

- Peer-Reviewed, Open Access Journal
- Indexed in NepJOL; Star-Ranked in JPPS
- Permanently Archived in Portico



Glorifying Ecocide in Cinematic Trends Versus Voicing Ecocritical Aesthetics

Ahmed Tahsin Shams¹ , Sanjida Akter² 

¹Media Arts and Sciences at Media School of Indiana University, Blomington, USA

²Department of English, Metropolitan University, Sylhet, Bangladesh

Article History: Submitted 04 Apr. 2024; Reviewed 09 Jun. 2024; Revised 12 Jul. 2024

Corresponding Author: Ahmed Tahsin Shams, Email: ahshams@iu.edu

Copyright 2024 © The Author(s). The publisher may reuse published articles with prior permission of the concerned author(s). The work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). www.cdetu.edu.np



Abstract

This paper comprehensively analyzes how the environment is depicted in cinema. Portrayals contribute to normalizing such violence as a prevailing cultural trend in cinema that not only they commemorate environmental disasters as noteworthy human ‘accomplishments’ in the film but also they cultivate a concerning lack of empathy towards ecological emergencies. Spectators may perceive an ecological rape as visually captivating events, hypothetically and hegemonically. This depiction perpetuates, arguably, a distorted perspective that undermines the significance of the environmental movement. Moreover, this study reevaluates the commodification of this phenomenon, delving into how this lack of regard for the environment has evolved into a lucrative narrative device and a predetermined recipe for achieving blockbuster triumph. However, this paper concludes that alternative examples of ecocentric aesthetics are framed in a few of the 2022–2023 films where nature’s voice is not marginalized within the crowd of human voices.

Keywords: Ecocide, voyeuristic gratification, environmental disasters, ecocentric aesthetics

Introduction

The dissemination of awareness regarding critical social issues such as race, class, and gender are greatly influenced by literary scholarship, pop culture, and visual media (Glotfelty and Fromm xvi). Scholars have astutely observed the mounting pressure on the “life support systems” of our planet and have raised apprehensions regarding the potential loss of humanity’s appreciation for the profound importance of the Earth (Glotfelty and Fromm xvi). The issue of environmental awareness resembles the historical portrayal of women in cinema, a prominent medium within popular culture. In its early stages, cinema depicted women as mere objects, serving as a reflection of the

dominant patriarchal ideology prevalent in society. The advent of Marxist and feminist theories, on the other hand, brought about a dismantling of these societal frameworks about both class and gender. Similarly, the portrayal of environmental awareness in cinema has been subject to overt and covert marginalization, occurring through conscious and unconscious means.

Against this backdrop, the lack of attention given to environmental issues in mainstream cinema is clearly demonstrated by the poignant statement that “plants cry in silence” (Marris). This phrase alludes to the fact that the sounds emitted by plants are ultrasonic, surpassing the auditory range of human perception. The absence of attention observed here reflects the phenomenon of nature being objectified, which is a matter that has not been sufficiently explored in current cinematic trends. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, prominent theorists of the Frankfurt School, posit that the mass media serves as a means of enlightenment for individuals, albeit in their capacity as consumers within the realm of the “entertainment business” (Durham and Kellner 51). They argue that within this domain, a fundamental element of hostility persists, inherently embedded within the very principle of entertainment itself. As a widely consumed medium of mass communication, cinema has frequently exploited and negatively impacted the environment, although regrettably, it has been embraced by audiences. In the USA (Figures 1.1–1.4) and India (Figures 2.1–2.4), ecological catastrophes have become tools for entertainment, becoming a trendsetting definition in the ‘action’ genre, as seen in contemporary highest-grossing films. While boosting commercial success, this synergy also risks homogenizing cultural products and echoes the concerns raised by the Frankfurt School theorists.

The treatment of the environment in genres such as romance or drama is often relegated to a “temporary excursion” (Glotfelty and Fromm 234), as noted by Glen A. Love in his essay “Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism.” While there is an increasing projection of equity concerning racism and sexism in scholarly productions, cinema has yet to fully “recognize and dramatize the integration of humans with the natural cycles of life,” as Love proclaims (Glotfelty and Fromm 235). This gap leads to cinematic texts contributing to “earth-denying and ultimately destructive anthropocentrism” (Glotfelty and Fromm 235), which needs reassessment to end the glorification of marginalizing nature.

For a decade, the definition of action entertainment has set a trend of ecological catastrophe in the commercial cinema industry, where superheroes save the world, ironically, from the villains. However, the process is ecocide, which is applauded visually. The source of such genocide of nature is ‘capitalism’ committing “ecocide” (Glotfelty and Fromm 79), claims William Howarth. This propagandist narrative of the profit-oriented culture industry intensifies how this style or approach of action entertainment productions presents the earth as a “true home” (Glotfelty and Fromm 86). In contrast, the struggle projected in these films has one homogenous purpose—opposing the hostility of making the earth an “alien place” (Glotfelty and Fromm 86).

