MISE-EN-SCÈNE

The Journal of Film & Visual Narration

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About *MSJ*

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Situating itself in film's visual narrative, *Mise-en-scène: The Journal of Film & Visual Narration* (ISSN 2369-5056) is the first of its kind: an international, peer-reviewed journal focused exclusively on the artistry of frame composition as a storytelling technique. With its open-access, open-review publishing model, *MSJ* strives to be a synergitic, community-oriented hub for discourse that begins at the level of the frame. Scholarly analysis of lighting, set design, costuming, camera angles, camera proximities, depth of field, and character placement are just some of the topics that the journal covers. While primarily concerned with discourse in and around the film frame, *MSJ* also includes narratological analysis at the scene and sequence level of related media (television and online) within its scope.

Particularly welcome are articles that dovetail current debates, research, and theories as they deepen the understanding of filmic storytelling. The journal's contributing writers are an eclectic, interdisciplinary mixture of graduate students, academics, filmmakers, film scholars, and cineastes, a demographic that also reflects the journal's readership. Published annually in the spring and winter, *MSJ* is the official film studies journal of Kwantlen Polytechnic University, where it is sponsored by the Faculty of Arts, the KDocsFF Documentary Film Festival, the KPU Library, and KPU's English Department. In print, it can be found in KPU's and Cinemateca Portuguesa-Museu do Cinema's libraries. *MSJ* appears in EBSCO's Film and Television Literature Index. ▪

ONE FRAME AT A TIME

Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader:

Who here has noticed the increasing number of films and streaming series set in the 1980s?

Time will tell if this resurgence is just a trend, but for now our cinematic/popular culture landscape continues to find a home for representations of larger-than-life '80s iconography. Whether you have been "Running Up That Hill" with *Stranger Things* (2016-2025) or wrestling with *The Iron Claw* (2023), Gen Xers aren't the only ones who are nostalgic for the decade of decadence. If that weren't meta enough, there's also a Hulu documentary on the Brat Pack directed by Andrew McCarthy called *BRATS* (2024) and IPs such as Doug Liman's *Road House* (2024) and Selena Gomez's *Working Girl* being reimagined for a 2020s audience. Of course the '80s also launched the directorial careers of the Coen Brothers and marked the breakthrough for Steven Spielberg and a new level of acclaim for Martin Scorsese. While David Lynch is counted amongst these directors as a now revered auteur, his 1984 adaptation of Frank Herbert's *Dune* was one of the decade's biggest critical and commercial failures that made him an outlier. Lynch himself disowned the film.

However, 1984's *Dune* has since amassed a cult classic following that has seen its re-evaluation as an adaptation of Herbert's novel and as a flawed but legitimate part of Lynch's filmography. In Issue 9.1, "1980s Redux," returning contributor Andrew Hageman investigates Max Evry's *A Masterpiece in Disarray: David Lynch's 'Dune'* in "The Reader Must Awaken" to determine *Dune*'s place in the Lynchian cinematic universe.

The 1980s is also spotlighted in Kelly Doyle's review of Ava Maria Safai's *ZIP* (2023), a horror short set on the cusp of 1980 that follows the story of Melody (Gelareh Ghodrati), an Iranian teenager whose father zippers her mouth shut before she can perform at her school's talent show. Gail Maurice's dramedy *Rosie* (2023), the story of an orphaned Indigenous girl who is taken in by her fabulous aunt and two-spirit friends, is included in Ian Frayne's report on the Sundar Prize Film Festival.

I would like to dedicate this special "1980s Redux" issue of *MSJ* to KPU English instructor, Neil Patrick Kennedy (1959-2024). Not unlike 1980s cinema, Neil was bold, larger-than-life, beloved, and iconic. May his love of cinema and stories that unite us follow you through the pages of Issue 9.1.

Greg Chan
Editor-in-Chief

Our Contributors

HENRIQUE BRAZÃO

Born in 1993, Henrique Brazão is a Portuguese PhD student at NOVA University (FCSH) and an independent filmmaker based in Lisbon. He holds a BA in Screenwriting from Lisbon Film School (ESTC) and a Master's degree in Communication Sciences from NOVA University. Currently, he is developing his doctoral thesis, which examines the themes of love and temporality in contemporary cinema, focusing on the work of North American filmmaker Kelly Reichardt. Over the past six years, Henrique has written and directed three short films: *In June* (2019), *Beacon* (2022), and *Postcards from the Atlantic Ocean* (2023). He is currently working on a short documentary about his hometown.

KELLY DOYLE

Kelly Doyle holds a PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies from UBC; she currently teaches film and literature at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. Her research and teaching interests focus on the subversiveness of gender and posthumanism in horror film. Her work on zombies in popular culture was featured on CBC Radio, Shaw TV, and in local newspapers, while her recent publications explore anthropocentrism, humanism, and cannibalism in zombie films, as well as the representation of gender and 'the human' in zombie transmedia. She is also a reviewer, copyeditor, and advisory board member for *MSJ*.

IAN FRAYNE

Ian Frayne was raised in Langley, British Columbia on the unceded territory of the Kwantlen, Semiahmoo, Matsqui and Katzie nations. While pursuing a career in storytelling with the Character's Talent agency and a BFA degree at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, he writes/acts/produces film, publishes creative and critical writings, and works for the Sundar Prize Film Festival. He has been awarded a BC Excellence Scholarship and a Billeh Nickerson Creative Writing Award. As a descendant of settler-colonials, Ian is learning to be an active ally each day. He loves speaking with trees, drinking from bowls, and learning from his family for their unconditional inspiration.

HAILEY GLENNON

Hailey Glennon is a graduate from Kwantlen Polytechnic University with a BA in English and a minor in creative writing. Her academic pursuits include focusing on the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality across literature and film, but specifically in the speculative fiction genre. She is interested in the bridge between race and identity, and a lot of her research revolves around South Asian, Black and Indigenous studies. She hopes to continue this work in graduate school. Outside academic pursuits, she is a lifelong film enthusiast and creative writer. Her work spans across various genres from short fiction, speculative novels, and feature screenplays. As a mixed-race South Asian woman, Hailey's creative and academic endeavours aim to address the ethnic and gender-based stereotypes often overlooked within literature and film. She is also a 2023 recipient of KPU's Intersectional Social Justice Essay Award.

ANDREW HAGEMAN

Andy Hageman is Associate Professor of English and Director of The Center for Ethics and Public Engagement at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, USA. His most recent publications include "Exploring SF Ecocinema: Ideologies of Gender, Infrastructure, and US/China Dynamics in *Interstellar* and *The Wandering Earth*," a co-authored with Regina Kanyu Wang chapter in *Ecocinema Theory and Practice 2;* the "Engaging Students and Global Weirding" chapter of the MLA book *Teaching the Literature of Climate Change*; and "The Wood for the Trees: Regional and Anthropocene Signals in the Pacific Northwest Forests of *Twin Peaks*.

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Samantha Lay is an English instructor at Meridian Community College and an adjunct professor of English at the University of West Alabama. Her work represents her interest in Gothic film and literature, specifically on the intersection between Gothic and social issues concerning gender and class. During her doctoral studies at the University of Houston, she taught film and literature courses focusing on the films of Alfred Hitchcock and the literary and philosophical works that influenced his films. Dr. Lay's chapter, "The Child Hero in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds,*" appears in *Children in the Films of Alfred Hitchcock* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), and her book *Monstrous Marriage: Re-Evaluating Consent, Coverture, and Divorce in Nineteenth-Century Women's Gothic Fiction* is forthcoming from McFarland in 2023.

JOAKIM NILSSON

Joakim Nilsson completed his PhD At the University of Alberta. He previously taught at Pierce College and Simon Fraser University, and now teachers in the English Department at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. His teaching and research interests focus on representations of masculinities in American literature and film, and in medieval literature. He is currently working on an article exploring the representation of the male artist as a "kept man" in post-World War Two Hollywood films.

PAUL RISKER

Paul Risker is an independent scholar, freelance film and literary critic, and interviewer. Outside of editing *MSJ*'s interview and film festival sections, he mainly contributes to *PopMatters*, although his criticism and interviews have been published by both academic and non-academic publications that include *Cineaste*, *Film International*, *The Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, and *Little White Lies*. He remains steadfast in his belief of the need to counter contemporary cultures emphasis on the momentary, by writing for posterity, adding to an ongoing discussion that is essentially us belonging to something that is bigger than ourselves.

CAROLINA ROCHA

Carolina Rocha is an incoming dual master's student in Archival and Library & Information Studies at the University of British Columbia, where she hopes to continue her exploration of queer and gender dynamics, film theory, diaspora, fandom culture, and classical studies. She has a BA in English and Creative Writing from KPU and is passionate about her creative as well as scholarly work—outside of her academic pursuits, Carolina works as a book designer, and her personal writing has been published in *Room* and *pulpMAG*. This is her third publication with *MSJ*.

AMY TREMBLAY

Amy Tremblay is finishing her undergraduate degree at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in May 2024, where she will be obtaining a BA in English. As a peer tutor, Amy is passionate about empowering learners with writing, reading, research, and technology skills, and she hopes to pursue this passion in UBC's Master of Library and Information Studies program, which she will be attending in the Fall. Amy's research interests include feminist film theory and examinations of transgressive liminality in literature and film. She also enjoys thinking critically about Canadian pasts and presents, and she has had a creative research paper published in KPU's undergraduate history journal, *The Emergent Historian*.

ONE FRAME AT A TIME

Touching the Millennium

The Nostalgic Impulse of Tsai Ming-liang's *The Hole*

BY HENRIQUE BRAZÃO
FCSH/IFILNOVA - NOVA UNIVERSITY LISBON

ABSTRACT

By taking a close look at the forms and cinematic strategies of Tsai Ming-liang's 1998 film *The Hole*, this article intends to identify the nostalgic subtext that emerges from the tensions generated by different temporal/diegetic levels of representation. Using proper citation mechanisms, the film dialogues with the memory of the century that ends, while projecting into the near future–the overly symbolic year 2000–the anxieties of the present, ultimately proposing a way out through human unmediated connection. Relying on scene analysis, the text will invoke thinkers from cultural studies, film studies, politics, history, philosophy and sociology as well as objects from the visual arts and fiction literature, to create an ample mesh of references that can help contextualize Tsai's gesture as a filmmaker of its time.

INTRODUCTION

A retrospective impulse defined the twilight of the twentieth century. Attested by social, political and cultural manifestations of many types, about that which has since been labeled "an accursed century" (Badiou 2), this urgency can be understood as an attempt to make sense of colossal structural changes–at the intersection between globalization and digital technology–and inexpressible angst, brought up by baffling wars. Simultaneously, a conscientious look into the near future (the advent of the overly symbolic year 2000) equally defined artistic and literary gestures guided by anxious anticipation.

In the late 1990s, French film production and distribution company Haut et Court selected a group of filmmakers from around the globe (Ildikó Enyedi, Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas, Hal Hartley, and others) proposing an anthology composed of ten fiction feature films about the impending turning of the millennium, named *2000 vu par…* (*2000, Seen by...*). *The Hole*[1] (1998), written and directed by Malaysian-born Taiwanese director Tsai Ming-liang, is arguably the most intensely studied and discussed film of this heterogeneous collection. The context from which this piece of apocalyptic contemporary cinema surfaces is symptomatic of a generalized state of apprehension regarding the near future.

This article proposes a critical look at the aesthetic and narrative forms of the director's exquisite picture through the perspective of nostalgia, specifically following Svetlana Boym's influential concept of "reflective nostalgia" (2001), placing the filmmaker's choices in the larger discourse about the memory of the century (substantially shaped by cinema) and the challenges of the future in a globalized and technologized world. As a methodological principle, the text will allow for an encounter between *The Hole* and other cultural objects, as well the mapping of a larger context, where the ideas of globalization and nostalgia are guiding compasses.

Primarily, the film will be summarized, not only regarding its narrative episodes and visual identity, but also the very important construction of its temporality. Additionally, the text will be concerned with Tsai's gesture as a filmmaker, trying to interpret the way the director responded to the proposed

1 Original title in traditional Chinese: 洞, Dòng.

challenge, and how his artistic choices reflect a particular idea of memory and nostalgia, underlining that the history of the twentieth century is inseparable from film history. It will be proposed that the musical sequences that interrupt the narrative flow are the key to understanding this nostalgic impulse, largely conceived by a collective way of visualizing history through a cinematic structure.

In her book *Screening the Past,* Pam Cook offers a tactful insight concerning historical fiction films, stating that

> they use the cinematic medium self-consciously to explore our imaginary relationship with past events, presenting history as a collection of mementoes, as fragmented and partial, accessible only through the mediation of personal perceptions and emotional responses. (177)

Set two years in the future, rather than standing as a hypothetical exercise, Tsai Ming-liang's film can be thought of as a historical recreation in reverse. *The Hole* projects into the future the uneasiness that defines its present, while permanently quoting and communicating with a troubled past.

A detailed analysis of the complex and multi-layered *The Hole* inevitably invokes the works and thought of many artists and writers, such as Boym, Gary Cross, Guo-Juin Hong, Andreas Huyssen, contemporary thinkers of nostalgia, a problematic and ubiquitous concept, as much an abstraction, a technique or an ethos; Susan Sontag and the idea of disease as a metaphor; Laura U. Marks or Marianne Hirsch and the symbiotic relations of skin and memory; the works of Fan Kuan, Edward Hopper, Luís Carmelo, Hou Hsiao-hsien, or Grace Chang, where aesthetic principles and thematic affinities can be sources of comparison. Concurrent with the vast networks of a globalized culture, the political and geographical specificities of the insular country that is Taiwan–as well as Tsai's condition as an expat artist–indisputably participate in the shaping of the film as an artistic phenomenon.

Considering the century in its graspable essence, the focus on the transition years can also outline a path for thinking about the present, as the film portrays the reality of a virus-stricken city, where political and health authorities dictate mandatory quarantines. Within the diegetic universe of *The Hole*, a hypothetical sense of normalcy has been fractured (indeed, the film can be read as a search for comfort in disturbing times) firmly conditioning any reflection made during these early years of the millennium's third decade.

TIME THROUGH A HOLE

The Hole is built on a multitude of dichotomies: masculine/feminine, private/public, modern/post-modern, dry/wet, human/non-human, past/future, up/down, local/global. Yet, Tsai Ming-liang's 1998 film doesn't necessarily offer a binary view of the themes it tackles, even if polarization and these ontological conflicts – and the tensions that consequently arise from them – are at the core of its identity. Succinctly, the film follows a woman (Yang Kuei-mei) who lives downstairs from a man (Lee Kang-sheng) on an almost empty building in urban Taiwan, during the last days of 1999. Preceding the opening shot, the soundtrack discloses the social context of this fabricated future over a black screen. A voice from a news anchor informs that, due to the spread of a dangerous virus, the areas under quarantine rules will cease to have water supply, starting 1 January 2000. The Kafkaesque consequences of this invisible threat–it can make people behave like cockroaches–echo Susan Sontag's words about the HIV/AIDS epidemic: "[t]he most terrifying illnesses are those perceived not just as lethal but as dehumanizing" (126), establishing a point of reference with a familiar extradiegetic reality [2].

The very descriptive first frame shows the man upstairs sleeping on his leather couch, with a mountain of peanut shells, a pack of cigarettes, a can of beer, a glass of water, and a remote control over the coffee table. It rains, and the walls are plunged with sparse mold stains. These are important details, as the great majority of the dialogue comes from television sets, and the two main characters—onely, alienated, and apathetic–are mostly presented through their movements, their objects, their private surroundings. The woman's apartment downstairs is in a more deteriorated condition: the wallpaper barely sticks to the impressively wet walls, and there is a palpable humidity that conveys a sense of eerie discomfort. In the chaotic state of things, these two individuals embody the resistance against governmental directives, deciding to remain inside the almost deserted building. The main conflict ensues when water starts dripping from above, into the woman's space, creating a large hole, an entity used for surveillance, communication, sexual exploration and eventual communion.

After a few challenging days of rain and tacit animosity between the two residents, the hole that connects their independent habitats becomes a symbol of unity. One of the final images of the film (Fig. 1) silently suggests that salvation is a possibility: there is hope for the new millennium, if human touch is made

Fig. 1 | Connecting through touch in Tsai Ming-liang's *The Hole*, 01:24:28. Celluloid Dreams, 1998.

2 On the television documentary My New Friends (1995), Tsai directly addressed the impact of HIV in Taiwan, through the testimonies of two men.

Fig. 2 | Musical sequence from Tsai Ming-liang's *The Hole*, 00:15:49. Celluloid Dreams, 1998.

Fig. 3 | Musical sequence from Tsai Ming-liang's *The Hole*, 00:31:14. Celluloid Dreams, 1998.

Fig. 4 | Musical sequence from Tsai Ming-liang's *The Hole*, 00:32:57. Celluloid Dreams, 1998.

Fig. 5 | Musical sequence from Tsai Ming-liang's *The Hole*, 01:03:30. Celluloid Dreams, 1998.

viable. Through the hole, the man offers the woman a glass of water, and then gives her his arm so that she can ascend, to the upper floor, to the light.

In between scenes, disrupting not only narrative linearity but diegetic status as well, five musical segments, set in the common areas of the apartment building, punctuate the narrative, like autonomous music videos. Respecting genre conventions, these instances have the characteristics of an integrated musical (Thompson and Bordwell 229) where the numbers are not justified by the presence of a stage or an in-film audience, but rather occur spontaneously, within mundane spaces, and are purposefully made for the spectator. In these colourful scenes, Yang Kuei-mei lip syncs to recordings of Hong Kong-Chinese singer Grace Change (except for the final one, where the main couple quietly dances to the song), singing of love and deceit, of broken hearts and innocent hope, directly facing the camera. As deliberate fissures in the storyline, these musical sequences enable the reading of the many contrasts they make evident.

Where the visual traits of the main plot are damp and pale, the exuberant performances of Chang's songs bring colour and suppress the sensory avalanche of the film (Figs. 2-5). Laura U. Marks details the connections between the senses and the pulsation of memory, developing a theory that contemplates olfactory and tactile responses to audiovisual objects. For the author, "[m]emory is a process at once cerebral and emotional, and this is especially evident with smell" (148), and although *The Hole* is not part of the *corpus* Marks analyzes,

Considering the century in its graspable essence, the focus on the transition years can also outline a path for thinking about the present.

it is a clear example of the invocation of time and memory through cinematic technique, by creating a densely sensory atmosphere. Since spoken dialogue is scarce, the bodily interactions between the main characters and the environment are preeminent: the woman and the man urinate, defecate, vomit, and blow their noses, in scenes that emphasize the leftovers of human bodies, and the omnipresence of sanitary systems as indicative of the inescapable condition of social networks. As "the most intimate room in the house"[3] (Vincent 231), the all-present bathroom purports the perverse negotiation between private and public, where the lens is another hole for the audience to spy from.

3 The author examines nineteenth century habits that make up "private life," using France as a case study.

As deliberate fissures in the storyline, these musical sequences enable the reading of the many contrasts they make evident.

Along the oppositions evidenced by the intrusion of the musical numbers, the confrontation of different temporal stances (chronological and sensible time, *chronos* and *kairos*, respectively) is at the core of the film's identity, and a nostalgic impulse defines its subtext.[4]

In her important study of nostalgia as a defining concept for the end of the century – in itself a symptom of the larger nostalgic impulse that prevailed as the year 2000 approached – Svetlana Boym distinguishes between two main conceptions of nostalgia: "restorative" (41–48), a model characterized by a disregard of the marks left by the passage of time, utilizing the idea of a supposedly extraordinary past that must be recovered, or even recreated, whose values must be brought to the imperfect present [5]; and "reflective nostalgia" (49–55) defined by an acceptance of the impossibility of reconstruction, an approach marked by ironic interpretations and a collective perception of memory. Considering the Greek etymological origin of the word, nostalgia means the ache associated with the desire to return home. In its contemporary colloquial use, it concerns the longing for a specific historical time and a delimited space – as in a geographic location, where cultural and political landscapes contribute to a cohesive sense of national belonging. According to Anthony Smith's theory, there can be a point of view based on the "consciousness of belonging to a nation" that does not implicate ideological models or nationalistic movements (82), which suggests the possibility of associating reflective nostalgia with questions of national identity while, on the other hand, exploitative nationalistic operations rely on the restorative ethos. The reflective posture is arguably present in Tsai Ming-liang's millennial film, through its nonverbal discourse and formal qualities.

Taking into account the fragmented sense of belonging, upon which Tsai Ming-liang has publicly commented, seeing himself as neither Malaysian nor Taiwanese (Huang lines 81–83), it can be a delicate operation to analyze the filmic text through the prism of national identity. However, given the unequivocal diegetic place of his films – and the ontological condition of the *dispositif*, the camera as an observer, more than anything – the nostalgic impulse may present itself as a consequence of particular historical dynamics. Arguably, the major events in Taiwan's political twentieth century are associated with the Japanese colonial rule that lasted from 1895 until 1945 [6], and the subsequent transference of power to the Kuomintang (KMT) that implemented martial law until 1987, when a democratization process became viable. The politics of cultural assimilation result in a "dauntingly complicated diversity" (Hong 6) that is naturally mirrored by artistic efforts. In literature concerned with the local and the global, regarding history and identity in Taiwan, the 1990s are seen as an decade of crescent preoccupation with identity, regarding national history and heritage (Lu 17-18), as if the impending millennium (or the ending of a hectic century) demanded a retrospective look at the politics of acculturation, oppression and the shaping of individual and collective senses of nation, as well as a search for "authenticity" (Tu 1122), an ever-present concept in the ample discussion about Taiwanese identity. Hsin-Yi Lu also refers to the impact of globalization, during the period from where Tsai's feature came to be, as being both "liberating and confusing" (18), reinforcing the negotiations between local and international, between a singular historical past and a common path, defined by economic structures and technological development, and the need for affirmation:

> Owing to Taiwan's peculiar geo-political history, and particularly its entanglement with mainland China, the dynamic tension between globalizing energies and the urge to create an ever more robust nation is pronounced and central to the island's daily existence. (Lu 43)

Once more, the dichotomies that *The Hole* vehemently displays, and from which the nostalgic appeal surfaces, are coherent with the scattered sensation–felt by the characters, within the city, or even by the director–of belonging to somewhere.

The singularities of Taiwan's political situation at the turn of the millennium, and the global fixation on the year 2000 – Haut et Court's ambition to document the global expectations over the near future, through the works of high profile filmmakers from different countries, demonstrates this preoccupation – can also help sustain the affinity between reflective nostalgia and *The Hole*, proposing that the film establishes a transnational dialogue with the history of cinema, and appeals to a type of collective memory built by cinema and film practices. At the end of the millennium, a phenomenon labeled the "Taiwan miracle" defined by solid economic growth despite

4 Acknowledging this precise topic, Song Hwee Lim argues that the integration of Grace Chang's 1950s and 1960s musical references only carry a nostalgic quality "in retrospect," as the songs don't have any "inherent nostalgic qualities" (142). This important remark sets methodological guides for the possible operations with nostalgia as a cultural field, given the constant transformations of the symbolic nature of cultural objects. From a twenty-first century perspective, The Hole is, like Chang's songs, an object of the past where traces of another time – CRT televisions or landline telephones, for example – are printed in collective memory, and are valuable details for the emergence of nostalgic undertones.

5 Boym mentions conspiracy theories and general displeasure with present conditions when compared to a grander past. This attitude can be observed in political far-right campaigns, focused on national symbols and professing an artificial necessity to restore a mythologized past.

6 Taiwan became a Japanese colony following the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895. With Japan's defeat in the Asia-Pacific War in 1945, political and cultural power was transferred to the Republic of China, to the Kuomintang (KMT) party (Nishimura 81-82).

financial adversities in the Asian continent (Wu 47), could be taken to, in a very broad sense, outline the diegetic conjuncture of *The Hole*, regarding the social and economic undertones of the dynamics inside the apartment building, defining the place of the main couple as members of a struggling class. Assuming the perils of resorting to simplistic correlations between filmic discourse and political climate, it can nevertheless be noted that, on a pragmatic level, themes of isolation, resistance and a vigorous attachment to an abstract idea of home are central to the film.

In addition, as part of an anthology, as an object that is forced to communicate with a larger structure, *The Hole* also belongs to a globalized, multicultural(ist) ecosystem that celebrates international diversity through worldwide distribution and the influence of film festivals.[7] Contemporary discussion about the not-so-objective definition of globalization tends to address multiple phenomena of "Americanization," although, as Robert Holton sharply states, the synergies that are at stake at end of the century global cultural exchanges, are not linear nor are they easily limited (141). His conception of hybridization is particularly appropriate here since it is mostly identifiable in the arts (149), and the exchange processes involved are evident in *The Hole*. For example, the ubiquity of television sets in many of the film's scenes–a source of information regarding the developments of the epidemics, and a gate for escapist entertainment–implies the weight of uninterrupted connectivity, the global village made possible by electronic devices. The nonstop news broadcasting and "televisual immediacy" (Tomlinson 59) are also marks of the changes in the perception of time and distance in the age of astounding technological progress. While the residents of the building execute their basic routines, voices from around the world – a French doctor, for instance – speak through their television sets about the spreading of the disease, another symptom of ineluctable connectivity.

