

# Eye Candy

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## Editor's Note

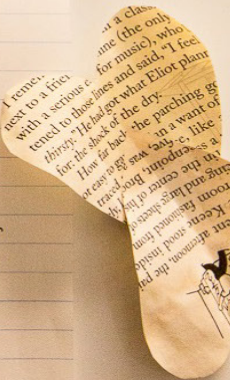
We are honored to present to you EyeCandy Volume 34: Home! This magazine has been both a privilege and a responsibility that our staff has been crafting since day one of the school year. All but a few of EyeCandy's previous members graduated or moved on to new things, meaning that our team had to grab the publishing bull by its horns in order to craft the magazine you see in front of you. Between financing, designing, and publishing, the journey to create Volume 34 has been both vigorous and tremendously rewarding. It's fitting that a publication about providing fresh analyses and perspectives to view media was put together by a team learning brand new lessons themselves.

We acknowledge that "home" is a loaded word. What that word means is so unique to each viewer with its own set of connotations. Our authors and designers took "home" to heart when crafting the magazine you see in front of you. Through explorations of the intricacies of hometowns, family dynamics, found family, and what it means to call someplace home, we hope to create a literary space where one can safely contemplate what that word means to you and what it could look like in the future.

Welcome Home  
and  
Happy Reading!

Amelia York  
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Lauren  
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Editor



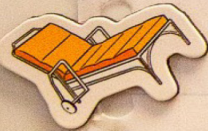
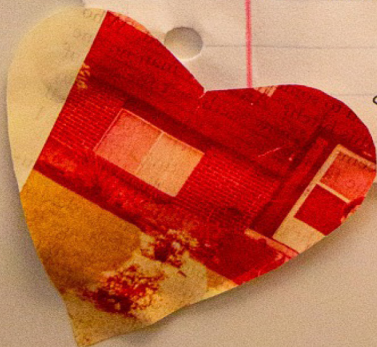
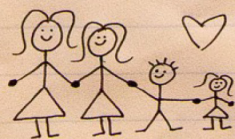


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(OR IS THERE?)

XOXO,  
EYECANDY



# EYECANDY CLASS OF 2024



*Moises  
Barajas*



*Cyrus  
Basharkbah*



*Alexandria  
Boettner*



*Cristian  
Chavez*



*Mike  
Collier*



*Avella  
Degennaro*



*Ava  
Fountain*



*Gabby  
Goss*





*Vivian  
Hawkins*



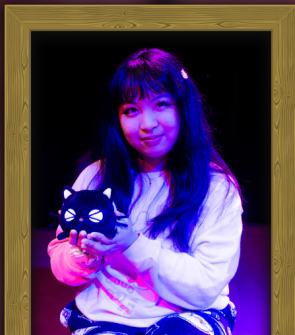
*Edie  
Irving*



*Caira  
Jordan*



*Rose  
McCullough*



*Jazmine  
Noguera*



*Katherine  
Patterson*



*Elle  
Roberts*



*Xion  
Sarte*



*Franny  
Trinidad*



*Alex  
Vargas*

## **NOT PICTURED:**

Lemon Huynh, Ainsley Kohli, Charlotte Magee  
Kylie Pettis, Maryam Sadeghifard

# EYECANDY 2023-2024 STAFF



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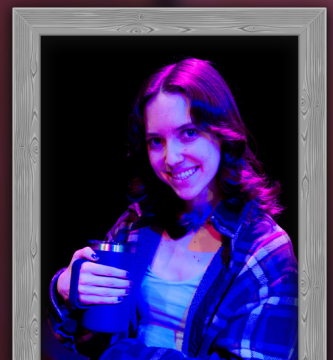
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# Framing Siblinghood

Written by Gabby Goss and Designed by Edie Irving

Nothing drives a plot quite like sibling rivalry. There are few people in this world who will go from screaming at you one minute to shamelessly asking for a ride to their friend's house the next. But few people in this world who would lay hands for you more quickly or pray for the downfall of your enemies quite like a sibling. As an older sister, I certainly understand this, and I believe that Jo and Amy March of *Little Women* (2019) are two other sisters who understand this well.

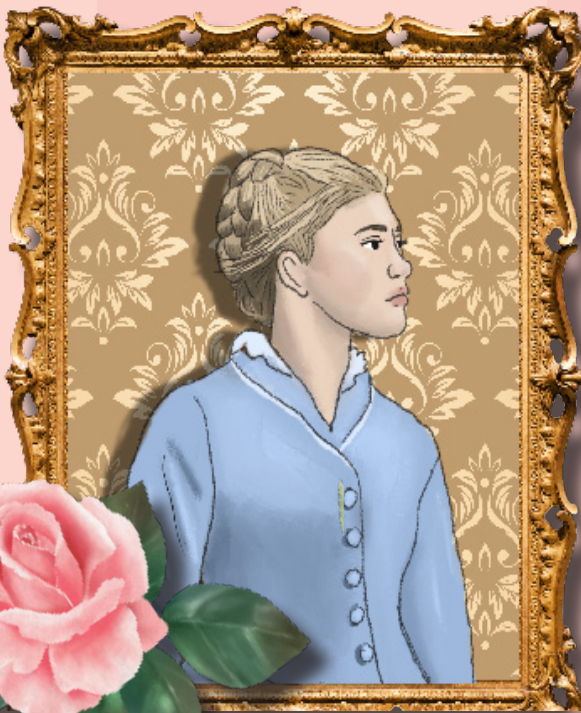
This complicated and ever-present love-hate dynamic that is so universal fascinates moviegoers of all sorts, siblings and only children alike. While we don't know quite what it is that motivates us to fight with but simultaneously care for our siblings the way we do, we can



look to films to help us make sense of this interlaced dynamic. For many people, siblings are the only people who have been by their side since the beginning.

*"For many people, siblings are the only people who have been by their side since the beginning."*

They are often the only ones who truly understand your lived-experiences as they have endured the same unique traumas and upbringing as you. Jo and Amy, two of four sisters from the March family in *Little Women*, are depicted as having a tumultuous sister dynamic. They fight over the same boy and invoke a love triangle of sorts throughout the

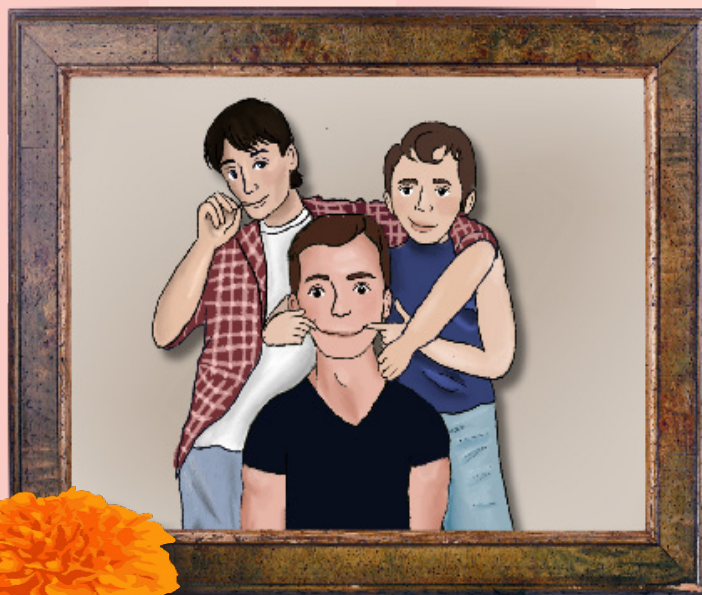


film with Amy going so far as to light the book her sister wrote on fire. But true sisterly love is revealed when Amy falls through the ice on a frozen pond, and Jo comes to her rescue. The pair then reconnect over this sudden flash of mortality and fear of losing each other. This duality of love and hate perfectly captures the essence of being a sibling. Throughout the duration of the film, the March sisters face enormous challenges and undergo various struggles as they come of age. Ultimately, it is their sisterhood and togetherness in the face of difficulty that binds them together. Siblinghood in cinema often represents a sort of home far greater and stronger than a physical space.

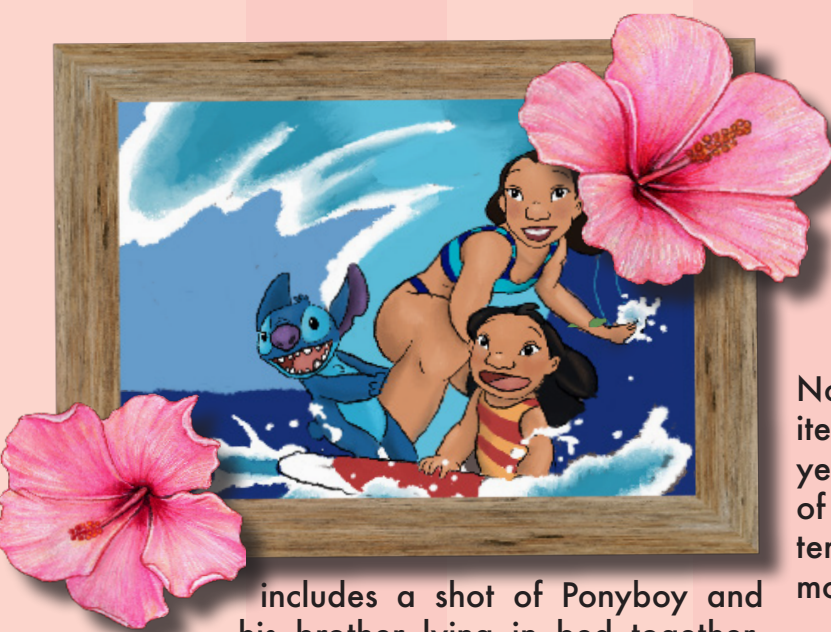
If *Little Women* is a testament to the power of sisterhood, Francis Ford Coppola's 1983 screen adaptation of *The Outsiders* provides a powerful addition to this fascinating display of brotherly love. The central family in the film, the three Curtis brothers, all have a sense of emotional maturity about them. Their backstory reveals that the unexpected death of their parents left them to their own devices at a young age, leaving the eldest to assume a parental role at home. The level of responsibility that the brothers possess makes for an interesting dynamic in which they are both emotionally grown up and stunted at the same time. Their worldview is not shaped by a typical homelife with two present parents and a stable routine. Instead, their home is marked by dysfunction in an environment filled with teenage boys. The house they live in is devoid of guidance from the typical parental figures, emphasized by the eldest brother being forced to step in as the guardian. His personal gaps in knowledge and his own room for maturity structures the Curtis home as a space of independence and self-discovery in which each of the brothers are forced to create their own definition of home within their found family.

For the Curtis brothers, their sense of home revolves around their reliance on each other and the friends they choose to call their kin.

*"For the Curtis brothers, their sense of home revolves around their reliance on each other and the friends they choose to call their kin."*



Johnny, Ponyboy's closest friend, comes from an abusive home. His parents are alcoholics who are alluded to be emotionally absent from his life. Johnny sources his most genuine feelings of comfort and safety from the boys who look out for him. The love he lacks from parental figures is supplemented by that of the friends he sees as brothers. In fact, all of the boys in the tight-knit Greaser friend group show a deep love for every one of their own. *The Outsiders* was actually criticized for its outward showcase of close male platonic and familial relationships. Coppola admittedly cut particular scenes out for fear that audiences would interpret them as homoerotic. An extended cut of the movie



This girl wasn't just my sister; she was my responsibility. I was her most direct role model, advice giver, and confidant. It's a dynamic that is hard to explain to those that haven't lived through it. I often felt like a stand-in third parent: sometimes by choice and sometimes by circumstance.

No matter how many disagreements or stolen items of clothing I've undergone in my first 16 years of sisterhood, I wouldn't trade that part of my identity for anything. Being an older sister has formed my personality and worldview more than anything else.

includes a shot of Ponyboy and his brother lying in bed together, sharing a deep conversation. This interpretation of love was rarely depicted on screen at the time, mainly in fear of showcasing emotional vulnerability between men in a family. Regardless, the Curtis brothers certainly struck a chord with audiences as their closeness sends a message that brotherly love is not just okay but even a lifeline for many.

When I was four years old, I became an older sister. I, for one, was not happy about this new development that rendered me the center of my parents' universe no longer. When she arrived home from the hospital for the first time, I attempted to send this newborn a message by taping a sign to the front door that read, "NO ONE UNDER 4 ALLOWED INSIDE." The sign, unsurprisingly, was not well-received. As time went on, my resentment for this small creature lessened and blossomed into the purest form of love I have ever known.

*"As time went on, my resentment for this small creature lessened and blossomed into the purest form of love I have ever known."*

In Disney's 2002 animated feature, *Lilo and Stitch*, older sister Nani becomes the sole caregiver of her sister Lilo following the sudden death of their parents. For Nani, sisterhood appears to be less so one facet of her life but instead becomes her entire identity as she works to provide for her sister. Lilo, Nani, and their alien friend Stitch may not encompass a traditional family structure in any sense, but they beautifully live out the equally - if not more important - home that is found within one's "chosen family." As Lilo's famous line goes, "Ohana means family. Family means nobody gets left behind or forgotten." Nani is Lilo's whole world, too. Her life's guidance all stems from the older sister to whom she looks up. Nani gives Lilo's life purpose and direction, and Lilo gives Nani's life the same back.

I have long held a close association between long car rides and *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988). A child of the 2000s, I was accustomed to a DVD player planted in the backseat between me and my sister; my parents' attempt to distract us from fighting in the backseat. Having a Japanese dad, Studio Ghibli movies were a frequent go-to with *My Neighbor Totoro* being a crowd-favorite. Unfortunately, I think the distract-

tion tactic caused its own set of issues as my sister and I often ended up arguing over who had a better view of the DVD player.

"You literally just turned it fully in your direction."

"I can barely see it!"

"It's like four inches closer to your side of the car!"

"Whatever, it's fine. Just leave it. I wanna watch."

About a decade older and potentially wiser, I am finally able to see the irony of the situation. While the two of us quipped in the backseat, we unknowingly mirrored the Kusakabe sisters on the screen in front of us. Just like us, Mei and Satsuki held a deep sisterly love for each other while feigning an outward sibling rivalry from time-to-time. I recall a scene in which Satsuki snaps at Mei for her lack of understanding as the youngest child. While the girls' mother is sick in the hospital, the two attempt to navigate life without her. In a state of distress, Satsuki takes her anger out on Mei, yelling, "You dummy! I'm not talking to you anymore." At the time, it was easy for me to judge this older sibling's break in maturity. How did Studio Ghibli allow for the development of such a mean older sister?



In retrospect, Totoro couldn't have nailed the sister-to-sister dynamic much better.

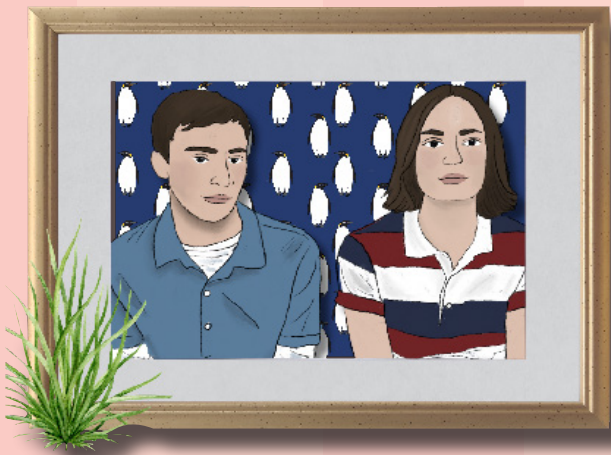
*"In retrospect, Totoro couldn't have nailed the sister to sister dynamic much better."*



Following their fight, Mei gets lost in the forest outside their home. Older sister Satsuki, unsurprisingly, is the first to fear for Mei's disappearance and desperately seeks help in finding her. Like a true eldest daughter, Satsuki is her younger sister's biggest protector and advocate at the end of the day. Mei, lost in a physical and perhaps metaphorical sense, too, is only found with the help of her older sister. The argument between them is forgotten the second Satsuki fears for Mei's well-being. Ultimately, Satsuki and Mei are the only ones who understand each other's biggest obstacles and fears. The film begins with the Kusakabe family moving into an old country house to be closer to the hospital their mother is staying in. At first, the house doesn't feel like a home, and the sisters struggle to adjust. Though the threat of possibly losing their mother may push them apart momentarily, it is ultimately what brings them closer together.

Despite the help they receive from the adults and creatures around them, no one else understands what they're going through quite like each other. I believe that the beauty of siblinghood lies in the balance between unfiltered emotions and mutual devotion. Satsuki and Mei find home in each other and bring the light into this home through their love and commitment to each other as sisters.

Several months ago, in the midst of my nightly scroll through TikTok, I stumbled across a video of a girl describing her experience with "Eldest Daughter Syndrome." Though I originally wrote it off as yet another dramatic term someone had ascribed to a generic set of traits, there did appear to be some elements of truth to the description. The accuracy of the symptom list bore a similar resemblance to many of the internal and familial struggles I'd faced in my own life.



*"The accuracy of the symptom list bore a similar resemblance to many of the internal and familial struggles I'd faced in my own life."*

Upon further research, I found an article that defined this experience as "frequently feeling like you're not doing enough, like

you're struggling to maintain a veneer of control, like the entire household relies on your diligence." This trope of the sibling who puts the needs of others before their own, sometimes even at the expense of being true to themselves, is well-exemplified by Violet Baudelaire in *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (2017-2019).

A true "eldest daughter," Violet steps in as a guide for her younger siblings after the three of them are suddenly orphaned. She is a clever and resourceful inventor and is frequently the one who saves her younger brother Klaus and baby sister Sunny from close calls with death. Tragedy and loss are what bind this trio of siblings together. Their shared pain can only be truly understood by each other. Throughout the series, the Baudelaire's undergo constant adventures in their attempt to escape their evil, distant relative Count Olaf, who seeks to steal the family fortune their parents left behind. Even in the realm of the fantasy world that the Baudelaire's exist within, the depiction of the unwavering support they have for each other in the face of adversity is both touching and painfully accurate.

The emotional burden of being a sibling does not only apply to eldest daughters. In many cinematic worlds, there are siblings who are forced to assume the role of a third parent in their household. All of the aforementioned films depict some version of brothers or sisters who have parental duties thrust upon them circumstantially. Being a guardian-like figure is an act that Casey Gardner of the show *Atypical* (2017-2021) frequently takes on in her household. Casey, though actually the younger sister of Sam Gardner in this series, is burdened with the responsibility of looking out for her older brother who is autistic. Casey's own achievements and choices

are largely dictated by what is best for Sam's well-being. When Casey, a talented runner, is offered the chance to transfer to a prep school on a scholarship, her mother outright opposes this idea. She expresses concern over who will look out for Sam at school if Casey is not around. This not only diminishes Casey's hard-earned accomplishments but also reinforces her role as Sam's involuntary caretaker. Though Casey loves Sam and wants the best for him, her parents place an unreasonable amount of pressure on her to be a support system for her brother. Though the sisters in these shows are dealt an unfair hand and expectation of parental-like responsibility, the deep love they hold for their siblings overpowers any feelings of resentment that they may feel.

*"Though the sisters in these shows are dealt an unfair hand and expectation of parental-like responsibility, the deep love they hold for their siblings overpowers any feelings of resentment."*

Despite the fights, competition, and obligations that accompany siblinghood, movies and shows have played a formative role in shaping my gratitude for it. *Little Women*, *The Outsiders*, *Lilo and Stitch*, and *My Neighbor Totoro* are just a handful of the films that capture what it means to share your unique childhood with another human. *Atypical* and *A Series of Unfortunate Events* remind us that our siblings understand us in a way that few others can quite match and are often the reason we behave the way we do or make the choices that we make. Siblinghood is a powerful force in my life and in the lives of many others. Yet, somehow, it is nearly impossible for me to capture fully in words. So I think it's best if I let the movies do the talking to fill in the rest.

## Endnotes:

1. *Little Women*. Directed by Greta Gerwig. Columbia Pictures, 2019.
2. Vivian Manning-Schaffel, 'Little Women' can teach us about the power of sisterhood (NBC News, 2020).
3. *The Outsiders*. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. Zoetrope Studios, 1983.
4. *Lilo & Stitch*. Directed by Dean DeBlois and Chris Sanders. Walt Disney Pictures, 2002.
5. Kara Nesvig, 'Lilo & Stitch' Put Sisterhood Over Romance Way Before 'Frozen,' Says Director (TeenVogue, 2022).
6. *My Neighbor Totoro*. Directed by Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, 1988.
7. Sarah Sloat, The Plight of the Eldest Daughter (The Atlantic, 2023).
8. *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Created by Mark Hudis and Barry Sonnenfeld. Netflix, 2017.
9. *Atypical*. Created by Robia Rashid. Netflix, 2017-2021.





*The Fabelmans* (2022)  
dir. Steven Spielberg

## images of home: amateur filmmaking and home movies in film written by moises barajas, designed by edie irving

**W**ith the invention of smaller and cheaper film formats, motion picture technology became a consumer product. Families used this new ability to capture moving images in the same way that they used still images; to document life, and capture memories. The subjects of these home movies remain familiar today: birthdays, vacations, holidays, and various other rituals. However, the lens of the home movie camera does not capture these memories objectively. Rather than document, as most would assume, these movies narrativize their subjects. Films like *The Fabelmans* (2022), *Aftersun* (2022),

and *We're All Going to the World's Fair* (2023) illustrate how home movies construct narratives about our lives, and how this has changed with evolving technology.

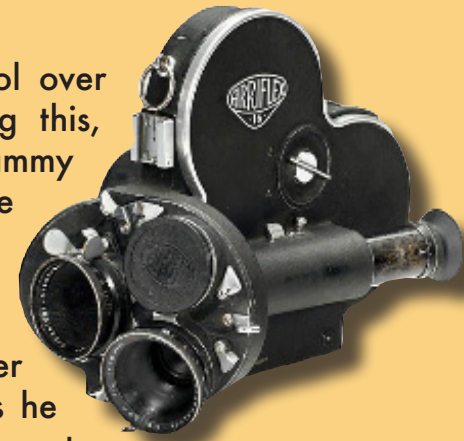
From its opening moments, Steven Spielberg's *The Fabelmans* highlights the artifice of home movies. The film begins in 1952 when a young Sammy Fabelman goes to see his first movie. As he waits in line, his parents Burt and Mitzi try to explain the concept of a movie to a nervous Sammy. Burt tries to explain the technical qualities of a motion picture. But the camera pans away from Burt to Mitzi, who simply says

that **movies are, "a wonderful dream that you never want to wake up from."**

At this moment Spielberg is rejecting a conception of film as objective. He accepts Mitzi's characterization of movies as idyllic fantasy escapes. This idea is then reflected in Sammy's eventual filmmaking.

When his family enters the theater to see a screening of *The Greatest Show on Earth*, Sammy becomes enraptured. He is shocked and frightened by the loud and violent spectacle of the film's train derailment scene. Afterward, he asks for a powered toy train for Hanukkah. Soon after he gets it, he stages the toy set like the scene from the movie and crashes it. When his father scolds him for mistreating such an expensive toy, Sammy simply responds, "I need to see it crash." By staging and recreating what has caused him anxiety and stress, he is gaining

a sense of control over it. Upon realizing this, Mitzi gives Sammy Burt's 8mm movie camera, so that he can crash the train once but watch the film over as many times as he wants. Through the act of filming his little train derailment movie, Sammy alleviates the fear and anxiety caused by witnessing that scene. He takes the memory and reduces it down into something that he controls. We see this process in more detail further on. Years later, now a teenager, Sammy goes on a camping trip with his family and Burt's longtime friend, Bennie. Sammy, who has continued with film making, films the vacation.