The argument in this paper entails a deliberate endeavor to portray nature not merely as a passive setting but as an engaged participant in the storyline, reflecting the notion of “environing” as an active verb (Glotfelty 138). Furthermore, the selected mainstream films in Figures 1, 2, and 3 are some of the highest-grossing films, indicating the growth of this new ‘action genre’ definition and style, where the marginalization of nature is normalized and appreciated. Thus, this study hints that the popular culture consisting of this particular kind of film franchise creates an audience devoid of any eco-consciousness since they remain unaware of the violence performed against nature and its consequences in the long run. Lastly, the study attempts to establish whether the

notion of “ecocide” (Glotfelty and Fromm 80) in film criticism and media discourse can bring ecological justice to some extent, as perceived in terms of racism and sexism, reducing the victimization process by deconstructing the power relation.

The concept of interpellation and its implications on audience perception and interpretation of cinematic narratives can be merged (Staiger 92–93). The complexities of audience engagement with ideological discourse can be applied to how viewers are influenced by the glorification of environmental destruction in films. The portrayal of ecocide in popular culture, especially in superhero movies, can be seen as an exercise in ideological interpellation, where audiences are subtly conditioned to accept environmental degradation as a necessary consequence of heroic action. Exploring the power dynamics within popular culture and audience interaction with mass media is essential (Kelley 1404–08). Kelley argues that while audiences actively engage with and interpret popular culture, there is a need to acknowledge the underlying power relations that influence these interpretations. In superhero films, environmental devastation is often framed as a spectacle, creating a dichotomy where audiences may find themselves celebrating visually stunning scenes of destruction while simultaneously overlooking the implications of such devastation on the natural world. Michael Denning’s insights into mass culture and the commodification of cultural forms further augment this argument (Denning 6, 10). Denning’s critique of mass culture as a commodified entity raises questions about the role of cinematic trends in shaping cultural perceptions. The commodification of environmental destruction in films (Figures 1.1–1.4 and 2.1–2.4) reflects a disturbing trend where the spectacle of ecocide becomes a profitable narrative device, potentially dulling the audience’s sensitivity to real-world environmental crises.

Since the result of this research addresses a limited number of film franchises based on the American and Indian film industries only, a significant scope remains in the academic sphere to conduct this research in a greater film discourse context outside of American and Indian cinema. In addition, this interdisciplinary study will assist academicians from other disciplines, like media and journalism, social studies, and environmental science, in observing and analyzing nature’s representation in different contexts beyond the liberal arts: literature and visual media.

Ecocriticism: A Theoretical Perspective

In his essay titled “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism,” William Rueckert presents a critique of the mainstream cinematic style. Rueckert argues that this style falsely celebrates the “destruction of the biosphere” (Glotfelty and Fromm 120). The author emphasizes the infrequent occurrence of “symbiosis” (Glotfelty and Fromm 120) in the portrayal of cinema, as shown in movies like *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022) and *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* (2023) (Figures 3.1–3.4). The films discussed in this context challenge the prevailing destructive narrative by adopting a concept known as “ecological poetics,” which advocates for coexistence (Glotfelty and Fromm 111). In his analysis, Rueckert parallels this approach with the concept that “poems are green plants” (Glotfelty and Fromm 111). This comparison implies that these films serve as a means to question and resist the urge to exert control over nature. Although these films belong to the action genre, they do not depict a “humanized planet” but rather emphasize the interconnectedness of Earth’s life systems (Glotfelty and Fromm 112).

The trend of representing environmental destruction in cinema, often under the guise of nationalism and heroism, perpetuates what can be termed ecological racism. This is evident in superhero films where the narrative of “saving the world” often involves violent destruction of the natural landscape, reflecting a “rape of a forest”

(Warren and Erkal 225), as noted by Griffin. The cinematic human cultural behavior is “suicidal” (Glotfelty and Fromm 116) along with the rise of this tendency “devised to conquer nature...” (Glotfelty and Fromm 116).

Figures 1.1–1.4 and 2.1–2.4 reveal these two different grounds on the table: “the social construction of nature and the social construction of woman” (Glotfelty and Fromm 111). Therefore, the incorporation of sexism and racism into academic discourse has shaped today’s creative world, influencing how authors represent race and gender over the years. A new study on anthropocentric approaches in literary pedagogy discusses how teaching social justice leaves out “eco-consciousness” (Glotfelty and Fromm 230) or environmental voices from the critical discussion. It also spreads a false idea of equity that examines humanism’s concerns, stifling and excluding “non-human voices” (Shams and Akter 1) from film and academic settings. In ecological representation, these mentioned films still posit “ego-consciousness” (Glotfelty and Fromm 230), which represents “the racist mind, the misogynist mind, the mind afraid of nature,” that “are often the same mind” (Warren and Erkal 225).

