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It's a Nice Day for a White Wedding
Marriage, pop-culture, and nostalgia in The Wedding Singer and Romy and Michele's High School Reunion

By Molly Davis

It's like the 90s never happened."

Imagine for a minute that we are still in the '80s. Would we still be listening to Culture Club and wondering what the deal was with Boy George? Would turquoise and fuchsia still be standard prom dress colors, complemented by dates sporting mullets? Scary. Bed hair jokes aside, we see that the 90s also created an interest in nostalgia, particularly a fondness for the '80s, shown through '80s generation films like The Wedding Singer and 200 Cigarettes, and Flashback films like Grosse Point Blank and Romy and Michele's High School Reunion. These films take the viewer back to a more "innocent and fun-loving era," which produced bands like Wham!, Spandau Ballet, and Bananarama; fashions like leg warmers, parachute pants, and sequined gloves; and classic TV shows like Bosom Buddies, Family Ties, and The Facts of Life. This "innocent and fun-loving" period is nostalgic because it implies that the '80s were a time for happiness and stability, a stability that is implemented by marriage and the "nuclear family." However, a rising divorce rate in America since the 80s suggests that the ideal relationships in films such as The Wedding Singer and Romy and Michele's High School Reunion are merely visions of what we would like marriage and the nuclear family to be.

"Say hi to your brother Tito!"

One can think of the 1988 film The Wedding Singer as one big ad for the 1980s, complete with references to Michael Jackson, Madonna, Donnie Don's, and Dallas. Besides glorifying the colorfulness that the '80s exuded, The Wedding Singer addresses issues of "family values," suburbia, and corporate materialism. The film stars the usually banal Adam Sandler as Robbie Hart, a failed hair-band-vocalist turned wedding singer who more than lives up to his last name. After being left at the altar by his spandex-loving fiancée fiancée, he falls in love with Julia Sullivan, played by the '80s' speaker's child, Drew Barrymore. Julia is about to marry the quintessential suburban hair-guy, a Miami Vice wannabe with a big city corporate job. The story is predictable; of course Julia and Robbie end up together, fortunate enough to have Steve Buscemi as their wedding singer. But like any good story, it's all about how they reach their happy ending. A scene in an ice cream parlor asserts the film's dream of the '80s as Robbie and Julia describe the perfect mate as someone they can "grow old with." Besides expressing their emotional "chemistry," this conversation tells the viewer that these characters think of their marriages as a life-long commitment, and the topic of divorce never seems to come up.

"We're living in a material world and I am a material girl. Or boy."

The Wedding Singer is a saccharinly sweet film whose main point is that contrary to popular 90s belief, marriage isn't an institution in decay. In The Wedding Singer, marriage is in fact the key to a happy life, at least according to how the film wants us to remember the '80s. All Robbie really knows and wants is marriage, along with a two-car garage, and a few kids: the supposed dream of the '80s. His fiancée Linda, on the other hand, wants glitter and glamour, and most importantly, to get out of Ridgefield, their idealized 80s suburban town. She should talk to Glenn, Julia's fiancé, who is only concerned with "possessions, fancy cars, CD players" and his Wall Street job. Neither Linda nor Glenn are suited for the suburban dreams of marriage that The Wedding Singer portrays because they are concerned with materialism, which turns out to be the reality of the '80s. If Robbie and Julia represent the myth of the '80s, bound by their dreams to grow old together, then Glenn and Linda symbolize another aspect of the '80s—materialism and decadence.

"I thought high school was a blast."

While the scenes from the '80s are few in Romy and Michele's High School Reunion (1997), they are key because the '80s are the catalyst for their lives in the '90s. For example, Romy (Mira Sorvino) and Michele (Lisa Kudrow) embraced all the funky aspects of the '80s, like modeling their prom dresses after Madonna's fashions. They believe in the glitz and glamour of the big cities, just like Linda from The Wedding Singer, and they use that glitz to create shiny and colorful clothing and lifestyles for themselves, treating themselves to the sort of life that their hometown didn't offer. While black lace and dark roots lead to pastel mini-dresses and chunky heels, the dream of glamour and excitement from the '80s carries over to the '90s, not only in Romy and Michele's High School Reunion, but in other films, like Grosse Point Blank and Clueless. Even though the '90s were known for cynicism and "Generation X" anarchy (especially in films like Reality Bites and Mallrats), the '90s also hold a sort of wistfulness for the hollow myth of innocence in the 80s, and Romy and Michele's High School Reunion symbolizes this nostalgia through flashbacks, music, and the characters' memories of high school in the '80s.

"And all we really need is maybe, like, better jobs and boyfriends. Right?"

