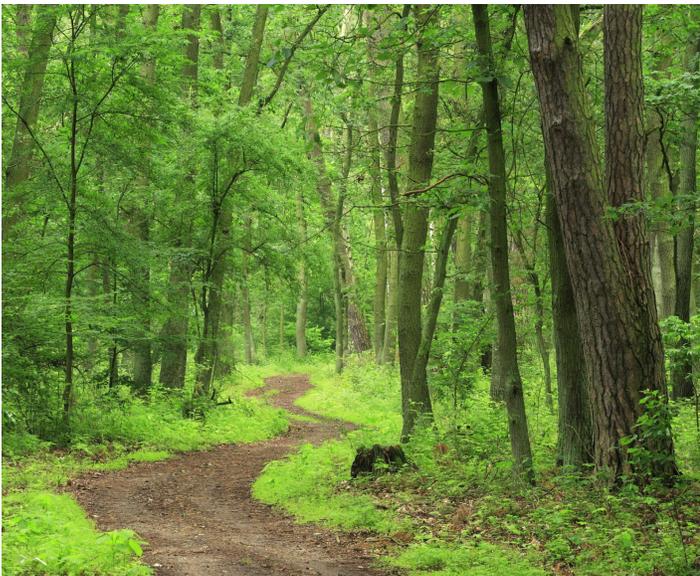
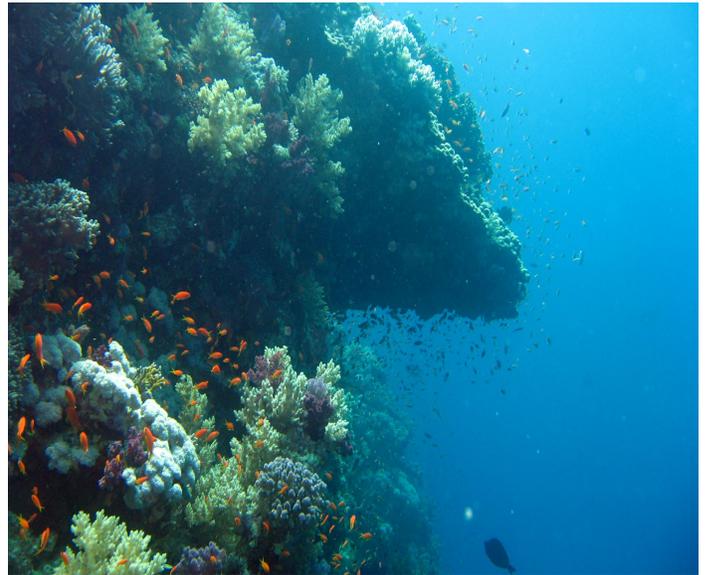


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Annotated Keywords



Speciesism
Anthropomorphism
Greenwashing
Consumerism
Ecocinema
Eco-Racism

Aaron Rouza

English 381 – Professor Rust



Speciesism:

“A belief of humans that all other species of animals are inferior and may therefore be used for human benefit without regard to the suffering inflicted”

THE TERM: Speciesism is a term similar to sexism and feminism in that it insinuates discrimination. In this case, it refers to giving a certain status to a being based solely on their species classification. In cinema, it becomes an important concept for films featuring wildlife. Having a “speciesist lens” implies that animals are not given their own perspective. That is, human emotions, values, and decisions are projected on the animals. Tactics for this include using camera angle that “look down” on the animals, giving voices and dialogue to supplement their physical actions, etc. These subtle changes can have a meaningful impact on the viewer’s interpretation of the film. Clearly, this is very common in current film, so it is hard to argue that it represents an explicit attempt to discriminate against animals. Rather, this is protested on the basis that it is a widespread viewpoint needing to shift in order to benefit all species.

PHOTOS: These photos are representative of how one can interpret speciesist themes, both literally and figuratively. On the left, the circus elephant is emblematic of humans subjecting animals to fulfill their desires, thus acting at the “dominant” species. While there are certain tasks that humans and animals performs together that do not fit a speciesist profile, we can see that circus acts fit well within the range of exploitation. On the right, the human hand shaking a dog’s paw is a metaphor for an anti-speciesist approach. Not all relationships between man and animal is exploitative; in fact, there are many beneficial “partner species” who work together to promote the evolution of civilization (Ladino 135). These relationships, however, are based on mutual respect and appreciation of each species’ right to exist freely in a shared world. We can see that the presentation of these images is an important piece in determining whether or not a film portrays a speciesist viewpoint.

