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Introduction: Cuts to Dissolves – Defining and Situating Ecocinema Studies

Salma Monani
Gettysburg College

Stephen Rust
University of Oregon

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Introduction: Cuts to Dissolves – Defining and Situating Ecocinema Studies

Abstract

This is the abstract for the entire book:

Ecocinema Theory and Practice is the first collection of its kind—an anthology that offers a comprehensive introduction to the rapidly growing field of eco-film criticism, a branch of critical scholarship that investigates cinema's intersections with environmental understandings. It references seminal readings through cutting edge research and is designed as an introduction to the field as well as a sourcebook. It defines ecocinema studies, sketches its development over the past twenty years, provides theoretical frameworks for moving forward, and presents eloquent examples of the practice of eco-film criticism through essays written by the field's leading and emerging scholars. From explicitly environmental films such as Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man* and Roland Emmerich's *The Day After Tomorrow* to less obvious examples like Errol Morris's *Fast, Cheap & Out of Control* and Christopher Nolan's *Inception*, the pieces in this collection comprehensively interrogate the breadth of ecocinema. *Ecocinema Theory and Practice* also directs readers to further study through lists of recommended readings, professional organizations, and relevant periodicals.

Keywords

ecocinema, ecocriticism, film studies

Disciplines

Film and Media Studies

introduction: cuts to
dissolves—defining
and situating
ecocinema studies

s t e p h e n r u s t a n d s a l m a m o n a n i

Ecology, by its very definition, is unrestricted; it is impossible to say where nature stops and culture begins, or vice versa.

Nadia Bozak, *The Cinematic Footprint*, 15

Wow! That means every and any film can be analyzed ecocritically.

Gettysburg College Environmental Studies Student

From an ecocritical perspective, environment is not just the organic world, or the laws of nature to which Kant counterposed the powers of human reason in the struggle for freedom, or that Nature from which Marx thought we were condemned to wrest our survival; it is the whole habitat which encircles us, the physical world entangled with the cultural. It is an ecology of connections that we negotiate to make our meanings and our livings. In this habitat, cinema is a form of negotiation, a mediation that is itself ecologically placed as it consumes the entangled world around it, and in turn, is itself consumed.

While film and media scholars have always explored cinema's cultural negotiations, until recently ecocritical perspectives have been largely absent in the scholarship. A somewhat remiss tack, since from production and distribution to consumption and recirculation, the cinematic experience is inescapably embedded in ecological webs. Cinematic texts, with their audiovisual presentations of individuals and their habitats, affect our imaginations of the world around us, and thus, potentially, our actions towards this world. In addition, cinema's various technologies, from lights and cameras to DVDs and even the seeming immateriality of the internet, involve the planet's material resources and serve as an indictment of cinema's direct role in transforming and impacting our ecosystems. It is only recently, most notably since the mid-1990s, that a growing number of scholars have begun to critically interrogate cinema's ecological dimensions and their implications for us and the more than human world in which we live.¹

This book is about such ecocritical interrogations. It draws on the thoughts and ideas of pioneering scholars in the field, such as Sean Cubitt, David Ingram, and Scott MacDonald, and it also accesses more recent voices, such as those of Adrian Ivakhiv and Nicole Starosielski, whose works present exciting new directions in the scholarship. It is very much a collaborative effort, rising out of conversations begun at academic conferences, and continued online through personal communication and on blog sites such as Ecomedia Studies.² In harnessing these conversations, *Ecocinema Theory and Practice* works to bring coherence to the richly burgeoning field of critical attention that is *ecocinema studies*.

defining and situating ecocinema studies

In soliciting essays, we asked our contributors to reflect on current concerns in film studies and ecocriticism and to compose a chapter that highlights one or more of these concerns such that the collection as a whole could showcase the wide range of films and theoretical approaches with which eco-film critics engage. The result demonstrates chapters on topics and genres one might conventionally recognize as environmental, such as wildlife documentaries on penguins, and those that one might initially not think of in environmental terms, such as horror films of the 1970s. Together, these diversely focused chapters comprehensively demarcate the goal of this book, which is to explicitly highlight how 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.

