

# **Ecological Philosophy and Aesthetic Construction in Film and Television Culture: A Comprehensive Examination of Environmental Consciousness in Film and Television from a Philosophical Standpoint**

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## **Abstract**

Contemporary film and television studies, significantly shaped by Deleuze's vitalist concepts, have often blurred the distinct attributes of cinema within a more extensive "ecology" of animated media. Our research analysed the environmental themes presented and the characters' interactions with nature in multiple films. A variety of methods was observed, with films such as "Kung Fu Hustle" examining themes of harmony with nature, but others like "Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe" depicted nature as a vengeful force against human devastation. Notably, certain films, such as "CJ7," employed characters that symbolise nature's vulnerability in response to human actions. We further examined the relationship between narrative strategies and the philosophical questions these films provoke. The investigation uncovered an intriguing interaction. "Kung Fu Hustle" utilised comedic hyperbole to critique human behaviour, encouraging contemplation on the repercussions of ecological imbalance. "Kiss the Ground," a documentary, employed professional interviews and practical examples to inform audiences about sustainability solutions and prompt them to reflect on the philosophical foundations of environmental stewardship. Our research enhances comprehension of the representation of environmental topics in films and the philosophical enquiries they provoke.

**Keywords:** Film, Television, CJ7, Kung Fu Hustle, Environmental Awareness and Philosophy

## **Introduction**

The rise of the fantasy genre in films, television series and animation (qihuan or xuanhuan) in China as well Hong Kong contributed to this thriller phenomenon over the last two decades (Tan 2023). Even if the expression of fantastic elements in Chinese

cinema has been a prevalent part of cinematic tradition, we might alight upon an identifiable genre within consistently-increasing "fantasy media" (qihuan yingshi) at least since this century. One reason for the growth of this genre is that box office hits such as *The Lord of Rings* and *Harry Potter* franchises in Western fantasy have found resonance with Chinese audiences. Qihuan, which is a literally translation to the "fantastic/strange illusions," equivalent of Chinese fantasy (Tan 2023). It has come to be used widely in film and television production, distribution, and viewership. We would use the term "qihuan" for Fantasy if we were to categorise on one of Youku, Tencent Video or iQiyi online video platforms. And here, "qihuan" is almost always juxtaposed with the Chinese word for science fiction (kehuan). Whereas "kehuan" stories tended to be more pseudo-scientific and set in the future, for want of a better description, "qihuang" describes anything that fits under its broader umbrella. It includes such sub-genres as 武俠 "wuxia" (martial arts fantasy), 神魔奇幻 mohuan or 「pantheon」 (spiritual hair-raising) and a reversal of the genre, 仙俠 xianxia (immortality/authors fantasy). Mostly set in the past, especially with themes of historical fiction or mythology/homages/not-present-day tales.

Early film theorists, from those who saw it as "living pictures" to Gilles Deleuze's concept of "crystal-images," have consistently drawn comparisons between cinema and the organic processes of nature. This connection intensified during periods of renewed interest in philosophical vitalism, as documented by Inga Pollmann's recent work. However, this association often led to ontological speculations about the "nature" of film and the vital forces of technology, blurring the lines between subject and object, nature and history (Pollmann, 2017).

The idea of cinema possessing a natural aesthetic is as old as film theory itself, and its proponents come from a surprisingly diverse range of backgrounds. André Bazin, in his seminal work *Ontology of the Photographic Image* (1960), argues that the photographic basis of film grants it a special connection to nature, akin to the inherent beauty of a flower or snowflake (Bazin & Gray, 1960). This sentiment is echoed by Theodor Adorno in his later writings, where he describes film, the quintessential technological medium, as being "intimately related to the beauty of nature" (Adorno & Levin, 1981). Miriam Hansen further expands on this concept, tracing the interest in film's "natural beauty" (Naturschönen) back to Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 2008, 2019). For Benjamin, the complex mechanical processes of filmmaking did not negate the

possibility of capturing "immediate reality," but rather transformed it into a "Blue Flower in the land of technology" (Benjamin, 2019).

According to Fang et al. The philosophy of environmental preservation is a branch which has its roots embedded deep in the past and wide spread along both Western and Eastern traditions. In historical times, agricultural societies reap those resources by developing crops, and domesticating animals. In China, evidence of environmental education can be found several years ago during the Western Han Dynasty (145-86 BCE), attributed to Sima Qian 司马迁. His classic text, the Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji 《史記》), cites examples in environmental complaints. For example, the *Five Emperors' Records* section mentions the creation of the "Yu" (虞) officer position during the reign of Emperor Shun (舜). This official was tasked with overseeing the protection of mountains, forests, rivers, plants, birds, and animals. While not initially driven by a modern concept of environmental protection, these regulations laid the groundwork for sustainable resource use and inspired future generations. Chinese emperors generally approached environmental management with a pragmatic perspective. Mencius (孟子) (372-289 BCE) exemplifies this approach in his statement: "Without delaying the time for people to cultivate, the grains will be much to eat. If you can go to the pond without utilizing a fine fishing net, you can eat many fish. If you can go to the forest to cut at the right time, then you cannot run out of wood. There are many grains and fish to eat, as well as much wood to use to be satisfied by human lives." (Fang et al., 2022). Mencius' perspective reflects an Eastern philosophical approach to environmental protection that prioritizes resource abundance for human well-being, differing from the focus on conservation ethics in modern environmental movements. The rise of qihuan cinema in the era of China-Hong Kong co-productions that was ushered in helped to spawn the modern-day incarnation known as Qihuan. Building on the 2003 CEPA accord, in which co-produced films were reclassified as domestic Chinese products to simplify industrial collaboration. This allowed the filmmakers to go around quotas for foreign films, including Hong Kong. Several of the most successful co-productions up to this point had incorporated elements of fantasy, such as Stephen Chow's *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004) and *CJ7* (2008), or Jackie Chan's *The Myth* (2005). Nevertheless, because of censorship restrictions in Hong Kong, film producers tended to deal with issues related to supernatural right away without involving the supernatural (Bettinson, 2020).

