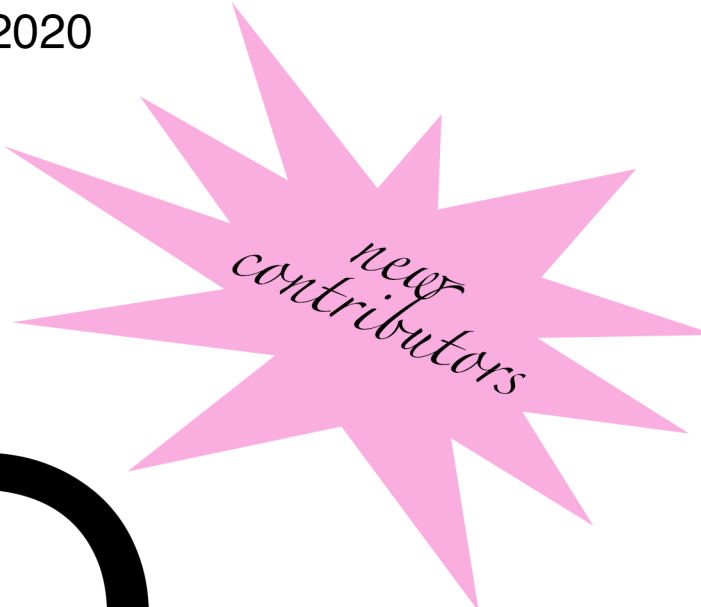


W

ISSUE #6
SEPTEMBER 2020



LAND

S

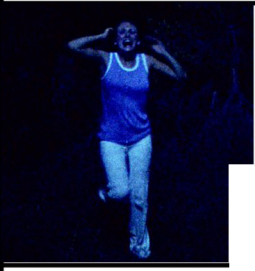


T

E

FEATURING
CHINATOWN (1974)
THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE (1974)
PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK (1975)
THAPPAD (2020)

click each film for the
full article on
wastelandarts.com



WASTELAND ISSUE #6

[Chinatown](#)

Roman Polanski, 1974
Words by Charlotte Mansfield

4

[The Texas Chainsaw Massacre](#)

Tobe Hooper, 1974
Words by Jessica Moore

8

[Picnic at Hanging Rock](#)

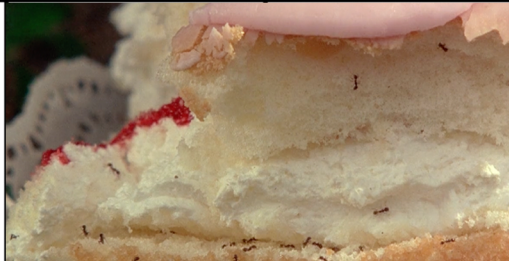
Peter Weir, 1975
Words by Isobel Wise

12

[Thappad](#)

