

LOGLINE: Want to hear a story? I was bamboozled. It's my own fault. But still.

ACT ONE: I got to know Daryl when he participated in Perspectives Film Festival: Breakthroughs in Cinema (PFF), an experiential module run by WKWSCl with students from across NTU. As Head of Editorial, Daryl and his team creatively expanded PFF's editorial offerings: branching out into podcasts, TikTok and video interviews. I was concerned it was too much, but the team rallied, excited by using new platforms for authentically talking about cinema. Later, as a Co-Festival Director, Daryl and the team expanded outreach activities. The PFF members were fully on board, enthused to share their interests beyond the campus borders. So. When Daryl approached me to be the Film Society's faculty supervisor, I should have seen it coming. He said it would be easy: reviewing screening proposals, giving feedback. Basically, having and sharing opinions, which is my forte. He might have mentioned something about expanding their portfolio . . . IDK, it was a while ago. Hard to recall.

ACT TWO: Once I began working with the Film Soc team, I saw familiar faces and met amazing new students from NTU. I'd barely settled into my new role when the Film Soc ExCo began talking about workshops for film production and film criticism. They wanted to seek out experts and build their skills and experience. Classic movie quest stuff. Again, to me, this story's Cranky Lady, it seemed like a lot of work for a film appreciation club. But they were all in. They invited filmmakers, editors, scriptwriters and film critics to share their expertise. And then they went to work and made their own films and wrote their own articles.

RESOLUTION: Community and attention. Historically, film clubs showcased films and provided spaces for discussion. They were also critical arenas for artists to find each other, building purpose through shared interests. The NTU Film Society builds on this history. They have become a creator's lab, providing opportunities for curiosity and play: watching, talking, writing, making. They give cinema their full attention and make space for one another to explore the objects of their attention. Our attention reflects our values regarding what is worth consideration. In the process of sharing our enthusiasms, we share something about ourselves.

EPILOGUE: This publication is the enthusiastic product of some film nerds who lured an unsuspecting faculty member to witness their journey. Exposure is the culmination of big ideas, tons of energy, and massive dedication. Enjoy! And if you're a student in NTU, join us.

Nikki Draper
Faculty Supervisor
NTU Film Society AY23/24 / Exposure Print

Since incepting in 2005, Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Film Society has prioritised the joys and communal potentialities of cinema in its activities: ranging from academic discussions to school-wide events foregrounding the fun of movies. Under the presidencies of my admirable predecessors Toh Hong Ming and Zach Wee in Academic Years (AY) 21/22 and 22/23, regular, private, and educational screenings have been emphasised. It is with this substantial foundation of film appreciation and community that our executive committee for AY23/24 could and has initiated new directions for our journey. While tentpoling film screenings with an emphasis on collaborations with organisations within and outside of the university, we now introduce two new tenets to our offerings: filmmaking and film criticism. Primarily through labs that encourage non-film students to discover talents and opportunities within these two domains, we have also introduced our in-house publication: *Exposure*.

Initially intended as an online publication that features the writings of our members, lab participants, and guest writers, *Exposure* now takes the form of a physical publication intended as a thematic survey of our students' cinematic interests of a particular time and space. With film criticism platforms in Singapore coming and going, an absent archive of these writings, and a perforation of writings for youths by youths, *Exposure Print* is an aspiration for a physical archive of our cinematic concerns, an artistic expression for a tactile approach to experiencing cinema, and a document of a community born out of the silver screen.

This first issue focuses on the writings of our Society members, and emphasises the curiosities of young Singaporean cinephiles. With gracious contributions by esteemed young writers such as Renee Ng, Sasha Han, Laura Jane Lee, and Morris Yang, our journal benefits from an extended and nuanced consideration for cinema. Nonetheless, in spite of our 'first issue' categorisation, we regard this print as a culminative and commemorative effort of our past year in cinema: within our Society, within NTU, and within Singapore. In this declarative act of enumeration, we express our ambition to position our publication beyond a commemorative journal, but one that can exist annually as a reflection of our year in cinema—and one that would platform more young voices vis-à-vis cinema, not just in our Society or NTU or even Singapore, but our region at large. I hope you will follow our journey on our social media, as we yearn for a second issue that would not be a distant dream.

