

For Issue 8 of wissenderkuenste.de, filmmaker Ali Kazimi has contributed five images from an anaglyph version of his installation *Fair Play*. The principle is simple: Each stereo image consists of a pair of images: one for the left eye and the other for the right eye. All stereo viewing systems seek to isolate the images, so the left sees only the one intended for it, and the right sees the one intended for it. Our brain creates the perception of a 3D image while viewing a 2D screen by fusing these two slightly offset images together. *Fair Play* brings together all strands of Kazimi’s research including stereoscopic 3D filmmaking, stereoscopic 3D photographic history and images, as well as early twentieth-century Canadian immigration history and colonialism.



Abb. 1
Fair Play - Bunkhouse 1 - Anaglyph, 2014
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Abb. 2
Fair Play - Bunkhouse 2 - Anaglyph, 2014
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Abb. 3
Fair Play - Office - Anaglyph, 2014
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Abb. 4
 Fair Play - Stereoscope - Anaglyph, 2014
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Abb. 5
 Fair Play - Wing Sang - Anaglyph, 2014
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A chartered ship carrying hundreds of darker-hued would-be immigrants arrives on the shore of an overwhelmingly white country. Screaming headlines describe this as an invasion; nativists rally to protect their culture and their way of life. The government forces the ship to anchor a kilometer from shore and surrounds it with armed patrol. The press is barred, as are lawyers. The passengers cannot communicate with their small community on shore. With massive public support, the government is willing to ignore the rule of law.

Italy 2018? - No.

Canada 1914? - Yes, Canada!

I am a Canadian who arrived first as a foreign student from India in 1983, then went on to become a “landed immigrant” in 1989, and finally took my oath of citizenship in 1993. For ten years I dealt with and wondered about the Canadian immigration system, a system that transformed my life. Concurrently, my interactions with immigration officers led me to explore two questions: the officers’ unfettered power with regard to who gets into Canada; and how this power has literally shaped the face of

the country. Years later in 2005, I came across a surprisingly honest and self-reflexive display in the Museum of Empire in Bristol, a didactic panel declared Britain's White Colonies—Canada, Australia & New Zealand. During that time, one would have been hard-pressed to find such an overt acknowledgement in Canada and definitely not displayed on the walls of a cultural institution. That kind of owning up to the white settlers' colonial past goes against the increasingly self-declared notion that key Canadian values have *always* been inclusion and cultural diversity. In recent times, since the growth of indigenous political activism, the once radical and fringe acknowledgement that Canada was a "white settler state" is slowly entering mainstream consciousness.

Apart from their shared history of being part of the British Empire, I vaguely knew that there was an historic migratory link between Canada and India. It was through researching immigration history that I came across the *Komagata Maru* "incident." Over the next decade, obsessed with this ship, its passengers, their plight, and the social, political, and personal narratives entwined within its narrative, I set out trying to make a documentary at first, which was followed by a book and finally the stereoscopic 3D installation *Fair Play* (2014).

Fair Play: The Installation

I had completed a feature documentary film, which has had a significant impact, and I had written a critically acclaimed book as a follow-up. Hence for the centenary in 2014, I wanted to push myself to explore the margins within the margins. When a younger, second-generation South Asian friend saw and heard Jack Uppal speaking in my film *Continuous Journey*, she was astonished: "Oh my God!! He looks like my grandfather but he sounds so *Canadian*!!" Jack came to Canada as a toddler in 1926. He grew up in Vancouver and spoke with a very discernable Canadian west-coast accent. For my friend, the mere fact that an eighty-year-old Canadian could be a South Asian raised in Vancouver opened the door to a hidden era of South Asian migration to Canada.

We enter a room that is painted dark slate grey. On the opposite length is a stereoscopic 3D screen that comes down to floor level; facing it is a long bench with a stand that holds a series of 3D glasses chained to it. A seven-minute long piece set in Vancouver in 1914 unfolds. It is comprised of a series of single frames set in inside a workers' bunkhouse, an office, a bedroom in a house. It unfolds uneventfully; it has no obvious beginning or end. The eight somewhat-static vignettes draw us into the private lives of South Asians in Canada. The set pieces are evocative, enigmatic, and deliberately ambiguous; each seems to be a long silent pause after an event has happened or just before it is about to take place.

Almost always, the histories of Asian communities in Canada are siloed, giving the impression that the only interaction that existed was between their community and the white community at large. However, in 1914, Vancouver was the most diverse and multicultural city in Canada. Systemic racism meant that Asians could not enter regulated professions such as law or medicine, which fostered everyday racism allowing bars, restaurants, cinemas, and other businesses to bar South Asians at will. A close examination of primary materials in the archives revealed that Indians on occasion ate in early Chinese restaurants; they entered into business transactions with Japanese fisherman and worked in fish canneries alongside not only men from these communities but also with people from the various coastal Indigenous communities in British Columbia. Oral histories recount additional tantalizing and equally fragmentary suggestions—as, for example, that South Asian men had relationships with white women, as well as aboriginal women. The viewer can enter and leave at any moment; there is no correct way to watch the film. For some, it can be a meditative experience to watch the sequences more than once. For them, each viewing reveals new detail; the viewers collectively enter into the private spaces across time.

On the opposite side of the installation's exhibition space is a small period desk with a custom-designed stereoscope emulating one from the

late nineteenth century. However, in place of stereo views, there is a high-resolution tablet (iPad Mini Retina) on which a slide show of a collection of a hundred scanned stereo views of British India from 1908 is looped. This is colonial British India photographed with a colonial eye, for the entertainment of the British public in the privacy of their homes.

While the screen installation can be viewed publicly, the stereoscope is necessarily a personal experience. The stereoscope viewer is, however, compelled to hear the ambient sound design of Vancouver in the 1910s, while simultaneously experiencing British India in stereo 3D.