Thus, the nostalgic impulse of Tsai Ming-liang's film, immersed in end of the century apprehension, comes as well from a larger discourse about progress and the perception of time. While introducing her investigation, Svetlana Boym asserts that

> Nostalgic manifestations are side effects of the teleology of progress. Progress was not only a narrative of temporal progression but also of spatial expansion. […] Instead of coevalness of different conceptions of time, each local culture therefore was evaluated with regard to the central narrative of progress. Progress was a marker of global time; any alternative to this idea was perceived as a local eccentricity. (10)

Bringing this comprehensive statement to the closely bounded universe of *The Hole*, the nostalgic expression that emanates from the articulation of cinematic strategies and narrative principles is like a side effect, the surplus of all the other elements (temporality, editing choices, camera angles and movements, colour palettes) that compose the film. The woman downstairs and the man upstairs – power dynamics and gender inequality (De Villiers 66) are accentuated by the places the characters occupy – defy unbridled progress and resist the authoritarian speed that defines the advent of the millennium, by staying, and by interacting with different temporal dimensions.

[T]he nostalgic impulse may present itself as a consequence of particular historical dynamics.

As previously hinted *The Hole* is not an heir of classic narrative structures, favoring a dispersed and slow unfolding of events without much regard for typified arcs or paradigmatic progression. The musical intermissions comprehend an additional layer of disruption to the already fragmentary scheme–aligned with modernity, with the cinema of the time-image (Deleuze), where the fractures of history are mirrored, absorbed, or processed by cinematic forms–and are, once again, saturated with irony, corroborating a reflective stance. In confluence with the erratic screenplay, the aesthetic and political identity of the film takes form through cinematic elements–especially editing patterns–that are decisive in creating a nostalgic subtext. Throughout the non-musical scenes, *découpage* is mostly neglected in favor of strictly arranged sequence shots[8], where the camera pans, follows and hides, like a sensor responding to movement. Sometimes, it is like the camera is also in danger of contracting the virus, roaming carefully around the humidity-stricken dark chambers of the building, witnessing as much as showing. Nostalgia is then a by-product of these artistic decisions, surfacing from the collision between an idea of home–molded by conscience of locality and global syncretism–and a deep consciousness of temporal liminality – the looming new century, and the final moments of the old one, whose traces of inexpressible atrocities, political tumult and uncanny technological advancements are printed in collective memory.

A detailed temporal analysis confirms that during the ninety minutes of "real time"–measurable, chronological, expressed in numbers–the apparatus is precise in delimiting narrative time: the eve of the year 2000 is expected from the first scene to be the ending point. During seven days, the woman and the man go on about their lives while the hole gets larger, and eventually, in 2000, is used for the symbolic ascension. Another facet of temporality, which relates to a time that cannot

7 The film premiered at the 1998 Cannes Film Festival.

8 Curiously, the hole serves as a cutting device since scene architecture also depends on the position of the characters inside the building. Thus, most of the scenes are not strictly continuous, as there are indeed many cuts motivated by the up-and-down setting.

Fig. 6 | The suspended leg in Tsai Ming-liang's *The Hole*, 01:07:54. Celluloid Dreams, 1998.

be measured, that is not necessarily linear nor can it be expressed in discrete units – thoroughly observed by Gilles Deleuze, Mary Ann Doane or Matilda Mroz, influenced by Henri Bergson's concept of duration – can be thought of as being intrinsically cinematic. As Mroz sensibly argues, "to speak of a homogenous process of film viewing is impossible" (41), as the perception of time is influenced by a number of variable factors and individual discernment. For Doane, the continuous shot embodies "a certain understanding of time and even a philosophy concerning its representation" (179), in truth, a film like *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000) directed by Hungarian filmmakers Béla Tarr and Ágnes Hranitzky – also an arresting cinematic impression of the turn of the millennium – where every scene is a long sequence short, clearly exemplifies the philosophical questions regarding time, perception and the mechanisms of the apparatus. Still, the minimal *découpage* that creates the temporal fabric of *The Hole* [9] and the different rhythms that infer the chronological clash between diegetic stances–where in the main narrative line, small actions dictate the duration of the shots, in the musical scenes, rhythm and camera movements are motivated by the songs' tempo–do propose a specific approach to time, and a possible commentary about the immediacy of electronic communications, the temporal acceleration of the era, where speed "has reached its 'natural limit'" (Bauman 10). The "liquid modernity" that Zygmunt Bauman attributes to the end of the twentieth century, where the pace of the world makes it impossible to maintain solid individual and institutional identities is contested by how temporal progression takes form in *The Hole*.

Preceding one of the most striking images of the film–the man upstairs' leg dangling over the woman's ceiling, after he decides to penetrate the hole with his inferior member (Fig. 6)–a sequence of essentially medium-long shots show Lee Kang-sheng's character slowly executing trivial tasks. He washes a metal spoon, eats from an open can while ignoring an insistent doorbell ringing, and cleans up around the hole on his floor, as if preparing for the act, like a ritual that needs to be consummated. The sound of ceaseless rain and the light of the room (greatly reminiscent the moody, dim landscapes of Fan Kuan, like *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* (谿山行旅) (c. 1000), or Edward Hopper's *Sun in an Empty Room* (1963) for its shadows, angle and straight lines (Fig. 7)) contribute to the duration of this buildup, which results in a grotesque

As the year 2000, in all its apocalyptic symbolism, comes to be, collective memory (...) can be a source of comfort

9 Which, evidently, is not particular to the director's 1990s features like Rebels of the Neon God (1992) or Vive L'Amour (1994) which are replete with the same recurrent motives, since his twenty-first century films What Time Is it There? (2001) and the accompanying The Skywalk Is Gone (2002) or The Wayward Cloud (2005), maintain the temporal identity and themes of displacement, solitude, urban alienation and a political configuration of place.

Fig. 7 | Light in an empty room in Tsai Ming-liang's *The Hole*, 01:11:38. Celluloid Dreams, 1998.

exploration of repressed desire, giving yet another connotative meaning to the hole: a sexual vessel, or bodily orifice.

These temporal traits are made explicit by the unannounced overstepping of the musical scenes, where *découpage* is employed and the choreographed performances, excess, flamboyancy, bursting colors and vibrant music alter the rhythmic patterns of the film. It is also in the tension between these two approaches to scene composition that a nostalgic impetus lies, in that the direct citation of the 1950s and 1960s within a contemporary (barely) futuristic diegesis, where everything is somber and diseased, reveals a tender attitude towards that specific epoch. As Gary S. Cross writes,

> the designation "the fifties" or "the sixties" is arbitrary and ambiguous, yet it is somehow still necessary even if and even because we each give "our" decade personal meaning. In fact, nostalgia invents periods like "the 1950s," reducing a complex and contradictory decade into an image that says almost as much about when the decade was "invented" in nostalgia as about the decade itself. (89)

The historical and political complexity of the "arbitrary" decades makes the work of citation a delicate one, as the retrospective act invariably presupposes processes of framing and exclusion. In broad terms, during these decades Taiwan experienced the abrupt passage of governmental rule (and profound cultural changes), with the late 1940s marking the beginning of, in Peng Hsiao-yen's words, "the so-called White Terror, which lasted for two or even three decades after the war" (234), a period of violent repression that "sowed the tragic seeds of lasting tension between the Mainlanders and Taiwanese locals" (Hong 39), echoed to international audiences on a particular important moment in Taiwan's New Cinema, Hou Hsiao-hsien's *A City of Sadness*, winner of the Golden Lion at the 1989 Venice Film Festival. Evidently, unlike Hou's film, *The Hole* does not provide historical recreations neither does it offer an explicit commentary on concrete political events. Instead, the mid-century the film evokes is akin to the traits of artistic and cultural diffusion, reviving *motifs* from musical films.

[T]he quasi-sacred image of ascension that concludes the film announces an alternative path for the troubled times to come.

In a way, spectators cannot have access to the 1950s and 1960s that the film projects, beyond the discrepancies of style that the musical moments enunciate. It is precisely that disconnection with what can be called a "realistic" approach, which is openly acknowledged, that points the way to the nostalgic traces. In *The Hole,* the artistic processes of inclusion and exclusion in order to create a space that merges different chronologies–the near future of the year 2000 and the abstract apparitions of past decades–is used as methodological principle.

Observing the frequent reminiscences of Classical Hollywood in Robert Longo's photographic work, Vera Dika points out that a longing for these conservative decades is not promoted by the artist whose stills endorse the "resistance

Fig. 8 | A manifest sense of smell in Tsai Ming-liang's *The Hole*, 00:46:18. Celluloid Dreams, 1998.

practice of the same era" (41), consolidating the need for these operations of cutting and clipping when remembering, representing and commenting on past periods.

The referencing of 1950s and 1960s Grace Chang's performances comes to life somewhat like the mental process of remembering an abstract mood, or an undefined time: through fragmentation and interweaving temporal and spatial dimensions, as the common areas of the building are the settings of the musical numbers, placing them in 1999, like apparitions from the past[10]. The present–which is also the near future–is the prevailing time, whereas the past is quoted, referenced, illustrated, alluded to, but never represented as a cohesive reality. In this manner, *The Hole* does not take the deceiving path of restoring a utopian past, or relying on a moralized memory of the precedent decades.[11]

The ending title, signed by the director, reads "In the year 2000, we are grateful that we still have Grace Chang's songs to comfort us" (01:27:09–01:27:24), which could be a key to grasping the central premise of Tsai Ming-liang's response to Haut et Court's project. As the year 2000, in all its apocalyptic symbolism, comes to be, collective memory – boldly and broadly shaped by film and popular music – can be a source of comfort, and unmediated human touch can be a solution for the *fin de siècle* unconstrained anxiety.

Tsai's film almost eradicates loneliness from its vocabulary.

If smell is a narrative *motif* throughout the film, related to human excretions and a diseased environment (Fig. 8) – notably, taste is also strongly manifested through the recurrent presence of canned meals and instant noodles. Like Gérard Vincent notes, regarding the evolution of private life in the twentieth century, "[p]eople in a hurry have no time for traditional cooking" leading to the development of "instant

10 As Yu Si-wah has pointed out, Grace Chang was herself a symbol of intercultural posture, performing Latin dances and merging Western and Chinese musical numbers (Yu 28).

11 A more recent example, from contemporary Hollywood cinema, La La Land (2016), directed by Damien Chazelle – "readily identifiable as a nostalgia film" (Sprengler 38) and part of a tendency in commercial American cinema to invoke mid-century USA (Sprengler 37) – reconstructs the atmosphere and formal techniques of Golden Age Hollywood musicals. Unlike Tsai's film, there is only one diegetic level in La La Land, and although the nostalgic appeal and mechanisms of citation related to a palpable consciousness of film history are equally promoted, the gesture of The Hole, with its ironic tone roaming meticulously through the realm of self-awareness, does not rely solely on aesthetic affinities with mid-century Asian and American cinema. Another suitable title would be Cheryl Dunye's 1996 feature film The Watermelon Woman, which exposes racist tropes in Hollywood representation methods, by constructing hypothetical 1930s and 1940s fiction films, that the main character (Dunye), in the present time, studies in order to find the identity of a neglected Black actress. Here, the aesthetic principles and mechanisms of segregation from Classical Hollywood are imitated for political reasons, as if to underline the fallacy of nostalgic idealization.

coffee, powdered milk, powdered soups, powdered sauces" (245) traces of which invade the world of *The Hole* – touch is kept restrained, as human contact is, given the pandemic situation, imprudent.

On the topic of haptic cinema and the possibility of a multisensory experience through audiovisual media, Laura U. Marks points out that touch is not necessarily stimulated by the presence of hands or skin on the screen, as that would "evoke a sense of touch through identification" (8), giving sound, textures, editing patterns, media characteristics and a multitude of other elements the ability to provoke the sense of touch. The similitude of filmmaking and handcrafted arts has also been addressed by media theories like Giuliana Bruno who, while introducing a section about the haptic qualities of Wong Kar-wai's cinema, states that "[t]he filmmaking process has been linked in this intimate way to the pattern of tailoring since its inception" (36), confirming the implicit importance of the hands as producers of visual sensory territories and meaning. Marianne Hirsch, whose compelling definition of "postmemory" permeates contemporary conversation about inherited trauma, views skin as a surface able to record experience and retain memory and, consequently, transmit it through touch and haptic visuality (48). In *The Hole*, even if there is indeed an expressive haptic ambiance–notably by virtue of the humidity that invades the domestic spaces and the sexual tension generated by the hole–the symbolic nature of human touch is paramount. The long-awaited touch, made viable by an architectural accident, could be interpreted, using Hirsch's formulation, as the transmission of an engraved experience, that of displacement, of disentanglement with the rhythms of the world at the verge of the millennium. Eventually, the *quasi*-sacred image of ascension that concludes the film announces an alternative path for the troubled times to come, where human contact prevails over fears, diseases, and technological mediation.

A HISTORY OF THE CENTURY, A HISTORY OF CINEMA

In *Camera Historica*, Antoine De Baecque examines the symbiotic relationship between cinema and history. For the author, cinema has the capacity of capturing historical events and, by means of its "mastery of time," of creating history (16). Even though historical reenactments are abundant in film history, what De Baecque mainly tackles is the idea of a symptomatic meaning created by cinematic objects–a concept prominently advanced by Siegfried Kracauer in *From Caligari to Hitler*, a seminal observation of the signs imprinted in the cinema of Weimar, as clues for understanding a national disposition or collective mentality that could be linked to the rise of Nazism–whose forms are capable of absorbing the larger historical context. These processes of interweaving history and cinema may not be intentional or rationalized but are consequences of the inevitable anchoring of artistic manifestations in cultural and political conjunctures.

Regarding the complex cultural status of Taiwan cinema, Guo-Juin Hong observes that

> filmic form makes legible the spectral and contingent quality of nation and nationhood in the context of Taiwan's multiple and overlapping colonizations as various sets of forces that are different and apart from, and yet closely implicated by, the Mainland influences, the Japanese colonial legacies, and the changing international pressures. (6)

A keyword in both Hong's statement and De Bacque's conceptions, form – as the manifestation of the convergence of multiple aesthetic/narrative/technical elements – is interlaced with the paths of legibility (or interpretation) of the filmic text, which, in the case of Tsai's film, and following Hong's sharp argument, appears inside the tensions created by history. Moreover, the author asserts that "[f]ilmic text (…) must be taken seriously as a materialization of historiography and even meta-historiography" (Hong 184). As previously stated, in *The Hole*, the story of the alienated neighbours at the dawn of the millennium doesn't explicitly allude to a historical perspective over the century that is ending. However, it is still relevant to situate the director's work (and the characters' diegetic universe) within a historical framework, in order to unveil the intricacies of the filmic discourse. The friction arising from globalization in a post-war context, and the politics of locality and definition of a national identity are particularly evident in the case of Taiwan. The consolidated impact of Taiwanese cinema comprehends not only the notable domestic success, contributing to the "definition of a transnational Chinese identity" (Yang), but also its consistent presence in European film festivals and North American award circuits.

Cinema itself (not as the collection of insurmountable filmic texts, but as an art with specific instruments), being a turn of the century event and an extremely impactful artistic (and educational, propagandist, or political) vehicle throughout the twentieth century, undeniably shaped the general relation with memory and the passage of time, as a major authority in the configuration of a visual idea of chronological progression. By the end of the millennium, the global fear of technological collapse–materialized by the *Y2K* problem, an ironic embodiment of the apocalyptic rhetoric associated with the year 2000–generated by the increasing dependence on digital structures, a substantiated transformation of the perception of time brought by the Internet, and the condition of a globalized world, understandably affected the international cinematographic panorama, while setting the anxiety tone for thinking about the future.

The Hole–and, perhaps, the whole body of Haut et Court's anthology–is a capsule of its time, as it expressively mirrors the anxiety regarding the future, and establishes a conversation with the memory of the century that ends. Also, it might be said that it represents a form of resistance to what Paul Virilio has called

"*the lack of depth of the present*"[12] (144), a consequence of the emergence of a global time, through its narrative themes and cinematic technique.

Even if the Internet and digital technologies are not part of the film's universe – which was shot "traditionally," not echoing the digital transition in filmmaking practices – the late 1990s and early 2000s were marked by an exponential growth in worldwide Internet users, with documented numbers in Taiwan and mainland China (Tang 282), placing the film in the unavoidable context of abrupt rearrangements in human contact. The operations with temporality can be seen as a possible symptom of this crescent invasion of technology in everyday life, with the virus being a symbol of global connectedness. Memory and nostalgia are not indifferent to the way the virtual space is organized. Again, a theory of speed is brought forward as "[t]ime in cyberspace is conceived in terms of speed: speed of access and speed of technological innovation" resulting in the annihilation of "temporal experiments of remembering loss and reflecting on memory" (Boym 347), an idea that is concomitant with the question Andreas Huyssen poses regarding the "boom" in both memory and the act of forgetting that defines the turn of the millennium:

> [w]hat if the relationship between memory and forgetting were actually being transformed under cultural pressures in which new information technologies, media politics, and fast-paced consumption are beginning to take their toll? (17)

The personal and heterogeneous experience of watching Tsai Ming-liang's film– considering that a historical approach to film analysis can imply the invocation of other motion pictures that communicate with *The Hole* in indirect ways by sharing aesthetical principles or displaying similar artistic gestures– brings to mind countless examples (besides the direct summoning of mid-century Hong Kong films like *The Wild, Wild Rose* (1960), starring Grace Chang) that also bear a close relationship to history, that silently comment on the disquietude of the times. Ildikó Enyedi, the Hungarian director whose vision is also part of *2000, Seen by…*, reflected on scientific progress with an oneiric outlook in *My 20th Century* (1989), a magical tale about the beginnings of the century–another instance of the retrospective and nostalgic impulse–where early cinema is thoroughly referenced. Hollywood's *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* (1959), directed by Ranald MacDougall presents a post-apocalyptic New York city where, like in the deserted building of *The Hole*, a man and a woman are the only remaining residents. In place of a dangerous virus, *The World…* uses nuclear catastrophe (mirroring the political tension and generalized fear of the 1950s) as a motivation for a larger perspective over racial prejudice, class struggles, and gender conventions. Hou Hsiao-hsien's properly titled *Millennium Mambo* (2001), an early twenty-first century work, narrated from ten years in the future, also approaches the millennium as a place of significant change – individually and at a global level. This state of mind, shared by Hou, Tsai, Yang, and so many others, is crystallized by their artistic efforts, as ways of extracting meaning from the strangeness of time.

Finally, as an odd companion piece, (and because the globalized perspective from which *The Hole* can be watched, may allow the invocation of disperse cultural manifestations), Portuguese novelist Luís Carmelo's *A Falha*, published the same year Tsai's film had its premiere, begins in 2001, as one of the main characters remembers an extraordinary event from the late 1990s. The intricate plot is centered on a high school reunion lunch in 1996, which culminates in the trapping of seven former colleagues under a monumental rock, at the base of a quarry. The human condition is put to test by the bizarre circumstances and the book ends precisely on the last day of 1999. This slightly futuristic exercise bears enormous affinities with Tsai Ming-liang's vision of this specific moment in history, regardless of national identity and political prospects. The polysemy and inherent geological metaphor of both titles (*falha* means fault), or the act of placing human beings under extreme conditions, as if that would be the definition of the end (of the century), are two points of convergence between these two seemingly unrelated objects, that corroborate the retrospective/futuristic impulse of the era and the assumed consciousness of this chronological mark as a symbolic occurrence. In the words of Eric Hobsbawm, "the century ended in a global disorder whose nature was unclear, and without an obvious mechanism for either ending it or keeping it under control" (562). In a way, it is as if these cultural signs tried to untangle the disorder by processing it through their respective cinematic or literary tools.

FINAL REMARKS

While promoting *The Wayward Cloud*, Tsai Ming-liang said that truth is at the center of his intentions as a filmmaker, stating that "there is nothing more truthful than when a person is being alone" (Huang lines 87–89) implying that people's social performances are absent in moments of complete loneliness. Within this paradigm, the focus on the mundane activities of the deeply lonely characters of *The Hole* comes up as a logical strategy to achieve that idealistic truth. Nonetheless, what this analysis tried to demonstrate is that, as a fragment of millennial cinema, deeply anchored both in a national setting and a globalized idea of the century that comes to an end, Tsai's film almost eradicates loneliness from its vocabulary on two levels: a narrative one, where the two main characters are united by touch, taking advantage of the hole, breaking the physical barrier that keeps them apart; and a textual or symptomatic level, as a work that takes on collective memory and collective conception of the past to address the anxieties of the near future.

12 Italics from the original

Nostalgia, specifically Boym's understanding of a reflective posture towards it, comes forward with the peculiar musical sequences, while hovering throughout the entirety of film. Author Liew Kai Khiun, on a study regarding transnational memory and popular culture in Asia, has noted the "semi-divine connotations" in "everyday practices and performances of popular culture", referring to the use of holographic images in popular iconography (Liew 57-70). This play between the material and the immaterial (akin to the sacred and the profane) could also be a way of observing the nostalgic impulse, while admiring the Grace Chang numbers in the 1998 film. The 1950s, or the 1960s, whether they be a flawed globalized idea, or a structured historical and localized succession of events, or an abstract place of comfort, appear in the futurist dystopia that is *The Hole* as a hologram, an untouchable visual representation that is detached from reality while appearing to be contemporaneous with it. Thinking about the millennium using cinema as a medium – and it could probably be verified with similar conclusions, albeit very different approaches, in the other works that compose *2000… vu par* – imposes a sense of temporality, of absorbing individual and collective pasts to allow for a livable future. ▪

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Hollywood's Portraits of the Artist as a Kept Man

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ABSTRACT

Since the early 19th Century, the male artist has been both celebrated as a heroic figure who represents self-expression and freedom from traditional work and a figure whose financial dependence of a patron undermines his masculinity. In the USA after World War Two, men faced increasing suburbanization and consumerism, and often longed for the rebellious freedom represented by artists like Jackson Pollock, Ernest Hemingway, and Jack Kerouac. But in the post-war Cold War culture, those who rebelled were threatened with the label of communist or homosexual. Focusing on three films made after World War Two--*Humoresque* (1946), *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), and *An American in Paris* (1951)--the article explores the portrayal of the male artist as a "kept man," and discusses visual and narrative elements in each film that work to reinscribe traditional gender roles. Specifically, each film uses a love triangle between the artist, an older, wealthy, female patron who threatens the artist's masculinity and artistic integrity, and a younger, more traditionally feminine woman who, by the end of the film, will help the male artist reassert his traditional masculine role.

For at least two centuries, the image of the male artist has created conflicting perceptions in regard to heteronormative models of masculinity. Romantic writers, such as Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron, promoted an image of the male artist as tortured hero and rebel. Discussing the "heroic artist," Wanghui Gan explains how, "according to this trope, the artist is an inspired visionary, a prophet-like figure marked by potency, legitimacy, and creativity. Often a solitary genius and tortured outsider following the inclinations of his desires in self-imposed exile, he is romanticized as a countercultural rebel who is more authentic and honest than the masses because he is more attuned to beauty and truth" (1). To men who follow the model of traditional masculinity—husband, father, breadwinner who sacrifices his personal needs to satisfy the material needs of his family—the male artist may represent freedom and escape from social and labour conformity.

But this lack of conformity, and the desire to express oneself honestly through one's art, often come with economic instability—the trope of the "starving artist." As Amelia Yeates explains, "The figure of the male artist in the nineteenth century was a locus for various concerns surrounding the construction of masculinity, such as the issue of labour and production, the role of the patron and the marketplace and the gendering of aesthetics" ("Introduction" 133). Katarzyna Kosmala captures two aspects of the artist's relationship to work:

> The career in the arts' sectors is often referred to as having a protean form, that is, a form of a boundary-free organization of creative practice and linked to an occupation whereby the motivation and a drive for a success are internally infused and self-driven (Baruch, 2004; Hall, 2004). A notion of creative career is also closely linked to the idea of non-career, which is reflected in a pattern of working that is nonlinear, not easily approximated with the monetary value or with a form of financial recognition (Hearn, 1977), until it enters the art market through either patronage, networks or recognition. (17)

To achieve "recognition," artists usually relied on a patron, a relationship that undermines the connection between masculinity and financial independence. In 19th Century England, according to Yeates, some people felt that "the emasculation

of artists through their subservience to patrons automatically rendered them prostitutes," as "within nineteenth-century discourses …, women were frequently linked with exchange and transaction, a connection that rendered problematic artists' activity in the marketplace" ("Slave" 175).

