

THE LOTTERY

From one hell to another.

by

Ben Hernstrom

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Date _____

(Kelly Sears)

(Melinda Barlow)

(Erin Espelie)

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ABSTRACT

Hernstrom, Benjamin (M.F.A. Department of Art and Art History)
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An undocumented immigrant wanders the Colorado wastes searching for her companions (whom we never meet). She's been separated from them and has run out of the little money she had. After finally making it to Denver, she's forced to panhandle, and someone gives her a lottery scratch-off card. Much to her elation, she wins \$500 dollars, but she can't cash it in because she has no ID/address, i.e. rights. After a chance encounter with an upscale professional, she approaches the woman to see if she'll cash it for her, offering to split the prize. The woman seems to agree but then disappears, causing the immigrant to stalk her in search of answers. Those answers turn out to be hard to find as the closer she gets to the woman, the less concrete her reality appears to be.

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The Lottery



Figure 1 The Migrant, lost in an apathetic and perilous natural world.

Ch. 1 From one hell to another

In 2016, America saw a marked rise in xenophobia, at least in so much as how much of it was publically and vociferously supportedⁱ. This was, of course, due partially if not largely to the campaign for, and eventual election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States. His campaign was in turns openly hateful and filled with dog whistle cues to the ears of bigots, who relished the opportunity to defy the apparent muzzling of racist and xenophobic behavior and rhetoric by the “fascist left” (and even those few less horrifying conservatives who didn’t support isolationism and white supremacy with such fervor). For many Americans, Trump was a galvanizer for the white person who felt left behind by the long slow push for a less grotesque society, which is so often read as a loss of rights rather than an expansion. The nascent far-right in America (and abroad) seized upon his message with all its vitriol. Trump described the “illegal immigrant” Mexicans as rapists and murderers and played on every fear-mongering tactic in the book. He repeated the old lies about the *other*; the other is not like us, they are inhuman in their violent hatred for all things good, once they sink their claws into American soil everything about our culture and way of life will be destroyed, especially our sacred freedoms... It was a low moment for a nation founded on genocide and slavery, if only because it proved that roughly a third of us didn’t think that either of those things were totally bad.

Awash in the rising tide of inhumanity, I, like so many artists, felt the need to respond. Much of my work is abstract and even myopic. It examines gray zones, questions that can’t really be answered, aspects of reality that hint at unreality. However, it always argues for progress in some fashion. My films *Etiäinen* and *Omega*

are ostensibly stories about how technology interacts/interferes with identity. Not overtly activist films, but both star only women and everyone is queer. My series of installation and performance works, *Null Space*, is focused on how sensory perception connects and influences our sense of spiritual experience, but is also an attempt to demystify the very notion of ecstasy/enlightenment. However, in order to address the crisis of American xenophobia, it felt necessary to be slightly more direct. Hence, *The Lottery* is more traditionally constructed than most of my previous work.

For instance, *The Lottery* is divided into a three-act structure, with each act taking place in a specific setting, and with its own cinematographic techniques. The first act occurs in a slowly evolving and menacing landscape. The main character is known only as Migrant, to express the idea that we shouldn't need to know anything about a person to have compassion for them and that it is not the details of our existence that make us human. We meet her as she wakes in a high-plains desert, emerging from a small recession in a rocky outcropping, as though she is born of the land itself. From there she finds herself in a desolate mountain range, draped in gray fog. She traverses the vast wastes, experiencing no interaction with other people, save a terrifying run-in with some self-appointed border patrol types as she finally arrives in an inhabited zone.