Anubhav Sinha. 2020
Words by Rhea Rajani

16

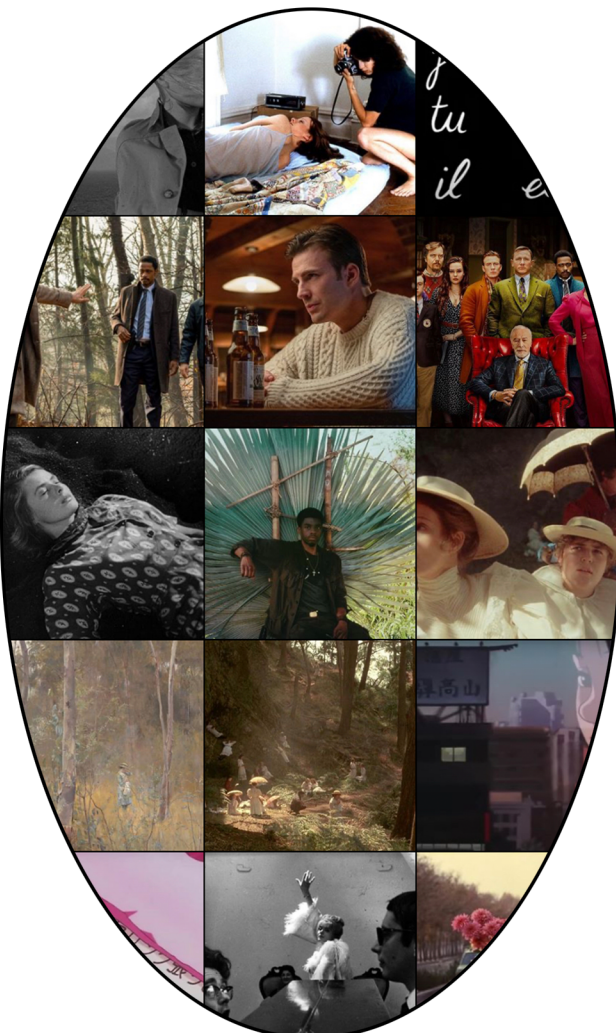




This month marks two years of *Wasteland*. What began as a space to explore visual culture as an extra-curricular to our degrees, and as a provisional space for essays and reviews, has evolved into a collaborative, synergetic newsletter of film analysis. To celebrate, for this issue we turn inward to our talented team of creatives who have each selected and featured one specific film. The result is a diverse cross-section of films for which we express deep interest or admiration; films which we consider both personally significant and essential.

As always, we'd like to thank you, our readers, for your continued support. If you haven't already, check out our newsletter archive on our website.

Jess
Founder and editor of *Wasteland Arts*



CHINATOWN





A beautiful classic, *Chinatown* follows private investigator Jake Gittes (Jack Nicolson), through a multi-dimensional and timeless allegory of evil men. His monotonous work life becomes unhinged as he begins to discover a horrifying secret. We share Gittes's view of the world, complemented by wonderful shots through his binoculars, reporter camera and the wing mirror of his car; as the audience we are invited in on his case. We learn new truths as he learns, and unravel the twisted events behind the investigator's case involving the intriguing Mrs Mulwray (Faye Dunaway) and her father played terrifyingly by the late John Huston. Executed with grace, Polanski's "Neo-noir" mystery inspired by the California Water Wars is anything but predictable, and is both a catalyst for many to follow (with homages including the likes of *Who Killed Roger Rabbit?*) and a love letter to the 1940s Film Noir genre.

Nicolson seamlessly portrays the sarcastic indifference of the ex-LAPD officer who has become outcast by former colleagues. While they mock his current tragic and sleazy line of work (uncovering marital infidelity), he appears physically ridiculous to even us in a nose cast for a portion of the film, before it is removed to reveal a kind and frustrated loner. As we realise his facade was perhaps adopted with the intention of self-preservation and numbing to his past

the film's darker tone is heightened. Nothing less than captivating and elusive, Dunaway glides through the movie alongside and appears as an object of elegance and hope, without undermining her complexity as a pained and secretive woman. The haunting score by Jerry Goldsmith perfectly compliments the intensity of each scene, while Gittes's wit adds a touch of lightness necessary to digest the sobriety. The sprinkling of jokes simultaneously *adds* to the level of tension, with the inappropriateness of each punchline building as the tone deepens. Meanwhile, foreboding mentions of Chinatown from early in the film pique curiosity, the squeak of a car being washed sounds more like a woman's shriek, and the beep of a horn startles you in your seat. >





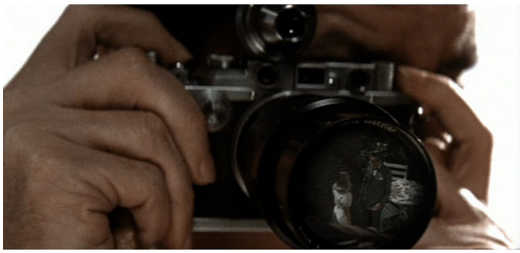
In a similar fashion to Wim Wenders, who was praised in the 1980s for films such as *Paris, Texas*, Polanski provides a wonderful exploration of America as an outsider, adding a sense of underlying dread throughout, perhaps linked to his own past trauma surrounding Los Angeles. The drought-ridden landscape and dusky spectrum of colour suit the film's gradual pace, alongside the pleasingly wide conversational shots, which are less back and forth and more purposeful with each expression unfolding slowly in front of us.

In viewing today, *Chinatown* is certainly more

than a gut-wrenching story, depicting an omniscient fable of the ever-present power of the elite. Wealthy men have a terrifying hold on their world, strategically composing a web of deceit to maintain their place in the food chain. Gittes is our intelligent and cunning hero who navigates this maze already aware of this hold, and yet remains hopeful in his pursuit to lift the curtain and reveal the cruel monsters that lurk behind. And like Gittes, we are lured into the trauma that is expressed so beautifully it is hard not to revel in it, and is what leads us to return to the masterpiece and relive the spectrum of emotion at a time when it has never been more relevant.