During the period on which I focus this article—the decade after World War Two—the conflicting feelings about the artist as rebel were further complicated by the Cold War, an increasingly materialistic American culture, the growing corporatization of white collar male labour, and male anxiety about the perceived influence of women: "In the 1950s American men strained against two negative poles—the overconformist, a faceless, self-less nonentity, and the unpredictable, unreliable nonconformist" (Kimmel 236). While, as Michael Kimmel suggests, overconformity was questioned—conformity was associated with communism—"mid-century therapeutic culture pathologized the man who sought a lifestyle outside of the conventions of the time. Moreover, the increased awareness of the (invisible) male homosexual in every walk of American life added to the sense that a man was compelled to fulfill the life trajectory that experts deemed 'normal' and 'mature,' lest he be tainted by the stigma of homosexuality" (Cuordileone 138). Whether men feared homosexuality or suburban drudgery, it was women who usually took the blame for society's social ills:

> In the mid-twentieth century, the enemy for many male critics was less the female reformer proper (the ominous image of Eleanor Roosevelt notwithstanding) but rather self assertive, "civilizing" women in the private sphere, and a looming matriarchy radiating outward from the home. The claims made by mid-century male critics that women maintained a matriarchal grip on the family and society were absurd, yet they reflect new and unresolved tensions about women's mid-century roles. (Cuordileone 139)

In the films I discuss, these related anxieties about male financial dependence and growing female agency come together in the character of a wealthy, middle-aged female patron who offers the male artist monetary support, but at the cost of his sense of masculinity.

working-class image. Pollock was hard drinking and wore a tee shirt, jeans, even cowboy boots (Jones 23), and much has been written about Gene Kelly's "athletic" dance style: "Not only did Kelly's American style democratize dance through his embodiment of the 'working man,' dispelling the myth of aristocratic ownership of dance, but his consistent portrayal of 'military man' roles offered a previously unseen, more universally recognizable male identity in onscreen musicals that continued to dispel the other American myth of dance as female" (Guernier 17-18). So, while a rebel against some aspects of society, male artists

> often reassert their manhood through an emphasis on sexual power relations and reconfirmation of their artistry. Thus, the correlation between the performance of machismo and of authentic artistic genius indicates that despite shunning society and being shunned by society, the [artists] still identify themselves within the boundaries of cultural ideologies that serve to assert and maintain male hegemonic power. They often display homosexual panic in grappling with long-standing cultural assumptions that associate artistry and male homosexuality, working to re-masculinize art and aesthetics. (Gan 4)

The popular post-World War Two artists I mentioned all maintained an image of masculinity that seemed to balance virility and heterosexuality with a challenge to the materialism and suburban drudgery that threatened to undermine traditional American manhood.

The three films I discuss—Jean Negulesco's *Humoresque* (1946), Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), Vincente Minnelli's *An American in Paris* (1951)—do not explicitly address homosexuality; instead, each portrays a relationship between a young, male artist and an older, wealthy, upper-class woman who at first acts as his patron but soon becomes demanding in a way that undermines both his art and his masculinity. Whether buying him nice clothes, providing a place to live and work, or helping him connect with other wealthy patrons of the arts, the older woman places the artist in the position of a "kept man"—a position he reluctantly accepts in trade for the success and stability that his art alone does not

To men who follow the model of traditional masculinity—husband, father, breadwinner who sacrifices his personal needs to satisfy the material needs of his family—the male artist may represent freedom and escape from social and labour conformity.

In the decade after World War Two, the most prominent artists in America worked hard to maintain an image of the artist as approachable and heterosexual, thus challenging the stereotype of the artist as elitist and unmasculine. Ernest Hemingway, Jack Kerouac, Jackson Pollock[1]—and Gene Kelly (whom I will discuss more later)—all portrayed a traditionally masculine,

provide. Using the narrative device of the love triangle, each film juxtaposes this older woman with a younger woman who, based on age, social class, and potential for love, marriage, and family—the hallmarks of heteronormative gender roles of the time—is portrayed as a more appropriate choice to restore the artist's manhood. And if these normative gender roles are not

clear enough, each film relies on other characters to articulate the expectations that the male artist is transgressing. While the mood and genre of these films range from melodrama to film noir to musical, each film resolves the narrative by restoring the main character's masculinity.

HUMORESQUE (1946)

The film opens near the end of the story, with Paul Boray (John Garfield)—a successful classical violinist—facing a crisis. Through his words to himself, we learn that success has not brought the happiness and satisfaction Paul has always longed for; he still feels "outside, always looking in" and "far away from home," and longs to "get back to the happy, simple kid I used to be" (0:03:55-0:04:22). Flashing back, we see that as a boy, Paul already showed signs of the "heroic artist": despite his father's protests (Rudy played by J. Carrol Naish), Paul wants a violin for his birthday, rather than the baseball bat or fire engine suggested by his father. While his working class, immigrant father seems concerned about the cost of a violin, he also seems to want Paul to choose a more traditionally masculine occupation. Upon returning home, Paul's mother (Esther played by Ruth Nelson) goes to buy the violin, starting a pattern of support for Paul's musical dreams. Is she overindulging Paul, like his father (and many social critics anxious about the impact of "momism"[2] on young men) fears, setting him up for a life of financial dependence? As Rudy tells Esther about successful artists, "Statistics show there's one of them in a million. … Paul Boray: the genius who lives over a grocery store?" (0:18:48-0:19:02). But Paul seems to possess the mix of talent and determination needed to be that one, despite his father's and brother's (Tom D'Andrea) criticisms, which focus on Paul's lack of financial contribution to the family, a situation his mother continues to defend. Now a young man attending a music academy, Paul tells his fellow (somewhat successful) musician Sid (Oscar Levant), his older friend and character foil, "I'm not going to be a parasite from now on. I'm going to pay my way" (0:19:41-0:19:45). Expressing his desire for social mobility, Paul states "I don't want to spend the rest of my life living in a hot box over a grocery store" worrying about unpaid bills (0:20:43-0:20:55). Ironically, it is at this point that Sid explains to Paul the realities of being a successful concert musician: nice clothes, an expensive violin, a manager—all of which rely on an upper-class patron like Helen Wright (Joan Crawford), and thus another form of financial dependence.

Before I discuss Helen Wright, the older, rich, married woman who provides Paul the money and connections he needs to succeed, I want to discuss Gina (Joan Chandler), the young woman who loves Paul, and of whom Esther approves. Early in the film, Paul is walking with Gina, a cellist from the neighborhood who also attends the music academy, telling her about his artistic dreams which, as a musician herself, she can understand and support. Paul then tells Gina, "I never open up like this to most people. Not even mom; it's only you. I don't have to pose with you. I don't have to fight or argue. I can be just what I am: no different, no better, no worse, just me…." Before going inside, she kisses Paul and says, "If I told you I loved you, would you laugh?" Once alone, Paul seems surprised and somewhat pleased, but he does not respond with similarly strong feelings (0:15:39-0:16:38). Maybe Gina is too familiar—they have grown up together—or maybe she symbolizes that "hot box over a grocery store" that he wishes to escape. Esther often speaks of Gina, and later makes clear that she can give Paul what he really wants: "I know you. Inside, Paul, you want a wife, home, children" (1:07:54-1:07:59). However, Gina cannot give Paul the financial support and social connections he needs to fulfill his artistic dreams, which he will not compromise. Unlike Sid, who is full of self-mockery and will acquiesce to the wishes of conductors or producers, and is happy to make any money from his art, Paul is proud and egotistical, regularly clashing with those who do not meet his artistic standards. As Sid says to Paul, "You have all the characteristics of a successful virtuoso: you're self-indulgent, self-dedicated, and the hero of all your dreams" (0:30:32-0:30:39). We see this pride and pugnaciousness on full display when he first meets Helen Wright, a meeting arranged by Sid as a first step toward the patronage that Paul needs and wants. What Paul soon learns is that there are strings that come with the support he will receive.

Fig. 1 | Our first impression of Helen: surrounded by men eager to please her, 0:33:08. Warner Bros., 1946.

Our initial perception of Helen Wright as a strong, demanding woman is created by the portrayal of the men who surround her. Before Paul meets Helen, he sees her surrounded by obsequious young men who laugh at her quips (Fig. 1), and he also meets her husband (Paul Cavanagh), who describes himself as "weak" (0:33:27)—likely for putting up with Helen's flirtations. While these other men do as they are told—'"get my glasses for me like a good boy, Teddy"'(0:35:51-0:35:53)—Paul challenges Helen from the beginning—not surprising, given the choice of John Garfield to play Paul. As Stuart Hands discusses, Garfield often played tough characters who combined "dynamic expressions of pent-up anger, vulnerability, cold disillusionment and brimming sexuality" (2). And if the audience misses the associations, a drunken woman at the party makes them clear, insisting to Paul, "You look just like a

Fig. 2 | A shot through Helen's wine glass—is Paul simply Helen's latest addiction? 0:40:59. Warner Bros., 1946.. Warner Bros., 1946.

Fig. 3 | Dressing the artist, but with some resistance, 0:55:03. Warner Bros., 1946.

prize fighter" (0:33:41-0:33:43). But then Paul plays, piquing Helen's interest (Fig. 2). Though she hides it behind insults, Helen seems to enjoy the challenge, likely having tired of the "weak" men around her, and the next day sends Paul a gift of a gold cigarette case. Mama seems concerned about Helen's interest, a scene followed by Helen buying Paul a suit (0:54:25-0:55:36). Again asserting his independence, Paul will let her buy him a suit, but he insists on disregarding her opinion and choosing the material himself (Fig. 3).

Paul clearly has conflicting feelings about Helen's help. At the next meeting, he refuses to light her cigarette, and then says to Helen, "The patroness of the arts. What am I? A substitute for this year's trip to Sun Valley? Or the discovery of a new painter? You think it's pleasant to be patronized by a woman?" He fears she has "just added a violin player to your collection, that's all" (0:57:40-0:59:22). Hands argues that "In their initial scenes together, Paul's hostility toward Helen is well-rooted in her social status and the upper-class world she represents. But at times, this anger becomes indistinguishable from his resistance to the emasculation he feels as this strong woman helps and guides his musical career" (57). Paul clearly expresses his conflicting feelings between desiring success and relying on Helen to achieve that success. But his anxiety about being "patronized by a woman" no doubt, if only on a subconscious level, also reflects his ambivalence about his relationship with his mother. Paul may recognize that he has moved from relying on his mother, who has always supported Paul's musical ambitions, even in the face of his father's and brother's criticisms, to relying on Helen, whom he feels more comfortable criticizing. Paul seeks financial independence and artistic success away from his family; nevertheless, he still seeks approval, not from his father but from his mother who will continue to question his relationship with Helen.

While Helen willingly takes on the role of "patroness," she initially defines their relationship as strictly professional: Paul suggests a possible romantic relationship, but she is interested in him "only as an artist" (0:45:00-0:45:06). As Helen describes her past marriages, we learn her reasons for this reluctance, and for her drinking: she has been unlucky with men, and seeks to keep them emotionally at arm's length. She was married at sixteen to "a cry baby" and at twenty-one to "a cave man" (0:44:18-0:44:25), and as we know, is again married to a "weak" man presently. So when Paul comes on to her, she quickly asserts her need for independence: "I don't know how you men get that way, but every time you meet an attractive woman, you begin to plan how and where you're going to club her wings down" (0:44:35-0:44:41)). When Helen does eventually profess her love for Paul—"I love you. I can't fight you any longer, Paul" (1:05:57-1:06:06)—she begins to be a more sympathetic character because despite Paul's claims that he loves her, she quickly learns that she is less important to Paul than his music.

While Esther still distrusts Helen and her interest in Paul—unlike Rudy, Esther is not impressed by the nice apartment Helen has helped Paul move into, and still believes "There's something wrong with a woman like that" (1:26:36-1:26:39)—we begin to see the dark side of Paul the "heroic artist": "the myth of the artist-genius often goes together with artists exhibiting harmful behaviour, notably narcissism, machismo, and misogyny, as the myth provides the justification and impetus for problematic behaviour as natural moral and intellectual superiority, especially when these artists feel a lack of understanding and acknowledgement from those around them" (Gan 2). Helen's husband grants her the divorce she wants, so she can marry Paul, but echoing Sid's statement about Paul's artistic ego, he warns her that Paul is "not soft" and that "nothing means anything to him but his music" (1:29:35-1:29:39). A male friend of Helen's reinforces this criticism of the male artist after he sees the negative emotional impact Paul is having on Helen: "A French philosopher once listed three hundred ways to commit suicide. Only he left one out: falling in love with an artist" (1:39:46-1:39:50).

More than the other two films I will discuss, *Humoresque* portrays the "patroness" as a complex and sympathetic character,

Fig. 4 | Joe Gillis finally gets some notoriety in Hollywood, 0:02:33. Paramount, 1950.

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and questions the drive and "narcissism" of the male artist. When Helen's friend speaks of "suicide," he foreshadows Helen's fate; Helen soon realizes that despite his claims of love, Paul is not a rebel against gender norms: "You want the homemaker type. Outside of your music, you cherish all the standard virtues," but more than anything, he is "married to [his] music" (1:43:00-1:43:36). Helen shows courage when she confronts Esther and professes her love for Paul, to which Esther replies, "You only make demands. Leave him! Leave him alone!" (1:46:32-1:46:39). Esther has always defended her son, and does not know what the audience knows about Paul's treatment of Helen. Increasingly despondent over her feelings for Paul, and not wanting to interfere with his musical success, Helen's last words echo those of Paul at the beginning of the film: "Here's to love. And here's to a time when we were little girls and no one asked us to marry" (1:51:44-1:51:54). Her suicide by drowning in the ocean—made melodramatic by Paul's concert music playing in the background, as if haunting Helen—suggests that she sacrifices herself for his music. Her death leads to Paul's emotional crisis that begins the film, but also the resolution he seeks: leaving his penthouse apartment, he returns to ground level and to what looks like the old neighbourhood. His final words, to Sid—"I'm not running away" (2:03:30-2:03:31)—suggest Paul has recognized that he can find happiness in returning to the place he so desperately wanted to escape, and while it is not clearly shown, the ending implies that Paul might return to Gina (she was at his concert, and looked happy), and to the heteronormative values that his mom defined as his true desire: "a wife, home, children."

SUNSET BOULEVARD (1950)

Like *Humoresque*, *Sunset Boulevard* begins near the end of the story but not with a question to be answered by the main character. As Joe Gillis (William Holden)—"just a movie writer with a couple of 'B' pictures to his credit" (0:02:28-0:02:30)—floats face down in a swimming pool (Fig. 4), we quickly realize that his

Fig. 5 | Nancy's disappointment in Joe's lack of artistic integrity, and Joe's defensiveness, 0:07:17. Paramount, 1950.

Fig. 6 | Joe as controlling gigolo..., 0:57:29. Paramount, 1950.

Fig. 7 | ... or self-deluding object of desire? 0:57:57. Paramount, 1950.

fate is sealed. We know that he dies, so our attention immediately shifts to "How did this happen?"—a question our dead narrator, through voiceover (and some Hollywood magic), answers by describing "the facts, the whole truth" (0:02:11-0:02:12) about the events that lead to his death. His story thus becomes a warning, and his first theme Joe focuses on the high price of seeking material success in Hollywood: "Poor dope--he always wanted a pool. Well, in the end he got himself a pool. Only the price turned out to be a little high" (0:02:35-0:02:42). As Joe will outline, his desire for success will cost him not only his life, but also his artistic integrity, an "appropriate" romantic relationship, and his sense of masculinity.

Continuing to recount his story through voiceover narration, Joe describes a life of financial desperation and artistic failure. Having left a comfortable job as a reporter in Dayton, Ohio, Joe clearly had artistic aspirations, but unlike Paul Boray, whose artistic integrity was always supported by his mother, Joe feels increasingly isolated and desperate. Unable to sell a story or even borrow money to avoid losing his car, Joe quickly gives up his artistic ideals, and even considers admitting failure and returning to his job in Ohio. His cynicism is highlighted when he meets the first corner of his future love triangle—Betty Schaefer (Nancy Olson), a young, idealistic script reader—while he is pitching his story "Bases Loaded." Not knowing Joe is present, she insightfully criticizes the story as written "from hunger" (0:06:26) and thus without merit, and then tells Joe that she thinks he does have talent he should nurture (Fig. 5). His response—"That was last year. This year I am trying to earn a living" (0:07:15-0:07:17)—reveals his vulnerability; Trowbridge argues that Betty's criticisms "insinuate that Joe Gillis has prostituted his writing ability" and that Betty "shows foresight, as the opportunistic writer indentures himself to Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson) soon thereafter…." Joe soon "does triple duty as the silent star's ghostwriter, gigolo and audience, in return for lavish gifts that overindulge his acquisitive appetite" (296).

Unlike Paul Boray, who maintains his emotional control as he pursues a relationship with a reluctant Helen, Joe does not recognize the artistic and personal cost of his relationship with Norma. Hiding his car in what he believes is an abandoned mansion, Joe believes Norma's house is a safe place where he can hide and regroup. Initially, Joe thinks that he controls the relationship with Norma—"I was pleased with the way I had handled the situation. I dropped the hook, and she snapped at it" (0:24:01-0:24:08)—and sees it as preferable to a humiliating return to Ohio. He does not recognize how, with Max's (Erich von Stroheim) help, Norma will manipulate him into a sexual relationship that will undermine a more legitimate relationship with Betty (Fig. 6 and Fig. 7). As Joan F. Dean argues, "Joe makes the same erroneous assumption about his profession as does his colleague played by Richard Gere in Paul Schraeder's *American Gigolo*. Both mistakenly believe that they control their situation, that they have the freedom to walk away from their trade when they choose, that they can reclaim their integrity" (95).

As Joe is moved from his apartment to the room over Norma's garage to a room in her house to Norma's bed, he

Fig. 8 | The salesman's words of advice and encouragement, 0:37:29. Paramount, 1950.

Fig. 9 | Joe does not react well, 0:37:31. Paramount, 1950.

feels increasingly conflicted about the relationship: "I wanted the job, and I wanted the dough, and I wanted to get out of there as quickly as I could" (0:29:10-0:29:15). His inner voice recognizes the peril he is in, but unlike Paul Boray, who has Mama reminding him of his heteronormative aspirations, Joe remains isolated and self-deluding. In a scene that parallels Helen buying Paul a suit, Norma criticizes Joe's clothes and offers to buy him new ones. Joe is initially reluctant—**Joe**: "I don't need any clothes, and I certainly don't want you buying them for—." **Norma**: "Why begrudge me a little fun? I just want you to look nice" (0:36:34-0:36:39)—but acquiesces. Through words of support, rather than criticism, the salesman (Peter Drynan) articulates Joe's role as a kept man by quietly suggesting to Joe that he take advantage of Norma's money: "Well, as long as the lady's paying for it, why not take the Vicunan?" (0:37:28-0:37:31). The salesman has no doubt seen this older, rich woman/younger man dynamic before, but as shown by Joe's reaction to his words, having his secret relationship made public does not sit well with his sense of manhood (Fig. 8 and Fig. 9).

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Like Gina with Paul, Betty is presented as a more socially acceptable choice for Joe, as she is younger, of the same social class, and a writer who wishes to support Joe's artistic aspirations: "[Janey] Place insightfully points out that in *Sunset Boulevard,* Norma 'insists [Joe] participate in her life rather than being interested in his' (57), and that Joe's ideal partner Betty dreams of *his* career rather than her own, that she is content to be behind the camera rather than in front of it" (Mazur). Joe begins to live a double life, meeting with Betty to write, but carefully keeping each relationship secret from the other woman. Some critics have argued that Joe is thus an unsympathetic character. While describing Norma as a vampire "feeding on the life-blood of the young," Cooke criticizes Joe for "feeding off Norma's wealth" and sees the film as doing "little to endear either Joe or Norma to the spectator looking for some kind of positive identification" (92). I would argue that unlike Paul Boray, Joe lacks the male artist's arrogance and self-centeredness, and he also lacks the focus on money needed to be an effective gigolo. Out to get cigarettes for Norma, Joe runs into Betty again at a New Year's Eve party, and there is a clear attraction. But Joe calls to check in with Norma, and Max informs her that Norma has tried to commit suicide. Rather than seeing this as an easy escape from his "kept man" relationship, Joe feels guilty and leaves Betty, so he can console Norma. And while not as sympathetic as Helen, Norma is also presented as a complex character, a victim of the Hollywood system. As Cecil DeMille tells a younger colleague after Norma drops off her script at the studio, "A dozen press agents working overtime can do terrible things to the human spirit" (1:07:14-1:07:19)). Driven by guilt, Max—her current servant, former husband, and the director who discovered her—continues to maintain her illusions of continued stardom and hopes of return, denying her the opportunity to face reality.

We know from the beginning of the film that Joe will die, but before this happens, he does recapture his sense of masculine agency with the help of Betty. Joe has been writing secretly with Betty, and while he fights his attraction to her—Betty is engaged to Joe's friend, Artie (Jack Webb)—Betty eventually visits Joe at Norma's house to solve the mystery of his private life. Joe admits out loud the taboo relationship he has worked so hard to keep secret: "Older woman who is well-to-do, younger man who is not doing too well. Can you figure it out yourself?" (1:36:07-1:36:18). His secret revealed, Joe demonstrates some humility and integrity when he chooses to return to Ohio, without Betty, believing that she will be happier with Artie: "Maybe it's [Joe's relationship with Norma] not very admirable, but you

and Artie can be admirable" (1:37:08-1:37:15). Joe also tries to be honest with Norma, an attempt undermined by Max, but Norma shoots Joe in the back as he tries to leave. So, while Joe does not survive, and also chooses to give up his artistic aspirations, he does finally show male agency and the willingness to choose the hard reality of artistic failure over the illusions he maintains during his relationship with Norma.

Jerry's first temptation toward the role of kept man occurs after his first meeting with Milo, who offers to have her driver take Jerry home. Sitting in the backseat of her large car, Jerry is cheered by the children in his neighbourhood, a scene echoing the cheers he might have experienced as a soldier liberating Paris during the war (Fig. 10). Through most of the film, Jerry will claim that there is no romantic interest between Milo and him, but the song he sings after returning home in her car suggests

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AN AMERICAN IN PARIS (1951)

Unlike the other two films I discuss, which are set in the USA, *An America in Paris* is set in a society that more willingly accepts the male artist and places less focus on material success as a measure of happiness. James Baldwin, an African America writer who lived most of his life in Europe, describes this different attitude in a 1959 essay:

> The American writer, in Europe, is released, first of all, from the necessity of apologizing for himself. It is not until he *is* released from flexing his muscles and proving that he is just a "regular guy" that he realizes how crippling this habit has been. It is not necessary for him, there, to pretend to be something he is not, for the artist does not encounter in Europe the same suspicion he encounters here. (6)

Through his opening voiceover, Jerry Mulligan (Gene Kelly) does establish himself as a "regular guy"—a veteran who decided, after the war, to stay in Paris to paint—but also as a man who has chosen the freedom to paint over trappings of material and financial success. Angela Dalle-Vache argues that "While Jerry Mulligan is a tame, good-hearted all-American guy, his geographical dislocation and eagerness for psychological fulfillment through artistic creativity suggest that he also might be out of touch with the conservative America of the fifties" (72). Jerry contrasts his choice to live and paint in Paris with those men who have given up on their art and chosen the comfort of middle-class conformity: "Brother, if you can't paint in Paris, you better give up and marry the boss's daughter" (0:02:21-0:02:25). Here, Jerry introduces another version of the "kept man": gaining wealth through marriage. And while Jerry is poor and lives in a tiny apartment, he does not have Joe Gillis' precarious financial and social situation, thanks to the GI Bill, which pays him a small monthly sum; Jerry also has "many dear friends in Paris" (0:04:44-0:04:46), giving him a social network for artistic and financial support.

Like Paul Boray, Jerry has a strong sense of artistic integrity, and of masculine independence, which is only mildly threatened by Milo (Nina Foch), a rich, American, female patron. something else. The chorus includes these lines—"I got my gal/ Who could ask for anything more?" (0:26:38-0:26:44)—which may be coincidence, or may suggest that Jerry's interest in Milo may not be so innocent. However, to assert his independence, when Jerry returns to her place that evening for a party, and discovers it is just her, he protests, but she tells him, "I'm not trying to rob you of your precious male initiative" (0:32:42-0:32:46). Like Helen, Milo assures Jerry that she is only interested in him as an artist—a claim quickly contradicted when we learn that Milo has a pattern of relationships with male artists. Jerry seems to take Milo at her word because he quickly and aggressively hits on Lise (Leslie Caron), a young woman sitting at the next table—even commenting on her attractiveness to Milo and her friend, Tommy (Hayden Rorke) (Fig. 11). Later, while driving home with Milo in her car, Jerry gets angry when Milo claims he treated her badly; the relationship is repaired only when she apologizes for her outburst. Milo is right when she tells Tommy that Jerry "is just not … housebroken yet" (0:36:22-0:36:24), clearly showing her plans to domesticate Jerry. In his disrespectful treatment of Milo, and his aggressive pursuit of Lise, Jerry epitomizes the same qualities as Paul Boray: the "narcissism, machismo, and misogyny" described by Gan as a common defense mechanism used by the struggling, unappreciated artist.

