FILMMAKER

Nº 119

Sara Dosa's *Fire of Love*
Andrew Semans's *Resurrection*
Martine Syms's *The African Desperate*
David Cronenberg's *Crimes of the Future*
Film School Guide

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In my recent online interview with Olivier Assayas about his HBO series, *Irma Vep*, we talked about a certain anxiety around the subject of television—its usurpation of critical and audience interest from cinema, as well as the kind of career imperative young filmmakers today feel about directing for the small screen. So much work is there that most young directors I know feel like they have to try and land series gigs, if for nothing more than to keep a roof over their heads as features take longer and longer to set up. One argument in favor of TV that comes up a lot is a variation on the "platform-agnostic" one—stories are stories and should migrate to the most inviting medium. Another has to do with what's perceived to be one of the specific creative possibilities of television: to tell long, multi-character stories that, to paraphrase Assayas, are more like novels than short stories.

Assayas had a few things to say that really resonated as we put together this summer issue, which contains our Emmy-timed section on TV. "I think indie movies have been kind of protecting the identity of the filmmaker, which is getting lost in the evolution of Hollywood," Assayas said, before going on to talk about film as being where a director learns their "values." "For me, filmmaking is independent filmmaking," he replied when I asked him a question about where he'd find himself if he started his career today. "And then you move on. You learn your values, and you know where you're standing based on what you learn in making indie movies, and then you can play with this, play with that, go in that direction, try not to repeat yourself, try to reinvent yourself, etc. But you first need to have your values."

Tracing values across bodies of work is an interesting way of looking at some of our TV pieces this issue, which include interviews by Taylor Hess and Destiny Jackson that specifically describe the motivations and aims of five filmmakers who are currently working in television. Another special section contains our annual Film School Guide as well as perceptive pieces on changes in both curriculum and production technology by Peter Labuza and Matt Prigge.

Our long-form interviews this issue include director Sandi Tan's cover story on Sara Dosa's visually overwhelming and beautifully melancholy *Fire of Love*, director Michael Almereyda's surprising interview with *Crimes of the Future* auteur David Cronenberg, Erik Luers's interview with Andrew Semans about his fantastic psychological thriller *Resurrection* and Natalia Keogan's talk with artist and filmmaker Martine Syms about her bold art-school comedy/drama *The African Desperate*. And with that latter mention I'd like to welcome Natalia to our staff here at *Filmmaker*. You've read her very sharp, knowledgeable and personal writing in both our print and web pages for the past few years, and I'm happy to announce that she's our new Web Editor. She'll still show up in print, but visit our website for more of her work each week.

See you next issue.

Best,

Scott Macaulay
Editor-in-Chief

FILMMAKER

55 Washington Ave. Suite 324, Brooklyn, NY 11201 | +1 212 465 8200 | filmmakermagazine.com

Cover image: *Fire of Love*, courtesy of National Geographic and NEON.

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55 Washington Ave. Suite 324, Brooklyn, NY 11201 | +1 212 465 8200

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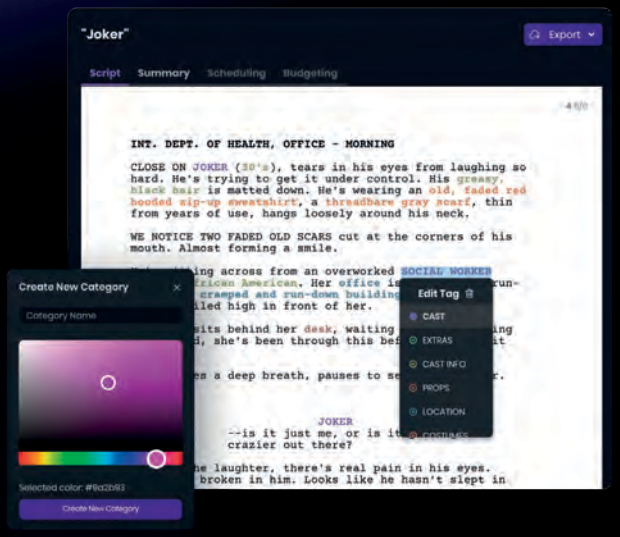

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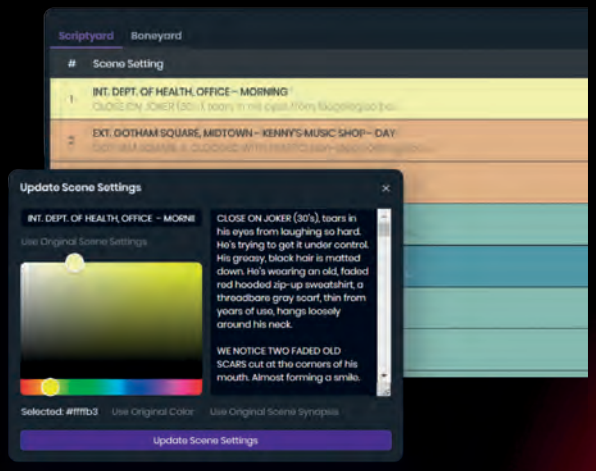

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Strategic Reassessments

As moviegoers venture outside their homes, Anthony Kaufman on arthouse distributors and the theatrical-vs.-streaming debate.

Less than a year ago, it seemed like the sky was falling for independent films being released in theaters. Netflix's stock was hitting record highs, the core demographic of older metropolitan moviegoers were staying home, and the entertainment complex was pivoting to the new normal of their subscription streaming overlords. Their dominance may ultimately prevail, but a more delicate and intricately linked dance between theatrical and streaming appears to be the future of releasing films. As an insider notes, "I think it's swinging back towards theatrical, even though the end-goal is still about making the streaming stand out."

To name one dramatic reversal, Netflix lost hundreds of thousands of online subscribers and is planning some major theatrical releases this year, such as *The Gray Man* and *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery*. Specialized film is also hoping to follow in the footsteps of A24's *Everything Everywhere All At Once*, which as of press time has stayed in theaters for more than 14 weeks (and more than $65 million in grosses). And even at the arthouse level, which still remains far less secure for indies, a handful of distributors are doubling down on a theatrical-forward strategy, although they acknowledge the streaming window remains the top priority.

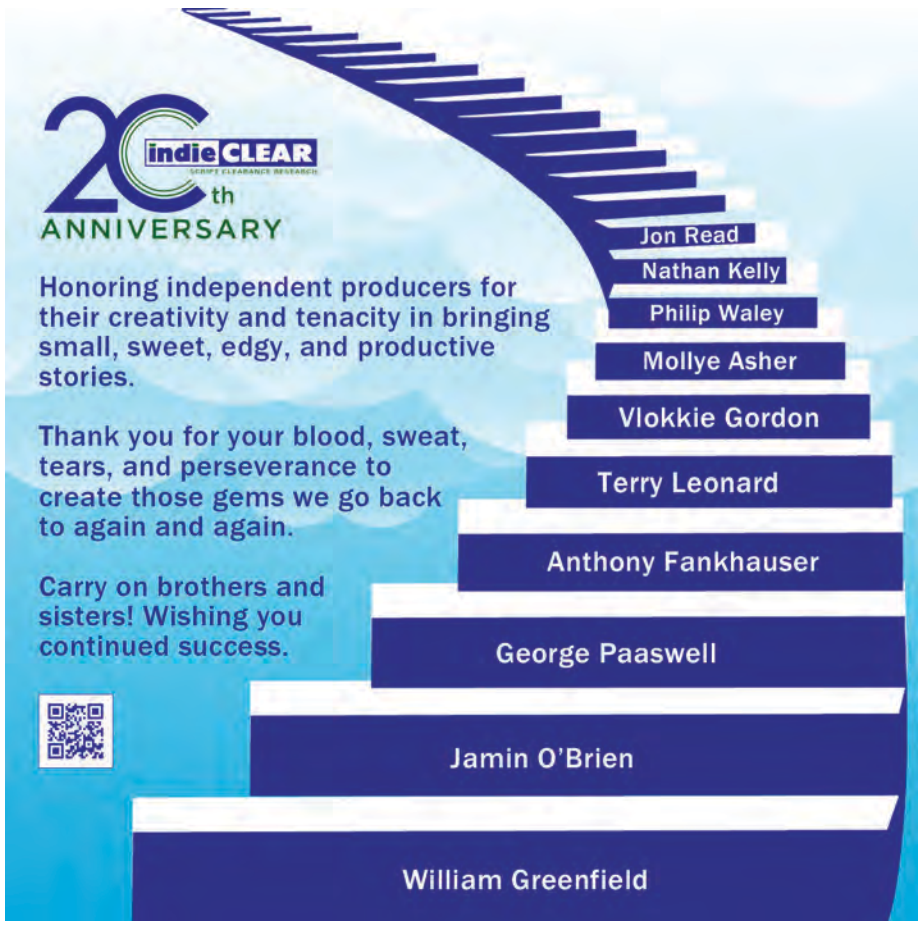
At Cannes, a number of independent distributors stepped up with newly aggressive theatrical plays. MUBI, the global cinema streaming

service that launched in 2007 as "The Auteurs," made its reportedly largest North American purchase yet for Park Chan-wook's *Decision to Leave*, as well as for a raft of other Cannes titles all set for U.S. theatrical release later this year. The company also recently acquired New York iconoclast Ricky D'Ambrose's *The Cathedral*. According to Ryan Kampe, president of Visit Films, which has been selling films to MUBI for more than 10 years, it's the first time MUBI has made an all-rights pact with his company, including U.S. theatrical rights. While Kampe acknowledges MUBI hasn't distinguished itself in U.S. theaters yet, he admits, "We need companies like MUBI to fill this ancillary hole where other companies are not buying into anymore."

Because the big streaming companies aren't acquiring "festival-type" indies in any significant numbers anymore, MUBI's rise—which has been bolstered by a wide range of investments for millions of dollars, from Indian and Chinese media conglomerates to filmmaker Nicholas Winding Refn to dozens of tech and entertainment investors—could significantly juice the arthouse sector. (Having recently hired Jason Ropell, former head of Amazon Studios, as head of content, MUBI is also financing and producing more movies in-house, though none have been announced yet.)

MUBI is also striving to find the right equilibrium between theatrical and streaming. MUBI's paying subscriber base—despite growth in recent years from a disclosed 100,000 in 2017—remains a tiny fraction of the larger SVOD companies, so if a film is going to stand out and be financially viable, a successful theatrical release may remain crucial. To emphasize the importance of the theatrical experience for indies, MUBI recently launched MUBI GO, whose subscribers receive a free weekly ticket to an arthouse movie. MUBI's director of U.S. distribution C. Mason Wells told *Deadline* recently the program was helping get audiences back into the "ritual movie-going habit," but it doesn't seem to have done much. The company's March release of the gay-themed Austrian Oscar submission *Great Freedom* stalled out at $72,000 in ticket sales, while Apple TV+'s big Sundance acquisition, *Cha Cha Real Smooth*—also MUBI GO-supported—failed to catch fire in its limited theatrical release.

Jason Ishikawa, a senior executive at Cinetic Media, which has sold movies to MUBI and many other distributors, contends, "Theatrical remains part of the commercial viability of a work, and this is a new idea for the streamers." For a theatrical success, Ishiwaka believes that distributors "need to commit fully to the theatrical experience," meaning one-week token runs or day-and-date releases are often destined to fail. "Is the problem that audiences have to come back to theaters or that distributors need to put films back into theaters?" Ishiwaka



Images: *The Cathedral* (opposite, courtesy of Ricky D'Ambrose) and *Cha Cha Real Smooth* (pg. 8), courtesy of Apple TV+

asks. “If distributors hedge their bets, they don’t give the movies the time to breathe.”

Another notable presence at Cannes this year, upstart distributor Utopia (dubbed as having “NEON-like potential” in the trades), also made a splash with its purchase of the Persian-language crime thriller *Holy Spider*, upending expectations for a company that doesn’t have a SVOD output deal—which “definitely makes it more challenging for us financially,” admits Utopia head of content Danielle DiGiacomo, formerly of The Orchard. Though the company has made one-off licensing deals with plenty of streamers, from HBO to Showtime to Shudder, DiGiacomo says they’re able to be more aggressive by “keeping our costs suitable for the release and not overspending.” It also helps that the company—founded in 2019 by Robert Schwartzman, son of Talia Shire and nephew of Francis Ford Coppola—recently received additional private investments, according to DiGiacomo, allowing it to commit to a stronger P&A commitment and Oscar push for the high-profile Cannes acquisition. “It’s important for us to lead with the theatrical release,” says DiGiacomo.

But Utopia can tout only a couple of very modest low-six-figure box office successes in its short tenure, such as Gaspar Noé’s *Vortex* and Emma Seligman’s comedy *Shiva Baby* (which, incidentally, was reportedly MUBI UK’s most watched online release last year

and garnered a U.S. SVOD spot on HBO). With upcoming releases such as Sundance acquisitions *Sharp Stick*, by Lena Dunham, and rock doc *Meet Me in the Bathroom*, Utopia is targeting the same younger audiences that A24 and NEON have also tapped relatively successfully during our pandemic years. "They are driving our theatrical," says DiGiacomo. "That's exciting to me and inspires a lot of hope that independent film will continue."

For all of DiGiacomo's optimism, the theatrical sector for indies remains tough, with the traditional older arthouse audience still unreliable. And what's going to happen if there's another COVID winter surge? Veteran distribution executive Bob Berney, who still operates his distribution company Picturehouse and is famous for shepherding theatrical indie blockbusters (like *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*), claims it's "impossible" now for any distributor to survive without a streaming deal or corporate power to undergird them. Even if a distributor has a potential sleeper hit on their hands, Berney laments the inherent lack of indie theaters to put it in. "It's pretty grim," he says. "New York is coming back, but that's not enough. L.A, San Francisco, Seattle—they also lost key arthouses, so there has to be a large streaming or PVOD component to back up a release."

Another distributor now riding the line between theatrical and streaming is Gravitas Ventures, known as a large online VOD aggregator. Acquired last year by Toronto-based media company Anthem Sports & Entertainment, Gravitas just launched a theatrical label called Gravitas Premiere, which aims to annually distribute four to six films with a significant cast in wide release and with significant P&A support. The first will be the August release of Katie Aselton's *Mack & Rita*, starring Diane Keaton. According to Gravitas director of theatrical distribution Cameron Moore, the company can make an impact with a movie with A-list stars "because the multiplexes need alternative content to fill all of their screens," and that can then trigger a major SVOD deal.

It's important to remember, however, that Gravitas acquires a far greater number of films each year, roughly 200 titles, which means only about two to three percent will see a theater screen. For the rest: "I wonder about the existing value of the theatrical release," admits Chris Horton, recently hired by Gravitas Ventures as senior director of business development after a nine-year stint running the Sundance Institute's Creative Distribution Initiative. "For most 'festival movies,' if I were an independent filmmaker," he says, "I would be thinking digital first. Transactional VOD still drives the business, and given that SVOD license deals are ever elusive, I would say that AVOD is where most people are going to see your film and where you can expect to see the most of your revenue. That's the reality."

Still Looking

Holly Willis on learning film technique, frame by frame.

In their new book, *Dramatic Effects with a Movie Camera,* Gail Segal, a poet, filmmaker and associate arts professor, and Sheril Antonio, an associate arts professor in the department of art and public policy, both at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, describe a form of shot-by-shot film analysis that can teach filmmakers the nuances of cinematic storytelling. Recently published by Bloomsbury Publishing, the richly illustrated book is based on an NYU graduate filmmaking course taught more than two decades ago by Segal.

"This class was an investigation of film technique," Segal explains, "with the goal of applying these techniques toward one's own work. One of the ways that I put it was, 'What can we steal?' or 'What can we learn from other films?'" Segal adds that the first iteration of the class was extraordinary, with students such as Debra Granik, Michael Burr, Katherine Lindberg, Lisa Robinson and Joshua Marston. Because of the class's instant success, Segal continued to teach it regularly. "At some point, maybe 10 or 15 years ago, someone said, 'I wish this was in writing,'" says Segal. "That was really the impetus for creating the book."

The challenges facing Segal, however, were daunting. How would she capture the dynamism of the graduate film classroom, in which film viewing is accompanied by discussion? "My whole teaching strategy is Socratic," she says. "We look at work. I ask a question, then the students answer and we build a dialogue. By its very nature, this is going to be gone in a book. And that dialogue is what creates the energy. So for me, in deciding to do this project, the challenge was finding what could substitute for the energy of the classroom on the page."

This is where Antonio stepped in. She and Segal had been friends for many years and shared a passion for global cinema. While discussing the project over dinner one night, Antonio offered to help out, with the goal of focusing specifically on the images to be included. Segal had already been turned down by two presses wary of the cost of publishing a book with an abundance of images, but Bloomsbury was undaunted. The next step, then, was to decide which film sequences to include, and to choose the specific images and place them on the page dynamically.

Antonio dove into the project enthusiastically: "I went back and watched many films. I watched all of Satyajit Ray and Kurosawa's early films that were requirements in film school, but I had forgotten what it was like to enjoy them!" Like Segal, Antonio is passionate about the melding of theory and practice. How can deliberately examining and discussing films make one a better filmmaker? She fully endorses Segal's idea that shot-by-shot investigation leads to more thoughtful filmmaking choices.

"I start with the work," says Segal. "I don't start with an idea. I don't start with a concept. I start with the work. What can the work show us?" She continues, "Film is a visceral medium. Maybe even before it's a narrative medium—as those early experimental films show us—it's just visceral. So, how can you as a writer or director hold that visceral nature of it captive and in service to the story you want to tell? That's what we're doing. How did this director do it? How did that director do it? I'm asking students when they watch a clip or a film to respond first with their viscera. What was the sensation? How did it make you feel? Then, how did we get there?"

The book models how to engage in this inquiry. Its nine chapters address mise-en-scène, the static camera, close-up, moving camera, wide shot, long take, handheld camera work and visual dynamics and tone. Almost all of its pages include shot sequences with clear descriptions of the techniques used to achieve certain effects. A brutal sequence from Bruno Dumont's *L'Humanité*, for example, shows the power of the static shot across seven images, with specific attention to character point of view. The images alone are compelling, but the text offers

a way of reading their "disturbing complexity" that is thrillingly insightful. "This is the discomfort of our having to look for too long at an image that refuses immersion," Segal writes, noting that we, as viewers, come to share not something as simple as character identification but rather the accusation of voyeurism that is directed at the character in the scene.

Segal demonstrates the power of the close-up through a reading of the 16 shots opening Lucrecia Martel's *The Holy Girl.* The filmmaker restricts the frame to tight shots on several girls pushed together, refusing to establish a location or context to orient the viewer. "The use of close-up and crowded medium shots act as a strategy for giving emphasis," explains the accompanying text. "The emphasis is weighted by what we are *not* shown, but what is subtracted."

Antonio says that while the examples are indeed exemplary, they are not necessarily replicable. "One of the things to be careful about with our students is not to highlight anything as the only way to do something," she says. "Instead, we say that in *this context*, this technique delivered this result. We don't want to [privilege] any single way of doing something, but instead we want to highlight achievements." She adds, "I'm proud of the films we put in conversation."

And she should be. While it would have been easy to collect simple examples of various kinds of camera techniques, Segal and Antonio have instead selected powerfully expressive examples, moving well beyond the Hollywood canon. The historical and global range of films included in the book is quite stunning, and just paging through it prompts a desire to see unfamiliar films or revisit those already seen. Miklós Jancsó brushes up against Béla Tarr and Gus Van Sant in the long take chapter. Andrea Arnold, Paweł Pawlikowski and Charles Burnett share space in another chapter focusing on handheld techniques, while Jia Zhangke, Spike Lee and Věra Chytilová connect in yet another chapter centered on tone.

With its expansive array of examples, careful attention to dramatic complexity and devout respect for the achievements of directors and cinematographers, the book exemplifies a great graduate seminar between covers. The clear affection for cinema evident on every page is contagious. "It really is a love letter for people who make movies and who love movies," says Segal. "I love movies, and I love anyone who is bold enough to look at them and make them."

Read Only Memory

Joanne McNeil on Chris Marker's 1997 CD-ROM work,* Immemory*, now being adapted into a new print edition by Damon Krukowski and Naomi Yang's Exact Change imprint.

"I'll find you," Chris Marker told Damon Krukowski and Naomi Yang. The first time they met—New Year's Day, 1999, at the Café de Flore in Paris—they had no idea what he looked like until he beckoned to them. There weren't photos of him anywhere; he'd send illustrations of his cat, Guillaume-en-Égypte, if anyone asked for one. Krukowski and Yang had reached out to Marker about collaborating on an English language edition of the director's CD-ROM project, *Immemory*. He could be difficult to reach but liked musicians and made time for the duo—formerly of Galaxie 500—who have performed as Damon & Naomi since 1991.

Marker was sitting outside in perfect anonymity in the middle of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. "It was like a spy movie," Krukowski told me. Marker handed them spools of old wire recordings and asked whether the pair could help deliver them to someone in the United States who could transfer the audio. "I need you to take very good care of these," he told them, stressing how important the files were. The Cambridge-based musicians agreed to deliver the recordings, which involved no small fuss at the airport—Yang pleaded with airport security staff not to send the spools through the X-ray machine—and "very *Third Man*" calls to arrange the pickup around New York. Once the spools changed hands, Marker contacted them by fax. Thus began their involvement with *Immemory*, which has lasted more than two decades in formats both digital and analog.

Images courtesy of Exact Editions

First released in 1997, *Immemory* is a memoir in digital bricolage. Marker's recollections of family and childhood are arranged alongside commentary on art, Proust, Hitchcock and technologies like Singer sewing machines and Rolleiflex cameras. Guillaume the cat acts as the CD-ROM tour guide in playful interruptions and comic book-style dialogue bubbles. The images are pixelated, the sound effects tinny, but these limitations to the form—apparent even back in the '90s—are the work's signature, along with the pleasantly meandering pace as the user skips through collages of superimposed images and Marker's beautifully written remembrances.

Marker built *Immemory* on an Apple IIGS with software developed for schoolchildren called HyperStudio. It looks somewhat like a website, but the hypertext architecture is unique, and the CD-ROM has been plagued with compatibility issues since its release. Centre Pompidou, which produced the work, hired a digital agency early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on to adapt it for Microsoft computers, but Marker—unwilling to make changes to its functionality—sparred with them. For the English-language edition released in 2002, Yang had to rebuild the CD-ROM architecture from scratch, retracing all the hyperlink pathways between images and texts. In 2008, Krukowski and Yang's publishing company Exact Change remastered *Immemory* for OS X; in 2011, the Pompidou created a version of it for the web using now-obsolete Adobe Flash. It's been a "quicksand jigsaw puzzle," Yang told me.

Immemory was the first non-print project for Exact Change, which ordinarily publishes paperbacks by avant-garde authors like Denton Welch, Unica Zürn and Fernando Pessoa. The next version, which they are working on now, will be what Marker called his "Gutenberg edition." Paper, after all, is "way more permanent than Mac OS 7.5," Krukowski said. "If it's locked in a secret format, that didn't seem so tragic to" Marker, but this is the best chance for *Immemory* to survive. Krukowski and Yang are thinking through the technical and conceptual challenges of this particular adaptation process: is a link necessarily a page break? How much repetition is essential to faithfully transfer this work? The project's model is Julio Cortázar's 1963 *Hopscotch*, a novel that can be read in various sequences of pages.

Marker's best known films, *Sans Soleil* (1983) and *La Jetée* (1962), demonstrate his creative approaches to cinema as a technology—the latter a short composed of still images, the former a feature shot entirely with a silent film camera. He worked in a variety of formats—radio plays, novels, documentary—and blended formats, most notably in his form-expanding work with the "film essay." In the '80s, Marker developed DIALECTOR, a chatbot program that speaks in an arresting and attentive fashion; for example, "PRESS RETURN IF YOU CONSIDER IT'S NONE OF MY BUSINESS ENTER THE NAME OF SOMEONE YOU LIKE?" and "DO YOU KNOW THAT EVERY CAT HAS HIS GUARDIAN OWL?" His writing for the automated voice is so present, curious and intimate that the projects hold up, even with chatbots today an inescapable nuisance of frustrating customer service experiences.

Marker thought of himself as a "Sunday programmer." When he'd send Yang emails, she recalls, "It was always something that he had hacked from somewhere. It was something incredibly buggy. Or it would freeze my computer. He got it off of some place on the internet or some hacker." Such playfulness comes through in Marker's 1997 film *Level Five*, which begins and ends with a woman speaking to the camera about her departed lover and the project he left her to complete, a video game about the Battle of Okinawa. She's distracted by her memories of the man who once "wrote at night, late, sitting at the computer, before [he] logged out." The actress sits before a computer in the chair in Marker's own workspace, where he had created *Immemory*. Marker—offscreen, naturally—contributes discursive voice-over narration on Minitel and Otto Preminger's *Laura*. Watching the film feels a bit like browsing the internet in the '90s, with quick cuts from glitchy screens to clips of interview subjects, maps and dissolving rudimentary computer graphics. *Level Five* conveys a poetic vision of computers as a tool for remembering and engaging with history; it captures the hearts poured out over email, the intimacy shared in abstraction.

Krukowski and Yang became close with Marker as they worked on *Immemory* and would visit him whenever they were in Paris. Marker would always blend in with the crowd. Even when they attended an exhibition of Agnès Varda's work, no one recognized him. When Marker's health was failing and he was no longer able to travel, he invited friends to join him in a digital sanctuary Max Moswitzer helped develop on Second Life, a sort of virtual museum in paradise with Guillaume there to greet visitors. Yang created an avatar, and they'd hold meetings in the virtual world—"Ouvroir"—to discuss the progress of the Gutenberg edition of *Immemory*.

Marker acted the same on Second Life as he did in person, Yang remembers, and his avatar looked like himself, just younger. When I told Yang I might have expected him to have a Guillaume avatar in Second Life, she noted that the companionship of his cat was always central to Marker's humor. Guillaume is the prankster in his work, and "Chris is like the straight man." Via Second Life, Marker made a rare public appearance at the Harvard Film Archive in 2009, which livestreamed him from Ouvroir. I was in the audience that night, and while I recall the physical world crowd was enthusiastic, something unclear to me at the time seemed awry in the virtual world. A decade later, I learned the problem was that the Second Life island had become mobbed with the avatars of strangers, an experience Marker found

unnerving—"exactly the situation that he spent so much effort avoiding in real life," Krukowski said.

After Marker's death in 2012, Exact Change put the Gutenberg edition of *Immemory* on hold. They felt an enormous obligation to complete the project, as promised, but it became tricky without his vision. There would be no more meetings in Ouvroir.

Several years later, Isabel Ochoa Gold, a doctoral student at UCLA, read about *Immemory* in a paper by film scholar Marsha Kinder. She found the work's Flash version on Gorgomancy.net, a website Chris Marker set up with the Pompidou, and wrote to Krukowski and Yang to let them know that Flash was scheduled to expire at the end of 2020. Through them, she learned about the so-called Gutenberg version, which Gold then wrote about in a feature for Criterion's Current. Yang even invited Gold to work on the project, sending her an antiquated Macintosh—a "spry geezer" Gold told me—found on eBay and, at present, the only way one can view *Immemory* (besides a less-than-engaging four-hour documentation of it that a fan uploaded to YouTube). Though she never had a chance to meet Marker, Gold feels like she's come to know him through his footprints, which linger on the internet: "Chris Marker seems to be alive and impish [online]. I keep finding him with these anonymous YouTube accounts, and his Second Life island is still there, even though no one's on there."

Gold's presence breathes new life in a project that had felt overwhelming to the Exact Change publishers. "Isabel appearing, that's such a Chris thing," Yang told me. It's like Marker had "dreamed [her] up. This beautiful young woman comes in and is like, 'I think we can do this.' And, magically, she has no problem with all the screenshots and capturing it, and has a great sense of it." (And she loves cats.)

Many years after they delivered the wire recordings for Marker, Krukowski and Yang asked what audio had been on them, anyway. "Nothing really," Marker told them, appearing to have forgotten all about the spools he once handed to them with intense secrecy. "It was one of those many, many mysteries of Chris," Krukowski said. The personal computer enhanced these mysteries: He could be part of the world while invisible, in a way, as he made friends with hackers and Second Life weirdos, freed in online communications from others' expectations and the weight of his legacy. He could work alone with sound and images, manipulate images and do everything with one machine with layers of anonymity that complemented his elusive nature. On the discs he'd send to Exact Change, there would be no memory left; he would push the technology to its limit. Marker once told them, "I've been waiting my whole life for this machine."

I Saw That at Cannes!

Friends and Strangers *director James Vaughan reflects on his first time attending the Cannes Film Festival.*

Image courtesy of James Vaughan

My producer and friend Rebecca Lamond had decided a few months ago to make her first trip to Cannes, primarily for business meetings to pitch our next feature film. I'd also never been, and initially I didn't see the point of joining her given the cost of flights and everything else. But when changed circumstances meant I was going to be in France in May and Rebecca said she had a sofa I could sleep on, it seemed logical to go. After all, there are other reasons to go to Cannes: the films, obviously, and the people that make, program and write about them. I'd always enjoyed reading critics' Cannes reports in publications like *Senses of Cinema*, *Film Comment* and *Cinema Scope*. The festival seemed to bring out a special combination of giddy excitement and pained, existential introspection from its correspondents, ambivalent about their own bondage to the annual spectacle of commerce, celebrity and art. And something about it moves writers to survey things broadly: the industry, in general; festivals, in general; criticism, in general; cinema, in general and, of course, their own careers and place within it all. As a fan of loose generalizations, I was interested to see whether the same topographical mood would take me. Maybe I'd even be gripped by genuine revelations, clarity about cinema and the world or, even better, my next project.

I had reservations, of course. I hate pitching, everything about it. As the words leave my mouth, and as I try to maintain the appropriate upward curve in my lips and twinkle in my eye of a person delighted by all the things they are saying, I feel like cold concrete is being poured into the spaces inhabited by my beastly little ideas. I like fumbling my way through the writing process and, perhaps paradoxically, I need the world of a film in its early stages to be an inexpressible one if I'm to stay excited about it. No doubt, there's an element of vanity to it, feeling like the film is so much more than these generic descriptors and reference markers. But it's more than that—it feels like a betrayal of the nebulous feeling that's actually at the core of the writing, and of the essence of the finished work, too. I like films that have ambivalence at their heart, films that are and aren't in equal measure. Pitches require you to pick a side, be clear about it. I'm a prevaricator and something of a crab, so this is not a good start.

