

Reimagining *Film International: Journal of World Cinema*

Editorial, double issue 22.3&4 (2024)

Arezou Zalipour

Source: *Film International*, Volume 22, Issue 3-4, Dec 2024, p. 4 - 8

A late May evening at Cannes 2025 set the scene for world cinema to once again take centre stage. *The Secret Agent* – a Brazil–France–Germany–Netherlands co-production by Kleber Mendonça Filho – swept Cannes with Best Director and Best Actor honours, a testament to the global reach of new cinematic voices emerging from the Global South. Just months earlier in Locarno, the Japanese feature *Two Seasons, Two Strangers* (dir. Shô Miyake) claimed the Golden Leopard with its elliptical meditation on solitude and migration (**Figure 1**). Even the ostensibly Hollywood-centric Venice festival saw its spotlight stolen by international films – notably Tunisian director Kaouther Ben Hania’s Gaza war drama, *The Voice of Hind Rajab*, which earned a record 22-minute standing ovation (**Glynn 2025**). These milestones on the 2024–25 international film landscape speak to a striking reality: international films, in all their diversity of voices and visions, are claiming a central place on the global stage.

Figure 1: Shô Miyake (dir.), *Two Seasons, Two Strangers*, 2025. Japan. © The Fool (Studio).



We find ourselves in a moment when the circulation of international films is evolving in unprecedented ways. The rise of streaming platforms has broadened access to world global cinema, fostering unparalleled transnational cultural exchange. A cinephile in Auckland or Austin can now delve into Senegalese or Filipino films with a few clicks, erasing old geographic boundaries. Diasporic communities are reconnecting with heritage cinemas on Netflix and Amazon even as they participate in a global media

culture. Such platforms have also spurred a boom in transnational co-productions, emblematic of how filmmakers forge alliances across borders to bring underrepresented stories to life. Meanwhile, industry metrics underscore a shifting balance of power. China has in recent years overtaken North America as the world's largest box office market (**Chen 2021; Brzeski 2020; Xinhua 2025**), proving that domestic productions outside Hollywood can not only dominate locally but compete globally. These developments point to a future in which no single region monopolizes cinematic creativity or audience imagination. World cinema is no longer an exotic sideshow; it is the main event, with filmmakers from Recife to Tunis expanding the art form's possibilities.

Yet alongside these exhilarating successes, we recognize profound challenges. The same digital platforms that broaden access also complicate visibility. Algorithm-driven recommendation systems often bury non-western and independent films, creating new barriers to discovery where audiences are repeatedly exposed to similar content (**Wayne 2020**). The global streaming economy, for all its promise, is governed by corporate logics that can sideline diverse voices in favour of the familiar or commercially safe (**Lotz 2022**). Moreover, the triumph of on-demand viewing has imperilled the traditional art-house and repertory cinemas that historically nurtured international film circulation. In 2025, even as more people than ever watch films from around the world, fewer may do so in communal cinema spaces (**D'Alessandro 2025**), raising questions about how we sustain the cultural ecosystems that support truly global film appreciation. The tension between broad access and audience engagement, between the convenience of digital ubiquity and the curatorial rigour of festivals, critics and local cinemas, is one of the defining dilemmas of our time. It challenges us, as practitioners, scholars and viewers, to find new ways of championing cinematic diversity amid the cacophony of the algorithmically driven marketplace.

It is at this dynamic crossroads that *Film International: Journal of World Cinema (FINT)* begins its new chapter. As incoming editor since August 2024, I am mindful of the journal's venerable legacy and the need for renewal. Founded in 1973, *FINT* has long been a forum for cineastes and academics devoted to critical engagement with cinema across the globe. Over the decades, it gained a respected academic presence (indexed in Scopus and the Web of Science's Emerging Sources Citation Index) and built a community of readers who care deeply about film as art and social practice. In September 2024, with a new editorial team, we embarked on a decisive refocusing of the journal's scope and vision. The mission we embrace is both celebratory and interventionist: we aim to broaden the film studies canon to reflect the full richness of world cinemas, and to foreground perspectives too often marginalized in dominant film discourse. This means actively encouraging scholarship on underrepresented regions – the Global South, small-nation cinemas, Indigenous filmmaking, diasporic and exilic film cultures – and on modes of filmmaking beyond the commercial mainstream. It also

means interrogating how aesthetic choices and narrative strategies function within specific cultural and social contexts: how, for example, grassroots screen collectives in South East Asia or Eastern Europe forge new cinematic languages under political and social duress. In essence, *FINT* seeks to be a key forum for research-based studies of global screen cultures, encouraging dialogue across transnational and comparative perspectives.

In pursuing this direction, continuity and change go hand in hand. We honour the journal's roots in rigorous film criticism while turning the spotlight towards research-based areas of inquiry. One guiding premise is that cinematic excellence and innovation are not the monopoly of Hollywood or any single 'centre', but are found in plural centres of creativity around the world. Thus, *FINT* will feature work that challenges established canons and theoretical paradigms – whether by examining feminist horror cinema in South East Asia, diasporic and Indigenous films in the Pacific regions, or the impact of streaming services on Nollywood aesthetics. The journal is particularly interested in how filmmakers from the Global South, ethnic, diasporic and Indigenous communities, and other minor cinemas strategically and creatively work with or push back against both the aesthetic conventions and the market logic of dominant mainstream cinema. How are genre and storytelling being reinvented in Nigerian or Colombian films? In what ways are digital technologies enabling new voices in First Nations cinemas? How do filmmakers in restrictive environments (be it socialist Eastern Europe of the 1970s or contemporary authoritarian states) find inventive means to express political critique? By foregrounding these creative and industrial practices, the journal seeks to expand the geographical and intellectual map of film studies, capturing the vitality of global film cultures in the 2020s – a moment of flux and possibility, when old hierarchies are fading and new cinematic worlds are coming into view.

The contents of this double issue (22.3&4, 2024) exemplify an instance of these ambitions. Each article engages with cinema that looks beyond the usual horizons, whether by reclaiming overlooked figures or by reframing familiar genres from a fresh vantage point. Harriet Idle's article, 'On the outside looking in: Suburban aesthetics and awkwardness in New Zealand/Aotearoan romantic comedy', dissects the rom-com genre from an antipodean angle. Close to home for me, Idle's focus on New Zealand films shows how 'awkwardness' – as both a comedic trope and a social feeling – becomes a tool to subvert the glossy norms of Hollywood romance. In these suburban Kiwi comedies, marginalized characters and local cultural quirks disrupt formulaic narratives, reframing questions of identity and belonging in Aotearoa's specific context. In 'The other side of the moon: Alice Guy and Surrealism', Vanessa Weller takes us back to the early twentieth century to rediscover the work of Alice Guy-Blaché. Long celebrated as the first female filmmaker, Guy is here provocatively reinterpreted as a forerunner of surrealist cinema. Moving to mid-century Japan, Thomas Caffrey's 'The monster as/is the doctor: Ishirō Honda's *Gojira* (1954) and the post-imperial' offers an

original reading of the iconic monster movie. Caffrey argues that Honda's giant radioactive creature is a profoundly ambivalent figure: at once a terrorizing monster and a metaphorical healer for a wounded nation.

Contemporary world cinema is explored through several lenses as well. In 'Car as a home, an emotional geography and a tool of resistance in Iranian cinema by studying *Deep Breath*', Alireza Sayyad, Milad Sotoudeh and Sajad Sotoudeh examine how young Iranian filmmakers have repurposed that most prosaic of spaces, the automobile, into a site of rebellion and refuge in Shahbazi's *Deep Breath* (2003). Luis M. García-Mainar's article 'Realism and authenticity in Chloé Zhao's *The Rider*', meanwhile, brings a transnational perspective to American independent cinema. Zhao's film, set among Lakota cowboys in South Dakota, is analysed for the subtle interplay between its documentary ethos and its poetic storytelling. *The Rider* is situated both within a lineage of realist art and as a unique product of a Chinese-born director working in the American West, embodying the very transnational currents redefining auteur cinema today. Finally, A. P. Anupama's 'Cinesexual palimpsests: The female body as canvas and (text) in Malayalam cinema' ventures into the vibrant world of South Indian popular film. Turning a critical eye on the item number (the song-and-dance spectacle often inserted into commercial movies) in Malayalam cinema, which can be considered one of India's regional-language film industries distinct from Bollywood.

Complementing the research articles, this double issue features an extensive book reviews section. These five reviews engage with new scholarly works that, in different ways, all speak to the evolving narrative of global cinema. In one review, Constantine Verevis takes on Nicholas Rombes's *Gerry: Movies Minute by Minute* (Bloomsbury, 2025), and discusses Rombes's analytical approach (part of Bloomsbury's Timecodes series). Another review, by André Seewood, examines Slawomir Mastroń's *Secret Violences: The Political Cinema of Michelangelo Antonioni 1960–1975* (Bloomsbury, 2024). Seewood highlights Mastroń's argument that Antonioni's enigmatic art films of the 1960s – from *L'Avventura* to *The Passenger* – were quietly political, encoding the era's social tensions and existential discontents in their very aesthetics of alienation. Özgür Çalışkan contributes a review of *Experimental Cinemas in State-Socialist Eastern Europe* (Amsterdam University Press, 2022), edited by Ksenya Gurshtein and Sonja Simonyi. This volume explores how avant-garde filmmakers in Cold War-era Eastern Europe challenged the constraints of state censorship and commercial norms.

