Eyecandy

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OUR MISSION

EyeCandy Film Journal is an annually published, student-run media studies collection. Our aim is to focus on culturally relevant and compelling topics that expand our relationships with film, television, and new media forms.

We hope that our publication will motivate readers to engage with media in a more in-depth, critical, and complex fashion, and act as a platform for the UCSC community to consider new and thoughtful perspectives on visual culture.

EyeCandy provides writers with an opportunity to synthesize interests in film and television studies. By empowering students to further express their passions in a hands-on and productive environment, they are encouraged to cultivate their own critical and professional voices outside of the classroom.

The publication additionally provides an avenue that connects student discussion to the wider Santa Cruz community, broadening a relationship we hope to foster for the future.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Every year, a group of gifted media enthusiasts gather in the Communications building to discuss their passions for film, television, digital media, and everything in between. With guidance from a faculty advisor, this team works each week to sustain a long-standing student-run publication: EyeCandy Film Journal.

This year, with help from the generous Professor L.S. Kim, we were able to redesign our website (eyecandy.ucsc.edu), sustain a series of web-based blogs, create a promotional video, revamp our social media presence, conceptualize the look and ethos of the magazine, and, at the core of this project, formulate complex essays for the final printed edition of EyeCandy.

In the pages that follow, we explore issues ranging from feminism, fandom, adaptations, Bollywood, existentialism, Wes Anderson(ism), the future, lesbianism, and slackerdom, all written by students who want to share their complex opinions on media with others.

It's been a privilege to work closely with the sharp and talented people involved in the process of developing this publication. As we look forward to the coming years of EyeCandy, we hope that the ideas and concepts explored in this edition continue to be circulated throughout campus, in dorm rooms, at the dining halls, in cafés, anywhere you may find yourself paused, caught re-reading a sentence, or a word, thinking through one of the essays, trying to decipher for yourself how it is you relate to our society's media.

We worked hard to create a conversation, and we invite you to keep that conversation alive.

Katie Jon Brandon D.J. Michelle W.

GRAY MATTER

A Fan's Reconciliation with Breaking Bad

by Michelle Nakashima

"Were you awake around two in the morning last night? I thought I heard you yelling. Who were you talking to?" My mom was not wrong — I was awake then, and I was yelling, but not at a person. I was watching *Breaking Bad*. What she believed to be a heated late-night phone call was actually the seventh episode of the third season of the show. If you've seen the show, you probably remember it: a certain main character receives an anonymous call while sitting in his car. The distorted voice on the other end of the line warns him, saying, "Two men are coming to kill you. You have one minute. They are coming."

Although three years have passed since I watched the scene for the first time, even writing the words now makes me shiver. After the unknown caller hung up, each passing second felt painful, as if Vince Gilligan himself was standing over me and dropping anvil after

anvil onto my chest. My rapidly intensifying anxiety pulled me to my feet and compelled me to hysterically shout and gesticulate at my television.

"What are you waiting for? Why are you so stupid? Get out of there! For the love of God — MOVE!"

No other film or television show has driven me to such emotional or physical measures. Truthfully, there are few things besides my personal safety that will prompt a physical reaction from me. Yet after the three times I've rewatched *Breaking Bad* in its entirety, I recognize that the show makes me feel as if my personal safety really is in jeopardy. It is a show singular in its ability to excite, distress, and shock.

I have no qualms in admitting how profound of an effect the show has had on my perception of television and those who make it.

Television has long been considered the inferior alternative to traditional cinema, but shows like *Breaking Bad* prove that television can be just as, if not more compelling, poignant, and valuable as film. Not only has *Breaking Bad* raised the stakes for visual and narrative quality in television, it has raised the stakes for audiences as well, possibly in ways that the writers did not intend.

Creator Vince Gilligan, the writing team, and the network executives would most likely not consider someone like me — a bi-racial, Asian American woman — as *Breaking Bad's* most ardent fan, let alone the show's target demographic. Truthfully, much of what I identify as is not included in the target demographics for any film or television

program. Homer Simpson once said, "I'm a white male, age 18 to 49. Everyone listens to me – no matter how dumb my suggestions are." The ugly truth of mainstream media is that whiteness and masculinity constitute the foundation from which everything else grows. The earliest popular television programs — *Leave it to Beaver*, *Ozzie and Harriet*, *The Honeymooners*, and others — established the image of the idealized white American family. Now it's a model that has been reiterated in media to the point where it's the natural state of being for characters, and anything different is consequently defined and understood by this difference. *Breaking Bad* may portray a perverted image of the white American family, but it is yet another image of a white American

family nonetheless. At least Vince Gilligan was smart enough to notice this pattern and assign Walter White's family an appropriate surname. *Breaking Bad* can be considered a show that would strongly resonate with white males ages 18 to 49 due to the amount of attention and consideration it places on Walter. It traces his journey from an overqualified, under-paid high school chemistry teacher to the greatest drug lord in the American Southwest. At the start of the show, Walter has a steady job, a home, and loving relationships with his wife and son. Yet he sees this life — his life — as a failure. His boisterous, rugged brother-in-law tells him to "man up" as he continually outshines Walter as a respected DEA agent and role model to his son. The diagnosis of inoperable lung cancer is merely the motivation Walter needs to embody a model of manhood that is not only dangerous, but also deadly.

> *"The ugly truth of mainstream media is that whiteness and masculinity constitute the foundation from which everything else grows."*

In Walter's mind, the measure of a man is not the relationship he has with his family, but his ability to financially support them. Much of the dramatic tension within the show comes from Walt's decision to sacrifice the former for the latter, even using his role as provider to justify his actions every time he deceives, wounds, or murders another person. Money and masculinity are inherently linked in *Breaking Bad*, and Walt begins to employ heteronormative codes of masculinity such as violence and virility to affirm his power as a man who provides for his family. However, in Walter's world, ensuring that his family has enough money to survive is not sufficient. "Being a man" extends beyond the realm of the family and the familiar. In chronicling Walter's corrupt transformation into his alter-ego Heisenberg, the show demonstrates that his toxic masculinity entails having control over his own life as well as the lives of others:

"Say my name."

"I am the danger."

"I won."

These quotes from Walter illustrate that "being a man" is not only about having power, but taking power away from someone else. The one person who is the most consistently harmed in Walter's struggle for power is his wife, Skyler. Over the course of the show's five-season run, she suffers severe emotional manipulation and is coerced into compromising her morals for the safety of her family. Yet she is not a victim. She acts as a foil to Walter and continually fights against him, making it clear that, although she is complicit in an illegal and immoral life, she is not on his side. Despite the strength and agency Skyler exhibits, she and Anna Gunn, the actress portraying her, have been the target of disturbingly negative remarks from viewers who would rather root for her husband. A large portion of the show's fan base has rallied around two rather misguided phrases: "Skyler is a bitch" and "Walt is a badass." Both are equally foul, both are equally wrong.

Under any other circumstance, I would be wholly disinterested in a show that focuses on a hyper-masculine white male who claims his dominance over everyone in his life. Under any other circumstance, I would be wholly disinterested in a show whose main female character is treated with such disdain and vitriol both within and beyond the constraints of the television screen. However, these are superficial readings of a deeply elaborate show. There is a vein of complexity that runs throughout *Breaking Bad* that complicates and even refutes its representations of whiteness and masculinity, and it is this self-awareness

of its uncomfortable aspects that makes my reconciliation with them possible.

It is unfortunate but necessary to admit that the nature of mainstream media entertainment is inherently biased towards those in power and those who hold traditional views. By and large, those are the views that get translated into what we watch. Although I am deeply invested in film and television, I am cognizant of the reality that I rarely see characters who reflect aspects of my appearance or personality. Yet if I were to dismiss every film or television program that did not prominently feature minority characters who exhibited complex understandings of gender, sexuality, and the oppressive structures that thrive within our society, the number of media products that I could allow myself to watch, let alone love, would be significantly diminished. Being aware of this dire issue of representation within our media landscape provides an opportunity to interact with a subject that we readily consume and invest ourselves in on a deeper, more constructive level.

I unequivocally love *Breaking Bad*. I am a fan. I would not have spent countless hours at my computer diligently throwing my own theories, observations, and opinions into the aether if I were not. The struggle to resolve the contradiction between enjoying *Breaking Bad* and remaining committed to my values as a consciously critical viewer not only validates my own adoration of the show, but legitimizes modern television as a media format singular in its openness for high quality storytelling and committed audience engagement. Television's long-form narrative structure offers *Breaking Bad's* writers to craft a product that is complicated and can subsequently generate similar responses from viewers such as myself. Oversimplifying any element of the show would be a sore mistake and a disservice to the quality of writing and acting that helped it gain the ubiquitous critical acclaim it's now known for. Much like Skyler, viewers are complicit in Walter's deadly decisions as well.

Regardless of whether we choose to support or condemn him, we are still compelled to watch him.

The concept of "authentic" and "heroic" masculinity that some fans of Walter support is one of *Breaking Bad's* chief concerns, and it manifests itself in a number of the male characters. Although Walter displays a violent and assertive brand of masculinity throughout the majority of the show, it is a toxic masculinity that is both damaging and deadly, fragile and fleeting. Heisenberg is nothing but a large shadow that the diminutive, ineffectual Walter White casts on the lives of those he comes into contact with. *Breaking Bad* expertly demonstrates how the dominant notion of "being a man" that Walter attempts to embody as Heisenberg is a facet of the absolutist claims of gender that constructed him as an emasculated figure in the first place. It would be irresponsible to ignore the effort Bryan Cranston and the writers took in depicting a man fooled by the illusory force of masculinity and who effectively threw his life away for it. It would be uncritical to believe that the writers and actors were not aware of the powerful and controlling images of race and gender that they were producing. It would be inaccurate to believe that they did not, in reality, criticize those images and the cultural forces that sustain them.

The process of criticizing oppressive and destructive structures within American society that *Breaking Bad* undertakes is comparable to the one any engaged audience member must participate in. Media is as much an oppressive structure as patriarchy or the notion of the nuclear American family, and to consume it is to support it, both directly and indirectly. Whether we align ourselves with the images and messages television produces, its global influence is undeniable. Television shows like *Breaking Bad* must be closely examined because they reflect an image of our society back to us, frequently magnifying its flaws. To examine shows is to examine ourselves. Our

relationship with a television program does not end when the show ends, nor does it go on hiatus during commercial breaks. As opposed to film audiences, television audiences have the fundamental power in forming the medium's future; our viewing habits are more closely analyzed and heeded in the creation of new programming. It is vital that we remember this role when we form relationships with the programs that we give our time and attention to so that we may become more involved in creating a culturally diverse media landscape. My relationship with *Breaking Bad* is ongoing because my love for it affords me the energy and motivation to reconsider its many meanings as I change and grow.

In the pilot episode, Walter describes chemistry as "the study of change."

"It is growth, decay, then transformation."

The final analytical conclusions I have come to on my own regarding the show's politicized meanings are not, by any stretch of the imagination, the "correct" ones. However, what is important is the process of infatuation, contemplation, and compromise that was crucial in arriving at a deeper, more constructive, and more personally valuable perspective on a show that I will cherish for years to come.

A CASE OF INFIDELITY

Freedom, Deviation, and Audience Reception in Sherlock Holmes Adaptations

by Alexa Olmos

Some of the most obvious reasons for the popularity of film and television adaptations lies in their timeless quality, nostalgic feel, and established audiences. However, in the case of the Sherlock Holmes adaptations, as seen in the newly released films, *Sherlock Holmes* (2009, 2011) and television shows, *Sherlock* (2010) and *Elementary* (2012), the reason, much like the detective himself, is complex.

In 1887 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle achieved literary success through his acclaimed *Sherlock Holmes* novels and short stories. Even before the last edition in 1927, the Sherlock Holmes figure had begun to influence other media by being adapted close to a hundred times in film, stage, and radio during Doyle's lifetime.[1] The public that made this literary work so popular adapted his creation in ways Doyle would never expect.

The current popularity of Sherlock Holmes should not only be judged as a way of using viewers' sense of nostalgia for the original text and past adaptations. While many still envision an actor such as Basil Rathbone in a classic depiction of Sherlock Holmes —

wearing a deerstalker hat and a pipe in hand — this portrayal is now either played for comic relief or completely dismissed in the present day. Today's Sherlock Holmes adaptations have developed their identities through their own mixture of infidelity.

The act of infidelity creates a freedom that fans and even casual viewers can discern across the media of film and television. This distinction made by viewers and fans is how the Sherlock Holmes legacy has grown through its 127 years of existence and continues in these media's interpretations of the text. These contrasting settings of infidelity display how they have branched out significantly from Doyle's literary works. Rather than viewing this as condemnation of the adaptations, they have insured a stronger collective that forms a greater freedom of creation and perception. In Anne-Marie Scholz's analysis of film adaptations, entitled *Adaptation as Reception*, she argues that film struggles between the boundaries of fidelity and infidelity due to its audience's perception of the medium. "There is a conflict of sorts between the reception of

the films and the ways the filmmakers attempt to invent new way of adapting classic works while simultaneously attempting to appeal to a large market."[2] The recent Warner Bros. *Sherlock Holmes* films (2009, 2011) represent this same objective. While Scholz suggests an interesting point that film adaptations are in a conflict between fidelity and infidelity, the Warner Bros. films do not struggle with mirroring the original text on this level. There remains minor differences that viewers and fans may observe and criticize, including its use of action, abridged narration, and its condensed storylines that continue from the first to the second film.

