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## Ecomedia: Key Issues

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# Ecomedia: Key Issues

## **Description**

*Ecomedia: Key Issues* is a comprehensive textbook introducing the burgeoning field of ecomedia studies to provide an overview of the interface between environmental issues and the media globally. Linking the world of media production, distribution, and consumption to environmental understandings, the book addresses ecological meanings encoded in media texts, the environmental impacts of media production, and the relationships between media and cultural perceptions of the environment. [From the publisher]

## **Keywords**

World Media, Environment, Ecomedia, Environmental Media, Environmental Humanities

## **Disciplines**

Communication Technology and New Media | Critical and Cultural Studies | Environmental Education | Environmental Monitoring | Environmental Sciences | International and Intercultural Communication | Mass Communication | Social Influence and Political Communication | Sustainability

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The authors' version of the introduction is available [here](#).

Click [here](#) to see the third chapter, also written by Dr. Salma Monani.

## **Introduction: Ecologies of Media**

By Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt

In Rust, Stephen, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt. editors. 2015. *Ecomedia: Key Issues*. Routledge Earthscan series, 1-14.

The last 40 years of media's history is one of leaps and bounds. The *digital revolution* that fuels and drives a network of media production, distribution, and consumption has become so extensively global that many in the US, Europe, Brazil, India, China, and across the world now have access to media experiences that were in the realm of science fiction not so long ago. Yet even as the internet and other products of this global revolution fuel social change and increase communications, we know that media technologies rely on an enormous amount of energy consumption – from the extraction of raw materials used in manufacturing and the energy grids that power our devices to the landfills and electronic waste facilities where our discarded technologies inevitably end up. In short, our love of media and media technology has become part and parcel of our *global environmental crisis*. We are, after all, living in a time in which human industrial activities are taking an unprecedented toll on our earth's systems. Deforestation, ocean acidification, species extinction, toxic pollution, and global climate change are all facets of this human propelled crisis.

For most people in the developed world, and for an increasing number of people in the developing world, media technology is at our fingertips. As our students in the United States and Great Britain have told us again and again, “We can't live without our cellphones.” In our current media-saturated lives, such every day dependence is what

environmental historian James Farrell would call our *common sense* – “everyday knowledge, what we think when we’re not really thinking about things, the stuff that everybody knows” (2010, 5). We “know” we need cell phones, laptops, and other media devices to thrive in our twenty-first century. This everyday knowledge feeds into our day-to-day habits, which appear beguilingly “natural” because they are just what we do, what everyone does. Yet as Farrell and many other *ecocritics* point out, such common sense is fueled by social, cultural, and political systems that often don’t support “nature” itself, or the ecological thinking necessary to uncover and change humanity’s troubling relationship with the planet.

*Ecomedia studies*, which the chapters of this book will familiarize you with, is a practice of media analysis that helps us move beyond the notion of common sense to what Farrell describes as *commons sense*. The idea of the commons is central to ecocritical work. It is based in the profound belief that we share the world in common with one another and with other non-human organisms and processes. By drawing our attention to the seemingly inaudible and invisible background static of our everyday media routines, the contributors to this collection invite us to shift our perceptions of the global commons. Taken together, the chapters of this book – from analysis of photography to exploration of satellite data imaging –emphasize two central themes. First, media, society, and the environment are inextricably entangled together, both in how media texts represent the environment (even absence suggests a representational practice of erasure) and in the inevitable ways that media texts and systems are materially embedded in natural resource use and abuse. Second, in untangling these ecological webs of connectivity that go far beyond media’s common sense notion of having easy access to

one's friends, entertainment, sports, news, or weather, theoretical and critical engagements can enrich both our intellectual lives and our ability to act in the face of contemporary ecological crises.

### **Theme One: Media as Ecologically Entangled**

It is crucial to keep in mind that media are inextricably bound up in society. If we take the keyword *media* at its broadest level as a means of mass communication, there can be no society without media. Just as our students cannot imagine a world without cellphones, we cannot imagine a society without language – without printed laws, printed and electronic money, codes for dressing and acting in social settings, etc. Media and society are synonymous: societies are made of the media that bind us together and media exist only where there are societies for them to bind. This is why media analyses are constantly immersed in questions of economics, politics, power, gender, race, identity, and culture.

