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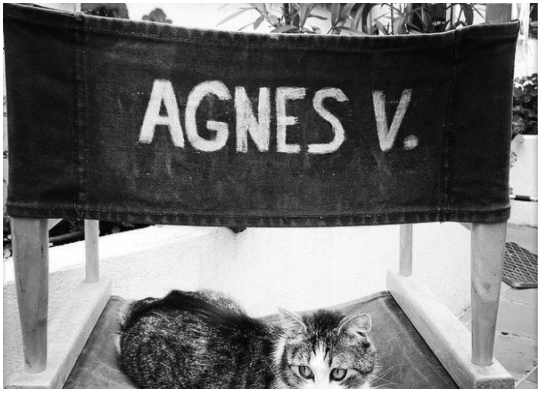

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Layout by Julia Rothkoff
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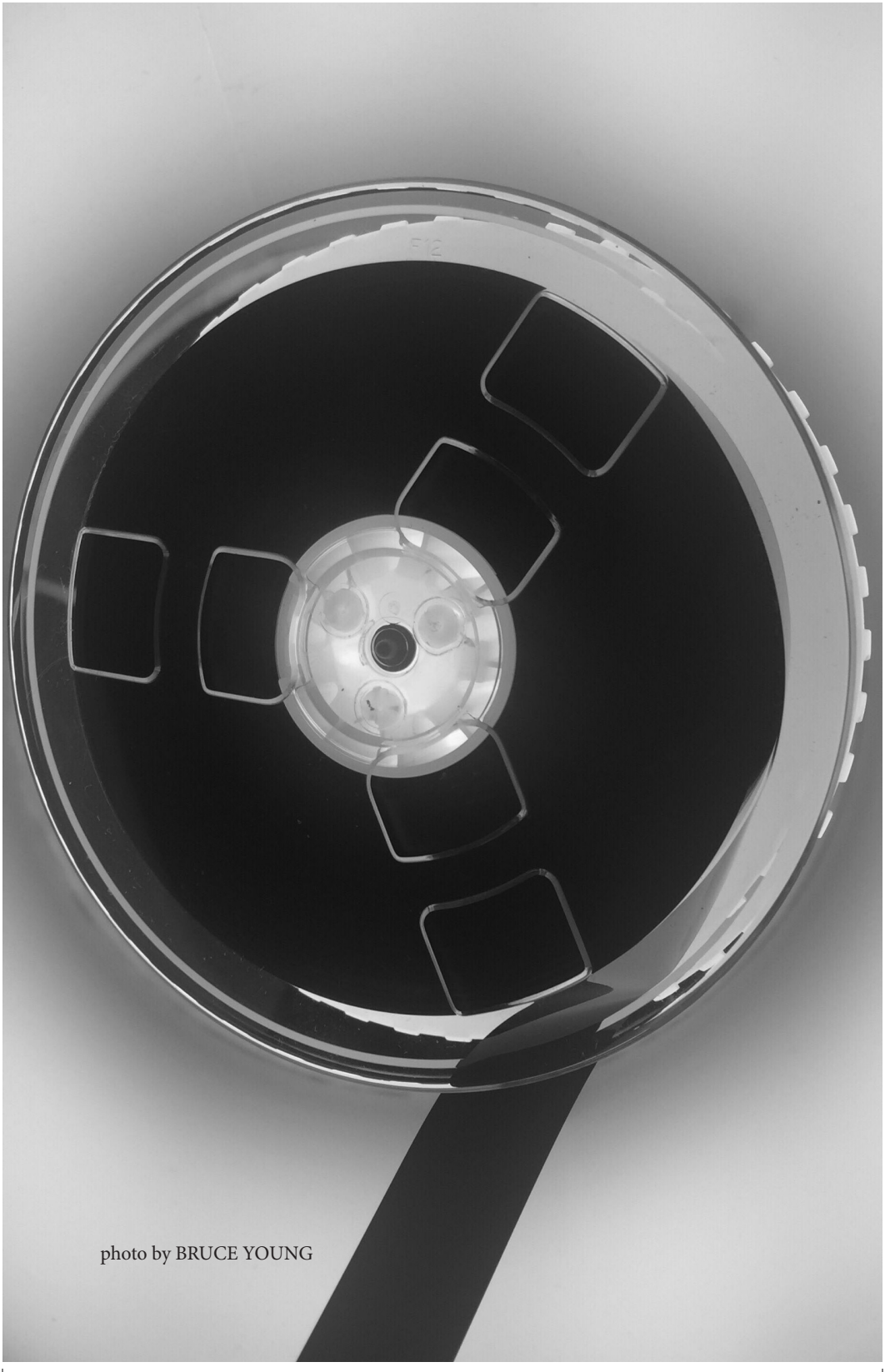

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contents

The Limits of Love Crystal Lua 4
Infidelity in Philippe Garrel's Films

God of the Loop Julia Rothkoff 14
An Examination of the Time Loop Protagonist and the Gamer

Minimalist Dreams Mohar Kalra 22
On the Surreal Films of Marie Losier

Cinema in the First Person Milan Loewer 26
An Interview with László Nemes

Hallowomen Dejavis Bosket 34
An Analysis of the Final Girl Trope in the Halloween Films

Ghost of Perfection Iris Sang 40
An Examination of Ghost in the Shell

Posthuman Woman Madeleine Collier 44
Dubbing and Autotune in the Hollywood Musical

THE LIMITS OF LOVE

INFIDELITY IN PHILIPPE GARREL'S FILMS

by CRYSTAL LUA

"Cinema is Freud plus Lumière," is Philippe Garrel's most-quoted refrain. And aptly so, for the French director whose quietly devastating films tease an emotional sublimity out of every frame of reality. Watching his films, one engages with the work of both a Romantic and a romantic, but perhaps that oversimplifies his style, for he only deals with romance insofar as he deconstructs it. His recent films attempt to illuminate something ugly yet intensely vital about love, or more accurately, about infidelity—the spaces where love begins to break down. One of the lesser-known auteurs of the French New Wave, Garrel's prolific filmography spans five decades, during which he simultaneously works within a formidable tradition of French cinema

A Burning Hot Summer (2011)

and seeks to define his own aesthetic with strains of philosophical introspection, moody black-and-white, and shades of flawed masculinity. His post-2000 work marks a shift from his earlier films, which were coloured by the drug-hazy, agitational atmosphere of the aftermath of 1968. In this oeuvre within an oeuvre, Garrel takes all the simmering restlessness and discontent of that era and brings it into the domestic sphere, inflecting his contemplative cinema with a bohemian melancholy.

Infidelity occupies a consistent presence in most of his films; he revisits this with renewed intensity in *A Burning Hot Summer* (*Un été brûlant*) (2011), *Jealousy* (*La jalousie*) (2013), and *In the Shadow of Women* (*L'Ombre des femmes*) (2015). Made consecutively, these three newer films form an "infidelity trio" of sorts. Each of the three films conducts an achingly poignant meditation on the vagaries of desire and art, on fickle love or lack of love. Despite incorporating experimental riffs on one common theme, his films unfold with verisimilitude through his deeply poetic narratives and subtle cinematography.

Fragmented Narratives

Garrel's films are the cinematic equivalent of Impressionist paintings—each individual scene disjointed and seemingly liminal, only cohering in a profoundly atmospheric shimmer of an idea. His films defy narrative clarity in favour of evoking the fragmentary, disorienting experience of a tumultuous love. "You don't love someone in a void," a woman accuses her lover in *Jealousy*. Garrel is acutely aware that love doesn't exist within a vacuum. Working within what is arguably a French cinematic trope of morally complex, enigmatic romance, Garrel's ruthlessly honest and bewilderingly fractured style is his response to rose-tinted New Wave chic.

He counters this most clearly by situating his films in densely layered contexts, especially in *A Burning Hot Summer*, where divisive political movements continue to intrude upon an idyllic summer, and one couple's cataclysmic fallout nearly results in another's. *A Burning Hot Summer* is, character-wise, the most intricate of the three. Garrel sketches out the fault lines that emerge when Frédéric and Angèle, a married couple whose faithful bliss is rapidly disintegrating, invite Paul (Frédéric's newfound friend and a bit part actor) and his girlfriend Élisabeth to live with them. Over one languorous summer in Rome, tensions unfurl in a series of slow-burning tableaus. The broodingly sensitive Frédéric, played by the director's son Louis Garrel, is the archetypal Romantic artist, artfully disheveled hair and all: he works in flashes of inspiration, citing love and art as his only two spiritual lodestars. He veers between confrontational sardonicism and raw, vulnerable sincerity, especially with Angèle, his fragile, sensual enigma of a wife, played by Monica Bellucci. But amidst their incendiary clashes Garrel lingers on the absolute mundanity of interstitial moments. The first time we are introduced to Angèle as Frédéric's wife, she is picking a splinter out of his foot, a tableau at

once drolly comical and entirely unremarkable.

His characters thus seem suspended in a perpetual state of in-betweenness, always falling in love or falling out of it. The films are entirely about love, but in an ironic twist, rarely depict romantic bliss, nor acknowledge the possibility of a fulfilling relationship. *In the Shadow of Women* maps out a futile emotional landscape: a cheating filmmaker (Pierre), his clingy mistress (Elisabeth), his long-suffering wife and assistant (Manon), and her unnamed, hapless lover. In one scene, Garrel cuts between the married couple looking at each other, flickering between Manon's adoring smiles and Pierre's indifferent gaze. And perhaps this is love's greatest undoing—the wearied indifference that seeps into his characters' interactions. Meanwhile, *Jealousy* strips the focus down to Louis (again played by the younger Garrel), a struggling theatre actor whose lugubrious good looks do little to fill his coffers, though they do facilitate his remorseless infidelity. Despite his culpability, Louis Garrel paints him with nuance, at times louche and callous, at times a tender father. In the opening scenes he leaves his partner Clothilde and daughter for another actress, Claudia, whiling his days away navigating his own emotional inadequacies and unsuccessfully trying to get Claudia a part. At one point, Claudia says, "We're here to have as full a life as possible, not to wait. Waiting is death." The line is written with a touch of irony, since Garrel's films are all about waiting. It is precisely in such scenes that dissatisfaction emerges; nothing concrete happens, but everything is at stake.

Wherever his films might verge on the melodramatic, Garrel purposefully steers away. We never see Angèle revealing her affair, though we do see Frédéric's protracted self-pity in its wake. Her confession is relegated to Paul's narration, cleverly dodging the central conflict. Likewise, there are no sex scenes; love is rarely sexualized, and the director has a knack for depicting desire in a more spiritual, oblique fashion. Every frame is charged with a fierce yet tender expressivity, whether it's in the close-ups of desperate, loving glances Manon throws Pierre, or an intimate cigarette Claudia shares with a stranger in the throes of her loneliness. Amidst the pointed gazes and disconnected moments, Garrel creates spaces for ambiguity. When Louis kisses a fellow thespian after rehearsal, it takes a while before we realize the woman isn't Claudia. The clandestine flirtation leads nowhere—she never reappears, and the purpose of this brief encounter is never explored, either; where Garrel might push moral confrontations further or extrapolate character development, the plot falls flat.

In pursuit of pure gestural atmosphere, Garrel's films tend to sacrifice cogency, leaving the viewer to connect the scattered dots. Yet arguably, in doing so, he saves non-essential narrative space for an underlying mood of existential ennui to emerge. For instance, in *A Burning Hot Summer*, realism is interspersed with mysterious dreamlike sequences. Early in the film an anonymous woman (only subsequently identi-

fied as Frédéric's wife) lies naked on vivid blue sheets, gesturing seductively towards the viewer in a scene evocative of a Venus painting. The abrupt cut to Frédéric crashing his car raises unanswered questions: was she a memory? A fantasy? These asides sometimes weaken narrative purpose, reading as an aimless amalgamation of elements.

An Objective Lens

This detachment translates into Garrel's cinematographic style, one that softens and mediates his characters' clashes. Often, it feels like the camera is capturing what occurs in the incidental moments—a welcome respite for viewers, for his characters' lives are characterized by a deep, pervasive dissatisfaction. They rank among those stylish, sentimental *bon vivants* who aspire towards some greater happiness, who are incapable of—or simply unsatisfied with—mediocrity, who live only in extremes. His characters are as explosively maudlin as they are hedonistic.