Our contributors (and others interested in this topic) may hold diverse, perhaps even conflicting, opinions about about what ecocinema is exactly.³

Some critics, such as Paula Willoquet-Marcondi in *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film*, suggest that certain independent lyrical and activist documentaries—not commercial (i.e. Hollywood) films—may be thought of as ecocinema because they are the most capable of inspiring progressive eco-political discourse and action among viewers.⁴ While others suggest there is more ambiguity in how individuals are inspired, what films might inspire them, and therefore, what constitutes ecocinema, eco-film critics generally agree on a few key ideas. First, we agree that all cinema is unequivocally culturally and materially embedded. Second, whatever our personal politics, we tend to agree that the dominant, consumeristic modus operandi often suggests a troubled state of affairs not only in human interactions but also with the nonhuman world, and that cinema provides a window into how we imagine this state of affairs, and how we act with or against it. Third, as Sean Cubitt has eloquently stated, “Though many films are predictably bound to the common ideologies of the day, including ideologies of nature, many are far richer in contradictions and more ethically, emotionally, and intellectually satisfying than much of what passes for eco-politics.”⁵ In essence, we tend to agree that all films present productive ecocritical exploration and careful analysis can unearth engaging and intriguing perspectives on cinema’s various relationships with the world around us. In demonstrating this attention to all films, this collection showcases the breadth in current ecocinema research.

In bringing some order to this wide array of scholarship, we have organized the book into four sections, which both reflect and blur the boundaries that have existed in the field thus far. Part I *Ecocinema Theory* sets the stage by presenting some of the theoretical dilemmas that haunt the field, and suggesting new insights into the nature of both ecological and cinematic reality. Part II *Ecocinema Practice: Wildlife and Documentary Film* spotlights a rich strand of ecocinema attention, even as it disturbs the boundaries of what one might consider constitutes a wildlife or documentary film. While documentary films have often been lauded for engaging environmental consciousness, Part III *Ecocinema Practice: Hollywood and Fictional Film* draws attention to mainstream films, both questioning assumptions that they are incapable of promoting ecological awareness because of their popular appeals and commercial intent, and highlighting genres which have been neglected by earlier eco-film critics. Part IV *Beyond Film* offers models for expanding the field through an exploration of environmental film festivals and a closer look at the technical and aesthetic properties of visualization and sonification used by scientists and filmmakers to record, interpret, and represent scientific data.

Our four-part organization, with attention to ecocinema theory and different genre emphases of practice, reflects the historical development of ecocinema studies, which we cannot ignore in a collection that seeks to highlight the field’s foundations even as it recognizes new directions.

Historically, in terms of scholarship, while there were sporadic publications prior to the late 1990s (such as sections of Donna Haraway's 1989 *Primate visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, and Barbara Crowther's 1994 essay "Toward a Feminist Critique of Television Natural History Programmes"), the beginnings of an unprecedented swell in eco-film criticism were marked by five book-length studies published at the turn of the twenty-first century: Jhan Hochman's *Green Cultural Studies: Nature in Film, Novel and Theory* (1998); Gregg Mitman's *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film* (1999); Derek Bousé's *Wildlife Films* (2000); David Ingram's *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* (2000); and Scott MacDonald's *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place* (2001).⁶

While Mitman and Bousé's texts provided the first comprehensive examinations of wildlife nature films, Ingram's *Green Screen* was the first comprehensive interrogation of Hollywood environmental films, and MacDonald turned his attention to avant-garde cinema. Jochman's *Green Cultural Studies* was one of the first book-length studies to apply the analytical theory of cultural studies to ecocritical readings of cinema. Published so close to each other and by scholars with different disciplinary groundings, these five books did not directly reference one other. However, because each of these efforts examined a type of cinema—wildlife films, Hollywood fictional films, or independent avant-garde films—and applied ecocritical attention to many films, they served as timely references for scholars interested in how cinema interfaces with and shapes our imaginations of the material environment. Each too, seemed to carve out distinct lines of ecocinema scholarship. For example, Ingram's *Green Screen* has been seminal to critics interested in Hollywood cinema, influencing works such as Pat Brereton's *Hollywood Utopia* (2005) and Deborah Carmichael's edited collection *The Landscape of Hollywood Westerns: Ecocriticism in the American Film Genre* (2006).⁷ Bousé and Mitman's projects became essential starting points for wildlife film scholars like Cynthia Chris (*Watching Wildlife*, 2006), and Luis Vivanco (for example his 2004 *Cultural Dynamics* article "The Work of Environmentalism in an Age of Televisual Adventures").⁸

However, even as these five books pointed toward different strands of ecocinema studies, some scholars have sought instead to actively disrupt the distinctions and assumptions generated by traditional genre focus. As the overlap and competition between the methods of production, distribution, and reception employed by these film types and the environmental messages they convey (as well as widespread media attention to environmental issues) has grown, the emerging work of scholars such as Adrian Ivakhiv (see his 2008 *ISLE* article "Green Film Criticism and its Futures") and Willoquet-Marcondi (*Framing the World*) demonstrate how conversations that transcend Hollywood, wildlife, and independent avant-garde film boundaries can enrich our understandings of all cinema as ecologically embedded.⁹ At the same time, these broader reflections on what constitutes ecocinema and the

work that eco-film critics do, or should do, raise important questions for the field and where it is headed.

