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Chaos

THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

CHIEF EDITOR
Micah Rickard

EDITORS
Finn Healy
Mengyao Wang
Jingjing Xia
Qianhe Wan
Hongfan Chen

EDITORIAL DESIGNER
Mengyao Wang

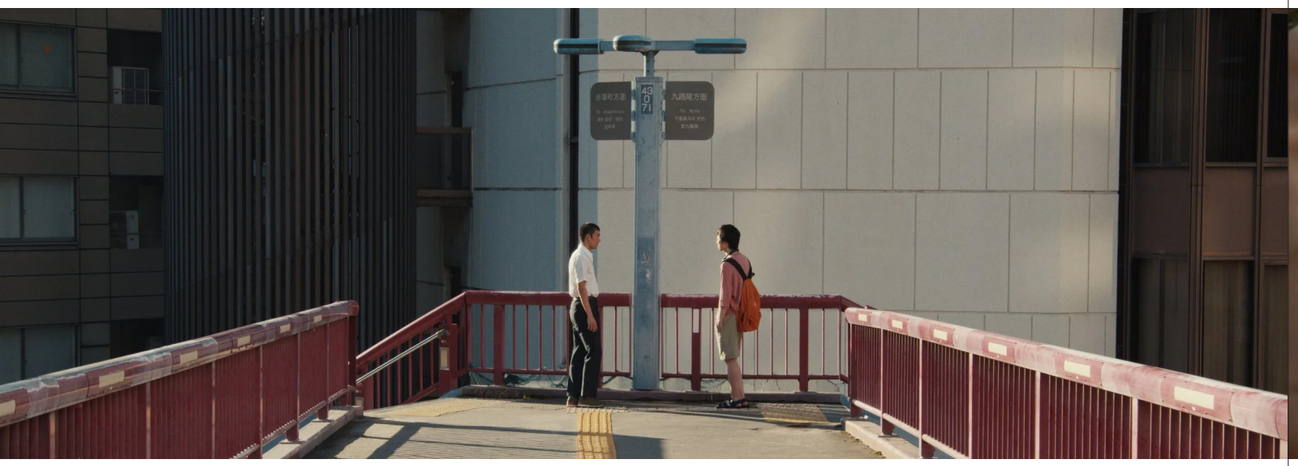
ACADEMIC STAFF ADVISOR
DR. Hoi Lun Law

THE FILM DISPATCH
DEDICATED TO THE MOVING IMAGE

EMAIL
thefilmdispatch@gmail.com

SOCIAL MEDIA
@the_film_dispatch

Editorial



The age we're living in is marked by uncertainty and relentless transformation: from wars, political turmoil and ecological collapse to rapid technological changes and digital overload. Under such circumstances, chaos has become not just an external condition, but an inner state, affecting our perception of ourselves, others, and reality. Numerous philosophers have commented on the ways that modern societal transformations have resulted in the isolation and atomization of individuals and the dynamics of distraction, burnout and spectacle that permeate contemporary life. Within mathematics and the sciences, too, chaos has been a critical theme across the previous century, both furthering and complicating our understanding of the universe.

So it should come as no surprise that movies reflect that chaos back to us in a myriad of ways. The essays throughout this issue of *The Film Dispatch* turn their lens to see what movies tell us about our chaotic world. From dystopian coming–of–age dramas to dark psychological thrillers, from the arthouse to documentaries, films are wrestling with chaos and wondering how we can live through it. These essays are wide–ranging, engaging with ecological scholarship, philosophies of linguistics and history, film theory, and social critiques. As we navigate these films and ideas, perhaps we'll discover a way through the chaos. But first, we must dive into it.

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Underwater, Nothing Is Pure: Chaos, Control, and Documentary Ethics in *My Octopus Teacher*

By Qianhe Wan

A kelp forest looks peaceful on screen: shafts of light, slow-moving fronds, an underwater cathedral of green. It is closer to controlled turbulence. Visibility shifts by the minute; currents pull at your body; predators and prey vanish into camouflage. *My Octopus Teacher* (Ehrlich & Reed, 2020) builds its emotional power inside that instability. It gives us a story of friendship between a human and an octopus, but it also exposes something less comforting: cinema is always trying to tame disorder.

That tension is why the film speaks so directly to the theme of chaos. A classic nature documentary offers viewers order: a clear narrator, a stable perspective, and the soothing belief that the camera can observe without changing what it observes. *My Octopus Teacher* adopts the language of realism yet repeatedly shows how fragile that belief is. Underwater, the expectation of documentary non-interference is not a rule you can simply follow; it becomes a shifting moral problem, complicated by bodies, tools, post-production, and emotional attachment.

From "Fly on the Wall" to Entanglement

Documentary realism often relies on what people call a "fly-on-the-wall" (Kilborn, 1997, 43) ideal: the camera is present but unobtrusive, close enough to see and far enough not to disturb. Wildlife films intensify that fantasy through concealment and distance—telephoto lenses, hidden blinds, and a style that makes the human observer disappear. The animal seems to perform for us naturally, as if we are not there. *My Octopus Teacher* rejects this distance. Craig Foster is not invisible; he is a participant. He free-dives without scuba gear, returning day after day into a South African kelp forest, and the film centres his bodily effort—breathing, cold, touch, and fatigue. Wide-angle close-ups shrink the space between human and animal. Instead of the detached voice-of-God tone typical of nature films, Foster's voice-over is personal and vulnerable. The intimacy can feel ethically promising, resulting in attention replacing conquest: the octopus is treated less like an object or spectacle and more like a fellow creature.

But participation creates ethical chaos of its own. Once a human enters the animal's world—moving close, returning repeatedly, learning routines—the camera is no longer a neutral observer. A key example is the night-diving sequence: to watch the octopus hunt after dark, Foster sets out with a torch, introducing artificial light into an ecosystem that normally depends on darkness, camouflage, and non-visual cues. The light does more than reveal the octopus's world; it reshapes it, transforming how bodies and threats are distributed in the scene. Hidden animals become visible, risks shift, and a human-centred way of seeing is imposed on a space not designed for human eyes. Here, chaos is not only the ocean's unpredictability; it is also the ethical unpredictability introduced by technology. The documentary's most immersive tools—close tracking, artificial light, crisp sound—are also the tools most likely to alter the very life they record (Ganguly and Candolin, 2023, p. 8).

*Picture on top: Figure 1: Foster turns on his torch during a night dive.

Editing and the Dream of Order

From a participatory perspective, *My Octopus Teacher* presents its story through seemingly seamless, continuous editing. The film feels like a continuous diary: one gaze, one relationship, unfolding day by day over a year. The year becomes a smooth narrative arc—meeting, trust, rupture, recovery, loss. This smoothness is powerful because it makes the forest feel readable and the bond feel stable.

Yet that stability is crafted. The production draws on footage shot by multiple people and on multiple camera systems, later unified through digital colour grading so everything appears to belong to one coherent viewpoint. As the Sea Change Project's production account notes, the post-production process involved making "20 different camera systems look like one" (Thiyagarajan, 2020). There is also a quieter, narrative kind of authorship at work: what begins as Foster's personal footage becomes, through interviews and editing, a film in which he functions as both narrator and on-screen subject while others shape the story around him. The finished documentary rarely calls attention to this shift. It feels seamless and natural.

Figure 2: Intercut sequence of Foster, octopus, and reaction shot.

