



# THE ENVIROTECH NEWSLETTER

Fall 2006

Volume 6, Number 2

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## Some Great Envirotech Films

By Numerous Generous Envirotech Members

*Editor's Note: Last spring Jeffrey Stine made the good suggestion that it might be useful to begin compiling a list of films on envirotech subjects. The following list is the first installment in that project. Perhaps a dozen or so of you were kind enough to send in titles and brief descriptions. My thanks to you all! But two Envirotechies—Lindy Biggs and Pat Munday—really outdid themselves by contributing long lists of films with richly detailed descriptions. Indeed, I did not have space to include all of Lindy's good suggestions. But again following a suggestion from Jeffrey Stine, I propose to continue to compile and periodically publish further additions to this list in the future. So for those of you who perhaps did not have the time to send in your suggestions this go-around, keep the project in mind for the spring. Likewise, whenever you discover a new film of value, please take a few moments to send me an e-mail so I can include it in future editions of the newsletter and add it to the master list.*

*Note that for convenience and to maintain uniformity I have generally not included the names of individual contributors except where necessary to obtain the film. But I do*

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## Update on the Envirotech Book Project

By Stephen Cutcliffe

### Important Dates:

- **December 1:** Deadline for nominations for the Envirotech prize for best article—see page 5
- **January 15:** Deadline for paper proposals for ICOHTEC 2007 in Copenhagen—see page 12
- **February 28-March 1:** ASEH meeting in Baton Rouge—see page 8

Several years ago the Envirotech special interest group began a very interesting list serve discussion on what constitutes our human technological relationship with the natural world. It is clear that the group in general agrees that a traditional dichotomy that would sharply and adversarially distinguish between the technological and the natural no longer satisfies us intellectually. At the same time, it remains clear that our ideas about the constantly shifting and overlapping connections of these realms are complex and also evolving. In an effort to refine our thinking and lay out some of the scholarly issues surrounding the environment-technology panorama, Envirotech as a group determined to publish an anthology of se-

lected essays that would “challenge conventional thinking about the relationship between technology and nature and about humankind’s relationship with both” in a way that would at once “give us a better grasp of historical complexity” and “the insight and knowledge to cope with the difficult issues facing us today” (book proposal). Martin Reuss, Emeritus, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Stephen Cutcliffe, Dept. of History, Lehigh University, agreed to take on the editorial tasks of identifying topics, soliciting authors to write on them, and finding a publisher.

As the project currently stands, the

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# “Rethinking the Nature-Technology Dichotomy”: A Session Report from Las Vegas

By Tim LeCain

For many envirotech scholars, the modern city of Las Vegas is likely to inspire a certain fascinated horror. In its windowless neon-bathed casinos jammed with insanely beeping slot machines and blathering Elvis impersonators, one feels divorced not only from the natural world but, perhaps even more jarringly, from whatever is authentic and organic in the human-built world as well. Walk along the sterile section of Las Vegas Boulevard called “The Strip” and you can pass from a half-sized replica of the Eiffel Tower to a torchlit Egyptian pyramid in the course of a few hours, never once escaping from a corporately controlled and engineered virtual reality. Likewise, the spectacular fountains and shimmering pools of water adorning the Bellagio and other overgrown hotels obviously belie the desert environment that surrounds the city. Along the Las Vegas Strip the organic, authentic, and locally unique—whether they be the products of human or non-human factors—seem to have been banished.

How appropriate, then, that the city was the setting for a scholarly session dedicated to the theme, “Rethinking the Nature-Technology Dichotomy: The Uses of Life in Late Modernity.” Held as part of the Society for the History of Technology’s annual meeting, October 12-15<sup>th</sup>, this Saturday morning session was a conference highlight for those envirotechies fortunate enough to attend.

Thomas Wieland from the Munich Center for the History of Science and Technology organized the session and also presented his fascinating paper, “Biological Rationality: Changing Attitudes Towards the Uses of Life in Late Modernity.” Late modernity, Wieland argued, has been characterized by a belief in a sharp dichotomy between the natural and technological. As a result, late modern thinkers emphasized technological rationality as the most powerful and accurate way of understanding and manipulating the environment. In this paradigm engineers, scientists, and other experts strove to replace organisms with technology wherever possible. Thus living organisms were translated, both metaphorically and physiologically, into quasi machines, and the rationality of the technical domi-

nated.

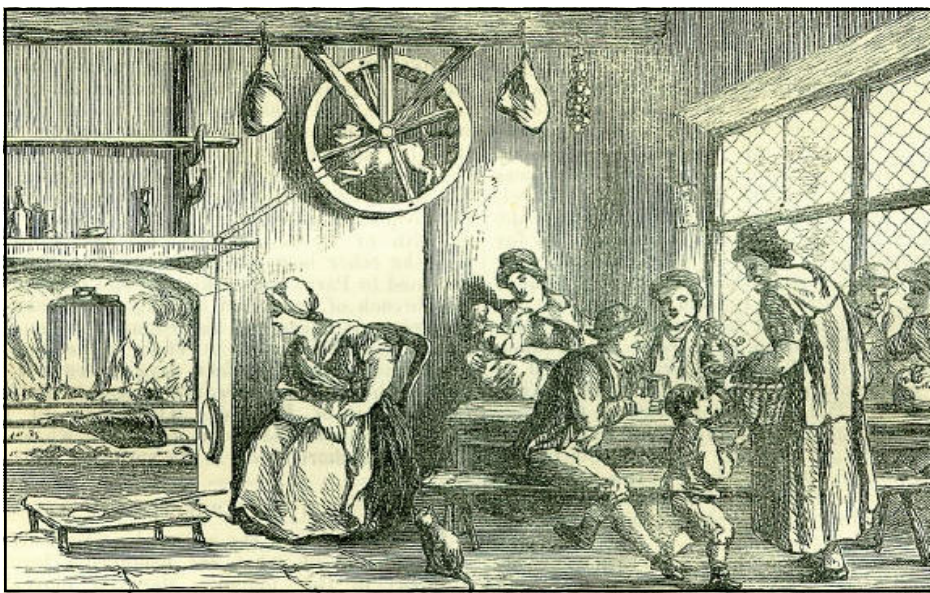
In the late 1950s, however, the concept of “bionics” offered a new way of thinking about both technology and biology. As conceived by innovators such as Jack Steele, bionics attempted to use principles derived from living systems in designing technology. Wieland offered a contemporary example of this with a 2005 advertisement for a Mercedes-Benz bionic car. Pairing a picture of the company’s lightweight and highly streamlined automobile with a

fish, the ad clearly suggested that “nature is the best engineer.” Another example of this “biological rationality,” Wieland suggested, can be found in integrated pest management strategies that combine chemical and biological controls.

Beginning in the mid-century, then, advanced technological nations began to embrace what Wieland termed “multiple rationalities” for understanding nature and technology. Challenging the earlier domination of the technical way of thinking and seeing the world, biological rationality suggested that nature was not just a passive

source of raw materials but rather an invaluable source of ideas for solving modern design problems. Older ideas that nature was best understood in technological terms gave way to the view that technological systems can also be productively understood in biological terms. Biological rationality thus challenged the nature-technology dichotomy by elevating the importance of natural systems and by blurring the boundaries between the natural and technological.

This blurring of the machines and organisms was also explored by Edmund Russell (University of Virginia) in his stimulating paper, “The Incredible Evolving Dog: Making an Animal Modern.” Russell started his talk with the picture of a somewhat unfamiliar looking little dog, asking the audience members if anyone could identify the dog’s breed and job. With this intriguing introduction, Russell suggested that dogs had been modernized in Great Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, undergoing a process in which humans remade rather than replaced the natural world. Acting through a process of



*A 19th century illustration of a Turnspit at work in a British inn, an intriguing example of Ed Russell’s process of “evolutionary history” in action. (From Robert Chambers, The Book of Days (1869), available on-line at the Emmitsburg Area Historical Society: [www.thebookofdays.com/index.html](http://www.thebookofdays.com/index.html))*

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# Envirotech News

## A Note from Anne Greene

Dear Envirotech,

I was sorry to miss the Envirotech meeting at SHOT, as I was attending teacher conferences and parent's weekend at my son's boarding school. It looks like there was a great turnout at the meeting and that Joy provided her continuing strong leadership.

