

**ECN 348- Economy, Ecology and Society: An Exploration Through
Film - Fall, Lec, 3 cr.
Professor Starkey**

Ecological economics applied to historical and contemporary issues using “popular” films as the basis of the exposition. The emphasis is on the connection between economic and ecological forces and political and social problems. Preq. ECN 100, or ECN201 or ECN 202

All that lives is holy- William Blake, Vision of the Daughters of Albion

The most critical task facing humanity today is the creation of a shared vision of a sustainable and desirable society, one that can provide permanent prosperity within the biophysical constraints of the real world in a way that is fair and equitable to all of humanity, to other species, and to future generations. Robert Costanza, Institute for Ecological Economics, The University of Maryland

Every rich nation amounts to a lifeboat full of comparatively rich people. The poor of the world are in other much more crowded lifeboats. Continuously, so to speak, the poor fall out of their lifeboats and swim for a while, hoping to be admitted to a rich lifeboat, or in some way to benefit from the goodies on board.... We cannot risk the safety of all passengers by helping others in need. What happens if you share space in a lifeboat? The boat is swamped and everyone drowns. Complete justice, complete catastrophe. Garrett Hardin.

Fact: Every week, globally, there are 2,523,290 births and 1,054,816 deaths. Thus, each week the world population increases by 1,468, 474. By 2025, the population of China will be three times greater than it was in 1950. The populations of Pakistan and Iran will be 7 and 9.4 times higher than they were in 1950. The population of the US and Japan will be 1.9 and 1.5 times greater than in 1950. The 10 countries with the highest population growth rates have a per capita GDP of \$530. The 10 countries with the lowest population growth have a per capita GDP of about 20,000.

Fact: the richest 20% of the Earth’s population consumes about 80% of the Earth’s resources.

Fact: The World Bank projects that GDP in developing countries will grow at an annual rate of 4-5% over the next 40 years.

Study Materials

Most of the reading materials will be prepared by Professor Starkey. These materials will contain extensive lists of other references. As all of these films are available on video, the students can view them on their own or in the media center. I will, however, encourage you to view them in small groups as a “social” event. I will organize and attend several of these. The

viewing should ideally follow the first preparatory lecture and the reading of assigned materials. For individual viewing, the films are available at the URI media center, or any reasonably well-stocked video rental store.

Exams and grading

There will be two “take-home” exams (Mid-term& Final) that will account for 40% of the student’s grade. Students will be also required to write one major paper (20%) and two shorter papers (10% each). Twenty percent of the final grade will be based on contributions to class discussions.

The major paper will involve an in-depth exploration of an important issue raised by several of the films e.g. cultural survival, the ecological impact of human economic activities, environmental justice etc.. The shorter papers will be devoted to specific topics from a single film e.g., the history of rubber production in Brazil, the “sharpshooter problem,” tort reform etc.. The shorter papers can be turned in at any time. The major paper is due by April 30. The first exam will be distributed on Feb 14 and will be due on Feb. 26. The second exam will be distributed on May 2 and will be due on the day scheduled for the final exam.

Schedule

Jan 22 - General Introduction and review of the syllabus..

Jan 24, 29 - **The Principles of Ecological Economics.**

Jan 31 - Film I. Rapa Nui - Sustainable economies. **The first law of ecological economics - *thou shalt not exceed “carrying capacity.”*** The use and abuse of “lessons from history” : Van Tilburg vs Heyerdahl and Costner. The Mystery of Easter Island - Racism, Class Struggle, Conspicuous Consumption ? The real cost of the *Moai*. Terminal trajectories - can humanity change its environmentally destructive ways?

Feb. 5 - **Chaos, Contingency, Chance**

Feb 7 - Film II. Run Lola Run - **The second law of ecological economics - “you can’t do just one thing.”** Contingency and catastrophe in history. Chaos Theory and the butterfly effect. Climate and history. El Niño, the North Atlantic Oscillation, the Ocean-conveyor system and sudden climate change. The precautionary principle revisited.

Feb. 12 - **Rainforest Ecology and Politics**

Feb. 14 - Film III - The Burning Season - Rainforest ecology, and politics. The misery of pollution and the pollution of misery. The social costs of beef: deforestation, desertification, global warming and social injustice. Irreversible decisions. The life and martyrdom of Chico Mendes. Cultural survival; gold, guns, germs, the Yanomami and the other indigenous peoples of

the Amazon.

Feb. 19 - Holiday class does not meet

Feb. 21 - Film 4 - Frankenstein shown in class.

Feb. 26 - Mary Shelly's Critique of Science

Feb 28 -The confused ideology of James Whale's *Frankenstein*. The politics of "nature or nurture." Biological determinism..

March 5 - Film 5, Dead End - Cradles of Crime: "It's all from the loinin."

March 7 -The Third Law of Ecological Economics - "there is no *away to throw to.*"

Spring Break

March 19 - The Science, Economics and Politics of toxic wastes. Environmental disease. Does Cancer have environmental causes? The "cluster problem;" toxic torts - the limits of proof; environmental justice; the "Superfund" and the EPA during the Reagan years; risk assessment (behavioral economics revisited). The "Precautionary Principle"- An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of clean-up. Tort Reform?

March 21 - Film 6 - A Civil Action

March 26 , 28 - *The Economic, Social and Ecological Effects of Coal.*

April 2 - Film 7 - Germinal - The ecological basis of the industrial revolution. The economic, social and ecological consequences of burning coal. Nature or nurture; Emile Zola's theory of human behavior. The relative importance of markets and elites in creating human misery. The "culture of poverty". Contemporary politics of coal. Monkey-wrenching: Anarchism then and now.

April 4 - The Energy Crisis?