As for the main characters, Robert Downey Jr.'s Sherlock Holmes and Jude Law's John Watson also exhibit contrasting characteristics from their original counterparts. Still, these are small technicalities when taking into consideration that film is a medium with a shorter timeframe than either literature or television.

Scholz's analysis primarily brings attention to the fear of infidelity from transnational film adaptations. She argues that transnational films are more susceptible to scrutiny for relocating outside of the country of origin. As a transnational British-American film, the Warner Bros. adaptation did not take as many chances as, for instance, the television series *Sherlock*. However, infidelity does not only consist of the content, but also the nationality of the adaptation. While the Warner Bros. adaptation develops little of its own style and content, its transnational roots open doors for the deviation from the original. The film can never be completely true to its original source because its mainstream American/blockbuster influences made for a predominantly American audience.

Rather than looking down on this form of infidelity, its mixture of cultural references represents an influence between both nations. The creation of more transnational Sherlock Holmes adaptations may push for greater leaps

in content and style, but for the moment its transnational origins allows the film a unique freedom of representation. Though content and style show minimal changes in this medium, television plays with the freedom of infidelity, whether or not it's transnational.

CBS's television series *Elementary* diverges entirely from the classic Doyle stories. By setting the series in a modern day New York City, there is an emphasis on America as a fresh start for the premise and plot to unfold. As for the main characters, Sherlock Holmes is given the added trait of being a recovering sex and drug addict, and John Watson is transformed into a woman named Joan Watson.

In contrast to both American versions, the BBC adaptation *Sherlock* reveals how the original text has developed in its own country. Taking place in London and with a British cast and creators, the series gives the story freedom to play with boundaries of fidelity in similar ways to *Elementary*. Both television serials take greater chances than the Warner Bros. films; however, both represent different uses of infidelity that establish new values for their creators and fans.

Even television shows with the same source material convey their own unique adaptations, regardless of major parallels. As both shows take similar steps in their interpretations of the text, there has been some backlash toward CBS's *Elementary*, because many see it as a reformulation of *Sherlock*. Since it is well known for American networks to adapt British television programs (e.g. *The Office*, *Shameless*, and *House of Cards*, to name a few), they were eager to create a series based on *Sherlock*. The creators denied this buy-out before it could be processed, but that did not deter CBS from creating *Elementary* with an opaquely similar scenario of dropping the characters into a contemporary setting. In reaction to this, the executive producer of *Sherlock*, Sue Vertue, stated, "Mmm interesting CBS, I'm surprised no one has thought of making a modern day version of Sherlock before, oh hang on, we

have!"[3] This statement may have spurned on fans of *Sherlock* to reject CBS's adaptation as a subpar imitation; however, both shows supply a collaborative foil to film and to one another.

While there are some unique qualities both television serials possess — particularly the switch to a modern-time period and added character attributes — there remain several content related differences. These different levels of infidelity provide freedom for the creation and interaction within the Sherlock Holmes universe. Moriarty's introductions in both shows represent their reverence to the original, but they are executed in ways that display how their individual infidelity creates diverse adaptations.

> "The act of infidelity creates a freedom that fans and even casual viewers can discern across the media of film and television."

The Moriarty of the original text was a mathematics professor who appeared in only two out of fifty-six short stories. Although Doyle created Moriarty to be both Sherlock's archenemy and ultimate downfall, the recent television adaptations give him a more sinister and mysterious persona in their earliest beginnings.

From the first episode of *Sherlock*, "A Study In Pink," the introduction to Moriarty represents an intellectual challenger who emphasizes the power of wit and deduction Sherlock Holmes carries throughout his future cases. In the final scenes of the episode, Sherlock confronts Moriarty's first of many lackeys. Instead of what viewers may assume would be a climactic sequence between hero and foe, the fight is reduced to two men sitting across from one another, in what would appear to be a polite exchanging words. Surprisingly, the scene captures the suspense of unraveling the mystery. By the end, Sherlock is left with a solved crime and only one name, Moriarty. While many may consider this scene slow paced, this moment actually demonstrates the intellectual struggle Sherlock faces, mimicking the original text with a plot developing twist.

In contrast, *Elementary* takes a darker turn in its the introduction to Moriarty. From the beginning of the episode "M.", Sherlock is confronted with a serial killer who has followed him to the United States from London. Akin to *Sherlock*, the foe in this episode only works for Moriarty and knows little about his employer's intentions. In the later scenes of the episode Sherlock kidnaps the serial killer and violently tortures him for information on Moriarty. While this implies the beginning between Sherlock and Moriarty, there is a semblance of history behind them and an emotional stake — one that is not merely intellectual. The juxtaposition between both shows could not be starker; however, it is not a matter of which is truer to the text or represents a greater story and characters, but rather how these adaptations open up the text in more creative outlets through their own distinctive qualities for its creators and fans to draw upon.

Without a doubt, the Internet has supplied that creative outlet for an active audience and more insights into the popularity of the Sherlock Holmes canon. For online fans, "the information and interaction helps them to think about a program differently, and perhaps more critically, adding to their enjoyment of the actual viewing experience."[4] The most active viewers are the online fan communities, whose engagement with the material usually leads the way in interpreting these various forms of infidelity.

Through online fan interaction, infidelity within an adaptation, whether small or large, can create an inspiring parallel experience for the creators and fans. In the original source,

"The Final Problem" was intended to be the end of the *Sherlock Holmes* series as Sherlock and Moriarty fell to their deaths down Switzerland's Reichenbach falls. Fans were outraged and the question after the death was a resounding 'Why?' Doyle, quick to please his fans, remedied this with his next installment of the series, where he miraculously brought Sherlock back to life.[5] *Sherlock's* last episode of series two (note: series indicates season in British television), entitled "The Reichenbach Fall," canonically shadowed Doyle's final short story, and like the original, gave way to an outpouring of fan speculation over Sherlock's death. The question now was "How did he?" Why not why? Infidelity comes into play once again; whereas *Sherlock* could not produce the same reaction as the original text, it had given away a key component by the end of the episode that its source had not: Sherlock was shown alive.

Though it is not a significant departure from Doyle's original story, it led to an outpour of responses from fans speculating how Sherlock faked his death.[6] With two years before series three would make an appearance, fans had ample time on their hands to share and debate their theories. "When it started to erupt, we saw a couple of them," Steven Moffat, a co-creator of *Sherlock*, said of the fan fiction that emerged to explain Sherlock's fake death. "We saw some YouTube things that were quite funny. Most of the ones I saw were jokes."[7] Moffat's playfulness aside, he indicates some understanding of the show's online fan presence; even if the creators do not bend to the whims of their fans, they are at least in conversation.

The first episode of series three was a testament to this fan and creator communication. For instance, a few versions of how Sherlock outwitted death play out mainly for laughs, but also as a light gesture to its long awaiting fans. Infidelity allows the fans freedom to think critically and creatively about the characters and their actions among themselves and one another. The creators are also allowed more freedom to play with and consider a character's actions while presenting the mutual growth of creation and perception.

Each current adaptation and those to come will seem to receive worldwide acclaim from critics and fans alike. While their unique content and styles are key factors to their popularity, their infidelity to the original text shows an evolution that will contribute to the Sherlock Holmes universe. In the case of these adaptations, infidelity does not mean disregarding the source material, but utilizing it in creative ways to breathe life into a cherished text. Should the original always be the standard for every adaptation to try to uphold? To an extent, yes. The classic stories and characters are still loved by many and should be preserved. However, an element of infidelity not only creates interest and a uniqueness that allows it to stand out among the rest, but also strengthens the entirety of the Sherlock Holmes character. These adaptations not only show the progression of the Sherlock Holmes universe across media, but also that infidelity is taking Sherlock Holmes to new corners of the globe, and new psychological frontiers that uncover character depth never explored until now. Sherlock Holmes represents the pinnacle of fictional complexity. As adaptations are becoming more and more complex, they can faithfully represent the man Doyle had intended, but in ways he never expected.

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THE ART OF REPULSIVE SEXUAL TENSION

Campion, Coppola, and the State of Feminist Filmmaking

by Amanda Ross

Let's make a film character. "A" woman. Wait. It could be "this" woman, it could be "that" woman. "A" woman is so replaceable. "A" woman doesn't need to say or do anything to be "A" woman — she isn't much different from that of a lamp or any other prop. Where is "The" woman? "The" woman who aims to hold "The" power that comes with her individuality. It's painful that I hardly see "The" woman character actually keep her own power, and I grow tired of seeing film after film with just "A" woman.

The hegemonic system, the convention, the man, Hollywood, whatever one may call it, wants the power and usually has it. This is a system that reinforces its own bad behavior, and "A" woman is likely to be the subject of their films. When I think of "A" woman, I think of every person who believes that their "greatest asset … [is] a marketable façade."[1] One important work that defies the hegemony of "A" woman is Katie Makkai's spoken word piece "Pretty", an inspiring declaration to both women and men that delves into the societal pressures placed on women. In "Pretty", Makkai calls dominant representations of the female body a "self-mutilating circus," thereby drawing attention to the fractured way society

has pulled many into believing this vain materialistic ideology about women.

Women have always been portrayed as the objects of desire, guilt, and pleasure in classic, Hollywood film narratives. The individuality in women characters is so often inhibited and subjugated to the "male gaze," a term coined by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey, which suggests that female characters succumb to the will of the male characters. According to this concept, female characters are "bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions."[2] Now, this doesn't mean we shouldn't have women as main characters. What it does mean is that we should be aware of the dangers women characters face, and actively resist these oppressive representations while working to create more nuanced ones. Yet, deplorably, many do not.

There is "one female film director for every 15.24 males,"[3] and there are even fewer female filmmakers who are inclined to break from the conventions that both society and Hollywood impose on them. But those few understand the influence their films embody for female empowerment. These filmmakers challenge the status quo by not letting the decadence of conventions mold their characters. Jane Campion is one of them.

Campion, a New Zealand auteur, studies feminist subjectivity and is keenly aware of how women are perceived on the film screen. Through her meticulous attention to the frame and active cinematography, she is a master at individualizing her women characters and deconstructing the classic gender roles that allow the male gaze to sustain its potency. Her unconventional modes of filmmaking challenge both the social structure in the filmmaking industry and the patriarchal society her women characters face. "The films that make up [Campion's] oeuvre explore characters' agency, sexual desire, and drive for self-expression — forces that set them at odds with each other, with the environment,

and also, particularly in the case of female characters, with themselves."[4] Through her protagonists, Campion explores how to avoid becoming "A" woman of the male gaze, and how to become "The" woman of her own empowerment.

"In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact."[5] In her film *Sweetie* (1989), Campion develops her lead character, Kay, to be rather passive and attractive, as anticipated by the male gaze. However, instead of feeding into the audience's desire, their craving is thwarted by Kay's disturbing nature. From the opening of *Sweetie*, Campion dives straight into Kay's insecurities, which are immediately challenging to identify with. The audience's doubts about Kay's inhibition deepen as she gets her fortune told and participates in increasingly stranger rituals. Campion frames her characters to guide and complicate the audience's desires. Before Campion reveals that Kay is pulling out a young tree in her backyard due to her own superstitions, she uses the frame of the camera to sever certain areas of the body, implying a sense of disembodiment.

The audience's desire to connect with Kay is further thwarted as Campion composes an eerie montage with a dramatic use of empty space around subjects to explore the ominous depths of Kay's superstitious imagination. Once Kay closes her eyes, the camera captures an uncanny string of images into Kay's distraught mind. The audience remains distant from Kay, as they are disturbed by these events in her mind — ranging from oddly arranged foods to shots of the strange movements of feet, to eerie negative-filtered images. The audience thus becomes wary of associating themselves with a suspicious character. Such mistrust points to a marked layer of unattractiveness that opposes the desire of the male gaze. In this way, Campion cuts the cord that ties Kay to being a subject of voyeurism. The audience

grows uncertain and disoriented, for Kay's life is not one they typically expect nor desire to gaze at.

Sex as a Preferred Taboo

Since the audience struggles to identify with Kay or find comfort in objectifying her, they turn to the main male character, Louis. However, with Louis nearly as dubious as Kay — he has similar suspicions, such as marrying Kay because she told him that she saw a question mark on his forehead and deemed it "a sign" for them to be together — the audience lacks a character to connect to. The

only aspect holding the audience's attention is curiosity.

There is an element, a device, a plot characteristic, if you will, that usually holds the most weight in films: the love plot. There is an inevitable hope that this plot will thrive, by exploiting sex as the central factor. The audience's male gaze anticipates that their inevitable request for sexual satisfaction will be appeased, and that they can eventually identify with a love between characters — with sex being the highest form of desire and love. However, Campion intentionally neglects this desire, and in turn, forces sex to represent the adverse.

After not having sexual relations for weeks because Kay had split from Louis to recover from her cold, they decide to plan to have sex. The audience patiently awaits the scene. Campion composes a long, gauche shot of the couple readying the bed. A wall impedes on part of the camera's view, which reflects the couple's own psychological barrier preventing them from the act. The characters slowly remove their own clothing, but only end up sitting side by side, naked yet never touching. These uncomfortable forms of sexual desire cause the audience to become repulsed by the sexual presence altogether. Campion forces sex to become estranged, foreign, and even indifferent, and thus, the audience continues to struggle to identify with the characters.

Removing the Gaze

Though Sweetie, Kay's sister, seems to arrive unexpectedly in the narrative, Campion has devised her to dominate the sexual aspect of the film. She is not a sane, passive or attractive character — at least to hegemonic standards — which makes her the ultimate abhorrent subject for the male gaze. Nearly indecent in every scene, Sweetie threatens the male gaze with her grotesque depictions of sex. In Sweetie's last few scenes, she poses completely naked and covered in dirt. The audience is conflicted by this repulsive sexual tension. Here, Sweetie is in utter control of the gaze, as she is often framed in low-angle shots, high above all the other characters.

However, Campion overpowers the male gaze of desire by literally crushing the only obvious sexualized icon of the moment: Sweetie. In the final scene of the film, Sweetie stands naked above the other characters in a tree house. However, the tree house collapses and she faces her untimely death. This dramatic and unexpected turn allows for Campion to suspend her audience from identifying any sexual reference and ultimately, to rid her viewers of their male gaze. The way

Campion poses this situation enhances the sense of awkwardness in the film and instills it into her audience, ultimately freeing her characters from the bondage of identification and providing them with their independence.

Becoming Frail

However, even with auteurs like Campion, feminist filmmaking has weakened, lost momentum and grown increasingly less feminist, as demonstrated by Sofia Coppola, one of the most high-profile female filmmakers in the United States. Her debut feature film, *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), follows the short lives of three teenage sisters who gradually become distant from society when their youngest sister commits suicide. Filmed from the point of view of a group of several boys, the film seems to obsess from afar over these young women. The boys spy on the girls and have fantasies about them because of the girls' conservative lives and controlling mother.

"By framing her female protagonists to pose in ways that are unappealing to conventional male desire, Campion destroys the male gaze and frees her characters of its oppression."

Sofia Coppola's film explores the male gaze through these boys, but it does not work to counter its grasp. In fact, it tends to perpetuate voyeurism by focusing greatly on the boys' stares and how they see the girls. At one point the boys spy on Lux — one of the

sisters who is acting out of spite for the rigid structures of her household — through a telescope to watch her have sex with a variety of boys.

At the end of the film, Lux invites the central group of boys over at night — in many ways inviting the male gaze directly. The boys believe their sexual wishes have been granted. They are finally able to be a part of the girls' lives, or so they think. Lux leaves the boys in the house to go "start the car." As the boys tour the house, they are invited into the girls' rejection of society — into their suicides. This scene is disturbing to the male gaze as these characters have lost their prime sexual attraction, and become objects of a different kind.

As much as I enjoy the idea of frightening the male gaze, I don't believe this scene is progressive for feminism. All the girls' faces are obstructed from view in their deaths, implying that they are merely objects to be gazed upon. The boys cannot gaze upon them for long and eventually run away in fright. While briefly encountering something that isn't pleasurable, the boys quickly return to their fantasies later that night, reminiscing about the girls and perpetuating a male construction of desire.

I appreciate that the boys never fully understand the girls because they do not have a clear relationship with them. However, their self-entitled right to objectify them on their own terms still demeans the young girls. At the end of the film, the boys all gaze upon some of the girls' belongings as if they were memories they experienced together. Even in their death, these girls cannot escape with their dignity intact — they still remain objectified.

Coppola's attempt to strengthen her women by killing them off is rather paradoxical. Although Campion also kills her character Sweetie, it is justified by freeing her character from the gaze and allowing her to die by her own will. Ultimately, the male gaze is repulsed by her and can have no influence on her. However, Coppola's characters commit suicide in response to the male gaze's oppression, marking the girls as victims to the gaze. While there are certain freedoms in death, Coppola denies her female characters the pains and pleasures of free will.

Watching Between Your Fingers

By framing her female protagonists to pose in ways that are unappealing to conventional male desire, Campion destroys the male gaze and frees her characters of its oppression. Jane Campion is one of the few female directors who has not let conventions dictate her filmmaking. Because of this, she has been able to grant her characters' female independence. Prevailing in similar stature are female filmmakers such as Miranda July, Catherine Breillat, Lynne Ramsay, and Elizabeth Subrin, to name just a few. These women are "The" filmmakers who challenge the system and how women are perceived. They also battle societal pressures to conform to the filmmaking world they live in. These filmmakers prove that if more women could enter the movie industry with an underlying goal to withstand the pressures of hegemony, filmmaking wouldn't feel forced to conform to these patriarchal ways.

Now, it may seem unfortunate that this is currently the world of filmmaking. But "unfortunate" would mean there is nothing we can do about it now, which is certainly not the case. There are stereotypes, prejudices, and hegemonic values pressing upon all systems throughout the world and the filmmaking domain is a system with great influence on millions. Don't we have the obligation to pave the way and to construct not just a future for women in this industry, but a progressive one? If filmmakers can come to a consensus to regard women in the industry and their women characters with the respect they deserve, there is a chance these artists can slowly diminish the prejudices that the filmmaking system chooses to exploit. With

a more open-minded industry, I can only imagine more women taking on filmmaking as a career option and further developing this resolve for more remarkable, resilient women — both within the filmmaking process and within films themselves.

I am ready to see "The" unconventional woman who is empowered by her individuality and not her sexual appeal. I am ready to see a filmmaking industry that takes a progressive step away from objectifying their women characters, following in the footsteps of filmmakers like Jane Campion. I am ready to believe in the words of Katie Makkai: "The word pretty is unworthy of everything you will be … You will be pretty intelligent, pretty creative, pretty amazing. But you will never be merely 'pretty'."[6]

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FORGOTTEN FUTURES
How the Past Failed to Depict the Future

by Zac Stein

The eminent and late Science-fiction author Ray Bradbury once wrote that "people ask me to try and predict the future when all I want to do is prevent it."[1] This ethos has come to represent the objective of most science fiction, a cautionary tale of the emerging and foreboding paths ahead.

In the following article I will be looking at an assortment of science fiction films that predicted the future. The prophesied dates of these films have either already passed in our present time of 2014, or are so close to passing, that their ideas of the future are unlikely to materialize. While it is a mere formality to mark the fictional past date as my selection process, I find the failure of these futures to be a driving indication of the contextual issues, technologies and infrastructures that these stories were created from.

Some of these films have correctly predicted specific future trends and some

are shockingly accurate in their portrayal of events. The unifying bond of all these films, however, is that the worlds they depict haven't happened and are unlikely to fully transpire. Many of the scenarios appear to be absurd ruminations, but under the surface, these are worlds that stem directly from the issues of the time they were prophesied and like the initial quote from Bradbury, they warn us of the possibilities.

It would seem that in our present state of filmmaking the blunt dystopian vision has become the prevalent cinematic portrayal of the future. These harsh, visceral realities often display the fallout of catastrophe, shown in films such as *Children of Men* (2006), *District 9* (2009), and *Dredd* (2012), all of which take place in a desolate world, overrun by mass poverty and rampant crime. Even the animated film *Wall-E* (2008) presents to the audience a failed future where our hubristic

reliance on technology has resulted in our downfall. While this dystopic vision is a very powerful and popular way to present the future, they raise fewer questions and tend to not be as vivid or interesting as the films examined throughout this essay.

For the most part, this period of forgotten futures that I will discuss begins in the early seventies. Like the futures of today, Hollywood during this time was on a run of dystopian pictures that portrayed the next chapter of humanity after the end of the world. In a series of essays, Keith Phipps describes a period of filmmaking that was the advent of science fiction — what he calls the "Laser Age," which started in the late sixties and faded during the mid-eighties. Phipps points out that the first *Planet of the Apes* sequel, *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1970), with its powerful yet morose ending, brought about this fixation on the aftermath. When lead character Brent (James Franciscus) detonates a nuclear bomb that destroys the future earth, many audiences and critics found it a difficult notion to digest.[2] This shocking new take on the future inspired a string of films that then asked: what happens after "the end?" These were popular films, such as *The Omega Man* (1971), which, while being set only a few years in advance of its release date, is an important film to mention.

The Omega Man's opening scenes depict Charlton Heston wandering through deserted Los Angeles streets, almost certainly a comment on the looming possibility of urban decay and the failure of commercial infrastructure inside the modern American city.[3] The film is full of pertinent issues for the time of production, including the subject of race, which runs throughout the film. Heston embodies the white, gun-toting hero of yesteryear, who now lives in a world controlled by the vampiric beings that are pressed to life in the shadows. Yet Heston's ally and love interest is an African-American woman, Lisa (Rosalind Cash). Their interracial love scene may not have been the first on screen, but to use a major star like Heston — at the time a liberal who supported Kennedy and advocated for the Civil Rights Movement — was a strong message to send. The fact that the world had to be devastated for union to take place also put the topic of race into perspective — that in the end of the world, we are all still human and we must work together.

The fourth film in the Apes series, *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* (1971), places the audience in the then-futuristic world of 1991, in an unnamed city of tomorrow with a cold cement infrastructure. The world has hints of dictatorships with high levels of surveillance; the city is covered with CCTV, and every human and ape is on a registered database. In this time, a disease has killed all cats and dogs, leading humans to use apes as their household pets.

One troubling scene worth mentioning shows a character named Armando being tortured for information at the hands of the machine called "The Authenticator." The device forces people to tell the truth, further reinforcing the Orwellian setting, and referencing the growing power of the government over its citizens and their thoughts. Conquest is most important here as being the first in my list of films to display the "failed utopia," the sinister underbelly of a surface-level, highly-functional society. It features an immaculate city free from expressive stylized architecture. In fact, the film was shot entirely in the then-newly built and uninhabited Century City, on what was once an old Fox Studio lot in Los Angeles.[5] This untouched polished cityscape greatly heightens the sterility that we see in many of the future utopias from the time, as well as raising issues of our conformist society.

Richard Fleischer's 1973 film *Soylent Green* comes at the interim between the dystopian and utopian. The world of *Soylent Green* is an uneven dichotomy in favor of the wealthy elite who live in their plush high-rises, while the rest of humanity is forced to

live in the worn down tenement buildings. Charlton Heston, in the starring role once again, encapsulates the bygone American everyman. Here, he plays a tough cop in 2022 New York City, where global warming from mass industrialization has left the world permanently polluted and overcrowded — all encapsulated in a hazy yellow tint that pervades most exterior scenes.

The film uses the idea of devaluing human life, a prevalent theme in most future science fiction, and takes it to the most extreme possibilities. Here, the wealthy leaders of the corporations rent luxury "furnished" apartments — the furniture being young attractive women who maintain the apartment and have sex at the renter's request. Other than

"Many of the scenarios appear to be absurd ruminations, but under the surface, these are worlds that stem directly from the issues of the time they were prophesied..."

the titular inhumane product, there are also horrifying scenes of crowd control that echo the realities of police brutality. During a huge mass protest, giant garbage trucks with solid metal scoops collect the hordes of protesters and pile them into the giant collectors with no differentiation or care. In this world everyone is equal, which is to say they are worthless, as humanity has been turned into a literal human cattle.

Soylent Green's future suggests that the many facets of a human life have been taken away — even one of our primary senses, taste, has been reduced to the three flavors of Soylent wafers that are available to the poor. These wafers provide people with the basic nutrients to live in misery. Another scary notion is that due to overpopulation, Heston's character is able to be stalked and chased by the masses; however, his pursuers are dressed exactly like him, which enhances the sense of fatalism at the core of the film — that everyone is the enemy for the right price. Even though the film concludes with a small thimble of hope — as Heston spreads the word to the houseless of the true nature of Soylent Green — Keith Phipps excellently states that "the battle has already been lost."[6]

Another method to combat the overpopulating of this future is through the legalization of euthanasia. At one point in the film, Heston's only friend, the elderly Sol, (Edward G. Robinson, in his final role before his death), goes to a assisted suicide clinic called "Home." Heston races to stop him but is too late and witnesses the procedure. As the lethal drug is administered, Sol is shown a glorious vivid montage of forests, oceans, nature and every other natural wonder that is now extinct. While Sol's death is shown as a moment of nostalgic beauty, this moment actually exposes the menacing notion that Sol dies with the realization that humanity let this happen.

