

ARTHEMIS

Is pleased to present a lecture by

James Cahill

On the Plurality of Worlds: *Le monde du silence* and the Cinema of Exploration



Friday, March 18, 16h, EV 6,720

If cinematic media may be understood to have a Copernican potential, whereby they may be used as instruments of scientific discovery and anti-anthropocentric displacement, 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 as well as contemporaneous film theory (Bazin, Thévenot, Angel, Epstein), philosophy (Merleau-Ponty), and anti-colonialist critique (Césaire), this paper 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 early 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, ongoing French imperialist 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 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, I read these films for the plurality of worlds they simultaneously archived and imaged, and call for a protocol of research and reading that sounds such material for a tendentiously anti-imperialist, anti-anthropocentric concept for the writing a natural history of the cinema.

James Leo Cahill is Assistant Professor of Cinema and French at the University of Toronto and an editor of *Discourse: journal for theoretical studies in media and culture*. His writing on film and media history and theory has appeared in *Discourse*, *Empedocles*, *Framework*, *Journal of Visual Culture*, *Kunstforum International*, *Spectator* and the edited anthologies *Screening Nature: Cinema Beyond the Human* (Palgrave), *Animal Life and the Moving Image* (BFI), *The New Silent Cinema* (AFI), and *Martin Arnold Gross Anatomies* (VFMK). He is also completing a monograph on Jean Painlevé, Geneviève Hamon, and the Copernican vocation of cinema (presently under review).