Issue 1.1, Winter 2023

The Cinematograph

Cinematography, Spectatorship and Ideology in *Manhatta* (1921)

Un Chien Andalou (1929), Surrealism and Femininity

TV Producer Mark Murray on Interning with Local Stations

Review of *Past Lives* (2023): A Moment for Asian-American Cinema

Letter from the Editor-in-Chief

Dear Reader,

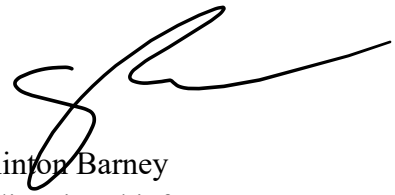
It is my distinct pleasure and utmost honor to introduce you to the inaugural issue of *The Cinematograph*, Washington University's first scholarly, interdisciplinary film journal. When I moved to St. Louis just over a year ago to attend WashU, I was enamored by the reach and passion of the local film community, even in the face of a nation-wide decline in moviegoing numbers. From Cinema St. Louis, and their annual presentation of the St. Louis International Film Festival, the Film Series at Webster University, and the resources and screenings offered by the Film and Media Studies Department at Washington University, I knew I had made the right choice in coming here. Yet, despite the well-rootedness of the film community, I wanted to offer something of my own, to give back to some degree.

The process of creating *The Cinematograph* began in early 2023, as I began preparing for my graduate practicum. I had just begun working in the Scholarly Communications department at the University Libraries, as well as started sending out manuscripts to undergraduate film journals. As an undergraduate student, I was not aware of the possibility of submitting my own work to scholarly journals, and thus contributing to ongoing discourse within the academy, until I was nearly set to graduate. Having submitted multiple pieces of my own to academic journals throughout the States, I was interested in the back-of-house processes that allowed the journals to run. And as it so happened, the department in which I began working introduced me to the realm of scholarly publications, including the Janeway system in which *The Cinematograph* operates.

With this journal, I hope to not only provide a platform for students to publish their work, and thus contribute to ongoing scholarly discussions, but in doing so, make widely accessible the research of St. Louis's up-and-coming film scholars. I hope to add another facet into the larger St. Louis film community, enriching its scholarly component, as to influence local mainstream understanding of film and media. Though these aspirations may seem daunting, especially for its status as a student project, I am hopeful that somebody, somewhere will read the works offered in this issue and think about cinema just a little bit differently. So I thank you, dear reader, for taking time to support the journal and the individual authors that provided the contents of this first issue.

The namesake of this journal derives from French filmmaker Robert Bresson. In his essay *Notes on the Cinematograph*, Bresson notes that to use the cinematograph (i.e. camera) is to write with light, and thus capture a new perspective of a true reality. With the writings of this issue, we hope to provide new perspectives on cinema from other disciplines. By putting light into words, we hope to capture new understandings of reality and our place within it.

Thank you, and I hope you enjoy our first issue.



Clinton Barney
Editor-in-Chief

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About *The Cinematograph*

The Cinematograph is a new interdisciplinary, scholarly journal of film and media edited and operated by students from Washington University's Film and Media Studies Department The journal seeks to foster interdisciplinary approaches from the humanities, arts, social sciences or STEM towards ongoing or relevant conversations in film scholarship. The journal's contributing writers are an interdisciplinary mixture of undergraduate and graduate students from the greater St. Louis area. With its open-access, open-review publishing model, *The Cinematograph* strives to provide a platform for the next generation of St. Louis's film scholars to contribute to larger scholarly discourse in film, media and other disciplines. At a more granular level, *The Cinematograph* seeks to build upon the strong film community in St. Louis, providing an outlet for local communication and collaboration between students, a wider movie-going public, and local exhibitionists. Published annually in the spring and fall, *The Cinematograph* is the official film studies journal of Washington University in St. Louis, where it is published and supported by the University Libraries.

Feature Essay:

The Spectator-in-the-Text: Cinematography, Spectatorship and Ideology in *Manhatta* (1921)

Clinton Barney

Washington University in St. Louis

As cinema developed into a narrative vehicle into the 1920s, moving away from its roots in experimentalism, a genre known as city-symphonies emerged, most prominently in the United States and Europe. With its emphasis on abstract aesthetic form over narrative development, city-symphonies "avoided…storylines and characters" and instead focused on capturing "the energy, the patterning, the complexities and the subtleties of a city."[1] Removed from the actuality films (i.e. panoramas, phantom/train-rides) of early cinema, city symphony films sought to capture more than just a photographic representation of the city. Rather, they sought to capture a city's *aura*. In tandem with the modernist approaches of Constructivism and Cubism, filmmakers appealed to and employed "rhythmic and associative montage" as a means to capture the "highly fragmented, oftentimes kaleidoscopic sense of modern life."[2] Capturing a city's aura was essential in capturing one's relationship with and experiences of the city, including work and leisure, and how both are shaped by industrial means.

Scholarship regarding city-symphonies typically reduces spectatorship within the confines of montage. The rapidity of images not only serve to reflect one's own overwhelming experience of the city, but categorize space and time in a manner that encourages a physiological response in the viewer. As Ori Levin notes, city-symphony directors "[turned] the rhythms of the

[1] Steven Jacobs, Eva Hielscher, and Anthony Kinik, eds., *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Avant-Garde, and Urban Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2019), 10-11.
[2] Jacobs et. al, 5.

machine into an aesthetic feature [in an attempt] to appeal to the viewers' emotions,"[3] particularly those of overstimulation and anxiety. In her essay on Robert Florey's *Skyscraper Symphony* (1929), Merrill Schleier writes that the "kaleidoscopic view of moving skyscraper fragments…act as stand-in for the viewer's urban confusion or over stimulation."[4] Suarez writes that these films' "stress on abstract patterns and collapsed perspectives" result in a "refusal to center the spectator" within the cinematic space, further contributing to their uncertainty and disorientation.[5]

The role of the cinematography within city symphonies tends to be overlooked, understood primarily as a stepping-off point as a means to evaluate montage, and has yet to receive proper scholarly attention in itself, particularly as an independent vehicle of ideological communication. It is within this scholarly gap that I seek to operate. Evaluating the relationship between cinematography, spectatorship and ideology will provide a more nuanced approach to understanding the role/placement of the viewer within the wider city-symphony genre, as well as provide a new perspective onto the ideological pursuits, meanings and/or shortcomings of particular films.

My approach in evaluating the cinematography of city-symphony films, and their relationship to the construction of ideology, derives from Nick Browne's 1975 essay "Spectator-in-the-Text: The Rhetoric of 'Stagecoach.'" In his evaluation of John Ford's 1939 film *Stagecoach*, Browne understands the cinematic spectator to be placed within the story-world

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[3] Ori Levin, "The Cinematic Time of the City Symphony Films: Time Management, Experiential Duration and Bodily Pulsation," *Studies in Documentary Film* 12, no. 3 (2018): 225–38, https://doi.org/10.1080/17503280.2018.1504370, 236.

[4] Merrill Schleier, "A Parisian in Manhattan: Florey's Skyscraper Symphony," essay, in *The City Symphony Phenomenon Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity Between the Wars*, ed. Steven Jacobs, Anthony Kinik, and Eva Hielscher (London: Routledge, Taylor et Francis Group, 2019), 112.

[5] Juan A. Suarez, "City Space, Technology, Popular Culture: The Modernism of Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta*," *Journal of American Studies* 36, no. 1 (2002): pp. 85-106, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0021875802006783, 89.

two-fold: by means of not only 1) where the camera is located in relation to the diegetic space and action, but also 2) who/what the camera is pointing at. Thus, the spectator is placed in two positions at once: with the *subject* of the gaze, and with the *holder* of the gaze. However, the spectator is driven to identify not necessarily with both controller and subject of the gaze at once. Rather, the audience's identification is determined by their respective level of approval or disapproval of the character whose perspective they are inhabiting, or of the character they gaze upon. In the example from *Stagecoach* given by Browne, he evaluates a scene in which the spectator oscillates between two camera positions, though for the purposes of this essay we will only focus on the first. He evaluates a series of shots in which the camera is positioned from the relative perspective of Lucy, a conservative, high-class wife of a soldier, picturing Dallas, a shunned prostitute, which he claims is reflective of Lucy's "social dominance" and authority over Dallas. Although the spectator occupies Lucy's gaze and understands the ideological implications of it (her perceived sense of authority), they are not inclined to share it, and in fact can reject it. As Browne elaborates, identification with Dallas is possible: "Insofar as I identify with Dallas, it is not by repeating her shame, but by imagining myself in her position"[6] as the one who is shamed. It is with one's approval of the subject of the gaze that they can overcome or nullify the ideological/power dynamics expressed by the holder of the gaze.