April 9 - Film 8 The China Syndrome. Why China Syndrome is a pro-nuclear film. The economics, ecology and politics of nuclear power. "There is no away to throw to forever." Risk to Whom?: The race, class and gender politics of risk assessment. The "greening" of nuclear power.

April 16, 18 - Film 9, Dr. Strangelove shown in class.

April 23 - The Coming Plague?

April 25, 30, May 2 - Film 10, Outbreak. Economy and Disease. Disease in History. *L’Affair Duesberg*; the Science & Politics of AIDS. Africa’s demographic disaster. Poverty & disease - the global failure of the private pharmaceutical industry and the public health system..

What this course is not.

It should be understood that this is not a “film” course, that is, there will be no attempt to determine whether or not a film is great film or a bad film, either in terms of aesthetic, or technical concerns. So if you want to know why *Citizen Kane* is considered the greatest film ever made, or why critics have denigrated some of the most successful films ever made, you have come to the wrong place. Indeed, while several of the films used in this course have won critical acclaim, most would be dismissed by critics as artistically mediocre or, even worse, as “junk food for the mind” [Turner, p. 3]. One of the films, *Rapa Nui*, has been declared by critic Roger Ebert, to be one of the worst films ever made (more on this later). Andrew Sarris has said that film debates are “not so much between right and left as between politics and aesthetics” [Andrew Sarris (1978) *Politics and Cinema*, p. 2]. Sarris, like Ebert, has decided he would “take a stand against bad movies with good intentions” [Sarris, 1978, p. 2]. I am not so inclined. If a film has an interesting and relevant narrative, that is, in purely “utilitarian” terms, “the theme, the moral, and the message” address in a substantive manner an issue germane to this course, however stylistically deficient it may be, I will include it [Sarris, 1978, p 1].

Similarly, if you want to engage in “discourse” on realism, neorealism, formalism, *auteurs*, *mise-en-scène* and *généré* and you like to use the dense, pretentious, and ultimately vacuous words and “stylistic affectations” of post-modern literary theory or French film theory, you have come to the wrong place [Paul Gross & Norman Levitt, *Higher Superstition*, p. 75].

Nor is this a course in “film history.” The films used in this course have been selected according to a criterion that has nothing to do with their marking any particular aesthetic or technical transition, in any particular *généré*, in any particular nation, at any particular time. Thus, if you want to study questions such as the transition, in the United States, of the “Western *généré*” from the “classic western” to the “professional” western, by way of the “transitional western,” as evidenced by the “patterning of structural oppositions within the representational discourses,” of these films you have come to the wrong place¹ [see G. Tuner, *Film as Social Practice*, p. 102].

Nor is this a course on “history through the film.” There is no presumption that any of these films are “historical” in the strict sense of the term. Several of the films do present “historical situations,” but the strict standard of history is not met, and, I doubt if any film could meet this standard even films that have been lauded for their historical accuracy, for example, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, have been guilty of what historian Natalie Zemon Davis has quipped, “a few departures from the historical record.” Nevertheless, while these films may not be totally accurate, in terms of history that is “known,” and one should add here that even professional

¹I might also add, you should have your head examined.

histories are never totally accurate, they do portray situations that are in a real sense historical. While some of the films are based on “documentable historical events” or may have an “imagined plot where historical events are intrinsic to their action” [Natile Zemon Davis (2000) *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision*, p. 5]. Historian Natalie Davis has opined in the regard:

Feature films are often described as creatures of invention, without significant connection to the experienced world or the historical past. The term “fiction films,” is often applied to them in cinema studies, highlighting a contrast between unconstrained imagination in feature films and “truth” in nonfiction documentary. It is precisely this dichotomy that I want to question, not merely because there is a play of invention- of “fictive” crafting - in documentary film, docudrama, and cinema vérité (as there is also in prose historical texts), but also because feature films can make cogent observations on historical events, relations and processes [Davis, p. 5]

Zola’s novel *Germinal* is a work of fiction, but surely a very realistic one. The film, which follows the novel quite closely, is a remarkable portrayal of the life of coal miners, the family and sexual politics, the coal industry, labor relations, and politics in 19th century France. Moreover, it provides a natural segue into a discussion of the economic, political social and ecological impact of the industrial revolution, the very fundament of which was coal.

But, in my mind, the great advantage of films is that they “both show and tell” [Davis, p. 7]. Even the greatest writer could never impress on one with mere words the hazardous, arduous nature of coal mining better than the visual scenes in *Germinal*. The image of a young woman who weighs no more than 80 lbs., pushing a cart full of a ton of coal, naked, in the stifling heat of the mine, up to her knees in water, and totally exhausted is one that one will not forget soon. The student will learn that during the industrial revolution had its dark side and that there were even more hellish places than Blake’s “Satanic Mills.”

The basic economic problem in *Germinal* is that “market forces” have produced a price of coal that is too low to be profitable, or to pay a living wage. But, the true human cost of coal use has not ever been more vividly depicted either in prose or on film, than in *the film Germinal*. Does it matter that these characters never really existed, or the events in the plot, in the strict historical sense, never happened? I think not. Of course, film is not prose history, but as Natalie Davis contends “as long as we bear in mind the differences between film and professional prose, we can take film seriously as a source of valuable and even innovative historical vision. We can then ask questions of historical films that are parallel to those we ask of historical books. Rather than being poachers on the historian’s preserve, filmmakers can be artists for whom history matters” [Davis p. 15].

One of the great filmmakers, Stanley Kubrick, averred that the “basic purpose of a film was illumination...showing the viewer something he can’t see any other way.” According to Kubrick this is best done by setting a film in the past and thus forcing the viewer to get out of his own backyard, and remove his environmental blinkers” and to hence gain a “deeper more objective perspective” [quoted in Davis p. 24]. In short, stories of the past can enlighten the present because we let our guard down when looking back. Quoting Santyana is so prosaic I will not do it here. But, it is clear that film, as parable, or a “thought experiment” can be as instructive as history [Davis, p.x]. The film, *Rapa Nui*, is one such parable and thought experiment. There

is nowhere on earth further from anyone's "backyard" than Easter Island.