Scholars like Gaard (1993) raise concerns about dissociating “masculinity from the images of heroism and militaristic fantasies” (53), which is illustrated further in Birkland’s essay “Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice,” as seen in recent mainstream films (Figures 1.1–1.4 and 2.1–2.4). These productions portray “violence against nature” (Birkland 50). “Environmental massacres” (Gaard 122), as Linda Vance mentions, have become part of the production design as a demand of the producer for the screenwriter. A good portion of the budget is allocated to provide this pleasant ‘gaze’ for the spectators to enjoy, as once and perhaps still now sexuality is represented as a ‘gaze’ element. Mainstream cinema thus serves voyeuristic pleasure, as Laura Mulvey points out, to the audience by “taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (Durham and Kellner 344); likewise, it instigates the same kind of pleasure in them through depicting environmental destruction. Hence, by projecting the rape of nature on the screen, “the cinema satisfies a primordial wish for a pleasurable look” (Durham and Kellner 345).

The concept of the ‘male gaze,’ traditionally associated with gender oppression, extends to the representation of nature in media and culture. Just as women have historically been oppressed, nature too has been subjugated, and reduced to a resource for human consumption (Gaard 285-86). The way “oppression is inadequate to describe women’s situation in society” (Gaard 284), Huey-li Li writes in “A Cross-Cultural Critique of Ecofeminism” that oppression of nature is so subtle and subconsciously hegemonic that raising this concern could also lead to various misconceptions, as feminism and racism did until these political issues were brought into the light as social justice. Consequently, with the advent of modern science, “nature has been reduced to a resource reservoir for providing the material needs of human beings,” defying human-nature interdependency. This notion signifies civilization as a factor contributing to the “immobilization of nature” (Gaard 285), as Li remarks:

Following the Scientific Revolution, the advancement of technology, in particular, enhanced the human capacity to control, manipulate, and further mold the natural environment. Pollution of air, water, and soil, large-scale deforestation, and the destruction of wildlife and wilderness demonstrate the power of human technology in molding the natural environment (Gaard 286). Thus, the human reasoning mind subconsciously or consciously projects the domination of nature as the patriarchal or racist mind does with women or race since the “objectification(s) of nature and women go hand in hand” (Thompson 506). This study discusses how the mentioned films seek “freedom in the context of unfreedom through

the use of guns and bombs” (Shiva 1993, 109)—a paradox unaddressed in academic and cinematic discourse. Through an inductive qualitative approach, this paper explores the trend of ecocide and its glorification as an action genre. This research also connects such an agenda involving the military or ‘superhero’ mission of saving humans from a common enemy opposing the ‘green’ movement in the process of the delusional fleeting victorious outcome, identifying the “profound relationship between militarism, environmental degradation, and sexism,” as Petra Kelly theorizes (Warren and Erkal 114). Therefore, this study examines such cinematic narratives promoting environmental catastrophe as an object of entertainment with the motive of “power over others” instead of “power with others” (Warren and Erkal 114). As films are a pivotal part of the societal superstructure, mind-shaping the hegemonic ideologies, such narratives seem to be checked with counter-arguments for a change in the political and societal hegemonic structure with the purpose of environmental justice. This paper addresses the propagation of entertaining violence against nature in such films, as this critical discourse has hardly been considered in film reviews or academic research.

Media undeniably has various effects on consumers, mostly psychological and, thereby, identity-forming roles. Within the field of media studies, a significant area of investigation revolves around the impact of various media forms on mood regulation and coping mechanisms. This becomes particularly crucial when exploring the potential role of pornography as a tool for emotional and relational coping. A similar concept can be implied for ‘ecological rape’ and the entertainment aspect associated with perceiving such rape. However, the convergence of mood theory and media effects provides a sophisticated viewpoint on how various forms of media, such as art, music, film, and writing, contribute to enhancing psychological well-being and managing trauma. These multiple forms of media are acknowledged for their capacity to elicit the release of neurochemicals that improve mood, albeit with variations in both the effects and underlying mechanisms across different mediums. The studies conducted by Losinski and Froeschle and Riney shed light on the visual arts’ therapeutic capacity in the emotional healing realm. These studies propose the incorporation of art therapy into interventions for Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD) and autism spectrum disorders, highlighting its effectiveness in improving social skills and psychological welfare. In “The Mood-Emotion Loop,” authored by Wong, the intricate interplay among writing, mood, and arousal is delved into, with a particular focus on the advantages of engaging in expressive writing exercises for individuals afflicted with post-traumatic stress disorder. This specific approach has been demonstrated to effectively reduce symptoms of depression, particularly when combined with the practice of positive reframing. Now, the question of changing camera narratives will undoubtedly have an effect; this hypothesis is not negligible.

Ahmed Tahsin Shams presents a compelling critique of the conventional understanding of the camera as a passive observer. It draws inspiration from Lyotard’s insightful theories on the influence of power structures on the construction of knowledge. Doing so establishes a thought-provoking parallel with Plato’s allegory of the cave, highlighting perception’s limitations and unquestioned nature (Shams 6). Filmmakers can enhance the daily bond between nature and humans rather than isolating nature from society. Judith Plant’s idea of giving a voice to the frequently disregarded and marginalized elements of our environment, such as animals and nature itself, serves as an example of this (Warren 128). However, the following ecocritical aesthetics in framing voices in this regard may bring new insights to this argument (Shams 6) while analyzing the films (Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4). This paper critically examines a few cinematic visuals to recognize that each camera frame represents a different narrative perspective, whether

it's the characters', the director's, animals', or nature's voices. Also, it is to be understood what is focused on and what is defocused in a frame (Shams 8). Secondly, it is to be discussed if those selected cinematic visuals have "PoV parallelism" (Shams 6) or not, which is if a character's 'Point-of-View' (PoV) is the chosen narrative, whether the camera should reflect only what the character sees, avoiding an authorial narrative, and so when the narration technique can allow an authorial voice if the script or story does not even demand one. Finally, to connect aesthetics with ecocritical ethics, consider how sound and silence are languages in storytelling where hegemonic, anthropocentric representations may ignore ambient voices.