On the surface, the world of *Rollerball* (1975) is miles away from *Soylent Green*: set in the year 2018, all the nations have gone bankrupt and the world has been turned into a global corporate state. As a result of the "corporate wars" that "no one talks about anymore," each conglomerate owns and controls different cities around the world. Humans have given up their right to democracy for the common good, as in this future all poverty and sickness have been eradicated. The titular sport at the heart of the film is the distraction, a bloody deathly pastime that resembles roller derby, which

feeds all of humanity's competitive urges. James Caan stars as Jonathan E., the captain of the Houston Rollerball team, which is owned by the Energy Corporation. The Energy Corporation chairman Mr. Bartholomew (veteran stage actor John Houseman) is keen for Jonathan to retire, as he has become too popular and has amassed a heavy following, which therefore makes him a threat.

Rollerball reveals a deeply satirical notion for the mid-seventies but a frank possibility today, as the strong corporate lobbying continues to further influence our present government. Throughout the years, the Corporation has tried many tactics to quell Jonathan's fighting spirit by directly interfering in his life. They took his wife away from him using the excuse that "she was promised to an executive." He is offered a lucrative termination package if he announces his retirement live on air. As Mr. Bartholomew puts it, "The game was created to demonstrate the futility of individual effort." In this future, much like today, we are forced to perceive ourselves as cogs in the machine. The women in the film best represent this loss of individuality, as they are easily recast into people's lives, and as Dyllun Vadher puts it in his review, are seen as "decorative disposable pleasures."[7]

Rollerball exhibits our most functional utopia. Like the previous futures, the sets all have a minimalist aesthetic yet the sense of evil is more fully present in every scene, not just in the barbaric Roller Derby Hybrid that the population salivate over. While the simple crowds feed their bloodlust, yearning for death and injury in every game, the elite take part in lavish hedonistic parties where they indulge their primal desires in a world without rules. In one scene of the film, Jonathan attends a fancy party for the corporation heads. There, he witnesses the upper crust's new favorite pastime as they get drunk and leave for the forest where they set fire to nature with a giant gun. It's a scene that emulates the famous book burning from Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, except here the destruction is an act of liberation, the wanton chaos is a privileged means of self-expression in a world that is highly governed by the corporations.

Like *Soylent Green* and many other future films already discussed, the primary goal in *Rollerball's* future is control, yet the methods are far more sinister. The titular sport is practically the reality television of today, with an ever-changing roster of heroes and villains. Jonathan's partners are chosen at will by the Energy Corporation. Like the Soma pill in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, the population is controlled by humanity's vices with a legal, mood-stabilizing drug that is distributed with as much care as a breath mint.

The most haunting scene in the film comes near the end, as Jonathan looks for the answers from the past and takes a trip to Geneva, Switzerland to visit the central computer system. Here, all the books and histories of the world are stored in a liquid-based computer system called "Zero." This scene echoes the current restricted access to information and is a precursor to the delicate cloud based operating systems that are quickly becoming a predominant method for storage. "Zero" captures the fragility of our movement away from physical media and the expanding release of information. In fact, while at the central database, the operator presses a wrong button and wipes out every trace of the 13th century from the records. His only comment is "What a pity," before musing that it was "just Dante and a few corrupt popes." This references many key concepts from Orwell's *1984*, namely that "The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history," and that "he who controls the past controls the future, and he who controls the present controls the past."

H.G. Wells' *Things to Come* (1936), directed by William Cameron Menzies, chronicles a hundred years of future history from the 1940s onwards. With shocking

prescience, Wells' script predicts a Second World War beginning in 1940 — except this war lasts for 30 years and plunges humanity back to a new dark age. However, it is probable that his prediction during the climate of the time was quite logical. When the film jumps to 2036, we see a burgeoning utopia on the precipice of disaster, while a heated debate brews on mankind's progress into the future — centered on the first trip manned trip to space. A movement of Luddites form to stop the technological progress, believing space travel will lead to our downfall. Encapsulating the efforts of science fiction to warn of the future, the progress that humanity desires in the film appears to be inevitable, no matter what the negative aspects may be. Thus, the fatalism about the future of humanity and its hindrance from the progression of technology can only be acknowledged and accepted as necessary. However, unlike Bradbury, the advancements seemed to excite Wells, who wrote in his novel *The Time Machine* that "we should strive to welcome change and challenges, because they are what help us grow."

While all these futures may be forgotten, they are never irrelevant. Most of these ideas

and themes are often recontextualized for current audiences. *Things to Come* represents the universal theme of these futures, the very nature of progression and its many consequences. While these dates have come and gone, the ideas and questions will always be relevant. At the end of the film, a speech encapsulates our hubris and the ambiguity of our progression: "And when he has conquered all the deeps of space and all the mysteries of time — still he will be beginning."

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THE AESTHETICIZED LIFE

Or, Confection, Commodification, and Privilege in the Works of Wes Anderson

by Debra Bilodeau

Wesley Wales Anderson is a hipster icon. At times a critical darling and an eye-roll inducer, it's his work which first got me excited about the craft of filmmaking, about the idea of conceiving and creating a whole story world. His films introduced me to the auteur — filmmaker as author and executive creative force — before I had any French under my belt: something more specific than just a name like Spielberg or Lucas. Someone whose films themselves are about the practice of storytelling.

All of his films focus on a nostalgia, to some degree, for the innocence of childhood and the precociousness of adolescence — as typically shown in temporally ambiguous costuming (Margot Tenenbaum's classic Lacoste-polo-with-fur-coat, the preponderance of corduroy and turtlenecks) and heavy rotation of classic rock. As Anderson's career has progressed, his films have arguably become more and more mediated and more and more steeped in their own artificiality, in their construction of these nostalgized worlds. Anderson's body of work, in its geometrically composed shots, intensely curated production design, film reference pastiche and framing devices, is successful insofar as the viewer takes pleasure in the recognition of his narratological technique. In other words, being "in on it" — getting his references — is half the fun.

The most iconic of Anderson's hallmarks is the overhead shot, whose many incarnations can be seen in Vimeo user Kogonada's lovely compilation "Wes Anderson // From Above." A metaphor for Anderson's filmmaking as a whole, it is a shot that simultaneously puts the viewer in the character's perspective and takes her out of it through the lack of perspectival depth in the shadow box-like presentation of

the onscreen objects. It places the viewer in the God-like position of Creator looking down upon the world, but retains the childlikeness of its simple composition.

In his excellent video essay series on Anderson, *The Substance of Style*, Matt Zoller Seitz posits that the overhead shot is an example of the influence of Martin Scorsese, known for his use of the "God's eye" perspective in his films. Though on opposite ends of the spectrum in subject matter, Anderson, like Scorsese, relies on music, sixties youth anthems in particular — they share a love for the Rolling Stones — to imbue his films with the restless youthful energy his meticulous style lacks. Much like Scorsese, Anderson's dramatic high points have become inseparable from the soundtrack cuts which they cue. *Rushmore* (1998), with songs from British Invasion-associated acts The Rolling Stones, The Who, John Lennon, Donovan, and Faces, is a prime example of this.

Two songs from folk musician Cat Stevens — known today for his tongue-twistably sing-along "Wild World" — feature prominently in two key sequences of the film. When Max, alone after his misadventures with Miss Cross and Herman Blume, is flying a kite toward the end of the film, Stevens's "The Wind" plays. In addition to its elemental topic, the song's reflective tone hits many of the poignant notes of the scene — the beginning lines "I listen to the wind / to the wind of my soul / Where I'll end up well I think / only God really knows" underscore Max's individuality and his uncertain future, while the song's resolving "I'll never make the same mistake" mirrors Max's decision to right his past wrongs by reuniting Herman and Miss Cross.

Anderson's emphasis on soundtrack cites another filmmaking influence — director Hal Ashby, arguably most famous for 1971's *Harold and Maude*, which featured a soundtrack comprised entirely of Cat Stevens songs. Following a death-obsessed teen's adventures with a septuagenarian who teaches him how to live, the film anticipates Anderson's bittersweet coming-of-age tales inflected by moments of slapstick humor, with the soundtrack lending a similar poignancy to the film's most touching moments.

With this layer of reference, however, it is difficult to accept Anderson's selection solely as dramatic underscoring. Do the emotions generate the music, or is it the other way around? The preoccupation with curation shown by his immaculately assembled soundtracks and careful filmmaking citations betrays an obsession with taste, with discrimination, the perfect musical selection to go along with an emotional scene — and, as music supervisor Randall Poster revealed to *Rolling Stone*, songs are sometimes chosen before a script is even written.

This is a central feature of Anderson's work, the notion of media — and, by extension, cultural — consumption. Anderson makes films presuming a visually and culturally literate audience, and it is those content with being "in" on Anderson's style who most enjoys them. The effete Texan's oeuvre is particularly important in a culture in which knowing of something is more important than one's opinion on it, in which references are more important than originality. Not quite as fantastic as Middle-earth or Oz or Panem, Anderson's constructed worlds are all the more deceptive for this.

Anderson's films are more than artificial, however; they are hyper-real. They inhabit the space of simulacra in that his referent is not some presupposed reality — the world we live in — but the film canon itself. That is to say, characters are based on film (and literary, it could be argued) characters rather than real people, his scripts and stories are based on other stories rather than reality or objective "truth."[1] This is, in the words of Jean Baudrillard, "a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real."[2] A question of Cat Stevens's wistful, melancholic music — a cultural commodity — instead of the emotion

itself.

Storytelling itself as an artifice is an important, recurring theme in Anderson's body of work, highlighted by his highly stylized narrative technique. For example, the introductory sequence of Steve Zissou's research vessel the *Belafonte* in *The Life Aquatic With Steve Zissou* (2004) tracks from compartment to compartment much like a child looks from room to room in a dollhouse. *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012), with its yellow-green filter, characters of early maturity, sense of fresh adventure, and whimsically nonsensical title, feels just like one of the vintage young adult novels packed in Suzy's suitcase. And, of course, *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) begins at the top of a children's storybook page. In bold

> *"The effete Texan's oeuvre is particularly important in a culture in which knowing of something is more important than one's opinion on it..."*

red letters we see the word "PROLOGUE"; next to that, a small, hand-drawn illustration of the Tenenbaum siblings, and, under it all, what is soon to be read by the velvety voice of narrator Alec Baldwin: "Royal Tenenbaum bought the house on Archer Avenue the winter of his 35th year..."

The Grand Budapest Hotel (2014) amps up the artifice and the excesses in storytelling which have become Anderson's trademark, presenting a story-within-a-story-within-a-story (within another?), beginning with 1) a contemporary young woman paying homage to an author's bronze bust, 2) journeying back twenty-five years to his introduction of 3) his

encounter with the proprietor of a Brutalistically remodeled old Grand Hotel seventeen years previous, who recounts 4) his exploits with the hotel's legendary concierge another generation before.

The Matroyshka doll (as phrased by Slate film critic Dana Stevens) of a plot is made visually concrete by way of the film's different, successively nesting, aspect ratios: 1.85:1 for 1985 to the present, the anamorphic widescreen of 2.35:1 for the 1960s, and the fabled Academy ratio (1.37:1) made standard in the year in which the bulk of the film's action takes place: 1932.[3] As if to compensate for the fact that the Nazis take power in Germany the next year, 1933, *Grand Budapest* is especially ensconced in its own artifice, distanced from the real by way of an excess of mediating devices: the nesting-doll frame stories, the book-within-the-film, and its chapter structure.

Grand Budapest's play with the mediation of storytelling is less in the frame itself and more in the focalization of the story, its dialogue between history and fiction. Though inspired by the writings of Stefan Zweig, an Austrian Jew who fled from the Nazis and literally could not bear to live in a world which the Fascists had taken over (he took his own life after fleeing to the Americas), Anderson completely fictionalizes this historical context, placing the hotel in the invented country Zubrowka instead of Zweig's native Austria and replacing the SS and Sig runes with Zig-Zags and stylized Zs.

Anderson has placed his particular veneer of fiction over fact, but summons the sorrows of bona fide history to his whim. There are still echoes and shadows of a historical context: the numerous "platz"es and "schloss"es, the name of the pâtissier, Mendl is a common Jewish name, the region in which the hotel is located is Sudetenwaltz, an obvious reference to the contested Sudetenland of then-Czechoslovakia, and, if one peruses the film's website, the *Grand Budapest's* location corresponds to the

Austrian Alps. Another layer of mediation, though this time paratextual.

Thankfully for Anderson, these "proto-Nazis," as many film critics have deigned to call them, at least decorate to match the place, with their zig-zagged Z runes the same delightful, confectionary pink as the Grand Budapest's façade. The confection remains just that. Even the Fascists are charming.

There is a fetishistic desire for completeness in Robert Yeoman's cinematography for

Anderson, evidenced by his use of symmetrical framing (see Kogonada's latest supercut, Wes Anderson // Centered), what David Bordwell calls the "planimetric"[4] strategy of staging the plane of action parallel to the camera plane "in a police lineup,"[5] and the ever-present overhead shot. This and the geometrically-arranged, shallow depth of the mise-en-scène render the screen reminiscent of a shadow or "jewel box" in which ornaments are carefully selected and arranged for display. Objects,

commodities take center stage in the high-angle framing and people are image-objects in their equally careful arrangement across the screen.