Words by Charlotte Mansfield



as possible

“as little





The Texas
**Chain Saw
Massacre**

1974 dir. Tobe Hopper





A woman with long brown hair, seen from behind, wearing red shorts, stands on a porch or balcony. She is looking towards a large, two-story house with a white facade and a prominent chimney. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

WHO WILL
SURVIVE

A high-contrast, black and white image of a horse-drawn carriage. The carriage is heavily laden with goods or people, and is being pulled by a horse. The image is stylized, with a grainy, almost graphic quality. The carriage is positioned in the center of the text.

AND WHAT
WILL BE
LEFT OF
THEM?

Hidden beneath its textural grit and reputational teen-scream exploitation is the pivotal horror film. Rife with folkloric symbols, pre-socialised spaces, androgyny, and a maelstrom of psychosexual repression, Tobe Hooper's 1974 *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* yields prolific gender commentary, and, more critically, indicates Leatherface as the prototypic slasher villain. His arrested development and fervent performativity, teemed with a desire to slaughter multiple victims, represents a shift from the undetectable villainy of horror predecessors, think of the indexically 'normal' Norman Bates in *Psycho* (1960). By the 1970s, villains' monstrosity is far more legible. They are closer to the Universal Classic Monsters such as Dracula and Creature from the Black Lagoon: outsiders, transgressive and inhuman, and, by implication, emasculated. Barbara Creed elaborates on this idea: 'in the process of being constructed as monstrous the male is feminized [and] this process is not simply a consequence of placing the male in a masochistic position but rather it stems from the very nature of horror as an encounter with the feminine.' While this is true of the genre as a whole, the slasher sub-genre is, in itself, gender deviant. It construes our expectations of low-budget, thoughtless thrills by presenting us with analysably emasculated men and androgynous women. Villains are digressive, masked, and marginalised; a vehicle through which the horror can manifest, and more importantly, a constant from which The Final Girl can be constructed.



The Final Girl refers to the victim/hero of the genre; to the most pragmatic figure, to she who is ultimately the sole survivor. And while she typically occupies a peripheral relation to the setting (she is often a babysitter or tourist), she is the genre's central figure. This is because, unlike the straight-forwardness of other characters, especially the other women who are usually sexualised and narratively punished by death, The Final Girl is mutable and thus able to survive

the slasher film's inhospitable terrain. As coded feminine in a masculine genre, The Final Girl is located within a space where gender is binarised and constantly affirmed. Yet because she is not the monstrous villain, she does not fiercely reject these binaries and transgress into deviance, she navigates gender to her advantage. She is the victim with whom the audience identifies, crafted to embody a multitude of recognisable characteristics: she is 'fiercely maternal', as Klaus Reiser suggests, or heroically masculine. She is a figure of pragmatism, perceptivity and caution, all of which the villain is entirely void.