Cinemas in the Age of the Anthropocene: Critical Analysis

The immense triumph of these films (Figures 1.1–1.4 and 2.1–2.4) at the box office is a testament to their profound influence on the collective consciousness and preferences of audiences worldwide. These instances serve as troubling examples of the glorification of violence and ecocide, indicating that media portrayals have the potential to influence and strengthen societal perspectives on both environmental and interpersonal violence. The depiction of devastation in films exemplifies a cinematic realm wherein violence and environmental deterioration play a crucial role in the storyline and frequently take center stage as captivating visual spectacles. This notion of ecological rape being perceived as aesthetically pleasing is the prevailing viewpoint. The intricate interplay between media consumption and viewer psychology is evident in the viewers' reception and the financial success of these films. The enjoyment derived from these displays of violence alludes to a deeper false consciousness. Furthermore, this phenomenon raises concerns regarding the absence of a critical approach to how audiences perceive and interpret environmental catastrophes. Instead of engaging in thoughtful introspection, these events are often celebrated, which is a matter of great concern.



Fig. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 & 1.4. [Clockwise] Scenes from the films *Mission: Impossible II* (dir. John Woo, 2000, 2h 3m): 1:42:58; *Rambo* (dir. Sylvester Stallone, 2008, 1h 32m): 00:35:40; *Captain America: The First Avenger* (dir. Joe Johnston, 2011, 2h 4m): 1:33:00; and *Avengers: Endgame* (dir. Anthony Joe Russo, 2019, 3h 1m): 2:02:45

These wildly popular movies (Figures 1.1–1.4 and 2.1–2.4) are examples of violence becoming a lucrative cinematic motif, pointing to a more pervasive cultural tendency. This observation substantiates the claim made in this paper regarding the emergence of this trend as a lucrative phenomenon, characterized by its sensationalized nature and a predetermined formula for achieving blockbuster success. This phenomenon

showcases how mainstream cultural industries capitalize on these narratives to generate financial profit, often at the expense of marginalizing more critical and environmentally aware viewpoints.

The question is whether Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 portray humanized nature or naturalized humans, according to the actions and screen portrayals. The method mentioned is the ecocritical aesthetics of framing voices; the examination starts with a camera shot. In Figures 1.1–1.4, these four films could serve as an example of how to apply this theory. Considering the screen ratio's approximate percentage of violence, it is evident that the central focus in all of these films is 'smoke' and 'fire,' a consequence of the characters' combat with each other. The PoV is directorial; in all these cases, it's a bird's eye shot or a wide, long shot where such heroic connotation unwillingly establishes the supremacy of humans over nature. Ambient voice is completely discarded in Figures 1.1–1.4, and non-diegetic sound along with diegetic sound is amplified for spectators' sensorium purposes. The results emphasize portraying the destruction of the environment as a form of glorified ecocide in films. Such portrayal of environmental disasters as a source of entertainment and a cause for celebration in movie theaters reflects a misguided societal reaction. The hypothesis of such representation and mainstream cinema's widespread appeal and impact reinforces the notion that harmful behaviors towards the natural world are commendable or enjoyable.

The question is not why the film *Rambo* (2008) is set in the lush jungles of Myanmar, nor does this paper question how to describe an intense human conflict that unfolds in that setting. Though nature is just a mere backdrop in these films, the question is why such representation is defined as a marvelous blockbuster. The movie *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) showcases explosive action sequences that are filled with adrenaline. However, these intense scenes often result in a trail of ecological devastation. They pay little attention to how their conflict affects the environment. The perspective presented ultimately reaches its pinnacle in the film *Avengers: Endgame* (2019). Throughout the movie, numerous battles occur in diverse settings, resulting in extensive destruction. However, despite this widespread devastation, the narrative consistently centers on the characters and their journey, disregarding potential environmental implications.

