**Ivens, Joris (b. 18 November 1898, Nijmegen, Netherlands; d. 28 June1989, Paris, France)**

Joris Ivens (Georg Henri Anton Ivens), nicknamed “The Flying Dutchman” for his globe-trotting career, was a Dutch documentary maker whose political commitment and deft use of montage helped shape documentary practice as he recorded and championed generally leftist political causes on every continent but Antarctica.

Ivens was born in Nijmegen, Holland, to a prosperous Catholic family running a photographic supplies business. While studying to take charge of the family business, Ivens became both politically active and fascinated with film culture. In 1927, he helped found the Amsterdam Filmliga (Film League), which brought him into contact with avant-garde films of the day and with visiting filmmakers including Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin.

A Filmliga visit to Berlin experimental abstract animator Walter Ruttmann (1887-1941) allowed Ivens to see Ruttmann’s new documentary feature, *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Grosstadt* [*Berlin, Symphony of a Great City*] (1927), one of the first films to attempt to portray a city solely through edited shots of urban life and physical details. The film’s influence on Ivens persisted throughout his career.

Encouraged by his meeting with Ruttmann, Ivens embarked on his own critically acclaimed film projects: *De Brug* [*The Bridge*] (1928), a lyrical portrait of the new lift bridge over the Rotterdam’s Konigshaven and the rhythmical (albeit silent) *Regen* [*Rain*] (1929) depicting the moods and visual patterns of an Amsterdam shower. In 1931 Ivens made the first Dutch film with sound, *Philips Radio*. *Nieuwe Gronden* [*New Earth*] (1934), with music by Hanns Eisler (1898-1962), depicted the Dutch reclamation of land from the Zuiderzee. With Belgian documentarian Henri Storck (1907-1999), he made *Misere au Borinage* [*Misery in Borinage*] (1934) about the poverty of coal miners in the Borinage region of Belgium and their long strike for better conditions. It was one of the first documentaries in the West to espouse a leftist cause. The filmmakers had to dodge police to make their film and wound up re-creating incidents they had been unable to film originally.

In the later 1930s, Ivens settled in America where he made two anti-fascist films which significantly influenced international opinion. *The Spanish Earth* (1937), with commentary written and spoken by Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), supported the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War. *The 400 Million* (1939) generated enormous sympathy and support for the Chinese in their resistance to the 1937 Japanese invasion and introduced Mao Zedong to the world outside China. *The Spanish Earth*, shot in the middle of a war zone, showed Ivens he could not depend on a script written before the actual filming commenced and forced him to construct his film in the editing room with his available footage. It also helped clarify his ideas on the levels of editing: first, simple visual editing, shot after shot; second, psychological factors; third, personal, political, social point of view of the filmmaker.

Ivens’ subsequent works focused primarily on poverty and war in countries around the world and won him numerous international awards. *Indonesia Calling* (1946), which supported Indonesia in its independence struggle against the Dutch Empire, alienated him from his home country until 1964 when the Dutch Film Museum hosted a special reception honoring his 65th birthday.

**References and further reading**

Bakker, K. (ed.) (1999) *Joris Ivens and the Documentary Context.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Ivens, J. (1969) “Spain and *The Spanish Earth*” in *Nonfiction Film Theory and Criticism* (Richard Meran Barsam, ed.), 1979. New York: Dutton.

Schoots, H. (2000) *Living Dangerously: A Biography of Joris Ivens.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

**Selected Filmography**

*De Brug* (*The Bridge*, 1928)

*Regen* (*Rain*, 1929)

*Philips Radio* (1931)

*Nieuwe Gronden* (*New Earth*, 1934)

*Misère au Borinage* (*Borinage*, 1934)

*The Spanish Earth* (1937) with commentary written and spoken by Ernest Hemingway

*The 400 Million* (1939)

*Power and the Land* (1940) documentary on the struggle to bring electricity to rural areas in America

*Indonesia Calling* (1946) made in Australia; union sailors and dockworkers refuse to load Dutch ships carrying arms to suppress Indonesia’s independence movement.

*Lied der Ströme* (*Song of the Rivers*, 1954) East German production about workers along six major rivers around the world

*La Seine a rencontré Paris* (*The Seine Meets Paris*, 1957) screenplay by Jacques Prévert; daily life along the Seine in Paris

*...À Valparaíso* (1963) with commentary by Chris Marker

*Loin du Vietnam* (*Far from Vietnam*, 1967) made with six French directors

*Comment Yukong déplaça les montagnes* [*How Yukong Moved the Mountains*] (1976) 763 minutes long, about the end of the Cultural Revolution

*Un Histoire de vent* (*A Tale of the Wind*, 1988) with Marceline Loridan; a reflection on Ivens’ life as he attempts to capture winds on film in China

**Paratextual**

*The Bridge* (1927-28) on UbuWeb: <http://www.ubu.com/film/ivens_bridge.html>

*Regen* [*Rain*] (1928) on UbuWeb: <http://www.ubu.com/film/ivens_regen.html>

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