

VOL. 2  
SPRING 2024

REEL DIALOGUE



# LETTERS FROM THE EDITORS

We are so excited to release the second volume of the Reel Dialogue magazine! We have been collecting and working with amazing students who have dedicated their time to writing, editing, and submitting their work. All those who have been a part of this magazine have left their legacy within this edition. Our hope is that this magazine will inspire future cinephiles to make their mark on the world through something we can all love and appreciate: all things cinema.

When I was first asked by the previous Reel Dialogue president, Sara Ciplickas, to carry on her legacy of the Reel Dialogue magazine, I could only feel honored. Her creation of the annual *Reel Dialogue* magazine has presented incredible opportunities for students to showcase their amazing work. I am so happy to have been a part of its creation this year, so I want to thank Sara for giving me this opportunity. Thank

you, also, to Brenna for your contributions to this magazine because I could not have done this without you! Thank you to Dr. John Smith and the World Cinema program for all of your help and supporting of this year's edition. Thank you, Dr. Smith, for trusting me with Sara's legacy and for supporting Brenna and I with the creation of this edition. Lastly, thank you to the members of Reel Dialogue. You guys have supported me so much with everything and I look forward to our movie viewings every week. I am forever grateful for those in my life that continue to support me because I could not have created this magazine without you all!

Without further ado, please enjoy the Spring 2024 Volume 2 of *Reel Dialogue*.

Sincerely,

**M**<sub>EG</sub>  
**D**<sub>AVY</sub>

When I was offered the position to be one of the editor's for this magazine, I was beyond honored and excited. I had submitted work of my own for the 2022-2023 magazine and was asked by the previous Reel Dialogue President, Sara Ciplickas, to help out with their year's magazine alongside the current Reel Dialogue President, Meg Davy, and it has been nothing but a fun and growing experience. This process of gathering work, building the magazine, and sharing it with others has been truly a fun experience and will be a fond memory when I look back at my time here at Clemson.

Of course, this would be nothing without the support of Dr. John Smith and his contributions to what we have made, Meg and her hard work in making the magazine happen and sharing it with others, and the students who sent in their work to share with others their creativity. I am thankful and grateful for their time, their energy, their contribution, and their

willingness to bring this magazine to life and share it with others. It has been a privilege to get to work on this alongside Meg, and I am so proud of what we have accomplished!

As a World Cinema major here at Clemson University, I have learned so much about the art of cinema and the film industry and to be a part of this has taught me so much more from the eyes of others. I am excited to share what we have accomplished this year and hope you enjoy it. So please, as if you are in the movies, sit back and enjoy the show we have pulled together for your reading and viewing!

Sincerely,

**B**<sub>RENN  
**C**<sub>URTIS</sub></sub>

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# SOMETHING GREAT IS YET TO COME:

On a dark, blustery Tuesday morning in February, I, along with thousands of other cinephiles around the world, waited with eager anticipation for Jack Quaid and Zazie Beetz to announce the 2023 Academy Award nominations. From the explosive drama of Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer* to the historic contributions of female filmmakers such as Greta Gerwig and Justine Triet, 2023 was truly a fantastic year for cinema. While the Oscar nominations naturally always come with shocking surprises and decisive discourse, there was one particular facet of the conversation that made me reflect on my creative inspirations and the ways in which film has impacted my life, that being John Williams' nomination for Best Original Score for *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny* (2023 dir. by James Mangold).

Williams, who just celebrated his 92nd birthday this February, has been nominated for an astonishing 54 Academy Awards over his astonishing career. While most film-fans would agree that much of this recognition has been very much

deserved, Williams' recent nominations for *The Fabelmans* (2022 dir. By Steven Spielberg) and *Dial of Destiny* have left cinephiles questioning the Academy's habit for awarding cinema's past greats with legacy nominations over the more relevant contributions of less awarded artists. As a life-long Williams fan, I was even frustrated when his name was announced instead of that of Joe Hisaishi, who, after decades of crafting the musical identity of the films of Studio Ghibli, is long overdue for an Oscar win. Despite all this, as I sit here listening to William's newest contribution to the film canon, I'm still finding joy in the symphonic story Williams continues to paint to this day. While the score for the *Dial of Destiny* is perhaps not as memorable or original as William's earlier work, it still hits all the emotional beats, adding a somber quality to iconic themes that is indicative of Williams' generation of filmmakers—revolutionary in their day, legendary in their own right, but slowly fading away.

As the daughter of a musician, I grew up listening to Williams' iconic melodies and, although they were most often being played with a myriad of mistakes by young flutists, I quickly recognized Williams'

singular talent for painting a musical picture that not only complemented the visuals of a film, but also added to its subtext. One great example of this is seen in the track "Leaving Hogwarts," from *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001 dir. By Chris Columbus) which plays as Harry boards the train home after a heroic end to his first year at Hogwarts. The track expands upon a beautiful, emotional motif used earlier in the film as Harry reflects upon the loss of his parents and his desire for family. However, contrasting to the childlike simplicity of its earlier iteration, played on the celeste, the theme is more somber and developed, played with triumphant swells of horns and strings. This demonstrates Harry's newfound maturity as he embarks on a journey of self-discovery and finds a new family in Ron and Hermione. While the innocence of his childhood has forever been altered by the revelations of his past, Harry has, in turn, found something even richer. Despite his legendary work on popular blockbuster series such as *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars*, Williams has garnered the most critical acclaim from his collaborations with director Steven Spielberg. In working with an auteur such as Spielberg, Williams has been able

## A RETROSPECTIVE ON THE CAREER OF ONE OF CINEMA'S GREATS

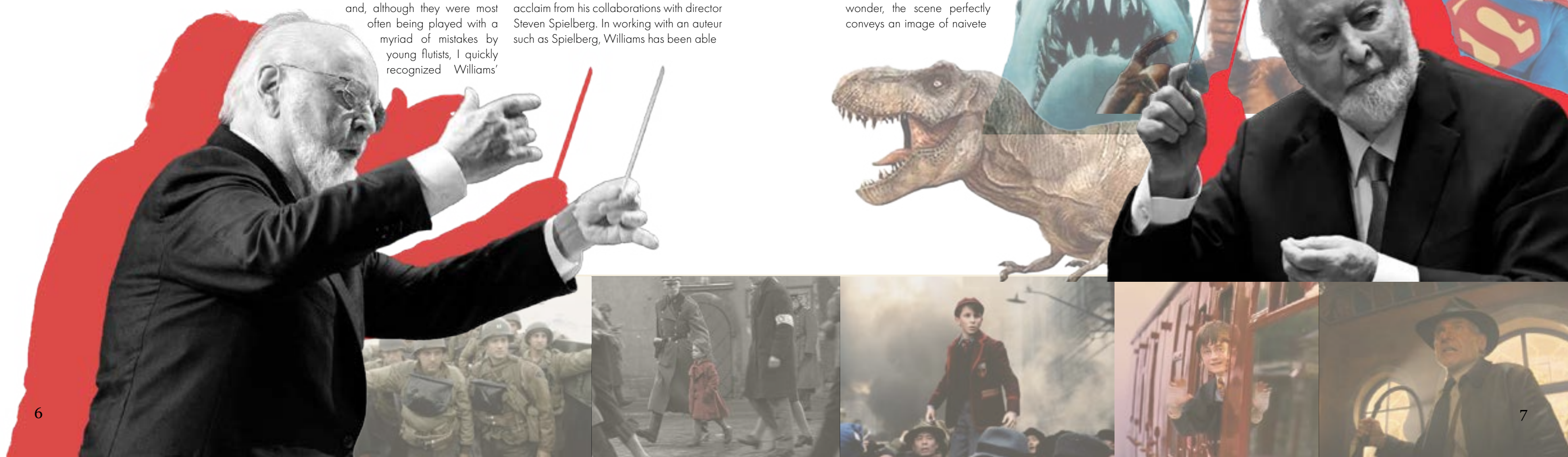
to contribute to projects in which camera-work and music go hand-in-hand to form a cinematic identity. Simply put, there is no Spielberg without Williams. This is because Williams' scores contribute perfectly to the main themes of Spielberg's films, particularly that of a child coming-of-age in the most perilous locale possible— the real world. This is perfectly illustrated in a pivotal scene from one of Spielberg's lesser-known works, *Empire of the Sun* (1987). Often overlooked as Spielberg's creative stepping-stone to later, more mature works such as 1993's *Schindler's List* and 1998's *Saving Private Ryan*, *Empire of the Sun* tells the poignant story of Jim, a wealthy English boy who becomes caught up in Japan's invasion of Hong Kong on the eve of the Second World War. In one especially striking scene, Jim, an airplane enthusiast, salutes to Japanese airmen about to take off near an internment camp. Paired with a somber reprise of Jim's Theme, a celeste-driven motif associated earlier in the film with Jim's child-like wonder, the scene perfectly conveys an image of naivete

amongst death and destruction. By the end of the film, Jim, along with the audience, is changed forever by the realization that, while youth is fleeting, something greater is born in the death of innocence.

As I grow older, leaving behind my own childhood, I've witnessed the triumph and twilight of Williams' career. In the words of Steven Spielberg, "Without John Williams, bikes don't really fly, nor do brooms in Quidditch matches, nor do men in red capes. There is no Force, dinosaurs do not walk the Earth, we do not wonder, we do not weep, we do not believe." In my own

words— Without John Williams, I would never have discovered the boundless joy and life-altering catharsis of cinema. The era of Williams, Spielberg, and their peers may be over, but their art has taught us that something new and great is yet to come.

ARTICLE BY: MAGGIE  
ROSINSKI





# MOVIE CULTURE:

## THE PROBLEM AND FUTURE OF AMERICAN CINEMA

The past few years have been the prologue to a new paradigm shift in the major American film industry and, thus, every production downstream from it. The production and distribution of films from every production level from now on have been forever altered by the pandemic and the rise of artificial intelligence. But, I believe the real threat is from within and has existed long before the new decade: that being the culture of cinema itself.

Firstly, I think a significant facet of this issue is the confusion (often willful) of cinema as a craft and cinema as a medium. Craft is a skill that can be acquired through sufficient material resources; medium is simply the procedure of creation. Praise of the blockbuster is from the indulgence in pure craft and material expenditure, which only depends on wealth that already exists. Even downstream from Hollywood, the adoration of craft is intensely saturated, and the standards of craft and aesthetics are set by Hollywood. Before the advent of photography, painting and visual art were widely adopted as primarily a craft by the public, patrons, and artists themselves. Once photography was invented, it robbed traditional media of its practical utility, such as documentation. Despite my

argument that cinema has been dethroned as the zenith of culture, it still holds firmly to its primary utility of cultural fortification, a kinder way of saying “propaganda”.

This is compounded by further reliance on digital technology. For example, most contemporary avant-garde filmmakers still work almost exclusively with the film format despite the more remarkable “plasticity” of digital and continuing techniques pioneered by the likes of Brakhage since the mid-20th Century. I believe this is not out of merely aesthetic preference but merely the fact that film inherently possesses a far more reciprocal procedure and ritual. Digital, ultimately, is data and variables; ritual has to be supplementarily attached by choice. Conversely, this is also why I don’t advocate for “cinematic luddism” as the choice to reject modern tools in itself is supplemental. Superficially, the choice to forgo modern techniques is often simply a fetishization of the past, divorced from all of the cultural and historical contexts in which older works exist.

Both the conception of filmmaking itself and the works themselves have been irreversibly changed by modernity. How cinema is interpreted differs radically from even ten years ago. At its origin, cinema was experienced in a specific, spatial and cultural context: the theater. As time introduced home video and streaming, the original

context became vestigial. Even worse, the shift of context is heavily compounded by the hyper-saturation of images. The distinction between a work of cinema versus an advertisement, a streaming series, or a documentarian video has blurred in the unconscious eye. What then distinguishes cinema from audio-visual media is purely craft rather than vision or design. Disturbingly, I believe the major movie-making entities are acutely aware of this hyper-saturation and are desperately vying to occupy the same space. Since the pandemic, nearly every major theatrical release I see feels more like an enormous wave of images, sounds, and schemas blasted at me at once. It feels as if the intention was to approximate the anatomy of a film as quickly as possible while simultaneously achieving far beyond feature-length run time.