Eventually, she arrives in Denver, beginning the second act. The cold blues and grays of a large American city contrast the oranges and browns of the various desolate landscapes of the first act. Here she wanders the city, buffeted by the massive glass and steel structures of the American city. Here, she tries to connect with her lost group and receives a scratch-off lottery card after resorting to panhandling to get money for food. She tries to cash the lottery card in, but cannot because she doesn't have

identification. While hiding from a group of men, who seem to be planning to attack her, she meets a businesswoman, referred to as Citizen. She asks the Citizen to cash the lotto card in and split the winnings with her. The Citizen wordlessly but disappears. The Migrant stakes out the massive, alien office building where she first encountered the woman and eventually spots her. She follows the woman to her home and there begins the third act, which occurs entirely in the Citizen's sleek house. The woman invites the Migrant into her house in a strange, unreadable way and once inside, the Migrant watches the woman eat something disturbing and disappear up the stairs. She follows her, determined to make the woman address her and the film ends in a moment of unresolved interaction; the woman staring lifelessly at the wall, appearing to have perished, while the Migrant stands above her.

With a kind of magical-realist or metaphysical layer to the film, each act operates as a unique world or plane of its own. The desert/natural world is transitory, constantly shifting, and uncaring. It is not for us. Following the transcendental tradition of human-against-natural-world, here we must recognize the apathy of nature. This brutal world is empty of humanity. It is a vast, unconscious, shifting world. My depiction of nature as harsh and unfeeling is meant as a counterpoint to its common romanticization, in which we give it personality, wholeness, purity, et al. It is none of those things. It is terrifyingly neutral. Only the privileged experience it as anything other than obstacles and crises. A heat wave, for instance, is an inconvenience to those of us with air conditioning at home and work, a car to protect us as we travel, an essentially infinite supply of clean water. For those less fortunate it can be deadly. This world is examined as a version of Hell.

The second act is synthetic in totality. A world completely of our making. We have conquered an infinite unfeeling nature, only to replace it with nothingness. Thousands of mirrors reflect empty faces to no one. Tiny particles of plastic, glass, rubber, and concrete seep into our pores, into our lungs. We travel the same paths, day after day, an apparently eternal loop to which no one ever really agreed. This world is Limbo.

The third act occurs in a domestic space, the Citizen's home. The home we build for ourselves with what resources we can muster. A quasi-sacred realm, ours and ours alone, where we find shelter from the both the natural and human worlds. Even here, though our realities find us. Here, in the silence we must confront our *selves*, just as the Migrant confronts the woman. Here we meet the Void.



Figure 2 The Migrant amidst the alien world of consumer capitalism.



Figure 3 The Migrant reaches another impasse.

Ch. 2 Whence We Come

ACT 1: Hell

One of the major inspirations for *The Lottery* is *The Painted Bird* by Jerzy Kosiński¹. *The Painted Bird* tells the story of a Jewish child fleeing the Nazis in an unidentified country in Eastern Europe. One of the most salient and personally impactful qualities of the narrative is the way that the natural world becomes a site for danger and fear. Living most of my life in urban America, it is difficult to imagine a world where the landscape itself is an existential threat.

It's so easy to forget the brutal qualities of nature, as most of us in the developed world never experience them in any meaningful way. Like many residents of Colorado, hiking through the mountains provides me with a nearly sublime respite from the eye-melting screens and oppressively banal spaces that otherwise occupy daily life. I can't imagine needing to traverse those landscapes without a car waiting within an hour's

¹ Kosiński long maintained that *The Painted Bird* was based in part on his own childhood experiences. This turned out to be pure fabrication. Polish literary critics revealed that portions of the story were lifted from other Polish authors and there is evidence that Kosiński spent the war in the care of a wealthy Catholic family.

walk, let alone needing to do so without food or water, without the confidence from knowing that if things go pear shaped someone will come to save me. What if, like the child in *The Painted Bird*, calling for help would most likely result in being apprehended by murderous soldiers? What would it be like to know that if you stumble and break an ankle, you'll likely die? How does one exist in a world where a small mishap could be fatal whilst traversing rugged and difficult terrain? I have been hesitant to push these concepts too far in *The Lottery* (we don't need to see any more ultra-graphic bear maulings), but reinstating some of the terrors of the natural world has been an important aspect of the project, if only to acknowledge the privileged position so many of us occupy.

