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EYECANDY ONLINE

SPRING 2011
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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Cinema is changing. We’ve heard this claim for years: that what we watch and the way we watch is in a massive state of flux. True or not, they avoid the larger point: that regardless of change, film will always matter. To understand cinema is to understand the culture that surrounds you.

For 20 volumes, EyeCandy Film Journal has attempted to document and respond to these shifts, and to offer a unique voice in the larger discourse surrounding film criticism and culture.

Aside from launching the journal’s new slew of web-only content (available at eyecandy.ucsd.edu), this year we’ve pushed our staff to consider a wide variety of topics worthy of discussion.

Among them you’ll find analyses of film’s representations of the dreamscape and television’s move into more theatrical modes; of the chronology of female (dis)empowerment throughout the evolution of the slasher film; and of how a three-minute scene aboard a train in 1932’s Shanghai Express delves into larger questions surrounding minority representation onscreen and off. In addition, we’ve featured interviews with Bay Area found footage filmmaker Jay Rosenblatt, and documentarian Stephen Marshall on his new film, Holy Wars. And finally, this issue showcases the works of two featured artists: Sabrina Habel and Dane Argentieri.

Of course, it’s impossible to fully document the extent to which the world of film is evolving. It’s impossible to have every discussion worth having. But this is a good start. And at the very least we hope it serves its purpose — to guide readers down a path perhaps not explored in their relationship to film and media. To facilitate the larger dialogue between us and the narratives by which we’re surrounded.

Things are changing out there. But progress is good. Change can lead to innovation, and innovation can lead to something close to perfection. The issue you’re holding in your hands is a testament to change. It isn’t perfect, but it’s damn near close.

ROD BASTANMEHR & MARK GASPARO
CO-EDITORS-IN-CHIEF
LIFE IN THE CONFLICT ZONE, 
ART IN THE COMFORT ZONE:
The New Media Practices of Wafaa Bilal 
by lorenzo estébanez

The United States has cultivated a casual indifference to how often we make war. Marita Sturken observes that "the way a nation remembers a war is directly related to the way that nation further propagates war." Since the Persian Gulf War — what Jean Baudrillard called "the First Postmodern War" — Americans remember war as a video game. Consequently, we as a nation show little reluctance to unleash our military might. Iraqi new media artist Wafaa Bilal is one of those millions of people for whom America's unfettered war-making has had tragic consequences. Bilal recognizes that the suffering unleashed by war is sanitized through the antiseptic, video game images that simulate war for Americans. Living between two worlds — one of comfort versus one of conflict — Bilal's new-media interventions and performance art installations try to pierce this simulation, to make the nature of warfare visible to a viewer. In his artistic practice, Bilal has been shot at 60,000 times with a paintball gun, received 25,000 tattoos, and been water-boarded. For his latest project, "The Third I," he has become a cyborg. Bilal's goals are ambitious: trying to remediate America's understanding of our relationship to the world. In trying to achieve this goal, Bilal has placed himself at the forefront of both articulating what a new-media artist can be and at the extreme end of the spectrum of what a performance artist will do in his practice.

Upon a first introduction to his work, most striking are the visceral and durational aspects of Bilal's happenings. Bilal's body usually has punishment or transformation inflicted upon it for a prolonged period of time. For his most infamous project, "Shoot an Iraqi" (also called "Domestic Tension"), Bilal sequestered himself in a room for a month with a remotely-controlled paintball gun for company. "...And Counting" involved Bilal being tattooed 25,000 times in one 24-hour sitting. For "The Third I," Bilal currently has a webcam attached to a to his skull by a subcutaneous titanium plate, a project that will last a year. The corporal element
to his work is in service of the ideological goal. Because we inhabit a comfort zone far from the trauma of the conflict zone, we Americans have become desensitized to the violence of war. We are disconnected, disengaged while many others do the suffering,” Bilal explains.

To bridge the divide between these two zones, Bilal uses his body to affect the viewer by engaging them on an unconscious, visceral level. Bilal says, “We’re talking not about intellectual language, or a conceptual or aesthetic language, we’re talking about a reaction. What that does to you “the viewer” is to meet you on a different level – rather than the mental one, it engages you on a corporal level. You are with it or against it, and that triggers a dialogue.” Bilal’s work has its incredibly visceral, performative aspect so that his body can be the site for posing ideological questions to the viewer. As important as the unconscious reaction the viewer experiences is the dialogue that comes afterwards.

The nature of new media enables viewers to be connected in such a way that a dialogue can form around Bilal’s work. Bilal describes his work as stemming from “a deep desire to engage with [his] fellow citizens in this country,” and this engagement is crucial for remediating the spectacle of warfare. Guy Debord posits that “the spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.” Americans have traditionally received our images of warfare from centralized distribution sources. Sexy, CNN-style “smart bomb” footage places a viewer in the point-of-view of military ordinance. Embedded reporters deliver their news from the perspective of a part of the combat unit that protects them. Always faithful to the sensibilities of its corporate owners, the media has an unspoken embargo on depictions of the dead and wounded. These are the images that mediate our social relation as citizens of the world’s most robust war-fighting state.

Media theorist Noah Wardrip-Fruin argues that media reports delivered by non-interactive means compose the simulation that undergirds our country’s warmaking. Wardrip-Fruin points specifically to the media depictions of the war in Iraq: “In these cases, there seems no call to resist, to transgress the simulation. It’s as if it’s simply time to sit back and enjoy.” The antiseptic video game images of warfare delivered to Americans by one-way conduits of information like our government and media are seriously challenged by the promise of digital connectivity. In addition to enabling discussion, they allow digital imagery to undermine the simulation. The torture at Abu Ghraib was exposed through the Internet and digital imagery, and it marked the turning point in public support of the Iraq War. “The phenomenon of digital connectivity is raising the barrier between the comfort/conflict zones, and I think that’s what’s been needed for a very long time,” Bilal explains. “It’s totally impossible to do a project such as ‘Shoot an Iraqi’ and mobilize people without access to the internet and mobile devices.”

“Shoot an Iraqi” offered participants a platform to do precisely what the name implied. Bilal’s project arose in the aftermath of his brother Haji’s death by a remotely-piloted rocket in their hometown of Kufa, Iraq.

“Prior to the death of my brother,” Bilal says, “I spoke from an artist’s point of view, who cares about humanitarian issues. But then with the death of my brother and the tragedies that followed it, the work became very personal.” “Shoot an Iraqi” marked the beginning of the deeply performative component of Bilal’s practice. “With the death of my brother and the tragedies that followed it,” he says, “the work became very personal. I wasn’t out there making statements, rather I was out there dealing with my own losses, and that’s also where the body comes in”.

“Shoot an Iraqi” would confront viewers with Bilal’s body and force an ethical choice. Pre-
sented with the kind of racialized, othered body that the American narrative had long demonized. Would a participant make a personal decision to bring harm to an Iraqi? Bilal explains the hard choice as “confronting the viewer with a very hard choice of whether to shoot or not, which allowed them to be aware of this remote killing.” Every time Bilal was shot or spared, every mouse-click was a user making an ethical decision, participating in the creation of the narrative.

“Shoot an Iraqi” was an open platform,” Bilal says, “which means the viewer him or herself could act to write a narrative, and by being part of the narrative and an active inventor, you have to carry that narrative with you.”

The project attracted visitors through a viral marketing campaign and its inherently controversial mission. Users could control the gun either from a computer in the exhibit hall or online, by visiting the website wafaabilal.com. The aesthetics of wafaabilal.com allowed the participant great leeway in their own interpretation of the project: There were as few indicators as possible about whether participation was to be enjoyable, or even if the project was real or not. While Bilal’s body offered the site where this narrative was enacted, the website wafaabilal.com was the site where the narrative was written. The interactivity enabled by the online forum opened up space in which people from any country on earth, and from anywhere on the political spectrum, could engage in a dialogue about the exercise of state violence and our own culpability within those systems.

Wafaabilal.com utilized the visuals of contemporary combat in its presentation. Visitors found a very sparse website, with a background of muted, gunmetal grey, little text and no sound. Bilal chose the grainy, low-resolution imagery of the gun-mounted camera to create “a heightened sense of detachment – something more akin to the experience of a soldier dropping remote bombs than the usual experience of a high resolution video game.” Bilal’s remediation of the images of remotely fought warfare mirrors “Shoot an Iraqi’s” platform – the actual software and mechanics that enabled the project to exist. Ironically enough, “Shoot an Iraqi” was made possible by cannibalizing technology that had been developed for the Department of defense to conduct remote warfare. The most heartening aspect of technology is the way it can be used for counter-imperial ends. Wikileaks, for instance, is dependent on encryption technology developed for Defense and corporations. The internet itself saw its genesis in the government’s ARPANET. “When it comes to technology, I have a very high respect because I think if we reverse it we can allow people to really be aware of the very machine we talk about.”

The technology and imagery of remote-warfare, the kind of combat that claimed the life of Haji Bilal, pose a serious threat to understanding war’s realities. In 2010, A U.N. human rights
official condemned America's drone warfare specifically for creating a "Playstation mentality" towards combat – an indictment of the new realities of our military. America's wars are increasingly fought like video games by removing humans from the battlefield or mediating their physical presence through technology. "When it comes to video games, the military has denied for a very long time that our soldiers have become 'virtual warriors,'" Bilal explains, "but it now goes beyond ideas of training into implementing an apparatus that allows a participant to be disconnected. I was reading a recent article about how the gunner has been moved from the top of the tank to the inside, where combat is now mediated through an LCD screen. And the military now says, 'our best gunners are video game players.'" Video game conflict is ahistorical and consequence-free. Its pleasure stems from the fact that a player can enact violence in a universe without any real suffering or complex, problematic history. The images of video game warfare shroud the viewer in a cloak of moral nihilism.

The act of creating a memorial is based upon opposing values. A memorial creates history by situating an event in time and space, and rejects moral nihilism by articulating a stand on suffering. In 2010, Bilal used the medium of tattoo to turn his own body into a memorial for the installation "...And Counting." For 24 hours, Bilal had Iraq mapped on his back, receiving 5,000 dots in red ink for American casualties and 100,000 in invisible ink for Iraqi dead, visible only under a blacklight. Visitors to the gallery were invited to read the names of the dead while Bilal underwent the needle. "...And Counting" engages the viewer on the unconscious level through the visceral physicality and duration of it, but also makes a conscious political point about civilian suffering. The invisible ink reflects our country's callous indifference to the suffering of civilians like Haji; in response to a question about Iraqi civilians deaths, a Pentagon spokesman coldly replied, "We don't do body counts." Bilal stopped after 25,000 tattoos due to the condition of his skin, and under normal light, his back reads Arabic city names with red dots clustered around. Under infrared, however, his back lights up like the night sky.

Bilal’s current project, "The Third I," is at first almost atypical in its seeming political passivity. It has all the highly performative, visceral aspects of Bilal’s previous work, centering on the webcam Bilal had installed to the back of his head in Dec. 2010. Though "Third I" is more passive than some of his previous happenings, it triggered a political and ideological dialogue immediately upon its inception. NYU, where Bilal is a professor, insisted that he block the camera while on campus over fears about privacy. The webcam unit broadcasts his location by GPS 24 hours a day, and takes a picture every minute, which is uploaded to the website 3rdi.me. Rather than being passive or apolitical, "Third I" immediately asked questions...
about privacy in an age of digital surveillance and private versus public space.

"Third I" prompts political questions and intervenes in cultural attitudes about race, privacy and surveillance. Though Bilal concedes that "with Third I, I am questioning my own life by exposing it," for a Middle Eastern male, questions about self are inherently political. To inhabit a body so politicized is to be in a perpetual state of assumed surveillance. "Having the camera on my head, rather than hidden, is the mirror reflecting that social condition—a question I pose to people. It's to establish a dialogue about surveillance, and the disappearing private life."

Discussions surrounding "Third I" are replete with complaints about the intrusion of Bilal's webcam into the privacy of passersby. For Bilal, this is precisely the sort of discussion his work is intended to foster. "The project tends to edge people out of their comfort zones," Bilal says, "and that's the trigger or platform for establishing a dialogue." In an age where digital images are infinitely replicable and interconnectivity enables instant dissemination of these images, the question of what we conceive as private space couldn't be more important.

"I don't think any of us have given the government the right to listen to our conversations, to tap our phones," Bilal muses, "and when a condition is ignored it becomes the norm." The electronic eye that "Third I" introduces to public space is a provocation—intervening in the cultural attitude of indifference that allows our privacy to be abrogated. Though Bilal is the one who is truly exposed, "Third I" reveals the condition of our surveillance, and forces the viewer to consider questions of what spaces are private and which are public.

The dialogue "Third I" establishes about privacy is particularly important in the context of the ongoing expansion of the American surveillance state. Since the passage of the Patriot Act, our country's national security and surveillance apparatus has grown to an unprecedented size and exercises nearly unfettered power. When Americans receive glimpses of the true power and scope of the surveillance state, it's clear that systemic abuses, unaccountability, privatization, and the disintegration of institutional safeguards are the status quo. For the most part these revelations generate little debate or public interest over surveillance and civil liberties, and government surveillance continues.
its quiet expansion. The challenge “Third I” poses to its viewers is to stop ignoring this condition.

The impetus for technological innovation has always been rooted in mankind’s instinct to make war. Just as instinct drives the human species to use technology for war, there is the mirror instinct that our technologies for war be used for peace. The digital age holds the promise of our own 21st century swords being beaten into plough-shares. Bilal is heartened by this phenomenon – removing technology from its military use and using it for a humane art that challenges imperialism. The technology that disconnects soldiers from the battlefield can connect citizens to the people on whom their nation makes war. The simulation that separates us from our postmodern wars, that insulates us from the horrible crimes done in our name, is threatened by modern digital connectivity. “We could become a channel, each one of us, of distribution. That’s how you can undo barriers – by disseminating information to each other,” Bilal enthuses. “That’s the challenge being posed to empires, and I think the technology has to be given a great deal of respect because of how it empowers individuals.”

Lorenzo Estévez is the former Co-Editor-in-Chief of EyeCandy film journal. He currently resides in Berkeley, California, where he writes for Tikkun magazine.

FAVORITE MISUSE OF COMPUTERS
by lynn he

Computers are the future. But Hollywood makes them look like magic. There are quite beautiful displays of sights and sounds when it comes to any science fiction show where computers are involved. Huge screens are projected in midair with bright and glowing grids, unheard-of technologies can “enhance” pixilated video footage to crisp quality – you can even zoom into pictures and discover a suspect in the reflection of an eyeball. I believe in suspending your disbelief, but I simply cannot do it when it comes to shows that display such exaggerated forms of technology. Perhaps there will be machinery in the future that can display the fantastical elements on the silver screen and the small screen, but there is one aspect in every computer sequence I love to hate: the sound effects. Every show like CSI, Law and Order, Fringe, etc. has annoying beeps and blops when a window pops up. It’s everywhere. Perhaps shows like Law and Order and CSI are directed toward the older grandparent demographic that doesn’t really understand how technology works when it comes to something as simple as an email, but for even semi-tech-savvy users, there is always an urge to groan whenever computers make unnecessary noises on shows.
Brought to You by: YouTube
Filmmaking in the "Free" Marketplace
by Ariel Savage

One of the many decrees brought on by the Internet was the dawn of equal enterprise. In this market of open competition, the little guy can go up against the corporations—and win. The Internet has provided something that Hollywood has refused to allow: equalized distribution. The once (and some may say still) marginalized group of independents, amateurs, and even thieves, bring consumers products quickly and freely. While media conglomerates scramble to stymie dwindling DVD and box office revenues, independents, and even some mainstream filmmakers, are embracing the "pirate's" method of distribution. With sites like YouTube providing free access to an ever-expanding audience, filmmakers are redefining and foregoing the distribution and exhibition methods that have kept Hollywood flush for decades. Some say this provides consumers with more of what they want, and more often than not, at the price consumers expect: free. At least, that is what Wired magazine writer, Chris Anderson contends.

In the viral world, a consumer can find almost anything. If one's tastes go beyond what is available on YouTube, be it a handy cam recording of the current box office hit or a hard-to-find cult favorite, torrent sites such as Demonoid or the invite-only site cinematiq.net can likely provide for one's desires. Consumers are no longer settling for paid-for and scheduled entertainment. The viewing experience has surpassed the $12 tent-pole spectacle and the four demographic-pleasing shows on cable. We, as consumers, choose what we see, and for the most part, how we see it. If that wasn't proof enough of the growing autonomy of the consumer, we also often get to entertain ourselves for free.

While we may enjoy the spectacle of films such as Avatar (of which there is a promised second and third), as well as the communal experience of going to the theater, the selection is fairly limited. This is hardly a coincidence. As of 2000, nine of the top 10 film distributors in the United States were either majors or their subsidiaries. In addition, the majors now owned 10% of all movie theaters in the United States¹, effectively yanking a fing out of the already weakened Paramount decision of 1948. Thank you Ronald.
...the corpse-like remains of the music industry looming in the not-so-distant past, the film industry has been more proactive...

"Reagan (look it up)."

That of course, would answer the question as to why so many of the odd indie movies we read about on blogs rarely make it to our local theaters. However, it must be acknowledged that while majors do chiefly peddle their products in their theaters, they also exhibit some of the top-tier, multiple award winning festival favorites. Yet, if it’s not an Academy Award season, most of those indies that make it to the big screen typically have a short run as they are pushed aside for the next hopeful “hit.” This tactic is understandable. A typical theater needs to sell 1,500 tickets per screen over a two-week span if it hopes to make back the rental fees for a film. So what happens to those films that might not have an eye-popping opening weekend? Or don’t even get an opening weekend? These films may have an avid fan community, but one that is dispersed. In some instances screening on demand through sites such as eventful.com may get a film to one’s local theater (as it did with Paranormal Activity), but again, one would need a large, informed, and active community. Currently, that’s seldom the case. Films like the ghastly The Human Centipede, which used its notorious nature to create a morbidly curious audience, had a lot of people talking about it, but screened in few theaters. The Human Centipede is one in thousands. The best option for these films to reach their audience is the Internet. This also means the hopeful fan must wait. If the fan is old school, he’ll wait for it to come out on DVD. Most likely he’ll stream it on Netflix, rent or buy the downloadable version like Amazon, or if he’s more brazen, download a pirated version from his trusted torrent site. All this will happen after he checks out interviews, previews, and short sequences on YouTube, which also offers multiple sites to download the film. So marks the end of the tyranny of physical space, as Chris Anderson decrees.

Chris Anderson, in his much-debated article “The Long Tail,” and later his book of the same title, predicts, or as some may feel, comments on a new era of “unlimited selection” in which people are allotted the freedom to choose and consume a range of media (music, literature, film/video). Anderson’s main claim is that unlike with the limited and costly physical distribution of film to theaters and DVDs, the Internet, at little-to-no cost to distributors, supplies a bounty of products that account for most tastes and desires. Unlike with theaters, online distributors such as iTunes, Netflix, Amazon, or Hulu, simply and cheaply archive thousands of products and over time, accrue profits on films that were previously written off as “misses.” This is what Anderson has dubbed “The Long Tail” and the end of the “hit driven economies” that has fueled Hollywood for decades.

Given consumers’ renewed attention to forgotten or marginalized products — from music, to film, to TV shows — producers and distributors are adjusting their business models to allow for a continued profit from these products. With the corpse-like remains of the music industry looming in the not-so-distant past, the film industry has been more proactive in combating the loss of DVD sales and box office revenues with its own digital distribution methods. Along with on-demand streaming and online DVD rentals provided by such sites as Netflix, downloads of video content are provided through other sites like, Hulu, Hulu Plus, iTunes, and Starz. Major studios are even entering into the fray, however their method may seem reluctant to adapt fully to this market. Major studios such as Warner Brothers with its Warner Vault, Universal Studios with its “Anywhere 4 U” program, or Paramount’s Online...
Studio Store, offer both stripped-down DVDs sans any special features that they sell direct to consumers (some of which are not available on Netflix) or offer their own streaming programs. Nonetheless, "high quality resolution" and "legally obtained" appear to be less of incentives for purchase than the major studios had hoped. The freely available content found on YouTube and pirating sites still beckons.

In his more recent debate-invoking work, Free, Anderson argues that the next step for producers and distributors is to distribute their work, as the title implies, for free. As one would expect, many have not accepted this controversial suggestion. One contender, writer for The New Yorker, Malcolm Gladwell, argues that Anderson's idealist vision of free content for all disregards the cost of production by emphasizing the low-to-no cost of distribution. As Gladwell lambasts Anderson's utopian vision of a changing market structure, it seems the irony of his free-to-read online article is lost on him.

The idea of providing a product free to consumers is a risky one. Yet, it isn't new. Many companies will provide one product for free in the hopes of enticing the consumer to either buy a complementary good or to simply buy a second of the free sample. In the same vein, filmmakers are now giving away their products online. Some do this to spread awareness of their names or films, while others have their products distributed without their consent.

One of the more progressive moves made by mainstream filmmakers in the viral environment was by the Monty Python creators. Irked that so many of their videos were being uploaded, in poor quality no less, onto YouTube, the remaining creators opted to make their own YouTube channel. In giving their products away they censured those who "ripped off" their films and television shows and asked them to follow the links on their channel to buy the Monty Python DVDs. Not only did the Monty Python Channel become one of the most subscribed to channels on YouTube, sales for the products increased substantially. It seemed that, at least in this instance, free earned these filmmakers money.

In 2005, about six months prior to the inception of the Monty Python YouTube channel, two independent filmmakers, Arin Crumley and Susan Buice, created their own channel for their film, Four Eyed Monsters. Beginning with a 13 episode series that charted the making of their film, Crumley and Buice invited viewers into the "reality" of their filmmaking process. Consisting of podcasts and video clips, Crumley and Buice openly addressed both the mental, and more importantly, financial strain of creating Four Eyed Monsters. In 2007 the duo posted their completed film onto YouTube, making Four Eyed Monsters the first feature-length film posted in its entirety onto YouTube. Crumley and Buice also provided the film free to download off the film's website. While they offer a $20 DVD that includes both the feature as well as the episodes in a quality resolution "much higher" than that found on the YouTube clips, they also accept donations of any amount. However, pioneering filmmakers' biggest money making device came in the form of a partnership with Spout.com. For a limited time, Spout offered Crumley and Buice one dollar for every person they could get to join the Spout.com website. This agreement ultimately ended in earning almost $50,000 for the filmmakers. Though this amount did not clear them of the debt incurred from making the film, it is nonetheless an intriguing grass roots example of Anderson's argument for free.

With free being the new price for entertainment, filmmakers are discovering a market
that allows them to break away from dominant Hollywood distribution methods. Filmmakers, or fans, can use YouTube, social networking sites or torrent sites to not simply distribute their products for free, but to also generate interest in their films, themselves, and even DVDs. In this world where anything is available, we - the consumers - have changed the state of the industry, putting filmmakers in the same domain as pirates.


FAVORITE HORROR MOVIE SCREAM
by ariel savage

"Now that's a scream!"
In Brian De Palma's 1981 classic, Blow Out, soundman Jack Terry, played by John Travolta, proves there is no line that cannot be crossed when pursuing realism in film. In this disturbing yet campy thriller, Terry witnesses a murder cover-up while sampling sounds for a B-grade horror movie. An ex-cop, Terry's investigative instincts kick in and he is soon enmeshed in the perilous world of political conspiracy.

Though Terry's one-man pursuit of justice gains him the blood of the killer, it is at the bereavement of his love. Drafting the first victim's mistress into his investigation, Terry soon becomes smitten only to suffer her loss at the hands of the murderer. Terry's past as an ex-detective haunted by his inability to prevent his colleague's death heightens the trauma of the scene as he once again fails to save his "partner." As Terry races to save his girlfriend he listens to the live transmission of her hidden wire updating him on her fatal struggle. Right before he can save her, her last scream pierces his ears. He's too late.

After a mawkish scene of a snow-covered Travolta huddled on a park bench tormenting himself with the recordings of his dead girlfriend, the final scene fades in. Terry is once again back at the mixing boards with his sleazy boss. The scream that haunts Terry now haunts the screen as the mouth of a bare-breasted blonde is filled with the gut-wrenching shriek of his love killed. Delighted, Terry's boss proclaims, "Now that's a scream!" to which a sweaty and wrecked Terry mumbles, "It's a good scream...it's a good scream..."