A lot of the meetings at Cannes are in poky hotels lined along the heaving waterfront promenade. One minute, you're facing the beach and conga lines of people in bikinis and tuxedos, and next, you're in a tiny lift going up to meet someone who may or may not help you make a movie. They are generally friendly, smart people but also fatigued and (necessarily) skeptical types who take 10, 15 meetings a day for 10 days straight. If you get them in the afternoon, you can feel your head turning into a cold glass of rosé as their eyes glaze over. As someone prone to anxiety and also

committed to vague, borderline unpitchable films (I self-funded *Friends and Strangers* partly to avoid the difficulty I have with these examinations), I found these visits too much. After pussyfooting my way through the first couple of meetings, I decided to stay away. My clenched presence was throwing Rebecca off, and she had lots of productive encounters after I disappeared. Though I had some shame—like I was somehow shirking the work I'd come to do—I instantly felt so much lighter once I'd made this decision.

Rebecca and I had been advised by Jonathan Page, our domestic distributor for *Friends and Strangers* and a Cannes veteran, to save on accommodation costs by staying in a town outside Cannes called Golfe-Juan. It was certainly cheaper, but I wouldn't do this again. I have a Bean–like capacity to lose my bearings, and my first time using the regional train I went the wrong direction, finding myself about 30 kilometers from Cannes and guaranteed to miss my first session, Pietro Marcello's *Scarlet*. I soon found that Cannes has a fearful system of punishment for those who don't show for screenings they've booked, dropping you down in its invisible algorithmic pecking order with consequences that can never be known precisely. The new online ticketing system was already farcical—it was nigh impossible to book tickets to anything in competition in the first few days, such was the dysfunctionality of the website. But I seemed to have a harder time of it than Rebecca. Morning after morning, we'd wake at the same time and she could log in to make bookings while I could not, no matter what device I was using. I couldn't get any clarity from people at the ticketing desk. If I were more robust spiritually I think this would have bothered me less, but I was pretty down for the first week. After all the buildup in my head about this festival and the movies on the program this year, and after years of reading about critics describing the excitement of prancing from one highly anticipated top-shelf competition title to another, day in, day out, I had the feeling that somehow I'd gotten it horribly wrong. I was getting the exasperation, the overpriced meals, the bewilderment in the crowds and the heat, the sense of rushing even when you've got nowhere to be, but none of what it was all meant to be for. Cannes does seem to have a way of making you feel always on the outside of whatever it is "in there"—the secret special thing behind the velvet rope, behind the barrel-chested security guard, behind the tinted window.

I love getting drunk, and I was fortunate through the kindness of my friend Michelle Carey, a programmer at Director's Fortnight, to get sought-after tickets into a few official afterparties. These functions were typically held in pop-up style venues near the water that reminded me of the sprawling monstrosities filled by the sons and daughters of capital in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs and North Shore. Free drinks meant they were always at capacity: facing beleaguered bar staff fighting a losing war against queues 10 bodies deep made getting a drink feel a bit like getting a ticket to a movie. And needing to be up before 7:00 a.m. every day to refresh the ticket page for an hour in the hope of getting those tickets made late nights less appealing.

I started to wonder to myself, what is the point of all this? Aside from being able to say to other people later, somewhat stupidly, "I saw that at Cannes!," as a punter I don't really find there to be anything important about being among the first to see new films. I also realized early on that going to a festival like Cannes as a director who doesn't have a film in the festival can flummox people. After introducing myself, people would reasonably assume I did, and always seemed slightly disappointed when I said I was here for pitching. Maybe they hated pitching as much as I did. Disappointment would turn to incredulity after the obvious next question, about how the pitching was going, was met with the reply that I'd stopped going to them. "So, what *are* you doing here?!" they'd say with great amusement. "Well, seeing lots of films, of course" and a feeling of solemnity would suddenly take hold—"Ah, of course," as if there was something sad about coming to Cannes just to watch films. One time, I added, "And for conversations like this!," which elicited a slightly disturbed widening of the eyes and an urgent need for this man to excuse himself.

It wasn't until the second half of the festival, when I started to have more luck with the ticketing system and finally saw a few films that really excited me, that it all started to make more sense. *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, the new film by Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor showing in Directors' Fortnight, was a revelation and an insight into how the contradictions at the heart of Cannes can actually lead to interesting and original experiences of films. At a time when the lack of sleep, lack of films, frantic social intensity and sense of vulnerability around the new project was starting to manifest in a feeling of enervated dejection, I found myself swimming inside other people's sedated bodies as the filmmakers' microcameras (attached to surgical tools during real medical procedures) led us on a squiggly, thrusting journey through and around brain folds, urethras, irises, crooked spines, tumorous breast tissue and more. Once I got through the ick, I found seeing indifferent doctors pincer, suck and hammer body parts we all have in common oddly invigorating. I'd entered a ball of nerves and left almost euphoric, feeling more connected to the people around me, the privilege of generally good health and the joy of discovering with others a radical cinematic work that is able to muse on what it means to be human in such an original way. I had moments of comparative joy with João Pedro Rodrigues' *Will-o'-the-Wisp,* also in Directors' Fortnight. I've been a fan of Rodrigues since I saw *The Last Time I Saw Macao* at Melbourne International Film Festival way back and always look forward to seeing his new films. Watching only a few rows behind the cast and

crew, who seemed like a big family with tremendous affection for each other, made this session feel like a privilege to be a part of, and I'm still feeling the afterglow.

This experience fed into more thoughts about this social dimension that I started to see is the heart of what Cannes is really about: one place and time that people who work in film have the chance to come to and have rapid-fire encounters with dear, but rarely-seen, friends and colleagues. No other festival seems to have this grand central meeting point feeling. In that sense, I imagine Cannes is something that grows and improves as one's own plexus of acquaintances expands. And while there is something grotesque and elitist about a festival almost exclusively for the insiders who can afford to be there on a regular basis, and moreover something problematic about the number of air miles burned through to make it all possible, the opportunities it affords to strengthen friendships across a delicate global networks of cinephilia is a real positive. Self-funding *Friends and Strangers* meant not traveling outside Australia at all for most of my twenties and then, as fate would have it with the pandemic, for almost none of the festival release, either. This was bitterly disappointing, not just for me but also for the very talented crew and cast who gave so much to the project. Australia is isolated in a lot of ways, and when people are working for much less money than they'd get on advertisements or television, the prospect of traveling at the end to an overseas film festival with collaborators and loved ones is a big draw. I'd had one very positive experience of traveling with a film to a film festival previously, when my short film *You Like It, I Love It* screened at Clermont-Ferrand and the Berlinale in 2013. There's perhaps a danger as a filmmaker in getting addicted to these sugar hits, but as life spent self-funding projects is slow and filled with many moments of loneliness and doubt, attendance at festivals does play an important role in feeling like you're part of a broader community, especially as allies in the highly commercialized structures in Australia can be few and far between. Though I wasn't at Cannes with a film, it was nevertheless a special experience to meet in the flesh some of the lovely people with shared interests and values I'd come into contact with over email through the release of the film.

The highlight of my festival experience was the premiere of Albert Serra's Cannes competition debut *Pacifiction*—a sublime work of art that I'm certain will be among my favorite films of the decade. I only managed to see two films in the official competition and by coincidence both had colonialism front and center: Serra's and the droopy, unwholesome mess that was Claire Denis's *Stars at Noon*, set in present day Nicaragua. Where *Stars at Noon* struggled to know how much to commit to and position itself within its own involuted clutter of real and fictional historical reference points, Serra succeeded in creating an exceptional film that wafts through present day Tahiti like a humid breeze, passing around political corruption and France's corrosive colonial legacy with a dreamy, deceptive insouciance as it explores the sinister depths of predatory egoism. In many ways, it seemed a return to a structure most clearly explored in 2013's *Story of My Death*—a languorous contemplation of a complacent man (played brilliantly in *Pacifiction* by Benoît Magimel) lolling in tainted luxuries and his own sense of importance, slowly overtaken by a formless, existential terror: a phantasmic pall neither entirely of the world nor fully in the mind of the protagonist. That in both films the source can't be located precisely in terms of logic is important; in the vacuum, all circles back on the affective qualities of the film, the fading light, the bleeding sounds, the void between word and gesture.

Pacifiction is Serra's first foray away from period settings, and he is completely in command of mood and pace, perfectly calibrating his ethereal, solipsistic performances to the haunted colonial context and endless-sunset atmospherics. While there's a powerful relationship here with the notion that an invading power's greatest weapon is a kind of imaginative warfare—the insidiously slow usurpation of Indigenous ways of thinking by the colonizer's languages, stories and dreams—this climactic crisis of perception is also pure cinema, a raw expression of the medium's productive instability and its power to multiply material textures, abstract generalities and subjective impressions to profound effect. Leaving the cinema after seeing the premiere of this film at the gaudy, mall-like Palais, which felt itself like an unsettling extension of Serra's seedy, waterside world of open-shirted schmoozers and devourers, was another reminder of how the festival can reverberate with the films in fascinating ways. And is there not something imperial about the way all great films, or any works of art, take up residence in our minds? Certainly, the buyers are looking for things that have this potential. But perhaps as a viewer it's more akin to seduction. Here, we feel a more agreeable complicity—one must be open to being seduced.

There's something treacherously seductive about Cannes, an aspect the festival seemed to acknowledge in this edition's *The Truman Show*–inflected poster of a man walking up a stair to the heavens, just as he's realizing the sky and clouds are painted on. His face is turned from us, so we can't be sure: is he dismayed, delighted, resigned? Is he even conscious or caught in a dream—fated to stumble desiringly onwards, forever?

James Vaughan is a filmmaker based in Sydney. His debut feature, *Friends and Strangers* (2021), premiered in Rotterdam's Tiger Competition and was named in *Sight & Sound's* annual critics poll as one of the 50 best films of 2021.

** NOTICE: This report contains information on the development and progress of TV programs, feature films, and other entertainment-oriented media projects. This information is shared with the Marine Corps for the purpose of determining whether the project qualifies for Department of the Navy and Department of Defense support. It is pre-decisional information for our Chain-of-Command. IT IS NOT INTENDED FOR PUBLIC DISSEMINATION. The information contained in this report, if publicly disclosed, could be financially and professionally detrimental to the entertainment media production entity or individual filmmaker(s) providing the information, and would deter these companies and individuals from seeking Marine Corps assistance.

Battles Won and Lost

Vadim Rizov looks at film companies' clearance and assistance requests to the United States Marines Corps.

In 2015, Tom Secker's website SpyCulture.com published 1,669 pages of documents from the US Marine Corps Entertainment Liaison Office obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. Spanning 2008 to 2015, these internal reports from a variety of entertainment projects covering requests for support from the Marines have become freshly relevant with the success of *Top Gun: Maverick* and renewed scrutiny of American military involvement with film productions. Below, a selection of highlights.

"How to Look Good Naked" – Lifetime Television: Reality television show that gives makeovers to women who are dissatisfied with their appearance. (Note: there is no actual nudity).

"Transformers 2" – Paramount Pictures: Joint planning held Feb. 13 to discuss the military's role in the sequel, due out in June 2009. Production is expected to begin this summer, most likely in June. At the meeting we pitched the idea of having some of the lead military characters to be MARSOC portrayals, and most seemed to like it. Script is in development right now due to the Writers strike just being lifted. DoD has given support agreement letter, (b)(6) has been appointed the Marine Corps Project Officer. So far, it looks like the want to use Marine extras in several scenes; they want to film a CH-53 in several different locations; they want to use tanks doing an amphibious landing on an LCAC; and they potentially want to film using one of the beaches at Camp Pendleton. MTF as situation develops. Production has begun and should carry through the fall. New projected for CH-53 in San Diego is early October (no solid dates as of yet). http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt1055369/ /Z

"Transformers 3" – (2011): LA PA Service Reps and DoD Rep will meet with Michael Bay on 23 March to discuss military involvement in next iteration of the Transformers movie. Details on requested support will be not known until script reading is complete. LA PA will move cautiously given amount of support versus amount of screen time on Transformers 2.

"RuPaul's Drag Race" – Reality show requested female Marines to place contestants through a mini boot camp with makeovers and gown dresses as prizes for the Marines. The contestants (not Marines) would be dressed in drag for the show. Request denied 28 July due to not reflecting upon Marine Corps' values and the possibility of discrediting the Corps. /E

"Military Heroes" – FOX: Veterans Day special – MyNetwork TV contacted our office with vague ideas of what type of features they would like to include in their two-hour special. We have provided courtesy support so far and advised the producers to compile specific requests for support so we can work a production assistance agreement and DoD can task all the services individually. The show is sponsored by Sears, and the producers are trying to feature stories that help out military members and their families (ie. connect a deployed service member with his wife and newborn via video-teleconference and then build the family a nursery). They may also compile some simple, "feel-good" package stories. MTF as it develops. /R

"Fireproof" – Provident Films: LA PAO was contacted by MCB Albany, GA, PAO concerning local interviews of (b)(6) had a major role in the movie and was portrayed as a firefighter. (b)(6) was previously cleared by LA PAO to participate with a briefing on the role of military members in the industry. Local television reporters inquired about interviews upon the release of the film. LA PAO provided guidance to Albany command in order to eliminate the possibility of USMC endorsement of the movie.

The Marine 2 – WWE – Sequel to WWE's "The Marine" where a Marine single-handedly defeats a large number of bad guys who take his wife hostage. Same scenario, different Marine, different location. Production has requested to use Marine Corps flag and EGA. The production company expects this movie to go straight to DVD. Scheduled to start filming last week of November.

"MTV's Nitro Circus" – MTV: Producers of the show, which features champion motorsports competitor Travis Pastrana and his crew of "top action sports athlete buddies," contacted us requesting to shoot an episode on Camp Pendleton. They wanted to perform myriad dangerous stunts and low-culture antics in concert with military members, and they requested access to several areas on the base, military equipment including a tank, and personnel including at least one drill instructor. We denied the request based on the obvious conflict of interests with the hot topic of motorcycle safety in the Marine Corps.

"Charm School" – VH1: Producers requested a drill instructor to harass and drill the spoiled contestants on this low-culture reality show. LA PAO declined support because it was inconsistent with our mission and outside the scope of a Marine drill instructor's actual duties.

" Avatar" – 20th Century Fox: LA PAO met with director/writer James Cameron on 28 March for a sci-fi feature that finds a Marine paraplegic war veteran on another planet. In the project, the main character encounters a humanoid race with their own language and culture, which later comes to odds with humans. LA PAO offered courtesy support for verbiage in the script dialogue and met with Director on set April 13. Anticipate release in Dec. 2009.

"Cut in Half" – Spike TV: Producers of this show cut large vehicles straight down the middle and give viewers an intimate look at and knowledge of the guts of the vehicle. CGI and narrative are used in addition to the actual cut-in-half portion. Producers contacted LA PAO requesting to cut a Marine Corps vehicle - past or present. LA PAO turned down the request after speaking with Mr. Martin Durette at Fleet Support Division in Barstow. Mr. Durette advised that all "retired" or damaged vehicles are subject to rehabilitation on some level and cannot be cut in half.

Dancin' in Iraq – Rossi Filmworks: Scriptwriter Mike Rossi sent over the script for review. Film centers on a crew of Navy nurses in Baghdad who start a dance troupe to "stay sane." Script is abysmal. The dance troupe is actually a small, virtually insignificant subplot. The central plot focuses on a romance between a Marine commanding officer of a "combat hospital" in Baghdad and his XO, a Navy Lt. Cmdr. LA PAO advised writer we will not be supporting due to various plot lines. Mr. Rossi contacted LA PAO by email after the request was declined. His verbal threats were considered unfounded and all other branches were notified accordingly.

"Red Dawn" – MGM: Producer, Tripp Vinson, forwarded the treatment for the remake of the 1984 film. LA PAO has reviewed the script and will not support in accordance with DoD Entertainment Office reply unless production is willing to change the opposing forces in the script.

"Megadrive" – MTV: This brand new series would feature host Johnny Pemberton, an inexperienced young man learning how to operate "Mega vehicles." He would relate to the target audience in a way never before explored by other extreme vehicle programs. Producers asked if we could let their host drive and fire an Abrams tank, drive an MRAP and fire a Javelin rocket at a car. LA PA denied request based on the low-brow nature of the programming and the fact that it would be a gross misuse of DoD assets.

"House Cat House Calls" – Animal Planet: HCHC is a reality based show, similar to the dog whisperer, where a host meets the families and finds out what problems their cats have, and then diagnoses the cat's family on how to fix it. LA PAO denied support because the show isn't intended for an audience of Marines or people interested in joining the Marine Corps. HCHC also doesn't focus on the Marine Corps mission other than the fact that Marines would be filmed.

"Pirates of the Caribbean 4 – Walt Disney Pictures: Contacted by location manager for permission to use facilities aboard MCAS Kaneohe Bay. Currently reviewing script to ensure nothing is inappropriate prior to moving forward. There is no Marine Corps portrayal in the movie but may use the opportunity for a good community relations opportunity.

"Working Title" – Investigative Discovery Channel: Ben Sessoms, a producer with M2 Pictures, requested B-roll footage of Marine Corps basic training and a photograph of former Marine Skylar Deleon, a Marine who had gone UA after basic training and was later found guilty of murdering a married couple. SNM is currently serving a life sentence and the bodies were never found. This was denied due to the fact that his being a Marine had no relation to the fact he murdered a married couple.

"Exercising the Real: Immersion" – German/European Public TV/Discovery Enterprises International: Harun Farocki Filmproduktion produced four short documentary films (approximately 15 minutes each), which present applications that make use of immersive technology and simulation for training purposes. The film series "Exercising the Real: Immersion" presents how exercising in an artificial world leads warriors as close as possible to the reality they will experience and shows how image worlds of computer games as well as simulated scenery of building and objects are used seriously - namely in preparing U.S. Marines for deployment to combat zones. LA PA and 29 Palms PAO escorted crew aboard MCAGCC Oct. 5-9, 2009. LA PA reviewed rough cuts. The production style is very unconventional – no voice over narration and no prepared interviews. Marines are shown training on virtual reality applications and at combat town during Exercise Mojave Viper. No corrections necessary.

"Batman" – Warner Bros: OshKosh Defense has expressed interest in supporting the movie with vehicles. Conference call held mid-April with Christopher Nolan, director and support is doubtful as they are unwilling to reveal the script.

"Untitled" – Webisode: Denied request for Chicago area recruiters and poolees to participate in a project assisting in the rehabilitation of dogs, most likely pit-bulls. LA PA does not recommend supporting webisodes nor projects that deal with poolees and pitbulls.

"Mix Master Cooking" – No Distribution: Bobby Brooks (music mixer/producer), of Bleep Me Bitch Productions, requested to come aboard Camp Pendleton to cook for Marines and their families to produce and promote his website of "cooking with music." Brooks also requested the use of a kitchen and lodging for his crew aboard base. Request was denied as it did not meet support criteria (no distribution, unrelated to operations and missions).

"Part of Me: Katy Perry Music Video": Marine Corps provided support to the production of a music video for Katy Perry at MCB Camp Pendleton 16, 17 and 24 February. Video depicts Ms. Perry leaving behind a past life and become a United States Marine. Rough cut will be reviewed this week with the video debuting 12 March. (JJ)

"Pacific Rim": Legendary Pictures. Audio producers with Legendary Pictures have requested to record audio of a CH-53 lifting off and flying for an upcoming Guillermo Del Toro film. Producers recorded audio of CH-53s aboard MCAS Miramar 17 May. LAPA awaiting air date.

"Capt Phillips": Columbia Pictures. Production has requested possible use of Marines in Malta for this picture which details the Maersk: Alabama-Somali Pirates Operation. Development is in the early stages and DoD/USN Support is pending. We have reviewed the script with no issues.

“The Ultimate Sacrifice” – No distribution: DIVACA Productions wanted to create a short film based on “true” events about a married couple struggling in their relationship both physically and mentally. The husband, is a Marine who suffers from PTSD. The wife, Nicky struggles to understand his illness. The producers expressed that the intent behind this film is to help promote and raise awareness of this disorder and show how it affects Marines and their families. According to the production company - actor Dan Aykroyd is supporting their mission and is going to narrate the film. The production has funding but no distribution and would like to film a scene where a group of female Marines are hit by a suicide bomber while on a convoy and three of them are killed. They requested a Humvee and male Marines as extras. In addition, the trailer to this movie is currently available at wwww.theultimatesacrifice.com. Support has been denied due to logistical constraints and lack of distribution and funding.

“Bathroom Crashers” – DIY Network: Producers from Big Table Media, remodeled a former Marine’s bathroom with the help of recruiters from RS Sacramento. The Marines wore proper civilian attire and “Pain Is Weakness Leaving The Body” EAC t-shirts. Participation was approved by MCRC and RS Sacramento MPA was on site during filming. The show was filmed March 8. Marines were filmed greeting the homeowners, unloading supplies, and helping to demolish the bathroom. Episode aired 25 June.

“Top Gun 2”: Bruckheimer Films. Service Liaisons and OSD-PA met with Mr. Bruckheimer to discuss DoD Support to this film. Services are standing by for the first draft script before evaluating the requests. Initial meeting indicated production will be looking for a large amount of aviation support across all branches.

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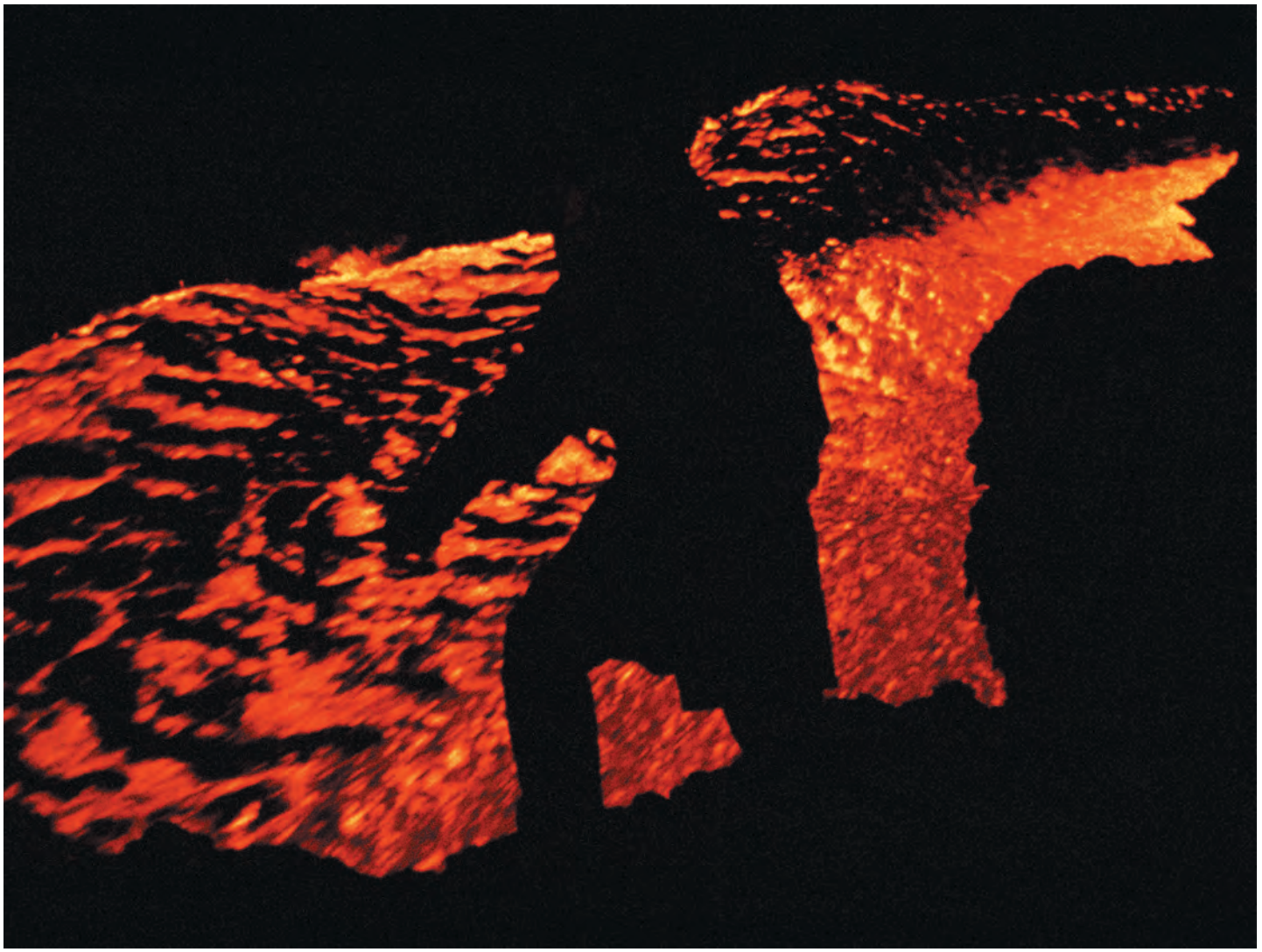

Using archival footage, animation and a voiceover performed by Miranda July, Sara Dosa's *Fire of Love* is both a visually spectacular science documentary as well as a chronicle of an oddly beautiful romance between French volcanologists Katia and Maurice Krafft, who created private worlds amidst the flames and ashes. Interview by filmmaker Sandi Tan.

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"I couldn't love someone who doesn't share that love at the top of a volcano," says French volcanologist Katia Krafft early in Sara Dosa's *Fire of Love*, a film that's both a spectacular, eye-searing documentary about the history and science of volcanoes and achingly existential romance. Katia, a geochemist, and partner Maurice Krafft, a geologist, met, fell in love and—"disappointed in humanity"—turned away from the tumult of the 1960s to find a life on the outskirts of the primordial, amidst drifting ash and near-psychedelic lava pools. "We contemplate lying at the edge of the abyss," Katia says. Like today's storm chasers, the Kraffts traveled the globe, cameras in hand, striving to get as close to erupting volcanoes as possible. The couple were clear-eyed about the risks of their chosen lifestyle: "It will kill me one day, but that doesn't bother me at all," says Maurice. "I prefer a short life to a monotonous, long one."

Through their expeditions, with their measurements and experiments, the Kraffts contributed tremendously to our current knowledge about volcanoes and the dangers they pose to proximate humanity. But the couple were filmmakers, too, and part of their storytelling art was the creation of their own on-screen characters: the intrepid, obsessive duo. Clad in blue parkas and red hats, or futuristic silvery protective gear, the Kraffts were nothing if not self-aware of their own iconographic potential, a media-savviness that's captured well by Dosa's film, which dances between affirming the Kraffts' onscreen image as romantic oddballs—proto-Wes Anderson characters—and deconstructing it. Animated sequences trace the couple's early romance, actors voice diary entries and, most significant, filmmaker and artist Miranda July reads an exquisitely melancholy voiceover, which both narrates and philsophizes. And just when the viewer is tempted to question the film's loving buy-in to the Kraffts own self-mythologizing, July's voiceover offers a reality check. For the couple to get back "home" to the volcanoes, she tells us, they needed to pay the bills, which meant monetizing their work and personas through increasingly tedious TV appearances and lecture tours. The duo's final expedition, tipped early in the film, becomes romantic resolution, ultimate escape and destiny fulfilled for these two fatalistic explorers.

A winner of the editing award at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival, *Fire of Love* is San Francisco–based Dosa's third theatrical feature. The first, 2014's *The Last Season*, captured the relationship between two soldiers connecting and healing while on an Oregon mushroom hunt for the rare matsutake mushroom. *The Seer and the Unseen* (2019), an environmental-themed documentary about an Icelandic elf whisperer, inspired her new film, as Dosa explains below. To speak with Dosa about the inventive, poignant and artfully realized *Fire of Love*, a film whose visual splendor rewards a viewer's return to the movie theater, we asked filmmaker and author Sandi Tan, whose own *Shirkers* explored the mysteries of character and latent creative potential lying within a trove of archival footage. *Fire of Love* is currently in release from National Geographic and NEON. — *Scott Macaulay*

I saw your previous film, *The Seer and the Unseen*, about an elf whisperer in Iceland poking around volcanic landscapes. Was this how you came across the work of the Kraffts, which became the foundation for *Fire of Love*? In other words, how did you get sucked into volcanoes?

"How did you get sucked into volcanoes?" is a great sentence. But yeah, I first discovered Katia and Maurice Krafft when we were making *The Seer and the Unseen*. That film opens with imagery of volcanoes because we wanted to set the stage with this story of how Iceland was created through powerful natural forces, and we thought archival material of volcanoes could do that quite well. So, we started researching volcano archives, and that's when Katia and Maurice's names popped up. The more we learned about them as characters, the more we started to fall in love. Their playful way, their philosophy, made us realize, "We want to make a film about these people and live in their world."

All that footage shot by the Kraffts sat there like treasure in an archive, waiting to be reanimated since 1991. How did you get access to all their stuff?

The archive was in an archival facility in Nancy, France, called Image'Est. Maurice's brother, Bertrand, actually had been the caretaker of it for many years. He entrusted it to different people at different facilities, but it wound up there at the Image'Est. One of our producers, Ina Fichman, struck up a good relationship with Image'Est and was able to negotiate a contract for the licensing of the 16mm footage the Kraffts shot. That was the main bucket of footage that we were working with, about 180 to 200 hours of 16mm footage.

Whoa.

Yeah, they shot a ton. Also, there were thousands of still photographs that Katia largely took. All of that footage was in Image'Est, and they beautifully scanned and digitized it for us. About 20 hours had been digitized a few years ago, but the rest of it was in these classic metallic reels.

Wow. You guys managed to get a budget for them to digitize all this stuff, so you had no idea what you actually had until everything was digitized.

Exactly. We had a sense of it, just from people who had seen it in the past. Other documentaries in the 1980s and '90s used their footage. For example, there's a great French documentary about them called *The Rhythm of the Earth* that came out in 1995. But since 1995, there hasn't been a feature documentary using Katia and Maurice's footage. Image'Est had an inventory list for us organized by country and year, things like "Zaire, 1971" or "Iceland, 1984." So, we didn't know what it would look like, but we had a sense of where it would go.

And what percentage of it was silent?

All of the 16mm footage was silent. We then worked with another bucket of footage, about 45 to 50 hours' worth of footage that our fabulous archival researcher, a woman named Nancy Marcotte, found for us. Those largely existed in the Institute for Audiovisual Records in France, as well as other television archival libraries. All of that, luckily, had sound because that was Katia and Maurice on television, being interviewed, where you really got to see them interacting with each other and hear their own words. There wasn't a ton of that, but at least there was some. But yeah, all the 16mm footage that they themselves shot came to us silent.

What was your reaction when you saw everything for the first time, and where were you? Were you in France?