This commodification of nostalgia is all well and good for retro and/or temporally ambiguous Bildungsromans, but I have a problem with a film that injects a sense of wholeness and visual harmony to a world that is splitting apart, of placing a conflict that destroyed lives into a jewel box. Anderson is precious-izing a world that was actually — literally and irrevocably — destroyed. Destroyed by the threat that Anderson chooses to embody in the featureless, innocuous person of Edward Norton.

This is one of the most distancing aspects of the film: as featured so very prominently in the trailer, the cast is comprised of a cavalcade of celebrities. Media-savvy viewers are counted upon to express their delight with "oh, that's Jeff Goldblum!" and "what a bald cap on Harvey Keitel." This is a universe in which Brecht's alienation is turned consumer, in which the reification of the image of the movie star is called upon to ironic effect, inspiring audience awareness of the constructed nature of the film story. We get a sense of "Bill Murray" in his characters' perennial existential fatigue — but what is this but a cultural product, a construction of a brand identity?

Anderson's filmic technique is all about packaging, be it in the mediating nature of his storytelling devices, the arranged-to-display nature of his compositions, or the intense attention to design (set, costume, and, famously, typography), or even in the Wes Anderson-approved (by way of a sticker with his signature!) Criterion Collection special edition DVDs of his films.[6] But refugees, Fascism, war, and death are not things to wrap up in delightfully-folding Mendl's pâtisserie boxes, or in candy-colored symmetrical, storybook framings.

Parallel to the scopophilic harmony of his framing and the completeness of his storybook expositions, Anderson's scripts as of late, with their blend of narrative economy and completely imaginary on-the-spot witticisms from the characters, are engineered to create the punchiest, most pleasing succession of events. The effect is quite like that of a child playing with dolls. For example, when M. Gustave is faced with a death squad in *Grand Budapest*, his extolling of the virtues of civilization is cut short by his too-well-timed, "Aw fuck it!"

The news of Agatha's later death in the film's epilogue does pack a wallop. What F. Murray Abraham, who plays the older Zero, has in spades is what the rest of the film lacks in its handling of such serious issues — gravitas. But there is little emotional investment in the 1932 story itself, too little value for real tragedy, aside from the news of Gustave's execution. A "cripple boy" becomes little more than a visual gag; we are shown a girl's severed head, but it's not that of Agatha, Zero's love interest, so are we supposed to laugh as the timing suggests?

To be perfectly frank, the evocation of such a horrific catastrophe — which affected real human lives and continues to affect politics in the region to this day — that sets off a confectionary nostalgia tale such as this is highly unsettling. The vast majority of Anderson's viewers have never had to experience polio or war or poverty. They have not had to deal with the ramifications of Fascism or the emotional trauma of being a refugee.

In the words of Jonah Weiner, "Wes Anderson situates his art squarely in a world of whiteness: privileged, bookish, prudish, woebegone, tennis-playing, Kinks-scored, fusty. He's wise enough to make fun of it here and there, but in the end, there's something enamored and uncritical about his attitude toward the gaffes, crises, prejudices, and insularities of those he portrays."[7] In short, Anderson's films are films of privilege.

An assistant named Pagoda (played by

Kumar Pallana, who played a similar role in three of Anderson's films) and pejoratives such as "Coltrane" and "black buck" in reference to an African-American character are played off for laughs. Three brothers (and their custom-made Louis Vuitton luggage) embark upon a neocolonial spiritual journal in India. Even Zero Moustafa, whose complex refugee past is still humorously offset by his deference, youthful goofiness, and drawn-on mustache, is part and parcel of this privilege.

Anderson's films reflect and draw upon some of the most insidious problems in contemporary popular culture. We approach the world and each other through the lens of media images meant to sell us things: clothes, music, a "lifestyle." We present ourselves as products, brands, editing our Facebook profiles to maintain artificial images of ourselves. We put effort into making sure we're the most adroit consumers, be it in the outfits that are a careful blend of the "vintage" and the super-hip (but not too trendy as that would be seen as trying too hard), the Spotify playlists assembled, Tumblr archives, and Facebook likes carefully selected to demonstrate maximum sophistication.

There is a lack of sincerity in expression; when it is present, it is displayed in the affect of an Other, at once paradoxical and bitingly critical of the fakeness of our curation culture: "real." We enjoy Wes Anderson's mustard yellows, warm browns, and Pepto-Bismol pinks because we want to see the world through an Instagram filter.

Maybe I don't "get it." Maybe I don't want to anymore.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SINGING AND DANCING

How Bollywood Films Have Bridged the Binary Between Tradition and Modernity

by Kianna Anvari

Tollywood, Kollywood, Sandalwood, Mollywood, Jollywood, Ollywood, and Punjwood. These are only a few of the film industries operating in the different regions of India in over twenty languages. India is the largest producer of films in the world — yielding over 800 films a year and contributing to the staggering growth of the nation's economy. The hub of Indian film production is now associated with the Hindi-language based industry centered out of Mumbai (Bombay), known as Bollywood. Films produced out of Bollywood are recognized for a key element unlike any other. It is a component that connects Indians in the diasporic communities and bridges a sense of nationalism worldwide. It is an element argued to be a significant factor in the merging of tradition and modernity in India. It is the spectacle of song and dance.

Though Bollywood has been thriving throughout the 21st century, the industry struggled for decades in order to gain recognition from the Indian state because film was not viewed as advantageous to the development of the country. Tejaswini Ganti, associate professor of Anthropology at NYU, explains that the state did not initially see film as a vital entity for modernization and considered it a "vice."[1] Filmmakers in the 1990's were thus encouraged by the state to make family-friendly films, as opposed to previous films depicting sex and violence, in order to receive funding from larger institutions.[2] This new investment was also influenced by the desire to reimagine the nation and the audience. Additionally, the state began to recognize the impact films could have on education, especially considering the high illiteracy rates of the nation.[3] India

was finally identifying film as a pedagogical tool in the nation's modernization plan, and the production of socially relevant films was largely increased in order to uplift the masses. Due to the changing relations between Hindi cinema and the Indian state, films began to exemplify the morphing of tradition with new globalization.[4]

Ganti points out that a film's commercial success in India depends on its level of entertainment and the subsequent viewing pleasure of the masses.[5] Anjali Gera Roy points out that one way Bollywood has been catering to the masses is through the notorious use of song and dance — which combines classical Indian tradition with "Western" modernization. Musical numbers began to be utilized as resources that valorize tradition because they bring in many different Indian cultural and regional values into films. Roy states that not only does the use of song and dance act as a defining distinction of World

Cinema, but it also provides sentiments that cannot be portrayed as strongly through dialogue. Roy notes, "Rather than being dismissed as fantastic interludes disrupting the progress of the cinematic narrative, songs and dances are now valorized as part of the cinematic grammar through which the signification of meaning takes place in Bollywood, creating a new aesthetic for Indian cinema."[6]

Bollywood films are the only films in the world that average about four to five musical numbers per film, and it is this element that marks the clear distinction between Bollywood and Hollywood. To those who do not understand Hindi, the musical numbers tend to appear extravagant and unrealistic. It is only when one learns the context of the songs that the messages become clear. The songs are the crucial element in Bollywood films because they embody the core of Indian cultural values. They also cover a range of themes from

gender roles, sexuality, family, love, friendship and religion. The dance thus reflects the lyrical themes, expressing the emotions and meanings across all language barriers. It has been said that music is central to the success of a Bollywood film because it has the power to unify audiences despite linguistic, cultural, or regional differences.[7]

Aditya Chopra's award winning 1995 film, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (*DDLJ*), highlights the importance of preserving tradition in the globalized world.[8] This binary of tradition and modernity is exhibited through the diaspora of two Indian teens whose families live in London. The female lead, Simran (Kajol), has been arranged by her strict father to marry a boy in his home region of India since she was a child. But before she weds she is given permission to explore Europe with her friends, eventually meeting the male lead, Raj (Shah Rukh Khan), who is also traveling. Although their personalities clash at first, the two begin to develop a friendship that soon leads to deeper feelings for one

another. As the narrative progresses, we see that although Simran is in love with Raj, she still goes to India for her wedding because she feels obligated to uphold the tradition in place for her. However, her father allows her to be with Raj in the end because he recognizes that he is the man she truly loves. This proves that her father's traditional values have begun to change with the rise of modernization and the diaspora. Although he believes that upholding tradition is important, he understands that Simran grew up in a globalized world where traditions have often been challenged.

DDLJ fills the screen with multiple musical numbers, but one song in particular is notable for its combination of tradition and modernity. Before Simran and Raj meet, Simran expresses fantasies about the man of her dreams. In the song, "Mere Khwabon Mein," for example, Simran is dancing around in a bath towel and singing happily about a man who comes to her in her dreams. She sings: "He comes and teases me / Tell him to come face-to-face with me sometime." By dressing Simran in

only a towel, the film is suggesting a sense of sexual freedom — arguably a modern concept. Further, by repeating the words "face-to-face" in the chorus, she is signifying the longing to be kissed — a form of intimacy that is censored in Bollywood films. The upbeat song is laced with vignettes of Raj who is being glorified for his admirable skills, such as winning a car race, running alongside a plane taking off, bowling a strike and picking up a girl on his motorcycle.

Toward the middle of the song Simran is shown singing the same words on a different day, but this time to her mother. Mother-daughter relationships are known to hold a strong bond in Indian tradition; therefore, the fact that Simran is sharing her desires is common. However, her mother's recognition of her yearning to fulfill these needs exemplifies the modern concept of female sexual desire. Toward the end of the song we see a sequence where Simran is laying down in the rain, wearing a short, white skirt and a blouse revealing her midriff. She sings, "It is like someone has cast magic." She starts dancing and jumping around in the rain as the chorus repeats. The attention devoted to Simran's sexual desires in this number is significant because it highlights the merging of tradition and modernity. "I am mad for you, he says / Then why does he stay hidden."

Today, there are about four million Indians living in the United States and about ten million living outside of India.[9] Ganti points out the importance of this diaspora and says, "The success of Hindi cinema outside of India highlights the significance of the South Asian diaspora as a market for the Bombay film industry, and certain filmmakers have explicitly articulated their desire to cater to diasporic audiences."[10] This desire for a diasporic appeal can be seen in certain films revolving around the theme of diaspora itself. Films like *DDLJ* demonstrate how Indians living outside of India are still maintaining a special connection to their homeland. Thus, the diaspora has influenced the growth of the

market because these films act as a bridge for Indians living outside of India — providing a crucial link between diasporic communities and the Indian nation and influencing a rise in Indian nationalism.

The growing appreciation of Bollywood films around the world has positively affected the resurgence of nationalism throughout India. Ravinder Kaur acknowledges this nationalism, claiming, "The recent restoration of pride in

"Musical numbers began to be utilized as resources that valorize tradition because they bring in many different Indian cultural and regional values into films."

the motherland is reflected in the renewed patronage of Indian culture, particularly Bollywood movies."[11] Kaur references Sudipta Kaviraj, who points out that Bollywood films have constant themes of nationalism, and essentially embody Nehruvian definitions of nationalism and democracy. Kaur explains that nationalism is growing because film plots are now highlighting Indian tradition, and illustrate how the young, "Westernized" subjects "keep returning to roots located in a traditional-yet-modern India."[12] Thus, even though India is becoming a modernized nation, Bollywood films emphasize the importance that core traditional values have on the markers of national identity.

Globalization has had a significant effect on the nation's economy due to Hindi cinema's appeal to diasporic communities, as well as larger audiences. Ashish Rajadhyaksha argues

that globalization has contributed to India's growing economy because of Bollywood's widespread appreciation. He explains that in the early 2000s people all over the world were enticed by the new hype of Bollywood and its ability to "spin their screen fantasies." Thus, Rajadhyaksha explains that globalization helped Bollywood develop the resources for creating an unprecedented style of cinema in India.[13] Rini Bhattacharya Mehta also acknowledges globalization's influence on Bollywood films, and that "…the availability of Bollywood fare in Europe and the USA via satellite channels, and the renewed prevalence of Bollywood in the popular cultural imaginary of the Indian diaspora continue to sustain the most successful industry that ever existed in India."[14]

The spectacle of song and dance has not only differentiated Bollywood from all other film industries, but it has also allowed for a morphing of tradition and modernity in the diverse nation-state of India. As a result, Indians around the world have developed a stronger sense of nationhood and pride in their homeland. Bollywood has utilized filmmaking not only as a medium of entertainment, but also as an outlet for reaching wider audiences to foster a sense of an Indian unity.

This article was inspired by the teachings of Dr. Annapurna Pandey, in her Anthropology course at UCSC: "India and Indian Diaspora through Films."