I am poignantly reminded of the vitality of film societies as an institution: the way the Birmingham Film Society provided attention to films that would otherwise have been ignored and contributed to the development of the Birmingham Surrealists; or how the Calcutta Film Society became a harbinger of a New Wave of cinema in India; or how Kirsten Tan, Desmond Lee, and Tan Bee Thiam remarkably started nuSTUDIOS. I hope the passions, concerns, and intentions of our writers here reflect our larger aspirations as a Film Society pertinacious in supporting, challenging, and furthering the cinematic ambitions of our students, Singapore, and Southeast Asia.

I share all my love to and through the editorial and design team (Rhea, PM & Phyllis) of this issue, and our executive committees that have made dreaming possible.

See you at the movies!

Daryl Cheong
President / Editor-in-Chief
NTU Film Society AY23/24 / *Exposure Print*

Why is film criticism important in our region? This question kept coming back to us during the process of editing *Exposure*. Film criticism is not just about evaluating films—it's about fostering interaction between filmmakers, audiences, and even distributors. It acts as a bridge, helping to vitalize the film industry in the region.

The process of evaluating a film reflects our position in the world we live in. It helps us establish—or even further complicate—our identity. Why are we called Southeast Asian? What do we mean when we talk about Southeast Asian cinema? Can Southeast Asian writers discussing international works galvanise our collective regional voice? Ultimately, it is a process of defining ourselves in the course of life, and we can only truly recognize ourselves through interaction with the Other.

Exposure is an arena—or even a lab—for us, who have all gathered here in this little red dot for various reasons, to discuss, debate, and engage in discourse about film. *Exposure* doesn't just fill the long-lost gap in film criticism in Singapore; more importantly, it establishes a space for cinephiles and aspiring critics to exchange ideas and perspectives, sparking meaningful discourse.

Lee Peng Ming
Programmer / Editor-in-Chief
NTU Film Society AY23/24 / *Exposure* Print

When we were formulating the themes of our first issue, we were deeply aware of how it would be critical in shaping our voice and influencing what the future of *Exposure* would look like. We were inspired by the cinematic environment this issue was written in. The start of our academic year coincided with the influences of 2023: Barbenheimer, but also political turbulence that inspired questions about our structures and hierarchies--within and outside of film.

With our first prompt, *Behind the Camera*, we wanted to flip perspectives and hold space for layers of the cinematic experience beyond what is projected on a screen; There's an incredible amount of labour and soul that leads to film becoming film—be it film theories, film distribution, film community, a survey of genres and tropes, or even our childhood experiences of storytelling.

When 인연 (romanised: In-yeon) took the screens in *Past Lives*, I was struck by how an untranslatable phrase became so embedded in our beings and psyches. This led us to our second prompt *Lost in Translation*, where we wanted to dissect the untranslatable—whether linguistic, or otherwise—within film and open up ways of meaning-making.

There's a long way to go from here. We've just started writing, and through the time it took to write, edit and finally publish, so much has changed and evolved in the world around us. That just shows us how important it is to continue writing, editing and publishing. I'm excited for how *Exposure* Print shapes up to be in the future. I hope you stay for the ride.

Rhea Chalak
Editor-in-Chief
NTU Film Society AY23/24 / *Exposure* Print

- 01 *nigella damascena* I.*
hires a spin-doctor p. 1
- 02 Cinema's Travelogue p. 3
- 03 What's so funny about
Jack Neo? p. 14
- 04 Interview with Judith Tong
of FFF.forever p. 18
- 05 The Brilliance of Yeo Yann Yann:
The Language of Mid-Shots and
Proxemics in *Ilo Ilo*, *Wet Season*
& *Permanent Resident* p. 29
- 06 Letters to Bugis Street p.37
- 07 Making the Hidden Visible:
The Role of the Film
Programmer & A Profile
on Viknesh Kobinathan p. 44
- 08 Anak Dara: Seorang Wanita yang
solehah atau sebuah buah yang
merkah? [A Virgin; A virtuous
woman or a ripe piece of fruit?]
p. 57
- 09 The Life of a Code-Switcher p. 66
- 10 Apologies in *Bô Già* p. 73
- 11 Optics of Survival p. 79
- 12 You are an இளிச்சவாயன்:
a contextualisation of
language and circumstances
in *Mandela* (2021) p. 88
- 13 Watching Films At The End of
The World: Tatsuki Fujimoto's
Exploration On Why We Want to
Live and Tell Stories in *Fire Punch*
(2016-2018) p. 103
- 14 Lost 少女: Finding Sexuality
and Power in *Belladonna*
of Sadness (1973) p. 115
- 15 The Illusion of Choice:
Barbie (2023) and
Poor Things (2023) p. 125
- 16 Reality is Overrated:
Embracing Stylisation in Film p. 131
- 17 Rear Window p. 139
- 18 To Eat One Out: A Short Survey of
Cannibalism in Cinema p. 143
- 19 From Qi to Chi: Beginning Thoughts
on Bodily Mistranslations of Wuxia
p. 149
- 20 김민희를 만난 홍상수의 전,후
[Kim Min Hee Before and After
Hong Sang-Soo] p. 160
- 21 Obsession: The Heart of Chazelle's
Cinema p. 169
- 22 Spanning Time:
On Cinema and Its Lives p. 175