Yet the camera's gaze is always neutral, and the mise-en-scène is always sparse. Garrel seems to suggest that if viewers point a camera at the quotidian for long enough, something profound will emerge. The camera directs his gaze, and by extension, ours, at an unadulterated reality—or at least a cinematic image made potent by effacing its own patina of pretense (returning to Freud and Lumière). As Louis drives to his death at the beginning of *A Burning Hot Summer*, the camera stays steady on his face in a scene that lasts two minutes. Against a contrasting soundtrack of calm piano melodies, we see his expression transform from distraught, to forlorn, to a glassy blankness. Later in the movie, the same steady camera gaze tracks Élisabeth as she sleepwalks around the villa's pool under the sway of some unknown perturbation. What is the purpose of her sleepwalking? We never find out, but it hardly feels accidental. Deciphering Garrel's films require the same patience espoused in his cinematographic style, parsing the unfulfilling red herrings that don't detract from the plot so much

Jealousy (2013)

as disrupt it with the everyday, proving we don't love in a melodramatic vacuum.

The relationship of Garrel's camera to his characters is that of a calm eye amidst a maelstrom. A scene in his 2004 film *Regular Lovers* depicts a youthful crowd dancing, movements ecstatic and uninhibited; as the camera roves among the bodies, it cuts to reveal the solitary protagonist merely watching them, silent and still. In the same vein, his camera enacts this deliberately observational mode with a keen eye, allowing the stormy emotional action to play itself out. In the liminal spaces between action and dialogue, Garrel's camera captures the minutiae of gestures, articulating multifaceted relationships far more potently than words ever could. In a particularly memorable scene, Claudia, Louis, and his daughter sit around a dinner table. He watches his daughter, and Claudia watches him, enframed in a strange triangulation. Notably, the camera never deviates throughout the conversation, keeping all three of them in the frame, allowing the unspoken tensions to cohere. Instead of sweeping flourishes, every careful shift is weighty, made poetic through the economy of his camera movement.

Garrel's cinematography reveals a remarkable ability to bring us into vulnerable moments. In *Jealousy*, the camera does little more than simple pans. When Louis and Claudia walk through the streets, heady with novel romance, the camera keeps close to them with a tight tracking shot. We feel like we are intruding, a sensation exacerbated by the copious use of lengthy takes. For instance, Angèle and her secret lover lie in bed for a minute-long shot, utterly silent and motionless, captured in all their frag-

In the Shadow of Women (2015)

ile intimacy. The camera's refusal to glance away serves two functions—firstly to emphasize the excruciating passage of time as part of his fragmentary storytelling. The second,

more radical one, is that while Garrel presents his characters sans judgement, he is persistent in his interrogation of them, fixing his camera on subtle facial expressions and body language. In place of lush, saturated colour, his black-and-white films are coloured instead by pervasive jealousy and paranoia. Silent shots of faces and bodies render each glance significant, so infidelity suffuses every frame. In *A Burning Hot Summer*, an ostensibly casual dinner thrums with tension: "Stop looking at [Angèle] like that," Frédéric accuses Paul. Later, the same dinner becomes the backdrop for a nascent affair. While conversation flows at the table, the camera zooms in on Roland and Angèle in the background, smiling at one another. It's worth noting that although infidelity is not always made explicit, the temptation to stray certainly is.

These characters' convoluted relationships are inflected with insecurities that run deeper. When Claudia invites Louis to move into her new apartment, he is instantly wary, unjustifiably but accurately jumping to the conclusion that she has another (more moneyed) lover. This underscores a dual impotence: not just sexual betrayal, but the recognition that he has been supplanted by a richer, more capable person. His inability to get her a job is a throughline across the film, a testament to his failure. Similarly, in *A Burning Hot Summer*, Frédéric is willing to overlook Angèle's affair, but finds her disdain for him "unforgivable." He admits this to Paul, in a lengthy, nearly incoherent rant during which the camera never leaves his face. Amidst this tangle of suspicious gazes, the camera in turn puts characters under its scrutiny.

In the Shadow of Men

Across his films, male cruelty, desire, and impulses take centerstage. Yet curiously, the camera never follows the men, but instead the women they leave in their wake. This is particularly evident in *Jealousy*, where many scenes depict women moping in private, lonely moments. Women, in Garrel's worlds, are eternally afraid of abandonment. Elisabeth, Pierre's mistress in *In the Shadow of Women*, is painted as desperate and pathetic, sprawled on the bed pleading with him to acknowledge her in public, even as he laces his shoes up to leave. Married women are not spared, either. Early on in the film, the narrator plainly states, "Manon lived in her husband's shadow." Indeed, whenever they occupy the same frame, Pierre is always the one shot in focus. Manon works on Pierre's films, having dropped out of college to devote her life to him; "It's not a sacrifice, it's a choice," she tells her mother.

A Burning Hot Summer is significantly more intricate, probing an unusual four-way dynamic (Garrel explores a similar theme in his latest film *Lover for a Day*, where a daughter moving home must come to terms with the fact that her father's new lover is her age). We see the two women form a friendship of their own, as well as the odd homosocial-bordering-on-homoerotic relationship between Frédéric and Paul. Their friendship draws jealousy from Élisabeth, and their chance en-

counter a year later in Paris is painted as an almost romantic reunion, each transfixed by the memory and presence of the other. Inevitably, it drives a wedge between both couples; the women feel lonely and irrelevant. Angèle complains, "[Frédéric] said fidelity is an outdated, petty-bourgeois concept and he isn't into it." In any other context, the line would sound campy, but lensed through Angèle's anguish, Frédéric's adulterous trysts land as quietly shuddering blows. These often thorny gender dynamics mean that, in Garrel's pessimistic interpretation of infidelity, "Men always blame [women] for what they do to [them]." The great tragedy is that maybe Garrel's women blame themselves, too.

To his credit, Garrel doesn't give them a moral pass, rigorously surfacing the jarring incongruities in his characters' casual misogyny. It's this double standard that gives Pierre the courage to casually admit his marriage before he cheats with Elisabeth—and true to the director's archetypal women, she simply shrugs, inadvertently normalizing male infidelity. Yet Pierre assumes that he cannot be cheated on, and when Manon defends herself by saying her new beau makes her feel truly loved, Pierre's frigid anger is destructive and obsessive. The juxtaposition is made striking when Garrel's female characters knowingly settle for a veneer of romantic bliss, resorting to emotional impassivity as the lesser of two evils. At one point, Louis semi-confesses to his mistress, "If one of us ever cheats, do we say so?" Her only reply is, "You're so complicated. I just need you to love me. Love me. And for us both to be happy." Eventually Manon, Angèle, and Claudia all leave their partners. There is a poignant symmetry to *Jealousy*: the film begins with a distraught Clothilde clinging to Louis, but ends with him the jilted, jealous one in a fallout that feels like a quiet catastrophe. He stands alone on the street, bereft, before an ominous cut to a gun lying on a table. Interestingly, Garrel's morally detached cinematography makes it clear that taking

moral sides is not his project. For his characters are fatally tethered to one another; they profess their undying love but continue to hurt each other.

It is worth mentioning that many of his films (these three included) bear some autobiographical strains. What emerges from the intimately personal stories is a precarious sensitivity, a manner of looking clear-eyed back at what their tales might reveal about humanity more generally. It is as if, in the retelling, he is not trying to piece a singular narrative together, but merely offering us the chance to make sense of these tricky emotional entanglements. In *Jealousy*, an elderly friend of Claudia's counsels Louis on everyone's differing, often incompatible "limits of love." Garrel's films therefore pose a similar question: how do we navigate our limits of love?

The Limits of Love

"I'm not a masochist. I'm not made for self-sacrifice," Angèle laments, as she considers leaving Frédéric. Garrel suggests that suffering is inextricably embedded within love, and the endings of these three films indeed offer little respite. In *In the Shadow of Women*, when the estranged lovers meet some time later, Manon begrudgingly admits solitude saddens her. All three films end on a bittersweet note as murky and indefinite as his plot drivers. That's not to say, however, that his work is entirely characterized by depressive romance. There are brief flashes of happiness; while watching Claudia and Charlotte's foolish antics, Louis exudes fondness and affection. Manon and Angèle appear truly content with their extramarital affairs (though neither are still in the relationship by the epilogue). Garrel adopts a thought-provoking approach to infidelity—beyond eroticized bodies or shiny new objects of desire, it is simply inherent to any realistic understanding of love.

Garrel's body of films form a cinema of introspection, his camera capturing secret vignettes that elucidate the paradoxes of love and infidelity. It's voyeuristic, but never judgmental, and utterly compelling. Nothing his characters say or do are particularly radical, but perhaps that is what Garrel strives to show us: the casual cruelty normal people inflict upon one another, and upon themselves. His films, for all their parallel preoccupations, are less repetitive than they are receptive to endless interpretation. We are left to piece together these drifting, transitory moments that meander along as one intoxicating, extended reverie, the halcyon thrill of fresh romance often tumbling rapidly into *amour fou* (literally "mad love", passion to the point of obsession). To watch a Garrel film is to immerse yourself in a moral conundrum, to flirt with controversial takes on infidelity, grappling with the contrast between illicit love and the seemingly transcendental intimacy of these affairs. Astonishingly, it is impossible to accord blame by the time his nuanced films draw to a close; instead, we are left questioning if the pursuit of genuine happiness might not justify some moral ambiguity after all. ◆

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GOD OF THE LOOP

AN EXAMINATION OF THE TIME LOOP PROTAGONIST AND THE GAMER

by JULIA ROTHKOFF

Many scholars have drawn structural parallels between video game and time loop film narratives. Echoing the gameplay dynamics of video games, time loop films are structured around a protagonist repeatedly attempting a task in order to move on. The common video game model requires players to repeat levels and learn from their previous mistakes until they develop the skills to "level up."

Scholars have gone as far as to claim that the time loop film is inseparable from video games no matter how much both forms of media try to distance themselves from one another. For example, Lluís Anyó writes about the time loop film's relationship to video games in his analysis of temporality in video games and cinema. He writes, "The loop has become part of the very identity of video games… When the cinema has sought to reflect or take narrative inspiration from video games, it has adapted the loop, which seems very odd. In fact, […] until the nineties the use of the narrative loop was unusual and virtually non-existent in the cinema." Some scholars have explored the similarities between video games and movies with regard to their narrativity. For example, Britta Neitzel comments on the similarities between video games and cinema on a narrative level; however, she argues that the two mediums are inherently different due to the gameplay aspect of video games. She writes, "The process of playing a computer game thus corresponds to the process of narration. This process leaves behind traces on the level of the discourse, which makes up certain relationships with the level of the story, for example, in respect to temporality." Neitzel compares the act of playing video games to that of a narrator; the gamer's control over the character allows him or her to dictate the temporal aspects of the game. In time loop films, however, the audience does not have control over the temporal and narrative aspects, as that is the task of

the filmmaker. While Neitzel's argument is convincing, it rests upon the comparison of the video game player to the film audience. Perhaps greater similarities between the two media would arise if comparisons were drawn between the video game player and the protagonist of filmic time loop narratives.

Both the gamer and the time loop protagonist have a sense of omnipotence over their respective scenarios. The time loop protagonist, for example, wakes up and has to redo the same day repeatedly until they eventually learn from previous mistakes and can thus escape the loop. Likewise, the gamer, in the controlling position, has total control of the video game character. Gamers can play a level of the *Super Mario Bros.* games, for example, and learn from their mistakes every time they cause the character to die. Eventually, they will know precisely how to escape the "time loop" pattern of the character dying/waking up/starting over again. This constant repetition and practice will allow gamers to level up once they perfect the art of escaping this "time loop."

While many scholars have pointed out the aforementioned similarities between the time loop protagonist and video game players, few have considered these similarities as being a way of "playing God." The previous scholarship regarding the similarities between time loop protagonists and gamers make very little mention of the implications of these aforementioned observations beyond the superficial conclusion that there are indeed comparisons to be made.