Envirotech holds two meetings a year, at SHOT and ASEH, welcoming scholars and graduate students from a variety of disciplines, and maintains a newsletter and website. Under Betsy and Joy's leadership it inaugurated a prize, and is sponsoring a volume of Envirotech essays under the editorial guidance of Marty Reuss. Let Joy and me know your ideas for other ways that Envirotech can continue to grow and serve your needs and interests.

## Eve Buckley's Update on ET Finances

Here is some data on money collected for Envirotech at recent SHOT and ASEH meeting, courtesy of Ann Greene (who has been acting as treasurer for the past several years):

SHOT 2003 \$205 (36 people attending)

ASEH 2004 \$100 (20 people)

SHOT 2004 \$110 (22 people)

2004 total: \$210 not including SHOT's SIG contribu-

tion of \$300

ASEH 2005 \$150 (29 people)

SHOT 2005 \$200 (44 people)

2005 total: \$350 not including SHOT's SIG contribution of \$300

ASEH 2006 \$170 (38 people)

## Envirotech Needs a New Co-Chair!

With Joy Parr (sadly) scheduled to step down as ET co-chair this summer, we are looking for her successor, ideally a scholar in the their "later career," to use Joy's words. Please direct inquiries to Joy at: [jparr@uwo.ca](mailto:jparr@uwo.ca)

## ET and SHOT's 50th Anniversary

As some of the readers of this newsletter will know, SHOT will celebrate its 50th anniversary during the 2007 and 2008 conferences in Washington, D.C., and Lisbon, Portugal. Details about the anniversary can be found at <http://www.historyoftechnology.org/fiftieth.html>. Anyone with ideas about how Envirotech might contribute to the coming anniversary celebrations (better still, ideas and the time to tithe to our common purposes) should contact Thomas Zeller, our conduit to the anniversary committee at [tzeller@umd.edu](mailto:tzeller@umd.edu). Contributions might include, but are not limited to, paper sessions, roundtables, and posters.

## Envirotech Contacts:

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*Envirotechies gather for their traditional breakfast meeting during the 2006 meeting of the Society for the History of Technology in Las Vegas.*

## Member News

### **New Book Release: *Alternative Routes to the Sustainable City: Austin, Curitiba, and Frankfurt***

Most of us accept the proposition that nature evolves, but only some of us accept the proposition that nature coevolves with society and technology. Readers receptive to this second proposition will find in the study of three cities--each associated with the concept of sustainable development--competing story lines of our coevolution that reject universal models and lists of best practices as the only routes to the sustainable city. In this empirical study Steven A. Moore employs STS methods to consider the city as whole to be a sociotechnical artifact that benefits more from "design-thinking" than from "analytical-thinking."

### **Jim Williams' Sailing Blog**

Many of you know I've been "blogging" for a couple of years, and I know lots of you have checked in occasionally with my blog. Several weeks ago I was invited to write a new sailing blog for the *San Francisco Chronicle's* web site [SFGate.com](http://SFGate.com). The *Chronicle's* community blogging project has been underway for several months, and it is being launched. SFGate readers will see links appearing to the new community blogs feature throughout this week.

I'd like to invite you to check my new SFGate blog "[Messing about on boats...](#)", under my screen name *Spindrift*.

### **Sylvia Washington Address Update**

Just in case you try to or need to contact me at UIC there has been some slight changes. I have changed offices; and my rank has also changed. My correct information in UIC's phonebook and web will probably be corrected by the end of next week. In the future please contact me using the following information. Hopefully this is the last message from my NU address.

Dr. Sylvia Hood Washington  
Research Associate Professor

Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Division

Institute for Environmental Science and Policy University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), School of Public Health  
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[www.iesp.uic.edu](http://www.iesp.uic.edu)

sewhood@uic.edu

### **New Book from Peter Thorsheim: *Inventing Pollution***

Peter Thorsheim's book, *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800*, was published in the spring of 2006 by Ohio University Press. Thorsheim, who was recently awarded tenure at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, is currently writing an environmental history of Britain during the Second World War.

### **Joe Anders Takes New Position**

Joe Anders reports that he is now an assistant professor of history/public history at the University of West Georgia--about 11,000 students an hour or so from Atlanta--right next to Alabama. In addition to history courses he will teach graduate courses in public history (interpretation/education, collections management, administration, and others related to my previous career as an administrator). He is also the assistant director for the Center for Public History, which is a real workhorse program. Joe's new email address is [jlanders@westga.edu](mailto:jlanders@westga.edu).



### **Introducing Eve Buckley**

I am interested in Latin American environmental history, the intersection of environmental and human health, and the social history of natural disasters. I completed a dissertation at Penn (History & Sociology of Science Dept.) last spring, entitled "Drought and Development: Technocrats and the politics of modernization in Brazil's semi-arid Northeast, 1877-1964." I am currently a lecturer in Penn's Health & Societies undergraduate program.

Dissertation summary (feel free to shorten as needed): My dissertation examines technical aid provided by engineers, medical sanitarians, agronomists and econo-

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## Members News Continued

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mists to alleviate drought in Northeast Brazil, focusing primarily on the years from 1909 to 1959. I consider the intellectual and political constraints on scientific developers' work that limited their ability to reduce the Brazilian sertcos periodic drought crisis. Drought relief was promoted as a way to modernize the sertco and rescue its inhabitants from famine and migration. Yet in the several political periods analyzed (Brazil's First Republic, Vargas era, and the developmentalist decade of the 1950s), it was not implemented in a way that increased the security of landless and smallholder sertanejos most adversely affected by climatic fluctuation. Northeast elites frequently used drought relief to draw federal resources to their region, for infrastructural improvements. In examining technocrats' failure to transform the sertco, I emphasize their faith in the apolitical and context-independent nature of their expertise. This is characteristic of many scientific development endeavors during the twentieth century, when models from one region of the world (often the United States) were

adopted in regions with very different social and political organization. State technocrats working in the sertco were severely limited in their efforts by the conservative agendas of a landowning elite. Their attempts to remake the sertco landscape served largely to reinforce existing social and political relations--which were arguably the root of the drought crisis. I'm also Envirotech's humble treasurer, at present.

### Latest Issue of

#### ***Solidarity, Sustainability, and Religious Violence***

Luis Gutierrez reports that the November 2006 issue of "Solidarity, Sustainability, and Religious Violence" has been posted: <http://www.pelican-consulting.com/solisustv02n11.html>. It includes an invited article, "The Theology of Sacrifice and the Non-Ordination of Women," by Mary T. Condren: <http://www.pelican-consulting.com/solisustv02n11condren.html>. Please notice the CFP and the new directories in the home page. Any feedback is gratefully received.

## The Envirotech Prize

We are inviting nominations for the Envirotech Prize for Best Article on the Inter-play between Technology and the Environment in 2004/06. The Envirotech Prize recognizes the best article, including both journal articles and book chapters, on the relationship between technology and the environment in history published in the three previous calendar years. We are particularly seeking innovative publications that explore new ways of thinking about the interplay between technological systems and the natural environment. Articles may be submitted in any language; however, for articles not written in English, the applicant will need to provide a translation. Younger scholars are especially encouraged to submit their publications.

The Envirotech Prize carries a cash award and will be awarded at the conference of the American Society for Environmental History in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, February 28 – March 3, 2007. **The deadline for submissions is December 1, 2006.** Self-nomination is encouraged.

Please submit one copy of your article, together with a brief curriculum vitae, to each of the committee members:

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Museumsinsel 1  
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Germany  
[f.uekoetter@deutsches-museum.de](mailto:f.uekoetter@deutsches-museum.de)

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authors and titles will constitute the table of contents for the volume. (See accompanying box). Each title will be posed as a question, the answers to or comments upon each author will explore in his or her essay. Clearly the list of topics is not exhaustive, but hopefully the essays will summarize the current state of thinking in the field and lay the groundwork for subsequent research, thereby helping to shape the parameters of this exciting area of inquiry for students and scholars alike.