However, through the colonial dominance of European philosophical traditions, much of mainstream global culture has learned to speak about society as an exclusively human phenomenon. We place society on one side, and nature, over on the other, whether we think of nature as the external environment or the instinctive and biological aspects of being human. Over the last forty years, *environmental humanities*, however, has questioned this division and the central mission of *ecocritics* is to critically interrogate such dualism and expose its fallacies. Society cannot exist without the environment, which it inhabits and from which it derives. Humans are animals, and thus need access to natural resources (for example, sun, air, water, or food) much like our biological kin. A

similar logic reveals that even though media are artifacts of human civilization, they are not entirely divorced from nature and the environment. Just as speaking requires a human body capable of articulating sounds, writing, drawing, and musical instruments require paper from plants or animal skins. We use plastic in pens and other media tools that we derive from the oil we get from ancient deposits of dead plants and animals, or metals extracted from the earth and refined by human hands. Similarly, broadcasting and cellular networks require the extraction and manufacturing of raw materials from the earth by human bodies and machines and our radio spectrum for transmission is also occupied by cosmic radiation and the electrical fallout from lightning.

The planet's human population has doubled in the past forty years, and the number and hours of use of media have increased even more. Thus the impact of media practices on the environment and environmental understandings are more important to consider today than at any point in history. To take just two examples: First, the most financially successful motion picture of all time, *Avatar* (2009) considers humanity's mistreatment of the environment as its central theme. Hyped through the internet, the film generated some of the most chatter of any recent Hollywood blockbuster. Yet at the time of that film's release, the server farms that allow the internet to operate and that provide cloud-based digital computing had surpassed the airline industry in terms of the amount of carbon dioxide released into the earth's atmosphere (Boccaletti et al, 2008). Such statistics speak all too clearly about media's contributions to global climate change. Second, today we can understand the behaviors of plants, animals, and even the weather in ways that were unimaginable to previous generations of humans. From thermometers and weather satellites to earthquake monitors and medical technologies we use science to

mediate between the human and nonhuman worlds. If we understand media as the physical devices of mediation, then we can see that media pervade both human and non-human worlds. In essence, the idea of an absolute division between human society and our environment is no longer tenable when we begin to analyze media from an ecocritical perspective.

### **Theme Two: Media and Ecocritical Studies**

To explore the second central theme of this book, it is important to note that ecocritical inquiry as a scholarly discipline is a relatively recent phenomenon. The pioneering studies of Leo Marx (1964) and Raymond Williams (1973) were oddly alone until the foundation of organizations such as the *American Society of Environmental History* in 1977, the *Association for the Study of Literature and Environment* (ASLE) in 1992, and the *International Association for Environmental Philosophy* (IEAP) in 1998. Subsequently, pioneering works of ecocriticism appeared in history (for example, Cronon 1982), literature (for example, Buell 1995), the fine arts and high culture (for example, Schama 1995), and philosophy (for example, Callicot and Nelson, 1998). In addition, considerable scholarly attention in communication studies paid attention to the relationship between news media and public understandings of environmental and ecological issues (for example, Anderson 1997 and Neuzil 2008). The development of ecocritical and environmental humanities organizations across the globe (e.g., the International Environmental Communication Association and the various affiliates of

ASLE) as well as recent growth of international consortiums (e.g. the Environmental Humanities network) attest to the vibrancy of recent ecocritical inquiry.

Despite this multi- and cross-disciplinary attention to ecocritical inquiry across the humanities and social sciences, it is only in recent years that ecocritics have really expanded their focus to consider popular media texts. Cinema, popular music, and television have all become important subjects of analysis (for example, Cubitt 2005, Ingram 2010, and Molloy 2011). Most contemporary ecocritics recognize that popular cultural artifacts are at least as significant mediators of the human-environmental relationship and its attendant anxieties and joys as are literature and the fine arts (for example, Meister and Japp 2002, Dobrin and Morey 2009). Indeed popular media have several important sociocultural qualities (such as their broad consumption and appeal to multiple segments of society) that make them potentially finer antennae than the fine arts for sensing the changing moods and tendencies in cultural perceptions of environmental relationships and concerns.

