmental policies and their anticipations concerning the trajectory of ecological concerns.

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Theme 1: Animation as a Medium for Engaging Diverse Audiences and Ideological Messages

In the discussions surrounding *Minuscule: Valley of the Lost Ants* and *Raining Cats and Frogs*, participants highlighted animation's unique ability to convey multilayered ecological and social messages. In *Minuscule*, interviewees in focus group 2 recognized the film's potential to communicate complex themes through anthropomorphized ants. The discussion revolved around the balance between conveying an ecological message and maintaining an engaging narrative for children. This conversation extended to *Raining Cats and Frogs*, where participants in focus group 3 discussed the film's choice of animation to convey ecological and social messages effectively. Lily brought attention to the film's emphasis on the over-exploitation of the Earth, illustrating how humans have pushed the planet to its limits. Théo drew a parallel to Noah's Ark, recognizing the film's resonance with stories of survival and ecological balance, and referencing the symbolic rain as an environmental crisis. Félicie presented a different viewpoint, seeing the film's core message as unity and respect among individuals to progress together. Participants highlighted that the choice of animation allowed the film to convey ecological and social messages effectively, and to target a wide audience, including children and adults:

Mélie: I think it's a deliberate choice to create an animated film: it implies that a child watching this film starts to understand what ecology and social issues are, but also that an adult can watch it and it resonates with other things they also know.

Banaji's (2008) insights into audience interpretation find resonance within the animated films' discussions. This becomes particularly pertinent when examining Mélie, Lily, and Chloé's discussions on how both children and adults can interpret the intersecting messages in the films from distinct perspectives. The participants' interpretations of the films also align with Barker's concept of "media/cultural engagements" (2006), where the audience's diverse experiences come into play when engaging with animated films' themes. In the case of *Minuscule* and *Raining Cats and Frogs*, the animated medium allows for intricate storytelling that encapsulates ecological and social concerns. Analysing the dialogues centred on the themes of these animated films reveals that this genre is susceptible to ideological influences.

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The narrative decisions, visual portrayals, and thematic emphases present within these films all collectively contribute to their underlying ideological dimensions:

Nael: For me, it's purely a criticism of human society in the sense that ants behave like humans.

Mila: It's a critique of capitalism!

In the extract from the interview, Nael and Mila's interpretations of the film's themes align with Turner's framework of ideology (2006) in cinematic analysis. Nael's perspective, emphasizing the similarity between ant behavior and human actions, resonates with Turner's assertion that films are sites where ideologies are consciously or unconsciously read and where the relationship between a film and its cultural context can be traced to ideological roots. Nael's observation can be seen as a reflection of how films, as "systems of representation" (Turner, 2006: 181), reveal ideological underpinnings and prompt audiences to draw connections between cinematic narratives and broader societal structures. Mila's interpretation further supports Turner's argument that films provide rich sites for ideological analysis. By recognizing capitalism as a target of critique within the film, Mila engages in an ideological reading of the narrative, highlighting how films can be "reflectionist" in nature (Turner, 2006: 181). This echoes Turner's view that films both work on and are produced by the meaning systems of culture, presenting a reflection of societal ideologies and beliefs.

Theme 2: Young Audiences' Collective Sense of Powerlessness and Call for Systemic Change

A thread running through all the interviews is the theme of powerlessness in the face of complex ecological issues and the need for systemic change. This prevailing sentiment is evident in the discussions centered on *The World According to Monsanto*, where participants collectively acknowledged their awareness but expressed a sense of helplessness in effecting substantial transformation. Émile felt disempowered by the documentary's fact-focused approach, saying, "It's a shame because she's making us passive." Similarly, participants in focus group 2 expressed scepticism about reversing harmful ecological trends. Nael pointed out the complexities of reverting to a greener way of life:

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Nael: I just think it's impossible in reality. Because going back is too complicated to achieve, in the sense that we've grown accustomed to a certain comfort, a way of living, and the entire society is built around it. And it's simply impossible to return to a greener way of life without breaking everything and rebuilding it all.

This sentiment extended to focus group 3, where Théo acknowledged the necessity of challenging the existing economic system built on consumption. The participants agreed that addressing ecological issues requires mobilisation of decision-makers, industries, multinational corporations, state organisations and governments – super-structures in the Marxist tradition –, transcending individual efforts. Building upon ideology theories as previously explored in this paper, Žižek's introduction of "ideological fantasy" as an unconscious illusion that molds our perception of reality (Žižek, 2008), and Arendt's complementing perspective on how ideology shapes a distorted reality that dismisses conflicting viewpoints (Arendt, 2017), further resonates. This relates to the young audiences' experience of powerlessness, as their sense of disempowerment is perpetuated by the ideological constructs that govern their understanding of their role in ecological challenges. Furthermore, Fisher's notion of "capitalist realism" (2018) feeds into the discussions about systemic change, as young audiences' aspirations for change are hindered by the overwhelming influence of capitalist ideology on their perceptions of what is possible. Lastly, Schinaia's insights into "defense mechanisms and intrapsychic tactics" (Schinaia, 2019: 277) provide an enlightening perspective on the young audiences' prevailing sense of powerlessness. The audience's hesitation to directly confront the adverse outcomes of capitalist ideology, as highlighted by Schinaia, harmonizes with the participants' expressions of their inability to question long-standing societal conventions and behaviors.

