4:30-6:00pm, Conference Room, AD Hope 128

cinéma

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UN SOIR APRÈS LA GUERRE

un film de Rithy Panh

Leslie Barnes

Smoke and Mirrors:
Sex Work and Rithy Panh's Cinematic Image

This paper examines the narrative authority of the sex worker in Rithy Panh's *Un Soir après la guerre* (1998) and *Le Papier ne peut pas envelopper la braise* (2007), two films that counter the discourses surrounding sex work with the voices and lived experiences of individual sex workers. When read together, the feature and the documentary question the divide and hierarchy between fiction and nonfiction, both in terms of genre distinctions and in relation to the subject of each film: the reality and representation of sex work. Drawing on theories of cinema as window and mirror and developing Panh's use of windows and mirrors in each film, I argue that Panh's cinematic image of sex work challenges the assumption of a 'transparent' relationship between the cinematic production and the profilmic event, undoing the presumed links between perception, action, and effect. The extent to which this image upsets filmic norms and 'epistephilic' desire, that is, the desire on the part of the viewer to know and to connect knowing with acting, is evidenced in the films' critical and popular reception, which reveals an ongoing discomfort before the sex worker who speaks for herself.

Leslie Barnes is Associate Professor of French Studies at ANU. She is author of *Vietnam and the Colonial Condition of French Literature* (Nebraska, 2014) and co-editor of *The Cinema of Rithy Panh: Everything Has a Soul* (Rutgers, 2021). Her current project studies literary and cinematic narratives that engage with questions of sex work, mobility, and human rights in Southeast Asia. She has published on these and other subjects in *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, *Modern Language Notes*, and *Humanity*.

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