The film also edits around the chaos of human limitation. Freediving is defined by interruption: you descend, run out of air, you surface. The film rarely shows those breaks. It invites us to experience Foster as if he could remain underwater for as long as the story requires, following the octopus with near-magical persistence. A dramatic chase sequence briefly cracks this illusion. A shark attacks; Foster follows; he must surface for air; when he returns, the octopus has slipped away off-camera. In that gap, the film admits what it usually hides: a human who breathes air cannot achieve omniscience underwater. Documentary knowledge is partial, interrupted, and dependent on what the camera happens to catch.

This is as much an ethical concern as an aesthetic one. Editing can shield us from confusion, but it can also conceal the conditions under which knowledge is produced. Chaos is not eliminated; it is curated—made beautiful, paced, and meaningful.

When Chaos Breaks Trust

The film's most revealing turning point arrives through a small accident: Foster drops a camera lens near the octopus, startling her into flight and forcing her to abandon her shelter. The moment is almost mundane—clumsy human hardware colliding with fragile habitat—but the consequences are immense. The camera stops being a tool of closeness and becomes an invasive object. Trust, built across weeks of careful proximity, collapses in seconds. This rupture forces a shift in perspective. Foster cannot simply "be there every day" and wait for intimacy to return. He must track, search, and learn to anticipate the octopus's movement on her terms. He begins asking questions that move towards a familiar challenge in wildlife storytelling—anthropomorphism ("What is she thinking?" "Does she remember?")—yet the questions also mark a moral change. Rather than treating the octopus as a spectacle to be captured, he tries to follow her fear, her hiding strategies, her rhythms. The human perspective loosens. The film flirts with a posthuman idea: knowledge is not owned by the observer; it emerges through entanglement, patience, and the willingness to be decentered (Ross, 2021, p. 5).

When the octopus later returns and approaches him, the scene is filmed as a miracle of renewed connection—a relationship "reanimated" after collapse. Yet the miracle does not erase the ethical questions it raises. If this is friendship, what obligations follow? How do you separate care from control when one friend holds the camera and the power to turn intimacy into a global story?

The Shark Attack and the Collapse of Principles

If the dropped lens reveals how easily filming can harm, the shark attack reveals how easily ethical principles break. Foster describes his instinct to scare away predators, then insists he must not interfere with "the process of the forest". This can sound like the old documentary ideal: step back, observe, let nature take its course.

But the film has already complicated that ideal. Foster has been intervening from the start—approaching, touching, returning, building familiarity. The octopus's trust is not simply "nature doing its thing"; it is part of a relationship shaped by repeated human presence. Once you accept participation, "non-interference" can begin to look like selective withdrawal: claiming objectivity when responsibility feels hardest. After the attack, the octopus survives but loses a tentacle and retreats, weakened and unable to hunt effectively. Later, Foster brings her food, cracking open a shell and offering it to her. The gesture is compassionate—and direct intervention in survival. At this point the film's ethics enter full chaos: the filmmaker alternates between observer and friend, recorder and caretaker, with the power to decide, moment by moment, which role matters most. Even genuine care can reproduce hierarchy, because it assumes the right to choose when to step in and how to frame the intervention as part of the story.

The film's title suggests the octopus is the teacher. Yet in the feeding scene, the balance swings back. The human becomes provider, manager, and author of the ending.

What Chaos Teaches Us about Cinema

My Octopus Teacher is often praised for inspiring ecological empathy, and it genuinely does. It asks viewers to look closely at a creature radically unlike us and to feel kinship across that difference. But it also shows how cinema manufactures that feeling: through proximity, through continuity, through turning ecological disorder into a story with emotional beats. That is why it belongs in a conversation about chaos. The kelp forest is chaotic as a living system, but the film is also about the chaos of unstable categories: observer versus participant, nature versus culture, care versus control, realism versus storytelling. Each time the documentary tries to stabilise these oppositions, the ocean pushes back.

A responsible way to watch the film is to hold two experiences at once. Let it move you but notice what it smooths over. Ask what the camera alters when it "reveals." Ask what editing conceals when it "connects." Ask what friendship means when one party holds all the tools. In other words, treat chaos not as a failure of ethics, but as the condition that makes ethics necessary. If the film's realism is an effect produced through proximity, technology, and post-production labour, then entanglement is not simply its theme; it is also its method. Its posthuman promise lies in moments when Foster relinquishes mastery and allows the octopus's rhythms to determine what can be seen. Yet the same aesthetic strategies that generate empathy can also reproduce control, because the camera and editing translate another life into human narrative time. Underwater, nothing is pure. On screen, nothing is neutral. The film is compelling because it lets that truth surface.

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Chaos, Rhythm, and Rupture: Youth, Control, and Fragile Togetherness in *Happyend*

By Yuchen Xie

Neo Sora's film *Happyend* (2024) is set in a near-future Tokyo where earthquake warnings keep appearing like a constant background noise, representing an unstable society. The school invokes safety to introduce stricter CCTV surveillance and tighter institutional control. Yuta (Hayato Kurihara) and Kou (Yukito Hidaka) are two graduating friends, and the film begins from their perspective. They listen to music, joke around, and hang out on the streets, maintaining the light mood of adolescence within a repressive social environment. However, a prank at the school triggers an institutional overreaction, transforming the campus into a highly visible, surveilled, and regulated space.

Chaos in *Happyend* is a more chilling form of chronic loss of control. Disasters and political uncertainty continuously hum like low-frequency noise. Society continues to function on the surface, people's daily lives seem to progress smoothly, but gradually break apart in tiny details. The most incisive aspect of the film lies in its ability to show us that chaos is often a by-product of the expansion of order—the more detailed the rules become, the more difficult it is for people to breathe, and youth is forced to deform within the gaps of the system.

In the opening scene of *Happyend*, Yuta, Kou, and their friends are denied entry to a club because they are minors. Inside, the dancefloor is dimly lit and saturated with red light, while bass-heavy beats pulse beneath a DJ's performance onstage. The pounding bass and low light do not simply create atmosphere; they organize bodies into a shared tempo, momentarily replacing social hierarchy with rhythmic coordination. Yuta and Kou's removal of their school uniforms before entering the club deepens this reading. The gesture does not merely help them pass as adults; it symbolically suspends the disciplinary signifiers of school and allows them to blend into a temporary community organized by rhythm rather than institutional identity.

This rhythmic chaos offers a psychological safe zone, providing a much-needed reprieve from the persistent geographical chaos and existential instability of the earthquake-prone world outside. In this sense, Garcia-Mispireta argues, "their dancefloors are utopian in spirit: they provide concrete sites for the collective envisioning of a different kind of 'good life' " (Garcia-Mispireta, 2023, p. 7). Yet this togetherness is fragile from the outset, because it depends on participants remaining unexamined and uninterrupted. Dancefloors can function as "spaces for experimentation with ways of living together" (Garcia-Mispireta, 2023, p. 7). In other words, the dancefloor briefly offers a social mode in which bodies become legible through synchrony, not through credentials. Once identity differences are made legible, this balance quickly collapses. The police raid and the one-by-one ID checks abruptly reinstate the logic of verification and exclusion, transforming the dancefloor from a space of collective resonance into a space of institutional scrutiny. By forcing identity to become the condition of presence, the raid exposes how easily the good life imagined on the dancefloor can be overwritten by social control.