In many instances, the true history is not known and speculation and controversy, often bitter and polemical, dominate the "dialog." The history of Easter Island is precisely such an instance. The film, *Rapa Nui*, produced by Kevin Costner, is clearly intended to be an eco-comparable, but it nevertheless presents a reasonably good depiction of what the cultural, economic and political life was like on Easter Island, and what forces possibly brought the inhabitants of the Island to their miserable end, or at least had them on a "terminal trajectory." But, there is controversy and we will probably never know what really happened. That is, we will not be able to resolve the question of whether or not the Easter Island culture had degenerated before western contact or was done in by it.

Nevertheless, there is a great deal of cultural and historical information conveyed in this film that escaped reviewers like Roger Ebert. Ebert claims that *Rapa Nui* is one of the worst films ever made. Its only redeeming feature, in his mind, is what he calls the "National Geographic exception." Because the women in the film were Polynesian, and hence brown-skinned, Ebert claims it was acceptable, under the aforementioned exception, to show all of the women bare-breasted. For this reason, he said he would probably view the film again.

In any case, Ebert mockingly reviews the plot of the film. He is especially sarcastic regarding what he called the Easter Island version of the "Ironman Triathlon" where men must climb down a steep cliff, swim to an Island, find the egg of a Frigate Bird, swim back and climb back up the steep cliffs to the finish line - without breaking the egg. Whoever thought up such a silly thing? Well, the Easter Islanders did, and this event was central to the so-called "Birdman Cult." To be fair, the film's depiction of the annual event did go "over the top" but in many of the essentials the film was accurate. Indeed, virtually every aspect of the film represents at least one scholar's version, most often those of Thor Heyerdahl, and Father Sebastian Englert, of what actually happened on Easter Island. Moreover, as *Rapa Nui* was shot on location on Easter Island, one gets to see the magnificent *Moai*, and gets a sense of the size and remoteness of the Island, and most importantly, the magnitude of the challenge to survive on the Island is manifest. Thus, *Rapa Nui*, is a film worth watching and discussing even though the main plot is driven by a trite "Romeo and Juliet" story. Of course, the ignorant, like Ebert, will miss all of it. There are subplots that introduce the ideology of class struggle, revolution, racism and sustainability, all of which should be most thought-provoking to University students.

What this course is about.

This course is about Ecology, Economy and Society, thus, to be included a film had to deal with, in a substantive way with at least any pair of these (e.g., Ecology and Economy) or all three. In some instances, the issues are obvious. In others, the issues are evident only to the trained eye. In the first instance, for example, the film *Rapa Nui* shows, quite explicitly the social and economic system of the Rapa Nui, but more importantly, it depicts a relationship between the social, economic and ecological systems of Easter Island. The ecological message is suggested, but is vague to one not versed in the ecological effects of deforestation and erosion, and, thus, needs to be teased out. In the case of *Run Lola Run*, the ecological content of the theory "contingency, catastrophe and chaos" is not obvious at any level.

We are going to study these sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit depictions of

ecological, economic and social reality under the rubric of “ideology.” An ideology is a representation of reality. It may deal with a broad generality such as the existential struggle for “meaning” or the battle of individuals against the forces of fate or destiny, or oppression and may be either optimistic or pessimistic in its view. Or ideology may be a comment on a specific social, political, economic, or ecological issue, e.g. the inevitability of patriarchy, or hierarchy, or environmental destruction.

Ideology in Film

Ideology circulates in films..and helps to establish an “imaginary” relation between the spectator and the world. Though such imaginary relationships, the discourses of ideology turn the opacity of the world into a luminous intelligibility that not only makes sense of reality “out there” but also, and more important, creates meaning for the film’s viewer, who becomes in this process a knowing subject - Mas’ud Zavarzadeh, *Seeing Films Politically*, 1991, p.1]

Movies speak mainly to the eyes. Though they started talking in words some seventy years ago, what they say to our ears seldom overpowers or even matches the impact of what they show us.- James A.W. Heffernan, Looking at the Monster: Frankenstein & Film, *Critical Inquiry*, 24(1): p. 133.

This is, perhaps, the foulest Toadstool that has yet sprung up from the reeking dunghill of present times. William Beckford, 1818, after reading *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley

deconstructionists regard theory to be the discourse of mastery in which the local, the cellular, and the particular are erased Mas’ud Zavarzadeh, *Seeing Films Politically*, 1991 p.viii

I believe that the increasingly populist “resistance to theory” is part of the contemporary conservative attack on conceptuality...it is a mode of the postmodern return to the empirical. The empirical is not real but the product of the discourses of the dominant ideology. Mas’ud Zavarzadeh, *Seeing Films Politically*, 1991, xii

through films the social order “fashions the kinds of subjectivities required for its perpetuation”
P. 1

the dominant forms of film theory and criticism are more interested in the formal study of the immanent properties of filmic texts than in the effectivity of film as a mode of cultural and political subordination p. 2

formal study emphasizes the aesthetic specificity and the uniqueness of each film

In this course, the film is the “text” used for the exposition of issues that have standing independent of the film, but upon which the film makes some comment, and serves as a useful segue into the issue. *Roffman & Purdy’s, The Hollywood Social Problem Film - Depression to the 1950s* and Graeme Turner’s, *Film as Social Practice*, are good exemplars of the type of content and analysis entailed in the course. This is to say that we will address the ideology of the film directly for in many cases the film itself is quite pertinent to the discussion at hand.