Lise is initially turned off by Jerry's aggressiveness, but eventually relents. On their first date, we quickly discover that Lise better fits the feminine ideal of the 1950s: unlike Milo, who is middle-aged, rich, assertive, and at times, demanding, Lise is nineteen, works in a perfume store, is modest, and tells Jerry, "I don't like to talk about myself. I prefer to listen to you" (0:54:39-0:54:43). While she dates Jerry, and they fall in love, we learn that Lise is also loyal: she eventually reveals to Jerry that she is engaged to Henri, a successful middle-aged singer who cared for Lisa while her parents fought, and died, for the French Resistance during the war. In reality, Milo is not much older than Jerry, but compared to Lise's youth, and given her pattern of failed relationships, Milo comes across as older. And as with Helen and Norma, Milo's money, and Jerry's poverty, put them in positions of power that undermine Jerry's sense

of masculinity. Without telling him, Milo rents Jerry a studio, and arranges a show of his work. Initially resistant, Jerry eventually agrees but insists that he will pay her back. When Milo asks Jerry, "Why do you always make such an issue of money?" he replies, "Because I ain't got any. And when you ain't got any, it takes on a curious significance" (1:11:17-1:11:25). Angela Dalle-Vache claims that Jerry's "heterosexual identity is further threatened by the traditionally 'male' initiative Milo appropriates. … By virtue of his artistic vocation and his dependency on Milo's money, Jerry himself risks turning into that 'extra girl'" she used to lure him to their meeting date (67).

More than the other two films I discuss, *An American in Paris* overtly reinscribes normative gender roles. Though he is not married, Jerry has a strong sense of heteronormative values: during their first "date," Jerry tells Milo, who was married for two years before her husband left her for another woman, "You know, you should get married again. You need it." "Why?" she replies. "Everybody does. Everybody needs somebody to account to" (0:33:42-0:33:50). When Jerry does become more financially dependent on Milo—but remains in denial of her feelings for him—he has his friend and fellow musician, Adam (Oscar Levant, who also plays Sid in *Humoresque*), to remind him of the risk to his masculinity:

> **Adam**: "This, eh, sponsor of yours. What does she want in return? Don't tell me. I shock easily."
> **Jerry**: "You're crazy. She's not interested in me. She's just a good-hearted kid who likes the way I paint."
> **Adam**: "Huh. That's real dreamy of her. Tell me, eh, when you get married, will you keep your maiden name?" (1:04:25-1:04:44)

Later, Adam tells Jerry, "I told you this sponsoring business was complicated. You see what happens today? Women act like men and want to be treated like women" (1:16:53-1:16:59). And even Milo says she desires to fulfill the traditional female gender role, telling Jerry when he finally acknowledges her feelings for him and kisses her: "I feel like a woman for a change." "You are," Jerry replies (1:26:08-1:26:11) (Fig. 12). Jerry insists on arranging their plans for the evening, and she gladly agrees.

Despite her seeming acceptance of her traditional gender role, as a rich, middle-aged woman, Milo cannot prevail against social, and genre, conventions: "What is at stake in this love triangle is whether art should be aligned with the docile femininity of Lisa [sic], with the creative masculinity of Jerry, or with the entrepreneurial aggressiveness of Milo. These alternatives narrow themselves down to form the happy ending, which suggests that an American male can be a painter in Paris as long as he marries a French girl" (Dalle-Vacche 71). While *Humoresque* ends melodramatically with Helen's suicide and Paul's self-awareness, and film noir *Sunset Boulevard* ends with Joe's death and Norma's complete detachment from reality, *An American in Paris* is a musical, and thus the audience expects the reuniting of socially-appropriate lovers. And this is what they get. Ironically, what briefly pushes Jerry into Milo's arms

Fig. 10 | Jerry gets a taste of the good life in Milo's car, 0:24:47. Warner Bros., 1951.

Fig. 11 | Jerry spots the other part of his love triangle—unconcerned about Milo's feelings, 0:35:22. Warner Bros., 1951.

Fig. 12 | Jerry takes charge, and Milo "feel[s] like a woman," 1:25:55. Warner Bros., 1951.

The artist represents freedom from suburbanization and soul-numbing work and consumerism, but as a "kept man," he reflects the fear of poverty and loss of traditional masculinity through financial dependence.

is learning that Lise is engaged to a man she admires and feels indebted to, but does not really love. We know that Henri has overheard the lovers, but we do not know his reaction to their revelation. But after Jerry's lengthy dance number, we find that Henri has freed Lise from their engagement. Lise returns and she and Jerry kiss—the happy ending we want, but an ending with little practical resolution: "the happy ending with the French girl distracts us from the difficulty of being an American male and a painter in Paris at the same time. From the plot alone it is hard to tell whether Jerry will continue to paint after marrying Lisa [sic]." Furthermore, the ending "does not completely resolve the rivalry between Art and Love, unbound male creativity, and the routine to which marriage leads" (Dalle-Vacche 65). Will Milo continue to help Jerry? Will Jerry and Lise have children, and how will being a husband and father impact Jerry's artistic aspirations? These practicalities remain unaddressed as the two lovers embrace.

CONCLUSION

Writing about the post-World War Two era, Michael Kimmel describes how men faced a dilemma regarding their definition of masculinity: "Men had to achieve identities that weren't too conforming to the march of the gray flannel suit lest they lose their souls; but they couldn't be too nonconforming lest they leave family and workplace responsibilities behind in a frantic restless search for some elusive moment of ecstasy" (236). The three films I have discussed each portray the male artist as reflecting that dilemma: the artist represents freedom from suburbanization and soul-numbing work and consumerism, but as a "kept man," he reflects the fear of poverty and loss of traditional masculinity through financial dependence. The films also use the upper class, middle-aged "patroness" to portray anxieties about the perceived growth in the social and financial influence of women in this time period. Juxtaposing this empowered woman with a younger, more traditionally feminine love interest allows each film to reinscribe traditional gender roles by showing and telling the dangers of assertive women and weak men.

But the films differ in degree of dependence each artist faces, and of sympathy we feel for the "patroness" character. *Humoresque* is the most critical of the artist, as Paul Boray best represents the "heroic artist": driven to escape his working-class roots, Paul is "married to his music," and has the arrogance and selfishness to succeed. Helen is the most sympathetic "patroness," and it is only after her suicide that Paul begins to question his singular focus on music and to value the family and community he has worked so hard to escape. Joe Gillis faces the greatest financial and social vulnerability of the artists I discuss, and unlike Paul and Jerry, he lacks both arrogance and people close to him who can remind him of the dangers of transgressing against traditional gender roles. Through Joe's voiceover, we follow his ambivalence and self-delusion regarding his role as an artist and a "kept man." Although he dies, Joe achieves self-awareness and masculine agency: his decision to leave Norma, and give up his dreams of being a Hollywood writer, and return to his job in Ohio, show that he no longer wants to live the sort of illusion that has defined most of Norma's adult life. Living on the GI Bill, Jerry Mulligan never really faces Joe's financial desperation, and Jerry's artistic arrogance, combined with constant reminders from Adam about gender roles, means that Milo never really had a chance to make Jerry a "kept man." And while the film gives the audience the happy (gender role affirming) ending it wants, the film sidesteps any serious questions about how Jerry will balance the roles of male artist, husband, and father. Thus, while not every love triangle resolves to a happy Hollywood ending, each film does show the male artist eventually finding his traditional masculine identity. ▪

NOTES

1. While Jackson Pollock maintained the image of working-class, independent masculinity, in reality, he was the epitome of the artist as "kept man." According to the documentary film *Peggy Guggenheim: Art Addict* (2015), Guggenheim discovered Pollock and "rescued" him from a job as a carpenter by giving him a large commission and arranging his first show. She also gave him a monthly allowance and a loan to buy a place to work, and continued to give him money after he married. Guggenheim also claims they had only one sexual encounter, which she described as "unsuccessful" (0:53:50-0:58:18).
2. See Kimmel, chapter 7, and Cuordileone, chapter 3, for a discussion of post-World War Two critics blaming women for male anxiety, as well as juvenile delinquency, homosexuality, and many other social ills.

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Uncovering Identity on Both Sides of the Camera

An Interview with *Monica* Director Andrea Pallaoro

BY PAUL RISKER
Independent Film Scholar

Italian film director Andrea Pallaoro's striking third feature, *Monica* (2022), sees trans actor Trace Lysette play the titular character, a trans webcam performer who returns home and tries to reconnect with her ailing mother, Eugenia (Patricia Clarkson).

Monica is a continuation of the themes of fractured relationships and loneliness that define the early stages of Pallaoro's career. At a glance, *Medeas*'s (2013) focus on a rural family appears to share more in common with *Monica*, than his sophomore feature *Hannah* (2017) that centres on a woman thrust into loneliness when her husband is imprisoned. Both *Medeas* and *Monica* are broader family portraits, compared to *Hannah's* sparseness. That is not to suggest that it lacks the depth of exploration into human nature, but its smaller cast of characters deepens the claustrophobic intimacy of his other feature films.

Pallaoro directs Monica with a patience that emphasises the character's self-reflective nature, utilizing longer takes and fewer edits to not interrupt the stream of consciousness. The director wants us to observe the character, to piece together our understanding of who she is not only by her words, but her silent existence. It is difficult to not notice the spirit of Michelangelo Antonioni's non-intrusive observational approach in Pallaoro's storytelling, but *Monica* never feels an act of imitation; instead it continues a tradition of filmmaking through the individual voice of its director.

Speaking with *MSJ* during the film's festival run in the spring of 2022, Pallaoro discusses encouraging the audience's active participation, the opportunity of his non-judgmental gaze, and the creative manipulation of the cinematographic framing.

PR: What thoughts and feelings fill you about *Monica* at this present time?

AP: The experience of sharing it with an audience has been thrilling and electrifying. It takes so long to get these films made, that when they're finally across the finish line, it's great to see an audience experience what you've worked so hard to make (Fig. 1).

PR: Given how long it takes, is there a point when you feel the pressure to break ground on your next film?

AP: At least for me, it's necessary to go through that phase when you finish a project and accompany it as it takes its baby steps out into the world. It's not only a way to get in touch with the world and reassess what you've worked for and what you've made, but also how it's being understood and recognized. That experience informs your next chapter, your next endeavour, and your journey.

Fig. 1 | Director Andrea Pallaoro on the set of *Monica*. Nio Vardan, 2022.

PR: When you're sharing the film, do you observe intentions that you weren't previously aware of?

AP: I'm sure there are subtleties you discover while you're making it, but also when you show it to those first audiences. So yes, that's something I'm familiar with. Sometimes the audience will surprise you—reactions you may not have thought about, or even details you may have not paid that much attention to, become more important for some people because of who they are and their own personal experiences. This is the part of film that allows, or invites let's say, the spectator to project him or herself on the film in an active way. Hopefully they have an individual experience and to get to know themselves more profoundly through the experience of projecting themselves onto the character. So yes, it's a type of filmmaking that induces one to do that.

PR: In what way does *Monica*, or this type of filmmaking encourage people to do that?

AP: By not providing answers, but by asking questions, and by not following precise narrative formulas, the spectator is given the freedom to undertake a personal journey or experience. That's the type of cinema that I look for as a spectator and it becomes natural for me to make that type of film as a director. But it's also a cinema that's not black and white. The characters are not perceived as good or evil, and in fact, they're not morally judged. That's one of the most important things for me because when you don't judge your characters, it's an opportunity to understand them more deeply and that's very valuable.

PR: In *Monica*, there's no judgement, even when the brother learns his sister is a sex worker. It occurs to me that this lack of judgement is rare.

AP: It's true. I'd say that most of stories or films are tainted by these polarizing views, these dichotomies, or at least these moral guidelines. Escaping or resisting them requires a meaningful type of effort.

PR: And it's alienating to some audiences.

AP: Of course. It's a cinema that requires an act of participation from the spectator. It's not the type of cinema that you can just sit back and passively experience something that has been packaged for you—that confirms your beliefs. You have to challenge yourself, your understanding of the world, and that's not often comfortable. But requiring more participation, it creates the opportunity to experience a degree of satisfaction it otherwise wouldn't. It's more satisfying ultimately if you're willing to go

Fig. 2 | Director Andrea Pallaoro directs actor Trace Lysette on the set of *Monica*. Nio Vardan, 2022.

on that journey and it's more meaningful too because it can stay with you for longer. This type of filmmaking can play a big part in how you understand yourself too, but art in general does that. The ideal spectator for this type of film is someone that wants to dig deeper into the human psyche.

PR: *Monica* is attentive to how we live inside of our own minds, and the true identity of a person is found in the character's silence.

AP: I love to follow a character and to experience them by themselves in silence because it creates an opportunity for intimacy. When a person doesn't have to worry about performing or being, it gets closer to their true nature. These moments are opportunities and because of this, cinema more than any other art form is fantastic at photographing the character's thoughts and emotions. And this relationship keeps evolving long after your experience of the film is over. Once it's established that connection, it could keep engaging with you. I find that to be beautiful, powerful, and meaningful (Fig. 2).

PR: The scene in which Monica and her brother sit talking by the pool is one of the most powerful moments in the film, because this was the first time I began to feel like she transitioned from a stranger into someone I would recognise were I to pass them on the street.

AP: From the very beginning, Katelin Arizmendi, my cinematographer, and I wanted to approach Monica by showing different parts of her, little by little. I wanted the audience to feel they were getting to know her progressively, getting closer to her, or that Monica would let them get closer to her.

Even the framing we chose was closer to a portrait. It's a type of framing that prioritizes the portrait over the landscape—the body and the subject over the landscape, while also underlining the co-dependence of one or more body in the same frame. It's a type of framing that can be unsettling at first but has a lot of psychological implications in the relationship between the spectator and the protagonist.

PR: Do you mean how it forces us to become more active participants?

AP: Yes, but it's also much more suffocating and when it crops the landscape out, the relationship the two bodies have to one another in the same frame becomes so much more palpable and physical within the frame.

PR: The character of Monica is framed in a way that paints her many sides. It's a beautifully nuanced portrait of femininity and masculinity that highlights the sensual and sexual, strength and vulnerability, through this self-reflective woman's trauma and maternal instincts.

Fig. 3 | Director Andrea Pallaoro directs a scene with actress Patricia Clarkson on the set of *Monica*. Nio Vardan, 2022.

AP: It's actually a tool that my collaborators and I use to shape the relationship between the spectator and Monica, and how they discover who she is. I don't want the spectator to consume her because she is the leading force of the film. She explores her identity with the spectator through femininity and masculinity, and through her history. This is also a film about a mother who doesn't recognize her daughter, or a mother who only recognizes her daughter after a long journey—I wanted this spectator to teeter around that experience (Fig. 3). It's one of those examples in which the cinematic language, the approach towards the character, is a reflection of the themes that are explored.

PR: What struck me was the silence when you cut to the end credits—there's no music.

AP: The sound plays a major role in the film. It's exclusively diegetic meaning that there isn't a music score. There is music, but it's always diegetic—music the character listens to. It's not meant to manipulate the spectator into having a specific reaction and often the sound allows us to understand what goes on outside of the often-static frame that crops out so much of the world. Visually the film is framed in a very specific way, and it's the sound that creates the 360-degree dimension. We not only hear what comes out of the frame, we hear what's all around the character, at all times.

PR: Now seems an opportune moment to ask if there are any filmmakers you're drawn to that may influence your creative approach?

AP: The list is very long. One of my major sources of inspiration for the last twenty years has been Michelangelo Antonioni. The way he was able to articulate the relationship between a character and their environment has always fascinated me. I have a type of experience with his films in which every viewing is different, offering new discoveries. [Filmmaker Rainer Werner] Fassbinder has played a very important part of my evolution in cinema and also filmmakers like Chantal Akerman and Lucrecia Martel, who is someone I've endlessly admired.

PR: And how do you view the relationship between your films?

AP: They start from the same place, which is my interest in psychological complexity and the consequences of abandonment, not only the act of feeling abandoned, but also the experience of not being recognized or understood for who you are. The focus for my characters is on the lengths they'll go to heal the wounds that comes from their traumas—how unsettled they are by it and how their driving force comes from the need to deal with that trauma.

PR: In your cinema, themes and ideas are not purely driven through narrative and plot, but also the aesthetics of sound and cinematography.

AP: That's a very important point because the language is the grammar, and I believe the cinematic approach is able to invite the spectator on a journey to experience these themes in a more sensorial and psychological way. Style and content are one and the same. In my cinema, they cannot be separated. Style informs content and content informs style. ▪

The Reader Must Awaken

On *A Masterpiece in Disarray: David Lynch's Dune*

BY ANDREW HAGEMAN
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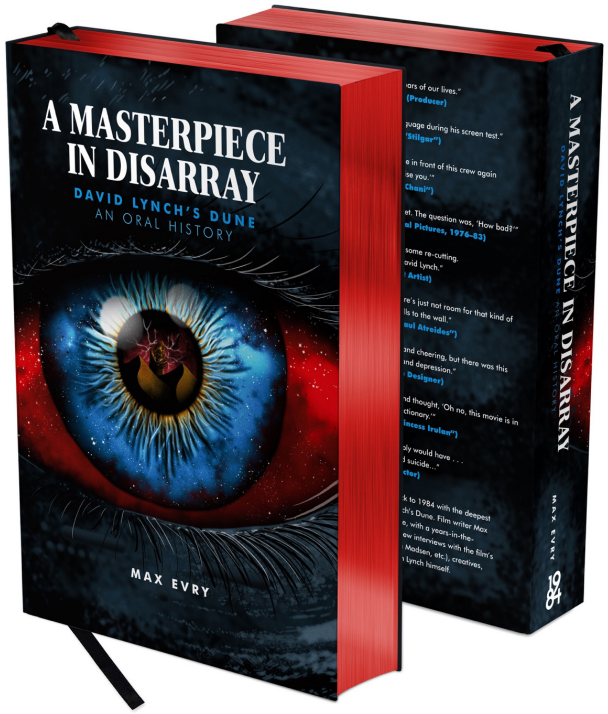
INTRODUCTION

Max Evry's 2023 tome, *A Masterpiece in Disarray: David Lynch's Dune*, claims a spot in the top echelon of books that explore the production, release, and legacy of a cinematic work. This detailed history of Lynch's *Dune* (1984) makes many of the same productive moves to historicize the era of production alongside the director's career arc and to present a wide range of reflective perspectives as Herbert Biberman's *Salt of the Earth: The Story of a Film*, Clark Collis's *You've Got Red on You: How Shaun of the Dead Was Brought to Life*, Todd Melby's *A Lot Can Happen in the Middle of Nowhere: The Untold Story of the Making of* Fargo, and Kyle Buchanan's *Blood, Sweat & Chrome: The Wild and True Story of Mad Max: Fury Road*, among other notable members of this niche genre. In particular, Evry transfers the electricity of his passion for *Dune* and the cinema of David Lynch without producing a mere hagiography. The author's admiration for, and authority on, all things Lynch fuel an open curiosity about the diverse perspectives of cast and crew members who have been part of *Dune*, past and present. While reading *A Masterpiece in Disarray*, I found myself balancing two competing urges. Many passages made me keen to re-watch the scenes under discussion that I wanted to mark the page, close the book, and pull up the film. At the same time, I felt compelled to table that urge in order to maintain the flow of reading Evry's assiduously curated interview material and the complex accounts he constructed.

The book is organized into four sections: Pre-Production, Production, Post-Production and Release, and Legacy. Within them are subsections where Evry presents informative contextualization of that phase of the film for readers to keep in mind



A Masterpiece in Disarray: David Lynch's Dune
Max Evry
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while diving into the oral history subsections. The interview excerpts in the oral history evince a curatorial mastery. While some oral histories of film and television carry an obnoxious whiff of fanboy impulses to collect, colonize, and own anecdotes as if to flaunt exclusive access to the people involved and establish superfan status, Evry assembles clusters of interrelated memories the way an editor creates montages that imply connections yet put the agency to arrange and triangulate the points of view in the audience's hands. In other words, *A Masterpiece in Disarray* is an act of open archive sharing to catalyze reader wonder and analysis rather than promote the author's theories or status. Within this archive is a treasure trove of options that were considered and would have made for deeply different renditions of *Dune* as well as anecdotes of life on- and off-set. Relatedly, Evry reminds readers that Lynch's *Dune* was considered inside the industry and by critics and fans alike to be the It-Project of its early 1980s moment–a point that is easy to neglect or overlook from our current moment as mainstream critics then and now, and the director himself, have disparaged this film that nonetheless sustains a cult following and renewed interest in light of director Denis Villeneuve's new versions (2021, 2024). In this review, I highlight a range of insights and information that prove valuable for revisiting the film, whether your interest entails film research, film history, *Dune* fandom, or more.

PLANS WITHIN PLANS WITHIN PLANS WITHIN PLANS

Among the most fascinating elements of *Dune* that Evry's book delivers is the complicated fabric of production alternative possibilities that were considered but cut. Interview excerpts from costume designer Bob Ringwood provide detailed background on the origins of design concepts, the processes of decision making, and reflections on how this work continues to influence cinema aesthetics in science fiction and beyond. Alongside production designs are extensive lists, drawn from rigorous archival research, that document the actors considered when casting for many of the roles. These materials provide a speculative glimpse into the many versions of *Dune* that could have materialized but ultimately did not. For those actors who did join the cast, the interviews with or about them capture the moods and activities of life on and off the set in Mexico.

Through the Ringwood interviews, Evry takes readers back to a very different time, when film professionals had different formulas and oversight shaping their work. It was a time when creative team members brought eclectic approaches to production and when curiosity more than algorithms drove inspiration and surprise. Ringwood's anecdote about being recruited to the film by producer Raffaella De Laurentiis is as fun as it is illustrative of how open to uncalculated serendipity the decision makers on *Dune* could be. Moreover, he recounts his inspiration for costumes in gallery exhibitions he had visited where particular elements of works stuck in his memory. Alongside Ringwood, costume assistant Mary Vogt shares an appropriately weird story about them sourcing the base materials for the black Guild member outfits, though I will leave the details vague here to preserve the discovery for those who read the book (206). As just one of many production interviewees, Ringwood insightfully points out genealogical lines of visual influence from *Dune* through many films that have followed it. While *Dune* was not, in several ways, the success it might have been, what continues to influence the creative professionals who imagine and make cinematic worlds are its stillsuits and architectures along with the realized commitment to making every aspect of the mise-en-scène clearly signal the planet to which it belongs. While these cinematic progeny include projects that did not employ Ringwood, he does recount his own role in evolving the batsuit for director Tim Burton in *Batman* (1989) from the stillsuit of *Dune*–it is another story I refrain from spoiling here (432-33).

A Masterpiece in Disarray pivots from production design to casting, imagining a panoply of different *Dune*s that might have existed if other actors had filled major and minor roles. Citing the original notes of casting director Jane Jenkins, held in Special Collections at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Evry includes comprehensive lists of wide-ranging options and anecdotes in the work of choosing, recruiting, and securing the talent. For example, the group of potentials to star as Paul Atreides has 24 names in addition to Kyle MacLachlan, who eventually took the role. Aside from MacLachlan, the relative star power and points in career trajectories of the actors on that list is an exciting film-history exercise. Each list-and-process section on the different roles grants readers access to implicit priorities and preferences of the creatives behind *Dune*. Aside from speculating on what *Dune*'s cast would have been, the more significant outcome is the robust analysis we can bring to the strategies Lynch and De Laurentiis forged to counterbalance the risk of MacLachlan as an unknown lead with Sting as an ascending global phenomenon and the edgy SF vibes Sean Young brought via Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). Evry also delves into casting with emphases on Val Kilmer and Tom Cruise as top choices for Paul Atreides and a story about Gloria Swanson rudely turning down the role of Shadout Mapes because she assumed she was being cast for the Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam–a turn of events that uncannily echoes Norma Desmond in Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), a Lynch favourite that he references by naming the character he plays on *Twin Peaks* Gordon Cole.

As to life on- and off-set, Evry includes a range of people beyond the core cast members. Because the story of making *Dune* is itself a synecdoche of 20th-century globalization, the collected accounts of hiring local seamstresses in Mexico City as well as the many people who stood as extras in desert shots point directly to matters of political economy within this making-of narrative. On the seamstresses, the costume assistant Vogt recounts the production team paying close attention to the textile items that Mexican and Guatemalan women were making and selling on the streets in the Zona Rosa area where the crew hotels were located. Vogt and Ringwood were so impressed by the artisanship that they hired several of the street vendors to produce costumes, and Vogt highlights one

of these employees as having made an entrepreneurial leap to owning her own shop based on working for *Dune* (207). To Evry's credit, he includes these seemingly positive tales of meritocratic philanthropy alongside more exploitative accounts that remind readers that Mexico was chosen by the De Laurentiis family principally to save money.