No. I'm glad you asked that because I forgot to mention we really made this project during summer of 2020 through the fall of 2021. We were in lockdown at the height of the pandemic making this film.

A great pandemic project.

We were actually working on a totally different project when the pandemic hit and had to pivot to find an archival project. I longed to go to France—I wanted to be there so badly, to pore through the reels myself and be in-person with people who knew and loved the Kraffts. But I wasn't able to actually go until October 2021.

So, this is all negotiated over the internet, on the phone, with people that were digitizing all this footage for you? That's amazing.

Yeah, we were so grateful for them.

How long did you work with the footage?

We started receiving it at the end of 2020, and it took about four months to all get digitized. It was truly mesmerizing because we would get them in tranches of about 20 hours every few weeks. We were in our own little pods—I was in San Francisco at that time—and totally isolated in this fearful, uncertain world of the early days of COVID-19. Getting to watch imagery of bubbling lava flows in Hawaii or blizzards in Iceland, these incredible, surreal landscapes, felt like a way to be transported. It was a refuge during such a hard time. And this was such a tremendous team effort—I just adore my collaborators. My core team—[producer/writer] Shane Boris, [writer/editors] Erin Casper and Jocelyne Chaput and [producer] Ina Fichman, as well as our fabulous executive producers at Sandbox Films, Greg Boustead and Jessica Harrop—

and I rolled up our sleeves. In October of 2020, Shane and I went on a writing retreat where we wrote a treatment and outline for the film that served as the grand map. Then, when we were starting the edit in earnest, we were trying to figure out how to take that outline and divide it into discrete chunks that could create the right kind of workflow. The first week with Erin in New York in May of 2021, we were working the Iceland, 1968, scene and were trying to figure out the artistic grammar, the big questions—how we were going to use sound, how we were going to use Katia and Maurice's writings, if they were going to be voiced by actors or, if the narrator was going to say these words, who the narrator was going to be.

How long did you take to edit this, and how did you, Erin and Jocelyne work together? How did you project manage something like this?

It was a seven-month edit total.

That's really quick.

It was quick. Erin and Jocelyne were both working full-time, and we were working long days for sure. We had a few different processes that evolved over time, but first and foremost, it was highly collaborative. First, Erin and I were working for a week in New York, and Jocelyne was remote on Zoom in Berkeley. There was a ton of time pressure, but we felt so much joy in the process. Erin lives in New York, Jocelyne actually lives close to me in the Bay Area, Shane lives in LA. Those three descended on my little house—at that time, I had moved to Berkeley—and moved in. We were working all hours of the night, like a college art project or something, trying things out, editing in a very associative manner. There was a lot of laughter and joy. We were led first and foremost by Katia and Maurice's playful spirit and their collaborative nature of doing work. We tried to divide and conquer between acts. Jocelyn took one section, Erin took another, but by the end of the film everybody had touched everything. We had guiding principles that all of us were trying to work with to keep a cohesive voice and style for the film.

Can you talk about the importance of sound design when working with silent footage, especially footage that's been used before?

Erin and Jocelyne very quickly knew the narrative power that sound had and that we needed to build it into early cuts, that we couldn't just watch silent cuts. That would really undermine the stories that we were trying to build. So, both of them, from our first assembly, would build these incredibly detailed soundscapes, working with libraries that contained eruption sounds, volcano sounds, geothermal sounds. They really wanted to make sure it was historically accurate. I remember one day when Jocelyne went down a total rabbit hole to find the exact engine of the car that Katia and Maurice and their friend drove in 1968 on the first expedition to Iceland. But at the same time, the fact that the footage didn't come with sound opened up a space for some play, especially to be subjective. It was really important to us that we created the character of the volcano, so to speak, in line with how Katia and Maurice perceived them. They perceived them as kind of sentient beings that were so alive and beyond human understanding. So, we wanted them to feel accurate in their sound design, of course, but to add more dimensionality and character. In our scene in Indonesia in 1979, Erin actually experimented with dinosaur sounds. It was super fun and really playful. It added that layer of monstrosity or beastliness that felt true to the Kraffts' perception of volcanoes.

Who was it amongst you who determined that that was a great idea, to portray volcanoes as sentient beings?

We were inspired early on by Katia and Maurice's own writing. They wrote nearly 20 books. A lot of them were very scientific, but some were first person and incorporated poetry. They would often describe volcanoes as monsters waking up but were so in love with them at the same time. So, we crafted the soundscape specifically when it came to developing the love triangle relationship between Katia, Maurice and volcanoes. Also, the audio record, too, was quite limited. There wasn't all that much of them talking about their psychology or relationship. So, however we could get playful or creative to bring in emotions and sound, we really wanted to go after that so that we could hint at interiority.

The volcanoes do come alive in your hands, but so do the Kraffts. As you say, there's not that much on them, and we've seen them before, but they've never been as alive as they are in your film. They seem fully formed, two eccentrics that, when you watch them, you want to hold dear and protect. Was it your intention to amplify the characters the Kraffts created for themselves in their own films, or do you think you had a different conception than they had of themselves?

It was really important to us from the beginning that this film felt like a co-creation with Katia and Maurice Krafft—not just that we were using their footage and interpreting it from our own perspectives, but that they were guiding us the whole way. [Because] cameras were their tools, and they do show up in their own footage—even though not a ton together—we always felt like they were inscribing themselves into

their own myth. They knew that their lives could be lost in an instant and setting their image to posterity through celluloid felt haunting, like they knew that they were going to die and how they wanted to represent themselves. The way that they played themselves on camera felt very true to them, though. It wasn't inauthentic—they understood their role as storytellers and science communicators.

And they knew they were being funny, right? They knew that they were odd, and they were unselfconscious about being slight oddballs. They were happy and exuberant in their oddness.

Exactly, yeah. They had such a playful way with each other and knew that other people found that engaging. And if people found them engaging, then they could be the conduit to teaching people about volcanoes and, by extension, the natural world. That was really their goal, to forward this understanding for the planet, and they were very successful at that. I think that they were really savvy in understanding who they were and the characters that they played, but never in a way that undermined their own truth. It was fun to take their humor and playfulness and try to work with that.

How did you find for the film a sweet spot between beauty, message and entertainment?

We really see the film as a collage. We're working with 16mm, video, written materials, narration, and whenever there was too much of one element, the film started to feel really congested and the overarching narrative structure, guided by this love triangle story, would get blocked. So, a lot of it was experimentation. We wanted to marry the ideas of scientific inquiry with falling in love, but if we had too much science, that blocked the dreaminess of falling in love because there was a lot of information saturating your mind. But if we had too much dreaminess, it wasn't grounded by Katia and Maurice's reality and lived experience. So, it was a lot of trial and error and experiential, intuitive editing—checking in with ourselves, what moved us as storytellers and filmmakers, if we had emotional reactions, where did we laugh. We were lucky to work with some science advisors who helped position the field of volcanology within our film in a way that felt true. We also sought the guidance of some trusted viewers throughout the process to make sure that what we were doing was working, wasn't confusing, and they helped us to cover some of our own potential blind spots as a filmmaking team.

I love the idea that the film portrays a love triangle between Katia, Maurice and the volcanoes. The fact that you identified that as being the narrative force of this film is brilliant. It's so affecting, and it's also the thing that kills them.

There was a sentence in a book that Maurice wrote, where he says, "For me, Katia and volcanoes, it is a love story." That line appears at the very end of our film now. That was the genesis point because we felt like he gave us the thesis of the film, which was that there are three characters, and it's a love story. The fact, too, that they came of age during the French New Wave—those aesthetics really showed up in their own work. For example, in Maurice's cinematography, there's a lot of fun snap zooms, and their writing reminded us of Truffaut's narration. So, we wanted to work with that stylistic influence that showed up in their work and embrace it.

How much writing was there? Did they have lots of books that you had to read?

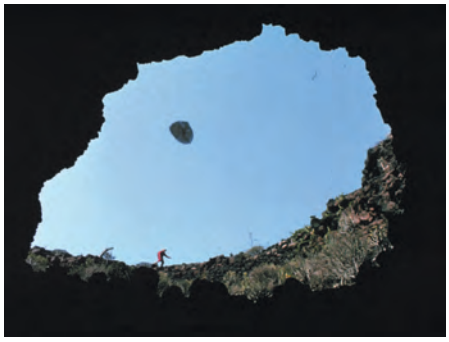
They did, yeah. They wrote nearly 20 books. Academic articles, too.

That took a long time to synthesize as well?

Totally. It was such a gift, though, because you really got a sense of their voices, how they saw the world. The other thing it did was that in the 16 millimeter footage, because it didn't have any sound, we were often thinking, "What are we looking at?" But their writings would detail where they were, travelogue-style. So, for example, in the footage we would see gorgeous images of this sulfuric landscape, then these two tiny figures in a raft out in the middle of the lake. What is this craziness? But Katia, in her book about Indonesian volcanoes, details exactly what she experienced watching Maurice and his other geologist friend going out on this flimsy raft in the middle of the sulfuric acid lake. So, we got not just the play-by-play of what happened, but also Katia's perspective on it, and we could bring in her emotions by working with her writing. Those books infused our own approach to the narration, but also, we have actors at different moments to try to make them feel more real.

Then, you use other techniques. This is the point at which we should acknowledge the wonderful young animator Lucy Munger. How did you find her? How did you decide on using this old-timey animation to fill in the blanks? And how did animation fulfill what you needed that was lacking in the film?

We really wanted there to be a feel of the dreaminess of falling in love for the film's telling of a love story. We also wanted to draw a parallel with falling in love and research. The more you learn about a topic, that intimacy that comes with knowing, that curiosity that drives scientific inquiry, can also be compared to the process of when you're falling in love. You're



learning the secrets of your lover, you're trying to understand them, trying to know how they tick. So, we thought that animation grounded in a paper archive, in this kind of research process, could be a playful way to set that theme that also reflected their own period of falling in love as university students. But Katia and Maurice also collected thousands of illustrations of volcanoes dating back centuries. They were scientific and almost psychedelic in their whimsy, all at once—they reminded us a bit of stills from Terry Gilliam's work—and made us think these could be the right kind of base plates for animation. I started asking filmmaker friends, "Does anyone know someone who works at paper animation in this playful way?" And my dear friend Cecilia Aldarondo had worked with Lucy before on a forthcoming project. Once I saw Lucy's work, I was just like, "We need to work with her. She's the only one."

How did your score fit into everything?

We wanted a retro futuristic score that felt in line aesthetically with the sci-fi vibes that Katia and Maurice were very much leaning into with their own storytelling and imagery, as well as their volcano helmets. We were brainstorming what bands could do that and Air came to mind, especially because they're also French. We were listening to Nicolas Godin's work—he's one half of Air—and really loved it. It was very playful and fun and charming and multifaceted and romantic and whimsical—all the elements we were really looking for. So, we enlisted him as our composer for the film. We also wanted to use music as archive, so we used a lot of French pop music from the late '60s and '70s to bring out the historicity as well as the cultural influence.

When did you get Miranda July involved as a narrator, and did her inclusion influence the way you wrote the voiceover narration?

Miranda came into the process late. We had thought of having a French narrator at first, but during our brainstorm, one of our EPs, Greg Boustead, mentioned her because he had worked with her. She had done some consulting for Sandbox Films, which he runs. And I have loved Miranda's work forever—she's one of my favorite filmmakers and artists and writers—so it was such an easy yes. Part of that was because we really wanted a curious narrator, someone who could prompt questions rather than say declarative facts, and Miranda's work as an artist herself possesses this profound curiosity and inquisitive voice. We had written the majority of the narration before she came on, but definitely once we knew it was going to be her, that did help further craft the cadence, the

HOW THEY DID IT

Production Format
16mm

Film/Tape Stock
16mm
(including some Kodak)

Editing System
AVID

Color Correction
Da Vinci Resolve for color and online

tone, as well as some of the language that we used.

And did she change the writing or ad lib it?

In the process of recording, she made a few suggestions here and there. That was really helpful. But she didn't do any reedits. I think once or twice there was an ad lib that wasn't even conscious, but we were like, "Whoa, that was amazing." And she's like, "Oh, I didn't realize I did that."

Was it your choice or hers to do it as an old woman volcano?

We never talked about it like that, but the guiding direction that we worked with was to have a feeling of deadpan curiosity—not to be distancing or sarcastic, but to make sure that her voice could leave space for Katia and Maurice's voices to form, as well as for the imagery to flourish. We thought that if her voice had too much personality, it would cause the audience to wonder, "Who is this narrator? What's their relationship?" So, a little bit more of a distanced tone could create that space. I should also say, at the very beginning of this process I didn't imagine a narrator. I thought it was just going to be Katia and Maurice's voices. But since there were such limitations to the archive, that's where the narration came in. The other main direction was, even though we had the deadpan curiosity, we wanted the narrator to express warmth—that this is a narrator who admired and loved them, almost longed for them. We actually wrote a very detailed backstory for the narrator that we never wanted the audience to know. But it helped us ground our writing because Erin, Jocelyne, Shane and I wrote together and needed to have a cohesive perspective for the narrative voice. We didn't want Miranda to know it, either, because we wanted her to bring her own full self to the work. But having that backstory was really cool.

Can you tell us what that secret backstory is?

Sure. An American woman in her early 40s was approaching the age of Katia and Maurice when they died. She had just gone through a dramatic breakup and was contemplating meaning, love and loss. She moves to France. She loved French films and French pop music as a teenager and always saw herself as a Francophile, and decides out of this radical breakup to move to France and find any job. So, she gets a job in a science library cataloguing dental records from the '70s. She has this really OCD boss, who makes her organize things painstakingly—but no one's ever going to see them again, so it feels like this absurdist task, and the fact that she's looking at teeth all day raises all these other questions about mortality and meaning. But she stumbles upon this old box that happens to contain volcano archives and becomes fixated by them. That's how she meets Katia and Maurice.

That's a great note to end on.

Images courtesy of National Geographic and Image'Est

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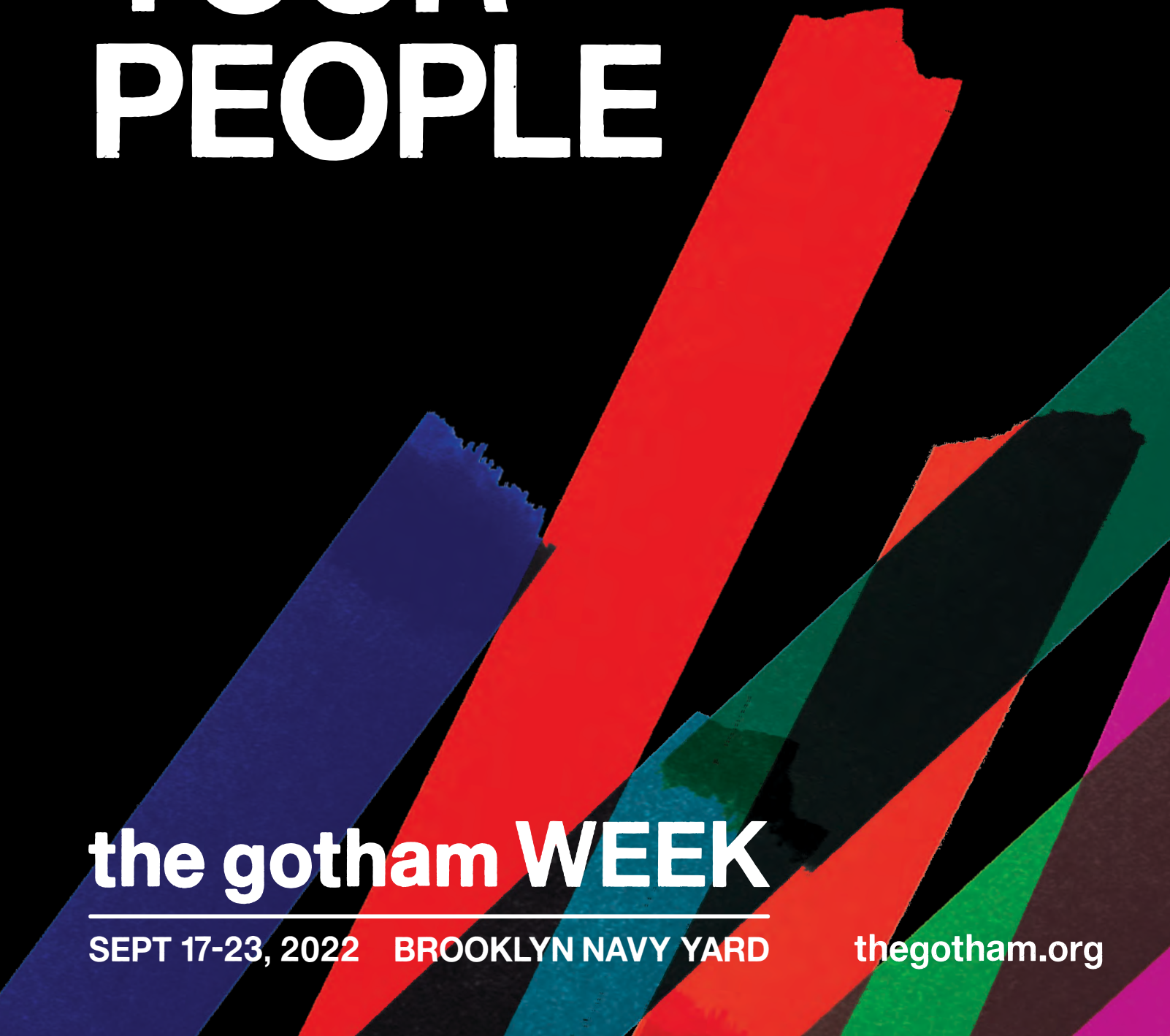

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Inside Out

Director Michael Almereyda talks with *Crimes of the Future*'s David Cronenberg about the Canadian auteur's unexpectedly romantic look at humanity's next evolution.

HOW THEY DID IT

Camera
ARRI Alexa Mini

Production Format
ARRIRAW (3.4K)

"There is an inner life to a human being that can be as dangerous as any animal in the forest." So asserts David Cronenberg in his supremely self-aware book-length 1993 interview *Cronenberg on Cronenberg,* tracking a career that has supplied us with indelible nightmare images: ravenous parasites, murderous mutant children, an exploding head, a slimy gun extracted from a pseudo-vaginal slit in a man's abdomen—to name a conspicuous few. Recalling the early films, it's almost easy to forget that the jolting imagery emerges from compelling atmospheres of isolation and estrangement. Cronenberg's reliable quotient of ghastly mayhem has always roared up from his characters' tormented interiors. More recently, in increasingly passionate, sly and unclassifiable films, Cronenberg's definitions of "inner life" and "dangerous" continue to darken and morph, even as a soaring romanticism and his reliably mordant sense of humor counter the despair declared within the films' dystopian worlds.

Crimes of the Future, Cronenberg's 22nd feature, presents us with the spectacle of modified "new" organs blooming in the body of Saul Tenser (Viggo Mortensen), a performance artist whose innards are lovingly harvested by his surgically gifted collaborator, Caprice (Léa Seydoux), in theatrical settings attended by a small, rapt public. Who or what is responsible for Saul's mutating organs, and should they be considered crimes or works of art—monstrous disruptions of the biological status quo or portals leading to a transcendent revision of human nature? Cronenberg is pressing us, once again, to consider the proximity, the fusion, of human bodies and technology, the interconnection of desire and disease, love and pain.

I revisited a half-dozen of his earlier films, belatedly devoured his 2014 novel, *Consumed*, and drew up enough questions to fill out two or three hours of talk—before it was communicated to me that my Cronenberg encounter would be slotted into a post-Cannes NYC press junket, a kind of journalistic bullet train, enabling me to Zoom with the master for a fleeting 20-minute session, his 18th interview of the day.

When Cronenberg appeared on my laptop screen, he was, I noticed, beautifully lit: seated before a dark red curtain, wearing a black pullover and dark gray suit, his white hair brushed back from his forehead. A white cup, held alternately at chest or chin level, seemed to glow with particular brightness as he talked, smiled, sipped. He was unfailingly gracious, lucid, unpretentious—and I was predictably startled when a disembodied voice interrupted to say we were out of time.

This transcript has been slightly edited, mainly to eliminate my most obsequious gushing. *Crimes of the Future* is out now in theaters and on digital platforms.

I dipped into *Cronenberg on Cronenberg* recently and kept finding things that were relevant and resonant related to this new movie, and I was intrigued by one thing you confided: "Each of my films has a little demon in the corner that you do not see, but it's there." I wonder if this holds true for *Cosmopolis*, if there's some demon lurking in the shadows of the film that you might want to talk about.

Gee, I usually don't speak of demons, maybe because it smacks of Christian theology [chuckles]. I don't know if there is anything like that in this movie for me. I wouldn't have thought of it in that way because it's pretty right out there—it's not really hiding very much. Maybe I've gotten to the point where I don't have to hide any of the demons anymore. They're right out there.

OK, the demons are running around loose now, out in the open. There are clear threads and connections with your other films, almost too many to name, but one ingredient that was particularly affecting to me, especially in relation to your novel, is the presence of an unconventional couple who share a new reality that the film thrusts them into. There's a deep sense of romanticism even though they're going through an ordeal. The couple in the book are described as being "ardent consumers," and the couple in the.... You're shaking your head. Am I saying something negative?

No, I'm not. I'm actually nodding sideways [laughs]. I'm a total romantic, basically. I believe in and crave that kind of love. I lived with it myself, so it's there in all my movies in one form or another. The couple in this movie, they're developing a relationship that is unique but also classic and eternal. There's changing technology, changing sexuality, changing bodies and yet there's still the need to have that kind of love of two people for each other that is very physical as well as emotional, no matter what the changes are around and within them. That is a central part of this movie. Maybe that is the demon, you know? I'm happy that quite a few of the critics who have written about it have noted that there is tenderness and affection and sweetness to the movie, which is not maybe what you would think on first blush.

I recognize it in so many of your films, and I'm glad other people have, too. I think it comes up most strongly for me in the exalted close-ups of Léa Seydoux and in her chemistry with Viggo Mortensen. But the way you open the movie seemed daring to me, starting with a de-coupled wife, a character on the periphery, who triggers the action, the plot. The woman who plays the mother of the mutant boy gives a powerful performance. I wasn't familiar with her. I wondered how you found her and steered her into the anguish that starts the story.

My producer, Robert Lantos, sai "Have you seen this Israeli TV series calle *Losing Alice?* You should really watch it b cause the lead actress, Lihi Kornowski, sensational and really interesting, and yo might find a place for her in our movie." watched it and immediately thought, "Sh needs to be in this." I thought perhaps sh was really very well known, and I think sh is very well known in Israel but not real anywhere else. It was fantastic to have h in Cannes on the red carpet—she real made an impression on anybody who m her. If this helps launch her a little bit bi ger, that would be great because she's a te rific performer.

Let's talk about the character a little. There's a history of mothers in your movies: Samantha Eggar's character in *The Brood* accepts the monster she's given birth to, and in this case the woman doesn't. How would you characterize that change?

This movie is partly about people wh are willing to accept very revolutionar and evolutionary change, and people wh are not able to accept it and fight again it. We have characters doing both in th movie—and yes, certainly, the Samanth Eggar character in *The Brood* was one wh fully embraced the strangeness of what sh had become and was giving birth to. Yo know, I have three children and four gran children, and really, childbirth is the mo amazing, astounding thing. People tak pregnancy for granted because it's ha pening all over the world all the time, bu I'm still astonished by it. I love babies, yo know? I love children because you real

have to see how a child develops to understand what a human being is, and it's always fantastic.

think Howard Shore's score is extraordinary. He's one so many great scores for you, but this one is particularly propulsive and haunting. It sets a tone. Then, hen Viggo appears, there's a nice shock of humor rifting in. I just re-watched *Dr. Strangelove*, and it almost seemed like he was channeling George C. Scott nd Peter Sellers at once, the ecstatic grimacing and rowling. How did you work that through together? Was here any particular advice you gave him?

I really let my actors show me what they've got. As you know, casting is a huge part of directing, and it's usually invisible. Most people don't talk about it as part of directing, but it really is important. It's not simple, either—the actor's passport makes a difference if you're doing a co-production, and their availability and financeability and all of those things. But once you've got your actor—and you hope you've got the right actor—then I want to see what they have. I don't want to tell them what to do. I want to see what they do first intuitively.

Viggo started immediately to use what is in the script: this man cannot eat properly, he has throat problems, voice problems, digestive problems. That sounds very banal, but it's of the essence of what the movie is about in a way, and he immediately started to use his voice in a way I've never seen him do before. Our discussions mainly were, "Is this too much at this point? Is it interfering with the intelligibility of what you're saying or enhancing it? Let's do a take where it's a little less or more." It was almost strange animal, birdlike sounds at certain points, but done so subtly and so naturally that we actually got very used to it on set. Viggo very quickly got the rhythm of how it should work. You don't want the audience to forget it—it's part of his vulnerability as a character—but you don't want it to become annoying or irritating or distract from what's being said. So, it's a balance.

was also impressed with Scott Speedman in his role. e's kind of a low-key fanatic. As a villain, he's slightly nister but also sort of soulful and wounded and lonely. ow did that emerge from the script? Was that ambigu- y pointedly part of it?

About the only thing I said to him about the script was, "Your character is actually the emotional core of the movie. His grief drives everything, and his grief drives his fanaticism." Like most adept fanatics, he has a way of making his fanaticism seem quite rational, quite comprehensible. He speaks very reasonably even when he's suggesting to Viggo's character that he allow these tumors to grow because they

are actually something positive, and he should think and stop interfering with their growth. It turns out that perhaps he's right. So, is he really a fanatic after all? Is he really a villain? In a way, he is not.

was in an East Village bar in the 1980s. It as very dark and very loud, and in the cor- er up against the ceiling was a TV monitor nowing *Scanners*. The force of the imagery, he visceral power of it, made everything se in the room vanish. I remember being o sucked into those images. I had seen the lm before, and somehow it just took over he reality of the room. I wondered if you've ver had an experience like that, where a lmmaker's images have leapt out at you like hat and been overwhelming or hypnotic.

Probably many, but I can point to specifically Nic Roeg's *Don't Look Now*. I remember walking into the theater, and in seconds I was completely paralyzed and mesmerized. That movie had a really strong effect on me. This bizarre anticipation, almost welcoming death—the whole movie was that but done in such an artful, offbeat, abstract way, and yet so viscerally compelling.

hat's a great reference point. Did you ever et to meet him?

I did get to meet him and also worked with his son, Luc Roeg, who's a producer. I didn't get to talk a lot to him, but I did meet him, and it was very exciting for me.

was hoping to meet you when I was in Ath- ns last year. I was actually on the set, and y silhouette is in your movie. This might be mild shock to you.

Oh my God. Really?

was standing almost as close to you as I am this monitor, but I was a background extra n the bar scene in which Scott Speedman atches a man collapse and convulse after ating a toxic purple candy bar]. It was fun see how decisive you were, how calm you ere and how few takes you did. I don't know if hat speed and calm characterized the whole hoot—is this your normal mode or new?

I started to feel around the time of *The Fly* that there was a Samuel Beckett inside me. It occurred to me that *The Fly* was really three people in one room and started to treat it that way. Peter Suschitzky, who I did 11 movies with as a director of photography, talked about how I would do a lot of coverage—close-up, medium, loose medium, wide shot—and as time went on, I would simplify and simplify. I think it's just experience—spending a lot of time in the editing room, saying, "Why did I do that many takes? Why did I do that much coverage when I didn't need to?" And gradually, I came to a place where really I feel that I'm a minimalist. Of course, there are an infinite number of ways to cover two people talking—and you have to decide that you don't want that, that you have to find the perfect way for your movie to capture them. It's a matter of honor and also efficiency. I don't have big budgets, I don't have long shooting schedules, so how can I do this minimally but still incredibly effectively? So, I do one or two takes. I also think the technology has given me the confidence to do that because, in the old film days, we often would say, "OK, let's do one for the lab"— meaning we know the lab is going to destroy a couple of takes in their chemical baths because somebody's gonna screw up, so we better do an extra take just in case, so we don't have to reshoot. But now you have digital back-ups and see exactly what you're shooting, which you couldn't in the old days.

You don't miss film, celluloid?

Not at all. Basically, I hate film. It's horrible. I mean, I have nostalgia for movies shot on film because there were so many great movies made on film, but as a medium, it was very deficient and doesn't compare at all to what you can do with digital, which is fabulous. That's my attitude.

Another line I plucked from *Cronenberg on Cronenberg:* You quoted Nabokov saying, "Nothing is so exhilarating as vulgar philistinism"—or was it "philistine vulgarity?" You've been gliding into a more elegant phase, even though you're still able to compel people to walk out of your films. Having been on the set for half a day watching a scene take shape, I was impressed by how serene and clear everything was. Since a lot of your work lately has been either addressing art directly or centered on characters who are artists, it seems like you're moving away from the vulgarity

that Nabokov was talking about and into something more rarefied, museum oriented.

Well, I think Nabokov was, of course, himself accused of being quite elitist and aestheticist and so high-level that he was abstract and too academic and all of those things, but then of course, he wrote *Lolita*, so... [chuckles].

Is that your favorite of his books?

Pale Fire, actually, but *Lolita* is hard to beat for its incredible emotional impact and strangeness and dissection of America at that time, which is incredibly acute and astute.

And funny, as well.

I mean, he's always funny, and I think I'm always funny, too.

I agree.

Our saving grace as animals is that we have humor. It's a great survival mechanism. We really need it. And since each movie is a kind of human animal, it should have humor to be fully alive.

I'll loop back to your novel. It's beautifully written, remarkably precise about the world it describes. It reminded me of DeLillo, who I know you have a relationship with. It has this coolness and heat, an erotic and emotional heat. Again, it's a portrait of a couple—a marriage, even if it's not officially identified as such: two people moving through a new reality together, like entering a shared dream. Do you want to write another book, continue on that path?

Well, I thought that writing novels would be what I would do. I went through a phase where I thought I just don't want to do movies anymore because it's just too complex, too many people, too much financing. I'm sure every director has felt that at one point or another—it's undoubtedly why Soderbergh has retired 10 times already. So, I was never going to stop being creative, but I might have stopped making movies. But now I'm thinking—you know, Robert Lantos, who produced *Crimes of the Future*, wants to do a movie based on that novel. That would be very tempting for me to do, and I have a feeling we will eventually do that.

I can picture it. There are so many overlaps, but it's still a very sly and unsettling book.

