

HAWAII COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES & HAWAII INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL PRESENT

FILM FOR THOUGHT 2015

THE COMMON GOOD: **HUMANITIES IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE**

CONTAINMENT

CROCODILE GENNADIY

FRAME BY FRAME

OPERATION POPCORN

SONGS MY BROTHERS TAUGHT ME

WONDERFUL WORLD END



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THE COMMON GOOD:

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THE COMMON GOOD: HUMANITIES IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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"FIRST, SAY TO YOURSELF WHAT YOU WOULD BE; THEN DO WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO."

"EVERYTHING HAS TWO HANDLES: ONE BY WHICH IT MAY BE CARRIED,
THE OTHER BY WHICH IT CANNOT."

-- THE ART OF LIVING BY EPICTETUS (A.D. 55-135)

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This year, as we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of the National Endowment for the Humanities, its Chairman William Adams announced a new initiative on *The Common Good*. Congress spoke of the need to attend to "the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life" in the 1965 NEH establishing legislation. "Today," according to Chairman Adams, "as our country grapples with both remarkable opportunities and extraordinary challenges... this need is greater than ever."

Social critic Rebecca Solnit points out "We talk about open questions, but there are closed questions, too, questions to which there is only one right answer, as least as far as the interrogator is concerned. These are questions that push you into the herd, or nip at you for diverging from it...."

FILM FOR THOUGHT 2015 certainly raises a number of open questions for which the answers are difficult, perplexing and consistently resists closed questions limited to simplistic political, social, legal or even moral solutions. The stories in these films carry us away from safe and predictable reporting, however fair and balanced, to situations that are charged, unfamiliar, and not at all obvious in terms of what should be done.

Watching CONTAINMENT, in a post-Fukushima post-Chernobyl world, can we really contain some of the deadliest, longest-lasting toxic substances ever produced? When and how can we stop producing more of them?

Witnessing social, economic and political unrest in the Ukraine following the breakup of the Soviet Union, in CROCODILE GENNADIY, can there be any help or hope for those living there? Recognizing that there is no humanities, civility, or human culture without such hope, for "I've heard it in the chilliest land, and on the strangest sea" (Emily Dickinson).

WONDERFUL WORLD END shoves us down-the-rabbit-hole asking about obsession in a mass-connected media and digital world, but also about the meaning of love, friendship and being a good person, questions that echo from Socrates to Confucius to Neo in the Matrix.

SONGS MY BROTHERS TAUGHT ME challenges us to look for balance between lives on the Pine Ridge (Indian) Reservation and in Los Angeles, asking questions about indigenous culture and whether it is possible to live native values in a modern world that has so effectively colonized native lands.

Finally, knowing how wars and civil strife sow particularly troubling questions, we come to our last two films: FRAME BY FRAME raises questions without words as photojournalists in Afghanistan move among one of our most dangerous media landscapes; and OPERATION POPCORN, with its stories of Hmong refugees, displaced from Laos to fight Communists and brought to America when the U.S. leaves Vietnam.

BOB BUSS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

HAWAII'Ī COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES

THE VISUALIZATION OF THOUGHT

The most basic form of communication used by humans is oral, the spoken word. Somewhere between HOMO ERECTUS two million years ago and HOMO SAPIENS one hundred thousand years ago, humans developed a complex oral signaling system to express their thoughts. This tool is called language. Then, about 3,000 BC, a new language technology began to emerge that today we call "writing". Writing first appeared as cuneiform and hieroglyphics; but these were eventually replaced by a technology called the alphabet that many of us still use today.

By using sounds and symbols, humans were able to communicate what they were thinking (ideas & concepts) and feeling (sensations and emotions), and over the past 5,000 years humans have produced a rich body of scientific and creative literature using the oral and written technologies of language.

But not every thought or experience is best expressed through spoken or written words. As a result, we find evidence of cave drawings and paintings dating back to 35,000 BC also being used to express human thought and experience. The use of pictures allows humans to communicate an entirely different type or range of thought and experience. And, just as the invention of writing expanded the power and options of language to express human thought, so too did the invention of still photography and moving picture technologies in the 1800s provide new options for capturing human experience and expressing human thought.

Some ideas come to us in the form of sounds – words or music – while others come to us as images – pictured or danced. Concepts become articulate when defined or captured in language and art. And, as Marshal McLuhan pointed out, the medium is as much a part of the message as the thought it conveys.

The films included in the FILM FOR THOUGHT section of the Festival have been selected by HIFF in the hope that they will cause us to reflect upon both the ideas expressed in the film and the means employed to express them. The brief essays provided on the following pages by knowledgeable scholars in the humanities are offered as guides to help you explore both the thoughts of the filmmaker and your own experience of these films.