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THE COLOR OF CONTROVERSY

Blue is the Warmest Color's Forgotten Love Story

by Michelle Woo

This past year's 2013 Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or winner generated quite a stir in the indie film world, receiving a multitude of positive and negative reviews. Directed by French auteur Abdellatif Kechiche, *Blue is the Warmest Color* (*La Vie d'Adèle - Chapitres 1 & 2*, 2013) follows the ups and downs of a love affair between two lesbians, Adèle and Emma. Regardless of sexual orientation, the unfortunate end to their love affair is an emotional experience that any audience member can relate to. However, what seemed to capture the audience's attention were the performances by the two female leads. It generated conversations centered on the controversial reactions toward the film's explicit lesbian sex scenes. In response, Kechiche said he "wanted it to be a love story. [His] job as a director is not to make a statement about

homosexuality but about these two characters and their profound love story."[1] However, many critics lashed out at Kechiche's "artistic" approach to portraying lesbian sex, describing the scenes as pornographic as opposed to an artistic expression. Controversial issues, such as the portrayal of realism of lesbian relationships and what constitutes "real" lesbian sex, surround Kechiche's film *Blue is the Warmest Color*.

The film focuses on a naïve, blue-collar high school student, named Adèle (Adèle Exarchopoulos) as she explores her sexuality. She begins searching for that missing something, or possibly someone, in her life. Her early boyfriend fails to satisfy her emotionally and physically, and she expresses her frustration by finding comfort in eating her stash of candy bars in a very obnoxious, childish way. The

first half of the film emphasizes the immaturity of Adèle, as the viewer witnesses her sloppy eating habits and her messy bun when she goes to school. Even her facial expressions and innocent gaze give insight to her emotions and thoughts as she struggles through her teenage years. Adèle's life begins to change following a serendipitous moment where she passes by a beautiful, blue-haired stranger, locking eyes with her. That look exchanged between Emma (Léa Seydoux) and Adèle symbolizes love at first sight, demonstrating the intense chemistry these characters possess. Adèle later sexually fantasizes about Emma, an older and free-spirited art student, which leads her to question her own sexuality. One night, Adèle decides to go to a lesbian bar with a friend, finally encountering this beautiful stranger with blue hair.   Even though audiences witness Adèle experiencing her first same-sex relationship, the story ultimately focuses on the emotional roller-coaster of being in love, rather than on their sexuality.

The film is based on the graphic novel, *Le bleu est une couleur chaude* by Julie Maroh, who has voiced her frustrations with the film. As a writer, she understands that Kechiche's vision of the film and her own may contradict each other, but from a lesbian's perspective, she states unhappily:

"It appears to me that this was missing on set: lesbians … this is all that brings to my mind: a brutal and surgical display, exuberant and cold, of so called lesbian sex, which turned into porn, and made me feel very ill at ease. Especially when, in the middle of the movie theatre, everyone was giggling. The heteronormative laughed because they don't understand it and find the scene ridiculous. The gay and queer people laughed because it's not convincing at all and found it ridiculous. And among the only people we didn't hear giggling were the potential guys too busy feasting their eyes on an incarnation of their fantasies on screen."[2]

Maroh's displeased attitude is also expressed on her personal blog where she comments on the absence of lesbians in the film. Simply because there were no lesbian actresses does not mean the film was missing lesbians. These two women are doing exactly what they are supposed to be doing: acting. Other films have contained heterosexual actresses performing homosexual characters, and yet, they still gave a convincing performance despite their sexuality.

In the film *The Kids are Alright* (2010), the two actresses, Annette Benning and Julianne Moore, were praised for their performances as a married lesbian couple raising a family with two children. Because the film focuses on their unconventional family structure, the audience can overlook the fact that they are two straight actresses. As long as they can perform their role convincingly, the sexuality that an actor or actress identifies with does not appear to be an issue. Society tends to forget that it is the actor's goal to accurately portray a character unlike themselves. Convincing the audience that they are one with the character and not just an actor pretending in front of the camera verifies the actor's ability to act, which has nothing to do with their sexuality.

Like *Blue is the Warmest Color*, the film *Saving Face* (2004) contains similar complex themes surrounding a lesbian relationship. The main character, Wil, is a Chinese American lesbian surgeon whose family emigrated from China and continues to hold onto their traditional values. Already, there is a cultural clash between the main character and the rest of her family. Her family is in denial that she is a lesbian, and Wil struggles to balance her secret love life with Vivian and her family issues, dealing with her pregnant mother and stubborn, traditional grandfather. Both the actresses identify as being straight, again proving that films do not need lesbian actresses to portray lesbian characters convincingly. However, the representations of lesbian characters differ depending on the director and how they see lesbian relationships.

For example, the director of *Saving Face*, Alice Wu, identifies as a Chinese American lesbian, thus her depiction of lesbian relationships is different from Abdellatif Kechiche, a straight white male from France. Through the art of filmmaking, each director expresses a different idea of a lesbian relationship, which varies based on their culture, age, gender, and sexuality. One should understand that theses characters are not meant to be iconic figures of the lesbian community. Instead, the audience should see them as being complex characters that anyone, not just lesbians, can relate to on a personal level. Both directors, despite their sexual orientation and differences in culture, constructed their own artistic approach around their ideas of what a credible, homosexual relationship and lesbian sex looks like.

Seven minutes of explicit sex between two gorgeous women may make a few people blush and squirm in their seats uncomfortably. But, members of the audience should ask where that line between art and pornography exists. Was it really necessary to include sex scenes, let alone a seven-minute one? Some critics, like Richard Knight Jr. from the

Chicago Tribune and *Windy City Times*, believe "The scenes were shot like porn but they didn't seem designed to turn you on. I was more turned on by all the stuff leading up to their first sex scene — their first encounter in the lesbian bar was incredibly hot."[3] For some, the build-up is enough to portray their intense passion for each other. It's no surprise that these characters are having sex, but American audiences always seem shocked when the act of sex is portrayed on screen. Since the production code era, conservative Americans consider sex as a taboo topic. Both actresses were of legal age during the filming process, and gave their consent to do these scenes with Kechiche before filming began. The film was given an NC-17 rating, warning viewers that the film contained explicit sex scenes. However, the sex scenes in no way suggest the film is pornographic. The scenes were put into the context of the story, resulting in a deeper meaning for the characters and the audiences — its sole purpose is not arousal. Although it makes some people feel uncomfortable to watch others have sex on screen, for Kechiche, it was an artistic approach to his work.

To some film critics, *Blue* contains more

than just a seven-minute sex scene. Well-renowned film critic B. Ruby Rich explains female sexuality on screen and how Americans should move past the prudish mindset of sex being taboo. She explains, "Directors are famously sadistic toward their actresses … Film is a medium which expertly hides its own process. You never know what went on on a film set unless someone chooses to talk, and they usually don't. These actresses are young. I think they didn't realize what sex means outside France for instance."[4] Mostly giving positive reviews about *Blue*, Rich applauds the film for being an authentic lesbian love story.

"Instead, the audience should see them as being complex characters that anyone, not just lesbians, can relate to on a personal level."

However, some aspects of the film had some loose ends that were left hanging. The unresolved issue between Adèle's parents and their disapproval of homosexual relationships is a huge issue that was either missed or not addressed in the film. Yet adding more conflict between Adèle and her judgmental parents would have made *Blue* more of a lesbian film, as opposed to a love story. The audience would take away a completely different message, for they would see more struggles with her parents' disapproval as well as her peers' condemnation at school. There are already hints that her family and friends already disapprove of Adèle's homosexual relationship early in the film by the way her parents assume Emma has a boyfriend and the confrontation between Adèle and her classmates at school. Any more tension would take away from the relationship as a whole, while also changing the focus of

the film and altering the spectator's experience. Manohla Dargis, a critic for *The New York Times*, has a point of view that differs from Rich — she found several glaring problems in *Blue*. Dargis took issue with the artistic representation that Kechiche envisioned in his film with the two actresses, accusing him of patriarchal anxiety demonstrated through his aesthetic choices and poor cinematography, according to Dargis. She notes, "as the camera hovers over [Adèle's] open mouth and splayed body, even when she sleeps with her derriere prettily framed, the movie feels far more about Mr. Kechiche's desires than anything else."[5] Shots that emphasize the curves of the body and extreme close-ups of Exarchopoulos's face make the audience question whether Adèle is the pawn of objectivity. These two heterosexual actresses may have felt objectified due to the fact that the director is a straight heterosexual male who made strenuous demands during the production of the sex scenes. Close-up shots of Adèle's face and body provide more of a subjective point of view because the audience is able to interpret Adèle's feelings and emotions on a more intimate level. Throughout *Blue*, the audience witnesses the emotions and identifies with Adèle, solidifying a sense of subjectivity. Nonetheless, there is still some sort of gaze present in the film, most clearly articulated by the shots that focus on Adèle's body.

Since the director is male, the issue of the male gaze has been a topic of discussion. Feminist theorist Laura Mulvey analyzes the male gaze in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), describing the representation of women in films. Is the male gaze assumed only because the director is a heterosexual male? If a lesbian were to direct this film, would it still be considered a male gaze, and how different would these scenes look? There are questions to ask when thinking about the male gaze vis-à-vis non-heterosexual relationships.

The idea of the male gaze is influenced

by the actress' accusations concerning the behavior of Kechiche during production, especially during the approximately ten days of filming the lesbian sex scenes. Kechiche is known for his intense shooting days and his attention to detail. Seydoux comments that her nude scenes made her feel like a prostitute.[6] In an interview with the two actresses, they expressed their feelings about the production of the film. Seydoux states, "The thing is, in France, it's not like in the States. The director has all the power. When you're an actor on a film in France and you sign the contract, you have to give yourself, and in a way you're trapped."[7] Exarchopoulos comments, "He warned us that we had to trust him — blind trust — and give a lot of ourselves. He was making a movie about passion, so he wanted to have sex scenes, but without choreography — more like special sex scenes. He told us he didn't want to hide the character's sexuality because it's an important part of every relationship. So he asked me if I was ready to make it, and I said, 'Yeah, of course!' because I'm young and pretty new to cinema."

The end product of *Blue* is a beautiful and convincing tale about two lesbian lovers, played remarkably well by the two lead actresses. The film's goal was not to turn the audience members on during the passionate scenes, but instead for them to recognize and understand that characters cannot represent an entire community. Characters contain complex personalities just like the average human being, and it's hard to say whether or not the portrayal of a certain type of character is accurate or inaccurate. Every director takes different approaches to illustrate their own artistic vision and portrayal of different groups of people based on their own experiences and ideas. The same goes for audience members. Spectators' own experiences also affect the way they analyze a film, as they construct their own ideas and personal reflections. That is the true beauty of film. Each individual approaches

an artwork with a different mindset, thereby conceiving of different viewpoints on controversial stylistic approaches.

Despite the controversies, one cannot deny that *Blue is the Warmest Color* emotionally drains the viewers by following a six-year long relationship between two lovers. Anyone can relate to this beautiful love story about falling in and out of love, and the film contains captivating performances that are unforgettable. In the end, the film is simply a story about falling in and out of love.

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THE SERIOUSLY ABSURD

The Dialogue Between Existentialism and Jewish Comedy in A Serious Man

by Jessie Janssen

"Something is very wrong." This is the lamentable manifestation of Larry Gopnik's life in *A Serious Man*, a film by Joel and Ethan Coen that examines what occurs to a man when everything in his life quickly goes awry. In what is suggested to be a modern retelling of the Book of Job, we see one man lose grip on his wife, children, career, and perhaps even sanity. However, as the film wears on, the viewer is made aware that this isn't a tragedy at all, but rather a comedy, or something inhabiting the small overlap between the two.

Some might view this film as a depressing mediation that categorically chronicles a frustrating and exhausting series of occurrences, but in the world of the Coen Brothers we are encouraged to laugh at the inexplicable misfortunes of the protagonist in this dark comedy rife with Jewish humor. The absurdity and irony of Larry's misfortunes are a commentary on the pointlessness of life, and provide an ongoing discourse on existentialism in the text.

Though Jewish humor and existentialism

may seem mutually exclusive, I find it commendable that the Coen Brothers have found a way to mine the "existential discomfort and insecurity" of Jewish comedy in a way that bridges the gap between these two themes in the film and puts them into a smart and entertaining dialogue with one another.[1]

Humor Through Absurdity

In the scene when Larry is speaking to Dick the relentless record salesman on the phone, he states, "I haven't done anything!" This becomes the mantra for the film, an embodiment of Larry's helpless situation. Although Larry has not changed his behavior as far as the viewer can tell, suddenly his wife is leaving him for a condescending widower named Sy Ableman, his kids are doing drugs and financing their habit from his billfold, his brother won't leave, his student is bribing him and endangering his progress toward receiving tenure, and his goyische neighbor is endlessly terrifying. In one conversation with his disgruntled student, Larry says, "Actions always have consequences!" Yet if that is true, then Larry should have done some atrocious deed to warrant all the negative juju coming his way throughout the film. All of this consequently left me, the viewer, contemplating: bad things happen, and there is nothing to be done about it. It is in the control of the Coen Brothers, however, and when asked in an interview how they developed the narrative, Ethan Coen stated: "He has this problem. How do we make it worse? That is the way we think about it as we're writing it."[2] Sadistic? I think yes, but also very comical.

