Anthropomorphism

Definition: Ascribing human attributes, such as emotions and motivations, to nonhuman beings.

Anthropomorphism is often related to anthropocentrism--where it is believed that humans are the superior and most significant species. Nonhuman animals become anthropomorphic in multiple forms of media. Often anthropomorphism is a strategy used for entertainment in literature and motion pictures. Many religious texts use anthropomorphism in order to represent their gods or divine beings; such as, Zeus and Apollo in Ancient Greek mythology. Ascribing human characteristics to nonhumans in stories and films allows the intended human audience a much more relatable and entertaining experience. However, while this does help create some understandings of nonhuman beings, it can also encourage anthropocentrism and misrepresentations of those beings. When analyzing a film or other forms of media understanding anthropomorphism can help further understand creative ways of relating nonhuman beings and humans together. Understanding anthropomorphism and how it works can also help differentiate between the real and fabricated information in the media.

March of the Penguins is an excellent example of how anthropomorphism can be used. By providing narration that describes the behaviors of the penguins in human related terms, it allows the audience to make personal connections to the animals. In this shot, a family of penguins is focused on and the audience is told about the strong bound and love that they all share for each other. Humans will interpret this scene has two penguins that are in love cuddling. However, it could very well be for some survival purpose or alternative motive outside of love. The film directly relates these three penguins to an ideal American family. During close-up shots of the two penguins, it becomes incredibly intimate and is positioned so it appears the two are kissing. The penguins become relatable to the audience and are able to project their own emotions and relationships. As the audience watches the family reunite, they may imagine the return of a father from war or how difficult it can be to leave ones own child.

SOURCE:
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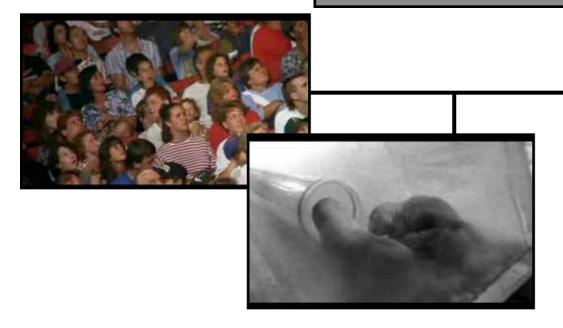
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Zoomorphism

Definition: Representing and associating non-human animal characteristics onto humans or other beings.

This term is a much ecocentric than anthropomorphism, however it is not always used in ways that create a superiority over nonhuman animals and nature. It is quite common for different forms of media to use zoomorphism to create an opposition to civilized society. Films and literature often use zoomorphism when attempting to show humans who are primitive or sometimes mentally unstable. People often make the association that a person in not safe or insane when related to and performing behaviors similar to other animals. Horror films successfully use zoomorphism to create chaos and disturbing imagery. A horror film may present a scene with close up shots of a family eating meat and cut to shots of a wild wolf pack eating their prey. This association emphasizes the similarities humans share with nonhuman animals and brings our natural behavior to the audiences attention. Of course, this can appear disturbing or unsettling to some who have grown up in a modern civilized society where these types of behaviors are oppressed.

These two images are shots from the film *Fast, Cheap and Out of Control*. In this scene, the character Mendez is explaining the behavior of naked mole rats who are confined in a small space. As he is describing the actions of the rats the scene cuts to shots of people at a circus. While this structure of Mendez's voiceover and shots of a crowded circus may have had a specific goal, it can have a wide array of interpretations. These shots are meant to force a direct comparison between nonhuman animals and humans--specifically naked mole rats and humans. It may not be clear exactly what association Morris is attempting to make, but it provides an unmistakable connection between all animals. Splicing shots of humans and shots of nonhuman animals is a common use of zoomorphism in films. This technique allows the audience to make the connections themselves visually and aurally--thus making connections provided by the film seem much more reasonable.