A common issue I see in discussions of “why movies suck now” (to be extremely reductive) is the hyperfocus on the major releases. I don’t believe the major studio release does or should represent the state of an entire medium. That being said, I think it’s missing the forest for the trees to suggest that the stagnation of “cinema” (whatever you consider that to be) is purely born of greed on behalf of corporate entities. I don’t think it’s that simple because I see the same malaise where it shouldn’t be. I do not believe at all there is a shortage of great creative minds that are active today; however, I noticed very few of them have an interest in cinema. Most are musicians, game developers, visual artists, and writers. This is because the young people who do aspire to be filmmakers don’t see cinema as a medium but as purely a vehicle for culture, or particularly what I call “Movie Culture.”

A blatant example of this phenomenon is the prevalence of geek culture. Individual creators classified within do not actualize their own designs through art but contribute to a greater cultural canon. Cinema, specifically American cinema, is very similar. A loose canon of studio classics and cult successes exists above the medium, progressing through collective evolution, like that of a species or a history, instead of works that coexist tangentially with one another, categorized by medium and not cultural presence. This mythology of sensibilities and schemas is purely what exists within the film culture; the medium and form itself are incidental. Though I said that greed isn’t what this essay is about, consumerism is still a major part of Movie Culture, and I blame entities like A24 and The Criterion Collection for facilitating the “canon as product” over the individual achievements of artists. Many young filmmakers are preoccupied with Movie Culture rather than the medium: a young painter likely does not aspire to have any work exhibited in galleries before dedicating himself to that discipline. Well, until the idiotic discourse of generative AI when many artists outed themselves as having no incentive to create art if they can’t monetize it (or really, be meaningfully distinct from the output of a machine). Many of my personal favorite filmmakers were polymaths engaged in other mediums, the best example being Shuji Terayama (Throw Away Your Books, Rally in the Streets; Pastoral: To Die in the Country), who was primarily regarded as a poet and playwright. I often think of a quote from a BBC interview with Peter Greenaway (Drowning by Numbers, A Zed and Two Noughts) in which he said in regards to shifting away from studying painting to filmmaking, “paintings do not have soundtracks”. This quote explicitly illustrates that this artist chose cinema as his preferred discipline because of a dimension not afforded by other mediums. This quote explicitly illustrates that this artist chose cinema as his preferred discipline because of a dimension not afforded by other mediums.

The filmmaking process was somewhat opaque for most of its history, along with a lack of access to technology. But that has clearly changed, and yet Movie Culture has crystallized further. In the late 1980s and early 90s, consumer-grade camcorders became available to the public, catalyzing entire movements of producing shot-on-video (SOV) features and distributing them through local video stores. In this Cambrian explosion, a new wave of autodidactic filmmaking emerged, regardless of quality and integrity. Though influence from the then-contemporary Movie Culture obviously existed, especially in horror productions, there appeared to be a greater dedication to the medium, likely because there was such a stark, unavoidable distinction between the SOV films and what was theatrically distributed. In 1991, David Blair released Wax or the Discovery of Television Among the Bees onto the Internet, the first ever

film to do so. Very soon after this paradigm shift, cinema was a medium adopted by the genuinely innovative like Blair and the fringe like Guiseppe Andrews (Trailer Town, Garbanzo Gas) and the nearly forgotten Antero Alli (The Drivetime, Tragos: A Cyber Noir Witch Hunt). Cinema as a medium became accessible to those who were very unlike filmmakers who would find success in the traditional industry. Despite further advancements in the accessibility of production and distribution, the contemporary Western “underground” is deeply underwhelming, again specifically because of the ubiquity of Movie Culture, even within the alternatives to popular culture.

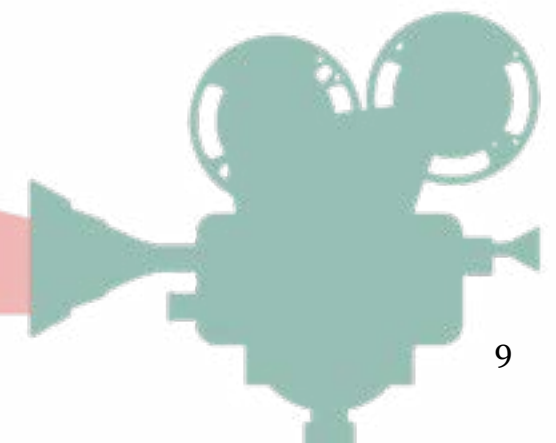
I believe the most grizzly casualty of Movie Culture’s influence is the horror genre. Horror cinema, for nearly all of its history, was inherently counter-culture and even socially taboo. Now, modern horror has been “rehabilitated” into something not just easily consumable but also socially responsible. Modern horror often chooses social anxieties over fundamental human truths but does so as a vehicle for culture itself and not as a counter. The commentary of “socially conscious” horror enables presuppositions about society, but nothing said would truly make one uncomfortable about the world they live in. Otherwise, it would not have been so readily adopted by the Movie Culture. Horror had to be reformed into a genre that can be practiced with social responsibility, as its violence and exploitation are either entirely amputated or saturated in post-modern irony to where the content becomes incidental. A recently successful film like Terrifier 2 may seem exploitative. However, its indulgence in violence is meant to evoke cheers and laughs, starkly contrasting with previous generations’ sincere attempts to shock and transgress. I am personally not entertained by exploitation, but the motivations of this reformation are that of cowardice and compliance, disguised as virtue and artistic progression.

To illustrate an example both of the horror genre and from the underground, as of writing, I had watched \$5,000 body-horror film called The Sound of Summer. It has many of the sensibilities of other contemporary horror films, but what studio out to me was the lack of indulgence into pain. This could be simply bad direction, but graphic depiction of extreme physical and emotional pain has the risk of being misconstrued as exploitation within the contemporary horror Movie Culture. Therefore, vulnerability is completely absent and substituted with empowerment. Despite slavish reverence for the horror canon, the new Movie Culture remade horror into a new being, antithetical to the nature of the genre itself. Ironically, a film often hailed and highly influential in this culture is The Exorcist, which I would argue is spiritually at complete odds with modern “post-horror”. In revisiting, I would say The Exorcist is not only exploitative but even

reactionary. The text itself is of an entity exploiting the body and soul of a child; it blasphemes God and debases his creation, the human body, and the film isn’t sheepish about the details even today. Subtextually, the film can be interpreted as an attack on the Sexual Liberation movement, likely as a socially conservative Catholic wrote it. Even more ironically, is not just its nastiness in contrast to modern horror but its distinct lack of nihilism. Modern horror often supplants graphic content with a nihilistic disposition, starkly unlike Blatty’s anxiety about the ambiguity of The Exorcist’s ending. The film’s insistence on the triumph of good over the Devil imbues the harsh evils depicted with actual meaning. Nihilism permits an ambivalence towards evil, while the preservation of values means there is something that can be lost to evil. I believe it is entirely possible to attack virtues in a secular society, but that is simply not happening. It makes me wonder if the purveying legacy and influence of the film in modern genre filmmakers are because of its monolithic cultural significance rather than the film itself because it is so contrary to what modern horror represents.

In terms of recent names that are showing potential, there are not many. As the United States continues to lose global political and cultural relevance, ideally, other nations will promote their own artists to fill the void. The early previews of the capabilities of Sora by OpenAI have unsurprisingly spooked many “amateur” filmmakers. Still, I see its arrival as a much-needed incentive for the next generation of filmmakers to embrace the medium of cinema. If, one day, a near-Hollywood-level product can be created with a prompt and a graphics card, then what is left unreplaced is the process of filmmaking. For film to finally be truly embraced as a medium, it needs to be devoured by a machine.

**ARTICLE BY: BEN WATFORD**





# TRANSVERSING THE “*ROCKY HORROR* PICTURE SHOW”

Modern movie theaters as spaces tend to be passive locations: entertainment that is sat through in the dark, in silence. In stark, technicolor, campy contrast to this, a showing of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is instead a part of a long tradition of ribald, ungovernable audience members whose interactions with the entertainment shown to them is a form of ownership. I intend to examine *Rocky Horror Picture Show* shadow cast events as a cinema-going social experience and experiment, specifically in Los Angeles.

Los Angeles has one of the longest-running and tenacious *Rocky Horror* scenes in America, and it was the site of the first American showing of the film. I am most interested in examining why an interactive show like this is such a draw—what histories are at play and how the rituals around watching this show develop and take on a life of their own. There are many cult films, of course, most of which are “B-movies,” but few have the kind of lingering cultural and interactive draw that *Rocky Horror* does.

*Rocky* occupies a liminal space: Not bound by the walls of a theater itself, but spreading into public, non-moviegoing areas as well. Los Angeles theaters were among the first locations where audiences began singing along to the film’s musical numbers, and where shadow casts (individuals acting out the film while it plays behind them) began forming (*Rocky Horror* Wiki). The city of Los Angeles is central to the development and survival of *Rocky* as a film and a communal experience, and it is necessary to try and understand the zeitgeist of Los Angeles during the mid-1970s. At this time, the city was under particular stress following the Watts Riots, the crooked leadership of then-Mayor Sam Yorty, the Manson murders, along with a nationwide recession and the fallout and tragedy of the Vietnam War (Fallon 3). The city had issues with smog, violence, and a sense of a loss of fantasy in the idea that absolutely everything is possible (Banham). In other words, Los Angeles in 1975 was not living up to the “Good Vibrations” as promised by the Beach Boys ten years earlier.

But for all of the smog and grit of the city at this time, it was also a thriving area for music, the arts, and pertinently, late-night clubs and scenes on the Sunset Strip. This section of Sunset Boulevard is peppered with iconic locations like the Comedy Store, the Whisky a Go Go, and the Roxy Theatre, where the staged version of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* ran from March of 1974 to January of 1975. The Sunset Strip was wildly popular with teenagers in the 60s, who flocked to new nightclubs and music venues, sometimes blocking traffic and causing general mayhem. Law enforcement responded to complaints from business owners and residents by enforcing a 10pm curfew, sparking the “Sunset Strip Curfew Riots.” These protests in 1966 and

1967 rocked the boulevard with unruly throngs of teenagers...to which law enforcement responded with arbitrary violence and dozens of arrests.

In many ways, the protests and the crackdown that ensued were simply a part of larger, perennial issues that mark generational schisms, but they can also give us insight into a time period and locale fraught with tension over “who controls public space and the right to congregate in those spaces” (Haut). This idea of control and ownership of public spaces offers a connection between these teenage-led riots and the rowdy crowds that later flocked to the first midnight showings of *Rocky* at the UA Westwood Theatre, which was located about four miles away from the site of the Sunset Strip Riots near UCLA. The ribald, outsized nature of *Rocky Horror* offered an outlet to teenagers and twenty-somethings—the long, late-night queues that spilled onto the sidewalk and into the street for a showing of this film was a callback in many ways to the pre-riot freedom of the Strip. *Rocky Horror* as a public, social act begins here: On the sidewalks and in the queue for midnight showings.

The UA Westwood was the site of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* film premiere, and the one location where the film didn’t bomb in the US. The Westwood drew capacity crowds for showings of *Rocky Horror* to this 500 seat theater. Aside from this, however, the film grossed less than \$400,000 in its first three weeks of its broader release. But the audiences at the Westwood were unique in one radical way: According to publicists for the film, LA fans were seeing the film repeatedly (Weinstock 18).

In addition to this, the Westwood’s proximity to UCLA is also notable, as students there established the university’s first Gay Student Union and Gay Awareness Week in 1974, just a year before the film’s premiere. Neighboring West Hollywood also started the first legally permitted Gay Pride parade in 1970, on the anniversary of the Stonewall Riots (“UCLA in the 1970s”). This area, in other words, was one of the few locations in the country which it was relatively safe to be out and queer in the 70s—and *Rocky* as a film celebrates queerness openly and exuberantly.

A primary theme in *Rocky Horror* is the criticism of middle-class, conservative values, which are typically only achieved at the cost of minorities, outsiders, and the Other. *Rocky* came into being during Ronald Reagan’s tenure as Governor of California, and the values he espoused, like anti-welfare and hawkish foreign policies (Glass), were antithetical to burgeoning desires for social welfare, desegregation, and acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community.

This tension is set up early on in the film through the first protagonists we meet: Brad Masters and Janet Weiss, a “normal,” middle-

class, conservative couple, with “normal,” middle-class, conservative values. Through their initial relationship, dialogue, and wardrobe, they are clearly intended to evoke not only Reagan’s ideologies, but also the ideologies of his political forerunner, Barry Goldwater, and then-President Richard Nixon. Brad and Janet may be “normal” at the start of their adventure, but their entire worldview will be called into question by the end of it (Matheson 19). Brad Masters is quickly revealed not as the standard Noble Cis-Hetero Hero, but as a patsy, hopelessly square and absolutely clueless. For Los Angeles teens who went through the Sunset Strip riots, or who were a part of the nationwide student protests against the Vietnam War, this satirization of a clean-cut nice young man was a delightful turn of events.