This is where our collection fits in, drawing attention to the need for theoretical rigor in the scholarship, blurring historical divisions in genre focus and, most importantly, inviting readers to contemplate both the tensions and the potentials of such cuts and dissolves between the various strands of ecocinema studies as the field moves forward.

the essays

Our volume begins with theory to capture the ways in which eco-film critics are mapping the purview of what ecocinema is, and how scholars might engage its potentials. To lead off we have Scott MacDonald's chapter, "The Ecocinema Experience," a revised and expanded version of his 2004 *ISLE* article, "Toward an Eco-Cinema," in which he coined the term ecocinema to describe films 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."¹⁰ As much an ode as a polemic, MacDonald argues here that exposing audiences to the long-duration takes and other avant-garde techniques used by independent filmmakers like Andrej Zdravič, James Benning, and Sharon Lockhart can function as a way of retraining perception. In effect, the experience of avant-garde cinema works to counter the damaging psychic and environmental effects of the commercial media.

David Ingram takes exception to some aspects of this position, countering in "The Aesthetics and Ethics of Eco-film Criticism" that cognitivist film theory offers a useful corrective to the aesthetic assumptions that have shaped recent work in ecocinema studies. Ingram presses his case by analyzing three films of radically different aesthetic styles—*sleep furiously* (Gideon Koppel, 2008), *Sunshine State* (John Sayles, 2002), and *Southland Tales* (Richard Kelly, 2008). Each, he argues, is capable of both challenging its viewers to retrain their perception of ecological awareness but also being completely ineffective in this regard, depending on the audience's prior predisposition and training. To help explain his point, he organizes the chapter using three conceptual oppositions that complicate aesthetic appreciation: art and popular cinema, realism and melodrama, and moralism and immoralism.

Like Ingram, Andrew Hageman worries that a strictly aesthetic or moralistic approach to ecocinema studies falls short of offering critics a sufficient toolkit for identifying and analyzing the contradictions internal to all films. Thus, in "Ecocinema and Ideology: Do Ecocritics Dream of a Clockwork Green?" he uses different genre depictions of the struggle over water privatization in Cochabamba, Bolivia—the documentary *The Corporation* (2003), the fiction feature *Tambien la Lluvia* (2010), and the animated short

Abuela Grillo (2009)—to demonstrate that ideological contradictions exist in all films. His point is that it is precisely these contradictions—which illustrate the limits to our ability to think and act ecologically—that should make us cautious of narrowly defining ecocinema.

If much of the energy to theorize ecocinema is devoted to identifying how a film's ecological potential is gauged, Adrian Ivakhiv's philosophical understanding of cinema's relationship with the world is yet another approach to doing so. In "An Ecophilosophy of the Moving Image: Cinema as an Anthrobiogeomorphic Machine," Ivakhiv draws on the insights of Agamben, Peirce, Whitehead, Deleuze, Guattari, and Heidegger, to present a process-relational theory of cinema. Cinema, in this model, is a machine that moves us along vectors that are affective, narrative, and semiotic in nature and discloses worlds in which humanity, animality, and territory are brought into relationship with each other. In describing cinema's complex interactions with three ecologies of the earth-world—the material, the social, and the perceptual—Ivakhiv suggests a method of engaging with cinema that is nothing less than holistic.

These theoretical investigations are not left behind in Part II *Ecocinema Practice: Wildlife and Documentary Films* but are deepened by the efforts of Luis Vivanco, Jennifer Ladino, Nicole Starosielski, and Claire Molloy, who engage current debates related to filmic representations of animality and humanity, wild and tame, us and the "Other." While filmmaking is a fundamentally human activity, what we put on screen, how we do so, and how we respond to these images is determined as much by culture, politics, and economics as it is by the nonhuman world that many films seek to represent. By highlighting these interactions between the cultural and the material, and by troubling generic assumptions that have tended to characterize previous discussions of the so-called nature film, these chapters remind us that the borders between human and nonhuman worlds are fluid ones indeed.