The gamer's ability to master a level through repetition puts them in an omnipotent position over the gameplay; the prior knowledge acquired from continual attempts at the same level allows gamers to anticipate every hurdle they might encounter. Studies in the field of psychology have yielded results suggesting that humans

Run Lola Run (1998)

have an inherent need to feel omnipotent. In the book, *Economic Aspects of Omnipotence*, Francisco Ribeiro touches upon this finding. He writes, "We often see humans expressing necessity of having a distinguished social status. Studies have shown that this need is originated in deep emotional aspects; it is a psychological need to feel omnipotent." Ribeiro continues by writing that Freud suggests that "this feeling of omnipotence is found at an early age in the first months of life, but the reality principle…restrains it." This psychological need to feel omnipotent perhaps explains the role of both the time loop protagonist and the gamer as they control the narratives before them. This need to be all-powerful is most explicitly mentioned in video games, like Abbey Games' *Reus* (2013) and Ubisoft's *From Dust* (2011) in which gamers are granted complete control over aspects of the game, such as the weather and the shape of the land. Even without the control over weather and various other aspects of a video game's virtual world, it can still be argued that gamers are put in an elevated position with their prior knowledge and control over the video game character's actions. Given Ribeiro's scholarship on omnipotence, the gamer's control over their characters presents an opportunity for gamers to break this reality principle. Richard Cobbett observes that, "Everyone who's played *The Sims* has, at one time or another, locked a whole family in a room with no toilet, or stolen the ladder from their swimming pool, or stripped someone naked at a dinner party just to watch the reaction." By breaking the reality principle—through acting in ways otherwise frowned upon in society—gamers possess a sense of omnipotence. Thus, the video game medium allows gamers to act upon this psychological need.

The same can be said about characters in time loop films. Protagonists of time loop films take control over their initially disorienting and seemingly hopeless existence in a time loop. However, they learn from their initial mistakes and escape the time loop with the help of their prior knowledge of the situation. The superhuman ability of the time loop protagonist to repeat a day in order to prevent past mistakes resembles the omnipotence granted to video game players. Through an exploration of *Run Lola Run* (1998) and *Source Code* (2011) a deeper understanding of the parallels between time loop film protagonists and gamers can be attained.

Run Lola Run has drawn comparisons with video games since the film's release. Tom Tykwer's fast-paced German thriller follows the main character, Lola (Franka Potente), in real time through three 20-minute attempts to save her boyfriend, Manni (Moritz Bleibtreu), from his boss (Heino Ferch). The film's opening scene has several references to games. An unidentified voiceover narration says, "the game lasts 90 minutes", alluding to the nearly 90-minute runtime of *Run Lola Run* and establishing the film as a figurative game. Although the narration does not mention video games explicitly, one can draw parallels between the three animated sequences preceding each of Lola's 20-minute runs and video game cutscene animations. Other parallels between the two mediums become

apparent when at the end of Lola's first two runs, either she or Manni dies. The narrative's ability to bring Lola back to her "save point"—her bedroom where she receives a frantic call from Manni at the beginning of each run—echoes the gamer's ability to reload the game from a save point after game over.

Not only does Lola's ability to relive the same 20 minutes three times parallel the common video game trope of having three "lives" to achieve a goal before the gamer must start over, but also Lola's accumulating knowledge allows her to finish her third attempt $100,000 richer. Much like how gamers use memories of prior failed attempts to learn from their mistakes, Lola also changes her course-of-action with each try. This ability to have a nearly supernatural power over the outcomes of each run makes Lola seem omnipotent compared to the other characters in the film. For example, during her first run, Manni teaches Lola how to use a gun and unlock the safety switch. In the second run, Lola is shown to already possess this knowledge, and it allows her to rob the bank, thus leading to Manni's death at the conclusion of her second run.

Many scholarly discussions of *Run Lola Run* analyze the film's commentary on free will. Multiple times throughout the film, Lola screams and seemingly changes the trajectory of her run. Lola's screams (which represent her free will) can perhaps also be viewed through the angle of cheating. The casino scene during Lola's third run, in particular, shows Lola as having omnipotent control of the situation and cheating to win money for Manni. The scene starts with a medium shot of Lola as she is hunched down in front of a roulette table awaiting her results. The sound design introduces a rumbling noise until Lola begins to scream, isolating all other sounds. The camera then cuts to a close-up of the roulette ball spinning and various other close-ups of people

covering their ears and glass champagne flutes shattering. The camera subsequently cuts to another close-up of the roulette ball landing in the winning slot. A few shots later, the camera shows Lola collecting her winnings and then pans to the casino crowd as they stare at her in awe with their mouths agape. Lola's ability to change the general flow of time with a very loud scream, coupled with the cinematography and sound design, paints her as omnipotent. As the sound of Lola's scream overwhelms the other noises, Lola's enhanced abilities are especially apparent when accompanied with the shot of the roulette ball going into the slot. The scream enables Lola to have complete control over the situation and conclude the film $100,000 richer.

Lola's cheating during roulette perhaps shares similarities with the various cheat-codes gamers can input in certain games in order to receive an advantage during the remainder of gameplay. These codes range from ones that can grant a player unlimited lives to weapons that are more effective than those that come with the game. The ability of a gamer to cheat in this way not only parallels Lola's cheating in roulette, but also offers the gamer control akin to the control Lola possesses. For example, a cheat in which a gamer can possess infinite lives eliminates the possibility of reaching the "game over" by dying and losing lives repeatedly in gameplay. Similarly, Lola's "cheat code" comes in the form of her screams, and the scream during the casino scene grants her the ability to have economic stability, which is as desirable as having infinite lives in a video game. The very ability of both Lola and the gamer to cheat gives them a superhuman level of control over their respective situations.

Lola's ability to have control over her situation and end the film $100,000 richer allows her to break the reality principle established by Ribeiro. By enacting the same omnipotent techniques used by the gamer (replaying the same scenario over and over again until "leveling up"), Lola ensures financial stability at the film's conclusion. The final shot of the film is Lola and Manni walking away from the chaos, as Manni asks her, "what's in the bag?" The sound of a camera flashing is heard, and then the film ends on a freeze frame, similar to that of a photograph. Tykwer's choice of essentially ending the film by pausing it ensures that Lola forever stays in this moment. Her financial stability is secured for eternity, as nothing else in the diegesis suggests otherwise. For the audience to see this character break the reality principle and achieve what so many strive to secure throughout their lives, financial stability, Lola becomes a sort of projection of the audience's dreams. For instance, during the exact moment that Lola wins the $100,000 at the casino, Tykwer films much of the scene through a first-person perspective, thus allowing the audience to see through Lola's eyes. Similarly, when Lola realizes that Manni already has his missing money, so she can keep her lofty casino winnings, the scene is also filmed with a first-person perspective. By allowing the audience to see through Lola's eyes during these pivotal moments involving financial gain, Tykwer enables

the audience to fantasize about the possibility of their own financial stability. This capability, however, is only provided through Lola's ability to be in a similar position to the gamer, and thus break the reality principle.

Duncan Jones' time loop film, *Source Code*, also expands upon this exploration of omnipotence's allure. The film follows a United States army veteran, Captain Colter Stevens (Jake Gyllenhaal) as he struggles to understand why people on a train are calling him "Sean Fentress." It is later revealed that Stevens is a paraplegic on life support after suffering a horrific accident in Afghanistan. He discovers that he is in a computer simulation called the Source Code in which he relives the last eight minutes of another person's life in order to find a train bomber and prevent a bomb from going off in downtown Chicago later that day. Unlike *Run Lola Run*, *Source Code* does not associate the idea of omnipotence exclusively with the protagonist. Rather, Stevens' bosses, Captain Colleen Goodwin (Vera Farmiga) and Doctor Rutledge (Jeffrey Wright), hold the keys to Stevens' life, and they are the ones repeatedly putting him in the Source Code.

Following the usual formula of time loop films, Stevens' multiple trips through the Source Code allow him to gain knowledge from previous experiences in the loop and eliminate the second bomb threat. Stevens, however, feels as if his actions are not enough and wants to save everyone involved in the first bombing. Captain Goodwin repeatedly tells Stevens that there is no possible way to change the fate of those on the train. But Stevens convinces her to let him try. In Stevens' final trip into the Source Code, he not only disarms the bomb and turns the bomber into the authorities but also saves everyone involved. All of this occurs while Captain Goodwin is taking Stevens' real body off life support. In one of the film's final moments, time finally stops as a close-up shows Goodwin pressing the button to turn off Stevens' life support. The following shot is a freeze-frame of Stevens—as Sean Fentress—kissing his companion throughout the film, Christina (Michelle Monaghan). The camera, suspended in the air, then pans around the rest of the train car, showing the joy on the commuters' faces as they unknowingly live the last seconds of their lives. Jones' ordering of the shot of Goodwin taking Stevens off life support followed by the shot of the camera panning around the train insinuates that Stevens is, in fact, seeing from the camera's perspective. The camera's suspension in the air as it seamlessly floats around the train car gives this perspective a sense of omnipotence. Stevens' seemingly omnipotent qualities ultimately help him escape the time loop and continue his life in the body of Sean Fentress.

In the book, *Time Travel in Popular Media: Essays on Film, Television, Literature and Video Games*, Victor Navarro-Remesal and Shaila García-Catalán write about the time loop in *Source Code* as a problem-solving device. They write, "The exploration of the time loop, and the escape from it, allows Stevens to rebuild himself, not as the soldier he was but as another person, Sean Fentress, with a new life. The time loop becomes…a space

Source Code (2011)

where the protagonist can explore himself and build a better self. Stevens conquers the time loop, his memory and his self." This view on Stevens' character and the concept of the time loop further emphasizes his ability to overcome the obstacle of death with the help of his omnipotent abilities granted by the time loop. It is only through these superhuman gifts that Stevens is able to not only apprehend the bomber and save everyone on the train but also to escape his own impending death.

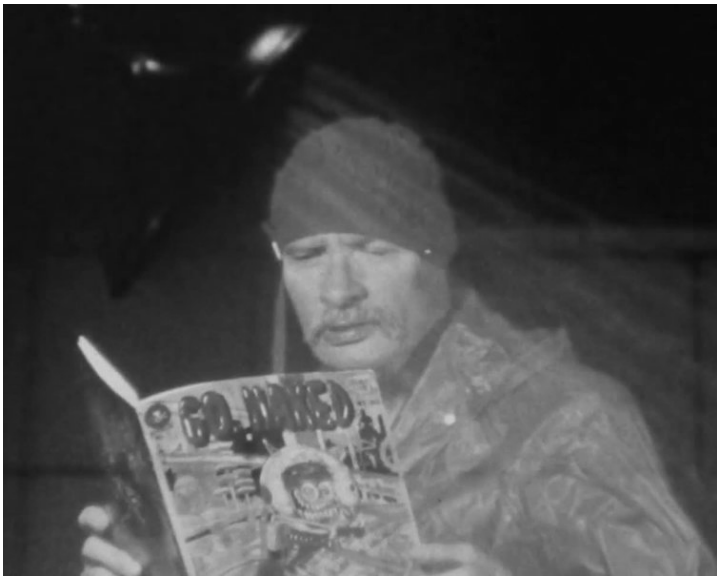
As Navarro-Remesal and García-Catalán explain, the time loop allows Stevens to keep living past his death by performing the same omnipotent abilities used by gamers. Similar to how the time loop in *Run Lola Run* enables the audience to experience financial stability through Lola, *Source Code* allows the audience an outlet to overcome death. Much of *Source Code* involves Stevens' identity and his switching between multiple "avatars." Not only does Stevens live the remainder of his life as Sean Fentress, but also he pretends to be a security officer when needing to persuade passengers to follow his instructions. In addition, Stevens calls his estranged father to reconcile their relationship, posing as a fellow soldier. This ability to switch between avatars not only echoes the gamer's same potential to do so, but also creates an outlet for different personas. A gamer can be bullied during the day at school and return to the computer at night, taking on the persona of a powerful deity. The sense of omnipotence possessed by both the protagonist and the gamer in this scenario creates an ability to switch between ineffectual personas. During certain scenes, Stevens needs to switch to a different avatar in order to achieve the task at hand, such as diffusing the bomb and reconciling with his father. The gamer acts in a similar way. The parallels between the protagonist and the gamer allow for each to confront their insecurities and change them. Stevens' use of different avatars

throughout the film creates a filmic adaptation of the gamer's same ability. However, both can only achieve this feat through the omnipotent capabilities provided by the time loop and the act of controlling a video game.

