Looking Through a Film Lens: Feminist and Queer Edition
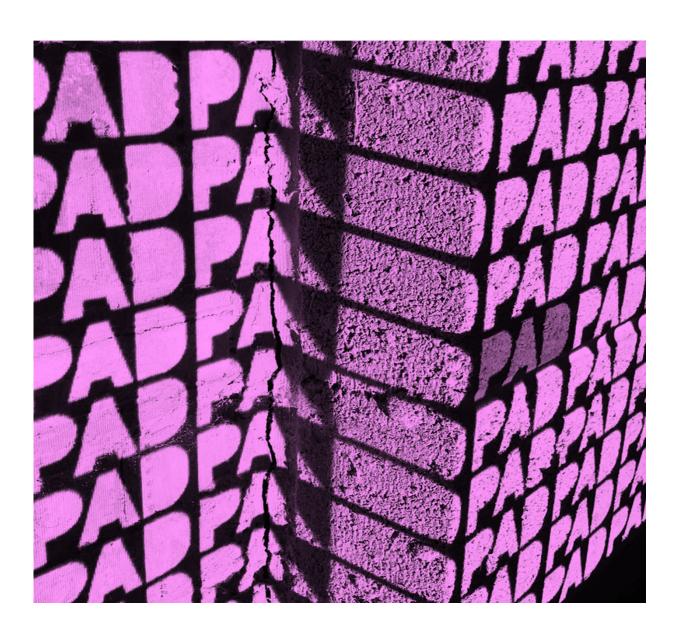
For the collaboration and collection of work I wanted to find female perspectives on female topics important in past and present media. I started this curation by questioning why certain genres and elements within the film and TV industry have inaccurate and misleading representations of gender. Focusing this collection on my own idea of gender-bleeding on screen, why within specific genres and narratives the portrayals of someone's gender are 'played upon' and misleading for an uninformed audience. In this takeover the eleven pieces of work exhibited within this eleventh edition of PAD: Perspectives in Art and Design, exhibit and discuss themes of feminism, queerness, toxic masculinity, as well as the representation of mental health and disabilities (physical and mental). Looking at these themes through a feminist and queer theory-based lens. The collection of work curated together looks over the last 100 years of film; examining how women and gender have been portrayed within different time periods, film movements and genres, noting on the overall development of gender representation in film over the last century.

I conclude this introduction to the exhibition by opening it with an outlined timeframe of key dates, genres, movements and individuals significant in the growth and development of how women and gender are portrayed and received on screen. From the collection of work within this publication there are periods and subject matters discussed in depth, and some that are not due to the current knowledge and understanding there is around these new subject matters important within the society we now live in.

Digital media has always been a reflection of society. However, like a reflection, it's not always all that it seems. The media echoes cultural, social and political news that align with the views, opinions and beliefs of the specific audiences at the time of reporting. Conventional media, like newspapers, radio, television, magazines, bring together facts, ideologies and discussions of these reporting topics. Social media has speeded up how news is received and reported. For the last decade, the film industry has represented society's transformation, trends and values even sometimes trying to warn us of what we could be capable of. Films communicate relevant and important messages on different topics to its audience, including romance, religion, family drama, social and cultural challenges. Films have the power to bring people together, however they still spread and support stereotypes that create underrepresentation of gender roles. Analysis and social theory surrounding the development of the film industry found theoretical belief of gender-bias and stereotypical representation of women on screen.

Women in film, and the media, have been misrepresented for years. Women play a crucial role in life, from an economic field to motherhood. For women to be fully aware of their potential, and their place in society, they should not be marginalised by male belief and representation. The media plays a role in spreading awareness among women, uncovering potential and challenging the male-dominated world.

Historically, women were given domestic within society while men were actively involved. Women were also rejected access to education and had limited job opportunities. Furthermore, women were excluded from public life and couldn't vote. Eventually through many historical, social, and political changes, and the arrival of feminist movements, women were given equal right to men. Although there have been vast amounts of work done by activists throughout the 20th century, women still receive stereotypical misrepresentation in the media, and in film industry.

There are two social theories that offer a better understanding of audiences' perception of gender representation in film. These theories are the social cognitive theory and the cultivation theory. Social cognitive theory claims that people start building their perceptions of the world through media consumption. For example, romantic films, they project the relationships presented in the films to real life, making assumptions about relationships. Social cognitive theory states that instead of offering a realistic representation, the media tends to encourage gender stereotypes through personality, characteristics, abilities and attitudes. The theory also states that media content can have a passive and long-lasting effect on people and their perception of reality.

