



Gregory Bateson in *An Ecology of Mind*

Cinema Pacific

Eugene and UO's festival features films and directors

Cinema Pacific is a bouillabaisse of art. The films, talks and visual art exhibits aim to expose audiences to films and new media from countries around the Pacific (including the U.S.), and to connect artists and the public. Venues across Eugene host the events, which continue through Sunday, April 10.

Liu Jiayin and her parents invite viewers into their home in the pseudo-documentary *Oxhide*, a portrait of a Chinese family trying to stay afloat with their leather handbag making business. The film follows the family members through ordinary moments inside their apartment, discussing their business as well as their pet peeves with one another.

Playing characters loosely based on themselves works for the family of actors, and the amateurs appear so real that *Oxhide* feels like a true, intrusive documentary. Arguments and a few moments of violence, debates and ongoing worries show the difficulty of transitioning to entrepreneurship in modern Beijing.

In the tiny apartment, Jiayin makes a virtue from a liability, choosing to shoot each scene on one camera from a single take. Many of the scenes reveal only hands or torsos, and the apartment is so dim that others are almost entirely in silhouette.

The style reinforces the economic difficulties that the family faces — that its debts are closing in on them and selling their leather purses isn't helping them climb

out of the hole. His customers' constant demands for a discount stress the father's pocketbook and dignity. He tries to focus on other problems, like his adult daughter's shortness, but the only relief from the unsolvable height is in its distraction. Beibei (Jiayin) hates his atrocious table manners. The mother wishes everyone could be more sympathetic toward each other.

The sum of these conflicts is a scab on the wound that is their debt, and it is picked, picked, picked. The torn flesh is a vivid and beautiful if somewhat forlorn portrait of modern China, apart from the technology and the menacing boom trumpeted in the West.

An Ecology of Mind is a traditional documentary, a portrait of director Nora Bateson's father, Gregory Bateson. An anthropologist and philosopher, Bateson continuously questioned ways of looking at the world, and the film seeks to unpack the way that Bateson settled on viewing it.

Whether a viewer likes *An Ecology* depends entirely on the viewer. Innate philosophers and perhaps neurology buffs will appreciate the way that Bateson thought and enjoy glimpses of his fascinating life. But if you're a person who makes fun of people who talk about whether a table is really a table when they are way, way too stoned? It's boring as hell. **EW**

Oxhide plays at 6:45pm Saturday, April 9, at Bijou Art Cinemas. Director Liu Jiayin will be present. A follow up to the 2005 film, *Oxhide II*, will play at the Bijou at 1pm, Sunday April 10; *An Ecology of Mind* plays at 6:45pm, Thursday April 7, at Bijou Art Cinemas, with Joan Gratz's Puffer Girl and Kubla Khan. Director Nora Bateson will be present.



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