Anthropomorphism:

“An interpretation of what is not human or personal in terms of human or personal characteristics”

THE TERM: Anthropomorphism is a viewpoint often represented in modern culture. In a way, this can be considered a more exaggerated form of speciesism, since its presentation is very deliberate and easy to identify. Vivanco describes the practice as being praised for “its ability to generate empathy by emphasizing human-animal continuity” but criticized as a “profit driven pandering and sentimentalism disguised as factual entertainment” (Vivanco 117). This is the crux of anthropomorphism, for there is a delicate balance between species awareness and the benefit of leaving certain species in peace. As mentioned in *The Cove*, the television series “Flipper” did wonders to create empathy for dolphins (and more incentive to not cause them harm), but it also led to a demand for their domestication to be kept in captivity. Unfortunately, this may have had a long-term negative impact by increasing animal exploitation for human entertainment.

THE PHOTO: This humorous photo represents a common tactic people use in manipulating animal characters. In this case, we see that



the animal is anthropomorphized with a thought bubble containing words it is incapable of actually understanding. While this is cute and often harmless, the downside is when the information becomes misleading in a negative way. For instance, kangaroos are a popular animal for their unique and adorable features, but in reality are very aggressive and dangerous. A misrepresentation of kangaroos in film may lead to increased human interaction resulting in injury. Therefore, filmmakers need to be careful in their tactics (especially for “factual” films) lest they be having a detrimental effect on human-animal relationships. While this likely is never their goal, it is clearly something that needs to be taken into consideration.



Greenwashing:

“Expressions of environmentalist concerns especially as a cover for products, policies, or activities.”

THE TERM: Greenwashing often is interpreted as a disingenuous attempt to win over the masses with a “green” message. As environmentalism becomes a topic more on the minds of the public, companies try to strengthen their brands by being supportive of what their customers care about. This includes sustainability, waste reduction, and reduced carbon footprints, among other things.

While we often think of this term in the context of consumer

goods, it is also applicable to filmmaking.

Wildlife films give off the impression that their main aim is to benefit the species they are studying, leaving their habitats intact; however, there are many ethical concerns associated with creating these films. Therefore, it is important to take a close look at *how* certain films were created. Were habitats impacted? Were the animals forced into “staged” actions that were unnatural? If so, we are observing the misleading and negative aspects that are the greatest criticism of greenwashing.

THE PHOTOS: As we can see in these photos, they take the literal “green” element of greenwashing and combine it with corporate and monetary symbolism. The dollar sign represents the vast amounts of money at stake with eco-friendly products. Environmentalist measures are costly to undertake but potentially can lead to a large payoff. However, companies need to promote their stance in order to receive any amount

of financial benefit. Disneynature is

a perfect example of this. This unit,

established in 2008, aims to “inspire a greater appreciation of the world we live in and the creatures with whom we share it” (Molloy 176). This new branch of Disney is the first to hold the actual Disney name within it. While this is a controversial strategy they are using (for reasons which will be touched upon under “Eco-consumerism”), it demonstrates their commitment to creating a brand recognized for its contributions to the environment. This tactic isn’t unique to Disney, but it does show that major players in entertainment understand that this is an important business route to take in the future.



Eco-consumerism: “The association of human consumption with environmental responsibility.”

THE TERM: This term is currently without a widely recognized definition. Some may associate it with the behaviors of consumers themselves; however, I have chosen to examine the term from the corporate perspective. While this term is related to greenwashing in some ways, eco-consumerism should be looked at as a creator of behavior rather than a reactor. Companies conducting the practices of eco-consumerism may incentivize consumers to consume by associating their purchases with environmental responsibility. Additionally, these corporations may try to turn nature into a consumable product, such as creating animal themed parks or shows, which may corrupt the social perception of nature to the point that it becomes one large commodity. As this becomes a pervasive belief, the lines between what humans have the right to consume and what they do not becomes blurred, leading to the exploitations of countless species and natural resources alike.