In "Penguins are Good to Think With: Wildlife Films, the Imaginary Shaping of Nature, and Environmental Politics," Vivanco contends that throughout the history of the wildlife film genre filmmakers and viewers have used penguins to reflect on broader political issues such as survival in difficult environments, family relations, habitat destruction and, more recently, global warming. In themselves, Vivanco points out, penguins are no better or worse to "think with" than other subjects of wildlife film. Nevertheless, by tracking the cinematic representation of penguins, he offers future scholars a model for exploring how historical changes across the wildlife film genre are reflective of broader cultural concerns.

Jennifer Ladino's "Working with Animals: Regarding Companion Species in Documentary Film" extends scholarship on animality in documentary film by using Donna Haraway's influential concept of "companion species" to investigate three documentaries: *Fast, Cheap & Out of Control* (1997), *Grizzly Man* (2005), and *Sweetgrass* (2009). Ladino shows how each film decenters a

humanist (speciesist) perspective, showcases ways of “becoming with” nonhuman animals through work, and positions nonhuman animals as co-evolving agents in shared environments. Self-reflexive documentaries like these expand notions of wildlife film by probing generic and species boundaries and challenging cinematic tendencies to simulate, objectify, and marginalize nonhuman animals.

Similarly expanding the terrain of eco-film criticism, Nicole Starosielski draws our attention to films shot underwater in “Beyond Fluidity: A Cultural History of Cinema under Water.” Examining films from the 1910s through the 1960s, she uses a historical and cultural studies approach to argue that in early films the subaquatic was the domain of an ethnic Other, yet during the 1950s these regions became zones of territorial conflict and the displacement of ethnic Others. In the 1960s, cinema and television drew upon space-age discourse to depict the ocean as a place to colonize and domesticate. These discursive shifts pioneered the tropes of modern aquatic ecocinema, tropes which are still visible in images such as those taken by filmmaker James Cameron during his descent of the Mariana Trench in 2012. These early underwater films also mediated the United States’ ascendance as a dominant marine power and speak volumes regarding evolving marine policies.

Claire Molloy is equally interested in the broader relationships of political and economic power that circumscribe films. In “‘Nature Writes the Screenplays’: Commercial Wildlife Films and Ecological Entertainment,” Molloy turns our attention to Disneynature, Disney corporation’s new independent film unit dedicated to producing, acquiring, and distributing wildlife films in the spirit of its earlier True-Life Adventure series. She argues that the disparities between environmentalists’ perceptions of Disney and those of the general public can be explained through an examination of the company’s construction of a “green brand.” Through the theoretical lens of media industries studies, this chapter draws attention to the problematic nature of contemporary corporate environmental discourse, thus providing an important bridge to the next section, which further extends these debates through detailed examinations of commercial, fictional films.

Recognizing that Hollywood film production is ecologically problematic, Part III *Ecocinema Practice: Hollywood and Fictional Film* nonetheless underscores the potentials of its films and their extensive audience reach to highlight mainstream socio-cultural needs and anxieties. In “Hollywood and Climate Change,” Stephen Rust argues that climate change films such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) have influenced a pronounced shift in American popular environmental discourse by translating the science of global warming into the vernacular of cinema. His chapter adapts Frederic Jameson’s cultural logic of late capitalism to propose that such films articulate a “cultural logic of ecology,” in which dominant consumeristic ideologies are figured as both a cause of and potential solution to climate change.

In “Appreciating the Views: Filming Nature in *Into the Wild*, *Grizzly Man*, and *Into the West*,” Pat Brereton takes an even more positive view of commercial cinema by exploring three contemporary cinematic narratives that he suggests actively engage with a form of therapeutic nature through their unique framing of landscape. While *Into the Wild* (2007) tracks the eco-spiritual journey of its adventure-seeking young male, *Grizzly Man* (2005) examines a naïve naturalist who does not accept that there are boundaries in the wild that should not be broken. *Into the West* (1992) epitomizes the childish romanticism and mythical glorification of freedom and escape found in the Irish countryside. In their final *mise en scène*, Brereton suggests, all can be read as counter-cultural and cross-cultural eco-road movies that speak to a new generation’s need to experience natural landscapes first-hand.