Beyond feature films, the rapid growth of Tencent Video, Youku, and iQiyi has spurred the creation of original content, including online films, television series, and reality shows (Wang & Lobato, 2019; Zhao, 2018). Fantasy holds a prominent place in this era of media convergence, with both films and online series achieving high popularity, topping box office charts and garnering strong fan followings. Arne Næss (1912-2009), a proponent of deep ecology, challenged the anthropocentric view that values the environment only for its usefulness to humans. Deep ecology, in contrast, emphasizes the inherent value of all living things and the interconnected web of life. Næss believed that Earth's biosphere functions as a complex and delicately balanced system. Human interference in these natural processes disrupts this balance, threatening not only human survival but also the well-being of all life forms. The Gaia hypothesis, which posits Earth as a self-regulating system, aligns with this deep ecological perspective (Afeissa, 2017; Gare, 2014; Haukeland, 2023).

Deep ecology goes beyond biological principles. It also provides a broader social and ethical base than do the human-centered environmentalisms. Deep ecology brings human values, morals and philosophical perspectives together to provide appropriate foundations for environmentalism, ecology and green politics. We must go beyond the scope of protecting individual species to have effective environmental conservation. This entails making decisions based on considering genetics, dynamics with the environment and landscape culture. At the base of this, Environmental Education represents a substantial cornerstone for environmental literacy. For this reason, the need of good environmental education programs is paramount. Such programs should provide a solid grounding in science related to the environment. Similarly important is the building of responsible attitudes or values toward nature as a whole. Education fosters environmental awareness, personal accountability and action for challenges.

### **Rationale and Main Objective**

This article investigates the convergence of ecological philosophy with film and television aesthetic construction in our study. We hope to delve deeper into how environmentally concerned film and TV works—and their backgrounds—have been produced. Through a philosophical lens, we explore how these narratives use the visual and storytelling strategies along with ideological associations to represent nature and mobilize culture in relation to ecological issues of human intervention. This study of

the representation and inspiration drives to investigate how contemporary film must affect public awareness in environmental, sustainability issue for better future.

## Methods

### Research Design

A multimethodological approach was followed in our study, combining Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with Ecocritical Film Analysis (see Figures 1 and 2). In this study, we adopted CDA to investigate how the related Chinese fantasy films (e.g., *Kung Fu Hustle* and *CJ7*) shape their environmental meaning through narrative construction, visual aesthetics as well as character portrayal. We also examined how these films use aesthetics, narrative style and underlying ideology to depict nature in Ecocritical Film Analysis and engender audience concern on ecological matters.

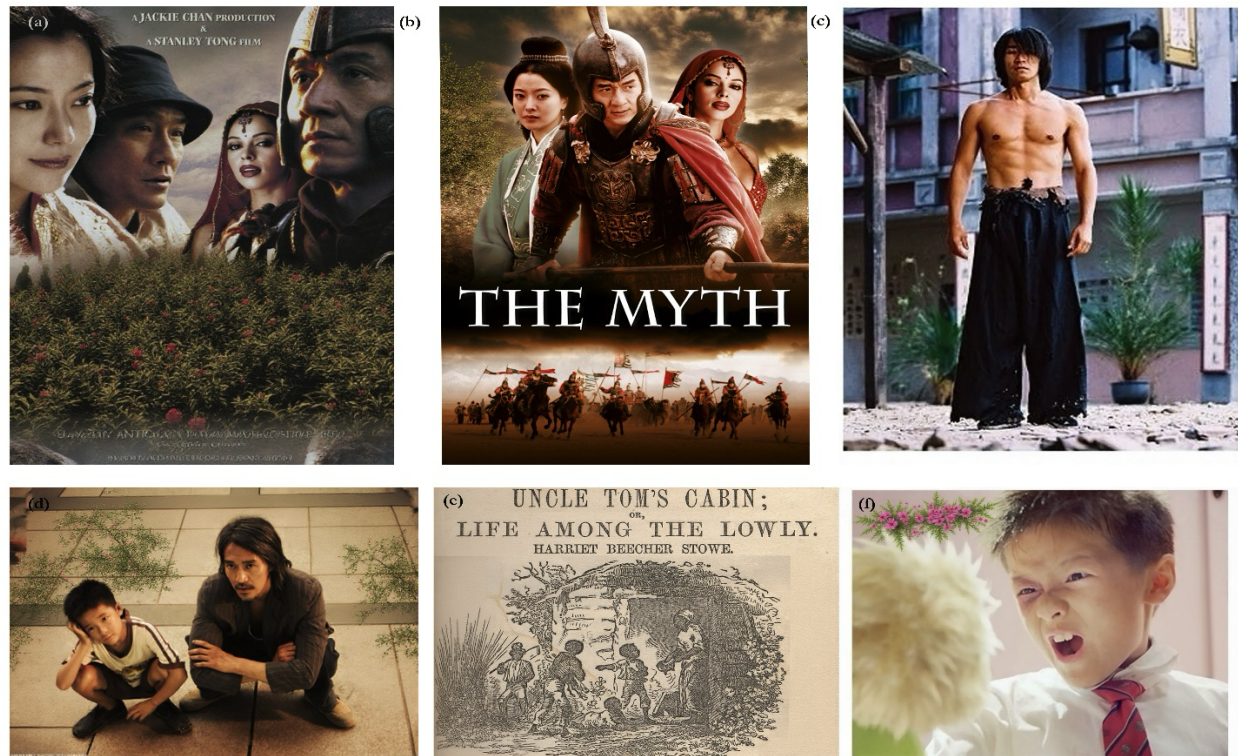


Figure 1: (a) A promotional poster for *The Myth* (2005), a historical fantasy film starring Jackie Chan, (b) an alternate poster for *The Myth*, featuring battle scenes and the film's main characters, (c) a still from *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004), a martial arts comedy directed by Stephen Chow, (d) a scene from *CJ7* (2008), a sci-fi comedy-drama directed by Stephen Chow, (e) an illustration from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe,

depicting themes of slavery and social justice, and (f) a dramatic moment from *CJ7*, showing a child character reacting intensely.