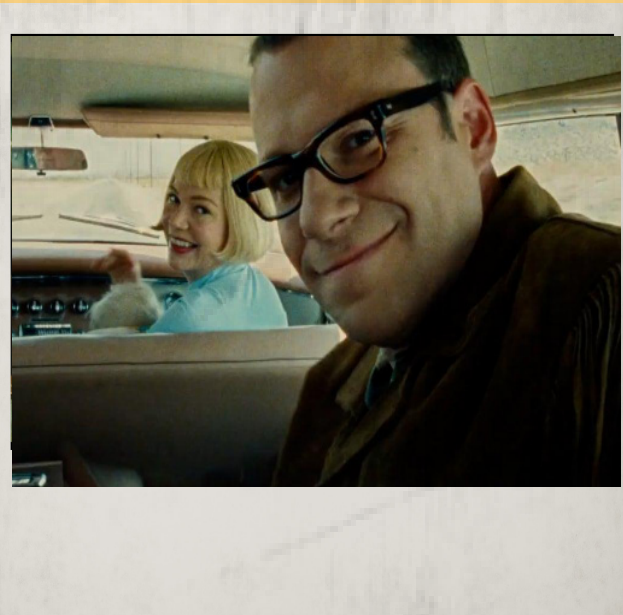
Soon after, tragedy causes Mitzi to fall into a deep depression. Burt asks Sammy to put together a movie out of his camping footage to try and lift his mother's spirits. But as he begins to look over the reels in his editing machine, he notices something peculiar. In the background and at the edges of the frame, he can see Mitzi off alone with Bennie. As he slows down the footage, playing it back and forth he can see the way they look at each other, the way they touch each other. They are having an affair. An unpleasant reality has penetrated the dream. Sammy decides to cut out all of these incriminating moments, as well as any other unpleasant details of the trip. Through this act of editing, Sammy's home movies



more explicitly take on Mitzi's characterization of movies as dreams. To bury this ugly truth **he manipulates these unpleasant images into a dream that the whole family can relish in.**

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As they watch the film together, fantasy takes the place of memory. But this denial of reality can only be maintained for so long. When Burt uproots the family in pursuit of a promotion, the move to California separates Mitzi from Bennie. Tensions in the family rise as the truth about what is upsetting Mitzi slowly seeps to the surface. But just before the situation hits its boiling point, the film diverges for a moment. The perspective changes as we watch Sammy's home movie depicting their family's arrival at their new, freshly built California home. The camera follows Burt as he shows off the result of his single-minded careerism; a luxurious house furnished with every modern appliance. But as everyone else runs around the house in awe, Mitzi only watches from outside. Seeing this, Burt goes to her, swings her up into his arms, and carries her into the house. This final moment is stretched out through slow motion; Burt's face is beaming, but Mitzi's smile is strained. Then it cuts to a brutal scene of the parents announcing their divorce to their children. The film seems to have built toward this cut, this juxtaposition of scenes. This home movie is Sammy's fantasy depiction, not just of his move to California, but of his family. Instead of being something corrosive to his family, the movie turns Burt bringing his family to this new home into a



happy event. But evidently, this dream cannot sustain itself. Its artifice shines through in Mitzi's eyes and her forced smile. The cut to the divorce solidifies this point. It is the reality that the fantasy tried to cope with.

Charlotte Wells' *Aftersun*, a film about a young girl's vacation with her father, similarly thinks of home movies as incomplete memories. However, while *The Fabermans* focuses on the production of these images, ***Aftersun* is about looking back on them, knowing that they are missing details that can't be retrieved.**

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The film signals this reflexive quality from the beginning. As the opening credits roll you can hear the beeping and whirring of a miniDV camera beginning to play a videotape. It is as if the movie itself were a video the audience is looking back on.



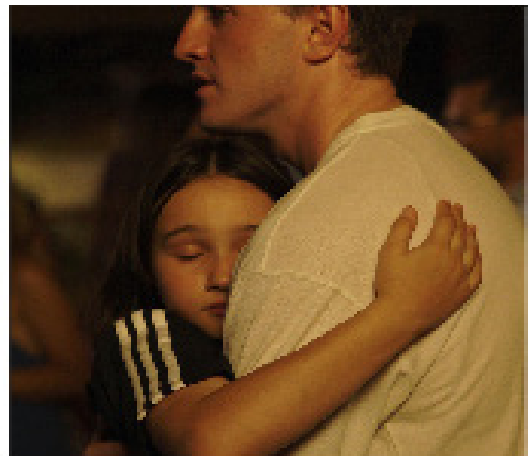
The film follows various moments throughout the family vacation. The scenes are often accompanied by a video taken at the time. What's interesting about the juxtaposition of the videos with the actual scenes is what is left out of the recordings. These vacation videos would look familiar to many. They tell the story of a father and daughter; happy and having fun on a trip. But outside the videos, one detects an underlying sadness, particularly in the father, Callum. This point is exemplified by a scene in the middle of the film. Callum is getting ready in the hotel room with his daughter, Sophie. Sophie has the camcorder connected to the TV, streaming its recording onto the screen. Wells captures the scene in a static shot of the TV.

***in essence, we are seeing the moment through Sophie's camera lens.***

Sophie records her father having fun as he tries to embarrass her with his silly dance moves. But then she asks him about his upcoming birthday and where he thought he would be at this point in his life as a child. Callum's demeanor plummets at these questions and he asks his daughter to stop recording before disconnecting the camera from the TV. The television shuts off, but we continue to see the scene in the screen's reflection. Sophie persists with her mock interview, saying she'll capture it with her "mind camera." Callum tells her a story of when his parents forgot his 11th birthday, and they got angry when he tried reminding them. The moment contrasts video with memory. The camcorder only captures the happy and fun moments they wish to preserve; it doesn't capture the whole story, nor does Sophie's "mind camera." The memory – her father's recounting of his 11th

birthday – is still only seen in the reflection of the TV screen. It's distant and lacking in detail. Like Sophie, we can only make out a vague melancholy within their father, unable to completely understand him.

The film expresses the sadness in these videos' inability to wholly capture our loved ones. In its final moments, we see the last video Callum took on the trip; his goodbye to Sophie at the airport. When the video is over and the sweet moment comes to an end, it freezes in its final frame. Suddenly, the camera pans right, revealing that what we were seeing was a TV screen. An adult Sophie is watching the old vacation videos. The camera continues to pan until we see the reverse perspective of the airport farewell video, only the setting is distorted. We see Callum with his camera, but he isn't in the airport, he is in an empty room. He shuts off the camera before walking away, through a door at the end of the room, into a black void. This single shot succinctly illustrates



*TURQUIE, ÉTÉ 97'*

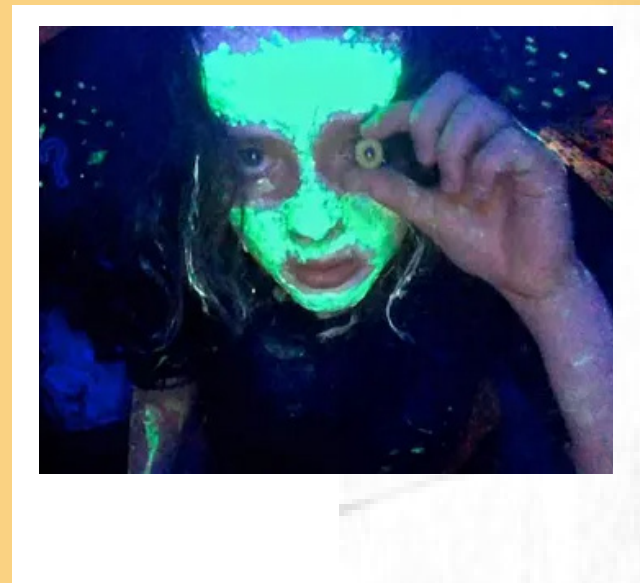
the film's central point. Sophie reaches the end of the vacation videos, but they haven't revealed anything to her. She can't see anything beyond that final moment before he disappears into the void. As technology evolved so did the ways in which we record and view ourselves.

in which she performs the challenge's initiation ritual. Before she starts recording, she rehearses her lines, arranges her bedroom, and adjusts the lighting. The perspective of the camera combined with the way Casey treats her bedroom like a set, characterizes these videos as performances.



What distinguishes these videos from the home movies of the previous films is the internet. Before, home videos existed strictly in the context of the lives of the people who produced them. **Meaning is derived from the producer's own personal relation to the film's subjects and settings.**

What *World's Fair* demonstrates is how, through the internet, the videos one



Jane Schoenbrun's *We're All Going to the World's Fair* demonstrates how the internet has changed the way we use video to narrativize our lives. The film follows Casey, a teenage girl with a troubled home life, as she takes part in an internet trend known as "the World's Fair challenge." The film's opening scene introduces us to the mechanics of the challenge. The scene

is shot entirely from the perspective of Casey's webcam as she produces the video

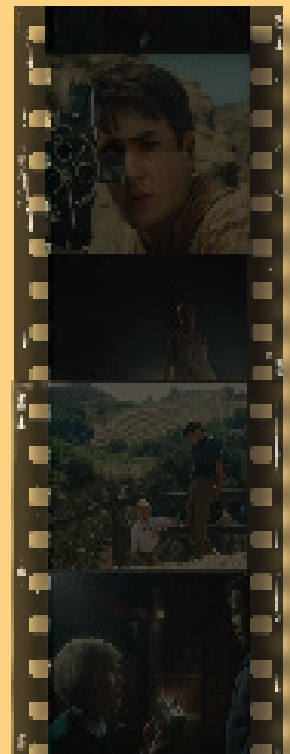
produces exist within a greater context involving other people. Meaning is created through one's position in a network of other producers. The film illustrates this point in sequences where Casey watches other participants in the challenge. She sits in her room watching participants' videos detailing the supernatural effects of the challenge on their bodies and behaviors. The subject of one vid-



eo describes how they have lost all feeling in their body. In the next scene, Casey makes a video out in the freezing snow, talking about how the temperature does not bother her since taking the challenge. The editing juxtaposes these moments to demonstrate the way that narratives are constructed through the network. Casey watches videos that together form the greater fantasy narrative of the World's Fair. To bring that fantasy into her own life she produces videos that mimic those that she has seen. Like Sammy's home movies, Casey's videos are a dream that distracts her from her home life. **in many respects, the ways that we photograph ourselves and our lives have changed, but at their core, the function of these images remains the same.**

## Endnotes

1. *The Fabelmans*. Directed by Steven Spielberg, Universal Pictures, 2022.
2. *Aftersun*. Directed by Charlotte Wells, A24, Mubi, 2022.
3. *We're All Going to the World's Fair*. Directed by Jane Schoenbrun, Utopia, 2021.



Like the characters of these films, we often try to capture the happy moments. We stage the scene, frame the image, and cut out what we don't like. The resulting images are at once both memory and dream; narratives we construct out of our lives. But to say that these films and videos are not reality is not to say that they are cynically manufactured. They may just be stories, but at their root, they are usually stories about love.



# GROWING UP WITH PIXAR

ARTICLE : MIKE COLLIER • DESIGN/ART : JAZMINE NOGUERA

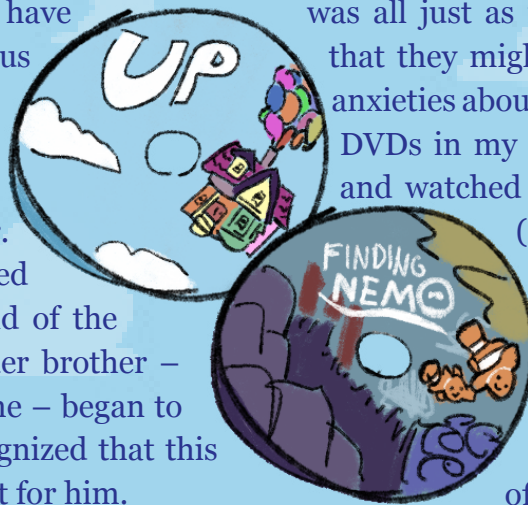
Growing up with Pixar, it's safe to say that as a child, one of the greatest joys was going to the movie theater. The smell of popcorn as you're walking in the door and begging your parents for overpriced candy is a staple of many childhood memories. Though, the trip I remember the most was when *Toy Story 3* (2010) came to the big screen. I was so excited as I loved the *Toy Story* franchise and wondered what fun adventure Buzz and Woody would have this time. In some mysterious manner though, this film felt different; it felt more serious than the last two, and its story seemed scarier. At the time, I honestly hated it. However, toward the end of the film, I realized that my older brother – who was eighteen at the time – began to tear up. That's when I recognized that this film wasn't made for me, but for him.

My brother was about to enter college and was in a transitional period of his life, just like Andy. The concept of change and leaving home was a terrifying concept and he didn't want to move away from family. He was scared of abandoning his comfort zone to be alone in a new place, just like many of us were when we first started college. I didn't realize how important this film was until I was heading into college myself. *Toy Story 3* is about the terrifying

feeling of growing up and changing, something that was much too complex for a nine-year-old me to fully grasp. As college got closer, I began to have feelings of uncertainty, and was afraid of the change to come in the next couple months.

I thought back to how my brother felt when we watched *Toy Story 3* for the first time, and I decided to see if all of Pixar's filmography was all just as impactful – also, I was hoping that they might be able to help me tame my anxieties about growing up. I dusted off the old DVDs in my family's home movie collection and watched *Up* (2009) and *Finding Nemo* (2003) back-to-back. These films felt *almost too* personal and I felt a deep connection to my hometown and family. Pixar's films are mostly about the fear of change, something that most of us have struggled with. Leaving home is probably one of the biggest changes a human goes through in their lifetime and these films are the perfect expression of these common feelings.

Throughout these films, very similar themes are seen and developed, but we witness the characters utilizing different perspectives to navigate their problems. These three films are the pinnacle of the fear of leaving home, and each shows us a new, helpful perspective for dealing



with said emotions. The fear of leaving home is, at first, a terrifying concept, but through the help of films such as these, one can have some assistance in recognizing that the act of moving away can be one of the most freeing experiences you can have.

## FINDING NEMO

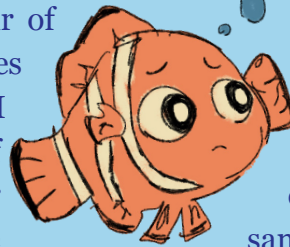
*Finding Nemo* was the first film I watched during my college dilemma, and in my opinion, it perfectly describes the transition between childhood and adulthood. The film is primarily about how scary it is to leave home for the first time and the fear of being on your own. These themes stuck with me because, as a child, I had seen *Finding Nemo* hundreds of times; however, at the time, I never understood the true themes of the film. As a kid, it feels like you're going to be young forever and that your parents will always be there to fix our mistakes and help you learn. However, the hard truth we learn later on is that life challenges you the more as you grow up and your parents won't always be there to protect you.

Although *Finding Nemo* is a children's movie, it delves deep into very adult themes. To be thrown out into the ocean the way Nemo was is what the majority of college freshmen experience when leaving their homes for the first time and get to truly experience being on their own. The transition between childhood and adulthood is a hard one and most people have to work through their mistakes in order to truly become an adult. Another theme of the film is the bond between parent and child. I'd imagine as a parent, having your child leave for

college must be a really hard thing to do. After teaching and protecting someone since infancy, it's hard to let go of those parental instincts. This is especially shown through Nemo's dad, Marlin. Although he is extremely overprotective of Nemo, he ultimately just wants Nemo to be in a safe and loving environment.

I related to this heavily as my father too was concerned for me when I left my family for the first time, not because he thought I couldn't handle myself, but because of the dangers of the world that I wouldn't be able to control. Although my dad would always tell me how harsh the world could be, I related heavily to Nemo and always wanted to leave home and explore somewhere new. The concept of being on my own was terrifying but exciting at the same time. After three months of debate, I finally decided for myself that I would move hundreds of miles away and try my luck at being on my own. Honestly, this was the best idea I ever had, and I'm thankful that I gave myself the opportunity to challenge myself and grow as a person.

*Finding Nemo* is the perfect representation of what it feels like to leave home. Although it can be terrifying to put yourself in a new environment, it's the most beneficial experience for growth as a human. This film to me perfectly describes the college experience for both the student and their parents. Pixar teaches us that the world is scary but going outside of our comfort zone is what makes us into the people we need to become.





### TOY STORY 3

*Toy Story 3* is the next chapter in growing up, as it depicts what it feels like to have to let go of the past, childhood in particular. Through the first two *Toy Story* films, we see Andy grow up, but by the time the third film comes along, Andy is fully grown and packing to move away for college. During the packing process, Andy decides to give most of his toys away to a daycare center so that they can be played with. This terrifies the toys, particularly Woody, as he wants to remain one of Andy's toys forever. The whole film is about the toys desperately trying to get back to Andy. They eventually, against all odds, make it back to Andy's house.

However, at the end of the movie when they get back to Andy's, they're given away to a small girl instead. This ending was a beautiful representation of the loss of childhood. Although at times we may try to go back to our childhood, we must realize that everything happens for a reason. Growing up is a terrifying concept, and I often wish to go back to when times were simpler, but that's unfortunately not reality. The thought of not seeing those you care about, or even worse, growing apart from them, is a gut-wrenching thought; however, the film teaches us that confronting this fear is what's needed for us to grow. That new experiences are healthy and necessary for each of us to become the people we need to become. We all have to grow up at some point, no matter how much we wish we

didn't. Although we may try to go back in time, the past will not be there waiting for us.

### UP

*Up* is my personal favorite out of this list and the one that was the most impactful for me. Carl, an old man who has lost his wife and childhood best friend, Ellie, is looking to go to Paradise Falls, a place where he and Ellie always dreamed of living together. Following her passing, he moves his entire house using balloons and flies there himself. However, on his way, he is met with Russell, a Boy Scout trying to earn his "assisting the elderly" badge. Together, they travel through treacherous terrain and fight off different villainous animals and people to eventually get to Paradise Falls. However, in the end, Carl realizes that getting

**"NEW EXPERIENCES ARE HEALTHY AND NECESSARY FOR EACH OF US TO BECOME THE PEOPLE WE NEED TO BECOME."**

to the falls that his wife dreamed of does not make him inherently happy.

Carl realizes that the only thing that truly makes him happy is his wife. He understands that by letting go of the past and accepting his wife's death, he can take her memory with him. He was always an adventurer at heart and wanted to take Ellie all across the world.

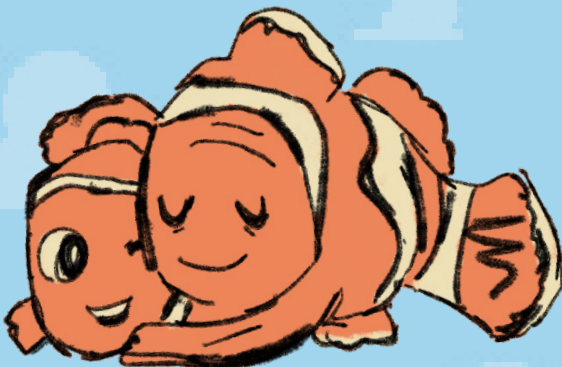
Despite missing the opportunity to travel with Ellie while she was alive, he finds Russell and eventually takes him under



his wing. Although Carl may be old, he helps Russell prepare for the future and becomes a sort of father figure for him. Getting old is a hard concept to grasp, even now I continue to struggle with the feeling of becoming old. Although we aren't able to do everything we used to, we can give our wisdom and experiences to the younger generation to help guide them, maybe even a little bit better than our parents guided us.

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These three films were monumental to me, not just in my childhood, but in my day-to-day life now. The themes of Pixar helped me better define my morals and character. Although these characters face crazy and unrealistic challenges, the messages of each film are deeply human and emotional. Each film tells us the story of growing up in different ways, and each character represents a different stage of life, and I feel uniquely connected to every one of them. Nemo represents youth and innocence, not truly understanding the world but having a unique energy and passion when discovering it. Then, Woody expresses more of the bridge between childhood and adulthood. Often it's been hard to look back at my childhood and not wish to be there, but Woody teaches us acceptance and that we should be just as hopeful for the future as we were for the past. Finally, Carl teaches us that although we may lose things – whether it be people or objects – acceptance and moving forward is



**“ALTHOUGH THESE CHARACTERS FACE CRAZY AND UNREALISTIC CHALLENGES, THE MESSAGES OF EACH FILM ARE DEEPLY HUMAN AND EMOTIONAL.”**

a natural part of life, and all we can do is love and embrace the present moment. These three characters represent not only the college experience but also the human experience. Pixar has created a unique and powerful group of stories that not only tell a single story but tell the story of all human emotion.

## ENDNOTES

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# Sisterhood On

# Screen:

EXPLORING FEMININE  
FRIENDSHIP IN TELEVISION

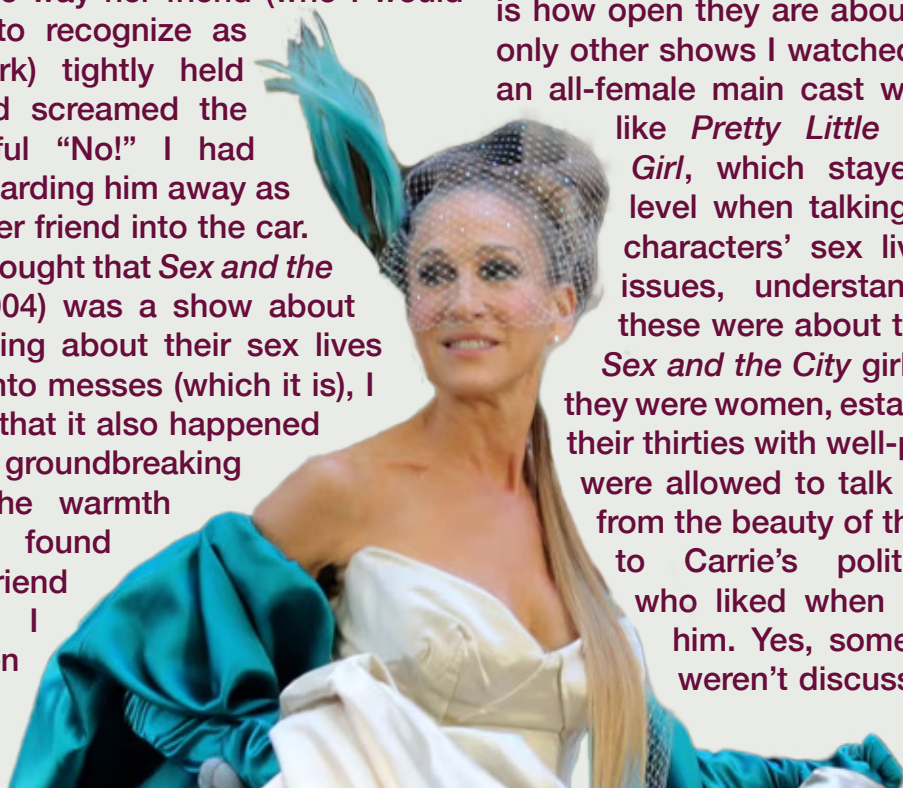
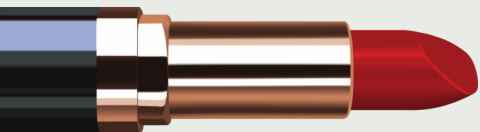
WRITTEN BY AVA FOUNTAIN • DESIGNED BY JAZMINE NOGUERA

As

I was recently searching for a new show to watch, my mind went back to a clip I saw circling the internet. The star of the clip was a character I knew briefly from her pure, pop-culture “iconic-ness.” That was Carrie Bradshaw, standing in her Vivienne Westwood wedding gown, throwing her bouquet at Mr. Big. The pure drama immediately caught my attention — but it wasn’t what made me want to watch the show. What really drew me in was the way her friend (who I would soon come to recognize as Charlotte York) tightly held onto her and screamed the most powerful “No!” I had ever heard, warding him away as she carried her friend into the car. While I had thought that *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) was a show about women gabbing about their sex lives and getting into messes (which it is), I came to find that it also happened to be a groundbreaking display of the warmth and honesty found in feminine friend groups that I had never seen before on-

screen. After being introduced to this world of sex, drama, and cocktail-filled brunches; I began to discover that this silly dramedy can be linked to significant progress in how women went on to view sex and sexuality through more open discussions of these topics.