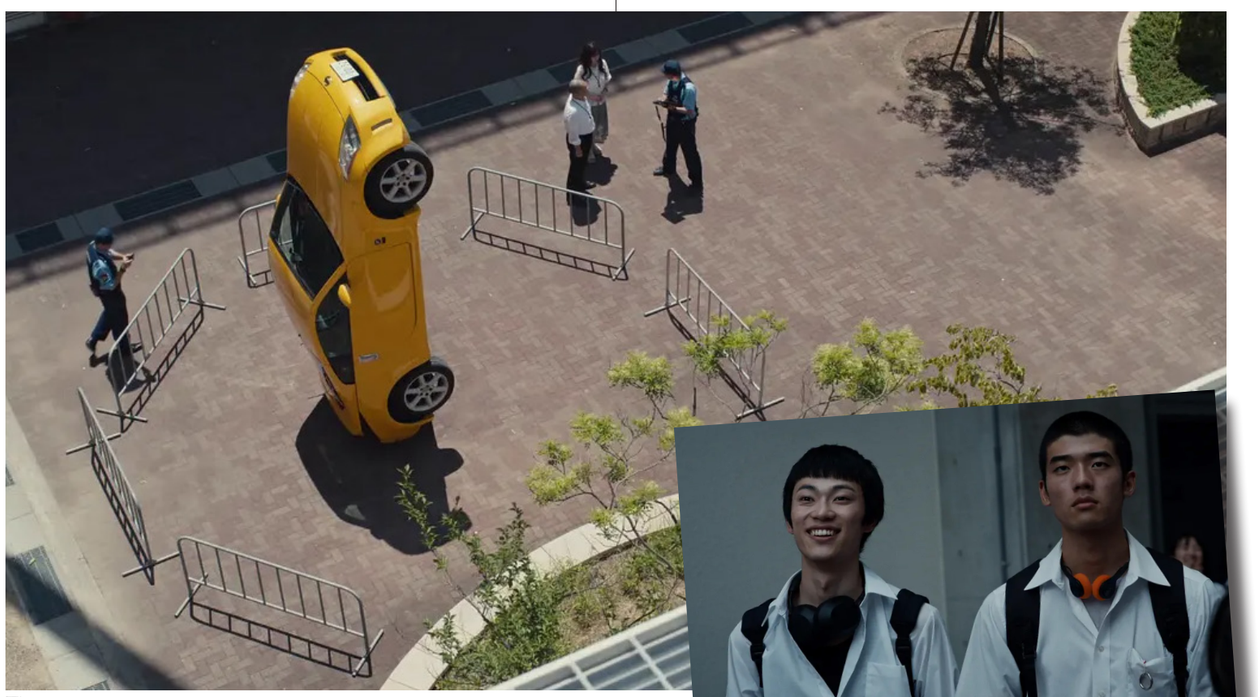

Figure 1.

The scene featuring the headmaster's upside-down yellow car serves as a profound visualization of disruptive chaos. By placing the inverted vehicle at the center of the frame, the film reorganizes the school courtyard into a site of spectacle, forcing students to pause their ordinary routines and become spectators of an absurdity. The composition itself reflects the tension between order and rebellion: the car is enclosed by a gaze of bodies, just as the bodies are enclosed by the school's architecture. Here, rather than depicting chaos as sheer noise, the film visualizes it as a fleeting rupture in the school's disciplinary control.

The use of color is particularly symbolic. The car's bright yellow stands out as the most distinctive element in a space otherwise dominated by white uniforms, black suits, and grey buildings (Fig. 1). This color contrast marks the car as a "rupture" in the school's visual environment. Furthermore, this visual chaos is paradoxical; while the act represents a break from control, its very visibility makes it easier for the authorities to monitor and suppress. The car is an externalization of adolescent restlessness—a momentary rupture that proves both the power of rebellion and the looming reach of social control.

If the inverted car marks a localized rupture inside the school, the earthquake alerts extend the film's chaos outward as a condition of the entire city. Beyond the protagonists' pranks, *Happyend* anchors its exploration of chaos in the physical environment itself. The recurring earthquake alerts operate as a rhythmic register of instability—a persistent reminder that the ground beneath everyday order is never fully secure. For Yuta and Kou (Fig. 2), such background turbulence intensifies the stakes of adolescence, making their gestures of rebellion read less as casual mischief than as an urgent grasp for agency within a world that could shift without warning.

Figure 2.

This tension is further articulated through the film's treatment of urban space. Yet the film also repeatedly retreats into interstitial, cramped spaces—cluttered rooftops, dim rehearsal rooms—where the city's disciplinary geometry loosens. In the rooftop shot at dusk, the indifferent skyline weighs on the frame, but the marginal ledge becomes a fragile pocket of reprieve: here, rigid uniforms and institutional postures give way to the soft, unorganized intimacy of bodies at rest (Fig. 3). These spatial cracks do not escape control permanently, but they briefly reconfigure chaos as something non-violent and even restorative—a momentary suspension of legibility until the next alert, the next inspection, or the next lens reasserts the terms of visibility.

The rift between Kou and Yuta was foreshadowed early in the film during the dance floor assault. When the police intervene and break the rhythmic synchrony, Kou follows the flow of people toward the exit, while Yuta remains where he is, trying to soak in the remnants of the music. At this moment, Kou's meaningful look back under the top light at the exit hints at the two completely different survival strategies in the face of outside forces (Fig. 4). The body resonance that was once highly consistent on the dance floor began to collapse into a gradual distance in physical space due to the intervention of social control.

Figure 3.

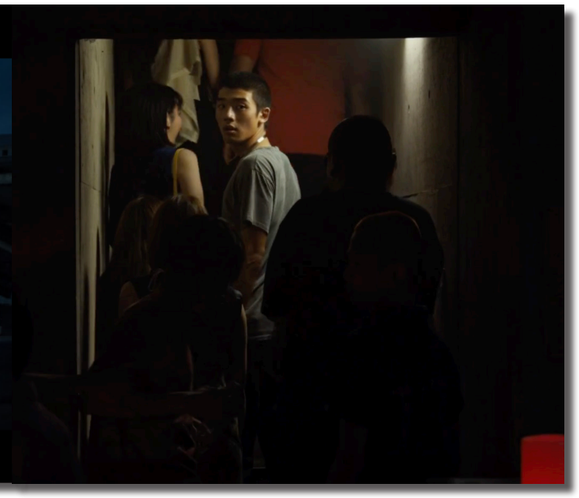

Figure 4.

This shift from sharing to separation is reinforced through a small but telling detail: the two initially share a single cigarette, while later they are shown smoking alone. The movement from sharing the same rhythm of breath to establishing separate physical boundaries not only signals the emergence of individual consciousness, but also suggests an emotional misalignment shaped by differences in class background. As a relatively privileged local, Yuta never fully experiences a sense of material urgency; his experience of chaos remains largely confined to the illusions of adolescence. By contrast, Kou's political awakening grows out of his recognition of himself as an outsider or a subject under pressure, and his awareness that, in a world already on the verge of collapse, simple withdrawal is no longer a viable option.