DR. PHILIP BOSSERT

FILM FOR THOUGHT HUMANITIES COORDINATOR

CONTAINMENT

HAWAII PREMIERE | UNITED STATES, JAPAN 2015

ENGLISH, JAPANESE W/ ENGLISH SUBTITLES | 82M



FRIDAY NOVEMBER 13

8:00 PM | DOL

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 22

4:00 PM | DOL

SYNOPSIS

Can we contain some of the deadliest, most long-lasting substances ever produced? Every nuclear weapon made, every watt of electricity produced from a nuclear power plant leaves a trail of nuclear waste that will last for the next four hundred generations. We face the problem of how to warn the far distant future of the nuclear waste we have buried --but how to do it? How to imagine the far-distant threats to the sites, what kinds of monuments can be built, could stories or legends safeguard our descendants? Filmed at the only American nuclear burial ground, at a nuclear weapons complex, and in Fukushima, the film grapples with the ways people are dealing with the present problem and imagining the future. Part observational essay, part graphic novel, *CONTAINMENT* explores the idea that over millennia, nothing stays put.

DIRECTORS

Peter Galison, Robb Moss

PRODUCERS

Peter Galison, Robb Moss

CINEMATOGRAPHERS

Hervé Cohen, Tim Cragg,
Austin DeBesche, Leonard Retel Helmrich,
Stephen McCarthy

THOUGHTS ON CONTAINMENT

SHALANDA H. BAKER

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF LAW
WILLIAM S. RICHARDSON SCHOOL OF LAW
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT MANOA

■ ■ ■

"DO NOT DESTROY THESE MARKERS.

THESE STANDING STONES MARK AN AREA ONCE USED TO BURY RADIOACTIVE WASTES.
THESE WASTES GIVE OFF INVISIBLE ENERGY THAT CAN DESTROY PLANTS, ANIMALS AND PEOPLE.
THE ROCK AND WATER IN THIS AREA MAY NOT LOOK, FEEL OR SMELL UNUSUAL, BUT MAY BE
POISONED.

DO NOT DIG HERE.

DO NOT DRILL HERE.

THESE MARKERS WERE DESIGNED TO LAST 10,000 YEARS."

■ ■ ■

A woman wearing a paper facemask wanders through a scene of urban decay. Her eyes search the surrounding buildings as she steadies herself against the town's emptiness. She breathes against the mask into the silence. The scene ends, and we are haunted. With this, *CONTAINMENT* begins. In the eighty minutes that follow, the damning legacy of the nuclear age unfolds.

The film is visually arresting. The film deftly weaves the sharp black and white images of graphic art with vivid archival color film footage of the Cold War Era, modern digital media, and rounded cartoon images into three dense narratives. In the first narrative, we meet the ebullient former Mayor of Carlsbad, New Mexico, Bob Forrest, who praises the selection of Carlsbad as the site of the United States Department of Energy Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, or WIPP, a nuclear waste storage facility designed for the deep burial of radioactive weapons waste. The March 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant disaster in Japan shapes the second narrative. South Carolina's Savannah River Site nuclear facility, or SRS, a nuclear waste clean up site, forms the third. On balance, the film reveals as much about the slowly unfolding nuclear disaster facing the planet's current and future inhabitants as it reveals about humanity itself.

Radioactive waste remains dangerous for thousands of years, and in the case of plutonium, 240,000 years. Before WIPP became operational and began to bury radioactive waste deep within the salt deposits of the earth, the U.S. government assembled a team of futurists to design a warning system to prevent future disruption of the site by humans. In this project, the system's authors were tasked to imagine a "future beyond societal imagination" with a variety of scenarios, ranging from the optimistic to the bleak. As one futurist described, the warning message to a future society that may or may not share the same language might come in the form of

symbols to create a “visceral” sensation through a “landscape of peril. . . You can go to a place and you can say, ‘There’s something wrong here. I don’t feel right. This place doesn’t feel right. . .’ You just know, nothing good has ever happened here, and nothing good can happen here.”

In Burke County, Georgia, the county that borders the 320 square mile Savannah River Site nuclear facility, the markers indicating a similar peril hide in plain sight. During the Cold War, the SRS provided enough plutonium for 10,000 nuclear warheads. The waste created by this fuel was an afterthought, and still sits on the surface at this site and sixty to seventy similar sites around the country. The bucolic stream that separates the facility from the adjacent community belies this deeper menace, but the rural community of 22,000 people dotting the vast 842-mile landscape recognizes the threat posed by the facility and the four nuclear reactors in the surrounding area. The question implicit in the filmmakers’ juxtaposition of WIPP and SRS is thus made clear: What is the duty owed to this generation, and by whom?

We turn to Japan next, and it is here that the filmmakers reveal the conceit of the question of duty, whether to the current or future generations. In this final narrative, we meet survivors of the Fukushima disaster and we learn of the futility of warning systems. From Professor Fumihiko Imamura we learn that ancient stone markers already provide a warning system to warn future generations of the danger of tsunamis. “Do not build below this marker,” they warn. But build we did, ignoring the markers. If the stone markers warning of devastation could not avert the arrogant decisions of our generation, the filmmakers seem to ask, why might future generations heed our messages?