Romy and Michele's High School Reunion comments mostly on the '80s, even though it is set in the '90s. The main characters can't seem to escape the '80s: ten years later, all they think about is high school, their yearbooks, the outrageous fashions of the '80s, and the great music. In fact, they are hardly any '90s songs in the film. It's as though the film is entirely about Romy.
and Michele looking back on the '80s, especially since they haven’t really changed since they graduated. The plot is driven by Romy and Michele’s desire to impress their class at the reunion by dressing like “business women” and claiming they invented Post-its. The underlying goal, though, is to have boyfriends and successful jobs. And while Romy and Michele “get what they want” in the end: boyfriends and their own successful clothing store (even selling '90s pop-culture wear to the cynical Heather), their good fortune is due to Sandy, Michele’s knight in shining armor. The film seems to make the comment that the right match is the key to happiness, a leftover ideal from the perfect '80s relationship.

“You’re gonna love him, and everything’s gonna be wonderful.”

Not only have the '80s come and gone, but so have the '90s, giving us a whole new decade to parody in years to come. It may be strange that Hollywood chooses to look back on a decade that so recently passed, but it makes sense. After all, the children of the '80s are coming of age and creating their own paths, using both the '80s and '90s as a guide to what they want out of life, comparing the myth of the ideal marriage to the actual marriage, deciding what sort of family life seems to work best. While The Wedding Singer and Romy and Michele’s High School Reunion expose the real 80s as a much less innocent decade, especially with allusions to a materialistic world, the birth of corporate take-over and the creation of “family values,” the films also create these idealistic myths themselves. Part of the success of these myths demands that the viewer laugh along with them and thus remember the '80s.
HONG KONG (INTER)ACTION

Exploring body and movement as conversation.

By Robert Eastley

When watching action films, viewers are often looking for just that: action. They are often unaware of the fact that they are being short-changed when it comes to physical interaction. Physical interaction is important in film because it retains all of the possibilities for expression that dialogue does. This becomes apparent when watching a common Hong Kong Action fight scene, which can be seen as the epitome of physical discourse between characters. The importance of Hong Kong fight scenes is due to the fact that they can be dissected in the same way a verbal conversation can. They can further be broken down and categorized, the same way dialogue can be comedic, or argumentative. This article will confront how and why physical interaction is important and how it has been over looked in American films.

Take, for example, two characters talking. Most conversation is a verbal interaction between characters in which one character directs a comment or question towards another. There is usually a response or answer to this question/comment. At its very simplest, this is a conversation in a film. Of course, at this level, one would receive little mental gratification, so good films usually contain complicated dialogue, which unfolds in (hopefully) intricate and engrossing film.

A fight scene is similar. Physical interaction should be understood as a form of dialogue between two or more people. A punch is a question, and a block is an answer, which is soon followed by more questions and answers. When the question asked is always answered the same, or if a question is asked and the answer ends the conversation, an audience is usually bored at best. American audiences are familiar with this type of physical conversation. For example, Chuck Norris’s roundhouse kick, Steven Segal’s backhand punch, and Jean Claude Van Damme’s high sidekick dominate their fight scenes, rendering them one-dimensional. The purveyors of Hong Kong cinema have not overlooked physical interaction though. Within them we find fight choreographers whose fathers spent their whole lives perfecting their art and whose children continue their work to this day. This depth of understanding of physical interaction is what allows these choreographers to inscribe dialogue and therefore emotional complexity into a fight scene.

Since 1985 we have seen an influx of Hong Kong cinema and Hong Kong cinema fight scenes into American mainstream film. Examples of this are Jackie Chan films, Jet Li films (although America has yet to realize his full potential), The Matrix, Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, Charlie’s Angels, and so forth. As you may notice, in these films the fight scenes go beyond simple physical dialogue and are more precisely a conversation that leads us places in the narrative. A character may punch but his other opponent may respond by stepping into the aggressive character’s personal space, rendering his or her punch useless (seeing that he or she cannot wind up to punch). The person who threw the punch may respond with a bear hug to subdue the other’s arms and legs leaving him or her open to gouging by the chin. This could go on endlessly.
because much like dialogue, a fight scene can have many levels as it progresses, creating and solving problems in the story until its end or resolution.

At its most basic level fight scene dialogue is strategic, as is a conversation to a lesser extent. A conversation in a film shows us a character's ability to understand and adapt to the situation as it develops. Surprising dialogue is often pleasing for the viewer, especially if it changes the dynamic between the characters. This is only the most fundamental level; we must also take into account that a fight scene can be romantic, angry, impassioned, and so forth, just as a conversation can be romantic, angry, impassioned and so forth. For our purposes we will break down these different types of fight scene dialogues into 4 categories. These categories are simply a way to begin to recognize the different types of physical interactions that occur in a fight scene; while these categories do not cover everything, they do cover a large area of Hong Kong action cinema and verbal dialogue. These include: 1) the comedic discourse, which is the most common form of fighting in American film, and is best exemplified in Jackie Chan films; 2) the traditional discourse, which incorporates traditional Chinese Wu-Shu (martial arts) forms and styles; 3) discourse that incorporates the environment, which can range from fighting with chopsticks to fighting on and around objects; and, lastly, 4) the superhuman discourse, which includes "flying" and aerial acrobatics that defy natural laws of physics.

