

The University of Iowa
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Department of Cinema and Comparative Literature

Proseminar in Cinema and Culture: 048:112
ENVIRONMENTAL CINEMA
Fall 2011

Class Time

Thursdays, 6:30P – 10:00P
101 BCSB

Contact information:

Instructor: Kyle Stine
Office: W243 AJB
Hours: 4:00P – 6:00P R and by appointment
Phone: 335-2844
Email: kyle-stine@uiowa.edu

Course Supervisor: Corey Creekmur
Office: W211 AJB
Hours: 2:30P – 4:00P MW and by appointment
Phone: 335-2824
Email: corey-creekmur@uiowa.edu

Interim DEO: Russ Ganim
Office: E210B AJB
Phone: 335-2827
Email: russell-ganim@uiowa.edu

Overview:

Recent years have witnessed an outpouring of films concerning the natural environment. From popular fiction films, such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and *Avatar* (2009), to activist documentaries, such as *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) and *The Cove* (2009), to experimental film and video, such as the works of James Benning and Andrej Zdravic, environmental concerns have taken hold of filmmakers, film festivals, and moviegoers at large. Across genres and platforms, such films range from guerrilla media projects to simply poetic contemplations of the natural world, from exposés of environmental degradation to cinematic explorations of things previously unseen and untouched. The Proseminar on Environmental Cinema seeks to contextualize these recent ecological concerns within the long history and international scope of nature films and ecocinema.

Using film to capture environmental phenomena stretches back to the earliest days of cinema and even into the prehistory of cinema in the chronophotography of Étienne-Jules Marey and the animal locomotion studies of Eadweard Muybridge. Starting from these earliest experiments, we will pass through the nature *actualités* and newsreels of early cinema, the ethnographic films of the 1920s (*Nanook of the North*, *Grass: A Nation's Battle For Life*), the abstract films and poetic documentaries of Joris Ivens, and the New Deal documentaries of Pare Lorentz. Along the way, we'll pause to consider the nuclear catastrophe cinema of the 1950s and the role of the environment as a character and concern in Western genre films. Moving toward the present day, we'll look at the environmental disaster cycle of the early 1970s (*Silent Running*, *Soylent Green*) and the visual tone poems of Godfrey Reggio (*Koyaanisqatsi*) and Ron Fricke (*Baraka*). The later part of the semester will focus on several special topics of recent environmental cinema, including the energy crisis (*A Crude Awakening*, *Collapse*, *Who Killed the Electric Car*), the food supply (*Our Daily Bread*, *Food, Inc.*, *King Corn*), and waste and pollution (*Manufactured Landscapes*, *Waste Land*).

The Proseminar is a screening and discussion-based course. It assumes no prior knowledge of the topics addressed, and encourages all students to engage with the materials in an active and thoughtful manner.

Proseminar in Cinema and Culture
48:112 Department of Cinema and Comparative Literature -- Fall 2011

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES

Instructor: Kyle Stine

ENVIRONMENTAL CINEMA

Aug 25 The Environment as Cinematic Object: An Introduction
GROSS (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, USA, 1925, 71m.)

Sep 1 Degrees of Pare Lorentz: U.S. State-Sponsored and Poetic Documentaries
H2O (Ralph Steiner, USA, 1929, 13m); *Mechanical Principals* (Ralph Steiner, USA, 1930, 10m);
Regen (Martinus Franken & Joris Ivens, Netherlands, 1929, 15m); *Power and the Land* (Joris Ivens, USA, 1940, 38m)
The River (Pare Lorentz, USA, 1938, 31m); *Tale of Two Cities* (U.S. War Department, USA, 1946, 12m)

Sep 8 The Western: Resource Conflict on the Frontier
Once Upon a Time in the West (Sergio Leone, Italy/USA, 1968, 165m)

Sep 15 Imagining the Catastrophe: 1970s Environmental Disaster Cycle
Silent Running (Douglas Trumbull, USA, 1972, 89m)
Plus: *Dead Earth* (Leonard M. Henny, USA, 1970, 20m) @ 16mm

Sep 22 Chinese Ecocinema: The Case of the Three Gorges Dam
Sanxia haoren [Still Life] (Jia Zhangke, China, 2005, 111m)