A similar trend of glorifying ecological rape is adopted in Indian cinematic narratives (Figures 2.1–2.4). These films not only captivate audiences with their thrilling narratives but also frequently depict instances of environmental destruction, either subtly or explicitly. The emergence of ecological rape can be observed in several recent films (Figures 2.1–2.4). These films captivate audiences with their intense and thrilling storylines and incorporate different ecological impact levels within their narratives. The film *Pathaan* (2023) revolves around a nationalistic mission and prominently showcases intense action sequences involving gunfights and bombings. For instance, Figure 2.3 showcases a chase sequence taking place on the frozen surface of Lake Baikal. The film does not at all highlight the environmental consequences of militarism in cinema through the bombings taking place in a crucial freshwater lake. The fact that this lake is home to a diverse ecosystem emphasizes the significance of the environmental damage these actions have caused. This concept is not only passive in this film but also absent—as if ecology does not exist. *Brahmastra: Part 1: Shiva* (2022) skillfully incorporates elements of Hindu mythology within an action-adventure mystery narrative. Figures 2.1–2.4 vividly portray the extensive destruction inflicted upon the earth's surface, including the burning of trees and the disruption of ice forests. The narrative in question effectively weaves together various elements of ecological disturbance; however, no critic or film scholar has ever emphasized the absence of environmental implications associated with

the mythical conflict depicted in these films. A similar trend is maintained where ecological voices are unheard by scholars and critics in films like *Sooryavanshi* (2021), *Jawan* (2023), and many more. The framing is again a wide-angle long shot, non-diegetic violent sounds are amplified, and diegetic sounds of destruction also exist; however, this sound design alienates humans from nature instead of a symbiotic co-existence approach. More than 80 percent of the screens in Figures 2.1–2.4 are filled up with ‘fire,’ ‘smoke,’ and other motifs of natural disasters. The emergence of this trend in cinema prompts us to consider the broader implications of these portrayals and the necessity for a more environmentally conscious approach to storytelling.



Fig. 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 & 2.4. [Clockwise] Scenes from the films *Sooryavanshi* (dir. Rohit Shetty, 2021, 2h 25m): 2:06:50; *Brahmastra Part One: Shiva* (dir. Ayan Mukerji, 2022, 2h 47m): 2:33:10; *Pathaan* (dir. Siddharth Anand, 2023, 2h 26m): 1:38:07; and *Jawan* (dir. Kumar Atlee, 2023, 2h 49m): 1:39:00.

The portrayal of environmental destruction in action cinema can be seen as a manifestation of an anthropocentric worldview, which prioritizes human interests above all other considerations. Although these films offer entertainment and a means of escape, they also play a role in perpetuating a cultural narrative that undermines the significance of the natural world. The demand for a transformation in cinematic storytelling is increasing as it becomes increasingly important to acknowledge and value the environment as an essential element of our shared narrative. It is crucial to protect and consider the environment, recognizing its significance. On the other hand, films opposing this anthropocentric view, like Figures 3.1–3.4 and Figures 4.1–4.7, express the symbiotic relationship between human and non-human worlds in films like *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022), *Aquaman: The Lost Kingdom* (2023), and *All Dirt Road Taste of Salt* (2023). These films actively express their concerns about communicating with the natural world to co-exist.

Avatar: The Way of Water (2022) is seen as a testament to Cameron’s belief in the power of cinema to transport and immerse audiences in a fully realized world (Tallerico). Figures 3.2 and 3.3 explicitly portray communication between humans and non-humans, where the framing does not centralize human characters or marginalize non-humans; instead, humans posit the same ratio on screen as any other natural beings.

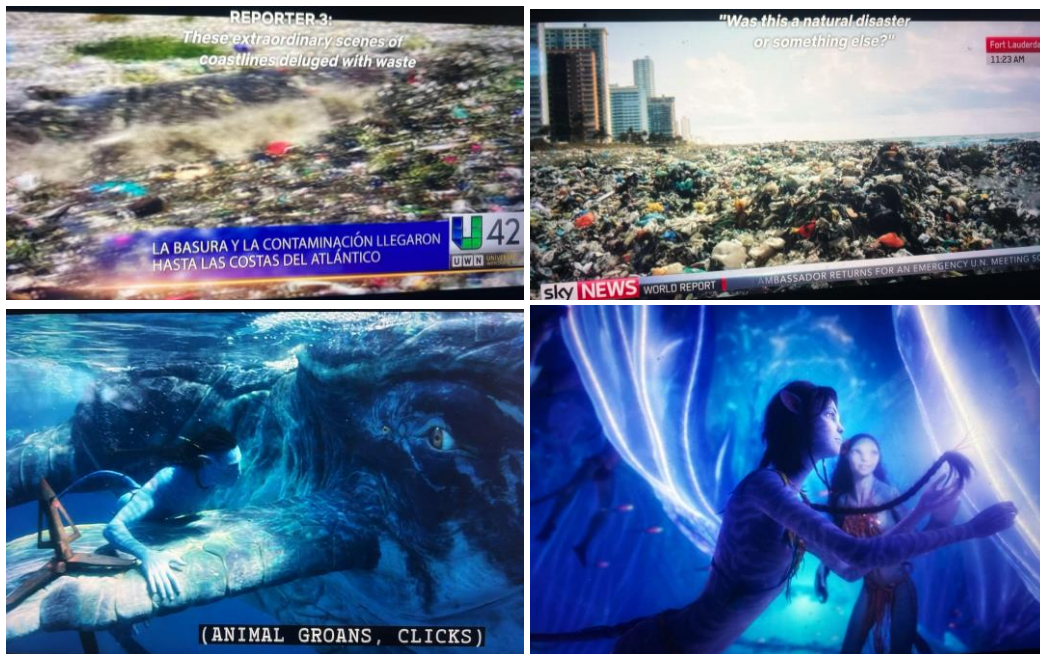


Fig. 3.1, 3.2 & 3.4: [Clockwise] *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* (dir. James Wan, 2023, 2h 4m): 00:37:18 and 00:37:24, and *Avatar: The Way of Water* (dir. James Cameron, 2023, 3h 12m): 1:21:53 and 1:33:30

The diegetic sound is emphasized even with the use of non-diegetic sound to amplify the bond between humans and non-humans. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 directly ask who is responsible for this “coastline deluged with waste” (Figure 3.1) in the film *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* (2023).