As climate change continues to unfold all around us, this became a central theme in *The Lottery*, despite being a smaller part of the original concept. My thoughts were originally focused on the apathy and lethality of the natural world, and how our lack of fear for it is only afforded to us through the various systems and technologies developed throughout human history to shield us from it. Our homes provide effective shelter, our clothes warmth in the cold and relief from the heat. Our cars carry us across vast distances while protecting us from exposure to dangerous temperatures, rain and storms, exhaustion, etc. Our water is heavily treated to make it drinkable (in itself a disturbing fact), and then often transported to us from sources across vast distances. Food is readily available for most Americans, though roughly 20% of American families do not get enough nutrition and far more than that have access to the calories they need to survive but not to healthy options, leaving them fed but sick.

As we were filming, we found ourselves in a variety of locations which hinted at or clearly depicted evidence of both the causes and devastating impacts of climate change. We stumbled upon a burnt strip of land next to the highway an hour outside of Grand Junction. The soil itself had been blackened by heat, the trees felled and turned to charcoal, shrubs left as ashy black sticks jutting from obsidian ground. Nearby, we stopped to film under an eroded heft of rock and found a pile of discarded tires and rotten lumber. Surrounded by this most extraordinary landscape, we stood at the base of the garbage heap and I asked Catalina Garaoya (The Migrant) to stand next to it and just stare at it. I decided not to show her face as she does, because it felt like it would be too demonstrative. I didn't want to give the audience the "This is how you should feel" prompt but rather allow them to contemplate the inhumanity of the image, without the warmth of Catalina's humanity to console them. In fact, throughout the film, I tried to be very selective about when the viewer would have the direct conduit of her face to connect to the Migrant. So much of our humanity is read and shared through simply seeing each other. We even have the cliché of the "eyes are windows to the soul" because to look at a person's face is to believe we are understanding them. We read the cues through eons of evolution, our brains so heavily weighted around recognizing and understanding faces. However, I wanted to use Catalina's face as strategically as I could. We spend much of our time following her from behind. This helps "place" the viewer in her perspective without the overtness of a Point-of-View shot, especially as she trudges through the various environs (desert, mountain, rural, urban). This allows the viewer more space, more room for personal examination. Instead of simply absorbing her emotional state, the viewer must rely on their own ability to empathize.

For a film to be valid, in my mind, it must not simply tell the viewer what to feel from moment to moment. I want the viewer to be challenged. I want them to explore their own humanity, their compassion. Everyone wants to save the resplendent tiger from extinction. What of the Aye-Aye?

Further, how absurd does our isolationist rage seem when we decry this “invasion” of foreigners, if we can’t even be bothered to take care of the land we claim to be protecting? Corporations run roughshod over everything other than their CEO’s private properties, yet conservatives live in fear of the Mongol hoard. Communities are poisoned by factories as a daily occurrence, and not a one of them is owned by South American refugees. I grew up in an area that had some of the lowest air quality in the country, rivers that you couldn’t touch with naked skin and dangerous amounts of toxins in our soil. Immigrants didn’t cause this environmental disaster. They suffered in it. But our society is built around the desires of corporations. They say, “illegals steal your jobs!”, and we believe them, despite them never exhibiting the tiniest symbol of truthfulness.



Figure 4 The Migrant stumbles upon a garbage pile amidst the incredible grandeur of the American West.

ACT 2: Limbo

If the natural world is dangerous because of its wildness, the human world is dangerous because of us. The second act is set in Denver and utilizes a set of rules to represent some of the crises of modern urban life in America. One rule was that there should be no green objects in the frame unless totally unavoidable. This was intended to keep out anything that might recall a sensation of nature. As act 1, is ruled by natural tones; brown, tan, red, green, act 2 is governed by blue, yellow and gray. Another rule was that the frame should be filled with as much glass, concrete, and metal as possible. This simple tactic is aimed at giving the viewer a sense of rigidity and sharpness. The ambivalence of nature's chaos and overwhelming scale is replaced by the coldness of the synthetic world. This is not intended to draw a value distinction between the natural and man-made worlds so much as show the missed opportunities in the way we've built our habitats. Faced with nearly infinite paths, we settled on a design schema that valued so little of what brings people comfort. More progressive cities around the globe are confronting these questions of how to make a city nice to live in, but late-stage capitalism is not going to make retro-conversion easy. In some cases, it appears impossible.