We are pleased to be able to report that the University of Virginia Press has seen fit to offer a contract for the collection of essays. The volume is tentatively entitled *Ties That Bind: Environment and Technology in History*. Unfortunately we have learned that this title has already been used for some other works, so it is likely to change before final publication. To that end, we would like to solicit the Envirotech community for suggestions for a revised title, so please send us your ideas.

We were also very fortunate to secure National Science Foundation funding for a two-day workshop, which was held last June at the University of Maryland campus. The workshop brought together the contributors

and several additional observers, including Jeffrey Stine and Joel Tarr, who presented and discussed preliminary outlines and rough drafts of each author's thoughts at that time, with the result that we believe the volume will emerge with a greater sense of coherence than is sometimes the case for thematic anthologies.

Currently the authors are finalizing their rough drafts, which will be submitted to the editors for review by the end of the year. Revisions will take place during the Spring, with a goal of submitting the final manuscript to the UVA Press by September 2007. Publication should follow approximately a year later. We hope to be able to propose a session focused on the book at the 2008 Lisbon meeting of SHOT as part of that organization's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, as well as an ASEH session at either its 2008 or 2009 meeting.

As the volume editors we are very pleased at the progress to date, recognize the hard work of all the contributors, and appreciate the support of the entire Envirotech community as this project continues to unfold.

*Martin Reuss (martreuss@aol.com) and Stephen Cutcliffe (shc0@lehigh.edu)*

## Working Table of Contents:

*James Williams:* How Do Humans Explain Nature?

*Peter Perdue:* Is there an Asian View of Technology and Nature?

*Peter Coates:* Can Technology Improve on Nature? Or, Can Nature Improve Technology?

*Edmund Russell:* Can Organisms Be Technology?

*Fekri Hassan:* Can History Show How Sustainability Works?

*William Rowley:* What is Natural about the American West?

*Joy Parr:* 'I Am Here, Therefore I Am': Technologies and Environments Embodied

*Ann Vileisis:* Are Tomatoes Natural? How Concepts of Nature and Technology Inform our Thinking about Food

*Sarah Elkind:* What are the Implications for Landscape of the Growth of Cities?

*Craig Colten:* What is Waste and Pollution?

*Sara Pritchard and Thomas Zeller:* What was Natural About Industrialization?

*Hugh Gorman and Betsy Mendelsohn:* Where Does Culture End and Nature Begin? Converging Themes in the History of Technology and Environmental History

*Martin Reuss:* Reworking the Paradigm



## Rethinking the Nature-Technology Dichotomy, cont.

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artificial selection, humans became agents of what Russell has termed “evolutionary history”—that is, the history of the human role in guiding (intentionally or unintentionally) the evolution of other organisms and the consequences of this evolution for human societies.

It is through evolutionary history, Russell continued, that we must understand the mysterious small dog he had begun with. This dog, he now revealed, was an extinct breed known as a “Turnspit.” During the early modern period, these little dogs were bred for the purpose of powering wheels rather like those found made today for pet mice and gerbils. In the Turnspit’s case, however, the running wheel was connected to a meat spit before a fire, thus constantly turning the meat so that it would cook evenly.

Why did the Turnspit breed ultimately go extinct? In an apt illustration of the process of evolutionary history, Russell argued that the Turnspit’s niche was eliminated by the development of mechanical clock technology. Spit turning mechanisms were thereafter powered by clock springs or falling weights.

Such hybrid human-nature niches were created, altered, and in some cases eliminated through a variety of forces, Russell argued, including such well-known historical phenomena as the creation of nation states and evolution of the ideology of romanticism. The example of the English bull dog, he argued, demonstrates the role nation states can play in evolutionary history. Initially bred for the purpose of bull baiting, bulls dogs were compact and agile animals with strong jaws—the traits needed to avoid being gored so the dog could get a fierce biting hold on the bull’s face. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the British state had outlawed the practice of bull baiting, in part for moral and religious reasons, but also because the pastime did not fit well with regimentation of the emerging factory system. Unlike the Turnspit, however, the bull dog was saved from extinction by the opening of a new ecological niche when the dog became valued as a pet. Subsequent breeding efforts thus directed the bull dog’s evolution away from its more functional form to emphasize aesthetic traits pet owners found attractive, like a short snout, large head, and narrow hips. Indeed, the anthropogenic evolution of the modern bull dog is so pronounced that the breed’s narrow hips require that pups be delivered by caesarean section.

At the same time, Russell noted that the nation state’s role in eliminating the bull dog niche opened a different niche for another sporting dog, the Greyhound. Unlike bull baiting, which was often a drawn out and complex activity that could consume an entire afternoon, Greyhound racing was a cheap and quick entertainment for a working class that no longer had the unstructured leisure time of the pre-industrial era. A Greyhound race could be executed in only a few minutes as the animals raced over relatively short straight courses. Accordingly, humans selected the dogs (initially Whippets) best capable of short high-speed sprinting, thus producing the Greyhound’s long lean streamlined form with its echoes of the “naturally”

speedy Jaguar.

Finally, Russell discussed the importance of modern ideological forces in driving evolutionary history. With the rise of romanticism in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, middle class Britons developed a new appreciation for what they considered to be beautiful pastoral landscapes. This middle class definition of natural beauty, however, was defined in large part by the absence of any actual work from the landscape. Accordingly, many middle class visitors to the countryside admired the image of sheep gently grazing in green pastures, but they found the sheep dogs who herded them to be distinctly ugly. Breeders thus catered to the middle class fascination with rural nature by breeding the typical sheep dog—an early form of the Border Collie—with Greyhounds. The outcome was the lean and elegant Collie, an indisputably attractive animal but one which Russell pointed out is totally useless for herding sheep or anything else.

A third paper was presented by Geraldine Abir-Am of Brandeis University, “The Transatlantic Origins of Biogen: A Case Study in the Transition from Molecular Biology in Late Modernity.” Abir-Am traced the historical development of Biogen Corporation, which began in 1978 with the cooperation of seven European scientists and two Americans. The Biogen story offers a fascinating case study of the transition from molecular biology to biotech. Resonating with Wieland’s work, Abir-Am suggested that the “biological rationality” embraced by the founders of Biogen simply side-stepped the traditional boundaries between science and technology. From the very start, this influential biotech firm saw little distinction between the study of nature (science) and the development of useful technological processes, such as interferon and bioengineered enzymes. Biotechnology thus offers yet another compelling example of how the nature-technology dichotomy blurred and collapsed in the process of creating the modern world.

In a useful comment, Gabriella Petrick (New York University) applauded all of the papers for their interesting insights, but she also raised several larger questions applicable to all of the papers. Petrick argued that all the authors might wish to give more attention to the slippery concept of modernity, which far from being a static idea has evolved over time. Further, by using the term without first clearly defining it, scholars run the risk of robbing the concept of any true analytical power. Petrick also questioned one of the basic intellectual foundations of the session, which was the existence of a “Nature-Technology Dichotomy” that the three authors now proposed to problematize. But did this dichotomy ever really exist, Petrick wondered, given that historians have known for some time that science and engineering overlapped and intertwined almost indistinguishably from the beginning. Likewise, in a comment from the floor, Sara Pritchard (Montana State University) encouraged the authors to think about the social construction of the nature-technology dichotomy, and particularly how the evolving concept might have proved useful for economic, social, or political purposes in the past.



Las Vegas from space (NASA)

## Sneak Preview: ASEH 2007

The next American Society for Environmental History (ASEH) conference that meets in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Feb. 28 - March 1, 2007, will feature many sessions of interest to Envirotech members. There is a track at the conference that focuses on the integration of science into environmental history, and sessions throughout the conference focus on the related theme of risk. Themes of interest to Envirotech members, such as animals and agriculture, also are represented. Cities focus some sessions as the sites of environmental quality or as the sites for contentious action about improving environmental quality.