*Sex and the City* follows the lives of four single New York women in their thirties navigating their careers, love lives, and a plethora of other insane plots (like when Charlotte gets crabs in the Hamptons). What immediately grabbed my interest in the show is how open they are about everything. The only other shows I watched in the past with an all-female main cast were teen dramas like *Pretty Little Liars* or *Gossip Girl*, which stayed very surface-level when talking about the main characters’ sex lives and intimate issues, understandably so since these were about teen girls. But the *Sex and the City* girls weren’t girls — they were women, established women in their thirties with well-paying jobs. They were allowed to talk about everything from the beauty of the female orgasm to Carrie’s politician boyfriend, who liked when women peed on him. Yes, some of these topics weren’t discussed with grace or





seriousness, but the fact that they were being discussed is crucial. A show focusing entirely on relationships through the female perspective was essentially unheard of at this point, especially when that perspective was centered around sex.

In the television industry's early beginnings, a majority of broadcasted shows were created to reflect traditional American families. While strides were taken in creating more versatile and fluid storylines for female characters, almost all of their stories ended in said characters centering their lives around a man. As popular culture began to change and adapt to the rise of the female liberation movement, television began to reflect this. We began to see stories of women who strayed from the grasp of purity culture. *Friends*, for example, one of the most popular shows currently airing at the time of *Sex and the City's* release, featured three female main characters who were, for the most part, written in a realistic and relatable manner. But *Friends* was a sitcom airing on broadcast television, and its tone didn't allow for the exploration of deeply flawed female protagonists like Carrie Bradshaw. It wasn't uncommon in television reviewing to make sexist and demeaning comments about Carrie, which unfortunately extended to insulting her actress, Sarah Jessica Parker.

When referencing how Carrie would occasionally break the fourth wall and speak to the audience in the first season, a Washington Post reporter wrote, "Sarah Jessica Parker has an in-your-face face — she

always seems to be thrusting it forward. She's in love with camera. Unfortunately, it's unrequited." Women had to be docile, beautiful, and not display any signs of self-confidence or flaws. That is why Carrie was introduced to the world through the premium cable network HBO, where the show was able to deliver less censored versions of real-life stories — bringing the realism of sex to *Sex and the City*, with all the messy faults that came along with it.

While *Sex and the City* was groundbreaking for the ways that it explored sex and friendship through a new and refreshingly honest viewpoint, that doesn't

**“Many queer and trans characters appeared at the butt of many of these women’s jokes, entire episodes being dedicated to belittling their lifestyles and personhood”**

make it above very important criticisms. Many queer and trans characters served as jokes, entire episodes being dedicated to belittling their lifestyles and personhood. While the series makes amends

in some ways in the new spin-off series *And Just Like That...* (2021-), these jokes still leave a distasteful imprint on the franchise's legacy. While my experiences watching *Sex and the City* were positive, and, in many ways, transformative, I found myself in search of a show that reflected more diverse relationships — which is where I discovered *The L Word* (2004-2009). This Showtime series was labeled as “Same Sex, Different City.” The series surrounds a group of lesbian and bisexual women living in Los Angeles who, similar to the *Sex and the City* women, are navigating their love lives and careers. Although there are some deep flaws within the show, it revolutionized the depiction of queer women in television.





At the time, (and still to this day if we're being honest) shows would throw in one lesbian character and call it a day. *The L Word* not only had an entire cast of queer characters but it was also the first television series to be written and directed by predominantly queer women. Despite making television history and featuring several prominent figures such as Gloria Steinem and Billie Jean King, it is now seen as a corny soap opera from the early 2000s. Granted, it was, but it's often looked past in discussions of representation and cultural impact.

Like *Sex and the City*, *The L Word*'s characters foster a sense of a solid female community, acting as a family to each other since many of their biological families did not support their sexualities. They showcase the comfort and support that can be found in shared communities, always helping each other despite their mutual exes and complicated sexual histories. One thing *Sex and the City* never had to worry about was what

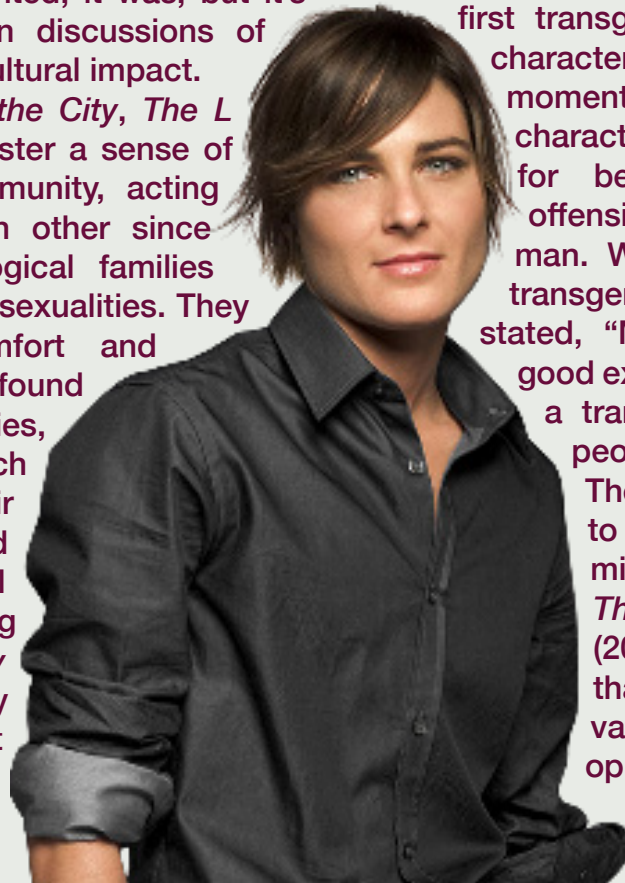
would happen if the two protagonists started dating, but the same could not be said for *The L Word*. One of the longest-running bits of the show is Alice's "chart," which connects all of the queer women in their area via hookup. This aspect of the show was used to highlight the connections between each character, tying their separate histories to their current ones and highlighting an important moment in queer history, expanding beyond just the lives of the main cast. The show makes an effort to explore many different aspects of sexuality in a more sincere way than *Sex and the City*, but being a series from 2004, there were similar problems that *Sex and the City* had in terms of representation.

**“The L Word not only had an entire cast of queer characters, it was the first television series to be written and directed by predominately queer women.”**

One glaring issue at the core of *The L Word* is the way the show treats transgender characters. The first and only transgender character to enter the main cast of *The*

*L Word* was Max Sweeney in season three. Sweeney was credited as being television's first transgender male regular series character. While this was a historic moment in television history, his character has since been criticized for being an inauthentic and offensive caricature of a trans man. While speaking about Max, transgender filmmaker Rhys Ernst stated, “Max in 2006 was a really good example of cis [writers] telling a trans narrative with no trans people involved, point blank.”

The creators have since aimed to make amends for these mistakes in their spin-off, *The L Word: Generation Q* (2019-2023), with storylines that represent a much wider variety of queer people — as opposed to the rich, primarily





white women who were centralized in the original plot.

Regardless of these shows' flaws, they created essential waves in pop culture history, influencing how generations of viewers act, speak, and talk about sex and sexuality. Continuing in my search for relatable and entertaining shows with a primarily femme main cast, I decided to dive into HBO's *Girls* (2012-2017). *Girls* has been credited as the "millennial *Sex and the City*" despite the creator and star Lena Dunham's rejection of that title. Dunham says she "reveres that show just as much as any girl of her generation," but wanted to emphasize the differences between the ages of the women in *Girls* and the *Sex and the City* characters. While *Sex and the City* focused on women in their thirties with their lives "put together," *Girls* centered on characters freshly out of college, still trying to figure out what to do with their lives and degrees. The show garnered a lot of both negative and positive attention, it is noted as more of a self-referential piece, drawing lots of its plot from Dunham's personal experiences. One similar detail in all of these shows is their refusal to write likable main characters. Almost every character on *Girls* has moments where you have to question how someone could lack

**"Girls also features a much more strained look on feminine friend groups, featuring lots of large fights between the girls, spending huge chunks of the show with two or more characters in a tiff."**



that much self-awareness. I consider myself pretty resistant to secondhand embarrassment; however, I had to stop watching some scenes because of how hilariously uncomfortable they became.

*Girls* also features a much more strained look on feminine friend groups; featuring lots of large fights between the girls, spending huge chunks of the show with two or more characters in a tiff. While *Girls* had a less heartwarming tone than *Sex and the City*, there were moments throughout the show where we got to see deep bonds between the main cast. Hannah and Marnie, in particular, were an excellent look into those complicated friendships where you honestly kind of hate each other yet would still die for one another.

Seeing as all of these shows served as critical cultural standpoints for previous generations, I began wondering what could potentially be viewed as the Gen Z version. One show I remembered feeling similarly about when I had watched it was *The Sex Lives of College Girls* (2021-). As the title clearly implies, *The Sex Lives of College Girls* follows four college freshmen as they





navigate through the new stage of early adulthood and romantic relationships. This show differs from the others, not only because of the characters' ages, but also their lack of shared history. We're able to see how their relationships start and progress — as opposed to the other shows where they've known each other for years. Viewers get to see more unique viewpoints through each character (considering every main character is from differing socioeconomic backgrounds), clearly reflected in the show's central plot. *The Sex Lives of College Girls* features several queer and transgender protagonists without sensationalizing them like *The L Word*. The main character, Leighton, comes out at the end of season one and I found it to be one of the most beautiful and moving coming-out scenes in modern television. Creator Mindy Kaling has a distinct pattern of writing characters

## Endnotes

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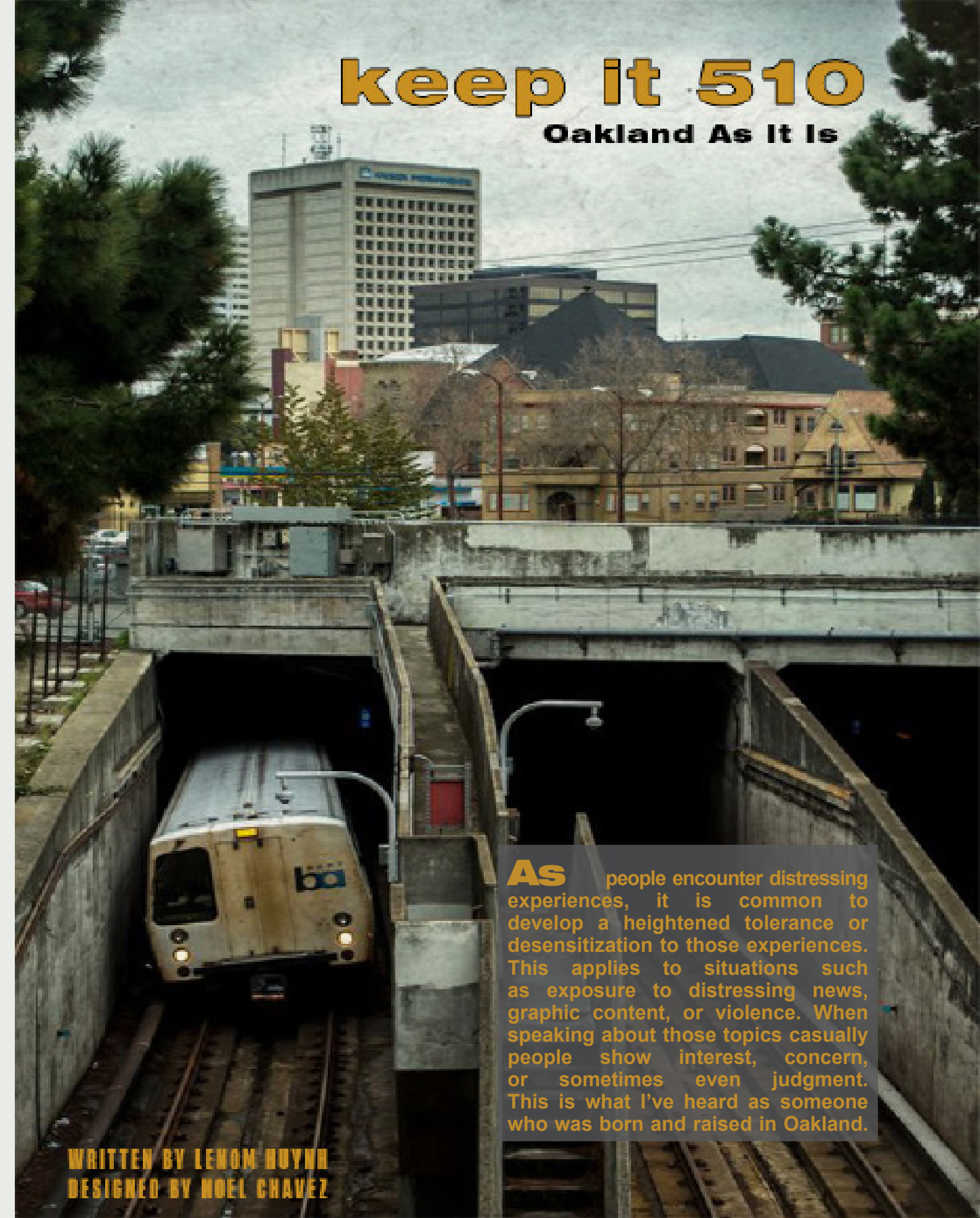
who are unlikeable yet very easy to love and root for, similar to the way many feel about Carrie Bradshaw. While I find this show to lack a certain depth due to its newness and differing form, there is still a strong potential for it to hold a similar impact.

While each one of these shows was created with the purpose of comedy and entertainment, it's essential to acknowledge how they helped shape culture; especially in conversations about sex and friendship. While it's easy to scoff at the absurdity of some of these series (especially when you see Carrie Bradshaw running around the streets of Manhattan wrecking homes), it's crucial to remember **that these pieces of media were able to break past a culture that sought to vilify women for straying from traditional gender roles and expectations.** So while they may focus on characters that are deemed as "affluent, glib, often frivolous and prone to prattle about penises," it doesn't take away from the fact that there is a raw and beautiful display of love and friendship that is reflected throughout generations of women in television to this day. I find that although these series' are often cast aside as "chick shows," they provide viewers with a refreshing perspective of sex and friendship that I will continue to search for in other media.



# keep it 510

Oakland As It Is



**As** people encounter distressing experiences, it is common to develop a heightened tolerance or desensitization to those experiences. This applies to situations such as exposure to distressing news, graphic content, or violence. When speaking about those topics casually people show interest, concern, or sometimes even judgment. This is what I've heard as someone who was born and raised in Oakland.

WRITTEN BY LENOM HOYND  
DESIGNED BY NOEL CHAVEZ



Typically, when I introduce myself, I share my name, occupation, and where I am from. Often, the common reactions I receive when I say **I'm from Oakland** include remarks like, "Isn't Oakland considered a dangerous city?" and references to the city's high crime rate. Though I do understand the sentiment, I also find myself taking offense because of my love for my city. But why am I offended when it's true that Oakland is a precarious place? I believe this happens because people who are unfamiliar with the area may not comprehend the reasons behind Oakland's reputation. Their perception of Oakland is often shaped by news outlets, media representations, and statistics. While the numbers may be accurate, they fail to authentically and realistically capture the essence of the people, the culture, and the soul of Oakland.

Oakland has a rich history, previously renowned for its Hyphy Culture and the influence of the Black Panthers. However, in recent years, the city has garnered widespread recognition, capturing attention through cin-

ema. Some of these film unique insights into the **multifaceted identity of Oakland** and do so by showcasing its vibrant culture, challenges, and distinctive character. Films like *Fruitvale Station* (2013) and *Sorry to Bother You* (2018) stand out as noteworthy examples. Each of these movies portrays Oakland realistically in regards to themes such as poverty, gentrification, and social injustice – many issues that **hit close to home**. The films address internal challenges within Oakland, utilizing a poignant and emotional genre, as well as incorporating a comedic and satirical approach to tackle these hard-hitting topics. I plan to analyze the films, focusing on an evaluation of their authenticity and accuracy by examining the themes, characters, and dialogue. Additionally, I intend to examine how Oakland has changed since the release of these movies, especially after the pandemic, and discuss whether the problems in these films have worsened, improved, or if there is a nuanced combination of both scenarios. I aim to delve into how film depicts Oakland and offer insights into how these stories con-

nect with the **real identity** of Oakland and the changes happening in society.

# Sorry To Bother You

*"Sometimes it makes me feel fake, like I'm losing my sense of self"*

- Joey, on Code- Switching  
(21, Oakland native)

As I mentioned earlier, certain expectations are tied to growing up in Oakland, the use of Bay Area slang and dress, to be specific. But these expectations aren't unique to Oakland – many people, depending on their cultural background, are shaped by their regional upbringing, influencing their **personalities** and how they express themselves. Unfortunately, because of our upbringing, our way of expressing ourselves can impact our ability to secure or even maintain a job. When we find ourselves in new environments, it becomes important to adapt to make others feel comfortable. In an article by the San Francisco Chronicle, Justin Phillips wrote, "I could feel myself trying to convey some unrequested sign of civility to the white people around me...I could hear myself using a voice with the worker at the register that was slightly softer, more cordial, and maybe an octave higher than normal... 'I know you've seen Black people do bad things before, but don't worry, I'm one of the good ones.'"

This practice is commonly known as **code-switching**. In my experiences working in the Bay Area, especially in customer service roles, I definitely had to change how I communicated. Talking in my usual manner might seem unprofessional and disrespectful to others, and so I engage in code-switching, altering how I express myself. It's not about being prejudiced; it's a deliberate effort to create a welcoming atmosphere for others and present a more friendly image, especially in professional settings.

That is why the film *Sorry to Bother You* hits home for me. The film is a dark comedy directed by Boots Riley that follows the story of Cassius Green, or Cash, a young African American man, who is struggling to make a living. After landing a job as a salesman at Regal View, Cash finds that he has a unique talent for cold-calling, and he quickly gets promoted in a short time. He is specifically skilled in using a "white voice," or code-switching, that allows him to connect with customers in a way "...they wished they sounded like" (00:14:46). The start of the movie accurately portrays an Oakland native facing challenges in excelling at his job due to issues related to his way of speaking. Despite the constraints that prevented him from **fully expressing** his true self, he manages to earn money and swiftly ascend the corporate ladder. This raises the question of how an individual's way of expression impacts their job performance, particularly in a corporate setting as depicted. Speaking in an improper tone is considered **unprofessional**, and companies aim to avoid employees who might be seen as "problematic" and could potentially "harm" the company's image. If an employee misrepresents the company, it can affect how customers perceive the entire organization. This is why many people of color born in cities like Oakland often find themselves jobless.



The movie also delves into the class inequalities present within the company. Lavish perks enjoyed by those who choose to code-switch bring frustration and resentment among regular employees, leading to uproar

and protest. Characters Detroit and Squeeze, along with their activist group, choose to disrupt the workplace during working hours, aiming to unsettle their colleagues and the company's higher-ups, now including Cash. While observing his friends who share his upbringing revolt against him, Cash began questioning the value of his wealth and the company, weighing whether it was worth pursuing at the **expense of his community** – with his identity and culture exploited. This impactful scene reflects the social and economic divide in Oakland, a divide perhaps even more extreme now. Code-switching is a common practice to secure or advance in a job, but it is also a reminder that our employment opportunities often hinge on sounding white. Many people recognize the reality of this and begin to lose themselves in the pursuit of wealth, while some revolt and fight back, creating an ideological divide in our city today. This division mirrors Oakland's historical wealth gap; even with wealthy companies headquartered in Oakland, the presence doesn't necessarily translate into more job opportunities. "The only real viable opportunities here in the Bay Area is the high-skill, high-paying tech sector," says Jones. "However, there isn't a real pipeline for folks who live in communities like East Oakland and West Oakland to go work for a Google or an Apple." Instead, available jobs often go to those who either **conform** to certain expectations, overlook corporate mistreatment, or those who are lucky enough to be offered an opportunity to pursue a career of their choice.

## Fruitvale Station

*"I am happy to live here.  
I wouldn't be the same person  
if it weren't for my community"*

- Kevin, on living in Oakland  
(22, Oakland Native)

*Fruitvale Station*, a film directed by Ryan Coogler, tells the heartbreaking true story of Oscar Grant III, a young Black man whose life ends tragically in a police encounter at the Fruitvale BART station. The movie not only sheds light on Oscar's life but also highlights the issues faced by communities like Oakland, where **racism** and police brutality are all too common. At the center of the film is Oscar Grant, portrayed by Michael B. Jordan, who struggles with his past while trying to make a better life for himself and his family. However, his life is cut short in a devastating encounter with law enforcement.



This event serves as a painful reminder of the systemic injustices that many Black people face, not just in Oakland but across the country.

An important moment in the film is when Oscar meets a former inmate now working at the grocery store. The film discusses problems in the criminal justice system, like finding a job and fitting back into society. In another article from San Francisco Chronicle, Lempres wrote, "Dozens of people return to Alameda County from jails and prisons in a given week...If those people are not able to secure work and housing, they're likely to return to bad habits out of necessity..." Recognizing the parallels, it becomes evident that it's not unusual for formerly incarcerated individuals to revert to a life of crime, primarily due to the **unjust and systemic issues** deeply embedded within Oakland and its community. Despite efforts to address these issues, instances of racial profiling and unjust treat-

ment by law enforcement continue to disproportionately affect communities of color. Additionally, economic inequality and lack of access to affordable housing remain pressing concerns, contributing to the cycle of poverty and social marginalization. In Oakland, a city with a strong history of **activism**, *Fruitvale Station* encourages viewers to confront the realities of racism and inequality by speaking up and letting our messages be heard. The film challenges us to reflect on our own roles in perpetuating or dismantling these systems of oppression. It calls on us to stand in solidarity with marginalized communities and to work towards creating a more just and equitable society. At the end of the film, Oscar is fatally shot to death by a police officer at the BART station. The scene is a powerful metaphor for the ongoing fight against police brutality and racial injustice. Despite protests and efforts to demand justice, incidents of violence against Black individuals continue to occur. Oscar's death symbolizes the countless lives lost due to racism and systemic **oppression**, highlighting the need for systemic change. *Fruitvale Station* is a call to action. It urges us to recognize each individual's humanity and advocate for systemic change. As we grapple with these complex issues, the film reminds us that the fight for justice is ongoing and that we all have a role in creating a better future for everyone.

*Fruitvale Station* and *Sorry to Bother You* delve into themes of police brutality, racial injustice, and economic disparity, echoing the socio-political realities of Oakland. The portrayal of Oscar Grant III's encounter with law enforcement in *Fruitvale Station* reflects systemic violence against Black communities, while *Sorry to Bother You* highlights the challenges faced by people of color in finding good jobs and economic stability. Both films vividly capture Oakland's socio-economic dynamics, emphasizing **pervasive injustices** and systemic barriers. Through their exploration of pressing issues, these movies spark critical discourse and

call for systemic reform, urging societal introspection and collective action toward social justice. Oakland, a symbol of resilience and hope, seeks a better tomorrow where **justice**, equality, and opportunity are accessible to every member of its community. Through the lens of Oakland-based films, stories of family, love, and culture foster a sense of togetherness and understanding, compelling audiences to confront uncomfortable truths and strive for meaningful change within and beyond the city's borders.