The time loop film and video games have displayed parallels with each other since the genre's popularization in the 1990s. In *Run Lola Run*, Tykwer makes his film's similarities to video games apparent through Lola's "three lives" and the film's animated sequences, echoing video game animation. Lola's ability to use her memory like an omniscient being in order to end the film $100,000 richer also parallels the ability of gamers to use their prior memory of a game's obstacles in order to "level up." Through the device of the time loop, Lola fulfills a psychological need for the audience to experience financial stability. Tykwer also uses first-person perspective when Lola receives the $100,000. He thus puts the audience in the same position as the character. *Source Code* uses the time loop as a way to make its protagonist into a savior with superhuman abilities, such as "replaying levels" until he reaches his ultimate goal. Just as *Run Lola Run* fulfills the psychological need to overcome financial insecurity, *Source Code* provides an outlet for the audience to overcome death and other obstacles. Not only does Stevens live on after his death, but he also has the ability to switch between different personas, much like gamers do when controlling a video game character. This ability to switch between avatars allows both the gamer and Stevens to shed their undesired personas. Ultimately, both time loop narratives and video games are so satisfying to viewers because of the omniscient avatar they allow viewers to project themselves onto, offering an outlet to experience a sense of control and certainty in their often tumultuous lives. With the continuing advancements of digital cinema, perhaps future evolutions of film will bridge the gap between the video game and the cinema, presenting even more novel viewing experiences in the coming years. ◆

MINIMALIST DREAMS

ON THE SURREAL FILMS OF MARIE LOSIER



by MOHAR KALRA

One of the first scenes in Marie Losier's *DreaMinimalist* (2008) captures the documentary's subject, experimental artist Tony Conrad, hopping around and flapping his arms to a soundtrack of clucking noises in front of a black backdrop. The rest of the 27-minute film offers similarly absurd images, from Conrad lying on his couch attempting to catch a floating violin, to Conrad and Losier dressed as old women preparing jars of pickled film reels. Shot on 16mm, Losier's camera floats, pushing in and out, very clearly handheld. The music and narration that accompanies the film is nondiegetic, lending the images the camp surrealism of a silent film. These qualities carry through nearly all of Losier's documentary short films and features, each focusing on experimental artists ranging from George and Mike Kuchar to Genesis P-Orridge.

What sets Losier's work apart from her contemporaries is that Losier is neither a pure documentarian nor the autobiographical subject of her films. The images presented to viewers do not exist in some parallel plane of existence only accessible through Losier's subjectivity. There is no detachment between the hand filming and the action being filmed. Indeed, most of Losier's subjects are close friends, and Losier interacts with them from both behind and in front of the camera. Much of *DreaMinimalist* actually depicts Conrad and Losier together, dressed in vegeta-

ble costumes, cooking, dancing, and touring Conrad's cluttered Buffalo home. There is an unmistakable sense that events are not being filmed or fabricated but that viewers are experiencing the reality of Losier's interactions with and friendship with her subjects. In this respect, Losier's films have the vitality and immediacy of home videos.

Even her fictional short films have this quality. Made almost entirely with a cast of friends and on shoestring budgets, Losier's absurd short films explore a wide gamut of the images that seem to occupy Losier's mind. Her short, *Eat My Makeup!*, according to Losier, depicts "Five winsome damsels picnic[king] on the roof of a warehouse in charming Long Island City, a forest of skyscrapers gleaming across the river. But when a swarm of flies interrupts their feast of chocolate-covered pretzels and cream-pies, the young ladies run amok." Perhaps unexpectedly, with the exception of Losier herself, each of the "winsome damsels" are played by noticeably hairy men (including George Kuchar) in pink bonnets and nightgowns. Before long their picnic on a nondescript rooftop devolves into a food fight as each "damsel" takes turns throwing a near limitless supply of cream pies at the others' faces. Once again, there is no dialogue, as Losier filmed on a Bolex camera incapable of capturing audio, and tinny music accompanies the ensuing ruckus.

It is an absurd short for sure, not-so-subtly upturning perceptions of "dainty femininity" by having these ungainly men plaster each other's sloppily made up faces with whipped cream. Yet, the intentionally camp props and costuming, combined with the unsteady, handheld camera and ephemeral, montage-esque editing draws attention to the process of making the film. Viewers see both a film about five "damsels" engaging in a fantasy food fight, as well as the documentation of Losier and her male friends dressing up in silly costumes, channeling their best Buster Keatons and throwing pies at each other.

The film, though fictional, is grounded in reality. There are no spectacular special effects or costumes. Nearly every image seen on screen can be reverse engineered, betraying the process by which the image came to be. Much like early 20th century silent films, Losier's films appear to exist squarely within the realm of the possible. Yet, as with early silent films, Losier's films have an undeniable dream-like quality to them, as if existing in an ever so slightly twisted version of our reality. This tension between the real and the surreal is what makes Losier's films so infectiously enjoyable.

In Losier's portrait of George Kuchar, entitled *Electrocute Your Stars*, Losier superimposes footage of Kuchar talking in a shower miming exaggerated confusion against vintage footage of a house swirling in the air amongst tornados and lightning. Once again, the content of the film rests squarely within the realm of the possible, and it's clear to see how Losier produced the visual effects she did. Nonetheless, in documenting without audio Kuchar acting in such an exaggeratedly comic manner, Losier elevates the strange yet possible to the surreal. Losier's camera lends permanence to the absurdity in front of her lens, confirming and validating

it. And so, Losier's images gain power as images, not just because of their strange subject matters, but because of the context behind the creation of those images. The image of George Kuchar wincing and jumping at superimposed lightning behind him is implicitly tangled with the understanding that he is not an actor behind the camera, and he is legitimately having a ball with Losier. The same holds true for *Eat my Makeup!* and Losier's many other films. At once, she is interested in creating fantastical images, but she embroils these images with the affecting experience of producing those images.

Discussing the many silent film influences that permeate her works, Losier writes: "I'm crazy about silent film. In a way they're full of dreams because they have no rules. And they're the only type of film to have no rules. They're very expressive; things are mixed that make no sense; they're super-impositioned film-wise. For me, they're dreams on top of dreams on top of dreams. I love that language in film, with the texture of film, if you can dream yourself or bring your story as a dream or as a performance, you don't need to narrate something with A, B and C but an audience can be carried into that dream and feel something."

Without diegetic sound, the space of the film is able to disconnect from the logic of reality. But just as dreams seem plausible in one's sleep, so too do Losier's films feel perfectly natural while you watch them. This effect is achieved by focusing in on extreme images, sensations, experiences, and offering them a space to exist self-assuredly. As such, Losier's films rely on the transmission of aesthetic experience rather than explicit information to characterize her subjects. Losier seeks to elicit empathy from her viewers and transmit to them the essence of her subjects whom Losier has already come to appreciate.

Enamored by the larger-than-life individuals that surround her, Losier infuses her films with an empathy for her friends that elevates her films. Her most recent feature-length documentary, *Cassandro, the Exotico!*, departs from Losier's typical storytelling style in that it uses diegetic audio and dialogue for the first time, but nonetheless, it offers a valuable look at the qualities that lend Losier's films their tenderness. Focusing on an aging Cassandro, a widely popular gay luchador sometimes dubbed the Liberace of Lucha Libre, the film is lyrical. In one scene, a shirtless Cassandro looms into frame outside his spartan bungalow with a wide grin, his eyebrows contorted to suggest mischief, and he proudly walks Losier through the many injuries, surgeries, and experiences etched into his stout frame. Losier's camera is untethered, floating, and cutting around Cassandro seamlessly, mimicking the glee with which Cassandro tells his story. Throughout, Losier establishes a dichotomy between the fantastical persona that Cassandro has adopted and envisions himself as, with the hardship he has had to and still has to endure as a gay wrestler and a former addict. Her dialogues with Cassandro are less interrogative and more conversational, with her presence in the film being one of another character interacting with Cassandro. When Cassandro is emotional or down-trodden, she

Cassandro, the Exotico! (2018)

comforts him. That's her role in the film—not necessarily to document, but to experience and empathize. In doing so, viewers are able to interact with Cassandro, not as a novelty, but as the person who exists in Losier's life.

Each individual Losier focuses on has an indelible aura—an effect on the people surrounding them. As in the case of Cassandro, Losier's dreamlike filmic style works to emphasize and stage those auras—to convey the experience of being around such a person, and what it means for that person to exist in our relatively ordinary reality. After all, to meet with someone as unconventional as Kuchar, Conrad, or Cassandro would likely cause most viewers to recoil or treat them as oddities detached from normalcy. These are individuals who, to many, would seem out of sync with reality. In using her films to create "dreams," Losier strips away the burdens of the real and forces viewers to reckon with characters, images, and strangeness that exist but do not mesh with reality. Losier's "dreams" create a space that complements and accentuates the fun and the zeal characteristic of her subjects. It's a film space that offers a realm where anything can be reasonably expected.

Despite the self-destructive tendencies he battles and the relative sparseness of the life he lives, Losier's camera makes clear that Cassandro the Exotico is the man adorned in sequins, lavish makeup, a wild pompadour and extraordinarily long coattails jumping into a crowd of adoring fans. When he cuts his hair after losing a fight, he is that same man. When he considers quitting wrestling for good, he is that same man. The same goes for Conrad, Kuchar and P-Orridge. And, goodness, they all seem to be having the times of their lives. ◆

CINEMA IN THE FIRST PERSON

AN INTERVIEW WITH LÁSZLÓ NEMES

by MILAN LOEWER

László Nemes' first feature film, *Son of Saul*, is the closest that cinema has ever come to depicting the Holocaust from the subjective point-of-view of the victim—forcing the audience see the world through the eyes of a concentration camp inmate in an environment designed to turn him into an object. His second feature film, *Sunset*, premiered last month in the United States, and is an elaboration on the "subjective cinema" of *Son of Saul*, set this time in the crumbling, but magnificent, late Austro-Hungarian Empire. This past winter, *Double Exposure* sat down with Nemes to discuss his career and perspective on contemporary cinema.

Double Exposure: I want to start by talking about the unique style that you have developed in your two features. In both of your features, *Son of Saul* and *Sunset*, you focus on one individual's subjective perspective as the camera follows that subject through a chaotic and claustrophobic environment. What attracts you to this specific way of presenting the world?

László Nemes: For me, filmmaking is all about subjectivity and about expressing subjective experience. My attraction to subjectivity is probably a rebellion against contemporary trends in film and in art more generally. Contemporary art seems to be trending towards objectivity; it treats human experience as if it were bound to a sort of objective, God-like point of view, which, in fact, could not be further from the truth. In

cinema, in particular, the so-called digital revolution has lead us more and more towards objectivity. Directing styles increasingly follow a narrow, almost televised logic, and editing patterns are more and more about a multiplicity of angles and a shortening of shots. It gives me the impression of a televised football game—the camera is always in the right place at the right time following the action. In this kind of cinema, there is no room for the restrictions of human perception. Humans do not experience the world from an omniscient point of view; we have a much more restricted access to information and knowledge. This orientation in cinema, and media more generally, towards an all-encompassing point of view creates untruthfulness and anxiety precisely because our actual condition is marked by restriction rather than omniscience. It represents a reduction of the language of cinema, which, in my work, I am definitely rebelling against.

DE: More specifically, what attracts you to the kinds of stories that readily lend themselves to this 'subjective cinema' that you have developed?

LN: I am interested in plunging into a world with a character—discovering space and time with them and forcing the audience to share both space and time with the character.