Jeongrak Son

김민희를
홍상수의
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Kim Min Hee
Before and After
Hong Sang-Soo

20

A not so thorough introduction to Hong Sang Soo's cinema

Whenever I watch films, it is hard not to be conscious that I am looking at fictional characters—crafted, performed, shot, and edited. This awareness is exacerbated when watching films in Korean, the language that I am most comfortable with. The only exception, at least among Korean directors, is Hong Sang Soo's filmography. I must clarify that this consciousness is not necessarily a sign of poor acting or filmmaking, nor is it always desirable to have characters that I can picture as my next-door neighbours. There are numerous films that I enjoyed despite recognising the artificial nature of characters: Park Chan Wook's *Oldboy* (2003) uses an almost-cartoonish protagonist and antagonist as the perfect vessels for exploring possibly one of the most primitive human emotions, vengeance. However, Hong's verisimilitude perfectly fits his overarching cinematic vision—both before and after Kim¹—which aims to capture the multifaceted reality that people too often reduce to simple categories after observing only a few facets. As Jung Rae urges in Hong's film *Woman on the Beach* (2006), it seems that Hong believes novel, multidimensional images constructed from different facets of reality can protect us from falling into the trap of simplification and stereotyping.

Hong's way of escaping hackneyed images is to emancipate his plot and characters from causality. David Bordwell distils the essence of classical narrative of commercial films as causally connected plots, goal-oriented characters, and cinematic devices that advance the story to the clear-cut objectives of the narrative, as opposed to the narrative of Art Cinema that breaks free from some of these restrictions.² However, Hong's cinema also does not fit Bordwell's notion of Art Cinema that is "classical in its reliance upon psychological causation". In an interview preceding the release of *The Day He Arrives* (2011), Hong articulates his rejection of psychological causation, asserting it to be a mere retrospection of what happened, concocted by some observers.³ Any observer, with limited perspectives and intentions, distorts the truth while reconstructing the narrative. Hong's primary goal is to transcend such distortions; instead his approach is to let coincidences govern his films, rather than deterministic rules of action and reaction.

¹ The Kim mentioned here refers to actress Kim Min-Hee, known for her remarkable acting, but also the affair she had with Hong. Their relationship, which began in 2015, is both

professional and personal, intertwining with both their artistic endeavours.

² Bordwell, 56.

³ Kim.

Notwithstanding his invariable dedication to his cinematic vision and apparent repetitions among his films, each of Hong's works possesses crucial differences from the previous body of work, mirroring the repetition and variation within his individual films. In this essay, I focus on one of more significant shifts in his filmography that I have observed, after the introduction of Kim Min Hee in Hong's films (and also his life), i.e. films since *Right Now, Wrong Then* (2015).

Before Kim First, I must briefly sketch Hong's cinematic universe before Kim. In pretty much all of his films, including the ones after Kim, the protagonist is an artist and often a filmmaker. The entire plot usually revolves around this protagonist interacting with his or her old acquaintances, and new friends encountered by chance. More importantly, those interactions are repeated: sometimes explicitly with the same sets of people, other times more subtly sharing only a vague resemblance. The repetition and variation become more pronounced due to his cinematic techniques, such as dividing his films explicitly into a few chapters, or marking separations between each segment that is repeated and varied by music or narration. This signature style of Hong's aligns with his universe, which is full of contingency rather than of causality.