For this reason, the dissolution of their relationship is not a sudden rupture, but a slow process of emotional chaos unfolding within a broader condition of social instability. In an interview, Neo Sora describes the film's breaking point through the metaphor of "tectonic plates shifting," echoing the earthquake that punctuates the film's structure (Sora, 2025). Read through this lens, the separation between Yuta and Kou can be understood as an inevitable tremor that occurs when the simplicity of adolescent connection collides with social and political realities. At the level of interpersonal relations, chaos thus takes shape as an intense entanglement between youthful friendship and the awakening of political consciousness.

The final stage of chaos in *Happyend* is not found in the streets, but in the widening silence between Yuta and Kou. As director Neo Sora notes:

> *There are two times when the sound cuts out completely–the earthquake, and then the end, when the two characters look at each other. Those are the only two moments of complete silence, and they both coincide with major turning points in the story–a kind of rupture. So, I split the film structurally with those silences.*

This tectonic shifting signifies that their ideological divide has become as vast and irreversible as a rift in the earth. While they once moved as one on the dancefloor, the pressure of institutional control has forced their internal plates in opposite directions. In the end, the *Happyend* delivers the quiet, devastating realization that they no longer inhabit the same world, separated by a rupture that no shared rhythm can ever bridge.

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Happyend:

The Liminal Space Before the Apocalypse

By Petrina Shek

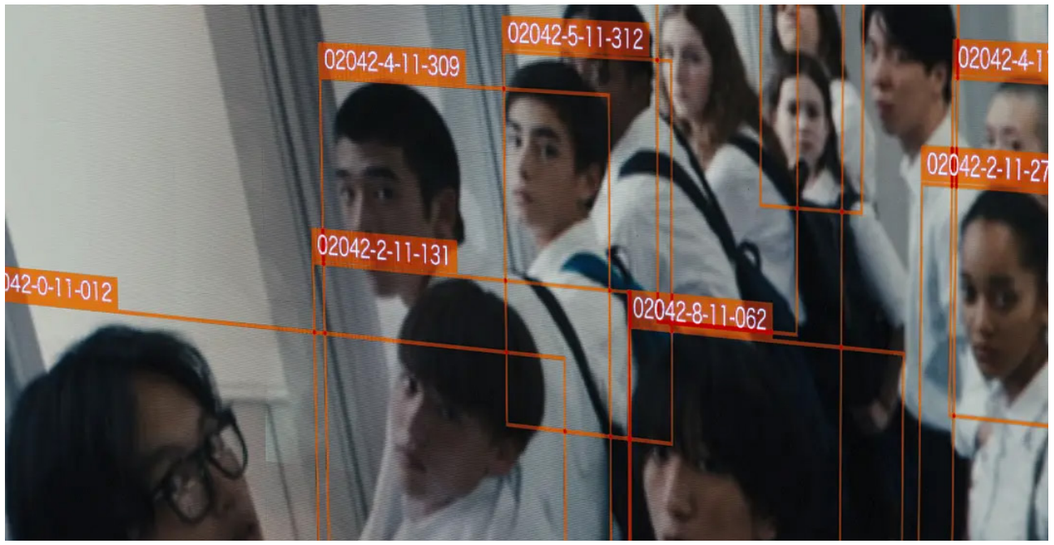

Figure 1.

Amidst the collapsing sociopolitical structures around the world, I often seek solace through watching disaster or apocalyptic films, as if consuming relevant media can provide answers on how to survive an impending disaster in real life. Disaster films often feature dramatized natural events, caricatures of political players, and heroes who swoop in at the last minute to save the world. These tropes are undoubtedly gripping when done well, yet seldom capture the sense of chaos in a slowly decaying world. In this essay, I aim to present *Happyend* (Sora, 2024) as an anti-disaster film, or rather a coming-of-age film within the backdrop of an impending apocalypse. I will demonstrate how the film uses well-crafted juxtapositions in storytelling, camera movement, and mise-en-scène to portray how younger generations perceive the current world and, more specifically, the ideological segregation between one's personal and political self. *Happyend* illustrates that for young people of today, the impending apocalypse is felt like forewaves of an earthquake that incrementally increase in force and destruction, but aren't immediate or massive enough to have caused an actual earthquake yet, resulting in a continuous, unresolved dread.

Happyend is set in near-future Japan, where main characters Kou (Yukito Hidaka) and Yuta (Hayato Kurihara) live in a dystopian, soon-to-be fascist regime where AI surveillance tools and nationality patrol checks are commonplace. The film introduces an impending earthquake in the very beginning, and the Japanese prime minister harnesses this threat to legitimize militarized policing and surveillance. The main cast of high school students never quite

acknowledges this fact, but the nihilistic dread is depicted through occasional handheld, shaky shots caused by the earthquake's forewaves; the impending disaster is constantly looming over everyone. The high school is a miniscule version of an encroaching fascist system, where a prank performed by the Kou and Yuta—they flip the principal's car to stand vertically—is used to justify the installment of an AI surveillance system on campus (Fig. 1). This plotline exemplifies opportunistic authoritarianism, where a minimal prank legitimizes the principal's decision to install a large-scale and detrimental system of surveillance. The surveillance system is literally called "Panopty", a reference to Michael Foucault's famous coinage of the Panopticon, describing a perfect, self-sustaining prison system where individuals learn to govern and discipline themselves under the threat of an omnipresent watcher. It is within the collapse of political systems on a state-wide and local level that these characters live as teenagers who experience love and friendship and heartbreak. The tie between surveillance and disaster is reflective of the current times, where disasters are hidden in plain sight through the normalization of state intervention into private lives, and individuals' data are collected on a massive scale through surveillance. Rather than buildings being literally swept away and destroyed through a natural disaster, it is the slow, gradual erosion of social cohesion and welfare, reinforced by surveillance, that allows for a brewing storm.

In the wake of a literal natural disaster enabled by political chaos, the film chooses to focus instead on the seemingly mundane moments between the main characters. Although *Happyend* could have easily gone the sentimental and dramatized approach to create characters who fully lean into revolution, complicity, or crisis mode, Sora's ingenious directing grounds the film as solemn and realistic without using any disaster film tropes. Instead, this backdrop is used to create a liminal space, where everything is felt strongly under the threat of an earthquake that never quite hits. Newiak (2022, p. 138) has argued that the cinematic "blackout" historically creates a threshold experience, the experience of an in-between, between no longer modernity and not yet post-modernity". This blackout is often shown on-screen or through dialogue where modern facilities like electricity and water are cut off,

Figure 2.

immediately heightening every living moment. The impending earthquake, that only ever makes an appearance in the occasional forewaves, adds significance and precarity to every lived experience. The film's manufacture of this liminal space is especially relevant to the political climate of today, from technofeudal lords exploiting natural and human resources to increase their profits, continuous wars and genocides perpetuated due to historical and financial ties between the most powerful countries, to the rise of fascist regimes across the world. Despite the mass scale of injustice enacted in every waking moment, there remains a thinly veiled facade where some of us are privileged enough to pretend everything is fine. The impossibility of reconciling our anxiety surrounding the global turmoil, and our self-preservation and helplessness, makes merely living feel suffocating.