While Browne's essay focuses on narrative Hollywood films, his understanding of dual-spectatorship can be used to evaluate even the most avant-garde of forms. For this essay, I will be using Browne's approach to evaluate one of the most famous city-symphony films: *Manhatta* (1921) by Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand as a means to understand both how the film places the spectator within the diegetic space (by means of the camera), and the ideological underpinnings

[6] Nick Browne, "The Spectator-in-the-Text: The Rhetoric of 'Stagecoach,'" *Film Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1975): 26–38, https://doi.org/10.2307/1211746, 35.

or connotations established through the spectator's placement. My research is guided by these overarching yet connected questions: Who is the intended audience of these films? What/who is the audience meant to identify with? What ideology are these films trying to capture and promote? Most importantly, how does the camera position the viewer in relation to the film's ideology?

In their attempt to place the spectator within proletarian public spaces (assumedly inviting the spectator to identify with the proletarian public), the camera juxtapositionally places the spectator in a position of unhinged privilege; an outsider (or even a slummer) detached from the proletariat public spaces shown, able to weave through the city and access its entirety without consequence or hindrance. Thus, the spectator is placed in two simultaneous positions at once, swaying between the perspective of the (attached) proletariat and (detached) bourgeoisie. Ultimately, the film (by means of cinematography) does not drive the spectator to disapprove entirely of the proletarian human subjects based on their relationship with the city, but rather makes it impossible for approval of said subjects to be obtained whatsoever. This oscillating perspective negates (or at least confuses) the ideological goals of the film in relation to the wider goals of the city-symphony genre.

The dichotomy between the attached proletariat and the detached bourgeoisie can be best described as the different relationships each holds with the city. For the proletariat, the city is an inescapable, all-encompassing network. As the site of their home, work, leisure, and daily life in general, the proletarian is constantly subject to the varying stimuli of the city, from advertisements to technology to other people. Their attachment to the city is as physical as it is economical, spiritual and psychological. John Sloan's rooftop paintings (Figure 1) emphasize this attached nature of the working class to the architectural and societal infrastructure that

surrounded them. Whereas the rooftop is perceived as a site of temporary escape from the city, placing (both physical and spiritual) distance between the individual and the city's streets that serve as the hub of activity and commerce, the individual is still attached to the city, unable to truly disentangle themselves from the visual and audible stimuli of the streets below. Yet, the desire to detach is still there. This constant subjection to stimuli requires the necessity of what Simmel defines as a stimulus shield, the ability to create a "mental distance" through a "blasé attitude," or sense of emotional "antipathy" (apathy) towards the city and its inhabitants.[7] Thus, it is necessary for one to detach themselves from the city and its incessant activity in order to survive and preserve their mental wellbeing.

Figure 1: John Sloan. Sunday, Women Drying Their Hair, 1912. Oil on canvas. 26 1/8 in. x 32 1/8 in. (66.36 cm x 81.6 cm). Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA.

Comparatively, for the sake of this essay, the bourgeois experience is defined by one's ability to escape from the city and its constant stimuli. This mode of detachment can be best

[7] Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," essay, in *The Blackwell City Reader*, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 103–10.

understood in terms of Chauncey's discussion of slumming. In his study of early gay culture in New York City, Chauncey notes that middle-class straight men would enter the lower-class red-light districts where the gay community resided for temporary reprieve and escape. Unlike those who actually lived in the red-light district that could not escape their daily lives, the middle-class bourgeois men were able to leave the city and remove themselves from the proletarian sphere, to come and go as they pleased. This ability to detach granted the slummers a "sense of superiority" over not only the proletarian, but the space itself, which is perceived as a mere spectacle.[8] The "blasé", unsympathetic attitude towards the city is thus realized in not just physical terms, but psychological. Inasmuch as these bourgeois individuals are able to vanish from the physical infrastructure which entrapped and defined the lives of the proletarian masses, they are able to detach themselves from any emotional connection or mode of relationship with those who they perceive as inferior. Thus, to refine our given thesis, through the placement and movement of the camera (i.e. the cinematographic means) in relation to the subject material shown and visualization of proletarian spaces, these early city-symphony films position the spectator to sway between two perspectives: a *proletarian attachment* to the city, and a *bourgeois attitude of the blasé*.

Often regarded as the first American avant-garde film, Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's 1921 *Manhatta* serves as a celebration of America's postwar vitality, architectural and industrial prowess, as well as the American Dream itself. The opening images of *Manhatta* (Figures 2 and 3) immediately introduce the spectator to New York City's vast utopian promises, placing the spectator within an immediate, fixed perspective of a passenger on a ferry entering the city

[8] George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

(presumably for the first time).[9] Given the succeeding shots which sees a group of commuters descend from a ferry, it can be assumed that within the opening shot, the spectator is directly placed within the perspective of one of these commuters. While the identity of these commuters is uncertain and not directly explored by the film, scholars have interpreted these individuals to be either immigrants[10] or working-class citizens.[11] For the sake of this essay, the crowd will be interpreted broadly as a proletarian crowd, constituting both identities of immigrant and native-born workers. The cityscape, through the perspective of a working-class individual, is thus embedded with notions of an idealized utopia that New York City represented for many hopeful newcomers. The proletarian crowd lives in accordance with the American Dream, working as a means to engage with capitalism and improve their socioeconomic standing. The city serves as an arena and embodiment in which they can engage with the American Dream. In having the spectator gaze upon the skyscrapers, which in themselves serve as "emblems of capitalism and democracy, symbols of class and social mobility,"[12] the film seems to immediately inundate the spectator with the promise of success, namely economic and social mobility, representative of the American Dream. Thus, in sharing the perspective of the proletarian, the film invites the spectator into their respective ideology.

This promise of success seemingly offered to the spectator in the opening images is exacerbated by the film's constant appeal to the poetry of Walt Whitman. Excerpts from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* are intercut between the various shots of the city, serving as the

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[9] Sarah Jilani, "Urban Modernity and Fluctuating Time: 'Catching the Tempo' of the 1920s City Symphony Films," Senses of Cinema, September 2013, https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2013/feature-articles/urban-modernity-and-fluctuating-time-catching-the-tempo-of-the-1920s-city-symphony-films/.
[10] Jilani.
[11] Cecilia Mouat, "Experimental Modernism in City Symphony Films," essay, in *Film and Literary Modernism*, ed. Robert McParland (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 20–26, 23.
[12] Vojislava Filipcevic Cordes, "The City in Motion: Modernity, Mobility and Skyline Views in Manhatta (1921)," *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (2018): 331–49, https://doi.org/10.1386/jucs.5.3.331_1, 332.

guiding force for the images. Whitman's poems "emphatically celebrate the city's grandeur"[13] in terms of the scale of its population, diversity and architectural feats, inviting the viewers to relish in and understand the city's idealistic promises. Whitman's poetry embraced the new American life defined by industry and community. He was a firm believer in the existence of the melting pot, and "'expressed fascination with the urban crowd…[and] 'an egalitarian bonds of comradeship'" that occurred between peoples.[14] When intercut between images of the city itself, these excerpts produce associations in the spectator between these utopian ideals of comradery and industry, and the city. Oehlrich notes that "[Sheeler and Strand's] reliance on Whitman's idealizing verse of the city…spoke to the potential for an American way of life that had not yet been achieved, but which they hoped was on the horizon"[15] as a result of industrial means and cooperation.

Figure 2: Opening Panorama of Manhatta *(1921). The city's idealistic skyscrapers from the perspective of a ferry, 00:01:51. Public domain, 1921.*

[13] Suarez, 86.
[14] Cordes, 345.
[15] Kristen Oehlrich, "Lyrical City: Reconsidering Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand's *Manhatta* (1921)," essay, in *Film and Literary Modernism*, ed. Robert McParland (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 27–39, 35.