Yeah, and the thing is, I'm not afraid of overlaps, really. I mean, there are a lot of overlaps between *Crimes of the Future* and my other movies, the so-called body horror films—which I never think of as body horror at all, but the phrase has kind of stuck. The overlaps to me are just natural. It's like Burroughs saying he didn't separate his art from his life. Writing the screenplay for *Naked Lunch*, I said, "You know, William, to make this work, I'm gonna have to include some scenes from your marriage, some scenes about your life," and he said, "Go ahead. I don't separate the two." In a way, I say the same about my life and movies: they all overlap, so if *Consumed* has strong overlaps with *Crimes* or other movies I've made, so be it. They should enrich each other, like a diamond with many facets. You're looking at the same interior, which is my interior, but from different planes.

Michael Almereyda is at work on an adaptation of Don DeLillo's *Zero K*, starring Willem Dafoe. His previous films include

Images courtesy of NEON

ART SCHOOL

HANGOVER

Artist and filmmaker Martine Syms talks to Natalia Keogan about *The African Desperate*, her bitingly incisive and very funny feature about one Black MFA student's odyssey through the academy's white-walled white spaces.

HOW THEY DID IT

Production Format
3K HD

Camera
ARRI Alexa Mini

Editing System
Adobe Premiere Pro with Adobe After Effects for visual effects

Color Correction
DaVinci Resolve

LA-based digital artist and filmmaker Martine Syms makes her feature debut with *The African Desperate*, a deeply funny and unflinching survey of the embedded racism within what the artist classifies as "elite spaces." Syms previously made 2017's *Incense, Sweaters & Ice*, a 69-minute art installation that depicts three generations of Black women and the nature of their surveillance. With *The African Desperate*, Syms vies for a more personal angle by centering her film on Palace (frequent collaborator Diamond Stingily), a Black MFA student who's finishing her degree at Bard College, where the director received her MFA in 2017. While the name of the college is never formally disclosed in the film, the architecture of Bard is easily identifiable.

The film begins with Palace enduring a final thesis review—a degree requirement—littered with racist remarks and observations from four white professors. At one point, she practically pleads with her professors to shelve their collective obsession with her identity to fairly assess her thesis: "Let's talk about the work, and y'all stop making me the work." Eager to get back home to Chicago, Palace has no intention of attending the end-of-program party that her classmates have planned, but her plans change with the introduction of narcotics. Transpiring during the 24 hours after Palace's thesis crit, *The African Desperate* descends into a wild night of drug use that morphs the visual language of the film itself, further highlighting Palace's status as an outsider in this world of white art school kids. Blending interactions that are absurd, frustrating and (albeit synthetically) euphoric, *The African Desperate* inspects institutional power structures and what's muddled (or revealed) by the theory-laden conversations these spaces spur.

I spoke to Syms via phone the day before her show, "Grio College" (named after the fictional program in her film), opened at Bard's Hessel Museum of Art. She'd just arrived upstate in Kingston, New York, a stone's throw over the Hudson River from her alma mater's campus. At first sounding justifiably exhausted from her cross-country trek, Syms' responses became increasingly convivial, teeming with intellectual musings on memes, visually representing a 'shrooms trip and using humor as a defense mechanism in the face of blatant racism. T*he African Desperate* is out in September from MUBI.

You graduated in 2017 with an MFA from Bard, the undeclared yet totally discernible setting for *The African Desperate*. Did you begin to conceive this project while still attending the program, or did it materialize more as a reflection of your experience there?

It materialized later. I also taught in art programs, and my co-writer [Rocket Caleshu] went to another graduate program and taught. So, it was a combination of experiences, both as a student and MFA faculty and just being around institutional settings. It came about, really, through collaboration with Diamond Stingily, who plays the lead. She's been in several short films that I've made over the years, and in the exhibition at Hessel, I tried to show some of those earlier projects. [Diamond and I] were just talking about how we've known each other for a long time, but she was reflecting upon my time [at Bard] and was like, "I don't know what I would've done." Something about the idea of her being in that program was very inspiring and hilarious to me, and that's how I started writing it. And honestly, the school is very supportive. It's clearly named—or not named, but visible. It's part of my exhibition. I think that's the *roman à clef* side of me.

I read that the film itself is actually set in 2017, the year that you graduated. Is that right?

Yes, correct.

In the past, you've stated that your work is typically forward-looking, and you're careful about romanticizing the past. So, what made this film an exception when it came to delving into this past period of time, even if it is only five years ago?

When I was spending time upstate, where I am right now, the political climate was pretty hostile, and there was a lot of Trump insignia. My first summer, I didn't have a car. I was walking a lot down this road at night, and there was someone who drove around in a pickup truck with a huge Confederate flag. There were also several racially motivated shootings—I'm thinking specifically about Charlottesville—during that summer. So, the context of being in the town was foregrounded for me by the [national] political situation, and that was a really clear indication of the difference between my experience and some of my classmates, because everyone just kept talking about how beautiful it was here, and I was having a much different experience.

I actually graduated from a school in the same Hudson Valley area in 2017 as well. I weirdly feel like I know the pickup truck you're talking about. Could you talk more about how you went about evoking this very surreal juxtaposition of beautiful nature with the feeling of being trapped in a specific small community?

Nature was part of what I wanted to make feel transcendent. In the [scene at the lake], there are maybe two moments of trying to explain how the landscape itself is still very healing. Even the scene where Palace is getting ready for the party, just her being alone within the landscape was really healing. Rocket, Diamond and I talked about containing the richness of that kind of experience, where you can really love a vista or the way something very sensual feels—like water or a breeze or eating—but then you're also getting told you shouldn't be somewhere, you're followed at a store or you're in your program arguing with somebody, and all of that is making up your experience.

Tomorrow is the opening day of your exhibition. It's cool that this film—which is essentially an indictment of racism in the art world and academia in general—had its premiere and is making this statement ahead of your show there. Can you speak about the process of mounting this five-year retrospective and how you brought the institution in conversation with the film itself?

The first thing that I'd like to say is that this problem isn't specific to Bard. It's quite endemic. I've had many institutional experiences—with work, with art, with education, as well as with siblings and friends—and it's very common. It just hasn't been reflected. That was part of what I was interested in talking about: what it feels like to be in one of these kinds of "elite spaces." I was working on the show simultaneously with the film, and a lot of my works are generative in this way: They're in conversation

with one another because it's hard for me to compartmentalize my creative brain in that way. So, when I was writing, I was interested in these gaps between experience or your memory of something and someone else's [memory]. I'm thinking of this Margo Jefferson term, "fact in trouble"—[after] which I had named a show before—from her memoir *Negroland*. I really love that idea, or Kevin Young's idea of the truth.

A lot was going on in my life at the time I was in the program. I was taking care of a family member, I was traveling and exhibiting a lot, and life and all those references became a curriculum for me. And that's emphasized in this one work called "Lessons," like [Kevin Young's book] *Lessons of the Tradition*. That was the first time I worked with Diamond on a video, though I'd met her years ago. I was just trying to think about this pedagogy that's broader than school and how everyone's coming with this different set of experiences. That's the big lie of education, that we're all equal now in the classroom—I am always thinking about power dynamics in relationship to liberation. It felt really exciting to me to be able to make this film but also speak directly to those ideas in the exhibition. We talked about the institution very generically, but like you and I both said, we were students at places like this. It is artwork, it's not directly like, "fuck this place" or something like that. So, I wanted to be in dialogue with the experience of the student, but it seemed weird to ignore the fact that I've made a lot of work from 2015 to 2017 at that place.

I'd like to touch on the use of on-screen memes in *The African Desperate*. I see them as a way for the audience to understand Palace's internal frustration and disbelief at remarks she receives or that are said in her vicinity. You just mentioned your previous collaborations with Diamond Stingily, and I know that you responded to what's been regarded as the "memeification" of Black femme bodies in your 2015 "Notes on Gesture," which also features Diamond. What made memes feel like an essential component for telling this story, and how do you feel about the way we use them to interact with the world around us?

Even before we were using the word "meme," just within my friend group our communication style is shorthand: a quote from a movie, a line from a song, this hypertextual way I speak with a lot of my friends. That's why I think memes are so popular, because they are popularized by Black internet use, so it's like an extension of a Black vernacular. I wanted them to be these almost subliminals that you could forget about but that would take you back to Palace's interior. One thing we were trying to play with was a fairly universal experience, which is that you're somewhere you don't want to be but you can't leave. Whether that's a job you don't like or another challenging situation, for financial reasons you cannot leave the setting. There's a different way that you have to display your emotion, and I just thought that was a funny way of interjecting that. Also, there's this scene where she is doing a makeup tutorial, and I was thinking of Diamond being really good at playing these different modes of address. The humor worked really nicely visually against [cinematographer] Daisy [Zhou]'s gorgeous imagery.

Speaking of Palace's makeup tutorial, the way that you folded the fabric and feel of the internet into the film itself is very cool, particularly when it comes to daily occurrences and interactions. In addition to Palace filming her make-up routine, I especially loved the way you shot FaceTime calls. What felt interesting and important to you about portraying these facets of daily digital life?

We wanted to challenge ourselves to focus on the affect of texting with somebody, or being on the phone, or FaceTiming, or looking at a meme—that way that you're in conversation and you see something [on your phone]. These streams are constantly going in your consciousness. I mean, I talk to myself constantly. And Diamond was saying sometimes when she's doing her makeup—that's how this came up in conversation—she would [say aloud to herself], "And usually I just put a little bit of moisturizer on…." My nephews are five, and my brother has sent me a video of both of them talking on the phone, saying,

"Hey guys, what's up?" to no one. They think that's how you do stuff—you just introduce it like you're on a vlog because that's what they've been watching since they were born. If I go do something, I'd be like, "Hey guys, I'm here in Kingston right now." A film I made in 2017 [*Incense, Sweaters & Ice*] used a lot of text bubbles, which was right for that. At the time, people were like, "That's going to look so dated," and I was like, "That's the point!" I wanted it to feel very time-stamped in that way. But with this film, I wanted it to feel a bit more romantic. It's like if I watch an older film and I see the phone in it—for some reason I'm thinking of Godard—but it's kind of romantic. You're like, "Oh, look at that old phone."

I also think that what you were saying about your nephews is this idea of how part of one's consciousness now involves having an invisible audience present at all times. How did you go about integrating this idea of performance from our personal spaces to our public ones?

That was a really big note with all the actors. When I was speaking with the actors, there was this idea that your performance can shift because it's going to go from private to public, even if the space is still intimate. So, a crit feels—as someone who's both been in many of them but also taught many of them—very strange and performative. And you try not to, but teaching is also performative; it has the quality of speaking to an audience. It depends on the format of the class, but it's hard to avoid that. So, in the first scene I'm trying to show each of these professors monologuing to a degree, with a lot of empathy for the fact that sometimes you're just making it up. There's a couple of times where what they're saying just peters out. Also, Palace as a character behaves much differently with her teachers in a group than even with a teacher one on one, or with her friends, like how she is when they're shit-talking versus being in a room where she feels less comfortable. And this is definitely my experience of the world, but I felt that grad school was highly performative. One of the more irritating things to me was that I felt like sometimes you're trying to have a conversation with somebody and there was an invisible audience. And I'm like, "We're in the middle of the woods. Who the fuck are you talking to right now?" So, when I was thinking about it, especially in speech—the film is fairly talky—I felt that was the nature of discourse in the space that I was in. Sometimes, you're just like, "You can stop now. No one's around. You can be normal, OK? I just want to know who you are." Maybe people felt that way about me as well, I don't know.

Let's talk about the drug sequence. As you mentioned before, even when these people are on molly, ketamine, weed, coke or whatever, they're still discoursing and talking out of their ass. I thought that rang so funny and true—this inability to admit that you've lost your mind and senses a bit, that political commentary from you might not be needed right now.

It feels that way often, this absurdity where you're like, "Why are you talking to me about this? I'm high as shit right now."

The way you capture this drug-fueled night of partying is simultaneously horrifying and euphoric. Could you speak a little bit about how you went about executing this with your team?

I really do want to shoutout my DP, Daisy Zhou. She's incredible and was very collaborative. We talked a lot about some of the films I was interested in. I really like Tsai Ming-liang. *Rebels of the Neon God* is one I was thinking about because those night sequences are so captivating. Then, I was thinking about the sense of time upstate. You could say that anytime you leave the city your day just feels so long. You're like, "What? It's only 4:00 p.m.?" I liked these speed changes. Then, I was thinking about the Persephone myth or *Dante's Inferno*, but Persephone was more key to me. You start above ground but go through this underworld. Then there's catharsis and chaos, and those are intertwined. And we really wanted it to be vivid—to actually feel like you are on drugs. We have these different modes, as we were calling them. One [is] where you feel like you're watching a bunch of people on drugs, but you're not that high, and it's like what you were just describing:

"Why are you still trying to talk about theory?" Then [there's] another one, where you're closer and in the space with everyone. We did a lot of in-camera effects and used light in a really interesting way because I liked the idea of the conversation becoming visible, like this idea of everyone's light leaking out, or Palace starting to be able to see it all. So, we used a rigging setup and then did VFX on top of that, which was really fun because some of my VFX people had never done drugs. I was like, "You know, it's like you're on mushrooms. It just needs to be a little more vivid and saturated," and they just had blank stares. So, that was a fun challenge, to be really specific about what the different drugs felt like. And also to make it fun! It started with her being like, "No, I'm not going to do this." Then it was, "You know what? I should celebrate." And then it was like, "Why did I do this?"

The scene captures that scary-fun feeling after a certain point of excess. Like, "I can't really control my body or thoughts, but I'm OK with that."

Yeah, the loss of control is part of the fun of it! Especially if you're the type of person—which most people who are in graduate programs are—who tries to do "The Thing," you know? They're goal oriented, and they're like, "How can I improve myself?" or "growth mindset" or whatever the fuck. You get to break that.

It's almost like therapy, it's kind of necessary.

Yeah, definitely. I've done a lot of drugs, if you can't tell from the movie [laughs].

I think *The African Desperate* does a fantastic job at illustrating the really micro, cringy ways that large-scale injustices manifest in what seem like totally inconsequential interactions. There's the white girl who loudly complains, "Oh my god, I hate white women." Or the fact that literally no one in the trust fund-coded cohort has an Android charger. These moments are all infused with a really clear-cut sense of humor that illustrates how absurd and awful these scenarios are. How do you as an artist find humor in these otherwise frustrating and sometimes unfair situations?

For me, humor has been huge. It's just my outlook in life, but it's also been a survival mechanism. I'm really interested in the moment where humor signals pain, because I find myself in these situations where I'm like, "They just said that?" but it's also absurd to me. Anger is also a notion that I wanted to have running throughout the film because I think that it's [an emotion] that sometimes Black people avoid, for obvious reasons. It's quite dangerous to display anger. Anger is this catalyzing emotion that often is tied to sadness, a real grief over what you're experiencing or what you're unable to experience sometimes. So, I wanted to have all those feelings of sadness and anger and humor because I find the absurdity in a lot of it. One time, I was trying to describe what racism feels like, and I was saying that whenever I've been truly discriminated against, my first feeling is actually genuine confusion over what's happening because it doesn't make any sense, you know? Philosophically, it's nonsense, so I treat it as such, and a lot of times it's really funny to me.

I was interested specifically in the format of the MFA program. [MFA programs] take all the structural issues of the art world and play them out on an interpersonal level. One part of that is that there are differing experiences that people are having, and there might be someone you are very close to who does not understand what you're going through. And that can be quite painful and sort of sad—you realize the edge of your relationship. Sometimes you can grow, and sometimes you're like, "I'm done with that, I don't need those people." But that doesn't mean that it's easy to be in a relationship with everyone. When you're in these predominantly white spaces, you're going to have white friends who say dumb shit to you. Them's the breaks. I don't have anything quite elegant to say about that, just that that's a part of the experience. It's been my life experience that I haven't seen reflected very much—when you're like, "Aw, come on. You can't say that." [laughs]

What also makes it difficult is that white people act more offended about being called out on their racism than most people of color do when they're actually in a racist situation. Especially in these liberal arts institutions.

When I taught at CalArts, there was a study being done, and they had this huge faculty meeting where they revealed that the outside board had determined that despite CalArts' progressive attitudes, students and faculty were experiencing a lot of racism. I was like, "You needed to call in an outside consultant?"

They could have just asked anybody on campus.

Literally, just ask anyone.

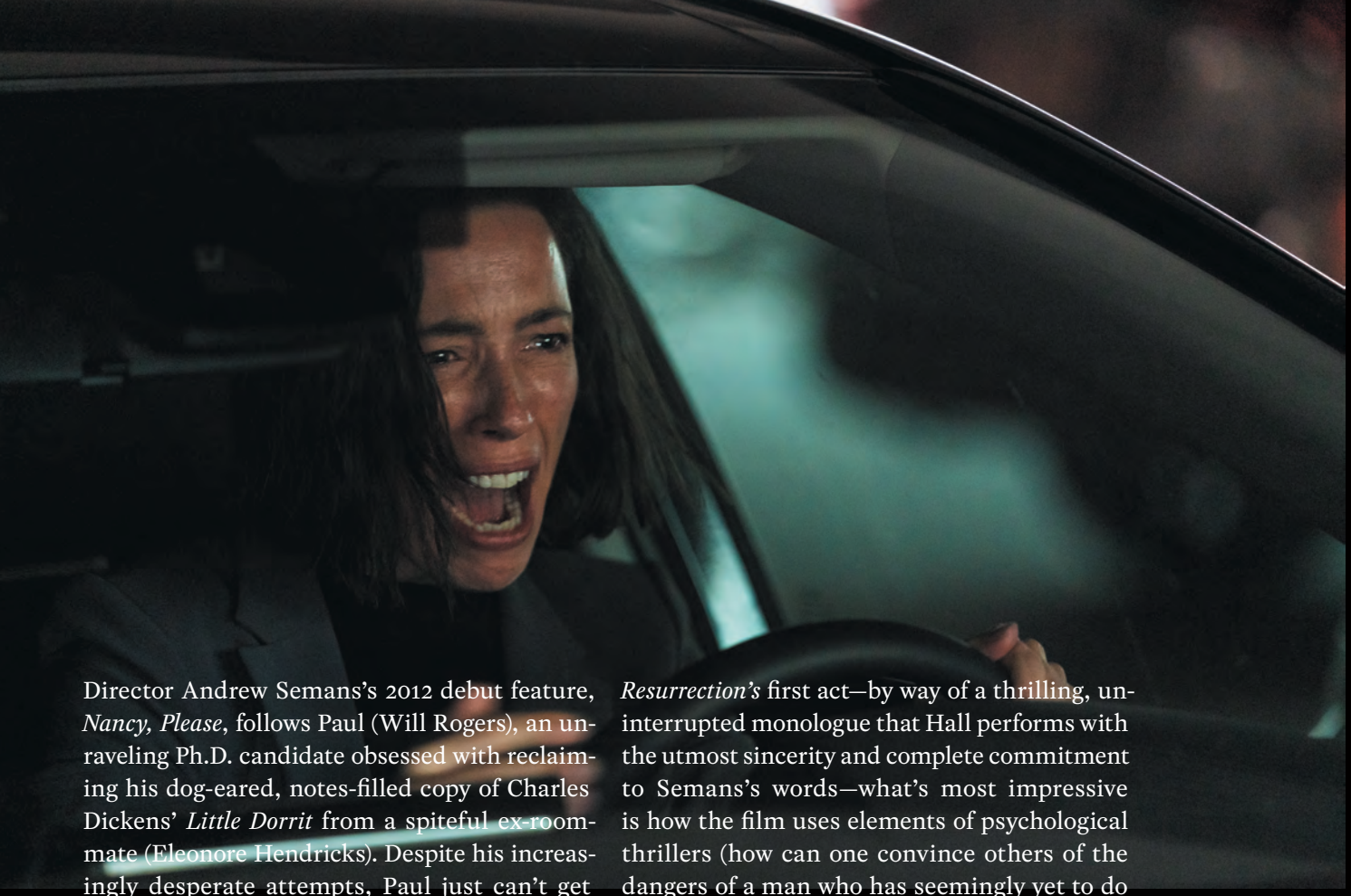
Do you see yourself skewing more toward feature films, the white cube gallery space, or melding the two in your practice?

I'm excited to figure out how to meld the two. I have two shows up, but another's opening next week. So, there's the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Hessel Museum, then the MCA Chicago. Then, I'm on a little bit of input time. There's been a lot of output, so I'll just be thinking about writing another feature film right now. But I don't know, I'm actually looking forward to things I can't imagine. I'm trying to make space for that to happen right now.

Images: *The African Desperate*, courtesy of Dominica Inc.

THE RUNNING WOMAN

With *Resurrection*, which contains a riveting performance by Rebecca Hall, writer-director Andrew Semans has made a boldly original psychological horror film dealing with repressed trauma and the anxieties of being a parent. Interview by Erik Luers.



Director Andrew Semans's 2012 debut feature, *Nancy, Please*, follows Paul (Will Rogers), an unraveling Ph.D. candidate obsessed with reclaiming his dog-eared, notes-filled copy of Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* from a spiteful ex-roommate (Eleonore Hendricks). Despite his increasingly desperate attempts, Paul just can't get Nancy to relinquish the book from their formerly shared apartment. As the ex-roomie continues to live rent-free in Paul's head, his deteriorating mental state prevents him from completing his thesis. Less interested in why Nancy won't relinquish the book than why Paul so easily accepts his newfound submissiveness, *Nancy, Please* is a dark comedy about not being able to move forward and how one's life can crumble as a result.

A decade later, Semans's second feature, *Resurrection*, is equally focused on a toxic relationship from which the story's lead cannot break free. Margaret (Rebecca Hall), a single mother in Albany, raises her 17-year-old daughter (Grace Kaufman) with an overprotectiveness that would concern even the most staunch helicopter parent. One afternoon at a medical conference, Margaret recognizes a man (Tim Roth) who prompts her to recoil in physical disgust and abject terror. Over the subsequent days, the mysterious gentleman will continue to pop up in public spaces with seemingly no purpose other than to intimidate and threaten the safety of Margaret and her daughter. Who is he, and what secrets from her past does he hold?

While the man's identity and connection to Margaret is revealed by the conclusion of *Resurrection's* first act—by way of a thrilling, uninterrupted monologue that Hall performs with the utmost sincerity and complete commitment to Semans's words—what's most impressive is how the film uses elements of psychological thrillers (how can one convince others of the dangers of a man who has seemingly yet to do anything wrong?) and gory body-horror to tell a story about a mentally abusive relationship. Not since *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* have a man and woman so sadistically battled over the memory of a loved one, happily waging psychological warfare to exert one's control over their shared narrative.

From a first draft written soon after the theatrical release of *Nancy, Please* to the script's 2019 appearance on The Black List (an annual survey of the year's best yet-to-be-produced screenplays), *Resurrection* has taken a long journey to the silver screen. Shot during the summer of 2021 and premiering at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival, *Resurrection* seems poised to take Semans's career another step forward. This is also true of his personal life: in addition to his second feature, the writer-director is eagerly anticipating the summer arrival of his first child. I spoke with Semans about his career between his two features, *Resurrection's* extended gestation into production, his appreciation for intricate sound design, his love of monologues and more.

Resurrection opens in theaters on July 29th from IFC Films and hits streaming on August 5th via Shudder.

As it's been a decade since the premiere of *Nancy, Please*, I wanted to begin after that film's release. What path were you hoping your career would take?

Nancy, Please premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2012. It was a microbudget movie made for very little money; nonetheless, we were quite scrappy and able to get it made and, after Tribeca, it went on to receive a small theatrical release from the mighty Factory 25. While the critical response was good, nobody saw the movie. It didn't exactly launch my career into the stratosphere! After *Nancy, Please* was done, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I didn't have another project planned, nor did I have a career trajectory in mind. I was in the wilderness for a while, at least in terms of my career. Creatively, I felt a bit disillusioned. I didn't know where my strengths were as a writer or director, so I was a little blue.

Gradually, I took an interest in some other stories and ideas and tried writing scripts that were more commercial. I was hoping that I might be able to break in [to Hollywood] as a screenwriter and make some money, but even that didn't really work. I'm not very good at imitating other writers, which, to a certain degree, was what I was trying and failing to do. I started writing *Resurrection* as an antidote to that, where I would give myself permission to write whatever interested me and follow my impulses, my unconscious, and see where it took me. I didn't think anyone would take an interest in the script, nor did I think it would go anywhere, but it turned out to be the screenplay of mine that people were most interested in. I felt weirdly vindicated, and once I'd gone through a few drafts, it started getting noticed by people whom I was interested in working with. From there, the long, slow climb to production began.

Is it true that part of the inspiration came from a friend who had been struggling with a toxic relationship? Knowing that you yourself were not a parent while developing and directing the film, what led you to writing from an almost strictly female point of view about motherhood and maternal protectiveness?

I found myself intrigued by the parental vigilante genre that continues to be very popular. I must've had the *Taken* movies on my mind and was attracted to the genre as something to mess around with. It felt very primal, like something anyone could understand and relate to regardless of whether or not they were a parent. "Parent protects child from dangerous predator" is such a simple and emotionally gripping concept, right? I was intrigued by how parental revenge/vigilante movies trade on and exploit fears around parenting, of being unable to keep your child safe or

protect them from injury, harm or exploitation. These are very natural, deep-seated fears that I wanted not only to exploit but also to provide with a grandiose, narcissistic fantasy. Margaret is a normal parent who is suddenly transformed into a sort of unstoppable superhero when her child is threatened. I think this idea is very appealing to parents and non-parents alike: "If the thing I love most in this world is threatened, then I will turn into something more than human. I will be[come] indomitable."

I began filling in the basics of the story, the specific traits involved in the idea of a parent whose child is threatened and who must act alone to protect them. I immediately based the parent character, at least initially, on my own mother. And, as I was trying to figure out a way into this genre and its trappings, a friend of mine became involved in an unhealthy relationship with a very toxic, sociopathic individual. I was witnessing it play out firsthand and doing my best to try to help her and understand the incredibly dangerous bond that had formed between them. Really, it was a trauma bond that had formed between them. I found it very frightening but also fascinating. As I researched the subject [of trauma bonds] and learned more about the psychology of victim and victimizer in these relationships, it influenced my script in a significant way. I've had the misfortune of knowing a couple of true malignant narcissists in my life, real sociopathic men—I guess it's inevitable, working in the film industry—and they served, to one degree or another, as inspiration for David, the character played by Tim Roth.

Over the years in which you were receiving attention for the script, were you returning to it every few months to revise or work on a new draft? Or did you lock it away in a drawer and resist that temptation?

It became a backburner project. I had other things I was trying to write, so I would work on *Resurrection* piecemeal or whenever the spirit moved me. It did not come out in one big, cathartic gush [laughs]. It wasn't a case of being up for 72 hours and writing the script continuously, then locking it away. It was pieced together over a long time, but the amount of time I actually spent writing the screenplay was, if you were to add it all up, fairly short, at least when creating early drafts.

Was being included on The Black List in 2019 a turning point for the project?

It certainly helped, and it legitimized the project in the eyes of some people in the industry. It's a nice feather in your cap to have, and if you say that a certain script is on The Black List, people are often inclined to pay more attention and take it more seriously. Rebecca [Hall] coming onboard was the big turning point for us, though. [In addition to starring in the film, Hall served as an executive producer.]

Did the numerous production companies involved, including Secret Engine and the newly formed Square Peg, come aboard fairly early? Was there a domino effect where one company signed on to develop the project and connected you to another?

I initially got the script to Tory Lenosky and Alex Scharfman, who at that time were working at Jay Van Hoy and Lars Knudsen's production company, Parts & Labor, which now no longer exists. Once the company disbanded, Tory and Alex remained interested in the film and wanted to keep working on it, so I went with them. Around that time, Alex was in the early stages of forming a production company, Secret Engine, with [producers] Lucas Joaquin and Drew Houpt, so the film subsequently became a project with Secret Engine and Tory Lenosky. They all ultimately produced the movie. Lars came back on a little later, having formed the production company Square Peg with [*Hereditary* and *Midsommar* writer-director] Ari Aster, to help out. Like a lot of indie movies, it took a long time and required real patience and dedication, which I'm lucky the producers had. They didn't get discouraged. They stuck around, and God bless them for it.

Did the script always specify that its two leads be English?

No, it didn't.

I'm assuming that change was made once Rebecca Hall signed on, and watching the film, I was really struck by the idea of two English characters with a dark, shared past

HOW THEY DID IT

Camera
Alexa Mini LF with Canon K35 lenses

Editing System
AVID Media Composer

Color Correction
DaVinci Resolve, graded in a theatrical environment using a custom color pipeline and project-specific film emulation

coming back into each other's lives in… Albany, New York. Was setting the story in the state's capital also a later development?

That addition also came later. Regarding the characters being English, the script was originally written with American [characters], and when Rebecca joined the film, she was planning to play the role as an American. She frequently acts with an American accent, and she's very good at it! But at a certain point, it was Rebecca suggesting, "I would like to do this with my English accent." She hadn't used her native accent [in a film] in some time, and I didn't see any issue with it at all. I actually quite like [her character being English], in that it creates a sense of difference and separation between herself and her environment. There's a sort of alien presence to [her character], as if she feels as though she's from another land. It felt appropriate. Later on, once we had another English actor, Tim [Roth], on board, if Rebecca was to be using her English accent, it would've been silly for Tim to not use his, and it was very easy adjusting the script to accommodate that. Again, I liked the idea of having these two people who don't belong in this rather mundane-seeming American environment, somehow otherized by the environment they find themselves in. It felt right, and I think both actors were more comfortable speaking in their normal voices.

The script was originally set in New York City, but, for a variety of practical reasons, we did not shoot there. However, choosing to film [and set the story in] Albany wasn't a choice made for creative reasons but for a host of production-related ones. Albany is a strange and fascinating city, a very odd place that's frequently both beautiful and bleak. There are several bleak landscapes that I really came to appreciate and like for the film. At first glance, it seems like such an ostensibly mundane city, but then you look again and it's not. It's very eclectic and old, and honestly one of my regrets about the movie is that we didn't maximize the Albany landscape enough, primarily due to time constraints. We couldn't take full advantage of the city's infrastructure, which still saddens me, as visually, it's a very cool, cinematic city.

You open the film with the camera locked on Margaret's intern, Gwyn (Angela Wong Carbone), recounting a toxic relationship she's currently stuck in and apparently seeking Margaret's advice. It's a kind of one-shot on Carbone, then we hear Hall, off-camera, asking follow-up questions as if she's Gwyn's inquisitive therapist. Not long after this scene, Margaret herself delivers a monologue (to Gwyn) about her own toxic relationship.

