[Figure 1] Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL*, 2018, video installation and hotel, International Film Festival Rotterdam. Photo: Duncan Caillard

Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Sleep Cinema: Intimacy, Inattention, Surrealism

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In January 2018, Apichatpong Weerasethakul mounted his first *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL*, a fusion of immersive video installation with a functioning overnight hotel.[1] Staged in an upper floor conference space at the Postillon Convention Centre in downtown Rotterdam, the *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* allowed paying guests to stay overnight in a communal sleeping space accompanied by a single-channel video projection and a curated soundscape of running water and rustling leaves. Guests were free to come and go at any time, and other festival attendees were invited to watch from a viewing area positioned above the sleeping platforms, allowing them to watch both the video projection and the sleeping bodies beneath them.

SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL spatialised Apichatpong's ongoing fascination with sleep, dreaming and inattention. A range of his feature films idiosyncratically included long takes of characters sleeping, opposing conventional narrative cinema's focus on active, goal-oriented protagonists. Sleeping bodies recurred throughout Apichatpong's narrative films, which devoted unusually long amounts of time to characters drifting between various states of consciousness. His second feature film, *Blissfully Yours* (2002), ended with a four-minute shot of one of his characters falling asleep, while the plot of *Cemetery of Splendour* (2015) circulated around a group of Thai soldiers paralysed by a mysterious sleeping sickness, depicting the soldiers bodies at rest in a hall filled with hypnotic shifting lights. Apichatpong's fascination with sleep was even more pronounced in his short film and video installation work. In his short film *Morakot (Emerald)* (2007), the camera floated through an abandoned Bangkok hotel, looking out onto empty, unmade beds as a visual reminder of Thai urban decay. His silent, three-channel installation *TEEM* (2007) showed his then-boyfriend Chaisiri Jiwarangsan waking up in the morning—restaging Andy Warhol's *Sleep* (1963)—while other exhibitions from *Primitive* (2009) to *For Tomorrow and For Tonight* (2011) included footage of sleeping bodies arranged throughout the gallery space.

Yet Apichatpong's fascination with sleep extended beyond the diegetic contents of his film works and into his very understanding of the architecture of cinematic attention. He had often noted his comfort with spectators sleeping through his lethargic, dream-like feature films, stating in 2011 that 'I am fine when people say that they fall asleep in my movies. They wake up and can patch things together in their own way.'[2] He reiterated this disinterest in disciplined forms of spectatorship in 2018, stating his desire 'to have a cinema specifically for sleeping. I feel because, for me, over the years I have become less and less interested in watching movies. Even [in] my own films, I sleep.'[3]

For Apichatpong, sleep and dreaming were indistinguishable from cinematic experience itself. He stated, 'I always believe that we possess the best cinema. We don't need other cinema, meaning that when we sleep, it's our own image, our own experience that we edit at night and process.'[4] By collapsing ontological distinctions between the collective

experience of cinema and the personal experience of dreaming, Apichatpong proposed a cinema that was both *a cinema of sleep* (within which sleep is represented), and *a cinema that was sleep* (in which sleep was intimately and inextricably involved in the spectatorial process).

In this article, I investigate the issue of sleep within Apichatpong's cinema and explore its implications for his reimagined architecture of cinematic attention. This analysis is derived from fieldwork completed in 2018 at the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) and incorporates elements of my own embodied experiences within the space. My focus here is not on a representational analysis of sleep within his filmmaking, but rather centres on sleep as an embodied spectatorial condition in-itself, a style of viewing in which the sleeping body of the spectator is not only permitted but encouraged by the film style itself. As Apichatpong's work constantly strayed between feature film, short film and installation, at times integrating multiple artistic conventions in the process, my analysis is intentionally cross-media and interdisciplinary, and addresses the structural similarities between his modes of practice. By addressing the interdisciplinary yet structural resonances in Apichatpong's practice, I argue that his relaxed and idiosyncratic understanding of spectatorship substantially reshaped our understanding of film experience and opened up new avenues for interpersonal intimacy and political resistance.

Practicing Sleep Cinema: *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* (2018)

Apichatpong's *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* was an outworking of Apichatpong's long-term relationship with the International Film Festival Rotterdam, and was open to the public over five days in the January 2018 edition of the festival. Staged in a conference space on an upper floor of Rotterdam's Postillon Convention Centre, the *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* cost between €75 and €150 per night. Guests stayed in a communal sleeping space segmented into individual 'sleeping pods' that were made from mesh screening and semi-transparent privacy curtains suspended by a grid of metal scaffolding at varying heights from the floor. From one of the rooms, a large window—which was covered at night by thick stage curtains that blocked out external light—looked out onto the city street a few levels below. A large, double-sided circular screen suspended by wires between the window and the sleeping structure was visible from both inside the installation space and from the street outside [figure 1]. A viewing platform was positioned on an upper floor on the opposite side of the room with seating freely available to hotel guests and the general public. A private bar and a set of temporary showers were installed in a foyer outside the main screening space, where a communal breakfast was served in the morning.

A video was continuously projected throughout the duration of the installation, with a short break between 2:00pm and 4:00pm each day to clean and reset the space for the next night's guests. In contrast to Apichatpong's usual work (which prior to 2018 was almost exclusively shot and set in Thailand), the footage projected onto the screen was sourced from the Dutch EYE Filmmuseum and the Netherlands Institute of Sound and Vision, featuring archival footage of boats, water, clouds, sleeping people and sleeping animals.[5] There was no discernible narrative or signifying logic between the pieces of archival footage, which were edited through a process of association, cutting between shots of clocks, boats on rivers, churches in the European countryside and sleeping animals without any immediately obvious links between the sequence of images. This video projection was paired with a looped soundscape of wind, rustling leaves and ocean waves prepared by Apichatpong's regular sound designer, Akritchalerm Kalayanamitr, reflecting the mood and contents of the found footage on screen. In concert, these sounds and images created a soothing spectatorial environment, and, as there was no evident logic governing the montage on-screen, spectators could fall asleep at any time without missing relevant information. Instead of demarcating narrative progression, the footage on-screen paired with the soundscape to create a frictionless space in which attention was optional and the spectatorial experience was not contingent on the actual contents on-screen.

Furthermore, the structure of the sleeping pods visually interfered with the spectators view of the screen [figure 2]. The sleeping pods were rudimentary: each platform contained a bed, side table and lamp, with a single geometric structure comprised of scaffolding that supported the pods at the centre of the room. Rather than face the same direction, the beds were positioned at a 45-degree angle to the screen, with views obscured by other parts of the structure. This meant that guests had a perpetually disrupted view of the screen. In addition to this structural obscurity, the walls of the installation space were made from a polished wood that curved as it connected with the double-height roof made from the same finish, resembling the interior inverted hull of a ship. The effect at night, when the screen became the dominant light source in the room, cast distorted reflections across the polished surfaces of the walls and roof that were visible from the beds. Although a small viewing space was set up at the front of the room with bean bags to allow guests to watch the screens directly, the primary form of participant engagement with the screen was from their beds via the indirect light of the reflections.

SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL played with transitions and permeable divisions between interior and exterior space. Guests were free to come and go at their leisure, meaning that there was regular traffic between the screening space, the bar area and the outside world. Although each bed was propped up on its own platform, the absence of walls and the thin

metal struts of the scaffolding created a permeable boundary between each sleeping pod and other spectators in the rest of the space. Even while sleeping with privacy curtains, sleepers were always visible to others from an observation deck on a mezzanine, from which members of the public could attend the installation between 4:00pm and 10:00pm each day.

As the scaffolding intentionally obstructed my view of the screen from my bed, I found myself looking around the space at the other sleepers, listening as they whispered to one another. For visitors on the mezzanine level above, the scaffolding structure partially blocked their view of the screen, directing their attention down towards the metal structure and reclining bodies contained within it. Expanding the layers of observation of *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL*, the circular screen was double sided and positioned in front of the window, meaning that the images were constantly visible to passers-by outside. These carefully orchestrated conditions exposed overnight guests from all directions: to the light of the projections, the looks of their fellow guests, the spectatorship of visitors in the upper level, and the attentions of pedestrians on the street.