There are many frameworks for attempting to comprehend the relationship between film and the ecological, economic and social order. The so-called “reflectionist” model sees film as a “reflection of the dominant beliefs and values of its culture” [Turner, p. 152]. Obviously, film makers are to a considerable extent “constructed” by their culture, and thus, many fundamental values of that culture will be manifest in the films they make. Yet, a film is clearly more than a mere reflection of reality, rather like any other artistic enterprise, “it constructs and re-presents” reality “by way of the codes, conventions, myths, and ideologies of the culture as well as by way of the specific signifying practices of the medium.” [Turner, p. 152]. While surely any culture’s ideological system is not monolithic, that is, there are “competing and conflicting classes and interests,” there is usually a hegemonic or dominant ideology and thus, there is no doubt a significant degree of “cultural authorship” in films that tends to produce films that are ideologically similar [Turner, p. 153].” However, even though there is often a dominant point of view (hegemonic ideology), there will be other contradictory and sometimes threatening ideological “representations” in films. But again there are other processes at work that tend to produce ideological homogeneity. Most notably, sometimes the “interests” behind the hegemonic ideology will attempt to suppress these contrarian “representations.” For example, Turner reports, the film board in Australia exercised censorship of film exports to insure that the proper image of Australia is projected abroad, in particular as to how that image might affect tourism [p. 160]. Film critics in Australia took a particular dislike to *Crocodile Dundee*, finding the “shrewd, potentially criminal (but basically decent), populist” image it projected of Australia “unacceptable” [Turner p. 168]. More sinister, of course, was the work of US censors during the 1930s which suppressed representations that threatened the existing political, economic, social, and gender order. For example, even the oblique reference to lesbianism in Lillian Hellman’s play, *The Children’s Hour* was removed in the first film version of the play. This was a consequence not only of the action of the censor, but also out of recognition by the producers of the fact that lesbianism was a culturally taboo subject, the depiction of which would ensure the commercial failure of the film. Similarly, in the film *Dead End*, Sidney Kingsley’s portrayal of slum life was cleansed to minimize the social sting of the economic class differences revealed, and the fatalistic view of the chances of people from escaping the poverty of the slums. Neither the censors nor the producers would want to popularize such a view for political reasons. After all communism was on the rise in America. Moreover, such a fatalistic view is in conflict with the hegemonic American Creed of the reality of “equal opportunity.”

Sometimes, however, a film may contain several contradictory ideological views. In *Film as Social Practice*, Graeme Turner explains how “ideological considerations allow us to begin to understand the relationship between film texts and their cultural contexts.” He warns, however, that one should not suppose that the film text is ideologically “unitary” that is, free of “contradictions” and not subject to different interpretations. Rather, Turner insists, “the film’s text is (sometimes) a kind of battleground for competing and often contradictory positions

[Turner, p. 171]. This ambiguity is a result of the fact that ideology works on both the conscious and the unconscious level, and a film is usually the product of the work of many artists with often very different conscious and, often inconsistent ideological agendas, and varied individual histories and unconscious cultural assumptions which are, in turn, confounded the with ideological demands of governments (censors, film boards, Congressional committees etc).

As an example of how ideology can unconsciously infiltrate a film, consider Fritz Lang's classic (1927 silent) film, *Metropolis*. *Metropolis* was made in Germany during the chaotic period following WWI. The film opening, shows a "modern city" which has been described as a "demonic stone desert" an "artificial, mathematical, utterly land-alien product"² [Stephen Jenkins, ed. [1981], *Fritz Lang: The Image and the Look*, p. 152]. The film portrays the alienation and exploitation of workers in this modern city and appears to be right out of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of Karl Marx. Workers live underground and are depicted as the slaves of machines, and in one scene, the workers are actually consumed by a giant machine that looks very much like an ancient Aztec sacrificial pyramid. The workers, led by the beautiful Maria, initiate a movement to improve their condition, and again seemingly following Marx, the factory owner and a "mad scientist"(represented as Jewish) produce a robot³ that will eliminate the need for workers. The robot is cleverly made to look like Maria with the purpose of deceiving the workers. The false Maria urges the workers to violent rebellion in the hope that they, no longer needed by the industrialists, will destroy themselves. The workers, urged on by the false Maria destroy the factory, which causes their underground city to flood and their children to drown. The workers turn on false Maria and burn it at the stake, and then proceed to war with the upper class. The rebellion ends when, with the guidance of the real Maria, the "son" of the "ruler"⁴ mediates between workers and the ruler to produce an organic, read fascist society where there is "cooperation" between the enlightened "head" and the subordinated "hands"(workers). Obviously, such conservative reformism is antithetical to revolutionary Marxism. Thus, Lang's film is not a Marxist critique of modernity. This is not surprising since Lang was not a Marxist. Lang, however, was German (actually Austrian) as was subject to a commonplace romantic agrarian ideology that rejected modernity. Like that of the Jeffersonians in the United States, the Physiocrats in France, and even the later Populists in the United States, and landed aristocrats everywhere, this German agrarian mysticism devalued all that was modern - most notably cities and factories. Nazism, with its reverence for "blood and soil" was also

²According to one critic, this look is intended to be critical of modernity and reflects the "strong current of agrarian mysticism running through much of German thought" at the time. Such backward- looking romanticism is common in places where modernization is displacing agriculture as the principal mode of economic activity.

³These scenes were obviously influenced by the early Frankenstein films.

⁴The film is loaded with Christian imagery and symbols. Beside the father and son thing, Lang has Maria, the leader of the impoverished workers meeting with and preaching to them in catacombs just as the early Christians did. Maria speaks before a candle-lit altar backed by three crosses, and recounts the biblical story of the Tower of Babel. Feder, the son of the ruling industrialist, is in effect, given birth by Maria, for it is only after he sees her that he sees the oppression and suffering of the workers and interceded with his father to reform the situation. Finally, there is the flood that punishes the workers for their transgression against the "father" [Robert Armour [1977], *Fritz Lang*, p. 40]

infected with this backward looking romanticism.