Janet Weiss represents the feminine side of conformity, and in many ways her obsession with the size of the engagement ring Brad gives her in the first part of the film exemplifies the consumer excess that the 80s would be known for. This also offers a critique of women who stumped for the patriarchy: Janet has attached her worth not to her own personhood, but to an item of metal and stone. Consequently, Janet’s journey through the film and through the actors who play Janet in their shadow casts is one of the most satisfactory in *Rocky Horror*: A journey that moves away from this bargaining with the patriarchy to personal freedom, open expression of desire, and selfhood (Cornell 42). Janet Weiss is not the only person who gets this journey to authenticity courtesy of *Rocky Horror*—arguably, each of the primary theaters that showed or show this film in Los Angeles (and elsewhere) act as vehicles of self-expression for their audiences and cast members. These theaters are spaces in which the “notion of pure acceptance of the identity of others” and oneself is integral and required for this experience (Levy).

One of these primary theatres was the Tiffany, which hosted upwards of 1500 people for *Rocky Horror* every weekend between 1977-1983, and was the first location to have a shadow cast.

According to Troy Martin, a long-time *Rocky* fan and a member of one of these original shadow casts in Riverside, California, part of this popularity was due to “People want[ing] something fresh and exciting. There were new ideas about art, film, music, fashion, attitudes, and presentation. *Rocky Horror* was among them...” (“Absolute Pleasure”). This communal excitement, particularly in conjunction with the quasi-lawless Sunset Strip where the Tiffany was located, led this theater to have a reputation as one of the most singularly boisterous and popular *Rocky* showings, not only in Los Angeles, but nationwide. Its location in the heart of West Hollywood, away from the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles Police Department, also contributed to the relative safety of queer attendees and cast members, like Garrett Gafford, an openly transgender man who played Dr. Frank-n-Furter at the Tiffany for four years (“The Tiffany Troupe”).

Among these influential theatres that showed *Rocky* is the Nuart Theatre, now arguably the singular destination for a *Rocky Horror Picture Show* experience in Los Angeles, with one of the longest running shadow casts in America, many of whom started in the original casts that performed at The Tiffany. The Nuart began showing art house films around 1959, setting the stage for its current devotion to *Rocky Horror*, *Hedwig* and the Angry Inch, grindhouse festivals, and foreign films—the Nuart is not where Angelenos go for blockbuster hits, but for the particular enjoyment of films that develop their own kind of culture. *Rocky Horror* devotees come to this theater in large part because of this reputation—it is a place where interest in cult film is welcome and wanted.

In a personal interview, Xach Fromson, who

started going to *Rocky* shows at the Nuart when he was 19, described walking into this theater for a midnight showing as follows:

“[It] always felt like coming home. It was frenetic, chaotic...lines of people forming to get in...some of them are wearing lingerie, or costumes from the show...There’s a rainbow of hair colors and skin colors, a human quilt of tattoos and piercings. It’s boisterous with the din of friendship...” (Personal interview). The relative safety of a large city and county like Los Angeles allowed the *Rocky* community at the Nuart to be safe from police who were not deputized to arrest fans for wearing lingerie in public, and harassment from outsiders was fairly rare.

Aside from the specific location of these theaters and their *Rocky Horror* devotees in Los Angeles, this film is also broadly and uniquely situated to demonstrate how cinema memory and cultural memory work in accordance with Annette Kuhn’s theories in “What to do with Cinema Memory,” beginning with her bottom-up approach that centers the “remembered experience of actual cinemagoers.” Kuhn states that “Cinema memory...may also provide material for stories that we share with others—stories about our lives and the times and places we have inhabited...” (86). She divides modes of cinema memory into three categories: remembered scenes and images, situated memories of film, and memories of cinema-going (87), stating that these categories overlap, bleed into, and influence each other—a description of liminality that absolutely applies to the *Rocky Horror* experience. Kuhn’s notion of shared subjectivities and remembered experiences are clearly seen in first-person interviews and memoirs where memories of seeing *Rocky* as a film for the first time are inextricably woven with the memories of being an awkward teenager, and with the memory of the shadow cast’s performance. When *Rocky* devotees describe the film itself, it is almost always intertwined with how they felt while viewing it, or how an interpretation of a

scene from it by the shadow cast affected them or the audience. But an even more important theme that is unique to *Rocky Horror*—this film that has become a community—arises again and again in interviews and memories: That of Coming Home.

It is in those personal testimonies, and their shared memory through cinema of what “home” feels like that I find the story of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* so deeply compelling. *Rocky Horror*’s long, devoted cult following would simply not be possible without this emotion linking film, cast, and audience together. Each of the theaters represented here offer or offered a space and a ritual to gather around—a modern campfire, drawing groups of outcasts around to share and become a part of each other’s stories and memory.

ARTICLE BY: REBECCA REA ROSS





# VEHICLES IN CINEMA:

## AUTHORSHIP AND MOBILITY

Movement has fascinated humans since the beginning of our existence. The wheel revolutionized our way of life millennia ago, and ever since, humanity has obsessed over producing the next evolutionary step in our transportation technology. As such, automobile manufacturers incessantly describe their latest SUV as the peak of human innovation, and while these strategies can often come across as pretentious or exaggerative, their claims emphasize our dependency upon and fascination with vehicles. In cinema, some of the most engaging and memorable sequences of all time are those involving intense car chases, aerial dog fights, swashbuckling naval battles, and other dynamic vehicle stunts. The multifaceted role of vehicles in film has led to a remarkable relationship with authorship, and this role ultimately contributes to the collaborative nature of filmmaking.

### REFLECTIONS OF MODERNITY

A vehicle can be defined as “a means of carrying or transporting something” (Merriam-Webster). In film, this definition presents limitless possibilities for storytelling. Perhaps most relevantly, vehicles at a broad level symbolize modernity. For instance, *The Horse in Motion* (1878), one of the earliest examples of cinema itself, consists of only twelve frames, but this sequence of images signifies the importance of motion in film (Muybridge).

After all, the illusion of movement provides the foundation for cinema that audiences have grown accustomed to in the modern age. Vehicles literally and metaphorically facilitate the movement of a film. Something as simple as a horse and its jockey revolutionized the way society has perceived photography and visual storytelling, but even more revolutionary are the mechanized vehicles such as locomotives, automobiles, aircraft, and spacecraft.

Upon the release of the famous short film *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1896), otherwise known as *The Arrival of a Train*, audiences exhibited such a visceral reaction that rumors began circulating suggesting individuals fled the theater out of fear that the train on the screen was going to hit them (Lumière). Historically, locomotives have been understood as markers of technological progression. In America alone, they allowed for the connection of cities, states, and coastlines, and thus, trains have firmly situated themselves at the center of popular culture.

Although audience members exiting was likely an exaggeration, the Lumiere brothers nevertheless understood the train's potential for excitement, and by capturing the sensation of a train on camera, they were able to produce some of the most striking reactions from moviegoers at that time. They likewise proved the kind of power a director can exert over their audience

when delivering an experience predicated on spectacle and the technological sublime.

While the nature of vehicles makes them perfect candidates for visually dazzling or technically impressive sequences, they also serve the film in countless other ways. Notably, they can provide underlying motivation without stealing attention away from the story itself. As an example, Italian neo-realist film, *Ladri Di Biciclette* (1948), also referred to as *The Bicycle Thieves*, communicated the themes of despair and misfortune prevalent in post-war Italy through the lens of a simple working-class man, Antonio, desperate to retrieve his stolen bicycle (Sica). Antonio, and his son, Bruno, are relying on this measly mode of transportation for their entire livelihood, making the tragedy of losing it feel even more helpless and heartbreaking. Director Vittorio de Sica manages to take the simplistic collection of metal tubes, gears, and chains and deliver to the audience a wealth of emotion and insight into this critical point in Italian history as well as film history.

### VEHICLE PERSONALITY

Vehicles also offer the director a unique opportunity to express their ideas through mise-en-scene and iconography. The AMC *DeLorean* in the 1984 film *Back to the Future*, which protagonist Marty McFly uses to travel back in time, not only serves as an integral piece of the plot development but also highlights both the film's personality and the director's personality (Zemeckis). Director Robert Zemeckis transforms this otherwise mundane and relatively obscure luxury automobile into science fiction history, and it has become synonymous with the *Back to the Future* franchise. In addition, the choice of time-travel machinery helps reinforce Doctor Emmett Brown as an eccentric scientist with bold ambition and exotic tastes.

At one point, Brown explicitly retorts to Marty, “If you're gonna build a time machine into a car, why not do it with some style?” In a similar vein, each of the renditions of Batmobiles in the various Batman films across the decades have represented the tone and filmic language of each cinematic experience. The slick, hotrod-esc muscle car found in Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989) portrays a sense of fantastical whimsicality while still contributing to Batman's dark, reclusive personality (Burton). On the other hand, the massive, armored vehicle in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2009) more closely resembles a tank, which demonstrates how this Batman prioritizes practicality and intimidation over style (Nolan). While having access to the considerable budget of a superhero blockbuster makes choices like this more convenient, filmmakers at any level can communicate a lot about their film and its characters with vehicle selection.

### EMBRACING COLLABORATION

In his article entitled, “De la Politique des Auteurs,” film critic Andre Bazin comments that “a great talent matures but does not grow old” (Bazin). The vehicle exemplifies Bazin's claim as it allows directors to innovate and thus mature their craft, but this innovation typically means directors must rely on other members of a film's production to make their vision a reality. Incorporating vehicles into cinema has continued to present new challenges throughout the years. In modern filmmaking, recording car chase sequences, relatively ubiquitous in all genres, requires numerous individuals such as stunt drivers, stunt coordinators, and specialized camera operators. Not to mention, these types of sequences rely on elaborate filming equipment ranging from bulky hood-mounted camera rigs to specialized automobiles called biscuits, wherein the actual driver operates the vehicle from a cockpit that the camera operator can hide (Geaghan-Breiner and Desiderio). These techniques allow a director more creative freedom, but at the same time, they force the director to relinquish some control over their product due to unavoidable accident-prone factors akin to driving on bumpy terrain.

Director Edgar Wright exhibits as tight of a control over car-based sequences as one can throughout much of his filmography. In the high-octane, action-packed film *Baby Driver* (2017), Wright conveys a distinct style and sense of humor with his vehicles. He also utilizes all the available filming techniques to realize his shots, which speaks to his willingness and ability to embrace strategies that produce the best possible result (Wright). During the film, Wright meticulously crafts the car chases to synchronize with the film's score, creating a film experience unlike any other in terms of its cadence and tone. In one scene, the film's protagonist, Baby, played by Ansel Elgort, times the windshield wipers of his vehicle to match up with the music to which he is listening. The subsequent scenes feature Baby expertly speeding down the busy streets of Atlanta while still performing his actions in time with the music. This throughline of editing to the beat showcases Wright's filmic language as well as the specific personality of *Baby Driver* as a standalone production.

### REALITY VS SPECTACLE

While most filmmakers remain in the realm of reality or exaggerated reality with their vehicle sequences, some manage to transcend these conventions through their modes of transportation. George Lucas, the creative mind behind the wildly successful *Star Wars* franchise, pushed vehicles in cinema to the extreme with some of the most enthralling and groundbreaking sequences involving spacecraft.

Despite their departure from realistic space-exploration vehicles, the augmented and hyper-stylized spacecraft in films such as *Return of the Jedi* (1983) are utterly unforgettable (Marquand). Furthermore, the extravagant space battles brought to life by dazzling laser blasts and impeccable sound design, has left an unprecedented mark on the zeitgeist for new and older generations alike.

Impressively, none of these vehicles exist in the capacity that the film stock would lead audiences to believe. These flying hunks of metal are no more than detailed models captured using inventive filming techniques. Similarly, space battles found in modern *Star Wars* pictures continue to become increasingly visually impressive at the expense of material realism due to advancements in computer-generated imagery. Nowadays, many car-based sequences are largely created with digital assets in order to please the modern audience's insatiable desire for spectacle. Even when productions use tangible automobiles, there is still an inconsistency between reality and the cinematic truth. For instance, companies such as JEM prepare vehicles by cutting into the structural metal in various ways to produce a specific effect when the car crashes or receives damage (Geaghan-Breiner and Desiderio). Quite simply, there is a disconnect between real vehicles and cinematic vehicles. However, most audience members do not even realize this incongruity and instead accept it as an inseparable part of the cinematic experience.