DE: So what are the kinds of stories that most readily allow for a cinema in which we can discover space and time with a character? Are you already working with your cinematographer, Mátyás Erdély, when developing your scripts, or, once the story is already there, do you and Erdély then work backwards to figure out how to plunge into the subjectivity of the main character? Do you think that the scripts you have could be shot differently?

LN: They could be shot differently, although Mátyás already intervenes when I only have a treatment. He has been very helpful in shaping the subjective cinema that I have been working on since my first short film. He presents his point of view

at an early stage, which is very useful. He's interested in stories, and in films that have the ambition to push the limits of filmmaking. He's also interested in my questioning of the established order of filmmaking; it is not by chance that we are working together. We talk about our work in an analytic way, but we are also instinctive in our taste. What we can do in a given situation is very limited, because we gave these frameworks to the films; we are here and now with the main character. Mátyás is very helpful in defining what can and cannot happen within this framework—what the logic of the film is and what falls outside of that logic.

DE: It's also very interesting that you tie the tendency towards 'objectivity' in recent cinema to the digital revolution. You've shot both of your features, and all of your shorts as well, on film. What is so important to you about the medium of film, and how does digital encourage the kind of objective cinema that you are rebelling against?

LN: My attachment to film, first and foremost, originates in the fact that it is a medium based on the physical world, on optics, on chemicals, and on physical rules, rather than on a virtual world that doesn't actually exist. I feel that art has to be grounded in the tangible world and in human experience, otherwise it becomes too abstract; we give the power to computers and take it away from our minds. Obviously, physical film is limited—not endless. In this way, it's also linked to our possibilities as human beings. Digital, on the other hand, gives us the impression of being limitless, of having endless material and endless means. It gives us the illusion of liberty, but in reality, digital is only an excuse for making bad films. Digital tempts the filmmaker to do more without having a real plan. It's a different approach, and it allows for laziness—laziness which is disguised as the seductive idea of improvisation. Digital also enables you to create worlds that are more and more sumptuous but, in a way, create less and less of an effect on the audience. When you're shooting on film, on the other hand, you have to make your decisions before and during the shoot—not afterwards, in the editing room. This raises the stakes and creates energy. It pushes the filmmaker and everyone on set to be at their best. Rehearsal means something. You don't switch on the camera in the morning and switch it off in the evening. While this may seem limiting, this limitation actually opens up a realm of possibilities; it forces the filmmaker to be creative.

DE: You often use sustained long takes, sometimes static but sometimes very active, which for me convey a visceral, very experiential sense of time passing. Does your use of film tie into the way in which you work to express the passage of time?

LN: I think part of the answer to your question relates back to the kinds of limitations that film as a medium puts on you as a filmmaker. But, beyond that, it also has to do with physical properties of the film itself. When you project on film, half of the time the audience is in darkness; it's a sort of hypnosis. You are creating movement out of still images. The movement is created in your

brain. In other words, it's a hypnotic movement—a physiological movement. This is a phenomenon that cannot be replicated by pixels, which bombard you with information without the breathing room created by the shutter reprieve. And I'm not even going to get into the details of how regressive digital quality is compared to film. We're losing so much by losing film.

DE: Regarding your writing process: when you're germinating an idea for a film, do you start with a story, an idea, a theme, or just an image? How did you end up making a film set in Auschwitz?

LN: It starts more or less with an impression. For *Son of Saul*, I wanted to make a film about the Sonderkommando. Or rather, I wanted to make a film about Auschwitz after reading Miklós Nyiszli's book. It contained incredibly vivid and powerful imagery that I thought should be on film. But not frontally, because frontally, no one would be able to sustain the images of the concentration camp. It would diminish its effect to show it frontally. And again, to return to the importance of analog, from the very beginning this film had to be made on 35mm. It would have been savagery to recreate this world in the computer. At first, I didn't know quite how to approach it, and then I came across the stories of the Sonderkommandos: their written testimonials. It took years. And then the image came. Not even an image really, just the idea of a man finding his own son among the dead and trying to bury him. Then we developed it with Clara Royer from there, but based on the testimonials of the Sonderkommandos. It was a very complicated process. It incorporated so much—*Shoah*, the Lanzmann film, Kertész's *Fatelessness*, all the preexisting ideas and stories and imagery of the Holocaust. I wanted to tell a story about the Holocaust based on one person, honed in on their subjectivity, giving the viewer no room to distance themselves—no room to find safety in distance. I was not trying to uncover it all from a removed omniscient perspective.

DE: How did the process for *Sunset* compare to the process for *Son of Saul*?

LN: *Sunset* was all about the fear of an unknown city. I wanted to make a film about the birth of the 20th century. I wanted to show how the shiny civilization of the 19th century turned towards the most barbaric forms of self-destruction. I wanted to show the fall of that civilization into darkness, and how the forces of destruction were already present in the most beautiful city of the civilized world on the eve of the First World War.

DE: You mentioned Nyiszli, Kertész, and Lanzmann as inspirations for *Son of Saul*. Did you read anything that set you towards making *Sunset*? Musil, for example? I feel that there's this very Musilian ambivalence that's expressed in the film.

LN: Musil didn't influence making the film per se, but I think there's so much in common. It's very striking. Nonetheless, Kafka certainly made an impression on this film. The main character is always facing an obstacle that cannot be overcome. It's something that's very Central European, and it comes from this tra-

dition of Central European thought that I definitely identify with.

DE: Your films, certainly *Son of Saul*, appear to have a direct chronology. Some great films immerse the viewer in the subjectivity of a character through the use of what Gilles Deleuze calls 'virtual images': dreams, recollections, fantasies, or whatever, where we go away from the present chronology of the film, and into the subjectivity of one of the characters. Many of the filmmakers that you have said you admire make use of nonlinear narratives, dream sequences, fantasies, and flashbacks (Tarkovsky, Malick, Bergman, etc…) perhaps with the notable exception of Béla Tarr who tends to stick to a direct chronology. Your films seem not to feature these kinds of 'virtual images.' And yet, I feel that more than almost any other films I have seen, the viewer is immersed, almost drowning, in the subjectivity of your characters. Do you feel like you can reach inside and show us a character more fully without the use of 'virtual images?' By not directly entering the consciousness of the main character, but rather seeing the world as they do, does this better approach, perhaps in an indirect way, an understanding of their subjectivity?

LN: It's really difficult to answer this question. I only do what I feel is right. Sometimes Bergman can be very, very realistic in a way. Take *The Virgin Spring*, for example. In a way it's very down to earth, even if, ultimately, it approaches reality in a different way from the way my films deal with reality. I really wanted to plunge into a realistic world—almost a trivial one—that becomes, through the directing strategy, very subjective and dream-like.

DE: Would you ever consider making use of some kind of non-chronological narrative, or slipping into fantasy in your future work?

LN: For the moment, I'm not so interested in that, but maybe someday I will. Films rely on those kinds of images very easily, and I think it's very hard to make them specific, to make them stem from true subjectivity. They express the director's point of view, mostly. Instinctively, I'm drawn to a more Bressonian approach. Even if the film is still very much driven by the director, it is more economical in its approach, and more grounded in the here and now. On the other hand, I'm also drawn to visions, for example what Klimov achieves in *Come and See*—by the way, that's one of the greatest achievements in filmmaking. There are attempts at going away from the present reality in that film, but these are only attempts; the events finally pull back the viewer into the world of destruction.

DE: In *Sunset*, particularly with a lot of the inexplicable violence and the way it crescendos towards the end, a lot of that seemed like wandering through a dreamscape.

LN: It is. It's a subjective experience. We're really going into the mind—the labyrinth—of the main character.

DE: But, nonetheless, it's a subjective experience of the present reality?

LN: Yes… well, there is, you know, this whole presence of the brother in the second part of the

film, whenever he can be seen or felt, it is linked to some kind of personal, very subjective imagery.

DE: So is he really there?

LN: Well, when he is seen in the fun fair, I think he's a vision.

DE: So in a way that is a fantasy image?

LN: I would say that he's grounded in reality, but, at the same time, he's a vision as well.

DE: You use the image of the child as an uncomprehending witness in both *Son of Saul* and *Sunset*. In *Son of Saul*, at the very end, we see a Polish child stumble upon the escaped Sonderkommando, and in *Sunset*, we have this image three times. First, when the wunderkind is witness to the rape of countess Redey, then when a child sings over the casket, and, towards the end, when we again have the wunderkind playing the violin as the raid on the villa commences. What attracts you to this image?

LN: I like it. I guess it stems from my personal experience, from my childhood. I experienced things that I did not fully understand or fully want; I wasn't protected in the way that I might have been. This is something that stems from there.

DE: In *Sunset*, we get this sense of a wonderful lost world. But that same world also contains a kind of grotesque dysfunction. How did you attempt to evoke these two competing realities?

LN: *Sunset* was always planned to have those two elements. The shining light and brightness, and the darkness and shadows trying to undo it. That's very instinctive for me. The characters in the film are always twofold. The whole film is about duality —its architecture is organized around duality. Each character in the 'world of the day,' has their counterpart in the 'night-world.' I drew this paradigm, partly, from fairy-tales. I'm very drawn to the logic of fairy-tales, and I loved fairy-tales when I was a kid. They left a great impact on me. *Sunset* is a tale of a young girl who arrives in a foreign place and tries to understand it. She has to try to get through the 'forest', and the more she goes through that forest, the more we discover that the forest is herself. We are in her own labyrinth, and the labyrinth is something that there isn't necessarily a way out of.

DE: So you're saying that the world on screen, is kind of a projection of Írisz?

LN: Yes, in a way.

DE: There's this really interesting line in the film where someone says that Kálmán (Írisz' brother) projects horror onto the world, and Írisz is wondering if she does the same. Is she actually similar to her brother in that way?

LN: Yes, absolutely. The main character herself not only goes on an actual concrete journey, but also on a psychic journey through the layers of herself. The more she opens the curtains around her onto the horrors present in her world, the more she uncovers new layers of herself. I also always felt that this film was a doppelgänger film. It's interesting how the feminine and masculine intertwine and cannot be separated. I really like this idea, and I know that it's something that's not very trendy in an age when we want to turn men

against women and women against men. It's a very primitive, but, also, I think, humanistic approach, in which the two essences cannot be separated.

DE: I want to switch gears and talk about your development as a filmmaker more generally. You grew up partly in Hungary and partly in France, but I get the impression that you have a closer connection with Hungary's history and psyche. Would you agree with that?

LN: I am connected to both. I have a Central European heritage that emphasizes the forces of the unknown—a sort of gothic world, the world of Kafka and Dostoevsky. But I have the Cartesian tradition in me as well. I went to France when I was 12. It was a brand new world, and I was definitely attracted by the power of reasoning. I relate to both traditions, and I wouldn't like to choose, although I feel very much attracted to Central Europe. The history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been influenced by Central Europe so much, and I think that influence will continue in this century as well.

DE: What do you think set you down the road of wanting to become a filmmaker?

LN: I think it was the moment when I first looked through the viewfinder of a 35mm camera. I can still remember the image I saw, and it was magical.

DE: What was that image?

LN: It was just a room, but the image through the viewfinder looked magical, even if it did not represent anything out of the ordinary. And this is something, by the way, that digital cannot reproduce.

DE: Where do you intend to go from here? Will your future films also be shot in this 'subjective cinema' style? What, if anything, can you say about your next project?

LN: It's too early to say anything specifically. I'm working on two different projects right now, but I can't really get into it yet. But I will say that I don't want to do only subjective cinema. Or rather, I want to push the limits of subjective cinema by using other styles and using space in a different way. For example, both *Son of Saul* and *Sunset* are films made of sequence shots, more or less, and that's something that I am not necessarily wedded to in my future projects.

DE: What would your advice be to aspiring filmmakers? You went to Tisch briefly. Did you gain anything from that experience?

LN: My experience of film school was very disappointing because it failed to convey a sense of curiosity to the students. The program did not truly encourage curiosity and openness to the world; instead it pushed amateurs to make films before they were actually ready to make anything. That's my main problem with film programs. They convey the message that everything starts with you —which is a lie—instead of teaching the students that there are traditions and you have to be interested, at least a little bit, to know where you are in those traditions. This pedagogy creates narcissistic people because they know that there's so much that has been done, but film programs, instead of giving their students a real corpus of knowledge—an introduction and invita-

tion to the art of film—pretend that students have to express themselves.