Needless to say, Hitler loved this film and several other of Lang's films that followed. The Nazis offered Lang, a (half)Jew⁵, the position of head of the German film industry and the status of "honorary Aryan" [Turner, p.173]⁶. Lang, at least then, was not political, at the time, and certainly had no special proclivity for Nazism. He fled to Hollywood in 1933 and became a U.S. citizen in 1935. He did make several anti-Nazi films in the US during WWII. Yet, *Metropolis*, in his mind, was not ideological, but was rather a "rather silly melodrama" [quoted in Turner p. 173].

The fascist ideology evident in the film was not consciously Lang's, but that of his culture. The ruler was patriarchal and fatherly. Whatever evil intentions the "father" had, were deflected onto the "mad (Jewish) scientist." Further, amid post-WWI chaos of the Weimar Republic there was a pervasive sense that any political disturbance was socially harmful. Moreover, then it was common among the middle-class, and aristocrats to assume that the workers did not know their best interests, and, thus, had to be controlled by a benevolent, if stern, leader. In short, the social, political and economic conditions that produced Hitler also produced *Metropolis*! As Turner writes, "Fritz Lang was not the author of the discourses of *Metropolis*, his culture was!" [Turner, p. 173]

The ideology manifest in a film, is not so as a consequence of direct statements, but is more obliquely signaled by the narrative structure and visual style of the film. For example, Mike Cormack's, in his book, *Ideology and Cinematography* shows how lighting, and camera angles and other aspects of filming *per se* either diminish or enhance the ideological message of a film. The German expressionism⁷ manifest in the set design of *Metropolis* and, more vividly so, in the *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, for example, conveys the general message of expressionist art that humanity is powerless against the forces of fate and the power of destiny. This is precisely the fatalist sense that pervaded all of Europe after WWI, but Germany in particular.

"A Kafkaesque experience is one in which a person feels trapped by forces that seem simultaneously ridiculous, threatening, incomprehensible, and dangerous" [Lawrence Cunningham

⁵His mother Paula Schlesinger was Jewish. Presumably he was raised in the religion of his father

⁶The offer was actually made by Goebbels. Lang was nonplused by this offer as the Nazis had just suppressed his film, *The Last Will of Dr. Mabuse* (1933). This film depicted a master criminal controlling the activities of other criminals even though the former was confined to an insane asylum. The similarities between Dr. Mabuse and Hitler were not lost on the Nazis. Yet, Hitler liked Lang's films, especially *Metropolis*, and earlier films like *Siegfried and Kriemhild's Revenge* as they portray ancient Aryan myths. Immediately after the meeting with Goebbels, Lang fled to Paris leaving his money and his wife behind. His wife later joined the Nazi party.

⁷ In the 1920s, German expressionism was a highly regarded film movement that was influenced obviously by the movement in painting with the same name. The goal in expressionism is not to depict reality but to use art to express mood, emotions and ideas. Although not German, Edvard Munch's *The Scream* gives one a pretty good idea of the morbid feelings and ideas characteristic of the German expressionists and Fritz Lang. In film, it is marked by a strong visual style which employed low-key lighting, oblique camera angles, and sharp juxtapositions of light and dark, and distortions of Euclidian shapes. The influence of German expression is seen in the *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and in James Whales (1931) *Frankenstein*. The expressionist filmmakers, though not exclusively, chose gothic or supernatural themes.

and John Reich, *Culture and Values*, p. 456]. It is not unreasonable to assert that Kafka's experience of WWI had shaped his dark vision. Culturally, the war destroyed once and for all the notion of progress and the nobility of man [Troop, p. 89]. It destroyed the notion of meaning and set the stage for Existentialism. The values that emerged from this catastrophe were either complete dissociation and cynicism, or frivolity and hedonism. There was no sense of order or reason. In the words of the poet Yeats written just after WWI, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold/ Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world/The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned" [William Butler Yeats, *The Second Coming*]. And most surely, the Enlightenment notion of "perfectibility" seemed naive and even silly.

Fritz Lang was conscripted into the Austrian army and fought during WWI. He was wounded four times. Surely he was no less than others likely to have absorbed the depressing lessons of WWI that influenced his entire generation.

It is generally accepted that Lang's work has consistently presented the theme, in Lang's words, of the "fight against destiny, against fate." As film critic Andrew Sarris has written, "Lang is determinism," all of his films are the "product of a bleak view of the universe where man grapples with his personal destiny and loses" [quoted in Jenkins, p. 3]. Another writes, to understand Lang, one must comprehend Lang's "despair of mankind," and his "sense of [the] evil and omnipotent forces at work" in the world [Jenkins, p. 3].

For the Greeks, one's "fate" was disposed by the will of the Gods. For Lang, and others in the early 20th century, the caprice of the Gods had been replaced by new forms of determinism, that is, forces over which he has no control. For Lang, these included social forms such as Tyranny. These new forces were of a biological nature, heredity and environment. Following Darwin, a person's future was more or less determined by his genetic endowment and the environment in which he competed for resources. If one is fit one endures, if one is not, one does not.

Then there was the Freudian and Jungian revolution in psychology that depicted human behavior as being driven by unconscious, and hence, uncontrollable psychic forces. Thus, following the debacle of WWI, and the revelations of the new biology and psychology, humanism faded and determinism came to be a dominant ideology in the first four decades of the 20th century [Armour, p.31].

We will witness the complex interplay between the old enlightenment optimism and the new post-WWI pessimism in the film *Frankenstein*. Here is a classic case of a confused ideological message. On the one hand, we have the theme of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* that the "monster is a social creation, that is the consequence of Victor Frankenstein's moral failure. On the other we have the message of early 20th century biological determinism. Frankenstein's creation inevitably becomes a monster because it is mistakenly given a "criminal brain." A similar contradiction appears in the film, *Dead End*.