Within the film industry there is a list of themes and tropes that showcase the portrayal of women's roles on screen. Primarily, women rarely take the role of a leading character. Because of this it creates an imbalance between our perception of women in film and their

roles and status. Another common way women are portrayed is by romantically linking them with the lead role. For instance, in "Independence Day", there are three leading characters, the president, a marine, and a technician. These all portrayed by male actors, while the main female characters are the three love interests of the leading male characters. Because of this, female characters were viewed as supporting characters. This typecast of female character is common within the action genre, as seen in "Transformers", "Pirates of the Caribbean" and "Indiana Jones". Finally, the third stereotypical portrayal of women on screen is as someone who needs to be rescued, a damsel in distress. Even though "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade" has a strong female character, she does not save other characters. However, in the last decade the film industry has made some progress in the representation of women. Women's portrayal as rescuers is far different from men's image of being a hero.

Women are frequently represented as over-emotional and powerless characters, with no ambition. Even films that target female audiences offer a stereotypical image of women. Though with the rise of feminism in the 20th century the film industry spreads a misrepresentation of women, assuming that audiences have a stereotypical mindset seeing men and women having traditional defined roles. One of the main factors why women receive unequal representation is because the film industry is very male dominated. Most films are written, directed, and produced by men, which leads to fewer opportunities for female perspectives. Studio executives usually work with filmmakers who have experience in the film industry, and they are usually men. Because of this, female directors do not receive the same budgets and resources. The lack of female roles could be due to, male-directed films having fewer female leads, in contrast to female directors casting more female protagonists.

The film industry offers a particular point of view of women through a patriarchal perspective. Women receive stereotypical representation to traditional roles of wives, love interests, and mothers. Opposed to this the film industry portrays women as glorified objects, entertainment and symbols of sex appeal. Because of feminist movements, gender stereotypes are being challenged, and more complex characters are being showcased and represent, for example "Barbie" and Bella in "Poor Things". Another approach to why we are seeing more female leading characters is because women are now an active part of the filmmaking process. Consequently, female directors offer audiences unbiased and realistic image of women that align with modern-day society.

4 Feminist Waves

In Western countries, feminist history is broken down into 4 "waves". The first wave lasting from the mid-19th century to the 1920's. The second wave from 1960's to the early 1980's. Third wave the mid-1990's until the 2010's. Finally, to the fourth wave we are experiencing, which is believed to have begun in the mid-2010's.

The first person to classify feminist history into "waves" was journalist Martha Weinman Lear, in 1968, in her New York Times article The Second Feminist Wave. The article indicated that the women's liberation movement was a new chapter in the history of women rights, responding to anti-feminists at the time. From this classification many feminists use and refer to "waves" when explaining their position to previous generations, or waves.

First Wave 1848-1920
The first wave of feminism refers to the fight for women's right to vote. Starting in 1848 in America, 300 women gathered to debate Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Declaration of Sentiments. The declaration outlined women's inferior status in society and demanded suffrage (there right to vote). The fight for the declaration continued for decades while in 1866, in the UK, the suffrage petition went to parliament. The wave is classed as ended in 1920, when women were granted the right to vote in the US. However, limited women's suffrage had been introduced in the UK two years earlier, in 1918.First-wave activists believed once they won, women could use the new rights to enact on other reforms in society, linked to property ownership, education, employment and more. White female leaders dominated the first movement. Included Carrie Chapman Catt president of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in the US, Emmeline Pankhurst leader of the militant Women's Social and Political Union in the UK, and Catherine Helen Spence and Vida Goldstein in Australia. This masked the recognition of non-white feminists like social reformer Sojourner Truth and journalist, activist and researcher Ida B. Wells, who fought on many fronts for anti-slavery, anti-lynching and feminism.