An important influence for the second act was Knut Hamsun's *Hunger*². *Hunger* was something of a seminal work for my development as an artist. The atmosphere is so stifling throughout the book and everything from the ambiguous ending to the concept of the main character being "a foreigner to life" produces such a harrowing

² Not to be outdone by Kosiński's disturbing lack of authenticity, Hamsun was intensely racist and supported the Nazis from start to finish. He donated money to them before they came into power and even wrote a glowing eulogy for Adolf Hitler. Never meet your idols, as they say.

sense of loneliness and alienation. No work prior to reading *Hunger* had spoken so directly to my discomfort about the social aspects of the human experience. The sense of façade, that despite our proximity in urban settings, the humanity of the other was always at risk of being overlooked or forgotten.

The arc of the plot (a young man slowly starves while wandering around Oslo looking for opportunities to sell his writings) is a good reference point for creating the kind of physical/psychological duress that poverty/homelessness enforce. Additionally, I am inspired by the sense of empathy that comes through in the writing. *The Lottery* is ultimately about seeing each other's humanity, recognizing the suffering of the other. Even as the young man seems to sabotage himself and refuse solutions, it feels human and recognizable rather than mocking. Further, I'm inspired by how *Hunger* submerges the reader in the psychological experiences of the protagonist.

Another major influence on my work in general is Tsai Ming-Liang. With Ming-Liang, I'm inspired by his deft, understated portrayal of urban alienation in a theoretically connected world. His repeated use of Lee Kang-sheng as a marginalized quasi-participant in society served as an inspiration for the Migrant, specifically through the idea of "ghost status"; a person who stays mostly invisible to society due to fears that any visibility jeopardizes the fragile position they occupy. In Ming-Liang's work, Kang-sheng's characters must stay on the periphery, avoid being noticed. This is often due to being a homosexual in a society that does not accept homosexuality, but class plays a role in the disenfranchisement as well. In *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone*, Kang-sheng Lee is sexually fluid *and* an illegal alien. The settings Kang-sheng finds himself in become a driving symbol of his dislocation and placelessness. In *I Don't Want...* he spends much

of his time in a construction site, which never seems to be active. The crumbling concrete and jagged rebar provide a perfect psychogeographic setting for Kang-sheng's unmoored and unrecognized drifter. Ming-Liang's characters always find themselves left out of the prosperity brought about by Taiwan's economic boom. In *I Don't Want...* Kang-sheng finds himself in Malaysia, a developing economy that depends on the cheap labor of undocumented immigrants.

Always intertwined with questions of poverty, place, citizenship, etc. Ming-Liang's work also looks at its common companion; urban alienation. His characters do not find community easily. Looking to his cinematographic tactics, especially vibrant in *Stray Dogs* and *Vive L'Amour*, beautifully agonizing wide shots couch the characters in a massive, daunting society. The camera is often fixed in place with limited efforts to center our attention on the characters; a grammatical phrase I am very quick to employ in my own work, though only a few examples can be found in *The Lottery*.



Figure 5 The immigrant (Kang-sheng Lee) brings his love interest, a lower-class food service worker to his concrete domain in Tsai Ming-Liang's *I Don't Want...*



Figure 6 The heavy concrete of urban life dwarfs the Migrant.

ACT 3: The Void

The third act takes place inside the home of the Woman (Citizen). The home is not as large as I had envisioned, which reduces the sense of unnecessary wealth that I had hoped to create, but I guess that's how AirBnB works. It feels like sort of a funny nod to the validity of the film, paying exorbitant hidden fees to rent an apartment from a guy driving a Tesla, which he purchased solely to rent for profit and which remains unoccupied much of the time, only to find that it is half the size depicted in the photos online.