This extractivist aspect of globalization comes through when the book documents the extremes of heat and dehydration faced by the masses of low-paid extras who had to endure sweltering desert temperatures in heavy costumes without the prospects of cooled escape spaces that the major talent could access as well as being denied bottled water to stay hydrated (177-78). Evry's passages of Hollywood film production in Mexico City in the early 1980s do not shy away from putting the troubling realities of hierarchy and hazard in full view, especially as experienced by below-the-line personnel. How the admirers of Lynch reconcile these facts of production with his well-known practice of Transcendental Meditation and the multiple glowing accounts by top-billed actors of working with him, is something that Evry prompts readers to consider. Did the scale of wealth disparity and socio-economic exploitation contribute to Lynch's *Dune* despondency? While we do not hear that idea from Lynch, or explicitly from Evry, within *A Masterpiece in Disarray*, the author makes it possible to wonder about the affects, conscious or otherwise, of Lynch being the director in a filmmaking model that leverages some of the same settler-colonial logics that are sharply critiqued within Frank Herbert's *Dune*.

Meanwhile, running parallel to the below-the-line folks making the film possible, the top-billed actors share fascinating insights that connect with the film's performances. MacLachlan gives sustained anecdotes of being chosen from relative obscurity in the Seattle stage scene. The sequence of steps to a major role were new and strange to him, and once he was selected he had to focus deeply on delivering the role while also projecting into the future potential that being Paul in *Dune* would open up to him. MacLachlan's memories tell the story of his career breakthrough aligning almost uncannily with his character Paul's ascendancy. Furthermore, it turns out that MacLachlan was one of the biggest *Dune* obsessives in the cast and crew, so he had been living with the narrative and its characters for a long time before the prospect of being in a major adaptation existed. One revealing insight comes from MacLachlan and others recounting a performance impasse he reached when trying to pivot from killing Jamis (Judd Omen) to giving moisture to the dead, the Fremen expression for shedding tears (222-23). MacLachlan exposes a weak spot in his acting abilities at that time to illustrate how the adaptation of Herbert's complex prose in print lent to the disarray of what made it to the big screen. Along the path of MacLachlan's experiences, Evry folds in fun gems like the camaraderie and mischief shared among MacLachlan, Patrick Stewart, and Everett McGill (215-17).

Complementing the adult actors' anecdotes are actress Alicia Witt's memories of moving to Mexico as a child with her parents and experiencing a radically altered family life in addition to getting mentorship and friendship with the adults in the cast. Witt, who played Alia Atreides, notably worked again with Lynch in a minor role in the television series *Twin Peaks* (1990-91) before reprising the role in *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017), so she brings first-hand knowledge with the benefit of reflection over decades. Since Witt filmed with Lynch both when he was mired in the film he eventually would disavow and most recently when he was filming the 18-hour-long film that many hold to be his true masterpiece, she is uniquely positioned to share a complex profile of the fabled director. Witt takes us behind the scenes of a precocious child actor who thrived in a community of colleagues who respected her abilities and whose middle-class family suddenly enjoyed more opportunities to expand their cultural horizons together.

PROFILES OF DAVID LYNCH

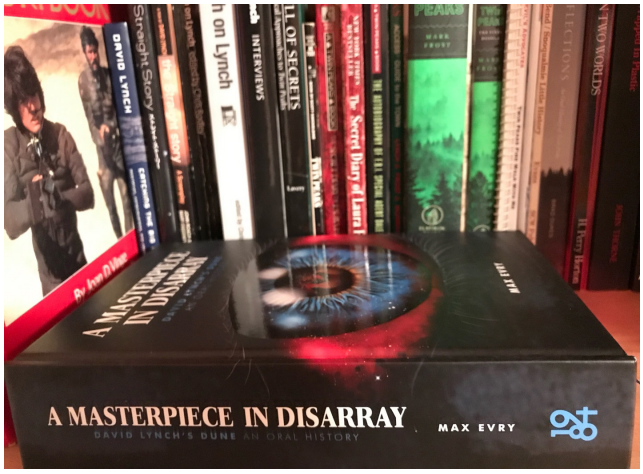
Just as Witt's memories differ in profiling Lynch early and late in his career, the interviewees in *A Masterpiece in Disarray* represent a diversity of profiles within the scope of making *Dune*. This composite demonstrates Evry's interviewing and curating expertise and sets the book apart from other works on Lynch's cinema which feel aimed at bolstering his hagiography. To be sure, the accounts collected here are predominantly positive accounts of admiration and collegiality. Yet, the positivity underscores different values and characteristics in Lynch, and there are some documented moments of struggle and strain, too.

As with the oral history of life on- and off-set, Evry features the voices of production team members to great effect. Giles Masters (Art Department), Frederick Elmes (Additional Unit Cinematographer), Ringwood (Costume Designer), and Vogt (Costume Assistant) each speak to collaborating with Lynch as enjoying the director's trust. Vogt remarked:

> He [David] trusted the people that were doing the visuals. David has this 1940s cast iron telephone on his desk, and he said to Bob, "This is what I want the movie to look like." Bob was like, "Okay, I get it." I think David could see that Bob was brilliant and trusted him. You're not going to get any better than Tony Masters, Freddie Francis, and Bob Ringwood. David trusted them with the visuals, then he went and did what he needed to do. (189)

It is rare to find interviews on collaborating with Lynch other than those with actors, and it is noteworthy that Vogt repeats the word "trust" when describing the director's relationship with multiple team members. Trust is such a vital component of collective projects, and Evry chose excerpts that explicitly name it and that give details on how these colleagues discerned it and why they value it.

More complicated is the overall set of memories that Young delivers. She describes a conflict on the set where she and her sister, who was visiting the set, responded to a scene being filmed in a way that angered Lynch to the point that she says he "fucking yelled at me in front of everybody" (236). She proceeds to say, "I took it. We finished it. Then I called him outside where no one could hear us, and I said, 'David,



if you ever fucking yell at me in front of this crew again like that you will regret it, I promise you'" (236). Similar levels of indignation resonate across other excerpts from Young and manifest when she talks about being part of The Asylum's mockbuster *Planet Dune* (2021), which was released to capitalize on Denis Villeneuve's first *Dune* (2021) installment. While Young's attitude is an outlier, it is an important part of any project and director profile to include interactions that roughed up the smooth edges.

Evry does mention the rumor, as appealing as it is apocryphal, that Lynch may have been called upon when shooting *Blue Velvet* (1986), his next film after *Dune*, to assist the first-time directing efforts of Stephen King as he filmed *Maximum Overdrive* (1986) in the same North Carolina vicinity. Sadly, the rumor simply gets rehearsed without new evidence. An extremely short interview with Lynch himself is included as practically the last word of the book. The interview is consistent with others by Lynch, particularly when it comes to *Dune*. He often opts out of speaking extensively about his films, so his brevity and circumspect tone here are in character. It is an interview that might have been more effectively placed elsewhere in the volume as it punctuates the plethora of detailed anecdotes and perceptions across the book with a rather flat note, even as I understand Evry's impulse to record this dialogue in a prominent position. Finally, Evry gestures at a parallel between Herbert's sharp interrogation of "charismatic leaders" who attract vehement followers and Lynch's own "devotion to a charismatic leader, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi" (507). The book leaves this idea largely undeveloped, and it is vital to add here that *Dune* is fully framed within a messianic cosmology that does not seamlessly apply to Transcendental Meditation. As a result, the thematic alignment of charismatic leaders that Evry posits actually brings Lynch into relief as distinctly remote from the messianism at the heart of *Dune*. By the end of *A Masterpiece in Disarray*, we can hold in mind a far more complex sense of Lynch than before we have read it.

CONCLUSION

Overall, Evry has produced an epic journey across time and space that is worthy of the quality of Herbert's and Lynch's versions of *Dune*. The combined oral history and research are a readerly equivalent of drinking a shot of the Water of Life: alternative visions of different iterations of the 1984 film co-exist in this space. Somewhat akin to director Quentin Tarantino's book *Cinema Speculation* (2022), *A Masterpiece in Disarray* opens pathways to imagining the films that might have been and re-frames the film that came to be. It is pleasurable to visualize Rutger Hauer playing Duke Leto Atreides and productive to use archival cast lists to contextualize film careers and the state of the Hollywood industry and the De Laurentiis family's part in it in the early 1980s. Plus, scholars and fans of Lynch's cinema get a multifaceted representation of his working style from different angles, including a finely assembled *Rashomon*-effect account of what transpired between him and filmmaker George Lucas when the opportunity to direct *Return of the Jedi* (1983) could have displaced *Dune* as Lynch's big-budget SF project (43-48). From the quality and quantity of interviews to organization and montage-style curation, *A Masterpiece in Disarray* is a model for oral history accounts of filmmaking. ▪

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A Review of *ReFocus: The Films of Antoinetta Angelidi* edited by Penny Bouska and Sotiris Petridis

BY HAILEY GLENNON
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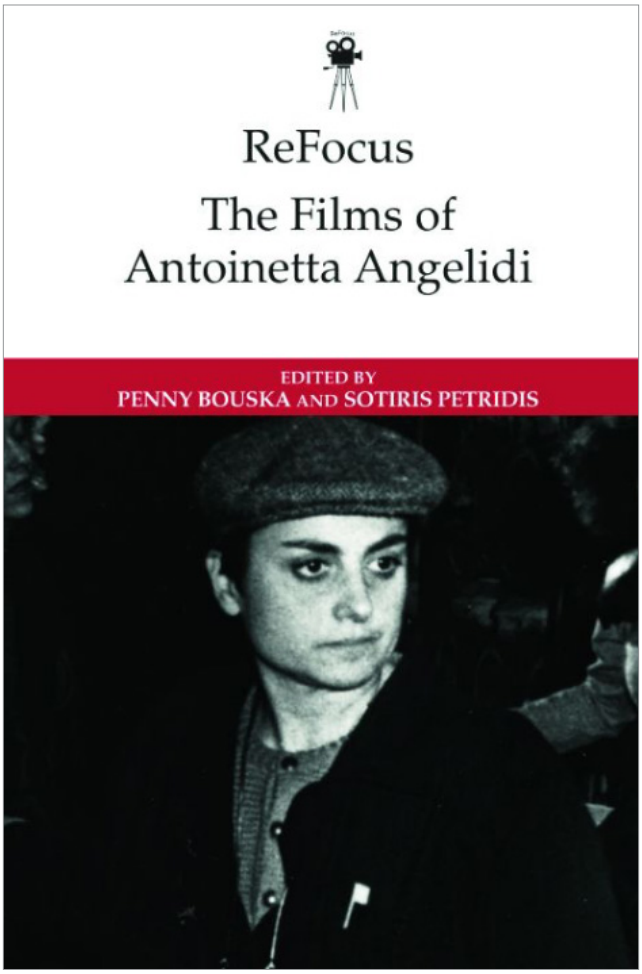
Antoinetta Angelidi's films transcend the confines of traditional cinema, boldly exploring the frontiers of experimental filmmaking. Within the many styles of filmmaking and film theory, the genre of experimental film—often associated with the terms avant-garde or underground— encompasses a diverse range of technical approaches aimed at shattering the restrictions and stereotypes of traditional genres. It beckons the audience to venture into uncharted territories of cinematic techniques and visual expressions, liberating them from the boundaries of the mainstream commercial film industry. The goal is to re-evaluate cinematic conventions by exploring film outside of traditional narrative forms with the use of abstract techniques such as rapid changes in image size and style, sound manipulation, and alternating film rate. "Experimental cinema is more than an artistic practice of expression, more than a technical method of cinema" (1) Penny Bouska contends. In fact, these films strive to illuminate certain issues and topics expanding across themes of time, space, dreams, and perception, while executing them through unique sound and image stylistic choices that promote the vision of the filmmaker in ways that spectators may not get from commercial films. It is "[this] distinctive and exceptional [style of] filmmaking that Antoinetta Angelidi introduced to Greek cinema" (1). Not only did her work reshape the perceptions of film enthusiasts and critics regarding avant-garde works, but it also forged a path for numerous women filmmakers to share their narratives and leave an indelible imprint in an industry traditionally dominated by men. Penny Bouska and Sotiris Petridis's *ReFocus: The Films of Antoinetta Angelidi* breaks down the legacy of this Greek filmmaker and feminist. The text is divided into three parts with about three chapters per segment. Each part focuses on a different aspects of Angelidi's style and works. The text brings together a variety of film scholars to analyze Angelidi's artistic contributions, including her roots in Greek diaspora, her start in the visual arts, a thorough break down of the feminism and the avant-gardism within her works, and a look at the sound and visual techniques she established in the industry. With references to many of her films, a specific focus on *Topos* (1985) and *Idées Fixes / Dies Irae* (1977), Angelidi's obsession with the feminist uncanniness, motherhood, and the correlation to psychoanalysis and Freudian theory are just a few among numerous recurring themes and ideas.



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There are many other aspects of Angelidi's filmmaking that aim to defamiliarize the audience. Angelidi takes them into a "transformation of the familiar [and] into the uncanny as the base of an alternative poetics of cinema, where films are no longer simple audiovisual representations of linear stories but function as artistic articulations between the imaginary and the symbolic order" (106). Angelidi's unique take on sound and visuals are some of the elements that make her films stand out here. Chapter Seven, "From Orchestrated Noise to Elaborated Silence: The Audiovisuality of Antoinetta Angelidi's Films" by scholar Electra Venaki addresses how the "immersive audiovisual experience [of Angelidi's films guides the] audio-spectator consciously or unconsciously [to follow] the seemingly parallel flows of two bifurcated worlds, that of the visual and that of the sound, to reach a perception of all the cinematic elements as a whole" (143). It is throughout all Angelidi's films that spectators can see how "voices, sounds, music, moving images and written texts–-are [all] intertwined" (143). Additionally, in Chapter 9: "Antoinetta Angelidi: The Visual Gaze," art historian Calliope (Pepy) Rigopoulou dives into the influence of Angelidi's visually artistic childhood, showcasing the history of her love for the visual long before she got behind the camera. The chapter considers the various works such as her films *The Hours* (1995) and *Hanging Water* (1988) to analyze how geometry, colour, and frame manipulation coincide to craft "an austere fluidity [that] permeates [the] landscape [of the frame] . . . [wherein] [p]laces/soulscapes emerge from her visual and cinematic work" (192). All elements of the mise en scène express the innerworkings on Angelidi's artistic mind, highlighting how her "visual gaze relates not only to her visual art, but to her oeuvre as a whole" (193). The distinctive qualities and components that distinguish Angelidi's films in such a remarkable manner are intricately tied to her significant role within feminist film theory. Her portrayal of themes such as female sexuality, motherhood, and heterogeneity are uncanny, exemplifying her exceptional talent and artistic vision. Part One: "Feminism and the Avant-Garde" goes "through [Angelidi's] interpretive concept of uncanniness, viewed as a feminist avant-garde strategy" (15) in more depth.

When thinking about how Angelidi "exemplifies both avant-garde and feminist filmmaking, [her films *Topos* and *Idées Fixes / Dies Irae* help highlight] the distinctiveness of Angelidi's poetics" (15). "Weird Mothers: The Feminist Uncanniness of Antoinetta Angelidi's *Topos*" by Rea Walldén explores the use of the term avant-garde as a form of revolution. Walldén discusses the history of the French Revolution in relation to this art form in the early twentieth century. As Walldén notes, the revolution initiated a "function of avant-garde [that] was claimed by both political parties and artistic movements; and, in the context of art, it has since become a historical determination (16). It was this turning point that shifts Walldén's focus of the chapter from history to scholarship as it includes Laura Mulvey, Tania Modleski, Mary Ann Doane, and Teresa de Laurentis to illustrate the "views on avant-garde cinema as . . . rely[ing] heavily on psychoanalytic theory" (20). The complexity of psychoanalytic theory is touched on by many scholars interested in feminist theory–-particularly in the realm of feminist film theory. Angelidi is a feminist who also incorporates the concept of psychoanalysis in her filmmaking. Walldén's chapter delves into how Angelidi makes reference to feminist philosophers, such as Cixous and Luce Irigaray, to critique patriarchal ideologies most commonly addressed within psychoanalytical theory. Similar ideologies are also exposed within her works as well. Her reference to these philosophers comes with acknowledging how "Cixous deconstructs the founding dualities of gender and posits the possibility of 'feminine writing' [while] Irigaray opens up the Freudian text, revealing its blind points and their – not so hidden – implications, and the possibility of a gender and subject formation" (21). Within this chapter, Walldén interweaves history and theory to address Angelidi's positioning of women as filmic subjects and portraying the Mother as the most controversial figure. The idea of the "Mother is considered the paradigm for female sexuality, as the other for her son or for her husband who sees in her his own mother, and who can give her what her father can't, a penis" (21), which are concepts Angelidi does not shy away from.

These philosophical theories are further enhanced in reference to Irigaray within *Idées Fixes / Dies Irae*, a striking audiovisual about intellectual and political extremism. This connection comes from Irigaray's words that a mother/woman is a

> Womb–-earth, factory, bank–-where the semen-capital is entrusted so that it germinates, manufactures, bears fruit, without the woman being able to claim its property or even its usufruct, being only 'passively' submitted to reproduction. She herself is possessed as a medium of (re)production. (22)

In Angelidi's works, it is evident that her central focus revolves around the politics of feminism. Throughout the various films explored in this text, a distinct theme emerges: "Women who destabilize the system are perceived as strange" (Walldén 24) –-a motif that Angelidi fearlessly embraces and attempts to bring to light. The film mentioned within this chapter, *Topos*, highlights Angelidi's "poetics of feminist uncanniness reach[ing] its full maturity in her distinctive style" (15), as it adeptly portrays women who are

> [t]hreatening to patriarchy but not to men: women who desire but don't need men, or women; who may become mothers but don't need to be; who don't desire to be their lovers' mothers; who when becoming mothers don't cease to be subjects; who search for their own origins and love their mothers; who love their daughters as much as their sons; who claim the authorship of their words and their works; and who . . .re-define what subjectivity and authorship may be. One may think of this new subject as a weird mother. (24)

In particular, it is "[t]he figure of th[is] uncanny mother [that] is used as a multifaced simile for an unconventional

structuring of women's subjectivity, which resists and refutes patriarchal trope" (15). For instance, *Topos,* with its run time of 85-minutes, jars spectators for its raw look at the way women have been treated and depicted within Western Art. With a soundtrack composed exclusively of human noises and a visual play with light and darkness to embody a dream-light atmosphere, *Topos* succeeds at creating an uncomfortable and destabilizing experience for the spectators. Angelidi projects the ultimate fear of the patriarchal society, a "wom[a]n who do not conform to the patriarchal system and act[s] as reminders that the system is neither natural nor eternal" (23), and anyone, or anything that destabilizes this system is the muse for this groundbreaking filmmaker.

Angelidi embraces uncanniness. Within the personal interview provided at the end of the text, "An Interview with Antoinetta Angelidi" with Rea Walldén, Angelidi says she was never "satisfied with any woman's body in any kind of cinema, whether mainstream, auteur or avant-garde" (205). Her work "speaks [on] women's experience[s]" (205) and this obsession with how "women's bodies [are] represented" (205). The pervasive discontentment and harmful misconceptions that plagued women in such a constrictive society served as the impetus for Angelidi's unwavering determination to explore uncharted territories and give voice to unique narratives that had remained unseen until now. The invaluable concluding discussion gives readers a glimpse into the inner working of this Greek feminist and the connections she aims to make within her narratives, all of which feature in some form "no greater scandal than a woman who loves herself and exists, as a subject" (24), Angelidi has never backed down from experimenting with the "game of art" (221). It is through her cinematic endeavors that Angelidi not only establishes an enduring legacy but also shapes an ongoing narrative in the realm of film. ▪

The Un-zipped Lips of Iranian Women in Ava Maria Safai's *ZIP* (2023)

BY KELLY DOYLE
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Horror film has always been remarkably suited for the transgression of social norms and expectations. Working to shock viewers out of complacency, horror film ruminates on social and political ills to vindicate those ascribed a state of otherness or dehumanization. Far more than an expression of the fantastical and the disturbing, horror films at their best drag real and pertinent injustices screaming into the light. Director Ava Maria Safai's short horror film *ZIP* (2023) (Fig. 1) is an effective condemnation of human rights violations against Iranian women, sparked by the murder of 16-year old Mahsa Amini ostensibly for removing her hijab. The film's closing credits are prefaced by the slogan of the resultant #FreeIran movement, "Women. Life. Freedom" (00:14:02) in a call for the end of the repressive regime in Iran. Millions around the world and in Iran itself rose in protest to the compulsory wearing of the hijab, and remarkably, women have remained the public face of the movement in resistance to Iran's oppressive theocracy.

Safai asserts that *ZIP* was born of a dream, or more fittingly, a nightmare, about "a girl with a zipper mouth who desperately wanted to sing. I woke up from this dream, awake and alert; I knew in this moment that I had a story on my hands which was special." The premise is deceptively simple: this disturbing coming of age story, set intentionally in 1979, features Melody (Gelareh Ghodrati) planning to sing at her high school talent show on the evening of her 16th birthday but her dream is tainted by her father's (Ashkan Nejati) plan for her to meet the man over twice her age that she will be forced to marry. If this was not bad enough, she wakes on the day to discover a closed zipper where her mouth should be (Fig.2). The horror of being rendered voiceless as an inevitable part of becoming a woman is loud and clear as a previously vibrant and assertive Melody

Fig. 1 | Promotional Poster for *ZIP*. Crazy 8s, 2023.

Fig. 2 | Melody stares at her zipped mouth in horror and tentatively attempts to open it in *ZIP*, 00:06:05. Crazy 8s, 2023.

Fig. 3 | A close-up of Melody's backpack as she prepares for a day at school in *ZIP*, 00:00:53. Crazy 8s, 2023.

Fig. 4 | Melody's glance lingers on photos of her mother in *ZIP*, 00:1:03. Crazy 8s, 2023.

finds herself silenced. It seems no coincidence that Melody is the same age as Mahsa Amini, but *ZIP* offers a hopeful outcome for women who refuse to cleave to traditional and oppressive expectations, though not without real pain.

Out of hundreds of submissions, *ZIP* was green-lit for production by the Crazy8s Film Society, a fitting moniker for an organization that tasks emerging filmmakers with shooting the project in 3 days and completing post-production in the remaining 5 (8 crazy days total!). In April 2023, *ZIP* went on to become the first film in Crazy8s's 24-year history to receive a standing ovation at the Centre of Performing Arts in Vancouver, where it was previewed to a 2000-person audience. Behind the gruesome rendering of the zipper, a typically benign tool (Fig.3) repurposed as a painful symbol of the stolen voices of women in the film, is a moving call (or song) to revolution and action that viewers respond to.

The 1979 setting in a Canadian town is pivotal to the film's message. It brings Melody's distress, and thus the allegorical distress of women in Iran, into sharp relief against a backdrop Western audiences can relate to; it also paradoxically illustrates the disturbing disconnect between the vibrancy of 70s culture in the Western world with its focus on women's liberation and other social movements and the realities of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. As Safai elucidates:

> "'It was really important for me to make a film that Western audiences can understand by watching it and really get a sense of what's actually going on…1979 was the year of the Iranian revolt. Iranians don't like to call that event the 'revolution' anymore, because they don't feel positive about it.'" (qtd. in Alexandra)

As Alexandra observes, "by 1981, under the laws of the regime, women were mandated to wear the hijab" ("Local Short Film"). The film opens in the vibrant, sunlit, pastel aesthetic of Melody's room, in which she dances wearing yellow pyjamas and prepares for school to an upbeat disco track: "You better zip, baby, better get my fix…" (00:00:32-00:00:34). The original song is noteworthy as the playful lyrics foreshadow a more insidious meaning to the idea of zipping: rather than being a lighthearted prompt to arrive or zip quickly to an impatient lover, it is an imperative to relinquish agency. Melody's room is marked by iconic musicians whose counter-culture ideas continued to resonate in the 70s, like *The Beatles* and Janice Joplin. Indeed, Melody is an aspiring singer-songwriter herself: viewers learn that she has attempted to share her voice in the talent show since grade 8, and even her teacup is adorned with music notes, but her father has quashed her attempts at every turn. A shot of Melody's calendar in vignette informs the audience that it is January 31, 1979, one day before Melody's birthday and in the timeline of the film, just 11 days before the revolution in Iran that would see it return to conservative traditions. The forewarning of things to come is echoed in the relative normalcy of Melody's room, where the codified signifiers of childhood permeate the mise-en-scène: teddy bears, yellow curtains with flowers, and a close-up of a framed photo lined with roses of Melody and her best friends all set the stage for the jarring undermining of childhood and self-expression to come. One shot lingers on two photos of a woman that viewers are encouraged to assume is Melody's mother (Fig.4). She is not present in the film, and she sits cross-legged, wearing stylish dresses with knees and shoulders exposed. It is a striking reminder that until 1979, women in Iran enjoyed far more cultural freedom in terms of dress than they do today.