### THE STAR VEHICLE

George Lucas might have created some of the most remarkable star vehicles in film history, but the more literary concept of the “star vehicle”

has grown in popularity over the

years. This term describes movies that serve to develop an actor's career or capitalize on their current popularity. However, especially nowadays, this idea extends further to include other members of the production such as the director, screenwriter, or any other prominent figure on set. Film studios and production companies will rely on the names of such personalities alone to sell tickets at the box office.

While the idiomatic expression “star vehicle” might not directly relate to the physical vehicles on the silver screen, it once again emphasizes how pertinent vehicles are to cinema. “Star vehicles” are perceived as the very method by which recognizable talent persists and increases the publicity of a film for better or for worse. The studio or casting director can utilize this brand recognition to contribute to the authorial composition of a film. For example, Billy Wilder famously cast Jack Lemmon in several of his movies, primarily throughout the 1960s and 1970s. One could argue that these films benefited from the presence of Jack Lemmon and acted as “star vehicles” for his career as well as for the commercial success of the film itself. This choice to cast Jack Lemmon ultimately fell on Billy Wilder, and thus, it provided another aspect of the production to influence. In sorts, Wilder drove the film while Lemmon rode in the passenger seat and stuck his head out of the sunroof.

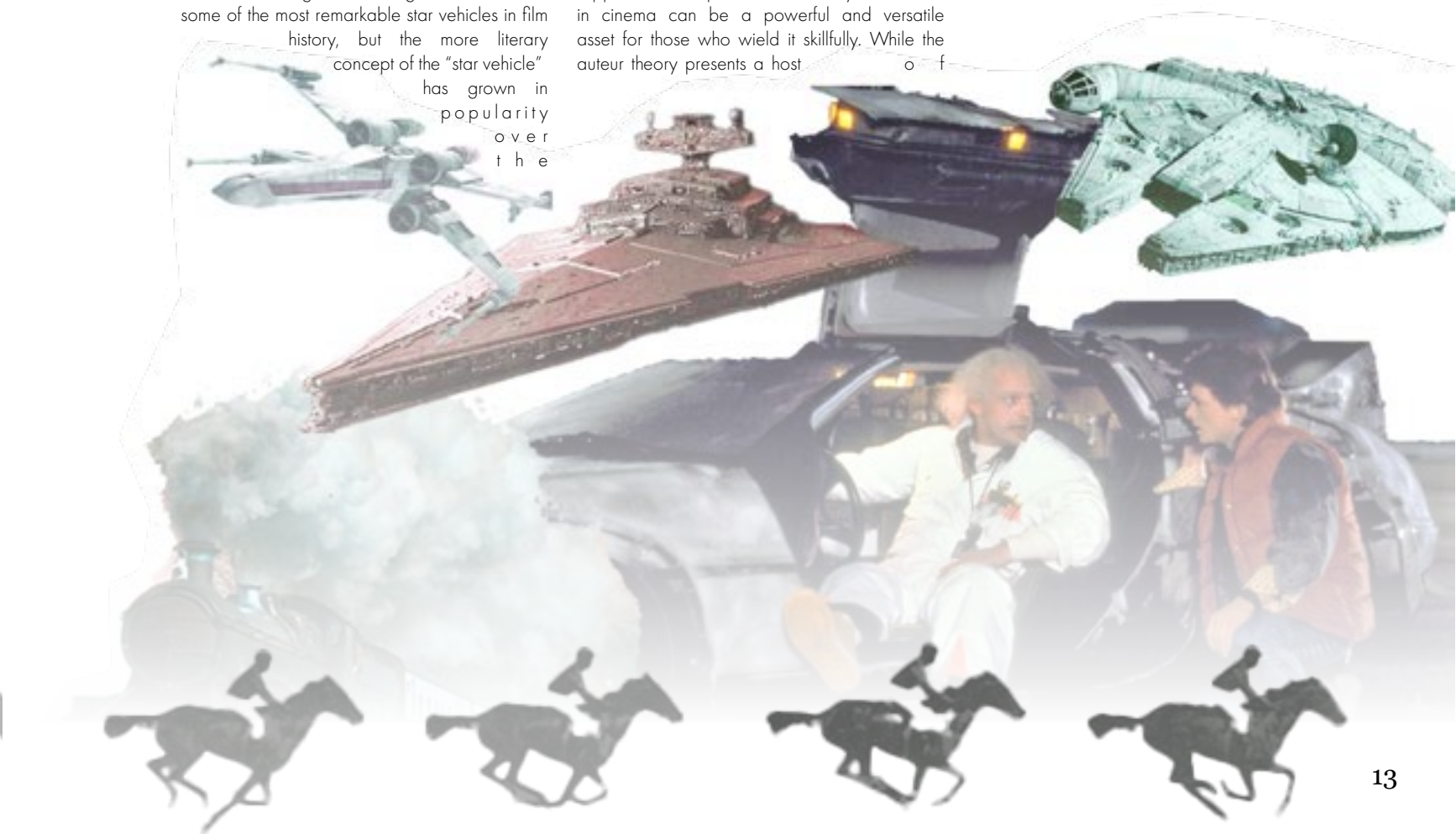
### AUTEURS BEHIND THE WHEEL

Time and time again, vehicles prove to be an integral piece of film history since they drive innovation, signify literary concepts, and support authorship in countless ways. A vehicle in cinema can be a powerful and versatile asset for those who wield it skillfully. While the auteur theory presents a host

questions regarding authorship in film, I think it is safe to say that the ideal auteur is someone who maximizes the tools and techniques at their disposal to produce the best quality product congruent with their vision. Vehicles offer one piece to this puzzle of authorship by giving the director opportunities for more elaborate and exciting storytelling. However, it also reinforces the importance of viewing film as a collaborative artform.

Henry Ford once stated, “If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself.” This mentality echoes in the hearts and minds of filmmakers, young and old. As technology continues to improve, it becomes even more important that films continue to uphold this collaborative spirit of success. Just like how *The Horse in Motion* would not have been possible without the director, the jockey, and the horse, vehicle stunts in modern productions are nearly impossible to capture alone. Romanticizing the idea of the auteur diminishes the reality that films require many specialized hands with distinct creative styles, and capturing a thrilling car chase is just one example of how authorship cannot be solely attributed to one person. Everyone has a noteworthy part to play in operating an automobile, whether they are working under the hood or behind the wheel.

### ARTICLE BY: SAMUEL LANGENFELD





# BLADER RUNNER, METROPOLIS AND

When watching *Blade Runner* (1982), one concept always springs to the front of my mind; the concept of *reality*. Ridley Scott tackles the concept of our reality through the lens of a not-entirely unrealistic depiction of a future dystopia in LA. The film is constantly grappling with the idea of real versus fake. Artificial animals, synthetic humans, fabricated memories; all possible in the world of *Blade Runner*. The heavy motif of eyes frequently explored in the film is a representation of our perception of reality.

Are Roy's and Rachael's memories as authentic as that of a human being? Are the life and emotions they experience apart from their creator something entirely new and real, or are they just part of the fantasy? All of these questions are posited in a neon-drenched amalgamation of cultures, architecture and people. I find this sentiment reflective of the architect Rem Koolhaas' excerpt "Life in the Metropolis" from his book, "Delirious New York", and his notion that the creations of the modern metropolis are attempts to "establish fantasies as realities in the world" and that "they discredit the idea of Reality as an immutable and indestructible presence". This vision of creating architecture to

produce fantasy worlds for the people who designed it, is reminiscent of the decadent 'utopia' that the wealthy, like Tyrell, experience in *Blade Runner*. To maintain these false realities, they manufacture replicants (who experience an arguably more authentic and impactful reality than their own creator) as slaves to maintain the fantasy for the wealthy. Again I find a comparison to Koolhaas' idea that as a city develops higher, so does the wealthy that follow it, and the "undesirable circumstances" get left behind along with the people in them. The buildings in *Blade Runner* like the Bradbury Building (a real building on the national register) are left in disrepair, for the "undesirables" like J.F. Sebastian to inhabit the wreckage, alone. Meanwhile his boss, Tyrell, is living lavishly on top of the city in his pyramid with artificial owls, beautiful robes, and a luxuriously soft bed.

This "Metropolis" that Koolhaas describes, full of "'hysterical' structures" with "unpredictable outcomes" would fail as they never address the whole, only the few. This "Metropolis" is also represented in Fritz Lang's 1927 film of the same name. It's no coincidence that *Blade Runner* draws heavy inspiration from *Metropolis*, both featuring massively layered cities, with the wealthy living in fantasy and the poor working their short lives away to service said fantasy.

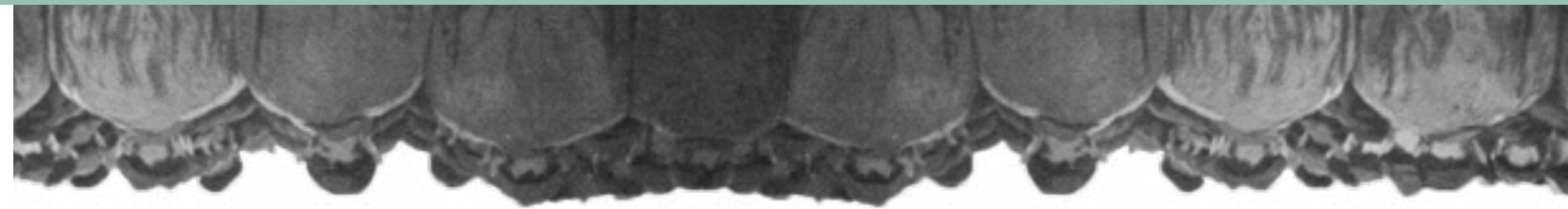
## ARCHITECTURE

The Eternal Garden of *Metropolis* sits atop the city (much like Tyrell's pyramid) for the children of the city leaders to frolic and play while deep underground the people tirelessly crank machines, which are only accessible by large elevators, the very same invention Koolhaas credits as the proponent of modern metropolis.

*Metropolis* also features a fabricated human, the Machine Man, who is created (much like a replicant) to serve endlessly. These creations bring to mind Koolhaas' obsession with Coney Island's various inventions including the inexhaustible cow, which simulates a living creature, but completely regulated by human control.

In both the films and "Life in the Metropolis", a utopian agenda is engaged by the wealthy to suit their fantasies but eventually it is collapsed by the people who are left behind. In the same way that the Downtown Atlantic Club (which Koolhaas touches on) was designed to provide a utopia and yet failed to meet its intentions and failing its maker, Roy was designed to be a slave to the utopia and yet strayed from his intentions, forging his own path, and killing his maker. Can architecture that is created to simulate a fantasy really withstand our ever changing society or will it create a new reality of its own?

ARTICLE BY: PEYTON DAVY





# A LOOK INTO *BARBIE* (2023)

Director Greta Gerwig used this phrase the “authentic artificial” throughout the filming of Barbie to remind herself and the crew of the look and feel they were aspiring for with the film, as a mantra to moor the creative collaboration. In many ways, we understand this approach just by knowing Barbie as a figure as one that is completely fictional and plastic in all her representations. But the representation in the film of Barbie Land (and the hyper-accentuated Real World counterpart) that there are elements of reality present throughout the movie, derived from the feminine, human, and societal experience, just with the image of Barbie. However reality does not equate to authenticity. Gerwig achieves this through the almost child-like quality of the entire film being excessively on the nose with its characterization and commentary, herself speaking through the mouths of her “dolls” to the audience with a tone of extreme earnest. Films themselves are a type of authentic artificial with the writers and directors able to tell a story that they create (whether based distinctly in history/ reality or not) and infuse it with humanness to relate itself to the audience. And so her fusion of the act by which many girls have practiced for generations of giving their artificial toys an authentic story and life born from their own minds, into the act of filmmaking whereby she also decides the story by controlling all the aspects of the characters - it truly brings life to the oxymoron of a kind of natural unnatural to a novel degree.

Something I’ve seen neglected in online discourse is that Gerwig wrote this script with her partner Noah Baumbach (notable for Marriage Story, Frances Ha, Madagascar 3: Europe’s Most Wanted). Yes, major credit goes to her directorial skills and production decisions, but it feels like the men who have expressed their dislike for the film say it feels like a hollow shell of what a man is, shone in a misandrist light. And yet, the very man that helped write this screenplay wrote the one that you see in all their “Best Acting Performances” TikToks of men yelling (yes, it’s that scene of Adam Driver).

I know this itself seems like a broad generalization, and an almost hypocritical one being a male cinephile myself, but it’s hard not to make when it is quite literally the same

accounts making these videos that I see. I think their partnership on a film that is so distinctly feminine works so much better than if she had just worked by herself because there are now exaggerated representations of men and women through the lens of both genders, informed by both of their distinct experiences. Being in love, scorned, anxious, unbothered, elated, depressed - both have experienced these as a result of the opposite gender, even being sourced in the other person. There are representations of sisterhood and brotherhood that are only understood through authentic experience where each representation of gender in the film is just accentuated by the authenticity of their interaction with the other. They can exist on their own, but are better defined by each other, inextricably connected. “It’s Barbie and Ken.”

But this leads to the film’s statement midway through where our protagonist Barbie is traveling back with the girl who plays with her. Gloria tells Barbie that she never got a Ken doll, to which Barbie responds “Ken’s superfluous”, and they share in laughter. This was Ken’s central drive for his actions in the film because he felt this sentiment from her, even saying at the end that he’s only “and Ken”, nothing without her, and so he must take control to enact the change he wants to see: he wants to have the power that she holds and use it to actually have her. And so he uses it vengefully to give her a taste of the medicine he’d been receiving by leaving her for boys night like she did every night before for girls night. But that is the distinction: Barbie had girls night because it was her ability in autonomy to do what she actually wanted to have the perfect day, while Ken did not do it for his own satisfaction of having a fun, fulfilling time with friends, but to deprive Barbie of the fulfillment of hers. This is not to say that the way Barbie treated Ken before was morally right, because as the Barbies realized in the end of the movie, their patriarchy was in fact unfair and our Barbie apologized for her actions with empathy (which Ken did not reciprocate when he knew the moment he did it that it was wrong). Rather, to exist under subjugation distinctly characterizes the relationship between the self and gender expression, especially in how one relates to others in community; in Barbie Land, this is Ken (representations of cis men), and in the Real World, this is women (represented ideally in Barbie). To be a Ken before is to be an accessory under corporate Barbie, to be a woman for all of history is to be in relation under men, but the resolution of this film has the Barbies ceding their power over them to allow for each Ken to figure out who he is to himself.

Ironically enough, Ken’s identity as an accessory to Barbie was actually a result of the Real World patriarchy. Remember, the Barbies

are being played with in the Real World and Barbie began having death anxiety because of Gloria’s imagination, and so her thoughts of Ken being superfluous was a result of Gloria’s attitude towards Ken, viewing him as unnecessary for Barbie’s life and happiness. The accessory attitude of many girls with respect to their Barbie is true in reality because Barbie is that fulfillment of self-gratification, as particularly when Barbie was invented, this is not the reality for women under the patriarchy. Therefore as there is patriarchy in the Real World, of course the fantastical Barbie Land would imagine itself as its opposite. The “man extender” tool of the corporation, in this case Mattel, capitalizes on this aspect of fantastical fulfillment for girls in their aspirations in order to satiate their desires in their heads while continuing to deny full capability in reality. The Barbie doll does not in fact in all cases inspire women to their potential, but allows an avenue to attain those aspirations while upholding the patriarchal power structure. Was it just coincidence that the representation of the Mattel executives was entirely composed of men whose sole motivation in the story was to maintain their power? Even at the end, the CEO tries to dictate the rest of Barbie’s story of living happily ever after with Ken - the same story that’s been told since their inception. To this, the film’s representation of the modern generation of girls, absolutely rebuffs. It is the dream of the Barbie feminist to both free women from enforced relation with men in order to exert autonomy, and to free men from the extended prejudices that stem from resentment toward these struggles, not to be free to be with each other, but free from being with each other exclusively and at all as a unit, and disavow the binding power of that “and”.

That is what this film is trying to do. Barbie wants to be the inspiration for girls, and not just those actively experiencing adolescence, but the little girl in every woman who believes in freedom in the truest sense. Gerwig is seeking to tap into that earnestness with which children use in every way they think and act in order to actually fulfill the goal of Ruth Handler’s dream of inspiring her daughter and daughters everywhere that they are capable just in being their authentic selves. Even discourse from women who enjoyed the film described it as “Women’s Studies 101” material, too heavy handed on its elementary commentary, especially in Gloria’s central monologue. But this is neglecting the intention of universal relatability that is central to the success of Barbie as a brand. Girls of today never had radical feminist Tumblr, much less an actual academic course dedicated to the topic, and so the foundation of the inherent contradictions the patriarchy dictates is needed for her to build more off of.

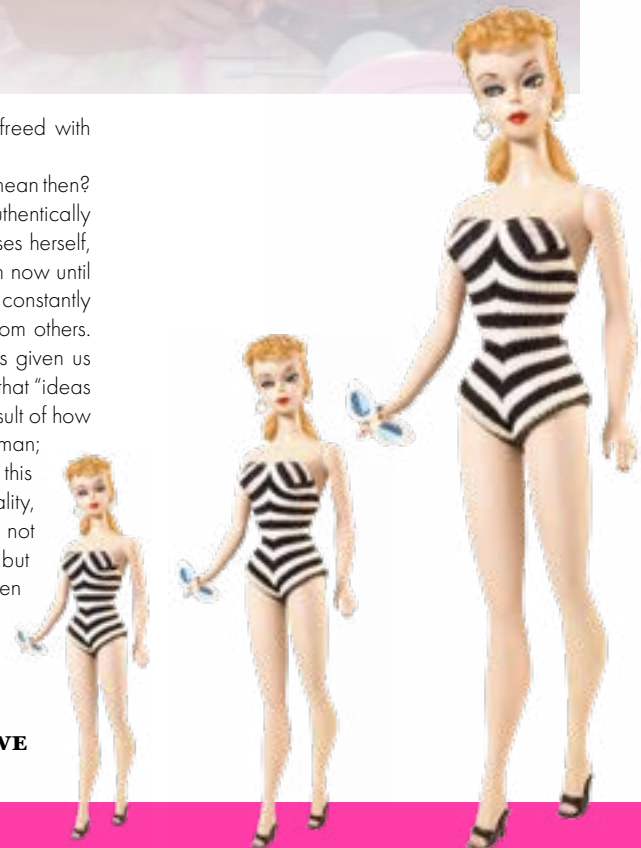


Not to mention the millions of women who have these shared experiences of contradiction, but never had the faculty of intellectualizing it as a harmful and shared experience. In this respect, Barbie works more as a collective experience being brought about through the medium of film. It has, after all, had the biggest opening weekend box office numbers since the second highest grossing film of all time: the franchise conclusion Avengers: Endgame. . Millions of people shared in the experience with collective laughter and understanding of the film’s commentary, many donned in pink, furthering the link between moviegoers. They were there together, even if they came separately. There was no ostracization of a Weird Barbie or an Allan, because as the film resolves, the only way to all have autonomous satisfaction is not only through a united sisterhood, but an integrated reality. The artifice of the film generated this within our reality, in that collective expression of authenticity for each individual is how we become united, not a union based on rigid structures of external identification; we’re

not stuck with patriarchal artifice but freed with feminist authenticity.

What does being a Barbie mean then? What is a woman? Anything she authentically decides every day in how she expresses herself, so to make today and “every day from now until forever” the best day ever in terms of constantly becoming her best self with support from others. This is the power Gerwig has and has given us through the film, embodying her notion that “ideas live forever”, not in spite of, but as a result of how tied they are to what it means to be human; the strength of the artifice (the movie in this case) comes from its authenticity to reality, not imitative but genuine. Barbie does not present a pale imitation of a woman, but she “is all women and all these women are Barbie”, together forever in their authenticity.

**ARTICLE BY: JACKSON LOWE**





# THE UNRELIABLE NARRATOR AND ALTERITY: DRAWING PARALLELS BETWEEN THE HOST/GUEST AND PRESCRIBER/PATIENT RELATIONSHIPS

Linguistics, on a foundational level, begins its instruction with word order. Sentence structure may embed a culture with an unrecognized tendency of how its people understand their world and will and power within it. In English, the subject-verb-object sequence establishes a framework of action in which the actor acts upon the acted upon. Most languages have fixed word orders. One of the exceptions is the Russian language, which allows an unfixed or free word order. In Russian, it does not matter which of the elements comes first. The choice in order demonstrates to the reader or listener what part of the sentence the writer or speaker wishes to emphasize. The Russian language user will place the vital part of the sentence in the beginning. The endings of words contain their function or reveal the part of speech.

The subject is positionally first in English and places the individual conducting the action front and center, the lead actor on the stage that is the sentence. Energy springs forth from the subject into the object through the action that is the verb. The object receives the action and receives the blow. The transfer of energy changes the object. *A boxer hits the punching bag.* A businessman collapses into a bed at the end of a hard workday. The punching bag and the bed receive and are at once transformed. They crinkle, they dent, and they create space for the subject. This transference of energy in a sentence is ordinarily unremarkable. It goes unnoticed; it is unquestioned, a given. Consider less impressionable imagery and less impactful verbs.

*A mom plans the family schedule.*  
*A widow selects a casket.* The schedule and the casket look different based on the plans or selections made. Events take place that would not have otherwise been orchestrated. With pricey ornamentation or simple embellishments, a casket contains a deceased body (also a former container) that returns to the ground. The object is changed by being chosen. But the relationship between words can quickly become violent when both the subject and object are human entities. Violence involves the intention to harm. The relationship can become grace when one gives and the other receives. A pause for consent, or agency for the object or the acted upon, is not part of the template of understanding for the elementary use of language. The relationship can become muddled and confused when there is an opportunity for the interaction of will. The simple

becomes complex. After all, to give is to receive. For every call, there is an opening for a response.

Lars von Trier's film, *Dogville*, explores the dynamic between host and guest to illustrate the innate and insidious conditions in the relationship. It is a picture of the classic have and have-not scenario when the have-not enters the space of the have. *Host*, or *hostess*, has a positive connotation of politeness and hospitality, one who opens up their home and resources. However, politeness is not synonymous with innocence or naivety and bears an undertone of agenda and design. Politeness is instilled through training or repetition of desired behavior.

The parents are the ones that are praised when a child is polite. The person giving the compliment to the child for exhibited manners will typically look up and around to meet the eyes of the child's parent to acknowledge their indoctrination. They may even affirm to the parents that they are "doing a great job" raising the child to encourage behavior reinforcement. Other adults in the room know that it is not the child's doing but the result of the child continually being acted upon. As the object of training, the child has been shaped into obedience. A child of a certain age in December will offer to clean every room in the house to avoid coal in a stocking. The politeness is not innate within them; it is an exhibit. The power of reciprocity is ingrained early, or else it is natural to the point that a baby will reciprocate as soon as

possible. Babies love to feed their moms, and moms know better than to refuse.

In likeness, a host trains and tames the guest. The arrangements a hostess of a party or gathering makes for a guest are exact, as stated – arrangements. Conditions are attached. Nothing is unplanned. There is an implicit contract. "It seems natural to offer hospitality on the condition that the guest never offers hostility to the host; that the guest always remembers that, while he may make himself at home, he is not truly at home" (Atkinson, 2005). It is signed the moment the guest steps over the threshold, across the boundary from public to private space. The hostess is in control; she can "get off" on allowing others into her home by savoring the superiority achieved through the position. The hostess commands the role of the giver, the provider. "Of course, there is always the possibility that the generous host is, in fact, a monster, who offers hospitality only to make a meal for the guest" (Atkinson, 2005). While preparing food, doing laundry, making beds, and cleaning the house for her guest, she can add it up and know these are precisely the debts owed back to her, plus interest. She can incur as she disperses.