While Brereton’s choice of films draws from the Romantic tradition of finding solace in wild nature, Carter Soles’ chapter “Sympathy for the Devil: The Cannibalistic Hillbilly in 1970s Rural Slasher Films,” highlights films that both present and subvert the older Puritan tradition of wild nature as “a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men.”¹¹ Soles suggests that the figure of the cannibalistic hillbilly in films such as *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) is a site whereupon urban viewers projected their fears of the unknown. However, unlike horror films of both earlier and later eras, which present the hillbilly as craven villain, the rural slasher films of the 1970s can be read as subversive (perhaps even heroic) responses to the social and ecopolitical upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s because their “villains” can be interpreted as victims of systemic environmental collapse, dwindling natural resources, and the structural mistreatment of the working poor.

Scholarship of this sort, which offers nuanced readings of horror films, road movies, blockbusters, and other genres of commercial filmmaking, suggests how ecocinema’s boundaries are anything but circumscribed by independent productions and that eco-film criticism’s purview is expansive.

In Part IV *Beyond Film*, Salma Monani and Sean Cubitt look still further beyond the edges of current thinking in the field. Drawing from the burgeoning field of film festival studies and its engagement with public sphere theory, Salma Monani’s “Environmental Film Festivals: Beginning Explorations at the Intersections of Film Festival Studies and Ecocritical Studies” suggests that the current terrain of these festivals is bounded by three end-member types: that of the official public sphere, the alternative public sphere, and the corporate or trade-show sphere. Few environmental festivals fall neatly into a single category, yet analyzing how they construct their identities underscores the complex ways in which these festivals work to negotiate their presence in a heterogeneous environmental and media landscape and makes room for continued attention to these unique sites of ecocinema engagement.

Finally, in “Everybody Knows This is Nowhere: Data Visualization and Ecocriticism” Sean Cubitt explains that while film critics remain preoccupied with the realist image, environmental science deals in effects that are often too vast, too slow, or too dispersed to be observed photographically. To present such data in public as well as to scientific audiences, a number of data visualization strategies are available. Cubitt looks at these visualizations in relation to claims of populism and humanism, and suggests that in the increasing use of charts and diagrams in films like *An Inconvenient Truth* there is a cinematic move towards rendering the world as visual data. This move is given fictional form in a series of eco-apocalypse films directed by Roland Emmerich, and returns in a haunting suite of “irreality” films in the 2000s, where reality itself is equated with its data. Cubitt’s consideration of scientific data visualization and sonification as adapted cinematically opens the door for eco-film criticism to move beyond the photorealist image and suggests new directions for cinema and media studies.

earth meets sky: future directions in ecocinema studies

Despite their breadth, the chapters in this collection cannot hope to encompass all of the approaches to eco-film criticism currently at play in the scholarship, nor should they. In the past few years, ecocinema studies (and *ecomedia* studies in general) has grown at a breathtaking pace as ever more scholars—often inspired by their students—have turned their attention to ecological concerns. As the field expands, the need for students and scholars to collaborate through classes, conferences, journals, and collections such as this will be important to our sense of engagement in a shared conversation.

Whereas this collection is predominantly focused on First and Second Cinema to more deeply interrogate those ideas which have been central to the field’s development, looking forward, we see at least five overlapping and stimulating directions for ecocinema studies. First, there is developing attention to Third and Fourth Cinema, particularly as they apply to the cultural and environmental concerns raised by transnational film and media production. Sheldon Lu and Jiayan Mi’s edited collection *Chinese Ecocinema* (2010), and Pietari Kääpä’s forthcoming edited collection *Transnational Ecocinemas*, have recently broken ground in this area. Nadia Bozak and Shari Hundorf’s work on Inuit filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk and Isuma TV in *The Cinematic Footprint: Lights, Camera, Natural Resources* (2012) and *Mapping the Americas: The Transnational Politics of Contemporary Native Culture* (2009) respectively draw much needed attention to Fourth Cinema.¹² In furthering research in these areas, one might usefully engage Brereton’s recognition of Romantic Western ideals as a foil to the ecological messages of such films, or adapt concepts such as Scott MacDonald’s notion of “retraining perception” or Stephen Rust’s “cultural logic of ecology,” to the uniquely local yet globalized contexts of such cinema.

Second, cinema that engages gender politics is also an important consideration as presented in works such as Noel Sturgeon's *Environmentalism in Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of the Natural* (2009). Recent literary ecocritical attention to this area—for example in the following three 2010 publications: Greta Gaard's *ISLE* article, "New Directions for Ecofeminism," Timothy Morton's *PMLA* contribution "Queer Ecology," and Stacy Alaimo's *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Maternal Self* (2010)—can be easily directed towards ecocinema.¹³ In doing so, one might productively apply Andrew Hageman's model of ideological critique, Adrian Ivakhiv's philosophical approach, or Luis Vivanco's historical take to such conversations.