Melody's father is quick to tell her that instead of performing in the talent show, she will be meeting Omid (Soheil Khojasteh), the future husband he has arranged for her, and his family. Further, he does not want to hear her talking about her music (00:01:19-00:01:20). As Melody spars with her father, reverse shots frame him subtly in low angle to suggest his prominence in the power dynamic between them. He addresses her in Persian rather than English, which she insists on using, and there is a clear tension between the desires and communication styles though his message is clear: Iranian tradition and culture is binding, and she must adhere and conform. At the outset, however, Melody is outspoken about her dreams and

Fig. 5 | Omid and his father unzip the mouths of female family members so that they can eat in *ZIP*,00:09:56. Crazy 8s, 2023.

Figs. 6 and 7 | Melody is presented with Birthday cupcakes, 00:06:42; Melody is laughed at in class, 00:07:14.

intentions; she has a voice and uses it in the face of patriarchal assertions both at home and in school: In class, she corrects her male teacher when he compares the female body to a chicken coop and erroneously asserts that the uterus is a vagina on a diagram of the female reproductive system. The boys in class are no better; they goad her by asking if she'd like to "nest their egg" (00:02:54) and are summarily embarrassed when she points out that they do not have eggs. Attempts to intimidate her or reduce her to her body, her ability to give birth, or be treated as an animal for reproduction fall flat. The moment speaks to the importance of having a dissenting voice in the face of misinformation and ignorance about women and their bodies, but it is one that Melody loses when she wakes on her birthday to find her mouth zipped, her attempts to pull the zipper unbearably painful, and her dreams stifled.

The use of a zipper as a tool of pain, distress, and muzzling reflects the violent oppression of women in Iran and the cost of pushing back. At her birthday dinner with her future in-laws, sister, and husband, Melody has become a silent server. Women prepare the food that nurtures but are themselves only sustained with permission. As Melody offers tea to her guests, viewers are horrified to realize that none of the women seem physically able to take sustenance because of their zippers. During dinner, they eat only when their father or husband un-zip their mouths, a process that looks uncomfortable at best and painful at worst (Fig. 5). Inherent is a subtext of women's bodies controlled and disfigured. Part of the hellishly effective detail is the care taken by SFX artist Andy Le: the longer a woman has worn a zipper, the less sore the zipper prosthetic appears. Melody's wound is new and raw, but her mother in law's scars have faded. In effect, they all bear the physical evidence of a traumatic wound newly and forcibly imposed or faded but hellishly effective over time. The zipper is evidence of ongoing violence that pales but does not end or heal. Every woman, we are told, gets a zipper at age 16, and the men are excited about the notion of a new leader that will make women with zipped mouths a tradition once more. Indeed, according to Afary, following April 1st, 1979 in Iran, the Family Protection Act that provided extended rights to women in marriage was declared void, and *komītehs* were formed to patrol the streets an enforce Islamic codes of dress ("Iranian Revolution").

So how does Melody's affliction resonate with her Canadian classmates? Not how we might expect. Part of the horror is that Melody isn't really met with concern or empathy, but with discomfort at best and derision or glee at worst. When she arrives at school, her friends seem mostly uncomfortable, as though they do not know what to say. Her Canadian female cohorts are not subject to the coming-of-age zipper and maintain a sense of distance and discomfort (Fig. 6). In a pointless gesture that unsuccessfully tries to gloss over the horrific reality of Melody's involuntary silencing, she is offered birthday cupcakes that she cannot physically eat. "Have you tried unzipping it?" (00:07:26) one friend asks, in what is perhaps the well-meaning but misguided tendency to ask of women in repressive regimes why they simply have not tried removing the hijab. Disturbingly, Melody's classmates, male and female alike, all laugh at her inability to retort or express herself, even as her teacher continues to spew sexist misconceptions about menstruation (Fig. 7). In essence, the subtext alludes to North American and European culture's lack of understanding about the importance of being heard and the horror of not having a voice in Iran, but *ZIP* makes this point explicit.

Despite the horror, *ZIP* emphasizes the spirit of revolution, as painful as that might be. "How much does your voice cost?', we are asked at the end of the film, and we are encouraged to answer it considering the full range of subject positions we inhabit, and upon which the film reflects, depending on age, culture, religion, and geographical location.

In Melody's room, her print of "The Unicorn Rests in a Garden," one of the seven scenes in *The Unicorn Tapestries,* hints at her personal revolution (00:00:59). According to The Met, this is one of 7 of the "most beautiful and complex works of art from the late Middle Ages that survive. Luxuriously woven in fine wool and silk with silver and gilded threads, the tapestries vividly depict scenes associated with a hunt for the elusive, magical unicorn" ("The Unicorn Rests"). Depicting a unicorn tethered to a tree and constrained by a fence in a garden, it is

Fig. 8 | Melody prepares to emancipate herself at the talent show in *ZIP*, 00:12:24. Crazy 8s, 2023.

often considered a depiction of the beloved tamed; the confinement is meant to be happy, as the space contains pomegranates, a symbol of both fertility and marriage ("The Unicorn Rests"). It is worth noting that the unicorn is being hunted very much against its will in the tapestry series, so that despite the claim to willing confinement, and that the chain is not secure and the fence is low enough to be cleared, the scene reads more like this confinement is the result of a broken spirit. The print is a wonderful allusion to traditions that can be broken rather than breaking those who are subject to said traditions but the cost to Melody and her real-life counterparts is high. It becomes clear that the only way to assert her voice is to rip the zipper off, but she sings her original song about being free, in Persian, beautifully and clearly to a rapt audience through the bloody and yet somehow beautiful maw that is now her mouth. With its foil cut-out stars and its iconography of a teen girl in formal wear, coming of age and exposed and bloody on stage, the talent show is notably reminiscent of director Brian dePalma's *Carrie* (1976). Like writer Stephen King's original 1974 novel and the film that follows it, *ZIP* also explores patriarchal fear of women coming into their own power and warns that such a move is inexorable. With the song of revolution strong in her lungs, Melody galvanizes the women in Omid's family to open their zippers, and *ZIP* reminds viewers that there is an ongoing fight for women' rights in Iran that refuses to be stilled, muzzled, or zipped. ▪

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Journeys in Solidarity

A Review of KDocsFF 2024

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Fig. 1 | A group of KDocsFF 2024 volunteers with Festival Director Janice Morris and Community Outreach Director Greg Chan. Eyes Multimedia, 2024.

Celebrating its 10th anniversary as KPU's official documentary film festival, KDocsFF 2024 found new life by introducing daily themes to its varied programming. Across five days (Feb 21-Feb 25), this year's milestone event screened 18 films under the banner of "Journeys in Solidarity," which recognized a common thread of community-building and the search for connection in each day's thematic focus: Liberating the Body Politic, Radical Humanity, Decolonizing Power, Resisting Erasure, and Preserving Democracy.

In the process of co-authoring this review, we came to the festival not only as viewers but also as volunteers (Fig. 1). Having co-developed community resources as part of the Irving K. Barber grant "'i am here because you are here': Re-Imagining Intersectional Solidarity at KPU," we helped run a Community Resources table as one of many exhibitors sharing and discussing our work between each event. Designed to empower the community with Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization (EDID) resources, the Community Resources table functioned as a catalyst for KDocsFF's chief goals: sparking engagement, dialogue, and community solution-building. Situated near the VIFF Centre's entrance, our table became an entryway into the kind of discussions that festivalgoers, on their way to see the films and panels, would encounter once they reached the auditorium.

Fig. 2 | KDocsFF 2024 Keynote Speakers and Joint Panelists Afton Quast Saler (*Neurodivergent*) and Ella Glendining (*Is There Anybody Out There?*) answer audience questions. Eyes Multimedia, 2024.

On opening day, festival co-founder Janice Morris welcomed a weekday crowd to the Vancouver International Film Centre with a call to action. All of the films, Morris noted, "embody and inspire" the "spirit of organization and action" at the core of KDocsFF, and how it is our responsibility to celebrate the voices shared in this space "by not looking away." It was with this shared sentiment that KPU's Elder-in-Residence, Lekeyten, prefaced the proceedings with a heartbeat song, offering filmgoers a sincere reminder to engage meaningfully with the stories of endurance we were about to witness and to pass on the knowledge we gained as a result.

With that, the festival officially kicked off with a double-feature of Afton Quast Saler's *Neurodivergent* (2021) and Ella Glendining's *Is There Anybody Out There?* (2023), two documentaries well-paired for their intimate portrayals of living with disabilities through a distinctly gendered lens.

With a tightly edited 25-minute runtime, *Neurodivergent* brilliantly harnesses the narrative potential of mixed media to capture Afton's sense of "living as a contradiction," making the most of visual storytelling to translate one woman's profoundly personal experience of receiving her ADHD diagnosis at the height of Covid-19 into a short film that audiences could relate to. After all, as the documentary's director and subject expressed in her keynote speech, "Positive change must start with connection"—a message that carried over into Ella Glendining's feature. Fresh off the 2024 BAFTAs, Glendining introduced her critically acclaimed story to Vancouver as "a film about ableism and loving yourself as a disabled person in a nondisabled world." What begins as a journey to find someone with a body and unique condition just like hers takes on a new dimension as she discovers a surprise pregnancy early into filming. Through the eye-opening process of bringing her son into the world and building a community with other disabled folks, Glendining comes to a beautiful conclusion: "There is no [other] me," and, most importantly, "The world would be worse off without disabled people." Both films and filmmakers displayed a touching vulnerability while infusing their stories with joy and humour, and the lively discussion that followed the screenings proved that they succeeded in connecting to the KDocsFF audience (Fig. 2).

In the afternoon, director Jeanie Finlay's *Your Fat Friend* (2023) premiered in Vancouver to a sold-out audience. Following fat activist Aubrey Gordon's rise from anonymous blogger to best-selling author and podcaster, the film offers an intimate portrayal of Aubrey's fight against the systemic oppression of fat people—and of her complicated relationship with her own family. Both deeply personal and deeply representative of the experiences of many feminine-presenting fat

people in the West, Finlay's film speaks to the power of personal stories, and thus of individuals, to resist and reimagine biased narratives in the fight to change the world. And changing the world *is* the goal, as Aubrey's activism goes far beyond self-love: "You can't love yourself out of oppression," she explains in the film.

Before the screening, SFU and UBC-Okanagan lecturer and documentary filmmaker Layla Cameron reflected on Aubrey's article "In Defense of Fat Sadness," which confronts the dehumanizing binary of representations available to fat people. On the one hand, Cameron explained, anti-fat rhetoric demands that fatness be portrayed as something to resist, resulting in what Aubrey deems the "Sad Fatty" narrative. On the other hand, the desire to disprove the "Sad Fatty" narrative creates pressure to depict fatness as always joyful. Both approaches are dehumanizing, denying fat people access to the full range of human emotion.

Your Fat Friend refuses to be confined to these narratives, instead insisting on Aubrey's complex personhood. Finlay's subversive gaze is both frank and caring, embracing Aubrey's body as it is and joining Aubrey in moments of joy, fear, and sadness. And the film makes clear that Aubrey's sadness never derives from her body, but rather from the people who want to change her body.

Closing the day was Susan Sandler's *Julia Scotti: Funny That Way* (2021), a film of happy returns—to comedy, yes, but also to family. Unflinching in its depiction of Scotti's journey as a trans woman and comedian, the film invites us to sit with the uncomfortable truths of her past, from off-colour, self-revealing stand-up routines to loves lost in the pursuit of a true identity late in life. Throughout the film, we see her find new success on *America's Got Talent*, undergo a near-fatal medical emergency, and reconnect with her once-estranged children. As was the case for the rest of the day, this film showed a deep preoccupation with community and connection, with Scotti coming to the hilarious conclusion that "if you're independent, you're an asshole." After all, who are we to deprive those who love us of the gift of caring for us when we need it?

Rather than hold the traditional Q&A following the movie, Scotti treated the packed audience to a fantastic stand-up set, which lived up to the film's promise of a seasoned comedian making a triumphant return to the stage with newfound pride and authenticity. Ripe with self-aware humour, Scotti's set basked in the comedy of being old while touching on the harsh political reality of transphobic legislation in the United States. Fearless and bold, Scotti is one to watch.

Day two's theme of "Radical Humanity" manifested across three deeply moving films. In the morning, director Karl Malakunas' *Delikado* (2022) told the story of three environmental crusaders in the Philippines who risk their lives defending the island of Palawan from corporate and political greed. In the afternoon, director Henna Mann's *Rails, Jails and Trolleys* (2022) examined the sweeping reach of the Indian farmers' protest, focusing in particular on its manifestation amongst the Canadian diaspora. And in the evening, director Nisha Pahuja's Oscar-nominated *To Kill a Tiger* (2022) tells the story of Ranjit, a poor farmer who refuses to back down from seeking justice when his 13-year-old daughter is gang raped in their small village in Jharkhand, India. As the tale of a father's refusal to deny his daughter's humanity in the face of a patriarchal culture and a community of opposition, the film testifies to the power of one man standing against gendered violence and injustice. "Your courage will give others courage," a supporter tells Ranjit near the end of the film. "Your story is an example for other men to follow, they'll learn to also fight for the girls and women in their lives on the issues of violence and justice."

The third day, "Decolonizing Power" placed the spotlight on Indigenous stories, activists, and decolonial ways of learning. Starting us off was a double-feature connected by a shared focus on environmentalism, which began with a short documentary by educator Cam Douglas and filmmaker Rodney Fuentes: *ReWilding the Classroom* (2023). The film spotlights a group of young students from the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board's integrated curriculum based out of Trent University as they take part in the semester-long Youth Leadership in Sustainability initiative (YSL). The program takes education out of the classroom by incorporating the environment into their standard programming, enabling them to build a personal connection to the sustainability movement. Next up was an intimate account of Indigenous stewardship with *The Klabona Keepers* (2022, dir. Tamo Campos and Jasper Snow-Rosen), which sees non-Indigenous storytellers collaborate with Indigenous elders to bring their 15-year-long fight to defend the Sacred Headwaters, also known as the titular Klabona, to the big screen. *The Klabona Keepers* offers a platform for the unwavering matriarchs of the village of Iskut to share their stories of healing and resistance—set against the colonial frameworks of the Canadian government, mining corporations, and generational trauma.

Continuing the thread of Indigenous resistance, on its fourth day, KDocsFF 2024 brought Navajo filmmaker Ivey Camille Manybeads Tso to the stage to introduce *Powerlands* (2022), an award-winning portrait of the director's investigation into the loss of land—both in the form of displacement and environmental devastation—inflicted onto Indigenous communities across the world, from the Philippines to Mexico. Meeting with Indigenous women whose fights mirror her own, she learns from their fierce struggles and leadership and brings these lessons home to the Navajo Nation, where the resistance continues. Like many of the day's films, *Powerlands* urges viewers not just to stand in solidarity with Indigenous peoples at the forefront of environmental protection, but to take direct action with them.

The evening then moved into the Vancouver premier of *Who She Is* (2022), an animated short by filmmaking duo Jordan Dresser and Sophie Barksdale with art direction by Ojibwe artist Jonathan Thunder. With their first animated film in their eight years as producing partners, Barksdale and Dresser wanted to challenge the traditional narrative of Missing and

Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) in the media, wherein racialized victims—as opposed to their white counterparts—are typically portrayed using the colonial language of violence and tragedy. Inspired by their experiences living in a border town in Wyoming, USA, and the deep connections made with Indigenous community members in the process of producing a film about the residential schools in America, the two questioned: "How could we tell a story about the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women epidemic in a different way, to have people connect with the issue?"

In our interview with Barksdale, who came to the festival as a visitor on Thursday prior to her Friday screening, she spoke of their desire to encourage audiences, who may easily dismiss statistics about MMIW as not personally resonant, "to care deeply" about the four women whose stories the film tells in the first-person. While the film does not shy away from the ugly parts of these four stories—each from a different decade and developed in close collaboration with the victims' families—its main goal is to humanize these women and to give ownership over the narratives of their lives (and deaths) back to them. As Barksdale explains, "We're not here to make victim porn. We wanted something beautiful, and we wanted it to reflect each of the women." To that end, Thunder's eye-catching watercolours certainly succeed.

Following the short was *Twice Colonized* (2023), a film that may be described in the broadest of terms as showing what it means to be Indigenous in the modern world. And, that, it does—but far more intimately than that description suggests. Much like its subject, Inuit lawyer Aaju Peter (Fig. 3), *Twice Colonized* doesn't pull any punches. What director Lin Alluna achieves is a film that seamlessly transitions from sweeping cinematography that captures the stark beauty of the Arctic to close-up portraits of an Inuit/Greenlander woman's lifelong battle against colonial cycles of violence. The film, while ultimately hopeful and justifiably reverent of Aaju Peter's relentless advocating for the rights of the Inuit, is also held together by a thread of barely contained anger and loss. What we see is a colonial subject moving through an empire and its altars, determined to bring it all down. It is at times harrowing, and other times triumphant, staying true to the complexity of a life lived with the burden of trauma, but also an unshakeable drive for justice. As the credits rolled, the audience undoubtedly left the theatre with a deep respect for Aaju Peter, and also a sense of awe. With a heart-pounding score, honest storytelling, and effective pacing, *Twice Colonized* is nothing short of triumphant.

On Saturday, the day's theme of "Resisting Erasure" saw films honour marginalized communities grappling with an increasingly uncertain sense of place. As a whole, the day's programming advocated for solidarity and joint action by diverse communities routinely marginalized by gentrification, beginning with an honest look into the lives of four Black transgender sex workers in Atlanta and New York City. *Kokomo City* (2023) is a triumphant feature directorial debut by D. Smith, who paints an electric and playful portrait of the intimate experiences of Daniella Carter, Koko Da Doll, Liyah Mitchell, and Dominique Silver. Into the afternoon, KDocsFF continued the day's theme by amplifying the voices and stories of unhoused people, members of a population subjected to repeated attempts at erasure by a state that criminalizes their existence and a society that denies their humanity. In a screening of director Zack Russell's *Someone Lives Here* (2023), the festival depicted Canada's housing crisis through the work of carpenter Khaleel Seivwright, who quit his job at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to build life-saving tiny shelters for unhoused Toronto residents.

Fig. 3 | KDocsFF 2024 Keynote Speaker and Panelist Aaju Peter introduces *Twice Colonized*. Eyes Multimedia, 2024.

Keynote speaker Alexandra Flynn, an associate professor at UBC's Peter A. Allard School of Law, prefaced the screening with what she admitted was a radical assertion for a law professor: the idea that the right thing to do is not always the legal thing to do. In the film, Khaleel, driven by the life-or-death urgency of sub-zero winter temperatures, persists in building and distributing tiny shelters even as the City of Toronto begins the legal process required to restrain him. Until our governments take responsibility for solving the current housing crisis, Flynn said, "I hope we have more people like Khaleel who have the capacity to do what is right."

Someone Lives Here opens powerfully with the voice of Taka, an unhoused resident of Toronto who recalls the brutal winter of 2021, which she survived by living in one of Khaleel's tiny shelters. Taka's narration, striking in its strength and humanity, arises intermittently throughout the film, forging a coherent narrative of community action and support.

As the film depicts Khaleel's relentless, day-by-day pursuit, aided by a growing team of volunteers and a GoFundMe campaign, Russell expertly contrasts the absurd bureaucracy of the City of Toronto's response to Khaleel's shelters with the immediacy of freezing to death on the Toronto streets. In these depictions, the film makes clear that the City's priority is maintaining control of and authority over so-called public land, and in this objective, unhoused people become undesirable burdens. Taka gives voice to this experience of being marginalized and erased by the State, claiming that she has become a "refugee" in her own city.

Taka's story in particular dismantles the notion that housing can or should be merely structural, instead emphasizing the human need for home, for a place that is physically and mentally safe and that, ideally, engenders community. And as winter thaws to spring, Taka effortlessly speaks to the communal nature of Khaleel's temporary, life-saving intervention: "I have survived the winter . . . I can't believe we did it." *We* did it, Taka says: Khaleel, the volunteers working with Khaleel, the people who donated money or materials, outreach volunteers, and unhoused residents like Taka. *Someone Lives Here* makes evident the community of care that goes into Taka's (and others') survival. Community and care are at the heart of it all.

Russell does not let viewers forget, however, that the State is ultimately responsible for perpetrating—and thus for solving—the housing crisis. Spring becomes Summer, and the City of Toronto carries out a 1.9-million-dollar encampment clearing campaign in three city parks. Footage of heavy machinery destroying one of Khaleel's tiny shelters juxtaposes ensuing footage of locals enjoying one of the newly cleared parks, highlighting the insidious ease at which governments erase the unhoused—erase people like Taka. *Out of sight, out of mind*, the concluding shots seem to say, made even more insidious by the text overlay, informing viewers that 92% of encampment evictees remain without permanent housing three months post-clearings.

The post-film panel, composed of Flynn, CRAB Park advocate Fiona York, housing activist and former CRAB Park resident Drew Hirschpold, and Khaleel Seivwright himself, offered both expertise and lived experience. BCGEU Executive Vice President Kari Michaels moderated a Q&A session that perfectly complemented the film's sombre ending, extending hope and suggestions for concrete policy changes (Fig. 4).

Playing to a sold-out audience in the evening, *Big Fight in Little Chinatown* (2022) is director Karen Cho's "love letter to Chinatowns"—those of her childhood, and also those that have been woven through her life and career. Highlighting businesses and activists fighting to protect racialized neighbourhoods across North America, the documentary and its accompanying panel were odes to placemaking and represented Chinatown as "a living, breathing organism" that serves as "a sanctuary for marginalized communities." Covering the years before, during, and immediately after the world was forced into quarantine by Covid-19, *Big Fight in Little Chinatown* showed the immense resilience of the people most affected by the pandemic, be it financially or in the form of anti-Asian hate. Ultimately, this was a story about "staying where you belong" rather than bucking beneath the pressures of systematic racism and gentrification. Beautifully crafted, this documentary was a standout in this year's stellar programming.

Unsurprisingly, the Q&A (Fig. 5) was panelled by several Chinese-Canadian community leaders, like moderator Henry Yu from the Centre for Asian Canadian Research Engagement; Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Hua Foundation, Kevin Huang; and Chinatown Legacy Stewardship Group co-chair, Stephanie Leo. But that was not all—the panel also emphasized a common spirit of resistance across different Vancouver neighbourhoods by bringing Hogan's Alley Society's Executive Director Djaka Blais and Jag Nagra of the Punjabi Market Regeneration Collective to the table. The resulting discussion was a rich, intersectional celebration of the "interconnected" histories and struggles that make up cities like Vancouver, where community solidarity and cross-class relationships enable us to fight against erasure. "What does it mean," the panellists invited us to question, "for us to have collective power?" And whom exactly does the possibility of joint action threaten? Needless to say, an entire day could have been dedicated to the lively dialogue sparked by the film and Q&A.

Fig. 4 | KDocsFF 2024 Panelist Khaleel Seivwright discusses *Someone Lives Here*. Eyes Multimedia, 2024.

Fig. 5 | KDocsFF 2024 Panelists Jag Nagra, Karen Cho (director), Kevin Huang, Stephanie Leo, and Djaka Blais discuss *Big Fight in Little Chinatown*. Eyes Multimedia, 2024.

While every event brought difficult conversations and realities forward, the final day of KDocsFF 2024 was perhaps the most weighty in the subject matters it covered. Is it that, as we approach crucial elections around the world, from Russia to Canada and the United States, the tenuous hold of democratic leadership over global affairs and the growing fragility of journalistic freedom fill us with an unbearable sense of doom? If so, the relevance and complexity of these issues were certainly

Fig. 6 | KDocsFF 2024 Keynote Speaker and Panelist Katrina vanden Heuvel introduces *The Price of Truth*. Eyes Multimedia, 2024.

reflected in the day's self-explanatory theme: "Preserving Democracy." Pessimistic as recent discussions around this topic may be, the title suggests an ongoing battle. And that is the uniting principle throughout all the films shown on this day—that the fight does, and *must*, continue.

Starting Sunday with a bang, *Manufacturing the Threat* (2023) was nothing short of a political thriller. Following the disturbing case of John "Omar" Nuttall and Amanda "Ana" Korody, whose impoverishment made them the targets of an entrapment plot by undercover law enforcement agents, director Amy Miller takes audiences through the RCMP's and CSIS's histories of infiltrating social movements, inciting violence, and breaking the law "in the name of national security." Moving through decades of history and complex legal proceedings without ever losing its sense of urgency, *Manufacturing the Threat* calls Canadians to attention with an echoing question from keynote speaker Alexandre Popovic, the man whose nonfiction book inspired this feature-length documentary: "Do you feel safe?" Deeply unsettling, the film is a must-watch precisely for *how* it disturbs us. How could any of this happen? Who have we charged with protecting us—and what or whom, exactly, are they protecting us *from*? Unrelenting in its dissection of the endless self-justification of covert government agents to operate with impunity, Miller's film is both sharply informative and ripe with tension.