Oakland's vibrant persona lies in deep-rooted systemic issues that must be addressed. From racial inequality to housing instability, the city grapples with many challenges that impact its residents daily. Despite progress in some areas, many communities still face barriers to opportunity and justice. But as I delve into the films set in Oakland and compare them with the city's actual realities, one prevailing motif stands out: unity. Despite the diversity in race, culture, gender, and socioeconomic status, Oakland natives share a common desire for a city that prioritizes the livelihood of its **natives**. Despite facing challenges, the city continues to inspire with its diversity and activism. Films like *Fruitvale Station* and *Sorry to Bother You* shed light on the struggles of Oakland's communities, highlighting issues like police brutality and economic disparities. However weighty the topics and issues portrayed in these films may be, they ultimately showcase the unique bond of solidarity among Oakland natives, a characteristic not often found in other cities.

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# Paul Thomas Anderson California's Native Filmmaker

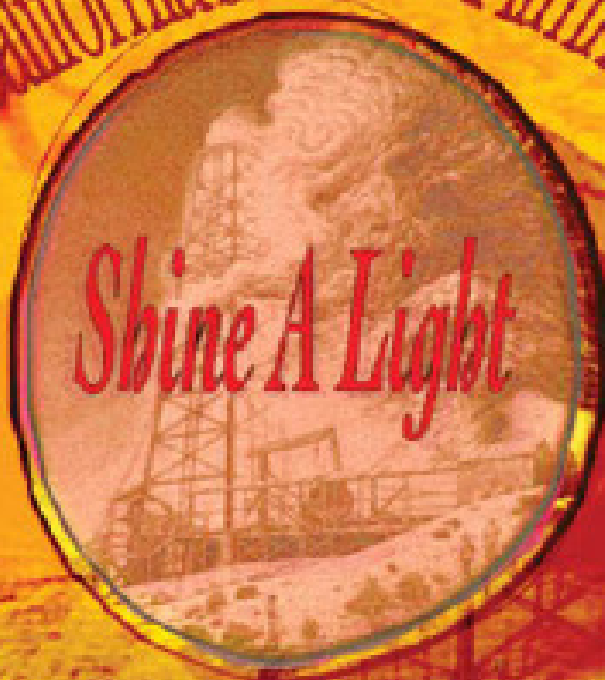
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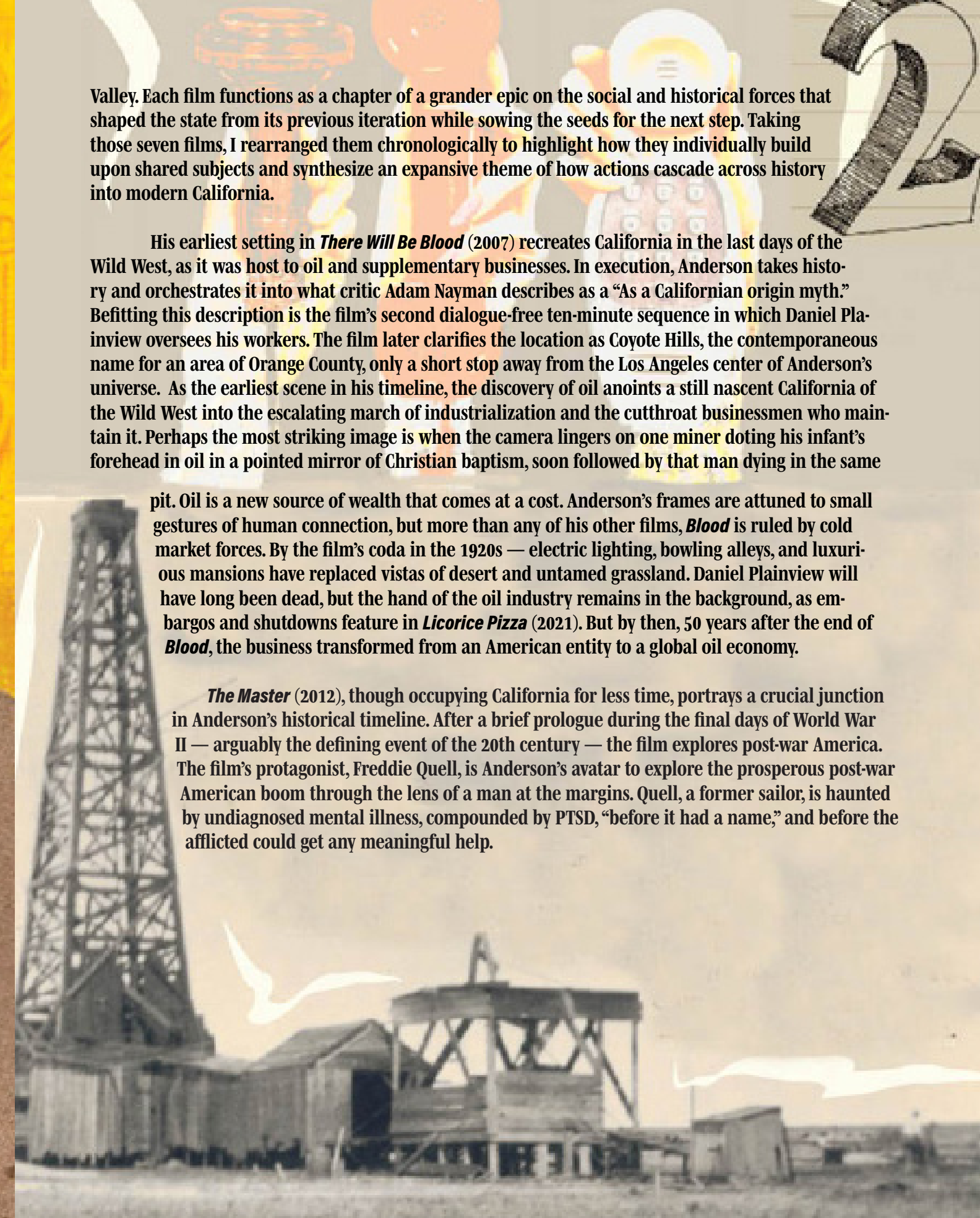
*Pettis*



Enter Paul Thomas Anderson, a homegrown California filmmaker from the San Fernando Valley. In the tradition of literary and cinematic figures, Anderson's filmography displays a sense of specific regional preference in focus and aesthetics, with seven of his nine current films prominently set in California and five specifically exploring the Valley. Unlike other films, which flatten location details for a homoge-

neous setting, Anderson's California is the one experienced by locals, not tourists. Anderson has a touch for capturing details that reveal the essence of the location. His films in the Valley take this even further, crafting a lived-in ecosystem that borders on a loving document to a place that often isn't taken seriously.

Beyond his native roots, Anderson possesses a broader scope, almost approaching an anthropological analysis of the state. Collectively, his filmography shades how California developed throughout the 20th century, particularly in the San Fernando



Valley. Each film functions as a chapter of a grander epic on the social and historical forces that shaped the state from its previous iteration while sowing the seeds for the next step. Taking those seven films, I rearranged them chronologically to highlight how they individually build upon shared subjects and synthesize an expansive theme of how actions cascade across history into modern California.

His earliest setting in *There Will Be Blood* (2007) recreates California in the last days of the Wild West, as it was host to oil and supplementary businesses. In execution, Anderson takes history and orchestrates it into what critic Adam Nayman describes as a “As a Californian origin myth.” Befitting this description is the film’s second dialogue-free ten-minute sequence in which Daniel Plainview oversees his workers. The film later clarifies the location as Coyote Hills, the contemporaneous name for an area of Orange County, only a short stop away from the Los Angeles center of Anderson’s universe. As the earliest scene in his timeline, the discovery of oil anoints a still nascent California of the Wild West into the escalating march of industrialization and the cutthroat businessmen who maintain it. Perhaps the most striking image is when the camera lingers on one miner dotting his infant’s forehead in oil in a pointed mirror of Christian baptism, soon followed by that man dying in the same

pit. Oil is a new source of wealth that comes at a cost. Anderson’s frames are attuned to small gestures of human connection, but more than any of his other films, *Blood* is ruled by cold market forces. By the film’s coda in the 1920s — electric lighting, bowling alleys, and luxurious mansions have replaced vistas of desert and untamed grassland. Daniel Plainview will have long been dead, but the hand of the oil industry remains in the background, as embargos and shutdowns feature in *Licorice Pizza* (2021). But by then, 50 years after the end of *Blood*, the business transformed from an American entity to a global oil economy.

*The Master* (2012), though occupying California for less time, portrays a crucial junction in Anderson’s historical timeline. After a brief prologue during the final days of World War II — arguably the defining event of the 20th century — the film explores post-war America. The film’s protagonist, Freddie Quell, is Anderson’s avatar to explore the prosperous post-war American boom through the lens of a man at the margins. Quell, a former sailor, is haunted by undiagnosed mental illness, compounded by PTSD, “before it had a name,” and before the afflicted could get any meaningful help.

California locales in *The Master* span further north and rural than typical in Anderson's films. A shot of a boat underneath the Golden Gate Bridge encapsulates Freddie's life intertwining with the cult in a reprise of his traumatic origins on a Navy ship. Aided by the meticulous production design of Jack Fisk, Anderson invokes the typical

**"representation of the fifties as a life of stability,"**

a faithful recreation that highlights the qualities of "stagnation, repression, and conformity" embedded in the social fabric. The most crucial sequence occurs in an Oakland department store. Freddie works as a portrait photographer, leading into a striking montage of portraits showing people holding still, faces frozen in smiles. Thematically, Freddie is creating the stereotypically golden 50s look common to commercials and nostalgia. They are an American ideal that can be purchased and displayed, but Anderson's films toy with that concept. The figures he is interested in empathizing with are people from fractured origins yearning for connection.

1970s America is the period Anderson revisits most frequently. Though those three films far from shy away from the darker elements seeped into the culture, they are also the most affectionately realized. *Licorice Pizza* is an amalgam of tales of 70s California, mixing anecdotes from a Hollywood who inspired the lead character, the starring Haim family, and Anderson's childhood in the Valley. In an interview, Anderson refers to the motorcycle jump centerpiece,

extracting from a childhood story of Evel Knievel at a local hangout. A viewer can feel how the California in these movies draws from a sense of lived history. With *Licorice Pizza*, textbook historical events are featured in the background, holding less weight than sketched scenes with the feel of a family in-joke.

In interviews, Anderson references the Valley's cultural reputation as a pedestrian attachment to Los Angeles:

**"The San Fernando Valley has always been epic to me... my goal was to make the valley cinematic. It seemed rather easy, because of my frustration with how others had tried to do it."**

If that is the outsider's outlook, then *Licorice Pizza* and *Boogie Nights* (1997) show the Valley through Anderson's camera-eye. One where the hills of Encino hide the most electric and thrilling comedy setpieces, all staged in a routine that could only play out in this specific suburban landscape.

While these 70s films are not overtly politically focused, Anderson imbues them with the counterculture movements of the time. Often, they function as a unifying factor for social outsiders: hippies, the Black Panthers, and even *Boogie Nights* frames its seedy porn industry as a film collective bastion. But at the same time, the 1970s are marked in a transient period. The reformations in the air are soon to fade away. Through its opaque plot, Anderson's adaptation of Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* (2014) sketches in the margins how these



ments were hijacked. It's a tangled web of dealings movethat's difficult to parse, yet broadly pointing to how drugs and outsider culture were taken as extensions of control — be it governmental or big business.

In contrast to the screwball noir of *Inherent Vice*, *Licorice Pizza* hones that perspective through a grounded story. Fitting the film's significant motif of pinball, the two leads ricochet through different cultural pockets, from celebrity culture to local politics. Each provides a stopgap for an entertaining vignette, but nothing lasting. Instead, the characters pass on to the next step, and at times, are left disillusioned by their experiences. In some ways, *Licorice Pizza* is a love letter to the California of Anderson's youth. But he pointedly does not shy away from the seedier aspects that were socially endemic. Glamorous movie stars turn into crass drunks and racist caricatures are a staple of adult humor. Yet, *Inherent Vice* and *Licorice Pizza* both find spots of true solace in a shared image. Two lovers running through the wide sidewalks of Los Angeles in blithe joy. In those scenes, the long Californian sprawl appears as a runway, where they don't need anything else as long as they move.

The march of time most viscerally manifests in *Boogie Nights* during the 1979 New Year's Party, where the 70s literally ends as the film's structure collapses into a series of losses, failures, and devastating incidents for its cast. Though tales of murder and drugs have an operatic but still fictional quality, other changes appear to ring truer to Anderson personally. Most notably, he places the industry turnover from film to digital video as a marker for the turn away from quality and work ethic as an industry pride. This incident is about a niche culture long before the mainstream shift from film to digital, of which Anderson is one of the biggest stalwarts of film photography. But as Adam

Nayman analyzes, this scenario serves as a microcosm for Anderson's greater theme,

**"a counterculture and its corporatization."**

It can be easy to mock porn formats as a subject deserving of seriousness, but Anderson treats it with genuine pathos. Director Jack Horner's insistence that he's a real filmmaker who makes real movies can be self-deluded. But it's not a leap to relate to someone defending their creative environment from encroaching business cuts.

With an affinity for period settings, Anderson thus far has depicted contemporary California only twice. *Magnolia* (1999) and *Punch-Drunk-Love* (2004) comprise a narrow slice of the turnover from the 20th to the 21st century. Gone is the freedom and counterculture that he lovingly portrayed; modern times are a sadder affair. Both films center around his loneliest and saddest characters, but there is no hippie movement or band of artists for them to latch on to for community. Conversely, Frank T.J. Mackey — a modernization of the manipulative business tactics regularly featured before, fosters a community of male hate and resentment, twisting shared pain towards resentment from which he can profit.

The California locales in these films are among the most mundane of Anderson's career. Anderson's period films exchange a certain kind of glitz and glamor, exciting but also distancing. His recreations of the past are authentically detailed, and the textures feel lived in of the time. In lieu of the epic-scale awe of the oil derricks of *Blood*, these films traffic in melancholic reality that can be more directly potent to a given audience. *Punch-Drunk-Love* stages a set piece where its anxious protagonist crashes through a typical fluorescent supermarket. Or *Magnolia*, where the camera barrels through a

multitude of suburban homes at an almost relentless pace. If Anderson, in his words, wanted to make the Valley “epic,” then these two films are his most significant effort. He reconstructs the most ordinary places through film as exciting, purely cinematic spaces.

The Valley may have been considered an uncool hub, but Anderson’s filmmaking exalts it for all its Southern Californian glory. There is a quality to how Anderson films the Valley in both framing and lighting. If one had to boil down his stylistic tendencies and trademarks, perhaps the most signatory technique in Anderson’s arsenal is his employment of blown-out highlights in a frame. But far from being the result of amateur (with love) filmmaking or unavoidable setbacks, this blinding white light is deployed with precise deftness. As early as *Boogie Nights*, when Dirk ambles through Jack Horner’s poolside villa, and as late as *Licorice Pizza*’s sunbaked suburbs, Anderson lets the warm California sunlight bathe the images. In select shots, the sky burns white instead of blue, or blue flares add an artificial texture to the film. Likewise, in *Punch-Drunk-Love*, the opening scene shows its protagonist leaving his dim office, drowning the celluloid in an enveloping layer of white light. It’s a sensation that many California residents can relate to during the peak of summer. As a palette tool, Anderson and his cameraman, Robert Elswit, blend the unvarnished white to complement bold primary colors for a uniquely Golden State image.

For as much as Anderson’s films paint a loving portrait of California locales, he simultaneously portrays its almost inextricable links to capitalism and conniving salesmen, who transmute in form and medium over time. Oil is the first, but traveling down the chronology shows how religion and cults, Hollywood filmmaking, and sexist self-help gurus are further vectors laced in a collective mindset of salesmanship and acquiring capital from the masses. If these films together examine the state’s development since the 20th century, then this observation is one of the principal roots of their narratives and themes, even if they take place in different stories and genres. At the time of this writing, Anderson is in the midst of filming his new movie in Eureka, California. From set photos, it appears to be contemporary, his first since 2002. Whatever the film ends up being, it surely will be an exciting new addition to Anderson’s vision of California, his most recurring character.



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*Written By Alexandria Boettner*

*Design by Charlotte Magee*

## *Notes on Camp: Dysfunctional Families in Cult Horror Films*

What is a cult film? There isn't an exact definition, as the term encompasses an extremely wide range of movies, but certain qualities have remained constant in cult films throughout history. The "cult" in cult film (or cult classic) refers to its central identifying feature: a small, yet extremely dedicated fanbase. Cult films are typically **rejected by critics** and the mainstream public upon their initial release, but adored by underground counterculture groups. This is because more often than not, cult films address disturbing or taboo subject matter, which leads to controversy and censorship. The film may eventually be given a reevaluation after decades and embraced by the general public, but that is not always the case. Even then, cult films are still viewed as bizarre in comparison to mainstream films - in no small part due to the frequency with which they display qualities of camp.

Now, it's important to define what the term "camp" actually means, as it has been used in a wide array of contexts and is crucial to exploring the significance of cult films in cinema. The term was coined by Susan Sontag in her 1964 essay "*Notes on Camp*" in regards to works that are entertaining because they are bad - often out-

rageously and unintentionally so. However, films can be intentionally camp as well. In fact, many films are more self-aware of their outrageousness than we tend to give them credit for. For this reason, I'd like to define camp simply as the opposite of realism: a specific tone and style of filmmaking revolving around the nature of being an over-the-top, transgressive, & satirical reflection of reality. **Camp reveals truth:** not through trying to accurately replicate every detail of the real world like realism or formalism does, but by defying so many filmic conventions that it forces us to confront why those conventions exist in the first place. This is why it has resonated so strongly with counterculture audiences throughout history; most prominently the **queer community**.

Camp reclaims the nature of being an outcast, and can transform trauma into something cathartic by simultaneously exposing and rejecting the social confines of the mainstream. The frequency with which disturbing subject matter is depicted through camp is also why cult films are so closely tied to the horror genre, and precisely why I find them so fascinating. This article will examine three instances of cult filmmaking. Specifically, films sur-



rounding the terrors of idyllic suburban family life: depicting the home as a breeding ground for abuse and crime through varying degrees of camp and horror. All of these examples were initially considered to be “bad” films, yet as time has passed they’ve each been given retrospectives – albeit in very different ways.

Perhaps no director is more suited to portraying domestic abuse through camp than **John Waters**, whose entire body of work is purposefully distasteful and provocative in order to expose the hypocrisy behind mid-century social norms and family values. His protagonists partake in crime and debauchery such as sexual assault, incest, cannibalism, and murder – all of which are played for laughs. At the front and center of nearly all his films is drag queen Divine, whose persona Waters describes as **“Godzilla and Elizabeth Taylor put together.”** Her screen presence is inimitable; she delivers Waters’ hilariously drawn out and creatively insulting lines as if her words could kill, and her physicality is indulgent, confident, and chaotic, the human representation of camp. Though extremely removed from reality in tone, the actions expressed on screen in Waters’ films remain bold and visceral.

Take *Pink Flamingos* (1972), which used real pyrotechnics to burn down the main characters’ trailer home, and ends with a scene of Divine actually eating dog poop on camera. Waters’ 1981 film *Polyester* significantly tones down the filth factor, instead upping the ante on his flair for kitsch. Obnoxious floral wallpaper, white picket fences, and hair rollers galore are used to explicitly **satirize** 50s Technicolor melodramas like those of Douglas Sirk. The general public was never the target au-

dience – Waters knew his films would be met with disgust by the mainstream, and that was precisely the point. His films were crafted specifically for social outcasts to enjoy, queer audiences in particular.

The same cannot be said for Frank Perry’s 1981 biopic drama *Mommie Dearest*, which has acquired a particularly infamous reputation. The film was an adaptation of Christina Crawford’s memoir, detailing the childhood abuse she suffered at the hands of her mother, Joan Crawford. Upon release, the film was met with abysmal ratings – all targeted toward lead actress **Faye Dunaway**. Her performance as Joan Crawford was deemed outrageously awful by critics and so-bad-it’s-good by general audiences. Naturally, the film became a cult classic. John Waters himself described Dunaway’s portrayal of Crawford as “the first drag queen played by a woman,” and it’s not hard to see what he means. Dunaway’s overexaggerated physicality and nearly operatic line readings are immediately reminiscent of Divine. Her screaming of “no wire hangers!” and “Tina, bring me the ax!” were so instantly iconic that they’ve been referenced time and time again in queer pop culture.



The film has gained a new life among queer audiences, but past their comedic reinterpretations of the film and critics' distaste for it lies a third reading of Dunaway's performance: that of stark realism. If you read the YouTube comments under the clip of the infamous wire hangers scene, most of them are from victims of parental abuse who consider Dunaway's over-the-top meltdowns to be eerily similar to how their own parents acted towards them. What has been dismissed as bad acting by some is frighteningly realistic for many others. This draws an unlikely parallel to another film of nearly the exact same content, but whose backlash was for an entirely different reason.

The original 1990s run of David Lynch's surrealist mystery drama *Twin Peaks* – while strange, campy, and highly satirical of melodramas (just like Waters' films and *Mommie Dearest*) – was actually beloved right off the bat. However, its 1992 prequel film, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, is an entirely different beast – and audiences were not ready for it at the time. The complete antithesis of *Twin Peaks*, *FWWM* didn't ex-

pand the show's world: rather, it completely shattered it. The literal smashing of a television screen at the end of the film's opening credits isn't exactly subtle when it comes to addressing how the film is meant to relate to the show. While *Twin Peaks* was campy and subversive, these qualities were removed from the underlying horror and violence intrinsic to the story. In Waters' films and *Mommie Dearest*, camp works to accentuate violence – not distract from it.

*Twin Peaks* was explicitly about murder and abuse, but such harrowing subject matter was heavily sanitized for television audiences to maintain a more lighthearted tone. Murder victim Laura Palmer was simply a beautiful dead girl: a symbol for the strange but enticing environment of *Twin Peaks*. In *FWWM*, there is no semblance of nostalgia, no fan service, no exciting mystery to latch onto. Audiences were forced to confront the horrifying nature of what *Twin Peaks* had always been about: the abuse and eventual murder of a young woman. *FWWM* is a bleak two hours of nothing but terror, misery, and suffering. Even the dreamy visual atmosphere of the show has been turned into a nightmare, the retro kitsch aesthetic now a **symbol of horror**. Family homes are liminal spaces, childhood bedrooms a surrealist hell. Lynch is uncompromising in his depiction of the horror of Laura's situation, and it is deeply uncomfortable to watch. However, this is all done with the specific purpose of centering Laura's experience and showing how she perceives the town that audiences had romanticized for two seasons of the show. The unwavering adherence to her perspective and emotions regardless of the viewer's comfort gives Laura agency, and more importantly, compassion



– two things she was never granted in the original show. The final scene is most evocative of this, in which she is greeted by an angel after her death and we see her smiling in relief. It feels like Lynch is trying to give Laura some semblance of a happy ending after all she's been through. Thus, while *FWWM* is undoubtedly an **exercise in misery**, it is also an exercise in visceral empathy.