Sep 29 "Bearing the Brunt of the World's Excess":
Water Depletion and Climate Change in African Environmental Film
Nature of Life (Craig Foster, South Africa, 2008, 52m); *Running Dry* (Ilan Thebaut, USA, 2005, 82m)

Oct 6 Andrej Zdravic: Geysir Song and River Ballet
Restless (Andrej Zdravic, Slovenia, 1987, 11m) @ 16mm; *Riverglass* (Andrej Zdravic, Slovenia, 1997, 41m)

Oct 13 Lost for Words I: Metaphor and Meditation
Baraka (Ron Fricke, USA, 1997, 95m)

Oct 20 Local Activism and Environmental Aesthetics: Iowa City's Hickory Hill Park
With Special Guest: Filmmaker Jason Livingston
Underfoot & Overstory (Jason Livingston, USA, 2005, 35m) in 16mm

Oct 27 Lost for Words II: "A Thousand Pictures to Give Them the Power of One Word"
Koyaanisqatsi (Godfrey Reggio, USA, 1982, 86m)

Nov 3 James Benning, Landscape and Lakescape: A Beauty, A Challenge
13 Lakes (James Benning, USA, 2004, 135m) in 16mm

Nov 10 Concerning the Energy Crisis
A Crude Awakening (Basil Gelpke & Ray McCormack, Switzerland/Germany, 2006, 84m)

Nov 17 Concerning the Food Supply
Unser täglich Brot [Our Daily Bread] (Nikolaus Geyrhart, Germany/Austria, 2005, 92m)

Dec 1 Concerning Waste and Pollution
Manufactured Landscapes (Jennifer Baichwal, Canada, 2006, 80m)
Plus: *Kuzu* [Junks] (Iimura Takahiko, Japan, 1962, 8m) in 16mm

Dec 8 Cinema as an Environmental Technology
The Cove (Louie Psihoyos, USA, 2009, 92m)

ALL SCREENINGS
THURSDAY, 6:30 PM
101 BECKER COMMUNICATION
STUDIES BUILDING (BCSB)
AT WASHINGTON AND MADISON

Sponsored by the Institute for Cinema & Culture, International Programs, Department of Cinema and Comparative Literature, and the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. All films are free and open to the public. Individuals with disabilities are encouraged to attend all University of Iowa sponsored events. If you are a person with a disability who requires a reasonable accommodation in order to participate in this program, please contact the Institute for Cinema & Culture at 319.335.3348 or email kyle.stine@uiowa.edu.

Readings and Films:

Selected readings and resources are available on ICON.

Many films screened in the proseminar are available to view in the Main Library. See South Circulation Desk.

Course Web Site:

The syllabus and recommended readings can be accessed on ICON. When you are registered for this class, you will be able to access the site: (<http://icon.uiowa.edu/index.shtml>). You will need your Hawk ID and password to log in to ICON.

Student Responsibilities:

Students are expected to attend all screenings and to engage actively in discussions of the films. Participation in post-screening discussions may from time to time require reasonable preparations, such as short readings and taking notes during the films.

Grading:

Grading for this course is S/U (satisfactory/unsatisfactory). Students must attend all screenings and participate in post-screening discussions in order to receive a satisfactory mark. There will be a sign-in sheet following each discussion. Two absences are allowed without penalty.

Important Dates and Times:

October 6: Andrej Zdravic's *Restless* in 16mm and *Riverglass*

October 20: Jason Livingston's *Underfoot & Overstory* in 16mm and a discussion with the filmmaker

November 3: James Benning's *13 Lakes* in 16mm

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The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Policies and Procedures**Administrative Home**

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall or see the Academic Handbook (<http://www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/>).

Electronic Communication

University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences. (Operations Manual, III.15.2. Scroll down to k.11.)

Academic Honesty

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences expects all students to do their own work, as stated in the CLAS Code of Academic Honesty. Instructors fail any assignment that shows evidence of plagiarism or other forms of cheating, also reporting the student's name to the College. A student reported to the College for cheating is placed on disciplinary probation; a student reported twice is suspended or expelled.

