

The **Zurich** Program: Syllabi Fall 2020

Module I: Ecocritical Approaches to Film



I. COURSE INFORMATION

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II. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course approaches film from an ecocritical perspective to explore how the medium of film articulates relations between the environment and humans. In recent decades, scholars have increasingly examined how film represents ecological issues and humans' involvement with those issues, particularly with regards to environmental disaster and climate change. The course aims to make students familiar with those debates by examining a variety of film genres -- blockbuster, documentary, short films and animation, among others -- to offer a survey in reading film ecocritically. The Global Science Film Festival that takes place every fall in Zurich will offer a live platform for students to see the most recent films, gain experience in analyzing films as texts and in applying ecocritical theory to those films and the ethical issues surrounding them, from production to narrative, and from distribution to reception. Screenings, theoretical readings, class discussion, video-making and writing assignments will help students develop a critical awareness of how film tells the story of our complex relations with the environment. This syllabus was adapted from Ann Gardiner's course on ecocritical approaches to film.

III. RATIONALE

Zurich is a vibrant hub for filmmakers, film producers and film festivals in Switzerland. Aside from studying ecocritical approaches to film within the context of the Global Science Film Festival, students will also have the opportunity to visit the Human Rights Film Festival and the Zurich Film Festival, and meet with filmmakers, scientists, environmental activists, film producers and festival directors to discuss their perspectives and their roles in promoting films that grapple with the nexus of humans and the environment.

IV. COURSE GOALS

The overall aim of this course is to help students understand how film in its broadest sense constructs discourses about the environment as well as humans' interactions with it. The theoretical focus of the course should give students an introduction to some of the basic ecocritical concepts and vocabulary used to analyze any kind of "moving image." A secondary aim of the course is to help students become better critical readers of a mass medium that has come to dominate popular culture on both big and small screens. Finally, students will come away from the course understanding the importance of festivals in the selection and distribution of films that only rarely go on to achieve blockbuster status.

V. SPECIFIC LEARNING OUTCOMES

After successfully completing this course with a C or better, students will demonstrate that they have:

1. Improved their ability to read films as "texts" and understood the basic components of film;
2. Acquired a basic knowledge of key terms, concepts and theories associated with ecocriticism as it applies to film;
3. Learned through watching different kinds of films how to apply ecocritical terms and concepts to specific genres and/or film moments;
4. Fine-tuned their research strategies through regular research assignments and in-class activities in order to more fully understand what it means to join the ecocritical scholarly community;
5. Mastered some of the conventional rhetorical strategies used in making theoretical arguments and backing up claims through a final analytical project;
6. Gained a sense of the collaborative nature of academic writing through our class blog;
7. Developed their awareness of their own role in affecting environmental change through reading, writing, thinking, and making videos about human-environment interactions;
8. Understood the role of film festivals in distributing small films and shaping public discourse.

VII. ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

Assessment for this course will be based on reading notes, class participation, engagement with filmmakers, film producers, and scientists, class presentations of readings and individual research, the optional production of a video essay, or a research paper.