SOURCE:
Cubitt, Sean, Salma Monani, and Stephen Rust. "Working with animals regarding companion species in documentary film." Ecocinema Theory and Practice. New York: Routledge, 2013. 129-145. Print.

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Speciesist Camera

<u>Definition:</u> The depiction of non-human animals through the perspective and interpretation of a human by altering their behaviors with a social lens--favors humans over nonhuman animals.

This term/theoretical concept was developed by Jennifer Ladino when analyzing and discussing wildlife films such as *Grizzly Man* and *March of the Penguins*. The speciesist camera is a nearly inevitable occurrence when creating films. It is nearly impossible to create a film or motion picture without the presence of the human creating the film. Similarly a camera can be racist or sexist because of how the director, cinematographer, editor or camera operator decided to manipulate the film. Ladino states that a camera becomes speciesist when it utilizes a anthropocentric viewpoint and makes animal behaviors simply a caricature of human behavior. A speciesist camera also reinforces the idea that nonhuman animals are spectacles that humans look at as objects. While the speciesist camera can establish an important awareness and connection between nonhuman animals and the human audience, it can also support and promote an anthropocentric ideology. Films that are not careful with filmmaker's potentially speciesist perspective can create a false sense of human superiority over nonhuman. This can influence society's treatment of nonhuman animals and legitimize the cruel brutality of nonhumans.

The speciesist camera is sometimes difficult to avoid. *Grizzly Man* attempts to oppose the speciesist camera to support a shared world between human and nonhuman animals. In this film humans and nonhumans are placed in the same environment. At times nature becomes harmonious. In this scene specifically, Treadwell places himself into the scene along with the bears. This can be seen as a way to blur the lines between animality and humanity. It is clear that Treadwell does not have an anthropocentric viewpoint. A key difference between this film and other wildlife films is the actual presence of Treadwell as he narrates. The audience is not only observing the bears in the scene but also Treadwell himself. Treadwell becomes just as much a part of the film as any of the other animals. Even his and the animals' positions are at the same level as Treadwell bends down onto the ground almost on his hands and feet.

SOURCE:
Cubitt, Sean, Salma Monani, and Stephen Rust. "Working with animals regarding companion species in documentary film." Ecocinema Theory and Practice. New York: Routledge, 2013. 129-145. Print.

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Distanciation

Definition: Often referred to as the "alienation effect" where a person is estranged from the norm and is a technique used to subvert traditional ideologies.

This term originated from the theatrical practices of Bertolt Brecht. It was an important practice in the 1920's Soviet cinema/school. Brecht attempted to distance the audience in order to show how theater is able of reproducing society's ideological and institutional constructions. The connections Brecht made were to show how both theater and society are fully constructed and can be changed. Distanciation is often used to subvert cultural norms and establish a new and different way of producing media. Popular cinema movements utilized the alienation effect in order to explore less traditional ways of producing cinema as well as represent parts of society that were not being represented. Avant-garde films and counter-cinema implemented distanciation through films visually and narratively. The French New Wave and Italian Realism are excellent examples of how films have been able to use distanciation in order to counter the highly popular Classical Hollywood style film. More and more Hollywood films are experimenting with distanciation and experimenting with less traditional cinema practices.

During 2008 there were major motion pictures like *The Dark Knight* and *Iron Man* that dominated the box office. However, another film called *sleep furiously* (displayed image) that could not have been further away from the top grossing action hero films. *sleep furiously* depicts the fading rural lifestyle in a Welsh village. Not only is the subject matter far from most films being produced at the same time, the editing and narrative structure is much slower and intimate. During the scene the camera is stationary and lasts significantly longer than most other films. The woman hanging her laundry and whistling for her dog is all that occurs during this minute long scene. There is only one cut in this scene where a shot of the sky is inserted for about 12 seconds when it cuts back to the original shot. This dramatically distances the audience from the standard 2-4 second shots of modern Hollywood films.