However, in films before Kim Min Hee, the contingency typically led to nowhere, and the repetition was rather depressing and claustrophobic. This worldview, where coincidences replace meaning, is best epitomised by a short dialogue in *Woman on the Beach* (2006). As usual, the characters in this film are film industry-adjacent people. They talk about the synopsis of a potential new film, "On Miracle". A man encounters a miracle: hearing the same Mozart song three times in a day by coincidence. He then devotes ten years of his life tracing the reason behind this miracle, trying to understand the meaning of the universe, finding all the intricate connections between everything. Nonetheless, these omnipresent connections themselves offer no inherent meaning, leaving the mission destined to fail.



*The Day
He Arrives*
(2011)

However, Hong is more interested in depicting those complicated interconnections rather than extracting a meaning out of them. For this, he needed to explore these various contingencies. *The Day He Arrives* (2011) offers a prime example, showcasing four different days after Seong Jun, a semi-retired film director, visits Seoul. These four days can be interpreted as either four consecutive days after the arrival, or four parallel scenarios of the day he arrives. Seong Jun meets the same set of people on all four days, engaging in loosely similar conversations. Despite the differences in how each day unfolds, Seong Jun always leaves the woman he flirts with at the end. He can be regarded as the typical Hong protagonist who “faces an obstacle, is turned away, and continues to fall” when “searching for a way beyond an apparently existential impasse”, according to Akira Mizuta Lippit’s analysis on Hong’s first four films.⁴

At the end of the film, Seong Jun’s unforgettable expression of terror suggests a sense of being trapped in the Limbo, where meaningful advancement is impossible. If I borrow Slavoj Žižek’s words on Krzysztof Kieślowski’s film *Blind Chance* (1987): “we get a claustrophobic universe in which there is no freedom of choice precisely because ALL⁵ choices are already realised”.⁶

⁴ Lippit, 22.

⁵ Author’s emphasis on “ALL”.

⁶ Žižek, 23.

**After
Kim**

Hong stays committed to his agenda of capturing the entirety of truth. However, his repetitions started to find a breakthrough out of his prior claustrophobic world after meeting Kim Min Hee. Let us examine the first Hong Sang Soo film starring her: *Right Now, Wrong Then* (2015). Cheon Soo, a film director, visits Suwon for a film festival and meets Hee Jung, an ex-model now identifying herself as a painter. The structure of this film is rather simple.

Cheon Soo flirts with Hee Jung without being completely honest when talking to her and other people. Disappointed, Hee Jung never sees Cheon Soo again. Then the film suddenly starts over. The second time, Cheon Soo does things right. He still flirts with Hee Jung but with full honesty, baring himself to her (quite literally, going naked). The next day he gets the ‘right’ ending. Unlike previous films of Hong, where all contingencies were unfolded, *Right Now, Wrong Then* is more of a “what if” story. In the second iteration of the day, Cheon Soo makes the right choices, or to quote a critique of another Kieślowski film *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991), “repetition becomes accumulation, with a prior mistake as a base for successful action”⁷.



*Right Now,
Wrong Then*
(2015)

⁷ Insdorf, qtd. in Lippit 22.



*On the Beach
at Night Alone*
(2017)

More radical changes appeared after Hong's affair with Kim Min Hee—remarkably similar to the plot of *Right Now, Wrong Then*—became public. Perhaps this evolution was predictable, since Hong is a director who draws inspirations from his life, although it is important to note that he always differentiates his works from autobiographical ones. In an interview after *On the Beach at Night Alone* (2017), Hong acknowledges that his real-life emotions towards Kim Min Hee affected the way he portrays his characters.⁸ His approach to his characters became unmistakably sympathetic. In the rest of this essay, I will explore new directions that Hong is experimenting with some of the notable films after Kim.

The most straightforward changes can be seen in *On the Beach at Night Alone* (2017). Young Hee (Kim Min Hee) is an actress who became embroiled in a scandal because of her relationship with a married director, although they are no longer together. Again, Young Hee encounters various people repeatedly, some by accident. However, the repetition she goes through has a clearer direction. In the beginning, she still longs for her ex-lover. As the film progresses, she is surrounded by genuinely caring female friends, has moments to express her anger at dishonest people, and reaches a closure with her ex-lover, albeit in a dream. Young Hee can finally say that everything is okay at the end of the film.

In this sense, Kim's character in the film acts as a point of connection between both Kim herself, and the character Young Hee; the relationship between the married director and actress are mimicked in both film and reality. Therefore she embodies a (self-)referencing point that allows for a layered interpretation of the film. At the same time Kim is not a prop to Hong, or a supporting character; rather, she is the muse that inspired both the film and also the actual love affair.