While our previous collection *Ecocinema Theory and Practice* (2013) confirmed the expansive purview and viability of ecocritical film studies, this collection responds to a clear need in the scholarship for a volume bringing together a far more diverse set of media texts and contexts. A marked increase in course offerings, journal articles, doctoral dissertations, and conference presentations all attest to the need for a definitive collection introducing readers to Ecomedia Studies. The collection brings scholars from around the globe with interests and expertise in everything from comic strips and photography to radio and social media into one space to better integrate ecocritical work in media studies.



Our book benefits from significant new work undertaken in interdisciplinary *environmental studies*. One of the most telling accusations against environmentalism and Green Party politics has been that it is a single-issue campaign based on the interests of the upper-middle class and wealthy, or at least those who are comfortable enough to worry about more than survival. However, as the “environmentalism of the poor” movements in the Global South has demonstrated, it is the poor who suffer most from toxic waste, air pollution and climate change (for example, Martinez-Allier 2002). Demands for environmental justice have become central to contemporary ecocriticism, such as articulated in Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein’s foundational *Environmental Justice Reader* (2002) and Rob Nixon’s more recent work (2011) on environmental degradation as *slow violence*. Indigenous speakers have cast off the New Age demand that they should teach us how to live, instead campaigning for an end to the exploitation of their lands and the restitution of the commons (for example, Tuhiwai Smith 2011; Pulitano, 2012). At the same time, ecofeminism has been a growing force, increasingly influential since the publication of Carolyn Merchant’s *Radical Ecology* (1992), and eco-queer studies has followed suit (for example, Seymour, 2013). Combining with both electoral and direct-action environmental politics, these ways of reconsidering how humans make themselves and the more-than-human world suffer by exploiting and degrading their environments have brought green issues to the centre of broad political movements such as Occupy in the United States, Cochabamba in Bolivia, *Indignados* in Spain, and the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul. They suggest another kind of globalization is possible, based on ecological rather than economic principles.

At the same time new intellectual currents have been influenced by environmentalism and influenced ecocritical thinking. The *actor-network theory* associated with Bruno Latour (2005) makes a powerful philosophical and sociological case that humans *never* act alone, but are always caught up in networks that include both environmental features and technologies, which Latour calls “non-human actors.” Taking off from Latour, a recent movement in philosophy sometimes called *object-oriented ontology*, is shifting the traditional anthropocentrism to recognizing an ecosphere of what one leading figure calls simply 'things' (Harman 2005) or others call *new materialism* (Barad, 2007; Bennet, 2009). Repositioned in terms of environmentalism, these theories propose an alternative to the rigorous mutual exclusion of human and non-human situated at the foundation of Western philosophy: a new way of philosophising the interconnectedness of everything as “ecological thought” (Morton 2012). The very ideas of “nature” and “environment” are under attack because they suggest a separation between us humans and them non-humans that, the new philosophers argue, no longer exists, if indeed it ever did.

We have long understood that media *frames* the world in specific representational ways (Goffman, 1974). For media studies, ecocriticism’s evolving theories enable new frames of reference, and the ability to re-frame familiar media themes. From the care of animals on set to the environmental footprint of digital cameras (Maxwell and Miller 2012), the connections between material media and the resources they are made with have become new grounds for analysis and critique (Bozak 2012). In addition, issues of race and class are being re-investigated in terms of climate justice and the unequal burden of pollution. We have also long understood media as *flow*—the processes and means by

which we communicate (Williams 1974). Now we understand media as particular concentrations of flows of minerals and energy. We begin to understand human beings themselves as media through which other environmental forces pass. Finally, we have recently begun to think of media as *convergence*—the interlocking, overlapping presence of media across a variety of platforms from traditional print to the social media forums of the internet (Jenkins 2008). Now, based on ideas of the commons and of communication as the convergence of human and more-than-human, we look towards a new politics grounded in the interlocking presence of ecosystems. If politics is, as Aristotle argued, the debate over how we should live, then media, with which so many suggest we cannot live, are central to the politics in the 21st century. Ecomedia studies is then the complex work of deciphering which forms of media—texts in contexts— facilitate ecological discussion, and which squash it, praise inaction, and “commonsensically” make invisible not only non-human but the majority of human agents from participation, and refuse to discuss anything but wealth creation as the essence of how we should live.

