

*ECOLOGIES OF THE MOVING IMAGE:*

*CINEMA, AFFECT, NATURE*

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The world appears to us as a world of moving images. Images affect viewers in ways that other forms of expression cannot; this is their singular power. Cinema, since its invention — or rather industrialisation — has arranged these images and has given rise to a set of material practices known as spectatorship. Analogies between spectators of cinema and subject-spectators of “the world” are common. In 1960, Siegfried Kracauer argues that film is unique in the representational arts, as it allows viewers to experience reality more fully. Film theorists of the 1970s — Jean-Luc Baudry, Christian Metz, and Laura Mulvey for instance — explain how viewers identify with film images in what is essentially a voyeuristic relationship. More recent scholarship drawing on phenomenology and affect theory asserts a more dynamic relationship between viewers and images. In these contexts, the question of how the world in its natural states relates to technologically mediated “worlds” arises promptly. A growing number of media-analytic works attuned to concrete ecological issues, including the “media ecologies” research field, examine this question. The world is constituted by an infinite array of natural ecological and geographical processes that unfold next to a more ephemeral range of social and cultural practices. But where does cinema fit into the world and how does it mediate or present this world? Does film somehow change our perception of the world? This is where Adrian J. Ivakhiv’s *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature* picks up.

The novel part of Ivakhiv’s conception of the affective relationship between images and viewers is the particular structure he argues that it takes: images themselves are structured as worlds. “World” in this sense signifies a fluid system of natural relations. Ivakhiv is interested in the *movement* from natural relations to mediated relations, and there is a strong sense throughout this work of the imbrication of images’ affective potentials and place, or a geopolitical awareness of the world. Indeed, movement is an important figure for Ivakhiv as it

points to the scale of the world. Images move viewers; moving images, then, go a step further by “projecting our imagination more extensively across the territory of the world” (1). These movements take place in a series of contexts, which the author terms “relational ecologies”: “[All] of this takes place through a process that moves from minerals to photographic chemicals, plastics, and silicon chips, to shooting locations and sets, to editing suites and film distributors, who deliver images to screen and desktop.” (5). Here we sense the broad stakes of these ecologies, which Ivakhiv approaches in a distinct manner.

After a general introduction and a chapter on the book’s “process-relational” approach to cinema, Ivakhiv delves into three chapters on what he calls the geomorphic, anthropomorphic, and biomorphic dimensions of cinema’s significance. These categories could be rewritten as objective, subjective, and “livingness”; the world is divided along a subjective-objective continuum where biomorphy is the middle and mediating term. The final main chapter looks at ecological crisis, examining films and discourses concerning the politics of trauma and the sublime. The afterword examines digital cultures in relation to the book’s key questions. The appendix lays out a series of questions to be asked when doing process-relational analysis. Rather than analyse each individual chapter, I would like to spend some time on some of Ivakhiv’s key concepts, and their consequences.

Firstly, he analyses cinematic ecologies in material, social and personal, and perceptual/affective terms, thus adopting a method of threes or triadism. Ivakhiv derives this approach from Charles Sanders Peirce’s phenomenology of experience — “phaneroscopy” — and Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy. It is a tendency in modern thought, according to the author, to divide experience into dualisms such as nature/culture, mind/body, and materialism/idealism. Introducing a third term disrupts this tendency and circumvents this dichotomising habit (34). The book is structured on Peirce’s triadism and makes frequent reference to his categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness.

Secondly, Ivakhiv adopts an ontology of the world that he calls “process-relational”: “it is a model that understands the world, and cinema, to be made up not primarily of objects, substances, structures, or representations, but rather of relational processes, encounters, or events.” (12). This ontology thus rejects Cartesian dualisms, which separate the essences of mind and body, preferring to conceptualise experience in terms of events and encounters. The book draws on Henri Bergson’s theory of images as flows of matter and movement, Gil-

les Deleuze philosophy of difference, and Félix Guattari's "three ecologies," in addition to the sources already mentioned.