In this act, the tactic of following the Migrant in motion, utilized in the first and second acts is replaced by a motionless camera. The idea is that the domestic world of the economically comfortable American is stable and thus the constantly moving camera of the previous acts is replaced by a braced, secure camera. However, it was

important to make this space problematic. Stable is not utopian in itself. It is a neutral state. It simply guarantees a lack of change. The Citizen's home provides security for her. It mitigates risk. It does not provide fulfillment, meaning, intimacy, love. While the Citizen is meaningfully privileged, she has failed to build a satisfying world for herself. Her material comforts fall short, as they so often do, and her life is empty. This is seen particularly in the shot of her refrigerator, which reveals it to be almost completely empty and clean to the point of sterility. The only sustenance inside appears to be a dead bird, whose severed head she consumes. This is the first real signifier that the Migrant has entered somewhere that is not completely within our understanding of the world. My hope for this moment in the film was to draw attention to the very notion of consumption as problematic. Further, I wanted to show that the consumption of the upper classes is predatory in nature. Playing on the symbolism of the bird as representation of freedom/mobility/self-determination, the moment is perhaps too easy, but it is my feeling that sometimes you don't need to hide your metaphors. Sometimes, if you want to show the grotesquery of wealth, you just have the wealthy character eat a raw bird's head.

One of the central influences for the way I wanted to construct the third act was Apichatpong Weerasethakul. The intimacy and vulnerability he conjures in his characters is stunning, and it's always contextualized in a kind of broken or interrupted (apparent) reality. His shifting reality is largely inspired by Buddhist beliefs regarding reincarnation and a universe composed of multiple planes, while the disintegration in *The Lottery* serves as a metaphor for the sensation of reality falling apart in times of extreme duress. Additionally, the current political environment in the U.S. feels genuinely unreal on a regular basis as gas-lighting has become a daily tactic

for the current administration and the GOP at large. This sense of an impossible reality in *The Lottery* will hopefully creep into the experience slowly and then ramp up as the Migrant begins to experience more noticeably metaphysical events in the third act.

Prologue/Epilogue

The film begins and ends with footage of U.S. Border Patrol agents, captured by surveillance cameras and personal cellphones. This footage was published by No More Deaths, a humanitarian-aid and migrant-advocacy group based in Tucson, Arizona. The idea to include the footage in the film occurred to me as we were shooting the scene in which the Migrant finds a stash of water, assumedly hidden by a humanitarian group. As we were shooting the scene, one of the crew asked for clarification on what was happening in the scene and I explained that it was a reference to the policy of destroying these caches by some Border Patrol agents. I realized as we discussed it, that many viewers might not be familiar with this occurrence and thought that including footage of this happening would explicate the reality of the event. This is a thing that happens. Government employees under the guise of national security destroy supplies that could be the literal difference between life and death for passing migrants.

Another influence that must be addressed is the Shirley Jackson short-story of the same name. Jackson's "Lottery" explores how easy it can be to accept a system, when you are not the one who suffers under it. While her point is also relevant to my *Lottery*, the central metaphor of my project extends in other directions as well. I am interested in the role that birthplace and the circumstances into which they are born play

in every aspect of a human's life, especially as it is completely and utterly out of our control. No one chooses where they're born, who their parents are, the body they live in, the state of their inherited society, the time-period of their existence... It seems imperative that my work helps to amplify these concepts while contemporary American culture hounds us with the absurd ego-driven "success is a choice" mantra.



Figure 7 The dreaming space in Weerasethakul's *Cemetery of Splendor*.



Figure 8 The Migrant wanders the city while symbols of the decline of capitalism abound.



Figure 9 A U.S. Border Patrol agent is videoed destroying humanitarian aid supplies by an unidentified witness.