About 20% of the papers concern non-United States history, both in non-U.S. sessions and in international sessions. Many of the sessions concern methods of writing environmental history, including a roundtable on Diamond's "Collapse." Bruce Babbitt will speak, and also people involved in the recovery of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast from Katrina. This promises to be a conference interesting to many Envirotech members; and, there will be an Envirotech meeting on Thursday morning (March 1). Please go to <http://www.aseh.net> for complete and up-to-date conference information. The first 150 registrants who express an interest, will be able to participate in an all-day "rolling seminar" bus tour of New Orleans, which occurs Wednesday, Feb. 28.

Betsy Mendelsohn, ASEH 2007 conference, Program Committee member



# Position Open

New York University

The Steinhardt School of Education

Department of Nutrition, Food Studies & Public Health Clinical Assistant Professor, Food Studies

The Department of Nutrition, Food Studies and Public Health invites applications for a position to direct a graduate program in Food Studies and to teach courses and advise students in the M.A program in Food Studies.

**Qualifications:** Candidates must hold a graduate degree (Masters or Doctoral degree) in Food Studies, Food Systems or a related field and should have a strong interest in teaching and advising students. Additional experience in the food professions is desirable to assist with student internships and positions in metropolitan organizations, business and schools.

**Responsibilities:** 1) Teaching and curriculum development of undergraduate and graduate Food Studies 2) Coordination of course instruction to meet program standards and enhance our National standing and prominence 3) Academic and career advising of prospective and matriculated students 4) External relations locally and nationally to foster new initiatives 5) Recruitment and admissions of students including established programs with The Institute of Culinary Education and the French Culinary Institute 6) Maintaining active alumni network and links with professional societies and the food community 7) Participation in departmental and school activities that support the mission

**To apply:** Qualified candidates should send a cover letter discussing qualifications, a curriculum vitae, and the name and telephone numbers of five reference to: Prof Sharron Dalton, Search Committee Chair, Department of Nutrition, Food Studies and Public Health, New York University, 35 West 4th St, 10th Floor, New York, NY 10012-1172. Tel 212 998-5580. Fax 212 995-4194. Application review begins November 15, 2006 and continues until the position is filled.

## Conferences and Calls for Papers

### **New Chemical Bodies: Biomonitoring, Body Burden and the Uncertain Threat of Endocrine Disruptors**

The Chemical Heritage Foundation will host the 2007 Gordon Cain Conference, “New Chemical Bodies: Biomonitoring, Body Burden, and the Uncertain Threat of Endocrine Disruptors,” on 22-23 March 2007 in Philadelphia, PA. The conference is designed to foster cross-disciplinary discussion and collaboration between those working in the chemical, ecological, environmental/public health, and social sciences to address the problems and challenges associated with the use and proliferation of human body burden studies, especially as they relate to research into endocrine disrupting chemicals. We will employ a format focused on discussion rather than paper presentation; as such, this call is for participation rather than specifically for papers (see below for further details). Please submit inquiries and statements of interest to Jody Roberts ([jroberts@chemheritage.org](mailto:jroberts@chemheritage.org)), Gordon Cain Fellow, Chemical Heritage Foundation. Statements should include an abstract-length (approx. 200 words) description of how your work bears on the issues outlined below, along with appropriate publication(s) or work(s) in progress (graduate students are certainly encouraged to apply). Deadline for submission is 1 December 2006 with notification of acceptance no later than 1 January 2007. Some travel assistance will be available for participants through the Gordon Cain Fellowship. Please check the website for updates: <http://www.chemheritage.org/events/event-detail.asp?id=255>.

#### Background and Prospectus

In July of 2005, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control released its *Third National Report on Human Exposure to Environmental Chemicals*. Through the process of biomonitoring—measuring the amount of a chemical in a blood or urine sample—the CDC aims to track the accumulation of synthetic chemicals into the human population through direct measurement of the populace. As the report states: “Biomonitoring measurements are the most health-relevant assessments of exposure because they measure the amount of the chemical that actually gets into people from all environmental sources (e.g., air, soil, water, dust, or food) combined.” But just what happens once these chemicals enter our bodies, and what exactly we are to do with this information remains unclear. This conference aims to address the uncertainty that surrounds the now well established fact that organisms of all types, kinds, and geographies—including but certainly not limited to humans—find themselves carrying/composed of a cadre of chemicals heretofore unknown to the planet.

Additionally, the class of chemicals generally referred to as environmental endocrine disruptors presents challenges to our current systems of monitoring and regulating synthetic chemicals in the environment. These chemicals have potential activity at orders of magnitude lower than current dose limits for other toxins. Perhaps more troubling, these chemicals leave no “smoking gun” with effects manifested years if not decades later, and often times in a body only indirectly exposed (such as developing fetuses). Thus, new modes of thinking about these problems seem necessary and timely. Understanding the new chemical bodies of the twenty-first century requires new analytical tools – both instrumental and conceptual. A primary goal for this conference, then, is to begin thinking about what this new set of tools might look like.

The conference will bring together individuals from a diversity of research areas and institutional backgrounds in order to represent and address the breadth and scope of the issues while initiating collaboration towards the construction of new modes of dealing with our new chemical bodies. It will be held over two days and will utilize two different for-

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## Conferences and Calls for Papers, cont.

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mats. The opening day will feature keynote lectures on topics related to biomonitoring, body burden, and environmental endocrine disruptors. It will provide an opportunity for a public forum where leaders in the field can offer their perspectives on the current state of the fields involved with these issues. The second day of the conference will be devoted to an intensive and focused conversation about the future trajectories of the field. This academic-styled meeting will be smaller and centered on a set of pre-circulated papers from conference participants, designated commentators for each of the papers, and with the remaining time left to open discussion by all participants.

Confirmed participants include:

Terrance Collins (Carnegie Mellon University)

Carl Cranor (University of California, Riverside)

Kim Fortun (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute)

Scott Frickel (Tulane University)

Alistair Iles (University of California, Berkeley)

Nancy Langston (University of Wisconsin)

John Peterson Myers (Environmental Health Sciences)

Fred vom Saal (University of Missouri)

### **Advance conference information: 5th IWHA Conference, "Pasts and Futures of Water" (13 to 17 June, 2007)**

The International Water History Association (IWHA) will hold its 5th Biennial conference from 13 to 17 June, 2007 in Tampere, Finland with the general theme "Pasts and Futures of Water". The event is co-organized and hosted by University of Tampere (Dept. of History) and Tampere University of Technology, TUT (Institute of Environmental Engineering and Biotechnology, IEEB).

The major themes of the conference are:

- (i) Water and the City
- (ii) Water, Health and Sanitation
- (iii) Water, Food and Economy
- (iv) Water history and the Future of Humanity.

First Announcement will be published in June 2006 and can be viewed at:

[www.envhist.org](http://www.envhist.org). Proposals are to be sent by 15 Oct 06.

For possible enquiries: [victor.pal@uta.fi](mailto:victor.pal@uta.fi), [eija.vinnari@tut.fi](mailto:eija.vinnari@tut.fi).

The International Water History Association (IWHA) is the leading global

organization on water history. Previous Biennial IWHA Conferences were held in Bergen, Norway, at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Egypt, and at UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, France. The Association deals with water history in all its aspects bringing together historians, geographers, engineers, archaeologists, anthropologists, and water managers. IWHA is committed to bridge the gap between academics and policy makers, and strives to ensure representation from all world regions. To become a member and enjoy the benefits of IWHA membership visit [www.iwha.net](http://www.iwha.net)



## Conferences and Calls for Papers, cont.

### ICOHTEC 2007

#### What's the role of the environment in technological design?

The theme of the International Committee for the History of Technology's 34<sup>th</sup> Symposium in Copenhagen, Denmark, 14-19 August 2007, is *Fashioning Technology: Design from Imagination to Practice*. Design has always been part of material culture. It has been an element in handicrafts, tool-making, manufacturing, building, as well as shaping landscapes. Industrialization and the rise of consumer society have made it even more important and influential.

ICOHTEC's intention is to examine design in the context of engineering, architecture, regional planning and other similar creative endeavours in a historical perspective. Designing normally requires considering aesthetic, functional, constructional and many other aspects of an object, which usually requires substantial research, thought, modeling, iterative adjustment, and re-design. Therefore, design should be regarded as a process. Design can also be considered an integrating factor that connects various features of material culture into functional and socially acceptable entities.

Among the sub-themes suggested by the program committee is *Reshaping spaces: landscapes, cityscapes and technoscapes*, which should be of particular interest to members of Envirotech. Indeed, design is implicitly affected by the environment.

ICOHTEC has long encouraged sessions and individual papers dealing with technology and the environment, so please consider making a proposal for a session or an individual paper and participating in this 34<sup>th</sup> Symposium in Copenhagen.

The deadline for proposals is 15 January 2007. Please see the full call for papers at <http://www.icohtec2007.dk>.

Special features of ICOHTEC's 34th Symposium include the annual Mel Kranzberg Lecture by a distinguished historian of technology, the traditional Jazz Night, several excursions, and a special plenary "Copenhagen Session" of invited scholars.

## Great Envirotech Films, cont.

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*extend my individual thanks to all of you who contributed to what promises to be a very useful filmography.*

### ***Aeon Flux***

Animation by Chung (1996)

I have a VHS tape collection of the show's segments that aired on MTV's "Liquid Television" years ago. Female bionic anti-hero struggles against the forces of order and oppression, and with the great questions of post-modern ontology. From Wikipedia website: "*Aeon Flux* is set in a bizarre, dystopian, future world of mutant creatures, clones, and robots. The title character is a tall, scantily-clad secret agent from the society of Monica, skilled in assassination and acrobatics. Her mission is to infiltrate the strongholds of the neighboring country of Bregna, which is led by her sometimes-enemy and sometimes-ally Trevor Goodchild. Monica represents a dynamic anarchist society, while Bregna embodies a centralized, scientifically planned state. The names of their respective characters reflect this: *Flux* as the self-directed agent from Monica and *Goodchild* as the technocratic leader of Bregna."

### ***Affluenza***

AFFLUENZA is a groundbreaking film that diagnoses a serious social disease - caused by consumerism, commercialism and rampant materialism - that is having a devastating impact on our families, communities, and the environment. We have more stuff, but less time, and our quality of life seems to be deteriorating. By using personal stories, expert commentary, hilarious old film clips, and "uncommercial" breaks to illuminate the nature and extent of the disease, AFFLUENZA has appealed to widely diverse audiences: from freshmen orientation programs to consumer credit counseling, and from religious congregations to marketing classes.

With the help of historians and archival film, AFFLUENZA reveals the forces that have dramatically transformed us from a nation that prized thriftiness - with strong beliefs in "plain living and high thinking" - into the ultimate consumer society.

The program ends with a prescription to cure the disease. A growing number of people are opting out of the consumer chase, and choosing "voluntary simplicity" instead. They are working and shopping less, spending more time with friends and family, volunteering in their commu-

nities, and enjoying their lives more.

[www.bullfrogfilms.com](http://www.bullfrogfilms.com) (\$250) (can sometimes be found on amazon.com)

### ***The Atomic Café***

A collection of Cold War public service announcements and other kitsch synthesized into "a comic horror film" by Rafferty et al (1982). From the IMDb website: "An ostensibly tongue in cheek documentary about the nuclear age of the late 40's and 50's, juxtaposing the horrific realities of the arms race with cheery misinformation (and simplistic redbaiting) doled out to the public by the US government and private sector. The overall effect is chilling-for every scene of hilariously misguided propaganda and dismissal of nuclear danger (an army film cheerfully assures a fictional fallout victim that his hair will grow back in no time) there's scenes of Pacific islanders affected by fallout from remote nuclear tests and US soldiers getting debriefed on the minimal dangers of witnessing a nuclear detonation a few miles away (with goggles on, to be fair). Not an objective documentary by any means - not that it should be - the filmmakers excoriate the duplicity of the government and the mock the complacency of the public with equal zeal, but there's a certain absurdist charm to the whole affair."

### ***Baraka***

Without words, cameras show us the world, with an emphasis not on "where," but on "what's there." It begins with morning, natural landscapes and people at prayer: volcanoes, water falls, veldts, and forests; several hundred monks do a monkey chant. Indigenous peoples apply body paint; whole villages dance. The film moves to destruction of nature via logging, blasting, and strip mining. Images of poverty, rapid urban life, and factories give way to war, concentration camps, and mass graves. Ancient ruins come into view, and then a sacred river where pilgrims bathe and funeral pyres burn. Prayer and nature return. A monk rings a huge bell; stars wheel across the sky.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0103767/> (\$11.32 VHS @ amazon.com)

### ***The Beloved Community***

By Pamela Calvert/Plain Speech

Pam Calvert's film on health issues arising from

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## Great Envirotech Films, cont.

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endocrine disrupters in the First Nation's community surrounded on three sides by the chemical in Sarnia Ontario, across from Port Huron Michigan, is in rough cut and will be shown locally in mid September. The nerve center of Canada's petrochemical industry, Sarnia, Ontario once enjoyed the highest standard living in the country—but now the bill has come due, in compromised environmental and community health. How do you stay in the home you love when the price you pay may be not only your own life, but the safety of future generations? In *The Beloved Community*, a petrochemical town faces a toxic legacy head-on. *THE BELOVED COMMUNITY* is a co-presentation of Detroit Public Television. Jeff Forster, Executive Producer. For more information: [pcalvert@plainspeech.tv](mailto:pcalvert@plainspeech.tv)

### *Blue Vinyl*

(2002)

With humor, chutzpah and a piece of vinyl siding firmly in hand, Peabody Award-winning film maker Judith Helfand and co-director and award-winning cinematographer Daniel B. Gold set out in search of the truth about polyvinyl chloride (PVC), America's most popular plastic. From Long Island to Louisiana to Italy, they unearth the facts about PVC and its effects on human health and the environment.

Back at the starter ranch, Helfand coaxes her terribly patient parents into replacing their vinyl siding on the condition that she can find a healthy, affordable alternative (and it has to look good!).

A detective story, an eco-activism doc, and a rollicking comedy, *BLUE VINYL* puts a human face on the dangers posed by PVC at every stage of its life cycle, from factory to incinerator. Consumer consciousness and the "precautionary principle" have never been this much fun.

<http://www.bluevinyl.org/animationlow.htm> (\$23.99 DVD @ amazon.com)

### *The China Syndrome*

By James Bridges (1979)

From IMDb: "A reporter finds what appears to be a cover-up of safety hazards at a nuclear power plant."

### *The Corporation*

*THE CORPORATION* explores the nature and spectacular rise of the dominant institution of our time. Footage from pop culture, advertising, TV news, and corporate propaganda, illuminates the corporation's grip on our lives. Taking its legal status as a "person" to its logical conclusion, the film puts the corporation on the psychiatrist's couch to ask "What kind of person is it?" Provoking, witty, sweepingly informative, *The Corporation* includes forty interviews with corporate insiders and critics - including [Milton Friedman](#), [Noam Chomsky](#), [Naomi Klein](#), and [Michael Moore](#) - plus true confessions, case studies and strategies for change. Winner of 24 INTERNATIONAL AWARDS, 10 of them AUDIENCE CHOICE AWARDS including the AUDIENCE AWARD for DOCUMENTARY in WORLD CINEMA at the 2004 SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL. The long-awaited DVD, available now in Australia and coming in March to North America, contains over 8 hour of additional footage.

<http://www.thecorporation.com/> (\$11.19 VHS/\$17.92 DVD @ amazon.com)

### *Dam/Age*

(2002)

*DAM/AGE* traces writer Arundhati Roy's bold and controversial campaign against the Narmada dam project in India, which will displace up to a million people. The author of *The God of Small Things*, which won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1998, Roy has also published *The Cost of Living*, a book of two essays critical of India's massive dam and irrigation projects, as well as India's successful detonation of a nuclear bomb. In her most recent book *Power Politics*, Roy challenges the idea that only experts can speak out on such urgent matters as nuclear war, the privatization of India's power supply by Enron and issues like the Narmada dam project.

As the film traces the events that led up to her imprisonment, Roy meditates on her own personal negotiation with her fame, the responsibility it places on her as a writer, a political thinker and a citizen.

