

PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: AGAINST THE TIDE

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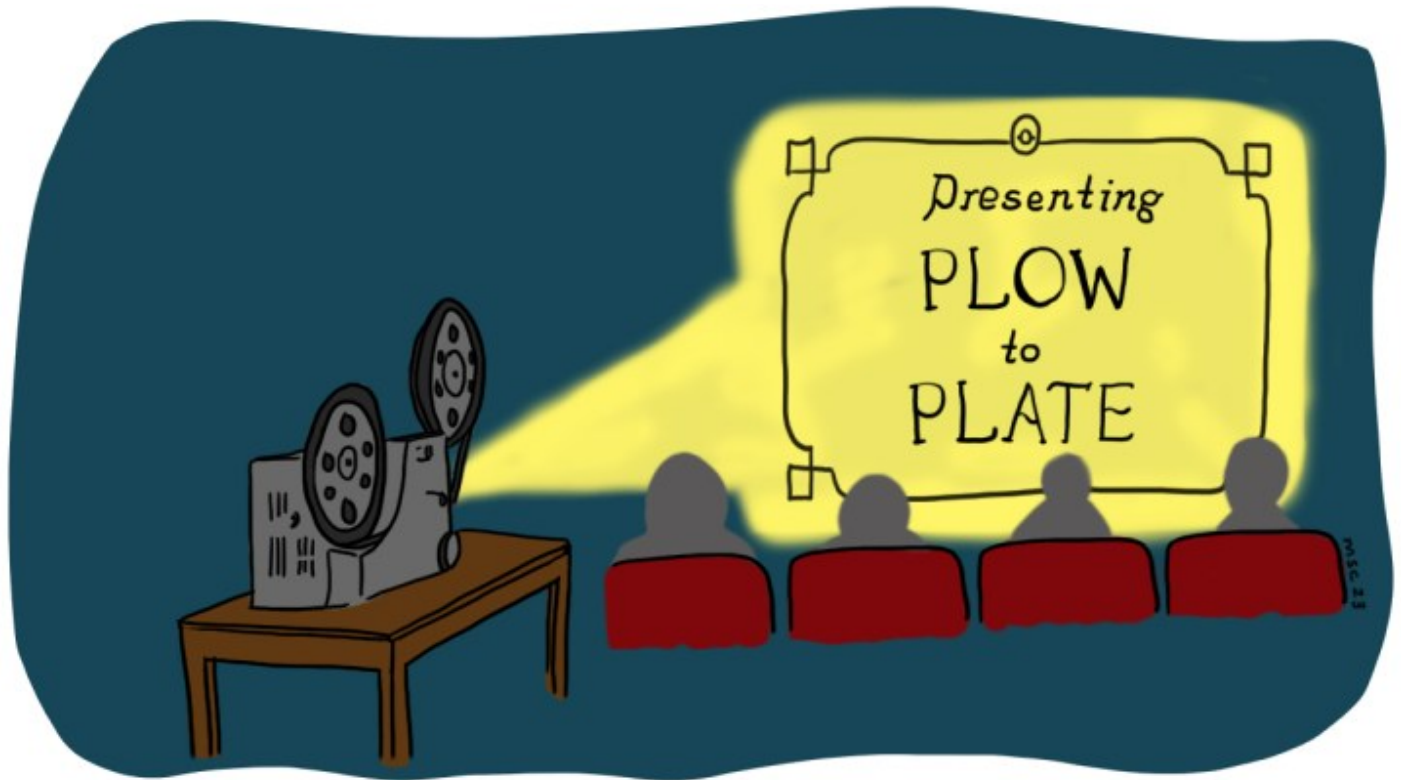


Illustration by Maggie Carson

By Adam Rabiner

Against the Tide begins in silence and darkness. Against a black background, white credits sporadically appear. Forty-five seconds in, a very soft drone is heard, then, abruptly, a newborn baby's cry, and the camera starts to roll. The baby is cradled between the legs of an older woman, who is giving him a vigorous massage and blessing him, "Mother Sea, protect your son. My little angel. My baby." Later, the child is cleansed and purified with herbal smoke from a cast-iron cauldron as his grandmother implores, "Mother be kind to your child." The following scene shows the baby's young father, a traditional fisherman named Rakesh Koli, walking along a Bombay beach at dawn, as a singsong prayer intones, "Fear not! Fear not! Fear not! There's nothing to fear. Fear not! Tides turn, fear not. Winds howl, fear not. Tides turn, fear not. A Koli knows no fear. Remember you're a Koli. You fear nothing."

This third straight screening of a Grasshopper film follows the company's style of im-

mersing viewers in the action without explanation or context. You are like that newborn babe, suddenly thrust into a world that is baffling to the point of near incomprehensibility. Who is this woman rubbing my body parts? Why are they dangling me head down on top of a wood-burning brazier? But as for that infant, eventually the pieces naturally and organically begin to fall into place. You start building a vocabulary and an understanding of where you are and the people around you: what they do, their circumstances, and therefore yours, too.

That is the challenge and the beauty of Grasshopper films. They are immersive like no others. The subjects allow you into their lives and conversations like an eavesdropping fly on the wall. But they do not answer questions, opine or explain directly to the camera what they are thinking or feeling. They simply live and share their lives in all their messy detail. This is not a stint with Anthony Bourdain on *Parts Unknown*, but a deep dive into another unfamiliar world. It is like an anthropological or sociological textbook come alive.

You almost immediately meet Rakesh's good friend Ganesh Nakhawa, who is also a seventh-generation Koli fisherman. Unlike Rakesh, who is poor and owns a small traditional boat and fishes the "shallow sea," media-savvy Ganesh Nakhawa is middle-class and studied banking in Edinburgh, but returned to Mumbai (home of the Kolis), in India to found and become CEO of BLUCATCH, which oversees a small fleet of larger commercial ships. He fishes the "deep sea," has his own website and advertises his business with a bumper sticker and baseball caps bearing the Instagram logo and hashtag #ThelastfishermanofBombay.

Rakesh lives in a typical modest compound near the water without indoor plumbing, while Ganesh resides in a modern apartment in the city. Both are married, Rakesh to a woman of similar circumstances and Ganesh to the daughter of a prosperous businessman. Rakesh has children and Ganesh's wife becomes pregnant during the film. Despite these distinctions, they lead parallel lives. Both are dependent on the vagaries and bounty of the sea, which, due to overfishing, pollution and climate change, is becoming less generous. The lack of fish threatens both businesses, and they face

similar challenges about where and how to fish, and whether to downsize. While Rakesh takes advice from his mother and the traditional wisdom of his ancestors, such as whether or not to fish during a monsoon, Ganesh relies on deep-sea maps and multiyear satellite data on ship locations. Rakesh tells Ganesh he would be happier and more successful if he returned to his roots, without the debt, credit or pressures of his large-scale enterprise. Ganesh tells Rakesh to borrow one of his boats and try his luck outside the shallows, where he can catch tuna, mackerel, salmon and other large, valuable fish.

To describe this film in much more detail is to give away too much. I want the viewer to experience the movie the way it is meant to be, as it gradually unfolds, like the baby who, over the months of filming, acquires language and begins to solve the puzzle of his existence. As you do so, the film's title takes on symbolic and economic meanings in addition to its literal one, and you come to appreciate the exhortations to live without fear more fully. The movie left me teary-eyed, something a typical sociological text cannot achieve, but one that fine cinema is always capable of.

Against the Tide Tuesday, January 13, 2026, @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html>

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@gmail.com.

From October 2025 through March 2026, Plow to Plate is exclusively featuring Grasshopper Film documentaries.

Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina.