

VISUAL STUDIES RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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SPRING 2022 EVENTS

Images Out of Time Seminar



FRIDAY, APRIL 21
2:30-5pm PST
USC SCA 110 and Zoom

SCREENING AND LECTURE:
Jacques Cousteau: Seeing Underwater and the Making of an Icon of Environmentalism

JAMES CAHILL
Director, Cinema Studies Institute and Associate Professor,
Cinema Studies & French, University of Toronto

Respondent: MARGARET COHEN
Andrew B. Hammond Professor of French Language,
Literature, and Civilization and Director, Center for the Study
of the Novel, Stanford University

**Co-sponsored by the Caltech-Huntington
Program in Visual Culture**

In conjunction with a screening, Professor James Cahill will present a paper titled *On the Plurality of Worlds: Jacques Yves Cousteau and Louis Malles' Le Monde du Silence*.

If cinematic media may be understood to have a Copernican potential, whereby they may be used as instruments of scientific discovery and displacement of anthropocentric perspectives, how does such a potential change how one conceives of the world or even constructs—or for the historian reconstructs—new ones?

Drawing from archival research and contemporaneous film criticism and theory (André Bazin, Jean Thévenot, Henri Agel, Jean Epstein), philosophy (Maurice Merleau-Ponty), and anti-colonialist critique (Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon), this talk traces how filmmakers in metropolitan France began to address these questions through the re-emergence of a cinema of exploration in the late 1940s and 1950s. These films were produced at the very moment when the question of the world as conceived by the traditions of French humanism and its universalist aspirations were called into question by crises of wartime collaboration, the persistence of colonialism, and coca-colonization (the ascendant American economic and cultural hegemony). Such films participate in these discourses at a sensuous level, while also offering historians unexpected documents for writing a very different history of cinema. Focusing in particular on the production and reception of Jacques Yves Cousteau and Louis Malle's *Le Monde du Silence* (*The Silent World*, 1956), the most popular and aesthetically ambitious production of this cycle of exploration films, Cahill reads this work for the plurality of worlds they simultaneously encountered, destroyed, archived, and reimagined through their cinematography and its lessons for cinema historiography.

Image: From *Le Monde du Silence*

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