A Jackie Chan film is a good example of comedic discourse. At its simplest, this humor is synonymous with that of the The Three Stooges, but can become more intricate, involving a character's accidental domination of his opponent, the protagonist's clumsy actions, or even plot devices that come into play during the fight scene. This is the physical equivalent of a joke. As in the example of The Three Stooges, verbal and physical humor are linked, and it is understood that some physical comedy can appeal to intelligent viewers as well as to the lowest common denominator. Physical humor is just as important to verbal humor in many films; many of the most entertaining comedies include a complex balance of each.

In a traditional discourse we may see a character fight with a "hard" style, a rigid form which relies heavily upon a powerful attack. His or her opponent may use a "soft" style, which is receptive and fluid, an ideal way to nullify a hard style. It should be noted that this discourse remains limited to those who have a background in certain Chinese Wu-Shu systems, and would be able to recognize them on screen. This can be compared to Shakespeare, which must be read slowly, or watched repeatedly. Though Shakespearean dialect is similar to modern-day English, there are enough differences to confuse audiences who are new to such plays. This, along with character's references to surroundings that have greatly changed in the last couple of centuries, is roughly analogous to the complexity of combinations of kung-fu styles presented in some Hong Kong action cinema.

Environmental discourse occurs when a character's physical dialogue is mediated by either weapons or objects. This could include sword fights, some gunfights, and fighting on and around objects such as benches, rafts, large wooden structures, and so forth. This could be compared to watching court cases or kidnapping dramas, where characters in the films use people and objects as bargaining chips or "weapons" against their opponent. In a court case drama this would include a lawyer's use and handling of evidence, and in a kidnapping film a person is used in the same manner.

Lastly, there is the superhuman discourse, in which characters have the ability to "fly," balance on people's heads, or perform aerial acrobatics which, until recently, have been laughable by Western standards. This category may seem at first as though it has no boundaries, but it does. Just as a language, it has rules, which it follows to varying degrees. For example, characters never hover (they can't really just fly), they still fall, and aerial acrobats tend to follow some simple rules of physics. This is somewhat similar to film dialogue that hypnotizes, casts spells, and raises the dead.

Fight scenes are physical conversations between characters that follow similar rules to cinematic dialogue. There is not as distinct a line between physical and verbal dialogue as American moviemakers have come to believe. There is an intrinsic link, and its representation is changing due to the insurgence of Hong Kong films. It has become apparent that physicality is an important aspect of film which has been overlooked in the past in the US. The American audience is coming to recognize physical dialogue and its importance, which will lead hopefully to more complete films that contain dialogues that are orally and visually complex.
IDA LUPINO
Giving a Voice to
An Unsung Revolutionary

By Briana Lenz

Hollywood in the mid 1900s was a lucrative industry—the stereotypical, idealistic American dream. And from this era we gained a mass of talented artists, both in front of and behind the camera. But the history books, unsurprisingly, have missed someone. However vast an understatement it is to claim that only one talented individual has been denied proper recognition, my purpose here is simply to open some eyes about this one case. Volumes could be written about all of the artists denied their proper status, and perhaps someone should undertake that task. This project can start here, with an exceptional woman, one who paved the way for future women in film. Remarkably enough, this woman is more well known for her acting than her other talents. She was one of the first female directors in Hollywood in the 1940s and also one of the first women to start an independent film production company. Martin Scorsese cited her as one of his major stylistic influences when he wrote her obituary. She brought what are now called \"women's issues\" to the screen in a time when many of them were explicitly forbidden by the Motion Picture Production Code (MPPC). She moved swiftly from acting to directing, screenwriting, and producing both film and television. Yet she has not been installed into the canon of great filmmakers, or even feminists, which is probably why you can't name her. The fact is that Ida Lupino's works have been ignored far too long, by theorists, viewers, and critics alike. One is left wondering why she has not been more thoroughly addressed.

Some may say that her films are not good enough to be considered worthy of critical acclaim. One could simply challenge the assumption that films must meet a certain set of criteria in order to reach a point of consideration as masterpieces. But a serious rebuttal to this argument seems in order here. Surely films have been inaugurated into the category of \"film as art\" based on pure cinematic genius or revolutionary filmic techniques (Hitchcock, Kubrick, Coppola, Welles). But films that have sparked social change or seriously challenged stagnant ideologies have also been canonized (Spike Lee). I would argue that Lupino's films, most of them small budget \"B\" films, fit into this latter category. Not to say that her films do not possess an amount of stylistic merit; this will be discussed later. But greater than her filmic technique is their role as a form of social critique. Lupino tackled such \"taboo\" subjects as rape, unwed motherhood and bigamy with an equally sensitive eye. She portrayed women as marginalized members of a society that couldn't provide them the required resources or acceptance they needed to recover from their situations.