SOURCE:
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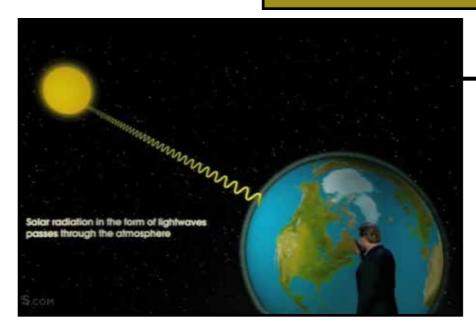
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Hegemony

Definition: The dominant influence on a group or society as a whole that persuades them to believe that current ideologies are the only normal ways of thinking.

This concept was created in order to explain and end the exploitations of lower classes in a capitalist society from the ruling ideology. It concerned many Marxist theorists that people in the working class simply accepted the dominant ideology as the truth and made no significant effort to challenge it. Hegemony is essentially a well established trick. Controlling the power of knowledge is key to uncovering the truth and allowing oneself to decide what is ideal for their own life. The media is one of the most powerful tools in creating and reinforcing dominant ideologies. It can be dangerous when people allow media to influence them--especially since all media is controlled and produced by large conglomerates. Media, however, does not usually create new ideologies. It mainly reinforces them through its representation of society. The dominant cinema reveals the hegemonic values as natural and thus desirable. Often Hollywood cinema represents and emphasizes the importance of traditional families and social mobility.

Solar radiation in the form of lightwaves passes through the atmosphere

This is an image from the film *An Inconvenient Truth*. In this scene Al Gore is explaining the basic science behind global warming. At the beginning of this scene Al Gore makes a quick statement about how he does not plan on spending too much time talking about the basics behind the science because "you know it well" already. The science behind this film's interpretation of global warming is understood and reinforced as dominantly accepted. This film had been released around the same time that a majority of Americans were becoming aware and understanding the impact climate change was/is having on the environment. Al Gore makes no attempt to present the audience with the numerous other theories and opinions on the climate change. This is incredibly common in the mainstream media. The main problem that arrives is when the majority of the audience simply accepts it as the unquestionable truth and falls victim to hegemony. While *An Inconvenient Truth* is an important film to watch to be provided with unknown knowledge, it is important to consume other information that may oppose the Al Gore's dominant perspective.

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Commodification

Definition: The process in which an object or idea is transformed into a product that can be sold or traded; when social relations become exchange relations.

The idea of commodification originated from the theorist Karl Marx. Marx analyzed the commodification of the labor process in which individual laborers were transformed into simply another cost of production. These people became products of their own where their time was seen as a valuable commodity. Today, commodification has expanded into the cultural economy. Advertising is a direct relation to commodification and further promotes the production of commodified products. Most mainstream media is commodified. A franchise is crucial to successfully commodifying a film or television series. Walt Disney was one of the first to successfully use major motion pictures in order to venture and profit through other forms of media related to that film. Synergy is an important part of major corporations' economic success. Often non-traditional ideas or objects become commodified; such as, sex, the natural world, labor and culture. Media texts often take advantage of current cultural trends and creatively find ways to profit from it.

This image shows one of Disney's most recent commodity. Disneynature is the company's revitalized attempt at commodifying nature. Before Disney explored this through its True-Life Adventures wildlife film documentaries. Not only does Disneynature produce wildlife documentaries that are released in theaters and later sold on home video, Disney is able to market more products that directly relate to the new film. *African Cats* is prominently displayed with a variety of products with the same label. This process not only successfully sells an array of merchandise it also functions as further advertisement for the film. Wildlife documentary films are especially profitable because of the low cost to produce the films. While Disney is spreading awareness of environmental issues, it is also exploiting and misrepresenting nature and nonhuman animals as entertainment. Animals become equivalent to toys or candy in terms of value. The media makes nature into something that humans can simply purchase and consume.

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