Within this precarious in-between time, *Happyend* employs masterful juxtapositions in storytelling, blocking, and camera movement while establishing the protagonist Kou, and displaying the irreconcilable segregation between Kou's political and personal selves. Kou's position as a fourth-generation Korean immigrant forces him headfirst into the politicized world, where immigrants are verbally and systematically discriminated against (Fig. 2). His newfound friend Fumi (Kilala Inori) invites him to protests, representing his political ambitions and engagement, but his long-standing friend group represents his personal self—kind and loyal and ultimately still a teenager. This juxtaposition of attempting to be two different people at once is not new within the coming-of-age genre, but the specific contrast between one's political and personal ideology is refreshing. Throughout the film, Kou remains frustrated at his best friend Yuta's seeming lack of political engagement, yet Yuta's revelation of his pessimistic, serendipitous approach to life paints a more complicated picture, challenging Kou's restrictive perspective towards politics. No character can be easily painted as one way or another, making apparent the incredibly entangled nature of one's political and personal inclinations.

The film also uses intentional juxtaposition of sound and voiceovers to illustrate this intangible segregation between the characters' inner lives and their political identities. Kou and Yuta are best friends who have bonded over their love for electronic dance music, yet important scenes between them are played out in utter silence, with great contrast to the loud and overbearing music they love. This obvious juxtaposition reflects the two selves Kou is trying to be, and the ultimately irreconcilable nature of personal and political involvement under the current system. Since there is not one correct way to engage with or rebel against the political context, one may find their mode of resistance in conflict with the genuine interests of loved ones. The film also never allows audiences to hear characters in pivotal and intimate conversations, instead using a wide shot with other characters' voiceover. This is symbolic in two ways: first, the characters' growth and heartbreak can be interpreted as utterly insignificant in the grand scheme of an impending apocalypse, but they are simultaneously so significant that characters deserve their moments of privacy and intimacy that even the audience is not privy to. Such juxtapositions help depict this devastating segregation between characters' inner lives and the parts they play in the wider world, where everything simultaneously feels broader and smaller than ever.

The film closes with Kou and Yuta going their separate ways—a typical ending of the coming-of-age genre where two characters drift apart—and the blocking of the scene literally segregates the two characters with a physical

Figure 3.

line between them (Fig. 3). These lines have been broken by characters in the film, namely when Kou retreats back to the EDM club to be arrested alongside Yuta and when Yuta chases after Kou on this very bridge to hang out for longer. However, the film ends without letting the audiences know whether either of them has crossed this physical and metaphorical boundary to reach for the other, leaving a lingering sense of uncertainty and dread. Contrary to the "blackout" trope that usually ends with modern normality restored (Newiak, 2022, p. 49), *Happyend* ends with this haunting shot. Kou and Yuta have yet to have a face-to-face honest conversation, the surveillance system at school remains under debate, and the earthquake still hasn't arrived. This chilling ending is what makes the film great, as this is unfortunately the liminal time we're all living in. We're waiting for the rescue or disaster to hit first. *Happyend* delivers an incredible depiction of a foreboding apocalypse that is not too far nor too near, as well as a depiction of all of us who precariously live within it.

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Fragments of the Self: Psychological Fracture and Narrative Chaos in *Identity*

By Jingjing Xia

The era we are in is defined by continuous revolution and uncertainty. Under these circumstances, chaos has shifted from external conditions to a radical inner state, affecting our self-acknowledgement and perception of reality. Although *Identity* (Mangold, 2003) is often classified as a psychological thriller, its main concern is dissociative identity disorder. Drawing on Mark Fisher's discussion of "hauntology," the film's core horror lies in the structural entanglement of the past and the present. Fisher argues that what defined hauntology, "more than anything else, was its confrontation with a cultural impasse: the failure of the future" and "the disappearance of future" (Fisher, 2012, p. 16). This essay will analyse how Identity, through its "non-place" setting, "crystal-image" narrative structure, and individual "restorative nostalgia," depicts a psychological landscape haunted by spectres of past trauma, thereby foreclosing the possibility of a new future.

This essay develops three interlocking arguments through close textual analysis. First, it reads the motel's mise-en-scène—its generic signage, corridors, and weather-beaten surfaces—as a "non-place" that materialises Fisher's sense of time's disappearance. Second, it analyses the film's restricted narration and Deleuzian "crystal-images" to show how the virtual past repeatedly breaches the present, turning narrative causality into a loop rather than a line. Third, it interprets Ed (John Cusack) as an agent of Boym's "restorative nostalgia" whose policing fantasy promises repair through patriarchal order yet ultimately converts trauma into a compulsion to repeat. Together, these strands demonstrate how Identity figures subjectivity as trapped in repetition precisely when the future can no longer be imagined.

The Architecture of Haunting

Identity constructs the motel as a prototypical "non-place": a standardised, functional space that erases historical depth. As Fisher notes, such spaces exist "alongside the disappearance of time" (Fisher, 2012, p. 19). The motel functions not as a passive shelter but as a "crystal-image" where the past and present constantly collide. According to Deleuze, it is a site where "the actual image of the present which passes and the virtual image of the past which is preserved" become "distinct and yet indiscernible" (Deleuze, 2013, p. 81). In the film, ten personalities (spectres) intertwine within the rainy motel. This mise-en-scène depicts the collapse of time: the motel is not an objective reality but a physicalization of past trauma, trapping the characters in a fatal pattern of repetition (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The long shot displays the hotel as an architecture of haunting.

The resulting temporal short-circuit is chaotic—murders "reset" the group without producing resolution—mirroring a contemporary moment in which crisis feels continuous and the present is repeatedly interrupted by unresolved pasts.

The Past Agent

The character of Ed embodies what Svetlana Boym terms "restorative nostalgia": a desperate need to reconstruct a lost "truth and tradition" (Boym, 2001, p. 41). As a former police officer, Ed attempts to "repair" the fractured world by establishing order. This desire for mastery aligns him with the paternal "caretaker" figure Fisher identifies in Kubrick's Jack Torrance: the subject who manages the past rather than escaping it. However, as in Fisher's analysis of Jack in *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980), Ed's role within the psyche ultimately evolves into a "caretaker of the past," ensuring that the logic of violence keeps repeating. As the violence stemming from "psychological fracture," a violence enacted by the young boy persona, eliminates other identities, we witness a structural enforcement. This cycle reveals Fisher's "disappearance of future" (Fisher, 2012, p. 16). Despite Ed's efforts to build a safe "future," he and all the personalities are eventually absorbed into the stillness of past trauma.

In conclusion, *Identity* is more than a thriller; it is a hauntological demonstration of the crisis of modernity and the collapse of the individual. By treating "chaos" as a structural disorder caused by the past invading the present, the film formally displays how individuals are trapped in the ruins of self-repetition when the future is cancelled. Echoing Fisher's diagnosis of hauntology as a confrontation with "the failure of the future," the film leaves its protagonist unable to imagine a life beyond traumatic recurrence (Fisher, 2012, p. 16).

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Chaos in Silence in *Taxidi sta Kythira* (Voyage to Cythera)

By Deniz Alp Sarisakal

The characters of *Voyage to Cythera* (Angelopoulos, 1984) experience the chaos of twentieth century Greece as a form of stillness and silence. Moments of silences between the characters and within the characters permeate all the scenes from the beginning until the end. This is primarily true for Spyros (Manos Katrakis), who comes back to Greece after 32 years of exile in the Soviet Union. He chooses to be silent in the face of the tumultuous changes experienced by Greek society during his absence. In this short piece, I will therefore focus on the social and political aspects of the chaos experienced by Spyros rather than his relationship with his family.

