

Article

Nomadic Life on the Steppes: An Ecocinematic Exploration of *Tulpan* and *Cave of the Yellow Dog*

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Abstract: Ecocinema: (1) analyzes the role of visual media in responding to the environmental crisis; (2) has explicit interest in environmental justice; (3) includes a variety of genres and modes of production; (4) informs viewers of issues of ecological importance; (5) promotes ecocentric ways of framing the world; and (6) has an activist agenda. Ecocinema examines films produced by/with historically marginalized communities underrepresented in film. Using Ecocinema and Fourth Cinema (Barclay), I examined two fictional films featuring nomadic peoples of the Central Asian Steppes whose culture and ecologically low impact lifestyle are threatened and fragile in the global order. *Tulpan*, a 2008 Kazakh/Russian production by Kazakh-born Sergei Dvortsevov, tells the story of Asa, a young Kazakh man, returning to his home in the Steppes to establish himself as a shepherd with his own flock. *Tulpan* features the long takes and slow pacing needed to “retrain the perception” of viewers. *Tulpan*’s biocentric focus on landscape and animals is equivalent to the focus on the human, reconsidering the human/non-human relationship. *Tulpan* shows one young man dreaming of a meaningful life rooted in his cultural traditions, struggling to locate himself within contemporary economic, political and cultural realities in a region underrepresented in world film. *The Cave of the Yellow Dog*, 2005, by Mongolian filmmaker Byambasuren Davaa, tells the story of a Mongolian nomadic family. Davaa, similar to Dvortsevov, works in documentary and fictional films, uses professional and non-professional actors, and relies on Western funding to make her films. These two films suggest that non-commercial fictional films are an important vehicle for addressing global environmental concerns as they present stories of marginalized people and help us imagine solutions to global problems.

Keywords: ecocinema; environmental justice; Kazakhstan; nomads; Fourth Cinema; Dvortsevov; Davaa

The Environmental Humanities inhabit a difficult space of simultaneous critique and action. Scholarship in this field is grounded in an important tension between, on the one hand, the common critical focus of the humanities in ‘unsettling’ dominant narratives, and on the other, the dire need for thoughtful and constructive practice in these dark times . . . this dual imperative for critique and action. (Emily O’Gorman and Kate Wright *The Living Lexicon for the Environmental Humanities*)

Ecocriticism, as an academic response to the environmental crisis that threatens all life on the planet, is a space of critique of cultural texts and practices. Equally important, ecocriticism seeks to involve people in action for social and environmental justice. That is, ecocriticism, as part of the growing field of the environmental humanities, not only raises questions of meaning, value, responsibility, representation and purpose in our time of rapid and escalating anthropogenic change, but also carries with it the challenge to take action to address those changes.

Ecocinema, emerging from within ecocriticism, analyzes the particular role of visual media in exploring the impact and meaning of human habitation on our planet. Ecocinema has an explicit

interest in environmental justice, includes a wide variety of genres and modes of production, seeks to inform viewers of issues of ecological importance, promotes ecocentric ways of framing the world, and has an activist agenda (MacDonald 2013, pp. 17–41).

Recognizing the ubiquitous nature of visual media and therefore their impact on people's lives, Pietari Kaapa and Tommy Gustafsson (Kaapa and Gustafsson 2013), in their introduction to the volume *Transnational Ecocinema*, call for an ecocinema that is firmly rooted in the "the participatory potential of cinema in ecological debates" (p. 6). Ecocinema must be an activist enterprise that goes beyond scholarship and ideological political readings of texts. "After all," they ask, "what type of contribution can a subjective reading of a text ultimately have?"

In this paper, I focus on an ecocinematic reading of *Tulpan* (2008), a Kazakh/Russian feature film, written and directed by Sergei Dvortsevov, and also briefly extend my considerations to *The Cave of the Yellow Dog* (2005), a Mongolian/German feature by Mongolian filmmaker Byambasuren Davaa. Both films bring the stories of the pastoral peoples of the Central Asian steppes to the big screen, a place where they have been sparsely represented, in particular to the world audience that both these films reached. Both films, by their very choice of subject matter, challenge dominant media patterns.