DE: Regardless of whether that expression is actually expressing anything at all?

LN: Anything at all. It doesn't matter if there's real thought behind it or not. The most interesting advice that I would have given myself, in retrospect, is to never say anything without a thought. A thought is not just a line. It's not just a dialogue. It's something much more deep, buried underneath. Be truthful to the voice that's within you and don't try to imitate other things—try to think about the world. Don't touch a camera before you have anything to say. You can only have something to say if you first have a thought, and for that, you have to be open to the world and you have to be aware of your own place in the history of cinema and in the history of the world in general.

DE: You studied political science before you went to film school. Did that inform your filmmaking?

LN: Political Science, specifically International Relations, taught me a lot about the world. But, I think mostly it was important that I didn't have to start making films immediately.

DE: What experience was most important for you in your development as a director?

LN: I think the idea of the apprenticeship is very important. It's important to learn from someone with real thought and vision.

DE: And that was Béla Tarr for you?

LN: Yes, absolutely.

DE: So Tarr was quite important in getting you on the path towards discovering your own unique voice?

LN: Yes. That's why I think it's of paramount importance to be next to someone who is a master. The concept of apprenticeship is something that is forgotten and should be reinstated, because it is so important. It's like in a painter's workshop: you start by painting the bushes, and then you move on to other details, and then the background characters. So I encourage everyone to try to find an 'apprenticeship' rather than to go to film school. The good news is that there is so much room for good filmmaking because there is less and less of it. And if you question the system a little bit, you might end up with something significant. ◆

Sunset (2018)

HALLOWOMEN

AN ANALYSIS OF THE FINAL GIRL TROPE IN THE HALLOWEEN FILMS

by DEJAVIS BOSKET

Imagine this: You are reaching the end of a Reagan-era horror flick. You have seen assorted teens scramble for their lives through an empty campground, silent suburban streets, or a vacant sorority house, pursued and dispatched relentlessly by an impenetrable masked killer. You see that only one remains—the frumpy, studious girl who has never been kissed, yet wields the kitchen knife or machete that enables her to finally quell the killer. Dressed in cloaks of atmosphere, circumstance, and tone, this formula produces the slasher film. Carol J. Clover defines the slasher film in her landmark 1992 text, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, writing, "a psychokiller who [because of a past trauma reanimated by an anniversary] slashes to death a string of mostly female victims, one by one, until he is subdued or killed, usually by the one girl who has survived." This recipe—consistent despite its unendingly diverse manifestations that include everything from mine parties gone wrong (*My Bloody Valentine* [1981]) to trouble in outer space (*Jason X* [2002])—has faced criticism on the grounds that such plots are trite, exploitative, and cruel to women by necessitating gratuitous violence upon female bodies and calling upon gendered moral codes as justification. Clover identifies a trope that she calls the Final Girl, a figure left to confront the killer at the end of a slasher's third act who functions as a unique site of gendered conflict and viewer identification. The coupling of this concept with its archetype of dowdy Laurie Strode from the immensely popular *Halloween* franchise has cemented its place in film criticism as a staple of the slasher genre. With the release of 2018's *Halloween* starring Jamie Lee Curtis and produced with the blessing and assistance of John Carpenter—the director of the 1978 original—the well-worn Final Girl figure assumes a new shape and reflects the changing tide of horror.

Superficially, Final Girl theory seems to be compatible with

a feminist reading of slasher films. Here, a female character lives beyond the limited expectations of her gender and triumphs over an outwardly insurmountable foe. Clover cautions, however, that to "applaud the Final Girl as a feminist development […] is, in light of her figurative meaning, a particularly grotesque expression of wishful thinking." Enter Carpenter's wildly successful 1978 film *Halloween*, which established many integral elements of the slasher narrative. In the film, six-year-old Michael Myers murders his sister on the titular night in 1963. Fifteen years later, homey teen Laurie Strode (Curtis, in her film debut) celebrates the holiday by dodging the temptations of her friends and babysitting neighborhood kiddos. As her evening winds down (activities include watching movies and carving jack o'lanterns), Laurie unknowingly awaits the mounting madness of Myers, who has already killed her more licentious friends. Laurie is presented as the opposite end of a spectrum bounded by her friends at the other extreme. On her side is androgyny, virginal inexperience, and a sense of domestic duty; on theirs is overt sexuality, prurient instigation, and eschewed responsibility. When Laurie first appears, burdened by textbooks and entrusted by her father to complete an important task, she is dressed very conservatively and encounters the young boy she will babysit that night, all of which serves to associate her with duty, modesty, and maturity. Laurie—who, during a prolonged home invasion in which she brings the children to safety and dispatches the silent Myers with a knitting needle, wire hanger, and his own kitchen knife—is the only one of Myers' potential victims who is able to thwart his unyielding pursuit. Despite the divergence of fate

Halloween (1978)

set up between Laurie and the other women of *Halloween*, Laurie is never able to fully realize her capacity for self-preservation; Myers killing spree is ultimately ended (at least in this film) by the gun of psychiatrist Dr. Loomis, Myers' cerebral doctor who seems to exclusively possess the knowledge and ability to stop his patient's rage.

Clover relies on Laurie as a foundational manifestation of the Final Girl in film. Clover asserts that "[h]er smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls," an almost character-specific analysis of *Halloween*'s Laurie. In a poignant scene in her friend Annie's car, Laurie asks what she will be wearing to the dance the next day. "I didn't know you thought about things like that, Laurie," says Annie, to which Laurie responds by looking forlorn and ashamed as the setting sun shines in her face. The camera gazes at Laurie from the backseat, like a silent passenger with no help to give. Vulnerable and seeking guidance, Laurie reveals her crush on a classmate—a disclosure that will go on to bring Laurie anxiety for much of the night to come. Contrasted with her friends, Laurie is everything they are not—sexually unavailable, responsible, observant, and resourceful. Resultantly, an exploitative and anti-feminist message appears to permeate much of *Halloween*; women are violently murdered in a way that draws attention to their bodies (friend Lynda exposes her breasts just before her death and Judith dies naked) as a direct consequence of their sexual inclinations, while Myers' two male victims are disposed of in a quiet, inactive way (one off-camera). In the decades after *Halloween*'s influential arrival, however, slasher films—reinvigorated by more active Final Girls like Nancy Thompson of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) and self-aware heroines like Sidney Prescott of *Scream* (1996), adjusted by the abundance of early 21st-century remakes, and finally uprooted by different kinds of protagonists in contemporary films—have experienced a transformation of the Final Girl trope that is in some ways recognizable, but in many ways more nuanced and true to real-life experience.

As a film genre, horror has long been an arena for the exploration of societal fears at any given moment—of Cold War conflict turning hot (*It Came From Beneath the Sea* [1955] and *The Blob* [1958] face the reality of nuclear warfare with monstrous creatures), broadcasted violence from Vietnam (*The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and *The Hills Have Eyes* [1977] make ample use of on-screen bodily harm) or mind-numbing consumerism (*Dawn of the Dead* [1978] and *They Live* [1981] point towards the dangers of consumption)—and this pattern largely holds true today. Successful horror films (critically or otherwise) of the past few years are often quite unlike the gratuitously blood-spattered nasties of the 1980's: *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014), *The Babadook* (2014), *The Witch* (2015), *It* (2017), *Suspiria* (2018), and *Hereditary* (2018) are just a few examples of recent entries that are less concerned

with violent gore and masked killers than with more nuanced inner conflicts that are harder to resolve. 2018's *Halloween* also functions in this vein by presenting Laurie Strode not as just another disposable heroine whisked away in an ambulance at the end of the film, but rather as a traumatized but resilient survivor of a psychologically scarring night she lived through as a teen. Importantly, this film provides Laurie a fresh slate by retconning the conflicting and muddled storylines of the original film's various sequels and reboots, which left the figure of Laurie burdened with various amounts of narrative detritus. 1981's *Halloween II* follows Laurie on the rest of the titular night as she is stalked and tormented at a hospital, ending with the doubly-traumatized character being sent to yet another hospital. Other sequels do not feature Laurie at all, reveal that she has died, continue to claim that she is Myers' sister, or follow her as a single mother hiding her teenage son from his psychotic uncle. Bypassing the series' confused history, *Halloween* (2018) bestows upon the narrative refreshing plausibility and a new focus on the psychological toil of cat-and-mouse games; routine escapes from high-security sanitariums wear thin on any viewer's suspension of disbelief, and a muddled treatment of the antagonist's main victim deprives viewers of character growth and development. Instead, this film presents Myers' escape as the result of a timely mixture of his transfer to a new facility, the approaching Halloween holiday (and fortieth anniversary of his last killing spree), and the agitations of prying interviewers who pay him a visit. Laurie, in the intervening years, has more or less successfully raised a daughter who has in turn raised a daughter of her own. Laurie lives alone in a fortified compound in the woods, constantly anxious, yet prepared, for what she understands as Myers' inevitable return. Her readiness, however, comes at a steep personal cost: "Could it be, that one monster has created another?" asks a journalist on his way to see Laurie at the beginning of the film. "Both exist in isolation, fettered by their own fear and hatred of one another. Could it be that the only hope of rehabilitation is through confrontation?"

Although *Halloween* (2018) does offer the usual thrills of the slasher film—creative deaths, special effects to match, and incompetent male would-be heroes—it differs from others of its ilk by refocusing its attentions away from the masked killer and towards the strained relationship between Laurie and her family. In this way, trauma and its real consequences, as well as the unique ties that bind generations of women, usurp the traditional focus on the killer's sprees and the forces that motivate them while updating the Final Girl trope with psychological complexity. Here, Laurie's 1978 ordeal is not scattered away with the next batch of Myers' victims, but used to fill out the lines of what would otherwise be a stock character. Divorced, disconnected from her family, and dependent on alcohol, contemporary Laurie suffers from her memories of that night. By preparing herself for the unknow-

able moment of Myers' return, Laurie devotes her life to combat readiness at the expense of closeness with her family. Now, rather than being obligated to face Myers due to her adherence to a culture of purity, Laurie instead fights Myers as a consequence of a different isolation: from her loved ones and from the possibility of a healthy, fulfilling life.

When Myers inevitably escapes and begins pursuing Laurie once again, it becomes clear that their once-fixed roles of predator and prey have, to some degree, switched. Laurie, speaking angrily to local authorities, clarifies her determination: "Do you know that I pray every night that he would escape?" she asks a sheriff. "What the hell do you do that for?" "So I can kill him." Rather than being completely subject to Myers' stalking, as she was in the original film, Laurie is now somewhat able to control the conditions of their engagement by setting herself up in a defensive position. Having reoriented her entire living situation around her eventual confrontation with Myers and rigged each room with traps and contingency plans, she controls the circumstances and becomes—to an extent—the cat (or perhaps the cheese-leaden trap) to Myers' disoriented mouse. In one tense scene that recreates Myers' apparent defeat from the original film, Laurie struggles with Myers and falls from a second-story balcony, splaying out on the ground below. Just as Myers arose in 1978, however, so too does Laurie, completing her transformation from hunted to hunter.