Figure 3: Opening Panorama of Manhatta *(1921). Skyscrapers in direct presentation with the naval vehicles that occupy the city's bays, 00:01:43. Public domain, 1921.*

The film's opening sequence is constructed of slow, methodic, wide-angled pans that seek to capture the cityscape in its entirety. Each shot ranges from 5-10 seconds, inviting the viewer to absorb the splendor and totality of the idealized New York skyline. Shot at the same height and angle, the shots follow the same movement line and do not require the spectator to reorient their eyes, reducing the possibility of visual overstimulation, save for the sublime awe one may feel about the massive range of skyscrapers. As expressed by Mouat, "[t]he editing of *Manhatta*, far from the rapid montage developed by Vertov and Ruttmann, creates a filmic space that allows enough time" for the spectator to embody and occupy and familiarize themselves with the cinematic space.[16]

This is mostly in part due to the spectator's visual arrangement and association with the proletarian crowd whose perspective they occupy. Horak determines that the film's opening sequence creates a "unified space" in which the spectator is able to "establish spatial relationships" with the city and its skyscrapers through our sense of attachment with the

[16] Mouat, 23.

individuals on the ground.[17] The spectator's understanding and perception of the city, at first, is determined or guided through their connection with the arriving proletarian crowd. Thus, the film's opening sequence also creates the expectation of a coherent relationship between spectator and the city space: their experience of the city will be in tandem with that of the group whose perspective they occupy. Paired with the celebratory nature of the film and in conjunction with Whitman's texts, in assuming the perspective of "the ceaseless crowd,"[18] again, the spectator is invited to identify with the proletarian journeymen. Thus, the opening images of the film seek to attach the spectator to the city by means of attaching their perspective to that of the working-class crowd who understand, celebrate and live in accordance with the city's utopian ideals.

However, after said opening, this mode of attachment between the spectator and the city/crowd is quickly severed by the film by means of the cinematography. Immediately as the commuters detach from the ferry, Sheeler and Strand detach the camera from the ground and the fixed position of the city-dwelling individual. Rather than placing the spectator on the ground with the proletarian crowd that defined their understanding and perspective of the city up until that point, the majority of *Manhatta* is shot at a high angle from the heights of the idealized skyscrapers, looking down upon the city (Figures 4 and 5). While likely used to "encompass a total vision of the cityscape,"[19] the camera's heightened position "'reduces the passerby to a mere note, whirled and buffeted by the winds of traffic'" and architecture.[20] The high angle in which the camera (and thus the spectator) is placed detaches the spectator from not only the proletarian subjects below, but their experiences of the city. The spectator is unable to witness or

[17] Jan-Christopher Horak, "Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta*," essay, in *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-45* (Univ. Wisconsin Press, 1998), 271.
[18] Walt Whitman, "Sparkles From the Wheel," Leaves of Grass (1881-82), accessed January 2023, https://whitmanarchive.org/archive2/published/LG/1881/poems/221.
[19] Jiliani.
[20] Cordes, 332.

identify with the trials and tribulations of proletarian life in the new modern city. The city's architecture, rather than maintaining its aforementioned idealism, serves as a boundary between the spectator and the crowd, the means of detachment in themselves. The skyscrapers provide the spectator the ability to remove themselves from the immediacy of the street and its crowds, both in terms of physical and mental distance, something those who reside on the rooftops of Sloan's paintings could not achieve.

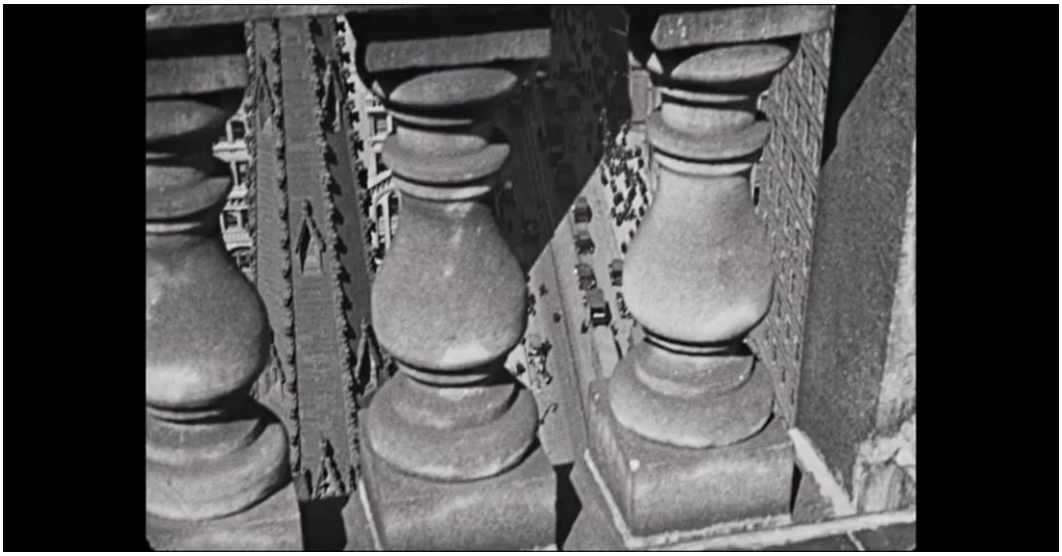

Figure 4: The spectator's newly heightened perspective above the city's streets, framed in relation to stone pillars, 00:10:28. Public domain, 1921.

Figure 5: Viewing the kinesis of the city from above, 00:10:45. Public domain, 1921.

If the skyscrapers, returning to the film's initial images, are meant to physically embody and represent the promise of success and American vitality, then it is these idealizations that serve to imprison the city's crowds within its constructs. The city's inhabitants are framed in relation to, if not consumed by, the city's vast architecture; either directly compared or obscured by the architectural embodiments of success. Horak describes those on the ground as "'antlike [*sic*]…insects crawling between skyscrapers."[21] Horak's description, while dehumanizing, is apt. The proletarians are perceived less as a community of individuals with their own lives, desires and struggles, but as a part of the crowd, entities that make and make up the city. Their experiences are defined particularly by their service to the city; they are placed as agents of commercial consumption and work. The image of smokestacks, which signify the "smoke of industry" and consumption,[22] (i.e. the burning of coal for heat, engines, etc.) serves as a visual motif throughout the film (Figures 6 and 7). Not only does smoke emit from the houses and businesses the proletarian crowd resides in, but also the steamships and trains that surround the city's periphery, creating a visual association between the industrial machines of commerce and the working-class. The crowd, thus, is placed as simply a piece of a larger, city-wide puzzle that contributes to the greater economic flow, and thus, architectural expansion. They share the same status as the machines, means towards a commercial end rather than an end in themselves through their existence as human beings.

[21] Horak.
[22] Oehlrich, 35.

Figure 6: Steam emerging from smokestacks, likely from commercial or residential buildings, signifying consumption of energy, 00:05:35. Public domain, 1921.

Figure 7: Steam emerging from ships. A group of smaller ships push a larger barge, a signifier of the travel industry, 00:08:47. Public domain, 1921.

Beyond the urban vitality embodied by the skyscraper, Sheeler and Strand celebrate the process of its creation, by placing particular emphasis on the workers who build the city's skyscrapers: "these films highlight the quality of the material used, the workmanship involved, and the unique characteristics of the particular building."[23] They are framed either *en masse*, with

[23] Jon Gartenberg and Alex Westhelle, "NY, NY: A Century of City Symphony Films," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 55, no. 2 (2014): 248–76, https://doi.org/10.13110/framework.55.2.0248, 253.

their backs to the camera, or in relation to large machines or industrial properties that dwarf if not minimize their placement within the space. It matters not who these individuals are, but rather what they do for the city. This lack of individuality (although not necessarily agency) is also reflected in Whitman's poetry employed by the film in its intertitles, namely, Whitman's emphasis on the crowd. As expressed by Cordes, "[Whitman's] vision also reveals a poet who, while submerged into the streets, is yet mentally distant from them…withdrawn from the immediate experience of urbanity."[24] Through the lens of a detached bourgeois voyeur, both the subjectivity and experiences of the city's proletarian inhabitants are reduced in relation to the totality of the city and its commercial and industrial goals.

Whereas the spectator's attachment to the immigrants prompted the spectator to connect with the city and its peoples, the spectator's newfound perspective above the city prompts the viewer to disconnect. This notion of disconnection is not prompted by a state of disapproval akin to Browne. The spectator does not (metaphorically) look down upon or despise the proletarian crowd in the same manner Lucy does to Dallas in *Stagecoach*. Rather, in detaching the spectator from the crowd by means of physical and emotional distance, the spectator is invited towards a mode of *indifference* about the crowd they were once associated with. While the spectator relishes in the magisterial view offered by the proletarian workers who constructed the skyscraper, the spectator is not driven to approve of their labor. The film seems more interested in the processes of its construction and the fact that it exists rather than the contributions of its workers. Instead, the cinematography seemingly encourages the separation between the spectator and the crowd. It is in their separation that the spectator is able to relish in the panoramic views of the city, and that the film is able to exist in the first place.

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[24] Cordes, 336.

