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Hong’s use of the zoom in *Beach* is more assured than in *Tale of Cinema*: a tight shot begins with only Joong-rae and Moon-sook in frame and then zooms out to reveal that the hapless boyfriend is also present, the effect neatly capturing the latter’s cruel exclusion by the duo, his ‘third wheel’ status. And though the film retains Hong’s dual structure, with its inevitable reiterations – Moon-sook is alienated from her father in the first half; the woman who becomes her romantic rival is alienated from her mother in the second; and so on – there are enough felicities and mysteries to save it from *Tale’s* schematism. Joong-rae’s weeping, prostrate prayer before three bare trees complicates our sense of his character, and Moon-sook, at once humiliating and humiliated, is one of Hong’s most complex women. (Issues of trust and faith are important to the women in the film but are typically misunderstood by the men.) *Beach*, however, tilts dangerously toward literalism. A motif involving a white dog is both redundant and blatant, a needless restatement of the theme of abandonment. An earlier, more ambiguous Hong would have left uncertain the identity of the man who terrorizes Joong-rae and Moon-sook with his motorbike; an egregious insert reveals what we have already guessed. And Joong-rae’s mishap with an unused muscle that has him hobbling through the last part of the film suggests the kind of short-hand lesser artists resort to: physical disability as metaphor for psychic infirmity. Like Yong-sil in *Tale of Cinema*, Hong seems unsure that we can really understand the film.

Acropolis Cinema presents:

![Woman on the Beach](image)

*Hong Sangsoo’s Woman on the Beach*

June 19 - 25, 2020 – Acropolis Virtual Cinema

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www.acropoliscinema.com
ABOUT THE FILM

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100 min. | South Korea | 2006

Twice Told Tales
by James Quandt

*The following is an excerpt of an article originally published in Artforum, Summer 2007*

You wouldn’t want to hang out with Hong Sang-soo. So cringe-making is the Korean director’s acuity about social relations — the petty vexations, vanities, and evasions that constitute most so-called alliances — that one can only infer that he spends much of his time noting others’ foibles for use in his films. Hong never exempts himself from this inquisition; indeed, his seven features can be read, if reductively, as a project of auto-excoriation. His work teems with Hong look-alikes, alter egos, and surrogates, most of them self-absorbed, obtuse, feckless, forever doing the wrong thing: insisting on paying a host for a home-cooked meal; crying out the name of another woman in the middle of sex; drunkenly demanding a blowjob from a long-abandoned girlfriend; upbraiding or abusing servicepeople; borrowing money from a grieving acquaintance at a hospital; ignoring the reluctance, discomfort, or pain of the women they fuck. “Life is a challenge,” says Sun-young, a married woman being pursued by Kyung-soo, an actor, in the second half of *On the Occasion of Remembering the Turning Gate* (2002). “What?” obliviously replies the distracted Hong proxy, who is determined to bed her. “Do you like my moves?” he inquires once he is thrusting inside her; and when he later suffers a bout of impotence, he blithely asks, “Shall we die together cleanly without having sex?” (a proposal that gets restated by the callow male in the film-within-the-film in Hong’s *Tale of Cinema*). Kyung-soo may have memorized as a mantra a line tossed at him by James Quandt, Summer 2007

For critics who complain that by the time of *Woman Is the Future of Man* Hong had created a cul-de-sac for himself, his repetitions having become in themselves repetitive, Hong’s latest films, *Tale of Cinema* and *Woman on the Beach*, with their insiderish world of filmmakers and routine reliance on the romantic triangle, might confirm a sense of aesthetic stall. But much is new in both films, particularly the radical resurrection of a shot long abjured by contemporary directors. Not only does *Tale* introduce Hong’s first use of voice-over, typi-cally viewed as a lazy device — telling, not showing, and all that — but there is also an insistence reliance on the zoom, similarly thought slovenly. On the moral or ethical continuum for shots, the zoom stands opposite to the fixed, long (preferably distant) take, which has been assigned qualities of integrity, even purity, in its noninterventionist, ‘whole’ recording of reality. The zoom, an intrusive visual aesthetic stall. But much is new in both films, particularly the radical resurrection of a

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