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Introduction to MIAP

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## All That Is Solid Melts into Air...

### A Film Series about Industrialization, Trash, Love, and Endings

I developed this imagined film series as a way of addressing through cinema the admittedly quite broad and amorphous theme of modernization--of humanity's changing relationship to our natural environment, and of our changing relationships to one another within our built environment. I have aimed to approach this theme through an eclectic collection of screenings, and the resultant list of films does contain (I believe) a fairly robust variety. There are experimental films, documentaries, an industrial film, and of course features. The countries of origin include Brazil, France, Georgia, India, Italy, Japan, and the United States. There are comedies and dramas, personal films and political films. The latest film is from 2012, the earliest from 1922. Of course at this juncture I must make clear that I have not attempted a comprehensive statement on processes of modernization, but have hoped rather to generate the potential for provocative comparisons and connections. Below I will explain in further detail both the films and the surrounding elements of this series.

### The Venue

In seeking out an appropriate setting to imagine this series taking place, I chose MoMA as a model. The pairing made sense to me for several reasons. Firstly, MoMA's

screenings themselves are fairly wide-ranging, not catering exclusively to classic films, new films, or niche films, but offer a relatively diverse mix of these. Secondly, I had envisioned an accompanying exhibition component to the series, and MoMA has the area for mounting such an exhibition. Thirdly, I wanted have the fantasy of being able to draw on the resources of an institution as established as MoMA--not merely financially but archivally. As explained below, I imagine drawing on not only moving image materials but also manuscripts, photographs, and books, which a museum might be best primed to access. Lastly, I chose MoMA for my familiarity with its physical space and its publications and advertisements, which I drew on in my plans for my posters and brochure design. I also drew on my familiarity with the museum while envisioning the exhibit space, and in scheduling the films. All these aspects were lent a greater solidity in my plans through my experience accessing MoMA as a filmgoer myself.

### The Format

I have spread the 15 films chosen across four weeks, with about 3 per week (one week is slightly bulkier, due in part to the presence of short films alongside features). Each week of films has been grouped together within a thematic headline, with these being, in order: Human/Nature (a week dealing with the exploration of humanity's relationship to the planet, touching on environmentalist, technological, and agricultural themes); Another Man's Treasure (in which we focus on trash); Work, Place, Romance (a week-long look at lives and love stories thwarted and aided by material progress and the concerns of commerce); and lastly Only Connect, The Rest Is Silence (considering ways in which human relationships are estranged by modern life, but also moments in

which chaos and connection still prosper). Accompanying each the change each week will be the changing of video material in the exhibition area, as will be explored in more detail below. Additionally, all weeks are intended to in many ways overlap with one another, beyond the confines of their themes.

## Exhibition Area

The exhibition area is planned as if taking place in the theater galleries outside the Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1, through which visitors would pass on their way into that theater. The articles exhibited would be a mixture of materials directly related to the films and other materials that are thematically rather than literally linked. These would include:

Photographs: by artists such as Berenice Abbott, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Margaret Bourke-White, Bill Brandt, Harry Callahan, and Sebastiao Salgado, all of whom have in different ways depicted the processes of a modernizing and modernized world, be it in the form of architectural and industrial structures, human masses at work or in transit, or figures isolated within their built environments.

Books: A small library of books surrounded by seating, allowing for perusal of relevant texts before or after films (or during the day, to intrigue additional guests). An example of titles:

- *They Became What They Beheld* by Edmund Carpenter, with photographs by Ken Heyman. An odd collection of black and white photography and semi-anthropological/semi-anecdotal observations. 1970.

- *In Praise of Shadows* by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki. A perspective on the relationship of traditional Japanese aesthetics to those of the encroaching Western world. 1933.
- *White Noise* by Don DeLillo. A novel dealing with man-made disaster and dread, mysterious medications, mortality, and the struggle to connect. 1985.
- *Jacques Tati* by Penelope Gilliatt. A slim volume profiling Tati, with quotations, photographs, and interviews. 1976.
- *Man and Space* by Arthur C. Clarke. A LIFE Science Library book by the famed science fiction writer detailing the history of humankind's relationship to life beyond earth. 1964.
- *Passionella and other stories* by Jules Feiffer. Collection of cartoon stories satirizing America in the late 50s (and prescient far beyond that time), particularly relevant for the story of Munro, a four year old boy who is drafted into the army and cannot convince anyone, from sergeants to psychiatrists, that he is not meant to be there (compare, with interesting results, to *Il Posto*). 1959.

Posters, photographs, and other ephemera: posters from around the world for *Playtime*, *Il Posto*, and *Mother India*. Record of the *Mother India* soundtrack. Making of photographs for *Playtime*.

Video documentations by Gordon Matta-Clark of various projects of his, to be changed weekly in accordance with theme:

- Week One: Human/Nature--Tree Dance. 1971. A performance done suspended in a tree.
- Week Two: Another Man's Treasure--Fresh Kill. 1972. Matta's truck is destroyed in a landfill.
- Week Three: Work, Place, Romance--Office Baroque. 1977. One of Matta's cutting works, done in an commercial building.
- Week Four: Only Connect, The Rest Is Silence--Conical Intersect. 1975. A cutting work through a building in Paris. Particularly an interesting watch in conjunction with the Paris built by Tati in *Playtime*.