Thus, the heightened perspective of the spectator not only suggests a sense of mastery and classist superiority over the proletarian crowd they once associated with, but more so, akin to Chauncey's slummers, a sense of mastery and superiority over the cityscape itself. As Michel de Certeau describes in his 1984 essay "Walking the City," where he imagines viewing Manhattan from the top of the World Trade Center:

> To be lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be lifted out of the city's grasp…When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators. An Icarus flying above these waters, he can ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below. His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was 'possessed' into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god.[25]

The heightened position of the spectator allows them to reduce the space into an assemblage of forms -- less of an actual place where people reside and lives are lived, but more as a spectacle. The ideological significance of this cinematic detachment from the city's streets and its inhabitants can be best expressed in relation to Albert Boime's discussion of the magisterial gaze. In evaluating the paintings from the Hudson River and Rocky Mountain schools during the mid-19th century which depict the Westward landscapes of the United States, Boime notes of the heightened perspective from which the paintings placed the spectator. Boime reads this heightened perspective, which he calls the magisterial gaze, as an embodiment of American ideology during the time of Manifest Destiny, namely, a belief of one's control over and ability to conquer a landscape. The elevated placement of the spectator in relation to the rugged, seemingly-untouched landscape grants the spectator a commanding gaze over the landscape and those (particularly Native Americans) who resided and established culture within

[25] Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," essay, in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 91–110, 92.

it. Encoded within the landscapes are notions of futurity and progress; they are something to be controlled and subjugated as a means of American ideological and territorial expansion. Thus, in viewing them from a heightened distance, complex landscapes are reduced into a representational form that allows itself to be presented as accessible and within reach, especially given the expansion of railroad infrastructure. The heightened position of the spectator grants them visual mastery and control over the landscape and those residing within it, in the same manner that the spectator's placement above the city grants them a powerful gaze in *Manhatta*.

This reduction of (particularly new, "exotic" Westward) space into an accessible format was not new to the cinematic medium either by the time of *Manhatta*'s creation. Prior to the establishment of narrativization, during the era labeled by Gunning as the cinema of attractions, panoramas, phantom rides and other actuality films sought to render spaces into easily-digestible and accessible attractions. These spaces were spectacles partially due to their placement as exotic, from representations of unfamiliar Western landscapes to newly-obtained colonial ecosystems. Lauren Rabinovitz, in her evaluation of films between 1903 and 1908 that presented views of amusement parks at night, notes that the only possibility for the viewer to regard the mechanical space as an exotic spectacle was through a mode of detachment, both in terms of height (physical) and psychological connection. These films "often emphasized the importance of spatial detachment from the [subject] for the full effect of bedazzlement," rooting the essence of the spectacular in the spectator's distance from the pictured space.[26] She states "[w]hat is offered as an ideal vantage point [in these films] would have been difficult to achieve as a lived experience" for those on the ground, and as such, "could not be fully realized from within the

[26] Lauren Rabinovitz, "The Miniature and the Giant: Postcards and Early Cinema," essay, in *Electric Dreamland: Amusement Parks, Movies, and American Modernity* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012), 97–134, 132.

crowd." Rather, one "could regard [the space] as spectacle…only when the viewer [or camera] could step outside" of it.[27] Similarly, the city in *Manhatta* is cinematographically presented as a spectacle particularly as a result of the spectator's/camera's detachment from the space. The city-symphony's spectator, like Chauncey's bourgeois slummers, are prompted to view the city and its streets as less as a space where people inhabit, and more as an idealized construct where they can enter and escape at will. The city's streets are placed as something to be consumed, along with the people that occupy it.

This detachment also manifests itself in relation to the film's lack of a "central perspective" used to "orient and position the viewer in the concrete and recognizable geographic space of the film's narrative."[28] Without a physical attachment to the city, or to a central 'protagonist' within the city, the camera is free to roam wherever it may please, not bound or motivated by any particular subject or perspective. The entire city then, and its inhabitants, are subject to the camera's/spectator's magisterial gaze. All views are accessible to the spectator, and thus are all at the risk of being reduced to simply a mode of spectacle, primarily in their detachment from the central perspective of the proletarian crowd. To return to the opening images, after the point-of-view shot from the ferry, the camera is placed on a dock and captures the arrival of the proletarians/immigrants aboard, motivated by our attachment to the immigrants' gaze. The camera, still motivated by the attachment, follows the proletarian crowd into the city. As the camera detaches itself from the proletarian subjects, however, the viewer's understanding of and relationship with the city is as a result disoriented. Despite the longer length of the shots aforementioned, placed by the camera in many different locations in a short time-frame, the audience is unable to familiarize themselves or connect with the various

[27] Rabinovitz, 133.
[28] Horak, 271.

locations. The city becomes a "fractured space"[29] both in terms of its representation, but also in the spectator's relationship to it. They cannot truly identify with the space itself, nor the individuals that inhabit it, before the camera moves the spectator into another unidentifiable or unrecognizable space. The lack of an orienting placeholder "induces a sense of temporal and spatial inertia"[30] in the viewer, who is instead subjected to a vast amount of stimuli. The spectator cannot fixate themselves within the city outside of their magisterial gaze over it, and thus cannot identify with the space or its inhabitants below the summits. The film, in forcing this mental distance between spectator and human subject, prompts the spectator to adopt a blasé attitude. This notion of the blasé is not a result of overstimulation a la Simmel, but through said distance between spectator and crowd.

Figure 8: A negative of the panorama at the film's opening intertitles, meant to exemplify the city at night. Taken from a heightened perspective from beyond the shoreline, 00:11:30. Public domain, 1921.

The film's final image (Figure 8), which also serves as the backdrop for the intertitles, consists of a wide panoramic of the city at night (achieved through creating a negative of the film's initial panoramic image/backdrop), assumedly taken from the position of a ferry or liner

[29] Suarez, 99.
[30] Jiliani.

seen throughout the film. This image calls back to the introduction in which the spectator inhabited the perspective of the proletarian crowd arriving via ferry. While not necessarily a point-of-view shot to the same degree (due to the image's height from the waterline), the spectator remains detached from the city's interior, outside of the city and thus the lives of its inhabitants. Once again, the spectator is placed in an elevated perspective, contributing to the rendering of the city as a spectacle.

As Rabinovitz states, it is within this "idealized, detached" gaze of the spectator that the cityscape "delivers its utopian promise."[31] For the spectator of the amusement park's panoramic views at night (i.e. *Coney Island at Night*), the utopian promise was that of illumination, of modernity's sweeping overhaul of one's perception of nighttime space. For the heightened spectator atop New York's tallest skyscrapers, that utopian promise is less clear. The detached position of the spectator serves to contradict the celebratory nature of the film in general. The idealized, utopian notions of democracy and the melting pot derive from a sense of attachment with the city and its people who engage directly with it and live their lives in accordance with it, being on the ground and an active member of the city, not detached and removed from it. The spectators themselves are unable to engage with said melting pot, fixed to the perspective of the skyscrapers and those who inhabit them instead. Rather, the melting pot is something that is diminished, considering that the (assumedly) diverse identities of those in the crowd are not visible due to the spectator's physical distance, as is the architectural and commercial vitality of the city, reduced into a spectacle meant for digestible and exhibitionary consumption. The promise of success embedded within the film's opening image is unfulfilled, and instead seems

[31] Rabinovitz, 133.

impossible to obtain as a result of the camera's, and thus the spectator's, physical and psychological detachment from the city and its peoples.

Thus, the dual positioning of the spectator, which serves to place the spectator outside of the city in a detached, bourgeois position of perceived superiority over the city and its proletarian inhabitants, effectively contradicts the celebratory and utopian nature of the city-symphony genre. The spectator is unable to truly identify with or (to use Browne's rhetoric) approve of the proletarian public nor the public spaces in which they occupy that serve as the subject material of these films. Rather than serving to connect the spectator to the space and its peoples, *Manhatta* effectively reduces or denies the spectator's attachment to it, creating a mental distance between spectator and on-screen action, resulting in the adoption of a blasé attitude. While industrial modernism and the comradery of the proletarian crowd is celebrated through the filmmakers' appeal to Whitman, it is celebrated as a means for the bourgeoisie to maintain magisterial control, the means to which they interact with the city, and their perception of the city itself. Unable to truly access the city and interiority with the proletariat, the spectator fails to truly recognize the city's utopian promise. Instead, they are forced to remain an outsider, or a slummer, existing outside of the city and its new processes of modernity.

This essay, focusing only on *Manhatta*, is understandably unable to capture the entire genre as a whole, nor does it seek to generalize the argument towards other city symphony films. More evaluation needs to be done with respect to the wide selection of other films in the city-symphony genre in understanding how the camera, not just the editing, places the spectator within the text and in relation to the genre's ideological goals.