The notion of opening the film with an extended shot of Gwyn was always in the script and was actually the first scene I wrote. To be honest with you, I don't know what impulse led to [shooting the scene in that way]. I think I liked the idea of withholding the protagonist for a moment and enjoying the slight reversal there, the idea that you feel that Gwyn is likely going to be the lead character—or, at least, a lead character—then, at the end of the scene, we switch over to the person who is actually the lead. We also shot a whole take from Rebecca's side and tried a version of the scene where we cut back and forth in a more conventional, shot/reverse shot way, but it just felt boring and didn't have the same emotional impact. I like the way we shot the scene, as yes, it sets the viewer up for Margaret's monologue later in the film, like "Oh, this is the kind of movie that might have a sustained, near static shot on a person for quite some time!" It just felt right.

I believe you shot Margaret's big monologue twice and that at one point you even considered interspersing it with edited-in flashbacks of the memory she's describing. Now, it's primarily a static shot of Rebecca Hall with a few subtle zooms snuck in. How did you envision the look of that scene?

The shot was primarily influenced by Alan Arkin's 1971 film, *Little Murders*. Have you seen that?

Yes, I have.

I love *Little Murders*. It's one of my favorite movies. It's a very talky film, and that's somewhat due to it being based on a play. [Adapting his 1967 Broadway comedy, playwright Jules Feiffer originally penned the film adaptation that, before landing on Alan Arkin as director, was at one point in

pre-production to be helmed by Jean-Luc Godard]. One of the many things I love about that movie is that right at the midway point, Elliott Gould's character brilliantly delivers a wonderful monologue that, up until that point in the movie, is a departure [from his character's enigmatic figure]. We don't really know what makes his character tick. and we don't know anything about his backstory, or at least very little. Then, boom, Gould delivers this origin story in his six- or seven-minute-long monologue, all done in a single take. I loved the formal strategy being employed there. I did something very similar in *Resurrection*, where, through the first 35 or 40 minutes, you know that there is some significant backstory informing this character's behavior, even if it's not clear what actually occurred. I liked the idea of it all being revealed in one fell swoop and it was always my intention (or hope) that it would be shot as a single take. It was very scary because if the monologue isn't performed impeccably, it's going to completely destroy the movie. At first, it felt like a real risk, but after working with Rebecca for one day, I was wholly confident that she would pull it off brilliantly.

To your earlier question, at a certain point in the script there were in fact very brief dream-like flashbacks interspersed into the monologue, which I thought we should maybe shoot just to have, just in case. I think I was worried that people coming onboard the movie, financiers, might see this three-page, continuous strain of dialogue on the page and respond negatively, like "No way. This is going to completely *ruin* the movie." So, I broke it up to make it, at least on the page, feel more cinematic. I thought that if we were to at least shoot these flashbacks, who knows, maybe we could use them somewhere. In the end, we decided not to shoot them at all. I took them out of the script in the run-up to production, and now I think that if that monologue were intruded upon by flashbacks, it'd be very frustrating and would suck.

Unless my eyes deceive me, the lighting gradually changes during that sequence too, no?

It does.

Rebecca Hall feels more in silhouette. I was curious how, in shooting a performance-heavy long take, you still found ways for the camera to be very active.

There is a very, very slow push-in on Rebecca's face that's almost imperceptible. Now, if you were to fast-forward through it, you could clearly see that the camera does in fact move quite a bit, but it's very slow. And yes, in the color grade, we wanted her to be increasingly enveloped in blackness. Her background melts away and you just see this face looming in black. It was simple to do and didn't require any particular trickery. The idea was, how do we give just a little sense of visual development here (while including movement) and subtly reinforce the trajectory of the story by using blackness that gradually appears to encroach around her? The color gradually drains over the course of the monologue or, at the very least, gets less saturated and much cooler. She looks less and less healthy as the monologue moves forward—but again, all of it is so gradual and incremental that most viewers won't notice.

Is that also true in regard to the lighting in the sequence between Margaret and David at the local diner? When they first sit down in a booth for a tense conversation, the sunlight bathes down on them through the window, but then, as their conversation gets darker, the lighting gets colder.

Yes, we did something similar there. When they're sitting across from each other and David mentions wanting a "kindness"

from Rebecca, we shift the tone of the lighting, darkening it a bit and making it feel a bit more somber and threatening, although hopefully in a way that's subtle and doesn't knock you over the head. Honestly, we did that in a few scenes. The visual strategy in general was that we wanted the movie to be very simple, rather austere in its design. We didn't want to do a lot of coverage and didn't want a style that called attention to itself and was very expressionistic. We wanted to maintain a sense of a rather mundane reality while, at the same time, shooting in a way that was handsome, attractive and cinematic, but that didn't call attention to any particular visual strategies or trickery.

I like the idea of this story, which is admittedly quite outlandish and operatic, taking place in an environment that felt extremely familiar, even banal. The film takes place in offices and in apartments, a park, a hotel room, etc.—boring, commonplace locations. What we tried to do was maintain that sense of banality while funnily and insidiously bringing in a sense of menace, of paranoia, in a way that isn't too overt or immediately detectable by the audience. It was always a balancing act. How can we make it look real and relatively plain but also suspenseful and thematically appropriate? And how do we make sure it still all looks good? I think we found a nice balance.

Did finding a balance between banality and threatening menace also apply to how you approached the film's sound design? At times, the aural landscape feels like a merging of Rebecca Hall's breathing, Jim Williams' score, and other ambient sounds that subtly begin to lurk in.

We gave ourselves much greater permission to be stylized or expressionistic in the sound. I imagined the visuals were the facts of the case, and the sound was Margaret's [subjective] experience. We certainly pushed that in certain scenes and refrained from doing so in others. On a sound/audio track, you can get away with doing a lot of weird or goofy shit, and the audience doesn't seem to notice. Hopefully they feel it and it goes on to augment their experience, but if you are very, very stylized visually, it's just much more apparent, consciously, to the viewer, than if you're [playing with audio]. On a soundtrack, you can get away with a lot more, so in the sound design and the mix, we gave ourselves more latitude to really mix things up. Our sound designer, Ric Schnupp, had a really good time with that.

Was that also the case in the scene where you incorporate Margaret hearing a baby's cries emerging from the loud traffic underneath the overpass bridge? Were you working with separate audio tracks (i.e., a baby crying, very loud cars) and going back and forth to raise the volume on one while lowering the volume of another?

Somewhat. That particular scene where Rebecca is apparently listening to her infant child was a lot of fun because we were going to try to incorporate the infant sounds within a swirling mass of environmental sounds from the busy roadway above. Much of those sounds came via sirens and loud trucks and other things passing by. We took those environmental sounds and blended them into a big mass, while also incorporating wailing baby cries. We had many discussions about how explicit we wanted those baby cries to be. Do we want [the viewer] to just detect them? Do we want to make sure everybody hears them and doesn't miss it? How much should they be integrated in with other similar sounds in the environment? I think Ric was a bit disappointed [with me], since he had these crazy baby noises built into [the sound] and then I'd say, "No, I think we actually want to be more subtle here." [laughs] I think Ric was a tiny bit heartbroken that these nerve-jangling baby screams he had so lovingly put together had to eventually be discarded.

Given the heightened situations some of your characters are placed in, what was your experience like directing the performances, and Rebecca Hall, specifically?

The actors on this movie made it incredibly easy for me. They're all very experienced, and each had a strong sense of what I and the whole team were going for. It didn't require a major intervention from me to get them to a place that was appropriate or effective in each given scene. With

Images courtesy of IFC Films and Shudder

Rebecca, she just came ready every day and without any discussion or guidance, would just knock it out of the park on the first take. It became apparent to me early on in production that the less I directed Rebecca, the better. Had I tried to verbalize any adjustments, I just would've gotten in her way. If we did a take that wasn't 100 percent perfect, we would just do another one and knew that that take would be remarkable. She is a director's dream and does all the work herself. That's extremely welcomed on a movie like this, where there's so little time and very little money. Having her come in and just nail it from the jump on every scene, on every setup, was an enormous gift to the production.

I also appreciate your use of Rosemary Howard in the film [a character actress, Howard plays a small role in *Resurrection* as a stern hotel desk clerk whom Margaret encounters].

Rosemary is great! Please include a shoutout to Rosemary in this. [laughs] Also, her scream is so intense. She's the scariest screamer ever. When she screamed at Rebecca on the first take in the [hotel room scene], the entire crew jumped. Everybody was terrified, and nobody knew this woman had it in her! That too was quite a revelation for us.

As you're nearing the release of this film, how would you say the project has grown over the years? I'm referring both to the long journey the film took to getting made as well as your own personal journey with the story. For example, you're currently on the cusp of parenthood. I'm sure the long duration of time it took to get the film made isn't something you're eager to go through again, but was the decade of living with this story rewarding in other ways?

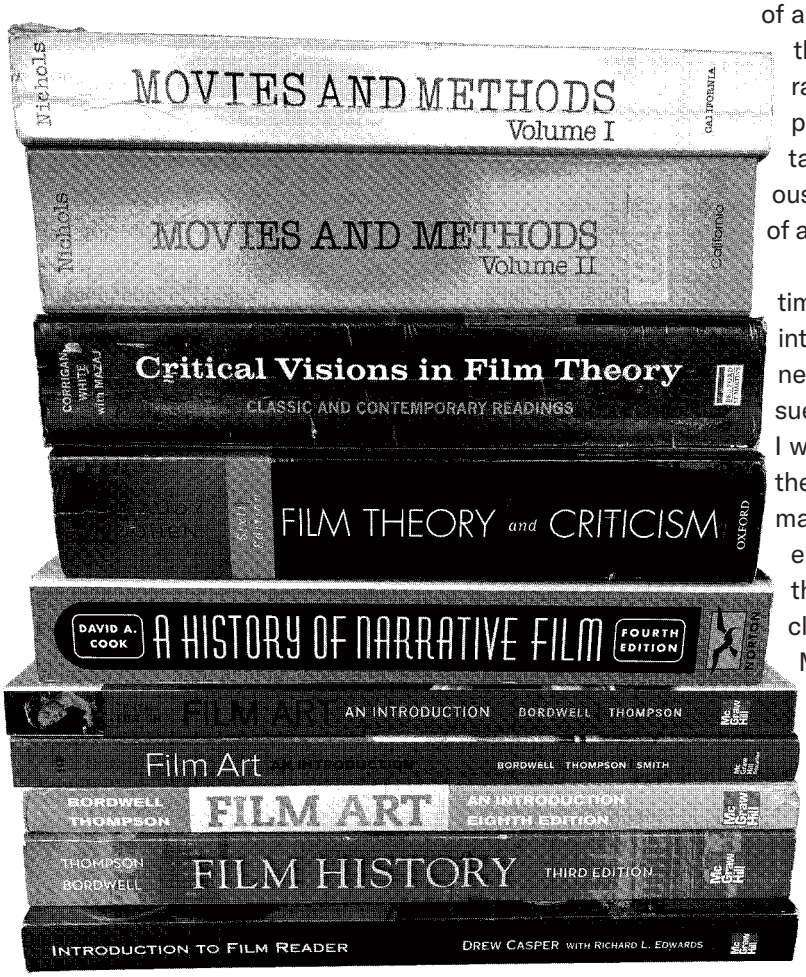
Oh my god.

It's a big life question, I know.

I don't know. Ask me that question in a year, and I might have more perspective on it! Right now, honestly, I still love the film. When you make a movie, it becomes such a part of your day-to-day life. It becomes more about completing a series of tasks or identifying challenges and new problems to solve. Often, I think I forget to step back. We've had good success with it thus far, but I'm only now waving goodbye to it. Saying that it dominated about a decade of my life is true, and while I still love it, I'm eager to move on to telling other stories. A couple of big releases in my life are happening at more or less the same time in July. In a couple of years, I will have been a parent for a couple of years, and I'll probably look back on the film and ask myself, "Knowing what I know now, what did I get right and wrong about parenting in this movie?" But I have no idea how I'll answer that question, because I haven't had the experience yet.

TEXT AND CONTEXT

Peter Labuza on rethinking film studies for a new generation.



My students know how to edit footage and use a zoom lens; they're experts on lighting and composing a shot. But because they learned those techniques through their phones to upload to social media platforms, they use them in a completely different manner than what usually gets taught in a filmmaking class. It might be easy to dismiss these skills, developed mostly to impress their friends, but more and more jobs are looking for university graduates who can create, use and distribute video content (or just light themselves for Zoom). In that model, appreciating a movie is not exactly a requirement.

How does one approach understanding filmmaking when the traditional narrative feature is hardly the dominant form of media? Smartphone filmmaking has given introductory cinema classes like my own, "The Art of Film," a unique challenge. I began teaching my class—essentially Film 101—in 2021 at San José State University, a state school where many students work part- or full-time and often come from first-generation backgrounds. Living in the shadow of Silicon Valley, many students focus on STEM and business majors but end up in my class when looking to fill a general education requirement with something a little more fun than Shakespeare.

However, the idea of the 90-to- 120-minute feature is in some ways *closer* to Shakespeare, a historical form of art. I noticed this when students watched our first film of the semester, Joe Dante's *Matinee*. Its very traditional narrative construction is right out of the classical Hollywood playbook and would hardly surprise most viewers of a certain age. Yet, a number of students considered the numerous subplots and characters to be as complicated as those of any Christopher Nolan film.

Given these changing dynamics, I've spent a lot of time thinking about how to keep the core of these kinds of intro classes by merging the basics of film aesthetics with new approaches that might correspond more closely to issues students faced in their educational and working lives. I was not about to leave mise-en-scène or deep focus by the wayside but wanted to think of additional tracks that matched the conditions and anxieties expressed by workers, critics and artists in the industry today. I am hardly the first person to try to rethink the introduction to film class. My fellow members of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, particularly in their Teaching Media dossiers, have written wonderfully about innovations they have developed in the classroom. But some of my whims took me in different directions that could not only help young filmmakers but could also alter the mindset of an expanding market landscape of media workers.

Introduction to Film usually features standard components no matter where it is taught. Instructors often begin with a discussion of aesthetics you will likely

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recognize from your old Bordwell/Thompson *Film Art* textbook: narrative, mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, sound. The general idea is to teach film language so students can grasp how films make meaning, whether by examining why the camera puts some details in the frame in focus over others or more complex ideas around how a film develops a message separate from the main character. My own lectures use scenes from recent works like *Moonlight*, *Parasite*, *The Book of Eli* and *Marie Antoinette*, with a few historical examples thrown in (I cannot resist showing that opening long take from *Touch of Evil*). Given that these are often terminology heavy, I frame lectures as learning a new language students see all the time but have never had to articulate before.

But these terms are partially what students find confusing: "Editing" for them isn't arranging shots but actually doing color correction, while eyeline matches hardly seem critical for designing a scene. Ironically, in my experimental film seminar—where we ignored film terminology all together—students found it easier to engage with the images when not having to consider how traditional films are put together. In the age of the smartphone, that *Touch of Evil* long take has lost its appeal; what students desired were ways to think about film beyond the text itself.

Covering the basic principles of moviemaking rarely takes a semester, so professors usually follow a few different paths from there—looking over colleagues' syllabi, I found most included a mix of genre studies, film theory, alternative forms like animation and documentary or issues in representation or globalization. Having sat through these lectures as a teaching assistant, I know they can be effective. However, I also found they could require intensive historical frameworks that felt anachronistic in today's media landscape. Genre studies emphasizes the differences between horror and noir, but students more commonly now examine the differences between YouTube tutorials and longform television. Another example: documentary studies often emphasizes the differences between filmmaker and subject, but most nonfiction that students watch has entirely blurred that line without the political connotations once associated with doing so.

In my first attempt at the class, I decided to emphasize the route I had taken as an undergraduate with film theory, thinking about the nature of cinema and its role in society. Students read André Bazin, Sergei Eisenstein, Laura Mulvey, Stuart Hall and bell hooks, among others. My hope was to give students an introduction to college-level reading through "difficult texts" while also engaging with the properties that make the moving image unique. I was not entirely surprised that my students found the language in these articles challenging, but they actually had much *more* trouble grasping the ideas when I laid them out in my lecture. Questions about realism, the apparatus and the spectator felt entirely out of place with the present moment. Eisenstein's theories about montage and creating political ideas felt old hat given the amount of election ads they see every year. And how did the apparatus control and influence spectators if they were just watching a phone on the subway? There was some value in these essential texts, but I had to spend more time explaining the politics of mid-century Europe than how they related to today.

I realized that while I enjoyed film theory, these were not the questions I had in my research, either. The best scholars I know today are using different strategies and tools that were not around when these foundational texts were written. They are rethinking how audiences react and relate to film, analyzing labor dynamics, calculating environmental damage caused by DCPs and finding the hidden contributions of BIPOC workers in every nook and cranny of history. If this class was to introduce students to why they might study film, I realized I should teach it in a way that better reflected what scholars today think is important in the field. I kept the films the same—canonical works like *His Girl Friday* and *The Watermelon Woman* along with newer indies like *The Fits* and *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore*—but reoriented my lectures toward why film studies still mattered.

In my third go-round, I broke the semester into two parts: *text* and *context*. We would try first to understand "what is a film," then open up to see how films interacted in society. I tried to lean into what made me most excited about thinking about film and, in turn, what might excite students. My second half of the class thus took up five core topics: industry, representation, audiences, technology and labor. Rather than focus on canonical articles, I turned my focus toward contemporary


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research and issues that students knew and experienced: how is Netflix changing how movies were made? Why do all Marvel films look the same? How is it possible there is simultaneously more and less diversity in the industry? I wanted to make the course feel specific and give students the tools to see how filmmaking works today by moving beyond what the industry made to who made and received it.

I thought students would enjoy the less textbook-heavy material but was still surprised how much more it mattered. Their discussion posts became lively with personal experience and argumentation that was missing in the more straightforward first half. Students were still somewhat lost with Laura Mulvey but latched onto Kristen Warner's ideas of analyzing casting decisions and forcing actors into what she calls "plastic representation." My week on audiences focused on how different screening experiences could transform the meaning of a film; students fondly recalled the differences between watching films on their laptops compared to roaring crowds for films like *Spider-Man*. During my week on technology, I explained the differences between celluloid and digital projection by centering how it transformed the labor specialization of projectionists. Most notably, students found surprising resonances while reading Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's famed essay on mass culture, connecting it not just to the Marvel Cinematic Universe but also their TikTok and Instagram feeds.

More importantly, I centered workers rather than artists. Given the pitfalls and misunderstandings that come with auteurism, I tried to situate filmmaking as a creative endeavor negotiated by dozens, if not hundreds, of individuals, both before and after they step onto a film set. Rather than a perfunctory acknowledgment of labor, I wanted them to examine how collaboration and control at any level—from corporate shareholders to gaffers—could ultimately change the meaning of a film in the ways we analyzed in the first half of the class. It's one thing to teach why a creator might choose a Steadicam rig over a dolly shot for creative purposes, but I wanted students to understand that it often was a question of budget or scheduling. When it came to censorship, we looked at documents from the Department of Defense regarding Ang Lee's *Hulk* and compared them to reports on China's import program and demands made of studio films. Only after a semester discussing how choices came down to creativity *and* studio control did a clip from *Business Insider* promoting TechViz—where studio animators can essentially decide every shot far in advance of working on a set, leaving very little for the director to decide—cause my students to see how and why I emphasized industry and labor and why it matters who makes these decisions.

By orienting the class toward the work of cinema rather than the art, I hoped for them to engage with cultural objects in a way that could eliminate bad habits. If it is easy to be annoyed by criticism that combines analysis and theory with questionable poor-faith tactics for clickbait, I wanted my students to engage with the issues that are at the center of the industry today, like safety, financialization and accessibility. Rather than focus on the realism of a shot, I focused on the reality of Georgia's tax breaks. I ended the class by discussing the unions that dominate Hollywood and noted how, decades before gig workers became a central part of our economy, these unions negotiated issues for freelance workers jumping from studio to studio. These were the kind of things I never learned as an undergraduate that could have entirely transformed how I thought about film. In our last class, I had students look up behind-the-scenes materials on their favorite movies to understand what processes affected their production and learn the names of those workers who made them happen.

For our final screening, I showed Kirsten Johnson's *Cameraperson*. I explained to my students that in a day and age where we see so much of the world through our screens, here was a film that not only valued the idea of a cinema worker, but also asked us to think about how the world changes when we see it through a camera. For my students, understanding who was holding a camera, and why, was just as important as what the camera shows.

Peter Labuza is a media scholar who has taught at the University of Southern California, University of California Berkeley and San Jose State University. He now works as a researcher for the International Cinematographers Guild, IATSE Local 600.

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WORLDS WITHIN SCREENS

Matt Prigge on film schools' embrace of virtual production technology.

In the late 1990s and early aughts, film schools moved away from film itself as digital cameras (and editing) became the main tools. What's happening today may not be quite as seismic but will still change film schools' DNA: the movie and TV industry is moving toward virtual production. Popularized by *The Mandalorian,* virtual production essentially takes green/blue screen to the next level, and in some ways, it reverses traditional workflows. Instead of cast and crew finishing principal photography and then handing it off to an army of VFX techies, the techies create that VFX before anyone steps on set. This is not a fad. "Remember when 3D came in and everyone said this is the real thing? I was like, 'No, it's not,'" remembers Rosanne Limoncelli, who oversees New York University's first virtual production class. "'If it didn't work in the '50s, it's not going to work now.' But VP is a whole different ballgame."

To make *The Mandalorian,* video game designers created immersive 3D backgrounds, which appeared on a massive wall of LED screens in a shooting space known as a volume. If that still sounds like green screen, it's not: with green screen—long used by the likes of Marvel—the backdrop is composited in later. With VP, the background is visible to the performers and, like the screen of a first-person game, can move, with the camera moving in tandem with it. The result is the illusion that actors are inside fantastical (or mundane) photorealistic worlds. (Green screen's not going away—it can still be used with VP to add VFX after principal photography, and it's also much, much cheaper.)

"It's really just shifting all of the CG work from post- to pre-production," says Max Thomas, who teaches game design, including how it applies to VP, at Georgia State University. "I think directors who accept this process will really like it because it puts the control back in their hands, and they have an example of exactly what they want the film to look like before they even have to roll the first cameras."

VP also makes the actors' jobs easier. "If we have a live-action actor, or even someone in a motion capture suit, they can respond directly to what they see on the LED wall," says Olaiya Gardner, who also teaches at GSU. "If you have, let's say, a bullet train going by, you can see it coming and move your body to react to that. With green screen, you can't see that."

Bullet Train, the forthcoming Brad Pitt action movie, is one of a number of productions that have adopted, in part or whole, VP. (Others include *Star Trek: Discovery, Thor: Love and Thunder* and other *Star Wars* shows, like *Obi-Wan Kenobi*.) Not only is it cost-effective, but it's made production easier and safer during the pandemic. Right now, universities are in the early days of adapting to this new (and expensive) technology, with some drawing from both their film and game design departments—divisions that, historically, had only minimal overlap. "I look at it as not necessarily a mesh between the film department and the game design department, more so as the game design department taking a cinematic turn into the industry," says James Clayton Martin, who teaches VFX and motion capture at GSU.

In 2021, NYU debuted "Introduction to Virtual Production," a graduate-level course that's also open to experienced undergrads (i.e., not first years). Students spend the first half of the semester learning Unreal Engine, the 3D game design engine used by *The Mandalorian*. Eventually, they break up into small groups and collaborate on two-minute-long final projects. They can either download available assets to create their worlds or create them themselves, then integrate them with a live actor.

NYU doesn't have a volume on campus. They will starting next summer, when the recently announced Martin Scorsese Institute of Global Cinematic Arts, boasting an LED wall, opens. For now, students remotely access a volume in California. That LED wall is nowhere near the size of the one for *The Mandalorian*, which eats up a huge wall as well as the ceiling—this one's about 10-by-8 feet. Students

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*According to a recent study, 99% of Spring 2021 graduates were employed, pursuing further education, or both within 10 months of graduation.

Image by Mike Lulgjurai, IU School of Informatics and Computing, IUPUI

have access to PTZ, robotic "pan-tilt-zoom" cameras, which require no physical—or in-person—contact. They can do everything via Zoom, even as the school increasingly returns to in-person learning. Because it's still tricky to audition talent mid-pandemic, their actor is just the guy who runs the California studio.

The pandemic sped up NYU's shift to VP, and the same happened at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) that fall. Zebulun M. Wood, co-director of the school's Media Arts and Science program, says he and his colleagues had a lot of time to think about how to not only piece together what became a six-course certificate program, but also how to afford technology that he describes as "pretty prohibitive." (One retailer sells a 25-by-10-feet wall for about $35,000.)

One solution was to see what the university already had. For instance, there was an LED wall in a building for engineering and science labs. Last spring, Wood had five students on-site make a virtual production commercial for the school's virtual production capabilities. They used Unreal to create a cityscape and a medieval realm with a dragon. The result was essentially a proof-of-concept to attract students to the school while teaching the students who made it the tech they could use to get jobs in a rapidly changing industry.

The LED wall at IUPUI is fairly modest, about 10-by-10 feet. The one built at Full Sail University is not. In March, the Florida school opened a $3 million VP studio, which includes an LED wall that's 40-by-16 feet. They then did something unusual: they opened it up to a professional production, namely *9 Windows*, a modernization of *Rear Window* featuring William Forsythe and Michael Paré. The film was mostly set either in a house or a basement, making it an ideal maiden voyage for Full Sail's new volume—and a reminder that VP can be used for more than sci-fi and fantasy. Full Sail has already leased out its giant LED wall to other productions and has been taking meetings with producers. That way, it can make money that can go back into the school (and pay for expensive equipment) while allowing students to learn VP alongside real crews.

The LED wall installed at Georgia State University in Atlanta isn't nearly as wide as the one at Full Sail, about 25-by-15 feet. But GSU has something else: a huge, ambitious MFA program devoted to VP, which launches in the fall, combining film and game design courses. The school is also right in Atlanta—as industry types call it, the Hollywood of the South. When he's not teaching, Thomas works on major productions, like *The Suicide Squad* and the forthcoming *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*, which have embraced VP techniques, and says it's a "total pipeline" from GSU to Atlanta productions, which students visit while in class. "We take students on set with us and put them to work," he says. "They get hands-on onset. They're there from sun-up to sundown, six days a week, sometimes. It's straight into the fire."

One reason these educators are confident that the industry will be moving, at least partially, toward VP is that it's a great expense that winds up saving money. (The same goes for schools that adopt it.) Small teams can be sent to scan environments, which are then recreated inside a set space. With VP, studios "don't have to send 600 people to New Zealand or anything like that," says Thomas. "Your location comes to you."

VP also makes sets safer. "When a student wants to go film on a rooftop location, it's very difficult: the insurance, the risk, something—God forbid—happening," says Sang-Jin Bae, who teaches the VP class at NYU. But with VP, dangerous work can be done safely, on a giant set. "We can easily fabricate a rooftop in Unreal or take photographs and project it onto a 3D space. Then, they're just on an LED wall. They're not up on a rooftop. Space becomes accessible to everyone."

Bae calls VP a "great equalizer," pointing out that Epic, the video game company that first launched Unreal in 1998, makes it free to download, allowing anyone, even non-students, to get their feet wet. "Any time this type of technology comes out, right away it makes science fiction, fantasy and period pieces accessible to the filmmaker who doesn't have the budget to do it."

It's also attracted people outside of either film or TV. At NYU, musical theater students have signed up for the class. "Their specialty is writing music, and all of a sudden they can make a previs[ual] for the soundtrack," Bae says. "It helps them visualize what the story they're trying to tell with their music. They can put visuals to it very quickly. It gives them creative control without them relying on somebody else to make the visuals for them."

Limoncelli says VP jobs are "exploding," and some of those jobs didn't exist before. She points to the shift from film to digital two decades back, when all of a sudden there were new jobs, like a DIT (Digital Imaging Technician). "Instead of the film loader, you needed a DIT to work with the camera department and the post-production people to download everything and set everything up."

It's too early to tell whether VP will completely revolutionize film (and, for that matter, gaming) schools the way the shift from film to digital did, but educators see it as adding more variety. "It's another tool in the shed," says Wood. "And the shed is growing. There'[re] more tools, and the tools are getting cheaper." More and more schools are preparing for VP classes and degrees, including University of Southern California, Florida State University and L.A. Film School. The virtual production initiative at Chapman University in Orange, California, has gone so well that they're about to add a second LED wall.

"It just made sense for us to move alongside the industry so we know our students will be able to get jobs," says Gardner about GSU. "We've already had quite a few students get jobs utilizing Unreal because of our training." Universities can't ignore the jobs that are opening up: "We just want to stay in line with the studios, march parallel to them."

Matt Prigge is a writer and professor based in Brooklyn. His work has appeared in *The Village Voice*, Vulture, The Guardian, Metro, *Philadelphia Weekly* and Uproxx. He teaches at NYU, where he received his Master's in Cinema Studies.

FILM SCHOOL GUIDE

Returning here is *Filmmaker*'s now annual guide to noteworthy film schools across the United States. As before, this is a factual and hopefully useful list of schools, complete with average tuition and deadlines, that range from institutions that focus heavily on production to those that mix critical theory with practice. There are public and private schools, universities with storied histories and relative newcomers to the film education field. Information contained here is a mix of material collated by our staff as well as provided by the schools themselves.

Prospective students should remember that the choice of film school can be a career-defining decision, setting a filmmaker on a clear professional path or perhaps stranding them with a heavy debt burden. Accordingly, we recommend all readers headed to film school do their own further research on the schools included here before applying.

1. Address
2. Degrees available
3. Admission Deadlines
4. New Initiatives 2021–2022
5. Student Resources
6. Notable Faculty
7. Notable Alumni
8. Financial Aid (merit/need-based/both)
9. Undergraduate Student Average Tuition
10. Graduate Student Average Tuition
11. Additional information
12. Website Link

*Responses in quotes come directly from the schools.