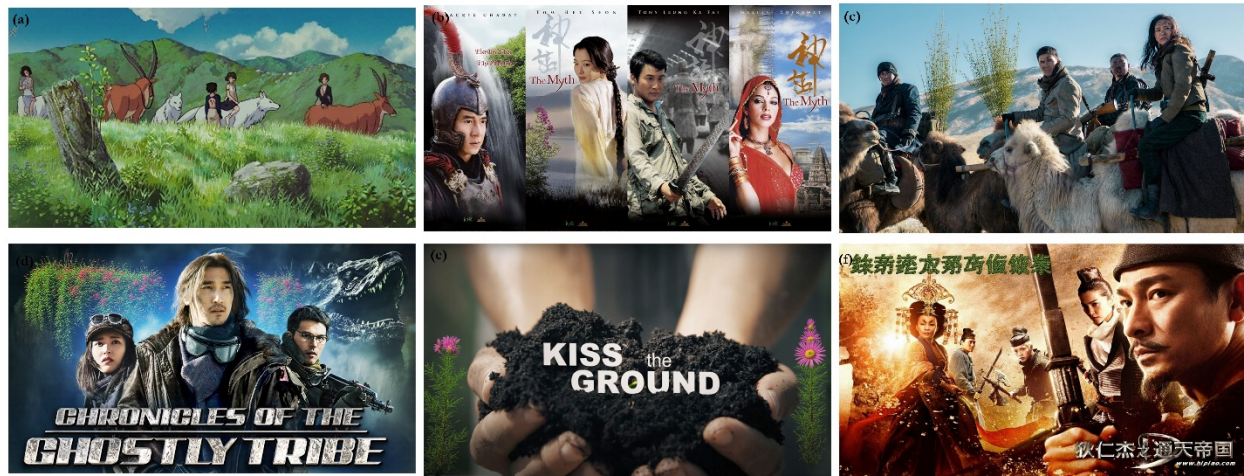
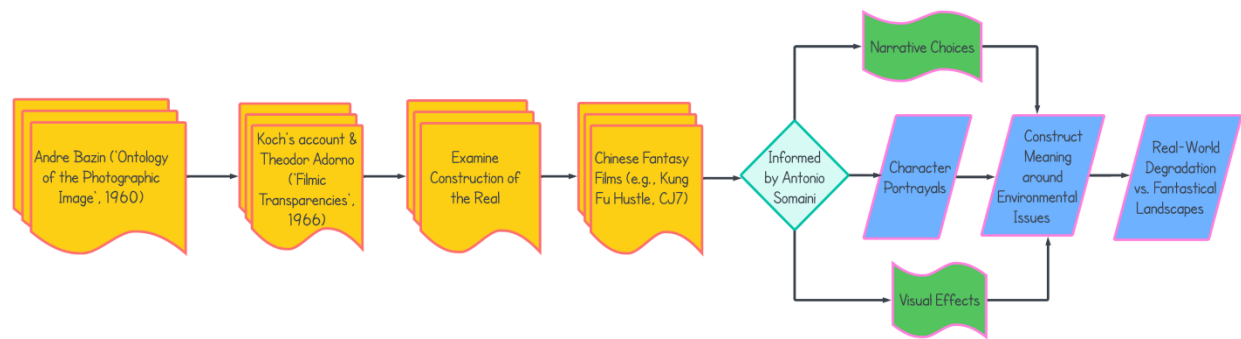


Figure 2: (a) A scene from *Princess Mononoke* (1997), an animated film exploring the relationship between humans and nature, (b) a promotional poster for *The Myth* (2005), a historical fantasy film starring Jackie Chan, (c) a still from *Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe* (2015), a Chinese adventure film with themes of mythology and archaeology, (d) a poster for *Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe*, emphasizing its sci-fi and fantasy elements, (e) a promotional image for *Kiss the Ground* (2021), a documentary on sustainable agriculture and environmental preservation, and (f) a poster for *Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame* (2010), a Chinese fantasy mystery film blending historical and supernatural elements.

### Critical Discourse Analysis

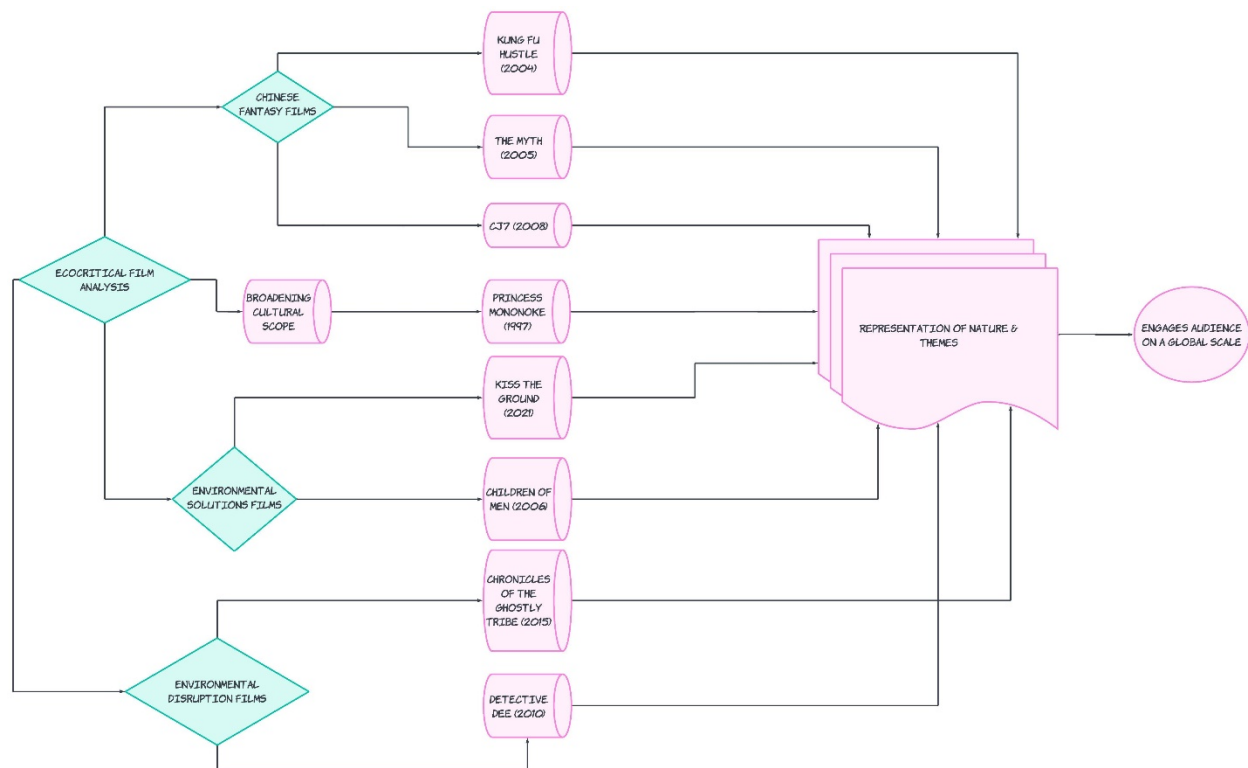
Our Critical Discourse Analysis (see Figure 3) utilized major theorist such as André Bazin ("Ontology of the Photographic Image," 1960) Koch's films, and either Adorno ("Filmic Transparencies", v.9 March-April 1966), for discussion on how reality is constructed in mutually exclusive to realms found within Chinese fantasy film (e.g., *Kung Fu Hustle*, *CJ7*). The analysis, which follows the line of drift suggested by Antonio Somaini, picked up how narrative and story elements as well visual effects or ways to portray characters build a certain environmental issue. At least earlier, in the sense of how you address certain types and scale forms within particular artistic practices: For example, we have been analysing on approaching fantastical landscapes not only as a mirror but also an irretrievable reality from actual environmental decay.



