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Elwood – An Investigation into a Social Relationship with Nature

Elwood is a 22-minute short fiction thesis film about a young woman who discovers that she is able to communicate with one and only one tree, named Elwood, in the woods near where she lives. To her dismay the tree is scheduled to be cut down, a fact that the tree itself does not seem very concerned about at all. The film follows their conversations over the course of one year through the seasons.

The film was shot almost entirely outside in the Natural Lands on Campus over the last 7 months, capturing the entire seasonal variation of the environment. It relies on primarily stationary shots to accentuate motion and life in the natural world, a style largely inspired by nonfiction documentary filmmaking.

This stylistic choice interwoven with a narrative within a fiction film is intended to ensure that the small details of apparently mundane nature are brought to the forefront and kept there, often aided by use of extreme wide shots or, on the other end of the spectrum, extreme closeups of the environment. This is done to provoke a phenomenological frame of mind when watching the film, a choice inspired by animated works like Hayao Miyazaki's earlier films and films such as *Loving Vincent*, where objects of nature or "phenomena" are put front and center for the viewer to reflect upon.

Alongside the aforementioned aesthetic choices, the film includes a few technical innovations that are somewhat unique amongst student films in park. The two actors never actually met in person save for a table reading of the script over zoom. All of Elwood's lines were recorded in a voice booth prior to filming with stand-in readers on set conversing with our other actor. Additionally, due to the variability of lighting and weather outside, the film was shot almost entirely sequentially from day to day, which is somewhat atypical for most film sets. These factors have required innovation during both production and post-production which will shine through in the finished product.

The film attempts to ask a lot of questions of the viewer throughout the dialogues of its two characters. It certainly has an environmentalist lilt to it, and also contains light comedic elements, but neither of these are the primary focus. The main theme presented in *Elwood* is one of relationships. How can we as humans "socialize" with nature, and what social benefits and we receive from the natural world? This question I believe connects intimately to a mindset of "Object Oriented Ontology" presented by Timothy Morton in his book *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. What happens to environmentalism and our own identities when we switch the focus from subject (us) to object (the world around us)? What happens when the background becomes the foreground?

Elwood wrapped in February and has just entered picture lock (final stages of post-production). It will be finished this month. All that would be required for the presentation would be a digital screen to play it on.

References

Morton, T. (2013). *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and ecology after the end of the world*. University of Minnesota Press.

Universal pictures. (2018). *Loving vincent*. Roma.