Academy of Art University

1. 79 New Montgomery St, San Francisco, CA, 94105
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Rolling
6. Jana Sue Memel (writer/producer), Kris Boxell (production designer)
7. Chris Milk (director, founder of WITHIN)
8. Both
9. $24,624 (domestic), $25,800 (international)
10. $1,171/unit (domestic), $1,227 (international)
12. academyart.edu/art-degree/motion-pictures-television/

AFI Conservatory

1. 2021 North Western Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90027
2. Graduate
3. Dec. 1 (fall 2023 admission)
6. Allan Arkush (director), Stephen Lighthill (DP)
7. Terrence Malick, David Lynch, Darren Aronofsky, Ari Aster (directors)
8. Both
10. $63,575 (including tuition, production materials and fees)
12. conservatory.afi.com

Arizona State University

1. 1001 S Forest Mall, Tempe, AZ 85287
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. "ASU is still accepting first-year student applications for fall 2022."
6. Nonny de la Peña (VR director)
7. Sidney Poitier (actor/director/producer),
8. Both
9. $12,698 (resident); $32,442 (non-resident)
10. $12,014 (resident); $24,498 (non-resident)
12. film.asu.edu/degree-programs

Biola University

1. 13800 Biola Ave, La Mirada, CA 90639
2. Undergraduate
3. Oct. 15 (spring 2023 admissions)
6. Angela Ang (sound/dialogue editor)
7. Scott Derrickson (director)
8. Both
9. $44,382
12. biola.edu/film

California Institute of the Arts (CalArts)

1. 24700 McBean Parkway Valencia, CA 91355
2. Undergraduate, Graduate, Certificate Programs
3. "The application deadline was Wednesday, January 5th, 2022. However, we are still accepting applications for certain programs, and you may still be able to apply. Our application process is very similar to previous years, and is detailed on calarts.edu/apply."
4. "A remodel of the Character and Experimental Animation program student spaces, computer labs, and other facilities will soon be complete."
6. Thom Andersen, James Benning, Juan Pablo González (directors)
7. Pete Docter, Eliza Hittman, Akosua Adoma Owusu (directors)
8. Both
9. $54,440
10. $54,440
12. calarts.edu/admissions/explore-calarts/school-of-film-video

California State University, Northridge (CSUN)

1. 18111 Nordhoff St, Northridge, CA 91330
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. May 31, 2023 (for fall '23)
6. Scott Sturgeon (screenwriter)
7. Joan Chen (actor/director), Tracie Graham (producer)
8. Both
9. $3,532 (for fall '22 semester at 6+ units; out of state students must add $396 per unit)
10. $4,249 (for 6+ units, fall 2022 semester; out of state students must add $396 per unit)
12. csun.edu/mike-curb-arts-media-communication/cinema-television-arts

Chapman University

1. One University Drive, Orange, CA 92866
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Undergraduate: Nov. 1 (early action/decision), Jan. 15 (regular). Graduate: Dec. 1.
6. John Badham (director), Scott Feinberg (entertainment journalist)
7. Justin Simien, Matt and Ross Duffer (directors)
8. Both
9. $60,290
12. chapman.edu/index.aspx

Colgate University

1. 3 Oak Drive, Hamilton NY 13346
2. Undergraduate
3. "Students apply by January 15 and learn of their decision in March."
5. Home of the Flaherty Film Seminar and Flaherty/Colgate Global Filmmaker Residency
6. Mary Simonson (scholar), Jordan Lord (director)
7. Joe Berlinger (director), Jeff Sharp (executive director, The Gotham Film & Media Institute)
8. Need
9. $63,904
11. "Meets 100% of the demonstrated needs of all students. Family Income <$80k, tuition-free; $80k–$125k, 5% of income; $125k–$175k, 10% of income."
12. colgate.edu/colgatecommitment & colgate.edu/fmst

Colorado Film School

1. 9075 E Lowry Blvd, Denver, CO 80230
2. Associate, Certificate Programs
3. Spring '23: Oct. 15 (priority), Oct. 1 (international), Nov. 30 (late)
8. Need-based
9. Fall '21-Summer '22 tuition for 18 credits: $2,909 (resident), $11,475.20 (non-resident)
10. Certificate: $4,750 (resident), $6,450 (non-resident). Associates: $4,900 (resident), $6,700 (non-resident).
11. Colorado Film School is a division of the Community College of Aurora.
12. coloradofilmschool.co/

Columbia College Chicago

1. 600 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60605
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. "Application deadlines for all BFA and BMus programs have passed. Applications remain open for BA and BS programs. Columbia accepts and reviews applications on a rolling basis."
6. Missy Hernandez (screenwriter), Dan Rybicki (director)
7. Janusz Kaminski (DP), Lena Waithe (screenwriter)
8. Both
9. $31,026
10. $34,857
12. colum.edu/ctva

Columbia University

1. Dodge Hall, 2960 Broadway, New York, NY 10027
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Undergraduate: Nov. 1 (early decision), Jan. 1 (regular decision). Graduate: fall 2023 admissions applications open October 1, 2022. Application deadline: December 15, 2022
4. "For the first time in May 2022, the Columbia University Film Festival featured a virtual-reality thesis film."

5. "Student-led organizations include FOCUS – Filmmakers of Color United in Spirit."
6. Mynette Louie (producer), James Schamus (screenwriter/producer/director), Anocha Suwichakornpong (director)
7. Kathryn Bigelow and Sandi Tan (directors), Shrihari Sathe (producer)
8. Both
9. $60,514
10. $66,880
11. "New awards and prizes include The Bobby Kashif Cox Memorial Scholarship, The William Goldstein/Dr. Phibes Award for Screenwriting, and The Focus Features Award for Social and Cultural Impact."
12. arts.columbia.edu/film

DePaul University

1. 243 S. Wabash Ave, Chicago, IL 60604
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Nov. 15 (early admission), Feb. 1 (regular)
6. Michael Flores (editor)
7. Alex Thompson (director)
8. Both
9. $42,189
10. $743/credit hour
12. cdm.depaul.edu/about/Pages/School-of-Cinematic-Arts.aspx

Duke University

1. Durham, NC 27708
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Nov. 1 (early decision, undergrad); Jan. 4 (regular decision, undergrad); Feb. 4 (MFA in Experimental and Documentary Arts)
6. Shambavi Kaul (director)
7. Robert Yeoman (DWP)
8. Both
9. $60,435 (fall '22)
10. $60,220 (fall '22)
12. duke.edu

Emerson College

1. 120 Boylston WSt, Boston, MA 02116
2. Graduate
3. Nov. 1 (Early Decision I), Dec. 1 (EDII), Feb. 1 (regular).
6. John Gianvito (director)
7. CJ Ehrlich (screenwriter)
8. Both
9. $52,288
10. $1,349/credit
12. emerson.edu

Emory University

1. 201 Dowman Dr, Atlanta, GA 30322
2. Undergraduate
3. Nov. 1 (Early Decision I), Jan. 1 (Early Decision II, Regular Decision)
7. Nathan Lee (critic)
8. Merit
9. $54,660
12. filmandmedia.emory.edu/index.html

Fairleigh Dickinson University

1. 285 Madison Avenue, Madison, NJ 07940
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Early decision (binding): Nov. 1. Early Action (non binding): Dec. 1. Regular decision: Jan. 31.
8. Both
9. $33,264
10. $987/credit
12. fdu.edu/film

Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT)

1. 227 W. 27th St, NY, NY 10001
2. Undergraduate, Associate
3. January 1
6. Michelle Handelman and Josh Koury (directors)
7. Joel Schumacher (director)
8. Need
9. $7170 (New York resident), $21,962 (out-of-state)
10. $11,542 (New York resident), $23,586 (out of state)
12. fitnyc.edu/academics/academic-divisions/liberal-arts/film-and-media/index.php

Feirstein Graduate School of Cinema (Brooklyn College)

1. 25 Washington Avenue, Steiner Studios, Brooklyn NY 11205
2. Graduate
3. "Applications accepted on a rolling basis until all places are filled. Each cohort is about 80 students, rolling admissions."
6. John Hadity and Jason Kliot (producers), Raymond DeFelitta (director)
7. Livia Huang (director)
8. Both
10. $21,134.
11. "Production assistants provided by Reel Works. The only film school in the US situated on a working film lot (Steiner Studios in Brooklyn Navy Yard). Four soundstages in our school are devoted to shooting and learning."
12. feirstein.brooklyn.cuny.edu

Florida State University

1. 600 W. College Ave, Tallahassee, FL 32306
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Undergraduate, early action: Oct. 15. Priority: Nov. 1. Regular: Dec. 1. Graduate, fall: July 1. Regular: Nov. 1. Summer: Mar. 1.
6. Victor Nunez and Antonio Méndez Esparza (directors)
7. Barry Jenkins and David Robert Mitchell (directors), Adele Romanski (producer), James Laxton (cinematographer)
9. $5,616 (Florida residents); $18,746 (out-of-state)
10. $9,360 (Florida resident), $22,270 (out-of-state)
12. film.fsu.edu

Full Sail University

1. 3300 University Blvd., Winter Park, Florida, 32972
2. Undergraduate, Graduate, Certificate Programs
5. Career Development, Program Advisory Committee (PAC), Project LaunchBox
6. Carl "Video" Verna (director), James Neihouse (IMAX cinematographer)
7. Darren Lynn Bousman (director)
8. Both
9. $94,000
10. $36,000
11. "Full Sail University has five undergraduate and one graduate-level Film and Television degree program offerings including: Digital Cinematography Bachelors, Film Bachelors, Computer Animation Bachelors, Creative Writing BFA, Show Production Bachelors."
12. fullsail.edu/area-of-study/film-television

Harvard University

1. Cambridge, MA
2. Graduate, Undergraduate, Certificate Programs
3. Undergraduate, Regular Decision: Jan. 1. Graduate: Dec. 15
6. Ross McElwee, Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor (directors)
7. Damien Chazelle, J.P. Sniadecki and Andrew Bujalski (directors)
8. Need
9. $52,659
10. $52,546
12. afvs.fas.harvard.edu

Howard University

1. 2400 Sixth St NW, Washington, DC 20059
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Undergraduate, early action/decision: Nov. 1. Regular: Feb. 15. Graduate: Apr. 1.
6. Haile Gerima (director)
7. Ernest Dickerson (DP/director), Arthur Jafa (visual artist), Bradford Young (DP)
8. Both
9. $61,168
10. $61,168
11. The only HBCU with a graduate film program.
12. communications.howard.edu/index.php/television-and-film/ & howardgraduate.film

Ithaca College

1. 953 Danby Rd, Ithaca, NY 14850
2. Undergraduate
3. Nov. 1 (early decision), Dec. 1 (early admission), Jan. 1 (regular)
4. S'Park is "a signature mini-course that provides a close-up look at the media industry and Skyping opportunities with Park alumni such as Bob Iger, Executive Chairman of The Walt Disney Company. For decades, Ithaca College students have graduated with a degree in Television-Radio (TVR) but starting in Fall 2022 current and incoming TVR students will now be studying under the name 'Television & Digital Media Production' (TVDM)."

6. Jack Bryant (screenwriter/screenplay consultant), Marlena Grzaslewicz (sound editor)
7. Bill D'Elia (producer), Liz Tigelaar (screenwriter/executive producer)
8. Both
9. $48,126
11. "Peter Johanns, associate professor in the Department of Media Arts, Sciences and Studies, posted his first TikTok a Tru-den Pen-ris video satirizing the Trump and Biden election—on Oct. 30, 2020. Within days, he gained attention from across the world. Less than two years later, his videos of satire and humor have accumulated over 275 million views, 33 million likes and earned him over 1.3 million followers (@PeteyTVprof)."
12. ithaca.edu/rhp

Johns Hopkins University

1. 10 E. North Ave, 2nd Floor, Baltimore, MD 21202
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Undergraduate, early decision I: Nov. 1. Early decision II/regular: Jan.
3. Graduate: Dec. 1.
6. Karen Yasinsky (director), Tim Perell (producer)
7. Alexandra Byer (producer)
8. Both
9. $60,480
10. $60,480
12. krieger.jhu.edu/film-media/

LA Film School

1. 6353 Sunset Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90028
2. Undergraduate
3. Rolling
6. Philip Bladh (sound mixer)
7. Brandon Trost (DP)
8. Both
11. "We have a long-standing relationship with AVID and are currently preparing to update our AVID lab. We are in the process of purchasing additional high quality digital cameras on the level of Sony VENICE/Alexa MINI for the new year."
12. lafilm.edu

Lipscomb University

1. One University Park Dr., Nashville TN 37204
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Rolling, application opens Aug. 1.
4. "Writer's Room Intensive continues each May with students spending two weeks with a notable showrunner/writer to break an original television series and write the pilot plus the first 3 episodes during two weeks. Students gain valuable experience with how Writer's Rooms function and collaborate."

6. Tony Bancroft, Tom Bancroft and Mike Nawrocki (animators)
9. $37,512
10. $1048/credit hour
12. lipscomb.edu/cinematicarts

Loyola Marymount University
1. 1 LMU Drive, Los Angeles, California 90045
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Undergrad: Jan. 15 (regular). Grad: Dec. 15.
6. Janet Yang (producer), Shane Acker (director)
7. Effie Brown (producer), Francis Lawrence (director), Evan Romansky (screenwriter)
8. Both
9. $54,360
10. $1,457 (per unit, by program)
11. "Film executive and producer Joanne Moore has been appointed SFTV's next dean, effective June 27, 2022."
12. sftv.lmu.edu

Marymount Manhattan College
1. 221 East 71st Street, New York, NY 10021
2. Undergraduate
3. Regular admissions are rolling.
6. Erin Greenwell (editor/director), Dan Hunt (producer/director/programmer)
7. Kenan Hunter (commercial director)
8. Both
9. $36,928
11. "Promoting social action is a goal of students as part of the Stand Up, Speak Out film festival, working with the Bedford and Taconic Correctional Facilities to create films designed to spark awareness and social justice."
12. mmm.edu/academics/communication-arts/film-and-media-production-major/

Massachusetts College of Art & Design
1. 621 Huntington Ave, Boston, Massachusetts, 02115
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Undergraduate: Dec. 1 (early action), Feb. 15 (regular). Graduate: June 20 (Fall Program)
6. Soon-Mi Yoo and Ericka Beckman (directors), Tammy Dudman (animator)
7. Hal Hartley and Debra Granik (directors), Nancy Haigh (set decorator)
8. Both
12. massart.edu/node/1021

New York University
1. 721 Broadway, New York, NY 10003
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Undergraduate: Nov. 1 (early decision I), Jan. 1 (early decision II), Jan. 5 (regular). Graduate: Dec. 1
4. A new course in Virtual Production will expand next year when the Martin Scorsese Institute of Global Cinematic Arts opens.
6. Spike Lee (director), Sam Pollard (editor/director)
7. Martin Scorsese and Jim Jarmusch (directors)
8. Both
9. $63,897
10. $68,192
11. NYU offers a three-year dual MBA/MFA degree through the Kanbar graduate film program and the Stern Business School.
12. tisch.nyu.edu/kanbar-institute

Northwestern University
1. 70 Arts Circle Dr, Evanston, Illinois, 60208
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Jan. 3 for undergraduates, Jan. 15 for MA programs
6. Stephen Cone (director)
8. Need
9. $60,276
10. $18,689 (quarter)
12. communication.northwestern.edu/radio-television-film/

Olympic College
1. 1600 Chester Ave, Bremerton, WA 98337
2. Undergraduate
3. Rolling
6. Amy Hesketh (director)
8. Need
9. $116.06/lower division credits, $226.53/upper division credits for in-state residents
10. $121.73/lower division credits, $637.35/upper division credits for out-of-state students
12. olympic.edu/filmmaking

Pepperdine University
1. 24255 Pacific Coast Highway, Malibu, CA 90263
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Nov. 1 for early action, Jan. 15 for regular decision and Oct. 15 for spring semester
6. Leslie Kreiner Wilson (screenwriter)
7. D.J. Caruso (director)
8. Both
9. $62,390
10. $1,955/credit
12. pepperdine.edu

Point Park University
1. 201 Wood St, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 15222
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Rolling
6. Hanjin Park (director)
7. Jimmy Miller (producer)
8. Both
9. $34,880
10. $759/credit
12. pointpark.edu

Pratt Institute
1. 200 Willoughby Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11205
2. Undergraduate
3. June 22 (extended from original deadline)

6. Eliza Hittman, Matías Piñeiro, Akosua Adoma Owusu and Jim Finn (directors).
7. John Requa & Glenn Ficarra (screenwriters/directors), Liz Hannah (screenwriter)
12. pratt.edu/academics/school-of-art/undergraduate-school-of-art/film-video-department/

Purchase College
1. 735 Anderson Hill Rd, Purchase, New York, 10577
2. Undergraduate
3. June 1
4. "A new Center for Media Arts and Film includes a digital screening lab, fabrication lab and soundstage. Work was also completed this year on the renovation of the Film BFA's 5,000 square foot primary soundstage."
7. Tom Cross (editor), Azazel Jacobs and Hal Hartley (directors)
8. Both
12. purchase.edu/academics/school-of-film-and-media-studies/

Quinnipiac University
1. 275 Mount Carmel Avenue, Hamden CT 06517
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Rolling
6. David Atkins (screenwriter/director), Ashley Brandon (director)
7. David Rabinowitz (screenwriter), Molly Querim (ESPN host)
8. Both
9. $50,250
10. $1,115 (credit)
12. qu.edu

Regent University
1. 1000 Regent University Drive, Virginia Beach, VA 23464
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Rolling
7. Nathan Todd Sims (producer)
8. Both
9. $18,080
10. $12,060
11. "Regent University's Film & TV Equipment Office stocks cameras and other equipment needed for class assignments, including RED camera and Blackmagic."
12. regent.edu/fields-of-study/arts-communication-degree/

Rhode Island School of Design
1. 2 College St, Providence, RI 02903
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Early decision: Nov. 1. Regular decision: Feb. 1.
6. Sheri Wills (director)
7. Gus Van Sant (director), Ryan Trecartin (video artist)
8. Need
9. $56,435
10. $56,435
12. isd.edu/academics/film-animation-video/

Ringling College of Art and Design
1. 2700 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, FL 34234-5895
2. Undergraduate

3. Rolling
6. Bradley Battersby (director)
7. Jason Letkiewicz (writer/producer/director)
8. Both
9. $52,836
11. "We offer a hands-on, production-intensive program with a choice of two tracks: Narrative Filmmaking or Branded Entertainment."
12. ringling.edu/film

Rutgers
1. 33 Livingston Ave, New Brunswick, NJ 08901
2. Undergraduate
3. Nov. 1 (early action), Dec. 1 (regular)
4. "While keeping a small conservatory model (25 students per cohort), we continue to see a significant increase in applications—an 18% acceptance rate."
6. Thomas Lennon (actor/screenwriter), Patrick Stettner (screenwriter/director)
7. "Only four graduating classes so far."
8. Both
9. $12,526 (resident), $29,737 (out-of-state)
11. "We have a small faculty-to-student ratio, with no more than 15 students per studio class."
12. masongross.rutgers.edu/degrees-programs/filmmaking/

San Diego State University
1. 5250 Campanile Dr, San Diego, CA 92182
2. Graduate
3. "The next application period will be for Fall 2023. Application dates will be made available closer to that time."
6. Joe Straczynski (screenwriter)
8. Both
9. $38,682
11. The SDSU MFA in Screenwriting is the first of its kind in the California State University system.
12. gc.sdsu.edu/3N6ihYV

San Francisco State University
1. 1600 Holloway Ave, San Francisco, California, 94132.
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Sept. 30 (spring '23)
6. Greta Snider (director), Joseph McBride (film historian)
7. Steven Zaillian (screenwriter/director), Jonas Rivera (producer)
8. Both
9. $7,484 (out-of-state), $4,461 (California residents)
10. $8,918
12. cinema.sfsu.edu

Sarah Lawrence College
1. 1 Mead Way, Bronxville, New York, 10708
2. Undergraduate
3. Early action/early decision I: Nov. 1. Early decision II: Jan. 2. Regular decision: Jan. 15.
6. Heather Winters (producer)
7. J.J. Abrams and Jon Avnet (directors/producers)
8. Both
9. $60,700
12. sarahlawrence.edu/undergraduate/arts/filmmaking-and-moving-image-arts/

Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD)
1. SCAD Admission Department, P.O. Box 2072, Savannah, GA, 31402-2072 USA
2. Graduate, Undergraduate
3. Rolling. "Students are encouraged to apply at least six months in advance to allow time to arrange for financial aid, and no later than 30 days prior to the start of their first quarter. Admission results normally take between two and four weeks."
4. "In fall 2021, SCAD opened a leading-edge mixed reality (XR) stage, which utilizes camera tracking and real-time rendering to create an immersive virtual environment, visible live on set and shot directly on camera."
5. "SCAD's Casting Office is the only full-time, in-house university casting office in the nation, uniquely providing career launching opportunities for SCAD students."
6. D.W. Moffett (actor), Madison Hamburg (director)
8. Both
9. $39,105
10. $40,050
12. scad.edu/academics/programs/film-and-television

SCI-Arc
1. 960 E. 3rd St, Los Angeles, CA 90013
2. Graduate
6. Liam Young (architect)
8. Merit
9. $49,940
12. sciarc.edu

Spelman College
1. 350 Spelman Ln SW, Atlanta, GA 30314
2. Undergraduate
3. "Applications for the 2022-2023 academic year will open on Aug. 1"
6. Ayoka Chenzira (animator)
7. Julie Dash (director)
8. Both
9. $14, 442
12. spelman.edu

Stony Brook University
1. 535 8th Avenue New York, NY 10018
2. Graduate
3. Full class for Fall '22. New admissions window opens in Oct. '22 for Fall '23
6. Christine Vachon and Pamela Koffler (producers)
7. James Sharpe (actor). Both
9. $471/credit (non-resident), $963/credit (out-of-state)

11. "We have an Undergraduate Film Minor, and Undergraduate TV Writing Minor, and Graduate Tracks in Directing, Writing & Producing in Film, and a concentrated stand-alone MFA in Television Writing."
12. stonybrook.edu/commcms/film-tv-writing/

SVA (School of Visual Arts)
1. 209 E. 23rd St, New York, New York, 10010
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
6. Amy Taubin (critic), Ross Kauffman (director), Rose Vincelli Gustine (strategy consultant)
7. Ja'Tovia Gary, Gillian Robespierre and Ti West (directors)
8. Both
9. $46,800
10. $52,240
11. Offers an MFA in social documentary film.
12. sva.edu

Syracuse University
1. 200 Crouse College, Syracuse, New York, 13244
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Nov. 15 for early decision, Jan. 1st for regular decision, Feb. 15 for the visual arts graduate program, Jan. 15th for Newhouse graduate program
6. Kara Herold (producer)
7. Brent Barbano (camera operator)
8. Both
9. $58,440
10. $32,436
12. pa.syr.edu/academics/transmedia/undergraduate/film/

Temple University
1. 1801 N Broad St, Philadelphia, PA 19122
2. Graduate, Undergraduate, Certificate Programs
3. Undergraduate: Nov. 1 (early admissions), Feb. 1 (regular). Graduate: Nov. 15 (domestic), Oct. 15 (international)
6. William Goldenberg (editor), Chet Pancake, Lauren Wolkstein, and Elisabeth Subrin (directors), Larry McConkey (Steadicam pioneer)
7. Qiong Wang (director)
8. "To calculate tuition: bursar.temple.edu/tuition-and-fees/tuition-rates"
12. tfma.temple.edu/fma

The New School
1. 72 5th Ave, New York, NY 10011
2. Graduate, Undergraduate, Certificate Programs
3. Oct. 15 (spring), Jan. 15 (fall)
6. Caveh Zahedi and Pacho Velez (directors), Rafael Para (editor)
7. Jazmin Jones and Sean Baker (directors)
8. Both
9. $51,900 (per semester)
10. $50,588 (per semester)
12. newschool.edu/academics/

University of California, Berkeley
1. 7408 Dwinelle Hall, University of California, Berkeley, California, 94720
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Undergraduate: Nov. 30. Graduate: Dec. 3.
6. Jeffrey Skoller (director)
8. Both
9. Residents: $14,760
12. filmmedia.berkeley.edu/

University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
1. 225 Charles E Young Dr E, Los Angeles, CA 90095
2. Graduate, Undergraduate, Certificate Programs
3. Nov. 30 (undergraduate), Dec. 1 (graduate)
6. Gina Kim (director)
7. Eric Roth (screenwriter), Francis Ford Coppola (director)
8. Both
9. $13,804 (California residents), $44,830 (out-of-state)
10. $17,756 (California residents), $32,858 (out-of-state)
12. tft.ucla.edu

University of Colorado Boulder
1. 316 UCB, Denver, CO 80309
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Nov. 15 (freshman early action); Jan. 15 (freshman regular decision). Graduate: Dec. 15.
6. Geoff Marslett (director/animator)
7. Derek Cianfrance (director)
8. Both
9. $28,750, Colorado residents; $53,504, non-residents.
10. $14,756, Colorado residents; $32,214, non-residents
12. colorado.edu

University of Colorado Denver (CU Denver)

1. 1201 Larimer St, Denver, CO 80204
2. Undergraduate
3. "Bollywood Connections is a two-week study abroad program designed in collaboration with the Indian film institute Whistling Woods International, based in Mumbai."
6. Eric Jewett (director), Edward Tyndall (screenwriter)
8. Both
12. artsandmedia.ucdenver.edu/areas-of-study/about-film-television

University of Michigan

1. 6330 N. Quad, 105 S. State Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48109
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Undergraduate: Nov. 1 for early action, Feb. 1 for regular decision. Graduate: Dec. 15.
7. John Nelson (special effects supervisor)
8. Both
9. $15,948 for residents; $52,266 for non-residents
12. lsa.umich.edu/ftvm

University of Missouri

1. 243 Walter Williams Hall Columbia, MO 65201
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Undergraduate: Rolling, but Nov. 15 recommended. Graduate: Jan. 1. "(Undergraduate) Applying by Nov. 15 ensures you can qualify for maximum scholarship opportunities and complete enrollment steps as they become available."
4. "Entering its eighth year, the center is updating curriculum to add more practical, hands-on skills components, and completely replacing its equipment inventory and editing lab."
6. Robert Greene (director)
8. Both
9. $12,396 (in-state), $30,374 (out-of-state)
10. $267-$333 (in-state) and $572-$665 (out-of-state) per credit
12. docjournalism.com/

University of North Carolina School of the Arts

1. 1533 S Main Street, Winston-Salem, NC 27127
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
4. "The School of Filmmaking has developed a collaboration with RISEBA University in Riga, Latvia, with UNCSA screenwriters creating scripts to be shot in Riga by RISEBA students. UNCSA has expanded its existing program of funding thesis films to now include providing all equipment, and a cash budget for every senior student thesis project.
6. Ilana Coleman (producer), Bob Gosse (producer/director)
7. Craig Zobel (director), Rebecca Green (producer), Danny McBride (actor), Jeff Nichols (director)
11. "The UNCSA School of Filmmaking has been majority female for the past two years (2020–21 and 2021–22)."

University of North Carolina Wilmington

1. 601 S College Rd, Wilmington, NC 28403
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
4. "Over 300 undergraduate majors. Accept 12 students each year to MFA and 12 students each year to MA."
6. Deepak Rauniyar (director), J. Carlos Kase (experimental film scholar)
8. Both
9. $7,133.51 in-state. $21,853.51 out-of-state
10. MA: $4,719. MFA: $8,594 Per year, in-state, 21,246 out-of-state
12. uncw.edu/filmstudies/

University of Pennsylvania

1. Fisher-Bennett Hall, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, 19104
2. Undergraduate
3. Nov. 1 (early decision), Jan. 5 (regular decision)
6. Josh Mosley (animator)
7. Fred Berger (producer), Matt Selman (screenwriter)
8. Need
9. $56,212
12. upenn.edu

University of Pittsburgh

1. 4200 Fifth Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15260
2. Both
3. Undergraduate: rolling
6. Sarah Joshi (scholar)
7. Gene Kelly (actor/director), Julie Sokolow (director)
8. Both
9. $19,902 (resident), $34,124 (non-resident)
10. $24,118 (resident), $40,894 (non-resident)
12. filmandmedia.pitt.edu

University of Southern California (USC)

1. 900 W. 34th St, Los Angeles, California, 90089
2. Both
6. Peter Sollett (director), Howard Rodman (screenwriter)
7. Megan Ellison (producer), Jon Chu (director)
8. Both
9. January 15
12. cinema.usc.edu

Vanderbilt University

1. Buttrick Hall 132, Box 125, Station B, Nashville, Tennessee, 73235
2. Undergraduate
3. Nov. 1 for early decision, Jan. 1 for regular decision/ ED II
6. Jonathan Rattner (video artist)
8. Both

9. $58,130
12. as.vanderbilt.edu/cinema-media-arts/

Vermont College of Fine Arts

1. 36 College St, Montpellier, Vermont, 05602
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. July 30 (Priority); Aug. 30 (Regular)
6. Amalia Ulman (director)
7. Josh Koury and Emilie Upczak (directors)
8. Both
10. Estimated two-year program cost: $60,312
12. vcfa.edu/programs/mfa-in-film/

Wesleyan University

1. 45 Wyllys Ave, Middletown, Connecticut, 06459
2. Undergraduate
3. Nov. 15 (early decision), Jan. 1 (regular decision/ED II)
6. Jeanine Basinger (film scholar/critic)
7. Michael Bay, Ruben Fleischer and Miguel Arteta (directors), Akiva Goldsman (screenwriter)
8. Need-Based
9. $63,722
12. wesleyan.edu/filmstudies/

Yale University

1. 53 Wall St, Room 216, New Haven, Connecticut, 06511
2. Undergraduate, Graduate
3. Nov. 1 (early action), Jan. 2 (regular decision) Dec. 15 (graduate)
6. Jonathan Andrews (director), Oksana Chefranova (programmer)
7. Wesley Morris and Bilge Ebiri (film critics), Jeremy Garelick and Sandra Luckow (directors)
8. Need
9. $62,250
12. filmstudies.yale.edu/

The Recurring Mystery

Taylor Hess talks to the married filmmakers—director, screenwriter and executive producer Antonio Campos and editor and co-producer Sofía Subercaseaux—behind The Staircase*, the HBO series about one of the most chronicled of recent true crime sagas.*

On their very first date in 2013, Antonio Campos pitched *The Staircase* to Sofía Subercaseaux. It would be years before the now married team officially began work on the project. In the interim, their collaborations have included *Christine* (Sundance 2016), written and directed by Campos and edited by Subercaseaux, and *Piercing* (Sundance 2018), produced by Campos and edited by Subercaseaux.

Campos became known for his acclaimed independent work with production company Borderline Films (*Martha Marcy May Marlene, Simon Killer, James White*). After directing episodes of *The Punisher* and *The Sinner* (the latter of which he also executive produced), he makes his first outing as a creator, writer and co-showrunner in the TV system with *The Staircase*. For Subercaseaux, who is most experienced with editing narrative and documentary features (*Nasty Baby, Tyrel, Dina*), *The Staircase* marks her first co-producer credit. Subercaseaux—who edited two of the eight episodes of the miniseries, now streaming on HBO Max—said the project "feels like it's been absorbing our lives for as long as we've been together. And many years before that for Antonio."

