Cinema has an enduring fascination with cars. From the lure of speed and movement to the threat of the crash, experiences behind the wheel have inspired filmmakers to deliver similar kinetic pleasures. The car also promised jobs, middle-class lifestyle, and movement without limits, but it was built on the dream of cheap gas. We now know that the car’s midcentury “autopia” helped set us on the road to our current climate disaster.

Programmed by Justus Nieland, Professor of English (MSU), Kyle Sittig, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English (MSU), and Brian R. Jacobson, Professor of Visual Culture (CalTech), “Petrocinema” explores the fateful entanglement of automobiles, film, and finite natural resources. Ranging from government and industrial films produced by the Office of Public Roads, GM, Shell Oil, and BP, to a range of experimental works, this screening program scrutinizes the promise and threat of the car as a commodity, technology, design object, and unsustainable fantasy. Registration is required.