The chapters that follow look at these debates from a variety of perspectives, typically focusing on a single medium and one or two individual examples. The case study format is vital because it allows us to look not at the statistical probabilities of things occurring on a national and transnational level but at the very specific ways in which each unique instance actually occurs and matters. Since as we have seen, nothing happens outside the vast connectedness of ecology, each instance also leads us to consider its radiating impacts across virtual and physical mediascapes. Ecocriticism implies making ethical judgements. Our authors have made theirs: you must then judge them. Among your criteria for judging them will be the question of how they live up to

the demand that ecocriticism should create more room for more people and more life, especially those traditionally excluded by class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or species, to discuss our common future on Earth.

### **Section and Chapter Organization: Frames, Flow, and Convergence**

As an introduction to ecocritical exploration of a variety of media, the collection draws together an interdisciplinary group of scholars from across the globe. In our first section, *frames*, authors discuss traditional visual texts such as comics, film, and photography; in the second section, *flow*, they turn to broadcast media such as radio and television, and media infrastructures we traditionally associate with such broadcasts but which also ground new media. Our last section, *convergence*, highlights the blurred terrain of new media such as multiplatform advertising, video games, the internet, and digital renderings of scientific data. At the start of each section, overview chapters discuss the organizing concepts of frame, flow, and convergence, serving to link these familiar media studies ideas to ecocritical inquiry. Each section then includes several longer chapters that present extended analysis of a particular type of media, case studies of media texts, and discussions of scholarship currently shaping the field. Each chapter also includes a list of keywords, discussion questions, and a list of further reading to make the collection particularly useful as a textbook or reading group selection.

Carter Soles and Kiu-Wai Chu's opening overview section draws attention to how framing in photography, comics, and film (the media genre of this first section) share basic units of similarity, such as images, panels, and shots, but also promise unique distinctions in how physical time and space can be regulated and rendered. As the

following chapters in the section then elaborate, each genre's frames speak to particular eco-discussions, but also provide openings for further theorizing, praxis, and trans-media, trans-disciplinary conversations.

Thus, in "Beyond Nature Photography," H. Lewis Ulman analyzes how photography, whether understood as framing the history of human and nonhuman relationships through a transparent lens or as reflective mirror, raises concerns about the ethics of representation – from the "ecoporn" of advertisements to the "terrible beauty" in Edward Burtynsky's dramatic images of extractive industrial scenes. To demonstrate these issues, Ulman further presents a case study of the evolving prairie lands representations of U.S. photographer, Terry Evans. Next, in "Eco-nostalgia in Popular Turkish Cinema," Ekin Gündüz Özdemirci and Salma Monani frame their analysis of writer/director Semir Aslanyürek's 2001 film *Şellale* in terms of ecological nostalgia. In doing so, they invite Turkish cinema scholars to reframe Turkish cinema as ecocritically engaging and invite ecocinema scholars to re-evaluate their current neglect of a rich and diverse national cinema. In the final chapter of this opening section, Veronica Vold examines concepts of environmental justice (EJ) and environmental racism in American comic strips. In "Aesthetics of Equity and the American Newspaper Strip: Reading the Environmental Imaginations of Mark Trail, Peanuts, and Torchy in Heartbeats," Vold juxtaposes African-American artist Jackie Ormes's mid-twentieth-century *Torchy in Heartbeats* with two white authored environmental comics of the time, *Mark Trail* and *Peanuts* to draw attention to mainstream US culture's EJ blindspots. Vold explores the formal architecture of the comics and their content to highlight Ormes' EJ themes and recover its insightful racial and gendered critiques.

The second section of the collection opens with Stephen Rust's overview chapter, "Flow: An Ecocritical Perspective on Broadcast Media," which readies readers for the chapters on radio, television, and broadcast infrastructure by interrogating the concept of media flow. Rust argues that the fields of ecomedia studies and media ecology must converge if we are to fully understand both the textual and material implications of flow.