I love the self-reflexive element of the filmmaker searching for "the real thing." How far would you go to capture authenticity? Jack Terry offers up his girlfriend's death scream.
RAPID EXPRESSION
Agency within Hollywood Cinema
by amanda kimball

After a shot of the train's moving wheels, the screen dissolves into the backs of two Chinese workers - a male moving luggage and a female washing windows. The scene swiftly cuts elsewhere on the train to a shadowed Anna May Wong behind a drawn cabin curtain and Warner Oland leaning through her open door. Oland addresses Wong in Chinese. Wong anxiously responds by lifting the curtain, looking frame left and asking his purpose in English with an English accent. Oland then replies in English, with proper grammar, that he would like her to "cure his loneliness." Wong responds in gruff-toned Chinese while Oland closes the curtained door and pulls Wong behind it. Wong again speaks in Chinese, opens the door, and pushes Oland out. The scene abruptly ends with a cut to white lead Clive Brook smoking leisurely on the train caboose.

Early Hollywood established an ethnic hierarchy that influenced - and continues to influence - cultural representation and reception of racial differences. Within this reigning chain of screen command, isolated races dominate: characters depend on their stereotypes while teetering on the white, black, Asian and Latino totem pole. Yet, early Hollywood also included a space for actors - particularly those of a traditionally minority status - to assert fluidity, rather than mutually exclusive structuring, of race. Epitomizing the space of the ethnic actor in early American cinema, the train in the 1932 film Shanghai Express reveals compartmentalized race representation that attempted to restrict non-white performative agency. The subversive performance tactics of many minor film stars, including Anna May Wong and Warner Oland, reveal the oft-ignored management of multiplicity within the visual construction of ethnic differences in early and contemporary Hollywood. Although identity politics of early Hollywood did not include the hyphens of today, many cross- and multi-ethnic film stars of the past imparted complex performances of otherwise stereotypical characters.

As a microcosm of Orientalist fantasies, the train traveling from Peking to Shanghai in Shanghai Express superimposes a white heterosexual coupling over the background of racist and sexist imaginings of China and its people. Directed
by Josef von Sternberg for Hollywood's Paramount Pictures, the film situates Marlene Dietrich as lead and Clive Brook as her male counterpart within the tumultuous travels of a white heterosexual duo, equating the narrative with their inevitable coupling. Conflict and climax, however, occur when Chinese political strife beyond the tracks halts the traveling train. In their representation and performance of these essential Chinese characters, actresses Anna May Wong and actor Warner Oland frustrate the film's focus on the white leads and Orientalist essentialisms. Through linguistic capabilities and exaggeration of gesture, Wong and Oland employ their stereotypical characters—respectively, Hui Fei and Mr. Henry Chang—for the complication and made-visible expectation of isolated ethnic-as-fantasy both within the narrative and off-screen. Thus, despite Hollywood packaging and intent within the dominant language of Orientalism, Wong and Oland create a space of complexity for the migrant, or otherwise othered, worker.

As *Shanghai Express* moves forward along the China coast, the short sequence in which Mr. Chang first threatens courtesan Hui Fei moves quickly—taking no more than 30 seconds. The joint, disruptive performance of otherwise essential (to the narrative) and essentialized (prescribed representational qualities) background characters seems easy to ignore, yet demands a second look. The scene reveals a shift in Orientalist representation and the increased power of the minor film star. Rather than simply revealing the threat of Mr. Chang through earlier action, the sequence creates a space for Wong and Oland to assert complexity of the background Chinese and the acting minor film star through language and gesture. Commenting on both character-as-representation and character-as-performance, each actor employs exaggerated gestures within the two-dimensional framework of the train compartment to reveal his or her awareness of Orientalist expectations of their character. Both perform the struggle with emphasis on the made-invisible—made-visible binary by pulling curtains up and down, sliding doors open and closed.

This emphasis on vision of the essential and essentialized Oriental character coincides with the emphasis on performed audibility. Language use in this scene is a specific choice—devoid of meaning for Sternberg, but rich with subversive possibilities for Wong and Oland. With an indexical relationship to China, *Shanghai Express* employs language as audible Orientalism, replacing expression with impression. Rapidly spoken Chinese accompanies the opening credits, triggering "the sensation of bustling confusion" that persists through the entire film. Meant as background, the Chinese characters provide unintelligible noise for the Western audience, emphasizing the miscommunication between white leads while offering a space for a linguistically rich performance by Wong and Oland. In the scene described, the use of Chinese-
functions to subvert Orientalism precisely by re-inscribing meaning on a language made meaningless by Hollywood.

Subversive tactics create a means of establishing and maintaining a resistant collective while deconstructing the notion of a “dominant” force. Tactics work from the bottom up — rather than strategies, which work from the top down — to repurpose the dominant system for use by a minority that deems that system incapable of fulfilling its needs. Appropriated by minor film stars, tactical performance within the language of Hollywood asserts a powerful minority that denies the invisibility or inaudibility dominant cinema demands of its non-white actors. Minor film stars re-purposing of Hollywood stereotypes stems from the necessity of employment, while their particular deployment of language and gesture allows a critique of expected misrepresentation. Through subversive tactics, minor film stars recuperate film as a political force, asserting their cross- and multi-ethnic position in American society despite Hollywood’s efforts to dominate the film platform with images of disparate minorities and white leads.

Wong and Oland offer a unique pairing of actors “capable of negotiating, reinterpreting, or resisting misrepresentation and stereotypes of hegemonic texts without necessarily forgoing the benefits of employment (in the case of actors) or dispensing with the pleasure of participation (in the case of audiences).” Although retrospectively pitched against each other within a dichotomy of minority and majority, Wong and Oland reflect active intervention within the dominant language of Western fantasies of the Orient. Their respective performances as Chinese-American and Swedish-American film stars suggest an often-denied space of multiplicity within the cinematic construction of ethnic identities. Rather than enforcing the essentialist dichotomy of Asian actress versus white actor — each with burdens of nationalist representation — their performances within Shanghai Express offer a complicated notion of authenticity and cultural ownership. Their performative agency, particularly of linguistic capabilities and gestural exaggeration, rather than representative responsibility, affirms Anna May Wong and Warner Oland as negotiating figures of the dominant Orientalist framework within Euro-American film industries.

"Wong and Oland reflect active intervention within the dominant language of Western fantasies of the Orient."
ly essentialist Hollywood depended on a long steep in the industry before their time aboard *Shanghai Express*. Each minor lead of the film was at the height of his or her American career, with Wong in demand after returning from work in Europe and Oland boasting a contract with Fox for several Charlie Chan films. the Western film industry remained steadfast in its efforts to contain the performances of minor film actors despite its increasing star status. *Shanghai Express* reveals a textual convergence in Hollywood between long-standing expectations of Asian characters in stereotypical plots and the subversive performances of those expectations by actors constantly associated with the stereotypes. The subversive power of Wong and Oland, in fact, stemmed from their position as proliterate migrant workers.

Although born in Los Angeles, Wong bore the burden of representation, since Hollywood consistently packaged her as the Oriental fantasy of a submissive China doll or thrilling China dragon. Western preoccupation with Asian heritage held “an American-born Chinese actress responsible for supposedly authentic, realistic, or positive depictions of China through screen acting.” In effort to escape the essentialist weight of foreign representations for an American audience, Wong migrated to Europe. She soon learned that Europe expected the same exoticism of her physical features and heritage as America, proving Western Orientalism extended across the pond. While in Europe, though, she learned to actively play with these exotic expectations for increased marketability, “even burn(ing) incense in her hotel room, to add to her exotic charm.” Wong then deployed this use of exoticism, as well as her appropriation of the English accent, in Hollywood to provoke further attention. She simultaneously subverted American notions of the Chinese woman. Rather than avoiding the stereotypical roles altogether, Wong asserted a new notion of the Orientalist fantasy, one that replaces pidgin English with perfectly – and curiously – English English.

Conversely, the migratory work of Warner Oland evoked little curiosity for Americans regarding his origins, as audiences often unabashedly included him within the overly simplistic realm of leading “white” actors. His generally Caucasian appearance gave way to vaguely Asian features through the use of Orientalist Hollywood make-up techniques, retrospectively denounced as yellowface. While viewing Wong as a victim of a racist job market, thus stripped of her agency to choose characters and perform them subversively, critics have alternately deemed Oland an exploitative beneficiary of Orientalist preoccupations. However, his migration from Umea, Sweden, positioned Oland as a migratory worker indebted to stereotypical roles out of the necessity for screen work. He asserted of Hollywood, “Gold was not to be picked up on the streets. As I approached manhood, I realized that I would have to earn [my]
money." Equally tired of the stereotypical roles offered to him — he once stated, "I'm a bit tired of all this killing," as Wong was of crying and dying — Oland sought to explore the pleasurable possibilities of performance. For his roles in the Charlie Chan series, "Oland studied Chinese, travelled [sic] to China, and learned Chinese calligraphy,"

The actor strove to lend authenticity to the roles offered to him and problematized Western expectations of a "white" actor through his expanding linguistic capabilities. He trounced these simplistic expectations and continued to study Chinese, despite the yellowface tradition of merely speaking broken English. Consequently, Oland complicated the dominant language system — a dichotomy of American accent with proper grammar for the whites and pidgin English for the Orientals — just as Wong did with her English accent and correct grammar.

The migratory status and linguistic capabilities of Anna May Wong and Warner Oland converge in *Shanghai Express*, equally complicating notions of authenticity and cultural ownership. While the majority of the film employs Wong and Oland separately, serving as background for the white leads, one short scene included both actors. Rather than remaining separate, silent or unseen, this scene invokes use of both voice and body, allowing the actors to assert their own voices and bodies with agency. Although the packaging of the film serves to enforce an Orientalist dichotomy of white and other, the performances here by Wong and Oland reveal an effort to subvert dominant Orientalist language for a wider imagining of the other to include fluidity of difference.

Orientalist imaginings of the exotic other, along with expectations of Wong and Oland as performers in relation to their character representation, come to verbal blows in this scene. For Anna May Wong, the use of English serves to undermine her assumed authenticity as a background character for the unknowing spectator, while her use of Chinese dialect undermines her authenticity as a Chinese figure for the knowing audience. Her commanding use of English by way of the English accent serves to contort Western expectations of her "native" language, complicating Orientalist understanding of ethnic linguistic capabilities. For the spectator who understands Chinese, however, her use of the Taishan dialect reflects a similarly unauthentic representation.

Rather than speaking the dialect appropriate to the territory through which the train is traveling, Wong employs the dialect she has learned as a second language to English. In using both, Wong complicates each part of the Chinese-American dichotomy, opting for the construction of her own space based on her life as a migrant worker. Furthermore, her use of Chinese — regardless of the dialect — rather than English within the scene asserts Wong as an individual able to control the world around her, commanding language to ter-
minate Chang's sexual assault herself, rather than yelling for aid.

Conversely, Warner Oland employs proper English, rather than the pidgin or fortune-cookie English of Charlie Chan, and the Chinese dialect to reveal the opposite expectations of a Chinese character represented by a non-Chinese man. Linguistically reflecting his understanding of a Chinese dialect, Oland asserts the ability to learn a language outside the parameters of his ethnic origins, twisting Western discomfort with assimilation of the other as a threat to self. Rather than employing typical Engrish associated with yellowface portrayal of fellow non-Asian actors, Oland makes audible his efforts to lend authenticity to the character. This allows invested expression of a character, rather than mere impression of a background figure. Oland's popular status within the simplistic category of "white," despite his migratory Swedish-American position, solidifies audible discomfort towards the Eastern threat to Western control. Oland performs as a linguistically capable immigrant within the narrative (a Chinese character able to speak English) along with a linguistically compromised white actor beyond the narrative. He articulates the complicated identity of a migrant worker that is neither East nor wholly West, but that "benefits" from each.

Complicating notions of dichotomous or uniform stereotypes, Anna May Wong and Warner Oland linguistically reflect the complicated identities of migrant, minor film stars despite reception as figures representing two ends of the ethnic spectrum. Their hyperbolic performance along a two-dimensional plane presented by Sternberg in *Shanghai Express* calls attention to the possibilities of subverting Orientalist expectations. Wong occupies the unique position to play with Western expectations for her to be an Oriental woman, and Oland to play with Western expectations for him to play an Oriental man. Through their execution of character, Wong and Oland expand the assumed dichotomy of other versus Western in *Shanghai Express*. Both Wong and Oland make obvious their performance through exaggerated gesture, and subsequently subvert expectations of language use to reinforce the performance of difference. As in the sequence specified, their efforts to make visible and audible the construction of difference within Hollywood reveals the ability to create an identifiable space, through visibility and audibility, of disruption.

The early Hollywood pairing of Wong and Oland offers a performance of difference with outstanding repercussions for contemporary global spectatorship. In a society increasingly concerned with multiculturalism and plurality, Euro-American film continues to present ethnic differences in isolated opposition. As the stereotypes remain, spectators must ask of their actors an acknowledgment of performative agency. We must make visible and audible the unrecognized minority/immigrant.
grant/migrant worker, call attention to the recent victimization discourse of minor film stars, and question the global possibilities of defining minority as shades of difference despite the dominant isolationist system. Subversive performative tactics reflect a burgeoning effort toward multiplicity and diversity of differences, pointing towards the pleasure of disruption. Through subversive tactics, minor film stars may recuperate film as a means of establishing and maintaining a resistant collective spectatorship, one that sees and hears the faults of the system.

A minor scene of disruption becomes background noise. The minority, with all its complexity and efforts to actively change the system, remains ignored. Clive Brook smokes leisurely on the caboose as the train moves along the track.

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References


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HOLY WARS:
An Interview with Director Stephen Marshall
by daniel james scott

Holy Wars (dir. Stephen Marshall, 2010) has been traveling the festival circuit for more than a year. As I write this, it is still traveling the festival circuit. This is so because the film has only become increasingly relevant.

The documentary traces the longstanding conflict between Christianity and Islam. Following two fundamentalists over the course of seven years, Holy Wars provides in-depth portraits of both sides of the War on Terror.

On one side of the conversation is Aaron Taylor, a Christian missionary who journeys to the Middle East to convert Muslims. On the other side is Khalid Kelly, an Irish Muslim who supports jihad against the West. Driven by images of imminent salvation, these two aim to indoctrinate the world in their beliefs. What the film reveals through their confrontation — a highly cathartic debate in which the jihadist is the more sensible — is the divide between their ideologies, as well as the necessity of transformation through the act of self-reflection.

In his 2007 book, Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing, Stephen Marshall wrote, “In my view, what needs to happen is a very profound shift in the consciousness of the American people themselves.” Beyond the United States, Holy Wars functions as a clarion call for us to question the narratives by which we live our lives. In fact, the film was recently endorsed by the U.N. group the Alliance of Civilization (UNAOC), whose aim is to foster understanding “among nations and peoples across cultures and religions.”

I spoke to Marshall last year before a screening of Holy Wars at International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA). Holy War is currently being shopped domestically by Films Transit International.

D. Can you talk about the evolution of Holy Wars?
S. It actually started off as a scare piece. In 2006, one of the stories we found was in Indonesia, in a city on an island called Ambon where 3,000 Christians and Muslims were killed in a holy war that lasted for three years — because of a traffic accident that happened in the middle of the city. There was no history of violence on the island,
but because of this one incident, the political disputes that had been raging suddenly exploded. So I thought, “wow, that’s an amazing story to tell.” And I went around looking for stories like that, which supported this ultimately frightening thesis. And then Aaron agreed to meet Khalid, and this détente model started to arise. So what started as an anthropological study of religious conflict became a story of transformation.

D. Early on in the film, you say that both of your subjects participated out of their self-interests. What was it like for you to be in that position?
S. I really had to drift in there with compassion. I didn’t want to judge them. There were so many moments where I couldn’t just nail them, you know? I knew the audience was going to judge, and I didn’t want to be with them in that. So for me, finding my voice was really a matter of sticking to the middle ground and holding the audience’s hand through [the film].”

“Finding my voice was really a matter of sticking to the middle ground and holding the audience’s hand through it. What surprises me is that people didn’t just dismiss the film. One woman hated Khalid. Hated him. Someone else thought that Aaron was a twerp. So I’d ask them, “Well, did you want to watch the film?” They’d say, “Yeah, I wanted to watch the whole thing.”

D. And how did you come to Aaron?
S. In my pitch to producers, I said, “I want to have a danger-seeking missionary who wants to propagate the word of Christ.” They said, “awesome.” Five months later, nobody wanted to do it. Every missionary in the organization was either reluctant to give us the names of their people, or they thought we were insane: “Follow a missionary into Muslim land with a camera?” So for a while, we thought the film wasn’t going to happen. And then we put up an ad in the online papers, and Aaron called us. He was the only missionary in America who was willing to do it — who wasn’t a crackpot.

D. The film parallels your characters’ lives until they meet in a huge confrontation. What was it like for you to behold that conversation?
S. We initially planned to film for two hours. But after the first day, Aaron was so hurt that he asked to come back so he could better represent Christianity. And Khalid agreed, of course. He wanted to know if he should wear the same shirt (“Soldier of Allah”)? I think people watch the debate and see Aaron just take it so hard on the chin, and they feel they would have done better. But in so many ways, I feel the confrontation we filmed is indicative of a large truth about the West and Islam.

I was in Indonesia with a top jihadist, whose brother was captured in a firefight defend-
ing Indonesia’s top Al Qaeda operative while we were there. And he told me, “In the war on terror, we (Al Qaeda) are playing chess and you are playing checkers.” We are playing a long game and you are playing a short game. If you look at the way we responded to 9/11, one attack... let’s think of it as a bishop moving on the castle. And we have thrown our entire board at the thing! I feel that the way we’ve dealt with the war is plainly apparent in that conversation.

D. What’s it like to screen the film to an international audience versus screening it in the states?
S. We did a screening in Missouri, which was intense because some people got really pissed off. What’s problematic for them is that Khalid makes a lot of sense at times. He is the abomination of all Islamic thought, ultimately being given the opportunity to voice a very clear message — “Get out of our land, and we’ll stay out of yours” — which ultimately leads to Aaron’s catharsis.

Americans in the South see Aaron as progressive and good, but they have a huge problem with his anti-nationalism. Christians think Aaron was a lamb who got brainwashed and forced into a left-wing pacifist position. Right-wingers think it’s complete hogwash. A lot of people identify with their beliefs to the extent that Aaron’s transformation seems like a betrayal of his country, of himself.

D. In the Q and A following the screening, one audience member criticized the film’s lack of solutions.
S. I definitely didn’t want to make any conclusions. Every time I tried to write one out, it sounded so pat. I think that it does offer a solution though. The object lesson is: You have to turn inward. Question yourself. To me, Aaron is the solution. Though he didn’t revoke Christianity in the end, he thought, “Before I attack you, let me get a grip on myself. Because I may be attacking you because I’m looking at my own reflection in the mirror.” That to me is the solution to any conflict.

D. Do you sympathize with the perspective among your subjects that we are in end times?
S. I think that as the [as the Zhou Chen monks] say, “One world is dying while another one is being born.” The capitalist system has been exposed for what it is. It’s amoral. It only serves to benefit those with the most capital in the system. And now that the concentration of wealth has become so extreme, it can only benefit the most extreme people. The system is the enemy of humanity. And I don’t believe in socialism. I don’t know what the fucking system is. But I think about what Eckhart Tolle says (never mind the platitudes): When you lose everything, it’s okay.

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What is “found footage”? For many, it’s just a term written off into the chasm of experimental films and not given much more thought. But it’s more than that. It’s using something old for a new purpose. It’s taking something that was relevant before and making it relevant again, but in a different way. To be specific, it’s using existing film footage and re-editing it into a new film that tells a different story. Yet, to the filmmakers who use this unique mode, that still doesn’t explain it. For Bay Area found footage filmmaker Jay Rosenblatt, it’s “dealing with existing footage — footage that’s already been shot — and taking that footage and transforming it into something new.” For many, the transformation part is the most important. “That’s either done by manipulating the image itself or by juxtaposing it next to something completely different, taking it out of its context, recontextualizing it, and also changing the sound associated with it,” Rosenblatt said. “I’m always putting it into a completely different context so it’s kind of an exciting way of working because you’re looking for connections that weren’t in the original material.”

Bruce Conner, often credited as the father of found footage, made his first film in 1958. It was a found footage film entitled *A MOVIE* and in its 12-minute running time, it shows everything from cowboys and Indians to surfers riding a wave that appears to be made by the atomic bombs launched by a submarine in the previous sequence. (They had to fire something, though. Marilyn Monroe was all they could see through the periscope!). Motorcycle races and crashes then take over the screen, followed by a collage of other found imagery that all seems to match in its now strange, black and white way. The text “A MOVIE BY BRUCE CONNER” appears multiple times throughout the film and the whole piece is matched to an orchestral music soundtrack which replaces all other audio in the film. *A MOVIE* gives a summary of then-recent history as depicted in cinema and, in a way, critiques it. Conner continued to make many more short films, including several found footage pieces done in the collage style, and eventually more filmmakers followed his approach.

The question still remains, however — what exactly is found footage? In the films of Jay
Rosenblatt, it often surfaces as old 16mm film, shot decades ago, that has been rescued from dumpsters or demolition. The visual aesthetic this creates is reminiscent of the old, scratched film reels that used to be shown in public schools to accomplish educational goals such as alerting students about the changes their bodies go through during puberty — films that haven’t been shown in schools for decades, but something your parents or even grandparents might be all too familiar with. That’s just one example of what found footage can look like. But through the ever-important transformation process of editing, that’s not what it feels like.

In Rosenblatt’s films, the finished product has a more poetic feel to it, conveying personal moods and emotions far beyond the original scope of the footage used. And a large part of that is because Rosenblatt’s films use the footage to tell personal stories that are autobiographical and often deal with loss and other issues deeply personal in nature. One of Rosenblatt’s more popular films, The Smell of Burning Ash (1994), for example, deals with growing up as a boy in a masculine environment and having to suppress any behaviors that could even remotely be considered feminine.

Phantom Limb (2005) is another better known autobiographical film by Rosenblatt that uses found footage to tell his story of losing his younger brother at the age of seven when Rosenblatt himself was only nine. “It remains a painful and haunting memory,” Rosenblatt said. “The entire family experienced indescribable pain.” The film is structured after the grieving process and the content follows this form, ultimately conveying to viewers that “While grief is painful and isolating, it is a reminder to each of us that life is impermanent.”

Not all found footage films have such dark, mournful or personal content matter, however. Found footage can also serve documentary and even political purposes, according to UCSC professor and social documentation program graduate director B. Ruby Rich. The Hour of the Furnaces (dir. Octavio Getino and Fernando E. Solanas, 1968) is an Argentine film comprised almost completely of found footage. Widely admired as a manifesto in the 1970s, it served as a revolutionary film to overthrow the dictatorship in Argentina, according to Rich. The film is broken into three parts and totals more than four hours. It contains a variety of footage including newsreels, interviews, montages, and a famous extended still of the dead face of Che Guevara. The film calls for Marxist revolution and ends with a request that viewers continue the conversation the film had started.

East German directors Andreas and Anneline Thorndike also used their found footage for documentary work that had political intent, Rich said. She recalls that one of their works went so far as to take archive footage of Nazi German leaders and match it with then-current news footage of elected officials, thus exposing their dark pasts for all to see. Sometimes that’s what found footage does. “It has a lot of purposes, potentially,” said Rich. “Sometimes it’s used for verification — sometimes it’s used as evidence.” But that still doesn’t summarize all of what found footage is, what it has done, or what it can do.

“In the ’80s and ’90s it began to be used sometimes in a postmodernist mode as a form of critique,” according to Rich. “ Appropriation became a mode of critique — a mode of argument. So then found footage would be included as if it could speak for itself and be a kind of ironic gesture towards something else that was being proved or disproved.” This was the case with The Atomic Cafe — a film comprised entirely of found footage that critiques and even pokes fun at the idea of survival in a post-A-bomb fallout situation. Among other things, it recalls Bert the Turtle, who reminds viewers to “duck and cover” when they see the atomic flash. (Again, if your parents don’t remember this, your grandparents will.) While all of this was taken very seriously at the time it was originally filmed, when it reappears in 1982 as a found footage piece, the idea of hiding under anything to survive an atomic bomb seems ironic and utterly laughable. “You know you’re supposed to be accepting all this footage ironically,” said
Rich. And it was laughable because you know that you're “more sophisticated than the people shown in it.”

