

LABOR GOES TO THE MOVIES

SEX & POWER

THE FILM INDUSTRY made cinema the art of the 20th Century, selling sex and power on the screen. So the film industry was also the fitting trigger, however delayed, for #MeToo, as Hollywood had, since its inception, made the casting couch the first audition for female stardom, a symbol for the power over screen access exercised by male executives. The cinema offers one apposite terrain for examining the representation of sex and its manipulation by power in popular culture, as the gendered relations of production ineluctably shape the industry's cultural output. This year's series looks at a variety of approaches to the tensions of sex and power across cultures and times at a moment when the culture industries have come under heightened critical scrutiny.

PSC Union Hall

61 Broadway, 16th Fl. Manhattan

Screenings take place on Friday evenings at 6:00 pm.

\$4 suggested donation.

Space is limited!

Light refreshments served before each screening.

Take the 1 or R to Rector St.; 2-3 or 4-5 to Wall St.;

J-Z to Broad St. or the A-C to Fulton St.

Near the PATH train & buses.

Call for directions, (212) 354-1252 or visit us online at psc-cuny.org.



September 14 MOONLIGHT

(Jenkins, US, 2016)

Barry Jenkins's second feature presents a triptych of seasons in the life of a Black Floridian: child, youth, man. Each vignette quietly dramatizes both the troubles afflicting a young life coming up, uncertain of sexuality, in a homophobic society, and the exigencies of growing up a poor Black male in the South. "Moonlight is both a disarmingly, at times unbearably personal film and an urgent social document, a hard look at American reality and a poem written in light, music, and vivid human faces." (A. O. Scott) A universally acclaimed, groundbreaking Black film — winner of both the Best Picture Oscar (and 2 others) and the Golden Globes Award for Best Motion Picture — Moonlight, released a scant ten days after the 2016 election, is a stunning, beautifully realized achievement of cinema art.



December 7 BOYS DON'T CRY

(Peirce, US, 1999)

While still a MFA film student at Columbia, Kimberly Peirce, after reading about Brandon Teena, a transgender man in Nebraska, co-wrote and directed *Boys Don't Cry*, starring Academy Award winner Hilary Swank. The teenage Brandon is involved in a relationship with a young woman, Lana Tisdel, played by Chloe Sevigny. Two drinking buddies of Lana's mother, young men in a small, declining Midwestern town, their own masculinity in crisis, befriend Brandon at first. But when Brandon's past is revealed, they react violently and sadistically to his love for Lana. Many critics viewed the film as a trailer park "Romeo and Juliet." The real Teena's fluid sexual identity shaped much of the commentary, as did the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard a year earlier. Most mainstream films with transgender themes concentrate on male-to-female transition, the characters often psychopaths (*Psycho*, *The Silence of the Lambs*). By contrast, the success of an emotionally gripping film focusing on a vulnerable transgender man struggling to establish his identity showed an America growing less rigid about gender identity. A landmark film.



April 12 FAR FROM HEAVEN

(Haynes, US/France, 2002)

Though the cinema inherited melodrama directly from theater, the German expat director Douglas Sirk ratcheted up the genre's natural tendencies toward excess to examine the US family at mid-century, exposing the seams normally hidden, or at least disguised, by the industry's self-imposed censorship regime. Since his days as a semiotics student at Brown, Todd Haynes has acknowledged the influence of Sirk's vision and adapted Sirk's method in a less sexually fettered era. *Far from Heaven*, set in suburban Connecticut in the 1950s, imagines interracial romance in the wake of a marriage unraveled by non-normative desire. Julianne Moore, winner of Best Actress Award at the Venice Film Festival for her depiction of Cathy Whitaker, discovers her husband's double infidelities of marriage and sexual orientation, which frees her to seek happiness outside the rigid boundaries of caste and class, a quest that provokes the whispered but merciless fury of white power.



October 12 WHALE RIDER

(Caro, New Zealand/Germany, 2002)

When you first meet Pia (Keisha Castle-Hughes), the heroine of *Whale Rider*, you can't help but be captivated by the eleven-year-old's innocence, beauty, and unflinching determination to win her grandfather/guardian's love and approval. Her goals are not minor. She intends to become the leader of her tribe of Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand. Her grandfather, a traditionalist chief, considers this apostasy. However, nothing stops her as she breaks convention to claim a birthright reserved only for male heirs. Based on the first novel by a Maori author, Witi Ihimaera, written and directed by Niki Caro, the movie is more than a paean to feminine energy; it is a study in relentless courage set against the glorious background of the sea. *Whale Rider* won audience awards at the Toronto and Sundance film festivals, and Castle-Hughes was the youngest person nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actress.



February 22 CELEBRATION

(Vinterberg, Denmark/Sweden, 1998)

Winner of a Special Jury Prize at the Cannes festival and many other prizes, Thomas Vinterberg's drama takes place in the course of a family reunion as a prosperous bourgeois clan gathers at its Danish country manor house on the occasion of the patriarch's sixtieth birthday. The story spirals from the gathering's festive start, through the tangle of family politics and sibling rivalry, to accusations of abuse, cover-up, and betrayal. As J. Hoberman wrote in the *Village Voice*, "The Celebration, in which Thomas Vinterberg presents one of the most disturbed Danish families this side of Elsinore ... reminds us that the family is essentially a feudal institution." Shot in 8 millimeter video and transferred to 35 mm film stock, *The Celebration* is sometimes identified as the first of the films made in the style of the "Dogma 95" filmmakers' collective, all sworn to "The Vow of [cinematic] Chastity."



May 10 THELMA AND LOUISE

(Ridley Scott, US, 1991)

The film was a critical and commercial success, receiving six Academy Award nominations and winning for Best Original Screenplay by Callie Khouri. More noteworthy is the controversy attached to the film. Some male critics decried it as a crude "feminist tract" while others saw it as "a regressive male-buddy film in female drag." *Rolling Stone* asked whether Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon were "feminist martyrs or bitches from hell." However, box office popularity and considerable scholarly discussion tell a more complicated story. While the film obeys the demands of established forms and genres, its success also indicates the incorporation of topical issues and novelty. Read as an allegory, this outlaw-couple film has its origins in the American, Depression-era gangster film, where the gangster is sympathetically portrayed for defying the law of oppression and drawing attention to the class hierarchy of capitalist society.



November 9 FIRE

(Mehta, India, 1996)

A young woman, Sita, marries into an extended Indian family, but her husband proposed marriage only to placate the pressures of his family. Once installed in the family's apartment/food business (selling erotic videotapes under the table), Sita works in the kitchen and at night discovers that her husband is continuing his now-adulterous affair with a mixed-race young mistress. Her brother-in-law has renounced sexual relations under the influence of a religious sect, leaving Sita and her sister-in-law, Radha, often alone in the family quarters. Their relationship develops first in secret, then stuns the family, as the women assert their autonomy. Hindu nationalists led protests in theaters and called for the banning of the film. On the left, female activists and writers faulted the film's concentration on sexual freedom as a narrow critique of patriarchy. *Fire* presents a test case for Roger Ebert's claim, in his review of the film, that "Women do a better job of creating art about sex, I think, because they view it in terms of personalities and situations, while men are distracted by techniques and results."



March 15 LATE SPRING

(Ozu, Japan, 1949)

The last *Sight and Sound* Critics Poll (2012) ranked Yasujiro Ozu's *Late Spring* the fifteenth greatest film of all time. Along with Kurosawa and Mizoguchi, Ozu spearheaded a post-war Japanese golden age that produced a remarkable number of great films. Ozu is the most traditional of Japanese directors. His late films depict ordinary people, often members of a nuclear family, doing ordinary things. In *Late Spring*, a widowed father and his unmarried 27-year-old daughter living together apparently in loving harmony are engaged in a power struggle to determine the direction their separate lives will take. They are participants in a traditional culture that is being undermined by the American occupation. The rigorous austerity of *Late Spring* and Ozu's other great post-war films reveal the tension between young and old, old and new, East and West — a quiet, even gentle, struggle for power rarely seen in Western films.