

Everything Everywhere...



by Phyllis Chesler

I had such a surprisingly massive and positive response to [my article yesterday](#) about the partly naked actresses at the Academy Awards that I decided: What the Hell! I might as well say something about the film that won seven Oscars.

I watched, "Everything Everywhere All At Once," yes, I did, and I was not amused. I was not even entertained. Actually, it gave me a headache. I, for one, do not experience a non-stop series of special effects as a form of plot development. For me, rapid and incomprehensible location (multi-verses) and costume "switches," do not qualify as a deep existential statement about reality or about alternate realities.

Clearly, others do, especially those who run Hollywood.

What am I missing? Am I hard-heartedly minimizing the fact that this is an immigrant story about a Chinese family-owned laundromat, the terrors of an IRS audit, a typically agonizing

mother-lesbian daughter conflict? Did I not love Michelle Yeoh in "Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon?" Yes, I did. Am I overlooking the importance of an over-the-top film about an Asian-American family who may only seem humdrum when in fact they inhabit multiple universes and are all heroes? Do I simply not understand the significance of a giant bagel that is threatening to destroy us all? I admit it—I don't understand it. Does it bother me that there are really no characters in the film—only comic-book stereotypes. Yes, it does—even though I love the actors and actresses in the film. Jamie Lee Curtis, Stephanie Hsu, James Hong. One thing has nothing to do with the other.

Long ago and far away, I taught Maxine Hong Kingston's work ("The Woman Warrior: A Memoir of Girlhood Among Ghosts," "China Men") and Amy Tan's work ("The Joy Luck Club," "The Kitchen God's Wife.") These are works I deeply admired because their stories about Chinese women in history and as immigrants in America were breathtaking, tragic, and opened unknown worlds to their readers.

It finally occurred to me that those who made "Everything Everywhere," those who saw it, loved it and, with only a few exceptions, reviewed it very positively, might have grown up playing video games and watching action movies. Perhaps they are of a generation that enjoys sudden, startling moves, jigsaw puzzles, all manner of fragmentation, clever insider odes to other films. The need for constant stimulation, constant WHAM-BAM-SHAZAM; the need to be constantly upended, wowed, forced to make sense of the senseless—ah, that is a bit ADD-like but also very postmodern. The film must have been an interactive game for those who loved it.

I stand alone—or do I?