According to Rich, who recalls a premiere for the film in New York, about 15 minutes into the screening, a “great big, stout Irish-American guy” stood up in the audience, “red in the face, furious and screaming” at the filmmakers that their project was an outrage. It was later discovered that the angry patron was a relative of two of the three directors (Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty and Pierce Rafferty). According to Rich, the two related directors were also kin of George H. W. Bush and had used that political sway to gain access to the archive footage in the first place.

“Yes, people were roaring with laughter and feeling very self-congratulatory,” Rich said, referring to the absurdity of the archive footage shown in The Atomic Cafe. “It thinks it’s self-explanatory and that it doesn’t have to tell you.” But here, what it is doing is critiquing the past, pointing out naïve ideas once accepted as fact, and using all this to garner a response from the audience, whether angry or amused.

For filmmaker and musician Thad Povey, the audience response is one of the best parts of filmmaking. In 1990, at the very first screening for one of his own films, Povey recalls standing behind a couple in the Adobe Bookstore in San Francisco and overhearing a man remark to his female companion. He said “That was really cool.” about a particular edit in Povey’s A Different Kind of Green (1989) that cuts back and forth between a young girl in a white dress and a Canadian Mountie riding a ski lift. It’s a simple screen movement with both subjects getting progressively closer to the camera and although Povey admitted he didn’t intend to get such a response for that edit, he also said it was not accidental. “I was stunned,” said Povey. “A simple idea connected with another human in a deeply gratifying way and I couldn’t explain why.” Not all reactions are so positive, however, and sometimes a film’s message can be misinterpreted. “A viewer may take away a completely different idea than what I intended,” Povey said. “Mine is a personal filmmaking style. There’s no real way for me to avoid autobiography with found footage since every ‘storyline’ wants to connect to my own history,” he continued. “[But] I try to keep the self-referential aspects very much poetic, buried metaphors.” This is done intentionally, in part, so that not every viewer will have the same interpretation or reaction when seeing his films. And to gauge the reactions of his audience, Povey said he will always prefer intimate screenings to Internet viewing, where the intimacy is lost and there is no way to see the audience’s initial response. “You can’t see your films’ effects on people [online],” Povey said. “I hope people watching films together in dark rooms doesn’t go away.” Povey also said that the Internet and YouTube have changed how he approaches found footage. “It seems less ‘special’ now that so much material is available online. I imagine that it matters little to someone watching my films that I dug through a dumpster [to find the footage], rephotographed optically, edited manually, and printed chemically. Why not just download and do it in Final Cut? There’s no real answer for that.”

B. Ruby Rich has a more positive outlook on the advancements for found footage filmmaking provided by the Internet and the digital age, however. “I think that changes in technology have made [found footage] much more available to people. The invention of YouTube has made it more available than it’s ever been in history to anyone who wants to use it,” Rich said. “It used to be that people either found material at flea markets or else they had to go to archives physically — fly there — go to Washington, go to New York, wherever — and sit there and go through boxes and look for materials because everything was so badly cataloged, and try to find footage to support whatever they were trying to support.” Though archaic-sounding now, this was a fairly standard protocol, according to Rich, and found footage filmmakers had to go to great lengths to get what they needed. Some still do. “I think now,” Rich continued, “it’s much easier but there’s also, I think, probably a bigger audience for it than there’s ever been. It’s instant history.”
Found footage filmmaker, Other Cinema curator (www.OtherCinema.com) and Other Cinema Digital (OCD) publisher Craig Baldwin also commented on the digital transition that found footage is currently going through, stating: "It’s seen more on computer and monitor screens these days than on theater or gallery screens." Baldwin also notices a video shift in found footage film work with this. "The material seems increasingly sourced from television productions, as opposed to cinema. Animal Charm and TV Sheriff (two groups on our label) work almost exclusively with material that originated as video — in the former case as ‘corporate videos’ or infomercials and in the latter as particularly inane TV commercials or even programming." And while Baldwin didn’t explicitly say whether these shifts or trends are positive or negative, their presence is undeniable in the found footage world and it is changing how films are made and how footage is acquired.

Before the online revolution, Jay Rosenblatt recalls finding a plethora of film in a hospital dumpster. "I got a small grant after my thesis film [for San Francisco State] and I ended up using some footage that I had found in a dumpster at the psychiatric hospital where I worked," Rosenblatt explained. "It turned out to be this incredible trove of training films for doctors in bed-and-breakfast manner and I really liked this footage and I was able to use it as a structure for the film that I created." The film Rosenblatt made was a breakout film for him. It was his 1990 short film, Short of Breath — a film about a mother’s role and a son who inherits her depression with issues of life, sex, suicide and death sprinkled on top. Literally finding footage in dumpsters and turning trash to treasure like Thad Povey, Rosenblatt takes the “found” part of the term “found footage” to heart. This was also the case when he was given hundreds of old 16mm educational films from the San Francisco and San Mateo Unified School Districts. “These school district libraries were getting rid of all their 16mm films — they were throwing them out — so myself and several other filmmakers were just in the right place at the right time. So I had hundreds of films in my basement that I had gone through and that provided material for many, many films and many ideas.”

“There is almost always an element of discovery [in found footage],” Craig Baldwin said on the matter. “It does not strictly mean footage that one chances upon, though it certainly can be that [...] It has come to mean footage from previously produced films,” he continued. "And in my case those are largely mid-century educational, industrial, or sponsored films — sometimes called ‘orphan’ films if they are floating around without proper authors, publishers, registration, or archiving — in the public sphere, but not so much in a commercial distribution world.”

Footage is not always “orphaned,” however, which can sometimes cause difficulties.
in procuring the proper rights. "It is a huge issue, though I can't say that fear of copyright-holders has ever played too much of a role in my actual production," said Baldwin, whose found footage film *Senic Outlaws* (1995) specifically deals with issues of copyright, alleged plagiarism and culture-jamming events of that era. "I call for an expanded juridical interpretation of 'fair use' and am also inspired by the generous vision of the Commons that is brought forward by the Creative Commons movement," Baldwin said. Also citing fair use, Thad Povey considers his films safe from copyright prosecution because no money is made from his found footage films. "My artmaking is far from the commercial world and I radically repurpose the material, so subsequently I feel it's clearly 'mine' and that fair use applies," Povey said.

Jay Rosenblatt's work is closer to the commercial world," however, so he uses a more cautious approach to copyright issues. "In the past, through the Library of Congress, I've figured out what images I'm using are public domain and if there are any clips that have a copyright on them I've researched them and gotten the rights. Luckily there have only been a few shots in several films so I was able to afford to get the rights, but it's extremely expensive," Rosenblatt said. His new tactic that he first tried on *The Darkness of Day* (2009) was to hire a lawyer well-versed in copyright law and to work together to make a case for fair use based on the argument that the work is transformative. "I was told by a few people that they consider my work very transformative in terms of the original imagery — that I had completely transformed it into something else," Rosenblatt said. After a discussion with the lawyer and some stipulations, a letter was drafted stating the film's claim of fair use. The fair use letter makes it possible to air the film on television and to acquire "errors and omissions insurance," according to Rosenblatt. "It seemed a simpler way of dealing with it," he said of his new tactic. "There were many, many shots I would have had to clear otherwise and I didn't think that was necessary." Rosenblatt's example just goes to show that when working with original footage that's not your own, it's good to have some sort of fair use assessment and legal escape plan, no matter how manipulated the footage is — especially when your work makes it to the commercial realm.

So what is found footage? Now you have a better idea. It's not just experimental film. It's a filmic mode with a fairly long history that takes footage, repurposes it, and ultimately transforms it to have new and varied meanings through its editing process. It can be political, it can be satirical, it can be critical, personal, and a plethora of other descriptive words ending in "al" depending on the filmmakers' intent and abilities — as long as the final product provides a different reading to viewers than the footage had provided originally. And even though the Internet and the digital age have shaken up the found footage world considerably, it still survives and is even more available than ever, both in terms of audience and in terms of source materials.

Mixed feelings exist among filmmakers on this issue and some are adapting to the changes, while others continue the celluloid tradition. Copyright issues offer another hurdle for filmmakers to clear or to simply ignore, but fair use is emerging as the logical counter-argument in that race. And although it seems that the state of the medium is changing, the classics will always remain classics and the possibilities of the future look promising with all the digital age resources available. Or maybe not. Who knows? Another thing to keep in mind is that found footage really isn't for everybody. But now that you have a better understanding of what found footage is, go check it out. You might like it.

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THE DESERT OF THE REEL
Assessing the Nature of Authenticity in the Mock-Documentary
by rod bastanmehr

In the 2008 documentary Standard Operating Procedure, filmmaker Errol Morris tackles the noble subject of truth, of perception — even of documentation itself. The film, which chronicles the torture and criminal actions at the Abu Ghraib prison facility in Iraq beginning in 2004, combines reenactments with archival photography. Those photographs, which broke the story on mistreatment at the hands of the guards, are the crux of the film’s narrative. But Morris focuses less on the facts and more on questions of authenticity — of how documentation can, according to Morris, “reveal and conceal, serve as [both] exposé and cover-up.”

Morris, a master manipulator of truth, able to present fact through the styles of fiction, has spoken openly about his film as one dealing less with questions of torture, terrorism or the powers that be, and more about our relationship with truth, as captured in an image and as simplified through documentation.

A documentary that questions whether truth can be documented at all: In an age of media consumption, is there any question more worth asking?

The cinema is a place of fiction; the documentary is a place of truth. Simplified, this has been the breakdown of our expectations of film. Where fiction dabbles in notions of escapism, documentaries have always been “grounded in the belief that [they] can access the real.” But what of films that use this format in an effort to progress a fictional narrative? The mockumentary is far from a new concept. It dates back to as early as 1964, with The Beatles’s A Hard Day’s Night, and hit its peak during the height of Christopher Guest’s reign as comedy’s go-to hyperrealist.

The mock-documentary, however, is an entirely different beast — one with intentions and results all its own. Where the mockumentary uses the notion of “the real” as a method of presenting its punchline, the mock-documentary presents the punchline as the belief in the notion of “the
real" altogether. This is why the hoax film is, quite possibly, one of the most fascinating minor movements that the film world has seen in quite some time: It takes the documentary's attempt to find the truth, but turns the lens onto the audience that receives it. Two films in particular — 2010's *I'm Still Here* and *Catfish* — tackle the question of authenticity in their own most fascinating ways. Both with conceptualizations of identity, of the true — one a hoax, the other about a hoax. What, when placed in dialogue, do these two films say about one another? About how we document the real, and whether such a thing can ever really take place when notions of the real are constantly interrupted?

So deeply rooted in time and place are both these films (dealing with ideas of celebrity, identity, the digital age, and the connective tissue between us and all three of these concepts) that it's no wonder they were birthed at the very end of the new millennium's first full decade. *I'm Still Here* stars Joaquin Phoenix as "Joaquin Phoenix," chronicling his decay as performer, his exit from Hollywood and his subsequent breakdown while trying to break into the hip-hop universe. The film, directed by brother-in-law Casey Affleck, follows Joaquin everywhere — from Los Angeles to San Francisco; from his childhood home in Panama to the cold floors of his shattered psyche. Joaquin's progression as an emotional actor on the brink of breakdown to an embarrassed performer whose now-infamous interview with David Letterman serves as the emotional climax of the film is harrowing.

That the Letterman interview is so pivotal to the narrative is, itself, key in rationalizing the film's place within the universe of the mock-documentary. Documentary, in its purest form, is meant to be a purveyor of truth. Where film grapples with representation or even recreation, documentary is of recovery, of revelation. Understand this: Phoenix's year long stint, posing as a troubled actor who looked like a Hasidic meth addict, was both a blend of public spectacle and performance art. But it was not real: A day after the film's national release in Sept. 2010, Affleck and Phoenix broke the news that the entire stunt had been orchestrated, conceived as a performance with the intention of documenting it.

But *I'm Still Here* chronicles the breakdown of a public image. For so long, the documentary has attempted to present itself as "being engaged in a coherent project, that of objectively recording reality." But by chronicling the notion of the real by sizing together the clips and the footage that created Joaquin's false-reality, *I'm Still Here* becomes a mock-documentary comprised of actual documentary footage. By documenting something counterfeit, but infusing it with footage from third-party documentarians who believed the footage to be "true," the film becomes a fascinatingly complex work that can't be called a mockumentary or a
documentary. It becomes a hybrid of the real, and manages to encapsulate what these films expose. For so long, the notion of fact and fiction has facilitated the definition of the documentary. This approach is predicated on the existence of a “fact/fiction dichotomy, with documentary on one side, and drama on the other.” What the mock-doc does is essentially position the documentary not as an opposing end of the cinematic spectrum, but rather as a genre, with its own conventions and methods of stylistic progression. And similarly, its lens is just as fixed on its reception.

Phoenix as a figure had his breakdown presented through the media even before his film was released. And real or not, outside coverage of his breakdown made his performance real. Once *I’m Still Here* begins to document the actual act of others covering Phoenix’s breakdown, it becomes a film not attempting to continue a shrick, but one that is actually documenting the response to a hoax they believe real. Our moment of mass media absorption has made it so that all information is digestible as truth because it is available openly and without question. This is why Phoenix’s performance is less an act of shockumentation, and more an example of how we, as viewers, can no longer differentiate between the real and fake because we don’t have to.

Nowhere is that more true than in *Catfish*, the haunting “reality thriller,” as it was billed by its twenty-something creators. The film chronicles Nev Schulman, a New York based photographer who one day sparks an unlikely friendship with an eight-year-old whiz painter named Abby, who mails him a painting of one of his photographs. Their correspondence leads Nev into a relationship with Abby’s parents and a budding romance with their oldest daughter, Megan. It’s at this point that Nev’s brother, Ariel Schulman, and their friend, Henry Joost, both amateur filmmakers, begin to document this sincerely sweet relationship that Nev had developed with the clan he has dubbed “the Facebook family.”

To say anything more would surely ruin the film’s faucet-drip pacing. Chances are you can perhaps guess in what direction the film will inevitably twist, but the emotion, the grief, the haunting melancholy should take you by surprise. It did me. The film is infused with so many 21st century signifiers that it becomes the first major work of fictional non-fiction to be birthed by the Facebook generation, who believe life is what you lead in the public eye.

The film’s legitimacy has been questioned since its premiere over a year ago at the Sundance Film Festival. These questions are fair. Scenes where the filmmakers begin to realize that the Facebook family seems amiss are often rushed and too perfectly captured. But these furrowed brows that preach the film as fiction are missing the point it makes through its fascinating anti-reception: that truth has suddenly become a choice. Megan's
identity and legitimacy are under question throughout the film's second act, culminating in a shattering finale that leaves us wondering whether authenticity is really even the point anymore.

And it is. But the fact that viewers have suddenly exhibited such a rabid response to the film and believe it to be fake signals a move into a new direction for the documentary. There has always been a clear separation between films that depict reality: They are either meant to exploit what we already know (Super Size Me) or unveil things we don't (anything by Barbara Kopple). But never before has there been a documentary that is so realistically fictitious — meaning the happenings on screen are so within the frame of possibility that they're almost impossible to confront as true. If I'm Still Here confronts notions of identity within its narrative, and births a reality outside of it, Catfish takes on questions of reality within its tale, but watches identification be actively denied. Why were viewers able to quickly believe the breakdown of a man whose lifework hinges on performance, but were quick to turn on a film behind realistic questions of identity in the 21st century? What do these two films say about one another, about us as viewers?

Truth — a fluid term meaning everything and nothing at the same time — is what cinema vacillates between attempting to convey and contextualize. And the notion that the camera in question can only capture the real is, above all else, questionable. Because what the camera does is capture not truth incarnate, but truth made subjective. Phoenix's decay onscreen — performed as it may have been — nevertheless documents an actual reality facilitated by the con itself. Catfish — real or fake, it's up for individual taste and tailoring — is a documentary about a reality that is actively being avoided by its viewers.

These films don't just play with the typical conventions of documentary. Instead, they alter our perception of the documentary's meaning, of its eternal quest for truth. Both films dabble in this question of identity, of how we represent ourselves and what the truth means when you can alter perceptions of the real and the hoax. But what makes them unique as a pair is that their reception speaks loudly about our relationship with contemporary film's ability to capture truth — about whether we even want it to, or believe it even can.

When we consider these two films as ushering in a new moment for documentary filmmaking, we see a movement that transgresses parodist names like the mockumentary and instead focuses its intention on documenting not the truth on screen but in reception. I'm Still Here crafts an elaborate year-spanning hoax that wants to be read as pop performance art. But instead it is a film that documents the reception of Phoenix's "breakdown." This is reality. Catfish crafts a tale about misrepresentation of identity, and the film's
actual documentation of reality has been met with cries of counterfeit. This is reality, too. Both these films operate in 21st century irony: *I'm Still Here* chronicles Phoenix's decline from the spotlight while simultaneously being filmed; *Catfish* shoes away notions that its story about a potential hoax is, itself, a hoax too. These films don't just play with the typical conventions of documentary. Instead they alter our perception of the documentary's meaning, of its eternal quest for truth. What the mock-documentary does is chronicle not a subject, but an audience. It reads its place culturally, its moment of arrival. It blurs the lines between fact and fiction, altering a method of filmmaking that is naturally perceived to depict truth at its most infinite. And in doing so, it captures something else entirely.

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4. Ibid.

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FAVORITE BREAKING OF THE FOURTH WALL

by rod bastanmehr

Violence oozes out of every moment of Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997/2007), a simple tale of two twenty-something prepsters who torture an unassuming family during their summer stay at a waterfront property. But it's the moment when we're finally granted the sweet nectar of revenge, when Ann (Naomi Watts) gets a hold of a shotgun and fires a shell right into Peter's chest, that Haneke inflicts his crudest but most fascinating bit of sadism. Mouth agape at Peter's death, Paul frantically searches for a remote control, eventually finding it logged in between blood-stained couch cushions. Hitting the rewind button, the entire scene does just that, and we're taken back to the moment before Ann lunges towards the gun — only this time, Paul grabs it before she can, jamming the rear end into her stomach before staring directly at the screen and lamenting the absurdity of her even trying.

It's a scene so shell-shocking that it requires a rewind at our own accord to fully digest it. Until that moment, the film's horror was rooted in the terrifying apathy with which Paul and Peter inflict their own brand of torture. But once that rewind occurs, and Paul acknowledges us as viewers, we are coerced into the horror, and our active role in the 'games' being played lie simply in witnessing them in the first place. The film has been remade stateside almost exactly a decade after its Austrian counterpart, and Haneke seems to be commenting on our desensitization to violence over the course of those ten years. And when that wall is broken, and Paul's sinister blue eyes pierce the screen, he isn't merely speaking to us, but acknowledging us as partners in cruelty.
SOMEBWHERE IN THE NIGHT
Escaping the Yuppie Fantasy of the 1980s
by mark gasparo

The 1980s were a tumultuous and confusing time for the "American dream." At the decade's start, the country was in a state of malaise, socially and economically weakened. With the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, the country saw its biggest turnaround by any president since Franklin D. Roosevelt. Reagan issued widespread tax cuts and embraced conservative values, favoring "individualism, private ownership of property, and free enterprise." He revitalized the American economy and what resulted was the alleged "decade of greed."

The films of the '80s mirrored this sudden economic growth with films like Wall Street (1987), The Secret of My Success (1987), Nothing in Common (1986), and Rollover (1981), which featured "aggressive urban money men" and young business executives navigating the fierce economic terrain of urban America with positive results. While the industrial boom favored the protagonists of these films, for some the office was a place where the monotony of everyday routine chipped away at the soul of the individual — cubicles became cells where freedom was traded for the promise of security or a safety net.

Three films — After Hours (1985), Into the Night (1985) and Something Wild (1986) epitomize this dissatisfaction with the status quo. This trio of films belongs to the subgenre of "Into the Night" movies as coined by AV Club.com from the film of the same name, which follow "one anxious character (or group of characters) embarking on an illicit adventure and emerging transformed." However, there are enough motifs and connective tissue between these films to warrant a discussion of their own.

These Into the Night films work to transgress the prevailing attitude of the time by criticizing the country's drive towards excess and materialism. The '80s mindset of the yuppie was to "party extremely hard as a reward for working extremely hard, to sacrifice (especially human relationships) for one's job, [which] mirrored the Reagan administration's deficit spending policies and high-tech defense system acquisitions." Hidden within the narrative frameworks of these films are a searing criticism of the times and the fear of what would happen if the yuppie dream were a farce. The corporate slave drones were operating under the pre-
tense of "the yuppie ideal — the act of erecting so many nets around one's life, attaching so many parachutes to one's existence that everyday reality actually could be closed out." For the protagonists of the Into the Night movies, what was needed was to awake, to realize that there was more to life than the urban sprawl.

The dilemma of the Into the Night protagonist is that he is mired in the corporate machine, unable to extricate himself from it. The path to enlightenment for him is not easily found, and although he may not realize it, his desire is to liberate himself from the confines of his humdrum existence. After Hours opens with Paul Hackett (Griffin Dunne), a word processor, training a new hire. Immediately, the trainee scoffs at the position, insisting that, "It's temporary. I do not intend to be stuck doing this for the rest of my life" — he still believes in the American dream. Paul, on the other hand is defeated. His only purpose — or lack of thereof — is to continue working. In Into the Night, Ed Okin (Jeff Goldblum) is bound by a cubicle office and an unhappy marriage, the day no longer having anything to offer him. It's only when he catches his wife cheating on him that he realizes what he must do — venture into the night. Something Wild offers up a slightly different character with Charlie Driggs (Jeff Daniels), the quintessential yuppie. Charlie hides behind the comfort of his position in life, but he's really as despondent as the rest. Like Ed, Charlie has been damaged, his wife having taken the kids and run off with the family dentist. He lacks spontaneity or "wildness," and suffers for it. These characters are too passive and impotent to free themselves from the routine of their lives. It takes "chance encounters with dangerous women" to rouse these protagonists from their sleep.

The women of these films are far more fascinating than their male counterparts. They're strong-willed, free-spirited and not afraid to get themselves into risky situations. However daring they may be, though, they're trapped or scarred by men in their lives. In Something Wild, it's Lulu (Melanie Griffith), a certified rebel with a fanciful dress sense, who forces Charlie to unleash the "closest rebel" inside of him and break the law. Lulu hijacks his life, forcing him to attend her high school reunion, but their weekend without rules is derailed when Lulu's ex-con husband, Ray (Ray Liotta), enters the picture. In Into the Night, Diana (Michelle Pfeiffer) jumps on the hood of Ed's car and begs him to drive away. Diana's strength lies in her willingness to act outside the law, associating with thugs and deviants. As a result, she is reliant on them, and therefore trapped. Marcy (Rosanna Arquette) in After Hours, on the other hand, is not trapped but psychologically damaged. Her boldness is brought on by her insecurity and lack of mental clarity. After meeting Paul at a café, instead of asking him out, she asks him if he'd be interested in purchasing one of her roommate's Plaster of
Paris bagel and cream cheese paper weights. While Paul tries to make sense of Marcy's scattered signals, her demeanor is the outcome of emotional scarring brought on by men. In the film Marcy reveals that she was raped by an ex-boyfriend. These uninhibited women leverage their power and behave contradictorily to the rest of society because like so many women of the time, they were “excluded from the yuppie dream.” The desk job was never an option for them and so they aligned themselves with men who also were excluded.