For Campos, the project began in 2005 when he received a DVD rip of a documentary playing on the Sundance Channel. Also called *The Staircase* and directed by French filmmaker Jean-Xavier de Lestrade, the six-hour story centered around the murder investigation of Michael Peterson after his wife Kathleen was found dead at the bottom of their stairs. Resulting in one of the longest trials in North Carolina history, the crime continued to attract public scrutiny after Peterson was convicted in 2003 and throughout his unsuccessful appeals in 2006 and 2007 and denied motion for a new trial in 2009. Returning to Durham to film with the Peterson family for a retrial hearing in 2011, de Lestrade directed a follow-up feature-length documentary that premiered at IDFA in 2012. Filming continued, and the entire story—from de Lestrade's original documentary through Peterson's final trial in 2016—dropped on Netflix as a 13-part true crime series in 2018.

Dramatized by Campos and starring Colin Firth in a commanding performance as Michael Peterson, this iteration of *The Staircase* eschews traditional linear storytelling by weaving together snapshots that span nearly 20 years, beginning before the death of Kathleen (played here by Toni Collette). (An executive producer of the series, de Lestrade has publicly contested the depiction of his documentary team's filmmaking process, and Michael Peterson has denounced de Lestrade for his involvement in the show.) Directing six episodes and running the writers' room, Campos tracks the impact of the trial on the family and, by including the documentarians as characters, explores a complex set of narrative arcs to reflect on the nature of storytelling.

Werner Herzog has spoken philosophically about his quest to access a deeper truth in his filmmaking, a "kind of truth that is the enemy of the merely factual," an "ecstatic truth." *The Staircase* deals with a contested truth and how that contested truth was explored through the lens of documentary filmmaking. How do you describe the parameters of what truth was for you in this process?

CAMPOS: The series starts off with the question: what is truth? It was always my intention to tell the audience that the idea of truth is quite elusive, that they will not know the truth by the end of each episode [or] by the end of the series. In my journey with this story, I had started off thinking that I could solve the case. I think a lot of people have the feeling that they're going to solve it: they're going to spend more time with it, put the pieces together in a way that someone else hasn't and see something that someone else hasn't and eventually the truth will reveal itself. Over the years, in the making of this show, I've learned how to live in the not-knowing. For me, the pursuit of the truth is a very noble and rewarding journey, but ultimately, I've come to the conclusion that if the truth is completely elusive, I'm happy to live in uncertainty. That's actually much more comfortable for me.

The Spanish filmmaker Luis Buñuel said, "I've always been on the side of those who seek the truth, but I part ways with them when they think they have found it."

CAMPOS: I completely agree with that. People have arguments about this case, and I just sit back and watch because I find both sides to be a little bit blind. I love the questions. What I love about film and storytelling is the mystery, and how long you can keep the mystery going because the answer, ultimately, is maybe not as interesting as what you'd imagine it to be. We've hopefully allowed the audience to come into the series with a clear sense that it isn't necessarily going to present you with "the Truth," but rather a lot of potentially truthful moments. I think the most you can do as a filmmaker or a storyteller is create moments that feel truthful.

In developing those moments, how is the approach different when you're dealing with characters based on real people?

CAMPOS: The approach has been the same with everything I've ever done: I try to create characters or versions of real people who are not one thing or another but who are complicated. I never want anyone to feel like a villain. What was so fascinating to me about Michael Peterson was that he felt like the ultimate challenge. As a character, he's kind of a maze you can get lost inside, in a way that I hadn't experienced with anyone else.

A lot of your work deals with characters who have hidden or unexamined darkness.

CAMPOS: There is this perception that I tell dark stories with dark characters who do dark things. But I always have tried my best to create dynamic, complex people who are doing things not because they know they are bad or want to cause pain, but because they believe that what they're doing in that moment is the best thing to do—not just for themselves, but for other people. Sometimes it's selfless, and sometimes they think it's selfless, but it's not.

Before *The Staircase* was a TV series, you were working on it as a feature. As it was evolving over the years, when and why did you decide to include the documentarians?

CAMPOS: I was really struck when I first watched the docuseries that the filmmakers were embedded with [the Petersons] for that whole time in that house, following every different aspect of the story. So, there was an opportunity to look at a story through the eyes of not just documentarians but outsiders. It's not really talked about in the docuseries, but Kathleen died just a few months after 9/11, and the world the trial took place in was post-9/11. These French filmmakers were there during the whole "freedom fries" time, when there was a real fear of the unknown and the "outside." In some ways, that fear was in the air and playing a part in not just the experience of the filmmakers but also maybe the way that the jury and the public, especially down in Durham, were seeing Michael Peterson and this case. There was this guy who they thought they knew, and [their] perception of [him] turned out to be completely wrong. That he was living this other life, I think,

scared a lot of people down there, and I think it had an effect on how the deliberations went.

Sofía, when I interviewed you for *Filmmaker*'s 25 New Faces list in 2017, you talked about dreaming of the characters from scenes you're cutting. In this series, we see an editor become completely absorbed with the life of her subject. How did it feel to be cutting scenes about an editor cutting scenes?

SUBERCASEAUX: It was very meta. The fact that we got to show the behind-the-scenes of filmmakers working—to nerd out about what a Final Cut 7 timeline looked like in 2012—and to put a spotlight on the work of an editor was really fun and satisfying, particularly because I don't think people necessarily understand what editors do.

In the series, it's hard to pin down the rhythm of the time jumps, but you also never feel lost in terms of the narrative chronology. Did you develop any internal rules together about the time jumping?

CAMPOS: We didn't have a hard and fast rule, and because of that we felt free to allow the episodes to move the way they wanted to move. But a lot was decided in the writing. We were looking for emotional beats to transition off of instead of just a character's look to send you back or forward. We were interested in the parallel action of the past, present and future all happening at the same time, and we wanted to avoid the sense that any of it was coming from someone's memory.

SUBERCASEAUX: And we wanted the audience to make their own connections and not feel guided by any one person's perspective. Even though a lot was figured out in the writing, there was reshuffling of the timelines in the edit of some episodes. In some, the Kathleen storyline needed to be balanced out so that you could feel her presence throughout the episode.

CAMPOS: Kathleen was a great indicator. If you saw Kathleen, you knew right away that it had to be the past.

By choosing to feature Kathleen in the series, you've made memories of her the center of the story. Was that your initial conceit going in, or did that evolve throughout the years as you were developing the project?

CAMPOS: I had explored Kathleen as a character in different versions of the project

when it was a feature, but I had never really made her a big part of the story until it became a TV series and I started writing the pilot. As a series, there was room to make Kathleen a real character, a fully fleshed out person. In the docuseries, she's always being talked about and you're constantly reminded of her presence with photos and clips, and you can feel the specter of her. In this series, she's so alive that when she's not there, you really feel the shift in energy. You feel her absence.

In episode four, there's an intense confrontation between Kathleen and Michael in their kitchen, and the scene is simply one two-and-a-half-minute wide two-shot. Was that decision to play the scene in the master an edit decision or your choice on set?

CAMPOS: We had a good schedule, but it wasn't luxurious like we had all the time in the world, which is great because then you have to make choices. In the case of this fight, I chose to shoot it in one—I didn't want to protect ourselves with coverage. It was very exciting for the actors; it became like theater. You rarely see a shot of two people in an argument sustained for that long on TV. It helps things feel more real when you allow something to unfold in real time. It makes you feel like you're listening to something that you're not supposed to, this private moment you're not necessarily meant to see.

In the show, there are rooms where we see various characters' attempts at organizing the story we're actually watching. For example, the dining room of the Peterson house is covered with notes of the case all over the walls. Then, there's the edit room in Paris, which is covered in note cards and still images from the trial and Mike's life at home. Going behind the scenes to your workspace, what did organizing the timeline of the show look like for you and your team?

CAMPOS: Years ago, at our old apartment, before I had written the pilot, we didn't have a big wall to put up cards. So, Sofía and I cut up this big cardboard box, laid it on the floor and started to write out all the beats just to get our heads around it in a visual way. The structure really hit for me when I did a week-long residency at the Jacob Burns Film Center. I went on a run, was listening to Enya, and somehow the idea of cutting from Michael waking up and tying his tie to setting up the crime scene in the past cracked the jump from the future to the past and helped everything fall into place for the rest of the episode. Then, when we got into the writer's room, we were working virtually, so we didn't have one big wall. The thing that really became our map was a Miro board, which is basically a virtual bulletin board, and it was fantastic.

How did you run the writers' room?

CAMPOS: One person, the writers' assistant, was taking all the notes. Then one person would be on this live typing app that

everybody could see and had the ability to edit in real time. Another person would be creating note cards. So, we had this system in place that allowed us to all be on the same page. We created one arc for the series, one for each episode, then did an exercise that was really helpful—each writer went off with four characters and put together a timeline of where they were in each episode in the past, present and future. While a lot of it didn't necessarily happen on camera, we knew where they were, what they were going through in their lives, and were basically able to walk through the past, present and future of every character in every episode.

Sofía, how did you visualize the timeline of the show with the other editors?

SUBERCASEAUX: At first, we were four editors working remotely, and we each had two episodes, our own cards and our own boards in our houses. Later, once we were all in New York, we moved into a post-production company, and there wasn't a wall big enough to visualize the entire show. But we had an entire floor at [post-production house] Company Three, so we kept going in and out of each other's rooms to look at each other's work and see what made sense.

CAMPOS: Everybody had an eye on everyone else's episode, and there was an open dialogue, so nobody got territorial about their episodes. We would move note cards around from one room to the other, and it was a great collaboration. Everybody was so invested in not just their episode but the whole series working.

How do you know when you're done playing with a scene in the edit? Does it ever feel finished to you, that you've done all you can do?

SUBERCASEAUX: Certain scenes barely changed since the assembly, then others we just kept going back to a million times. In TV, there's more of a "pencils down" timeline that we're not necessarily used to because in film—or at least when we've worked on movies together—we've always done screenings and then taken some time before revisiting. But with *The Staircase*, we needed to make decisions. I found that very refreshing. For me as an editor, the best way to know if something's working or not is to show it to someone in the room, and you feel it in your stomach. It's either working or not working, and you're either excited or embarrassed, and those are the only two ways to feel about it. I can watch it alone and not know exactly how I feel, but

when someone sits next to me and watches it with me, I immediately know how I feel.

CAMPOS: We were on a really hard deadline because of the air date being locked in stone.

SUBERCASEAUX: We finished shooting by Christmas, and by the beginning of May, all eight episodes needed to be delivered.

Antonio, you rose up with a creative network, including Josh Mond and Sean Durkin, that ultimately became Borderline Films. Sofía, you have a longtime collaboration with Sebastián Silva, who was a writer and story editor on this series. How have these relationships informed your creative approach on bigger projects?

SUBERCASEAUX: I came up as an editor working with Sebastián, who is a close friend, and with Antonio, who I'm married to, so this has never felt like a job where I sit in front of a computer that I can turn off at the end of each day. It feels like something that we carry through our lives. As an editor, the process didn't feel that different from how it's been when we've made movies together.

CAMPOS: With a production as big as *The Staircase*, it still feels the way it did when I was making movies with Sean and Josh—that I'm working with my close friends and family, and we're all just working together to think about the scene in front of us. Early on in your career, when you're making your film and people come to you with their ideas, you might bristle and feel like someone's trying to take something away from you, or they're telling you your idea is bad by suggesting something else. And when you get to the place where you can listen to everyone's ideas and be open to what's actually the *best* idea, it's great. Ultimately, what everyone wants to feel when they come onto a film set is that their presence has a purpose. To me, this is the whole point of making movies—it's a collaborative effort, and everybody's input and work is necessary. To nail a shot, the camera operator has to be in right place, the actor has to hit their mark for the light and say the line in the right way to hit the emotion, the dolly grip has to push the dolly at the right speed, the sound mixer has to capture the quality of voice in the right way. The fact that all of those things have to happen—that everybody has to hit the right mark, and the fact that that happens so many times a day on a film set—is a pretty remarkable thing. There's a lot of conversation to get there, but in the moment it's a silent dance that you're all doing with each other.

Images courtesy of HBO; Sofia Subercaseaux and Antonio Campos (pg. 94)

Images: *Pachinko*, courtesy of Apple TV+

Emotional History

Pachinko *showrunner Soo Hugh on history, storytelling and her all-encompassing TV job. By Jesse Pasternack.*

In television, the position of the showrunner covers so much territory and entails supervising so many different jobs that it can be difficult to define. Many showrunners are writers who create their series. Others are hired to execute a creator's vision, but all have vital responsibilities stretching across the entirety of a season, from pre-production work with writers to supervising the directors and production team during shooting and overseeing vital post-production work.

One showrunner from a writing background is Soo Hugh, who began her career on the feature side of the industry but switched to television when she was hired on *The Killing*. "I got to write an episode and, a few weeks later, saw my episode get made," she says. "That kind of satisfaction is the power of making television."

Today, Hugh is the creator and showrunner of the Apple TV+ series *Pachinko*, an adaptation of author Min Jin Lee's global bestseller, which she successfully pitched to the streamer with the support of Media Res execs Michael Ellenberg and Lindsey Springer and Blue Marble's Theresa Kang-Lowe. In contrast to Lee's novel, Hugh takes a nonlinear approach, alternating

the narrative of Solomon Baek (Jin Ha) trying to close a business deal in 1989 Tokyo with that of his grandmother Sunja (played by Youn Yuh-jung, Kim Min-ha and Jeon Yu-na at different ages) living under the Japanese occupation of Korea and immigrating to Osaka after a relationship with powerful fish broker Koh Hansu (Lee Min-hSZA`o).

Hugh acknowledges the showrunner's wide-ranging set of responsibilities, noting that the biggest misconception about the position is "that it's one job," and, she adds, "I think every showrunner does it differently."

Hugh's particular approach to showrunning extends to how she conducts the writers' room, although that term is not her preferred phrase to describe her team. "I like to think of it more as a think tank," she says. "You get together smart, passionate people who love the story and really want to dig in." In contrast to other writers' rooms, which focus on coming up with story beats quickly, Hugh likes to discuss the thematic underpinnings of a show and look at different forms of references that range from movies to paintings. "We're trying to wire our brains and creative energies together," she says of this part of the process.

Throughout her work as showrunner, Hugh likes to collaborate with people who have a wide range of perspectives. Showrunners often hire writers who predominantly work in the genre of the series they are going to write, but, she says, "I want the exact opposite. I want as many different types of thinkers as possible to constantly stress test the show." For *Pachinko*, her approach led her to collaborate with writers who had never previously worked in the historical fiction genre, as well as those with backgrounds in theater and poetry. But, she says, "We all felt a tremendous responsibility, not only to the source material but to the real history."

Hugh's method of valuing a writer's perspective and talent over their ability to fit into a box related to genre reflects her own background. Before the historical family drama of *Pachinko*, she created or co-created science fiction and horror television series such as *The Whispers* and *The Terror*. Hugh credits the thought process a writer gets into when writing horror, which involves deep thinking about how moments make an audience feel, as an influence on her latest show.

"That kind of discipline in thinking about where the audience is at any particular moment has been very helpful for a show like *Pachinko*," she says.

Hugh's belief in collaborating with talented people with different artistic styles extended to the show's directors. She worked closely with Media Res to find Koganada (*After Yang*) and Justin Chon (*Blue Bayou*), both hailing from independent film, who each directed four episodes of *Pachinko*'s eight-episode first season.

"They're both very different from one another," Hugh says. "I think it would do a great disservice to the show and to both of them as visionaries if you tried to make them into one. I never believed in that." As showrunner, she trusted that the story would join everything together while allowing for flexibility when it came to accommodating different visual styles. Kogonada's style involved a more static camera and use of master shots, while Chon took a more visceral approach in terms of camera movement and more close-ups. From different directions, the two directors grappled with the same question Hugh initially posed to them about creating the feeling of what she describes as "an intimate epic": "How do you make the close-up feel just as epic as the extreme wide shot? How do you make that extreme wide shot feel personal?"

With the dialogue between past and present a defining aspect of the series, *Pachinko*'s edit was long. If a scene or sequence in one episode wasn't working, Hugh and her editors would set it aside and work on a later one, which often helped them find a solution to that earlier scene. Hugh has a specific process for giving notes on the editing of an episode. After viewing the director's and editor's cuts of an episode, she writes formal edit notes, which involves grabbing screenshots. She then asks herself big picture questions about the identity and pacing of the episode before making sure that she and the editor understand each other. "I always like to start with the end and the beginning," she says. "I feel like if you nail the opening and ending, you know where to go in the middle."

Some of *Pachinko*'s most memorable moments are set to licensed pop songs, which Hugh wrote into the script. "I very much have a set idea of what I want in terms of songs," she says. "And if I can't get [a particular song], it's

figuring out what other songs can fill that emotional space." For example, Hugh wanted to set a pivotal moment to a favorite song, "In the Aeroplane Over the Sea" by Neutral Milk Hotel. But, when laying it in, the original version felt too modern for the sequence. Hugh ended up Googling covers of the song until she found a haunting one by musician Dan Mangan, which she ended up using in the sequence.

A key collaborator in creating the music of *Pachinko* is composer Nico Muhly. Unlike some showrunners, who may not bring on a composer until post-production, Hugh brought Muhly to work on the series months before shooting had even commenced. She also sent him ideas while they were shooting, which helped him put together pieces of music and character themes before they had an edit of a single episode. "I needed Nico to breathe in the show from the very first frame so that he could be a true partner," Hugh notes. Muhly's music is so important to her that she wouldn't allow the editors to use any temp music that hadn't been composed by him. "Everything has to be Nico, Nico, Nico," she says. Rather than wait for a cut, Hugh creates a music cue sheet near the end of filming, a document that communicates her vision of when cues should enter and the emotion they should convey.

In addition to her work on *Pachinko*, Hugh recently began a program with UCP (Universal Content Productions, a division of Universal Studio Group), The Thousand Miles Project, which helps writers telling stories through the lens of Asian American and/or Pacific Islander communities. The program's name is inspired by the Chinese proverb, "a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

"One of the things we found was that the entry touchpoint [to the industry] was sometimes the hardest," Hugh says. "If you have at least half a foot in, there are great programs that help you get to the next step, and the step after. So, the real question is, how do you even take that first step?"

Hugh's answer involves giving the project's writer participants two days of workshops with other writers, agents, managers and development executives. Some of the participants are chosen to take part in a 24-week development lab in which they will be paid to develop and write a pilot. This part of the program was important for Hugh, because writers can feel insecurity and a type of imposter syndrome at the beginning of their career. "I remember the first paycheck I ever got to write was the first time I felt comfortable introducing myself as a writer," Hugh said.

Jesse Pasternack is a writer and filmmaker based in Los Angeles. His writing has appeared in CrimeReads and the Establishing Shot blog run by Indiana University Cinema. His film work has been screened at the 'Anthology Film Archives in New York City.

Stepping In

Three filmmakers—Isabel Sandoval, Blackhorse Lowe and Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy—tell Destiny Jackson about bringing their own styles and audiences to their first forays in television directing.

In the past 18 months, Isabel Sandoval has expanded the narrative around queer and trans filmmakers' abilities to direct a wide range of material with her episode of the Hulu series *Under the Banner of Heaven*, Blackhorse Lowe has brought quirky humor and his own life experience to Hulu's *Reservation Dogs* and director Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy has represented Pakistani and Muslim communities in Marvel and Disney+'s *Ms. Marvel*. They're all crossing over from the feature world to direct television for the first time, while also building careers outside the industry glare of Los Angeles.

Award-winning trans director Isabel Sandoval moved from her native home in the Philippines to New York City during her college years. "I didn't [even] go to film school," she says. "I went to business school at NYU, and in between my classes I would go to the arthouse cinemas around the campus."

For Blackhorse Lowe, who lives in Oklahoma, where *Reservation Dogs* takes place and is shot on location, it was a feeling of tribal community and belonging—even though the show he writes for and directs follows a group of Native American teens who dream of moving to California to have a shot at a better life. "I've been involved in the Oklahoma film scene for a while," he says. "But this is special. Most of the [filmmakers are] Native. I've never had that experience where it felt like I was making a movie with my family, especially because I've known [series creators] Sterlin [Harjo] and Taika [Waititi] for so long. There's a unique freedom on *Res Dogs* that I don't get with every show."

As for Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, an award-winning Pakistani-Canadian journalist, filmmaker and activist, the decision to stay in Pakistan was an easy one, as her documentaries and short films usually center on the various human rights violations South Asian women face. "I say I am a citizen of the world, [but] my home is in Pakistan," she says. "I do spend a lot of time in the United States, but it's important for women like myself to continue to have a foothold in that world so that we can give back to those communities and to our people. Also, racking up those frequent flyer miles is nice."

ISABEL SANDOVAL

In 2019, Sandoval's third feature film, *Lingua Franca*, made history as it marked the first time a transgender woman of color both directed and starred in a film premiering at the Venice Film Festival. *Lingua Franca* follows the story of an undocumented Filipina trans woman who takes up a job as a caregiver to secure a green card to stay in America. But when she falls in love with her patient's grandson, her citizenship is jeopardized. Though not autobiographical, the film hit home for the Cebu native, who realized she was trans while shooting her first feature, *Señorita* (also about a trans woman), and transitioned after her second, *Aparisyon*.

"The decision to come out after *Aparisyon* had to do with my reputation in the Philippines as an emerging filmmaker," Sandoval says. "When the movie came out it was widely

acclaimed, and I thought that was the perfect time to transition. I didn't announce it on social media, I took a two-year [hiatus] so I could do so privately. I didn't feel that it was something I was ready to share. I really [needed] to be comfortable in my own skin as a person. I felt if I were to continue making art, I needed to be and feel more authentic, and that way the authenticity will then translate into the art that I make."

Recalling her youth, Sandoval says, "My maternal grandmother was an actress at a local theater in Cebu. We had a local film industry at that time, so she was quite a well-known actress locally. My mom didn't really get the acting bug, but my grandmother *did* talk her into starring in this one independent film, *The Diary of Mercedes*, that's now been lost."

It was childhood visits with her mother to the local movie palace that "started my love affair with cinema," Sandoval says. She went from watching Filipino films that knocked off Hollywood blockbusters to watching international dramas. "I became more discerning and selective when it came to films as a teenager. That's when I got exposed to the cinema of Wong Kar-wai and Pedro Almodóvar," Sandoval says of her time browsing local street stalls for bootleg DVDs.

Sandoval's break into TV directing occurred when she received the script for *Under the Banner of Heaven*, a true-crime show created by Oscar-winner Dustin Lance Black (*Milk, Big Love*), from her agents at CAA and thought, "Oh my god, I have to do this." Her critically acclaimed sixth episode of the eight-episode series, "Revelation," follows devout Morman Detective Jeb Pyre (Andrew Garfield) on his descent into disillusionment with his faith as he investigates a gruesome murder committed by members of the church.

About her approach as a new TV director, Sandoval says, "When you're working with your cast and crew, especially when your cast is working [episodically] with different [directors], they need to be reoriented into your style and your way of working. [Directing] is also about making them feel comfortable and creating an environment that's conducive for the actors to be present and in the moment as they inhabit their character. I remember telling Andrew, 'I'm here not just to direct you but really to support you and understand your process in preparing

for your scenes, and to give you the space to bring out the best possible performance for the character that you're playing.'"

She also went on to explain how important it was to her as a trans woman of color to be given an opportunity to direct on a show so far removed from anything else she's done prior: "I wanted to prove to everyone that I can do it. I was the most excited about it being worlds away from the films and the characters that I've done. I've done two films about a trans woman who happened to be Filipino. This series is about a Mormon homicide in the '80s featuring a mostly white cast. I wanted to prove that someone of my background can take on any story. [There is] this idea that we can only tell stories about our own backgrounds and our identities and communities. We can, but it can also be a double-edged sword because then Hollywood might tell us those are the only stories we are capable of telling. *Banner* allowed me to stretch myself artistically and prove how well I could tackle characters and stories outside of my own community. I'm so thrilled with the response to the episode so far."

BLACKHORSE LOWE

Blackhorse Lowe has allergies to partially thank for his immersion into filmmaking.

"You just spend a lot of time on the res. There's really nothing much to do if you're not farming or working on something," Lowe says. "And I have horrible allergies, so I was always sent inside once my allergies got the best of me."

Growing up in a small, semi-isolated town outside Farmington, New Mexico, Lowe and his siblings were often left to their own devices, but they were hardly lacking in entertainment. He and his siblings would pass the time recreating short films and scenes from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Star Wars*, while also receiving an impromptu film education from their close-knit cinephile family.

"Both my mom and dad invigorated my creative spirits. They were huge cinephiles. It's probably considered child abuse now," Lowe laughs. "But my parents didn't keep us from the more [mature] movies as kids. We were watching spaghetti westerns, *The Thing*, *Apocalypse Now* and *Blue Velvet*. Every one of my family members had different tastes in terms of what genre they gravitated towards."

Lowe was a self-starter early on. When he wasn't working outside on the ranch, he would comb through books about fine art, photography and creative writing his parents had laying around the house to teach himself about the visual medium. Lowe's dad was an aspiring painter, and his mother a Navajo language teacher. They even had a VHS camcorder and a 35-millimeter camera that Lowe's mom would use as a learning instrument for her language lessons.

You can see remnants of Lowe's upbringing on the ranch and his obsession with pop culture in everything that he does. His first feature film, *5th World* (2005), centers on two Najavo teens who fall in love while hitchhiking through Monument Valley. The way they fall in love? By bonding over films like *Apocalypse Now* and John Ford westerns.

After six shorts and three feature films, Lowe made his two-episode TV directorial debut on *Reservation Dogs*. "I've been working for the past 20 years doing independent films," Lowe says, "and it really started to pay off finally. Because of meeting Sterlin and Taika way back when [at the Sundance Native Labs], I'm now open to the TV game, and it's been very nice. It felt like making a movie with family. It was completely collaborative because I understand [Harjo's] style, and I know the kind of filmmaking that he does, so it was easy to lock into what he wanted. But he's also my friend and understands my style and what I do, so I got more freedom to do what I want."

The overarching plot of *Reservation Dogs* follows four Native American teens—Elora (Devery Jacobs), Bear (D'Pharaoh Woon-A-Tai), Cheese (Lane Factor) and Willie Jack (Paulina Alexis)—who launch a flimsy get-rich-quick scheme to do various crimes around town to fund their escape to California. The show's mood oscillates between heartwarming drama and wacky comedy, primarily by prioritizing character development over cliffhangers and overly dramatized story beats. The series shines in the episodes where each young member of the group creates a bond with a native elder in their community.

Lowe's two episodes, "Uncle Brownie" and "Come and Get Your Love" (both written by Harjo), are great examples of how Lowe's love of pop culture and respect for family come

Images: on the sets of *Under the Banner of Heaven*, *Reservation Dogs* (both courtesy of Hulu) and *Ms. Marvel* (courtesy of Disney Plus)

together. In episode three, "Uncle Brownie," the Res Dogs, who laughably consider themselves a small-town gang though they are generally nonviolent, ask Uncle Brownie (Gary Farmer), a stoner recluse who lives in an isolated house in the woods littered with VHS tapes of movies like *The Blues Brothers* and *Jurassic Park*, how to fight. But along with the pugilistic training—the episode contains a funny Mr. Miyagi–style lesson—Uncle Brownie also teaches them a lesson in humility when he offers a sincere apology to bar patrons he beat up 30 years ago.

"I find something in common with all the characters," Lowe says. "With Uncle Brownie, a stoner weirdo who lives as a hermit out in the middle of nowhere, I know that person. I was that person from time to time when I was writing, but he also reminds me of my uncle, too—that's who I designed him after. There are these little flaws and characteristics that I gave him from my own family members to make him a bit more real to me."

"Come and Get Your Love" (episode five), Lowe's second episode, is a supernatural entry in the otherwise realistic series. It follows Res Dog's Cheese and Officer Big (Zahn McClarnon), the town's Lighthorseman, as they spend the day chasing a trespasser who is placing weird miniature copper sculptures on people's porches. A parallel supernatural storyline focuses on a Deer woman who punishes bad men and illustrates how Officer Big sees the world through Native American folklore. "Something that attracted me to this episode is [my] connection to the supernatural aspect—the indigenous way of seeing things and living life," Lowe says. "We're still in our homeland, so we still have our living spirits and spiritual grounds that are still there. Those different beings are still very much real to us."

For Lowe, work on *Reservation Dogs* has changed the direction of his career. "After I directed the two episodes, I joined the DGA," he says. "Prior to last year, I'd just been doing independent films where I self-financed, found private financiers or was begging my friends to work on a film for a couple of days, and I'd pay them in weed or pizza. Now, I'm doing what I love with financing and help from department heads. People ask me now if TV's [difficult], and I'm like, 'No, it's the easiest thing ever. I don't have to bribe my friends, drive around and pick up actors, I don't have to worry about time within a certain location. I have all of these people to help me make something that much better.'"

"This is the first couple of years where the gate has been open for [Native American filmmakers]," Lowe continues. "And people like Sterlin and Taika opened the door for us. So, like what Sterlin did with me, I'm trying to bring up the next group of [Indigenous] filmmakers into this industry and get them into the DGA. That way, we have more opportunities to tell our stories, and what I think Hollywood and the rest of the world need to realize is we do have our own stories."

SHARMEEN OBAID-CHINOY

Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy has been asking difficult questions since she was 14. Encouraged by her parents with the belief that she and her sisters "could do anything," Obaid-Chinoy honed her focus on the very serious plights of women in her home country of Pakistan.

"I would write articles for newspapers when I was 14 years old," Obaid-Chinoy says. "So, I was always a storyteller. [Over the years] I've just changed the medium from print to television, to animation, to films, to reality." Early documentary work examined the limited freedoms of women in Saudi Arabia, xenophobia in South Africa, illegal abortions in the Philippines, honor killings and the Taliban's growing influence in Pakistan. In 2003, at the age of 24, Obaid-Chinoy debuted her first feature documentary. *Terror's Children* follows the filmmaker during a 10-week visit in her hometown of Karachi, where she meets eight child refugees who were forced to flee their war-ravaged homes in Afghanistan.

"I've always believed that when you show someone something, you can evoke empathy in them," Obaid-Chinoy says. "In 2005, I was filming in the Philippines, doing a story about backstreet abortions. [Because of religious suppression,] contraceptives were not being given to women in poor localities; their reproductive rights were being taken away. So, the organization that was part of my film asked if we could give them the footage because they were going to use it to lobby the government to show them the horrors of backstreet abortions. That's when the penny dropped in my head that my stories can be used for activism. They can be for legislation;

they can be used to change the way people see issues."