As a communist fighter in the Greek Civil War (1946-1949), he had fled Greece after the defeat. Afterward, Greece was reorganised as a capitalist society following World War II and the Greek Civil War. Thus, leftist legacies and experiences have been excluded from the sociocultural imagination in contemporary Greece. In this regard, Spyros's encounter with 1980s Greece reinforces his alienation rooted in his exile. This results in the feeling that he does not have a place in Greek society. In this light, his return to Greece and his disillusionment are the two experiences that expose the already existing chaos, though in silence. His communist identity and experience of political exile are the narrative devices that reiterate the social implications of chaos.

In the film, silence is a reaction to the social chaos inflicted by the historical events in twentieth century Greece. The characters try to grapple with the unhealed scars of history within their inner worlds by remaining silent. The past is ever present in the lives of the characters, and they do not know how to come to terms with the pain of the past.

Therefore, Angelopoulos forms a link between silence and chaos in this film. Interestingly, he attempts to convey chaos not through violence or destruction, but through dull colour palette, long takes and slow camera movement. This is an unconventional way of depicting chaos which allows the viewer to reflect on the mood of the characters and the implications of the weight of history. Silence is dominant in the film from the beginning, even before the arrival of Spyros. The film starts in a completely dark room; after a short while, a light beam falls upon a sitting child and then outside of the window gets bright whilst a German military march begins to be heard. The child goes to the window and looks outside from the narrow gap of the curtain which finally brightens the room. The camera is static throughout the scene as it captures the emerging light in the darkness through the efforts of the child. Later, it becomes clear that that child is Alexandros (Giulio Brogi), the child of Spyros. This early scene reveals the importance of the historical events as this scene takes place during the Nazi occupation of Greece.

Figure 1: Alexandros looking outside as the room gets brighter.

I believe this scene emphasizes that history's weight is felt not only by Spyros, but also by Alexandros. Like his father, he is mostly silent; however, he has managed to preserve some habits from his childhood such as slightly jumping while walking as if he plays hopscotch. I think that he does that to fill the silence created by the chaos of history and family tragedies. This scene stresses that chaos is a familial experience, not only limited to Spyros. He nevertheless feels more disoriented because he is able to perceive the social changes in Greece as an outsider due to his political identity and forced exile. He almost immediately becomes disillusioned and says that he wants to go to his village.

Figure 2: Spyros hearing Panagiotis' whistling close to the village.

The landscape is under fog as he returns to his village after thirty two years. The camera is again static as the car approaches with a deep focus that makes visible the impact of the fog. The road that had brought them there is invisible unlike the past which is ever present in their lives. The connection with the past is reproduced when Spyros hears his old friend Panagiotis (Giorgos Nezos) whistling: a method of communication they had used during the Civil War. This is the first time that Spyros openly smiles and starts to walk to find Panagiotis. On the way, he sees a dog and caresses it. What seems awkward is that he calls the dog with a specific name. He cannot possibly know that dog's name, indicating his identification of that dog with another dog that had used to live in the village before his exile. This shows his attempt to bring back the past to the present to make it familiar.

After meeting, the men wander in the ruined cemetery. This scene is a long take and starts as a long shot which enables the viewer to see them with the splendid natural landscape. They walk closer to the static camera; in the meanwhile, Spyros greets some of his old friends and possibly also his old comrade in arms. The encounter with the loss of his friends is executed within the silence of nature. The long take ends with a cut that shows an approaching crowd. At first the purpose of the crowd's presence is unknown, but it becomes clear after a few scenes which set the

Figure 3: Spyros and his friend Panagiotis wandering in the wrecked cemetery.

sociopolitical and economic tone of the film in contemporary Greece in terms of enormous social changes and their chaotic repercussions.

At the same place in the cemetery, Panagiotis says that "people are here to sell their land and they would even sell the sky if they could." At home, they tell Spyros that they plan to build a winter entertainment centre. He is silent throughout the scene. He suddenly rushes out of the house to go where people had gathered to sign the sales agreement. As he walks, the representative of the company announces that everybody should sign the deal; otherwise it would not go through. He approaches the crowd

in a long shot which enhances his isolation in his choice to keep the piece of land his family has.

Spyros then starts to dig the land to manifest his choice. The camera is positioned behind Spyros while he digs in contrast to the alarmed crowd. As his friend had said earlier, the majority is willing to sell their land which would result in the destruction of the environment, only for the sake of a bit of money. This is in connection with the impending economic and ecological disaster that is created by the state-private sector partnership. One of the men, Antonis (Dionysis Papagiannopoulos) runs towards him by shouting "You vile! Are you back to cause trouble?" By saying this, he designates him as the only troublemaker who hinders the villagers from getting paid by the selling. The immobility of the camera enables the viewer to experience this scene in all its naturalness and silence. The beautiful landscape which is planned to be commodified is in the background with the silent majority. This adds a social dimension to the effects of the chaotic changes arising from the structural transformations taking place in Greek capitalism. The majority is either silent or complicit in the implemented policies.

To conclude, Spyros does what he thinks is the ethically right thing to do. He does not find someone else who does not want to sell. The entire crowd seems to be opposing his views and his political conviction. This is another factor that worsens his disillusionment in silence. As a sole individual, he has no power to stop the wider social changes that culminate in the commodification of land in his village. This is something chaotic, and it reproduces his silence. Later in the film, the state authorities decide to deport him because of his opposition to the sales agreement, indicating the state's authoritarian role in the economic transformation of Greece and its intolerance towards political opposition and Greece's leftist past. Therefore, even though everything seems to have changed since his exile, in a sense everything remains the same albeit in a new façade.

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Figure 4: Spyros and Antonis fighting.

Chaos and Denial in *Blue Velvet*

By Finn Healy

Chaos in *Blue Velvet* (Lynch, 1986) is conveyed not through catastrophe but through subtlety and proximity. Lynch's masterpiece is often remembered for its extremities, such as its perverse violence, sexual cruelty, and moments of surreal shock. Yet, what gives *Blue Velvet* its lasting unease is how calmly these extremes are positioned beneath and beside the ordinary. Lumberton is not a town on the brink of collapse. It functions smoothly: its lawns are trimmed, its streets are quiet; order here is not threatened by chaos so much as it is designed to obscure it. *Blue Velvet* begins from the assumption that modern life depends on such obscurity, on the belief that horror can be hidden from our consciousness long enough to feel irrelevant and potentially non-existent.

The film's opening sequence lays this logic bare and visually encapsulates a collective horror that lingers on the fringes of our subconscious and everyday lives. Red roses bloom against white picket fences, a fireman waves cheerfully from a passing truck, and a man waters his lawn beneath a clear blue sky. When he collapses, Lynch refuses the clichéd cinematic language of crisis. The camera does not rush to diagnose or resolve, but rather drifts downward, beneath the surface of the grass where insects crawl and fight and consume one another. The image has become iconic, but its bluntness is its point, chaos is not elsewhere, inevitable or approaching. It already exists beneath the structures designed to reassure us of its absence. The comfort of the surface relies on a collective agreement not to look too closely. But once chaos is looked upon and ultimately realised, it cannot be forgotten.