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Essay:

Surrealism and Femininity: A Heterosexual Paradox

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From Montaigne's "what do I know"[1] to Gauguin's "where do we come from"[2] to Breton's "who am I"[3], French intellectuals have long grappled with the questions about self-identity, self-consciousness, and their relationships with the tangible world. The unconscious mind and the dream state were essential in opening the portals to these inquires. Surrealists were the pioneers in incorporating newly proposed psychoanalysis and theories about the unconscious mind, such as Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1899, into their literary and artistic practice. However, despite being considered avant-garde in certain fields, surrealists were not exempt from following many of the traditions of a long-established male dominated society.

The Surrealist group was formed by mostly male writers, poets, and artists. Even though there were female members, the major publications and manifestos were written by men. Surrealism advocated *l'Esprit Nouveau* including new ways of thinking, seeing, reflecting, and treating reality through artistic creations. Yet, considering both the conventional tendency of objectifying, idealizing, or sexualizing women in artistic expressions, and the default social structure of marginalizing, manipulating, and transforming female roles, Surrealists intentionally or unintentionally created a heterosexual relationship between the movement and femininity. Surrealism works often emphasized psychological movements, which further amplified the

[1] See Michel de Montaigne's *Essais, Apology for Raymond Sebond*
[2] See Paul Gauguin's painting, *Where do We Come From? What are We? Where are We Going?*, 1897-98, oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts Boston
[3] André Breton, *Nadja*, (New York, London: Grove Press; Evergreen Books, 1960), 11.

internal activities of masculine views on women. Women were portrayed as muses, mirrors, symbols, lovers, and *flâneuses*. In modern standards, many Surrealist statements and portraits are viewed as sexist and employing a male gaze, such as Man Ray and Rene Magritte's collaboration *I do not see the woman hidden in the forest*; however, it is hard not to admit that Surrealists set the precedent of looking inwards and beginning to question conventional beliefs (Fig.1). The conflicts reflected the instability of social values in the development of modernity.

Figure 1: Man Ray and Rene Magritte, I do not see the woman hidden in the forest, 1929

The active yet marginalized role of female Surrealist members has been a well-explored subject in scholarly discussion.[4] Nevertheless, the essence of Surrealist works resists interpretation or analysis, defying facile classification as a specific aesthetic, style, or medium. Rather, Surrealism is better comprehended as a dynamic "relation."[5] Film emerged as a favored medium among Surrealists not only for its capability to project animation but also for its unique

[4] Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf E. Kuenzli, and Gloria Gwen Raaberg, eds., *Surrealism and Women*, 1st MIT Press ed (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1991).
[5] Michael Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema* (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2006), 10.

cinematic experience, setting it apart from other artistic forms. The "relation" between the viewer and the film being viewed was more important to the Surrealists than labelling the film itself surrealistic. The act of sharing a "darkened room" in a with others in a cinema facilitated the dissemination of an individual creator's cognitive faculties a collective public memory.[6] Furthermore, the Surrealist movement evinced a pronounced textual predilection, centering extensively on literature and ekphrasis of the imaginary through manifestos. This underscores its documentary nature beneath the veneer of imaginative aesthetics.

In dissecting femininity within the framework of Surrealism, it is essential to traverse the bridges of "relation" instead of focusing on specific works or mediums. By examining Surrealism in different forms – film, manifestos, and literature – one can gradually understand the representation and role of femininity in a time of psychic revolution.

Buñuel and Dalí's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) visualizes the "psychic automatism" of the unconscious mind through a series of metaphorical montages, constructing dream-like sequences.[7] However, instead of delving deeper into its semiotic deciphering or historical significance, given its status as one of the most extensively analyzed and studied films in film history, this groundbreaking work should be considered as a reliable gateway. The projective and social natures of cinema, as a medium, bridge the psychoanalytic documentation of femininity in male-dominated Surrealist texts with the lived experience of female Surrealists in reality.

André Breton formalized the Surrealism movement through his seminal work, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, and contemplated on his own principles in the semi-autobiographical fiction *Nadja*. Femininity is a common theme in all three works, but it is explored with varying degrees of depth. *Manifesto of Surrealism* employs women as one of its linguistic vocabularies, or lexical

[6] André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, (Paris: 1924), 46.
[7] Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 26.

resources, in a conventional masculine way to better communicate its ideas to the 20th century European audience. *Nadja*, on the other hand, is Breton's attempt to implement his Surrealism theories, resulting in a juxtaposition of both projection of his own unconscious mind on the heteronormative relationship with Nadja and his conscious effort to examine her as the *flâneuse* of the *surreality* world. *Un Chien Andalou* establishes its surrealistic "relation" with the viewers by transposing expectations, evident in the absence of phonetic dialogue and the loss of semantic meaning in intertitles, thereby blurring the boundaries between the woman on the silver screen and in reality.

In *Manifesto of Surrealism,* woman is used as an example of the countless entities encountered in the "waking state".[8] Breton believed that the "waking state" and the unconscious mind affect each other, creating a "phenomenon of interference".[9] Impressions of women and the countless other things during consciousness "isolate the mind for a second from its solvent and spirit it to heaven".[10] Thus, the reality and the unconscious form a new "kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*".[11] Another way Breton construed the concept of the *surreality* was through the imagination of a "*castle*" on the "romantic *ruins*", where historical and contemporary intellectuals resided and worked.[12] He observed and concluded that fundamentally people are "masters of ourselves, the masters of women, and of love".[13] Women, again, are termed as the entities in the reality that men possessed.

Breton cited several writers to support his argument that the most powerful imagery is "arbitrary to the highest degree" and "takes the longest time to translate into practical

[8] Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism,* 13.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism,*14.
[12] Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism,*16.
[13] Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism,*17.

language".[14] Interestingly, several examples from Breton's ekphrasis for the most powerful imagery were associated with femininity and romance, such as "Rrose Selavy",[15] "Beautiful as the law of arrested",[16] and "The color of a woman's stocking is not necessarily in the likeness of her eyes".[17] Breton recognized the feminine as the muse of visual beauty.

Breton delved further into his preference for "arbitrary" imagery over textual description in *Nadja*. Deeming literary descriptions as inadequate for portraying the *surreality*, Breton used three types of imagery in *Nadja* to supplement the truth: portraits, urban landscapes, and artistic still life. The portraits, including those of Breton's fellow surrealists, a selfie, and several female figures, were real film photographs of existing people. As proofs of the reality, these photographs validate that surrealism is real. Among the female portraits are those of Blanche Derval, an actress (plate 13)[18], and Madame Sacco, a clairvoyant (plate 19).[19] However, none of these women can be definitively identified as Nadja. In the 1963 edition of *Nadja*, a montage of photographed eyes is the closest visual representation of her (Fig. 2 and 3).[20] The image is subtitle "Les yeux de fougère…" and the corresponding text describes these "fern-colored eyes" as belonging to Nadja:

> I've seen her fern-colored eyes open mornings on a world where the beating of hope's great wings is scarcely distinct from the other sounds which are those of terror and, upon such a world, I had as yet seen eyes do nothing but close.[21]

Fougère's squiggled contour or green leaves resemble nothing of human eyes, yet plant's history as source of inspiration for decorative patterns and architectural scrolls mirrors women's roles as muses and nurturers. They are the "two distant realities" connected through the power of analogy.[22]