Second Wave 1963-1980's
The second wave corresponded with the publication of Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique in 1963. Friedan's notions raised interest in issues that outlined the women's liberation movement until the early 1980's. Such as workplace equality, birth control, abortion, and women's education. Women came together, like the suffragettes, to share experiences of oppression that were still happening after the first wave. From this it motivated public activism for gender equality and social change. As there were many issues at the time surrounding sexuality and gender-based violence. In 1970 Australian feminist Germaine Greer wrote and published The Female Eunuch. This urged women to challenge the stereotypes of gender inequality and domestic violence. The worldwide success from the publication saw the launch of shelters for women and children escaping domestic abuse. Feminism during this wave gained strength as a political force in the 1970s, as Betty Friedan,

Gloria Steinem and Bella Abzug founded the National Women's Political Caucus in 1971. The second wave saw political changes like the Equal Pay Act and Roe v. Wade (1973) court case in relation to women's reproductive freedom. Like the first wave, second-wave activism was mostly irrelevant to non-white women, those of whom faced oppression on intersecting gendered and racialised grounds. African American feminists produced their own critical texts during this time, but they didn't get as much attention as other feminists at the time. Such as bell hooks' Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism in 1981.

Third Wave 1990's
The third wave of feminism began in the 1990's. While the progress of second wave feminism achieved equality and rights for women, the movement that was emerged in the 1990's focused on confronting issues that still existed, surrounding sexual harassment and the lack of women in positions of power in the workplace. The wave is universally credited to Rebecca Walker, the daughter of African American feminist activist and writer Alice Walker (author of The Color Purple). In 1992 Rebecca White wrote in a magazine article "I am not a post-feminism feminist. I am the Third Wave." Activists of the third wave didn't think gender equality had been achieved in previous waves. Third wavers argued that women's experiences were now shaped by political, economic, technological and cultural conditions. Third wave feminism was described as individualised feminism, feminism that couldn't exist without diversity, sex positivity and intersectionality. Intersectionality acknowledged that people could experience intersecting layers of oppression due to race, gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity. The third wave also introduced movements like Riot Grrrl and "girl power". Feminist punk bands like Bikini Kill, Pussy Riot and Little Ugly Girls sang about issues like homophobia, sexual harassment, patriarchy, abuse, misogyny, racism, and female empowerment.

Fourth Wave
The fourth wave is represented by online feminism which increased in popularity in the early 2010's, with the rise in social media. Online mobilisation led to online actions including the #metoo movement. #Metoo was founded by Tarana Burke in 2006, to raise awareness and support survivors of sexual abuse. The hashtag went viral in 2017 during the Harvey Weinstein sexual abuse scandal and was over 19 million times on Twitter that year. Fourth wave feminism saw the rise in online awareness, with the details and plannings of marches and gatherings. The rise in online connection, allowed fourth wave feminist to reach out to people worldwide. Additionally, fourth wave feminists are turning their attention to the systems that allow misconduct to occur. Like their forerunners fourth wavers continue to deal with the perception of intersectionality, and fight for how the movement can be inclusive and representative regardless of sexuality, race, class and gender.

The History of Film

Development of motion picture
The first motion pictures were very simple they used a few frames of people or animals. Eadweard Muybridge's The Horse in Motion is believed to be the most famous in early motion pictures. In 1878, Muybridge set up a racing track with 24 cameras to photograph if horses gallop with all four hooves off the ground at any time. Without Muybridge's pictures, the development of film technology wouldn't be where it is today. After taking the photographs he constructed a projection machine to display them on. Muybridge built a device called the zoopraxiscope, which was considered as breakthrough for motion picture. It was Muybridge's creation that inspired Thomas Edison to study and develop his own equipment.

A lot of development in motion picture is also linked to the Lumière Brothers. The Lumière Brothers established the technical craft of filmmaking with their cinematograph projection machine. The Lumière Brothers' short films are considered as the first films of all-time. In 1895 French actor and illusionist Georges Méliès tried to buy a cinematograph from the Lumière Brothers but was refused. Because of this Méliès partnered with Englishman Robert W. Paul. Who together for the next 5 years learned everything there was to know about filmmaking and projection machines. Over his career, Méliès produced over 500 films. The first of those being The One Man Band (1900) and A Trip to the Moon (1902). His understanding of visual effects, exposure, and cinematography made him one of the greatest filmmakers of all-time.

The first film movements
The majority of film movements come from the aftermath of war and conflict, the first movements emerging in response to World War I.

Dadaism and Surrealism is an art movement that began in Switzerland during World War I in 1915. The movement rejected authority, laying the groundwork for surrealist cinema. Although Dadaism was founded 1915, it didn't receive recognition until 1920 in France. People of France had experienced disillusionment with its government and economy during and after the first world war. People in France felt the same points of conflict that prompted the French Revolution. However, after the war French people responded in a different way, expressing themselves through art.