Ch. 3 Where now?

Making *The Lottery* was more challenging than any other film I've made. Production was beset by scheduling issues and setbacks. All manner of problems from surprise dental surgeries, to actors moving away mid-production, made finishing the film

seem nearly impossible at times. I doubted I would complete the film on multiple occasions. Thankfully, however, being that it is my thesis film, quitting wasn't really an option. Further, while production was stressful and filled with doubt (as it always is), there were myriad unplanned successes as well.

One of the most exciting "happy accidents" happened while shooting a long tracking shot of the Migrant walking along a cold silver metal office building/parking garage that stretched nearly a full city block. I asked Jaden Tuma, a former student turned peer, to handle the camera for the shot, which utilized a Ronin stabilizer as my back had started to complain quite loudly from the weight of it. I followed behind him and was immediately excited by the way the shot began to unfold. Smooth, controlled camera movements are incredibly difficult without the right equipment and difficult with the right equipment. However, even more exciting than seeing the shot coming together exactly as I had envisioned it, occurred as we came to the end of the building. The last section featured a Chase Bank ATM, which had lost part of its logo. Above it was a surveillance camera, and below it a discarded soda can. The wall in which it was nestled, was stained by air pollution. As Catalina walked past it, it felt like the entire film was validated. The metaphor was so on the nose, it almost felt like a sign from the universe. Of course, it was simply a sign that evidence of late-stage capitalism's rotting corpse is everywhere you look.

On another day of shooting, we scrambled to get a shot of the Citizen boarding a tram, which was an important moment for the plot. Waiting for the tram to arrive, I asked Catalina to do a wild take of her spying on the Citizen, and just as I got framed up and

began rolling a beleaguered white woman stepped in front of the camera and partially obscured Cat. The framing somehow ended up being too good to have been planned, as Catalina's face was hidden by the woman's face. The woman was so close to the lens that she was blurred beautifully and Catalina's face became visible only in a reflection on a transportation schedule kiosk. I trembled. Later that same night, we ambled from location to location in a shiny shopping district nearby, shooting tracking shots of the Migrant wandering the city as we went. Within the span of a single block, we happened upon a comically appropriate sign over an underground parking lot that read "NO ENTRY", and shot Catalina crossing the street in front of it. We turned left at the sidewalk and continued to the corner. Just before reaching the corner, a horse and carriage crossed in front of us, perfectly framed, perfectly timed. The horse looked so wondrously out of place in the cold, synthetic zone and the baroque, white carriage it pulled, even more incongruous.

Another perfect and unplanned metaphor occurred when we were shooting a scene in front of Elitch Gardens. I had scouted the location after seeing it from a distance by chance one day. In searching for images that would symbolize the grotesque income inequality as well as the disenfranchisement of immigrants in the U.S, having the Migrant hiding in the shadows, simply looking to change her clothes against the backdrop of the bright neon lights and absurd structures offered a clearer representation than I could have imagined. However, the best part was the unexpected passing of a large flock of noisy geese in the deep background of the shot. The strangely desperate quality of their honking calls filled the image with a kind of alienness, an inhuman but palpable cry, both sympathetic and awful. It was another of those

moments, in which I thought to myself, “This might actually turn out to be a pretty good film.”



Figure 10 The Migrant finds cover to change clothes in front of an amusement park.

CONCLUSION

The Lottery is a different film for me in some ways. It is rigid in ways that are usually left pliant and malleable. With a sense of higher stakes, there were some risks that I did not want to take. The Migrant is never identified as straight or queer, in contrast to the last several narrative films I've made, as I wanted to make sure that the central discussion could not be avoided. I wonder if the added layer of complexity that a queer narrative could bring to the story could be valuable, but in the end, the aim is to discuss the moral crisis of our xenophobia.