The Into the Night movies portray night as a place where danger lurks, a time when vagrants, criminals, and the deranged parade around and traverse the city with little to no consequences. For the Into the Night protagonist, it's a transformative subspace where the anarchic energy offers an impetus for the protagonists to reclaim control over their lives. In *After Hours*, the film portrays the once art-centric Soho district of New York as teeming with crazies. As Paul tries to survive his horror night in the city, he's implicated in a death, witnesses a murder, and is chased down by a rabid mob for a series of robberies he is thought to be responsible for. For Paul, his passivity is challenged as he's forced to endure existential tests around every corner. Paul, however, learns how to navigate the streets of the Soho district and emerges unscathed. In *Into the Night*, Ed and Diana are pursued by a group of Iranians for priceless jewels Diana smuggled into the country. Along the way, they're confronted by a petty crook played by David Bowie and a number of other ancillary characters who make their survival much more treacherous. For Ed, it is only under these conditions that he can articulate what he's searching for. When one of the Iranian thugs takes Diana hostage in LAX, and holds a gun to her head, Ed asks him, "Let me ask you something, maybe you can help me. What's wrong with my life? Why is my wife sleeping with someone else? Why can't I sleep?" The thug cracks a smile before splattering his brains on the wall. In *Something Wild*, when Charlie thinks he's got a hold on being impulsive, the real underworld and dangers of society are revealed by Ray, who forces Charlie to take part in a convenience store robbery. Ray takes Charlie and Lulu hostage in a hotel room and smacks Charlie around before abducting with Lulu, leaving Charlie behind. It's only through these events that Charlie gains the strength necessary to turn the tables on Ray later on in the film.

By the end of the Into the Night films, the protagonist has changed in a dramatic way. He no longer sees reality the way he has in the past. His worldview has changed, having been shaken by the real world. In *Into the Night*, Ed's inability to sleep is emblematic of a disturbance in his life. In some way he knows from the beginning that there's something missing or artificial about his life. Ed's existence in the film resembles a lucid dream and his awakening in the film is ironically seen through
his ability to sleep once again. When Ed awakes, he finds an envelope filled with two bundles of hundred-dollar bills, but noticing that Diana is gone, he doesn’t think twice. He walks out into the hall and finds her at the end of it. In *Something Wild*, Charlie transforms his nebbish persona, now able to subvert Ray. By the film’s end, Charlie resigns from his position as vice president and trades in his white collared shirt and tie for a more offbeat dress sense. Like *Into the Night*, *Something Wild* ends with a romantic coupling. The yuppy lifestyle had failed both characters, having squandered their personal lives for their jobs, which resulted in marital estrangement. However, they both had found women they can trust because they exist on the periphery of society. *After Hours* is by far the most nihilistic and defeatist of the trio. By the end of the film, Paul returns to his office and, without a second thought, dusts off his jacket to begin a day anew. Paul is not spared by the corporate machine. The message of *After Hours* is much darker, while still equally relevant as a criticism of the culture — the film is saying that “yuppies ought to be more satisfied with their superficial lot in life because reality, working without a net, tends to be much more dangerous.” *After Hours* does not defend the yuppy dream, but instead insists that there was no way out of it — that certain death could only be expected if one attempted to transgress the dominant ideology.

The *Into the Night* trio is not outwardly critical of the times. It lies in the transformational arc of the characters — the subconscious thought that maybe there was something beyond the desk job, beyond the promise of the yuppy dream that drove these characters. The 1980s were a destructive time for the soul of the individual. By focusing on being economically viable and consumer-driven, people lost touch with what was really important, the personal connections they had sacrificed and spoiled for the illusion of success. *Into the Night*, *Something Wild* and *After Hours* all offer their own portrait of the time, but they also share a perspective that something was wrong with the status quo — enlightenment, however, was possible. You just had to search for it in the unexpected. To find it, they had to go into the night.

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LOOSE ENDS & DEAD ENDS

The Dilemma for Women in Horror
by leo robertson

The cinema both terrifies and inspires me in ways that can hardly be quantified in simple terms. With the ability to show us our most beautiful dreams and terrible nightmares, the filmscape's hold on me is one I naturally share with countless other filmgoers. That film has long been a communal activity is one of the more comforting aspects of such a volatile medium, allowing me to find sympathy with not only a host of fictional characters onscreen, but with other dreamers like myself. Though different things may scare individuals, the effectiveness of film lies in its universal nature. Culling from the primal fears of physical stimulation, it's horror films which on the surface compel us to think in absolutes and are too often condemned as shallow for showing us what we want to see. Horror as a genre, despite its long association with cheap cinema, has always had the strange academic property of being able to provide insight into contemporary cultural values, especially pertaining to gender relations. These films often use their horror lens to manipulate female bodies in ways that have very telling social implications. The horror franchises that have a sequel-life spanning across decades most effectively illustrate the growth of the onscreen and offscreen female. Through the evolution, or de-evolution, of recurring females Ellen Ripley and Laurie Strode — of the Alien and Halloween series, respectively — lies a strong reflection of how more and more frequently women have been making a shift in film from victim and antagonist into much more ambiguous territory, wherein their integrity is now either wholly reified because of their bodily invasion at the hands of an aggressor or compromised by it.

The decade of the 1970s saw the birth of what is now considered to be the contemporary horror genre, bringing an unnerving vulnerability to the sacredness of body. Though horror film has always displaced our anxieties into other forms, the coming wave of bodily-centered horror showed audiences that the line between ourselves and the other could be blurred — threats exploding from within. The female body is a site that in particular has mystified and scared us on a primitive level, so it should be no surprise that the two films that hailed this new wave were also the ones that brought two new iconic female characters and
actresses to the forefront, *Halloween* director John Carpenter cast Jamie Lee Curtis and Ridley Scott followed suit a year later with Sigourney Weaver, as the studios began to catch on to the rising popularity of strong female characters. While today the Final Girl (the lone female who survives at the end of a movie) has become engrained as a cliché of the genre, viewers at the opening night in 1979 were new to the furious assertiveness of Ellen Ripley. Her introduction in *Alien* is not only one of pureness as she emerges quietly from an egg-like stasis pod in a pristine white room, but also one of wisdom as she is the first to realize that she and others have been awakened abnormally before arriving on Earth. However, it was not quite as simple as a move from powerless victim to competent resistor. Professor of film studies Carol Clover describes the concept of the Final Girl as encapsulated by the fact that the Final Girls were never the sexually active females in a narrative. Common genre-savviness denotes that for a girl to survive to the end, she has to be more intellectually sound than her promiscuous counterparts and less likely to adhere to the stereotypes of sexiness. Thus, they were the females who were “not obviously” female. In a sense, Final Girls are really just boys — at the very least, boyish girls among a host of others. The obvious other in each case was their respective stalker: the space beast in Scott’s film and the suburban beast in Carpenter’s, both extraterrestrials in their own right.

In *Alien*, this identification with the Final Girl is further enabled by the direction Scott chose to go in by allowing erotic-surrealist painter H.R. Giger to design the antagonist. Designed to resemble a giant penis, it was terrifying in every way — it’s indiscriminate penetration embodying a host of erotic anxieties, which could scare both men and women. The eggs they emerge from are also reminiscent of dark, vaginal recesses. If the screen is a site for people to impose themselves, and Final Girls in particular are a space for men to displace their transgender identification, viewers “protect” themselves by rejecting the phalic monster and hoping with all their hearts that Ripley will emerge untouched. We can’t escape the fact that boyish or not, Ripley is a woman and thus will always in some respect be viewed as other, separate from the screen’s male gaze. It is this which causes the never-ending pull between rooting for her and being subconsciously wary of her, a latent tie to the alien that will continue to snowball and become more visible as the series progresses.

The same is true of *Halloween*, as the audience is forced to identify with the sexually troubled murderer in the first-person view as Michael proceeds quietly through his home, finds his post-coitus sister naked on the bed and stabs her repeatedly in the first few minutes. As soon as his clown mask is removed and we realize that he is an attractive young boy, we’re more than willing to place our comfort in the unassuming innocence of Laurie Strode. A forerunner for what would later be termed the slasher film, Laurie was the first of a long line of scream queens who in her meekness lent herself more easily to sympathy by a threatened masculine audience. Similarly to Ripley, Laurie’s growing violence-awareness as the film progresses is the result of the character’s masculine subtext, and in her gendered ambiguity she becomes linked to Michael Myers. *Halloween II* was a simple extension of the night during which the first movie takes place, notable only for explicitly emphasizing that link to the other — revealing Michael to be Laurie’s brother.

Despite the less than obvious nature of their gender, this was nonetheless a turning point that began to more fully solidify itself in the later
1980s. 1970s America was making its move out of a more conservative era, but ideals were far from perfected. Consider Clover’s thoughts on the 1960s, which she claims were departure from with great suspicions of gender confusion to come, a prophecy that did not go entirely unfulfilled — particularly in the wake of the women’s movement, and their injection into not only the workplace but as family heads, with the rise of divorce. The horror films of the late 1970s might be considered that decade’s end-result of said confusion. The women may have displayed growing levels of assertiveness, but the ideological status quo still firmly laid down its limits. At the end of the film Laurie takes a hanger and bends the wire into a weapon with which to stab Michael. In her boyish characterization, she is given the tools to repurpose an effeminate device not only for defense, but offense through penetration — the very mode of action that Michael lives by. She even tears the mask off his face, revealing once again the nature of the handsome white suburban male beneath the perversion. Ripley uses a spear to impale the alien and force it out the airlock at the end. Yet she is subjected to a space-voyeurism striptease when alone in front of the audience, just before donning the spaceman suit and blasting the monster into space. Both of the women take it upon themselves to go from “sexually” passive to in fact extremely “sexually” active, utilizing and taking the phallic from the antagonist. There was no precedent for such actions on film. It’s unfortunate that in the essence of the last-minute male as represented by the savior physician, Dr. Loomis, in *Halloween* and the requisitioning of a masculine space-suit in *Alien*, we see perhaps the most obvious remnant of the era’s need to keep the Final Girl in check.

Hollywood of the 1980s saw the perpetuation of the blueprint for horror laid out by Carpenter and Scott with the 1980s “slasher film”. These films took the most easily duplicated and marketable aspects of new body horror and slasher horror and mass-produced it, though this did not mean a wave of new complex females. Ellen Ripley, at least, lived on in her own franchise. Laurie Strode, however, is curiously absent from the next two chronological entries in the *Halloween* franchise. Apparently unwilling to return to a series associated with the “poorer cinema” of the 1980s, Jamie Lee Curtis opted out as a result of becoming successful in the film industry. Instead, the easy-out was made with the inclusion of a new female relative — Laurie’s surprise daughter, Jamie Lloyd in *Halloween 4: The Return of Michael Myers*. The film explains her existence as that of an orphan to Laurie and an unnamed Mr. Lloyd, who both died in an accident. The fourth movie was released in 1988 to moderate critical reception and mixed reviews. With Michael having been established as a relative to the protagonists of the series, a connection is made between our Final Girls and the antagonist that will come to define their place in the series.
We see the potential for this when the fourth movie ends with yet another apparent death for Michael, though the twist: here is a finale where we are subjected to a repeat of the opening to the original movie: a first-person perspective shows someone putting on a mask and stabs Jamie's stepmother. The person is revealed to be Jamie Lloyd herself, having been "possessed" by the same insanity that gripped her uncle. The final image is a compelling one, of a little girl wearing the same clown costume and wielding the same bloody knife as the sexually chaotic male killer once did. The ending suggested that the series would continue with the little girl, Jamie Lloyd, as the "monster," potentially spinning off into interesting territory for the horror-female dynamic. The filmmakers behind the fifth entry, *Halloween 5: The Revenge of Michael Myers*, apparently did not think this thread was worth following. Released in 1989, the movie is another carbon-copy of the October holiday plot where Michael comes back from the dead. Jamie's transformation is written off as a temporary lapse in sanity, now a mute and traumatized child residing in the Hadonfield Children's Clinic. After reaching a point in which the series could have done something new, this child replacement for Jamie Lee Curtis is still firmly a child — Laurie Strode's arc culminating here in an even further underwhelming infantilization of her character through replacement by wordless nine-year-old. Where did our new-age Final Girl go?