Ecocinema, given its concern for environmental justice, invites discussions of films produced by and with communities who have been historically marginalized and "Othered" by mainstream Hollywood and/or other national cinemas. Ecocinema values the lives of marginalized people whose culture and ecologically low-impact lifestyle are increasingly threatened and fragile in the global economy, but whose voices and experience are crucial to the debate about the fate of our shared planet. Ecocinema shares this concern with Fourth Cinema, also referred to as Indigenous Cinema, a term developed by Maori filmmaker Barry Barclay in 2004 to describe cinema made by indigenous peoples for indigenous peoples. Fourth Cinema is not national cinema, but rather focuses on indigenous peoples who live with multiple and often conflicting identities within modern nation states. Produced across the globe, from New Zealand and Australia to Finland and, with strong presence in Latin America, the U.S. and Canada, Fourth Cinema is generally low-budget and non-commercial, seeks new ways of presenting narratives that honor indigenous cultural practices and story-telling forms, privileges the indigenous gaze and indigenous audiences, centralizes indigenous experience in its diverse dimensions, and, directly or not, challenges national mainstream screen culture, its institutions and aesthetics. It is in constant dialogue with contemporary and historical film representations of indigenous peoples (Pramaggiore and Wallis 2011, p. 361)

Tulpan and *The Cave of the Yellow Dog* offer possible responses to the questions that both ecocinema and Fourth Cinema raise. What is the role of film in addressing global environmental concerns? How do the stories of marginalized people help us understand our current planetary dilemma? Who gets to tell these stories? How is cinematic language best used to tell these stories? Do indigenous communities have the means to tell their own stories? Does fiction help us imagine solutions to global problems in a way documentary might not? How might cinema work to resist local, national, and global politics of disenfranchisement?

Both films break from mainstream commercial film in content, production methods, narrative structure and cinematography. Thus, they have a counterhegemonic potential to "unsettle dominant narratives" (O'Gorman and Wright n.d.) in both content and form, especially if they are understood fully within the global social, economic and political context that they inhabit. The extent to which they can fulfill the other challenge of ecocinema, to engage people in action, is not as immediately apparent. Both were well received in the West and had (limited) theatrical distribution, including online via Netflix, and were not viewed as controversial or confrontational. Critics reviewed both films positively and *The Cave of the Yellow Dog* in particular was promoted as great family entertainment. However, it is precisely the insight of ecocinema, in its connecting of the material to the representational, that can illuminate how these films, while heartwarming and uncontroversial, and of broad appeal in the art and family film market, also offer a deep critique of the global order, of environmental injustice, and the silencing and marginalizing of peoples deemed dispensable by global capitalism. Here, I heed

the words of Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the first prominent ecocritical voices, who links theory to practice and writes of the responsibility of those in academia to use their positions within the educational system to participate in and motivate their students to be agents for change:

... Ecocriticism expands the notion of “the world” to include the entire ecosphere. If we agree with Barry Commoner’s first law of ecology, that “Everything is connected to everything else,” we must conclude that literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter, and ideas interact . . . Most ecocritical work shares a common motivation: the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet’s basic life support systems. This awareness sparks a sincere desire to contribute to environmental restoration, not just in our spare time, but from within our capacity as professors of literature. (Glotfelty 1994, ASLE Position Papers on What is Ecocriticism)

