

Caroline Schaumann  
German Studies  
Course: Screening Nature  
August 2010

I applied for a summer 2010 Piedmont Project stipend in order to develop a new, cross-listed course GER 375/ FILM 373 "Screening Nature." While nature writing and ecocriticism are widely expanding fields of study, the environment in film has received far less attention. With this course, I seek to expand the emerging canon of environmental fiction by focusing on the treatment of nature in film.

Thanks to many diverse interactions as part of the Piedmont Project seminar this May, I received a lot of helpful feedback and input both in terms of specific suggestions for the course design and more comprehensive visions for its general direction. As a result, devising my course has become increasingly complicated, but enriched. At first I thought I would organize the course simply according to various environments (rivers, desert, forests, mountains) and focus on the filmic representation and connotation of these habitats. Attending the sustainability seminar, however, led me to understand that perhaps it would be worthwhile to concentrate on environmental issues more directly by including in my course additional readings in ecocriticism. To complicate matters, I found few books dealing with the topic of filmic portrayals of nature, and I could find no examples or models of comparable courses in film studies.

My syllabus is thus very much a work in progress. I have decided to assign both Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* and Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* to provide students with a broader perspective and background knowledge in the evolving depiction of "wilderness." Moreover, these two texts will equip students with terms that are critical in order to examine particular landscapes or natural phenomena in film. Due to the lack of resources, though, I am not assigning a book that deals with natural environments in film but will continue to look for articles and related texts that supplement the two books. Also, my course takes a somewhat broader approach, including films that project a futuristic vision of humans, animals, or ecological environments. In this way, it is my intention that students will grow increasingly reflective of any images of nature presented to them and consider the ideological function of what we term "pristine nature." To this end, the course constitutes an inaugural experience that aims to provide students with the tools to critically encounter what they may have overlooked before, an experiment that will undoubtedly evolve in many different directions as we proceed.

## **GER 375/FILM 373: Screening Nature**

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### **Course Description:**

This course seeks to explore the natural world as we experience it on screen. Even though all films are the product of studio manipulation, most feature a certain kind of nature, sometimes in order to define a genre (the Western, the Road Movie, Science Fiction, the Horror Film, the Mountain Film). Rather than accept a certain type of landscape as backdrop, mood setter, or metaphor for human emotions and actions, we will discuss the staging of the non-human world as a separate and central element to story and plot. Focusing on the characteristic nature vs. culture divide as well as fantasies of their reunion, we will raise questions about each film's setting, themes, and environmental awareness. What types of landscapes are etched into the film? What roles do they play and what fantasies do they reveal? How do they relate to the prevailing images of nature? What ideological and symbolic messages do they project?

The course considers about half American and half German productions, including directors such as FW Murnau, Arnold Fanck, Werner Herzog, John Ford, Alfred Hitchcock, Steven Spielberg, and Sean Penn. Focusing on the treatment of nature in film, the course is structured according to thematic units on monsters, mountains, waters, and animals, and integrates genres such as musical, drama, horror, Western, ecological disaster film, and science fiction. We will attempt to illuminate the representation of wilderness and wild animals in each respective film by examining the myth and romance of "pristine" nature, the call of the wild, the threat of devouring nature, the gender implications of landscape cinematography, the struggle of man vs. wild, the depiction of environmental destruction, and post-apocalyptic visions. No knowledge of German history, culture, or background in film studies is required. The course will familiarize all students with the vocabulary and concepts necessary for analyzing films.

### **Texts:**

Timothy J. Corrigan. *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*. 7th Edition. New York: Pearson, 2009.  
Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*. New York: Routledge, 2004.  
Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. New Haven: Yale UP, 2001.

Select readings available on Reserves.

### **Attendance and Class Performance:**

This is a seminar, not a lecture course and hence its success or failure ultimately depends on you. You are responsible for the intellectual level and content of our class. In order for us to have meaningful and productive class discussions, you will be expected to carefully watch the assigned film (take notes during or after the screening), thoroughly read all assigned texts (mark important passages and make notes in the margins), and to think of questions and comments for discussion. Three or more absences will affect your grade negatively.

### **Film Responses:**

Most weeks, you will write a short (approximately 1-2 pages) response to the film discussed or follows a specific format. Avoid plot descriptions, general praise, and personal considerations (i.e. whether you think the film is worthwhile to see or not). Instead, use these assignments to formulate your ideas for the in-class discussion, prepare your arguments for your papers, and get feedback. Responses will be graded periodically.

### **Presentation:**

In your in-class presentation, you will introduce your classmates to the film you have chosen and your ideas and concepts of your final paper. Your presentation should not take more than ten to fifteen minutes total, five of which can be used for showing select film clips. Please carefully prepare beforehand the excerpts that you are going to show so that not much time is wasted looking for your clips. Avoid lengthy plot summaries and focus on your overall thesis about the film and the issues it raises. You will also introduce and lead the class' engagement with your topic. Use this forum to get feedback and make use of the comments you receive from your classmates.