On the adjacent walls are the old colonial flags of the Dominion of Canada and British India—both drawn from the British naval standard, each made unique through the addition of the Canadian coat of arms and the Star of India.

Almost all the early immigrants were from the Punjab, and the majority were Sikhs, who continued to adhere to the distinctive identity their religion demanded: unshorn hair, neatly worn in a turban, and beards. The first Sikh temple had issued a diktat in 1908 stating that everyone was required to wear three-piece Western suit and polished shoes and to carry a timepiece. In many ways, following a long-standing strategy amongst people of color, dressing up was both an act of resistance and a way of neutralizing everyday racism.

The vignettes are moments experienced in the diaspora and not in the Punjab. Hence, I decided to use references to both Caravaggio as well as Edward Hopper to underscore the European settler context. The scene in the bunkhouse has the palette as well as chiaroscuro lighting reminiscent of Caravaggio. Edward Hopper's paintings have always been evocative of the feeling of alienation and wonder I had when I first arrived in Canada. I found the northerly light and the way it interacted with urban architecture to be so incredibly different from India. It was amazing, yet in evoking wonder, it accentuated the alienation and dislocation I felt. Similar feelings are expressed in the poetry written in Punjabi in Canada in the early twentieth century. (I use an excerpt in my film. In the face of racism in Canada, an anonymous poet says: "Tell me which shore I should go to, We strangers have no country to call our own.")

There is no diegetic sound. What we hear is a heightened internal experience of everyday sounds honing in on very specific sound: seagulls, a passing streetcar, footsteps, water dripping from a tap, a ship's horn ...

This work brings together all the strands of my research: stereoscopic 3D filmmaking, stereoscopic 3D photographic history and images, combined with a passion for sound, early twentieth-century Canadian immigration history and colonialism. I wanted viewers to collectively experience (stereoscopically) the embodied presence of these early South Asian arrivals on a large screen on one end of the space, and then, across the room, individually experience through 100 vintage stereo-views and immerse themselves in these "exotic" locales through a surprisingly immersive 3D experience. One hundred years later, digital stereography is used to pull together these seemingly disparate strands, to deconstruct and rebuild a largely forgotten history that links seemingly disparate colonies of the Empire.

The concept of "presence" has gained currency in virtual reality. However, most people forget that presence was in fact the promise of stereoscopic 3D. Scaling the projection, so that the characters would be life size, was key to allow viewers to feel that they were in the presence of the action in front of them, even if minimally. I deliberately chose to have all the action behind the screen, paying careful attention not just to depth but also to realistic roundness and volume in the bodies of the characters.

During *Fair Play's* run at *ReelAsian Toronto International Asian Film Festival*, I had a class of second-year integrated media students from OCAD University come to see the show. I noticed that even though there was no seating in this particular set up, students did not go beyond the

spot where the seat would have been. During the Q&A, I enquired about this and one of the students spoke up: she said the people were in such private intimate moments that she felt she would be intruding if she moved any closer. For me, this was an unforgettable gift! She was truly immersed. She had gone beyond the 3D glasses and had been transported to the feeling inside the piece.

I have always sought to make history engaging, emotive, and visually intriguing if not exciting. In my feature documentary *Continuous Journey*, the history of the *Komagata Maru* was brought to life using an innovative visual style. Archival photographs are animated in three-dimensional space using all the depth that creates the perception of depth beyond the screen.

Fair Play: Anaglyphs

For Issue 8 of *wissenderkuenste.de*, I have contributed five screenshots from an anaglyph version of the piece. Anaglyph viewing of 3D content goes back to 1853, and William Firease-Green made the first anaglyph 3D film in 1889. The principle is simple: Each stereo image consists of a pair of images: one for the left eye and the other for the right eye. All stereo viewing systems seek to isolate the images, so the left sees only the one intended for it, and the right sees the one intended for it. Our brain creates the perception of a 3D image while viewing a 2D screen by fusing these two slightly offset images together. In an anaglyph, one image is filtered through a color and the second image is filtered through the opposite color. In our case, the colors are red and cyan. This is an inexpensive way of generating and looking at 3D content; depth perception is often excellent. However, the trade-offs are two-fold. First, the overall color rendition suffers: there is a perceptible color cast to the image reflecting the filter colors. Second, the filters do not entirely block out the image for the opposite eye, thereby creating a “cross-talk” between the eyes. Our brains can compensate for this quite well, but over a long duration this leads to all the classic symptoms: headaches, eyestrain, and in some cases even nausea.

These frame grabs from an anaglyph version also reveal another facet of 3D: in stereoscopic filmmaking, depth in a given screen is calculated for the largest screen the image will be projected on. Consequently, the images you see have a fairly conservative depth perception when reduced to the size of an average computer screen. Nevertheless, the frame grab allows you to imagine how they would appear on a screen three to four meters tall.

There are some experimental filmmakers who have embraced the limitations of anaglyph 3D and have made celebrated work in this format. Being sensitive to poorly rendered 3D, I find films projected in the format very difficult to watch. The moving image in *Fair Play* is projected and viewed with a polarized system, the kind used in cinemas, which gives an excellent rendition of color and has very little cross-talk and is thus comfortable to watch. However, for a rendition of *Fair Play* within the context of an online journal to be viewed on a 2D computer screen, anaglyph stills provide for depth perception to be emphasized, while maintaining the installation’s search for intimacy and proximity.

Fair Play aims to be a whimsical and enigmatic immersive encounter with history and technology. A key aspect of *Fair Play* is to have the viewers feel that they are in the presence of historically accurate life-sized characters and their world beyond the screen, in order to generate an intense visceral and emotional impact ensuring that they remember this history.