As she puts it in *DAM/AGE*, "*The God of Small Things* became more and more successful and I watched as in the city I lived in the air became blacker, the cars became sleeker, the gates grew higher and the poor were being stuffed like lice into the crevices, and all the time my bank account burgeoned. I began to feel as though every feeling in *The God of Small Things* had been traded in for a silver coin, and I wasn't careful I would become a little silver figurine with a cold, silver heart."

The film shows how Roy chose to use her fame to stand up to powerful interests supported by multinational corporations and the Indian government. For her, the story

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## Great Envirotech Films, cont.

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of the Narmada Valley is not just the story of modern India, but of what is happening in the world today, "Who counts, who doesn't, what matters, what doesn't, what counts as a cost, what doesn't, what counts as collateral damage, what doesn't."

In a clear and accessible manner, the film weaves together a number of issues that lie at the heart of politics today: from the consequences of development and globalization to the urgent need for state accountability and the freedom of speech.

[www.bullfrogfilms.com](http://www.bullfrogfilms.com) (\$390)

### *Dr. Strangelove*

By Stanley Kubrick (1964)

From IMDb: "An insane general starts a process to nuclear holocaust that a war room of politicians and generals frantically try to stop."

### *Earth On Edge: Bill Moyer's Report*

(2001)

Every day brings news of human beings' impact on the life-support system known as Earth. But what is the truth behind the headlines? In 1999, an international group of more than 70 scientists analyzed the condition of the five ecosystems on which all life most heavily depends — freshwater, agriculture, forests, grasslands, and coastal ecosystems. Their findings are the scientific basis for *Earth on Edge*, which premiered on PBS June 19th, 2001 at 8 P.M. The program presents the findings of scientists who are studying the health of our world, as well as stories of ordinary people working to restore the health and well-being of the ecosystems they — and ultimately all of us — depend on.

[www.pbs.org/earthonedge](http://www.pbs.org/earthonedge) (\$29.95)

### *The End Of Suburbia*

Since World War II North Americans have invested much of their newfound wealth in suburbia. It has promised a sense of space, affordability, family life and upward mobility. As the population of suburban sprawl has exploded in the past 50 years, so too has the suburban way of life become embedded in the American consciousness.

Suburbia, and all it promises, has become the

American Dream.

But as we enter the 21st century, serious questions are beginning to emerge about the sustainability of this way of life. With brutal honesty and a touch of irony, *The End of Suburbia* explores the American Way of Life and its prospects as the planet approaches a critical era, as global demand for fossil fuels begins to outstrip supply. World Oil Peak and the inevitable decline of fossil fuels are upon us now, some scientists and policy makers argue in this documentary.

The consequences of inaction in the face of this global crisis are enormous. What does Oil Peak mean for North America? As energy prices skyrocket in the coming years, how will the populations of suburbia react to the collapse of their dream? Are today's suburbs destined to become the slums of tomorrow? And what can be done NOW, individually and collectively, to avoid *The End of Suburbia* ?

[www.endofsuburbia.com](http://www.endofsuburbia.com) (\$21.99 @ amazon.com)

### *Escape From Affluenza*

(1998)

This video shows audiences how to declare their independence from the epidemic of rampant consumerism and materialism ailing Americans and our environment by adopting the practices of simple living.

Like AFFLUENZA, this sequel uses expert commentary, thought-provoking vignettes and humor to show how people can reduce their consumption and simplify their lives. With stories of real people from Seattle to the Netherlands who have altered their lifestyles and re-discovered the joy of living, ESCAPE FROM AFFLUENZA offers the antidote to debt, stress, time-pressure and possession-overload.

[www.bullfrogfilms.com](http://www.bullfrogfilms.com) (\$250) (can sometimes be found on amazon.com)

### *The Four Corners: A National Sacrifice Area?*

By McLeod, Bullfrog Films (1984)

From the Bullfrog Films website: "This renowned student Academy Award-winning documentary examines the social, cultural, and environmental impact of energy development in the Southwest U.S. The film takes its title from a National Academy of Sciences report which concluded that strip-mining in the fragile arid environment could permanently damage the land, resulting in "national sacrifice areas."

The film explores the hidden cost of uranium mining

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## Great Envirotech Films, cont.

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and milling, coal strip-mining, and synthetic fuels development in the "Golden Circle of National Parks" -- the homeland of Hopi, Navajo, and Mormon cultures."

### *The Future Of Food*

THE FUTURE OF FOOD offers an in-depth investigation into the disturbing truth behind the unlabeled, patented, genetically engineered foods that have quietly filled U.S. grocery store shelves for the past decade.

From the prairies of Saskatchewan, Canada to the fields of Oaxaca, Mexico, this film gives a voice to farmers whose lives and livelihoods have been negatively impacted by this new technology. The health implications, government policies and push towards globalization are all part of the reason why many people are alarmed by the introduction of genetically altered crops into our food supply.

Shot on location in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, THE FUTURE OF FOOD examines the complex web of market and political forces that are changing what we eat as huge multinational corporations seek to control the world's food system. The film also explores alternatives to large-scale industrial agriculture, placing organic and sustainable agriculture as real solutions to the farm crisis today.

<http://www.thefutureoffood.com/> (\$16.99 DVD@ amazon.com)

### *Gaia: The Living Planet (A Portrait of James Lovelock)*

By Lizius & Jungjohann (1990)

As a brief biography of Lovelock and his eco-science, this should need no further description. But here it is, from Bullfrog Films: "The Gaia Hypothesis is one of the most exciting new scientific theories to emerge in the 20th century. It's the work of a British scientist, James Lovelock, who believes that the earth is itself a living organism, and that life actively creates the environment it needs to survive, by maintaining environmental factors like temperature, humidity and atmosphere. His theory has been embraced by the environmental movement and has stirred up controversy in the scientific establishment.

Lovelock lives in the hills of Devon in southwest England. He's a biologist, doctor, chemist, cybernetician, inventor, and author of science fiction. In this video portrait we meet the man at his home and workshop, and visit the Marine Biological Laboratory in Plymouth, which conducts marine research, that has produced some amazing results,

apparently confirming major parts of the theory.

The Gaia Hypothesis gives us a completely new view of the evolution of the Earth and may well be an incredibly productive tool for studying the complex ecological interrelationships that allow life to exist on our planet."

### *Germinal*

By Claude Berri (1993)

From IMDb: "The film is the rendition of Emile Zola's 1885 novel of the same name examining the difficult lives of French miners. The movie, which on the whole remains true to the original story."

### *Kilowatt Ours*

Kilowatt Ours is an inspirational and enlivening film that demonstrates how easy it is to conserve energy that is produced from traditional sources as well as the many ways the average consumer can easily become part of the renewable energy revolution. The film reveals the connection between personal choices and energy use and introduces us to individuals, businesses, schools and universities who have cut their energy use in half by taking simple steps that benefit the consumer, the environment and the economy.

[www.progressivedvds.com](http://www.progressivedvds.com) (\$25)

*Koyaanisqatsi: Life out of Balance* by Reggio (1983);  
*Powaqqatsi: Life in Transformation* by Reggio (1988);  
*Baraka* by Fricke (1992).

Stunning, powerful, moving set of non-verbal films. They work well as a full set but in the real world where life is short and art long I'd choose *Baraka* over the others. Re: *Baraka*, from the IMDb website: "Without words, cameras show us the world, with an emphasis not on "where," but on "what's there." It begins with morning, natural landscapes and people at prayer: volcanoes, water falls, veldts, and forests; several hundred monks do a monky chant. Indigenous peoples apply body paint; whole villages dance. The film moves to destruction of nature via logging, blasting, and strip mining. Images of poverty, rapid urban life, and factories give way to war, concentration camps, and mass graves. Ancient ruins come into view, and then a sacred river where pilgrims bathe and funeral pyres burn. Prayer and nature return. A monk rings a huge bell; stars wheel across the sky."

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## Great Envirotech Films, cont.

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It's all about culture, technology, and our connection to nature. All cultures mediate that relationship, but some mediations are more remote than others—e.g. watching a TV special about Yellowstone National Park vs. driving through YNP and viewing it through the windshield vs. spending a few days backpacking the YNP back country.