Victoria: (. . .) it worries us individually because it's extremely distressing as a topic. We are informed through social networks, and because it's heavily publicized, but essentially, it's like we're trying to drown out this kind of subject. Because ultimately, it's so anxiety-inducing that we don't want to confront it.

The interviews data, especially this quote from Victoria, illustrates how capitalist ideology functions as a protective barrier, shielding young individuals from acknowledging their

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involvement in ecological challenges, mirroring their internal struggle to confront their powerlessness and the intricate nuances associated with effecting meaningful change.

3.4 Frames of Impact: Ecocinema's Role in Awakening Environmental Consciousness and Political Engagement

The third section of the interview guide deals with the socio-political role of cinema in raising environmental awareness. This part aims to investigate how films contribute to shaping public consciousness about ecological concerns. The fourth section broadens the discussion to encompass the broader realm of art, exploring its impact on public sentiment and its potential to challenge established systems. Within these parts, participants are encouraged to share not only their personal encounters but also their deeper ideological and political perspectives on the roles of cinema and art.

Theme 3: Ecocinema's Informative Role Without Necessarily Catalyzing Action

Throughout the interviews, a significant theme emerged regarding cinema's unique capability, surpassing other art forms, to effectively address environmental issues, primarily attributed to its "distinctive visual" and "concrete aspect". Reflecting MacDonald's (2004) conceptualisation of ecocinema as films cultivating a mindset inclined towards environmental progress, interviewees from various focus groups echoed the feeling that film has the potential to spark conversations and raise awareness of environmental issues. Films like *Tomorrow*, *Okja* and Miyazaki's works (cited by participants in the three focus groups), but also *Goliath*, *Wall-E* and *Don't Look Up* (mentioned in 2 out of 3 interviews) exemplify this approach, evoking emotions and prompting viewers to contemplate their own behaviours. While participants recognized cinema's capacity to normalize environmental themes, they debated the accessibility of these films to broader audiences. Mathilde and Pablo pointed to documentaries possibly catering to an educated elite, while Victoria and Émile highlighted cinema's accessibility through relatable visual storytelling. In contrast to the perspectives of the two previous groups, the participants in focus group 3 arrived at a consensus that art, including cinema, has the potential to influence audience sentiment and political choices. The recurring

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use of the term “awaken” (14 times) underscored their conviction that art has the power to shake individuals out of inertia and envision alternative futures.

Théo: And, from the moment you influence people, you influence politics in one way or another. I think that if a film resonates with people, it will play a role in their political choices afterwards.

By suggesting that a resonant film can lead to changed political choices, Théo alludes to the transformative power of storytelling and visual narratives. The idea of cinema’s influence on broader societal imaginaries (Kaplan, 2016) echoes Théo’s belief in cinema’s power to translate individuals’ emotional response into tangible actions, which could involve supporting policies, advocating for change, or altering their own behaviors. However, a recurring perspective was that cinema often falls short of translating awareness into direct action. Aurélien and Nael acknowledged the tension between entertainment and ecological themes in films. They expressed skepticism about cinema’s ability to drive concrete ecological action, distinguishing between its impact on mass audiences and decision-makers.

Aurélien: I believe that politicians will always view art as a lower realm. They’ll think of artists as mere entertainers, finding their films on ecology amusing.

Nael: Just because someone like Elon Musk watches a film doesn’t mean he’ll change his way of thinking.

Theme 4: Between Utopias and Dystopias: Cinema’s Potential to Experiment Alternatives

Within the discourse of focus group 3, a specific extract captured my interest, prompting a deliberate choice to dissect and analyze this particular segment. This decision has been driven by the extract’s illumination of a novel concept nestled at the core of my analysis. The dialogue at the 01:07:31 timestamp delves into the intriguing interplay between dystopian and utopian narratives, ultimately shedding light on cinema’s remarkable ability to stimulate contemplation and cultivate a sense of agency in envisioning positive ecological transformations.

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The conversation began with Lily's contribution introducing a critical perspective on the interpretive nature of cinema and art. She highlighted the inherent subjectivity in artistic representation and the psychological implications of viewing apocalyptic or dystopian films. She pointed out the phenomenon of individuals unconsciously adopting scenarios presented in these films as potential realities, either avoiding or inadvertently contributing to their occurrence based on personal convictions. This observation underlines the power of cinema to shape the reality of individuals. The impact of films on audience beliefs and its potential for political mobilization reflects the ideas of Willoquet-Marcondi (as quoted by Rust & Monani, 2012: 3). Mélodie then expanded on the theme by emphasizing how art tends to forecast worst-case scenarios before eventually envisioning improved futures. This resonates with the notion that art often serves as a precursor to societal shifts, exploring alternative narratives and potentials. This admission aligns with Kaplan's concept of 'pre-trauma,' (Kaplan, 2016: 409) where the cinematic portrayal of potential future catastrophes generates a fearful anticipation that can deeply influence emotional responses. Her revelation unveils the profound emotional impact that cinema can exert, shaping a spectrum of feelings that range from fear to panic.