\textit{Not Wanted} (1949) addresses the problem of unwed motherhood through the character of Sally, who after a brief affair with an older man, becomes pregnant. However, the film does not pigeonhole her into the \textit{fallen woman} stereotype. Her sexual encounter is treated as a naïve mistake: more blame is placed on the male, who refuses to take his share of the responsibility for their actions. Sally flees to the city, too ashamed to face her family, and there she finds a community of women who share her position and with whom she can identify. There she must make the decision to either keep the child or put it up for adoption.

Because the Production Code Administration (PCA) prohibited graphic depiction of women giving birth, Lupino was forced to portray Sally's labor inventively, and it is one of the most unique scenes of the film. Through a sequence of surrealist point of view shots, the viewer sees doctors' heads looming above the woman as she is wheeled into the hospital room. It is highly stylized, metaphorically depicting Sally's distraught emotional state. The images fade in and out of focus as a disturbing montage of doctors and nurses, bright examination lights, and echoing voices bombard the viewer. We are aligned with Sally through this confusing sequence, we see only what she catches glimpses of through her panicked haze.

Lupino's next film, \textit{Outrage} (1950) is a social melodrama about Ann, the victim of a brutal rape. Special dramatic attention is given to Ann's communication from her quiet, suburban town. After the rape, her story is run in the local papers, and soon she is forced out of town and away from the critical social gaze she is subjected to there. Again, Lupino ran into trouble with the PCA trying to shoot the rape scene and used similar techniques from the birth sequence in \textit{Not Wanted}. What resulted was an eerie chase scene followed by confusing point of view shots of the rapist approaching the terrified woman. The camera avoids explicit portrayal of the actual crime by backing up and away toward a window where a man peeks out, checks to see what the commotion is about, decides it's nothing and closes the blinds on Ann's tragedy, just as society turns a blind eye to the same crime.

Another cinematic technique that carries over to many other of Lupino's works, but is most prominent in \textit{Outrage}, is the way in which Ann is framed within the shots. Often she, as are other
lead women in Lupino's films, is shot from behind objects: a large piece of farming equipment, the bars of her bed, etc. However obvious, these shots illustrate Ann's position in her society. It is not just in the frames of the film that she is obstructed and restrained, but in the frames of her society as well.

These two films both contain revolutionary scenes in which the leading women's subjective point of view is emphasized. Their outrage and desperation is given to the audience as a valid and understandable reaction to their situations. Despite their debilitating conditions, these women maintain a sense of female empowerment, which is a common thread in all of Lupino's work. Although these women have been forced from their societies, they still find ways to survive in their circumstances. Lupino also structures her films so that the audience is asked to identify and sympathize with her heroines. This structure is revolutionary, and much more promising for women's representation in film.

The feminist community has been hesitant to embrace Lupino's works as part of its movement, regardless of these achievements. This might be due in part to her public image, which was always inexorably linked to her Hollywood star persona. In private, as on screen, she played seconds to her men. She was a staunch believer in the 1940's ideology that women and men had their respective roles in society. "I hate women who order men around, professionally or personally," she was quoted in Action Magazine. She wasn't a radical feminist, even declaring that she didn't go in for "women's lib." But consider the unyielding patriarchy that she had to face. Perhaps this remark, along with many other seemingly disparaging public statements, was a way for Lupino to survive in the male dominated industry of film.

The New York Times (12/29/53), at the same time commending her work, downplays her success with this review of The Bigamist. "The Bigamist" belongs to Miss Lupino in more ways than one. This fragile director keeps the action with such mounting tension, muted compassion and stark-like clarity for behavioral detail that the average spectator may feel he is eavesdropping on the excellent dialogue." In a time when an esteemed director is praised as "fragile," towards the end of an outstanding and fierce career, and when the average spectator is a "he," how much freedom was she allowed? Perhaps taping through these barriers was the way to gain access to the screen.

But make no mistake: Lupino was revolutionary. She was a woman of many firsts, including being the first female to be double billed as both director and star of her movie The Bigamist. And she proved that she could work in any genre when she directed The Hitchhiker, a classic film noir itself remarking on norms of masculinity. Whatever her intentions, Lupino made a significant mark for women in film. We can hold her up as a role model simply by the fact that she was able to break into an industry that was (and still, for the most part, remains) male dominated.