**Figure 3:** An Illustration Flowchart of Critical Discourse Analysis

### Ecocritical Film Analysis

In our environmentally friendly film review we went through a broad variety of movies to investigate how they depicted nature and ecological topics (see Figure 4). The Chinese martial arts comedies of Stephen Chow, like *Kung Fu Hustle* and *CJ7* (2008), are suitable material with which to explore the delicate balance between human behaviour vis-a-vis otherworldly terrain; so too is Jackie Chan's more obviously historical *The Myth* (2005) an essay on a figurative past where such inter-connectedness once prevailed. But we did look at modern fears of environmental cataclysm in movies such as *Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe* (2015) and how CGI is used to represent eco-disaster in *Discover Dee* and also the *Mystery with all the Phantom Flame* (2010). Alongside the Chinese fantasy films, our ecocritical film analysis extended transculturally. We also reviewed titles that showcase powerful environmental solutions such as documentaries on sustainable agriculture (e.g., *Kiss the Ground*, 2021). To investigate additional narratives of environmentalism in films depicting the consequences of environmental disregard, we also assessed apocalyptic feature film "Children go Men" (2006). To further expand the cultural range of our analysis, we also included Japanese movie "Princess Mononoke" (1997), which recounts a story that reveals deep connections between humanity and nature. But through a broader spectrum of films, we sought to find out greater depths in how environmental stories and impact play at the global scale for big screen's devotees.



**Figure 4:** An Illustration Flowchart of Ecocritical Film Analysis

## Data Analysis

Drawing on the principles of CDA and Ecocritical Film Analysis, we performed a close-read analysis of films. This consisted of analysing elements such as narrative choices, characterizations, direction in visual effect and aesthetic presentation. Next, we examined how these constituents work in unison to create meaning on environmental subjects, and what type of impact they might have on our understanding for human-kind's place within the natural realm.

## Results

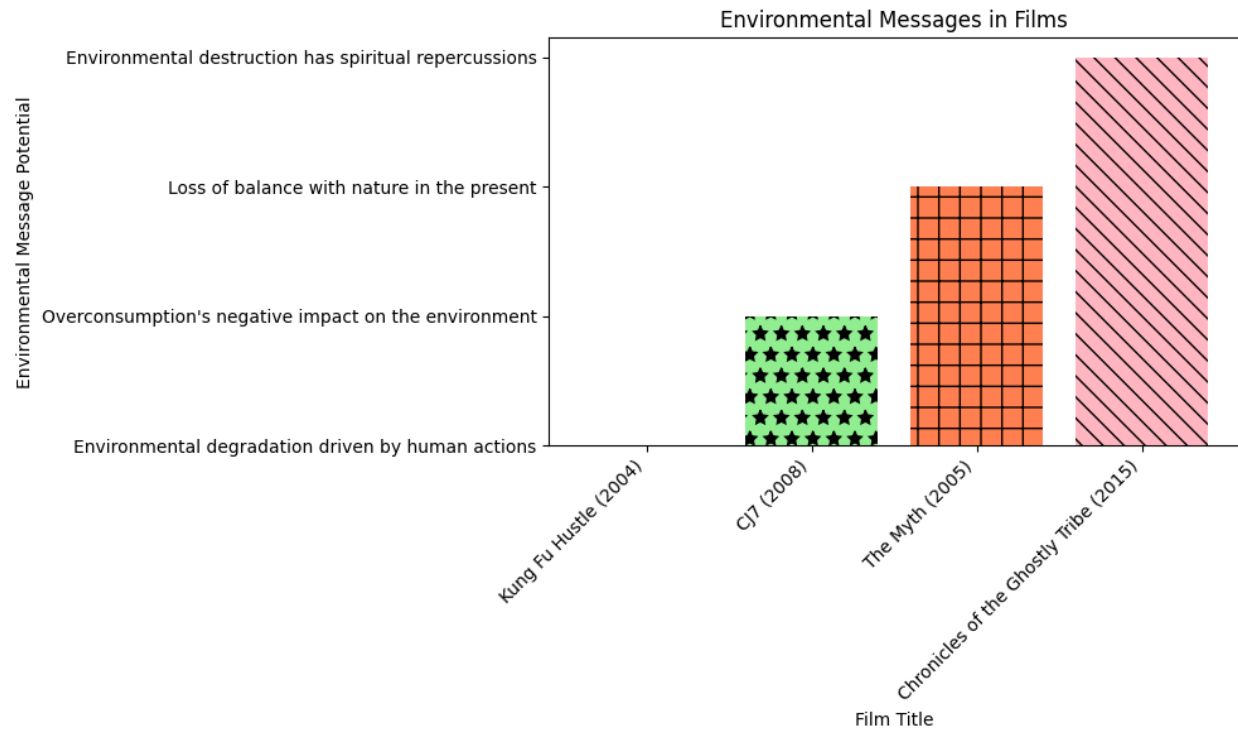
Our CDA analysis identified recurring narrative choices that constructed environmental messages. *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004) contrasted polluted cityscapes with idyllic nature, suggesting environmental degradation as a consequence of human activity. *CJ7* (2008) focused on consumerism, implying its negative impact on the environment. *The Myth* (2005) depicted a past harmony with nature, highlighting the loss of this balance in the present. Finally, *Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe* (2015) linked human disruption of the

natural order with supernatural consequences, suggesting environmental issues have spiritual dimensions (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** Narrative Choices and Environmental Messages

| Film Title                             | Narrative Choice                                                                 | Environmental Message                                  |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Kung Fu Hustle (2004)                  | Contrast between polluted urban slums and idyllic natural landscapes             | Environmental degradation driven by human actions.     |
| CJ7 (2008)                             | Focus on consumerism and desire for material goods                               | Overconsumption's negative impact on the environment.  |
| The Myth (2005)                        | Harmony between humans and nature depicted in the past                           | Loss of balance with nature in the present.            |
| Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe (2015) | Human actions disrupting the natural order and causing supernatural consequences | Environmental destruction has spiritual repercussions. |