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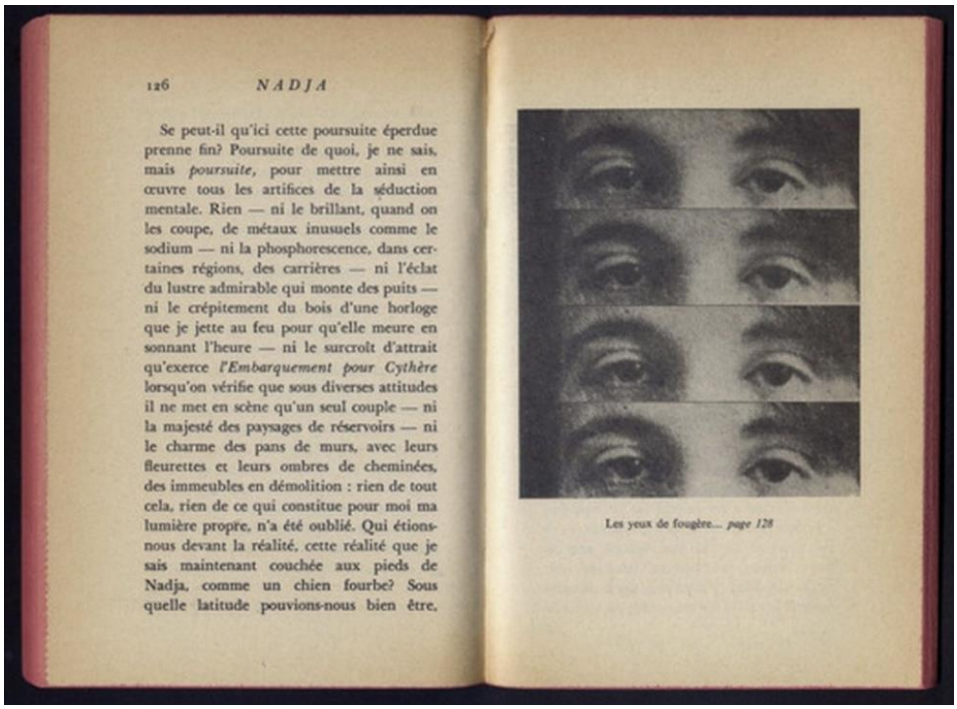
[14] Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*,39.
[15] See quote by Robert Desnos
[16] See quote by Lautréamont
[17] See quote by Max Morise
[18] Breton, *Nadja*, 49.
[19] Breton, *Nadja*, 79.
[20] André Breton, *Nadja* (1963 Edition), 126.
[21] Breton, *Nadja*, 111.
[22] Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 36.

Figure 2: Photomontage of Nadja's eyes, added in the 1963 edition.


126 NADJA

Se peut-il qu'ici cette poursuite éperdue prenne fin? Poursuite de quoi, je ne sais, mais *poursuite*, pour mettre ainsi en œuvre tous les artifices de la séduction mentale. Rien — ni le brillant, quand on les coupe, de métaux inusuels comme le sodium — ni la phosphorescence, dans certaines régions, des carrières — ni l'éclat du lustre admirable qui monte des puits — ni le crépitement du bois d'une horloge que je jette au feu pour qu'elle meure en sonnant l'heure — ni le surcroît d'attrait qu'exerce *l'Embarquement pour Cythère* lorsqu'on vérifie que sous diverses attitudes il ne met en scène qu'un seul couple — ni la majesté des paysages de réservoirs — ni le charme des pans de murs, avec leurs fleurettes et leurs ombres de cheminées, des immeubles en démolition : rien de tout cela, rien de ce qui constitue pour moi ma lumière propre, n'a été oublié. Qui étions-nous devant la réalité, cette réalité que je sais maintenant couchée aux pieds de Nadja, comme un chien fourbe? Sous quelle latitude pouvions-nous bien être,

Les yeux de fougère... *page 128*

Figure 3: The 1963 edition of Nadja

In the montage, the four pairs of eyes arrange vertically, leaving no room for the audience to imagine the rest of Nadja's facial features. While the eyes appear to be gazing outwards and attracting the audience to focus their attentions on them, the attempt to concentrating on interpreting this montage image instead makes it more abstract. Breton saw the reflection of his own unconscious mind through Nadja's eyes, making her a mirror of his heterosexual minds.

Breton sought the answer of "who am I" through Nadja. He was also interested in discovering her identity in the reality as a heterosexual "other" and observing the 20th century French society through her movements and dialogues. "Who are you?"[23] Nadja is the *flaneu*se who roams in the city of Paris randomly and appears in his mind irrationally. Nadja is fully aware of her existential meaning. She answers, "I am the soul in limbo".[24]

Ultimately, Nadja exists in three realities. In the literary fiction, she appears as an obscure and irrational character; reading from Breton's semi-autobiographical (or pseudo-) lens, she exists in reality as an unpredictable and "arbitrary" person; and in the 20th century France, "Nadjas" were the marginalized and aimless women *flaneuses*. All three identities are fictional and surreal, yet their triple overlapping commonalities echo to the *surreality*, demonstrating Surrealists' interests in everyday life.

Manifesto of Surrealism and *Nadja*, both of which were written in an illogical and non-linear structure, reflect Breton's suggestion to "write quickly"[25] as a Surrealist and his admiration for Picasso and Braque's assemblage technique. *Un Chien Andalou* effectively showcases the connection between automatism and the unconscious mind on the silver screen, visualizing the dream-like sequence through techniques of montage. The continuous sequence from the cutting

[23] Breton, *Nadja*, 71.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 29.

of a bull's eye to the cloud piercing through the moon, the "two distant realities" that is difficult to articulate in words is made easy through imagery. The movie's non-coherent flow is shown in the chaos of time. Time is marked in the form of intertitles, such as "in spring" or "sixteen years ago" (Fig. 4). The passage of time, however, is not shown in the movie scenes. The "Andalusian dog", or canine in general, are also absent. Thus, the chronological meanings behind the intertitles or the literary indication behind the main title are deprived, making them exist in purely textual forms. The words connect the dream world in the film with the audience sitting in the screening rooms, completing the formation of the *surreality*. To Breton, it is the film photographs and his collage-like writings that associate his words with the reality. Picasso and Braque's use of materials in everyday life, for instance newspaper or magazine cut-outs, made assemblage a medium bridging the two realms.

Figure 4: The intertitle "In Spring…" in Un Chien Andalou *(1929), 00:16:00. Public domain, 1929.*

In comparing *Un Chien Andalou* and Breton's texts, one noticeable difference is the absence of dialogues in the film. Instead, it is compensated by the characters' elaborate body languages and exaggerated facial expressions. As the "couple" spies on the crowd surrounding the woman with the chest on the street from the apartment window, the malevolent crescent

playing upon the man's lips contrast with the woman's composed observation, implying a dichotomy of gender attitudes. These are the imagery "arbitrary to the highest degree" that Breton praised about, granting film medium a privilege that literature could hardly achieve. Breton, limited by the medium of paper, suggested that "the forms of Surrealist language adapt themselves best to dialogue".[26] Dialogue allows for a sense of "suddenness"[27] and enables frequent exchange of thoughts between different minds. The dialogues between Nadja and Breton are sometimes disjointed, with Breton admitting "I have more and more difficulty following her monologue"[28]. Yet, Nadja's seemingly incomprehensible comments demonstrate "each precise sign of intelligence, of assent it requires."[29] Therefore, the ability to channel the *surreality* and the unconscious mind is spontaneous and innate, not something that should be trained for. Here, women are the muses of intuition.

All three works showcase the authors' knowledge and taste in the history of art. In *Un Chien Andalou,* the scene of the man being shot resembles Édouard Manet's 1863 painting *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (Fig. 5 and 6). Blending three Renaissance masterpieces, Manet inherited the ambiguity of Giorgione's *The Tempest* and borrowed the compositional harmony of Titian's *Fête Champêtre* and Marcantonio Raimondi's etching of Raphael's lost work *Judgement of Paris*. Manet was not only showing his knowledge of the past, but also continuing an unfinished quest of the sixteenth century masters to challenge the ambiguity of subject matters and the subtlety between text and image. Buñuel and Dali borrowed a work that is already a reinvention of the past, adding another layer to its intellectual depth. In *Nadja*, Breton also demonstrated his profound knowledge in art, ranging from Paolo Uccello's Renaissance predella *The Miracle of*

[26] Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism,* 34.
[27] Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism,* 41.
[28] Breton, *Nadja,* 106.
[29] Breton, *Nadja,* 72.

the Desecrated Host (plate 23)[30] to the Surrealists' inspiration Giorgio de Chirico's *The Enigma of Fatality* (plate 38)[31]. These knowledge of the past and present consolidate the cultural significance of Surrealism. Dali, Buñuel, and Breton could not escape the long convention of building upon the past even though they desperately tried to create a new form of aesthetic and spirit. Not only traces of artistic expressions from the past were extended to surrealist works, but also traditional values towards femininity. Women existed in all forms; however, they were always silenced from projecting their own voice.

Figure 5: Edouard Manet, Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe, *1863, Musée d'Orsay.*

[30] Breton, *Nadja*, 94.
[31] Breton, *Nadja*, 122.

Figure 6: Screen capture from Un Chien Andalou *(1929). Public domain, 1929.*

Despite the residue of male-gazing values, Surrealists embraced femininity as a symbol of looking towards the future. Nadja, a Slavic name carries the meaning of "hope", was Brenton's optimistic vision for the future of Surrealism. While the opening of *Nadja* takes the readers on a curious venture of existential exploration, the ending affirms the uncertain, continuous, and endless possibilities of life through a statement referring to femininity: "Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be at all."[32] In *Manifesto of Surrealism*, an unfinished subsection titled "*How to catch the eye of a woman you pass in the street*"[33] is left blank of any description. Breton left questions about the future of Surrealism, as well as the future of women, for others to answer.