The final two reviews shift the focus to cinemas of the Middle East and South Asia, reinforcing *FINT*'s global purview. Pınar Üzeltüzenci reviews *Reorienting the Middle East: Film and Digital Media Where the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean Meet* (eds Dale Hudson and Alia Yunis, Indiana University Press, 2024). Üzeltüzenci's discussion brings out how scholars are mapping a network of filmmakers and digital content creators from the Gulf to the Horn of Africa to South Asia, who share not just

geographic proximity but overlapping histories and audiences. Lastly, Xiao Di Janice Tong reviews Esha Niyogi De's *Women's Transborder Cinema: Authorship, Stardom, and Filmic Labor in South Asia* (University of Illinois Press, 2024). Tong's review elucidates how Niyogi De's book interrogates the roles of women in the cinemas of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and beyond – not only as on-screen protagonists, but as directors, producers and labourers whose work often crosses national borders.

The book reviews in this double issue do more than summarize new publications. They form a mosaic of current scholarship's frontier topics, from microanalysis of film form to sweeping regional reorientations.

Looking forward, I am filled with both excitement and a sense of responsibility. *FINT* enters this new phase at a time of immense opportunity for global film scholarship – and equally immense challenges. The possibilities lie in the ever-expanding array of screen stories and production contexts available to us as academic researchers. The challenge, however, is to approach this breadth with the depth and rigour that serious research and screen studies demands. I envision *FINT* as a meeting ground where aesthetic analysis and cultural critique inform one another, and where theory is never divorced from the concrete realities of filmmaking – industrial context, production, creative process, financing, distribution, audience reception, policy and more.

I write this inaugural editorial in a spirit of optimism. The past few years have shown that the appetite for world cinema is growing, not shrinking, and that generations of viewers are refreshingly unafraid of subtitles, unfamiliar settings or unconventional storytelling. The international successes highlighted – whether on the festival circuit or via streaming breakthroughs – attest to a genuine cultural shift. The task for scholars and critics is to deepen the conversation that surrounds such works: to bring historical context, theoretical frameworks and comparative perspectives that enrich understanding, insights and appreciation. *FINT* will strive to be at the forefront of that endeavour. In that spirit, we imagine continuing the tradition of film festival reviews and interviews in the near future.

In closing, I extend a warm invitation to our readers and contributors. Engage with the articles and reviews in this journal – argue with them, cite them, teach them and let them spur new ideas. Consider writing for us, engaging with the journal's published issues, and sharing your research on questions that drive curiosity and expertise. The world of cinema is as vast and varied as the world itself, and *FINT* is renewed in its dedication to traversing that terrain. I look forward to the journey, and to the myriad discoveries, debates and inspirations that await us in the pages of *FINT*.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the Intellect Board of Directors, journals manager Amy Rollason, head of marketing and sales James Campbell, digital products manager Naomi Curston, anonymous academic reviewers and the following scholars for their generous support and contributions to this double-issue: the journal's co-editor David Melbye (independent scholar United States, previously Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions senior research fellow at the University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom), book reviews editor, Navid Darvishzadeh (Grand Valley State University, United States) and the journal's editorial board members: Lisa Coulthard (University of British Columbia, Canada); David Balfour (University of Melbourne, Australia); Tomas Elliott (Northeastern University London, United Kingdom); Robert Geal (University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom); Sarah Hamblin (University of Massachusetts Boston, United States); James Harvey (University of Hertfordshire, United Kingdom); Mariana Liz (University of Lisbon, Portugal); Gozde Naiboglu (University of Salford, United Kingdom); Melissa Oliver-Powell (University of York, United Kingdom); Fernando Pagnoni (University of Buenos Aires, Argentina); André Rui Graça (Lusófona University – CICANT, Portugal and FilmEU, European University); Constantine Verevis (Monash University, Australia) and Ramna Walia (Foundation for Liberal Arts and Management Education [FLAME University], India).

References

- Brzeski, Patrick** (2020), 'It's official: China overtakes North America as world's biggest box office in 2020', *Hollywood Reporter*, 18 October, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/its-official-china-overtakes-north-america-as-worlds-biggest-box-office-in-2020-4078850/>. Accessed 17 October 2025.
- Chen, Xi** (2021), 'China overtakes North America as world's biggest movie market amid COVID-19', *Global Times*, 2 January, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1211591.shtml>. Accessed 17 October 2025.
- D'Alessandro, Anthony** (2025), 'As CinemaCon fires up, here are the biggest mistakes studios & exhibitors are making right now', *Deadline*, 31 March, <https://deadline.com/2025/03/movie-theaters-biggest-problems-2025-1236354239/>. Accessed 18 October 2025.
- Glynn, Paul** (2025), 'Film about Gaza child's killing gets record ovation at Venice', *BBC News*, 5 September, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8jmlx1p4mxo>. Accessed 18 October 2025.

Amanda D. (2022), *Netflix and Streaming Video: The Business of Subscriber-Funded Video on Demand*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Wayne, Michael L. (2020), *The Netflix Effect: Technology and Entertainment in the 21st Century*, New York: Routledge.

Xinhua (2025), 'China's 2025 box office surpasses 2024's full-year gross, with local films dominating', *China Daily Global*, 2 October, <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202510/02/WS68de3ebca310f735438b35c3.html>. Accessed 18 October 2025.