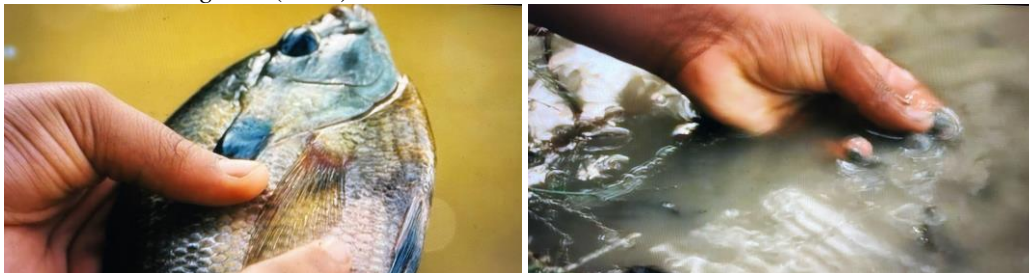


Fig. 4.1, & 4.2. [Clockwise, 00:39:00 and 00:05:45] Scenes from *All Dirt Roads Taste of Salt* (dir. Raven Jackson 2023, 1h 37m) where tactile technique is used along with non-diegetic sound where screen ratio of human and non-human voices are blended.

All Dirt Roads Taste of Salt offers Mack’s experiences as a “trip down memory lane... while growing up in Mississippi” (Castillo) from childhood to old age in a non-linear, reflective manner, capturing both mundane and pivotal moments of her life. Scholars highlight the film’s emphasis on sensory experiences and the detailed close-ups in the film that evoke a similar sense of nostalgia and sensory immersion. The film’s narrative structure is described as meandering, prioritizing heartfelt emotion over the false-conscious logical progression humans consider reality. Moments, like a mother bathing her child (Figures 4.4–4.5) or sisters (Mack and Josie) feeling the rain or in communion with the grass (Figures 4.6–4.7), the gentle pacing of this film and framing voices—human and non-human—prioritize the ambient realities. In Figure 4.5, the way human characters are positioned within the ambiance and the amount of screen possession perfectly lay out the main argument of this paper: how human stories can unfold without marginalizing nature.



Fig. 4.3. [Clockwise, 00:48:37-00:49:24] In this scene from *All Dirt Roads Taste of Salt* (dir. Raven Jackson 2023, 1h 37m), multiple similar jump-cut montage shots of the river in mid-long shots remind *Five Dedicated to Ozu* (dir. Abbas Kiarostami 2003, 1h 14m), where non-human voices are presented without any human intervention.

Similarly, Figure 4.6 is a striking example of rejecting the traditional rule of the third camera angle: low angle in this shot, how spectators are forced to hear how the grass speaks through the tactile sensorium approach of the characters towards their surroundings.



Fig. 4.4 & 4.5. [Clockwise, 00:56:37, 00:57:22] Scenes from *All Dirt Roads Taste of Salt* (dir. Raven Jackson 2023, 1h 37m)



Fig. 4.6 & 4.7. [Clockwise, 1:07:02, 1:28:58] Scenes from *All Dirt Roads Taste of Salt* (dir. Raven Jackson 2023, 1h 37m)

Selmin Kara discusses the criticism of logocentric or human-consciousness-based theories of reality, which scholars like Nigel Thrift and Karen Barad have defended. They argue against representational thinking that separates humans from non-human matter, proposing a shift towards understanding nature as a complex virtuality, thereby challenging anthropocentric traditions (Kara 5). For instance, Remes' analysis of Kiarostami's strategy is consistent with a broader critique of anthropocentrism in art. He compares it to La Monte Young's "Composition 1960 #5," where the existence of sound is independent of human perception, asserting a film's existence for itself rather than for an audience (Remes 239). This perspective is significant for discussing eco-centric

narratives in cinema, as it underscores the shift from human-centered storytelling to a more inclusive, environment-focused narrative structure:

Kiarostami's aesthetic critique of anthropocentrism is strikingly similar to the one put forth by La Monte Young in "*Composition 1960 #5* (1960) in which a performer 'turn[s] a butterfly (or any number of butterflies) loose in the performance area.' When someone named Diane objected to calling this piece music, since 'one ought to be able to hear the sounds', Young responded by saying, 'I said that this was the usual attitude of human beings that everything in the world should exist for them and that I disagreed. I said it didn't seem to me at all necessary that anyone or anything should have to hear sounds and that it is enough that they exist for themselves. (Remes 238)

Lavallée's perspective on the repetitive nature of cinematic imagery is that it may initially be enthralling. Still, eventually, the "hallucinatory quantum" (Albano 217) is depleted, leaving behind only a hollow reproduction of the world. The repetition can lead to a tragic descent as the magic of the images fades and the lethal illusion of cinema is all that remains. This underscores the inherently obsessive and ultimately unfulfilling cycle of desire within the cinematic experience, reflecting a broader commentary on the human condition and the pursuit of illusion. For instance, viewers continue to believe that violence against nature is not at the forefront of discussion when watching anthropocentric worldview-based movies like Figures 1 and 2. In contrast, films like *All Dirt Roads Taste of Salt* break away from this cycle of cinematic storytelling.