The absurdity and triviality of each interaction and each event is worsened by the fact that Larry and the audience cannot understand exactly what is happening, why it is happening, or how to stop it. Franz Kafka could be credited as the author who ignited previous masterful works on uncertainty,

providing an influence for the brothers. In his short works, such as *The Metamorphosis* and *The Trial*, we see similar themes of pointlessness and feel similar emotions of aggravation and frustration, and eventually can laugh at the characters', and our own, cluelessness. The Coens' work is Kafkaesque in many ways; they do not provide readily available explanations for many of their decisions within the film, including why these awful events are happening, the coincidences that seem to hold a deeper meaning, and the bleeding over of Larry's dream state into his consciousness. The modernist tendencies that these artists share is an acknowledged form of dark comedy, and the correlation that the authors are Jewish seems to suggest a trend in their collective sense of what is amusing, and what creates a captivating story.

This surreal, modernist form of storytelling can be classified as existential, which perfectly fits into the trend of pointlessness, absurdity,

> *"There's a story, there's a guy. He visits three rabbis. Then it can either be a fable, or it can be some Borscht Belt joke. In the movie, it's kind of both."*

and why we laugh at what cannot be controlled. A *Los Angeles Times* review of the film states "…the more the man of the title suffers the torments of Job, the more he tries to deal with the unknowability of the usual willfully absurd and decidedly hostile Coen universe, the more we're encouraged to wonder if this isn't just the tiniest bit funny. And the more real the pain becomes, the more, in a quintessentially Jewish way, laughter becomes our only serious option."[3]

Uncertainty and Existentialism Unpacked

Hand in hand with the themes of absurdity, pointlessness, irony and existentialism is the presence of uncertainty within the film and the viewing experience. Andrew O'Hehir, of *Salon*, suggests that "the fable might just be about the disordered, random operations of fate, and the futile human struggle to understand them."[4] Larry is uncertain not only about the awful, seemingly arbitrary events he begins to experience, but also about his own morality and integrity, and the viewer is proposed these ethical questions as well. Larry looks to religion to guide him, but the work of existential philosophers like Sartre, Camus, and Kierkegaard suggests this is just a means of disguising the uncertainty we all face. By evading the responsibility over our own lives through religion, we are abandoning any confrontation with the absurdity that is this world, as shown in the film. What Larry (in the stead of every human) must do, but can't, is to take accountability for what he sees as moral or ethical and react to it as a man, and not necessarily a "serious" Jewish man.

Jewish Question

Historically, the Jewish way to solve problems is through intellect or scholarly endeavors, and when they simply cannot be solved through reason, one goes to see the rabbi. Larry Gopnik does just that; in fact, he tries to see three rabbis. He looks to his Judaism to save him, to provide answers, but he is failed by his religion repeatedly through the condescension, unavailability, and puzzling stories of each respective rabbi. According to Ethan Coen, "There's a story, there's a guy. He visits three rabbis. Then it can either be a fable, or it can be some Borscht Belt joke. In the movie, it's kind of both." Joel echoes, "Yeah, it's both. We were just talking about that, actually, how 'A guy goes to see three rabbis' is

either the beginning of a joke or the spine of a folktale, you know what I mean?"[5]

This presents the Jewish questions in the film: can we look to Judaism to save us? Is it even meant to save us? According to my interpretation of the Coen Brothers and existentialism, Judaism is important, but it isn't there to save us; rather it is a tool of denial that provides the illusion of comfort in a disturbingly ironic world. As viewers, we have two choices: to see the Coen Brothers' message as bleak and self-hating, or to see the film for what it is — a hilarious satire of the complete reliance on religion. I prefer to think that the brothers wish for us to see each of these situations within their film, to yield to the fact that it can easily be both, and to realize that the overlap between farcical comedy and the Jewish narrative is often overlapping.

Inauthentic Relationships

While watching the film, it becomes apparent that there is a lack of authentic relationships among the array of characters, a missing piece that is simultaneously aggravating and amusing. This furthers the presence of existentialist overtones due to a tenet of the philosophical movement: that genuinely authentic relationships are one of the only remedies to an absurd world where the individual faces the burden of creating meaning for themselves. This theme subtly plays out in humorous ways through each interaction between characters. The flatness of each individual's personality gives them an almost inhuman quality that allows them to act in ways that show a lack of conscience, and a lack of respect or caring for Larry or his well being. Larry's wife denies her husband this sort of compassion when she unceremoniously asks for a divorce, having already lined up her next husband: Sy Ableman. Her disregard for his feelings, and moreover her following actions (including asking him to move out), give her a cartoonish quality that makes it easier for an

audience to laugh at her utter disrespect and emotionlessness. Like his wife, Larry's son and daughter also seem not to care one way or another about their father's well being in any sense, and continuously ask him for favors to better their own existence. The selfishness apparent in almost every character in the film is ludicrously exaggerated, providing a means for humor to flourish.

This comedy of exaggeration is paramount in one of the more central relationships in the film — the relationship between Larry and Sy Ableman. Sy as a character is slow talking and calm, in sharp contrast to the skittish and anxiety-ridden Larry. His unwavering serenity produces irony, as he is the one who causes the most anxiety in the title character. His manner of speech in itself is grating, but the condescending content especially breeds humor. Sy is extremely frustrating to the viewer in the sense that he completely disregards the fact that he is a homewrecker, instead succeeding in turning the tables on Larry and manipulating the situation to seem as if it is completely normal. He therefore maintains his "mensch" status in the community (one who is an all around good person). It is also humorous that Larry is put into positions where he is forced to thank the patronizing Sy, who is the catalyst for the ruination of his home life. It seems that no one else sees the nonsensical nature of this, and all the audience would like to see is for Larry to finally stand up for himself. The word that comes to mind when watching the film and seeing Larry continuously hit by demoralizing situations is, in its most literal form, "ridiculous." We as viewers can still laugh, mainly because we have ceased to make an effort to find things in common with the characters, as one might in traditional narratives.

Film Form

Though much meaning can be found in all of these thematic and narrative aspects of the film, *A Serious Man* is, in the end, an example of film form; therefore meaning can also be derived from the visual aesthetics of the film. The mise-en-scène of the film, representing the 1960's Midwest suburbs in an unconventionally depressing manner, features hot lighting in scenes of the Gopnik's backyard, as well as austere darkness in the hotel room at the Jolly Roger Motel. Both are uncomfortable, mirroring the discomfort of the events occurring at these places. These awkward situations are further represented through examples of the canted angle during such scenes as Larry getting high with Mrs. Samsky, Danny's bar mitzvah scene, and during the story of Dr. Sussman's fretfulness over the goy's teeth. These scenes all prominently convey feelings of unease and anxiety, partially signaled through this camera angle, which further illuminates the overarching theme of the aforementioned "existential discomfort and insecurity" that seems to breed exceptional Jewish comedy.

The Stepfordian characteristics of the Gopnik's neighborhood also exacerbate this mood. The flatness of the plane, the uniformity of each house and yard, and the uninterrupted flow of this suburban expanse seems to convey a vision of a neighborhood that is flawless, almost eerily perfect. The immaculate mise-en-scène of the setting breeds a tension that matches the strain in Larry's life — an example of the technical aspects of the filmmaking working with the narrative and the ineffectuality of its façade. As an unassimilated Jew living in this neighborhood, the Coens make sure to nod to Jewish literary history. The Coens provide an inside joke for viewers who are part of "the tribe" when they make sure to include a prolonged sequence of Larry fiddling with the cable wires on his roof. The hidden meaning here is a reference to Sholem Aleichem's famed Jewish tale *Fiddler on the Roof*, about a poor schlemiel reminiscent of Larry himself. By aligning Larry with a character like Tevye the Dairyman from *Fiddler on the Roof*, they are
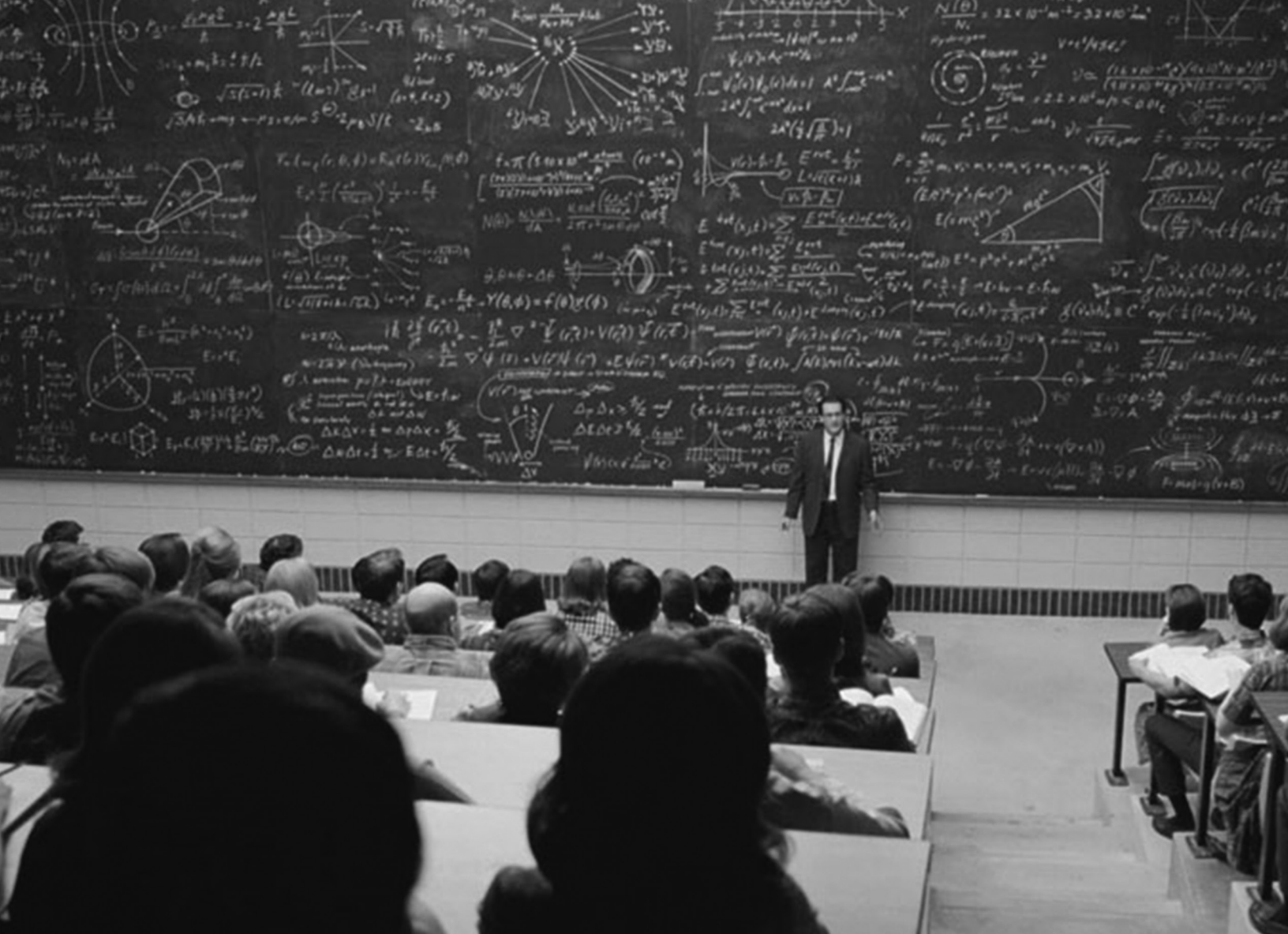
cementing the notion that Larry is meant to be a comic figure, and the means for making this connection nods to the absurdity of Larry's life.

Conclusion

On the surface, *A Serious Man* may present a series of coinciding events that snowball toward a cringe-worthy ending. But, when further scrutinized, it can be deciphered that there is in fact a larger commentary at work, both on the human and philosophical level. As the viewer experiences Larry's misfortunes, they are exposed to Kafkaesque situations of absurdity, flat relationships, and various questions of religious Judaism, as well as an assailing of images that all hold their own puzzling meanings. In the end, all of these facets add up to the irrefutable presence of existential philosophies in the text. Both in this film and in life, we can never truly know what is happening or why. What we can do however, is let ourselves laugh about it.

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SUSPENDED IN SLACKERDOM
Reflections on Ennui, Generational Anxiety, and the Fragile Unknown

by Jon Vorpe

Arizona, Epiphany

One summer two years ago, I found myself floating around the endless backroads of Arizona, visiting my girlfriend's family. The Arizona heat stuck to my skin and gave me headaches, and I was confined to the passenger seat as we drove around the San Tan Valley. From this vantage, all I saw were vast stretches of tract homes, chain restaurants, shopping centers, big sale signs, pristine gas stations, empty plots of land, piles of dirt, gravel, dust — a world of empty landscapes and suburbanite geographies.

On one of these bright and disorienting afternoons, I spent hours in the back of a well-stocked Barnes & Noble, browsing the many Criterion Collection titles. It was there I found *Kicking and Screaming*, Noah Baumbach's mid-90s debut film. The plot summary on the back of the package made reference to a word I had never heard of — ennui.