What followed was a riveting debate on policing and the logical fallacy of national security. Rather than a unified front, the panellists offered a range of opinions about the current state of democracy in Canada and the controversial role of the RCMP and CSIS in preserving it; while some held more optimistic hopes about the possibility of—and need for—police reform, others were not so sure that organizations built on foundations of racism and genocide could be changed from within, nor that they have shown any real interest in attempting to do so. Regardless of where audience members fell on that spectrum, KDocsFF held space for an open and informed conversation on the subject, reminding us exactly *why* we must continue the difficult work of preserving democracy.

The festival concluded with a double-feature screening that embodied this day's theme: directors Emilie Gambade and Malibongwe Tyilo's short documentary *Section 16* (2022) and director Patrick Forbes's feature-length *The Price of Truth* (2023). The complementary films confront threats to the freedom of the press in different contexts while exploring why some people continue to report the truth despite severe risks and consequences.

After *Section 16*, which examined the cyber misogyny and death threats faced by four female South African journalists, Katrina vanden Heuvel—editor and publisher of *The Nation*

magazine—delivered a keynote address live on Zoom (Fig. 6). Though *The Price of Truth* focuses on authoritarianism in Russia, vanden Heuvel argued that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's ongoing persecution highlights that independent media, and democracy itself, are under threat in the West, too. To protect democracy, the need for major systemic change is clear—for how can we fight authoritarianism without a media that holds people accountable? And the subject of *The Price of Truth*, vanden Heuvel added, has a spirit that keeps independent media alive: Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov "refuses to be a stenographer for the powerful."

The Price of Truth follows Muratov, editor-in-chief of Russia's only independent newspaper, *Novaya Gazeta*, as he and his team face increasing danger in their fight to defend truth and openness in Russia. The power of independent journalism as a weapon against authoritarianism is the pulse that propels the film—and Muratov—forward: "I'm not an observer," Muratov reflects in one particularly resonant moment. "I'm a participant."

Altogether, the addition of daily themes to KDocsFF 2024 was a welcome step toward more nuanced engagement with the topics at hand. From body autonomy to the political imaginary, this year's festival empowered visitors and filmmakers to tackle complicated issues with real stakes. At the same time, throughout the festival, fellow staff commented on the nature of the event as a safe space, putting into practice the meaning of "Journeys in Solidarity." Having had the privilege of moving through each event as both volunteers and attendees, we felt a rare sense of being part of the city and its rich cultural tapestry. This, then, is the power of a festival like KDocsFF: to honour existing communities and inspire the creation of new ones. ▪

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A Beautiful Prize

Review and Report on the 2024 Sundar Prize Film Festival

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The inaugural Sundar Prize Film Festival was a beautiful festival that achieved its goal: celebrating human resilience (see Fig. 1). Even though 2024 was the inaugural year of this festival hosted by the Sher Vancouver LGBTQ+ Friends Society, there were over 400 in attendance and an extensive list of sponsors and partnerships with all the major Vancouver film festivals. The festival awarded $17,000 in cash prizes to the winning films along with opportunities to collaborate with the festival's community partners. Despite being brand new, the festival is recognized as an Film Festival Alliance member, a Gold FilmFreeway event, and an IMDb qualifying Festival. The festival featured nine prize categories, including for fiction and nonfiction, that received submissions from around the world. A small part of the festival funding came from ticket sales and film submission fees; however, most funding came from the community sponsors. This festival could not have been made possible without the work of the co-founders Alex Sangha and Vinay Giridhar, the festival director, Sidartha Murjani, and the entire Sundar Prize team (Fig. 2). I have been fortunate to have joined the festival's planning committee in November 2023 and continue to work with the planning of the 2025 festival. This article summarizes my work on the festival in the context of film festival studies to provide a review of the Sundar Prize.

Fig. 1 | Sundar Prize FF logo. https://sundarprize.com

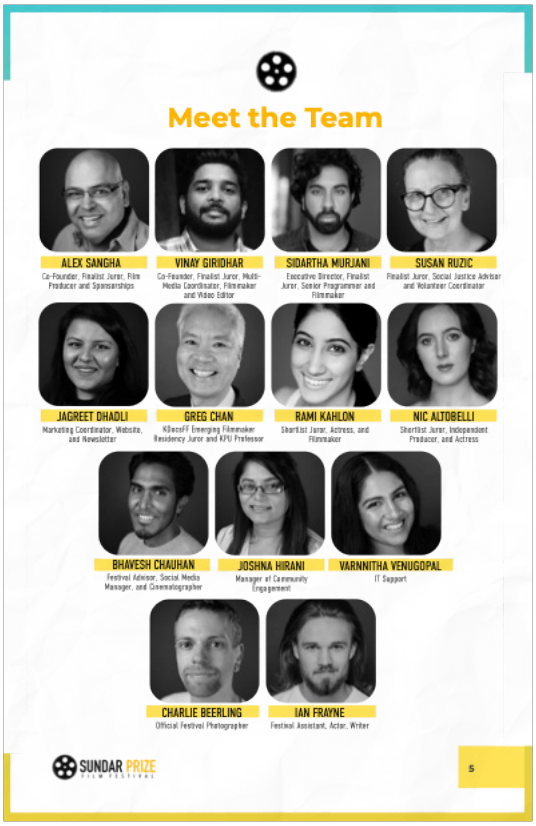

Fig. 2 | Page 5 from the 2024 Sundar Prize FF program designed by Vinay Giridhar, 2024.

WHAT IS FILM FESTIVAL STUDIES?

Film festival studies is a field of research that has been growing since organization like the Film Festival Research Network was "founded by Marijke de Valck and Skadi Loist in 2008" (de Valck and Loist). Film festivals and research on them has been around for decades, but it has been noted by scholars, like Ilona Hongisto and colleagues who note in "The Geopolitics of Programming at Documentary Film Festivals" the phenomenon of how "everyday screening diminish[ing]"

has lead to an increase in festival screenings. This trend has been ongoing since the early 2000s where the rise of diversification of documentary distribution helped film festivals and "[c]reative documentary" reflect the times of our "ongoing social political transition period" (Vallejo and Winston vi; Hongisto et al. 74). Sandra J. Ruch, Executive Director of the International Documentary Association from 2001 to 2008, stated in an interview with Samara Chadwick that "positive and powerful change" is taking place because there is an increase in audiences at "niche" documentary film festivals. Sundar Prize Film Festival is in a significant position as a new festival during this movement because it screened a diverse group of films which were all programmed around the central theme of human resilience. The winning films, the non-fiction and fiction, were all awarded for their exemplary filmmaking but also because they served as narrative documentaries: films that all focused on inspiring real social justice. Some of them are based on real event, but all were created to address real social justice issues. This was achieved in part by the festival's host, Sher Vancouver, bringing in the element of social work to the festival. Alex Sangha—who is also a registered social worker—is proud to co-found this festival, saying that the ability for the festival to screen films about social justice, about queer communities is "breaking barriers in Surrey...still a very conservative city" (Sundar Prize Festival). Film festivals can help shape the global human rights culture by screening films that show the sad, the triumphant, and the possible reality of human society (Colta 128; Nash 394; Giridhar 3). Though new, I believe this growing field of study will help foster more festivals that can represent positive social change on screens and at the programmer's meeting tables.

WHAT WAS MY PART IN THE FESTIVAL?

Though I was not heavily involved in the funding or programming of the festival, I can reflect on the process of the festival from planning to actualization. This article follows the tradition of practice-led research. This practice was articulated by Lyle R. Skains to be critical explanations of research "on the nature of creative practice, leading to new knowledge of operational significance" (85). My work experiences—or practices—lead me to articulate the "cultural practices [of the festival] in a self-reflexive, intersubjective way" (Colta 131). My reflections in this article seek to answer questions about the festival. It covers brief overviews of my involvement with the festival (see Fig. 3), the festival proceedings, the history of the festival's conception, some theory surrounding the festival's ideals, and final thoughts I can add to the growing conversation between festival programmers and academics about supporting human rights through festivals.

I was first introduced to this festival through a practicum program hosted by my university, KPU. During my placement interview for the course, I described my experience working in the film industry as well as my passion for social activism. My English degree had been teaching me how to formulate, research, and organize ideas but I hadn't used my skills to work in the *real* world. When my teacher placed me with Sher Vancouver, I believed I would be tasked with making a little video or to helping with grant writing. While I did learn about video production and writing for non-profits, my experience during the four months of my practicum would untimely lead me to work alongside the Sundar Prize team.

Fig. 3 | Ian Frayne interviewing Curtis Woloshuck from VIFF. Charlie Beerling Photography, June 15, 2024.

The practicum program involved some class time but primarily I was working directly with my host supervisor, Alex. Planning and funding had begun earlier that year, so I was tasked with creating the filmmaker reception invite list and assisting the shortlist jury. On the jury, I reviewed a few films to understand the kinds of films submitted to the festival. I was mentored on how to use FilmFreeway's platform to critically review each submission, rating them in categories such as acting, writing, directing, set-designing, pacing, and cinematography. I also evaluated whether they align with the values of the festival: celebrating human resilience. As an Arts student, I was able to apply what I learned about critical analysis and narrative structure in school to make this task easy and efficient. My work reviewing made me appreciate the difficult task the finalist jury had while deciding the winning films and helped me appreciate the number of artists creating films about social justice.

The bulk of my time in the practicum was spent connecting with over 300 filmmakers from the BC film community; some had attended or won awards at other BC film festivals, and most were found through online networking. Working side by side with Alex, we found filmmakers who had profiles listed on social media and databases such as Storyhive. Following the recommendation from the Sundar Prize Social Justice Advisor, Susan Ruzic, I looked first for artists from the BIPOC and LGBTQ+ community, as they often underrepresented in internet searches and repeatedly neglected by algorithms (Gillespie; Saltyworld). This work was also done for the community reception by another the manager of community engagement, Joshna Hirani, to invite community members who are interested in films and social justice issues.

After my practicum I was hired on as a Festival Assistant where I served on the planning committee taking meeting minutes, and later participated as one of the red-carpet

Fig. 4 | Jason Pillay (right) after interview with special guest. Charlie Beerling Photography, June 15, 2024.

Fig 5 | Page 11 from the 2024 Sundar Prize FF program designed by Vinay Giridhar, 2024.

interview hosts during the festival. In taking the meeting minutes, I learned how to participate by listening. When asked or when I had something to clarify I spoke up, but my recording kept me in the mindset of translating the conversations of the group into action items. This responsibility of reflecting on each meeting prepared me for this hosting the red-carpet interviews. The other interviewer—Jason Pillay (Fig. 4)—and myself met several times to discuss questions based on the films. Jason was able to share tips and advice with me from his experience to encourage my confidence and efficiency while talking with filmmakers, politicians, partners, and Sundar Prize team members. Having a red-carpet interviewer at the festival served to create more content for the marketing team as well as give the filmmakers a little practice answering questions before the panel discussions. I am grateful for the conversations I had and hope that other film festivals hire interviewers internally to keep the questions focused on the festival's overall theme.

The Sundar Prize Festival ensured that screening beautiful films—sundar is Sanskrit for "beautiful"— and cultivating beautiful conversations by allocating resources for receptions. For me, the most powerful aspect of this festival was seeing the community's work 'on stage' at the festival and 'behind the scenes' in the programming and curating stage. This article is my reflection on the festival which is informed my history—as a member of the Sundar Prize Planning Committee, an academic, a filmmaker, and a person of privilege. I have seen the festival come together from planning to actualization. To help keep this article objective, I conducted research into Film Festival studies and hope this paper adds to the growing body of research. Like the Sundar Prize Film Festival itself, I hope that this paper inspires conversation about social change and celebrate the resilience demonstrated by all who helped create this festival. I am truly inspired by the work I saw from filmmakers, programmers, audience members, and members from my community. It is my hope that more events like this can take place around the world.

SO HOW DID THE FESTIVAL RUN?

Each day was organized into two sections for a total of four. Each section generally followed the same pattern: red carpet interviews, opening remarks, screening of the winning short film(s), screening a feature film, and finally the panel discussions (see Fig. 5). The interviews and panel discussions were recorded and the Sundar Prize team will likely have them publicly posted within the year. At the end of each day there were receptions for food, music, and conversation after the films were complete. The festival was host at the New Surrey City Hall, with films screened in the council chambers and the receptions held in the atrium.

JUNE 15TH MORNING: SECTION 1

The first day began with Section One, when I conducted interviews with the filmmakers as well as founding festival partners from Vancouver International Film Festival and Vancouver Asian Film Festival. The screening were for the Best Animation, *Unstoppable Beat* (2023) directed by Luke and Rufus Dye-Montefiore, and the Best BC Film, *Dil Rakh: Gloves of Kin* (2023) directed by Dalj Brar. The day was opened with Indigenous land acknowledgments, thanks to the festival sponsors and partners, as well as speeches from the Mayor of Surrey and MLA of Surrey-Panorama before the films began. After that, the panel about "Building Empathy through Film: Fostering Understanding and Connection" began.

Unstoppable Beat features the story of a Hattian immigrant to Brazil after the earthquake that forced him to search for work far away from his family. Combining vibrant music and colour, the story explores the trauma of leaving one's family for the sake of finding them a better life. The film uses animation to show the explosion of hope and culture despite the grim reality faced by many immigrants. The musical rhythm ensures that the audience never forgets the protagonist's culture and creates a beat that ensures everyone who listens know "there are thousands like me...we dance to the same beat" (*Unstoppable Beat* 04:27: 04:35).

Immediately following this punchy short film was the boxing drama, *Dil Rakh*, which tells the story of a complicated reunion of Sukh Sidhu (Dalj Brar) with his adult son Dayton Sidhu (Umar Farooq Khan) after Sukh is released from prison after twenty years for allegedly killing a police officer. It is a drama that is further complicated by the intergenerational trauma and racism of small-town politics. The story explores themes of family, dignity, and forgiveness through the lens of South Asians living in a small, white town. Brar pulls the film forward with his powerful charisma on camera and brings out gritty, honest performances from the entire cast with his direction. Though it is a fictional story, Brar spoke to how all the characters in the film are based on people who have been in his life. Dayton's friend Brook (Joey Munroe) gives a brutal performance of a closeted gay man who takes out his grief with discrimination. The mother of Dayton and wife of Sukh has only a few scenes, but Rita Sudhu (Rami Kahlon) is given an earnest and personal performance. In speaking with Kahlon, she said she was very connected with her character, to the point where Rita's fear of driving is parallel to her own. As a South Asian actor raised in BC, Brar knows that racism also comes from institutions but sometimes from close friends. His film reflects his desire for healing and growth despite the systems of hate influencing out communities.

The panel discussion (see Fig. 6) was moderated by Amit Dhuga—a filmmaker who was part of the crew on *Dil Rakh*—who spoke with the Dalj Brar, Uhmar Farooq Khan, Rami Kahlon, and Dave Mann—executive produced the film. The filmmakers from *Unstoppable Beat* were not able to fly in from the U.K, and consequently their film was only discussed a few times during the panel. The primary focus was on the creation of the film, and the filmmakers' various opinions on whether South Asian representation in the film industry is improving.

Fig. 6 | From left to right: Dalj Brar, Rami Kahlon, and Umar Farooq Kahn. Charlie Beerling Photography, June 15, 2024.

JUNE 15TH EVENING: SECTION 2

After an intermission, Section Two began with interviewing the filmmakers whose films were screening in the evening: Shubham Chhabra,, winner of the KDocsFF Emerging Filmmaker Residency Prize for *Cash Cows* (2023), and Jason Loftus, winner of the Rogers Group of Funds Best Canadian Documentary for *Eternal Spring* (2023). Interviews were also conducted by a third-party news team from NTD on the screening of the film *Eternal Spring*, as the news sites is "aligned with Falun Gong" and its members are the subject of the documentary ("'Eternal Spring' Wins"; Wilson).

Cash Cows began the evening with laughter. The film is a brilliant display of how comedy can demand activism. The grounded performances of the main character (Dikshant Joshi) and the wild farce of the film drive home the main themes of how international students are taken advantage of. The film shows the kind of discrimination between members of the same minority community. The internalised trauma of all the characters is brought to life bye tight pacing and brilliant performances from the supporting cast. The contrast between Joshi's grounded performance and the ridiculously arrogant Ash (Shivam Arora) made many audience members laugh out loud. As a first-time short film director, Shubham exhibits clear skill and style: it is the emergence of a great director. His residency at KPU will help connect him with established and knowledgeable mentors to help him create his next feature film based on similar themes as *Cash Cows*.

In contrast, *Eternal Spring* is a grim and direct documentary of the social injustice perpetuated by the Chinese government against religious minorities. This powerfully visual film takes full advantage of interviews, animation, and behind the scenes footage of the documentary itself to create a flowing narrative to share a message of peace. Though I had never seen a film that combines live action and animation, ason Loftus responded to moderator Greg Chan (see Fig. 7) in the panel discussion that he was inspired by other films that he had seen such as *Waltz with Bashir* (2008).

that he was inspired by other films that he had seen such as Waltz with Bashir (2008). The transitions between the various types of footage works to lead the audience through the process of creating the film and sitting in on the interviews creates a deep level of sympathy with the characters and their story. I had never heard of the TV hijacking or Falun Gong, but the representation of how they were treated in China is a bold and clear example of China's authoritarianism.

The panel was moderated by Greg Chan—the director of the KDocsFF Emerging Filmmaker Residency and Editor-in-Chief of *Mise-en-scène* journal—and included filmmakers from

Fig. 7 | Jason Loftus accepting Best Canadian Documentary prize from KDocsFF's Greg Chan. Charlie Beerling Photography, June 15, 2024.

Fig. 8 | From left to right, Rainbow Eyes, Grandma Losah, and Alexi Liotti with Lady Chainsaw. Charlie Beerling Photography, June 15, 2024.

Cash Cows, Shubham Chhabara and Kaileigh Coles, plus Jason Loftus. The fourth panelist was not a filmmaker but was one of the film subjects of *Eternal Spring*. Mr. Zhang Zhongyu was featured in the film as one of the members who was persecuted by the Chinese authorities for his connections with the high-jacking. While all the filmmakers were able to answer insightful questions about how comedy was used in *Cash Cows* or animation was used in *Eternal Spring,* Mr. Zhongyu shared with the audience his first-hand experience living through the events of the film and his memories of the people killed during the persecution. This addition of non-filmmakers to the panel helped Sundar Prize to foster conversation about how to move activism beyond watching the films, putting a face to the names presented on screen.

After the panel, the audience was encouraged to continue the conversation with filmmakers in the atrium where food and drinks were provided. The food was a South Asian buffet, and the music that ended off the night was the "experimental indie pop band with Indian roots and American influence": हज़ार Hazar (Giridhar 18). During the conversations, there was a surprise visit from Alexi Liotti and Grandma Losha who was celebrating her 66th birthday. She arrived with friends, and they shared a warrior women's song with all who were present.

JUNE 16TH MORNING: SECTION 3

Similar to the day before, I began Section Three with interviews with the filmmakers. I also interviewed many of the core team from the Sundar Prize such as Alex, Vinay, Joshna, and Susan. This section began with two short films played back-to-back: the Best Short Film *A Good Day Will Come* (2024), directed by Amir Zargara, and the Best International Documentary *Swallow Flying to the South* (2022), directed by Mochi Lin. After an intermission there was the screening of the Best Environmental Film *Rematriation* (2022), directed by Alexi Liotti. The theme of this section's panel was "Hope in Times of Crisis - Finding Resilience Amidst Adversity."

A Good Day Will Come is inspired by the tragic execution of pro-Iranian wrestler Navid Afkari who was unjustly imprisoned and executed "after a grossly unfair trail" ("Iran: Secret Execution"). Sia Alipour gives a devastatingly subtle and steady performance as Arash, a pro wrestler who, like Navid Afkari, stands up against the Iranian government and is wrongly imprisoned, tortured, and executed. Zargara's unflinchingly accurate presentation of the authoritarian rule tells a powerful message of how the greatest fighters can be legendary peacemakers in times of war.

Similarly powerful, *Swallow Flying to the South* uses the medium of stop-motion animation to present a story of injustice under the authoritarian rule of mid-19th century China. Lin's film—it truly is her film, as she claims every role except composer—is a quiet and grievously sad film about a child living in a boarding school. The painstaking details and work that went into crafting the puppets and stop-motion-animating this film is so beautiful and delicate compared to the grim scenes of forced bathroom times. The film culminates with the young girl crying for herself, while all the adults around her cry at the news of Chairman Mao's death. The fact that this film was essentially made by a single creator is extraordinary.

The third film of the section, *Rematriation*, combines stunning nature videography journalist documentation to convey the tragic deforestation of the old growth forest on Fairy Creek on Vancouver Island. As the film title suggests, the film has many interviews with activists who fight for Indigenization in the form of rematriation to combat the exploitative industrial system. The film often goes back and forth between the various voices to communicate how large of an issue clear cutting is, and the connection between harmful industries and deteriorating quality of life. One of the main interviewees is Grandma Losah, who shares about the rainbow nation who gathered to protect the old growth forests. The film takes on a grim subject and a darker side of Canadian culture. However, the stunning cinematography and humility of the director to give the interviewees screen time to share their wisdom makes the film a hopeful story for continued action to uplift the women who protect the forests. In the words of Grandma Losah (Fig. 8), the film shows how "to take the bull by the horns and lead him. In a grateful, peaceful, loving way" (01:03:32-1:04:05).

The panel was moderated by Rami Kahlon and featured the filmmakers Alexi Liotti, Amir Zargara, and two of the film subjects from *Rematriation* who opened the panel with a traditional drum ceremony: Grandma Losah and Rainbow Eyes–also known as Angela Davidson. Like the previous panel, the combination of filmmakers and activists encouraged many action-oriented discussions.

JUNE 16TH EVENING: SECTION 4

The next and final section of the festival started with the last of the filmmaker interviews. The first screening was the Best Student Film *Dosh* (2023), directed by Rahda Mehta, and the best Feature Film *ROSIE* (2022), directed by Gail Maurice. After the films, there was the last panel discussion and the community reception.

Mehta's master's thesis film, *Dosh*, is a skillfully subtle film of the mental and physical barriers can create conflicts in a family. The film presents each character's fault—or *dosh*, which is the Hindi word for fault—in their own light but also how they work together as a family. The film is dramatic and serious but ends on a wonderfully hopeful note. Where this film truly shines is in how the director was able to present the main character's auditory experience when she loses her hearing aids. Mehta is hard of hearing and knows what is like to hear "the hum of the air conditioning" when not using an aid ("Interview with Rahda Mehta"). The audio of the film provides the viewer with an intimate perspective of the protagonist's experience. This film truly demonstrates how film can inspire empathy in audiences.

The most appropriate film to end the festival was *ROSIE*, which caused laughter and cheers to erupt throughout the film. The film follows Rosie (Keris Hope Hill) a young Indigenous girl in 1980s Montreal who is forced upon her aunt (Mélanie Bray) after her mother dies. The story is exceptionally heartbreaking and heartwarming. Though the film addresses some of the most horrifying experiences in Canada—residential schools, the 60s Scoop, foster care, homelessness, poverty, discrimination, and personal family grief—the film is ultimately a love story and a comedy. The characters are a vibrant and vulnerable family of misfits, making it impossible not to fall in love with them all. Though nothing is going for the characters at the start, through working together and maintaining love for each other, their film ends in a wondrously hopeful way.

The panel discussion was moderated by David C. Jones who spoke with Jamie Manning, a producer from ROSIE, Rahda Mahta, and Alex Sangha. Unfortunately, Gail Maurice and Mélanie Bray who were scheduled to join the panel had to cancel their trip, as they had already begun production on their next project. This meant the red carpet interview questions I had translated into French had to return to English for Jamie Manning, and the panel discussion shifted focus to evenly discuss *Dosh* and *ROSIE*. An essential responsibility of film festival workers is to pivot when inevitable mix-ups occur. Thanks to the team and the present Jamie Manning, a producer on *ROSIE*, the section ended smoothly.

Despite the emotional and physical exhaustion of the Sundar Prize team, the festival closed with celebration and music from Caro Silva, a musician "from Colombia who specializes in Alterlatino music" (Giridhar 18). After food, there were speeches of congratulations given by Alex Sangha and Sidartha Murjani, there was another birthday celebration for Rami Kahlon, and an open microphone available for filmmakers in attendance who were not connected with the festival to speak about their upcoming projects and connect with potential collaborators.

