

**Geal, R. (2021). *Ecological Film Theory and Psychoanalysis: Surviving the Environmental Apocalypse in Cinema*. New York: Routledge. 288 pages. ISBN: 9781032027760**

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**Abstract**

Book review of Robert Geal (2021). *Ecological Film Theory and Psychoanalysis: Surviving the Environmental Apocalypse in Cinema*, Routledge, pp. 288, price approx. 48.95 USD. Book published in English.

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Ecocinema, Psychoanalysis, Ecosophy, Culture, Anthropocentrism, Environment,

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Robert Geal is a Lecturer in Film and Television Studies at the University of Wolverhampton, UK, where he teaches classes on film spectacle, representation, adaptation, psychoanalysis and Japanese Cinema. He is the author of the monograph *Anamorphic in Canonical Film Adaptation*, as well as Numerous articles and chapters on topics including science fiction spectacle, Sexuality and gender in animation, race in television comedy, adaptation studies and film theory.

“Humanity stands at . . . The Precipice”

“history still unfolds”.

To say the entire text lies between these two lines would be oversimplification. The book, *Ecological Film Theory and Psychoanalysis*, bears the fruits of Robert Geal’s academic labour exerted during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Geal teaches Film and Television Studies at the University of Wolverhampton, UK. His research focus lies in subjects, such as film spectacle, representation, adaptation, psychoanalysis and Japanese cinema. It reflects timely concerns and echoes of an environmental humanist. The book raises inquiries into the role of culture, particularly the films on contemporary ecological crises. It familiarises the readers with the concept of ecosophy (merger of ecology and philosophy) and its interaction with several film theories. Incontrovertibly, it is an important interdisciplinary study exploring the interplay between culture and environment. Geal advocates and stresses on the interdependence of different disciplines and progressive thinking.

The extent to which this awareness model dominates contemporary thinking about addressing ecological crises is demonstrated by the alignment of ecological awareness with other forms of ‘progressive’ politics. The term ‘progressive’ is indicative here, demonstrating that social, cultural and political development is understood as an unfolding linear process, with an inevitable trajectory of improvement: each generation less racist, less misogynistic, less homophobic, and so on, than the last (Geal, 2021).

The book contains seven chapters alongside an introduction and conclusion followed by the index. Every chapter is followed by thorough notes and references. Further the chapters also conclude with summaries and filmographies of the films discussed in the chapters. The first three chapters are extensively theoretical, while the remaining four are elaborate explanations with films as case studies. The author uses questions as headings and supplies detailed answers, with an example being, “Do narrative resolutions operate within the context of the Symbolic Order?” (Geal, 2021, p. 176).

The book highlights the gravity of environmental crises and epistemological crises. In Chapter 1, the author underlines the concept of Ecolinguistics (ecology and linguistics) and its role in the present analysis, defining it as follows: “Ecolinguistics, then, is about critiquing forms of language that contribute to ecological destruction, and aiding in the search for new forms of language that inspire people to protect the natural world” (Geal, 2021, p. 20). He says that language influences how we think about the world. The book contains empirical surveys and cites several articles and documentaries, alongside his argument.

In later chapters, Geal provides few parameters and paradigms to illustrate the films as examples based on his thesis point: how anthropocentric films deal with final day disaster, and not every day ecological degradation. The films discussed in the book, mostly explore the humanity/nature binary. Further, the author uses other binary oppositions: human/nonhuman, anthropocentric/nonanthropocentric, and conscious/ unconscious, etc., in order to elucidate his ideas. He quotes movies such as *Fast and Furious* and *The Day After Tomorrow* – the latter being released in 2012 – which have shaped the culture of humanism and consumerism while also

paving the way for ecological degradation. These movies also represent technological hubris, which is a good point when it comes to understanding the interplay between technology and environment. Geal also explains how, the individualisation of conflict in Hollywood decentres the concern and brings relief through heroes.