Sean Cubitt's chapter, "When It Blows Its Stacks – Captain Beefheart and Popular Ecology," reads the career of the eclectic US musician Captain Beefheart against the backdrop of the transition from AM pop to FM alternative rock radio in the USA and the rise of pirate and then commercial and public service pop radio in Europe during the 1960s and 1970s. As Cubitt traces the curious flow of Beefheart's work he acknowledges its powerful environmental themes and its hardcore cult following but also critiques the individualistic contours of such music making, recognizing its problematic inability to drive collective ecopolitical change. In "Hostile or Hospitable: New Zealand Television Maps Degrees of Belonging," Sarina Pearson takes a postcolonial approach to examine how New Zealand settler-produced and Maori-produced reality-television shows when read together don't simply reaffirm settler-Maori dichotomies but also interrupt prevalent discourses about settler-indigenous antipathy to flow together and problematically ally against more recent immigrants. The final chapter in this section, Lisa Parks' "Earth Observation and Signal Territories: Studying U.S. Broadcast Infrastructure through Historical Network Maps, Google Earth, and Fieldwork," is a revised version of an article that first appeared in the *Canadian Journal of Communication* in 2013. Parks engages with three different modes of Earth observation—historical network maps, Google Earth interfaces, and fieldwork—to develop the concept of "signal territories" and elucidate a

critical approach for studying U.S. broadcast infrastructure. By highlighting physical infrastructures—technological hardware and processes in dispersed geographic locations—as important nodes in media flow, Parks explores what is at stake in understanding the ecological materiality of media systems from both afar and up close.

Anthony Lioi’s overview chapter, “Bert versus the Black Phoenix: An Introduction to Ecomedia and Convergence,” kicks off the final section of the collection by linking new media’s convergence theory to ecocritical concerns. Given the most recent development in convergence theory, the notion of “spreadability,” Lioi contends that a combination of formal and ethnographic methods will enable ecomedia studies to engage the productive value of new media environments without sacrificing a critique of their ecological structures and functions.

Highlighting convergence, Joseph Clark critically examines the evolution of advertising as it colonizes new media even as he points to productive eco-possibilities for resisting the totalizing narratives of commodification in his chapter “Advertising and New Ecomedia: Colonization and Resistance.” Shifting focus though not the new media interface, in “Where the Wild Games Are: Ecologies in Latin American Video Games,” co-author’s Lauren Woolbright and Thaianie Moreira de Oliveira consider video games produced or set in Mexico and Brazil, two of the world leaders in video game production. The authors frame their argument in terms of ecocultural dynamics, video game aesthetics, and technological convergence to explore how Mexican and Brazilian games point to untapped eco-potential in their depictions of, and gameplay with the unique landscapes, cultures, and environmental concerns of these two complex nations. From Latin America and video games, we turn to Aimie Yang’s chapter “New Media,

Environmental NGOs and Online-Based Collective Actions in China.” Yang contends that China’s new media environment might have some of the strictest government censorship policies but is nonetheless a prominent site for civil society to operate environmental networks that can instigate political change.

In the collection’s final chapter, “Earth Imaging: Photograph, Pixel, Program,” Chris Russill takes us beyond terrestrial concerns and into the earth’s orbit to explore the implications of turning our media technologies back on the planet. In historically tracing several iconic images—the photographing of the whole earth from space in the 1960s, the pixelation of these photos in the 1990s, and the programming of Google Earth between 2005 and 2015—Russill helps us grasp at the telescoping convergence of science and technology in popular ecomedia, its long histories, and asks us to critically evaluate its futures.

In all, such critical evaluation is the point of each of our chapters. Collectively, we hope the chapters not only present an introduction to a rich variety of ecomedia theory and practice but they also make room for additional dialogue that might soar beyond everyday common sense towards a more vigorously explored commons sense.

### **Conclusion: From Common Sense to Commons Sense—Personal Reflections**

As editors, each of us has been conditioned in some way by our experiences with media, from our upbringings in the United States (Steve), India (Salma), and Great Britain (Sean), to our personal viewing and listening habits as young people and now adults and our current work with students in university classrooms. By way of conclusion, we wanted to share a few short stories that we feel may offer readers a bit of



further insight on why our work with the contributors to this collection and building ecomedia studies into a viable field of academic inquiry has meant so much to us as individuals.

STEVE: When I was five years old, my parents took me to see *The Empire Strikes Back* at the local theater in our small town in the western U.S. state of Idaho. The memory of waiting in line for hours with so many people before the film has always reminded me of how powerful our shared experiences of media can be. A child of the VCR generation, I watched the film over and over and over with my siblings and spent many hours in the forest just beyond our backyard trying to move sticks and stones with “the force”.