Most viewers had not been interested in empathizing with Laura, and thus dismissed the film for being too “dark and depressing” in its depiction of her suffering. Many failed to consider that this may actually be a more accurate portrayal of an abuse victim's experiences. There is a scene in *FWWM* where Laura's father, Leland, goes into a rage over Laura having not washed her hands before eating breakfast. The way this scene plays out is nearly identical to many sequences within *Mommie Dearest* – the cartoonishly exaggerated outburst over a miniscule detail, the exhaustingly drawn-out nature of the suffering, the sheer terror lingering in the air. So why is *Mommie Dearest* laughed at while *FWWM* isn't? First, it's important to establish why each of these three examples were initially so despised. This relates back to a key element of cult films: their inaccessibility to the mainstream public on account of not only the films' subject matter, but the way in which such subject matter is portrayed. All the films I've brought up are textbook examples of **transgressive filmmaking**, with two central parallels between their depictions of abusive households. The first is the aesthetic subversion of traditional heterosexual suburbia. The homes in these films are all decorated with a retro feminine gaudiness similar to that of Old Hollywood melodramas



or soap operas. This starkly contrasts the extreme violence occurring within them, and directly links this aesthetic of kitschy Americana to an underlying depravity. Dunaway's poorly drawn-on eyebrows and feathered robes, the forever smiling face of Laura Palmer in her homecoming photo, and Divine's massive wigs and drag makeup all appeal to this nostalgia-driven aesthetic so aggressively that it's nearly sinister. Furthermore, the performances within these films all showcase “**extreme**” acting — on-screen behavior (in this case, unorthodox depictions of abusive parents) that completely abandons filmic conventions.

The lack of conformity to repressive cinematic styles can actually make these films more truthful and powerful, but it's also a lot harder for audiences to embrace. People really don't like it when their own personal comfort is disrupted, and the nature of all these films is very intentionally disruptive. When works attempting to expose a certain flaw within societal norms actually succeed in doing so, they are met with backlash. If you're making a movie about domestic abuse that stays within the bounds of filmic acceptability and plays it



“safe”, no institutions of power or privilege are challenged. For this reason, marginalized audiences tend to gravitate more towards films that are

actually transgressive. John Waters’ films have always been loved by queer audiences, but only in recent years has he been embraced by more highbrow film circles. Last year an exhibit dedicated to Waters opened at the Academy Museum in Los Angeles, now being considered “prestige art” by the very normies he was making fun of back in the 70s. Meanwhile, much of *FWWM*’s shifting reception can be attributed to its relationship with the original *Twin Peaks*, **challenging viewers** to see the show they loved in an entirely different light.

Now that decades have passed, *FWWM* has been granted a critical re-evaluation and is rightfully regarded by most as the masterpiece it always was. *Mommie Dearest*, on the other hand, has not been met with the same fate. At best, it has been treated as if it were a lighthearted Waters film, yet its content reflects something nearly as terrifying as *FWWM*. The truth is, *Mommie Dearest* can be both of these things at the same time – but because it is so multifaceted, audiences don’t really know what to make of it. It makes sense that critics dismissed the film as “bad” rather than reflecting on what conventions Dunaway may be shattering. The correlation between poor mainstream reception and underlying catharsis through camp speaks to how restrictive many cinemat-

ic conventions really are. It begs considering: who exactly gets to define what is “good” taste and “bad” taste, and why?

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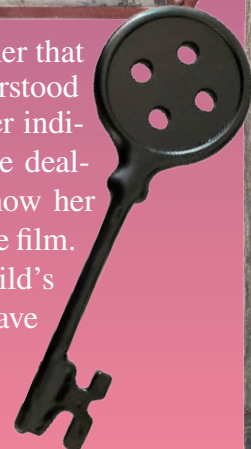
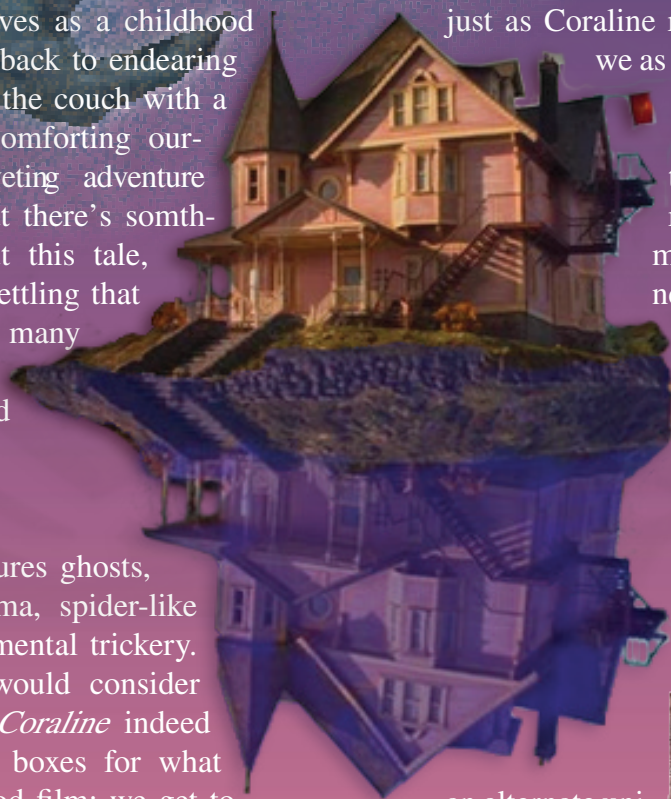
# Escapist Fantasies: Coraline's Other World

We all know and love the classic, cozy, and nostalgic film *Coraline* (2009) directed by Henry Selick. This film serves as a childhood favorite, bringing us back to endearing times cuddled up on the couch with a warm blanket and comforting ourselves with the riveting adventure Coraline endures. But there's something slightly off about this tale, something rather unsettling that sets it apart from the many fond childhood movies we know, love, and remember.

*Coraline* captures ghosts, spirits, familial trauma, spider-like mother figures, and mental trickery. Still a movie you would consider for children? Now, *Coraline* indeed checks many of the boxes for what constitutes a childhood film; we get to experience a tale of adventure, visions of the highly imaginative, and animals in silly costumes performing circus routines. But *Coraline* creates for itself boxes that do not constitute a childhood film; ones that you can only begin to grasp once you've grown a little older, thus gaining an understanding of the reality around you. Outside of its magical and imaginative nature, *Coraline* presents us with some rather uncomfortable and adult concepts such as problematic family dynamics, feelings of neglect, and unhealthy coping mecha-

nisms. This world that we're transported to throughout the film is seemingly colorful and wondrous, but just as Coraline realizes all that glitters is not gold, we as the audience can understand that the film means so much more than just an average tale of a child's adventure. *Coraline* serves as a fantastical representation of unhealthy coping mechanisms in regards to parental neglect, via Coraline's recreation of her reality which is tailored to what she's missing in her real life. She delusionally (and might I add, subconsciously) creates

an alternate universe, in which she is the center of attention – showing us further that she feels belittled and misunderstood in her real life. This can further indicate the possibility of Coraline dealing with mental illness, and how her delusions play a large role in the film. Are her visions just that of a child's imagination, or does Selick leave



a trail of crumbs leading us to a larger understanding of what's really going on in Coraline's mind? Let's get to the bottom of this by diving into the deeper implications of Coraline's dream world, the objects and scenes she creates, and further, how those mirror her internal mental workings!

**L e t** us start at the quaint yet creepy **Pink Palace**. From the jump, it's apparent to us that Coraline feels out of place in her real world. Her parents blatantly ignore her invitations to garden with her, casting her away like an insufferable nuisance. These first few scenes in *Coraline* characterize her toxic familial dynamic, which sets us up for Coraline's eventual motives in creating her other world. Further distinguishing Coraline's misunderstood character, have you ever stopped and noticed that a majority of the characters in Coraline's real world mispronounce her name as "Caroline"? Mr. Bobinsky, Miss Spink, Miss Forcible, and even her newly found friend, Wybie, all mispronounce her name, thus becoming a microcosm of Coraline's overall lack of acceptance and feelings of neglect. Interestingly enough, Mr. Bobinsky's army of mice correct him on his pronunciation of Coraline's name, and lest we forget that these mice are the connectors to Coraline's alternate world.

This being said, let's take a dive into Coraline's dream world, and what makes her distorted dreams so revealing of her psyche. When Coraline enters into her dream world we are faced with a beautiful array of colors, animated stuffed animals, and a seemingly

loving mother humming in the kitchen. This world is everything she's ever dreamt of living in, and her parents are the most crucial factor in helping us understand her needs not being met back "home".

The Other Mother is warm, inviting, and sensual. Coraline places the skill of cooking onto the Other Mother, and a gifted musical talent to her Other Father, revealing to us that she craves more

stimulation from both of her parents. As she and her "family" sit down for dinner, there is a feeling of warmth in the room constituted by the large array of food and her parents performing a grace. Just in this scene, we can grasp the feelings of home that Coraline desires to feel in her real world. The Other Mother recognizes Coraline's hunger, something her real mother hardly notices when sitting down to eat. This dinner scene is filled with maternal love as her Other Mother continuously offers her rolls, sweetpeas, corn on the cob, and even has a mango milkshake ready upon request. The inner machinations of Coraline's mind are evident in that she is dreaming of feelings she can't feel in her reality. Both the audience as well as Coraline can feel the sensation of home, deviating far from the emotions we feel in her real world at the start of the film.

Coraline is given the iconic "Welcome Home" cake after her feast, serving as our first material marker of her recognition in her dream world. After looking quizzically at her cake, Coraline's Other Mother remarks to her, "We've been waiting for you Coraline," and her Other Father says, "Yep,



wasn't the same here without you kiddo" (00:19:48). Coraline isn't only understood here, but she's wanted, thus projecting the void she feels in her reality. Her absence makes a difference to the other parents, while in her real world, Coraline has to beg and plead for her real parents to play games with her. From this, her alternate reality becomes a safe place; it is a place of desires where her subconscious mind can run wild...

**Taking a step back into Coraline's real world,** Coraline recounts a dream she had, excitedly sharing her visions with her parents. Immediately her dad discredits her by calling her a dizzy dreamer. Within this scene, we can



see that Coraline's parents belittle her imaginative qualities, and consider her silly and naïve. These dreams are comforting to Coraline (and are inherently her second home), yet foolish to her parents. As of now, we can understand Coraline's dream world as being a manifestation of her desires, or otherwise her uncon-



scious thoughts. Each night that she falls asleep in the real world, her dreams transport her into an alternate reality. But the curiosity of Coraline's other world coaxes her into visiting the magical door mid-day, leading us to believe that Coraline really does seek escapism. In this scene, the portal opens up just as it would in her dreams at night. It's here that the audience is presented with the idea that the other world

Coraline imagines may not just be a dream, but perhaps a cognitive dysfunction.

The lines between what is perceived and what is reality become blurred as aspects from Coraline's dream world seep into her real world, leading us to believe that Coraline has



dissociative qualities. In an article discussing dissociative qualities in children, FW Putnam adds how dissociative disorder can manifest itself in multiple fashions, including auditory and visual hallucinations, and vivid imaginary companionship.



So far, we have understood Coraline's dreams to be a coping mechanism in order to fill her needs of feeling seen and cared for. But if we look at it through the psychological lens of mental illness,

such as dissociative disorder, it feeds our understanding of Coraline's true despair. As she enters into Mr. Bobinsky's home, welcomed with cotton candy cannons and a rooster popcorn machine, the dancing circus mice get into formation and magically spell out her name. This in itself can be seen as a physical representation of Coraline being "seen" in her alternate world, because lest we forget the characters in her real world don't even pronounce her name correctly. The jumping mice perform a wonderful circus routine, entirely created for Coraline, making her feel like the star of the show.

Shortly after this fantastical mice show, Coraline and Wybie enter into Miss Spink and Miss Forcible's theater for yet another spectacle. Towards the latter half of the show, Miss Spink and Miss Forcible miraculously strip out of their home-ly suits, and transform into two beautiful trapeze artists. At once they begin to recite a poem that goes by the name of "What a Piece of Work is Man?" from the Shakespearian play, Hamlet. To place some context here, Hamlet is found in shambles by two university students sent by his uncle to spy on him. Before reciting the poem, Hamlet expresses his feelings of depression, and how the world around him brings him nothing but despair, essentially alluding to the idea that the life he lives makes him depressed. Selick's tasteful Shakesperian reference places Coraline and Hamlet as equals, given that both are craving more from their life, and are living in a depressing reality that doesn't suit them. The only difference here is that Coraline acts cog-

nitively on her depressive state and creates a world tailored to her desires. This reference, weaved within the astonishing play put on for Coraline, truly speaks to the broader problem at hand; Coraline's "dream" world/visions are acting as a dissociative vessel for her to escape the problems she faces at home. Much like Hamlet, Coraline's real world that surrounds her is dull, drab, and neglectful, which thus feeds her motive to create and imagine otherwise.

**As the film progresses,** Coraline finds herself escaping the Other Mother's home and wandering through the woods with her feline friend. In this shot, the world she created slowly starts to disappear, turning into a blank white environment. Her cat friend exclaims, "Nothing out here, she only made what she knew would impress you. She wants something to love, I think, something that isn't her" (00:55:14). The way in which the cat explains the Other Mother's world is synonymous to Coraline's own cognitive functioning, in that she created an alternate reality that she believed would satiate her unmet needs. This world is a noncontiguous reality to her own, and is filled with things that Coraline believes will make her feel loved. I personally viewed this conversation as a mirroring effect of the Other Mother's behavior onto Coraline's, becoming a commentary on how Coraline's brain is functioning in her alternate reality. She creates things that are idealistic to her, but more importantly things that act as a veil over her trauma.



Visually, the scene shows the fleeting effects of Coraline's alternate reality, and even deeper, the inadequacy of unhealthy coping mechanisms. We can see that the world she has created isn't truly fulfilling, hence why it is mostly empty. As Coraline's alternate reality morphs into her worst nightmare,



she faces the Other Mother in her true form, a skeleton-like insect. Coraline's belief that her dream world was pure perfection has caused her to face the fact that her cognitive tendencies have led her away from the very thing she thought she needed to rid herself of; her real parents. Coraline's dream world is a representation of her own coping mechanism in dealing with a neglectful home; but she soon realizes that her attempts at facilitating a perfect world actually leads her further from her desires. After defeating the Other Mother with the help of her feline friend and Wybie, Coraline finds herself back in her real home, with her real parents. As they enter,

they are covered in snow, an illusion that Coraline had envisioned in her alternate world. They are unaware of the snow, further proving Coraline's disillusionment in the present. This tells the audience that Coraline really is seeing things, deeming her "dream" world a dissociative manifestation.

*Coraline* prompts its audience with topics hardly touched on in PG films. We've looked through the real meaning of Coraline's dreams, and how they function as more than just a child's imagination at play but a complex manifestation of an adolescent's coping mechanism when faced with neglect. Her experiences in the other world are indicative of dissociative disorder, in that her real world and dreamworld overlap. Through Coraline's escapist fantasies, we find the complex internal issues that she struggles with; and through this we, the audience, can appreciate Selick's not-so-childish children's movie, and all the thought-provoking analysis it has to offer!

## Endnotes

1. Coraline. Focus Features, Universal Pictures, 2009.
2. Putnam F. W. (1993). Dissociative disorders in children: behavioral profiles and problems. Child abuse & neglect, 17(1), 39-45.
3. Ed. "What a Piece of Work Is Man', Meaning." No Sweat Shakespeare, April 1, 2020.



# Finding Refuge Elsewhere

*A Deep Dive into Achieving Eternal Sunshine*

Written By: Avalon Neal

Designed By: Avalon Neal & Mirabel Hunt

If you had the opportunity to erase the memories that broke your heart the most, would you? Would having a spotless mind lead to never-ending eternal sunshine? Michael Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) dives into this complex issue by illustrating a story of two heartbroken individuals choosing to forget all of the memories they once held with one another rather than naturally dealing with the emotions of grief. For someone you once considered your safe place or your home, it is hard to let go of such raw emotions and move forward. Nonetheless, is the process of erasing the memories you once held with a loved one the most ethical and beneficial way to move forward? Gondry tackles such complex themes in the most beautiful and emotional way by revisiting places of memories between the two heartbroken lovers while simultaneously showcasing how powerful the human mind and heart can be. Even with memory erasure, one cannot evade one's past, as instincts, emotions, and fundamental aspects shaped by past experiences persist and continue to influence one's current state.



The film revolves around Joel (Jim Carrey), a melancholic wallflower who is stuck in the monotonous labor of everyday life until he meets the carefree and impulsive Clementine (Kate Winslet). The two individuals bring out the best and worst within each other; even so, they consider one another to be their home. Eventually, Joel and Clementine reach an emotional deadend within their relationship, and spontaneously, Clementine decides to erase all the memories she ever had with Joel. Absolutely heartbroken and confused over Clementine's choices, Joel decides to get the same procedure done and completely erase all memory he has of his past lover. The audience watches Joel re-experience his memories with Clementine and witness the love they once held for each other unfold. Memories hold raw emotion and contentment, revealing Joel's vulnerable view of the world that Clementine helped build. As Joel's memories replay in reverse order, the audience watches as each of his memories flows into the next, each tainted with Joel's own imagination and manipulation. The non-linear narrative unwinds comparably to an individual's consciousness, motivated by emotional triggers that seamlessly activate a past memory. Through this non-linear and fairly melancholic sequence, Michael



Gondry is able to illustrate Joel's distorted view of home and his inability to move forward due to the unethical nature of the memory erasure.

As Joel is thrown from one memory to the next, his heart begins fill with pain as the harmonious memories from the early stages of his relationship with Clementine begin to play. He recalls the Clementine he once knew, the lovely red-haired girl who lit up his life with passion and happiness. Joel disconnected himself from reality and held onto a memory of a person that no longer exists. By disregarding the present-day circumstances that stand between him and his detached ex-girlfriend, he is furthering his distorted view of Clementine, which, in actuality, no longer exists. Clementine now resides as a broken figure in his life that he is not ready to let go of. In this moment of vulnerability, Joel decides to fight back against the memory erasure



in a new object. Melancholia is juxtaposed to mourning as a process that has gone wrong, that has become stuck in repetition. There is no moving on in melancholia, just repetition of gestures and emotions of grief; an unending retreat from life."

While mourning can feel overwhelm-

*"Joel's own awareness of his future mistake proves the destructive, ignorant nature of erasing an individual's memory."*

and hide Clementine in a part of his mind that cannot be reached. Despite the release of the pain that will be met once the procedure is done, Joel fights for his memories of Clementine not to be erased, as he does not want to treat the relationship as if it meant no value and like something that can be simply disposed of. He knows that the memories of Clementine should not be erased, for he becomes aware of the eye-opening perspective his lover had instilled into his life.

For instance, Joel is forced to face the tragedy of losing everything he had learned and loved about his past lover. All the knowledge he had previously gained while alongside his Clementine is now dissipating. Through Clementine, the deeply melancholic Joel was able to see the world in a brighter light and have the power to make his life more exciting and ever-changing. Without his memory of Clementine, Joel's own state of growth is left stagnant. Professor Havi Carel from the University of Bristol remarks on the static condition individuals find themselves in when resorting to memory erasure instead of allowing them to confront their emotions organically. She states, "Mourning is healthy because its ultimate aim is to allow the mourner to return to erotic life and to reinvest

ing, an individual needs to let themselves express and process these emotions to achieve eternal sunshine. Clementine's spontaneous and carefree attitude towards life carries through with her decision to ultimately have her memory wiped of her recent ex-boyfriend. This process leads the heartbroken Joel to follow in her footsteps, as he feels he is unable to go through life without her. The two lovers are stuck in a monotonous state of grief, never letting themselves go through the mourning process of heartbreak and letting melancholia take over. Even if the memory of one another no longer exists, their intuitive and innate emotions continue to persist. Joel and Clementine were not able to escape the heartbreak; instead, they amplified and prolonged it by leading to a repetition of actions and emotions.

Throughout the film, the ethics behind erasing one's memory are consistently being questioned as a resurgence of emotions towards past lovers continues to stand as natural instincts and emotions do not disappear. To illustrate this idea further, Michael Gondry introduces the audience to two seemingly unrelated characters. Upon further inspection, we learn that they know each other a lot better than previously seen. The man behind the madness,



Dr. Howard Mierzwiak (Tom Wilkinson), collaborates with his colleagues and his assistant, Mary Svevo (Kirsten Dunst), to erase the memories of those hurting the most. While working on Joel's memory erasure procedure, Dr. Mierzwiak and Mary are left alone with each other. The young and eccentric Mary cannot push aside her feelings towards her boss and passionately kisses the married doctor. Unsurprised by this action, Dr. Mierzwiak recounts to Mary that he is a married man with children, further relaying the impossibility of being

other after all memories of each other have been erased. They continue to meet eye to eye, but they still look at each other as if they were just strangers. Despite just recently "meeting" each other, their innate emotions for one another emerge, and they fall for each other once more. While falling for each other once again, Mary decides to boldly release all information about the patients affected by the memory erasure procedure to ensure that nobody will be harmfully affected by this method ever again. Clementine and Joel



*"You can have him, you did."*

together. Despite these factors, the two kiss each other once more and are caught in the act by Dr. Mierzwiak's wife. As Howard and Mary race off after his wife to console her for their own wrongdoings, the defeated and dispassionate woman claims, "You can have him, you did."

This information dumfounds Mary as she was unable to recall any memory of having been with her boss before this moment. The doctor quietly utters to the young assistant, "We have a history." At this moment, Mary realizes she is stuck in a repetitive state of heartbreak, constantly getting heartbroken over the same man over and over again because she is unable to hide her instinctual emotions. Instead of letting herself mourn, she decided to have her memory erased of Howard, which led her to end up right where she began.

In a similar fashion, Clementine and Joel could possibly be stuck in the same monotonous loop, as they are both unable to rid themselves of their innate emotions for each other despite having no recollection of one another. Nearing the end of the film, Clementine and Joel reconnect with each

are left appalled over this revelation as they are left with no recollection of their uplifting or disheartening experiences with each other.

Nevertheless, the two decide to give the relationship another chance in spite of the risks that stand in their way. The film ends on an ambiguous but uplifting note, with Clementine and Joel attempting once again to be with one another despite the circumstances. Although this decision is seemingly heartwarming, it could ultimately lead to their own demise. There is a reason why they decided to split ties with one another, and even though they are unable to recall this situation, it still shadows their hearts and relationship with one another, for they were meant to grow away from each other, not towards. The inability to separate themselves from someone they once considered their home continuously exemplifies the immoral nature of memory erasure, further proving its probability to cause more destruction than satisfaction.

*"Meet me in  
Montauk"*

*"I can't see anything that I don't like about you!"  
"But you will!"*

In order to further prove the dissatisfactory nature of memory erasure, it is necessary to comment upon the editing style and cinematography that is displayed in Michael Gondry's film, specifically when Joel's memory of Clementine is being erased. The film uses an anti-chronological editing technique, starting with the most recent events between them and then revealing their earliest memories with one another near the end. Ironically, the film seems to present the relationship in a lighter tone to the audience when, in actuality, their relationship has grown into an unpleasant and toxic environment. This technique is especially effective when analyzing Joel's own feelings toward Clementine and how his own distorted view of her led him to his demise. By having these past memories resurface, Joel falls in love with her all over again, pushing aside the toxicity that has risen between them and only admiring the good. By the end, the harsh memories have long faded, and Joel, alongside the audience, is left with the recollection of all of the positive memories. As the audience, we continue to root for the happiness of couples displayed in films and television as they usually end up together and live happily ever after. While watching *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, we root for Clementine and Joel to be together in the end because they have such

fond memories of one another and truly do love one another. Nevertheless, the reality of the situation is Clementine and Joel will end up making each other miserable once again, making this film an exceptionally realistic breakup movie.