Laurie's daughter, Karen, and granddaughter, Allyson, also assume and alter elements of the Final Girl role. Their strained, cross-generational relationship with Laurie results in a dispersion of the archetype that, rather than demanding strict adherence to morality rules, instead requires and values vulnerability, compassion, and cooperation. Viewers learn that Laurie lost custody of Karen as a consequence of her fixation on preparing both herself and her daughter for Myers' return. "I learned how to shoot a gun when I was eight… I learned how to fight," says Karen, who has been made into a Final Girl by her mother before Myers ever had the chance. Allyson recreates many of her grandmother's interactions with Myers' from the original film. Both women are filmed sitting in class, bored and gazing out the window while a teacher discusses fate. But while teenage Laurie sees Myers staring at her from across the street, Allyson sees her own source of anxiety—Laurie. Even the teacher's updated droning is telling; Laurie hears, unpropitiously, that "Fate never changes," while Allyson is told that "Even in the most disparaging of conditions, life can find its meaning, and conversely, so can one's suffering." Allyson also recreates the scene in the original film wherein her grandmother frantically bangs on a neighbor's door for help—but while Laurie's pleas go unanswered, Allyson is assisted and picked up by the authorities. Teenage Laurie faces the essential and traumatic moment of discovery unique to Final Girls (wherein the killer's psychological manipulations are cruelest and she is made to find the dead bodies of her friends) when she comes across

her peers' corpses, positioned to fall out and scare her. Struggling towards her grandmother's compound on Halloween, Allyson also suffers through a similar but subverted experience when, in confused and abject horror, she looks around and sees a crop of half-destroyed mannequins (while the camera zooms into, spins around, and cuts rapidly to an assortment of mangled faces—the very last of which is that of Myers) as the music mounts at each cut and rises in terror, culminating in her scream of total fear. But while Laurie is forced to realize the danger of her situation, Allyson's dread gives way to the recognition that she has reached the safety of her grandmother's compound (Laurie uses the mannequins for target practice).

Clover remarks that "in the final phase [of a horror film exists] a fairly tight organization around the functions of victim and hero (which may be collapsed into one figure or, alternatively, split into many)." In 2018's *Halloween*, Laurie and the women she leads are a synthesized team of future victors at work—a far cry from the physically anguished and victimized Final Girls of slashers past. Even Myers enjoys a greater degree of depth; rather than being just the deranged psychopath of the original film, he is a slumbering killer awoken by the unwelcome invasion of his mental stasis at the sanitarium by bad actors seeking to disrupt his relative peace. In both cases, the passage of forty years marks not only their development as individuals, but also the growth of the slasher genre as a whole in the direction of an expanded surface upon which viewers might project and grapple with the demons of their own pasts. At the end of the film, Myers looks up—through bars—at the three women he has failed to destroy. Their combined strength, resilience, and preparation show that, in spite of it all, you can in fact kill the boogeyman. ◆

Halloween (2018)

GHOST OF PERFECTION

AN EXAMINATION OF GHOST IN THE SHELL

Ghost in the Shell (1995)

by IRIS SANG

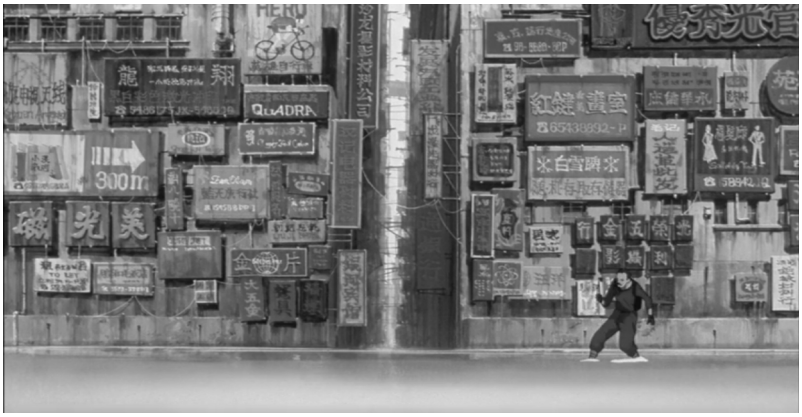
Ghost in the Shell (1995) starts in a straight-on science fiction manner, opening with a few lines of explanation of its highly computerized future, and a scene of an apparently secretive mission involving helicopters soaring above the city. The audience gets its first glimpse of the futuristic metropolis and a mind-blowing sense of the new world alongside the film's protagonist, Major Motoko. In the opening scene, she pulls out lines that are connected directly to her body through four ports on her neck, takes off her clothes, and dives elegantly and freely down to the blazing city. The film's central and existentialist discussion of humanity in the context of an augmented capability to modify and program our organic physicality is thus raised from the beginning, and deepened through Motoko's further interaction with the criminal hacker, the Puppet Master. Fans and critics have praised the cyberpunk film's futuristic vision and contemplation of technological advancement, but the film's most profound observation is fundamentally humanistic. *Ghost in the Shell* dives into the long discussed dichotomies between the human body and the mind, idealism and materialism, individual and the state/law, and desire and morality through its character building, storytelling, and aesthetics.

One of the most famous scenes in the film is the opening title sequence, which shows the construction of Motoko's body. Kenji Kawai's music, which sets off the whole sequence with the quiet tinkling of bells, incorporates traditional Japanese instruments and minimalist melody. Vibratos from a high pitched singing voice accompanied by slow beating drums not only sets the profound and cyberpunk tone of the movie, but also gives the body making process a quiet divinity as if we are witnessing the creation of humans by God. Motoko's body itself is a representation of human's relentless pursuit of strength and power. The "stronger" body—modified, weaponized, and perfected by inorganic materials—points to a revelation of our own fear and insecurity regarding our physical and even mental vulnerability. Ironically, it is revealed later that people's brains, which have been digitized, are now easily hacked into, enabling hackers to interfere with one's thoughts, self-conception, and memory (which, as Motoko points out, is a critical component of one's conception of the self). A man can attempt to hack into his wife's brain to investigate whether she is cheating on him, which marks how the technology is creating previously unimagined moral questions and violating individual privacy. The ability to create false illusions and fantasy puts humans more at risk of being the subjects of manipulation and control, which prompts more technological advancement to compensate for the flaws, creating an endless circle. The paradox between the strengthening of the physical body to a so-called perfection, and the increasing vulnerability of our mind points to Eastern philosophers' meditation of balance and harmony: When we tip over the equilibrium established by the natural world, what are the consequences? Can we be our own God, even while our greedy nature cannot make us as unconditional?

The complex emotions triggered by a dislocation of self-consciousness, as well as the navigation of identi-

ty within the inorganic, man-made body, are further conveyed through the relationship between people and the cyberpunk metropolis. The futuristic city is deliberately modeled on Hong Kong, incorporating elements such as the building jungle, the worn-out and dilapidated streets, and the neon lights and signs. In the first chase scene of the movie, cars move through the dirty roads within the condensed city space. Chinese signs in overwhelming number fill up the enclosed space of the dark, greenish streets, which creates a sense of depressing suffocation. The sequence also includes a variety of shots from different lengths, angles, heights and distances, which fully present the tension of the chase, while exhibiting the city space from multiple perspectives. The action is well coordinated within the geography of this condensed city, as agents from Section 9 engage in direct, face-to-face gun combat in a narrow and abandoned street, and chase the target through a very busy market. Resonant music and clear, echoing footsteps move in the same rhythm as the tracking and spinning shots, creating a strong sense of isolation and loneliness. The vulnerability and fear in being in this forest-like place becomes even more pronounced when Motoko corners the target in an open area covered by water. The visual contrast between the compact urban space and the clear square, the colorful signs and the gray skyscrapers, light and shadow, all highlight the film's overall tone of dislocation and isolation, and shed light on the human experience of living in this inhuman and robotic city. The diminished naturalness and organic elements within the city mirror the inner world of the characters. The dualistic discussion between the individual and the society (and the metropolis), the deteriorating city, and the advancing technology all point to how the inner sense of self is changing along with the outside world, a process which is overwhelming and uncontrollable.

After Motoko dives into the deep water to take a break from her reality, letting go of her sense of self, she talks to Batou about how their bodies can break down alcohol in just a few seconds without stupor and hangover. She says "We can just toss them back while waiting for orders." The city space and its lack of color relate to the lack of individual pleasure. Through the modifications of human bodies, the government is transforming individuals into callous machines that, in turn, become their instrument of power, war, and violence. The deprivation of pleasure points to the fact that the agents are controlled not only physically, but also through their own consciousness and emotions. Motoko says: "We are state-of-the-art, controlled metabolisms, computer-enhanced brains, cybernetic bodies." Every aspect of one's self is directly controllable and changeable, so their bodies become the state's property, because they now need to rely completely on state maintenance to survive. Together with the elimination of desire is the elimination of pain; we see that the destruction of Motoko's body is of little importance to her, as she does not feel pain, and her mechanical body could be rebuilt quickly. Reshaped conceptions of pain not only redefine our most fundamental human nature, but also leads



to the reconstruction of the nature of violence, which is manipulated by states and governments to gain power. When Section 9 tries to fix the escaped cyberbot, her body shakes and trembles in such a brutal and inhuman manner that it causes the audience strong mental and physical discomfort, but the officials are not moved by the cruel scene. Along with the elevation of violence against the body and easy physical sacrifices, the self-value of modified human beings is revolutionized in that the direct consequence of violence—physical pain and the loss of one's life—is no longer a primary fear. Rather, a new form of fear-inducing pain takes place: the mental dislocation and struggle in finding one's identity, and the disappointment and depression induced by the perpetual conflict between rationality and sensibility. In *Ghost in the Shell*, the proliferation of a new form of violence, violence of the mind and self-consciousness, further stretches the power hierarchy as those with the technology to hack into people's minds through the internet are the ones capable of the mastery of the self. And at this point, another of Darwin's natural selection cycle has begun, and a new God will thus be born.

After Motoko goes for a deep dive in the sea, she tells Batou, "I feel confined, only free to expand myself within boundaries." The camera dolly zooms into her face and the skyscraper jungle shines in blue light. Motoko's own sense of confinement is the direct product of the social, political, mental, and physical conditions of the digitized world. The film's evident repression of pleasure, personal freedom, identity, and sense of security prompts the creation of the Puppet Master. This new character thus leads another revolution for a different ideology, gaining control of the world through the mastery of the internet (and ultimately subsuming Motoko's identity to create a new God). What remains unchanged is the citizens' own self-consciousness, and the forever conflict between their own sensibility and rationality. No matter how strong and invincible the human body becomes, despair and struggle caused by this conflict will never cease to exist, and such emotions are what make us human. ◆

POSTHUMAN WOMEN

DUBBING AND AUTOTUNE IN THE HOLLYWOOD MUSICAL

by MADELEINE COLLIER

Illusions (1982)

Introduction: Chimeraculture

From the level of the pixel and the byte up through the feature-length film and the Facebook profile, tectonic shifts are occurring in the field of media representation. We have arrived at a moment where the first-person digital experience revolves around the database logic of a composite self, a manifestation of identity which increasingly incorporates the synthesis of self and other in a complex posthuman arrangement. Theorist William J. Mitchell coined the term "electro-bricolage" to describe the dominant projects of the new digital image economy, where relentless airbrushing, swapping, looping, sampling, and stitching reconfigures the indexical stability of the analog image into something far more nebulous and volatile. This new convention of media generation brings to light a formerly shadowy territory of chimerical representation, reframing a decades-old tradition wherein mainstream producers have constructed Frankensteinian subjects and passed them off as cohesive media entities.

While composite subjects have appeared sporadically across the timeline of representation, they began to claim a larger stake in the broader social imaginary in the wake of World War II. As Fordist paradigms of economic production were replaced by more specialized/feminized schemes of labor, the warping boundary between human and machine exposed new fault lines within the working subject. This political atmosphere, progressively animated by the capabilities of digital manipulation, inaugurated a media terrain so crowded with chimerical subjects, it might be labeled "chimeraculture."

Across platforms, a consistent attribute of chimeraculture through the last half century has been the disproportionate application of these slicing and stitching operations to subjects already marginalized within the cultural landscape. Now, as we move into uncharted media territory, the issue of chimerical representation carries with it the question of how technologies which were originally applied to dismember and reassemble feminized and racialized bodies have become a fundamental aspect of our everyday interactions on the internet. What can we learn from the history of chimerical representation to understand new schemes of subjecthood? More broadly, what does it mean for the protagonists of our dominant audiovisual input to be multimedia, multi-subject chimeras, especially as those protagonists increasingly feature fragments of ourselves? To begin to understand this phenomena, I return to an investigation of the golden age of Hollywood production, where dubbing practices were responsible for introducing and circulating split subjects in audiovisual media.

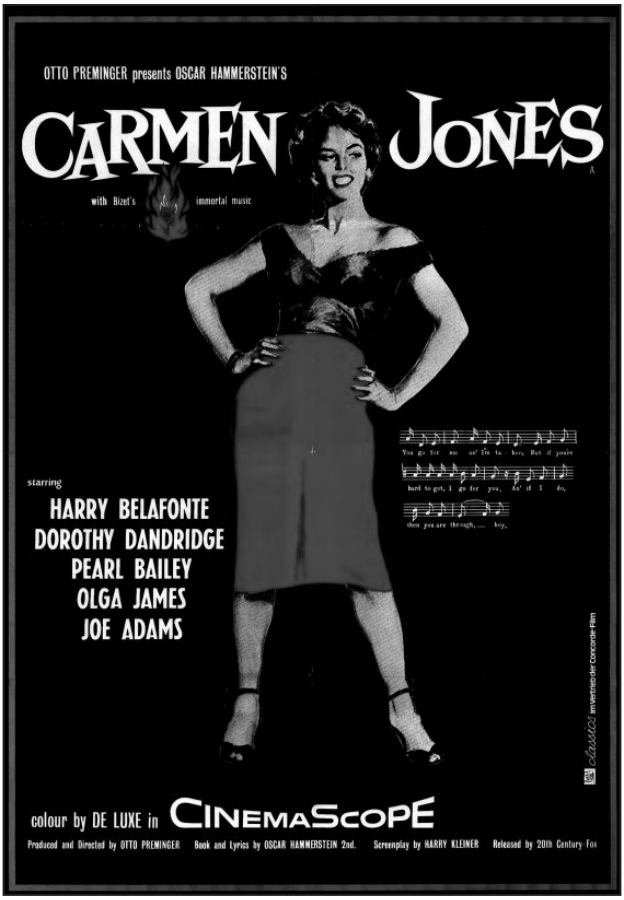
Composite Women in Hollywood's Golden Age

The rise of sound films ("talkies") as the predominant form of popular entertainment in

the 1930s-50s coincided with the moment that N. Katherine Hayles delineates as the transitional period from the liberal humanist to the posthuman era. In *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999), she posits that the posthuman subject emerged in the wake of World War II to "configure the human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals." In Hayles' conception of the posthuman subject, boundaries between the biological and the cybernetic have been superseded, creating a new concept of the self which extends beyond the limits of the body and incorporates informational prostheses. Within the realm of cinema, the transition from the liberal human subject to the posthuman subject was dramatically highlighted by the increasing manipulation of the onscreen environment, first through the maneuvering of video/audio track synchronicity and later in the computer-enabled renderings of digital sound and image.

As the sound film quickly gained prominence, traditional "talkies" were dwarfed by the films produced in the era of blockbuster Hollywood musicals, the mid-century pinnacle of spectacle entertainment and a genre instrumental to the vast economic success of the studio system model. Cinematic subjects now "spoke", thanks to synchronized recording devices, which largely eradicated the textual aspect of representation, such as intertitles; however, the composite subject continued to loom large in the realm of mediation. It was common in the golden age of Hollywood musicals for producers to "dub" the voices of (typically female and/or racialized) stars, fusing together the body and speaking voice of one actor and the singing voice of another. This procedure served to further normalize the composite subject, revealing new contours along which onscreen figures were fractured and fused.

In "The Curves of the Needle" (1927), Theodor Adorno asserts that: "Male voices can be reproduced better than female voices. The female voice easily sounds shrill— but not because the gramophone is incapable of conveying high tones… rather, in order to become unfettered, the female voice requires the physical appearance of the body that carries it." In Adorno's perception, technologically mediated female expression must be substantiated by a body; the dimensions of corporeality and materiality are inextricably intertwined with the comprehension of the female/feminized voice. Within the cultural conceptions of the early-mid twentieth century, the "disembodied" subject presented a threat to conceptions of gender difference as it was made manageable by visual mediation; a female voice emanating from the radio or a gramophone recording was too ambiguous and distant from un-



derstandings of the female form as "natural", "organic", and centered in the corporeality of the maternal body. As Kaja Silverman perceptively notes in *Acoustic Mirrors: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (1988), "What is at issue… is the identification of the female voice with an intractable materiality, and its consequent alienation from meaning… the corporealization of the female voice magnifies the effects of synchronization." When movie musicals arrived, the genre provided the opportunity for producers to reapply female voice to body, creating reassuring amalgamations of feminine presentation and identity.

Julie Dash's 1982 film *Illusions* performed a comprehensive analysis of this split by taking question of composite femininity and adding the further dimensions of race and the incorporation of the Other. The film features a black voice actress employed at a major Hollywood studio (working for realistically meager pay and recognition), supplying her voice for the studio's white stars. In "Are You as Colored as that Negro?:

The Politics of Being Seen in Julie Dash's *Illusions*" (1991), Farah Jasmine Griffin and S.V. Hartman write of a central white character: "Leila's image, the desired body [is]… mortified with the animating voice required to make her a desirable woman. Acting as cosmetic surgeons, the studio technicians construct Hollywood's ideal woman from composite parts." In fact, the politics of dubbing operates in dual directions; while blockbuster producers intervened at this seam to facilitate the illusion of Hollywood's ideal and obvious female, they also stripped the specific actors and singers of the unique power wrought by the cooperative application of their voices and bodies. By prohibiting a female protagonist from wielding her onscreen presence as a whole and developed individual, Hollywood producers not only preserved their authority to curtail and mediate female expression to a minute degree, but also created a legacy of fragmented female representation in cinema.

In a meta-narrative twist, the hugely successful *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) also features a plot which plays upon dubbing politics—in this case, the imagined synthesis of the appealing qualities of the glamorous female movie star and the girl next door. The climactic moment of that film arrives when the reigning star, Lina Lamont (Jean Hagen), mimes singing in front of an audience while lovable Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds, ironically dubbed herself) supplies the real voice from backstage. As Silverman observes of *Singin' in the Rain*: "The bewildering array

of female voices marshaled at both the diegetic and extradiegetic levels for the purpose of creating direct sound suggests, even more forcefully than the difficulties Lina encounters in attempting to articulate and record her lines, that the rule of synchronization simultaneously holds more fully and necessitates more coercion with the female than with the male voice—suggests, in other words, that very high stakes are involved in the alignment of the female voice with the female image."

This film, which captures some of the hysteria around the isolation and shuffling of female voices and bodies during this period, unmasks a host of tropes which were coalescing around representations of women onscreen. In one instance, Silverman notes that Lina can only remember to speak into the microphone when it is sewn into her costume; because of the perceived incongruity between her shrill voice and desirable body, her voice is evasive to technological capture. For Silverman, "synchronization is synonymous with a more general compatibility of voice to body… a voice which seems to 'belong' to the body from which it issues will be easily recorded, but that one which does not will resist assimilation into sound cinema."

Singin' in the Rain's drama of mismatched and composite women culminates in the moment when the curtain rises and the audience members erupt into laughter and jeers as they realize Lina's live performance is being dubbed. Their mixed cries express a certain pleasure in the ability to dismantle a flimsily-constructed subject, harkening back, perhaps, to the popular thrill of witnessing other political executions, other grotesque dismemberments. A memorable theatrical event is manifested from the spectacle of the Hollywood machine methodically stripping back the layers of artifice behind one of their colossal, extra-feminine creations. Indeed, the woman in the Hollywood musical is rarely a complete whole, even as she takes center-screen; she is fractured, and her narrative power is made manageable as it is split among women.

As explored by Julie Dash in *Illusions*, another prominent seam in dubbing politics is race and the incorporation of the Other. In *Imperial Leather* (1995), Anne McClintock outlines the concept of abjection in the following terms: "Abject peoples are those whom industrial imperialism rejects but cannot do without: slaves, prostitutes, the colonized, domestic workers, the insane, the unemployed, and so on." First developed by Julia Kristeva to describe the power relations sustaining social paradigms, the correspondence between the subject and the abject is made manifest across the history of film dubbing. Onscreen presentations of whiteness are often unsustainable without reliance on and incorporation of the racialized Other, just as white presence and existence in post-colonial industrial society is unsustainable without analogous support. Conversely, at the peak of the studio system's influence, the practice of mitigating

the presence of a racialized Other through voice dubbing was common; actors of color in *West Side Story* (1961), *Carmen Jones* (1951), *South Pacific* (1958), and *Flower Drum Song* (1961), among many others, were dubbed with white singing voices. In both these operations, the dual processes of fracturing female identity and bolstering white identity by abject efforts sustain the illusion of the Other as managed, directed, and palatably consumable.

In 2001, Rita Moreno (Anita in *West Side Story*) and Marni Nixon, who dubbed Natalie Wood's singing in the film, sat down for an NPR interview with Terry Gross to discuss their experiences of dubbing on set, decades earlier. Though Moreno, a lauded singer, performed nearly all of her own vocals, the production team brought in white mezzo-soprano Betty Wand to supply the voice for the duet "A Boy Like That/I Have a Love." Moreno herself admits that the dubbing was necessary—she was unable to hit the lowest notes of the piece—yet nearly forty years after the filming, she recalls with emotion: "I sat in the control room trying to tell her… how Anita was feeling at that time. But Betty Wand was a singer; she was not an actress who sang and she just couldn't get it the way I wanted it… Oh it's heartbreaking, it's heartbreaking because I wanted it to sound, it almost should have been a growl… you know, barely sung and she ended up sounding—you know, whenever I hear it, I just, my stomach knots up because she sounded almost like a cliché Mexican."

Moreno was one of the few actors of Puerto Rican descent on a set in which half the characters were meant to be Puerto Rican, and she describes how the decision to employ Wand was aligned with the production team's choices to paint the cast in dark makeup and require stilted Hispanic accents. Each, she asserts, undermined individual performances and the integrity of the film as whole.

Above all, the decision to employ Wand for this scene exemplifies the tendency of mid-century producers to deconstruct and flatten organic presentations of race, mediating the Other through a synthesis with whiteness. Across films of this period, producers were prompted to dub women's voices for a variety of reasons; this catalog included tone, accent, pitch, and even—as is dramatized in *Singin' in the Rain*—a perceived incongruity of their sound and their corporeal presence. In an insightful essay on the racial politics of *West Side Story*, Priscilla Peña Ovalle describes the effect of this particular casting decision, writing, "Moreno's assertive body language is mismatched with the generic quality of Wand's artificial accent, a kind of aural brown-face that flattens the scene's intensity." It is this flattening of expression and specificity which dubbing is able to perform, and which, in cooperation with other production decisions, has had an enormous impact on cinematic presentations of race and gender.

Autotune, Vocoders, and Cyborgs

In the twenty-first century, movie-musicals are rarely dubbed. Instead, the rise of digitized audio manipulation has allowed the original stars to keep their own voices; now they are simply auto-tuned. Interestingly, the effect is still far more heavily applied to female voices (and more heavily still to the hyper-female soprano realm), as a quick listen to *Les Miserables* (2012), *Into the Woods* (2014), or *Beauty and the Beast* (2016), will reveal. The clipped, reed-thin soprano tones of Emma Watson, Amanda Seyfried, or Anna Kendrick sound pronouncedly cyborgian; they would never be mistaken for unaltered human sound. In "'Believe'? Vocoders, Digitalised Female Identity and Camp", Kay Dickinson explores the application of similar vocoder technology to feminized and gay voices. She tackles the assumptions about female corporeality and naturalism brought forth by Adorno, noting that: "certain vocal conceits are cherished as exceptionally direct conduits to the core of the self, to some sort of emotive truth, with Bob Dylan's scratchiness or James Brown's grunts winning more of these types of prizes than the smooth, non-grating and physically less aligned vocal offerings of the likes of ABBA." Autotune and vocoders scramble the features of voices which have become associated with the authentic, the accessible, and the genuine; when singers' voices are altered in this way, they can lose the same individualized emotional power as they do when they are dubbed. As dubbing fades into the background, film producers have succeeded in retaining the fractured female subject by creating from her an entity that is "physically less aligned"; her Otherness is sustained in the big-budget spectacle film through her affiliation with the digital. ◆