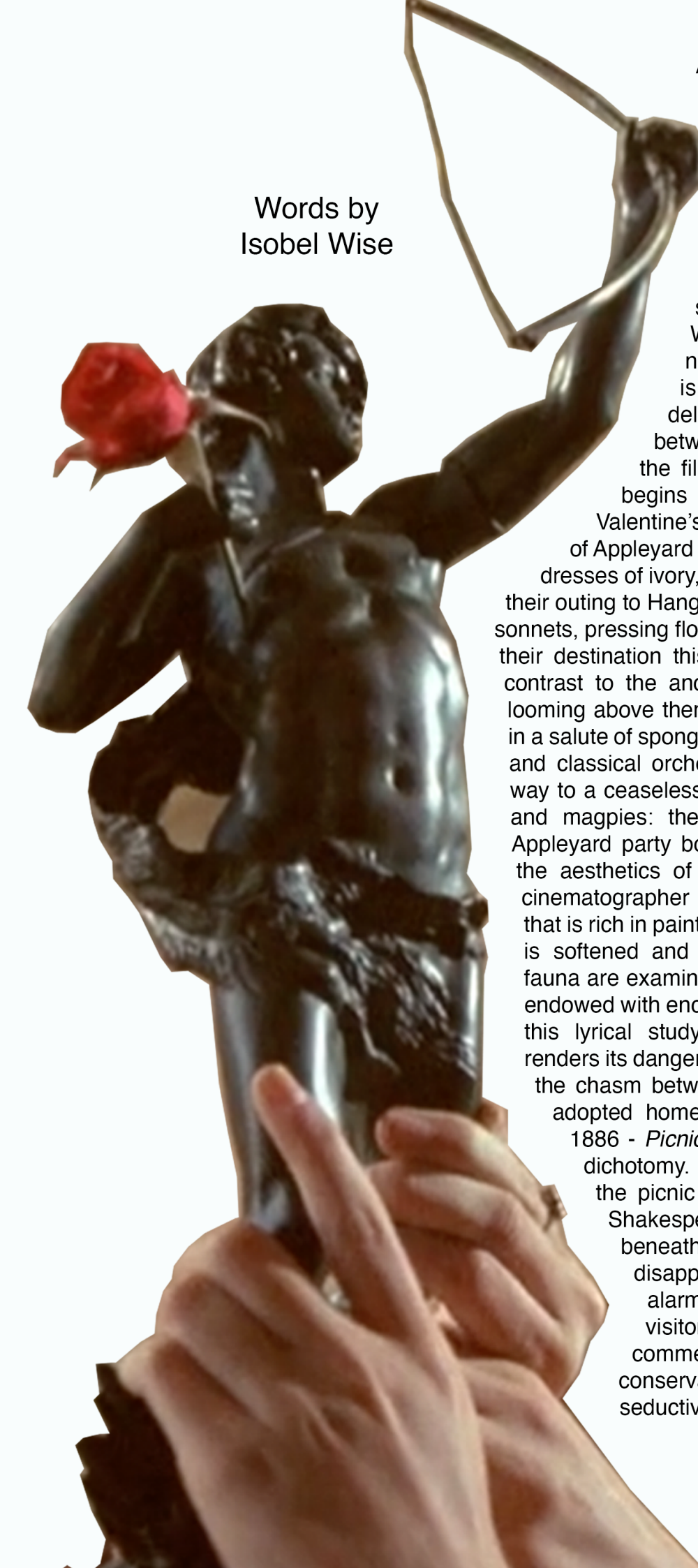
If *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* proposes any methodology of surviving the slasher genre, it is that of adaptation and self-reliance. The Final Girl's survival from the inhospitable landscape is indebted to the destabilisation of social convention, a rupture that manifests as a fierce expression of repressed strength and instinct. As subversive and deviant by design, the slasher horror film violently fractures upheld social categories of gender, and only The Final Girl, the most adaptive of all, is able to gather strength from its detritus.

Words by Jessica Moore



*picnic at
hanging rock*



A dark, glossy statue of a figure, possibly Cupid or a similar mythological figure, holding a red rose in its right hand and a bow in its left. The statue is highly detailed and reflective. In the foreground, a pair of hands is visible, one pointing towards the statue. The background is plain white.

Words by
Isobel Wise

As one of the first Australian forays into the arthouse genre, Peter Weir's 1975 feature, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, is an enthralling triumph that marries ethereal aesthetics with a tremendous sense of unease. Denying the audience resolution and explanation for the disappearance of three schoolgirls and their governess, Weir's film defies the classical narrative mode in favour of a work that is at once visually mesmerising and deliberately ambiguous. This disparity between beauty and danger is central to the film's visual and narrative success. It begins in the hazy summer morning of St Valentine's Day 1900, in the resplendent walls of Appleyard College. Students clad in diaphanous dresses of ivory, tiered ruffles and lace applique await their outing to Hanging Rock, filling their morning reciting sonnets, pressing flowers and counting their valentines. At their destination this societal femininity is presented in contrast to the ancient architecture of monolithic rock looming above them. As the students toast St Valentine in a salute of sponge and rose buttercream, the panpipes and classical orchestration of the college scenes give way to a ceaseless cacophony of cicadas, kookaburras and magpies: the Australian bushland envelops the Appleyard party both visually and aurally. Transposing the aesthetics of Australian Impressionists onto film, cinematographer Russell Boyd achieves a visual feast that is rich in painterly charm. The harsh Australian light is softened and imbued with drowsiness, flora and fauna are examined in intimate detail and each shot is endowed with enchanting splendour. Boyd's efforts see this lyrical study of the Australian landscape and renders its dangers beautiful and beguiling. Maintaining the chasm between the European settlers and their adopted home - see Frederick McCubbin's *Lost*, 1886 - *Picnic* is a film that rests on the power of dichotomy. Intoxicated by the languorousness of the picnic scenes - with the students reciting Shakespeare, consuming cake and dozing beneath dappled sunlight - the disappearance of four party members is alarming to the audience and Appleyard visitors alike. In a subtle yet felicitous comment on colonialism, sexuality and conservatism, *Picnic* flourishes as a film of seductive equivocality and timeless sublimity.