Overall, Michael Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* allows viewers to question the ethicalities of memory erasure and further prove the important connection between instinctual emotions and the memories that coincide with each other. Memories play an important role in our development as individuals and help us make decisions that benefit our future. The relationship displayed between Clementine and Joel exhibits an exceptionally realistic and complex perspective that viewers are able to connect with and relate to, as facing heartbreak is a nearly universal experience. Although the process of managing a heartbreak can be overwhelming, it is more important to love than to have never loved at all.



*Endnotes:*

1. "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind," directed by Michel Gondry (Universal Pictures, 2004).
2. Carel, Havi. 2007. "The Return of the Erased: Memory and Forgetfulness in Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004)." *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 88 (4): 1071–82.

# Eternal Sunshine of the spotless mind





*Designed by Maryam Sadeghifard*  
*Written by Xion Sarte*

# THE CAREFREE DECAY OF “POST-INDUSTRIAL” YOUTH

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## A ROMANTICIZED REALITY

**TW:** *Mention of sexual assault, suicide, domestic abuse, state violence, underage drug/alcohol use*

**A**t the turn of the mid-20th century, cinematic censorship had begun to dissipate. Notably, exploitation films, which are characterized as cheaply-funded productions portraying taboo imagery and current trends, started to rise in popularity. Between the 1960’s and 70’s, mainstream films still diverted from including such content; thus, exploitation films fed the masses’ darker desires. The visibility of the skate subculture similarly blossomed by the late 70’s, asserting values of autonomy, resilience, and community support. “To outsiders, skaters are thought of as rebels, social deviants, or simply different.” Historically, prohibitive legal measures have been made against skate culture, due to stereotypes of laziness and disorderliness. In a similar sense, exploitation films have been discerned as shocking and disruptive to the status quo. Sometimes shunned for their approach to realism – Larry Clark, director of the cult-classic *Kids* (1995), documented inner-city Tulsa teens, who lose themselves to the shattering bliss of the present moment. Clark returned to themes of desolation, screamo, and self-destruction in his obscure production: *Marfa Girl* (2012). Critics were underwhelmed by his recurring interest in working-class Latino youth, which had been previously featured in *Wassup Rockers* (2005). In his films, the contemporary adolescent faces the issue of having too-much time. Is the idle adolescent privy to being exploited in films made under the guise of art?

Similar scrutiny followed the Serbian director Maja Milos’ indie-sleaze feature, *Klip* (2012). The film explores frantic teenagehood from an honest, heart-wrenching perspective, but depicts (staged) gratuitous sex scenes between adolescents. The fourteen-year old lead, Jasna, clad in waist-cinching puffers and fur-lined boots, parties throughout freezing Belgrade nights. Through her phone’s camera, she and her peers glamorize their lifestyles, concealing the bleakness of their dilapidated suburb. *Marfa Girl*, meanwhile, features found-talent Adam Mediano, a Mexican-American boy who skates the Chihuahuan desert’s high plains.

Jasna and Adam are pressured by adult expectations, and they are emotionally isolated. Both characters exhibit voidness from the (impending) loss of a father figure. Jasna’s father is dying from a health condition, and she seeks relief from various highs. Meanwhile,



Adam's father is unpre-  
sent; he cheats  
on his devoted  
girlfriend and  
gets into trou-  
ble often. Adam  
and Jasna fre-  
quently engage in  
withdrawal coping  
techniques, whereby  
they remove them-  
selves from their  
home-centered  
anxieties. One  
study stated  
how the  
highest  
levels  
of

stress  
were determined to be  
parentally-related. Jasna and Adam's  
mothers are burdened with financial  
instability and lack an emotional support  
system. Jasna holds resentment against her  
family's structural decline. On the other hand,  
Adam briefly expresses his distress but omits any  
dedication towards envisioning a brighter future.  
Thus, the teens utilize sexual enticement and drug  
use as distraction strategies.

Disrespect towards state institutions is ex-  
plored through the teenagers' reactionary actions.  
These filmic choices metaphorize the predatory  
breaches made by members of disciplinary institu-  
tions. In *Marfa Girl*, Adam walks into school late,  
as students pledge allegiance to the flag of the  
United States and Texas. He does not vocalize the  
pledge, and falls asleep during class. His female

teacher awaits for the room to be cleared, and she takes  
advantage of Adam's disengagement. She threatens to  
paddle him, as a means of tantalizing him. Her false  
embodiment of intimidation is unsettling. Addition-  
ally, Adam brushes off the aggravation he endures from  
Border Patrol. His disconnect with his white mother is  
highlighted, as her advice is "not give them a reason [for  
officers]" to harm him. Due to the colonial history of  
Marfa, a town sixty-miles from the US-México border,  
manifestations of white supremacy affect Adam, as well  
as others within Marfa's Latinx community. The iden-  
tifier of Marfa Girl is a young, unnamed white wom-  
an; she is an artist interning for the Chinati Foundation,  
recognized by locals as a gentrifying force. Marfa  
Girl's relationship with the townsmen is as fetishistic as

it is consistent – she sleeps with  
many of the younger Latino  
men she encounters. *Marfa  
Girl's* white gaze reinforc-  
es the exoticization of Latinx  
people. Arguably, Clark may be un-  
consciously conserving this stereotype.

In white American-produced media,  
tropes of the Latin Lover and  
Spicy Latina indoctrinate de-  
meaning perceptions of Latinx  
man/womanhood. Colonialist  
assumptions of Latinx sensuality  
and sexual availability preserve  
the idea that the oppressed subject is easier to  
groom, or capable of withstanding mutilated boundaries.

In *Klip*, Jasna's school district offers poor academ-  
ic support. In one scene, Jasna and her friends giggle,  
as she films her professor falling asleep while lecturing.  
Secondly, the institution fails to monitor the violence and  
bullying that often occurs. Jasna's love interest, the sev-  
enteen-year old Djordje, even defaces school grounds  
as a hobby, stirred from his rebellious disdain towards  
his home and school life. As he and his friends routinely  
wreak havoc, they shout from rooftops, shouting their  
nationalistic pride. However, their ruinous actions ex-  
hibit their lack of faith in their country's economic pros-  
perity. For context, Serbia is ranked the sixth poorest  
country in Europe. In 2012, 8.8% percent of the Serbian  
population lived below the poverty line. In 2013, 24.5%  
of the population (which consists of less than 1.8 million  
people) were at risk of living below the poverty line.  
Those at such risk also tend to live in lower-income ar-  
eas, which are densely populated neighborhoods. This is

apartment complexes. In a particular scene of vandalism, the friend group sets school property afire. Djordje then unleashes the fire extinguisher. The friends frolic in the thrill of the short-lived, smokelike savior. This imagery alludes to the blinding elation felt from smothering of one's ailments. Djordje and Jasna run through the white smoke, symbolizing the clouded nature of their flammable lifestyles.

Both Jasna and Adam find themselves in compromising and toxic dynamics, due to early sexualization, gender norms, and their socio-economic conditions. Jasna is influenced by social media and her peers, and she equates her self-worth to her promiscuity. Slavic expectations of masculinity lie in warriorism and chauvinism, which entails the exertion of physical power and misogyny. Thus, Djordje is enabled to misuse Jasna's assumption of self-subordination. Meanwhile, Adam is being preyed upon by adults and figures of authority. At the beginning of the film, he has just turned sixteen. Marfa Girl tells him she is waiting for him to reach Texas' age of consent, seventeen. Adam is hypersexualized, due to the adultification of Latino youth. Though Adam is receptive to the attention, he is most likely accustomed to the predatory nature of their advances.

Both Jasna and Adam's mothers are loosely unaware of their children's safety, as they lack the time and resources to mitigate their children's whereabouts. In *Klip*, Jasna's mother asks her to sell her phone for money, despite how Jasna's rich uncle in Azerbaijan refuses to assist her family financially (he gave Jasna the phone). In *Marfa Girl*, an initial instance of sexual harassment occurs within the first five minutes: Adam is chased by a Border Patrol agent, Tom, due to bypassing juvenile curfew. These curfews were researched to disproportionately impact Black and Hispanic children,

and they were found to create problematic scenarios, as enforcers were also not trained on how to identify underage subjects. Tom later claims he stopped Adam due to suspicions of

him being an undocumented immigrant, or a "terrorist."

However, Adam knows the attack was intentional. When

he is tackled by Tom, and Adam spits out, "Hom!" This insult insinuates Tom's repeated behavior.

Later in the film, Tom even kidnaps Adam, and attempts to sexually abuse him. Tom tends to harass individuals unprotected by an adult male's machismo. However, Adam reaps his revenge in a culminating scene: he shoots Tom with a rifle, saving his mother's life.

The climactic moment in *Klip* is the day Jasna's father is hospitalized. In the bathroom with Djordje, she pours her heart out, and cries. This is the first time she expresses grief in the film. Djordje appears

**"HE GRABS HER WRISTS, AND THE TWO PROCEED TO KISS, AS BLOOD STILL RUNS FROM HER NOSE"**

uncomfortable with her externalized sorrow. Though it is implied Djordje and his mother were by the father, he responds with a gentle caress, and suggests cocaine will aid Jasna. A study discovered how “romantic love and cocaine addiction behaviors share survival system activation in the brain,” which illustrates why an obsessive need can generate so fiercely. Furthermore, “romantic love can become a destructive form of addiction,” upon instances of rejection.

This observation is concretized when Jasna becomes increasingly attached to Djordje, as he arbitrarily devalues her advances. His dismissive tendency is epitomized when Jasna confesses her love for him, amidst a passionate kiss. He shoves her away, disgusted. His reaction triggers a mutually fight or flight response. Thus, Jasna attempts to recapture his desire. She kisses another boy, and upon him noticing, he begins to beat her. Cocaine is researched to instigate hyperactivity within the limbic neurotransmitter system, its impulsive aggression in response to negative stimuli. Djordje, intoxicated, feels provoked to punish Jasna for her attention-seeking betrayal. Jasna then attempts to throw punches at him. He grabs her wrists, and the two proceed to kiss, as blood still runs from her nose. In *Marfa Girl*, cocaine use is also shown as a warning signal. The unnamed woman engages in snorting the substance with a local man. He speaks about his past, which includes “living on extremes.” He describes an evening by which he took his motorcycle two-hundred miles-per-hour down a highway, party-hopping from San Antonio to Austin: “There’s no processing anything. No looking side to side. It’s just you on this really fast horse.” His comparison of a motorcycle to a horse evokes the history of a Wild West Texas, and its symbolism of being unbound to law. As his speed causes him to surpass highway patrol, he accessed the feeling of being briefly undefeatable. As the man’s evasion of boredom

results in damaging distractions, his cocaine habit then developed into adulthood. Overall, the man represents a cycle that Adam and his peers may be susceptible to following.

Withdrawal coping, primarily with addiction, keeps many of the characters afloat. “When people are uncertain about an important outcome, they can hardly think about anything else.” When an individual cannot be promised an outcome, they begin to ruminate over the possibilities. They could get consumed by negative speculation, as they fixate upon undesirable outcomes. As Jasna is against her family’s downward spiral, she finds solace in empty spaces. Her struggle is illustrated through jump cuts. This technique is used throughout

the film. In one example, Jasna’s mother begs for her daughter to help with errands. She begins to have a breakdown when Jasna declines.

The mother is overwhelmed by her husband’s upcoming surgery and disheartened by how Jasna refuses to support her family. She sobs, hugging her daughter; however, Jasna’s position is stagnant, incapable of offering consolation. Jasna mutters, “You’ve already buried him,” implying how morbid grief already eats at the family’s crumbling hope. Jasna is constantly leaving her home, as she avoids absorbing her mother’s emotions.

The somber scene suddenly switches to Jasna in Djordje’s embrace. Their moment of intimacy soon escalates into a degrading, yet oddly playful sex scene. Jasna is catering to Djordje’s sexual desires, in order to receive validation from him. Thus, their immersion in a high-gear fantasy underlines the psychophysical stimulation she and Djordje crave. The final abrupt jump cut changes from this intense scene, to Jasna’s relatives silently eating in the kitchen. This footage is provided



through Jasna's flip phone, as she also films her father, asleep on the couch. The phone footage suggests Jasna's childlike approach to her technology. It is a reminder of her naivety, and her vulnerability to the depraved realities surrounding her. Comparably, Clark utilizes jump cuts in *Marfa Girl* to emphasize contrasts: he slices between self-consuming highs and depressive lows, as underlying mundanity lies in their shadows. Although there is a visually stark difference between the teenagers' self-made environments and their parents' homes, they all suffer from tattered sources.

Clark's *Marfa Girl* may be a voyeuristic, exploitative, and beautified perspective of banality. And though *Klip*'s sex scenes are quite graphic, the sharp turns between love and violence eerily parallel real-life dynamics.

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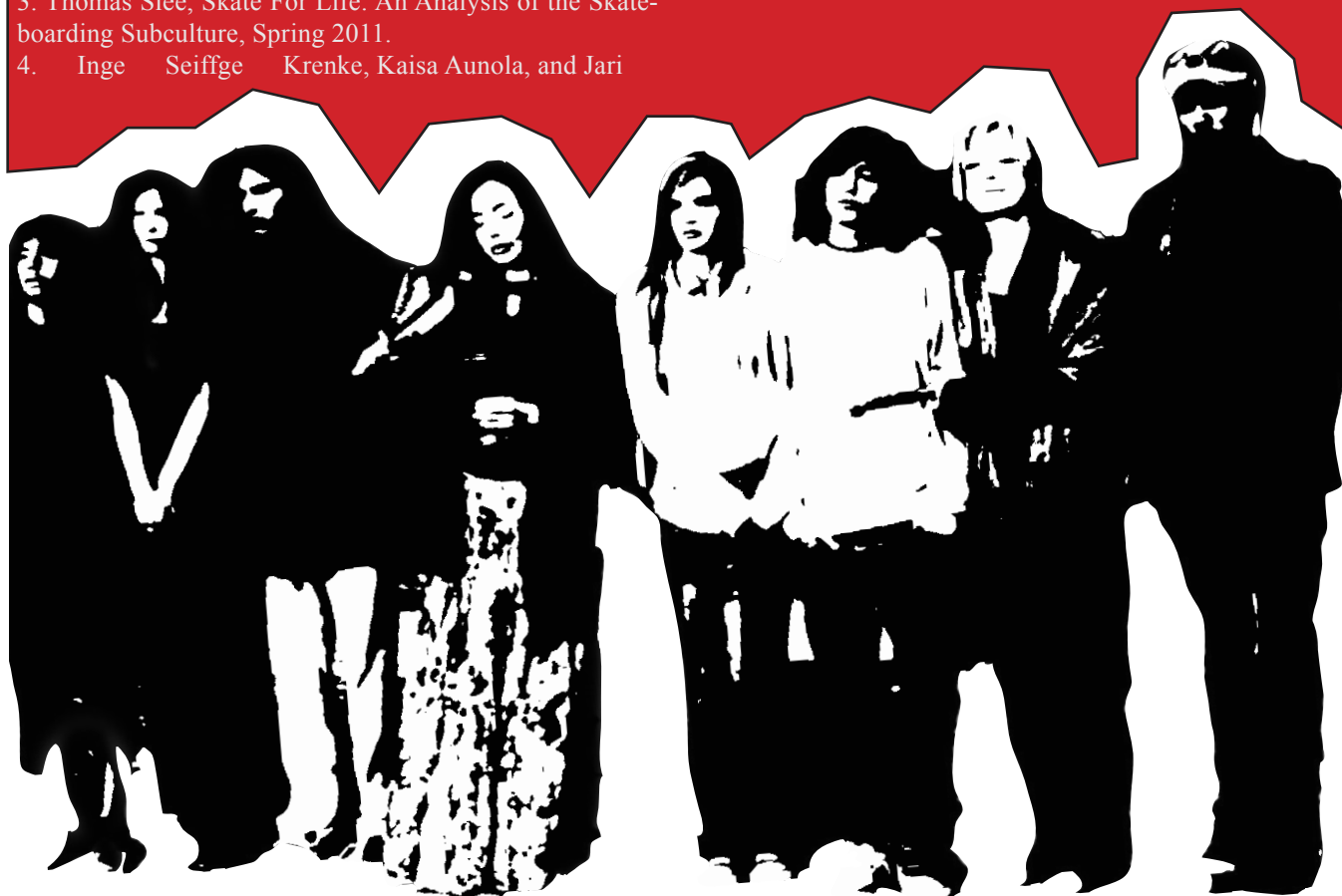
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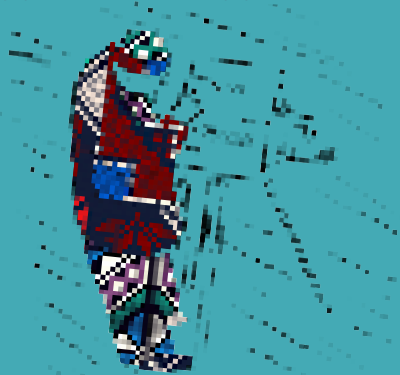
# *Palestinian Cinema:* **The Art of Resistance**

Written By: Franny Trinidad

Designed By: Vivian Hawkins

**FILM** possesses an unparalleled power to inform and provide a gaze into worlds which we may have otherwise not known. Complex topics such as identity, politics, religion, and the intricacies of human interaction can become more approachable through the lens of a camera and the comfort of a set, but filmmakers can also report in real time and document raw footage in the pursuit of truth.

*Cinema is a tool which has historically led revolutions and united the masses in opposition to oppression.*



Artists have always been fundamental to justice, and the creative minds of the Palestinian people have proven that resistance can come in many forms.

On Oct. 14 2023, the Palestine Film Institute (PFI) published a curation of films titled, “Unprovoked Narratives,” which is described as “a series of films celebrating the beauty of Gaza, its people, its struggle and its survival. The program aims to resist the demonisa-

tion of this beautiful place.” Palestinian artists and activists have continued to preserve creative spaces and champion for the importance of artistic expression in the face of Israel’s genocide against Palestine. “Unprovoked Narratives” was created with the intention of resisting misinformation and shifting false narratives surrounding Palestine by highlighting its rich culture and cinema. The Palestinian resistance has continuously been strengthened by the creative prowess and powerful messaging of artists. Each frame of a film, the strokes in a painting, every stitch in a textile – all echo the struggles of resilient people.

The 12 titles included in “Unprovoked Narratives” are divided into three genres: **experimental, drama, and documentary.** Each genre highlights films which embrace the diversity of the Palestinian experience. Viewers are invited into Gaza to discover the realities of life under occupation through the eyes of the Palestinian people. A wide range of themes are explored within the collection, through gut-wrenching war scenes to a tradition-defying forbidden love. The films included in the program are: **Experimental:** *Ouroboros* (2017), **Drama:** *Tale of the Three Jewels* (1995), *Condom Lead* (2013), *Habibi* (2011), and **Documentary:** *Ambulance* (2016), *Scenes from the Occupation from Gaza* (1973), *To My Father* (2008), *Gaza Ghetto: Portrait of a Palestinian Family* (1985), *One More Jump* (2019), *Gaza Calling* (2012), *Shujayya* (2016), *Samouni Road* (2018)

A mix of narrative, documentary, and experimental film – “Unprovoked Narratives” encapsulates the complexity of the Palestinian experience and transports us into their homeland of Palestine. One standout from the collection, a film titled, *Scenes of the Occupation from Gaza* (1973), provides visceral documentary footage of the Israeli occupation. It is one of the earliest films made on occupied Palestinian territory. Directed by Mustafa Abu Ali, one of the founders of the first filmic arm of the Palestinian revolution, Palestine Film Unit (PFU), this film and others like it highlight the anti-colonial struggle and compare the Palestinian people’s struggle for liberation to similar anti-imperialist movements in Vietnam, Cuba, and Angola. *Scenes of the Occupation from Gaza* features narration and reclaims footage from a French news team which depicts some of the earliest film footage from Israeli-occupied Gaza. Ali’s identity as a revolutionary filmmaker is made obvious through the radical work he creates. The film provides an in-depth critique of the ways imperialism and colonialism have plundered land and harmed indigenous people across generations. Ali’s knowledge of history, colonialism, and international solidarity is made apparent in this deeply touching documentary film. *Scenes of the Occupation from Gaza* is the quintessential example of an engaging form of media which immerses you into an unfamiliar world.

From the drama collection, *Habibi* (2011), directed by Susan Youssef, struck me as a unique subversion of romance conventions.

The film is a reconfiguration of the famous ancient Sufi parable “Majnun Layla,” set in Gaza amidst the Israeli occupation. *Habibi*, the Arabic word for “beloved,” explores themes of class struggle, forbidden love, and political turmoil through its two star-crossed lovers, Qays and Layla, who choose love despite the harsh realities of life under the occupation. Throughout the film, Layla is pressured by her family to marry wealthy as a way to stabilize. She grapples with social and religious expectations, as well as her feelings for Qays who is unable to provide financial stability. The cinematography features intimate moments of love in both the romantic sense but also in the form of Qays’s writing and poetry. The camera also captures the beauty of Gaza and its landscape, showing a deep appreciation for the land as well. By viewing this film through an intersectional lens, we are able to understand how Qays and Layla’s love story is directly affected by their ethnicity and religious upbringing. In a capitalistic, re-

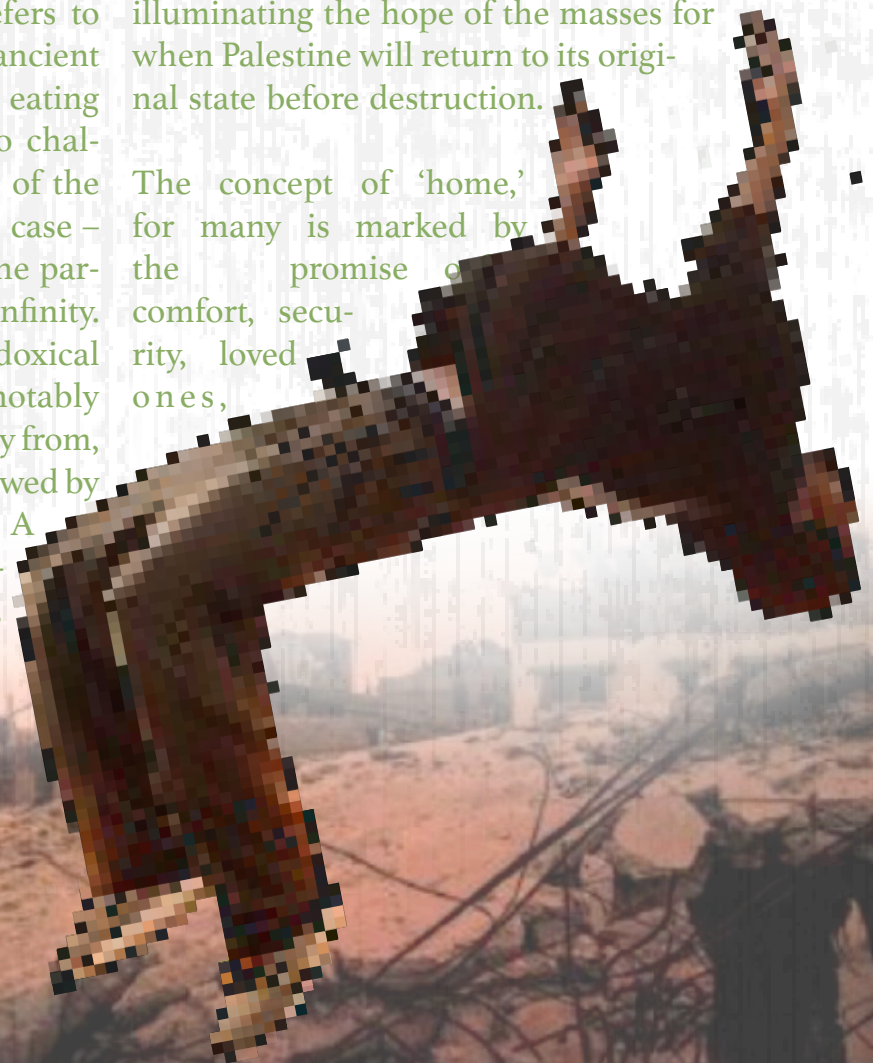


pressive, and fascist regime which strips Palestinians of sovereignty over their land and government – marriage becomes an economic move and a survival tactic. Their love for each other is an act of resistance and a way to reclaim joy and power, rather than to fall entirely victim to the occupation. She states, “Joy is important. We have a right to love. We have a right to write poetry about love, even if our country isn’t independent. We have a right to be happy even if people around us go hungry and are dying. To lose those things would mean to give into the occupation completely.”