Gibson's research questions how humans perceive motion through an environment and how this perception can be replicated in cinema, creating an illusion of movement (Richmond 77–78). This relationship between cinematic and visual kinesthesia was crucial in shaping Gibson's ecological approach, emphasizing the inseparability of perception and action and affirming that perception is commensurate with the world (Richmond 79). The environmental approach defines perception as an adaptive relationship between an organism and its environment arising from evolution. Perception is not about primary qualities like location or shape but about perceiving affordances, the relevant aspects of the environment that indicate potential actions (Richmond 79). This perspective leads to a fundamental shift in understanding perception: it is not a process occurring within an organism but an ecosystem property involving continuous environmental interaction. Richmond also addresses the concept of proprioception in cinema, discussing the role of the body in perception. He challenges traditional accounts that confine vision to the eyes and brain, arguing for a broader view of vision as an embodied process involving the whole body (Richmond 81–82). This embodied perception is essential in experiencing cinematic kinesthesia, where the sensation of movement occurs in the body, not just in the eyes, as *All Dirt Roads Taste of Salt* frames similar tactile ecocentric aesthetics and unfolds stories of humans through their interaction with nature.

Conclusion

It is high time for a paradigm shift in cinematic representation, moving away from anthropocentric narratives to more inclusive, environment-focused storytelling. Films like *All Dirt Roads Taste of Salt* and similar approaches to human storytelling by other visual artists and filmmakers herald a new era in cinema where ecological considerations are integral to the narrative, reflecting a growing consciousness of our relationship with the natural world. It is not an argument for limiting creative liberty to anthropocentric aesthetics and storytelling; instead, it is a concern that questions how equity between human and non-human voices can co-exist without marginalizing nature

or ecological voices for a sustainable world. More research and creative storytelling approaches may lead to dehegemonizing as a counter to the anthropocentric narrative techniques that still exist hierarchically as a dominant tool in the Age of the Anthropocene in mainstream mass media.

Works Cited

- Albano, Lucilla. "Cinema and Psychoanalysis: Across the Dispositifs." *American Imago*, vol. 70, no. 2, June 2013, pp. 191–224. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26305047>.
- All Dirt Roads Taste of Salt*. Directed by Raven Jackson, A24, 2023. *Amazon Prime*, <https://www.amazon.com/All-Dirt-Roads-Taste-Salt/dp/B0CPB4HQMB>.
- Avatar: The Way of Water*. Directed by James Cameron, 20th Century Studios, 2023. *Max*, <https://play.max.com/video/watch/a65365b6-42a6-445e-b3dc-932d0181d258/bf21e446-5423-4ef1-b0c2-b8d1d31d8638>.
- Avengers: Endgame*. Directed by Anthony Russo, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2019. *Amazon Prime*, https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/amzn1.dv.gti.a8b52476-383e-ee5b-230a-7f2fd14935a3?ref_=imdbref_tt_wbr_ovf__pvt_aiv&tag=imdbtag_tt_wbr_ovf__pvt_aiv-20.
- Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*. Directed by James Wan, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2023. *Max*, <https://play.max.com/movie/7b5168e8-da4e-4b49-bd29-091bc899ef2b>.
- Birkeland, Janis. "Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice." *Ecofeminism*, edited by Greta Gaard, Temple University Press, 1993, pp. 13–59. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bt5pf.5>.
- Brahmastra Part One: Shiva*. Directed by Ayan Mukerji, Star Studios, 2022. *Disney Plus*, <https://www.disneyplus.com/movies/brahmastra-part-one-shiva/4Uq5y1k4adyD>.
- Captain America: The First Avenger*. Directed by Joe Johnston, Paramount Pictures, 2011. *Amazon Prime*, https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/amzn1.dv.gti.a8a9f737-bcc4-34ff61b369f4db603c71?ref_=imdbref_tt_wbr_ovf__pvt_aiv&tag=imdbtag_tt_wbr_ovf__pvt_aiv-20.
- Castillo, Monica. "Review: All Dirt Roads Taste of Salt." *RogerEbert.com*, November 3, 2023. <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/all-dirt-roads-taste-of-salt-movie-review-2023>.
- Denning, Michael. "The End of Mass Culture." *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 37, 1990, pp. 4–18. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27671856>.
- Froeschle, Judith C., and Michelle Riney. "Using Adlerian Art Therapy to Prevent Social Aggression among Middle School Students." *Journal of Individual Psychology*, vol. 64, no. 4, 2008, pp. 416–431. <https://proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=41775421&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1996.
- Griffin, Susan. "Ecofeminism and Meaning." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, edited by Karen Warren and Nisvan Erkal, Indiana UP, 1997, pp. 213–26.
- Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor W. Adorno. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, pp. 41–72.
- Howarth, William. "Some Principles of Ecocriticism." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, U of Georgia P, 1996, pp. 69–91.