The film *Frankenstein* is included in the course primarily because its "text" expresses the ideology of biological determinism, especially regarding the etiology of crime, commonly expressed in the first half of the 20th century as manifest in the debate surrounding the "Negro Problem," the movement for Woman's Suffrage, and the Nativist Movement. Moreover, the film offers a particular critique of science that is quite relevant and important today in debates about cloning, and other issues raised by the "green" and feminist critique of modern science and

technology.

The biological determinist ideology manifest in the film *Frankenstein* is contrasted with the social-environmentalist ideology manifest in Sidney Kingsley's drama, *Dead End*, and in Lillian Hellman's screenplay for the film with the same title. It is well worth noting, however, that in Mary Shelley's novel, the "monster" is quite clearly and intentionally drawn as a social creation. How could the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin be anything else, but a "social-environmentalist?" Indeed, Whale's *Frankenstein* is quite confusing as it actually portrays both ideologies. It is evident, on the one hand, that the "monsters" violence is induced by harsh treatment, but at the same time we are told it is biologically predestined to violence because it was inadvertently given a "criminal brain."

The critique of science offered by the Whale film is not that of Mary Shelley, but stripped of its religious element it is not all that different. Mary Shelley was not a religious fundamentalist. She was well schooled in science, but surely, had she been alive in the second half of the 20th century she and Rachel Carson would have gotten along famously, she would have led the fight to close down nuclear power plants and to protect the rainforest, and would now lead the battle against cloning. For Mary Shelley, nature was sacred, and humans messed with it at their peril.

In *Dead End*, we have more contradictions. First, there is the variance between Hellman's screenplay and Kingsley's drama. Partially at the insistence of the censors, and, in part, that of the producer, Samuel Goldwyn, the movie set was sanitized. There was no stomping on cockroaches, no garbage or human waste floating in the water in which the "Dead End Kids" swam, no reference to venereal disease in general or syphilis in particular, and the display of differences between the classes was minimized. Moreover, Hellman imbued the lead characters (Drina & Dave) with heroic qualities of courage, and transcendence quite inimical to the more fatalistic and flawed characters in Kingsley's play. It is most revealing how Hellman alters the play's lead character, Gimpty, a disabled man. In the play Gimpty informs on his nemesis, the arch criminal "Babyface Martin" who is then rather viciously shot-down by FBI agents. Hellman, as both the *Children's Hour* and subsequent events (recounted in *Scoundrel Time*) would show, could never conflate heroism with "squealing." In the film, "Dave" is a virile, handsome young man, who is not afflicted with a rickets-deformed leg. Dave, does not "squeal" on Babyface Martin, he shoots Martin himself. While Hellman the Marxist, and Stalin apologist must surely have found the environmentalism and the class struggle elements of the play appealing, for Hellman the dramatist, and for Goldwyn the Capitalist, such issues lacked both dramatic and economic appeal. No one, both believed, quite correctly, would want to see a movie where "circumstance" produces a sometimes apathetic and sometimes vicious cast of characters. The national mood in the mid-1930s needed optimism not defeatism.

Moreover, the voice of the contemporary determinism had to be heard. As Mike Cormack has noted, the "noir" lighting of Babyface Martin toward the end of the film strongly suggests a sinister and inherently evil character rather than one that is the "victim of circumstance" so clearly drawn in the Kingsley drama. The message that comes out of the Hellman screenplay is that "some are good and some are evil, some escape poverty through their own agency, and others, due to a lack of character, do not. This is merely a variant on Social Darwinism where only the fit survive, and society has no responsibility for the losers.

The Analytical Framework

Over the course of the semester you will watch nine films. The films were selected to be illustrative of one or more of several themes that define the course. Most fundamentally, the course will explore the complex interrelationships between economics, ecology and social justice. This interaction is obvious in *The Burning Season*, where Chico Mendes, an impoverished “rubber tapper” in the Brazilian Amazon fights to protect his rubber trees from the predation of state-subsidized cattle-ranchers. The film also confronts one with the broader issues of rainforest destruction, species extinction, cultural extinction, and global warming.

The unifying theme is the issue of whether the economies and the societies they support are sustainable given the ecological boundary conditions that constrain them. For example, in *The Burning Season* it is evident that rubber tapping is sustainable, but cattle ranching is not. The problem is that Brazil needs meat more than it needs rubber. Thus, we see ecological problems have their roots in social problems - the misery and poverty of Brazil’s urban masses are driving the destruction of the rainforest and all the ills attendant to it.

The analytical framework we shall use, is the relatively new field of Ecological Economics. Ecological Economics, which developed out of the pioneering efforts of Kenneth Boulding, Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen and Herman Daly, differs from “conventional” economics in several important ways.

It is difficult these days to not be aware of environmental problems such as global warming and climate change, species extinction, hazardous waste pollution, and epidemics of new diseases. Similarly, one would have to go to some extremes to avoid confrontation with social problems such as, inequality of wealth and income, degrading poverty, crime, famine and political corruption. What is not commonly appreciated is that all of the problems are connected.

Both “economics” and “ecology” have the same root word, the Greek *oikos* meaning “household.” Eco-logy then means the science of the household, while eco-nomics means the discipline that deals with the numerous aspects of the household. Logically, then Economics should be a sub-branch of Ecology, but historically it has not worked out that way. The development of **Ecological Economics**, and the *International Society for Ecological Economics* in 1988, is a manifestation of this logic. The combination of the terms ecology and economics provides for a very catholic understanding of the term household which includes the social, political and natural households in which humans institutionalize the economies they require to produce what they need. It follows that a complete analysis of the situation of any individual or group requires a framework that includes economic, social and ecological factors.

