To the judges:

The ten articles I am submitting to you demonstrate the breadth, wit, intelligence, and feistiness of Stephanie Zacharek's film criticism. Week after week, as the chief film critic at the *Village Voice*, Zacharek treats her readers to learned yet approachable considerations of the films that seem to her that week's most urgent. She does so with a rare attentiveness to the actual experience of watching the films: To read Zacharek's evocations of a film's feeling and texture, its performances and design, is to feel as if you're already there in the theater. Zacharek can mount a sharp argument about aesthetics even as her writing proves to be an aesthetic event itself.

Zacharek will champion a deserving blockbuster, a curious indie, a challenging documentary, the playing-on-one-screen-only revival. While her elbows can be sharp, and her pans illuminating, most of the reviews I've included in this nomination are of films that, as Pauline Kael might have put it, turned her on. Never cynical, always open-minded, Zacharek is courageous in her willingness to love the movies she writes about. Her celebration of *Top Five*, Chris Rock's comeback comedy, acknowledges the film's imperfections while also toasting everything in it that moved and cheered her during what had been an especially hard week in New York City. The piece is stirring, deeply connected to the cultural moment. In it, Zacharek richens her readers' own encounter with the art.

Our readers have come to expect to be stirred by Zacharek's reviews. Perhaps the most potent of this year's pieces is her re-appraisal of *A Hard Day's Night* on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary. As always, Zacharek paints the film's look, feel, and craft, but she also writes movingly of the spell that it has held over her for the better part of her life – and of what its youthful madness now means to someone with, as she writes, “knowing that there's more of my life behind me than ahead of me.” The review is standout criticism as well as a wise and vital treatise on aging and memory.

That enthusiasm and that urge to take art personally also stamps Zacharek's reviews of *Love Is Strange*, in which she wrestles with the grim realities of New York real estate, or of *The Missing Picture*, a Khmer Rouge documentary built around puppets. Reviewing *Under the Skin*, she amusingly commiserates with the men seduced by the film's sexy, flesh-harvesting alien: “We're on their side — we can't blame them for falling for this not-quite-Scarlett Johansson, because we've fallen, too.”

That review, and others here (*The Immigrant*, *Mr. Turner*), suggests that Zacharek is very much a sensualist. But she doesn't just evoke the powers of the movies. She also digs deep into just how the movies summon up that power. I have included in this submission her penetrating essay about the joyousness of the violence in the little-seen *John Wick*. She opens with the admission that there's too *much* violence in the movies, in general, before getting to the root of what makes the shootouts and fisticuffs in *this* movie a grand exception.

Another essay here showcases another uncommon attribute of Zacharek's: humility. In “I'm Trying to Love Wes Anderson, That Miniaturist Puppet-Master” Zacharek examines the film of a widely admired director she has never admired much herself. Rather than dismiss the work of Wes Anderson, Zacharek

examines what it is in the films that she does *not* respond to. She demonstrates here – as she does every week in print, on our website, and the podcast she co-hosts – that the critic has a responsibility to address her audience not as if she's some singular authority. Instead, she as an engaged, honest, informed individual, restless in her drive to share what matters to her most.

I hope that you enjoy these pieces as much as I enjoyed editing them.

Sincerely,

Alan Scherstuhl
Film Editor, *Village Voice*