In Table 2, in our CDA, visual imagery played a key role in representing the environment. *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004) contrasted smog-filled cities with lush mountains, portraying nature as both a victim and escape from pollution. *CJ7* (2008) depicted mountains of discarded electronics, highlighting the environmental burden of consumerism. *The Myth* (2005) showcased vast, unspoiled landscapes, emphasizing nature's beauty and tranquillity. Conversely, *Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe* (2015) depicted ravaged forests and polluted rivers, underscoring the environmental damage caused by human actions (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5:** A Bar Chart Plot of Environmental Messages Conveyed in Various Films

**Table 2:** Visual Imagery and Environmental Representation

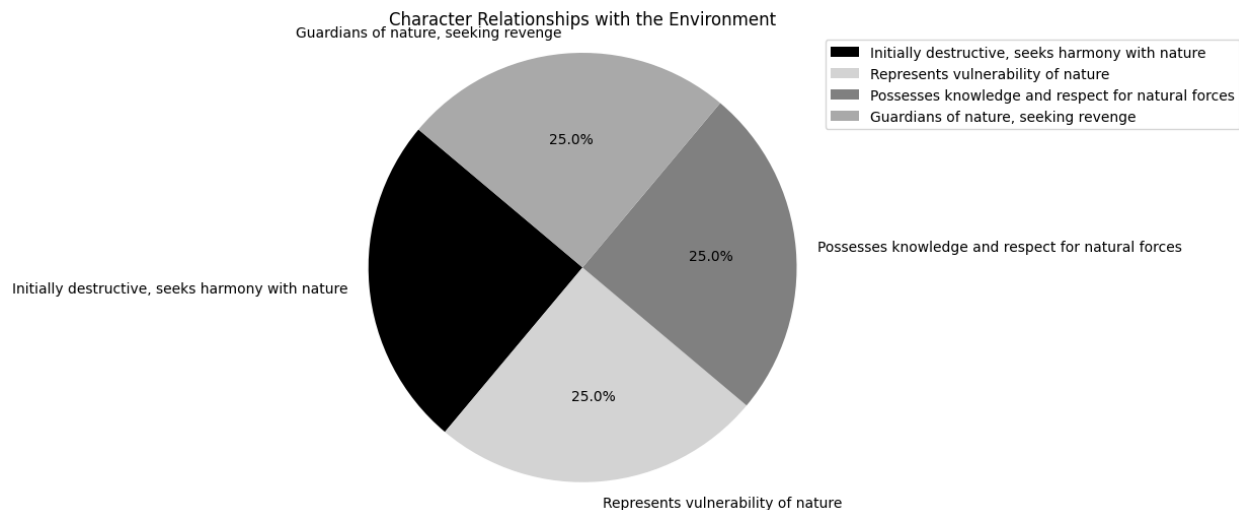
| Film Title                             | Visual Imagery                               | Environmental Representation                               |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kung Fu Hustle (2004)                  | Polluted cityscapes vs. lush green mountains | Nature as both a source of pollution and a refuge from it. |
| CJ7 (2008)                             | Mountains of discarded electronics           | Environmental cost of consumerism.                         |
| The Myth (2005)                        | Vistas of unspoiled natural landscapes       | Nature as a source of beauty and serenity.                 |
| Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe (2015) | Devastated forests and polluted rivers       | Environmental damage caused by humans.                     |

In Table 3 and Figure 6, Our CDA also examined character portrayals in relation to the environment. In Kung Fu Hustle (2004), the initially destructive "Beast" character ultimately seeks harmony with nature. CJ7 (2008) featured the vulnerable alien "CJ7," highlighting the fragility of nature under human influence. The Myth (2005) presented wise characters who possessed knowledge and respect for natural forces. Finally,

Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe (2015) depicted the Tribe as guardians of nature, seeking retribution for its destruction by humans.

**Table 3:** Character Portrayals and Environmental Agency

| Film Title                             | Character                      | Relationship with the Environment                                    |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kung Fu Hustle (2004)                  | The "Beast" character          | Initially destructive, but ultimately seeks harmony with nature.     |
| CJ7 (2008)                             | The dog-like alien "CJ7"       | Represents the vulnerability of nature in the face of human actions. |
| The Myth (2005)                        | Master and Disciple characters | Possess knowledge and respect for natural forces.                    |
| Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe (2015) | The Ghostly Tribe              | Guardians of nature, seeking revenge for its destruction.            |



**Figure 6:** A Pie Chart Distribution of the Character and their relationship with the Environment

**Table 4:** Philosophical Themes and Environmental Representation

| Film                  | Philosophical Theme                       | Environmental Representation                               |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kung Fu Hustle (2004) | Daoism (balance between human and nature) | Contrasted environments (polluted city vs. lush mountains) |

|                                                           |                                                                       |                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                           |                                                                       | highlight the consequences of disrupting this balance                                                            |
| CJ7 (2008)                                                | Consumerism vs. Environmental Sustainability                          | Barren landscape transformed into a consumer paradise showcases the environmental costs of unchecked consumption |
| The Myth (2005)                                           | Harmony with nature as a source of societal well-being (Confucianism) | Lush landscapes and flowing rivers depict nature as essential for human flourishing                              |
| Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe (2015)                    | Anthropocentrism vs. Stewardship (Deep Ecology)                       | Humans disrupting the natural order leads to consequences for all living beings                                  |
| Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame (2010) | Environmental Degradation as a Moral Issue (Ecofeminism)              | Visual effects depicting environmental destruction serve as a call for a more ethical relationship with nature   |
| Kiss the Ground (2021) (Documentary)                      | Intrinsic Value of Nature (Deep Ecology)                              | Sustainable agricultural practices promote the idea that nature has value beyond its utility to humans           |
| Children of Men (2006)                                    | Environmental Crisis and Existentialism                               | Bleak portrayal of the future raises questions about humanity's responsibility towards the environment           |
| Princess Mononoke (1997)                                  | Animism and the Interconnectedness of Life                            | Complex relationship between humans and nature highlights the interconnectedness of all living things            |

In Table 4, our ecocritical film analysis from a philosophical perspective, examining how films represent environmental issues through underlying themes. In Kung Fu Hustle (2004), Daoist principles of balance between humans and nature were explored through contrasting environments. CJ7 (2008) contrasted consumerism with