⁸ Jang.

A new manifesto of his film is hinted in *The Novelist's Film* (2022), which follows a novelist trying to make a film while reconnecting with old and new friends. Her goal is to capture the real emotions emerging from the human interactions among the actors she cares about. The film will be fictional, yet the story will not play a big role. So far, the description of this film-within-a-film sounds fitting to a typical Hong Sang Soo film that explores contingent but not necessarily real events. *The Novelist's Film* inserts some parts of said-film near the end, and it is striking to see how different it is from Hong's previous films. It does not shy away from capturing moments beautifully (the director even follows Gil Soo's request of having coloured shots instead of black and white), which almost felt like a taboo, considering Hong's previous films. In this short video, it seems like Hong, who is behind the camera, displays his genuine emotions towards Kim, truly appreciating the fleeting moment, rather than being disoriented in the recurring moments.

One of the ways that *The Novelist's Film* deviates from its predecessors is the role Kim Min Hee inhabits within the film. This is also similar to *Hotel By The River* (2018), where the focus is no longer on the personal lives of Kim and Hong but instead a dissection of Hong's life as a man navigating his middle-age. In *The Novelist's Film*, rather than being a reference of their personal life beyond the screen—that is, Hong and Kim's love affair—Kim is now part of the creative process. The short film therefore extends beyond simply being a documentation of his emotions towards Kim; it appears as a joint love letter to cinema.



*The Novelist's
Film* (2022)



In Water
(2023)

In Water (2023) initiates another direction of search in Hong's filmography. Similar to *The Novelist's Film*, Seong Mo, an amateur director, attempts to make a film with his friends, following Hong's methodology: going to a location with his cast before writing a story. The most salient feature is the off-focusing of the entire film. The audience's vision gets more and more blurry as the film progresses. It seems to echo Cheon Soo's statement in *Right Now, Wrong Then*—what matters is the bravery of going forward without even knowing the way forward. The uncertainty looming around the characters is reflected in their dialogue, revolving around things that cannot be easily made clear, such as unseen ghosts or unheard screams. Despite all these uncertainties, Seong Mo succeeds in finding what he wants to film. A woman is cleaning up the trash under the cliff, while the tourists over the cliff are enjoying themselves, oblivious to the traces they have left. In Seong Mo's film, he is trapped in between the world above the cliff, with all its earthly temptations, and the world under the cliff with the woman. Seong Mo walks into the ocean at the end of his film, which also ends 'In Water'. It seems popular to interpret this last scene as Seong Mo approaching death. However, I again want to make the connection with going forward unknowingly. The entire world is blurry like in water. Walking into the water seems like his attempt to embrace that uncertainty and proceed.

Editor's Note *In Water* marks another change of Hong's style. The intentional blurring in the film indicates the change in the way of viewing. When we see the film from afar, the blurry images almost look like an Impressionist painting. The out-of-focused shots in *In Water* prompt the audience to think about the true essence of cinema: images, and the way we read them. Whilst we imagine film to be a medium that reproduces reality, Hong's technique reminds us of the instability of film: once it loses focus, we cannot read the intended expressions. All forms of camera shots almost lose their magic of being able to signify emotions, like a close-up of Gloria Swanson in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), or the ultra-wide shot in *Gone With The Wind* (1939).

Hong Sang Soo has always been a keen observer. His earlier films are marked by their potency of seeing beyond the façade of clichéd images. In that process, Hong often observed the impasse that we encounter every day. These dreadful but seemingly unremarkable moments have been largely ignored in most films, which focus more on conveying the central message. Yet, knowing that many, if not most, real-life events are merely temporally contiguous rather than causally related, and that meaning cannot be derived from analysing our finite snapshots of the world, Hong's films possess a far greater sense of credibility compared to more conventional films.

Given that Hong understands the terrifying ambiguity and complexity of the world, his new trajectory after *Kim* looks even more daunting to me. At the same time, I am eager to learn in his new films what this ageing artist could find after his courageous march into the uncertain during the last decade.

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Jeongrak is a physics student who likes watching films where not much happens. Secretly, he might judge you for your film taste. When not watching films, he spends his time playing with the mathematical structure of quantum information processing tasks.