Blue Velvet was made in the mid-1980s, but its vision of denial is distinctly contemporary. Modern societies are particularly adept at managing chaos without confronting it directly. This aesthetic

*Picture on top: Figure 1: The film's opening image of middle-American white picket fence.

construct of normality is one we have inherited in the 21st Century: the fragmentation of attention, and the relegation of violence and instability to the margins of visibility act as a way of keeping us calm and ignorant. News cycles compress crises into digestible, bitesized segments, often accompanied by some form of comic relief. The chaos of modern life persists, hidden beneath Instagram reels, TV, and various other forms of never-ending entertainment. Language is softened and images are filtered so that outrage becomes fleeting. What cannot be resolved is reframed, deferred, or ignored. *Blue Velvet* operates within this same logic. Chaos is present, but it is displaced and contained within specific bodies, locations, that allow the rest of the town to proceed uninterrupted. The two can coincide just as long as conscious ignorance remains, but this doesn't equate to harmony and perhaps even highlights how sinister it is that such chaos operates on the fringes of our society and consciousness.

Jeffrey Beaumont's (Kyle MacLachlan) discovery of a severed human ear in a field functions less as a narrative catalyst than as a tear in the harmonious veneer of Lumberton. The ear is an object that resists assimilation, it cannot be explained or aesthetically neutralised. Jeffrey appears to be restoring order by bringing it to the police, yet the gesture only draws him closer to the chaos the town prefers to keep unseen. His subsequent encounters with Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini) and Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper) do not introduce a new world so much as reveal one that has been operating in parallel all along. It is as if the severed ear is a portal to that world. The film insists that chaos does not erupt suddenly into the everyday but seeps through the cracks created by denial and the illusion of the everyday and mundane.

It is in this moment when Jeffrey finds the severed ear that the familiar quite literally detaches and reappears where it does not belong. This placement of the grotesque and absurd within a setting of apparent normality is inherently Lynchian and demonstrates how he often explores the strange and uncanny aspects of life. Freud describes the uncanny as something "undoubtedly related to what is frightening—to what arouses dread and horror" (Freud, 1919/1955 p. 193), yet he crucially notes that it is not fear generated by the wholly unknown, but rather by a disturbance from within what is believed to be already familiar to us. The severed ear embodies this Freudian logic as it is recognisably human yet has been violently removed from the context to which it belongs, rendering it severed from reality and still inextricably part of it, and therefore impossible to ignore or comfortably explain. Freud further argues how "the uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it through the process of repression," (Freud, 1919/1955, p. 217). In *Blue Velvet*, Lynch allows chaos to surface, using physical objects as its manifestation. Lumberton's order depends on the successful concealment of violence and suffering, and the ear marks the return of what the concealment has forced out of sight. The unease it generates does not stem from chaos entering the town, but from the recognition that it has always been there, embedded within the very structures designed to deny its existence.

What Lynch manages to capture with uncomfortable clarity is how close these seemingly opposing worlds remain at all times—

Figure 2: The severed human ear discovered by Jeffrey in the field.

we are only a severed ear away from being drawn into such an alternate reality. The distance between safety and danger, civility and brutality, is shown to be minimal, sustained only by habit and a shared perspective. Frank Booth is not an alien force invading Lumberton but a figure who absorbs and performs the violence the town refuses to acknowledge. Dorothy's suffering is not an aberration, but a condition made possible by collective disinterest. The film communicates that these characters are archetypes and that they exist intertwined, intrinsically and inherently, with the society that we live in. Chaos, in this sense, is not disorderly at all. It is organised and permitted to exist by all of those in society who choose to ignore or become it.

Lynch offers no reassurance that this containment can hold. The film's unease stems from how easily it fails. Jeffrey's curiosity, which is initially framed as harmless, quickly reveals itself as complicit. To look is to participate, and to observe chaos without confronting it is to become part of the system that sustains it. *Blue Velvet* does not present chaos as something to be defeated or escaped, but as a structural feature of modern life, one that surfaces whenever the veneer cracks, and one that is always closer than it appears. However, Jeffrey's choice to consciously ignore this at the end of the film and embrace the illusion of constructed harmonious reality and beauty allows him to live in a reality free from chaos. Perhaps, such conscious ignorance is the only way to escape the chaos of modern life.

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Chaos, Theory: Investment, Entanglement, and Emplotment in *Cameraperson*

By Micah Rickard

"I really don't know how to explain it. It was an intense time." This sentiment is given by a man being interviewed in a documentary as he looks back on certain events decades prior. Said events took place in 1971, and the words were recorded on camera in the 2010s, but the feeling seems true to both times. It feels true to our own time.

Intense times and our fumbling attempts to explain them mark the foundation for *Cameraperson* (Johnson, 2016). The film is structured as a meta-documentary: Johnson worked as cinematographer on documentaries for over a decade, and she stitches together footage from these various projects alongside her own personal recordings to create *Cameraperson*. At the opening of the film, she encourages us to "see it as my memoir." But as the threads are stitched together, *Cameraperson* becomes far more than that—the interwoven montage becomes a theory of humanity's entanglement amid the chaos of the world.

That may sound like a cheery appraisal, but Johnson's work is clear-eyed about the world. Taken together, the subjects of these documentaries almost seem like a travelogue of evil, ranging across Bosnia, the United States, Nigeria, Myanmar, Yemen, Cuba, and other locations. Her footage documents an al Qaeda prison in Yemen; a murder trial in Jasper, Texas; Guantanamo Bay, where the United States tortured prisoners; the memory of ethnic cleansing and systemic violence against women in Bosnia; the fallout of the Penn State child abuse scandal. We witness the sites of evil in vehicles used for brutal murder, in extrajudicial camps, and in the buildings and homes where executions, torture, and rape occurred. Nyamata Church in Rwanda. Tahrir Square. The World Trade Center.

Figure 1.

Wounded Knee. And these are not the only threads of pain. One documentary explores the suicide of the director's mother and the director's attempts to process the shock of that loss. Johnson even inserts her own family, documenting the growth of her young children as well as her mother's memory loss due to Alzheimer's and subsequent death.

Johnson implicates herself throughout her collected fragments, foregrounding the thorny issues of documentary ethics. We see her images, but we also see her modify the frame to create a better shot. She pulls away the grass in front of the camera (Figure 1), she rearranges objects on a table, she asks for a windshield to be cleaned. We hear her voice, too, as she comments on events: she worries about a toddler playing with a hatchet, encourages a young, single mother facing an unexpected pregnancy, discusses what footage she can legally record, and comments on the question of recording bystanders. She tells a colleague that her goal in every shot, even if it's on a crowded street, is to establish "some kind of relationship with people." She recognizes that documentary ethics are a delicate balance, so the visual connection of eye contact replaces a formal agreement. In this acknowledgment, Johnson reveals that she is not merely a passive observer — she is invested. That posture of investment informs her work in each fragment and within the whole of *Cameraperson*.

None of this is direct or didactic, but Johnson posits a powerful argument for this interpersonal relationship. Curiously inserted among the fragments of human atrocity and loss is a conversation on quantum entanglement with astrophysicist Eric Davis. Describing the interrelated nature of quantum particles light-years apart, Davis proclaims that "you can entangle across time… through space. That's what quantum entanglement means. It means that there's another underlying level of nature that we haven't discovered yet." So consider *Cameraperson* as an investigation: a method for discovery that doesn't follow scientific principles, but that follows cinematic reflection as a means to unearth the substrate of humanity. Johnson is articulating a theory of human entanglement.

