

CfP: International Workshop *Images of Nature*

Department of Film Studies, University of Zurich, 7–8 May 2021

An event of the doctoral program “Film, Photography, and Other Visual Media” (UZH/UNIL)

At present, “nature” is a hotly debated term in culture, politics, and society, and it is being addressed, negotiated, and reframed in multifaceted ways, not least by the media of film and cinema. It thus seems rewarding to approach nature and film as a complex of relations that can take many shapes. Our choice of the term “nature” is deliberate here, as we aim to question the modern cultural concept of landscape. After all, one of the key motivations for this film studies workshop stems from the conviction that film is not “simply” a media mirror projecting nature onto cinema (or other) screens. Rather, in manifold ways, it is both a broadly defined reflection of nature(s) and a constructor, in the widest sense of the word, of images of nature. Strikingly, the context of ecology as an urgent political problem also entails a renewed boom of nature – or of its metaphorical idea and audiovisual manifestation – as a new horizon of escapism, introspection, and authenticity. Further, the mythology that has been inherent in the concept of nature since its emergence in Western thought in the 16th to 18th centuries, and which is contained in the nature/culture dichotomy, is simultaneously emphasized and deconstructed, made palpable and abstracted in film as a “high-tech product.” A discussion of these aspects currently promises to be interesting with view to documentary, essayistic, and fictional films.

When approaching such a complex framework – one that concerns the history of film overall as well as the specific form of individual works – certain lines of perspective seem inevitable: the workshop aims to draw these lines along the core concepts of the *poetics*, *pragmatics*, and *politics* of filmic nature. Accordingly, “Nature(s) in film or the poetics of filmic nature” (Panel 1) allows us to address themes of film aesthetics and history with regard to individual works or genre configurations, discussing audiovisual representations of nature (within and outside of cinema) and drawing connections between individual case studies and overarching historical and/or theoretical concepts. By contrast, “Film discourses of nature or the pragmatics of filmic nature” (Panel 2) no longer focuses on what aspects of nature become cinematic and how; instead, the focus is on filmic claims about and perceptions of nature in specific historical contexts. What ideas and ideologies of nature does film disseminate or push back against? And finally, the realities of the poetics and pragmatics also give rise to concrete “Politics of filmic nature or film cultures of nature” (Panel 3): among other things, these concern the use of film in political (and possibly activist) work, as well as the emergence of specialized festivals or the curation of dedicated programs, series, and retrospectives in cinemas and other sites of film (such as television, art galleries, museums, virtual reality, etc.).

The workshop is meant to foster dialogue about the forms and aspects of cinematic images of nature, allowing for in-depth discussions of their history and aesthetics, as well as the corresponding theoretical and methodological perspectives. A keynote lecture will launch the discussion of each of the three core themes:

Panel 1: “Nature(s) in film or the poetics of filmic nature”

Panel 2: “Film discourses of nature or the pragmatics of filmic nature”

Panel 3: “The politics of filmic nature or film cultures of nature”

We look forward to historical as well as aesthetical-theoretical perspectives on the topic, and we would like offer room for a mixing of approaches within the individual panels. In fact, in the interest of a plurality of aspects regarding “nature(s) in film,” “film discourses of nature,” and “film cultures of nature,” such mixing even seems desirable.

Apart from the keynote lectures, the event will feature short contributions of no more than 20 minutes (including film clips), followed by a discussion, in order to emphasize the workshop format. The presentations can be given in German or English.

The workshop is currently planned as an in-person event, but depending on the pandemic situation in the spring, a hybrid or fully online event remains a possibility.

We hope for lively interest and look forward to your submissions. Please send abstracts of maximum 2000 characters (including spaces) with a short biography to imagesofnature@fiwi.uzh.ch by 28 February 2021.

Organization and contact: Philipp Blum and Simone Winkler
(Department of Film Studies, University of Zurich, www.film.uzh.ch)