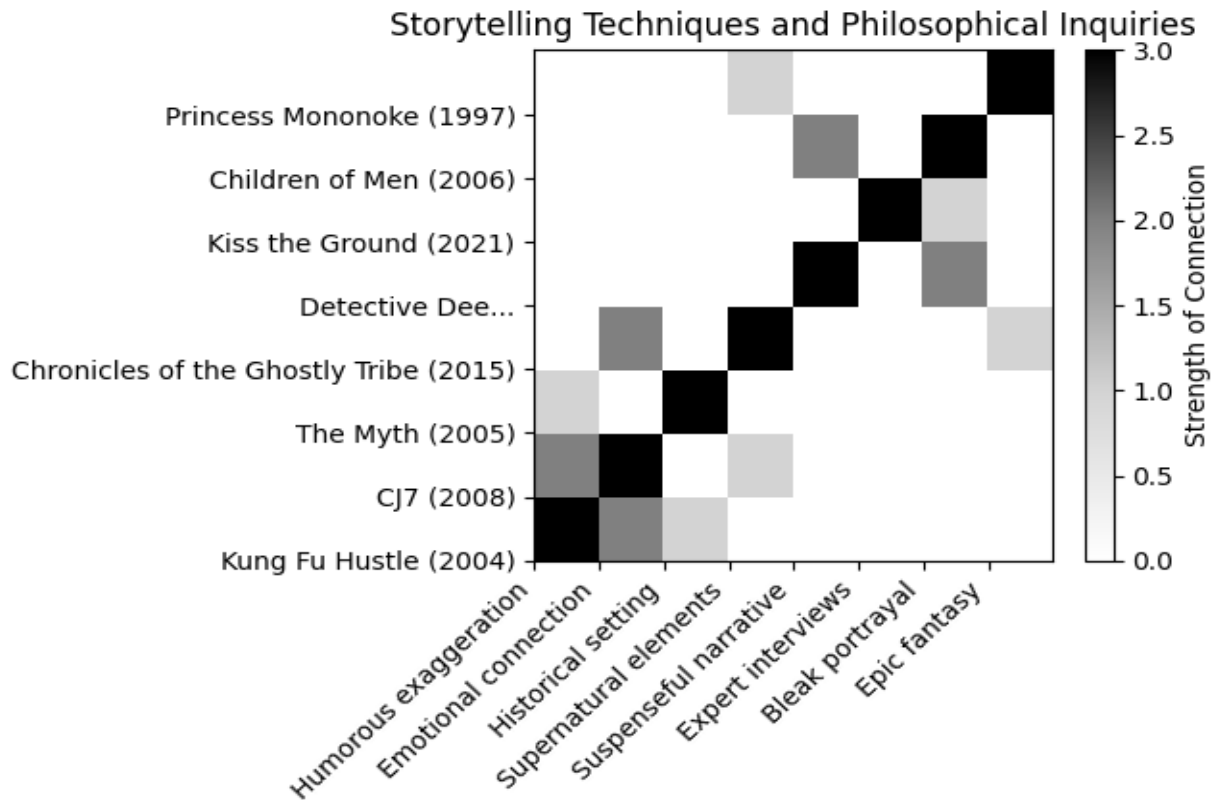
environmental sustainability by visually depicting the devastation caused by unchecked consumption. *The Myth* (2005) aligned with Confucian ideals, showcasing lush landscapes as a source of societal well-being. *Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe* (2015) explored Deep Ecology's critique of anthropocentrism, highlighting the consequences of human disruption. Similarly, *Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame* (2010) aligned with ecofeminism, using visuals to call for a more ethical relationship with nature. *Kiss the Ground* (2021) promoted Deep Ecology's concept of intrinsic value by showcasing sustainable agricultural practices. *Children of Men* (2006) presented a bleak future to provoke existential questions about environmental responsibility. Finally, *Princess Mononoke* (1997) explored animism and the interconnectedness of life, highlighting the complex relationship between humans and the natural world.

**Table 5:** Storytelling Techniques and Philosophical Inquiry

| Film                                                      | Storytelling Technique             | Philosophical Inquiry                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kung Fu Hustle (2004)                                     | Humorous exaggeration              | Satirizes human behaviour to prompt reflection on the consequences of environmental imbalance                              |
| CJ7 (2008)                                                | Emotional connection to characters | Evokes empathy for the environment and encourages viewers to question the value of consumerism                             |
| The Myth (2005)                                           | Historical setting                 | Explores the historical roots of environmental problems and prompts reflection on the need for a course correction         |
| Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe (2015)                    | Supernatural elements              | Creates a sense of wonder about the natural world and raises questions about human responsibility towards its preservation |
| Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame (2010) | Suspenseful narrative              | Draws viewers into a story that highlights the moral implications of environmental degradation                             |

|                                      |                                                 |                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kiss the Ground (2021) (Documentary) | Interviews with experts and real-world examples | Educates viewers about solutions and prompts them to consider the philosophical underpinnings of environmental sustainability |
| Children of Men (2006)               | Bleak portrayal of the future                   | Raises existential questions about humanity's place in the natural world and the consequences of environmental destruction    |
| Princess Mononoke (1997)             | Epic fantasy narrative                          | Explores the ethical implications of human interaction with nature, prompting reflection on the concept of stewardship        |

In Table 5 and Figure 7, Our analysis delved into how storytelling techniques encouraged philosophical inquiry about the environment. *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004) used humour to satirize human actions and prompt reflection on environmental imbalance. *CJ7* (2008) fostered emotional connection to characters, encouraging viewers to question the value of consumerism and empathize with the environment. *The Myth* (2005) explored environmental problems through a historical lens, prompting reflection on the need for change. *Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe* (2015) utilized supernatural elements to create wonder about nature and raise questions about human responsibility. Similarly, *Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame* (2010) drew viewers into a suspenseful narrative that highlighted the moral implications of environmental degradation. *Kiss the Ground* (2021) educated viewers about solutions through interviews and real-world examples, prompting them to consider the philosophical foundations of environmental sustainability. Finally, *Children of Men* (2006) presented a bleak future to raise existential questions about humanity's place in the natural world and the consequences of environmental destruction.