The theory does not remain abstract, though. Johnson also applies it. The brief discussion with the astrophysicist crystallizes the disparate facets of *Cameraperson* and clarifies Johnson's project as a work of emplotment. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur explores this in *Time and Narrative*: Emplotment involves "a mediation between the individual events or incidents and a story taken as a whole… It transforms the events or incidents into a story" (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 65). We move from experience to experience, and as we go we continually fit those experiences into a story that, we hope, coheres. Individual events—births, deaths, diagnoses, wars, injustices—appear as fragmented, chaotic. The work of emplotment is the effort to make sense out of the chaos. Ricoeur's title is instructive: As we experience events in time, we constantly reflect with a narrativizing method. The process of emplotment does not seek to justify or explain away the causes of suffering; rather, it absorbs the chaos in order to find a meaningful path through it.

We can form an analogue to scientific theories, where curiosity forms the posture and the scientific method structures the methodology. With Johnson's cinematic theory of entanglement, investment is the posture, and emplotment is the method. Through this lens, we see *Cameraperson* more clearly. Johnson's answer to the questions of documentary ethics is to adopt a posture

Figure 2.

of investment. Her family footage and her commentary on the events she captures attest to her involvement with the world. She recognizes and reflects on her agency in what unfolds, and the audience is encouraged to both extrapolate and identify with this recognition. Johnson wonders whether to intervene with the child near a hatchet (Figure 2) or whether to alert a nurse to a baby's condition. As a tapestry, *Cameraperson* also ponders how the filmmaker should involve herself in injustice on a global scale. Likewise, as the viewer ties these disparate pieces into a thematic whole through her reflection, these questions are reanimated with a personal charge.

Documentary ethics and audience investment are considered most pointedly when a Syrian man warns a group of artists that direct images of death can result in voyeurism. "So here is the main problem for us," he observes, "we have to find a way to represent horror, to represent death, respecting the golden rule—dignity." *Cameraperson* is Johnson's attempt to respond to that challenge. To resist the voyeurism of death, Johnson develops a sense of visual and visible entanglement. Visual, because we—the audience and Johnson, both—are weaving the meaning of these images as we see them edited together. Visible, because the connections arise from the images and their positioning; in giving these disparate threads our attention, we can't help but perceive them as interwoven. It's "plain to see." Ricoeur, discussing both literary and historical texts, emphasizes that emplotment implicates the reader as much as the author: "this act is the joint work of the text and reader… it is the reader who completes the work" (Ricoeur, 1984, pp. 76-77). Johnson clearly plays a formative role in creating *Cameraperson*'s meaning — but so do we. Therefore, just as Johnson is invested in the world of her images, so are we; the work of emplotment requires it.

For all its focus on the horrors of war and human injustice, *Cameraperson* posits the beauty amid ugliness. But that might give too much preference to beauty, so rather let us say that it documents the beauty and the ugliness, and the humanity underneath them both. As we confront the chaos of the present age, let us not shy away from the call of investment. Let us take up the work of emplotment. Let us situate ourselves in the unexpected entanglement of our world. Let's apply the theory.

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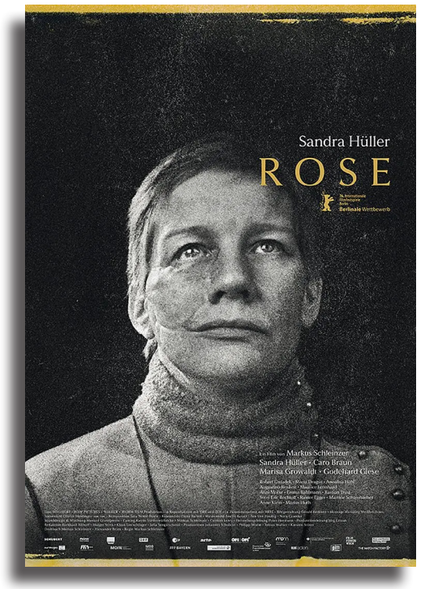
A Berlin Dispatch

A film festival is its own form of chaos, and the 2026 Berlinale was no different. The abundance of people and films and opinions became a cacophony, which was aptly demonstrated in the backlash to jury president Wim Wenders' comments about political versus personal filmmaking. But time becomes its own form of chaos, losing its structuring purpose as mornings, afternoons, and nights are all spent in a darkened theater. In the span of six days, I attended fourteen separate screenings, and while some of the movies I caught constitute misfires or failed provocations, a number are worth keeping an eye out for in the coming months. Here are a few of my favorites, many of which expressed their own forms of chaos.

Yellow Letters (2026) directed by İlker Çatak won the festival's top prize and expresses how political suppression creates a chaotic pressure in interpersonal relationships. After making art critical of the Turkish government, married couple Derya (Özgü Namal) and Aziz (Tansu Biçer) find themselves out of work and struggling to make ends meet to support themselves and their daughter. The political tension creates economic strain, which in turn puts their marriage under enormous stress. The central performances are nuanced and impassioned, making ***Yellow Letters*** a mature film that is inescapably political and personal.



Rose (2026) directed by Markus Schleinzer provides another chance for Sandra Hüller, who perviously appeared in Justine Triet's ***Anatomy of a Fall*** (2023), to shine. Here she plays Rose, a woman in early modern Germany who, having posed as a man to become a soldier, now adopts a false identity to claim an inheritance and rebuild her life. Director Markus Schleinzer and cinematographer Gerald Kerkletz created a black-and-white world that is at once earthy and transcendent, suffused with shades of Tarkovsky, Dreyer, and Bergman. But this is Hüller's show, and she is captivating throughout. Rose's rejection of the gendered categories she's offered attempts to create "the miracle of being new"—but her society is not ready to adapt.

Everybody Digs Bill Evans (2026)

Grant Gee's ***Everybody Digs Bill Evans*** (2026) focuses on the downward, chaotic spiral of jazz pianist Bill Evans in the aftermath of his friend and bandmate Scott LaFaro's tragic death. Kicking a heroin addiction is tough, but shaking off the listlessness of grief may be even tougher. Gee's film is also arrayed in black and white (save for a few interjections that jar the film's style and linearity). Anders Danielsen Lie gives a sharp performance in a tricky role: Evans is reserved to the point of fading into the negative space around him. The haze of addiction and sorrow pervades the images' grain, fracturing time and giving the film a tactile quality.

Heysel 85 (2026)

Nowhere was societal chaos more explicit and foregrounded than in ***Heysel 85*** (2026) directed by Teodora Ana Mihai. Narrativizing the events of a real-life tragedy that occurred in Brussels in 1985, ***Heysel 85*** shows how the local government's mismanagement results in violence and death during a football match between Liverpool and Juventus. Mihai laces archival footage in with reenacted scenes focused on the mayor's daughter, the only political figure around who appears willing to confront the severity of what's occurring. Her attempts to organize help are met with evasion, misogyny, and bureaucratic blame-shifting. Mihai's film is claustrophobic and anger-inducing as the calamity worsens, while those in charge preserve their public image above the lives of those in danger.

We Are All Strangers (2026)

In Anthony Chen's ***We Are All Strangers*** (2026), the economic strain of everyday life within consumerist capitalism is enough of a destabilizing force to give the film its narrative tension. Generations of a Singaporean family are made to live with the consequences of their choices—choices that are limited by the characters' economic horizons. ***We Are All Strangers*** is a patient, gentle film that takes multiple unanticipated turns, consistently settling into a new rhythm as it unfolds its story.

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