The filmmakers don’t provide clear answers to these questions, but in the final two minutes of the film Reverend Willie Tomlin of Burke County, Georgia, remarks, “When you, as a human being, stop and take a look at it, very little of your destiny you have in your own hands. . . We want to think we’ve got some control, and we don’t have it. We don’t have it. We’re here. We’re just here.”

CONTAINMENT reveals significant flaws in the human condition that the film does not attempt to patch or explain. We are left with to grapple with our own imperfections. The result is deeply unsettling. •

CROCODILE GENNADIY

HAWAII PREMIERE | UKRAINE, UNITED STATES 2014

UKRAINIAN W/ ENGLISH SUBTITLES | 96M



SUNDAY NOVEMBER 15

3:00 PM | DOL

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 21

1:45 PM | DOL

SYNOPSIS

The fall of The Soviet Union left Ukraine in a wake of social and political upheaval. The crippled economy and corrupt infrastructure produced little hope. Within this backdrop, a pastor and civic leader from Mariupol, Ukraine named Gennadiy Mokhnenko, made a name for himself by forcibly abducting and rehabilitating homeless drug-addicted kids from streets of his city.

He founded Pilgrim Republic, a children's rehabilitation center and home for former street kids. With Gennadiy's help over the years, things seem to have changed. Mariupol is no longer crawling with homeless kids. Many credit this largely to his efforts at Pilgrim. Now, as the large majority of Ukraine leans towards a European Union inclusion, hopes of continued revitalization seem possible. However, in the meantime, Gennadiy's center has evolved into a more nebulous institution. Gennadiy is also seen as a vigilante who uses any force necessary to carry out his moral vision. And when Russia invades the Crimean peninsula in 2014, Mariupol becomes embroiled in the violence, threatening everything Gennadiy has worked for.

CROCODILE GENNADIY examines the fine line between 'hero' and 'vigilante' in one of the world's toughest places. This harrowing, captivating, and stunningly lensed documentary from director Steve Hoover was also Executive Produced by maverick director Terrence Malick (TREE OF LIFE). This film is nominated for the Halekulani Golden Orchid Award for Best Documentary.

DIRECTOR	Steve Hoover
SCREENWRITER	Steve Hoover
PRODUCERS	Nicolas Gonda, Terrence Malick
CINEMATOGRAPHER	John Pope
CAST	Gennadiy Mokhnenko

THOUGHTS ON CROCODILE GENNADIY

JON DAVIDANN

PROFESSOR OF HISTORY
HAWAII PACIFIC UNIVERSITY

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"I am not rebelling against my God, I simply don't accept his world." Thus Gennadiy Mokhnenko quotes Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* to describe his motivation in *Gennadiy Crocodile*, a powerful story of brokenness, love, and the chaos of post-Soviet Ukraine. Mokhnenko, a pastor of the Church of Good Changes, takes on the role of savior of lost children in the eastern Ukrainian city of Mariupol. He goes onto the streets and takes kids off them and answers to no one but his own conscience. A postmodern vigilante, Mokhnenko helps director Steve Hooper narrate a story that is at once compelling and disturbing. Hooper sets the story against the ruined industrial landscape of Mariupol's factories.

CROCODILE GENNADIY, the title of the film, is at first a mystery to viewers. But the film immediately reveals it as the title of a Russian children's TV show from the Soviet era well loved by Mokhnenko. Scenes are interspersed with real life Mokhnenko's activities to create a sense of playfulness that belies the tragic situation unfolding before our eyes. There are other playful moments that allow the audience to take a breather from the very heavy human toll of Mokhnenko's work. He plays with his sons, he plows a field with his bare hands, and he swims in the Sea of Azov.

Like many excellent documentaries, CROCODILE GENNADIY tells not one but several stories. There is the story of Mokhnenko's life and work with orphans and his tough love approach. He works outside the law but produces such positive results that the city of Mariupol funds his Republic Pilgrim Center. It is also the story of post-Soviet Ukraine where the economy is ruined, corruption and drug use are rampant, and state institutions for the care of orphans are weak. I visited the Ukraine in 2008 with my parents to see where their families lived before they emigrated to the U.S. It was a place of hope but also despair. Odessa was undergoing a building boom and new wealth appeared around every corner. But it was saddled with a nineteenth century infrastructure in the countryside (we saw peasants riding horse-drawn carts) and a menacing neighbor in Russia. The film is also the story of the 2014 Russian invasion of Crimea and eastern Ukraine including Mariupol.

Hooper allows Mokhnenko to tell his story without commentary. This technique brings the realities of Mariupol and the chaos of Ukraine to the center of the screen. The story becomes more powerful and compelling since there is nothing to detract from it. The tone of the film moves from dark to light and back to darkness. The cinematography is expert. Small details stand out such as Gennadiy Mokhnenko's cross swinging from a desk lamp while he considers his sins and commits more.

Mokhnenko himself is quite a find. He is great on camera with his strong face and steely eyes. He is totally vulnerable allowing viewers to see into his life and work. His self-assurance is indomitable. He has fierceness and toughness combined with compassion and passion for his work and a self-understanding that makes him a very compelling character. He is very good at self-promotion which should endear him to an American audience. But when Mokhnenko is criticized as self-serving on his Wikipedia page for his crusades and TV appearances, for a moment he shows his pain and then shuts his computer lid.

As the story unfolds a sense of foreboding fills the screen. The music gets darker and the images more somber. Knowing that Mariupol was the scene of violent confrontation between Russian separatists and the Ukrainian government in 2014, I feared for Gennadiy's family. Mokhnenko made his allegiance to the government clear but could do nothing to stop the invasion. This larger than life figure, maybe for first time in his life, was unable to bull his way to a solution. He could not save Mariupolites from being blown apart on its streets. Adding to his pain, Mokhnenko knew the Putin regime would stop at nothing and treated the dying with indifference. "They will kill people in cold blood. They don't give a damn. They just need power and money." So Mokhnenko implores one of his former orphans, now grown up, to not to return to Crimea with his family.

The outcome is unclear, as it is in the real world. But the film ends with Gennadiy Mokhnenko admitting that the war has broken his heart. Be careful, this film might break yours. •

FRAME BY FRAME

HAWAII PREMIERE | UNITED STATES 2015
ENGLISH, DARI W/ ENGLISH SUBTITLES | 85M



SATURDAY NOVEMBER 14

3:15 PM | DOL

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 15

11:45 AM | DOL

SYNOPSIS

When the Taliban ruled Afghanistan, taking a photo was a crime. After the regime fell from power in 2001, a fledgling free press emerged and a photography revolution was born. Now, as foreign troops and media withdraw, Afghanistan is left to stand on its own, and so are its journalists.

Set in a modern Afghanistan bursting with color and character, FRAME BY FRAME follows four Afghan photojournalists as they navigate an emerging and dangerous media landscape – reframing Afghanistan for the world, and for themselves. Through cinema vérité, intimate interviews, powerful photojournalism, and never-before-seen archival footage shot in secret during the Taliban regime, the film connects

DIRECTORS	Alexandria Bombach, Mo Scarpelli
SCREENWRITERS	Alexandria Bombach, Mo Scarpelli
PRODUCERS	Alexandria Bombach, Mo Scarpelli, Jeff Orlowski
CINEMATOGRAPHERS	Alexandria Bombach, Mo Scarpelli
CAST	Massoud Hossaini, Wakil Kohsar, Najibullah Musafer, Farzana Wahidy

THOUGHTS ON FRAME BY FRAME

CAROLE PETERSEN

DIRECTOR, SPARK M. MATSUNAGA INSTITUTE
FOR PEACE & CONFLICT RESOLUTION
PROFESSOR, WILLIAM S. RICHARDSON SCHOOL OF LAW
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT MANOA

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We can all think of at least one iconic news photograph that captured our attention and touched our souls. But most of us know very little about the men and women who take these photographs. What leads them to become photojournalists? Do they feel guilty when they point a camera at a tragic scene? Do they form bonds with their subjects or remain dispassionate?

The documentary film *FRAME BY FRAME* explores these questions in an almost seductive fashion, by inviting us into the lives of four photographers who live and work in Afghanistan – Massoud, Farzana, Wakil, and Najibulla. The film vividly demonstrates the importance of photojournalism to anyone who cherishes a free society. But it also gives us insight into what motivates individuals to practice this profession. The directors of *FRAME BY FRAME*, Mo Scarpelli and Alexandria Bombach, kept their own cameras close to their subjects and it often feels as though we are right there with them. We climb a hill with Najibulla and learn how to photograph the panorama. We walk through the slums with Wakil to find opium addicts. We listen to Massoud recall, tenderly, how his professional friendship with Farzana gradually blossomed into romance and marriage. We feel their hopes for the future but also the weight of Afghanistan's history, and the pain of its memories.

Of course, the Taliban constitutes a large part of that history and the fear that it may someday return to power is a constant undercurrent. Farzana was only 13 when the Taliban arrived and she describes how it prohibited her (and all girls) from attending school. The Taliban also forbade photography. To take or even to own a photograph could lead to a beating. Thus wedding photos, baby pictures, and other treasured bits of family history had to be destroyed or hidden away. A part of the country's identity disappeared, as did the art and the skills of photography.