HOW WAS THIS MADE POSSIBLE?

Alex Sangha and Vinay Giridhar entered the film festival world through their award-winning film *Emergence: Out of the Shadows* (2021). Their experience in filmmaking and touring the festival circuit gave them the knowledge and drive them to host their own film festival, where films made with the same passion they exhibited could be shared with their Surrey community. With their respective experience as a social worker and filmmaker, Sangha and Giridhar set to gathering a community to create a festival. First, they began to work with program directors from other film festivals. Most significantly, Sidartha Murjani joined the Sundar Prize team and brought his knowledge. Murjani is an award-winning filmmaker who also worked behind the scenes of several large film festivals: programming at Vancouver Asian Film Festival (VAFF) and Vancouver International Film Festival (VIFF), pre-screening films for the Whistler Film Festival, as well as work in European festivals. Murjani joined the co-founders of the Sundar Prize to ensure the practical needs of festival planning were met and exceeded. As film festivals, like films, involve collaboration they kept the focus "providing value for filmmakers and film goers" through prioritizing filmmaker prizes and a reception at the end of each event" (Murjani). They consulted with other Vancouver film festival directors throughout their journey and used the support of established festivals to secure funding.

Alex was able to collect—or rather gather—an incredible number of sponsors for the festival because of his experience directing Sher Vancouver and with the help of the founding festival partners (Fig. 9). The largest financial sponsors were from different branches of the Canadian government, with Rogers Group of Funds sponsoring the Best Canadian Documentary, and Kwantlen Polytechnic University/KDocsFF who sponsored the Best Emerging Filmmaker Residency Prize. The credibility gained from having high-profile sponsors made applications for government grants and extending the Sundar Prize community with private organizations exponential easier.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS?

It is my opinion, supported by my reflections an experience, that the Sundar Prize Film Festival succeeded because of a strong team supported by proper funding. During the planning committee meetings, every member was given a voice to present ideas from their individual background. The team kept

Fig. 9 | Pages 16 and 17 from the 2024 Sundar Prize FF program designed by Vinay Giridhar, 2024.

Fig. 10 | Alex Sangha with Sidartha Murjani with Sundar Prize Volunteer team. Photo taken in the Marigold booth, June 16th, 2024.

a problem/solution focused mentality which helped us solve problems instead of assigning blame. While the team is formed by passionate, dedicated, proficient activists, I am unsure if this festival could have been as successful without its incredible sponsors, particularly the Government of Canada. This festival is an example of Canada's commitment to sponsoring the Canada Arts Council and funded organizations such as Creative BC. On the panels, there was discussion about how some of the films which are critical of governments, were not allowed to be screened in the countries which their film depicts. *Rematriation* is an exception; the film critically portrays the faults of certain Canadian government branches at Fairy Creek—most significantly the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and government backed logging industries (Rematriation 00:23:07-00:27:46). The Canadian government's pledge to support the arts even those that are critical of other branches, made it possible to sufficiently pay the festival workers, and allow so many filmmakers to be present for the panel discussions. I am keenly aware that this privilege is not available to all people living under other governments. Outside of government support, this festival shows how important community connections are for creating an inaugural festival of this scale. The positive influence of Alex Sangha and Sidartha Murjani was able to gather community sponsors and foster a festival which supported its own community (Fig. 10), as well as the broader social justice film festival community.

Through this practice-led research, I hope to begin filling the gap of "research is needed to understand the challenges, decisions and responsibilities of festival workers who, through their labour and creative approach, highlight certain perspectives over others" (Colta). I encourage other potential film festival scholars to work alongside festivals, at any level of seniority, to see how the challenges are addressed and what it means to engage with impactful films. ▪

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Southwest Popular/American Culture Association Conference

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Fig. 1 | The Conference Logo, southwestpca.org (2024).

The Southwest Popular/American Culture Association (SWPACA) just celebrated its 45th year in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where nearly 700 attendees gathered to share their research findings and exchange ideas (see Figs. 1-2). With the Marriott Hotel as its home base, the conference ran from Feb 20th-Feb 23rd, covering four days and a myriad of panels that ranged from Alfred Hitchcock and Animation Studies to Film and History to Disability Studies.

SWPACA's tag line, "If it's not popular, it's not culture," captures the conference's atmosphere and objective. Pop culture's reputation has improved in academic circles, yet the field continues to combat an image of unsophistication; however, there is nothing low brow about the panels at SWPACA. Pop culture should be at the forefront of academic research as it reflects transformations in cultural attitudes and awareness and can even influence society's shared interests. To examine pop culture is to examine the issues in today's world. Music, film, television, literature, fashion, technology, and art are all forms of pop culture, and they deserve to be studied with the same rigor as traditional academia.

While the conference is expansive, with 233 panels, events, and activities in 70-plus subject areas, it feels quite intimate thanks to the culture of encouragement and support that the Executive Team has cultivated. The conference leadership is comprised of Lynnea Chapman King, Tamy Burnett, Kathleen Lacey, and Stephanie Lim, who ensure that attendees have a positive experience; they are all highly visible at the Help Desk, so any issues can immediately be addressed. Overall, the conference is very user-friendly. The Executive Team embraces the conference's mission, which is "to promote an innovative and nontraditional academic movement in the humanities and social sciences celebrating America's cultural heritages, and to increase awareness and improve public perceptions of America's cultural traditions and diverse populations" ("About" southwestpca.org).

Fig. 2 | The Sandia Mountains of Albuquerque, New Mexico, 2024.

SWPACA fulfills its mission, even with the conference format. Rather than selecting a fresh annual theme, the panels are driven by trends in popular culture, which ensures that the panels reflect the ways that music, art, film, television, and literature, are examining the current social climate. In this way, the conference continually evolves alongside society. Where once popular *X-Files* panels faded away, *Harry Potter* panels flourished then declined, and next year the conference will offer a new area on Taylor Swift and Swifties. This allows the cultural zeitgeist to direct the conference topics which makes SWPACA even more timely and relevant as the panels adapt to reflect the needs of the time. To maintain this relevancy, the Executive Team welcomes ideas for fresh subject areas as new content matters emerge to ensure that the conference continues to engage with current social issues.

The interdisciplinary range of pop culture is apparent in the conference's offerings. In the Film, Television, Music, and Visual Media category, there are panels on "The American West," on "Rap and Hip-Hop," on "Game Studies," and on "Adaptation: Literature, Film, and Culture." In the Historic and Contemporary Cultures area, there are panels on "Classical Representations in Popular Culture," on "Psychology and Popular Culture, on Mothers, Motherhood, and Mothering in Popular Culture," and on "Beats, Counterculture, and Hipsters." The Identities and Cultures field includes panels on "African American /Black Studies," on "Native American/ Indigenous Studies," and on "Chicano/a Literature, Film, and Culture." The Language and Literature category involves panels on "Biography, Autobiography, Memoir, and Personal Narrative," on "Children's / YA Culture, on Graphic Novels, Comics, and Popular Culture," and on "Myth and Fairy Tales." The Science Fiction and Fantasy area has panels on "Apocalypse, Dystopia, and Disaster in Culture," on "Zombie and Pandemic Culture," and on *The Last of Us*. Finally, in Teaching and the Profession there were multiple panels on Pedagogy and Popular Culture. This list represents a fraction of the options available at the conference.

Most of these areas had multiple panels over the course of the week, so the diversity and scale of the conference become apparent. With an average of thirteen panels running concurrently, the largest complaint many attendees had was that there were so many interesting panels occurring at the same time that having to choose became difficult, which is more a virtue of the conference than a vice. For those interested in either attending or presenting, I highly recommend perusing the conference webpage's list of the areas offered: southwestpca.org/conference.

Fig. 3 | Jazmine Keeton (Texas State University) presents "*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: A Dystopian Underworld" (SWPACA 2024).

As the Area Chair of Literature (General), I must spotlight some of the literature presentations. In the "Dystopias and Trauma" panel, Jazmine Keeton (Texas State University) analyzed *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* through the lens of an apocalyptic world by describing the traits of a dystopia then using evidence from the novel to demonstrate how it aligns with that definition (see Fig. 3). One element is that the protagonist tries to solve a problem and central conflict by escaping, as seen throughout Carroll's novel. Another aspect of the genre is the indifferent character relationships and oppositional character relationships; in particular the Dodo and the Mouse and the Caterpillar and the Queen of Hearts. Most dystopian novels also include a controlling government, witnessed by the Queen of Hearts' totalitarian reign leading to fearful behaviour in her subjects. Finally, dystopian novels

include a critique of the current world, where the characters in Wonderland keep attempting to get Alice to conform to their ways of life. Keeton also demonstrated how dystopian literature is not just a contemporary phenomenon; it occurred in past historical periods as well.

In the "Women's Issues: Domesticity and the Fight for Social Change" panel," Noelle Rudolf (University of Louisiana at Lafayette) presented on "Womanhood as Wifehood: The Perpetuation and Dissension of Louisa May Alcott." She examined Alcott's surprisingly liberal life given that her writings were rather conservative. Rudolf asserted that Alcott compromised her personal beliefs when she married off three of the March sisters. However, she argued that Alcott strategically used incompatible relationships such as Amy and Laurie's marriage and Jo's marriage to Professor Friedrich Bhaer to both conform to and challenge the societal norm that women's primary aspiration should be marriage. Her discussion also connected to the alternate ending in Greta Gerwig's 2019 adaptation of *Little Women* where Jo never marries, maintains her independence, and becomes a successful writer, an ending that resonates with modern viewers. This presentation interacted effectively with M. Andrews' "Obituaries: Victorian Consumptive Woman Dies Wretchedly All While Saying 'Everything's Fine, Truly, I'm Alright. Can I Get You Some Tea?' to Avoid Becoming the Monstrous Other in *Dracula* and Obituaries of Late Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts." Andrews examined the illness scenes from the novel alongside obituaries from women who died from tuberculosis. The scenes describing both Mina Harker and Lucy Westenra after they are infected by Dracula mirror the nineteenth century obituaries that praised women for suffering in silence and for dying peacefully as to not disturb the men in their lives. Andrews argued these forms of writing modeled women's performative cheerfulness in sickness and in death, which undoubtably contributed to the idea that women who express their pain and suffering are labeled as hysterical. This stereotype affects women even today, where the medical community continues to under-prescribe pain medications to women.

Unfortunately, Horror is still fighting for academic recognition. Dr. Steffen Hantke (Sogang University) creates multiple panels and roundtables to establish Horror's place in the academy. The interdisciplinary reach of Horror becomes evident when examining the conference program, which included panels on "International Horror," on "The New Media Age of Horror," on "The Social Analysis of Horror: How Horror and Apocalyptic Studies Can Confront 'Real World' Problems," and on director Mike Flanagan, plus a roundtable on "Queerness and Psychoanalysis in Horror." Beyond the variety of horror panels, Hantke's "Rountable on Horror and/versus the Academy" specifically addressed the ways that horror can be elevated to an academic course of study, how scholars can continue to fight for horror's place in professional research and publishing, and how to maneuver the more disturbing aspects of horror when teaching. A diverse group of scholars including Danielle Herget (Fisher College), Emmanuelle Benhadj (University of Pittsburg), Gary Hoppenstand, (Michigan State University), Hans Staats (Cedars Academy), and Sean Woodard (The University of Texas at Arlington) discussed how they maneuver and intertwine horror studies with more conventional literature and film.

The roundtable on "Horror Movies as Trauma Narratives" offered a psychological purpose for watching the genre. Adbul Rafay (DePaul University), Aleksandra Socha (University of Warsaw), and Antoinette Winstead (Our Lady of the Lake University) examined how viewers can use horror films to navigate traumatic experiences. Interestingly, scholarship "indicates that trauma survivors are disproportionately horror fans, and many horror fans self-report that they find watching horror movies paradoxically soothing" (SWPACA Program 107). The elevation of Horror to a cutting-edge psychological coping tool is one that deserves further study. Because most horror films include various kinds of emotional and physical violence, they offer the audience a psychological release because watching horror movies can help viewers process their personal trauma; they have a connection to characters who have endured similar trauma and have a safe space "to understand and process extreme events," similar to exposure therapy. The panelists discussed domestic violence in *Black Swan* (Darren Aronofsky, 2010), *The Invisible Man* (Leigh Whannell, 2020), and *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996), and the notion that women can only be empowered once they have been victimized. The panelists also examined racial trauma though the violence that black bodies experience in Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017), *Us* (2019), and *Nope* (2022). They argued that black bodies are often traumatized in horror films, and that *Candyman* (Bernard Rose 1992) and *Get Out* can be viewed as a path to understanding racial and generational scarring, while *Heredity* (Ari Aster 2018) can be used to process one's mental illness and generational trauma.

In the Pedagogy and Popular Culture panel "From Aerosmith to Zombies, Engaging First Year Composition Students with Popular Culture," the presenters shared the benefits of using pop culture in the classroom. Yasminda Choate and Andrew Davis (Semoniole State College), and Paul Juhasz (Independent scholar), proposed that using a topic with which freshmen composition students are familiar builds their confidence, increases engagement, and is more accessible. Beyond using pop culture in the content of the course, they also experimented with using film techniques to teach the elements of writing. For example, a composition instructor would teach a common pattern in film: the establishing shot, the long, shot, the medium shot, the closeup, and the visual transitions between these shots. They would then make the connections between the purpose of these shots and the purpose of writing components where the establishing shot represents the thesis, which introduces the audience to the topic; the long shots are the mains points that will be detailed in the body paragraphs (the topic sentences); the medium shots and close ups are the specific details and evidence in the body paragraphs, and, just as there are transitions between these shots in film, there are

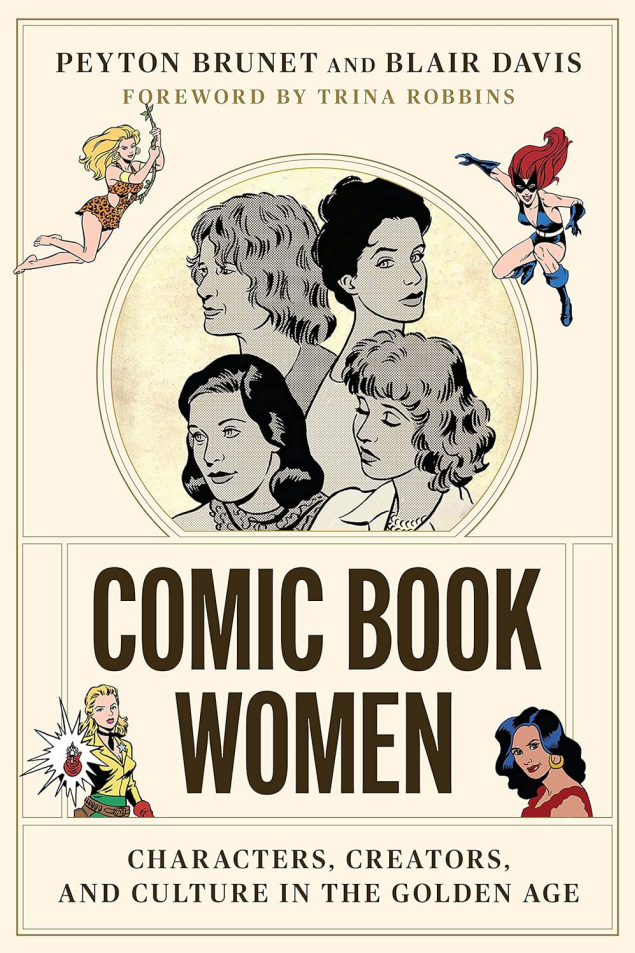

Fig. 4 | Cover of *Comic Book Women* (University of Texas Press, 2023).

Fig. 5 | Peyton Brunet's keynote address at the Opening Reception/Peter C. Rollins Book Award Ceremony, SWPACA Conference 2024.

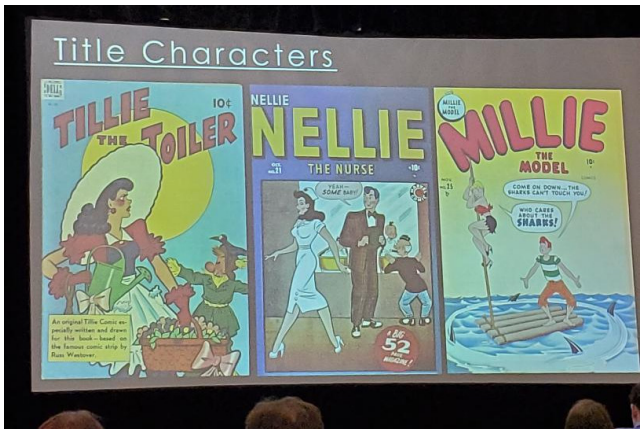

Fig. 6 | A slide from Peyton Brunet's *Comic Book Women* presentation, SWPACA Conference 2024.

also transitions between ideas in the paper. This innovative and interdisciplinary technique not only introduces students to basic film analysis, it also connects the foundations of writing to a visual medium within popular culture.

In addition to panels and roundtables, the conference also fosters a culture of community and networking. The Executive Team hosts an Opening Reception where the Peter C. Rollins Book Award and Student Awards Ceremony take place; this event includes a cash bar and a plentiful assortment of hors d'oeuvres. The Peter C. Rollins Book Award "recognizes contributions to the study of popular and/or American culture, particularly works analyzing cultural and historical representations in film, television, and/or other visual media" ("Awards and Professional Development" southwestpca.org).

The 2023 winners were Peyton Brunet and Blair Davis's *Comic Book Women: Characters, Creators, and Culture in the Golden Age* published by the University of Texas Press (Fig. 4). The study investigates the depictions and roles of women in comic books spanning from the World Wars to the women's rights movement, including real women's treatment within the comic book industry. Brunet delivered the keynote address about women's stylized bodies, fashion, employment, and range of superheroes in comic books (Fig. 5-6). The 2024 winner was John A. Lent's *Asian Political Cartoons* (University of Mississippi Press) (Fig. 7). The keynote speaker is the previous year's winner, so attendees at the 2025 SWPACA conference will get to hear Lent discuss his research when delivering the keynote at that year's award ceremony.

Another aspect of the conference's mission is dedicated to "supporting the development of new and young academic professionals in the fields of popular and/or American cultural studies through conference travel grants, paper awards, and professional development opportunities" ("Homepage" swpca.org). The most illustrious of these is The Michael K. Schoenecke Leadership Institute, which provides graduate students and newly-graduated scholars with two years of service and leadership experience, event management experience, and scholarly connections in the field of Popular/American studies. In this program, the Institute Fellows have opportunities to work with the Executive Team, help plan conference events, assist with *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, and work with area chairs for panel selection and creation. Southwestpca.org has additional information on the application process, which will run from October 1-December

1, 2024 for the 2025-26 year. The website includes information on the eight Graduate Student Paper awards in the following areas: Creative Writing; Television, Music, and Visual Media; Historic and Contemporary Cultures; Identities and Culture; Language and Literature; Popular Culture Pedagogy; Film Studies; and Science Fiction and Fantasy.

Anyone examining the program can see evidence of SWPACA's commitment to supporting new academic professionals. The Executive Team also hosts a Student Breakfast, where the team provides a buffet-style breakfast, during which students have the opportunity to meet and mingle. There is also the Annual Student Dine Out, where students and Area Chairs take small groups to restaurants around town. The events that target students foster a connection between new professionals and experienced scholars that benefit both parties.

As with many conferences, SWPACA houses a Publisher Exhibit Room where attendees can purchase newly released popular culture scholarly works and where they can meet representatives from McFarland Publishing, University of New Mexico Press, and Intellect Press. The conference also includes independent presses such as Casa Urraca Press, Headless Shakespeare Press, and Valorena Publishing. In addition to the exhibit room, there are also professional development sessions on Publishing with McFarland, on Publishing with Academic Presses, an Editors Panel session, and a session on Creating a Stronger Application for Graduate School. SWPACA offers a variety of opportunities for graduate students to build their CV and to network.

Beyond the panels, there are other social events that foster camaraderie. There was Pop Culture Pub Quiz where teams of up to six members competed on trivia questions about popular culture over the last thirty years, and which included prizes for unusual categories such as the best incorrect answer and most creative team name. Another option was a Buddy Show Meet-up and Trivia where the audience viewed and discussed the pilot episodes of *Supernatural* and *Starsky and Hutch*. Prizes were also distributed in this session. On Game Night, participants can engage in "fun, challenging, but easy-to-learn games that are anything but traditional, including European games of the year and Mensa award winners. Multiple tables will be available for social, 'party' style games and quieter, more strategic fare, so the more the merrier" (SWPACA Program 91).

In addition to Trivia and Games, there were also film screenings. During Film Noir Night, we viewed 1946's *The Stranger* with Edward G. Robinson, Orson Welles, and Loretta Young that included introductory remarks, a general discussion, and a fun trivia contest to earn noir-themed prizes. On a more serious note, the Women, Gender, and Sexuality area had a Roundtable and Screening on Feminist Border Arts, and on the opposite spectrum, there was the always hilarious Mystery Science Theater 3000 (MST3K), where attendees were treated to *The Giant Spider Invasion* (1975). The MST3K screening always includes one or two shorts, and this year we enjoyed two from RiffTrax: "Building an Outline" and MST3K's "Are

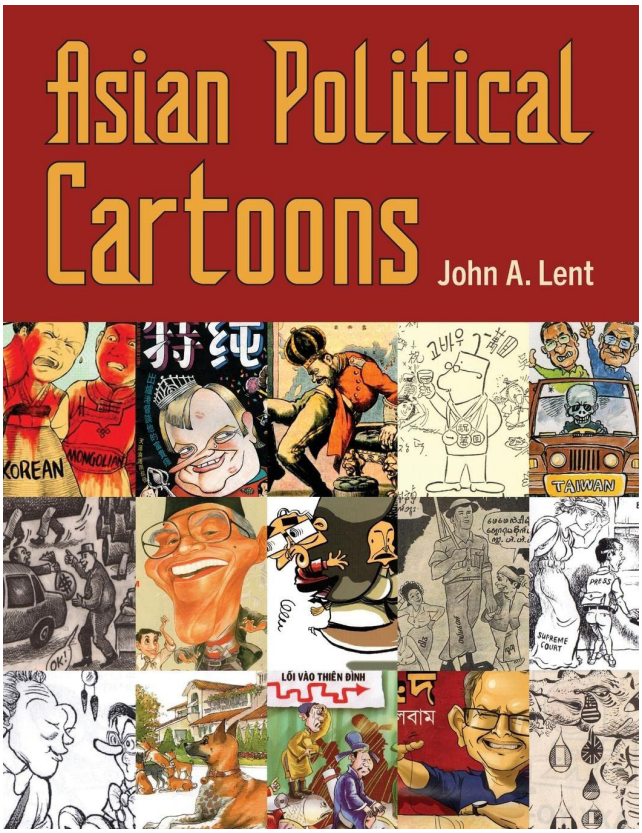

Fig. 7 | Cover of *Asian Political Cartoons* (University of Mississippi Press, 2023).

You Ready for Marriage?" While the conference offers a variety of social gatherings for those who wish to stay in the Marriott, attendees can also explore Albuquerque, especially Old Town and Church Street Café with its famous sopapillas, or even travel to the Meow Wolf Museum in Santa Fe. This menagerie of social events demonstrates the versatility of interests in popular culture and how the conference program both accommodates and reflects this variety.

Overall, SWPACA is one of the most welcoming and supportive conferences I have ever attended, and that atmosphere originates from the Executive Team and the Area Chairs and radiates to the attendees. I must illustrate this with an account from a panel. A graduate student presenter's voice and hands trembled as she shared that this was her first conference and that she was terrified. Immediately, multiple people in the audience encouraged her, telling her this was a safe space, and that we wanted her to enjoy her first presentation and the fruits of all her labour. The student ended up relaxing, smiling, and giving a dynamic presentation. She will likely remember that moment for the rest of her life, and, at that moment, I could not have been prouder to be involved with the conference. This is the kind of atmosphere that permeates the air at SWPACA.

The 46th Annual SWPACA conference will take place on February 19-22, 2025 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Area chairs will begin accepting proposals starting September 1, 2024. In addition to the full, in-person conference, the conference is

now offering a Summer Salon Online Conference from June 20-22, 2024. This smaller version of the in-person February Conference is ideal for graduate students and young professionals or anyone looking to present in their areas of interest. The Area Chairs will begin accepting proposals starting March 25, 2024. CFPs are posted in https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/ and https://networks.h-net.org/group/pages/20001709/call. I recommend this conference for anyone with an interest in popular culture, anyone who wants to incorporate popular culture into their courses, anyone who desires to be in tune with contemporary social developments, anyone who wishes to be a part of the movement that establishes pop culture's place in the academy, or anyone who wants to encourage and support the next generation of scholars. ▪

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- Mise-en-scène across the disciplines
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- Film spectatorship
- Auteur theory
- Adaptation studies
- Pedagogical approaches to film & media studies
- Frame narratology
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