Her temporary loss will be a long-term gain, like one of those paycheck advance shops with exorbitant interest. This is not to say that every host is scheming, but the terms and conditions of reciprocity and calculation that runs along with charity are of the human flesh. It is highly human to be aware of what has been given and what has been received or returned. There is an opportunity for the guest to intuit the potential moral arrogance of their host and discover the same tactic may be adopted for their exploitation. Often the genius in overcoming a helpless situation is to perceive that the obstacle is the way. The disposition of moral arrogance allows condescension, as stated by the father to his daughter Grace at the end of *Dogville*. As Atkinson (2005) insists, guest Grace has become, for the host town of Dogville, a "consumable thing" by the end of the film. Atkinson clarifies that to use Grace "is to consume her, to enjoy her as property or object – to use her completely, as it were until nothing remains." Atkinson specifies that precisely the conditions of hospitality have allowed monstrous consumption. With this context, that through grace she has allowed herself to be reduced and degraded, Grace's father reprimands her with the following. "My God! Can't you see how condescending you are when you say that? You have this preconceived notion that nobody – listen – nobody can possibly attain the same high ethical standards as you, so you exonerate them. I cannot – I cannot think of anything more arrogant than that. You, my child, my dear child, forgive others with excuses that you would never in the world permit for yourself." These lines shock as the audience works to catch up mentally and experience gratification in the climax as

all intentions are explicit and all internal questions answered. In *Dogville*, Grace is the guest, not the host. To maintain moral arrogance is the only way to remain in or regain some control even while being consumed, to consume while being consumed. Perhaps, in a way, she prepares herself as poison to be served to her host.

If a person cannot physically or socially look down on another person due to the nature of the relationship or circumstances, the only position of power left to capture is that which is intrinsic. "By the facade the thing which keeps its secret is exposed enclosed in its monumental essence and in its myth, in which it gleams like a splendor but does not deliver itself. It captivates by its grace as by magic, but does not reveal itself" (Lévinas, 1969). The display of grace is captivating. As smoke and mirrors direct the eye elsewhere while the trick's practicalities are

Suppose a person resigns to take a beating, recognizes oneself as forever other, or otherwise submits or admits a loss. Lévinas describes that, in utter otherness, "Total alterity, in which a being does not refer to enjoyment and presents itself out of itself, does not shine forth in the form by which things are given to us, for beneath form things conceal themselves" (1969).

**ARTICLE BY: HOLLAND TURNER**





# MARJORIE “MIDGE” WOOD: THE IRRELEVANCE OF THE FEMALE SPECTATOR IN HITCHCOCK’S VERTIGO

In her well-known essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” Laura Mulvey claims that when it comes to narrative cinema, men fill the role of an active watcher of the object of his desire: “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (5). A film on male obsession and infatuation with feminine appearances, *Vertigo* (1958) seems a by-the-book example of this claim. The film exemplifies many themes discussed in Mulvey’s essay such as man as scopophilic voyeur and woman as image to be molded to male desire. However, there is one character in the film who sticks out like a sore thumb. Midge acts as a cautionary tale to female spectators in Classical Hollywood narrative cinema. Though she plays an important supporting role in the first half of the narrative, her refusal to succumb to the traditional female roles in the cinematic apparatus ultimately leads to her cruel recharacterization and forceful removal from relevance.

Midge breaks the mold of femininity in cinema in a way that brings Hitchcock’s development of her character to question. The portrayal of a well-rounded, strong, independent woman who stands out from societal expectations could be interpreted as a feminist adaptation of the character. However, there is a cruelty in Hitchcock’s attention to detail that depicts all of the ways Midge is rejected by Scotty and the film’s body as a whole. Choosing not to directly represent Midge in either of these categories shows an intentional swaying of gender narratives in cinema, but the changes ultimately amount to nothing, making Midge look useless overall. While Hitchcock is not responsible for the social structures that shame female personalities like Midge, he intentionally plays into the “outsider-ness” that follows female agency. Her sudden exit from the film at the halfway point reflects that there is not a place for Midge’s role in the film and potentially society as a whole.

Because the narrative of *Vertigo* is centered around a male’s obsession with the female appearance, Midge is often left out of scholarly discussion in favor of a deeper analysis of the passive/female characters. Most essays written on the film, including Mulvey’s piece, tend to focus solely on the romantic leads of the film and neglect Barbara Geddes’ Midge. A potential reason for this Midge erasure could be because she lacks what Mulvey connotes as to-be-looked-at-ness. Midge could be swept under the rug because she fails to hold viewers’ attention as strongly as the women on display.

While Madeleine and Judy act as filmic femininity in their purest form, a blank page to be written by the male character, Midge resists conformation. Scottie and Midge seem to clash in terms of their exhibition of masculine traits. Scottie, though the “active/male” within the film, possesses a few qualities that weaken his ability to fulfill the role of the strong male character who conquers his dreams and desires. The tension Midge brings to Scottie’s storyline is apparent from her first scene in the film. They are very close friends that were once engaged in college until Midge broke it off. The significance of Midge being the one to end the relationship lends itself to Midge being a dominant figure in the relationship and Scottie being on the receiving end of her agency. In addition to the background information of the characters’ reversed power narrative, Scottie’s trauma from the incident that left him with acrophobia, his lack of a full-time job, and the naivete that allowed him to fall for the Elster’s murder plot cause audiences to question his strength in the dominant male role. Midge on the other hand is strong, independent, makes her own money with a full time job designing brassiers, is bold with her thoughts and confidently questions the happenings of the murder-plot while Scottie blindly plays along. Midge’s powerful identity acts as a foil for Scottie’s weaknesses and, in several ways, emasculates him.

Midge disrupts the visual pleasure of the film by not adapting to fully fit active/male or passive/female. Her disruption to the visual pleasure is multifaceted as it is in part due to her actions and identity as well as her physical appearance. Midge does not look the type of the traditional Hollywood love interest. As the physical appeal of the feminine character is so essential to her importance in film, Midge’s character design is certainly not that of a leading lady. She has short hair, her posture is far too comfortable, and to bridge the gap between her undesirably observant character traits and undesirable physical appearance, she wears glasses. The mere presence of her glasses symbolizes to viewers that she has more dimension and desire than the more physically attractive, short-sighted love interests of Madeleine and Judy. Her glasses distance her from the receiver of the look and instead make her a perpetrator of the look. In a film driven by the importance of Scottie’s obsession with looking, Midge’s character design lending to active spectatorship is an intentional choice to separate Midge from potential romantic assumptions and contrast Scottie’s observational skills.

Hitchcock uses lighting, wardrobe, and set design to elaborate on the contrast of femininity between Midge and the passive/female characters, adding to an underlying sense that she does not belong. *Vertigo* is famous for its color symbolism as it utilizes green to emphasize Madeleine (and Judy) and red to symbolize danger for Scottie. Of course, color theory tells us that red and green are opposites on the color wheel and in the film. Madeleine represents what is unachievable for Midge so long as she keeps her glasses, bland wardrobe, and independence. One of the most unassuming aspects of Midge’s character design that ties together her undesirable physical appearance and the undesirable aspects of her observant behavior is the color of her glasses. Though other aspects of her wardrobe change, the danger in her active glance is ever-present with her red glasses. Perhaps a stroke of genius that characterizes Midge as an outlier to the feminine role in the film happens one hour, seven minutes, and forty-nine seconds into the film when Midge informs Scottie that she has rediscovered her love of painting and reveals a self portrait. When Midge paints herself as Carlotta, she is imposing herself on the image of a woman who is craved visually. In the shot, the painting itself is not very well lit. The blues and shadows merge together, the background is unfinished, and Carlotta-Midge’s glasses stick out like a sore thumb. Midge’s figure sitting beside the painting is equally lackluster. Her pants, hair, and skin still seem to melt into the background while her red top and glasses take control of the screen. With the film already associating the color red with danger, Midge’s wardrobe is a direct threat to Scottie as perpetrator of the image. Despite reducing herself to an icon like the other women in the film, Midge as a painter is yet another threat to the male gaze. Though Hitchcock allows Midge to fashion herself as an image, he does so in a way that undermines and offends the active/male lead. Midge’s offering of transformation is not like the offerings of Judy and Madeleine; it is one painting that she crafted and polished to her own interpretation of what she thinks he likes. It is worth noting that, even in her idealized reality of being Scottie’s obsession, she paints herself with red glasses. Her persistence to see and take an active role transcends her willingness to transform to Scottie’s desires, therefore making her undesirable to him as she is not fully customizable.

In this way, Midge’s red glasses are a tragic symbol of her inability to see how she is failing to succumb to her role as object of desire. The red glasses in the painting are more than a funny quirk; they are Hitchcock’s secret “tell” to the audience that it is Midge’s gaze that is dangerous and undesirable. Even though she thought she was doing right by objectifying herself and catering to Scottie’s preferences, she could not see that her role as creator of the female image clashes with Scottie’s desire to be the painter of desire.

After failing to properly transform into the narrative cinema binary, Midge accepts her irrelevance to Scottie, and to the plot, and exits the story. Her leaving is symbolic in that it shows the death of the female spectator’s relevance in film. Unable to objectify herself, she is filtered out of the narrative. Midge’s exit ninety minutes into the film is dark and backlit. For once, Midge stands out from the background as opposed to blending in, yet due to the lighting and the shot facing her back, she stands out merely as a silhouette, a shell of a person unable to be defined by any small or distinctive traits. As she approaches the end of the hallway, her figure gets smaller, darker, and harder to identify. As she reaches the end, the screen fades to black and she is engulfed into the darkness of irrelevance. As punishment for being maladaptive, the film swallows her up.

I cannot help but question the larger implications of Midge’s character, if any. Hitchcock pushes for viewers to notice her as a spectator, yet the things that make her different from the other female characters do not add up to anything significant. I question the purpose of adding in a character like Midge and filling her with the potential to break gender-stereotypes only to pull the rug out from under her at the halfway point by forcing her into a maternal identity and, subsequently, irrelevance. Hitchcock’s attention to detail in portraying her as a spectator seems undeniably intentional, but there is no closure for her character. Hitchcock is famous for the humiliation and degradation of female characters as seen in many of his films; the destruction of Judy’s identity in *Vertigo* perhaps being the most extreme in his film catalog. Maybe there are larger social implications in establishing a strong female character, giving her bread crumbs of importance, and then reducing her to a rejected romantic

interest.

Did Midge even stand a chance at making an impact? The answer may be hidden in her name. Names in *Vertigo*, like colors, are very representative of deeper themes within the film. Characters like Scottie hold multiple names throughout the film as they wear different hats and perform different roles in the narrative. Much like Scottie’s full name is established as John Ferguson, Midge’s full name is Marjorie Wood. The nickname is a telling description of Midge’s significance in the film. According to The Oxford English Dictionary, a “midge” is “A small insect resembling a gnat.” Other associations with the name are “biting midge,” a minute fly whose bodies and roles are differentiated by gender. While a male midge fly is easily seen and does not bite, a female midge fly is small and only expands and takes on a reddish brown color as it draws in blood while feeding. The reduction of Marjorie Wood to that of a blood sucking gnat, Midge, is a way of putting the film’s opinion of her character front and center. Midge never stood a chance at making a monumental mark on the film, let alone in society as a whole. Her character seems no more than a small and pesky bug, swarming around the film searching for something to latch on to for expansion. Unfortunately, the film, much like Scottie, does not allow for her growth and swats her away, maybe even squishing her between its fingers, before moving on to the next plotpoint and forgetting her altogether.

**ARTICLE BY: VICTORIA JACKSON**



# THE MOTHERLY FUNCTIONS OF MIDGE AND MARGO

Many parallels have been drawn between the work of David Fincher and Hitchcock but the notion was first introduced to me through a talk from Dr. Michele Schreiber in November 2023. Schreiber is interested in examining Fincher's work as a whole, but this lecture was concerned particularly with his 2014 film *Gone Girl* and its functions as a cautionary tale in 21st-century contexts. In a very brief but pointed comparison, Schreiber presented *Vertigo's* Madeline Elster/Judy Barton as a precursor to *Gone Girl's* Amy Dunn. Schreiber argues that these two central characters are women who 'shape-shift' - Judy at the behest of men and Amy as a means to manipulate men. But they are not the only women in their respective stories, which is worth exploring. *Vertigo's* Midge and *Gone Girl's* Margo are two reasonable, honest, and caring women who ground their film narratives in concrete reality, yet are nearly entirely neglected by scholars in discussions about the films. Neither Midge nor Margo function as erotic objects for the male protagonist in their films, but the audience may, creating a mother-friend character tainted by the scopophilic gaze. This is undeniably Freudian and allows for a nuanced elaboration on Laura Mulvey's theory of the 'woman as object'.