The experimental film, *Ouroboros* (2017) by Basma al-Sharif, is eccentric in its sound, imagery, and thematic structure. Gaza is framed through symbolic actions, eerie score, and hopeful narration. The ‘ouroboros’ refers to a circular symbol originating from ancient Egypt, that depicts a dragon or snake eating its own tail. This imagery is meant to challenge our conventional understanding of the relationship between opposites; in this case – destruction and rebirth, symbolizing the paradox between self-annihilation and infinity. al-Sharif’s *Ouroboros* highlights paradoxical movements throughout the film, most notably in its opening shot of waves lapping away from, rather than toward the Gaza shore, followed by drone footage of the city’s destruction. A similar reverse force seems to be guiding a hijabi woman in the next scene,

where she moves throughout her house, but backwards. The audience can interpret this sequence as a metaphor for the ways in which the occupation disrupts the daily life of Palestinians, yet forces them to be resilient and continue on with everyday responsibilities. *Ouroboros* weaves together landscape shots from Palestine, Italy, Los Angeles, Brittany, and the Mojave Desert, expressing a shared erasure of history which is remembered more by the land rather than those who inhabit it. The central character continuously speaks to his feeling like a prisoner in his own home of Palestine and grapples with his love for Gaza and the threat to his safety if he were to continue living there. *Ouroboros* depicts the paradoxical struggle for ‘return,’ a commentary on the displacement of individuals living in Gaza, but also illuminating the hope of the masses for when Palestine will return to its original state before destruction.

The concept of ‘home,’ for many is marked by the promise of comfort, security, loved ones,



and basic needs. The first Nakba, or 'catastrophe' on May 15, 1948, is regarded as the day the State of Israel came into being through the permanent displacement of more than half of the Palestinian population at the time. However, Israel's violence against Palestine has preceded the events of the first Nakba and is continuing long after it. Since Hamas's Oct. 7 attack on Israel in 2023, the death toll in the Gaza Strip has exceeded 28,000, with over 67,600 wounded.<sup>7</sup> Home for the people of Palestine has been under occupation of imperialist powers for over 76 years – they have become prisoners within the land which they inhabit. Access to clean water, food, and shelter have long been severed. Medical services, creative spaces, and access to journalistic resources have been severely under threat during this time as well.

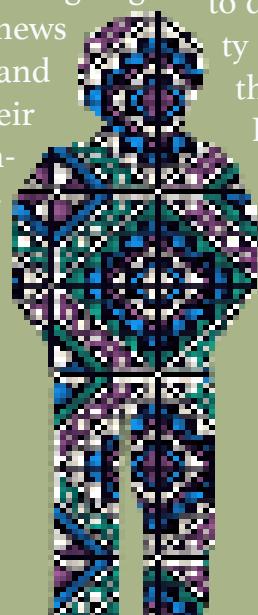
*“Palestinians have been denied and stripped of access to all the things we think of when we hear the word ‘home.’”*

“Unprovoked Narratives” is an initiative which is founded in the unceasing pursuit of truth. Amidst the volatile political and social climate regarding the ongoing genocide in Palestine, many news publications, public figures, and institutions are expressing their positionality and making unbased claims about Palestinians. The Palestine Film Platform (PFP), a section of the PFI's website, updates every Wednesday at 5pm Jerusalem time and showcases a new Palestinian film of the week. The institute's com-

mitment to highlighting a vast sector of works from animation to print publications exemplifies the breadth of impact media possesses on shaping the public's understanding of various groups, histories, and current events.

Media is inextricably linked with the dissemination of information and possesses a great influence on public consciousness. We must learn to employ critical viewership in an effort to seek out the truth and platform works which uphold this standard. The Palestine Film Institute is using the medium of cinema as a means to translate the cries, joys, and griefs of Gazans. Similarly, Palestinian journalists are utilizing social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to broadcast live updates on the attacks in Gaza. This is the first time in history where a genocide is being broadcasted in real time on a daily basis. Through social media, we are able to be exposed to the humanity of Palestinians and form a greater understanding of our role as international allies. I implore you to not look away from the news and the media coming from Palestine, and instead recognize your privilege as a viewer and not a victim.

We as a print publication must fight alongside the brave journalists who are committed to documenting and broadcasting the reality of life in Palestine. On our own campus, there are ongoing initiatives supporting Palestinian liberation and actively emphasize the interconnectedness of our struggles as a diverse student population. Students and Faculty for Justice in Palestine (SJP and FJP), Jews Against White Supremacy (JAWS), and the UC Divest coalition are spearheading many initiatives, including pressuring the UC to divest from



war-profiteering and weapons manufacturing which directly funds the Israeli forces.

The University of California and its investments in Blackrock and other weapons manufacturing companies has inextricably linked its students with funding the genocide in Gaza. In protest, UC Santa Cruz students and community members are organizing through mobilizations, art shows, and theater performances – only a few examples of the many creative ways people are condemning the UC’s complicity in these acts of terror and showing their support for Palestine.

On Jan. 14, 2024, UC Santa Cruz’s City on a Hill Press, along with other local publications, published a letter signed by UCSC faculty written in solidarity with the Freedom Theatre in Jenin, Palestine, calling for the immediate release of three performing arts professionals who were abducted by Israeli forces. In the letter, the faculty states, “If we do not stand up in solidarity with our friends at Freedom Theatre, the oppression of artistic and cultural voices lives on in all of our creative communities.

“A threat to artistic freedom anywhere is a threat to artistic freedom everywhere.”

As students in one of the largest university systems in the United States, we are uniquely positioned to advocate for underrepresented voices through our scholarly work. We have the privilege to freely express ourselves through art and the opportunity to extend our sympathies by organizing alongside each other, researching, and most of all, by amplifying Palestinian voices. We must understand the importance of preserving artistic freedom in areas like Palestine, where it is under attack. Protecting artistic endeavors and creative spaces is a way to resist colonization and the active genociding of not only people, but of culture. By analyzing Palestinian films, we employ our viewership as a tool for resistance. Our consumption and conversations are preserving and protecting Palestinian culture in the face of the ongoing genocide. Through the power of cinema, Palestine’s resilience has been kept aflame. Let Palestinian voices guide our revolution against genocide. Through the power of cinema, Palestine’s resilience has been kept aflame. Let Palestinian voices guide our revolution.

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**THE**

**DEATH**

**OF**

**SEX**

**PURITANISM IN**

**HOLLYWOOD**

**WRITTEN BY: ALEX VARGAS**

**DESIGNED BY: MARYAM SADEGHIFARD**

WARNING!

THIS  
ARTICLE  
CONTAINS  
ABOUT 69  
USES OF  
THE WORD  
sex,  
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S

ex in film and television has been dwindling as the century progresses. After a decade of cinema where sex on film hit its peak (the 1990s), sex started to falter as the 2010s rolled along. “Only 1.21% of 148,012 feature-length films released since 2010... contain depictions of sex.”

This prompts a discussion circling the industry: what is the worth of sex scenes in films? With a generation that is less sexually active than the ones before it, as cited by the CDC’s data graph detailing trends in the “Prevalence of Sexual Behaviors and HIV Testing from 1991—2015.”

Many critics  
of sex  
scenes

do not come from a place of media literacy, nor open-mindedness but of an ideology tied to puritanism.

An NPR article titled, “Looking for ‘nomance’: Study finds teens want less sex in their TV and movies,” cites a study conducted by UCLA about the need for sex on screen with Gen Z participants:

“Nearly 40% said they particularly want to see more non-romantic relationships or asexual characters on screen” as well as one respondent saying that they don’t get the “point of sex scenes” and often “turn it off” if any media has one.

What led to this rise in conservative or puritanical views on sexual content in films; with a majority of Gen Z participants asking similar questions?



# DEATH for The Death of SEX

Consent, abuse, discomfort, and incompetent directors are all serious issues that should be discussed in this argument. Two directors in particular would be Sam Levinson and Abdellatif Kechiche.

*Blue is the Warmest Color* (2013), Kechiche's controversial film, is a coming-of-age story about adolescent sexuality that explores lesbian themes – directed by a straight, white man. The film got backlash in recent years for Léa Seydoux and Adèle Exarchopoulos's infamous sex scene, which garnered the film an NC-17 Rating.

Both actors came out with their own stories of shame and discomfort after filming the scenes for 6 hours:

“Of course, it was kind of humiliating sometimes; **I was feeling like a prostitute.**”

“He was using three cameras, and when you have to fake your orgasm for six hours ...

I can't say that it was nothing. But for me, it is more difficult



for me to show my feelings than my body.”

I feel that part of this issue with sex scenes stems from

exploitation of actors' consent and forcing them to do things they aren't comfortable with – thus leading to this Puritanism.

To say Sam Levinson's works are horned-up messes is an understatement. He's the director who created *Euphoria* (2019) and *The Idol* (2023), shows about the melodramatic sex lives of their often pre-pubescent protagonists and characters... very profound...

Levinson and Kechiche utilize the Male Gaze not to bring substance to the viewers or come to a new understanding of the characters but instead to do what the Gaze is made to do: titillate and arouse the generalized hetero-male viewers.

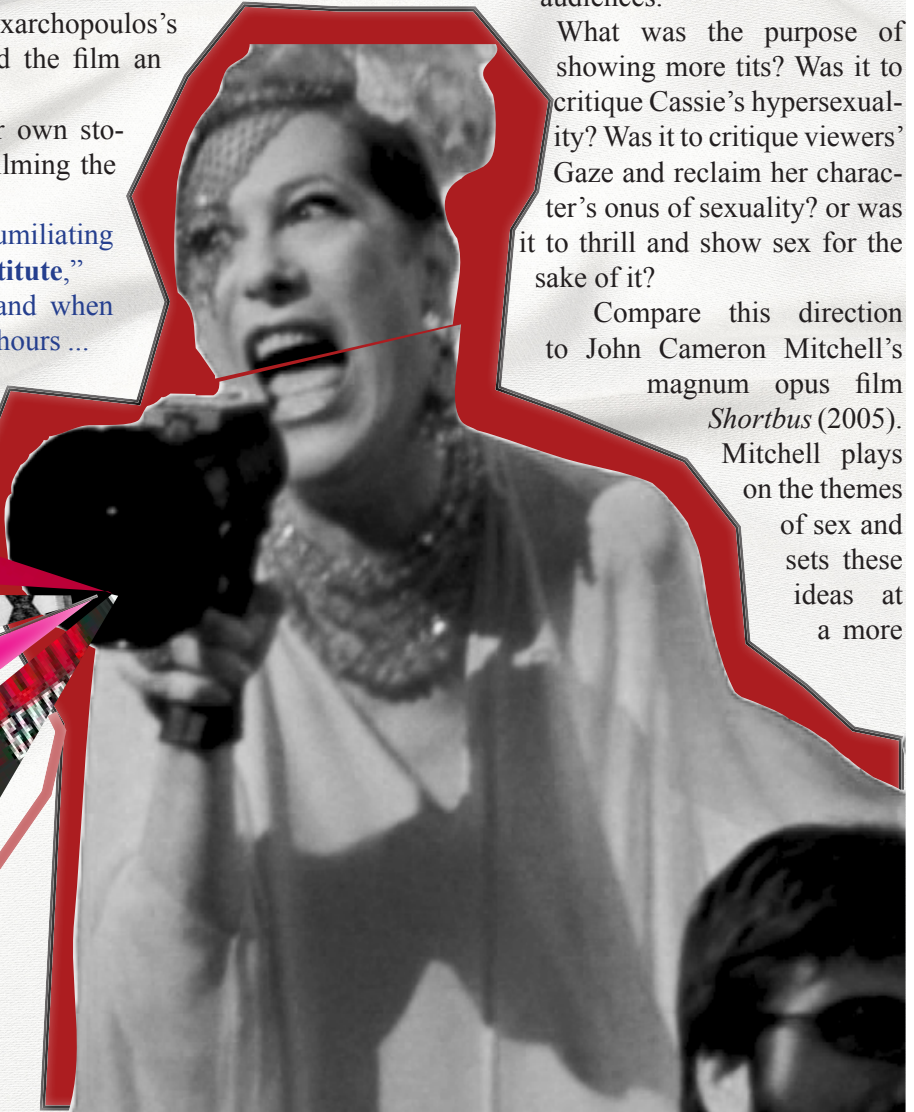
*Euphoria's* second season became infamous after a story surfaced about actress Sydney Sweeney fighting to reduce the number of nude scenes she did, which in the original script was more than what was shown to audiences.

What was the purpose of showing more tits? Was it to critique Cassie's hypersexuality? Was it to critique viewers' Gaze and reclaim her character's onus of sexuality? or was it to thrill and show sex for the sake of it?

Compare this direction to John Cameron Mitchell's magnum opus film

*Shortbus* (2005).

Mitchell plays on the themes of sex and sets these ideas at a more



is seen as a part of life rather than disgusting or disrespectful.

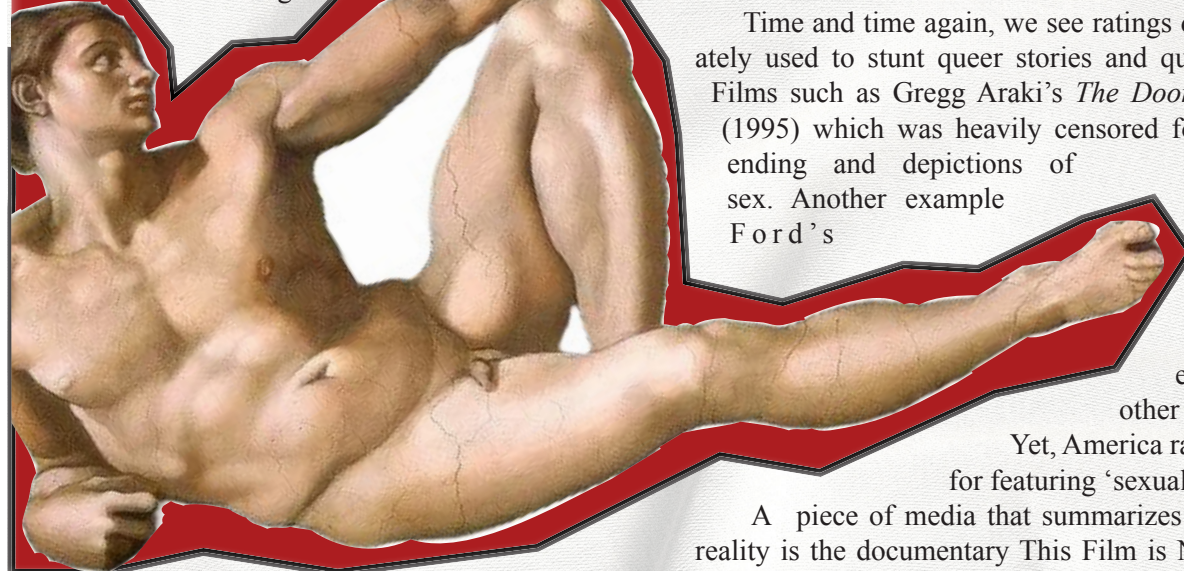
Its plot pokes at the comedy regarding sex in American culture – the most closeted country in the world – by showing these moments in ways that audiences can understand and enjoy. In a Q&A screening of *Shortbus*, Mitchell states how many films that utilize sex scenes effectively were all depressing stories about adolescence, trauma, and abuse, bringing up *Mysterious Skin* (2004) and international sex dramas like *Fat Girl* (2001) and *Irreversible* (2003).

John Cameron Mitchell wanted to make a film that views our cardinal pleasures as beautiful, messy, funny, and engaging. His direction of the film was to have the actors get comfortable with the subject by having them create their characters and the film's narrative. Mitchell highly regulated the audition process to ensure the actors' comfort in portraying the sex and intimate moments. The sex scenes themselves are unsimulated, so every moment had to be precisely choreographed and rehearsed through Mitchell and his team to ensure an ethical production for all crew.

Believe it or not, communicating, encouraging a collaborative environment, and disclosing these explicit scenes can lead to an ethical sex scene that isn't exploitative nor incompetently made!

The reason for the negative outcry against sex on screen is mainly caused by incompetent directors rather than other ethical reasons. While these valid critiques should push

Hollywood into telling



more aromantic and asexual stories, they also miss the critical disconnect between affected marginalized communities and their stories.

## Let's talk about SEX Baby

As early as the 50s, many queer artists of the underground film scene tried to fight oppression by depicting sex. Renowned and controversial director Kenneth Anger paved the way for sex on screen and fought for general artistic expression and freedom in Hollywood, as seen in his films from the 50s, including his infamous 1947 short *Fireworks*.

Alternatively, look to the works of Cheryl Dunye to view the history of intersectional directors covering broad topics of sexuality in their works. Dunye, notably with her break-out film, *The Watermelon Woman*, deals with a retail movie worker researching a long-lost Black lesbian actor of the 40s and unraveling the truth behind the erasure of Black queer voices in art. The film's depiction of sex is brought to show the character's emotional arc with her lover, and the portrayal of the sex scene is – by today's standards – relatively tame and respectful to the actors at hand. However, this depiction of sex is what prompted another setback to the sex scene (especially regarding queer sex), the X or NC-17 rating which accompanied the film.

Time and time again, we see ratings disproportionately used to stunt queer stories and queer directors. Films such as Gregg Araki's *The Doom Generation* (1995) which was heavily censored for the violent ending and depictions of polyamorous sex. Another example is Tom Ford's adaptation of *A Single Man* (2009), rated PG-13 in other countries.

Yet, America rates the film R for featuring 'sexual themes.'

A piece of media that summarizes this irritating reality is the documentary *This Film is Not Yet Rated*

(2006), a detailed history of how the MPAA rates films, along with an outline of their discrimination against queer and radical political films. One such film is *Sweet Sweetback's Badass Song* (1971), a film about a Black liberation that was rated X by an all-white jury.

Another note about *The Watermelon Woman* (1996) is that distribution became difficult. It led to a mediocre box office run, sparking a separate debate that grew into something more than Cheryl could have ever imagined. The film was funded by the National Endowment for the Arts Grant, a public grant funded by taxpayers' money to help fund various art projects, whether film, paintings, or photographic installations which raised debate.

This program was also under fire in the 80s for a similar hysteria surrounding the controversial works of Robert Mapplethorpe and his many photographic pieces depicting the gay S&M club scene along with other homoerotic and sexualized art. Mapplethorpe's art was critiqued when he displayed it at the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center in 1985. This led to a steady victory for the NEA grant, despite the exhibit owners being arrested for obscenity by Ohio state law.

Dunye's example became another victory for the NEA and her film. This court case is a testament to how closeted and puritanical our society was, even at the height of eroticism in film. Many directors from this era looked at Cheryl's case and shyed away from the sex scene altogether, leading to a divide within Hollywood.



Many films in the 2010s had a decline in sex scenes due to the rise of superhero films, streaming, and the #MeToo Movement, which prompted a large discussion in Hollywood about exploitation. While there are many notable examples of sex in TV's Golden Age, they all seem to have strayed away in their later seasons. *Game of Thrones* (2011) stopped focusing on the sex and joy



of its characters and instead gave into the general violence and complex narrative in later seasons.

In the wake of Hollywood trends, independent cinema has had a resurgence with the sex scene. Recently, we've seen it popularized by the it-girl/it-boy effect with stars like Alexa Demie and Sydney Sweeney in *Euphoria* or Jacob Elordi and Barry Keoghan in *Saltburn* (2023).



I WAS  
SILENCED  
LIKE  
THE  
WATERMELON  
WOMAN  
-CHERYL  
DUNYÉ

*Saltburn*, to me, feels like this generation's cry for help when it comes to sex scenes. We are desperate for provocative art again, and the tame content and queer baiting of *Saltburn* is evidence of this disparity.

Where are our queer voices in these discussions? After the successful works of *Paris is Burning* (1990), *Queer as Folk*

(2000), & *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994) – we've returned to the closet

after the 90s. Hollywood found these ventures into the LGBTQ community unviable. Artists like Lourdes Portillo, Dee Rees, Jerrod Carmichael, Luca Guadagnino, and Andrew Haigh made films separate from their identities to get funding, as seen in Dee Rees, Lourdes Portillo, and Cheryl Duny 's very vocal stories about the lack of funding due to their identities, whether that is being a person of color or expression of queerness. Oppression of another or othering of one's self. Something that irked me about *Saltburn* was how it did not shock or impress me with its sexual content, but instead, it made me realize how much better



other films are at portraying sex on screen – one being Andrew Haigh's recent film *All of Us Strangers* (2023).

Emerald Fennell's fanfiction of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999) uses sex to shock or arouse the viewers instead of keying us into the emotionality and vulnerability of the characters. Haigh approaches the scene with the opposite intent – giving character to the action, an emotional resonance lost in Fennell's work. Haigh also utilizes the plot to discover a deep meaning behind acceptance and grief, uplifted by cuddling and loving in an embrace and in the joys of fornication.

It's tame, dull, and not nuanced; with a little bit of sex in the lives of these characters, we could maybe see more depth or explore exciting and new topics on film. We are living in Hollywood, in both a "post-racism" and "post-queerphobic" America, yet we still have disproportionate stories and disproportionate representation.

Recently, stories of mass shootings, hate crimes, anti-queer and transphobic legislation passed in countries like the UK and the US (including Florida's Don't Say Gay bill, which banned the teaching of homosexuality from K-12 grade and Ohio's SAFE Act which targets trans youths' ability for hormonal treatment).

Still, we see queer characters relegated to the side or off-screen kisses that can be edited out for homophobic countries. In a time where the sex scene is as low as it was in the 1960s, we need to be bold, and we need to express ourselves in unapologetic ways. No longer should we be shackled by puritans and prudes; we should give into our cardinal pleasures. As a Queer 80s British pop band once said: **"Come to me, cover me, hold me, together we'll break these chains of love."**

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The neat rows of tiles that line the Netflix home screen are reminiscent of the products on the shelves of a drugstore. They call out to you in swirling rainbow colors: take me, I'll satisfy your craving for cheap romance! Or: no, me, I'll provide catharsis through lurid violence and off-kilter humor! And: I'm here too – I'll distract you with a wacky cast of characters in a fantastical parallel reality! Addictive “binge-worthy” series are Netflix's specialty. Many series are entertaining, and some are quite unique, **but the vast majority follow convention and formula.** They consist of “predictable storylines, narrative-driven cinematic structure, sprinkled with a plethora of ‘star’ names and copious doses of violence and/or sex to lure in audiences.” However, as Netflix loves to point out, there are some “hidden gems” amid the monotony. Every now and then, I'll click on what I expect to be another tin of “eye candy,” only to become enveloped in a world of the “real.”