Then, Mélodie's hopeful speculation about a future film dealing with environmental issues that diverges from the apocalyptic norm to embrace utopian themes adds depth to the conversation. She acknowledges that such a film might not be as sensational or attention-grabbing as its dystopian counterparts, but it could provide an essential counterbalance. The extract underlines cinema's potential to offer alternative narratives and challenge dominant ideologies, in line with Turner's (2006) argument that films construct and re-present reality through cultural and social lenses. Lily's concluding statement, "In fact, instead of depending on dystopias, we should go straight to utopias," crystallizes the essence of the discussion. Her perspective emphasizes the importance of fostering more utopian narratives in ecocinema, advocating for a shift away from overwhelming dystopian portrayals toward narratives that offer optimistic possibilities. Hence, this exchange of views explores the interplay between ideological constructs, imaginaries, viewing strategy and the role of ecocinema in shaping young audience's vision of the future. Barker's (2006) and Banaji's (2008) views on audiences' negotiation of meanings based on their pre-existing ideologies and experiences connect with Mélodie and Lily's reflections on how films can contribute to change opinions and attitudes.

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To conclude, I aim to introduce the notion of a ‘repertoire of possibilities,’ suggesting that cinematographic fictions, including works from both dystopian and utopian realms, offer a diverse array of alternatives to our existing reality. These narratives present a collection of conceivable worlds that underscore the importance, as emphasized by Vion-Dury (2020), of generating novel and transformative imaginaries. Indeed, to envision a reality where young individuals are truly engaged in environmental activism, it becomes essential to craft narratives depicting such a scenario.

CONCLUSION

In summary, by exploring the intricate interaction among ecocinema, youth political mobilization, and audience engagement, this dissertation has unveiled the nuanced yet essential role of “translating the science of global warming into the vernacular of cinema (Rust & Monani, 2012: 7), as reaffirmed by the perspectives shared among the three interview groups. The discourse established within these conversations has offered an invaluable platform for dialogue and introspection, allowing me to traverse the intricate fields of political mobilisation, ecological consciousness, and anticipatory visions through the lens of the generation inheriting our fragile planet. The thematic analysis of the interview data has yielded illuminating insights into the multifaceted relationship between ecocinema narratives from animation to documentary, collective sense of powerlessness, and young audience’s call for new utopias to emerge from a dystopian imagination. The narratives of the films emerged as vehicles for critiquing societal constructs, unveiling how audiences decipher and decode underlying ideological currents within cinematic narratives. Furthermore, the research broadened its scope to the socio-political impact of artistic media, uncovering their potential to awaken “green consciousness” (Buell, 1995: 31), catalyse political engagement, and shape collective imaginaries. While cinema’s capacity to raise awareness and spark discourse was acknowledged, debates arose around its efficacy in translating this awareness into tangible ecological action. The dialogue also explored the unique dualism of utopian and dystopian narratives, depicting both dire scenarios and inspiring alternative futures.

Guided by a methodological approach informed by Barker's alternate perspective (2006), the underpinning principles of this analysis illuminate the intricate oscillate between media

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content and its audience. This perspective delves into the interplay between text and audience, encompassing the intricate interplay between power dynamics and enjoyment, the engagement and detachment of fandom, and the delicate balance between the construction of meanings and a sense of insignificance (Barker, 2006: 128). Additionally, it involves reimagining “messages” as interpretations shaped by intricate media structures that are also embedded within the broader discourse frameworks imbued with power dynamics in our society. Furthermore, this approach involves situating audiences within belief systems and practices that attribute significance not only to the content of the media, but also to the media itself as an entity (Barker, 2006: 128).

The public and collective dimensions of cinema intertwined with its political and protesting nature, mentioned several times by interviewees, invite us to delve deeper into the study of its militant appropriations, an area that has received limited attention so far. In future research, it would be intriguing to explore whether socially aware films transcend its role on the screen by fostering public discussions and resonate with social and political mobilization. By doing so, it seeks to blur the boundaries between the realms of art and activism. Moreover, further research could thoroughly address the contemporary calls for “decolonizing” and “indigenizing” the Anthropocene within the realm of Media and Communication theories. Such works could challenge and broaden the prevailing interpretations of the Anthropocene. Notably, Todd’s 2015 article “Indigenizing the Anthropocene” could serve as an illustrative example for this exploration. A particularly intriguing avenue for exploration lies in the exploration of transnational ecocinema and indigenous literature, areas which, lamentably, found limited attention within this present dissertation.

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