I regard three features of Apichatpong's sleep cinema to be particularly significant. First, by de-centring the screen within the space and implementing circumstances that allowed spectators to drift in and out of the space, and between states of consciousness and unconsciousness, Apichatpong decentred the spectating subject within his sleep cinema. This open structure and 'drift' contrasted with the conventional organisation of mono-directional spectatorship in Western cinema. Second, the *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* was arranged in such a way that guests were repeatedly exposed to other guests and viewers within the installation, producing a state of heightened vulnerability and intimacy between them. Whereas conventional cinema directed attention away from other spectators toward the screen, Apichatpong's sleep cinema encouraged guests to spectate on each other. Finally, by using seemingly arbitrary footage and allowing spectators to make free associations between them, Apichatpong's sleep cinema created a space of epistemic freedom for spectators, surrealistically opening them to new, disordered organisations of meaning in which they freely associated between the imagery, reflections and experiences within the space. Together, Apichatpong's cinematic divergences radically reorganised the conventional architecture of cinematic attention and established new forms of spectatorial participation.

[Figure 2] The projection screen at the front of the *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL*, (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2018) video installation and hotel, International Film Festival Rotterdam. Photo: Duncan Caillard

Inattentive Cinemas

Upon checking into the *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL*, guests were provided a selection of hotel accoutrements: a towel, single use soaps and shampoos, bottled water, a bar menu and, interestingly, a blindfold. Although the inclusion of the blindfold was seemingly unremarkable given the hotel setting, it also signalled *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL*'s opposition to the conventional structure of cinematic attention and subjectivity. Rather than demand constant attention, Apichatpong's sleep cinema asked its guests to look away. By giving guests the means to block visual perception—an experience ordinarily at the heart of cinema itself—Apichatpong's sleep cinema decentred active, attentive subjects within its apparatus and replaced them with a partial and distracted spectator, free to come and go at their own leisure. By relaxing the conventional demands of viewing by allowing spectators to drift between consciousness and unconsciousness, presence and absence, *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* modelled a form of cinema in which human subjects were either

[Figure 3] The sleeping pods of *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL*, (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2018) video installation and hotel, International Film Festival Rotterdam. Photo: Duncan Caillard

decentred or absent, and within which the spectator's apprehension of the work will always be incomplete.

Over the past several decades, numerous artists associated with contemporary arts, performing arts and cinema have experimented with spectatorial attention through excessive duration. In 1963, John Cage staged a complete rendition of Erik Satie's *Vexations,* a musical work organised around a short theme that was repeated 840 times in succession. The performance lasted from 6:00pm to 12:40pm the following day and was performed by twelve pianists, who rotated throughout the night.[6] In his description of the event, Justin Remes noted that spectators came and went freely throughout the performance, or engaged in other activities such as 'eating, drinking, whispering, reading, writing, and sleeping.'[7] In 2015, composer Max Richter performed his eight-and-a-half-hour piece *Sleep* for the first time live over BBC Radio 3, a performance he has since restaged to overnight audiences across the world. Composed in conversation with neuroscientific research, Richter's *Sleep* was designed to create the ideal auditory conditions for its listeners to sleep, through slow pacing,

rhythmic repetitions and low auditory frequencies. Richter's performance inverted the conventional organisation of attention within Western art music, turning away from disciplined expectations of attention toward more relaxed and sensuous forms of spectatorial participation.

In its unprecedented experimentation with duration, Warhol's *Sleep* (1963) initiated a movement of extreme durational filmmaking and launched an aesthetic fascination with sleeping bodies. As Adam Sitney argued in his history of American experimental filmmaking, Warhol 'was the first film-maker to try to make films which would outlast a viewer's initial state of perception', producing a work completely incompatible with the hyperattentive conditions of contemporary spectatorship.[8] For Sitney, Warhol's *Sleep*'s slow pace and absence of visual action served as a profound reorienting purpose for spectators and allowed 'the persistent viewer [to] alter his experience before the sameness of the cinematic image.'[9]

We can see similar structural resemblances between *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* and Christian Marclay's *The Clock* (2010), a 24-hour montage of clocks appropriated from film history edited together to present the clock-time of the place in which it was exhibited (for example, an on-screen clock will read 11:46 at 11:46pm). Like *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL, The Clock*'s excessive runtime exceeded the attention spans of its spectators and could never be fully appreciated in one sitting. Unlike *The Clock*, which presented a play of recognition for attentive spectators that Julie Levinson described as both 'a riveting game of "name that movie"' for cinephiles, the images of *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* was not organised with any obvious narrative, formal or logical connections between them and as such did not offer the same pleasures for cinephiles, encouraging instead a relaxed indifference to the contents on-screen.[10]

We can further situate the inattentive form of spectatorship of sleep cinema within the histories of Thai cinema, which decentralised the position of the disciplined spectating subject within the cinematic apparatus. Apichatpong's filmmaking was intimately entangled with this Thai cinematic tradition alongside animistic traditions of the Isaan region in northeast Thailand—with apparitions, reincarnations and monstrous spirits serving as key motifs across his oeuvre. Also, Apichatpong's relationship with animism inflected the spatial and spectatorial conditions of his films.[11] Within northeast Thailand, there was a practice of conducting film projections as offerings to spirits at local shrines, which in contrast to commercial cinemas that charge for (human) admission, were paid for by petitioners as part of a transaction with local spirits in return for supernatural intervention in personal problems (such as help conceiving a child, assistance with an exam, or winning lottery numbers).[12] As Richard Lowell MacDonald observed, 'the film show is itself a medium of exchange and ritual action… a vehicle through which a ritual transaction is conducted with

a powerful supernatural being linked to a specific sacred place where the screening occurring.' As a result the sponsor of each screening rarely requested specific screenings and they frequently do not attend them in person.[13] Rather, these screenings were exhibited primarily 'for' spirits. Human spectators were decentred as the viewing subjects within the apparatus of Thai animistic cinema. MacDonald further observed that the human spectators of these screenings were usually itinerant workers found on the street at night—motorcycle taxi drivers, hawkers, laborers and the homeless—who would only stay for part of the screening.[14] These screenings were commonplace in Isaan and often took place at a shrine adjacent to Khon Kaen University (Apichatpong's alma mater), placing this comfortably within his sphere of experience.

Similar to these animistic screenings, Apichatpong's *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* structurally decentred spectating subjects, making it impossible for them to apprehend the entirety of the projected video work. The video projection was non-repeating and featured 120 hours of archival footage such that no two moments within *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* were identical. Echoing Nancy's metaphor of a boat gently leaving its moorings, marketing material for the installation emphasised the impossibility of fully experiencing the video, stating that '[j]ust like one can never step into the same river twice, any instant in the *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* [was] as unique as it [was] ephemeral.'[15]

SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL allowed for both attentive and physical drift, allowing its guests to move freely throughout the space at their own leisure. During my stay, I spent approximately thirty minutes at the start of the night watching the screen directly. Its images appeared unaffiliated from one another: underwater seaweed rocking at a gentle pace with the tide, black-and-white footage of a puppy waking up, an alarm clock, a puddle in the Dutch countryside adjacent to a forest, a small church sitting in a field. Accompanied by the atmospheric sounds of flowing water and wind coming from the speakers, I found the ritual experience of watching the screen to be calming, and found my thoughts drifting to other things: what would I see at the rest of the festival? Where would I travel after my fieldwork? Where would I go for dinner? Like the montage on-screen, my thoughts were disintegrated, drifting from the seemingly disordered combination of images on-screen to other, equally unpredictable thoughts of my own. After thirty minutes, I accepted that the images would not radically change or coalesce into something symbolically greater than what I had already experienced, and I left my place at the front of the room and went to find a nearby restaurant. After an hour away, I returned to the space and lay on my bed, watching the reflections of the screen on the ceiling, before gradually falling asleep. Rather than attracting my attention, the screen of the sleep cinema repelled it, insisting upon the textual irrelevance of its own contents except as an atmospheric presence.