Tulpan, the first full-length feature by Kazakh-born Russian documentary, an Sergei Dvortsevov tells the story of Asa, a young Kazakh man who yearns to continue the longstanding but threatened nomadic herding traditions of his people despite the overwhelming circumstances that thwart his desires. Asa returns from the Russian Navy to reestablish himself in his home in the Betpak Dala region of the Kazakh Steppes, also known as “the Hunger Steppe,” a sparsely populated, wind-blown cold treeless desert that averages 4–6 inches of rainfall a year. Asa lives with his sister Samal, her husband Ondas, an experienced herdsman, and their three children, sharing the intimacy of their life in a crowded yurt, while he attempts to establish himself as a shepherd with his own flock. To do this, he must find a wife, and sets out to court Tulpan (Russian for “Tulip”) the only marriageable woman for miles. Tulpan rejects Asa, preferring a move to the city to continue her studies over marriage. However, Asa, who was stationed on Sakhalin Island and who has sailed the seas and seen a bit of the larger world, is committed to fulfilling his dream of living a traditional nomadic life underneath the “beautiful Kazakh sky.” He rejects the possibilities of going to live in the city, despite the encouragement of his friend, Boni, who wants them to leave together to find an urban life he imagines will be full of possibilities, including the large-breasted seductive women that line the pages of the glossy Western magazines that Boni loves. Asa continues in pursuit of Tulpan, trying to win her over and convince her elderly, stalwart parents to agree to the match, while simultaneously trying to prove to his brother-in-law that he is a competent Kazakh herdsman.

While this human story unfolds, the screen is filled with the sights and sounds of everyday life of the nomads who live in this harsh, remote region of the globe, together with a collection of bleating sheep, camels, donkeys and horses. Life is not easy for the humans and animals who populate this film in equal measure, and indeed, one of the central tensions that drives the narrative of *Tulpan* is the rash of stillborn lambs in Ondas’ flock, which causes great anguish and threatens the family’s existence. Samal and Ondas repeatedly ask the regional Boss, a dour, unsmiling man, for permission and assistance to move to new grazing lands, but are unable to secure a commitment. Unsure of the cause of the flock’s trouble, and unable to prevent new stillbirths, Ondas, tense and unsmiling, repeatedly rebukes Asa and mocks him for his lack of competence as a herder. Asa’s two immediate goals are inextricably linked: court and wed Tulpan, and show that he can succeed as head of his own flock. Achieving these two goals will allow him to have the life he desires.

Tulpan, while not an explicitly environmentalist film, clearly fits the definition of an environmental text as established by literary critic Lawrence Buell in his landmark work, *The Environmental Imagination*. For Buell, a fictional work with an environmental orientation contains four characteristics, and the story that develops in *Tulpan* contains all of them. (1) In *Tulpan*, the nonhuman world is not mere “framing device” or backdrop for human action but rather the human and non-human are inextricably linked and neither can be understood without the other. (2) With its concern for the suffering of Ondas’ sheep, *Tulpan* places the interests of the animals on a par with those of humans—in fact, so engaging are the animals on screen that Dvortsevov worried that they would upstage the humans. (3) Tulpan clearly asserts that humans have ethical responsibility and accountability toward the environment

and the nonhuman sphere. In a dramatic scene towards the film's end, Asa successfully helps in the birth of a live sheep, and literally breathes life into its mouth. This scene represents a pivotal moment for Asa, who is portrayed as somewhat of a fool in the film's opening scene when he attempts to court Tulpan by telling her parents tall-tales about his struggle with a man-eating octopus, and later is unable to help in the birth of a sickly lamb, filled with revulsion at Ondas' efforts to resuscitate the dying animal, still covered in afterbirth. By film's end, when he finds himself alone on the steppe with a sheep in labor, and must come to her assistance, he does so with joy and then love for the animal and its newborn and thus finally sees himself in a reciprocal relationship with the animal world where his well-being is not possible without theirs. (4) The film hints at the social, political and historical nature of the environmental degradation that underlies the crisis of Ondas' flock, that is, as Buell states, there is a "sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant . . . at least implicit in the text" (Buell 1995, pp. 7–8).