One such movie that delighted me with its divergence from the norm is David Moreton's 1998 film *Edge of Seventeen*. (I should note that this movie has absolutely nothing to do with Kelly Fremon Craig's better-known 2016 film of *almost* the same name.) In the opening shots, *Edge of Seventeen* seems like any other 80s high school flick. It opens with a disillusioned teacher bidding his class farewell for the summer, cuts to a mousy adolescent approaching a locker next to what could very well be his girlfriend, and establishes them as social “rejects” by the passing call of some classmates.

Even by the sec-

ond scene, however, I began to sense something different about it. In this scene, a stationary shot shows the protagonist Eric's alarm clock ringing until it is abruptly silenced by a flying Converse shoe. The shot then cuts to a pair of plump, motherly hands placing circular slices of turkey onto a piece of white bread. When I first watched the movie, I couldn't have quite explained what it was about this sequence that captured my attention. I simply saw in it an eye for detail, a personal touch. Now I can explain it a bit more specifically: the simplicity of the first shot enhances the comedy of Eric's disgruntled reaction, while the switch to the second shot diversifies the cinematic flow and advances the exposition. Later I realized this opening sequence reminded me of a style of modern dance I was exposed to in a class I took last year. **Instead of defaulting to symmetry** – shuffle to the left, shuffle to the right – **the movie falls into a flow**, like a little metal ball on a wooden track. It lets the shuffle to the left carry it to something new.

By the time I got to the first scene between Eric and his perpetually smirking, nonchalant coworker Rod, my premonition that the film was elevated somehow above its counterparts solidified into recognition. The two are on their lunch break at the amusement park restaurant they work at together; Rod notices Eric and sits down. As they're making casual conversation, Rod dismisses the music on Eric's Walkman (Annie Lennox) as “freak” -ish.



“I’m more into Madonna,” he says with a shrug. “Madonna, oh,” Eric mocks, as he brings a bite of food to his mouth – only to drop it in his lap. There is a moment of silence - a bemused Rod looks on as Eric smiles abashedly. They begin to talk again, but a few moments later, Rod casually reveals that he is gay. Eric chews, glances up at him, nods, smiles slightly – it’s clear he’s trying to act as normal as possible. But when his best friend Maggie slides onto the bench next to him, he can’t keep it together any longer. He rises and eeks out a disjointed string of words about being on his break as he grabs the various articles of his lunch and his walkman and somehow manages to drop them all before exiting the frame.



The thing I love about this scene is **how real the awkwardness feels**. It’s not exaggerated, like someone dropping an entire lunch tray on themselves, but the tension between Eric’s discomfort and Rod’s bemusement is palpable. Mainstream movies can produce incredible performances, but it’s clear that they are performances; the actors are restricted by the bounds of the script. Movies like *Edge of Seventeen*, on the other hand, have a delightfully unpredictable quality. I couldn’t find any evidence to suggest that the production process included improvisation, but it feels like the actors chart their own story, moment by moment, rather than like they are following a clear-cut track. There is a rhythm to the character interactions that I don’t notice in blockbuster films. The conversations ebb and flow. Eric’s inward-pointed exhalations of laughter often fill uncomfortable silences,

but, as in life, not all silences are uncomfortable. **There is room for empty space in *Edge of Seventeen*.**

Another movie that embraces empty space is Alex Lehman’s *Blue Jay*. Netflix’s description of the film is “Two former high school sweethearts

unexpectedly reunite in their old hometown, where they rediscover their magical bond and face a shared regret.” For months, I would see the title and

click past it, not interested in what I assumed was a romantic melodrama. Interestingly enough, the writer (and lead male actor) himself, Mark Duplass, has admitted to drawing on the melodrama format for the film. However, I argue that while *Blue Jay* mimics the melodrama form, it isn’t a melodrama at all. Where melodramas are marked by a corniness and airbrushed glow that lends them their laughably caricatured quality, *Blue Jay* is securely grounded in reality. Melodrama characters tend to view their conflicts with intense seriousness and lack self-awareness. In *Blue Jay*, there are dramatic declarations of love and sorrow, but there’s also a “kitchen sink” element that pervades the film. Jim and Amanda are not above laughing at themselves, and this makes space for the audience to appreciate the more serious moments.

In *Edge of Seventeen*, it took me a few scenes to really notice the film’s realistic quality. In *Blue Jay*,

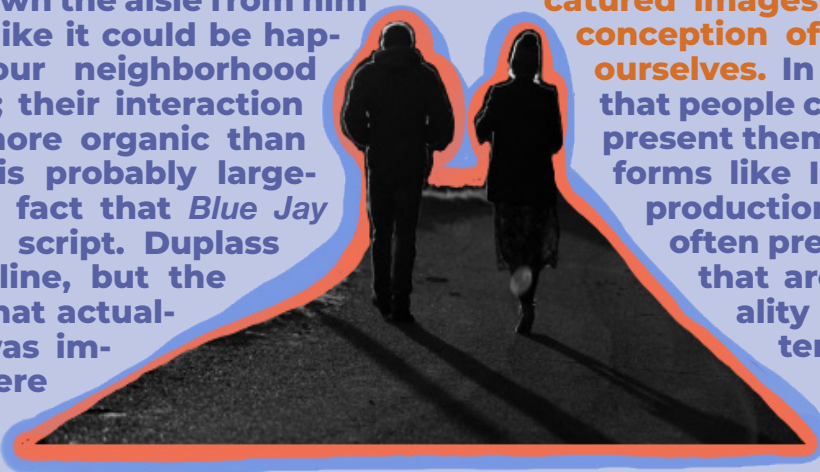
the film's realistic quality. In *Blue Jay*, however, this quality is pretty much evident from the first scene. It opens with a series of grocery store vignettes, and when the action of the scene really begins – when Jim notices Amanda down the aisle from him – it still feels like it could be happening in your neighborhood grocery store; their interaction feels much more organic than staged. This is probably largely due to the fact that *Blue Jay* didn't have a script. Duplass wrote an outline, but the majority of what actually got shot was improvised. Where *Edge of Seventeen* flourishes quietly

within the bounds of a conventional framework, *Blue Jay* grows wings and escapes the framework altogether. Rather than working inward from the lines, *Blue Jay*'s Duplass and Paulson work outward from intent. In other words, when Jim sees Amanda, it reads less like someone has told the actor (Duplass) exactly what to do and more like he just feels what his character feels, and reacts from there. When the two begin to talk, their conversation is awkward. Jim asks Amanda the same question twice. Later Jim fills a silence by blurting out that he didn't brush his teeth before leaving the

house. It's deeply uncomfortable, but in a deeply real way.

There isn't anything wrong with the mainstream style some of the time, **but a steady diet of caricatured images can harm our conception of reality and of ourselves.** In the same way that people curate how they present themselves on platforms like Instagram, film production companies often present narratives that are similar to reality but slightly altered. For example, take the 2016 *The Edge of Seventeen* I mentioned

earlier (the one that is unrelated to the 1998 film I have been describing). The main character Nadine is a high school underdog who has one friend, hates her mom and brother, and has a playful relationship with a dryly witty teacher. She often launches into the style of soliloquy made comic by so constant a stream of words that she barely pauses for breath. In one scene, her mom cuts her off after asking her how her night was – ostensibly so caught up in her own unhappiness that she won't listen to a response. In several scenes, a classmate who has a crush on Nadine performs self-con-



won't listen to a response. In several scenes, a classmate who has a crush on Nadine performs self-consciously after making awkward attempts to engage in conversation.

There is a relaxing element to this formulized, simplistic model of life. It's easy to watch someone perform the scratch-n-sniff sticker version of awkwardness, to exaggerate self-obsession and lack of attention to others' problems, or to speak so fast that others can't get a word in edgewise. However, when this style of performance becomes the norm instead of the exception, people can begin to think that what they see on their screens is reality – or at least the model of it.

I have a personal example of this phenomenon: when I was in middle school, I began **“performing awkwardness.”** Initially, this “performance” mostly consisted of simply calling attention to it – “I’m so socially awkward!” Over time, however, I began to manifest it, subliminally changing my everyday behavior until I embodied the “bumbling antihero” archetype. I exchanged bits and pieces of my uniqueness, my quirks and quandaries, for cliché.

In the mid-20th century, when “the movies” were a weekly American commodity, production companies didn't have to worry about losing viewership. However, with the rise of TV over the next several decades, Americans became much less reliable consumers and production companies began to concentrate more resources into fewer mov-

ies. This made it all the more important that each movie “succeed,” which meant they had to be relatively “safe.” There was little room for experimentation – for the bizarre, uncomfortable, or boring. Instead, as Derek Thompson explains in an Atlantic article, “Hollywood has become sensational at predicting what its audiences want to see. And, ironically, for that very reason, it's become better at making relentlessly average movies...” The movie industry has adopted the business model employed most glaringly by the drug and social media industries: get people hooked and keep people gratified. They don't have any use for “empty space.”

But just as we can't live on pills, we can't subsist solely on blockbuster pictures. Sometimes we need to see ourselves reflected back to us. Not simpler, neater, less weird versions of ourselves, but ourselves as we are, complex & curious beings with animal bodies and opalescent hearts.

*Edge of Seventeen* (1998) is not only a “coming-of-age” narrative, but a “coming out” narrative. The process of coming to terms with one's sexual identity is deeply personal and can be quite lonely, especially if it happens in a less accepting time and/or place (like 1980s Ohio). This reality makes it all the more important that we have access to unsanitized, unsimplified portrayals of such a narrative. Similarly, *Blue Jay* portrays a universal human experience: life doesn't always go the way we want it to, and we don't always end up



human experience: life doesn't always go the way we want it to, and we don't always end up with the person we want to be with. Melodramas are generally relegated to women's domain, but **women are not the only ones who benefit from seeing stories of love and heartbreak represented on screen.** By stripping the story down to its scaffolding, *Blue Jay* avoids the cotton candy fluff of the "melodrama" and creates space for the universal and the personal. Jim and Amanda are just two people with quirks, beauties, and flaws, and we get to watch as the current of their reconnection carries them from moment to moment. A film doesn't have to record reality without any alteration in order to satisfy my notion of the "realistic." On the contrary, the art of cinema must have style and subjectivity. However, it must also be unafraid to capture whatever it needs to tell its story. This may include things we find odd or ugly, cringeworthy, or uncomfortable. But if we resist the urge to recoil, to close ourselves off from it, we can experience a kind of beauty you only find watching a middle schooler sing "Lights" in a school talent show despite the immense discomfort of baring their heart to a potentially quite insensitive and unreceptive audience. It is the beauty of sincere, unconditionally authentic soul expression.

In much of the 21st-century world, we live in the light of screens, **bombarded ceaselessly by disjointed images and discordant sentiments.** For me, discovering "hidden gems" like the ones I have described in this article is like discovering isolated sprouts of greenery amid the rubble of it all. When I'm sick to my

stomach from all the eye candy, these movies are my vegetable soup.

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# COMING TO TERMS WITH YOUR HOME- TOWN:

CAN IT HAPPEN?

WRITTEN BY: KATHERINE PATTERSON  
DESIGNED BY: AINSLEY KOHLI

“Home” can be a challenging word to many people. The word can come with emotions tied to family, friends, and even hometowns. Hometowns make us who we are, they build us up but can also tear us down. Going back and forth between my hometown and school throughout my almost four years of college has given me time to reflect on my complicated feelings. I come from a smaller town with about 25,000 people, but besides parks, there wasn’t really much to do. So once you grew up, you’d already done everything that could be done. I always searched for movies that featured characters growing up in bigger cities, and looked to see if they felt

the same way I did in my small town. It seemed as though there was always a similar desire of wanting to leave your home and your hometown. Going back and forth all four years of college has given me time to reflect on my complicated feelings. I grew up close with my family, so going a little further away to somewhere like Santa Cruz wasn’t originally part of my plan. I planned on going to colleges closer to my hometown, like San Francisco State or Sacramento State. But once I got the acceptance letter from UC Santa Cruz, I knew I had to say yes. I moved out and into Santa Cruz in my second year, and at the beginning, it was extremely difficult, as I had never been that far from home without my family. But I decided to look at some of the films that had inspired me to go outside of my comfort zone, like *Lady Bird* (2017). And recently, I was able to find a film that I related to even more, *Real Women Have Curves* (2002). Both films left me interested in going outside my comfort zone; the protagonists had been able to move across the country, so why couldn’t I move two hours away? Both of these movies are able to express the feelings of joy and worry of grow-



*"I FOUND MYSELF CLAUSTROPHOBIC IN MY HOME, AND I FOUND WAYS TO ESCAPE BY HAVING A SAFE SPACE THROUGH MY FRIENDS."*

ing up and learning to navigate life away from family and becoming your own person. The journey of the main characters, Ana and Lady Bird, shows them going through their hometown to find themselves outside of their families. For example, Lady Bird becomes active in theater and works at the local cafe, while Ana works in the sweatshop her sister runs. These young women working shows how they were able to slowly build their agency, providing a contrast to the small-minded limitations disseminated by their families.

Talking more specifically about each movie first, I'd like to delve into *Real Women Have Curves*. The movie takes us through the life of Ana, a recent high school graduate growing up in a Latine household in Eastern Los Angeles. We see the world through Ana's eyes, and this insight is enhanced with close-ups. Through the faces of the various characters in *RWHC*, the close-ups show the characters during their most intimate moments and struggles. They're used to juxtapose Ana's different relationships with her family. She is always smiling or cheerful with the men in her family, but when she is with the women, tensions begin to rise and fights break out. The close-ups with the women in her family are the most revealing, as they are used in personal moments, like when Estela explains to Ana about the costs of the sweatshop. The best moments in which these tight shots are used are when they are between Ana and her mother, Carmen, revealing the dynamic relationship between the two and furthering the relatability. In one scene, when Ana is working in the sweatshop, she burns herself, and Carmen comes to help. In a two-shot, both

of their faces are clearly shown, and it is one of the only times where Ana and Carmen smile at one another. These small glimpses help reveal how Carmen isn't all bad. Though she has difficult moments throughout the film, where she criticizes Ana for almost everything. To contrast these close-ups, long shots of Ana are established as she walks through Los Angeles, depicting her confident stride through the city. Used in the beginning and ending sequences of the film, it's used to signify Ana's independence and confidence in being able to navigate any situation. The long shots demonstrate how she has come to terms with moving away from her family due to her comfort in getting from East L.A to Beverly Hills for high school. In tandem with the long shot is a dolly shot at the end where the audience gets a sense of Ana being overwhelmed but taking in New York City confidently, like her mother taught her.

To move on to *Lady Bird*, while rewatching, many familiar feelings arose. I found Lady Bird's dissenting opinions about her hometown highly relatable. She constantly struggles with where she grew up and perpetually looks for ways to escape it. I

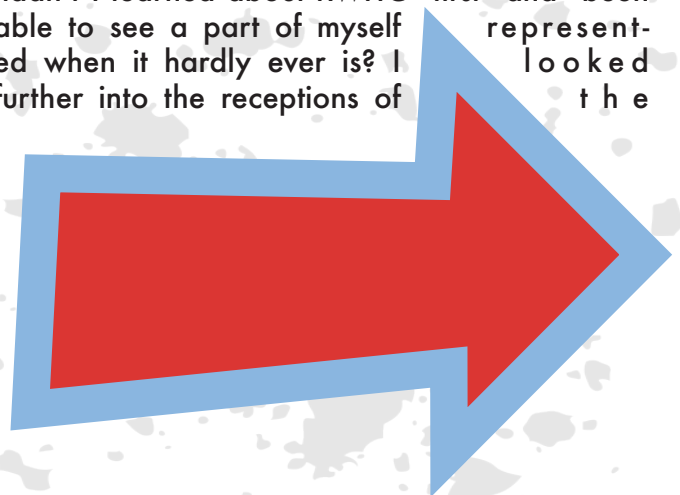




found myself feeling claustrophobic in my home, and I found ways to escape by having a safe space through my friends. With the help from her friends, Lady Bird goes through a journey of self-discovery through two shots with medium close-ups. Close-ups can show how the two people in the shot feel through facial expressions. Whenever Lady Bird and her friend Julie are shown together, it's always in a two-shot, emphasizing their friendship, whether good or bad. It demonstrates an intimacy only they know where they help each other through whatever they're going through. When Lady Bird is pictured this way with her rich friends, like Jenna and Kyle, they're distanced in the background and demonstrate the lack of connection Lady Bird has with them, even in the scene after Kyle and Lady Bird have sex. However, through her friendships with Julie and Danny, we see her more intimate moments that help her understand how to move on. She is there to support others, like her friends and family, being there for Danny when he comes out, and being there for Julie towards the end of the movie when they go to prom together.

The most interesting part of the movie, though, is the mother-daughter relationship between Lady Bird and her mom, Marion. They are shown in various ways that depict their complicated relationship. The first shot opens up on a medium close-up with Marion and Lady Bird in a fetal position, showing a vulnerability be-

tween the two and how they view each other as co-dependent. Throughout the film, settings in which their relationship is explored include in doorways and in the thrift store, with these marking how the two function with each other. Marion is always shown through doorways, but she keeps boundaries and typically doesn't go through them. One scene that demonstrates the importance of these doorways is when she finishes Lady Bird's dress for her meeting with Danny's family, and she leaves the dress hanging on the door. However, when she ends up going beyond the doorway and into Lady Bird's room while she sleeps, Marion stares at Lady Bird in a contemplative way and reflects on her growing up. By going through this doorway, she crosses into Lady Bird's world and can see how she lives, not in the way she usually does to lecture Lady Bird, but to see her in a light that shows she's evolving as a person. These techniques combine to make a complex demonstration of a mother-daughter narrative. To go back to my own experience with the films, I realized I had seen *Lady Bird* first. It helped me recognize my own feelings of wanting to separate from my family and wanting to learn more about myself. Yet, it always felt like there was something missing until I found *Real Women Have Curves*. As a coming-of-age Latine film, it has been able to capture my feelings of growing up in a Latine household, where family is extremely important and interconnected. It shows the difficulties of leaving behind familial obligations that *Lady Bird* couldn't. Finding these movies at such different times made me ask, why hadn't I learned about *RWHC* first and been able to see a part of myself represented when it hardly ever is? I looked further into the receptions of the



films, and found that *Lady Bird* was released to much fanfare, with fans immediately deeming it a "classic." Meanwhile, *Real Women Have Curves*, despite having a similar premise, did not receive nearly the same fanfare as *Lady Bird*, however its popularity has increased throughout the years. One of the main arguments for why this is is the fact that *Lady Bird* was written, directed, and acted by white people in a setting and plot revolving around mostly white characters. *Real Women Have Curves* was written, acted, and directed by Latine folx, depicting the intricacies of being a Latine woman. The two films are comparable because both deal with overbearing mothers, going to good schools where they are in a lower financial status than their peers, leaving California for New York, and dealing with mothers wanting to stop them. With these comparisons, a noticeable difference separates these movies besides the plot, one depicts a Latine family, and the other depicts a primarily white family. As I learned more about the films and their origins it made me beg the question: why would one get so much critical acclaim, while the other is left up for individuals to stumble across, if the stories are so similar?

In my curiosity, I went down a rabbit hole in the portrayal and marketing of the two films, and I began to make connections. To give an extremely brief examination, there has been an institutionalized hiding of people of color in Hollywood for the entirety of its history. It has been well-known throughout history that white people are prioritized and that

there is an emphasis on detailing the perspectives of white people in the media through white writers, directors, and actors. Talking through the politics of Hollywood, Maryann Erigha writes: "Hollywood insiders, who have the power to shape cinema from within the industry, structure film production around unequal racial hierarchies and justify inequality using statements that value and privilege white movies and directors over Black, Asian, and Latino/a movies and directors." Where *Real Women* had been independently produced for a budget of \$3 million and distributed by the up-and-comers at HBO, *Lady Bird* was produced and distributed by major studios like A24, Universal Pictures, and Focus Features, with a \$10 million budget. Through the funding of the movies alone, it can be seen how white voices are prioritized throughout filmmaking from inception.

The two films explore nuanced mother-daughter relationships, growing up, wanting to get away from home, and journeys of independence. The partnerships between these women give each individual a feeling of shame, which provides a sense of home to move forward from. Marion, *Lady Bird*, Ana, and Carmen have extremely complex relationships involving shame. The girls are shamed for their bodies and decisions, yet they're also in a strange partnership with their mothers. Ana is there for Carmen when they go to the doctors and find out Carmen has menopause or when Carmen has one of her episodes, and Ana has to calm her. Marion seemingly always has *Lady Bird*'s back, like when she sees *Lady Bird* and her friends high



in the kitchen, and she brushes them off, or when Lady Bird says she wants to be sexually active, Marion gives her advice rather than judge her. The partnership of these women, though at times toxic, gives the other the ability to move forward and become more confident in themselves, building off of each other's experiences. The building of these relationships throughout the movie helps ground the mothers and daughters, which allows for there to be a sense of home to miss or move forward from. Both of the daughters end up not getting closure with their mothers and the decisions they make, so on that note, they are similar. However, Ana and Lady Bird deal with this in different ways; Ana takes it as a challenge when she gets off the subway with

great posture and a brisk walk toward her future, as her mother taught her. Meanwhile, the audience sees Lady Bird struggling with going to college and having a difficult time grasping the world around her without the "home" she could go back to in Sacramento.



I found both of these films relatable in their unique depictions of mother-daughter relationships and the ability to move forward into their adult lives. Lady Bird goes back to church as a way to remind herself of home, and Ana utilizes the advice from the women back home on how to carry herself. The two women grow from moving away but also learn from their friendships and familial bonds that allow them to move on and live across the country. That's what these movies helped me learn. I can remember the lessons my family and hometown taught me; I move forward but do not forget where I came from. These movies are so special to me because they felt so realistic and could put into perspective what I had felt.



***"I MOVE FORWARD  
BUT DO NOT  
FORGET WHERE I  
CAME FROM."***

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# *Eyecandy Blogs*

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## *IS BARBIE REALLY ALL THAT?*

"AT THE END OF THE DAY, BARBIE IS A CHARICATURED MOVIE THAT LOSES ITSELF IN PLASTIC SLIDES, FUR COATS, AND CHASE SCENES. AWARD SHOWS DON'T NECESSARILY PROVIDE AN ACCURATE REFLECTION OF CINEMATIC MERIT, BUT I THINK IT'S WORTH NOTING THAT BARBIE IS NOMINATED FOR AN OSCAR IN SET DESIGN, NOT DIRECTING."-  
AVELLA DEGENNARO

## *UC WES ANDERSON COLLEGE?!*

"ANDERSON'S KNACK FOR CAPTURING THE BEAUTY IN THE MUNDANE ALIGNS SEAMLESSLY WITH THE UNIQUE ATMOSPHERE OF UC SANTA CRUZ, ENCOURAGING VIEWERS TO APPRECIATE THE ORDINARY IN AN EXTRAORDINARY WAY."-CAIRA JORDAN

## *A WOMAN'S FILM?*

"NOT OF SUSPICION OF BEING A COMMUNIST BUT OF BEING A LOW-ART DIRECTOR WHO MADE MOVIES FOR WOMEN YET DEEPLY TIED WITH HIS PERSONAL BELIEFS AS A COMMUNIST OF WORKING CLASS STRUGGLES, THE DECEPTION OF CAPITALISM, AND THE CULTURE OF OPPRESSION IT PERPETUATES, BRINGING US TO THE MAIN FILM I WANT TO DISCUSS: WRITTEN ON THE WIND (1956).."-ALEX VARGAS