**Figure 7:** A Heatmap of Storytelling techniques and Philosophical Inquiries

**Table 6:** Underlying Ideologies and Environmental Ethics

| Film                                   | Underlying Ideology                      | Environmental Ethic                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kung Fu Hustle (2004)                  | Daoist Harmony                           | Living in balance with nature for the sake of societal and individual well-being                        |
| CJ7 (2008)                             | Critique of Consumerism                  | Environmental stewardship and a simple life connected to nature are preferable to excessive consumption |
| The Myth (2005)                        | Confucian Respect for Nature             | Upholding a philosophy of respect for the natural world to ensure a sustainable future                  |
| Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe (2015) | Deep Ecology's Intrinsic Value of Nature | Recognizing the inherent value of nature, independent of its usefulness to humans                       |

|                                                           |                                             |                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame (2010) | Ecofeminist Environmental Justice           | Challenging the societal structures that contribute to environmental degradation and promoting a more just relationship with nature |
| Kiss the Ground (2021) (Documentary)                      | Regenerative Agriculture and Sustainability | Promoting agricultural practices that restore and maintain the health of ecosystems for future generations                          |
| Children of Men (2006)                                    | Existentialist Responsibility               | Humans bear existential responsibility for the environment and the future of the planet                                             |
| Princess Mononoke (1997)                                  | Animistic Interconnectedness                | Recognizing the interconnectedness of all living beings and fostering a sense of kinship with the natural world                     |

In Table 6, Our analysis revealed how films embedded environmental ethics within their narratives. Kung Fu Hustle (2004) promoted Daoist harmony with nature for societal well-being. CJ7 (2008) critiqued consumerism, advocating for environmental stewardship and a simple life. The Myth (2005) aligned with Confucian respect for nature, emphasizing its importance for a sustainable future. Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe (2015) reflected Deep Ecology's view of nature's intrinsic value. Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame (2010) echoed ecofeminist calls for environmental justice. Kiss the Ground (2021) promoted regenerative agriculture for sustainability. Children of Men (2006) highlighted humanity's existential responsibility for the environment. Princess Mononoke (1997) explored animistic interconnectedness, fostering a sense of kinship with the natural world.

## Discussion

We then analysed the nature-related messages present in different films under study, along with examining how such characters interacted with nature. In it, we assessed those films of like Kung Fu Hustle tackled a more harmonious take on nature while Chronicles of the Ghostly Tribe focused largely upon natural element desiring immediate revenge against mankind. The South Korean Film The Host, features a monster appearing as the porous vulnerability of nature haplessly assaulted by mankind

Mali Verde from "CJ7" This diversity emphasizes the nuanced ways that film can relate to environmental concerns. In fantasy film and media, landscapes set the stage for world-building. Fantasy Vampire movies are often spent a lot to build the configuration. Such stories will play out in places like the wild lands of a border region, dense woods or mountain range filled with beasts and magical kingdoms evoking Chinese traditional housing styles. These grand visual extravaganzas often exist outside the realms of everyday reality. For example, The giant Buddha statue in Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame (2010) is digitally created by using matte-painting techniques for authenticity; Chronicles of Ghostly Tribe (2015), meanwhile features ice caves, de facto ruins, cemeteries other mysterious locales to make a grand spectacle out visual composition.

Many suspenseful and adventurous fantasy films are inspired by print-on-demand literature. These intricate belief systems support the fantastical worlds of these movies. TV serials such as Chinese Paladin (2005) and its sequel play off in fictional past universes with medieval imaginers. And the modern practice of tomb raiding also overlaps with those earlier texts, which may explain why they combine adventure and detective work in books like Candle In The Tomb series or Grave Robbers' Chronicles. These are all productions that show off beautiful locations and the odd remarkable moment as well, typically some sort of dynamic surprise. World-building, destruction and extreme weather are some of the ways in which these artificial landscapes have been created through digital technology. These movies are often labelled as VFX films because they rely heavily on CGI for building the worlds, set extensions and creating characters etc. That's because 21 century of Chinese fantasy media actually contains a rich product system including films, TV and online series, animations, games. Many of these cultural productions also engage in transmedia storytelling, particularly in the context of convergence culture. For instance, with popular television shows or online series turning into feature films (Eternal Love) and vice-versa (Ghost Blows Out the Light). Where the idyllic visions of nature in Chinese fantasy media depart from our real-world trauma through environmental abuse, some fantastical destruction depicted similarly strays far beyond Nixon's (2011) "slow violence" on ecosystems and people. From a conventional Frankfurt School or Marxist perspective, these nonhuman features landscapes and creatures just play as mere instruments that can distract the audience from more environmental issues grounded in political-economical-socio factors here-and-now. For this, many academics dismissed Chinese fantasy media as

vacuous and escapist – not worth critical publication. Yet regarding popular cinema with an ecocritical attitude can create a reformulation of its engagement on film and ecology.

We also delved a little more into how storytelling relates to the existential questions that these movies bring out in us. The interplay that the analysis showed is quite intriguing. In this sense, a film like *Kung Fu Hustle* (where exaggerated humor was used to satirize human nature and make us think of the repercussions of environmental decay) made perfect use of visual metaphor. The documentary “Kiss the Ground,” through experts and bioremediation examples, taught viewers about sustainable solutions while forcing them to examine some of the philosophies underpinning environmental responsibility. “Such results point to the dominant impact of storytelling techniques in defining audience relationships with environmental narratives. Drawing extensively on VFX, the landscapes of Chinese fantasy media can be thought of as “animist landscapes” in Warner’s (2014) parlance. From the Latin word *anima*, meaning soul, ancestral belief in spiritual beings and that nature herself is alive (animism). Why these “animist landscapes” are causing such confusion for our ideas of nature, materiality and the non-human as passive or inert is immediately perceivable. Rather, materialities take on the role of subject-adjudicated and enacted actors in their world. The land of fairy tales is an example says Warner, calling it “where animals speak, stones roll” (2014). At the same time, Chinese fantasy worlds are frequently constructed with animistic worldviews inherited from its long tradition of folklore and classical literature in which landscapes — including forts, manor houses, ruins marshes....— they themselves appear as active agents rather than background.