German Expressionism is an art movement defined by monumental structures and ideas; the movement started before World War I but didn't gain popularity until after the war, like the Dadaist movement. German Expressionism changed the look and feel of cinema. German Expressionism was, gothic, dark, brooding with imagery and coloured filters. Great works of the German Expressionist movement are considered some of the earliest movies

accessible and relatable to modern audiences. The tone of the German Expressionist era set up the tropes and stereotypes for future psychological thrillers.

The Soviet Montage Theory is a Soviet Russian film movement that helped determine the principles of film editing, which took place from the 1910's to the 1930's. Soviet Montage Theory suggested that filmmakers should arrange, deconstruct, then rearrange film clips to communicate emotional to audiences. During this movement the Bolshevik government set-up a film school called VGIK (the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography) after the Russian Revolution. The practitioners of Soviet Montage Theory were the original members of what is categorised as film school.

During the development of motion picture and the first film movements there were no Hollywood studios. In America there was only Thomas Edison's Motion Picture Patents Company based in New Jersey. Most of the early film movements were European, yet America had the fastest and earliest advancements within the film industry. This was because Thomas Edison sued American filmmakers. Edison owned a catalogue of copyrights on camera technology, and if filmmakers attempted to copy his devices, he would exert his ownership with fury. To escape Edison's legal control, filmmakers ventured west to Southern California. Where in the early 1910's, Hollywood emerged as the working capital of the United States' film industry.

Pre-code Hollywood
Pre-Code Hollywood was a period in film history after the arrival of sound but before the use of the Hays Code between 1927-1934. Films produced during this period were focused on illegal matters, like bootlegging, prostitution, and murder. Pre-Code movies were wild in creativity because of them being uncensored. However, this period in Hollywood was short. In 1934 MPPDA Chairman William Hays introduced the Motion Picture Production Code which banned explicit depictions of sex, violence, and other harmful topics.

Early Hollywood and colour in film
During the 1930's and early 1940's saw some of the greatest movies produce as well as changing and developing the filmmaking process. At the end of the Pre-Code era, independent filmmaking were very few and Hollywood studios were the leading force. Hollywood studios had taken over business operations, as they conceptualised, produced, and distributed everything. Despite their enormous influence, neither "Citizen Kane" or "Casablanca" could hold up to the influence of "The Wizard of Oz" during this period. "The Wizard of Oz" wasn't the first film to use Technicolour, but it is credited to the rise in popularity of films in colour. Technicolor was revolutionary for the film industry, however the process hard, long and expensive for studios. This era saw the start of manufacturers experimenting with new processes to streamline colour photography, and overtime new technologies and techniques were created.

Wartime and propaganda films
In 1937 Benito Mussolini founded Cinecittà, a studio that used cinema as a weapon. During this time countries around the world used cinema and films to influence audiences. Wartime film is important to explore because it teaches us about how people interpret propaganda. For posterity's sake, let's define propaganda as biased information that's used to promote political points. Propaganda films came from the backlash of war and strong political leaders at the time. Propaganda films often have a negative association because they sh0w a one-sided perspective. Films from this era were one-sided as they were made to contradict the enemy of the audiences viewing the film. And over time wartime film became more nuanced.

Post-war movements
Italian Neorealism was a film movement that brought filmmaking to the streets from 1944-1960. World War II shocked Italian society socially, economically, and culturally. It took many people's lives and jobs. After the War, people needed an outlet of expression, and a place to reconstruct their new national identity.

French New Wave (1950's onwards) is an art movement commercialised by critics who were inspired by old-Hollywood techniques like editing. French New Wave followed auteur theory, that suggested that the director is the author of a film. The French New Wave was about simple narratives and independent filmmaking. Unlike the use of studio and high budgets in America at the time. The French New Wave used advanced filmmaking techniques like jump cuts and tracking shots. Which the influence of French New Wave cinema can be recognised in music videos, existential cinema, and film noir today.

Scandinavian Revival was a filmmaking movement in Denmark and Sweden, distinct from its monochrome visuals, philosophical dilemmas, and reinterpretations of religious ideals in the 1940's and 50's. Films from this movement have had an important role in cinema for over 100 years.