Collective Drift

SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL challenged the basic structure of conventional cinematic attention by removing the attentive subject from its centre. Dominant Western theories of cinematic experience presumed an active and continuous subject, embodied by the subject-centred apparatus theories of Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz and the practices of ideological critique that followed them. Against this approach, sleep in Apichatpong's oeuvre marked a partial disappearance of subjectivity and consciousness, the body giving up its status as an active, perceptive being. Martin Fuller argued, 'One thing that sleep seems to lack is a subject. The sleeper becomes a null field, a placeholder for a thinking being, something that will come back to its senses in due course.'[16] Fuller's understanding of sleep as an absence of subjectivity echoed Jean-Luc Nancy, who wrote that while sleeping,

> 'I' no longer exist, or else 'I' 'exist' only in that effacement of my own distinction. In my own eyes, which no longer look at anything, which are turned toward themselves and toward the black spot inside them, 'I' no longer distinguish myself.[17]

According to Nancy, a sleeping body ceased to be a subject and assumed the status of an object, something helpless and inert. He compared this state to drifting or sinking—as if floating on a body of water—in which 'everything has become indistinct… The boat gently leaves its moorings, and drifts.'[18] Similarly, Surrealist André Breton described the experience of dreaming as one in which you 'Let yourself be carried along, events will not tolerate your interference. You are nameless.'[19] Although I disagree with Nancy's assumption that sleep is a null field of perception, I nevertheless agree that sleep undermines our assumption that the spectator is a stable, continuously perceiving subject within cinema.

In place of subject-centred linear narrative, *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* provided an experience of collective drift. Across public statements on his work, Apichatpong described cinema as 'a vehicle transporting the audience to uncharted territories', noting that '[s]ometimes it is just beautiful to look and not think—like when you journey to a foreign land. Sometimes you let your mind drift off, so there are double narratives going on. That's very interesting to me.' [20] Rather than being a solitary experience, the experience of drift could also function as an intimate moment between bodies. As Nancy wrote, '[s]leeping together comes down to a sharing of inertia, an equal force that maintains the two bodies together, drifting like two narrow boats moving off to the same open sea.'[21]

We see similar understandings of drift manifest within surrealistic film practice.[22] As a young man, Breton would visit the cinema without checking what was screening or what time the movie was due to start, and then he would leave the screening at any point to visit

another cinema. In contrast to conventional linear spectatorship, Breton stated that he and his friends '[appreciated] nothing so much as dropping into the cinema when whatever was playing, at any point in the show, and leaving at the first hint of boredom—of surfeit—to rush off to another cinema where we behaved the same way.'[23] Breton described this cinematic experience as 'magnetizing', as a chance operation free of deliberation or judgments in which spectators gave into an experience of disorientation.

Apichatpong's *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* played into this metaphor of sleep as a sea-borne journey. The design of the room itself was structurally reminiscent of a ship: its walls were made from polished wood that curved as it connected with the double-height roof made from the same material, resembling the interior hull of boat. For Apichatpong, this hull-like interior was an important feature of the *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL*'s design, which he explained as,

> …because it is a boat [and] you are sleeping with other people in the vehicle. You go through… and that's why this image of the sea and the circle [projector screen] has so many memories and references with each people [sic] but for sure it brings back something about, how you call it, when you look through this telescope, when you see, when you explore a new territory.[24]

Rather than constructing a space of disciplined spectatorial attention, therefore, Apichatpong's sleep cinema was structured to facilitate a state of drift, allowing bodies to move freely between the space and the outside world, consciousness and unconsciousness.

As a wooden vehicle, *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* was structurally reminiscent of the wooden spaceship from his earlier *Primitive* exhibition, which he built with his teenage subjects. The *Primitive* spaceship was itself 'primitive', built from wood bent to curve into a roughly spherical shape resembling a boat. In one channel of *Primitive*, Apichatpong even showed his subjects sleeping inside the spaceship, their bodies propped against the curved sides of the ship, blanketed in red light. In an unpublished artist's statement for *Primitive*, Apichatpong compared the installation with Georges Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), as '*Primitive* [was] a meditation on those voyages in fabulous vehicles that [brought] about the transformation of people and of light.'[25] Framed through the lens of Georges Méliès' , the image of a group of people sleeping together in the sheltering hull of a vessel as they traveled to a foreign land not only reverberated through Apichatpong's own filmmaking, but also extended to the history of cinema itself stretching back to one of its earliest practitioners.