Ecological Economics is part of the new “science of sustainability.” In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development, known as the Brundtland Commission, published a report titled, *Our Common Future*. In this report, “sustainable development” was broadly defined to be development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Since then scientists, social theorists, economists, and others have struggled to define and operationalize the concept. In the process there has been much controversy, and little success. As Melinda Kane has noted, given the enormous complexity of our biological, social and economic lives, one should not be surprised at this. The daunting complexity of the problem has forced those who have been searching for a meaningful and

operational conception of sustainability into “crossing disciplinary orders, sometimes somewhat uncomfortably” [Melinda Kane, “Sustainability concepts: From Theory to Practice,” Introduction to *Sustainability in Practice*, 2000, p. 20]. Sustainability science needs to “span the range of spatial scales between such diverse phenomena as economic globalization and local farming practices, ... environmental degradation resulting from multiple stresses, ..and a wide range of uncertainties in natural and socioeconomic systems” [Robert W. Kates *et al*, Sustainability Science, *Science* 292 (27 April, 2001) p. 541]. Clearly, such “nature-society interactions” require cross-disciplinary thinking and cooperation [Kates et al p. 541].

Ecological Economics

First, Ecological Economics rejects the pro-growth agenda of conventional economics in favor of the development of *sustainable economies*. Sustainable development suggests improvements in the quality of life do not lodge in mere quantitative growth, in short, more is not necessarily better than less. And, given the social and ecological cost of producing good and services, “more” is probably worse. Consequently, GDP is not seen as a particularly good indicator of well-being. Ecological economists are working to develop alternative indicators such as the “Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare” or the “Genuine Progress Indicator” which take into account depletion of natural capital, the costs of pollution, and the social costs of poverty and misery. These indicators suggest that the economic growth of the past several decades has produced costs in excess of benefits.

As they are far less sanguine about the potential of substituting physical and human capital for natural capital, Ecological Economists emphasize the importance of conserving natural or ecological capital which provides essential ecological services. In the spirit of ecology, ecological economists tend toward seeing natural limits on economic growth, have more concern for the future, and worry more about irreversible decisions.

Second, Ecological Economics rejects the anthropocentric bias which justifies the valuation, economists, of other life forms as mere “resources” with no intrinsic worth. The traditional jibe that the economist “knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing” does not apply to Ecological Economists who take seriously, the words of William Blake, that “all that lives is holy.” Or as a Balinese farmer would pray, *Om sarwa prani hitangkaram* (may all that breathes be well).

Third, Ecological Economics is more concerned with the etiology of wants than conventional economics which simply takes them as a given, i.e. independent of economic and social forces. The social dynamics of conspicuous consumption as articulated by Thorstein Veblen and James Dusenberry, if taught at all in Economics classes, is presented as a *curiosum*, rather than as an ecologically dangerous social force. Rather than seeing it as a solution to ecological problems, the idea of “voluntary simplicity” is seen as seditious because of the potential macroeconomic problems its practice would present. Moreover, for ecological economists there are “goods” and there are “bads.” An ecological economist, for example, would subtract the cost of the clean-up of a toxic waste dump from GDP rather than add it on as does conventional economics.

Ecological Economics should be, at least in this context, broadly understood to mean the

“study of human economic systems in relation to ecosystems.” Ecosystems, in turn, should be broadly understood to include any “system” that impacts on a human being’s access to the resources she needs to survive and prosper. It matters little to a starving person whether food is not available to her due to a drought-induced crop failure, a pest or fungus, or to her lack of an “entitlement” to food that might be abundant in supply. A rubber tapper exploited in a monopsonistic market in the Amazon rainforest is as threatened by a government-subsidized cattle rancher that threatens to destroy the rubber trees on which he depends for his livelihood as by any insect, or fungus. The land in the Ciskei homeland in South Africa was severely degraded by overgrazing and the collection of firewood only because a growing population was packed to an appalling density, on marginal land, by Apartheid. Indigenous people are decimated as effectively by disease (which is often the consequence of economic activities), loss of its habitat to miners or ranchers, or outright genocide.

In another dimension, the health of a community can be challenged by the “liquidation” of an important local employer that might follow a hostile takeover, or the flight of a corporation to a low wage country, or the depletion or poisoning by a corporation of an aquifer or lake or river, or by changes in government policy.

The basic point is, that while necessary, science and technology are not sufficient for the solution to ecological problems. Ecological problems have their roots in economics and politics. True solutions will require good science as well as economic, social and political change. More importantly, there will have to be more weight given to values other than to technical expertise.

Economists in the attempt to build a positivist science, have endeavored to forget the fact that before he published the *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith published, *A Theory of Moral Sentiments*. For Smith, rational self-interest, and each individual’s emotional concern for others were the “two parts of one human nature” [Clive Splash [2000], “Reflections Upon the Role of Moral Sentiments in Economics,” in *Sustainability in Question*, p. 137]. Smith insisted that “sympathy” and moral judgement were central to how “humans both operate and value the world around them” [Splash, p. 137].

Hence, values and emotion can no longer be disdained in the decision-making process. The risk assessor’s rational calculation the risk of nuclear accidents is not to dominate how people “feel” about such risk. They may feel, out of sympathy with future generations, that it is wrong to burden them with mountains of radioactive waste, for example. Moreover, they may not want to have such risks imposed on them, even if the experts tell them it is in their interests to do so. Emotion is a fundamental component of the human being and subjective feelings are then an important component of human well-being. Ultimately what a “sustainable society” will be understood to be, will rest on what people perceive their “needs” to be. These needs will reflect rational, moral and emotional parts of humans.