After the American invasion, foreign photojournalists reappeared but local talent had to be nurtured so that Afghanistan could rebuild its photography profession. Najibulla teaches photography and his lessons are expertly woven into the film. Gently, softly, he introduces his students to the concepts – composition, depth of field, reflection, leading line. But for a photojournalist, there is a good deal that cannot be taught in classroom – like how to persuade a security guard to let you do your job. Although taking a photograph is no longer a crime, Afghan photojournalists still negotiate for access. Farzana photographs women, which is particularly challenging

due to the social norms. In one scene she pleads with a doctor to give her access to female patients in the burn unit. Labeled as victims of “self-immolation,” these women were more likely set afire by their in-laws after long periods of domestic violence. The doctor is polite but firm in his refusals. When Farzana persists he finally reveals his reason: the daughter-in-law of a powerful mullah is being treated in the burn unit. The mullah has already threatened to torch the hospital and he will almost certainly carry out his threat if Farzana photographs patients. Farzana eventually gives up trying to persuade the doctor but she does not abandon her project. Instead, she locates a victim elsewhere; and the directors of *FRAME BY FRAME* bring us right along. We hear the young woman’s story of unthinkable cruelty. We also see the reaction of Farzana; she does not flinch but she sometimes struggles to maintain her composure. Her work has already won international awards and will, no doubt, win more.

But Farzana’s husband, Massoud, is probably the best known photojournalist in the film and his path to fame illustrates both the risks of the profession and its ethical challenges. In December 2011, Massoud was photographing a religious festival when a suicide bomber detonated explosives. Bodies and limbs flew into the air and more than 70 people died. Although wounded himself, Massoud photographed the aftermath and one of his pictures – a heartbreaking image of a young girl in a bright green dress, covered in blood, screaming in terror – was published in the international press. Massoud won the Pulitzer Prize for that picture. The girl, named Tarana, lost most of her family. At some level, every photojournalist must consider that tension – because it is usually the tragic photos that are published widely and launch careers. How does Massoud grapple with this? Did he feel guilty? Does he stay in contact with Tarana? You will have to watch the film to find out. •

OPERATION POPCORN

HAWAII PREMIERE | UNITED STATES 2015

ENGLISH, HMONG W/ ENGLISH SUBTITLES | 81M



TUESDAY NOVEMBER 17

6:00 PM | DOL

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 21

10:30 AM | DOL

SYNOPSIS

During the Vietnam War, the CIA recruited Hmong tribesmen in Laos to fight against the Communists. Afterwards, tens of thousands of Hmong were forced to flee to the U.S. as refugees.

Nearly 40 years later, a video is smuggled out of Laos showing that the Communist government continues to persecute those Hmong still living there. California-based activist Locha Thao discovers that few politicians care about stragglers from a decades-old conflict, but then, out of the blue, an arms dealer named Steve contacts Locha, offering weapons for the Hmong in Laos to defend themselves.

Believing that Steve might be connected to the CIA, Locha becomes embroiled in a dangerous web of intrigue that could land him and the beloved leaders of his community in prison for the rest of their lives. Through surveillance recordings of Locha's meetings with Steve, we follow the operation to its dramatic conclusion. An epic story, OPERATION POPCORN shows how the aftershocks of war reverberate across continents and generations.

DIRECTOR	David Grabias
PRODUCERS	David Grabias, Anne Edgar
CINEMATOGRAPHERS	Howard Shack, Shana Hagan

THOUGHTS ON OPERATION POPCORN

PIERRE ASSELIN

PROFESSOR OF HISTORY
HAWAII PACIFIC UNIVERSITY

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Southeast Asia has produced its share of tragedies in the 20th century. The Vietnam War (1954-75) was arguably the bloodiest conflict of the Cold War era. Contrary to what its name suggests, it embroiled not one but three countries. To be sure, the heaviest fighting took place in the jungles of South Vietnam as US bombings ravaged the North. However, neighboring Cambodia and Laos were also drawn into the hostilities as decisions-makers in Hanoi and Washington considered what had once been French Indochina to constitute one battlefield. Thus, it is no coincidence that the same year Saigon fell to Vietnamese communist forces, the Khmer Rouge deposed the pro-US regime in Phnom Penh and the Pathet Lao, a revolutionary front sponsored by Hanoi, seized power in Vientiane. Indochina effectively went "red" in 1975, marking the dawn of a promising new age for some, and the onset of a fresh hell for others.

Much has been made of Pol Pot's reign of terror that killed hundreds of thousands in Cambodia, as well as of the plight of "boat people" who fled Vietnam presumably to escape persecution following national reunification under communist authority. Less publicized, however, has been the fate of those ethnic minorities that collaborated with the United States during the Vietnam War and paid a hefty price for that collaboration after its enemies triumphed. The Hmong, an eclectic clan-based ethnic group with roots in Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and southern China, were indisputably the most valued of America's so-called "Montagnard" allies during the war, with the postwar mistreatment to show for it. Their traditional hostility to the Vietnamese and history of collaboration with France during the latter stages of the colonial era, plus the fact that communist forces operated in those parts of Vietnam and Laos they inhabited, made them eager to work with the United States. For much of the Vietnam War US Special Forces and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) secretly trained, armed, and provided other forms of support to Hmong tribesmen, mostly in Laos, to help defeat communist armies, much as the French had done to meet their own ends during the previous Franco-Vietminh War (1946-54). By one estimate nearly two-thirds of Laotian Hmong fought for and otherwise abetted the royal, non-communist government in Vientiane before its overthrow in 1975. The Hmong's commitment to the anti-communist project in Indochina and attendant loyalty to western powers led to harsh reprisals by Vietnamese and Laotian authorities after the war ended, including detention in "re-education camps" under the most appalling and sometimes brutal of conditions. The reprisals, ongoing by some accounts, have been callous to the point of being considered tantamount to genocide. No wonder, then, that tens of

thousands of Hmong fled to Thailand by foot when they had the chance and, if they were lucky enough to survive, relocated to the West, mostly in the American cities of Fresno and Minneapolis-Saint Paul.