But the fact is that such an inspiring female has continued to be ignored by the general public. In a time when we are in desperate need of a redefinition of feminism we should be hailing strong women of the past. I propose that Lupino's works be reviewed and redefined as essential works of feminist film, and more broadly, essential works of film in general. It is not enough to settle with the history with which we have been presented and to classify Lupino as an underground or cult phenomenon. She is a landmark in film, and we need to treat her as such. Demand to see and hear of her in the future, for if she slips down the drain unnoticed, an essential
FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: DON’T WATCH FIGHT CLUB

A seemingly subversive film that produced a not so subversive response.

By Noah Finneburgh

“Brad Pitt had some great jackets...and the chick was hot,” said my friend when asked what he liked about David Fincher’s controversial film Fight Club. I laughed nervously at his response. Maybe he was joking, and maybe he just hadn’t watched the film closely enough. But no, my friend was quite sure of his comments. Brad Pitt’s jackets were great, and Helena Bonham Carter was indeed hot. Deeply perturbed, I decided to see if other people had deeper thoughts about the film.

Around this time I had been reading the writings of several critics who admired Fight Club for its substance, more specifically for how it critiqued ideologies that shape our conceptions of consumerism, materialism and masculinity. For instance, author Bret Eaton Ellis said that the film, “negates the hypocrisy of a society that continually promises us the impossible: fame, beauty, wealth...” Peter Travers of Rolling Stone declared that Fight Club was “lined up with explosive ideas.” While I did not totally agree with these critics, I did respect them for highlighting the film’s subversive intentions and decided to see if my peers were able to do the same. I asked a dozen people, simply “What did you like about Fight Club?” Their answers left me quite disturbed.

One woman said she thought the “surprise ending was cool...Ed Norton is cute...” Two interviewees commented on the visual aspects of the film, commending its cinematography and camera shots. One man remembered how “cool” and well choreographed the fight scenes were. One student said he really enjoyed the film and that, along with a friend, he had formed his own fight club in which people could duke it out with one another in the Porter College lounges. An old friend of mine from high school—who owns the film and has seen it “three or four times”—said that she liked the “little things” about Fight Club, like the flashing single frame images of Brad Pitt in the film’s first act. She also liked the film’s “cynical humor.” When the interview with my friend came to a close, I tossed the phone away in disbelief. I knew then that if Fight Club had any intention of presenting some sort of subversive message, it had been completely overlooked by many of the people who saw it. The people I interviewed for the most part admired material and superficial aspects of the film, while the film itself seemingly strove so hard to make us question the value of materialism and superficiality. Clearly, in this instance, too much attention to style on the part of the filmmakers meant that my subjects were at a loss for meaning and instilled in them the very values that this film was trying to debunk.

The main problem with Fight Club is that it tries to be too many things: social problem film, political propaganda piece, a vehicle for the acting talents of Norton and Pitt, and a music video. The film, much like its narrator, has one gigantic identity crisis, and that though interestingly ironic—counts in the true meaning of the film. The film does indeed have some subversive, leftist—and in my opinion admirable—intentions. Tyler Durden does have a few provocative ideas that are definitely worth thinking about. “You are not your job...You are not the Khakis...What are we? We are consumers...It’s all going down...” he says. However, his thought provoking ideas—the substance of Fight Club—are lost within the overwhelming style of the film.

Style drowns out substance in several
ways in this film. First of all, the makers of Fight Club seem to be criticizing the materialism and gotta-have-it tendencies of the MTV generation. However, giving Fight Club a style that emulates the very medium that our generation grew up on—the music video—might make the audience a little too comfortable with the film, and we might miss its subversive tendencies altogether. Our eyes will pop and our mouths will drool at the incessant quick cuts, slick special effects and beautiful cinematography set to infectious electronic music on the screen before us, but our brains might not be an auto-pilot. The special music video that accompanies Fight Club in its DVD format basically sums up how audiences will remember the film itself. The disc contains images of the film—mostly taken from the fight scenes—set rhythmically to music while Brad Pitt hurls off one line, catch phrase philosophy. After personally viewing this video, the images of fighting and the gorgeous cinematography remained in my head, while Pitt's theoretical babble did not.

Another problem with Fight Club is that the person telling us to turn away from materialism, obsessive consumerism and superficiality is Brad Pitt—David Fincher makes several references within the film to his star, including a marquee advertising Pitt's film Seven Years In Tibet—an actor who is widely considered to be the sexiest man alive. Pitt is also married to Jennifer Aniston, whose show Friends is, as USC Film Professor No: Surrourn put it, "one long Gap and Pottery Barn ad." Also, while Pitt's character criticizes materialism and the value we put on our appearances ("self-improvement is masturbation"), he is dressed in some of the trendiest and best-looking suits, sported a haircut that probably took hours to style, and a body that screams 24 Hour Fitness. One fan writer from Entertainment Weekly's website wrote that receiving such a treatment for Brad Pitt is "...tantamount to receiving a lecture on privacy from Sharon Stone...Brad, do me a favor. Dump Jennifer Aniston, stop having your hair professionally highlighted, and give me the millions you made from this movie...then we'll talk about the shallowness of the American Dream."