CLAS Final Examination Policies

Final exams may be offered only during finals week. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. Students should not ask their instructor to reschedule a final exam since the College does not permit rescheduling of a final exam once the semester has begun. Questions should be addressed to the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs and Curriculum. <http://www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/x/#5>

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint

Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit the instructor, then the course supervisor, and then the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident. See the CLAS Student Academic Handbook.

Accommodations for Disabilities

A student seeking academic accommodations should register with Student Disability Services and meet privately with the course instructor to make particular arrangements. For more information, visit this site: <http://www.uiowa.edu/~sds/>

Understanding Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment (<http://www.uiowa.edu/~eod/policies/sexual-harassment-guide/index.html>) for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

Reacting Safely to Severe Weather

In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the Public Safety (<http://www.uiowa.edu/~pubsfty/intlinks.htm>).

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I. Beginnings of Environmental Film

8/25 – The Environment as Cinematic Object

Introduction and Course Overview; *Grass* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, USA, 1925, 71m.)

9/1 – Degrees of Pare Lorentz: U.S. State-Sponsored and Poetic Documentaries

H₂O (Ralph Steiner, USA, 1929, 13m); *Mechanical Principals* (Ralph Steiner, USA, 1930, 10m); *Regen* (Mannus Franken & Joris Ivens, Netherlands, 1929, 15m); *Power and the Land* (Joris Ivens, USA, 1940, 38m); *The River* (Pare Lorentz, USA, 1938, 31m); *Tale of Two Cities* (U.S. War Department, USA, 1946, 12m)

II. Popular Genre Cinema

9/8 – The Western: Resource Conflict on the Frontier

Once Upon a Time in the West (Sergio Leone, Italy/USA, 1968, 165m)

9/15 – Imagining the Catastrophe: 1970s Environmental Disaster Cycle

Silent Running (Douglas Trumbull, USA, 1972, 89m)

Plus: *Dead Earth* (Leonard M. Henny, USA, 1970, 20m) in 16mm

III. International Case Studies

9/22 – Chinese Ecocinema: The Case of the Three Gorges Dam

Sanxia haoren [*Still Life*] (Jia Zhangke, China, 2006, 111m)

9/29 – “Bearing the Brunt of the Rest of the World’s Excess”: Water Depletion and Climate Change in African Environmental Film

Nature of Life (Craig Foster, South Africa, 2008, 52m); *Running Dry* (Jim Thebaut, USA, 2008, 82m)

IV. Experiments in Cinema and Environmental Art

10/6 – Andrej Zdravic: Geyser Song and River Ballet

Restless (Andrej Zdravic, Slovenia, 1987, 11m) in 16mm; *Riverglass* (Andrej Zdravic, Slovenia, 1997, 41m.)

10/13 – Lost for Words I: Metaphor and Meditation

Baraka (Ron Fricke, USA, 1992, 96m)

**10/20 – Local Activism and Environmental Aesthetics: Iowa City's Hickory Hill Park
With Special Guest: Filmmaker Jason Livingston**

Underfoot & Overstory (Jason Livingston, USA, 2005, 35m) in 16mm

10/27 – Lost for Words II: “A Thousand Pictures to Give Them the Power of One Word”

Koyaanisqatsi (Godfrey Reggio, USA, 1982, 86m)

11/3 – James Benning, Landscape and Lakescape: A Beauty, A Challenge

13 Lakes (James Benning, USA, 2004, 135m) in 16mm

V. Recent Environmentalist Topics

11/10 – Concerning the Energy Crisis

A Crude Awakening (Basil Gelpke & Ray McCormack, Switzerland/Germany, 2006, 84m)

11/17 – Concerning the Food Supply

Unser täglich Brot [Our Daily Bread] (Nikolaus Geyrhalter, Germany/Austria, 2005, 92m)

12/1 – Concerning Waste and Pollution

Manufactured Landscapes (Jennifer Baichwal, Canada, 2006, 80m)

Plus: *Kuzu [Junks]* (Iimura Takahiko, Japan, 1962, 8m) in 16mm

12/8 – Cinema as an Environmental Technology

The Cove (Louie Psihoyos, USA, 2009, 92m)