OPERATION POPCORN relates the bizarre story of a bizarre attempt undertaken by an even more bizarre cast of characters to overthrow the Laotian government during the first decade of the new millennium because of its continued repression of Hmong and overall misrule and ineptitude. The film introduces us to Vang Pao, a former Major General in the Royal Lao Army and de facto leader of the Hmong community in the United States until his death in 2011. Though Vang played a central role in that attempt, the main character in this rendition is Locha Thao, a California-based Hmong political and military wannabe of the most unscrupulous kind who clearly aspired to become Vang's heir apparent despite possessing none of his credentials, pedigree, or charisma. In addition to relating the Hmong condition in Southeast Asia and in the United States in particular, the film offers revealing insights into the enduring legacies of the Vietnam War in both places.

It is a testament to the sad condition of the American Hmong community that its leaders have been the likes of Vang Pao, Locha Thao, and others appearing in this film. Those leaders' desire to assist their beleaguered brethren in Laos may have been noble, but the plan they hatched to that end was utterly senseless. What is more, they possessed none of the knowledge, skills, and connections necessary to effectively carry out that plan, though that did not seem to have bothered them. In a roundabout way, the film demonstrates how easily blindly ambitious, shameless, yet cunning individuals can become influential members in their community by exploiting its marginalization and other afflictions. They can even insinuate themselves into the highest circles of power in Washington, DC. The stupefying ignorance of Capitol Hill legislators and policymakers and the ease with which they can be manipulated to serve the narrowest interests of unprincipled individuals are displayed in the film. Hapless revolutionaries and charlatans – to say nothing of stupidity – clearly know no spatial, temporal, nor racial bounds. •

SONGS MY BROTHERS TAUGHT ME

HAWAII PREMIERE | UNITED STATES 2015

ENGLISH | 98M



FRIDAY NOVEMBER 20

8:00 PM | DOL

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 22

10:45 AM | DOL

SYNOPSIS

With an older brother in jail and living with their single mother on Pine Ridge Reservation, Johnny and his sister Jashuan's lives develop new challenges when their absentee cowboy father suddenly dies. The loss prompts Johnny to strike out for Los Angeles, but would mean leaving behind his beloved sister.

Director Chloe Zhao, originally from China, was transfixed by the Indian Reservation and the community in which she decided to stay and craft a film. This resulted in living on the reservation and bonding with her mainly non-actor cast. The film premiered at both the Sundance and Cannes Film Festivals, winning accolades.

Set on the Great Plains and the Badlands of Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, SONGS MY BROTHERS TAUGHT ME is a compelling and complex tale that explores the bond between a brother and his younger sister, who find themselves on separate paths to rediscovering the meaning of home.

DIRECTOR	Chloé Zhao
SCREENWRITER	Chloé Zhao
PRODUCERS	David Grabias, Anne Edgar
CINEMATOGRAPHER	Joshua James Richards
CAST	Irene Bedard, John Reddy, Jashaun St. John, Taysha Fuller, Eleonore Hendricks, Travis Lonehill

THOUGHTS ON SONGS MY BROTHERS TAUGHT ME

BRANDY NALANI MCDUGALL

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF AMERICAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT MANOA

■ ■ ■

"Anything that runs wild got something bad in 'em. You wanna leave some of that in there cuz they need it to survive out here" are among the first words we hear from an Oglala Lakota teenager, Johnny Winters, as he rides a horse nearly bareback (with just a blanket under him) in Chloe Zhao's breathtaking film, *SONGS MY BROTHERS TAUGHT ME*.

Lyrically rendered against an ever changing, yet luminescent sky that touches massive buttes, gorges, and grassy prairie lands, the film offers us both the stunning beauty and poverty of the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Over 7,000 miles in size and home to over 28,000, Pine Ridge faces an 80-90% unemployment rate, an average per capita income of \$4,000, and the 2nd lowest life expectancy in the entire Western hemisphere. Thus, when Johnny shares that horses need to have some bad in them to survive, he speaks, not only out of the deep connection Lakota people have with the *sunka wakan*, the horse, but also from the standpoint of a people who know how to survive.

SONGS MY BROTHERS TAUGHT ME focuses on the story of Jashaun Winters, a 13-year-old girl and her brother, a high school senior, Johnny Winters. While their mother struggles with both alcohol and men and an older brother serves his sentence in jail, Johnny assumes responsibility for taking care of Jashaun. He sells alcohol, then illegal on the Pine Ridge Reservation, to make ends meet.