Third, those inspired by Carter Soles' unique spin on environmental justice concerns might look to Salma Monani, Carlo Arreglo, and Belinda Chiu's co-edited "Coloring the Environmental Lens: Cinema, New Media, and Just Sustainability," a special issue of *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture* (2011), as a point from which to investigate depictions of gender, race, and nationality, as well as local and global agency in environmental contexts. Also, Nicole Staroskielski's chapter reminds us, environmental justice concerns usefully bridge the disciplinary divides between such discourses and post-colonialism. We would encourage eco-film critics looking to expand on their work to read books like *The Environmental Justice Reader* (2002), *The Environmentalism of the Poor* (2004), and *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2010). Jennifer Ladino's chapter also serves as an interesting direction in which to take issues of environmental justice and her forages into the intersections of critical animal studies and ecocinema can be furthered with continued attention to seminal texts such as *When Species Meet* (2008) and *Animals and Agency* (2009).¹⁴

Fourth, as Claire Molloy's work on Disneynature, Salma Monani's research on environmental film festivals, or David Ingram's cognitivist approach suggest there is much room to explore the production, circulation, and reception of ecocinema. In such explorations, one can imagine how a reading of Sean Cubitt's arguments about datafication could be further considered by reading the essays on audience reception in Bron Taylor's forthcoming edited collection *Avatar and Nature Spirituality* (2013) alongside such ecocritical investigations as Ursula Heise's 2008 book *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, which examines the role of globalization in the circulation of popular culture and the shaping of environmental attitudes.¹⁵

Fifth, as the global demand for media expands, so too does the ecological footprint of film and media. Inspired in part by a comprehensive 2006 study conducted by UCLA and the State of California that ranked the Hollywood film industry among the state's leading polluters, Bozak traces the history of what she calls the "hydrocarbon imagination" in *The Cinematic Footprint*. From a similar perspective Jennifer Gabrys explores the topic of media's

material impacts in *Digital Rubbish: A Natural History of Electronics* (2011) as do Toby Miller and Richard Maxwell in their forthcoming *Greening the Media* (2012).¹⁶ Whether the recent efforts by the major film studios to increase recycling, purchase hybrid vehicles, and hire environmental consultants represents a positive move toward sustainability or little more than corporate greenwashing is among the many topics certain to inspire debate and continued research in the years ahead.

Ultimately, emerging from the many overlapping strands of theory and practice that make up ecocinema studies, there is a sense that despite certain misgivings over cinema's ecological footprint, many of us continue to love to watch movies precisely because of cinema's ability to reframe perception. For eco-film critics, cinema and ecocinema studies enable us to recognize ways of seeing the world other than through the narrow perspective of the anthropocentric gaze that situates individual human desires at the center of the moral universe. As the image from Andrey Tarkovsky's 1979 film *Stalker* on the cover of this book illustrates, the nonhuman world may not communicate in ways that we can always comprehend. As the canine figure from the wild traverses this desolate human wasteland, the viewer's gaze is temporarily decentered from the figure of the human hero lying in fetal position at the bottom of the frame. The walls on either side of the frame draw the eye further beyond the human and nonhuman figures to the reflecting pool, a memory of the sky. Ecocritical reflections of things apart become shared memories in the mirror that cinema holds up to the world.

acknowledgments

To Sean, whose words grace the first paragraph of this introduction, and to whose astounding intellect, expertise, generosity and good humor we owe this project.

notes

- 1 See the Resources section in the back of this collection for a complete list of currently available titles on the topic of ecocinema and further reading from journal articles and additional sources in the Select Bibliography.
- 2 Many of these conferences were hosted by the organizations listed in the Resources section at the back of this collection, such as Film and History, Society for Cinema and Media Studies, and the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment. The Ecomedia Studies blog (www.ecomediastudies.org) is a central meeting place for those interested in environmental concerns in media more broadly.
- 3 See specifically Salma Monani's synthesis of discussions from ASLE's 2011 *Ecomedia Pre-conference Seminar* at <http://asle-seminar.ecomediastudies.org/>; also Adrian Ivakhiv's short notes on the emerging themes in the *Moving Environments: Affect, Emotion, and Ecocinema* workshop sponsored by the Rachel

Carson Center in 2011 at <http://blog.uvm.edu/aivakhiv/2011/07/23/moving-environments-day-2/>.

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