Now 43, Obaid-Chinoy has scored seven Emmys, two Academy Awards (her first win in 2012, for the critically acclaimed *Saving Face*, made her the first Pakistani Oscar winner), a write-up in *Time Magazine*'s 100 Most Influential People and a Hilal-i-Imtiaz (Crescent of Excellence) award, a Pakistani designation that is the second-highest citizen honor, for her work as a filmmaker. Of her episodic debut directing episodes of Marvel's latest Disney+ venture, *Ms. Marvel*, created by Bisha K. Ali, Obaid-Chinoy says, "For the better part of two decades, I've been telling stories about ordinary women who are extraordinary because of the work they do in their communities. They are all superheroes but without capes. So, when my agent said to me that *Ms. Marvel* was looking for a director, I was like, this is just a tiny step away from the work that I've done because here's a superhero that represents so much [of the Muslim culture], and her story is going to matter. I really wanted to put my hat in the ring, so I did. I remember thinking to myself, 'I've been a storyteller for two decades, I can just go straight into the Marvel Cinematic Universe, right?'"

Ms. Marvel tells the story of teenage superhero Kamala Khan (Iman Vellani), a Pakistani-American, who tries to grapple with both having to save the world from cosmic threats and trying to pass her driver's test exam. Like the comic, the TV series is set within the Muslim community. Kamala and her family go to the mosque and speak Urdu, and the storylines often have to do with Kamala occasionally challenging older traditions. It was important for Disney that the majority of people involved in the production of the show be an accurate representation of the South Asian community, and Obaid-Chinoy holds the distinction of being the first Pakistani director involved with the MCU as a whole. Of her approach, Obaid-Chinoy says, "I love a good joke, and I love a good [relatable] human story. I wanted Kamala to be universal. I wanted any young person watching her to see a reflection of themselves and their lives in her. I wanted her to transcend the boundaries of just being a South Asian superhero. *Ms. Marvel* at the end of the day is a story about a family and their trials and tribulations as they try to find their footing in New Jersey. Kamala's parents just want to provide their children with the best opportunities while trying to have them retain a part of their culture.

"I saw what *Black Panther* did for people in the [Black] community," Obaid-Chinoy continues. "And [with *Ms. Marvel*] this is our moment. This is our story. I know there are moments that will be just as relatable to South Asian immigrants and any immigrant around the world because [the series] is such a celebration of our culture—our music, our food, who we are and where we come from. And that we matter. *Ms. Marvel* is going to be an anthem to our generation, to our culture, to our people. And within that anthem you will hear your grandmother's voice, your mother's voice, the [traditional] music and you will see them eating the food that you eat. You will hear them using the [culturally specific] jokes that you use. You will see that your life is now a part of pop culture now, and that's powerful."

Destiny Jackson is a freelance entertainment journalist living in Los Angeles. When not stuck behind her laptop, she can be found; haunting the local cinema, listening to Coldplay (unironically) or looking for pictures of Spider-Man. You can follow her on Twitter (@destinydreadful). She apologizes in advance.

Severance and Sub-Creation

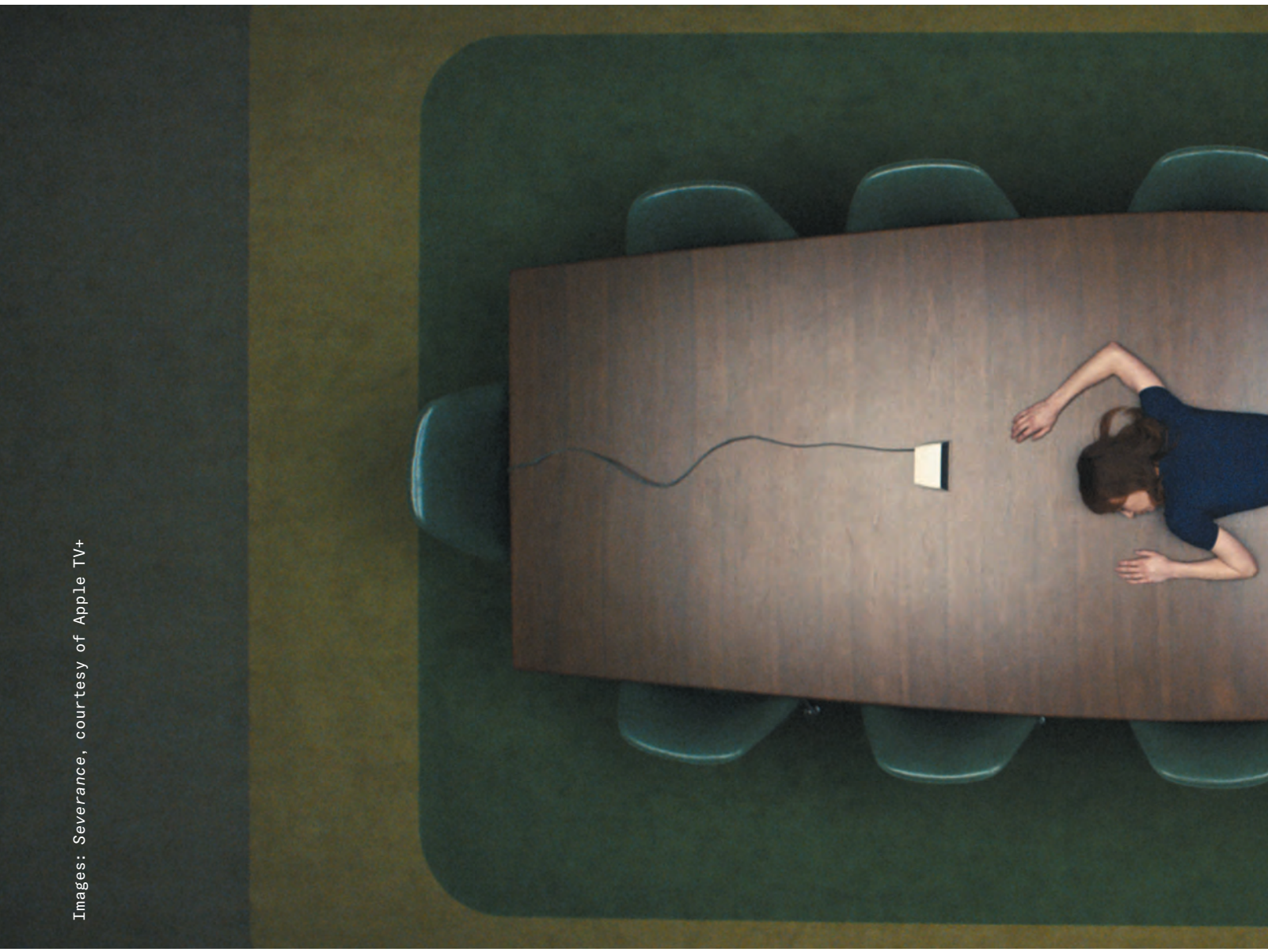
Brendan Byrne on the relationship of the Apple TV+ hit to science fiction's history of "world-building."

In what would have been called in an earlier period of TV development "the pilot" of Apple TV+'s series *Severance*, Mark (Adam Scott) attends a dinner party populated by the most obnoxious people in any possible world—members of the professional class chattering about various online thinkpieces. Amidst their debates, the attendees learn of Mark's high-concept job at Lumon Industries, where only employees who have had their work and non-work selves surgically divided—employees who have no knowledge of their work lives when they're at home and vice versa—may labor on the company's secretive "severed floor." Immediately, he is questioned about the ethical, logistical, psychological and existential ramifications of this extreme answer to the work–life balance problem. The look of weary resignation on Mark's booze-ravaged face relays his objection: how is it acceptable that my life is fodder for your chat? (Scott here once again plays a job-haunted alcoholic depressive with innate personal charisma, although in a different register than in the Starz sitcom *Party Down* [2009–2010].)

At first, it is tempting to think of the party's attendees (who return in the season's final two episodes) only as a particularly vicious satire of the thinkpiece-enraptured. However, *Severance*, as a water cooler show for a post-water cooler world, needs to justify its Apple-funded existence by generating brain-fucks at a relatively stable rate. Thus, the show, which was created by Dan Erickson, repeatedly prompts its audience to contemplate the very questions Mark's dinner party companions pose. Impressively, it manages to do so without too much viewer hand-holding. It does not open with a scroll, its characters do not speak in info dumps and its narrative is not a *Candide*-like introduction to a world. *Severance* doles out context slowly, allowing its audience to (re)draft their map of the territory as they encounter it. This kind of cognitive estrangement, requiring audience labor, was the norm

in adult science fiction across various entertainment industries before the genre encountered the Outside Context Problem of YA. While SF has always moved fluidly between age-bracketed buckets, the YA (young adult) marketing category emerged in the 1960s, thriving on, according to *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, "genre fusion… rather than genre purity," with an emphasis on first-person POV and "interpersonal relationships." This is a polite way of saying "soap opera," which is an impolite way of saying "drama." The success of *The Hunger Games* (2008) hardened these emphases into an affect which, combined with the tastes of a generation reared on fan fiction, dictates the current literary marketplace of the genre. What sets *Severance* even further apart in this marketplace is that, instead of congratulating its audience for engaging in cognitive labor, it interrogates their desire to consume other people's drama, whether in the real or built world.

Usually, this kind of SF invokes the dread specter of "world-building," a term which refers to making clear the construction of the undergirding imaginary in which the story takes place. Strictly speaking, *Severance*'s creators do not world-build. In the show, there is no COVID pandemic (though this is the norm for contemporary television), and the social and political effects of the vaguely cultish corporate entity of Lumon reverberate on a minor scale. Otherwise, *Severance's* world is ours.



Images: *Severance*, courtesy of Apple TV+

Lumon's severed floor is not. The severing process untethers the employee completely from the outside world's influence, then places them in a cloistered environment that comes complete with its own rules, history, logic and goals. The rules are made clear to the newly severed employee (and thus to the audience). The logic has a deeper grammar, though—one the employee internalizes without fully understanding. This explains the popularity

of the show: isn't all corporate life conducted by those who have internalized a logic they cannot fully explain? The severed floor's history remains a faintly menacing, just-out-of-reach amalgamation of rumors, lies, sanctioned lore and guesswork. Its goals remain, at the close of the first season, unknown.

In *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (2012), Mark J.P. Wolf offers a concise example of world-building through a close reading of the Robert Heinlein sentence fragment "the door dilated," found in his novel *Beyond This Horizon*. Heinlein suggests, in three words, "not only a different architecture and technology, but also a society technologically advanced to the point where such doors are possible." Wolf then teases out the implications of these three words. They are myriad.

The progenitor of world-building as a codified technique rather than merely an impulse is J.R.R. Tolkien, whose prose set on Arda, where Middle-Earth has its existence, is pockmarked by poetry, song info-dumps *avant la lettre* and vast appendices, many of which are now being strip-mined for Amazon's upcoming TV show *The Rings of Power*. Tolkien's volumes' immense swathes of historical time and intricately detailed social structures deeply influenced generations of SF readers and writers, providing a presumed gold standard for authenticity in the creation of a secondary world, which the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* defines as an "autonomous world or venue which is not bound to mundane reality... and which is self-coherent as a venue for story." (As academic Ben Robertson has noted, world-building, with its anxieties about "coherence & consistency," signposts SF's lineage from literary realism.)

In his 1947 essay "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien writes, "[F]airy-stories are not in normal English usage

Brendan Byrne's novella *Accelerate* appeared in 2021. *The Training Commission*, co-written with Ingrid Burrington, appeared in 2019.

stories about fairies or elves, but stories about Fairy, that is Faerie, the realm or state within which fairies have their being." Stories merely about fairies, Tolkien suggests correctly, are boring. Tolkien is careful to refer to the process of constructing secondary worlds as sub-creation, to best distinguish, in a Catholic manner, its hierarchical nature. (God creates man, man creates elves, etc.) The secular arrogance of world-building would come post-Tolkien, although there is no consensus regarding even its approximate origin. (Unfortunately, Philip K. Dick's use of both "world building" and "world-building" in his 1953 short story "The Trouble with Bubbles" seems to be a red herring.) A not-even-remotely authoritative search of Google Books has the term showing up with recurring frequency in the mid-to-late 1970s, in such specialist titles as *Writing and Selling Science Fiction* (1976) and *Science Fiction Voices 2* (1979), as well as George Edgar Slusser's more academic *The Delany Intersection* (1977). Critic and co-editor of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* John Clute suggests that "world-building in traditional hard SF—like Hal Clement—almost went without saying, like good grammar" and thus did not necessitate a neologism.

In the first two decades of the new millennium, the term became an industry standard and mainstay of mainstream storytelling. It seems to have reached an inflection point in 2010, with the word's n-grams beginning a spike that would more than double by 2014. During this period, SF fandom, virulently infected by YA, increasingly demanded comforting and immersive illusions of escape. The most successful secondary worlds, at least going back to Tolkien, have acted as both escape hatches from reality and also loci for community formation. Simultaneously, multimedia franchises (roughly, from LotR to Harry Potter to MCU) became Hollywood's latest financial cornerstone. These vast corporate secondary worlds required new ways of conceptualization and management, both of which the practice of world-building offered. You are now as likely to see the term in a *New York Times* review of contemporary literary fiction (whatever *that* is) or hear it in a streaming pitch meeting as you are to read it on a specialist blog.

Responses to this dominance have varied. In 2011, SF author Charles Stross proposed world-building as "the primary distinguishing characteristic of SF and fantasy (at least at a superficial level)," only to suggest less than seven years later that it was increasingly being executed incorrectly. Author and critic M. John Harrison, in his 2007 blog post "very afraid," designated world-building as an "attempt to exhaustively survey a place that isn't there" and coined the useful phrase "the great clomping foot of nerdism." Harrison's *Viriconium* sequence (1971 to

1984) is a direct response to post-Tolkien fantasy: the history, geography, physics and characters of its titular city are constantly shifting. Harrison's objection to the aforementioned "coherence & consistency" can be seen as primarily political. Others view world-building as a more politically flexible tool. Academic Leif Sorensen offers N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy as an example of an emerging trend of SF authors of color focusing on *re*building worlds that have experienced radical breaks from the previous order. It is possible to see this evolving rhetorical situation as an outgrowth of a generation-spanning dispute over escapism in SF, which (surprise!) goes back to Tolkien. In a 2002 piece in the *Socialist Review,* SF author China Miéville countered a quotation C.S. Lewis attributed to his fellow Inkling regarding "jailers" as the "class of men… most preoccupied with, and hostile to, the idea of escape" with this Michael Moorcock quotation: "Jailers love escapism. What they hate is escape."

While *Severance* is not set in a secondary world, Lumon's corporate creators are engaged in the act of an ongoing heretical IRL sub-creation. (*Severance*'s creators create Lumon, Lumon creates the severed floor, etc.) *Severance*, thus, is about the concerns of those who find themselves in a built world: what it feels like to be subject to such deeply structured control, whether it be corporate, political or authorial. The irony that such content is being offered by the streaming subdivision of a company whose name once stood as shorthand, along with "Foxconn," for insidious mistreatment of workers has been blunted by the past decade's obsessive refocus on domestic production and labor, allowing Amazon to assume the role, for the time being, of primary corporate bête noire.

Despite its bleak view of the professional world and deep vein of personal sadness, *Severance* is a hopeful show. It believes that human beings are ultimately driven to escape, not into the comforting simplicity of secondary worlds, but out of the built worlds that have been imposed upon them. This hopefulness, whether it is an organic extension of the show's creators' worldviews or not, is a necessary prerequisite in the current corporate climate. The streaming industry's prevailing logic, backed by copious metadata, indicates that audiences have an insatiable desire for such comforting simplicity. At the same time, a worldview centered around the triumph of the human spirit seems, in the current political climate, almost nostalgically quaint. Contemporary history suggests the class of person perhaps even more hostile to the idea of escape than the jailer is the jailed.

AFTER THE PARTY

Moods were high in Cannes, with much dealmaking, but, writes Tiffany Pritchard, distributors and sales agents are still navigating the pandemic-altered film landscape.

Film business sprang back to life in Cannes this year, with nary a peep from the usual "sky is falling" fearmongers. After two years of virtual markets, dealmakers were thrilled that premiering films could be watched together with international audiences, meetings could be done in person with near-full film slates and projects could be negotiated across territories with support from a multitude of producers. As UTA Independent Film Group's John McGrath said on a panel at the American Pavilion, festivals and in-person marketplaces create the kind of urgency that drives deals and business. Indeed, there hasn't been such an abundance of deals at one time since the pre-pandemic days, with streamers Netflix, MUBI and Apple TV+ making splashy buys out of the festival and market both, while distributors A24, NEON, Utopia, IFC, Sony Pictures Classics and Janus Films, among others, all bought festival titles that will head to theatrical screens.

But while the industry was in high spirits, agents, distributors, exhibitors and filmmakers are all working through remaining pandemic-related challenges. Visit Films's head Ryan Kampe says, "In general, business is trying to come back, but I don't think it's on solid footing yet." Chris Tuffin, managing director of foreign sales at production company Sentient Pictures International, elaborates: "With bigger films, there's a concern about which ones will actually be able to make their sales/finance budget, either due to overly ambitious pricing or being flipped [before completion] to a streamer. Smaller films are fighting for the few dollars left over."

From sales pricing and deal-making to production budgeting

and distribution slates, misalignments remain across the industry. As the fall markets and awards season approach, here are some of the discussions I found the industry weighing in on.

THE CONUNDRUM OF HIGHER PRODUCTION BUDGETS AND SALES PRICES

It's common knowledge that production budgets have increased for both scripted and unscripted content due to continued COVID protocols and hefty insurance costs coupled with inflation and skyrocketing talent fees. The question is, how do producers and financiers recoup higher production budgets when cash-strapped distributors are not able to pay more?

"Costs are going up, yet buyers are paying less, so you get downward pressure on your budgets from distributors and financiers," says Canadian producer Dan Bekerman, whose credits include *The Witch* and Viggo Mortensen's directorial debut *Falling*. "It can be stressful." He sees these factors driving more North American independent production overseas, where soft money and insurance support are more readily available. British producer Michael Ryan, partner at production, financing and distribution sales company GFM Animation and chairman of Independent Film & Television Alliance, also spoke at Cannes, saying independent producers have no choice but to budget for less: his budgets, he says, are now roughly 20 to 25 percent lower than before the pandemic.

With increased budgets comes increased cast lines. Matthew Helderman of production and finance outfit BondIt Media Capital says, "Streamers have definitely impacted this as they will overpay talent, which leads to a trickle-down effect where agents and managers will hold off on their clients joining indie projects as a streamer opportunity could be 10 times higher the rate. This makes it much harder for independent films to get off the ground."

Regarding the pricing of completed films, distributors have different points of view depending on the territory. Kino Lorber's senior vice president of theatrical/nontheatrical distribution and acquisitions, Wendy Lidell, tells me she noted that asking prices from sales agents for independent specialty and foreign language films remained largely steady, or even went down, because "sales agents understand the older arthouse audience has not returned to theaters in pre-pandemic numbers." Robert Aaronson, senior vice president of Cohen Media Group, concurs, saying he also did not see a great difference in prices except for the more exclusive festival premieres. But sales agents' slates are overstuffed: "There is plenty of product to go around," he says.

One smaller UK distributor described higher prices tied to the strong dollar, while others say that the loss of markets in China (due to increased censorship and continued COVID challenges) and Russia (despite rumors swirling that Russians are still buying, discreetly, from willing sales agents) have elevated asking prices. Another mid-size UK sales agent tells me they have had issues with certain territories struggling to meet price demands because of COVID-related issues but, given the last two years, are not in a position to lower their asking price. As Tuffin summarizes, buyers seldom take

into account production challenges like COVID, just like sales agents fail to take into account how distributors have managed to survive two years with no one in theaters: "We tend to listen only when we are forced to. That's one of capitalism's inherent problems."

EQUITY FINANCING

The state of the equity finance markets was also disputed. At Winston Baker's Film Finance Forum in Cannes, Rob Reiner spoke about his relaunch of Castle Rock Pictures with a $175 million fund from banks and blue chip investors, including one of the co-founders of the Moderna vaccine. (The company's new slate launches with Reiner's sequel to *Spinal Tap*, the original of which played on the beach during the festival.) In the same session, another speaker cited the role of private equity in large deals, such as the $900 million sale of Reese Witherspoon's Hello Sunshine production company to a new media venture backed by private equity firm Blackstone. But for smaller deals and individual pictures, producers speaking at the American Pavilion said equity financing is currently very tough. "Equity, equity, equity—it's a huge challenge," said lawyer and producer Harris Tulchin. "There are wonderful places you can find subsidies and rebates, and if you have a good sales company and compelling material, you can still make some pre-sales. But the challenge is finding the equity."

John Sloss, founder of the talent management, content sales and strategic advisory company Cinetic Media, also spoke about equity at the American Pavilion. He says that age-old motivations—e.g., to be connected to the glamor of the film business—are still in play, but there's a disconnect between the needs of equity investors and the current state of the theatrical marketplace. "The traditional equity model is being challenged," he says. "So, when those distributors come back, and it's not just flipping to the streamers for buyout, then I believe there will be more equity than ever. Right now, that is a tough model." We'll soon see whether the upswing in theatrical-driven deals at Cannes presages a better environment for equity investors.

The continual, age-old need for name actors to lock in independent film equity financing was cited again and again across various panels, with Bekerman sighing, "What a novel idea." Helderman adds that the level of cast needed to unlock pre-sales is higher than ever. Indeed, risk-aversion marks the post-pandemic era, and name talent is associated with financial safety, particularly for dramas or any other type of film that is not deemed genre or feel-good. And with the huge boom in streamer-backed production, securing key below-the-line crew is almost as tough as securing talent, says Jillian Apfelbaum, executive vice president of content at Village Roadshow Pictures. She comments that aligning talent, crew and financing availability can be very difficult. Apfelbaum points out that investors will be more apt to give a producer cash once there is already a financial backbone for the project—again, nothing new, but it seems doubly important at the moment.

Also speaking at Winston Baker's Film Finance Forum in Cannes, Participant Media's executive

Images: *Holy Spider* (pg. 112-113, courtesy of Profile PicturesOne Two Films; *Costa Brava, Lebanon* (this page, courtesy of MK@ Films)

vice president of content and platform strategy, Liesl Copland, suggested producers track which territories may have increased funding opportunities, whether due to new incentives or because a streamer has recently launched in a territory and hasn't yet allocated a budget for local production. She gave the example of *Costa Brava, Lebanon* from Lebanese filmmaker Mounia Akl, which premiered in Venice last year and was sold by Participant to Netflix for the Middle East. She also observed a rise in production entity federations, whereby companies based in different countries aid each other in centralizing resources, providing intel and banding together with cross-border producers to scale and collaborate at different stages. Others spoke of co-producers banding together across territories to mitigate risk with soft money and subsidies before seeking equity support. Cinetic's international sales and worldwide distribution strategist Jason Ishikawa stated that global collaborations help get projects off the ground that are not necessarily cast-driven or from well-known filmmakers.

DEAL-MAKING: ANYTHING GOES

From traditional models, including foreign pre-sales and selling territory by territory, to worldwide rights and more hybrid models, where studios might take multiple territories and sales agents, then sell everything else, it's safe to say deal-making is all over the map, too.

Cohen Media Group, which announced its acquisition of *My Neighbor Adolf* for North America during Cannes, often goes the more traditional route, securing pre-sales in the early production stages (if it's a level it is comfortable with). Aaronson adds that some sales agents ask to hold off on the domestic pre-sale as the upside, making, in some cases, the pre-sale process more difficult. Cohen, he says, is not competing with the Netflixes of the world, which are taking big swings for material that appeals to the masses. They are instead focused on niche content targeted toward committed moviegoers, betting that arthouse audiences will start regularly going to the theater again and haven't been permanently conditioned to simply sit at home watching streaming platforms.

Kino Lorber, too, is returning to theatrical, but Lidell says each film needs to be treated differently: "Like other distributors in response to the breaking of the 90-day window, we are experimenting with all of our windows to find the sweet spot for each different kind of film." A holdover of pandemic experimentation, the distributor's virtual platform, Kino Marquee, is still up and running.

Regarding in-person screenings, Kampe of Visit Films says he can more easily carve out theatrical and festival rights for some titles, and that he's also seeing a push by distributors for real theatrical windows—as opposed to day-and-date—again. About windowing, Tiffany Boyle, president of Ramo Law, says that the issue is brought up at the start of every deal-making conversation with the question, "Are we doing theatrical, and what does that window look like?" People are trying to be more flexible and more cognizant of this from the top, rather than it being sprung on them too late, explains Boyle.

Clay Epstein of Film Mode Entertainment—which is currently selling Mayim Bialik's dramedy *As They Made Us*, starring Dustin Hoffman and Candice Bergen, and K. Asher Levin's thriller *Dig*, with Thomas Jane and Emile Hirsch—says his company is seeing more multiterritory deals. Owing to the high costs and subsequent risks in releasing a film theatrically, a distributor's business model may focus on risk mitigation, which usually means a TV or streaming deal locked up before big money is spent on P&A, or maybe buying more than one territory. More often than not, he is finding most of the independent distributors are playing in the VOD/TV space, which is, once again, heavily dependent on cast-driven, commercial films.

But when I think of VOD cast-driven releases, I tend to think of worldwide deals. How prevalent are those deals still? BondIt Media's Helderman says he is seeing plenty of worldwide rights deals from streamers, studios and direct to consumer/home entertainment buyers like Saban, Vertical and Quiver. In contrast, Village Roadshow's Apfelbaum says she has noticed less of its content getting streaming deals, which inadvertently reflects on the number of worldwide deals. Tuffin agrees, saying he too has not seen a bevy of worldwide deals except Netflix over the past several years, which he attributes to pricing and exclusivity issues with regional first look and output partners.

If Netflix does take a Village Roadshow film, adds Apfelbaum, it is usually after their film has been completed—which is counter to the experience of other sellers I spoke to, who recommend striking a streamer deal early on. She also says that many (up to 200!) U.S. streaming platforms, particularly emerging ones, are now angling to control all territories: "They want all the territories even if they don't have a presence or footprint in that territory because the intention is they will in five to 10 years, which is beneficial for a 15-year license fee."

The tension between territorial pre-sales and the demands of an all-rights buyer like a streamer—a tension typified by the release of the Oscar-winning *CODA*—was referenced throughout the festival. *CODA* was an example where several territories had been pre-sold, deals that had

to be painfully renegotiated once Apple bought the film at Sundance and demanded worldwide rights. In previous years, there was a trend where streamers would pay back with a premium to local distributors to take global rights, but in this case, several held on to theatrical, arguing that they supported the film from the beginning and would stick with their releasing plan. Cinetic's Ishikawa cited a similar example around the company's sale of *I Am Greta*: "If distributors want it badly enough, they will fight for their rights." Still, he says, "We used to unwind territorial licenses to get a global deal all the time. It can be ugly and messy, and we try to avoid it."

Protagonist's head of sales, Janina Vilsmaier, says it too can have challenges in aligning territories with a global release. She uses the example of Elizabeth Banks's abortion drama *Call Jane,* picked up by Roadside Attractions for the U.S. after its Sundance premiere. While she says Protagonist was thrilled by Roadside's screen commitment, it was challenging to tell European partners they had to wait 10 months before they could release: "It's getting more and more tricky to get things aligned. Everyone has to work together."

CONTENT: WHAT'S HOT

Even more than in the past, higher-budgeted packaged genre content like action, thriller and sci-fi are deemed safe sells, which some consider critical for pre-sales. Action is king of international because it speaks to broad demographics. Comedy is also a safe market bet, particularly when there is a proven comedic star attached. Christmas movies are also making their way into bigger production hands, says Boyle, who notes that family content is strong, too. But the "depressing stuff" is harder unless there is a big name or director involved.

One Australian industry head says she heard sales agents saying in meetings they are looking for "projects that pop." If it's arthouse, then it needs authorial depth; if it's unique, it should also be personal. These sales agents advise not to use the word "drama" unless top talent is attached. Tuffin adds that having a strong, reliable filmmaker on board can add trust and value for buyers and allow for new acting talent that otherwise may not be considered "sellable." He uses the example of Sentient's latest action thriller *Sombra,* which it introduced in Cannes. Along with director Antonio Negret, the producers attached Latin actor Juan Pablo Raba, just off *Freelance* opposite John Cena and Alison Brie, and Portuguese actress Daniela Melchior, who starred in *The Suicide Squad* and *Fast X*. Neither are top-line stars, he explains, yet they ignited the imagination of buyers, who recognize they are buying in on the next generation of Latin and European talent.

WHAT'S NEXT

With Venice, Toronto and AFM looming and more films in post, buyers are expecting buzzier, cast-driven projects. Epstein says it's worth observing changes happening in both the streaming platforms and the traditional television markets, as this too affects the international marketplace. One example of a traditional television disruptor, AVOD (ad-supported video-on-demand), has already proven itself lucrative for distributors and producers, and it seems only a matter of time before Netflix joins the ad-tiered approach.

Distributors will be continuing to note the streaming platforms' buying patterns, with Boyle anticipating the confusion about how certain streamers will be proceeding as an opportunity for independent buyers to continue acquiring films that might have gone to streamers a year or two ago.

Tuffin, meanwhile, expects studios and streamers to shift back toward acquisitions, as forced downsizing and cuts often have a direct relationship with development and production, saying, "With the plethora of streamers needing content to fill their pipeline, this should in time start to favor indie and international producers, but at what price levels we aren't sure yet."

By the fall, distributors will have full slates, and it will be interesting to observe how awards contenders and specialty dramas will be released. Recent box-office figures are encouraging, says Lidell, but not up to pre-pandemic levels for these films. Many industry insiders estimate at least another year for recovery. In the meantime, which films can break out amidst the continued inundation of content across mediums?

On the deal-making side, will we see more hybrid approaches? Can buyers take on bigger deals, with worldwide rights and all territories? Will China return as a major player? And will smaller territories bridge together and work more as coalitions? One thing is for sure: after the pandemic's forced stay-at-home viewing, everyone wants the film business to spring back to theatrical life in some shape or form.

Tiffany Pritchard has worked in the film industry for over 15 years across marketing, design and video production. When not creating digital marketing content for companies such as StudioCanal in London or her own outfit Collectiff, Tiffany writes for film publications including Screen International and *Filmmaker Magazine* covering film festivals and industry news throughout the year.

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