### **Papers:**

In this class, you will write three papers of four to five pages each (1000-1500 words). All essays need to be typed, double-spaced, and in 12 point font. The first two papers are analytical papers and will not require research beyond the material we will cover in class. Topics will be announced in class. Your third paper builds on our work in class and explores in detail one (German) film of your choice that we did not discuss in class. Since all three papers are rather short, do not waste space by retelling the plot or whether or not you like the film, but focus on relevant and detailed analysis. Note the following due dates:

<b>First Paper</b>	<b>tba</b>
<b>Second Paper</b>	<b>tba</b>
<b>Third Paper</b>	<b>tba</b>

Please hand in all assignments on time; I do not accept late assignments.

**Rewrites:**

For one paper of your choosing, you will have a rewrite option. Rewrites are not mandatory, but you are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity because your writing and analytical skills will benefit greatly. Remember that the key to good writing is and always has been revising and rewriting. You are welcome to come to my office hours for consultation. If you do not choose to do a rewrite, your first draft will be worth the entire percentage of that paper. If you do choose to rewrite, I will average the two grades. Your rewritten paper, no matter which one you choose, is due on **tba**.

**Midterm:**

The in-class midterm will include film-clip identifications and explanations, definition of terms, and historical background questions.

**Final Exam:**

The 2.5 hour final exam will take a similar format as the midterm and include short essay questions. The final covers the material of second half of the course.

**Grading:**

The course grade is constituted as follows:

Attendance and class performance	15%
Film responses	5%
Film presentation	5%
Midterm	15%
Final	15%
Three Papers	45%

**Plagiarism:**

Using the ideas and/or words of others without specific and proper acknowledgement constitutes plagiarism, a violation of Emory's Honor Code and a most serious academic misconduct. If you are at all unsure about the appropriate form of acknowledgement in a particular situation, it is your responsibility to consult with your instructor to clarify any ambiguities. Plagiarism in any assignment will result in a failing grade for that assignment and may result in further disciplinary action.

## Course Plan

### (Un)natural Monsters: Insiders and Outsiders, Landscape and Cityscape, Silence and Sound

Thursday (January 13)	Introduction to course and class. Excerpts <i>Metropolis</i> (Fritz Lang, 1927). <b>HW:</b> Watch <i>Nosferatu: eine Symphonie des Grauens</i> ( <i>Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror</i> , DVD 3126); Film response <i>Nosferatu</i> ; Roderick Nash, <i>Wilderness and the American Mind</i> 1-22.
Tuesday	<b><i>Nosferatu: eine Symphonie des Grauens</i></b> ( <i>Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror</i> , Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, 1922). <b>HW:</b> Greg Garrard, "Positions," <i>Ecocriticism</i> 16-31; Roderick Nash, <i>Wilderness and the American Mind</i> 23-43.
Thursday (January 20)	Landscape and cityscape. Wilderness and Ecocriticism. <b>HW:</b> Watch <i>Frankenstein</i> (James Whale, 1931); Timothy J. Corrigan, <i>A Short Guide to Writing about Film</i> 1-17, exercise 1.
Tuesday	<b><i>Frankenstein</i></b> (James Whale, 1931). <b>HW:</b> Greg Garrard, "Apocalypse," <i>Ecocriticism</i> 85-107; tba.
Thursday (January 27)	Modern Monsters. <b>HW:</b> Watch <i>Creature From a Black Lagoon</i> (Jack Arnold, 1954); Timothy J. Corrigan, <i>A Short Guide to Writing about Film</i> 17, Exercise 2 (write one paragraph each).
Tuesday	<b><i>Creature from the Black Lagoon</i></b> (Jack Arnold, 1954). <b>HW:</b> Roderick Nash, <i>Wilderness and the American Mind</i> 44-66; tba.
Thursday (February 3)	Creatures of Horror. <b>HW:</b> Timothy J. Corrigan, <i>A Short Guide to Writing about Film</i> 18-35, Exercise 1 (Complete BEFORE watching the film!); watch <i>Der heilige Berg</i> ( <i>The Holy Mountain</i> , Arnold Fanck, 1926).

### Mountains: Conquests and Awe

Tuesday	<b><i>Der heilige Berg</i></b> ( <i>The Holy Mountain</i> , Arnold Fanck, 1926). <b>HW:</b> Simon Schama, <i>Landscape and Memory</i> 411-33 (Reserves).
Thursday (February 10)	The German Mountain Film. Excerpts <i>The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl</i> (Ray Müller, 1998). <b>HW: First Paper Assignment;</b> Watch <i>Nordwand</i> ( <i>North Face</i> , Philipp Stölzl, 2008).
Tuesday	<b><i>Nordwand</i></b> ( <i>North Face</i> , Philipp Stölzl, 2008). Presentation. <b>HW:</b> Roderick Nash, <i>Wilderness and the American Mind</i> 66-95.

Thursday (February 10)	<b>First Paper due.</b> Romantic Views of Nature. <b>HW:</b> Watch <i>Heidi</i> (Allan Dwan, 1937); Greg Garrard, "Pastoral," <i>Ecocriticism</i> 33-58.
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### Alpine Myths

Tuesday	<i>Heidi</i> (Allan Dwan, 1937). Excerpts <i>Bambi</i> (David Hand, 1942). <b>HW:</b> William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," 69-90; David Ingram, <i>Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema</i> , 1-24 (Reserves).
Thursday (February 17)	The Wilderness Idea. <b>HW:</b> Watch <i>The Sound of Music</i> (Robert Wise, 1965); Andrew Beattie, <i>The Alps: A Cultural History</i> , 140-60 (Reserves).
Tuesday	<i>The Sound of Music</i> (Robert Wise, 1965). Presentation. <b>HW:</b> Study for Midterm.
Thursday (February 24)	<b>Midterm</b> <b>HW:</b> Watch <i>The Searchers</i> (John Ford, 1956); Timothy J. Corrigan, <i>A Short Guide to Writing about Film</i> 35, exercise 2.

### The Wild West

Tuesday	<i>The Searchers</i> (John Ford, 1956). Excerpts <i>The Iron Horse</i> (John Ford, 1924). Presentation. <b>HW:</b> Roderick Nash, <i>Wilderness and the American Mind</i> 95-121; Timothy J. Corrigan, <i>A Short Guide to Writing about Film</i> 36-57.
Thursday (March 3)	The American West. <b>HW:</b> watch <i>Old Shatterhand (Apaches Last Battle)</i> , Harald Reinl, 1964); Timothy J. Corrigan, <i>A Short Guide to Writing about Film</i> 57-85, exercise 2.
Tuesday	<i>Old Shatterhand (Apaches Last Battle)</i> , Harald Reinl, 1964). Presentation. <b>HW:</b> Greg Garrard, "Wilderness," <i>Ecocriticism</i> 59-84. David Ingram, <i>Green Screen</i> , 45-55 (Reserves).
Thursday (March 17)	The Imagined West. <b>HW:</b> Watch <i>The Birds</i> (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963); <b>Second Paper Assignment.</b>

### Animals

Tuesday	<i>The Birds</i> (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963). Presentation. <b>HW:</b> Greg Garrard, <i>Ecocriticism</i> 136-59.
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Thursday (March 24)	<b>Second Paper due.</b> Animals as Threats. Presentation. <b>HW:</b> Watch <i>Jaws</i> (Steven Spielberg, 1975); Timothy J. Corrigan, <i>A Short Guide to Writing about Film</i> 87-107.
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### Water

Tuesday	<b><i>Jaws</i></b> (Steven Spielberg, 1975). Presentation. <b>HW:</b> David Ingram, <i>Green Screen</i> 88-101 (Reserves); Timothy J. Corrigan, <i>A Short Guide to Writing about Film</i> 133-63, exercise 1.
Thursday (March 31)	Ocean Fauna. Excerpts <i>The Cove</i> (Louie Psihoyos, 2009). Presentation. <b>HW:</b> Watch <i>Deliverance</i> (John Boorman, 1972); David Ingram, <i>Green Screen</i> 36-44 (Reserves).
Tuesday	<b><i>Deliverance</i></b> (John Boorman, 1972). Presentation. <b>HW:</b> Roderick Nash, <i>Wilderness and the American Mind</i> 141-60; Timothy J. Corrigan, <i>A Short Guide to Writing about Film</i> 114-32, exercise 1.

### Alaska: The “Last” Wilderness?

Thursday (April 7)	The Wilderness Cult. Presentation. <b>HW:</b> Watch <i>Grizzly Man</i> (Werner Herzog, 2005); David Ingram, <i>Green Screen</i> 102-18 (Reserves).
Tuesday	<b><i>Grizzly Man</i></b> (Werner Herzog, 2005). Presentation. <b>HW:</b> Roderick Nash, <i>Wilderness and the American Mind</i> 272-315; Timothy J. Corrigan, <i>A Short Guide to Writing about Film</i> 132, exercise 2.
Thursday (April 14)	Alaska. Presentation. <b>HW: Third Paper Assignment</b> , watch <i>Into the Wild</i> (Sean Penn, 2007).
Tuesday	<b><i>Into the Wild</i></b> (Sean Penn, 2007). Presentation. <b>HW:</b> Timothy J. Corrigan, <i>A Short Guide to Writing about Film</i> 164-81; prepare for final.
Thursday (April 21)	<b>Third Paper Due.</b> Preparation for Final. Presentation.

	<b>Final Examination</b> <b>Rewritten Paper due.</b>
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