Crucially, the experience of collective drift created conditions for intimacy shared with other spectators. Despite its separation from consciousness, sleep was a fundamentally

social state of being. While sleeping, bodies existed in their most vulnerable state, losing the capacity to pay active attention to their surroundings and protect themselves from harm. Fuller wrote:

> Sleep, as with love, makes one vulnerable. This is one of its pleasures. But it is also one of the reasons that social forms arrange themselves around sleep, with those who are willing to share their somnolence, and sleep together having at least a certain trust in the cohort of others around them.[26]

Similarly, Nancy also understood sleep as a site of privileged interpersonal intimacy, stating that '[s]leeping together opens up nothing less than the possibility of penetrating into the most intimate part of the other, namely, precisely into his or her sleep.'[27]

SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL architecturally maximised the vulnerability of its guests by placing them in constant visual contact with each other and with other spectators. Although each platform housed a self-contained sleeping pod, the interlocking grid of scaffolding formed a single structure such that guests felt the reverberated movements of people in other pods. Similarly, the privacy curtains of each pod only covered the sides of each pod, thereby partially exposing their sleeping space to the view of visitors on the mezzanine level. Not only was it possible for visitors to look into the sleeping spaces of the guests, but they were actively encouraged to do so through the scaffolding's partial obscuration of the screen.

Understood on these terms, Apichatpong's sleep cinema established a space of privileged interpersonal intimacy between spectators through the shared moment of social exposure. The structure of *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* turned spectatorial attention from the screen to the presence of others sharing the space, constantly reinforcing this shared presence through moments of visual contact and physical connection.

Dreaming of Freedom

I will conclude my analysis of Apichatpong's *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* by reflecting upon its politics. Apichatpong's work was intimately entangled with Thai domestic politics, driven by acts of aesthetic resistance against authoritarianism at home and abroad. Struggles with domestic censorship has provided an important background to his work, as Apichatpong had sought creative means of imagining political alternatives to military rule whilst simultaneously balancing risks against his safety and that of his collaborators.[28] In contrast to the more obvious political representations of his other work, *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* seemed conspicuously apolitical. As I have already discussed, its footage was entirely sourced from non-Thai archives, and its contents were not organised in such a way to represent (even

indirectly) any form of enunciated political critique. Despite this, the installation's place in Apichatpong's oeuvre implied a political dimension. Following the 2014 coup d'état led by General Prayuth Chan-o-cha that toppled Thailand's democratically elected government, Apichatpong stated that the 2015 release of *Cemetery of Splendour* would be his last film shot in Thailand and that he would shoot his next film, *Memoria* (2021), in Columbia.[29] Situated in a period of artistic exile for its creator, *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* therefore demanded some form of political investigation.

Despite its association with intellectual passivity or submission, sleep also had a subtly resistive dimension. In his book *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (2013), Jonathan Crary argued that sleep formed a natural limit on continuous processes of production and consumption under '24/7 capitalism', a temporality that reduced human existence to capital subjugated logics of constant, uninterrupted productivity 'composed of incessant, frictionless operations.'[30] Sleep—in its 'profound uselessness and intrinsic passivity'—was incompatible with this arrangement, as Crary explained:

> Sleep poses the idea of a human need and interval of time that cannot be colonized and harnessed to a massive engine of profitability, and thus remains an incongruous anomaly and site of crisis in the global present. In spite of all scientific research in this area, it frustrates and confounds any strategy to exploit or reshape it. The stunning, inconceivable reality is that nothing of value can be extracted from it. [31]

In its very uselessness, sleep represented a form of passive resistance against the demands of capitalist modernity, a refusal to participate within dominant rhythms of productivity and action. By foregrounding the performance of sleep, *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* emphasised this potentiality, pushing spectators to reconsider its function in their lives and media practices.

Yet *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* also offered a surrealistic opportunity for collective dreaming of alternative realities. Apichatpong rarely differentiated between acts of sleep and dreaming, and instead understood the two states as mutually constitutive. His filmmaking was often described as formally 'dream-like', prioritising juxtapositions and incongruous events over clear lines of narrative causality and meaning. He noted the importance of dream imagery in his work as far back as 2005, associating his films with 'Dreams. Floating… free forms', stating that 'Images flashing by have more weight than a coherent narrative.' [32]

In this way, Apichatpong's sleep cinema resurrected the Surrealists' interest in the experience of otherness and the inexplicable. Breton once described surrealism as the 'prehensile tail' of romanticism, inheriting its rejection of enlightenment rationalism. [33] Spurred by the violence of the Great War and the dehumanising machinery of modernity,

the Surrealists followed the Romantics in privileging poetic imagination as a method of authentic understanding of, and existence within, the world. As Michael Richardson described:

> What the dream offered the surrealists more than anything was an experience of otherness. For them the unconscious did not simply contain the detritus of everyday life, nor was it principally the realm of repressed memory. … Dream was also—and perhaps principally—an arena of unknown experience, one that was contained within the individual, but was also projected onto the collective.[34]

Breton refused to reduce dreaming to rational interpretation, or as he described 'to reduce imagination to a state of slavery', on the grounds that '[i]magination alone offers me some intimation of what *can be…*'[35] For Breton, the fall of sleep offered an opportunity for surrender 'in order to stop imposing… conscious rhythm of [his] thought.'[36] As experiences that resisted rationalisation, dreams therefore served as vehicles for imaginative resistance against the rationalising impulses of modernity.

It was on these grounds that we can begin to understand the surrealistic political potentialities of Apichatpong's *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL*. Whereas conscious reality presented itself as a space of government censorship and control in which criticisms were silenced, dreams represented a space beyond repression that cannot be dominated by governmental control. As a form of inattentive spectatorship that prioritised the 'free forms' of dreams over stable representational contents, Apichatpong's *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* could not be incorporated into national forms of understanding as it dwelt in a space of epistemic instability. As such, rather than directly criticise the state of contemporary Thailand, the radical passivity of Apichatpong's project reflected a disengagement from the frames of national discourse itself. By prioritising collective experience over privacy, Apichatpong's *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* rejected solipsistic spectatorship and redirected attention to the coexistence of others sharing the space. By creating a space of shared vulnerability, *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* allowed space for intimate contact between strangers, thereby foregrounding ethical encounters between them.

Conclusion

SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL was originally imagined as the first of a series of sleep cinemas to be installed at later film festivals across the world. A website (https://www.sleepcinemahotel.com/) was set up in 2018, but the link is now defunct and Apichatpong has not publicly expressed any plans to restage it in the near future. Despite its

temporary appearance, *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* proposed a new structure of cinematic spectatorship and attention that radically revised the disciplined and attentive conditions of conventional cinema. This is not to say that he was wholly successful. To echo Paul Hammond's description of surrealistic cinema, Apichatpong's filmmaking practice was 'a marginal, utopian enterprise, at once scandalous and prefigurative, ludic and lucid.'[37] Just as the surrealists were committed to using cinema in unexpected or unintended ways to challenge conventional organisations of meaning and experience, *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* inverted the conventional structures of attention and proposed a new organisation of cinematic spectatorship.

Apichatpong's *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* departed from the apparatus of conventional narrative cinema by inverting dominant hierarchies of attention and textual understanding, emphasising incompletion and drift. Rather than demand an attentive and continuous spectator, *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* assumed discontinuous attention, dismantling concepts of whole or complete texts and subtracting the stable subject-spectator assumed at the centre of the cinematic apparatus. Beyond its focus on inattention, *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* provided a means of collective intimacy, sharing the vulnerability of sleeping in a public space and entering new forms of communality with other spectators. The aesthetics of sleep opened new territories for ethical encounters between spectator and performance, implicating spectatorial bodies in its unfolding and complicating distinctions between passive and active forms of participation through which new forms of political resistance were made possible.

Through these radical revisions of conventional cinema, Apichatpong imagined an alternative model of spectatorship in which communality, vulnerability and intimacy were prioritised, and cinematic experience was understood as ephemeral and unreproducible, personal yet intrinsically communal. As a vehicle of collective drift, *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* provided a means of imaginative escape from strict organisations of experience and meaning.

About the Contributor

Duncan Caillard is a PhD candidate in Screen and Cultural Studies at the University of Melbourne. His doctoral research adapts auteur theory to address empty space, silence and inactivity in contemporary art cinema, with a focus on independent filmmaking in Southeast Asia.

Notes

[1] Thai naming conventions use given names in place of family names for formal purposes, and as such I address 'Apichatpong Apichatpong' as 'Apichatpong' throughout this article, but he encourages Westerners who struggle with his name to address him as 'Joe.'