In Mulvey's 1975 essay on visual pleasure, she writes that "Traditionally, the woman displayed [on film] has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium," (p. 63). This distinction between in-screen and in-auditorium is the space in which the mother-

friend resides. In fact, even if the narrative features no romantic plotline between mother-friend and male protagonist, the potential of eroticism is still present for the audience. In the case of Midge (portrayed by Barbara Bel Geddes), we learn that she was previously engaged to the main character Scottie, creating a history of eroticism for her character, despite the present platonic nature of her character. In *Gone Girl*, this shifts slightly because the mother-friend is Margo (portrayed by Carrie Coon), Nick Dunn's twin sister. There is no romantic tension between the siblings, but gossip outlets in the film narrative insinuate that exact thing, creating an 'in' for the audience to eroticize Margo as they choose.

While studies on *Vertigo* have been heavily focused on the dynamic of Scottie and Madeline/Judy, Midge seems to me to be just as fascinating, particularly when considering the origins of her character. The original 1954 novel by Boileau-Narcejac that Hitchcock adapted into the iconic 1958 film featured no Midge character at all. This is where screenwriter Samuel Taylor came in. In a transcribed talk given by Taylor in 1986 (, he claimed that Midge was entirely his creation and came out of a need to humanize the character of Scottie.

I told [Hitchcock] immediately that I would have to invent a character who would bring Scottie into the world, establish for him an ordinary life, make it obvious that he's an ordinary man. So I invented Midge ... Having made Midge, the whole thing fell into place, and if you think about the picture, you'll find that it wouldn't work well without her. It wouldn't be believable. (Taylor 288-289)

It is interesting to note that even in this instance, the woman is

operating to the benefit of the man and/or his arc. Midge's ties to reality, substance, and life are essential in grounding the first half of the film, and her departure from the screen is mirrored by the descent into madness that follows in the second half. Still, Midge serves as a touchstone for the Classical Hollywood audience. Her presence is one of the few aspects of the film that is wholly unambiguous - she lacks all the mystique of Madeline, providing something concrete for the audience to cling to. Despite all this, Midge is one of the more subdued aspects of *Vertigo*, even bordering on forgettable, given her early narrative exit.

The same can be said about the character of Margo Dunn due to the minimal impact she has on the major narrative arc between Nick and Amy. She is observant, critical, and yet rarely heeded by Nick during the disappearance. Her presence as a voice of reason creates the same audience reliance on Margo that we see with Midge as a means to navigate the complex narratives being sown. We also see the same departure from the lives of our central characters, with the conclusion of *Gone Girl* alienating her from the life of her brother. Upon learning that Amy has conceived Nick's child, we are given one last scene with Margo (2:22:40-2:23:30) in which she realizes, distraught, "You want to stay... You want to stay with [Amy]. You're breaking my heart." Nick replies, "Go, you're my voice of reason. I need you with me on this," begging her patience one final time. "Of course, I'm with you... I was with you before we were even born,"

Margo responds, reaffirming the bond they share as twins. The weight of this scene is overshadowed as Nick and Amy's back-and-forth manipulations culminate in the announcement of Amy's pregnancy on television, at which point any rationality provided by Margo ultimately dissipates. Her efforts to help Nick and correct the narrative are proven useless.

Returning to Mulvey, we must question whether her analysis can accommodate this function of woman as "voice of reason." On the surface, it seems flattering to depict women as intelligent, observant individuals who can see what men cannot, but the reality is far more nuanced. Moving beyond woman as an object, Mulvey provides the 'woman as icon.' "Ultimately, the meaning of woman is sexual difference, the visually ascertainable absence of a penis, the material evidence on which is based the castration complex," Mulvey writes, applying the Freudian theory of castration anxiety to the objectification of women (65). The presence of woman implies the threat of castration to which men respond by either investigating or fetishizing her in order to 'demystify' that which makes her different from man. One avenue this may take is to maternalize the woman, which is in line with Freud's idea of penis envy (in which a woman is fulfilled by bearing a son). This is precisely what we see manifested in the maternal functions of Midge and Margo.

Though they both inhabit this maternal role, it is clear from the first scene with Midge and Scottie that her mothering is a staple of their friendship, while Margo is pushed into the role through the narrative circumstances. Midge is introduced in the second scene of the film (5:00-11:20), immediately following the chase showing how Scottie developed acrophobia. She speaks in a sweet, coddling tone as Scottie shares his worries about finding a new job, making no eye contact with him until his mention of the death of his partner in the scene prior. "It wasn't your fault," she tells him firmly. Scottie is clearly dependent on Midge for emotional support, though we never see him support her in return. It is this imbalance that makes it feel distinctly maternal. The mise-en-scène surrounding her also contributes to the desexualization of her character, at least in Scottie's perspective - Midge's occupation as a fashion undergarment illustrator strips her of sexual mystery. The eroticism exists until attention is brought to it, which harkens back to Mulvey's iconic statement of intent that "analysing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it." It is in this way that the character of Midge has no erotic pull on Scottie or the audience. In Charles Barr's book analyzing the film, he compares the lack of sensuality in Midge to the character Lisa from Hitchcock's

*Rear Window*, both of whom long for requited affection.

"[Lisa's] triumph was to actually insert herself into that exciting screen/fantasy narrative, by crossing over to participate. But she was the star, Grace Kelly, rather than a self-effacingly deglamorized supporting player; and when Midge, later, tries a comparable kind of cross-over, painting herself into a new version of the romantic portrait that fascinates Scottie, the result will be disaster." (pp. 53-54) The scene that Barr describes is the epitome of how Scottie maternalizes Midge, finding himself repulsed and offended by what her playful gesture insinuates (an idealized Midge). In that moment, Midge's role is cemented as a mother and caretaker, never again a lover.

As I mentioned before, Margo does not occupy a maternal role with Nick usually, as we see in the first scene with the siblings in their bar, The Bar. They make crude jokes and discuss Amy as they play a board game, which does a lot to establish the sibling dynamic - playful and mutually supportive. A clear shift happens 50 minutes into the film when Margo finds out that Nick has been having an affair with one of his students (fig 3). Her unwavering trust in him is broken and leads her to question his innocence and morality. Discovering Nick's lies creates an imbalance in their relationship that shifts into maternal responsibility on Margo's part. From that scene up until Nick makes his amends for his affair on television, we see Margo as highly critical of and reluctant to trust Nick until he successfully makes amends on television for the affair. She no longer occupies a maternal role, it seems, though whether this is because Nick no longer needs it or because he is beyond saving is unclear - contributing further to the uncertainty of the film's conclusion.

Despite the inconclusive endings to their stories, the characters of Midge and Margo have far more to contribute to the ongoing narrative than meets the eye. Their roles as secondary women on-screen make them fascinating points of study, particularly through the lens of Mulvey's complex work on visual pleasure. Though women in cinema may not all be blatant objects of sexual desire, they can be cheapened in other ways, reduced to shallow roles like that of the mother-friend. There is clear progress occurring if Margo Dunn is any indication, adding more dimension to her character than simply an indulgent maternal figure, as Midge is. The continued study of these secondary women characters is necessary if we want to approach film studies through a feminist lens. As much as depictions of women have improved, the mother-izing of women continues. By continuing to study and expand on theorists like Mulvey, we can begin to deconstruct the nuanced ways

in which cinema has exploited not only women but all marginalized groups. An intersectional approach is the only hope we have of ever achieving a cinema for the masses.

ARTICLE BY: CHLOE OWENS

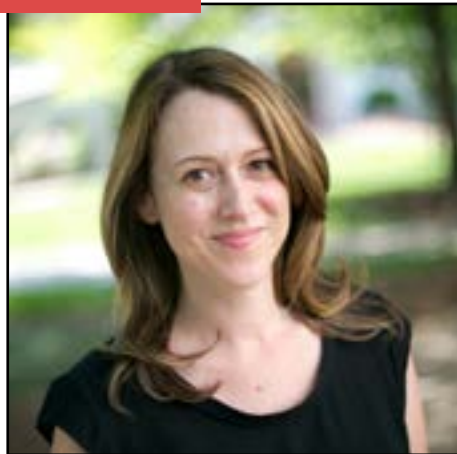




# MICHELE SCHREIBER

## A CLOSER LOOK AT *GONE GIRL* (2014) BY DAVID FINCHER

Brenna Curtis had the opportunity to talk with Michele Schreiber, author of the book *American Postfeminist Cinema: Women, Romance and Contemporary Culture (Traditions in American Cinema)*. Schreiber is a professor at Emory University and discussed her love for the movie *Gone Girl* and the director, David Fincher, to students here at Clemson. Brenna had the chance ask her a few questions about her thoughts on the film. And, watch out, spoilers ahead!



“THE UNIVERSE SEEMED TO BE TELLING ME THAT I NEEDED TO DIG DEEP INTO THE FILM,”

**B: What is the point of mentioning Amy’s past (Amazing Amy) for the context of the plot?**

M: It’s important to set up the fact that Amy’s parents have used her as a model for a fictional character, which has made her an object of public interest since she was a child. In a sense there have always been two of her. This is at the heart of how she can move in and out of different versions of herself so easily throughout the film.

**B: What sparked your interest in the film *Gone Girl*?**

M: I loved the novel *Gone Girl* and when I found out that David Fincher (about whose films I have previously written) was going to direct the adaptation, the universe seemed to be telling me that I needed to dig deep into the film.

**B: Is there a true antagonist in the film? Is it Nick, Amy, or another character? All of the above?**

M: Nick and Amy trade off being both protagonists and antagonists at different times in the movie. That’s what makes it such a compelling story.

**B: How would you describe Margo’s importance to the plot?**

M: Margo is the film’s stabilizing force and I interpret her cynical, comedic voice as being a stand-in for Flynn’s own voice. In a story focused on the perspectives of two characters (Nick and Amy) who oscillate between being somewhat likeable to flat out despicable, Margo is a necessary and relatable access point to “normalcy” and a voice of reason.

**B: Do you like Nick? Why or why not?**

M: At times, I do like Nick. As a Midwesterner myself who lived in New York City for some time, I do find some of his commentary on the cultural differences between the two geographic areas to be quite funny. We all know a guy like Nick. I think he is written to be universally recognizable.

**B: Do you like Amy? Why or why not?**

M: I don’t think Amy is ever presented as conventionally “likeable” but that’s kind of the point. I admire her resourcefulness.

**B: There seems to be two side: Team Nick and Team Amy. Whose team were you on initially? Are you still on their team?**

M: I switch between the two. Again, I think that’s by design.

**B: The plot line involving Amy getting robbed was a hard watch for me personally, even though I wanted to hate her! How did you feel about that scene in regards to Amy?**

M: It is hard to watch because you have seen her pull off a very difficult task in persuading everyone that she has been abducted and/or killed (spoiler!) It seems impossible that she can’t simply blend in and go undetected.

# SAM SOKOLOW

## A GLIMPSE INTO THE LIFE OF A PRODUCER

Brenna Curtis had the opportunity to talk with Sam Sokolow, a professor at Clemson University and two-time Emmy-nominated film and television producer, and asked some questions on his experiences working as an executive producer of *GENIUS*, a National Geographic series that features the life of prominent historical figures. In 2024, a new season of this series called *Genius: MLK/X*, highlighting the lives and stories of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcom X. Here, he tells us all about what it’s like to work as a producer.



“IT’S A LIFESTYLE AND NOT A JOB,”

sick. There’s always something to solve, deliver or push forward on one thing or another. And things take time. You have to be aggressive and patient at once. It’s a balance.

**B: You recently came to Clemson to become a professor. Why Clemson?**

S: My wife is from the upstate. I’ve always been super happy when we’re here. And teaching is true calling. Once we decided to move here the timing of everything just worked out perfectly. Dr. Smith had a lot to do with it. He was a great vision for world cinema and I wanted to be a meaningful part of it. It’s an amazing university and the sky’s the limit. I absolutely love it here.

**B: In your time here as a professor, what is something you learned from teaching?**

S: I learn every single time I walk into the classroom. The students I’ve worked with want to do this work and seeing their creativity spark and come to life is a great feeling. I’ve also almost figured out where to park on campus.

**B: When it comes to your show *Genius*, which actor did you enjoy working with the most?**

S: There are so many talented - and wonderful - actors that have been in the show but I’d have to say Geoffrey Rush, who played Einstein. We were in the same hotel in Prague and we had breakfast often. He’s a really affable and funny guy and his work is so ridiculously good. I’d always admired his work but now I admire the guy just as much.

