

Can cinema save the Earth? As part of the film review – *Cinema of the Anthropocene* at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, we are wondering whether images and technologies can help humans rebuild their relationship with the environment.

From media coverage to disaster movies – visual culture has always shaped our attitude towards nature. Under the *Cinema of the Anthropocene* programme, we take a look at how film artists break the human-centric thought patterns, and explore what role images can play in caring for the environment. What does the planet look like from a non-human perspective? Is man-made damage irreversible? Will the contaminated Earth be populated with new, previously unknown species? We will see both experimental cinema classics, as well as the latest productions depicting man's impact on the planet, and about the opportunities that the climate crisis can bring.

25/09/2019 8:00 p.m.

## An Atomic Evening



Many Anthropocene researchers consider the nuclear weapons tests of the 1950s to be the beginning of a new era. The film review *Cinema of the Anthropocene* commences with a strong atomic accent. The atomic bomb and radioactive contamination are just a few of the key topics in the discussion of human agency, but these are also topics that have fascinated filmmakers and artists. Recordings of the atomic mushroom have become one of the most powerful and iconic images of visual culture, and the set of films opening the review will be devoted to this.

### Atomic: Living in Dread and Promise

directed by Mark Cousins, United Kingdom 2015, 71'

Mark Cousins, who also directed the monumental *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*, has made a bold documentary about the lethal but fascinating power of atomic energy for the 70th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He uses archive footage from the British Film Institute, NASA and CERN, kaleidoscopic images – telling the social history of the atom; nightmarish, but also filled with human hope – given added impetus by a soundtrack from the Scottish band Mogwai.

### Crossroads

directed by Bruce Conner, USA 1976, 36'

Operation Crossroads was the name of the first two of 23 nuclear weapons tests that the United States conducted at Bikini Atoll between 1946 and 1958. Both tests involved the detonation of weapons with a yield equivalent to twenty-three million tonnes of TNT – the same as the atom bomb dropped on Nagasaki. More than seven hundred cameras, and approximately five hundred camera operators surrounded the test site. Nearly half the world's supply of film was at Bikini for the tests, making these explosions the most thoroughly photographed moment in history. Bruce Conner used archival materials, combining 23 shots of the same explosion from various perspectives and at different speeds. He thus created a mesmerizing film, bringing out the event's catastrophic and destructive beauty.

07/10/2019 8:00 p.m.

## Ziemia

[*Erde*], directed by Nikolaus Geyrhalter, Austria 2019, 115'

The Earth as a great sandbox: the geological impact of man on the planet is understood quite literally here. In an intricately constructed film, the Austrian director shows how people are changing as well as shaping the planet – but their actions are based on violence. They level hills, drill tunnels, cut mountains to pieces, dig up massive surfaces in search of raw materials, or bury radioactive waste. Those who are usually deprived of a voice on the topic of the Anthropocene – the workers and employees of large corporations, those who actually do the work – are the ones speaking here.

28/10/2019 8:00 p.m.

## See the invisible – radioactive boars

### Ah Humanity!

directed by Lucien Castaing-Taylor, Verena Paravel and Ernst Karel, France/USA/Japan 2015, 22'

The film was created as part of the Sensory Ethnography Lab, a laboratory at Harvard University dealing with visual and artistic research of social phenomena. The starting point for talking about how you can see the invisible and how visibility is disturbed in the Anthropocene era is the disaster at Fukushima. The film, shot simultaneously with a telephone and a telescope, tries to capture what which is near and far at the same time.

### The Horses of Fukushima

[*Matsuri no Uma*], directed by Yoju Matsubayashi, Japan 2013, 74'

How can you show and talk about a disaster that cannot be seen? About an event that changed not only people's lives, but also the lives of other, non-human beings. The disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant [Unit 1 Reactor] is an example of how an event from the human world affects the environment and animal life.

Lecture by Aleksandra Brylska

### See the invisible – radioactive boars

The lecture will be devoted to how, on the one hand, the failure of a nuclear power plant changed the status of a space, marking it with radioactive contamination, and on the other, to the symbolism inscribed by people onto the landscape and animals, enabling the telling of a story of something that is invisible. Animals play a unique and special role in this process because they have been divided into two categories, those that are being mourned and protected (domesticated and breeding species) and those that are being eliminated (wild species). Boars in particular have become the embodiment of the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant – a metonymy of radioactivity, and the fight against them is also the fight against radiation, aimed at restoring the reality from before the events of March 2011.

Aleksandra Brylska

A graduate of Art History from the Institute of Art History of the University of Warsaw as well as of Cultural Studies from the Institute of Polish Culture of the University of Warsaw. Currently, a participant in the international PhD programme Nature Culture at the Faculty of Artes Liberales of the University of Warsaw. She is preparing her doctoral dissertation on nature and the cultural status of post-nuclear spaces, using examples of the disasters at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant (in Ukraine) and the one in Ōkuma (Fukushima Prefecture, Japan). Brylska is interested in the methodology of environmental humanities, the environmental history of post-nuclear spaces, biosemiotics, and the theme of nature from philosophical and cultural perspectives. She is also interested in visual culture after World War II, the relationship between man and the environment, as well as the cultural consequences of the term "Anthropocene".

12/11/2019 8:00 p.m.