Noticeably absent is their estranged father, Carl Winters, a talented bull rider who dies in a drunken stupor when his home burns to the ground. After the funeral, Johnny and Jashaun visit with their many half-siblings. The conversation quickly turns to their father's alcoholism and the issue of prohibition. Johnny stares silently into the fire they sit around as one of his brothers considers the consequences of the ban being lifted. The next day, Jashaun, who wears her father's 2002 World Champion bullriding jacket, grieves alone, picking through the ashes of her father's house to find souvenirs.

Johnny decides to leave the rez with his girlfriend, Aurelia, to Los Angeles where she will go to college. When Jashaun finds out, she finds a surrogate big brother/father in Travis, an artist and ex-con struggling with alcoholism. Travis gives Jashaun a job keeping track of the money he gets from selling his art and clothing designs,

which always include the number seven, from the hood of his car. He explains: "Crazy Horse said 'Everything all seemed to have ended at Wounded Knee, but it will all begin again with the seventh generation. And you know—that's you.'"

Crazy Horse was staunchly against alcohol, seeing the damage that it did within Lakota communities. However, in 2013, a vote was held and residents decided to lift the ban on alcohol (1,843 in favor and 1,678 against). Zhao's film should be commended for capturing the profound impact of alcoholism at Pine Ridge—with as many as 8 out of 10 families affected—as people strive to find ways to feed their bodies and spirits after generations of trauma.

Wounded Knee continues to be remembered as a site of colonial violence and loss. Wounded Knee followed a long series of violent historical injustices, including the confinement of their people to the Great Sioux Reservation, the violation of the the Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868) which ensured Paha Sapa was protected as part of their territory, the extermination of the buffalo, and later, the division of their reservation (and people) into five smaller reservations. The Oglala Lakota found spiritual and political sustenance in the Ghost Dance, a ceremony of Indigenous resurgence. In 1890, threatened by this movement and seeking to put an end to Lakota and other Indigenous resistance, the U.S. military killed more than 250 Lakota, mostly women and children at Wounded Knee, just 16 miles east of Pine Ridge.

Chloe Zhao gives us many beautiful, powerful, and quiet moments to reflect on the struggles that the Lakota face as they strive to find greater purpose in their lives, yet keeping some of the bad in them to survive. Zhao compels viewers to reflect on how a people may move beyond survival toward resurgence, showing us the tremendous wealth of spirit of the people, the breathtaking beauty of the land, the plays of light and shadow as they move across Pine Ridge, and ultimately, guiding us toward the ever rising sun of the Oglala nation. •

WONDERFUL WORLD END

HAWAII PREMIERE | JAPAN 2014
JAPANESE W/ ENGLISH SUBTITLES | 84M



THURSDAY NOVEMBER 19

5:45 PM | DOL

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 22

2:00 PM | DOL

SYNOPSIS

In her Gothic Lolita guise 17-year-old Shiori attracts a lot of followers for her blogcast. Whenever she can, she talks about herself, offers make-up tips and is delighted about the growing number of visitors to her site. After a music video shoot, confident Shiori meets a strange young girl named Ayumi. The girl is a big fan of Shiori's and tries to copy her style. She also seems to be rather distracted and monosyllabic, as if she had nothing of her own to say, but runs away from home to be with Shiori. Hesitant, but also flattered, Shiori allows herself to be drawn in by this girl.

This story of the odd friendship between these two girls is also a multi-colored romp through the artificial world of Japanese teenagers. They do crazy things and dream of making it big. Their private thoughts are shared only in blogs. The film also reflects the disintegration of traditional forms of communication in its aesthetic approach: online chats pop up regularly over the proceedings. It is as if the smartphone display has been brought to the big screen. Seizing upon two music videos by Seiko Oomori – Shiori's favorite female musician in the film – the drama ends like a comic book dream.

— Berlin International Film Festival

DIRECTOR	Daigo Matsui
SCREENWRITER	Daigo Matsui
PRODUCERS	Takeshi Hayashi, Manabu Katahira, Yoichi Shigami, Akihiko Yamamoto
CINEMATOGRAPHER	Hiroki Shioya
CAST	Ai Hashimoto, Yu Inaba, Jun Aonami, Go Riju, Marie Machida

THOUGHTS ON WONDERFUL WORLD END

CHRISTINE R. YANO

PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY
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■ ■ ■