And who is most qualified to answer such question? It is women themselves. Female Surrealists, such as Leonora Carrington and Méret Oppenheim, participated in the movement

[32] Breton, *Nadja*, 160.
[33] Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 32.

with ambitions to establish their careers beyond being muse to men. It is irrelevant to delve into the career trajectories, relationships, rumors, or scandals of these female Surrealists as many of them were engaged with established male artists. What is important was their existence. These women humanized themselves by actively participating and outputting as artists, producing a "*shock*"[34] to the male-dominated world.

[34] Breton, *Nadja*, 160.

Film Review:

Past Lives *(2023): A Moment for East Asian American Cinema*

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In her debut film *Past Lives* (2023), director Celine Song expertly crafts a tender, unconventional and semi-autobiographical love story spanning twenty-four years that speaks so well to the lasting effects of immigration and the feeling of longing. Her experience as a playwright is echoed in the emotion expressed through the dialogue and subtle actions in between. The film frames characters' dynamics as being inherently influenced by themes of immigration as the film's lead, Nora (Greta Lee), is examining her identity and how she has changed over time, thus affecting how she navigates and perceives the relationships in her life. The exploration of this conflict contributes to a larger portrayal of the East Asian American experience reflected in recent cinema.

Na Young (Moon Seung-ah) and Hae Sung (Leem Seung-min) as children. A24, 2023.

Na Young and Hae Sung (Teo Yoo) grow up together in South Korea as best friends who have a bond that even their mothers can't ignore. When they are twelve years old, the two grow apart as Na Young, now Nora, moves with her family to Canada. Twelve years later, Nora now lives in New York City with aspirations of becoming a professional playwright. One day she reminisces and searches online for Hae Sung and finds that he too has also been searching for her on Facebook. It's as if it was fate that they had been looking for each other around the same time. She reaches out and the former friends reconnect, having consistent video calls filled with blushing, honesty, and bashful yearning. This communication comes to an end when Nora laments how neither of them will be able to visit each other anytime soon as she is trying to be a successful writer in New York and Hae Sung has to be in South Korea to finish university. She elaborates that they shouldn't spend all this time thinking about a possible life together when it is unlikely to happen.

After another twelve years, Hae Sung visits Nora, who he still calls Na Young, and her husband, Arthur (John Magaro), in New York City. Hae Sung's arrival spurs conversations about his and Nora's past and all the complicated what-ifs that are entwined within it. The three of their interactions keep viewers unwavering attention for the rest of the movie as they attempt to decipher the genuineness of their words and their slight facial movements. A glance a character gives could be interpreted as a deep lust or concern for another, yet the dialogue they say presents as more of a shallow statement of their feelings. Thus, we rely on those subtle looks or faint smiles actors perform to determine the authentic motives of their characters. Even when Hae Sung and Nora talk about their current lives and their own respective partners, there is an

implication of a deeper history that is evident through the unwavering stares they give to each other, probing for answers to what their current dynamic is in the present. Nora tells Arthur, regarding Hae Sung, that "He's so Korean…I feel not so Korean when I'm with him, but also in some way more Korean?" There's an underlying guilt Nora expresses when talking about Hae Sung with Arthur because they have a connection through their past and culture. Hae Sung's presence makes Nora feel both more and less Korean when she's with him, displaying an internal guilt as well, as she is examining her identity and is unsure about the exact state of it.

The notion of "inyun" is brought up continually throughout the film, inyun being the Korean idea of fates that intertwine throughout different lifetimes. Song writes and directs inyun regarding relationships and how they could exist in another life, but not this one. The characters develop heightened emotions as they contemplate what they were to each other in their past lives, what they could have been in this life, and what they will be in their next life. The film emphasizes the subtle lessons of learning how to accept fate and how to go through the fulfilling journey of receiving closure. Every conversation expresses slow heartbreak and the difficult attempt of trying to understand someone you thought you knew so well. The dynamic differences between Hae Sung and Nora versus Arthur and Nora reveal the complex nature of reconnecting with someone from your past and how that can impact your present. Hae Sung and Nora spend most of their time reminiscing whereas Arthur and Nora talk about the state of their own love and relationship now that Hae Sung has arrived. When Nora first left Korea, her mother said, "if you leave something behind, you gain something too." This notion guides the conclusion the characters come to. With intense eye contact and honesty, Hae Sung eventually tells Nora that it

was good for her to have immigrated because Korea was too small of a country to have fulfilled her ambitions. It is something he has come to appreciate about her: "You had to leave because you're you. And the reason I liked you is because you're you. And who you are is someone who leaves." Nora affirms his statement by saying that she left the little girl she was in Korea behind with him. She yearned for the life she could have had if she stayed in Korea, but now she accepts the reality of the life she has now. Much is left unsaid between characters, such as what Hae Sung's true motive for coming to New York was and how he and Nora exactly feel about each other now, but that makes the film more rooted in reality. Every day, people leave words unsaid because of the fear of confrontation or the consequences of the truth, and *Past Lives* ultimately expresses that bittersweet experience.

Nora (Greta Lee) and Hae Sung (Teo Yoo) reconnected. A24, 2023.

It is beautifully coincidental that "tender" is such a fitting word to describe many East Asian American films such as *Past Lives*, which now joins *The Farewell* (2019), *Minari* (2020), *Everything Everywhere All At Once* (2022), and others in investigating how to deal with leaving

a potential life behind for an alternate life to come into fruition. *Past Lives* presents this idea in more of an understated way grounded in the sense of gentle melancholy that immigration produces. Nora feels conflicted between her Eastern and Western identities, but the film ultimately concludes in her wholly embracing the uncertainties in how life ends up the way it does. She takes on this perspective just through having conversations, not necessarily experiencing huge catalyst moments of realization like having to lie to your grandmother about her terminal disease, struggling to establish your family farm, or the responsibility of saving the multiverse (although all these instances are also products of great Asian American films about immigration).

There is power in the simplicity of *Past Lives* in how it expresses the theme of the Asian diaspora. As Nora is navigating her relationships with these men, as stated previously, she is also reminded of the version of herself she left behind if she had stayed in Korea and reflects on the slight loss of her Korean side as she now resides in America. New York City itself becomes its own character as it is shown in beautiful deeply staged long shots, reflecting how pervasive and transformative a location can be upon one's life. It is a distressing truth–realizing you are losing or have lost a part of yourself simply due to circumstance–and this film conveys the idea of a fleeting self. It serves as a reminder that change, though a constant part of life, can be elusive until you truly take the time to reflect. The groundedness of the film allows for its emotional impact to permeate more deeply.

To tell this story through the life of an immigrant and during a tense period of her life where the different sides of herself and cultures are manifested in the dichotomy of each of her

relationships with these two men, makes the universal feeling of longing for what once was more enriched. It is a narrative that many immigrants experience, thus there is actuality in the film's themes. This authentic Asian American story expresses the notion of sacrifice as a necessary act for us to do in order to become who we are, but it also reminds us that making that decision does not stop us from being reminded of who we once were. Although Past *Lives* will likely leave viewers in a somber state, there is an optimistic curiosity ingrained in us after watching: possibly in another life we could explore the looming what-ifs of our current one. It is ultimately a hopeful and endearing outlook on the lives we choose to make for ourselves.

Interview:

To be Creative, Go Local: An Interview with Government-Access TV Producer Mark Murray

Sarah Block

Washington University in St. Louis

When you think of television producers, who comes to mind? Do you think of Shonda Rhimes of *Bridgerton* and *Grey's Anatomy* or Larry David of *Seinfeld* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*? Though they receive far less attention in our culture, there are many types of *non*commercial television production as well, many of which are affiliated with local school districts or religious organizations. Another type of noncommercial television is government-access television, in which a local government broadcasts over a cable television station and provides the local area with coverage of board meetings and public service information.

Mark Murray is a television producer for government-access television in Pennsylvania. He is a producer and director for Lower Merion Township Television in the Public Information Office. Murray directs live broadcasts of the weekly Board of Commissioners meetings and Board Committee meetings and provides Lower Merion Township with 24/7 programming. The programming consists of bulletin board messages with important township information and original programming. Murray produces, writes, records, and edits each of the original shows for township viewing.

Figure 1: LMTV Logo.

In the summer of 2023, I interned at Lower Merion Township television and experienced the benefits to noncommercial television broadcasting. Working in small crews, in a team of three, exposed me to every aspect of television production. As an intern, I wrote and edited promos and shows, operated cameras and teleprompters, and engaged in fieldwork. Unlike most internships in the commercial industry, this one allowed me to experience *everything*, even to the point of giving me considerable creative control.