Now this isn't the only part of Fight Club that is utterly ironic. The two main characters in the film are angry about the way our society works, angry about how a socially constructed ideology that dictates proper masculine behavior is forced down our throats by the media and pop culture. However, the way those two men "challenge" society's conception of masculinity is by beating the hell out of each other, a practice that has society's label of "masculine" written all over it. It seems that Fight Club is trying to show that its characters are quite irrational, that their behavior should not be emulated. However, the filmmakers spent so much time making Brad Pitt and his fight scenes look beautiful that they failed to provide ample enough criticism of the film's images.

In his essay, "Fight Club," Roger Ebert writes, "...a lot more people will see this movie and get in fights than will leave discussing Tyler Durden's moral philosophy. The images in movies like this argue for themselves, and it takes a lot of narration...to argue against them." When we consider the comments of our interviewees, we see that Ebert is right. Most audiences will retain the sexy eye candy of the film and admire Brad Pitt's clothes or the cinematography of the fight scenes and will then perhaps form fight clubs of their own, while completely missing the film's attempt at a subversive message.

One of my interviewees—the man who started his own fight club—said something that effectively summed up the film in several ways. He said that in the film, anarchy becomes just another corporate system, that "the thing they fought was the thing they became." This is not only true of the "Project Mayhem" terrorist group in the film but also of the film itself. While attempting to question capitalism, materialism and masculine ideologies that our society holds dear, Fight Club merely becomes another advocate for dominant conceptions of such ideologies. I do believe that the film had some great initial ideas that could have been discussed in a more effective way that would have left the audience talking about the ideas in the film rather than the film's look and feel. It seems like Hollywood has slowly been turning into a producer of films that emphasize style over substance. For example, Guy Ritchie, one of Hollywood's most acclaimed new directors, creates films centered on a stylization of violence. Quentin Tarantino utilizes the same tactic; his films also illustrate an obsession with pop culture iconography.
Seeing Lock, Stock & Two Smoking Barrels Through Snatch

Masculinity and Power in the Films of Guy Ritchie

By Andy Sarris

Guy Ritchie’s career in feature length film began with Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels. His next film, Snatch, was made with a presumably larger budget and a cast with more renowned star quality. Careful examination of Snatch will bring to light the reappearance of factors that were in Lock-Stock, as well as a hauntingly similar plot line which involves a large amount of money being shuffled around from person to person. The goal of each character after coming into contact with the knowledge of the “small fortune” is to grab it any way that he can. The only apparent difference between the two films is that the narrative of Snatch centers around chasing after the fortune, while the narrative of Lock-Stock simply presents the fortune “naturally” in the timeline of events in the movie. The main point of Lock-Stock appears to be a bunch of men pushing each other around trying to grab a small fortune. Snatch does not appear to be much more, with another set of men (some of them the same men from the last movie) trying to push each other around to grab at a significantly bigger fortune.

The plot twists both movies develop are almost interchangeable, while mob bosses and small petty gangs appear in both as well. At first, Guy Ritchie seems to have created the same movie twice with minor changes. Though after reading further into the film, Snatch appears to be a commentary on Ritchie’s first film, especially in its exaggeration and questioning of representations of masculinity. While one cannot know the intentions of Guy Ritchie, one can definitely interpret Ritchie’s new creation as a comment on his former work.

In Lock-Stock, we have a bunch of guys from the darker, seedier side of life. These socially unacceptable, yet witty men search for quick money, and often times are hard pressed to find any at all. Eddie, who is very good at cards, comes across an opportunity to play in a card game where the entry fee is $100,000. Gathering his meager cash at the expense of his friends who let him borrow money from them, he enters the tournament and starts to win. It is only after losing that he finds himself in debt to a very large, rather scary gangster named “Hatchet Harry,” which causes the group of friends to go off searching for half a million pounds in order to pay off the debt.

There is something in this movie that should be very apparent upon viewing: there are no main women characters in either of the films. In other words these are movies about men.

Lock-Stock is a film trying to define masculinity in the traditional sense: meaning to be a man you need to act hard, have the “biggest penis,” and have the most power. Each character has his own way of showing this, and one of the main metaphors used in the film is that of the gun. For instance, the most powerful man in the film, Harry, is the owner of a sex shop. His office is on the second story of a building right above his shop, symbolizing him as the ultimate man” on top of his world. Harry’s attitude can be seen as that of a man looking at himself in a mirror while on top of a woman in a missionary position; he is powerful, his office is on top of his sex shop, and he is subservient to no one. In a scene where Harry finds out that a man is trying to cross him, he beats the man with a thirteen inch black rubber dildo. This scene represents the qualities of the film’s masculinity, which is the need to exert power over others, focusing especially on those who propose emasculation. One of Harry’s goals throughout the entire film is to get his hands on a pair of antique shotguns. These shotguns signify Harry’s manhood and power. The shotguns become a symbol of this shameless display of testosterone-laced “male-competition,” and whenever the shotguns belong to is on top. One could even read the antiqueness of the shotguns and the traditionalist nature of masculinity as a parallel.