[2] Gary Carrion-Murayar, 'Interview with Apichatpong Apichatpong', in *Apichatpong Weerasethakul: Primitive*, ed. Gary Carrion-Murayari (New York: New Museum, 2011), 14.

[3] Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 'Apichatpong Weerasethakul – IFFR Big Talk #3,' interview with Chris Dercon, *International Film Festival Rotterdam*, 13 February 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMyTI5yrfk0.

[4] Weerasethakul, *IFFR Big Talk # 3.*

[5] 'CHECK IN AT THE SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL,' International Film Festival Rotterdam, published January 2018, https://www.sleepcinemahotel.com/.

[6] Justin Remes, *Motion(less) Pictures: The Cinema of Stasis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015): 32.

[7] Remes, *Motion(less) Pictures*, 32.

[8] Adam Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000* (3rd Edition) (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 351.

[9] Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 351.

[10] Julie Levinson, 'Time and Time Again: Temporality, Narrativity, and Spectatorship in Christian Marclay's 'The Clock',' *Cinema Journal* 54, 3 (2015), 89.

[11] For further discussion of animism within Apichaptong's cinema, see: May Adadol Ingawanij, 'Animism and the Performative Realist Cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul,' in *Screening Nature: Cinema Beyond the Human*, eds. Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway (Oxford: Berghan Books, 2013), 91-109, and; Andrew Utterson, 'Water Buffalo, Catfish and Monkey Ghosts: The Transmigratory Materialities of *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*,' *New Review of Film & Television Studies* 15, 2 (2017): 231-249.

[12] Richard Lowell MacDonald, 'Projecting Films to Spirits: On Shrines as Conjunctural Space and the Ritual Economy of Outdoor Cinema in Bangkok, *Visual Anthropology Review* 2 (2017), 156.

[13] MacDonald, *Projecting Films to Spirits*, 155-158.

[14] MacDonald, *Projecting Films to Spirits,* 160.

[15] 'Check in at the *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL*,' 2018.

[16] Martin Fuller, *How to Sleep: The Art, Biology and Culture of Unconsciousness* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 11.

[17] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep,* ed. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 7.

[18] Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, 1.

[19] André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, eds. Richard Seaver and Helen R Lane (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 13.

[20] Cited in Holger Römers, 'Creating His Own Cinematic Language: An Interview with Apichatpong Weerasethakul,' *Cineaste* 30, 4 (2005), 44.

[21] Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, 18.

[22] Apichatpong first encountered Surrealism while studying at the Art Institute of Chicago. His first feature film, *Mysterious Object at Noon* (2000), was inspired by the Surrealist practice of *cadaver exquis*, and he has frequently described his own work according to Surrealistic principles. Therefore, although his work cannot be strictly classified with that of the Surrealists (if such a thing is possible), we can comfortably identify its conceptual influence on his filmmaking practice.

[23] Cited in Paul Hammond, 'Available Light,' in *The Shadow and its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on Cinema*, ed. Paul Hammond (London: British Film Institute, 1978), 72-73.

[24] Weerasethakul, 'Big Talk #3.'

[25] Cited in Stuart Comer, 'Primitive (Exhibition Guide),' Tate Modern, accessed 7 October 2020, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/weerasethakul-primitive-t13564.

[26] Fuller, *How to Sleep*, 73.

[27] Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, 18.

[28] For further discussion of Apichatpong's relationship with censorship, see: Benedict Anderson, 'The Strange Story of a Strange Beast: Receptions in Thailand of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Sat pralaat*' in *Glimpses of Freedom: Independent Cinema in Southeast Asia*, eds. Adadol Ingawanij and Benjamin McKay (Ithica, New York: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2012), or; Matthew Hunt, *Thai Cinema Uncensored* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2020).

[29] Chris Dercon, Interview with Apichatpong Apichatpong, *Apichatpong Weerasethakul- IFFR Big Talk #3*, International Film Festival Rotterdam, 13 February 2018.

[30] Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 29.

[31] Crary, *24/7*, 10.

[32] Cited in Römers, Creating His Own Cinematic Language, 44.

[33] André Breton cited in Paul Hammond, *The Shadow and its Shadow*, 1-2.

[34] Michael Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), 6.

[35] André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, eds. Richard Seaver and Helen R Lane (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 14.

[36] Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 5.

[37] Hammond, 'Available Light,' 4.