- Jawan*. Directed by Atlee Kumar, Red Chillies Entertainment, 2023.
- Kara, Selmin. "The Sonic Summons: Meditations on Nature and Anempathetic Sound in Digital Documentaries." *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media*, Oxford UP, 2013, pp. 582–597.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199757640.013.034>.
- Kelley, Robin D. G. "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Folk.'" *The American Historical Review*, vol. 97, no. 5, 1992, pp. 1400–08. *JSTOR*,
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2165942>.
- Kelly, Petra. "Women and Power." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, edited by Karen Warren and Nisvan Erkal, Indiana University Press, 1997, pp. 112–19.
- Li, Huey-li. "A Cross-Cultural Critique of Ecofeminism." *Ecofeminism*, edited by Greta Gaard, Temple UP, 1993, pp. 272–94. *JSTOR*,
<http://www.jstor.com/stable/j.ctt14bt5pf.14>.
- Losinski, Mickey, Judith Hughey, and John W. Maag. "Therapeutic Art: Integrating the Visual Arts into Programming for Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders." *Beyond Behavior*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2016, pp. 27–34. *JSTOR*,
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/26381810>.
- Love, Glen A. "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, U of Georgia P, 1996, pp. 225–40.
- Marris, Emma. "Stressed Plants 'Cry'--and Some Animals Can Probably Hear Them." *Scientific American*, March 31, 2023,
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/stressed-plants-cry-and-some-animals-can-probably-hear-them/>.
- Mission Impossible II*. Directed by John Woo, Paramount Pictures, 2000. *Amazon Prime*,
https://www.amazon.com/Mission-Impossible-II-Tom-Cruise/dp/B001JU4S44/ref=sr_1_1?crd=1192F8JWOJXCE&keywords=Mission+Impossible+II&qid=1704554673&s=instant-video&sprefix=mission+impossible+ii%2Cinstant-video%2C100&sr=1-1.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, pp. 342–52.
- Rambo*. Directed by Sylvester Stallone, Lionsgate Films and The Weinstein Company, 2008.
- Remes, Justin. "The Sleeping Spectator: Non-Human Aesthetics in Abbas Kiarostami's *Five: Dedicated to Ozu*." *Slow Cinema*, edited by Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge, Edinburgh UP, 2016, pp. 231–40.
- Richmond, Scott C. *Cinema's Bodily Illusions: Flying, Floating, and Hallucinating*. U of Minnesota P, 2016.
- Rueckert, William. "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, U of Georgia P, 1996, pp. 105–23.
- Shams, Ahmed Tahsin, and Sanjida Akter. "Eco-Centric Versus Anthropocentric Approach in Literary Pedagogy: Inclusion of Non-Human Narratives as Teaching Social Justice." *Global Journal of Human Social Sciences*, vol. 22, no. A9, November 2022, pp. 1–9, https://globaljournals.org/_Volume22/1-Eco-Centric-Versus.pdf.
- Shams, Ahmed Tahsin. "Ecologized Humanity Versus Humanized Ecology: Critical Approach to Camera Narratives in Cinematic Arts." *International Journal*

- Online of Humanities*, vol. 8, no. 4, August 30, 2022, pp. 1-15,
doi.org/10.24113/ijohmn.v8i4.251.
- Shetty, Rohit, dir. *Sooryavanshi*. Directed by Rohit Shetty, PVR Pictures, 2021.
- Shiva, Vandana. "Masculinization of the Motherland." *Ecofeminism*, Zed Books, 1993, pp. 108–15. *Bloomsbury Collections*,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350219786.ch-008>.
- Staiger, Janet. "Film, Reception, and Cultural Studies." *The Centennial Review*, vol. 36, no. 1, 1992, pp. 89–104. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23739835>.
- Tallerico, Brian. "Review: Avatar: The Way of Water." *RogerEbert.com*, December 13, 2022, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/avatar-the-way-of-water-movie-review-2022>.
- Thompson, Charis. "Back to Nature?" *Isis*, vol. 97, no. 3, September 2006, pp. 505-12. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/508080>.
- Vance, Linda. "Ecofeminism and the Politics of Reality." *Ecofeminism*, edited by Greta Gaard, Temple UP, 1993, pp. 118-45. *JSTOR*,
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bt5pf.8>.
- Warren, Karen J. "Taking Empirical Data Seriously: An Ecofeminist Philosophical Perspective." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, edited by Karen Warren and Nisvan Erkal, Indiana UP, 1997, pp. 3-20.
- Wong, Mei Yin. "The Mood-Emotion Loop." *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, vol. 173, no. 11, 2016, pp. 3061–80. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44122239>.