Process-relational analysis of cinema proceeds as follows: a film *is* what a film *does*. Cinema is a composite process made up of social, material, and perceptual elements in admixture. It is a constant becoming that occurs from the top-down, bottom-up, and in every other direction: "from its making to its viewing to its after-effects, including its reverberation in viewers' perception, sensations, conversations, motivations, and attunements to one thing or another in the social and material fields that constitute the world." (44). Film analysis thus requires a consideration of how diegetic and extra-diegetic material, sociality, perceptuality — the "ecologies" of the title — relate to each other. In other words, our experience of cinema is firmly rooted in the world. Process-relational analysis sheds light on cinematic experience, which is posited as a reciprocal process between films and viewers. Each communicates with the other in a reflexive relationship that moves beyond traditional semiotic accounts of how cinematic representation works. Ivakhiv discusses film experience again in a series of threes — spectacle, narrative, and "signness" — working with Peirce's categories, but also re-writing aspects of Deleuze's classification of film images and Sean Cubitt's typology of film experience. Throughout the book, well-known films such as *Stalker* (1979), *Grizzly Man* (2005), and *Avatar* (2009) are analysed in depth, as well as other films by directors like Aleksandr Dovzhenko, Robert Flaherty, Peter Greenaway, Terrence Malick, and Lars von Trier. What these films have in common, as Ivakhiv tells us, is their construction of notable film worlds, and their relations to the material world. Taking *Stalker* as the signal film for process-relational analysis, Ivakhiv demonstrates with aplomb how the film's content and themes relate to the material, social, and mental conditions in the world. Tarkovsky shows the world as it is; its objects mean what they show. Ivakhiv advocates this kind of cinematic materialism, arguing that the material conditions of film production also generate meanings. *Stalker* is prescient in its presentation of themes concerning nuclear disaster — Chernobyl — human rights — Soviet gulags — and political power — the fall of the Soviet Union.

This is a long book. It discusses at length assumptions we may have about ecocritical or ecosophical approaches to cinema; it goes through concepts in threes, in order to circumvent binaries. All of this is required, however, to build the model of process-relational ontology Ivakhiv desires for cinematic analysis. He sets out a lot of groundwork but always in an engaging and provocative manner.

The form of Ivakhiv's argumentation is original. Each chapter looks at a different aspect of the triadic, process-relational approach to cinema. This approach does not cleave material, social, and mental perspectives apart, but insists on their interrelation as part of the same process. There is a sense, throughout, that cinematic worlds are as boundless and fecund as real worlds, "because there are always new films to be made, new kinds of films being made, and new sense to be made of them." (328). Cinema expands outwards, beyond its boundaries. But within these boundaries, cinema is not defined by sets of rigid points—it is more dynamic. And here we sense the significance of an ecophilosophy of cinema, which this book makes us aware of:

More and more of [cinema's constituent parts] are fluid bursts — more like bacteria that share genetic information across boundaries, or rhizomes that connect with others in ever-widening webs, than like sedentary organisms that take root and bear fruit in a single plot of soil. (328)

What questions remain to be asked for an ecophilosophy of cinema? Ivakhiv's comments on digital cultures and biosemiosis should be extended, as they occupy only an afterword here. In it, Ivakhiv ponders the effects of contemporary technologies on cinema — has mimetic representation, and thus the era of cinema, ended, or is it merely film that is coming to its end, with cinema continuing in other guises and by other means? — and finds that digitisation is the latest in a series of transformations of the cinema-industry apparatus that has always co-developed. Cinema will thus live on, exploiting the energies and potentials — "bio-semiotic" relations — made possible by this dynamic relationship. The relation between media and environmental, biological, and ecological issues, which is active in other realms of Media Studies, should be established in film scholarship if it wishes to remain relevant. Ivakhiv takes a worthy step in this direction. This is a rich book that I feel is only beginning to reveal its significance to me.