Green Screen: Environmental Perspectives Through Film

Fall 2021
MW, 9:55-10:45 Educational Sciences 204
Discussion sections, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday
Screenings, Wednesday, 4:00-6:00 pm, Social Sciences 5206
3 credits

Instructors
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Course Description
From the 1933 Hollywood blockbuster "King Kong" to the recent Netflix hit "My Octopus Teacher," from the somber 2006 documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" to the upbeat animated film "Happy Feet," made the same year, the history of cinema offers a lens through which to understand changing ideas and attitudes about the relationships between humans and the natural world. How can film shed light on changing environmental ideas and beliefs in American thought, politics, and culture and their impact on the real-world struggles of people and wildlife throughout the world? And how can we come to see, understand, and confront racial, class, and gender biases that have shaped the contours of American environmentalism over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries?

This course will explore such questions as we treat film both as a historical document, offering a window onto the past, and as a cultural force helping to define the concerns of past, present, and future environmental visions and actions in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

Course Learning Outcomes
Through this course, you will
1) develop the skills needed to interpret film as a historical document and to place it in a particular historical context.
2) understand the changing historical contours of American environmentalism and how the past continues to shape issues around the meanings and representations of "the environment," particularly with respect to issues of class, gender, and race.
3) recognize how the experiences and struggles of different underrepresented minorities, including those of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx peoples, have led to a diversity of environmental visions and viewpoints.

4) be able to identify the major environmental issues and controversies of the past, present, and future in the United States and around the world.

Course Requirements
Discussion (20%): Each one in class needs to assume the responsibility of an active participant and learner. Success in the class depends largely upon the time, energy, and commitment you invest. You will be required to arrive at class having attended the required film screening on Wednesday evening, read the material assigned for the day, and be prepared to engage in a thoughtful and constructive conversation that is respectful of others in the classroom and takes seriously the issues and themes presented in the films and readings. You need to post at least one comment or question on the films screened to the course webpage each week.

Film Reviews (40%): Choose two films, either screened in class, or approved in consultation with us, and write a 1,000 word review essay for the film that discusses how the film has reflected and/or shaped past or present environmental perceptions. Who made the film and why? In what context was the film shown and seen? Who was its intended audience? How was the film received by critics and the public? In what ways did the film reinforce or alter public attitudes toward nature or the environment in significant ways? These are due, in class, on Wednesday, October 6th and Monday, November 22nd.

Take-Home Exam (30%): You will have one week to prepare answers of 1,000 words each to two of three questions on the course content. The due date for the take-home exam is TBA.

OR

Digital Short Option (30%): You will produce a 3-5 minute short video that challenges viewers to see the environment in a new way or offers a mashup of a previous film, challenging us to see its content in a completely different light. See separate handout.

Grading Structure
A=93-100%, AB=88-92%, B=83-87%, BC=78-82%, C=70-77%, D=60-69%, F=0-59%

Honors
If you are taking this class for Honors’ credit, you need to be enrolled in the Tuesday discussion section of this class, sec. 309. The Honors’ section of this class includes additional reading and writing assignments, which will be shared with students enrolled for Honors’ credit in the discussion section.

Attendance Policy
We understand the challenges and uncertainties that the COVID pandemic presents, particularly in the event of illness, either of yourself or a family member. Class attendance in lecture, discussion sections, and film screenings is strongly encouraged for you to get the most out of the course. However, we realize that under certain circumstances, it may not be possible for you to attend. Consequently, we will not be enforcing an attendance policy as part of your final grade.
COVID-19 Public Health Guidelines
We want to ensure a safe environment for all students and instructors in the class. All students, employees and visitors to campus are required to wear face masks when inside campus buildings, unless an individual is unable to for medical reasons. You are responsible for following the UW-Madison’s policy regarding COVID-19: https://news.wisc.edu/changes-to-campus-masking-policy/. If you show up to class without a face mask, we will provide one for you before entering the classroom.

Caring for Your Well-Being
As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning. These might include strained relationships, anxiety, high levels of stress, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, or loss of motivation. University Health Services can help with these or other issues you may experience. Help is always available. You can learn about free, confidential mental health services available to you; call 608-265-6600 (option 2) or visit uhs.wisc.edu.

Privacy of Student Records & the Use of Audio Recorded Lectures
Lecture materials and recordings for this course are protected intellectual property at UW-Madison. Students in this course may use the materials and recordings for their personal use related to participation in this class. Students may also take notes solely for their personal use. If a lecture is not already recorded, you are not authorized to record my lectures without my permission unless you are considered by the university to be a qualified student with a disability requiring accommodation. [Regent Policy Document 4-1] Students may not copy or have lecture materials and recordings outside of class, including posting on internet sites or selling to commercial entities. Students are also prohibited from providing or selling their personal notes to anyone else or being paid for taking notes by any person or commercial firm without the instructor’s express written permission. Unauthorized use of these copyrighted lecture materials and recordings constitutes copyright infringement and may be addressed under the university’s policies, UWS Chapters 14 and 17, governing student academic and non-academic misconduct.