The visual element of *Tulpan* also offers fertile ground for a specifically ecocinematic analysis. Tulpan's cinematography (long takes, slow pacing, and hand-held shots, and actual rather than staged footage) are key elements of the ecocinematic imperative to retrain the perception of viewers whose spectatorship has been shaped primarily by commercial films—the accelerated consumption of images to parallel the accelerated consumption of material goods in our culture (MacDonald 2013, pp. 19–20). Dvortsevov trained as a documentarian at the Moscow Film School, and his four documentaries won him critical acclaim. His roots in observational cinema are apparent in *Tulpan*, as the film requires patience and careful attention on the part of the audience. However, *Tulpan* is decidedly a fictional film. Dvortsevov, who grew up in Kazakhstan, wrote the script—even though the film uses footage that could not be scripted, such as dust and thunder storms, and the movements of herds of animals across the steppes—and sought out professional actors for the lead roles, and lived for months on location with the people he filmed helping them prepare for their roles.

Tulpan represents Dvortsevov's decision to leave documentary. He explains his decision to move to fiction as a moral choice. Central to this concern is the relationship between director and subject in documentary, which he has described as the director "becoming a vampire" (Guardian). In a 2009 interview in *Cinema Scope*, he questions the use of a subject's life for a director's purpose, stating "it was becoming more and more difficult to make documentaries the way I do, spending months living with people, because it was like making art out of private lives and real drama, real tragedy. I think that in a way, documentary is an absurd genre. The worse it gets for the characters, the better it gets for the director (Dvortsevov 2009b)."

Kazakhstan certainly has been, and continues to be, a place of many tragedies. Dvortsevov, in the scant 100 min of *Tulpan*, indirectly, and without explanation or any overt activist agenda, asks us to consider its characters within the framework of their circumstances, which include no small number of the world's most challenging problems: poverty, erosion and environmental degradation, depopulation, disintegrating families, women's desires and struggles for education and autonomy within patriarchal structures, the urban/rural divide, the relationship of center/periphery, the robber baron capitalism that took hold in the former Soviet republics and its subsequent impoverishment of the masses, the continued ravaging of the environment, the disparities of wealth caused by the privatization of the oil industry, the heavy-handed rule of Nursultan Nazarbayev, the domination of Western media, the desire of new post-Soviet nations to establish themselves on the world scene, and the struggle of local peoples to retain their own language, culture and lifestyles.

Contemporary Kazakhstan has significant troubles that must be understood within a long history of empire and colonialism. It is a place shaped by an imperialist agenda that goes back to Tsarist Russia and was extended through Soviet times. Peter the Great began a policy of Russification, encouraging Russian and ethnic Germans to move to Kazakhstan. Tsarist and Soviet regimes used Kazakhstan as a place of exile—Trotsky was exiled by Stalin to the capital, Alma Ata in 1928. Kazakhstan was the victim of some of the Soviet Union's worst environmental experiments such as the one that led to the devastating pollution and subsequent draining of the Aral Sea by massive irrigation in order to ensure

cotton production in Uzbekistan. It gained its independence in 1991, the last Soviet Republic to do so. Radioactive contamination from Soviet nuclear testing continues to cause significant health and environmental problems. Post-independence, the privatization of the oil industry created a class of extremely wealthy oil barons but led to mass impoverishment and great disparities in wealth. Large segments of the population, especially those of Russian and German heritage, have left the country, which lost at least one million of a 16 million population in the first years following independence. Young people face massive unemployment, even in the cities to which they have fled from the remote regions. Mass plowing in the Soviet era has left a legacy of erosion—and the increased demand for meat led to overgrazing, loss of pastureland, and subsequent desertification in at least 2/3 of the Steppes. ([Dryland Degradation in Kazakhstan](#). n.d, University of Maryland Land Change/Land Use Program).

Kazakhstan is a place that has been shaped by what literary scholar Rob Nixon has characterized as “slow violence . . . a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is not viewed as violence at all . . . violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales.” (p. 2) For Nixon, this slow violence has resulted in peoples who, due to the contamination of their land and the loss of their lifestyle, are actually displaced without moving—an apt description of the cast of characters in *Tulpan* who are the few remaining on the steppes trying to eke out a living in a lifestyle for which the global economy no longer has room ([Nixon 2011](#)).