Sustainable development

Ecological Economist Neva Goodwin has characterized our current environmental situation as a “mess.” [Neva Goodwin (2001), *Civil Economy and Civilized Economics*, G-DAE Working paper #1, p. 7]. The characteristics of this mess are as follows:

1. It has trans-generational aspects. Keynes once quipped that, “in the long-run we are all dead.” While Keynes is surely dead, we are living with the consequences of the choices made by his generation, and future generations will have to live with those made now.
2. It has substantial global aspects. As we see in the *Burning Season*, land-use choices made in Brazil can influence the global climate. As we will see in our analysis of coal and nuclear power, choice of fuels to produce energy can have global consequences.
3. The trans-generational and global aspects of ecological issues raise the question of equity. How do current choices alter the distribution of wealth between present and future generations and rich and poor nations?
4. The effects of environmental degradation may be irreversible and may occur in “a non-linear, unpredictable fashion.”[Goodwin p. 7]. That is, many natural systems may be chaotic in nature. Due to our limited comprehension of the complexity of such systems, there is a great deal of uncertainty regarding the effects of current environmental degradation on the future development of natural systems, and since humans depend on these natural systems, on the quality of human life in the future.

The response of Ecological Economics to this “mess” is the “Precautionary Principle which emphasizes the need to recognize uncertainty by taking extra precautions”[Goodwin p. 8]. When it comes to economic activities that are potentially harmful, the Precautionary Principle reverses the current “innocent until proven guilty” standard manifest in the law today, to one of guilty until proven innocent. The precautionary principle mandates “foresight and prudence” in economic activities rather than coping with the ecological consequences of economic actions through punishment and remediation, especially since, in the light of possible irreversibility, remediation may not be possible, and the consequences may be catastrophic.

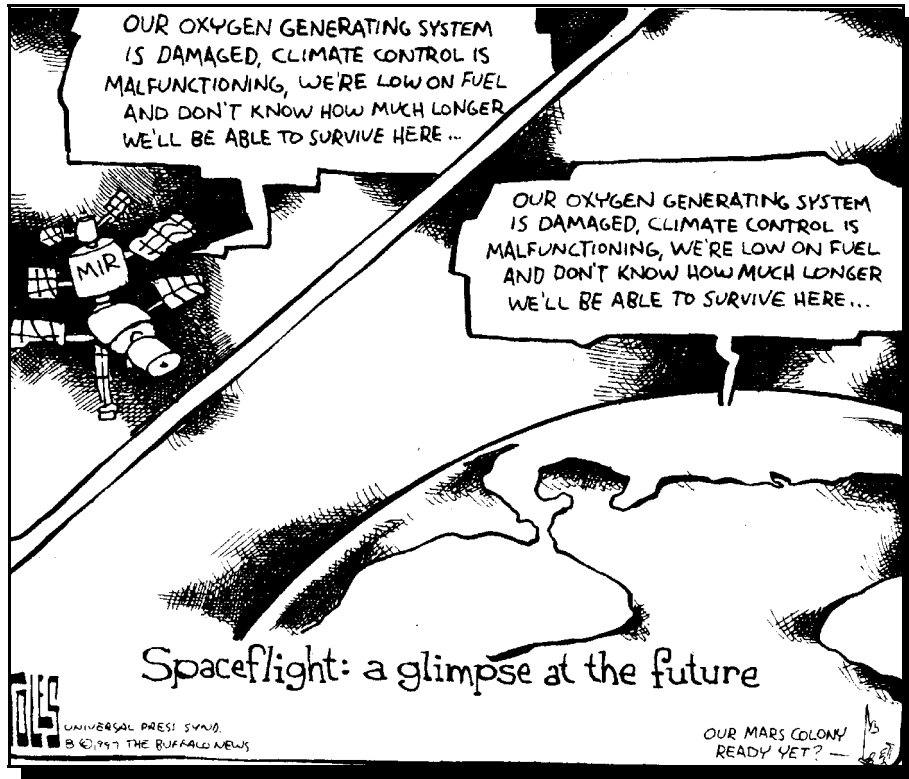
Sustainable development requires that “economic means” be directed toward improving human well-being, without imperiling the well-being of future generations. Further, it is asserted that fairness dictates that development be directed towards raising the living standard, to use Rawls’ term, the “least advantaged” in the world.

A final note

I have been using films in my “traditional” classes for many years. The reason is actually quite pragmatic; I find films to be a very time-cost effective way of exposing students to the issues I wish them to confront and understand. Should one attempt to teach the material covered in this proposal using traditional methods, the reading list would be hopelessly long. It would exhaust both the student’s book budget and surely exceed the library’s reserve desk quota. As it stands the students will still have reading equivalent to a good sized text book.

Secondly, by appealing to our empathetic and artistic dimensions, film can be a powerful complement to scholarly analysis. Some such as Gore Vidal have argued that, as a device for teaching history, the film surpasses the written work. Whatever its advantages, the use of film as

a pedagogical device is not without risks. Films provide powerful images, that can, as Stanley Hoffman has noted, “enrage or mollify” and thus have great propaganda potential. But, as written works of fiction or nonfiction all are “constructed” around an agenda, this risk is also present, if to a lesser degree, when they are used. If then, as Mark Carnes contends, “all imagined pasts are imperfect,” the instructor who wishes to be more than a propagandist, must do his best to divine the agendas and the imperfections of both film, and written works. Again quoting Carnes, the teacher must “pluck from the muck of the historical record the most solid bits of evidence, mold



them into meanings and serve them up” to the student.

A third advantage of films is that, in many cases, there is the opportunity to examine the relationship between a film and the work of fiction/ non-fiction portrayed. As noted above, it is most informative to explore how Hollywood altered Mary Shelly’s novel *Frankenstein* and Sidney Kingsley’s play, *Dead End* and, intentionally or not, rather dramatically altered the ideological message conveyed to the viewer .