Bengali Cinema (West Bengal) is also known as Tollywood. Which developed arthouse films like mainstream Indian cinema. The Indian film industry is the biggest in the world. As each year India produces over a thousand feature-films.

Countries such as Japan, Iran, Great Britain, and Russia had minor film revolutions as well after World War II.

The Golden Age of Hollywood
The Hollywood Golden Age began in 1968 with the fall of pre-Code Hollywood. The Golden Age of Hollywood was all about stars and celebrities. During this time studios knew big named actors would bring audience and sell a movie. The Golden Age of Hollywood saw the

beginning of advertising, and advent of many modern-day film industry techniques. Within this Hollywood era there were many sub-eras that emerged.

Censorship
In 1934 Chairman William Hays of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) founded a production code that banned graphic scenes of sex, violence, and other illicit deeds. The "Production Code", or "Hays Code" was liable for the censorship of films for 34 years. Hays Code kept cinema tame, but it led to Hollywood romanticism. This made cinema unrealistic, and audiences were longing for unbelievable outcomes. The censorship of films was about keeping power in the hands of people with power, Hollywood studios. Although it did have some positive intentions, it was a leading factor of suppression at the time.

Film noir
Film noir is a style of film, it is defined from its moralistic themes, high contrast lighting, and mysterious plots. Film noirs was inspired by detective stories, like those of Arthur Conan Doyle and Edgar Allan Poe.

Westerns
Westerns were extremely popular in the Golden Age of Hollywood. American audiences loved stories of lawlessness and expansion. Westerns allowed repressed audiences to feel alive. As because of the censorship at the time audiences took a lot of interest into these styles of films at the time.

McCarthyism and the blacklist
In 1947 Wisconsin elected Joseph McCarthy as senator. McCarthy despised free-speech and in 1950 ten Hollywood screenwriters appear before the United States Congress House of Un-American Activities because of McCarthy's opposition against communist sympathisers. The screenwriters were fired and blacklisted from the film industry. The blacklisting ruined the careers of hundreds of writers, directors, and producers from 1950-1960. The blacklist ended when Kirk Douglas credited Dalton Trumbo (one of the most famous blacklisted screenwriters) taking back control of Hollywood.

Paramount case
In 1948, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that the five major motion picture studios at the time: Paramount, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Warner Bros., 20th Century Fox, and RKO had violated the U.S. Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890.Because of this these studios could no longer exclusively create and distribute their own films. The case changed America cinema by allowing international films to be shown and the opening of independent theatres. It also gave more freedom to show movies outside of the MPPDA ratings system.

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New Hollywood

New Hollywood films overshadowed the Golden Age of films by telling stories with darker subject matters and that were more graphic. New Hollywood saw filmmaking going into a new era by reverting to the genres of the pre-Code era, producing films within the gangster genre and sex-centric films that had previously been banned. This new era also saw the arrival of film-school taught directors like George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, and Martin Scorsese. During this era, writers like Woody Allen explored themes of existentialist cinema like what could be found in the French New Wave and Italian Neorealism. Then directors like Martin Scorsese utilised advanced framing techniques that were experimented with during the pre-war era. New Hollywood saw directors, writers and studios using the knowledge, movements and techniques that had already been done and reshaping them by using the 'best parts' of them.

Dogme 95 and independent movements

High-budget films dominated cinema after New Hollywood ended in the early 1970's. From 1975-1995 cinema became more of an exhibition than an art form. The new era produced big-budget films like "Jurassic Park" but also saw filmmakers go back to their roots and making films independently. This new era and contrasts in cinema inspired the Danish Dogme 95 movement as well as the American Independent movement (indie films). Dogme 95 was a Danish film movement that brought filmmaking back to its primal roots, by using no non-diegetic sound, no superficial action, and no director credit. Indie film (also known as late 80's/ early 90's cinema) were films produced outside of major motion picture studios. Indie films were about experimenting with new cinematic forms, pushing agenda, and making art by any means necessary.

New distribution methods

The current state of the film industry is in pieces due to a wide range of issues, including the economic impact of Covid-19, the new vast number of streaming services, (Netflix, Disney, Prime, etc.), as well as the growth of new media platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels. Over the last decade epics like "The Avengers" have performed well at box-office, but the success of big epic films has often come at the expense of medium-budget movies.

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