Without making an overt political statement we see the consequences of this slow violence in myriad ways both large and small throughout the film. The dead bodies of stillborn lambs (actual, not staged footage) are a constant reminder of the precariousness of the family’s ability to make a living. Their material circumstances are sparse, with few possessions. They sleep on blankets on the floor of their yurt. The youngest child, a toddler, plays with a stick and a live turtle as toys. Nothing is wasted, no food, no tea, no water. Samal, the mother of three young children, washes dishes using only a few drops of water and bathes her young son with a wet rag while he stands in a basin containing no visible extra water. Samal treasures a few pieces of candy for her children, brought by Boni, that have fallen in the dust and are wiped clean on her dress. The absence of youth (for Asa, lamentably, women of marriageable age) speaks of a dying lifestyle. Even the dust storm, a mini-tornado captured by the film’s careful, patient camerawork and much-lauded image, is in reality likely to contain toxic agricultural chemicals, a legacy blown in from the ruined lands where Soviet industrial agriculture grew cotton. *Tulpan* is set in one of the “sacrifice zones where it is considered acceptable to discount people and poison the earth.” ([Adamson 2001](#), p. 182).

Thus, *Tulpan*, set in a region of the world barely represented in film, far from the gaze of mainstream film audiences, carries with it an implicit critique of a global order that deems some peoples and lifestyles as irrelevant and unimportant. However, although the lives of its characters are difficult and filled with hard labor, worry, and a merciless climate, *Tulpan* is an upbeat and humorous film. This upbeat and humorous tone, given the various crises the family is experiencing, might seem surprising, but it also points to the ways in which fictional texts, works of the imagination, can move us beyond the current order and imagine that life can be different. Dvortsevov offers a fictional rendition of contemporary Kazakhstan that does not hide the deep problems it faces. However, by creating Asa, whose desires to stay in rural Kazakhstan stand in stark contrast to the many who are in fact moving to the city and abandoning the countryside, who insists on his right to live in a traditional life on the steppes, Dvortsevov invites us to imagine a Kazakhstan, and, in a larger sense, a world, that indeed honors and has room for nomadic people. *Tulpan* neither glorifies nor denigrates life in this region of the world, but instead shows us how one young man, with his dreams and desires for a meaningful and productive life rooted in his culture and traditions, struggles against overwhelming odds to locate himself within contemporary economic, political and cultural realities. *Tulpan* thus offers itself as an excellent example of the possibilities of fictional film to help us reimagine the world.

Literary critic Joni Adamson writes “if . . . the environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination, then writers, teachers, environmentalists, and literary and cultural critics have a key role to play in these conversations and debates” (184). An ecocinematic reading of *Tulpan* reveals the concerns of its makers for insisting that the marginalized peoples of the steppes be recognized and acknowledged and also celebrated rather than remain anonymous. *Tulpan* asserts their right to live in their traditional lifestyle, even though it is ill-suited to the forces of the capitalist market.

The Cave of the Yellow Dog, the second feature of Mongolian filmmaker Byambasuren Davaa, also presents the story of a nomadic family. The Batchuluun family—mother, father, two daughters and a toddler son—lives in a one room *ger* on the sparsely populated grasslands of Western Mongolia. Similar to the family in *Tulpan*, the pastoral Batchuluuns represent a lifestyle that is marginal and under threat of disappearing, a point the film makes more than once. They are by modern economic measures poor, and even though they work constantly, they have few material possessions outside of their livestock.

The Cave of the Yellow Dog is a blend of fiction and documentary, and the Batchuluun family actually plays itself in this hybrid film. The storyline concerns the oldest daughter, six year-old Nansal, who finds a stray dog in a cave while out collecting the dung that her family uses for fuel. Nansal falls in love with the dog and brings him home. Her father does not want the dog, as he fears that it is a stray who has been running with wolves who might be following his trail and thus would discover the family’s herd. This problem of stray dogs running with wolves is noted at the beginning of the film, when we see several of the Batchuluun’s sheep lying dead in the pasture, gutted. Through a conversation between the father and neighboring herders, we learn that many of the people who have gone to make their lives in the city have left their dogs behind, and these dogs have begun to come together with their wild brethren.