Perhaps it was my fascination with the 1990s, perhaps it was my own desire to connect with a group of intellectual idlers, perhaps I just secretly wished I could make a living by wandering the back roads of a humid Arizona summer with nothing much to do. Whatever the reason, the film's articulation of listlessness unlocked a world of emotions I could only have imagined prior to viewing it. I came to realize that there are others whose greatest desire in this world is to drift through it, uncommitted to the traditional markers of American life — a job, a family, a professional career — and more concerned with remaining perpetually between days.

Kicking and Screaming opened the doors

for my own desire to occupy this non-space; it introduced me to the "slacker film."

The genre of the "slacker film" emerged in the early 1990s with Richard Linklater's watershed film *Slacker* (1991), which also ushered in — along with Steven Soderbergh's seminal debut *sex, lies, and videotape* (1989) — a new form of American independent cinema. Preoccupied with extended scenes of dialogue, mostly static or slow-moving camera work, and a meandering set of interactions between characters, the slacker films of the early 90s were a pivotal revisioning of the typical art house film.

After *Slacker* became a major success — made for only $23,000 and raking in over $1 million, as well as scoring a nomination for the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance — several filmmakers liberated by Linklater's plotless vignettes began to make similarly-minded movies, all of which chose to center on aimless characters with nothing much to do.

At the core of the slacker film is an overwhelming sense of ennui, no doubt influenced by the overarching anxieties of Generation X. Following the financial successes of the Baby Boomer cohort, Gen X'ers found themselves in a state of intense frustration over the dominating security of their parents and older relatives. As Maxim Furek notes, "A Gallup Poll ... reported that about 75 percent of Americans feared that their personal financial situation would become worse by the year 2000. Another 64 percent believed that it would be harder for young people, including college graduates, to find adequate employment."[1]

In addition to these statistics, a report conducted by generational theorists William Strauss and Neil Howe and compiled in *Theory and Generation X* revealed that "a Generation X child of the 1980s faced twice the risk of parental divorce as a child of the mid-1960s and three times the risk of a child of the 1950s."[2]

Thus, both economic anxieties and disrupted household units laid the shoddy groundwork for a generation of young individuals burdened with feeling less significant — financially, intellectually, personally — than the generations that had come before them. In many ways, the slacker film acted as one articulation of Gen. X'ers fears. The flourishing of the genre is a testament to the fact that young people of the early 1990s wanted a confirmation that they weren't alone in experiencing this generational listlessness.

While there are several films that fall into the category of the slacker genre — including *Metropolitan* (1990), *Dazed and Confused* (1993), *Reality Bites* (1994), *Empire Records* (1995), *Mallrats* (1995), *SubUrbia* (1996), and *The Big Lebowski* (1998), to name just a few — my relationship with slackerdom is most clearly articulated by three films: *Slacker* (1991), *Clerks* (1994), and *Kicking and Screaming* (1995). In tracing the various permutations of the slacker ethos between and across these three films, the subtle anxieties of this generation of losers become manifested.

Transcendent Wandering

Richard Linklater's groundbreaking debut *Slacker* navigates the subtle terrains of aimlessness in his distanced yet affectionate portrayal of Austin, Texas and its suburbanite wanderers. The film follows a different character or set of characters for small vignettes — usually not more than a few minutes — as they purposelessly travel from taxi cab to bookstore to coffee shop to theater, slowly traversing the sidewalks of the city. When one conversation begins to die down, another one faintly strolls into frame, and a new vignette begins.

These many eccentric forms of conversation typically have to do with conspiracy theories, sex, video equipment, music, and of course, Madonna's pap smear. What unifies these strange yet insightful comments is that these

slackers are all obsessed with making anything sound more intellectually stimulating. Indeed, at the core of these ordinary interactions is the subtle recognition that an enlightening conversation is more important than earning a living.

As one disgruntled slacker muses, "All that [earning a living] does is fill the bellies of the pigs who exploit us." Rather than pursue work, a job, a nuclear family — traditional markers of an American adulthood — these aimless wanderers prefer the pursuit of spontaneous conversation. As a means of combating the anxieties of living in a capitalist society and the accompanying pressures to "grow up and find a job," these Gen. X'ers find solace in the unencumbered permutations of improvised interaction. Thus, the pursuit of quasi-intellectual conversation is a central preoccupation of many slacker films. Reflecting some of the French New Wave's energy, and the general bohemian countercultural vibe of the 1960s, these films contain characters who sway toward confab over silence, dialogue over action.

For me, much of *Slacker's* bohemian tendencies reflect my own countercultural bent. I learn the most when I indulge myself in a nomadic lifestyle — travelling the back roads of my own private Arizona searching for an alternative to this American life. Instead of facing the looming possibilities of finding a job, or conforming to capitalist expectations, I would prefer to fill my days with a journey similar to those in Linklater's vignettes. His characters drift in and out of his camera, coming and going with the ebb and flow of their own intuition, following the voices in their heads, chasing after the last rays of afternoon.

There's something mildly magical in discovering moments of timelessness. In an

era where we are increasingly tapped in to the Internet, email, social media, and other cyberspaces that enforce a sense of "nowness," it's interesting to notice how counter-intuitive much of this urgency feels to me. When I have to consider how immediate my experiences are, or when I become bogged down in "managing" my time, I'm really just destroying the fragile architecture of my own search for timelessness.

Slacker pinpoints a central sentiment in this struggle: the melancholic wandering that accompanies slackerdom is a means of accessing a briefly transcendent moment, a temporal vortex. In those fragile moments of drifting, I uncover a connection with my own interiority, unburdened by lunch meetings, rushed trips to the grocery store, phone calls to make, and all those other responsibilities of professional grown-ups. There, in the margins, in the absences of time, I find myself freed.

Welcome to the Working Week

Unlike the slackers of *Slacker*, writer and director Kevin Smith's lead characters in his influential black-and-white debut *Clerks* (1993) are confined by the pressures of work, not play. *Clerks* centers around the events of one day at a convenience store, and the two humdrum heroes behind the counter, Dante Hicks (Brian O'Halloran) and Randal Graves (Jeff Anderson). With its focus on occupying an entirely jejune job, *Clerks* is a tale about the collective indifference of Gen. X'ers toward a life of labor.

Clerking, and having to serve an endless supply of demanding customers, causes these two to articulate their generational anxieties in polar opposite ways: Dante consistently reminds everyone that he's "not even supposed to be here today" — having been called into work at the last minute to cover for his boss — while Randal exhibits a flippant approach to his customers, oftentimes mocking them for their stupid video selections.

While similar in form to *Slacker* — most of the scenes involve lengthy discussions about banal events, the plot meanders, and the production quality is fairly low-budget — Clerks is more concerned with articulating the dissatisfaction of being a Gen. X'er with a shitty job. The film asks: Why do these clerks not pursue a better career path? Why do they feel the need to put up with these dull occupations?

Author Gary S. Marshall, in his book Theory and Generation X, suggests that Generation X'ers were plagued with feelings of insecurity, especially when it came to following a professional career. He writes, "the idea of a career ladder was met with great skepticism by all Generation Xers — even students whose education and training was in an area of high demand in the labor market. Much of the Generation X literature again suggests the seemingly narrow range of possibilities in the lives of Generation X students."[3]

As children of the massively successful Baby Boomers, these educated, intelligent, sharp and skilled Gen. X'ers nonetheless felt the overwhelming weight of insufficiency, as though there was some predetermined fate that would prevent them from achieving their professional dreams. Skeptical of finding and holding onto such vocations, these slackers fell back on their stable yet boring jobs as clerks, baristas, video store workers, and the like.

While the main conflict in *Clerks* revolves around Dante's and Randal's relationship, the film never offers a viable alternative to being a clerk. While there is a brief implication near the end of the film that Dante may attempt to find direction in his life, he still remains employed in the dead-end job he hates, as does Randal. And both of them continue clerking in the 2006 sequel *Clerks 2*, another confirmation that some fate has forced them to remain perpetually behind the convenience store counter. Thus, while clearly a depiction of the excessive ennui that accompanies menial occupations like clerking, Smith provides no light at the end of the tunnel. Instead, he

suggests that these Gen. X'ers must continue to put up with the endless annoyances of a mindless workplace routine.

Clerks articulates one central anxiety that persists today with the millennials. Many of my friends and peers continue to feel the pressures to find a job and "make it" as successful American individuals. Yet, oftentimes in the process of defining these career ambitions, myself and others are forced to work at jobs that are, to put it lightly, uninspiring.

Talking with others in my cohort, I notice that they too are uncertain of what comes next. Many of them have no idea what sort of work they want to do. Some of them do, but don't know how. All of them are scared, worried about the "seemingly narrow range of possibilities" that may actually exist for us. In essence, the anxieties of *Clerks* continue to matter to the millennials — perhaps, in the fragile time that follows college, regardless of cohort, we all struggle to understand our "place" in the world.

In the meantime, while we attempt to determine what it is we truly want to do, I bet you'll find us begrudgingly serving you a lukewarm latte at your nearest coffee shop. Or scoffing at your request to special order your new favorite poetry book. Or perhaps simply telling you that "I'm not even supposed to be here today."

Slacking Toward Bethlehem

Privileged by the generous financial assistance of their wealthy Baby Boomer parents, the recent college graduates of *Kicking and Screaming* (1995) have no need to find a job or make a living. This cadre of recent college grads float around their sleepy college town, doing mostly nothing while trying to extend the many intellectual conversations that permeated the last four years of their lives.

On its surface, the characters of *Kicking and Screaming* are as archetypal a reflection of the intelligent yet removed Gen. X slackers as it gets: they all reference various authors, philosophers, and theorists, carry a markedly ostentatious tone of voice, cleverly demean each other at every opportunity they have, and construct elaborately blithe personas, as though nothing in this postgraduate world is worth their valuable time. Behind the many snooty quips and calm façades of these bourgeois idlers, however, exists a suppressed anxiety around growing up and leaving the comfortable intellectual communities of college.

> *"Behind the many snooty quips and calm façades of these bourgeois idlers, however, exists a suppressed anxiety around growing up and leaving the comfortable intellectual communities of college."*

The film opens with the devastating news that Jane (Olivia d'Abo) has decided to travel abroad to Prague, leaving lead character and boyfriend Grover (Josh Hamilton) in a state of shock and frustration. As the film proceeds, various flashbacks deepen the relationship that developed between these quick-witted slackers during their senior year. In many ways, the main tension throughout the film surrounds whether or not Grover will overcome the omnipresent malaise of Generation X in order to leave his sleepy college town and reunite with Jane overseas.

As noted prior, one of the major markers of a Gen. X'er was the high likelihood that he/she would be a child of divorced parents. Grover's parents divorce shortly after he graduates

college, leaving him even more disillusioned with love. When his father (Elliott Gould) visits town, rather than engage in a deeper conversation about how he's coping with the separation, both parties humor each other with superficial chit-chat. Again, rather than tackle the pressing anxieties of his generation, Grover falls back on the monotonous as a means of skirting his own personal insecurities concerning romance and marriage.

After doing nothing for most of the film, Grover makes his decision: he wants to fly to Prague, he wants to be reunited with Jane. He rushes into the airport, hurries to the front of the line, and gives an impassioned speech about why he needs to make the next flight to Prague, only to realize he left his passport at home. The flight attendant, attempting to console him, suggests, "You could always go tomorrow."

Even after this slacker decides he wants to make a change, to actively resist the melancholy of his generation, to pursue a romantic life despite disillusionment, to do something instead of mope around all day and engage in meaningless quibbles with his friends — some small detail prevents his happiness. Fate, or fatalism, prevails, and this Gen. X'er finds himself just as he was when the film began: without his lover, without direction, defeated.

Last Call

As I look back on the summer I discovered *Kicking and Screaming* and the "slacker film," I now know these films have helped me realize one of the truest parts of myself. Like Grover, I know there's some part of me that wants to move on, to chase after my own imagined Jane, to fly to Prague and satisfy some craving to act on my desires. Yet, some great inexplicable weight persists. Perhaps it's fear of being a failure, perhaps it's fear of making little money, perhaps it's my own struggles with self-esteem or sense of worth, perhaps it's because I'm a part of a generation that is just as anxious about the future.

Suspended, I look forward at an unclear horizon. How many lazy summers do I have left, if any? College ends, my friends disperse, and all those backroads of Arizona, that big empty expanse — floating between days, quietly content with the unknown — fades into my memory.

Maybe slackerdom is just an imagined nostalgia for people we used to be, for times we had the freedom to aimlessly search for some intangible sense of direction, for the fragile intervals between childhood and what comes after…

As Grover sums the struggle up, as only a slacker truly could:

"Despite my intense efforts to do nothing, things happen anyway."

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1. Maxim Furek. *The Death Proclamation of Generation X: A Self-Fulfilling Prophesy of Goth, Grunge and Heroin* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2008), 11.

2. Gary S. Marshall. "Theory and Generation X," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 3 (1997): 399.

3. Marshall, "Generation X," 400.