On Saturday mornings, I often watched Marlon Perkins on *Wild Kingdom* rather than cartoons. Perkins taught me that although the world seemed utterly vast to a small town kid, the exotic wild animals I so longed to see in person some day were already disappearing from the planet due to habitat destruction and poaching. Years later, when I watched the 1982 Canadian Broadcasting documentary *Cruel Camera* on the internet, I was shocked to discover that much of Perkin’s show had been staged using captive animals. Of course, being an ecocritic means confronting such truths without becoming so jaded that we simply give up, a fact my students help me remember all the time.

Many years after cheering on my childhood eco-heroes Luke Skywalker and Marlon Perkins, I was invited by Jon Lewis to serve as assistant editor of *Cinema Journal* while I completed my MA degree. In the three years that I worked for the flagship journal of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS), I read hundreds of articles by leading professors and graduate students. Yet in all of that time, I cannot recall reading a

single article – either published or rejected – that analyzed cinema and media from an ecocritical perspective. My mission as a scholar has been framed by that experience.

In many ways this project began back in 2009 when I met Salma at the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) conference in Victoria, BC. Salma and I both came away from that event with a clear sense that the study of media and the environment had finally begun to coalesce as a distinct field of study as scholars from around the world were beginning to find each other's work and share ideas. Within a few weeks of the conference, we created EcomediaStudies.org, an online community dedicated to facilitating interdisciplinary and innovative approaches to the study of non-print media as it applies to environmental discourse and action. One of my primary tasks has been maintaining the site's comprehensive bibliography of work in the field.

In 2010, I organized a series of panels on cinema and the environment for the SCMS conference in Los Angeles, where I met Sean, whose 2005 book *EcoMedia* remains one of the field's seminal texts. Salma, Sean, and I were convinced that the time was right for collections that would provide some much needed cohesion to this burgeoning field. For our first collaborative project, *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*, we chose to highlight the many ways in which ecocriticism can be applied to the study of one particular media. Before that book was even finished, however, we had already talking about this current collection because, after all, the cinema is only one aspect of media's multifaceted relationship with ecology. Of course, we had no idea that we would be blessed with such an incredible array of talented contributors, whose collective efforts have made working on this collection far more fulfilling than I could have ever imagined.

SALMA: Other than our productive, previous collaboration on *Ecocinema Theory and Practice* (2013) two formative influences prompted me to coordinate this collection with Steve and Sean. While the first reaches back into my earliest memories of media experiences, the second is a more recent inspiration.

I spent the first nineteen years of my life in India before arriving in the United States as an international student on a scholarship for my undergraduate education. While individuals, like Steve, have early childhood memories of watching cartoons on colored television sets as they ate sugary cereal on Saturday mornings, I don't. Television was government controlled. In 1980, when I was six, my family acquired our first television set (black and white, with a roof antennae prone to being the lookout post for passing feisty, festive monkeys).

Each evening around 5:30pm, we'd wait with anticipation to see the screen turn from static to the enlarging, spiraling swirl of Doordarshan's logo. The signature montage's slow-paced and weirdly eerie sound track conveyed the solemnity of the government broadcast's usual fare of evening entertainment—news, a few classical music recitals, more talking heads for a couple of hours before the spiraling swirl signaled a return to static. I joke about how my experience growing up with my Indian family put me consistently about 5 to 10 years behind the media curve of my US peers. (I hate to admit that my first LP45, which I purchased in 1981, was ABBA's 1976 *Dancing Queen*).

This media lag is something my sister's kids do not experience. Where a family of five, like mine in late twentieth century India, shared one rotary phone, one television and

one LP player, it's the norm for twenty-first century middle-class Indians, like their counterparts in the US and across the world, to each have their own cell phone, televisions in different rooms, as well as personalized computers with video games, social media and internet at their fingertips. Reflecting on this changing mediascape motivated the global reach of this collection, as did a more recent influence—my attendance and subsequent work on film and media arts festivals that bring together artists from across the globe.

Through their programming, environmental festivals such as the Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival (FLEFF) in upstate New York, the DC Environmental Film Festival, and the TiNai Ecocinema Film Festival (in India), and indigenous film festivals such as the Native Film and Video Festival hosted by the Smithsonian in New York and the ImagineNATIVE Film and Media Arts festival (in Toronto, Canada) serve as vibrant gathering spaces that use media's power and interrogate its pitfalls to help re-inscribe voice and vision to the traditionally disenfranchised, illuminating what is so often kept invisible in the everyday of neocolonial societies.