THE PHOTOS: A simple barcode in the shape of blades of grass embodies the concept of eco-consumerism. The Disney Corporation uses this tactic with great success, including their promotion that donates certain proceeds from movie ticket sales to conservationist efforts around the globe. While these fundraising efforts have gone on to create some noticeable benefits, it is still criticized for the fact that it promotes extra driving and consumption, which is argued to cancel out the benefit of planting an extra tree, for instance. Additionally, part of their strategy is to bring nature to the consumer by means of theme parks and film. This too has been criticized extensively, including Susan G. Davis, who claims that “it seems entirely possible that theme parks could become a dominant way of experiencing nature” (Molloy 176). For these reasons, it becomes important to assess the costs and benefits of such actions to ensure that the interests of both man and nature are protected.

Ecocinema:

“Films with messages of environmental consciousness, whether explicitly stated or otherwise.”



THE TERM: Ecocinema is a term with a definition so broad that scholars often disagree on some of its characteristics. The definition above is about as inclusive as possible, and truly refers to an entire way of thinking about film. A benefit of studying film is that it “provides a window” into the state of the world at the time, allowing viewers to understand cultural beliefs, prejudices, and attitudes whether or not they were intentionally included as part of the film (Rust 3). Specifically, ecocinema criticism helps us to see how our actions in environmental filmmaking represent the human perspective on nature. Clearly, animals are unable to communicate in a sophisticated enough way to portray certain expressions of emotion, so every account is unavoidably affected by the human element. The job of an eco-cinema scholar is to dissect and understand the subtle nuances of wildlife film in order to get a feeling for what those impacts of human interaction truly are.

THE PHOTOS: Most wildlife films lack a human presence, giving the viewer a feeling of exclusivity in what Luis Vivanco describes as “decontextualized visions of sublime nature devoid of humans” (Vivanco 111). These photos clearly represent the opposite reality of those visions by showing that most wildlife filming comes with a pronounced presence among the different species. It is easy to see how seeing human interaction on film changes the audience’s response and interpretation of the animals’ actions. One challenge, however, is in understanding the *extent* of the impact. The implications of affecting a viewer’s interpretation of a film can have a substantial impact on the response. When humans are absent, the emotion is projected upon the animal subjects instead, and this can lead to a misunderstanding of how different species actually conduct themselves in their natural habitat.

Eco-racism:

“The portrayal of environmentally foreign creatures/concepts as inferior, submissive.



THE TERM: Eco-racism is a created word that tries to capture how the unknown in nature has often been categorized and portrayed in film. Western culture (predominantly whites) have a history of exhibiting a sense of superiority over those things that are foreign, be it human, non-human, or otherwise. This type of attitude has led to a perceived “right” for the civilized cultures to exploit what they see fit. Nicole Starosielski examines this topic in her essay “Beyond Fluidity: A Cultural History of Cinema Under Water”. She comments on how, in the beginning of the 20th century, most saw the “subaquatic as the domain of an ethnic Other.” Later in the century, it would be “depicted as a place we could colonize with no opposition” (Starosielski 150). This shortsighted viewpoint gives no regard to the millions of life forms present, but sees nature (or in this case, oceans) as a blank canvas that humans can exploit to no end. This term is not exclusive to wildlife, but can also be expanded to indigenous cultures who are not seen as being on equal footing as developed countries, and therefore have no respected claim to the land and resources they enjoy.

THE PHOTOS: Images are essential to how these concepts were transferred to large groups, often conveying a level of mysteriousness and danger in order depict nature as the “ethnic Other”. On the left, the (alleged) picture of the Loch Ness monster represents, both physically and symbolically, a story that urges a public need for discovery and answers. The fact that to this day people argue over the Monster’s existence and try to capture it shows that there is still a societal need to control the unknown. On the right, the image is representative of an indigenous culture that is outside of the “norm” of Western society, thus subjecting it to the willpower of the dominant cultures. We can see that it is clearly a human male in the picture, but the composition of the shot creates a foreign, mysterious feeling that makes him hard to relate to. With very little information available, early-mid 20th century citizens often saw misleading depictions such as these which lead them to associate these people with entirely different species.



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