In order to explain the resultant anthropocentric epistemology and environmental crisis, the author cites several films, such as *Matrix*, *Alien*, *What Lies Beneath*, *Grudge*, *Jaws*, *Avatar*, *World War Z*, *Noah*, *Bambi*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *Terminator*, *District 9*, *Chicken Run*, *Warm Bodies*, *Blade Runner*, *The Perfect Storm*, *Volcano*, *Peak*, *Impossible*, *Armageddon*, *Deep Impact*, *Children of Men*, *Deep Water Horizons*, *Waves*, *Geostorm*, and *The Core*, etc., foregrounding environmental crisis. The author also uses postapocalyptic films such as *Water World* and *28 Days Later* to explain the reflection of dystopia and of illusory survival. Towards the end, he also incorporates examples from Japanese cinema while simultaneously elaborating on non-occidental films which also exemplify apocalypse.

The author's linguistic dexterity aligns with his knowledge of the subjects: ecology, film studies, and other related branches. Furthermore, he also quotes several epigrams and kick words used by other thinkers and environmentalists, such as "doomsday fatigue", "magisterial gaze", "anamorphosis", "suture", "jubilation of final image", "cathartic calm", "zoomorphic", "anthropocentric gaze", "ocularcentrism", and "suspense and shock", which not only exhibits his existing knowledge of both scholarly and popular culture, but also makes the engagement with the readers livelier. He has included terminology from both ecocriticism and film studies. For instance, the term "suture", which signifies the relation between the film and its spectators, is from media studies. He compares his statements with others, "Holliday's description of Barry's flight, after all, is not dissimilar to my description of the airplane escape from the mass earthquake in 2012, discussed in the previous chapter" (Geal, 2021, p. 122). C. Holliday, in his article, "'I'm Not a Real Boy, I'm a Puppet': Computer-Animated Films and Anthropomorphic Subjectivity" published in *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, uses Berry's flight from *Bee Movie*.

Geal also offers etymological explanations and word meanings for essential concepts including "environment". Moreover, he employs interesting parallelisms. For instance, he compares various unconscious forces with "a tail wagging the dog", which is interesting. This is also both pun and paradox demonstrating author's linguistic dexterity. Further, he provides epigrams such as "the bleakness of a diagnosis is no reason to disregard it" (Geal, 2021, p. 36). He also appropriates terms such as 'political ecological unconscious' and 'extentionism'. This also demonstrates the author's meticulous efforts to illustrate terms and ideas for the benefit of the readers and scholars belonging from various disciplines.

Geal's genius is demonstrated in his interweaving of his film-making aptitude and ecophilosophy. He describes scenes technically and comprehensively in order to clarify and justify his point as follows.

An opening montage of people going about their morning routines ends with a protest against the extension of a subway route. In amongst this montage the camera repeatedly cuts to underground lava, suggesting that the subway's probing is linked to that lava. Various snippets of radio broadcasts can be heard over the montage, including a preacher saying 'The devil knows the wickedness of the city'.

(Geal, 2021, p. 149)

The book will benefit students, scholars, researchers, teachers, thinkers, and activists belonging to different disciplines as it is multidisciplinary in terms of the nature of its subject. Especially, it will serve the subject areas – ecocriticism, film studies, ecocinema, ecophilosophy, ecopsychology and its kind. Geal’s exploration of the model of “false consciousness” with reference to Marxism which also shows his proficiency in the understanding of different theories and ideologies. Moreover, he alludes to several other theories, such as “cartesian subjectivity”, “cartesian dualism”, “ecopsychology”, “deep ecology”, “ecophobia”, “speciesism”, “eco illiteracy”, “symbolic order”, and “denialism” etc. All this indicates Geal’s encyclopaedic knowledge and proficiency not in a single subject, but in multiple disciplines. Alongside the ecocritics and eco scholars, Geal also refers to several film theorists such as André Bazin, James Leo Cahill, Paula Willoquet-Maricondi, Christopher Holliday, Barbara Creed, and others.

The author argues and attests the important finding – the role of movies in making us mere spectators and not participants. He reiterates the significance of correct knowledge in combatting the impending emergency. Geal also repeats statements for emphasis. For example, he quotes Thoreau, who states that, in order to live harmoniously with nature, we must “front up to the facts and determine to live our lives deliberately, or not at all.” (Geal, 2021, p. 23). His exhaustive illustrations and analysis aid in comprehending the interplay between films, spectators, and environmental contemporary crises. The author also examines the degree of trauma afflicted upon both characters and spectators. With precautions and hope, he concludes that history continues to unfold.