Diversity & Inclusion
Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

Academic Integrity
By virtue of enrollment, each student agrees to uphold the high academic standards of the University of Wisconsin-Madison; academic misconduct is behavior that negatively impacts the integrity of the institution. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these previously listed acts are examples of misconduct which may result in disciplinary action. Examples of disciplinary action include, but is not limited to, failure on the assignment/course, written reprimand, disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion.
Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (UW-855) require the university to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities to access and participate in its academic programs and educational services. Faculty and students share responsibility in the accommodation process. Students are expected to inform Professor Mitman of their need for instructional accommodations during the beginning of the semester, or as soon as possible after being approved for accommodations. We will work either directly with you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to provide reasonable instructional and course-related accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. (See: McBurney Disability Resource Center)

Required Readings:
The following books, from which reading selections are drawn, are available for free as e-books through the UW-Madison libraries:

https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9910571295102121

https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9911078687902121

A set of digital readings are available on the course's Canvas website, https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/272536

Introduction
9/8 Introductions and course overview

9/13-9/15 Whose Nature? Widening the Environmental Frame
Julie Furmanek, “My Octopus Teacher is not for the faint of heart,” The Daily Free Press, April 12, 2021.
Environmental Pasts: Landscapes of Purity and Whiteness

9/20-9/22  Great White Hunting
The Meaning of a Monument, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eL2CW8bZ0to](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eL2CW8bZ0to)

9/27-9/29  The Myth of the Vanishing Race
John Grierson, “Flaherty” in *Grierson on Documentary*, edited and compiled by Forsyth Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 139-144

10/4-10/6  New Deal Visions
Anne Whiston Spirn, *Daring to Look: Dorothea Lange’s Photographs and Reports From the Field* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 3-5, 8-9, 15-20.

10/11-10/13  Disney’s Nature

10/18-10/20  The End Times of Ecology
Environmental Presents: Diversifying Issues and Audiences

10/25-10/27  Reclaiming Indigenous Sovereignty

11/1-11/3  The Politics of Food
Cesar Chavez, “*Perils of Pesticides*,” Address to Pacific Lutheran University, 1989
Excerpt from *King Corn*, Earl Butz interview, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lp2_xAhRrkY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lp2_xAhRrkY)

11/8-11/10  Toxic Burdens

11/15-11/17  Energy, Extraction, and Infrastructure
11/22 Spillovers, Pandemics, and the Ecology of Disease

Environmental Futures

11/29-12/1 Facing a Warming Planet

12/6-12/8 Border Ecologies
rivera/id1507621076?i=1000528949367&fbclid=IwAR1Hx3TvSTBXQ_kWx-FY0JKA7VvAt3RfNQf6g9Wlt6lfnp_xy8MVssQe4

12/13-12/15 Afrofuturisms

SCREENINGS
Wednesdays, 4:00 pm, 5206 Social Sciences
Sept. 15 My Octopus Teacher (2020, 85 min)
Sept. 22 King Kong (1933, 100 min)
Sept. 29 Nanook of the North (1922, 79 min.)
Oct. 6 The Grapes of Wrath (1940, 129 min.)
Oct. 13 Nature’s Half-Acre (1951, 33 min.); Bambi (1942, 70 min.)
Oct. 20  Soyent Green (1973, 70 min.)
Oct. 27  Imagining Indians (1992, 60 min.); Lighting the Seventh Fire (1995, 47 min.)
Nov.  3  Cesar’s Last Fast (2014, 93 min.)
Nov. 10  Blue Vinyl (2002, 97 min.)
Nov. 17  Awake, A Dream From Standing Rock (2017, 89 min.)
Nov. 24  NO SCREENING
Dec.  1  That Which Once Was (2011, 21 min), Age of Consequences (2016, 80 min.)
Dec.  8  Sleep Dealer (2008, 90 min.)
Dec. 15  Black Panther (2018, 135 min.)

Optional Digital Short Assignment

Digital Short Option (30%): Working with your assigned TA, Professor Mitman, and the DesignLab, you will produce a 3-5 minute short video that challenges viewers to see the environment in a new way or offers a mashup of a previous film, challenging us to see its content in a completely different light.

Those interested in the Digital Short Option must submit a one-page maximum request answering the question why producing a short video would enhance your academic goals and enrich your experience in this course. Please also indicate how you would like to use this exercise to broaden your perspective on what constitutes an environmental issue or problem.

Finally please indicate if you have any experience using these applications:
   - iMovie, Final Cut Pro X, Final Cut Pro, Premiere Pro
   (Training for these applications is available through DoIT and explained in detail below.)

Submit this request to Professor Mitman or your assigned TA by Friday, September 24th.

Outline of semester:
Submit one page request by September 24th
Submit outline/sketch of story ideas by October 8th
First Critique —
Submit first video draft
Second Critique
Final video due: December 15th