In our contemporary world of YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and online chats, reality is constantly cast and recast in the image of digital shape-shifters. Japan, with its longstanding techno-utopic visions, stamps its own particular brand upon this cyberworld. Director Daigo Matsui captures one version of this in the 2014 film *WONDERFUL WORLD END*, focusing on the simultaneously euphoric and bleak frame of *kawaii* (cute). Matsui's main protagonist guide through this world is 17-year old aspiring model Shiori, whose blogcasts hold fascination for both male and female followers. We watch Shiori navigate the fraught waters of her budding career (with its constant tug to soft pornography) and personal life (a failing relationship with boyfriend Kohei). Herein we see two components of *kawaii*: the cute and the sexy. These elements take a quixotic turn when Shiori meets a young, doting female fan, 13-year old Ayumi. If Shiori represents the career-seeking pretty teenage girl, then Ayumi represents nothing more than her adoring follower. From the perspective of the 17-year old, the 13-year old looks naïve and pure. Herein lies a third component of *kawaii*: innocence. We watch fascinated by the contrast between the older and younger girl, even as a relationship builds between the two. Shiori handles the cameras and spotlight deftly like a pro; Ayumi cringes at the barest attention, mired in shyness and hardly able to utter a word. Whereas Shiori is worldly and cunning, Ayumi is naïve, an artless novice just awakening to the world.

Together the two girls run the gamut of *shoujo* (young female; "girl"). However, whereas Shiori may don the schoolgirl costume of *shoujo* – as well as performative Gothic Lolita dress – Ayumi truly inhabits the schoolgirl spirit, even when she imitates Shiori's black and lace dress. Ayumi, in fact, holds the core meaning of *shoujo* – girlhood, youth, innocence, purity.

And yet, young Ayumi takes the bold step of running away from home, seeking her idol Shiori. Amidst crushing shyness, Ayumi asserts herself, dressing like Shiori, living in an apartment with Shiori's soon-to-be-dumped boyfriend Kohei, and expressing her feelings for both Kohei and Shiori in her own online blog. Ultimately, Ayumi's purity – of innocence, of budding sexuality, of avid fandom, of the candy that she offers to Shiori – wins. Casting boyfriend Kohei aside rather violently, Shiori turns to young Ayumi in a fantasy of nostalgia, childhood, and girl-girl sexuality. Holding hands, they giggle at their newfound freedom. That freedom finds sexual expression at a playground, the two girls' bodies intertwined beneath the bars of a

jungle gym. Shiori takes Ayumi to listen to her favorite girl singer, gritty Seiko Oomori who screams with raw abandon into the microphone. And we watch the stepladder of unabashed girl entwinement: Ayumi captivated by Shiori who is captivated by Seiko Oomori. They form a chain of breathless yearning.

One fascinating aspect of on-screen life that the film captures so well – large swaths of which non-Japanese speakers will miss because the translations cannot come fast enough or in equally layered fashion – is the rich real-time interaction between online, on-camera chatter and her audience. Shiori knows her avid followers by “name”, greets them individually, responds to their purrs of sympathy expressed through words and emoticons. We watch transfixed as Shiori faces the camera and talks somewhat languidly, but we also see the flurry of responses, tumbling over each other in rapid-fire succession. Here is the electronic pajama party of gossip and giggles, murmurs and coos, with star girlfriend in the middle. It is an empathetic kawaii huddle, carried out electronically.

The title of the film *WONDERFUL WORLD END* is written in katakana, the writing system that denotes foreign words, emphasis, and even bold face. This is Japlish – English words juxtaposed to suggest an atmosphere rather than an exact semantic translation. The title rockets into earshot sung by Oomori, in a style that is simultaneously pulsing, screaming, and abrasive. Ironically, Oomori plays with the kawaii of shoujo through warping some of its iconic symbols: for example, she might wear the pinks and reds of girls, but with skirt ripped and hair awry.

Likewise, this film attempts to rip at our image of kawaii, girlhood, and Japan. We see cuteness as both a sweet reality as well as a guise in its performed smile and tilt of the head. Cuteness adheres in the photobooth adjustments one can easily make, print, and distribute, resulting in girlfriends looking like doll-eyed twins. Girls thus become the cute icons of shoujo manga (girl comics). We see girlhood in its homosocial embrace, as well as in its homoerotic yearnings and heterosexual pregnancies. And we see Japan tripped by the fantasy of fluffy pink bunnies cavorting in a field of spring flowers with a backdrop of cherry blossom trees, *mankai* (in full bloom). Indeed, the quotation of cherry blossoms frames Matsui’s film: youth’s purity is all the more precious for its evanescence. One appreciates cherry blossoms best with the knowledge that they will fall in short time. Thus, at least in Japanese terms, we are to savor that which will be inevitably lost.

Ultimately, *WONDERFUL WORLD END* builds on this cherry blossom premise: the wonder of girlhood, purity, innocence, and kawaii, can only be relished through its vanishing. By the end of the film, we have reached some vanishing point – suspended from reality with juxtaposed shoujo, bloodied zombie (the-former-boyfriend-known-as-Kohei), adult-human-sized pink bunnies, and electric guitar, accompanied by the resounding tracks of Oomori’s screech. That vanishing point becomes our peephole into this embroidered world of kawaii at the warp speed of slo-mo. •

[illegible]

SPECIAL THANKS
HAWAII COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES & BOB BUSS