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**Frankie Four Fingers**, throwing gambling problems into the past.

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Since the shotguns can be seen as representing need for power, every gun in Lock-Stock can represent the need for power over other men. In an exaggerated instance, there is a scene where a robbery of drug dealers is taking place and one of the robbers
brings in one of the most enormous guns ever known to man. This man looks the “hardest” because of this and exemplifies the notion of phallic domination. One can read a fear of emasculation out of using a gun bigger than one’s own leg. The characters that appear to have little or no fear of emasculation, who also grow marijuana, begin to fight back with an air rifle. While hilarious in context, the air gun represents the characters’ independence from traditional constructs of masculinity.

Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels is a movie about trying to “show your macho.” Why would Guy Ritchie want to emulate this idea in another movie? The truth is, he did not emulate this idea in Snatch and probably made the two movies so similar for a reason. Snatch can be seen as a commentary on Lock, Stock. For instance, the character that resembles Hatcher. Harry in Lock, Stock is named Brick Top in Snatch. In Lock, Stock, Harry was portrayed as a stylish, sexy character, the traits that the film gave him led the viewer astray from his true nature of crime. In Snatch, Brick Top is associated with pigs, mostly through the pig farm he owns. While Brick Top is talking with the two main characters in Snatch, he is seen feeding his pigs with many close-ups. Brick Top then goes on a five minute monologue about how you can feed people to pigs. Through the imagery of pigs, Brick Top (and by extension Hatchet Harry) is nothing more than a dirty, greedy, evil man. The sleek, sexy powerful man we knew in Lock, Stock is now really just an ugly pig.

The biggest emphasis on traditional masculinity in Lock, Stock was through the use of guns. A scene in Snatch shows three men, two with fake pistols, holding up another character, Tony (an actor from Lock, Stock), for a very large diamond. After realizing that they were threatening him with fake guns, Tony goes on to call the man in the middle the “big dick.” The blocking and shot composition make Sol, the man in the middle, a visual penis with his two “balls” partners to his sides. Tony then recites a monologue about “different types of balls,” referring to men who act hard and men who do not, and the trio metaphorically being a penis going after some “good ol’ pussy.” The “pussy” that he refers to is the diamond which everyone is after in the film. He then points out that their guns are replicas and tells them to “shrink away,” after pulling out his real gun with Desert Eagle .50 written on it. Snatch is showing us that men have this false front that they put on. They have a whole attitude that they try to put across to others while using “guns” to do it.

Directly preceding the above scene, there is another scene where Tommy is going back to Borshe.Blade to get a gun that works. Boris had sold Tommy a faulty gun that did not fire, and so Tommy then begins to approach Boris’ house talking about how he is going to “show him who’s boss.” His friend Turkish tells him, “Gee Tommy, you sure have got those minerals...” As soon as he sees Boris walking up to the house, he starts to tell him that he wants a working gun. Boris then grabs Tommy by the testicles and pushes him up against the house, not even pausing to acknowledge his presence. Muttering to himself, Boris then comes back out with an extremely large gun. Once again, the false front that men put on is shown through Tommy’s

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actions. Tommy tries to show his testosterone-heavy masculinity when complai-
ning his gun is fake, thereby trying to confirm his masculinity, only to be emascu-
lated by Boris who then comes out with an enormous gun.

Furthering the idea that Snatch is a com-
menary on Lock, Stock, there is another
scene with Tony that almost replicates a
scene from Lock, Stock which involves the
same actor who plays Tony. In the scene
from both movies, the character in each
respectively movie is slamming a car door
into the head of his victim. This serves
as a direct link to both movies, portray-
ing the message that Lock, Stock is present
in Snatch. While other instances of similarity
might have been a tap on the shoulder, this
one is a smack in the face.