## Capturing the horizon

a set of experimental films, 64'



### Captive Horizon

directed by Lukas Marxt, Austria 2015, 14'

*Captive Horizon* walks the thin line between truth and illusion. For this, it uses Lukas Marxt's favourite motifs – uninhabited, yet man-shaped landscapes. The filming plays with perceptual habits to create original stories.

### Transitions

directed by Aurèle Ferrier, Switzerland 2017, 13'

In this work, Ferrier explores traces of human civilization, taking viewers on a journey from the middle of the desert to Las Vegas – the world's centre of hedonism. During this short journey between the two extremes, however, we will not see any people, just their traces.

### Silica

directed by Pia Borg, Australia/United Kingdom 2017, 23'

Shown at the Venice Biennale in 2017, this work is about a town near an opal mine in Southern Australia. By combining analogue film with microscope shots and animation, Silica blurs the boundaries between what is real and what is imagined.

### Imperial Valley (cultivated run-off)

directed by Lukas Marxt, Austria 2018, 14'

Imperial Valley is an agricultural region in California, where crops are only possible thanks to large-scale irrigation systems, and where the soil still contains pollution from military tests carried out in the region in the 1940s. The monocultural-ness of industrial crops on desert-like lands provokes the threat of environmental and ecological disaster. Lukas Marxt films the valley using a drone – the landscape, although created by man, appears to be a hostile place to which people certainly do not belong.

08/01/2020 8:00 p.m.

## Blue Humanities: Évolution

### Évolution

directed by Lucile Hadžihalilović, France/Belgium/Spain 2015, 81'

A small island inhabited by only women and young boys. One day, one of the boys sees a body floating in the water and begins to question the world he knows, wondering why he and the other boys need to go to a hospital. A visionary, water-based horror film about what path the evolution of mankind could take.

Lecture by Andrzej Marzec

### Blue Humanities

*Blue Humanities* is a post-humanist trend embedding the history of life in the ocean. According to this theory, our planet should be called Ocean and not Earth (since water makes up 70% of the globe). Steve Mentz, one of the theoreticians of the transoceanic turn, emphasises that, in order to understand the dynamic transformations of the Anthropocene, one should move away from the static categories of green fields, gardens or fertile lands. In his considerations, the most important are the turbulent waters, which carry a constant threat of catastrophe (wrecks, shipwrecks, etc.), as well as sailors or swimmers floating on the water, constantly remaining in a menacing environment.

I would like to look at the new materialistic approach to the ocean in *Evolution* (2015) by Lucile Hadžihalilović and show the material-discursive practices associated with it. The ocean is not a metaphor here, but rather the main character – a full-fledged actor and the generator of actions. I would like to draw your attention, above all, to its creative and active agency. Its unrestricted material creativity takes on a deep, unexplored, tentacular and monstrous character in Hadžihalilović's film – the multitude of Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*.

Andrzej Marzec

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Philosopher, film critic, editor of "Czas Kultury" [Time of Culture], author of the vlog *Widma Marca*. His research interests focus on object-oriented ontology, dark ecology as well as contemporary alternative cinema. The author of the book *Widmontologia. Teoria filozoficzna i praktyka artystyczna ponowoczesności* (2015) [*Hauntology as the Philosophical Theory and Artistic Practice of Postmodernity*]. He is drawn to the visual arts, alternative cinema as well as a vision of ecology that you can think about without using the concept of "nature".

29/01/2020 8:00 p.m.

## Notes from the Anthropocene

a set of experimental films, 65'



Notes from the Anthropocene

### Oil Gobblers

[*Ropáci*], directed by Jan Svěrák, Czechoslovakia 1988, 20'

The eponymous oil gobblers are a new species of creature inhabiting post-industrial mounds in the Czech Republic. They feed on oil and breathe exhaust fumes. The short mockumentary – Svěrák's graduation film – is about the expedition of scientists studying these animals. At the time of its creation, it was an ecological satire on industrial pollution. Now, however, you can start taking it rather more seriously – maybe nature has no other choice but to adapt to the conditions created by man, conditions in which he himself will not be able to live. Will pollution become a new opportunity for fauna and flora?

### The Sailor

directed by Giovanni Giarretta, The Netherlands/Italy 2017, 9'

An artificial language, Na'vi, was created specifically for the needs of James Cameron's film *Avatar*; it was supposed to be easy for the actors, while not resembling any earthly language. In *The Sailor*, it is in Na'vi that the off-screen voice tells the story of a sailor who hits a desert island, playing with the tension between what we hear and understand, as well as what we see.

12/02/2020 8:00 p.m.

## La région centrale

directed by Michael Snow, Canada 1971, 180'

This classic of avant-garde cinema – a three-hour long film shot on tape with a specially constructed robot filming the uninhabited landscape of central Canada according to its own mechanical measurements – is perhaps more current today than it was at the time of its creation. It can be read not only as a study of the camera's mechanical eye, but also as an experiment that breaks human habits as well as the anthropocentric view of nature and landscape. During the screening, this hierarchy disappears – we no longer know where is up or where is down, or what is the horizon. The camera, therefore, becomes a causative actor that can change our perception of the environment and help create new relationships with it.

U-jazdowski  
09/2019—02/2020  
film review

# Cinema of the Anthropocene

as part of the project *Plasticity of the Planet*