To keep the story legible, I reigned in my normal penchant for abstraction. This does make me worry that the ending will be disorienting, as the viewer might not be primed to expect something quite so bizarre and ambiguous. I am also concerned that the softness of the ending, the lack of violence or kinetic crescendo will turn viewers off. Movies go so big these days. If entire universes aren't at stake, why would an audience care? Further, to win awards, it seems one must assail the audience emotionally. Lee Daniels' *Precious* comes to mind with its litany of heartbreaks and tragedies. Every scene opens a deeper wound, screams painfully in the viewers' ears, demands we feel what it wants us to feel. I am confident that *The Lottery's* internalized, ambiguous ending, crystalized in the downward gaze of the Migrant as the Citizen inexplicably stares at nothing, potentially ceasing to breathe, is more interesting than the bombastic climaxes of so many contemporary films, but I am not confident others will agree. It certainly does not seem like the meek will inherit this Earth.

What confidence I do have in the climax-free ending is inspired by films that have utilized similar strategies to great effect. Béla Tarr's *The Turin Horse* is the most existentially brutal film of which I am aware, and its power comes from its relentless uniformity and refusal to kowtow to presumed audience desires. From the heavy, recurring score which dominates the first agonizingly long shot, to the (I am guessing) two full hours of scenes in which the two sole characters eat boiled potatoes, Tarr's film is unrelenting. As a viewer, the tension of the film gains more and more weight as the film treads on, never offering catharsis. If every plot point in a narrative film is a sort of breath, this is an exercise in lung capacity. This might seem simply antagonistic to its audience, but I am a believer. In a runtime of two hours and thirty-five minutes, *The Turin Horse* offers no love interests, no battles, no answers. We, as viewers, must simply observe and contemplate family, mortality, and toil.

Employing a less oppressive, and perhaps more humane cinematographic regime, Lucrecia Martel's *The Headless Woman* is a source of continued inspiration to pursue meaning rather than pleasure. The story is so minimal that it's hard to imagine that it could fill ninety minutes. An upper-class Argentine woman hits something with her car while distracted by her cellphone, and does not stop to see what it was. We are led to believe that it was either a feral dog or an impoverished child. Just as the woman does not find out, neither do we. This is deft maneuver as the state of unknowing forms the center of the film. To know the truth would undermine the entire concept of the film. Martel's confidence is rewarded as the film gains momentum through the woman's rising anxiety. Further, I believe, it's a savvy way of leaving the film's larger questions about class and empathy in the hands of the viewer. Especially effective at creating a

sense of rooted dislocation is the sound design, which nimbly highlights the cacophony of domestic sounds present in the diegesis without pulling them out of their spaces. They aren't hallucinatory or overwrought, yet they carry a layer of separation and distress throughout the film, without resorting to more overt tension building techniques like a swelling Hans Zimmer score or the even less interesting option of pre-existing popular music.

Kelly Reichardt provides perhaps the most overt refusal at closure since Michael Haneke's *Caché* in her quasi-western, *Meek's Cutoff*. In lieu of an ending of any sort, Reichardt's laborious journey simply stops. Like *Caché* and Tarkosky's *Stalker*, *Meek's Cutoff* is propelled by a single question. *Stalker* wanders a dangerous un-world seeking a mystical room in which one's deepest desire is rendered unto them, only to find the room and have none of the characters enter it. Haneke's haunting look at the role of the bourgeoisie in France's violent colonial history in *Caché* is centered around finding the source of the anonymous harassment of an upper-middle class family. The mystery is effectively motivating, and we as audience are desperate to find out the truth behind all the suffering. We do not. In the case of *Meek's Cutoff*, the question posed is; which path will allow us to survive. Much of the film is spent on characters arguing about it, but Reichardt denies us the catharsis of knowing who was right.