Because I found this experience in government-access television so rewarding, I thought other students in Film & Media Studies at Washington University in St. Louis—and beyond—would be interested in learning more about "alternative" opportunities such as this in the entertainment industry—opportunities that provide students with more hands-on experience and creative control from the very beginning. This interview provides a lens into government television—the differences between freelance work and corporate jobs, general information about government television, and the opportunities that government television offers. Also, the interview provides advice for students looking to enter the entertainment industry after college.

What did you do before working for government television?

Murray: I had a bunch of jobs. While I was in college, I was lucky enough to get a job at a post-production house in Philadelphia as a tape op. Then, through a family connection, I got a job in LA as a sound effect editor for network television and premiere movies. Then, the writers' strike happened, so I was forced to go look for work. I came back to the East Coast and worked for an insurance company. Having your own TV was a big thing back then, so I helped them build their TV studio and did productions for them. After seven to ten years there, they were bought out and

I started doing freelance work, including doing medical films. I did that for a while and then I applied to [Lower Merion] township. That was almost 30 years ago!

What did you enjoy most about the freelance work?

Murray: Learning! I didn't nail myself down as being just a camera man or just a technician. Whatever assignment they needed me for, I was more than willing to take. I learned a lot at each position. In Los Angeles, I learned a lot about the television industry, how it works, and how all the post-production stuff works. That was pretty cool. But I liked the constant change of input, trying new challenges—that I find exciting.

Figure 2: On the set of LMTV's Beside the Gavel.

How did you get involved in government television?

Murray: Well, I was thinking of getting married and having kids, and benefits cost a lot of money. Someone said, 'Hey you ought a get corporate job'. And I'm like 'Well, I don't know'. But this job opened. It was significantly different; it has changed a lot since I first started, but that's how I got in. I needed benefits. I wanted to have good health care to help take care of my family. In the freelance world, you—and it comes out of your paycheck—pay for every benefit that you want. Whereas with the government job, we get medical, dental, vision, sick days, holidays—a whole bunch of stuff—that are paid. In the freelance world, if you don't work, you don't get paid. There aren't any holidays.

What is different about government television, or makes it special, than other careers in Film and Media?

Murray: Well, I'm trying to break the stereotype of government video: of the boring, horrible, mundane video with people who can't act. I'm trying to change that up—that's what we're hoping for. But one of the things that makes it different is actually that. If you watch entertainment television or cinema, its goal is to entertain and to be visually pleasing to see.

"We are a non-union shop—so, you are not pegged to being just a camera man, just an editor, just a graphic artist; you get to wear all the hats and do all the things: write, produce, direct, and shoot your own show from beginning to end. A lot of places don't offer that opportunity."

Government is more informational and I'm trying to combine the two so you can be informed while being entertained. One of the shows we're writing is game show, "Where is This?", that

helps us get information across in a more fun way. Its goal is to have residents participate and learn about their local government and the area in which they live by answering fun questions.

What is your favorite aspect of your job in television?

Murray: I would say the variety. We are a non-union shop—so, you are not pegged to being just a camera man, just an editor, just a graphic artist; you get to wear all the hats and do all the things: write, produce, direct, and shoot your own show from beginning to end. A lot of places don't offer that opportunity. Of the things that I do, I would say my favorite is probably outside productions. I like setting up all the gear and making it more visually impressive as to what we do.

How does your perspective, or opinion, or directing tactics change when you're directing a live show versus a recording show?

Murray: Well, in a recording show, since it's not live, you can stop if you make a mistake. You fix it, and you move on; In post-production, you edit it and never know it happened. In live, you don't have that opportunity, so any problem that pops up, you must solve while keeping your show that's on moving forward. You must come up with a quick solution, know all your equipment, know your people, know how to solve that problem, and keep the live broadcast going—but come up with a quick solution to the issue.

Figure 3. Broadcasting LMTV's Board of Commissioners' Meeting.

Do you have a memorable story to tell from recording a show?

Murray: I remember one time we were recording our township manager, one of our previous township managers. When you go out on a shoot, you usually do a scouting location: you go out at the time of day you're planning on shooting, and you check

as much as you can, so you understand what the environment's going to be like. It was a perfect sunny day, everything was gorgeous. We start shooting and up shows a construction crew. They start jack hammering, making a heck of a lot of noise. Of course, we couldn't hear anything. So, I happened to have a makeup artist with me, and she said "Hey, I have an idea, I'll be right back." She runs out and we are trying to come up with a solution, and then she comes back, and goes "give it five more minutes." The jackhammering kept going and then it stopped. We asked what happened, and she goes "I bought them coffee and donuts", so all the workers stopped working to eat coffee and donuts, giving us enough time to record the township manager.

“Learn so you learn more skills and have a stronger skill set yourself, so you are more marketable.”

Figure 4: Shooting LMTV’s Lower Merion Update.

Do you have any upcoming projects you are looking forward to?

Murray: We are launching a show we call “Lower Merion Update” which is kind of a soft news program about what happens over a three-month period in the township: this will cover what happened in August, what happens in September, and what will be happening in October. We are also launching a new show called jobs at Lower Merion, which reviews all the open employment opportunities that the township offers.

What would you tell students interested in pursuing a career in government television or in the entertainment industry?

Murray: If you’re interested in production work, no matter what it is—government or broadcast or corporate—intern or volunteer as much as you can. The more experience you have, the more

valuable you are to the employer. If I had to pick someone who knows editing over who doesn't, well guess who I'm going to pick. And learn as much as you can. Learn while you're out there. Ask your producers, 'Can I assist in lighting', Can I assist in set design', 'Can I assist in editing or graphic design'. Learn so you learn more skills and have a stronger skill set yourself, so you are more marketable.

For more information on Mark Murray and what he is working on, check out Lower Merion Township Television's Video Catalog or check out LMTV's Facebook, Instagram, X, or YouTube.

For more information on government-access television across the US, check out "TV: Expanded Access to Government · Government Information Exhibits · University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library"

The Cinematograph

CALL FOR PAPERS: Issue 1.2, Spring 2024

The Cinematograph is fielding submissions for its inaugural spring edition, 1.2. We invite **current undergraduate and graduate students from Washington University or any other accredited University in St. Louis** studying film and media studies (major, minor or certificate), or with an *interest* in the field, to submit their work. We are also accepting works from students that have recently graduated (at least a year prior to the publication date). **Any major and year is welcome to submit.**

The journal encourages new and/or relevant insights from St. Louis's emerging film and media scholars. Essays that expand upon current scholarly discussions, revitalize films or topics previously explored, or seek to explore topics that have been overlooked or simply not evaluated in scholarship are highly encouraged. We invite new interdisciplinary perspectives that may challenge or confront contemporary scholarship or understandings of films, film history, film production/distribution/exhibition, genres, global cinematic trends, representations of race and gender, etc. We also invite reviews on relevant books or films, preferably those that were published within the last two years of the publication date, or are timely thanks to an actor, director, theme, etc. Video essays are also welcome! Works will be evaluated based on the interdisciplinary nature of their approach, if they respond to current/relevant scholarship, provide new or interesting perspectives on relevant works. We want our journal to last for years to come, which is only possible given a strong first edition. We want your help to set the standard.

We are looking for long-form and short essays, interviews, book/film reviews, and video essays. Book/film reviews, interviews and op-eds should be between 1,000-2,000 words (1-3 pages double spaced), short essays should be kept to a minimum of 2,500 words (5-6 pages double spaced), while longer essays should reach between 5,000-10,000 words (10-30 pages double spaced). Video essays should range from 5-20 minutes. Submissions should be written in English, formatted in either MLA or Chicago, double-spaced, and have proper citations and footnotes. Film titles should be italicized, and timestamps given where necessary. Images are permissible, and ought to be captioned, though they should be obtained in a way that ensures proper copyright. If you have questions about the copyright of an image, please contact the Scholarly Communications department at Olin Library.

Submissions should be received by **Monday, Feb. 5th, 2024** for consideration in issue 1.2. Feel free to use the submission tab at the top of the home page to begin.

If you are submitting more than one work for consideration, please create one submission form per work. Please do not link more than one submission into a single form.

Once submitted, the essay will go through an initial screening before moving into a two-stage peer review process. Authors of accepted works will be expected to work closely with the editorial board to revise their pieces prior to publication, if necessary, which is slated for the end of the Spring semester in May 2024.

If you have any specific questions about the journal, eligibility, or the submission process, please email Clinton Barney (b.clinton@wustl.edu), editor-in-chief.

https://journals.library.wustl.edu/cinematograph
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