Nansal, who at 6 is already an independent herder able to ride on horseback to take the cattle to a distant pasture by herself, and who lives apart from her family in town at a school during the winter months, will not be deterred from keeping her dog, Zochor. By film’s end, Zochor has proved his worth by saving the youngest child from predators. As the story comes to a close, the family is leaving their summer home, hauling their possessions in wooden-wheeled carts to their new location, Zochor now fully accepted and welcomed by all.

There are many parallels between *The Cave of the Yellow Dog* and *Tulpan*. The family members, despite their difficult material circumstances, value their traditions, their life of hard labor and the harsh physical environment they inhabit. In both films, the families are aware of the option of moving to the city and trying to find an easier life, but resist. In both families, worries over the animals drive the narrative. The children are hardworking and independent. The tensions between modernity and tradition are evident throughout the films and a constant presence in myriad ways. In *The Cave of the Yellow Dog*, the father makes a trip to town and brings home a cheap plastic ladle for soup that the mother views skeptically. Later, the ladle ends up melting in a pot of hot soup, almost setting a fire in the *ger*. The father also brings home a small pink wind-up stuffed dog that wiggles and barks, the family’s first actual toy, to the children’s fascination, while the real dog, Zochor, waits outside, hidden from the father. In *Tulpan*, traditional Kazakh songs sung by the mother and daughter contrast with the Boni’s repeated playing of a recording of the reggae song (in English) “Rivers of Babylon” as he rides his dilapidated jeep around the steppe. Political and cultural news from the outside world makes its way into the yurt via broadcasts, many of them in Russian, not Kazakh, on a small, dilapidated radio. Later, they are recited by the oldest son to the father when he comes home to the yurt when the day’s chores are over. Political news also reaches the family in the final scene of *The Cave of the Yellow Dog* via radio as a truck (the only one in the film) passes them as they head for their new home, possessions in tow, a news program blasting the message urging people to “make the right decision in the upcoming elections.” Both films end with images of the families on the move, riding horses and guiding their livestock to the next place where they will set their yurt and *ger*, images that

underscore the uncertainty and unresolved future that they, and all pastoral peoples in the current global order face. As in these people's actual lives, there is no easy closure to either narrative.

Both directors approached filming in the same way as well. The film crews spent months living with nomadic families, and both directors, while working from a plotted script, were also committed to working with found footage that required constant attentiveness and patience. They knew that with animals, weather and children, there was much that would happen that they had to be ready to capture when the opportunities presented themselves. As Davaa notes, "You can't have a plan because the nomadic way of life is based on the sun, the weather, the clouds and the wind. They plan their day according to the weather they see in the morning."

In interviews, both directors have stated that they sought to create a film that did not direct audiences into any specific message. Dvortsevov sought to create a simple story using simple film language. He avoided cutting, favoring instead long takes and deliberately sought a slow tempo which requires patience on the part of viewers. Dvortsevov states, "the audience will see the story as they choose."

For Davaa, it is important the audience leave the film with a respect for nature. In a press kit interview, she states "I wanted to put this way of life on film because it is about to disappear. As long as there are genuine nomads still out there, I wanted them to tell their story. With this movie, I was giving them the chance to tell the story of the nomads' way of life in their own words."

While neither director claims to be taking a political stand in making these films, the choice to create stories that reveal the lives of marginalized people nonetheless stands as a challenge to the commercial, homogenizing and consumption driven narratives that mainstream cinema sells. *Tulpan* asks audiences to view the world from the perspective of a young Kazakh mother whose world is crumbling because her husband and her brother will not live together peacefully in their crowded yurt while their herd is dying. *The Cave of the Yellow Dog* asks audiences to pay patient attention while a young Mongolian mother sews a silk *deel* for her oldest daughter to return to school, while calmly talking to her youngest daughter about why her sister must go away. Though the mother is calm, she is facing a wrenching dilemma—she supports her daughter getting an education, yet, by sending her daughter away to school, she is increasing the likelihood that her daughter will eventually move to the city, leaving her family and their herding lifestyle behind. These are not the faces audiences usually see on the big screen, nor the stories they are accustomed to following, nor the problems they are used to contemplating. Dvortsevov and Davaa, by bringing these stories to the big screen with patient careful attention to the smallest details of their daily lives, are recognizing the right of the struggling and marginalized pastoral people of Central Asia to exist and to live where and in the way that they choose.