I am eager to not allow the audience to leave *The Lottery* with a sense of closure. I believe that closure is too easily coupled with relief, relief with satisfaction, and satisfaction with inaction. This brings up another question of the agency of the Migrant. One critique for which I am bracing myself, is that the Migrant is passive. She does not

defeat this world, or redefine it, or change it for the better. However, I am convinced that such a triumph would leave the viewer warmly nestled in complacency. Further, I argue that while we may want her to be a heroine, it is more meaningful to show her as a survivor. She can't stop climate change, or make racists less so. One single person can't possibly affect the world enough to make everything all right, despite what Tom Cruise movies may say. But she can survive. She can refuse to submit. She can traverse a deadly and uncaring world and be the last one standing. The rest is up to us. I don't know if that will work for many viewers, but I am convinced it is the most honest it can be.

What I do know, is that this film deserves to exist. Not because its creation was so trying, or because it's particularly well shot or technically advanced. It deserves to exist because it asks valid, pressing questions about who we are as a society. It confronts us with the bizarre inhumanity that dwells in the shadow of our duplicitous proselytizations. It places the plight of vulnerable peoples at the center of our attention and does not look away. It hones in on the ironies of our screaming about protecting our borders while we can't be bothered to stop destroying a single inch of land within them.

In a nation, supposedly founded on the very idea of "inalienable rights", the grotesque irony of denying those rights to non-citizens, while boasting about our moral supremacy without cease, has further exposed an archaic, and outright hateful spirit in American society. *The Lottery* is a tiny salvo against the deluge of cowardly dehumanization and persecution of people, who have done nothing but be born into unlivable circumstances.

I suppose many filmmakers are gluttons for punishment. It never feels like the next one is any easier. Yet, there are so many other films I want to make. Even if making this film took more out of me than I thought was in me. I have a stack of scripts in various stages of completion, and I can't wait to start working on the next project. If I remain in Colorado, I plan to continue developing a short film that takes place sometime after the last assimilation school was closed in the United States. It follows three young women from different tribes, who find their schoolmistress has committed suicide. While she was a harsh, even vicious woman, her death brings new problems as the three must decide what to do from there. One has no tribe to which to return, and the other two don't know to where their respective tribes have been forcibly relocated. As it is a film about Native American women, and I am not a Native American woman, I intend to find a writing partner from one of the tribes native to Colorado with whom to collaborate.

This is the first of a planned trilogy of stories about spaces of oppression/destruction. Each is intended to be roughly 25-30 minutes and will be packaged as a feature upon completion. If I do not remain in Colorado, I intend to pursue one of the other stories. The second story is about 2 young men, both slaves, who are abandoned at their plantation as the owner flees from the approaching Union Army. The young men explore the many places previously off limits to them. As they do so, they begin to fall in love. Their relationship is naturally precarious. They have no idea of what will happen if the Union army does arrive, and traveling north on their own is unsafe. Even if they reach a place that will not harm them for being escaped slaves, their love for each other would likely result in imprisonment or death if it became known.

The third is set in an unidentified, forested hilly landscape during a long gray fall (the actual location is in the steep, barren hills of southwestern Pennsylvania in autumn) in which a civil war is being fought by two undefined factions. The time-period appears to be sometime in the 1990s. The story follows a raggedy middle-aged man, an outsider even within his faction, who comes across an enemy scout on patrol and they exchange small arms fire. The man strikes the scout fatally, and is suddenly praised by his comrades. His successful kill gives them cause to accept and celebrate him, but the more they applaud, the more the reality of what he has done eats away at him. The following night, a woman with a small child comes to him, stating that he killed her husband and must now provide for her and the child. He refuses, but as reality begins to dissolve around him, he is forced to confront the result of his actions.

So, despite the expected post-project sensation of having spent more of one's self than there was to begin with, I am excited to begin my next film. Buoyed by the positive responses that *The Lottery* has garnered so far, I feel more confident than ever in tackling them. Unless the world changes for the better in a million radical ways, I believe my voice can be a valuable one, if I use it as an amplifier for voices and conversations that are rarely heard.

ⁱ Byron Wolf, C. (2019). *Trump basically called Mexicans rapists again*. [online] CNN. Available at: <https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/06/politics/trump-mexico-rapists/index.html> [Accessed 8 May 2019].

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