## Films

### Week One: Human/Nature

*Koyaanisqatsi*. 1982. USA. Directed by Godfrey Reggio. American experimental depicting humankind's estranged relationship with nature, captured in wordless images of the world as we have made it. Ways in which technology and the built environment mediate our experience of the Earth. Also scheduled: an introduction by and Q&A with Reggio.

*Mother India*. 1957. India. Directed by Mehboob Khan. Bollywood classic charting India's path through changes in agriculture, society, and politics, as told through one woman's struggles to support her family, maintain her honor, and cultivate her land. A nation's progress and losses, tied to its soil.

*Princess Mononoke*. 1997. Japan. Directed by Hayao Miyazaki. Japanese animation probing humans' consumption of the Earth's resources in the tale of a feral

princess, a cursed prince, an industrial community, and a wounded forest spirit. The suffering of nature at the hands of man.

#### Week Two: Another Man's Treasure

*Ilha das Flores (Island of Flowers)*. 1989. Brazil. Directed by Jorge Furtado. Short Brazilian experimental documentary following the path of a tomato from fresh produce to garbage. An exploration of economic inequality under capitalism, through a fruit. To be screened in conjunction with *Garbage Dreams* (below).

*Garbage Dreams*. 2009. Egypt/USA. Directed by Mai Iskander. An Egyptian-American documentarian's look at the *Zaballeen*, people who make their living picking for trash, in Cairo. Industry, outcasts, and the struggle to sustain a way of life in the face of big business.

*The Gleaners and I*. 2001. France. Directed by Agnes Varda. A French auteur's documentary about the virtues of trash and those who rely on it. The wastes of cities and civilizations, the benefits of foraging, the process of aging. Also scheduled: an introduction by and Q&A with Varda.

#### Week Three: Work, Place, Romance

*Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans*. 1927. USA. Directed by F.W. Murnau. Silent American narrative of a farmer and his wife encountering the corruptions and spectacles of the city. Cars, cafes, the wiles of a femme fatale.

*The Electric House*. 1922. USA. Directed by Buster Keaton. Short American comedy of gadgets and gags. Plumbing the wonders and dysfunctions of technology and automation. To be screened in conjunction with *April* (below).

*April*. 1962. Georgia. Directed by Otam Iosselini. Experimental Georgian short which tells the story of love in the time of consumerism. A young couple beset by home goods.

*The Atom and Eve*. 1966. USA. Directed by Gene Starbeker. American promotion made for an nuclear power corporation. One woman's dance through materialism, made possible by nuclear power.

*The Atomic States of America*. 2012. USA. Directed by Don Argott and Sheena M. Joyce. American documentary detailing the oft dangerous history of nuclear power. Lies, leaks, cancer.

*Il Posto*. 1961. Italy. Directed by Ermanno Olmi. Italian neo-realist film watches a young man's fancies slowly turn to drudgery at his office job. Systems without feeling, possibilities left behind.

#### Week Four: Only Connect, the Rest Is Silence

*An Autumn Afternoon*. 1962. Japan. Directed by Yasujirō Ozu. Japanese tale of a father learning to let his daughter leave him for her own life. Love, loss, electric signage.

*Red Desert*. 1964. Italy. Directed by Michelangelo Antonioni. Italian art film presenting a woman in the grip of mental anguish, adrift in a poisoned landscape. Pollution, alienation, depression, motherhood, marriage, plumes of smoke.

*Playtime*. 1967. France. Directed by Jacques Tati. A French comedic masterpiece in a strange, modern Paris, a city automated and standardized—but with moments of human chaos tumbling through. A dance with modernity.

## Advertising and Funding

The accompanying brochures and posters are provided as mock promotional materials for the event. They attempt to capture the eclectic and somewhat dreamy nature of series, which draws more on unspoken correlations and evocations than on literal links between films. The brochures also include a tongue-in-cheek nod to a make-believe source of corporate sponsorship: DuPont.

## Scheduling

I imagine this series running, as MoMA series do, alongside other sets of films. It would not dominate for a month, but rather weave around other programming. The schedule, as provided in the accompanying brochures, allots two screenings for each film. Screening times and theaters have been chosen based on speculation about potential audience draw. For instance, some screenings are shown at one time during the week in the smaller theater (The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2, which seats 200) and then also on the weekend in the larger theater (The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1, which seats 400) (MoMA Theater Information). Overall, the program is placed in the final days of summer leading into autumn, a time at which native New Yorkers are well and truly tired of the grime and heat of city life and I think apt to be drawn to some of the themes presented here. It is also lined up so that *An Autumn Afternoon* may indeed land on an afternoon in late September when the feeling of fall is beginning to take hold. I have always found this time of year to be one of contemplation, especially the contemplation of endings and mortality, as the seasons pass from the seemingly eternal summer into the practical and professional concerns of the fall, and in that change our



thoughts pass to the inexorable wheel of time. I see these weeks, then, as the perfect moment for films such as these, which capture some of those very thoughts in the form of story and image.

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