



## WHICH FILMS FILM FILMS?

*Expanded Storytelling at GFF2020*

Feminist scholar Donna Haraway once wrote that ‘it matters which stories tell stories.’ It matters what narratives go beyond themselves, that represent their own place within our own world, that recount the situation of their making, that call attention to the materiality of storytelling itself. There are many screenings to look forward to at GFF2020, but I’ve taken Haraway’s lead to ask a perhaps meaningless question of this year’s lineup; which of these films *film* films? Which of their stories tell stories? I hope through my answers it will become clear which types of films allow audiences to project their complex life experiences onto them. Which act as nets to catch other narratives or to apprehend ideas as they speed past us? Or, to again use Haraway’s always-eloquent words, which are ‘stories (and theories) that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections’?<sup>1</sup>

Jamie Crewe, winner of last year’s prestigious Margaret Tait Award for Scottish fine art film, is premiering their new commission *Ashley* (GFT, 02/02, 18:30) at the festival this year. I saw Crewe give an artist’s talk at the Glasgow School of Art pre-Margaret Tait win, and spoke to them about their focus on fiction - adapted and original - in their films. For Crewe, the fictional

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<sup>1</sup> Haraway, Donna, ‘Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin,’ *Environmental Humanities*, 6, (2015)

film is both historical and escapist; more slippery and ethical than telling of real life stories. But their stories still *tell stories*. While *Ashley* is a work of speculative fiction, another pliable playground for Crewe to ethically create in, it promises to stay greedy for new and old connections beyond its tale of rural escapism, shifting identity and paranoia. At GSA they expressed a need to read backwards through history, in spite of any societal resistance, to find their lineage and identify a 'lore of transness.' *Men's Work* (CCA, 01/03, 19:00), their other contextual screening at GFF2020 brings together their references for *Ashley* with a crop of ghost stories centring around contemporary womanhood, suggesting *Ashley* will embark upon the same mission. That is, using *Ashley's* fictional story to tell stories of historicised gender expression, gender identity and self-actualisation, helping to construct a productive surrounding lore that can authentically present these contemporary experiences. At their talk, Crewe described their films as 'changing works about change,' and *Ashley* looks to be another. For added excitement, the winner of this 2020/21's Margaret Tait Award will be announced after the screening, and regardless of who wins the 4 shortlisted filmmakers deserve your attention.

Literary scholar Amanda Anderson thinks novels are 'fundamentally interested in the relation between ideas and life, or how one might *live theory*.'<sup>2</sup> If we are to expand this from novels to fictional filmmaking, Jessica Sarah Rinland's *Those That, at a Distance, Resemble Another* (CCA, 06/03, 18:00) fits the bill aptly. Rinland's story is nonhuman; her protagonist is not a person but an elephant tusk, meticulously studied, examined and archived using both 16mm film and innovative 3D animation techniques. Rinland's tusk gets to live theory and its story gets to tell a story; *Those That...* looks not just to be a quirky episode, but a message the passive anthropocentrists in us all could learn something from. Similarly, *Krabi, 2562* (CCA, 05/03, 20:30) brings filmmakers Ben Rivers and Anocha Suwichakornpong onscreen, blending fiction and documentary stylings to free their story from the constraints of time and traditional narrative space. Rivers' past work especially has melded the real into the fictional and allowed its potential to explode outward; to tell stories. For example, *Slow Action* warps his (and my own) native Somerset into its bizarre volcanic island setting for the post-apocalypse. If *Krabi, 2562* follows its filmmakers' leads, we could be in for a 4th wall shattering experience that catches the story *you* bring to the screening in its web.

David Charles Rodrigues' moving documentary *Gay Chorus Deep South* (CCA 03/03, 20:15 & 04/04, 13:00) follows the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus' tour of the American Deep South, a premise seeded with political drama and fantastic musical spectacle. But its power lies in its quiet moments of connection and reconnection; members of the choir reapproaching locations of personal discrimination and trauma, and the awe-inspiring altruistic determination embodied in their leader Dr. Tim Seelig. The overarching narrative of the documentary is inspiring, but the choristers' complex interpersonal stories 'keeps the edges open' matter all the more; these are the passages that I have taken away and have made new connections in my thinking and, I guess, my life.

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<sup>2</sup> Anderson, Amanda, 'The Liberal Aesthetic,' in Attridge, Derek, & Elliott, Jane ed., *Theory after "Theory,"* (London: Routledge, 2011)

Many stories on the program tell stories, but I've taken this opportunity to discuss these few films in particular which promise to approach storytelling in this complex and humanistic way.