Rob Shields in his work on *Places in the Margin* (Alternative Geographies of Modernity) examines how place functions as a marker of identity. Places or regions mean something only in relation to other places as part of a constellation of meanings. Social spatialization is a process of cultural production that creates "place-images" that are charged with emotional content, mythical meanings, community symbolism, historical significance. They are often oversimplified, stereotyped, labeled, dichotomized—"center-margins, near-far, civilized-natural"—and the center is valued as superior. The social "other" of the marginal and lower culture is disparaged in the official discourse of dominant culture and central power. Shields' work illuminates why the narratives of *Tulpan* and *Cave of the Yellow Dog* are important. The Kazakh Hunger Steppe and the grasslands of Western Mongolia are unvalued and largely unknown places in the world in every sense, including the screen. However, the racist and colonialist legacy and the forces of neoliberal globalization that have worked to degrade the land and eliminate the lifestyles of their inhabitants actually implicate the audiences viewing the film, though they most likely do not recognize that (Shields 2016).

Christine Ramsay, in an article in *Indigenous Screen Cultures in Canada*, cites Canadian scholar Marian Bredin, writing about Indigenous media in Canada, argues for a cinema that represents "an effort to understand local cultures, local meanings and symbolic processes without losing sight of

macro-processes of economic exploitation and historical change.” (qtd. In (Ramsay 2010, p. 110) For Bredin, people who call marginal (in the global economy) places home must use the media to vocalize their “demand for a future (quoted in (Ramsay 2010, p. 110).”

It is the task of scholars, critics, teachers and activists, in classrooms and film festivals and community screenings, to take the work of these filmmakers and demonstrate how their films can be used to advocate for social and environmental justice. Ecocinema scholars and critics know the potential importance and specific role of cinema within the movements around the world that seek social change and environmental justice. Film, as both art and a medium of communication, has great potential to reach broad masses of viewers around the world and become a voice in movements that seek environmental justice and offer a path towards a possible future.

Adrian Ivakhiv (Ivakhiv 2008) calls for an expansive form of ecocinematic criticism that works towards this challenge:

A holistic ecocinecriticism would closely analyze not only the representations found in a film but the telling of the film itself—its discursive and narrative structure, its intertextual relations with the larger world, its capacities for extending or transforming perception of the larger world—and the actual contexts and effects of the film and its technical and cultural apparatus in the larger world. (Ivakhiv 2008, p. 18).

In speaking of the difficulties of making *Tulpan*—filming unpredictable animals and children in a place with unpredictable and harsh weather, with limited funding—Dvortsevov says, “The only way to make a film like this is if you love the place (Dvortsevov 2009a).” With these words, Dvortsevov speaks not only for himself, as writer and director, but also for his fictional Asa. Through Asa, *Tulpan* offers us hope, advocates for the agency of the marginalized, for the voice of those who globalization would rather push aside or obliterate. Thus, through his fictional creation, Asa, one young man out on the Hunger Steppe, with his dreams, his determination to live a life rooted in his traditions—his demand for a future of his own creation, his own agency, Dvortsevov offers all of us the idea of agency, activism and hope, the right to live an authentic life in the face of the homogenizing forces of consumer capitalism and globalization. We can learn a lot from Asa, whose dreams have moved audiences around the world. We can share—or at least empathize with—his goals for a life centered in hard work and community, rooted in tradition but also integrating the present (at one point, he imagines a yurt with the kinds of solar panels he once saw in Japan). Through Asa—if we are a patient, mindful and observant audience—we can realize that there is no “Other,” but only an “Us.”

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