### *Life with Principle: Thoreau's Voice in Our Time*

Produced by Melvyn Hopper

See <http://www.lifewithprinciple.org/>, sponsored by the Thoreau Society <http://www.thoreausociety.org/>. The DVD costs \$250 for educational use and includes:

- The 56-minute film, *Life with Principle*, which features commentary that follow six themes present in Thoreau's writings. The themes are:

- ✦ Hearing That Different Drummer
- ✦ Being Awake, Aware, and Alive
- ✦ Examining Desperate and Deliberate Lives
- ✦ Living in Society
- ✦ Living in Nature
- ✦ Confronting the Mean and the Sublime
- ✦ *Thoreau's Concord*, a 12-minute historical documentary that follows the same themes to explore both Concord and Henry David Thoreau's place in it.
- ✦ *Profiles in Civil Disobedience*, a 12-minute examination of this philosophy as practiced by Wangari Maathai in Kenya, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi in Japan, and Nelson Mandela in South Africa.
- ✦ *World Leaders*, a 4-minute glance at the impact of Thoreau's writings on Leo Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Daisaku Ikeda, as well as on *Life with Principle* speakers Noam Chomsky, Daniel Ellsberg, and Howard Zinn.
- ✦ *The Boat Men: Bill and Ben*, an animated short that is certain to stimulate discussion of the six themes.
- ✦ A 16-page *Study Guide*, intended to provide an overall plan for implementing all of the *Life with Principle* materials.
- ✦ A 51-page *Thoreau Curriculum* that details teaching strategies, relevant activities, and recommendations for further study.

- ✦ An 11-page *Commentary* written by Thoreau scholar Bradley P. Dean (1954-2006). It reveals the origination of the six themes in Thoreau's writings.

A full set of the *Thoreau Society Bulletin*, dating from 1941 to 2005, containing sixty years of articles about Thoreau's life, literature, legacy, and the landscapes that inspired them.

The curriculum material was developed particularly for high school students, but the DVD would also be useful on the college level, particularly in lower-level environmental history courses that talk about Thoreau.

### *Local Hero*

By Bill Forsyth (1983)

From IMDb: "An American oil company sends a man to Scotland to buy up an entire village where they want to build a refinery. But things don't go as expected."

### *Manufactured Landscapes*

Directed by Jennifer Baichwal

MANUFACTURED LANDSCAPES is a feature length documentary on the world and work of renowned artist Edward Burtynsky. Burtynsky makes large-scale photographs of 'manufactured landscapes' – quarries, recycling yards, factories, mines, dams. He photographs civilization's materials and debris, but in a way people describe as "stunning" or "beautiful," and so raises all kinds of questions about ethics and aesthetics without trying to easily answer them.

The film follows Burtynsky to China as he travels the country photographing the evidence and effects of that country's massive industrial revolution. Sites such as the Three Gorges Dam, which is bigger by 50% than any other dam in the world and displaced over a million people, factory floors over a kilometre long, and the breathtaking scale of Shanghai's urban renewal are subjects for his lens and our motion picture camera.

Shot in Super-16mm film, *Manufactured Landscapes* extends the narrative streams of Burtynsky's photographs, allowing us to meditate on our profound impact on the planet and witness both the epicentres of industrial endeavour and the dumping grounds of its waste. What makes the photographs so powerful is his refusal in them to be didactic. We are all implicated here, they tell us: there are no easy answers. The film continues this approach of pre-

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## Great Envirotech Films, cont.

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senting complexity, without trying to reach simplistic judgements or reductive resolutions. In the process, it tries to shift our consciousness about the world and the way we live in it.

2006, Canada, 90 mins.

### *The Maxx*

Animation by Vanzo (1995)

I have a VHS tape collection of the show's segments that aired on MTV's "Liquid Television" years ago. Julie the social worker lives in a rundown apartment and deals with the mean streets of the city. She gradually gets in touch with her subconscious and spirit animal in the Pangean Outback. Together, she and the masked man(?) Maxx battle the serial rapist and killer Mr. Gone (see Wikipedia for more details). I like to pair *The Maxx* with a reading from Grumbine's *Ghost Bears* (about the biodiversity crisis) and exercises structured upon Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre vs. Theatre of the Oppressed.

### *Metropolis*

By Fritz Lang (1927)

IMDb: "Fritz Lang's groundbreaking landmark remains one of the biggest mysteries in the world of cinema. How can a movie that'll soon turn 80 years old still look so disturbingly futuristic?? The screenplay by Thea Von Harbou is still very haunting and courageously assails social issues that are of all ages. The world has been divided into two main categories: thinkers & workers! If you belong to the first category, you can lead a life of luxury above ground but if you're a worker, your life isn't worth a penny, and you're doomed to perilous labor underground. The further expansions and intrigues in the screenplay are too astonishing to spoil, so I strongly advise that you check out the film yourself. It's essential viewing, anyway! "Metropolis" is a very demanding film-experience and definitely not always entertaining. But, as it is often the case with silent-cinema classics, the respect and admiration you'll develop during watching it will widely excel the enjoyment-aspect. Fritz' brutal visual style still looks innovative and few directors since were able to re-create a similarly nightmarish composition of horizontal and vertical lines. Many supposedly 'restored' versions have been released over the years (in

1984 and 2002, for example) but the 1926-version is still the finest in my opinion, even though that one already isn't as detailed and punctual as Lang intended it. "Metropolis" perhaps is THE most important and influential movie ever made. "2001: A Space Odyssey", "Star Wars" and "Blade Runner" owe their existence (or at least their power) to it."

### *Modern Times*

By Charlie Chaplin (1936)

Henry Ford vs. stochastic chaos in the form of The Little Tramp. IMDb: "Long after most people thought the silent movie had been buried forever, Chaplin brought his "Little Fellow" out of mothballs for one more magnificent motion picture. The Tramp is trapped in a factory, performing mind-numbing repetitive tasks, and finally he goes hilariously berserk. I started laughing the instant I saw the lady in the dress with the buttons. Like "City Lights," this film is a collection of charming vignettes, this time revolving around The Tramp's desire to settle down with gamin Paulette Goddard. From the Tramp's encounter with an assembly-line "feeding machine" to his unsuccessful stints as night watchman and waiter, this movie is packed full of delights. Chaplin never speaks, but he does sing a little. This work of genius can make you smile though your heart is breaking. " No student should graduate from a STS or envirotech program without contrasting the feeding machine scene with The Little Tramp feeding the trapped master mechanic scene from this film.

### *The Next Industrial Revolution*

(2001)

While some environmental observers predict doomsday scenarios in which a rapidly increasing human population is forced to compete for even scarcer natural resources, Bill McDonough sees a more exciting and hopeful future.

In his vision humanity takes nature itself as our guide reinventing technical enterprises to be as safe and ever-renewing as natural processes.

Can't happen? It's already happening...at Nike, at Ford Motor Company, at Oberlin College, at Herman Miller Furniture, and at DesignTex...and it's part of what architect McDonough and his partner, chemist Michael Braungart, call 'The Next Industrial Revolution.'

Shot in Europe and the United States, the film ex-

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## Great Envirotech Films, cont.

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plores how businesses are transforming themselves to work with nature and enhance profitability.

www.bullfrogfilms.com (\$250 VHS/\$275 DVD)

### *Old Quabbin Valley*

(1981)

Boston's history has included a long reach for adequate water supplies. The city controls a complex system of aqueducts and reservoirs stretching 80 miles into western Massachusetts and culminating in the large Quabbin Reservoir, which was created in the 1930s by flooding four towns and six villages. This documentary focuses on Boston's latest, bitterly controversial scheme to meet its growing need for water--to skim floodwaters of the Connecticut River and divert them via an aqueduct to Quabbin. The centuries-old struggle between the state's urban east and rural west is investigated, highlighting especially the question of home rule. (Florentine Films, 1981, 16mm, color, 30 minutes.)

### *On the Beach*

By Stanley Kramer (1959)

From IMDb: "The residents of Australia after a global nuclear war must come to terms with the fact that all life will be destroyed in a matter of months."