Along the lines of what recent scholarly theorization sees as dynamic, living and agential all partakes in Chinese fantasy media like traditional fairy tales. Jane Bennett’s work is probably the main example of this, celebrating the dynamic ‘vitality’ of non-human and material life. Bennett (2010) asks us to ask “of what can these other things do, this capacity of things — edibles commodities storms nod such filtered not active only block or bot dampen but act as quasi-agents of formal material energies with trajectory and propensities and tendencies across the board. Moreover, as Rosemary J. Jolly and Alexander Fyfe have suggested (Jolly & Fyfe 2018), to study animism post-colonially is not merely about developing a particular ‘theory’ of materiality but instead entails charting different forms this thing we call the “material” takes across differing contexts — building on previous insights without disregarding what has been learned. Our

interest in film as an environmental medium sets us apart from vitalist philosophies that hold nature and film to be identical, ontologically. While we do not take issue with this idea of "cinematic nature" as a question itself regarding film aesthetics, it strikes us that this cannot explain every aspect. Cinema does not merely duplicate an original state of nature, just as Adorno himself suggested in reference to Benjamin when he spoke about the experience of a "natural aura". This aura — in Benjamin's words, "the original appearance of a distance" between subject and object, something others identify as rooted back to his earliest hashish experiments (Guan & O'Brien 2020). Drawing on Antonio Somaini, we acknowledge the changes of media theory in Benjamin's writing. His ideas mediate 19th and early-20-century environment, milieu, Stimmung, aura theories of the books as well discussions with reference to such new media & mass reproduction technologies. For this environment-produced experience photography as well as film was experienced to be important representations. It extended an evolution of the natural and historical, psychic and somatic soft systems as science-system-athletic knowledge simultaneously (Guan & O'Brien 2020).

This broader contemporary life-philosophical tendency, which would amiably lend Habermas a certain *droit du seigneur*, to dismiss sociotechnical conditions with an imperious wave of the philosophical hand, finds itself unexpectedly unmasked by Gertrud Koch (2009). Calling film a "formation-experiment," where subject and object mutually produced each other by perceptual means cuts diagonally through lines we like not to see crossed in what is really going on. According to Koch, aesthetics is situated between the two poles of absolute subjectivity and objectivity: it cannot be overly materialist or immaterialist (Haraway 2016). Environmental film theory discourse often references Siegfried Kracauer, whose work emphasises the links between cinema and 'physical reality'. Yet to identify Kracauer as an ecological thinker necessitates revisiting his "realist" film theory. This theory mixes together an array of philosophical keywords: 'nature,' 'matter,' life, and reality (Fay 2018). As an expert on Kracauer within the Frankfurt School tradition, Koch is certainly well-equipped to tease out some of the philosophical debts in his later film writing. In this dossier, she contributes a section on the influence of Alfred Whitehead's process philosophy on Kracauer and his understanding that film is medium of physical reality.

Koch contends that Kracauer revives the concept of reality with Whitehead. In doing so, he supplants the ancient philosophical dichotomy of "first nature" (nature) and "second nature" (culture)—which must be liberated from its false opposition to reveal

an ecological domain. This domain concerns the specific substantiality of objects, mental operations and social technological interventions. Still, Koch is right to point out that Kracauer deviates from Whitehead on the location of aesthetic reflection in cinema. As Guan and O'Brien (2020) argue, this reflection mediates how we experience the material world — upon which is built a basis for critical understanding and political transformation. Antonio Somaini *materialité, mais matière de plein droit*. In the film Somaini goes on to focus specifically on László Moholy-Nagy and his thought regarding light as a means of artistic expression. The 1920s spirit of Moholy-Nagy's convictions about photography, film and social reform saw from stasis to motion come true when he argued in favour for a shift constantly saying that by embracing transparency over opaqueness the materials will start fading towards what Paul Virilio calls state of progressive dematerialization. Somaini argues, for instance, that in his writings and experiments Moholy-Nagy anticipates postwar and contemporary trends—circa 2018—in art as well as experimental film engaging more recent contributors to this dossier such Georgina Evans or the realist filmmaker Selmin Kara. According to Somaini, Moholy-Nagy carries the film's relationship with light — which is implicit in its production and reception process — further than any others. He imagined light projections that would disappear the technological devices and screen, blending them into the environment itself (Guan & O'Brien 2020).

Current "eco-film studies" often overlook past theoretical and aesthetic explorations of nature within film. This project aims to revitalize these neglected traditions and practices while examining how cinema, aesthetics, and the material world interact in new ways (Morgan, 2013). The Frankfurt School provides a compelling model for rethinking natural beauty in film theory. While ecology is undeniably crucial for contemporary cultural practices, it cannot be a catch-all solution. As editors, we recognize a potential danger: the urgency of ecological critiques might lead to a narrow focus on the present, neglecting the rich history of moving images, their connection to nature, and the critical potential of aesthetic experience (Morgan, 2013). The concept of nature predates ecology in the arts and humanities. In the face of pressing ecological crises, this intellectual history offers valuable resources, not burdens Benjamin, Adorno, and Kracauer don't endorse a simplistic idea of natural beauty. Instead, they emphasize art's ability to historicize nature, revealing its political aspects (Morgan, 2013). While their concept of technology as "second nature" is often critical, they also acknowledge the possibility of technologically enhanced cinematic experiences that evoke a sense of

natural beauty. Hansen describes this as Adorno's view of nature as a potential source of happiness, "a promise that art seeks to keep" (Guan & O'Brien, 2020). Kracauer's famous concept of photography as a "go-for-broke game of the historical process" aligns with this view. For him, film plays a similar game, rearranging "disjointed nature" (Guan & O'Brien, 2020). Photography embodied the alienation of matter, while film offered the potential to "stir up the elements of nature" into new forms. Similarly, Adorno argues that film doesn't simply recreate the external world, but rather the subjective realm of images. It's this objective representation of subjective experience that he connects to film's aesthetic beauty akin to nature. Therefore, Benjamin's "blue flower" might not symbolize a nostalgic yearning for a romanticized nature. Instead, it could represent hope for technology's potential to be reappropriated for a transformative struggle against predetermined natural outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

Our analysis explored environmental portrayals and narrative strategies in films. We identified diverse character-environment relationships, ranging from initial destruction to respect and guardianship. Storytelling techniques like humour, emotional connection, and historical settings were linked to philosophical inquiries about environmental imbalance, consumerism, and sustainability. Black and white visualizations effectively communicated these findings. Our study underscores the potential of films to engage audiences with environmental issues and prompt critical reflection on humanity's relationship with the natural world. Our study contributes to a deeper understanding of how films portray environmental themes and the philosophical questions they raise. By analysing the relationship between characters and the environment, as well as the storytelling techniques employed, the study sheds light on the various ways filmmakers engage audiences with environmental issues. These findings can be valuable for filmmakers seeking to create impactful environmental narratives, as well as for educators and scholars interested in the intersection of film, storytelling, and environmental awareness.

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