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Stephen Rust, Salma Monani and Sean Cubitt, eds. *Ecocinema Theory and Practice* (New York & London, Routledge, 2013), 325 pp.



The last few years have seen a spate of publications in the growing area of ecocinema studies. To name a few, Nadia Bozak's *The Cinematic Footprint*, Robin Murray and Joseph K. Heumann's *Ecology and Popular Film*, Paul Willoquet-Maricondi's *Framing the World*, and Sheldon Lu and Jiayan Mi's edited collection *Chinese Ecocinema* all reflect an increasing interest and awareness of ecocinema within the field of ecocriticism and, to a lesser extent, of ecocinema within the more general field of cinema and media studies. In this context, Stephen Rust, Salma Monani and Sean Cubitt's *Ecocinema Theory and Practice* demonstrates not only added interest in ecocinema studies, but also the growing maturity of the field. The publication of this volume as part of Routledge's American Film Institute (AFI) Film Readers series also speaks to the increased recognition of ecocinema as an important aspect of film scholarship.

The book is organized into four parts: theory; practice as applied to so-called nature films and documentaries; practice in the context of fiction films; and ecocinema "beyond films." These four sections are preceded by an introductory chapter by Rust and Monani which seeks to "define and situate" ecomedia studies and provides an editorial explanation for how the essays contained in this volume were solicited and selected. Contributors were asked to contemplate current concerns within the field and to write an essay that focused on one of more of those issues. The overall goal of the project is to produce a book that would reveal the range of theoretical and methodological approaches utilized by eco-film critics, and also to demonstrate the diversity of films towards which those approaches can be applied. As a result, the collection is strong in its breadth of exploration, while in places calls out for more depth.

Similarly the editors held the ambitious goal of producing a volume which simultaneously "seeks to highlight the field's foundations even as it recognizes new directions" (3). Several of the essays included in the collection, therefore, are useful extensions and elaborations of earlier works within ecocinema studies. For example, Adrian Ivakhiv's excellent essay elaborates on the model he outlined in his 2011 article published in *Film Philosophy*, and Jennifer Ladino's chapter builds on the theoretical framework she introduced in her 2009 *ISLE* article, in particular her concept of the "speciesist camera." The introductory chapter concludes with a thoughtful attempt to outline future trends and directions in the field.

The editors begin their argument with the intriguing concept of cinema as a habitat, an environment that is "a form of negotiation, a mediation that... consumes the entangled world around it, and in turn, is itself consumed" (1). From this starting point, Rust and Monani provide a brief overview of the current conversation in ecocinema,

teasing out those areas where eco-film critics tend to agree before presenting a range of essays that also demonstrate areas where critical approaches and interpretations diverge.

Part I, “ecocinema theory” is comprised of four essays which, taken together, provide an illustration of the strength of theoretical analysis within ecocinema and also demonstrate how the binary opposition of theory and practice is dissolved in ecocinema studies by blending substantive theoretical roots with clear case study analysis and application. All films, Rust and Monani observe, are both “culturally and materially embedded” (3), and that belief is exemplified by the essays in this section. In writing about the “ecocinema experience,” for example, Scott McDonald explicitly reminds us that the main ingredient of celluloid film is collagen: “Collagen is produced by boiling the bones and tissues of animals... That is, the ‘life’ we see moving on the screen is a kind of re-animation of the plant and animal life within the mechanical/chemical apparatus of traditional cinema” (18). This is, perhaps, the most direct statement of the inextricable link between the materiality of cinema and its socio-political and cultural dimensions, a profound demonstration of what Stacy Alaimo calls “trans-corporeality,” in recognition that the human body is always materially enmeshed with more-than-human nature.

Another theme explored in this section of the book is the viewing experience of the audience. McDonald argues that one of the “jobs” of ecocinema is to “find new kinds of film experience” (20) and recognizes certain films as demanding more of their viewers than conventional films. This argument is picked up and re-shaped by David Ingram who draws on cognitive theory to offer a more holistic approach toward viewing and experiencing a film, one that “involves cognitive, emotional and affective aspects” (44). In his development of this argument, Ingram illustrates one of the strengths of this collection of essays; he both builds on the work of earlier ecocritics, and he challenges it, urging readers to think beyond the traditional cultural studies roots of ecocinema studies to draw on the diversity of theories that inform film theory and history. Likewise, Andrew Hageman reminds readers that even ecocinema is big business and must be considered within the context of the dominant capitalist system. Adrian Ivakhiv’s thought-provoking chapter draws on theoretical roots as diverse as the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, the critical theory of Heidegger, and the semiotics of Pierce to present his “ecophilosophy of the moving image,” in a chapter that epitomizes the strong interdisciplinary aspects of ecocinema.

Parts II and III consider ecocinematic practice. While there is not space within this review to address each chapter individually, in general I found the essays in Part II to be more effective illustrations of ecocinema practice than those in Part III. Particularly noteworthy are the chapters by Luis Vivanco and Jennifer Ladino, both of which draw on the roots of wildlife film theory and practice while extending them by blending ecocritical approaches with more traditional film theories, such as Ivakhiv’s consideration of environmental politics through the lens of documentary modes and aesthetic analysis and Ladino’s extension of Donna Haraway’s research on companion animals framed through the application of Laura Mulvey’s concept of “the gaze.” The three essays that comprise Part III look at mainstream Hollywood’s efforts to present issues pertaining to climate change, three feature films which are reconsidered as “eco-

road movies,” and the sub-genre of cannibalistic horror movies from the 1970s. Considered individually, each of these essays is well written and provocative, but I found the overall arguments did not build on each other in the same way as those presented in earlier sections, where the arguments seem to develop as a dialogue, integrating, adding to, and challenging each other in a form of stimulating conversation.

Part IV consists of two essays in which the editors look “beyond film” in an explicitly stated effort to push the current boundaries of the field of ecocinema. This is done by exploring avenues where films are grouped together for screening, as in Salma Monani’s chapter on environmental film festivals and Sean Cubitt’s carefully crafted consideration of the ways in which the visualization of complex scientific data is being presented in the context of cinema. Both essays are effective in their stated goal; to add to the scholarship in these areas and to emphasize the interdisciplinary dimension of ecocinema both in theoretical and practical terms.

Ecocinema Theory and Practice concludes with an extremely useful summary of current resources and publications in the field, organizations and journals of interest and an extensive bibliography. Overall this edited collection provides an interesting snapshot of the current state of ecocinema studies and makes a bold effort to project areas of possible growth and maturation in this emerging area of inquiry.

Works cited

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