This co-edited book is inspired by the spirit of such spaces. Like the interruption of feisty, festive monkeys on the television antennae of my youth, the vibe of a live celebratory festival in full swing provides an exhilarating and humbling experience. There's a magic in the media noise, in the dynamics of knowing that human and more-than-human are at play with each other, each influencing and shaping the other; how we engage the moment, with openness, wonder, and critical reflectiveness—i.e., with a sense of personal humility—might point to the promise of a collective way forward.

SEAN: I think the first book I ever read was a comic strip, in the style of boy's adventure comic annuals, called *Biggles and the Flight of the Condor*. My sister helped me, because at that stage I wasn't yet at school and couldn't read myself. From memory there were anacondas, jungle, and a race for treasure at Machu Picchu. I couldn't swear that this was the start of my passion for nature. We grew up in rural Lincolnshire, and spent long hours netting two- or three-inch long sticklebacks in the River Slea, and in winter chasing bats to try to catch them in torch beams. The hedgerows were full of robins' nests, and on long summer days we scrumped apples from the local orchards and plucked blackberries, fruit that seemed always to have been visited by the birds before we got to them.

In the living room was a large brown radiogram, its dial marked with names of stations from unknown places: Hilversum, Luxembourg. Years later I recorded a fragment of one of the children's radio shows, where Vernon Dalhart's *The Runaway Train* was cut off by an announcer's voice: "We have to stop the track there because otherwise we would have time only for one or two hymns". It was a different time. But it did include a wonderful BBC educational programme on how to observe wildlife. I decided that when I grew up I would be a vet.

Time intervened. The cinema fascinated me, as it still does. Television was a late arrival. Books absorbed me: *Tarka the Otter* for instance, which shed the anthropomorphism of other children's books, as did Jack London's *Call of the Wild*. The world seen from another viewpoint, soon to become a passion for science fiction's estrangement effects, somehow made the curious relation of representation to reality an emotional state, a hovering between worlds. This of all things was and remains to me the core of the environmental principle: to be both ourselves and other.

Discovering email and ftp in the late 1970s, working with video activists in the 1980s, the huge change brought by the arrival of the world wide web in the 1990s: the concept of media expanded, the links between them (and the older arts, music and painting especially) became my profession as well as my passion. The immense commercialisation of internet in the 2000s notwithstanding, the utopian potential of childhood and of art and activist media has always had for me the power, not to recapture lost innocence, but to create a new world, where we could indeed listen to the thoughts of animals, the stirrings of forests, the seismic voice of the planet as part of the immense dialogue of humanity with itself.

Ecocriticism comes as the most significant way to address the ancient cornerstones of aesthetics, of communication, and of politics, which I have come to understand as the question of how we should live. Ecocriticism asks the fundamental questions of Truth, Beauty and the Good that children, in their groping manner, still reach for, before we teach them to aspire otherwise. It is not only what we fight against that matters, but what we struggle for, in our lives and those of our students.

## **KEYWORDS**

Digital Revolution

Global Environmental Crisis

Common Sense

Commons Sense

Ecomedia Studies

Media

Environmental Humanities

Ecocritics/Ecocriticism

Environmental Studies

Slow Violence

Actor-Network Theory

Object-Oriented Ontology

New Materialism

Frames

Flow

Convergence

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What is your personal level of familiarity with the topic of ecocriticism and how do you think that will impact your ability to engage with the ideas in this book?
2. How are environmental issues reflected in the media you engage with on a daily basis both in obvious/direct ways (like with films such as *An Inconvenient Truth* or *Avatar*) or more vague/indirect ways?
3. Why is the difference between Farrell's notions of common sense and commonsense so crucial to understanding the relationships between media, society, and the environment?

4. From your experience, what are some particular ways that you have witnessed media texts change the way you, your friends, and/or your family discuss and think about environmental topics such as weather, air and water pollution, endangered species, travel, and even space exploration?

5. Do the key concepts of frame, flow, and convergence make sense to you as a way to organize a collection of essays on media and the environment? What are some alternative ways that a collection such as this could be organized and why?

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