Snatch can be seen as a comical and
critical commentary on Lock, Stock. One
can suppose that Guy Ritchie might have
made this film to stand back and laugh at
the traditional male's stereotypical role he
portrayed in Lock, Stock. With all of these
metaphorical digs running around after for-
tune it seems to be pretty strange that the
title of the movie is a pun on a vulgar,
misogynistic name for a woman's vagina.
One could assume that perhaps all the
men were really after in the film was sex.
Rumor states that the film was to be called
"Snatched" in order to be released in the US
because of the vulgar nature of the word. If
this change had occurred, it wouldn't have
had the same critical effect.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor(s) of EyeCandy:

I received a copy of last quarter's issue in my Film Theory Seminar. I was delighted to actually have a copy, feeling proud of being a film major at that particular moment. I had just turned in my final paper for the class, and can now graduate with my B.A. I opened the issue, began to read the first article, and was shocked at the very end of the first page. I quote, "Also, because I like the original so much, it was kind of hard not to consider 90's Psycho a good movie. Although casting a 12-year old boy look alike for your female lead doesn't help" (emphasis added). I was aslomed at the insensitivity and problematic assumptions in this statement. As well, I cannot for a second believe that this publication, which is supposed to reflect the intelligence and the consciousness of our department, would allow such an uncritical and thoughtless comment to be read by the very people it is attempting to address. I am not a huge fan of the term homophobic; therefore, let's take a closer look at what this gentlemen is implying.

The two still photos above the article create a visual comparison for the reader. Considering the article does not clearly explain the differences between the women. I assumed the photographs must offer something obvious enough to support Mr. Dimpfl's claim. Both Hache and Leigh are white, both have the same length hair, and both are nude in the scene. As well, the article itself goes so far as to point out that Hache's body is more sexualized than in Leigh's original scene: "we are shown Crane's naked backside, which was not shown in the original." Obviously Hache's body is treated like a woman's body, as pure sexual spectacle, so what then negates her feminalness? These instances of comparison lead one to believe that only reference that would allow Mr. Dimpfl to express these feelings is Hache's "out queer identity.

This is a very problematic conclusion. I am not arguing that Mr. Dimpfl cannot have a personal opinion about sexual orientation. What truly disturbs me is his inability to critically engage his opinions. Had he more clearly expressed visual or narrative explanations for his label, I would have no room to argue. Since he did not do so, I am left with a bad taste in my mouth, and with a very low opinion of the work your publication is attempting to offer.

But the problem goes beyond Mr. Dimpfl's ideas about film and film criticism. My main concerns lie in the fact that I opened a publication that was widely distributed, and read an article that contained very blatantly homophobic remarks, that were both uncritical and unnecessary. Even if one was to agree with Mr. Dimpfl's ideas about Heche, the article offers no real evidence to support his ideas, and that is simply bad journalism. As I have stated above, I am not charging Mr. Dimpfl with having an opinion that differs from mine. Rather, I am stating my disgust with the kind of uncritical and lazy analysis on the part of Mr. Dimpfl, as well as my disappointment with the editors of EyeCandy. It is beyond me how anyone could read this article and not question its theoretical insufficiency, much less publish such a thing. This addition to the publication only weakened what was to be a very interesting issue. The responsibility for such weak critical analysis is not more Mr. Dimpfl's, than it is the editors for allowing for such a poor reflection of the kinds of minds our department is grooming in the publication. For future reference, I am asking that you do a better job as the editors of a journal that is supposed to reflect our department, its integrity, and its students. You promote and perpetuate divisions in our department by publishing very discriminating content, as well as demean the work of other writers and students by publishing cheap opinion like that and calling it academic.

Disgusted and embarrassed,

Kacy Boxcarini

EDITORIAL RESPONSE

Dear Kacy,

I am very sorry to hear about your disappointment with our last issue. Particularly, I think that the issue you raise is a perfect instance of a public that can demonstrate the power of not only one's words, but also the power of the format and layout in which they are provided.

First off, EyeCandy is made up of a wide range of opinions, perspectives, and academic interests. While the language in Mr. Dimpfl's article invokes, combined with the context in which it is provided, may be read as homophobic, the EyeCandy editors felt that it worked with the overall tone of Mr. Dimpfl's article and was in line with his caustic criticism of other casting choices such as Brendan Fraser (whose "acting isn't worth the space his name is printed on in the credits").

While I completely understand and sympathize with your disappointment and apprehension over potentially homophobic remarks, please understand that EyeCandy of course has no intention of publishing content we feel may be offensive. In fact EyeCandy works very hard to examine modes of representation and authorship in relation to what might be called queer (Fall 2000 "Anti-Consumerist New Wave: Masculinity in American Beauty and Fight Club get stifled") and feminist politics (Winter 2001 "What Has Hollywood Done With Feminism?" and "disORIENTATION: Demystifying the Representation of Women in Graceling Tiger, Hidden Dragon"). Consequently, EyeCandy takes very seriously the issues you bring to the forefront. While I asked that anyone upset with the comment understand that EyeCandy is made up of one editor, one adviser, one production designer, and numerous individual writers all with varying perspectives and occasional degrees of dissatisfaction, EyeCandy does take full responsibility for its words.

Sincerely,

Nathan Brunskill
Editor-in-Chief