EVERYTHING



BEGINS AND ENDS AT EX

ACTLY

THE RIGHT TIME AND PLACE



Thappad





female independence in a world that adheres to ingrained misogyny



To define feminism is to define equality. The feminist movement advocates to rid the population of patriarchy and misogyny and strives for women's rights in order to create an equal society. *Thappad*, a South Asian film, introduces the theme of feminism at its forefront. Translated to 'Slap' in English, the film stars Taapsee Pannu, Pavail Gulati and Tanvi Azmi in lead roles and creates conversation about the sacrifices women make in a marriage, particularly in India.

Thappad's construction of the seemingly perfect marriage between Amrita (Taapsee Pannu) and Vikram (Pavail Gulati) quickly takes a sharp turn. At first, despite being a trained dancer, Amrita is the stereotypical housewife, succumbing to the needs of her husband. Committed to closely following Amrita's morning routine, the camera navigates her chores: she wakes at 6am, picks the post, makes fresh Indian tea, waters the plants, checks her mother in laws blood sugar level and gives her husband breakfast in bed. It is as if Amrita's life is within Vikram's, ensuring facileness. However, it becomes evident that it is Vikram's routine which is Amrita. Without her, he is ineffectual.

Vikram is an incredibly successful businessman who is looking to be promoted and subsequently relocate to London. However, at a party celebrating, Vikram receives a call informing him the promotion is no longer his. Angered, he starts a fight with his superior. Several men intervene but are told to 'get lost'. As Amrita intervenes, Vikram slaps her in front of everyone. His male superior is left unscathed. Amrita is shaken. The handheld camera rotates and focuses on her. There is a ringing background noise as the movie shifts to a slow-motion shot, therefore encapsulating the emotions and the shock Amrita is feeling.

Thereafter, her character shifts to one that is silent and numb to response. But it is this silence that speaks and stands for herself, separate from her husband. The silence acts as a vehicle for the start of the independence and the equality she has ignored throughout her married life. It is as if the one slap is a metaphor for admonishing the conditioning a woman is subjected to in marriage.

The movie introduces the theme of female independence in a world that adheres to ingrained misogyny. Unable to live in the home she was violated in, Amrita leaves for her parents and discovers she is pregnant. At her family home, her mother is outraged, explaining 'women have to learn tolerance to keep the family together'. Her brother describes the event as a 'small episode', one that is 'understandable' because after all, Vikram needed to take his anger out on someone. These opinions within the film represent structures of power whereby a woman is deemed to instinctively be more understanding and accepting of ridding herself of respect. The movie introduces an empowered female personality, one that is seldom seen particularly in South Asian culture. It is only once the divorce is finalised does Vikram finally apologise to Amrita. He explains he has realised his wrongdoings and has quit his job. This scene evidences the impact of a woman willing to unshackle herself whereby men, similar to Vikram, then realise the sacrifices their wives make for them and their families.

The movie ends following the two cars as they leave the court, with Amrita turning left and Vikram turning right, officially going their separate ways. *Thappad's* end offers stimulating conversation and one questions the adapting to misogyny that women succumb to so easily and willingly. Yes, it may well have been one slap, but it is that one slap that purveys commitment to conveying female independence in an industry and country that rarely stands for or exhibits a related movement of its kind.

Words by Rhea Rajani





FOUNDER AND EDITOR
JESSICA MOORE

WRITTEN BY
CHARLOTTE MANSFIELD
JESSICA MOORE
RHEA RAJANI
ISOBEL WISE

ARTWORK BY
NATHANIEL DEDUQUE

DESIGNED BY
CHARLOTTE MANSFIELD

@wastelandarts
wastelandarts.com