**B: How did you develop the concept for *Genius*? Why that particular genre?**

S: I love history and always wanted to do something epic. My company had the film and TV rights to Walter Isaacson’s book about Einstein,

For years, the thought was a feature film. We’d even had a script written. But it wasn’t working. One day it hit me that the problem had literally been one of physics. His life didn’t fit into two hours. It needed ten hours. And the *Prestige* limited series genre had just popped with series like *Hatfields* and *McCoy’s*, *American Horror Story*, *Big Little Lies*. Everyone got behind the idea and I put all my energy in that direction and it worked.

**B: What are some future historical figures you would like to focus on in future seasons of *Genius*?**

S: It’s a puzzle. The person has to have changed the world, have a name everyone recognizes instantly like Picasso or Aretha, and have lived a life with enough drama to be good TV. Lately, I’ve been thinking about Steve Jobs. I just read a book about Charles Darwin that sparked some ideas. Ruth Bader Ginsburg is a hero of mine. Hedy Lamarr, was a genius and her life is set against WWII and old Hollywood and she was married seven times - but not everyone knows ‘Hedy’. It’s tricky.

**B: Out of all four seasons of *Genius*, which was your favorite (whether it be based on the plot seen or the work that went into it unseen)**

S: My favorite one is always the next one, whatever that ends up being. I love the work, itself, the most of all.

**B: Are there any other plans, whether it be a movie or another TV series, on the horizon for you in the film industry?**

M: S: I’m actually pitching a new TV series I’ve been developing for a while this coming week. Like I said, It’s a lifestyle.



# A Year in Reviews...

Reel Dialogue meets once every week for movie viewings that are open to all students. This year, we've watched almost 30 movies covering a variety of genres! Here are some of the reviews written about a couple of the movies that we've watched. Watch out! There may be spoilers ahead!

## A Blast From the Past

*Back to the Future* (1986) dir. Robert Zemeckis

*Back to the Future* was stylish then and it's stylish now. Its atmosphere is one of a kind and there's no better way to kick off the start of Reel Dialogue's 2023/24 school year with this classic from Robert Zemeckis.

One of the many things I love about this movie is how simple they make the time traveling in it. Unlike movies like *Avengers: Endgame*, the audience doesn't have to think too hard about all of the consequences of time traveling. Sure, Doc mentions a few things here and there and those consequences are clearly seen in action multiple times such as Marty and his siblings disappearing from the picture, George McFly being rich while Biff waxes his car, and so on. However, it's all so straightforward and I don't have to wrap my mind around trying to think about the science or logistics behind it.

The one thing that mostly throws people off from this movie is the cringe inducing incest plot. It definitely just feels yucky as young Lorraine makes many romantic moves on Marty not knowing he's her own son. However, the movie really handles the situation well because it's obviously supposed to be weird and they make sure not to overdo it.

Another awesome thing about this movie is how quotable it is with all of its iconic lines, specifically that of Doc Brown. Christopher Lloyd does an amazing job at capturing the eccentric inventor of time travel and the audience can't help but love his character and his excitement for science. Michael J Fox and Christopher Lloyd have such a great dynamic between them both on and off screen and I always find myself wanting to know more about how these two, who are so drastically different, became such great friends.

I think this movie is and always will be awesome and I can always rely on it to cheer me up or just to have as a fun watch.

**Review By: Meg Davy**



## The Art of Nonsense

*Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) dir. Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones

For our fantasy genre, we watched the classic *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Personally, I've loved this movie since the first time I watched it with my dad. I remember him cracking up at the French guy and all of his jokes and insults. What's unique about this movie's humor is how much of it is just complete nonsense. One scene that always comes to mind when I think of *Monty Python* is the killer rabbit just flying around and biting everyone and they're all freaking out and trying to kill it. It's completely ridiculous! But that's the point! I love how self aware this movie is. The description of the movie on letterboxd even says "And now! At last! Another film completely different from some of the other films which aren't quite the same as this one is."

My review for this movie was something along the lines of how it seems like every scene was written individually by different people and then strung together to result in a silly movie. The movie is just as creative as it is silly because I think it's hard to use this kind of ridiculous, slapstick humor in movies and actually pull it off well which I believe *Monty Python* does. I really like a lot of the jokes throughout the movie but I think, if I had to choose, one of my favorite long running jokes is them galloping with their servants using coconuts to mimic horse hooves. I mean, come on, that's just too good not to like and the actors had to be committed as well because I'd probably be laughing the whole time if I had to do that.

There were a good few laughs during this viewing and maybe a bit of confusion thrown in there, but when is it not confusing when watching any of the *Monty Python* movies?

**Review By: Meg Davy**



## Artistic Horror

*The Shining* (1980) dir. Stanley Kubrick

*The Shining* by Stanley Kubrick is definitely a very unique genre of psychological thrillers. Through slow and drawn out scenes, Kubrick keeps us on our seats wondering where the next scene will lead. However, I will say I found myself thinking multiple times just how slow it is and if it's truly necessary to make it that slow. The most prominent example I can think of from the watch is the scene where Danny writes the famous "Redrum" on the door with lipstick. During the whole scene all I could think was "This kid could not walk ANY slower right now!" Even with this, though, this is definitely still at least a top 10 horror movie for me personally.

One thing we mentioned in our discussion about this movie is how much the score plays into the psychological horror. In my opinion, this movie would not be scary whatsoever without the score. The switch up between the shrilling sound to complete silence really gives a chilling atmosphere to the movie.

Lastly, the cinematography in this movie definitely stands out a lot more compared to other horror movies and all genres of movies in general. For me, the only scenes where I feel like hiding behind my hands are when Danny is riding around the hotel on his tricycle simply because of the movement and angle of the camera. The quick whips around the corners and the camera being almost at the height of Danny just makes me scared for what might show up around the next corner. Another scene that I find more scary than most is when Jack is chasing Danny throughout the maze because of the lighting and how it just barely illuminates the maze enough to where we see more of just the silhouette of Jack and his ax.

*The Shining* is definitely proof that jump scares are not needed to make a scary movie. And, even if you don't find it all that scary, it is still easy to appreciate the idea and craft behind it.

**Review By: Meg Davy**



## A Heart Racing Race

*Ford v Ferrari* (2019) dir. James Mangold

At first, my friends and I were a little leery of how much we would enjoy *Ford v Ferrari* since none of us are big car people, so we weren't too sure on how well we'd be in tune to it. Plus, the two and a half hour run time was a little daunting to see. However, I think I can speak for my friends as well when I say this was an amazing movie. We were very enthralled with the story line and were constantly on the edge of our seats on the ending.

So, the build up to the final race was great because we got to grow close with Carroll Shelby, played by Matt Damon, and especially Ken Miles, played by Christian Bale. I think it's also important to mention how amazing of a job Christian Bale did in his role for this movie because he really was one of the biggest reasons I loved this movie because he brought so much life to portraying Ken Miles. The banter between Ken and Carroll seemed so natural because of Bale and Damon's chemistry and it all just worked so well together, so there were a good few laughs from us throughout the movie. However, I will say there were some tears as well (both angry and sad) because we were just so shocked at the end. We all agreed that, yes although Ken Miles had his big turning moment at the end of the race where he finally decided to work with others rather than do his own thing and it fit the ending well, it was still upsetting to not see all of his hard work pay off to win the biggest race of his life!!!! The scene where everyone passes him and he looks up into the stadium to see Enzo Ferrari and his slight nod is a masterpiece, but an upsetting one. Now, I haven't really followed the real life story, but surely people also rushed to Ken Miles and congratulated him... right??

Well, we thought that Ken getting the win stolen from him could be the saddest thing in the movie, but then the last ten minutes happened (cue the sad tears). Even though this is clearly based on a true story and we knew most of the people portrayed are most likely no longer with us today, it was a shock to see Ken die just months right after the big race. It seems bittersweet that, even though he died doing what he loved, he still only got to revel in his experience from the Le Mans race for just two months before his death.

I think it's safe to say that this movie exceeded our expectations and is proof that sports movies can and should be able to relate to audiences both well versed in that sport and those unfamiliar with the sport.

**Review By: Meg Davy**





# A Guide to Appreciating Life

*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) dir. Michel Gondry

I had no indication as to what was going to happen in this movie, and I only knew that it is one of Jim Carrey’s more respected roles in a more serious manner and that it was sad. can say the one thing I didn’t expect was the sci-fi aspect to the film where people can completely erase the memories of another from their mind. Introducing this type of plot to a romance movie of all things definitely sounds like it has so much room to go wrong, but director Michel Gondry expertly puts a unique twist on the typical romance drama through a distortion in the movie’s storytelling and timeline, especially through its cinematography.

It’s really interesting to see how different scenes fall apart as Joel goes through the process of getting his memories of Clementine erased. For example, with the final scene featuring the final memory of Clementine from Joel’s perspective where the beach house is slowly falling apart and filling with sand as it disappears. Other scenes with other characters like the doctor and his group who help him erase people’s memories have almost disturbing themes to them as they become faceless or distorted, they’re voices are muffled, and not to mention the absolutely terrifying upside down eyed face of Elijah Wood (I mean of all actors, they choose the guy with the biggest, brightest, wildest eyes to flip upside down on his face). They are really strong representations of both the figurative and literal destruction of what it means to completely erase someone from your memory. Just as Joel originally thought, many people may think it seems like a great idea to be able to erase someone from your memories, but as the process went on, Joel realized it would be better to live with painful memories than never have lived them before. I think this goes along with the understanding that if you want to erase the painful memories, you have to erase the good ones too. It returns to the simple concept that you can’t have something that is good without having something bad as a precedent to compare it to.

Ultimately, this movie was not what I was thinking at all, but I enjoyed it a lot nonetheless. It beautifully captures what it means to be in a relationship and connected with someone. In my opinion, I think this movie is a good watch for when you’re feeling down or think life is bad because it makes you realize how precious life is, even the bad parts.

By: Meg Davy

## The Prestige: Nolan’s Foray Into Magic and Madness

*The Prestige* (2006) dir. Chistopher Nolan

With his recent box-office domination and Academy Award wins for *Oppenheimer*, Christopher Nolan’s presence within the industry shines bigger and brighter than ever. While film fans have waxed poetic on Nolan’s revolutionary style of filmmaking for the past two decades, 2006’s *The Prestige* continues to be one of Nolan’s most overlooked and criminally underrated works. In *The Prestige*, Nolan spins a tale of ingenuity and revenge interwoven with threads of romance, historical commentary, and, yes, a little bit of magic. To expound more on the actual contents of the film would detract from the viewing experience (our own Reel Dialogue members marveled at the film’s deceptions and twists), but, needless to say, with Nolan’s brilliant direction and powerhouse performances from all-star cast including Christian Bale, Hugh Jackman, Scarlett Johansson, and Michael Caine, *The Prestige* is undoubtedly a must-watch.

By: Maggie Rosinski



## Taking Stunt Work to a New Level

*John Wick* (2014) dir. Chad Stahelski

What can I say about *John Wick* besides the fact that it is the most awesome action movie series there is!! I am personally such a huge fan of the *John Wick* movies and I don’t think I can ever get tired of them. The story of John Wick is one of tragedy as he can never seem to find his way out from his haunted past of being an elite assassin. One thing that makes these movies so special is its profound stunt work that is changing the game in the stunt genre for movies.

Spoiler!! To start, nobody at this meeting besides myself had seen *John Wick* and nobody knew what was coming with his new puppy that his recently deceased wife gifted him as her last goodbye. However, we all agreed that a movie centered around a revenge story for the death of a puppy is very logical! There is never a dull moment as John Wick makes his way through some of the most dangerous assassins in the underground world of New York, and we see a lot of interesting kills along the way. This is where that profound stunt work comes into play.

The fight style of John Wick is really unique and has been labeled under “gun fu” which combines various types of martial arts and marksmanship. This type of fighting is seen throughout many movies, but I think John Wick does it best. Some of my favorite parts are when John Wick runs out of bullets so he just throws the gun at his attacker. I mean what else can be more entertaining! In reality, John Wick’s fight scenes are so good to watch because of the amount of work the actor, Keanu Reeves, had to put in to learn those moves. It is a pretty generally agreed upon fact that Keanu Reeves himself is known as Hollywood’s best and most genuine celebrity and seeing his dedication to making these films is very refreshing. He does many of his own stunts which really adds to the quality of the movies as well.

All in all, I will always stand by the John Wick films and will find myself rewatching them very often, especially with friends. It’s proof that movies centered around stunt work can be amazing forms of media!

By: Meg Davy



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