*Power and the Land* by Ivens (1940); *The Plow that Broke the Plains* by Lorentz (1936); *The New Frontier* by McClure (1934); and *The River* by Lorentz (1937).

Available as a VHS tape distributed by Kino Video some years ago. These are classic Depression-era government documentary films that show the growing political awareness of what today we would call "sustainable technology/economics." They also embrace the early 20<sup>th</sup> century optimism that technology is a solution to all social problems. My favorite of the bunch is *Power and the Land*, which "observes the daily activities of a dairy farming family in Ohio. The majestic photography...elevates them to iconic figures of Americana, their diligence rewarded by the messianic government in the form of electricity." (from the liner notes). This film pairs nicely with readings from Marx's *Machine in the Garden* as well as readings/discussions of the core meanings of "modernity" and "progress."

### *The Power Of One*

"The Power of One" is a strong movie based on the popular novel. This is quite a different project for director John G. Avildsen ("Rocky" and "The Karate Kid"), but the characters and events mix to create great chemistry. Stephen Dorff as the adult Peekay, the main character, wears his emotions on his sleeve. You can really see the pain he goes through. Morgan Freeman, as Geel Piet, does an excellent job portraying an inmate. I love his accent, and even though he isn't South African, he does an excellent job depicting one. This film recognizes the pain and anguish African people went through on their continent during World War II. It makes people realize that there are those who can make a difference. In fact, it made me believe that anyone can make a difference if they are inspired enough. I love this film and think it deserves great recognition. The story takes place in South Africa, partly in a jail, where Africans are treated horribly. Peekay, a white boy, grows up in these surroundings, and with the help of his friend Geel Piet learns that what is happening to these people is wrong, and should be made right. After Geel Piet stands up for what he believes, and dies for it, Peekay knows that it is his duty to get involved and help end apartheid. With a great and sad love story, this movie is truly magnificent. It shows us that by coming together we can create our own "power of one" and change the ways of the world that are wrong. Take my word for it and gather your power and courage to see a great movie. This story is the best example of good humanity, and anyone who sees it will be changed forever.

<http://www.teenink.com/Past/2002/June/Movies/ThePowerofOne.html> (\$4.38@ amazon.com)

### *Supersize Me*

Why are Americans so fat? Find out in *Super Size Me*, a tongue in-cheek - and burger in hand -- look at the legal, financial and physical costs of America's hunger for fast food. Ominously, 37% of American children and adolescents are carrying too much fat and 2 out of every three adults are overweight or obese. Is it our fault for lacking self-control, or are the fast-food corporations to blame? Filmmaker Morgan Spurlock hit the road and interviewed experts in 20 U.S. cities, including Houston, the "Fattest City" in America. From Surgeon Generals to gym teachers, cooks to kids, lawmakers to legislators, these authorities shared their research, opinions and "gut feelings" on our

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## Great Envirotech Films, cont.

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ever-expanding girth. During the journey, Spurlock also put his own body on the line, living on nothing but McDonald's for an entire month with three simple rules:

- 1) No options: he could only eat what was available over the counter (water included!)
- 2) No super sizing unless offered
- 3) No excuses: he had to eat every item on the menu at least once

It all adds up to a fat food bill, harrowing visits to the doctor, and compelling viewing for anyone who's ever wondered if man could live on fast food alone. The film explores the horror of school lunch programs, declining health and physical education classes, food addictions and the extreme measures people take to lose weight and regain their health. *Super Size Me* is a satirical jab in the stomach, overstuffed with fat and facts about the billion-dollar industry besieged by doctors, lawyers and nutritionists alike. "Would you like fries with that?" will never sound the same!

<http://www.supersizeme.com/home.aspx?page=aboutmovie> (\$18.74@ amazon.com)

### *Swades*

By Ashutosh Gowariker (2004)

"Swades" (pronounced "Swah-DESH is the first commercial Indian film to be nominated for a "Best Foreign Film" Oscar. I've obtained it a couple times from Netflix here in the U.S., so it can't be too tough to procure. It is in Hindi (almost Hinglish), but there are English subtitles. As is about typical for Bollywood films, it's about 3.5 hours long, so one has to be strategic about its use in a class. I'm actually in the process of preparing a conference paper (for the American Anthropological Association meeting), half of which discusses the film, so I'll just give you part of my draft from that:

The film's plot revolves around the character of Mohan Bhargava (played by Bollywood megastar Shahrukh Khan), an "NRI" (non-resident Indian) engineer living in the United States and working as the project manager for a NASA satellite program to measure global precipitation. Homesick and lonely, Mohan takes a short-notice vacation to return to India and find his nanny, who he has last touch with over the years. Despite the inclusion of several stock Bollywood elements of plot and style—a love interest initially denied, affirmation of the importance of family, interludes with song and dance—the film was not judged a sig-

nificant popular success, but critics gave it strong accolades as "a film that needed to be made."

The film is a rich thematic tapestry, juxtaposing global cosmopolitanism with rural India, national identity with familial obligation, spectacular "high technology" with developmental priorities. Atypically attuned to social discourse for a Bollywood film, it is particularly important for what it reveals about the meaning of space research in India through the allegorical figure of its protagonist, the non-resident Indian and earth remote sensing engineer.

### *Turning the Tide: Sustaining Earth's Large Marine Ecosystems*

Directed by Francois Odendaal Productions, and presented with GEF and IW:LEARN

"The Earth's Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs) are places of great beauty, biodiversity and bounty. Humanity depends on the vitality of these coastal areas, yet current human activities are causing catastrophic harm to LMEs. A global movement has begun to stop and reverse this damage before it's too late. With support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), nations are beginning to turn the tide to save LMEs. And you are part of the solution too..."

### *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*

WAL-MART: THE HIGH COST OF LOW PRICE is a feature length documentary that uncovers a retail giant's assault on families and American values.

The film dives into the deeply personal stories and everyday lives of families and communities struggling to fight a goliath. A working mother is forced to turn to public assistance to provide healthcare for her two small children. A Missouri family loses its business after Wal-Mart is given over \$2 million to open its doors down the road. A mayor struggles to equip his first responders after Wal-Mart pulls out and relocates just outside the city limits. A community in California unites, takes on the giant, and wins!

<http://www.walmartmovie.com/about.php> (\$11.50@ amazon.com)

### *The Wedding of Palo*

By Rasmussen (1935)

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## Great Envirotech Films, cont.

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I have an old VHS from Video Yesteryear. A quasi-documentary of “Eskimo life in the Angmagssalik district of Greenland.” It is a wonderful depiction of the toolkit of an indigenous people and a life lived according to the cyclic pattern of weather, seasons, salmon, seals, etc.

### *Where the Green Ants Dream*

By Werner Herzog (1985)

From Rotten Tomatoes website: “Director Werner Herzog’s unusual Aboriginal drama begins and ends with ominous footage of dust storms and tornadoes, accompanied by dramatic classical music. In between is the simple yet jarring story of Aborigines staging protest at the site of a prospective mine. The site also happens to be sacred Aboriginal ground, home of indefatigable green ants whose dreams, the Aborigines believe, are essential to the continuation the entire universe. Hackett (Bruce Spence) is the awkward geologist, manning the mining outpost in what he

calls “purgatory south” or the south Australian outback, a landscape crisply sketched by Herzog’s stark cinematography of dust heaps and empty vistas. When the fearless Aborigines walk directly into a line of exploding charges, the mining operation comes to a grinding halt, and Hackett barely prevents frustrated workers from killing them. The simplicity of the Aborigines’ aims, (they will not be swayed by money) serves to highlight the ridiculous and greedy machinations of the mining company as well as the Australian “law of the land.” As the absurdist struggle progresses towards a trial, Hackett’s role as a liaison between the mining company and the stoic natives brings him closer and closer to the Aborigines’ simple yet expansive philosophy of a land-centered spirituality.”

The trial scene is outstanding—a great exercise in the semiotics of nature, contrasting the court of British law with TEK (Traditional Ecological Knowledge).



*Carina Sophia Sheldon LeCain (10 weeks) says: “Thank you Envirotechies for trying to make the future world a better place for me!”*