Interestingly enough, the release of *Aliens* in 1986 also saw the return of Ripley with an associative daughter: Newt. The move out of the 1970s would seem to support Ripley's growth as a male-equal. The storyline sees these qualities accentuated nicely — except for one standout factor seemingly plastered on out of nowhere. Apparently Ripley was, in her Earth life, the first film, a mother. When she awakens, she discovers that she has been in cryo-sleep for 57 years, during which time her daughter has died of old age. This then explains for the audience why, when she returns to the original alien planet with a military hoping to eradicate the threat, she feels responsible for taking on as her surrogate daughter a colonist orphaned in an alien assault. While there is nothing inherently wrong with motherhood, the addition does seem crippling. This child to care for and a colonial marine love interest make for a ripe script, but the end-result in both the case of *Alien* and *Halloween* seems belittling. Where Final Girls could have been on their way to being independent Final Women, they were relegated to the age-old homemakers' trap: children. I would suggest that its reason for continuing to be such a huge success was the decidedly more patriarchal approach that Ripley takes not only in caring for the child, but in command of the military battalion as a genderless "Lieutenant Ripley." Additionally, as a lieutenant she leads a fight against the alien menace, which in this entry has been colored with the context of evil
matriarchy parallel to her own, with the inclusion of the Alien Queen. Ripley's maternal role not only deadens her ability to survive in the context of a single female but, like Laurie's literal family tie to Michael, the subsequent pitting of her against another mother goes a great way towards solidifying not only the perception of Ripley as a subservient wife but further as a separate other presence. The films poster wholly encompassed the ambiguity: Ripley holding Newt in one hand, while also very firmly in possession of a phallic rifle in the other, while vaginal egg sacs open up around her. Supermoms, as it turned out, may really have just been your standard action dads. It's likely that at least part of this acceptance of Ripley-Dad could be attributed to the 1980s' "cult of androgyny," as Clover puts it, which was certainly having its effects on what audiences members deemed normal. The androgynization of the character essentially culminated in a delaying of castration anxiety, which in Freudian psychoanalysis refers to the unconscious fear of penile loss. According to Freud, when a young boy becomes aware of difference between male and female genitalia he assumes that her penis has been severed and becomes anxious that his will, too — this anxiety never leaves the subconscious. Hence, the plethora of erotic imagery throughout the history of the cinema results in symbolic castration anxiety, causing generalized fears of being degraded, humiliated and losing sexual dominance.

The inclusion of a child for the once-lone Ripley, as well as Laurie Strode's essential transformation into a child are easy condemnations on the part of the writers and producers for what could have been shining moments in the strengthening of independence, where instead the dominance of the male ideology was maintained sub-textually on screen. The franchise did not need to make her a mother with a penis, nor did Halloween require the fight against abject terror within a complex female body moved into the reduced realm of simple child terror. As the 1980s waned, the two series would appear to be left at a standoff between game-changing and the same old. Alien 3, released in 1992, begins with a complete unraveling of the story-progression thus far. As it opens, the "modern family unit," which escaped the second film finds itself crash-landing on prison planet Fiorina 161. Newt and the marine love interest, Hicks, are killed off-handily in the crash. This disregard for the happy ending at the conclusion of Aliens presents a restructuring of that entry's Ripley-Dad. She is once again free of human familial attachment, in a prison full of male rapists and murderers — off to assert her lack of

"The franchise did not need to make her a mother with a penis."

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credibility amongst a host of misogynists who ignore her warnings of a more horrifying penile beast. The family values that director James Cameron attempted to reassert in the last film are not so much destroyed as they are re-imagined with the other— the alien— now as the singular definition of Ripley’s identity and her family.

While the second film was problematic in that it went to great lengths to ground her within the confines of a common American family, strong as she may have been for a female, she was nonetheless caged. With the plot now compelling her to shave her head, sleep casually with a criminal and tempt the other inmates into breaking their vows of peace with her very presence, her arc not only strips away the comfortable semblances of subservient femininity she once held but goes so far as to paint a picture of her as... well, alien. Consider this: As a non-male she automatically acts as an other who disturbs the societal norm within the prison complex. Combine this with the literal immersion of a new Alien Queen inside of her chest and it should become quite clear how her character is compromised by her relation to the antagonist. The Final Girl now, fully and completely, is separate from us. As film and feminist theorist Mary Ann Doane puts it, “to ‘have’ the cinema is, in some sense, to ‘have’ the woman,” meaning that a camera’s gaze is essentially one that embodies the dominant male ideology and codes the viewer as male. One might view Ripley’s infection by penile baby as the final insult to injury in the subversion of the independent female, but I choose to see Ripley’s final sacrifice and suicide as the final assertion of self. Control over the female can only go so far, even on film. She refuses to give up her child, displeasing as it may be for her to birth it, and in doing so turns her Final Girl status on its head and makes herself into the Final Monster. The implications don’t have to breathe, as the situation is immediately alleviated by her willing suicide. While the tone is very fatal, I appreciate director David Fincher’s attempt to stay true to the integrity of the character as a legitimate being who tried to define herself singularly, and in being unable to do so, saw fit to erase herself. What can be said of an audience that above all protests the exclusion of the factors that bind the woman to family, and by extension, to man? The mythos of Alien 3 took the woman away from the male coded gaze, and audiences could only abstractly feel that the cinema was taken away— hence the poor reception.

In 1998, Halloween H20 brought Jamie Lee Curtis back to the series after 17 years. That the film functioned instead as a direct sequel to Halloween II and ignored the daughter character would make it sound like a new opportunity. Being the first film where Laurie herself knew of the familial connection to Michael, it has a few unique scenes that seem to treat her alignment with the other in a progressive fashion. The brother-sister dynamic is highlighted during the climax of the
fused with that of the aliens. By this point in her development she is completely free of the binds of what psychoanalyst Joan Riviere calls the female masquerade — the idea that femininity itself is a conscious or unconscious act performed by women in order to adhere to the dominant male ideology, for both the pleasure of others and their own conformity within a system where no alternative is comprehended. The original Alien was the smoothest example of her existence within this act, as the masquerade helped disguise her blatantly masculine qualities within a Final Girl shell that could be easily digested. Aliens did present us with a powerful Ripley-Dad, but still followed certain rules of the masquerade, which reinforced the woman's place in the nuclear American home. Alien 3 made those vital first steps towards abandonment of masquerade, but it was more a feign towards freedom — as it led only to her demise within a society that could not accept such an abomination. Thus, we arrive at Alien Resurrection where the scientists with the God complex try so very hard to remove that other within her — and still fail. The mixing of DNA had now fully formed her as the most unholy representation of other, furthest from easy labels of human femininity: a being that, because of her inherent structure, had no place for masquerade within her blood.

The theatrical version emphasizes the rift in her personality in obvious ways, but it's worth looking at the extended special edition precisely for what it chose to hold back from audiences in 1997. One extended scene in which Ripley is learning basic English shows her presented with a picture of a young girl resembling Newt. She makes reference to her when explaining her disillusionment with humanity to a robot, saying, "I did [understand] once. I tried to save 'people.' It didn't work out." She goes on: "There was this one girl... I tried to help her. She died. Now I can't even remember her name." Male anti-heroes, like Riddick of Pitch Black, are always allowed to hate those they fight for, yet the loss of Ripley's effeminately-coded compassion was deemed unacceptable. The complete mixing of Ripley's being
with the penile extraterrestrial is what takes away the humanity that compels her to help others, yet gives her the capacity to live for herself — free of expectation and fear. This can be tied back to the very reason behind a male-coded audience's willingness to enter into transgender identification with Final Girls. It is the “Final” aspect that stems from the masculine abilities of the Boy hidden within the characters' subtext, and the Girl that is projected outward — the masquerade. No matter the entry in either series, there was always a boy disguised as a girl fighting constantly against penetration by either the alien's inner-jaw or Michael's knife. So when Ripley gives in to her new nature, and in her assertiveness decides to literally have sex with the alien for the first time in the series, the masquerade is completely torn down. The male viewer becomes fully exposed to a true female, penetrated and embracing the penetration. Unlike the resignation to the male-dominated ideology displayed in Aliens, I believe that her dropping of “feminine moral” and subsequent assertion over the phallic here is a much more legitimate embracing of its power. Much like horror, pornography is designed to stimulate our senses, but is essentially a violent display focused on pleasing a dominating male. The sex scene in Alien Resurrection, on the other hand, is all about the woman and her pleasure in the acceptance of a generically faceless penile force, rather than any male in particular, and it is hence not “pleasing” to a hegemonic ideology. Man as individual, now cut out of the picture, can only watch as Ripley finally and fully realizes his castration anxiety that was deflected in Aliens. Ripley has no penis. Ripley is a woman. Ripley thrives. It took absolute merging with the other in order for this to be realized. It's no surprise that the movie was bemoaned.

The first Halloween sequel of the 2000s was also Resurrection. But the similarities end at the title, as the only notable aspect of the film is the death of Laurie Strode in the opening scene, as mentioned earlier. Perhaps because it was so final a blip, the remaining two Halloween sequels were actually not sequels at all, but remakes. Rob Zombie’s Halloween in 2007 brought back the original Laurie character and plot, with her relation to Michael now the centerpiece of the narrative. Like the later Ripley, Laurie begins to be able to find a stronger screen presence, though it is the result of extreme association with the antagonistic elements that seem to justify her. 2007 Laurie Strode is not nearly as chaste as the 1978 iteration, as demonstrated by the uncharacteristic sexual jokes she makes to her parents. In a moment likewise uncharacteristic of the Michael we’ve come to know, the antagonist shows brotherly sympathy and seeks her affection. Instead, she rejects the other and like the H20 Laurie, manages to take advantage of their dynamic by repurposing the phallic; shooting him — penetrating him — squarely in the face. Like the ending to the original, the two find themselves in a game of cat-and-mouse, but there is no Dr. Loomis there to save her this time.

The initiative she displays leaves room for a branching of character previously unseen. Rob Zombie made the sequel in 2009, Halloween II, which was a bit more problematic in its resolution, or lack thereof, for Laurie. The Laurie Strode that the audience was assaulted with this time around was grungy and depressed — almost wholly unlikable. She is similar to the new Ripley in that the masquerade that had defined her suburban life is now being torn down. On Halloween she dresses herself in a maid's outfit, but her mind is in such a state of disarray that her downward spiral cannot be alleviated by the party her stereotypically sexy friend takes her to — an apt metaphor for a female naturally falling into psychosis when the trappings of the masquerade so emphasized as “normal” by her peers no longer holds any significance for her. In her casting down of Michael at the end of the first film it seems that she, like Resurrection Ripley, took the horror into herself. And like Alien Resur-
section, Halloween II failed in its release, along with its vision of the feminine in transition. This Laurie Strode doesn’t know how to get rid of the visions of lunacy — among which is a version of her wearing Michael’s clown costume, just like Jamie Lloyd had taken on at the ending to the fourth movie. Seen here is a realized continuation of that ending. She doesn’t know how to help herself because she hadn’t been given the tools needed to affirm herself as an female individual. Apparently, Rob Zombie did not know how to settle her dissonance either: after the climax in which Michael is killed yet again, Laurie greets the police force with Michael’s iconic mask now over her face. The sexual confusion she so ardently fought over the course of the series had not been resolved, and when unable to find a suitable alternative to the forgotten masquerade, she takes on the only answer known to her — the gender chaos embodied by Michael in every Halloween movie before. She, like Ripley, becomes wholly and finally the other that had so long plagued her. The next fade-in finds her sitting alone in a mental hospital — lost to insanity. With her female identity, as defined by our ideology, so chaotically put into question after these two films, the only route Zombie saw fit to take her down was one limited to the tried and true options: death or insanity. It certainly says something that the only alternate ending in existence shows that rather than have her committed, she is instead quickly mowed down by police gunfire simply because she picked up a knife.

Loss of life or loss of reality. These two outcomes are seen frequently in horror across the board. That these two franchises, which have long been held in high esteem because of their progressive depictions of women, should fall prey to these tropes is regrettable. This isn’t to say that the Alien and Halloween series have no value in pushing the boundaries of what has been done in the cinema. They are undoubtedly seminal works which will not cease to have an important stake in our popular culture anytime soon. But the cutting off of each series after the direction taken in the sequels does need to be acknowledged, for it speaks volumes. The two possible endings made for Laurie Strode as displayed on the Halloween II DVD gave her no other place to go but into the contrived. Likewise, the discontinuation of Ellen Ripley and the Alien series is a figurative death for the character that forced her to also conform to the loss of consciousness. Perhaps these ends were inevitable, as part of what made these females so unique from the very outset was how they were presented as so intrinsically tied to the problem itself — aliens and murderers. I believe that this faint light seen at the end of the tunnel was the possibility of a more modern woman on the screen; this is a fight that is still being fought for outside of the cineplex. As things are, however, the world may perhaps not yet be ready to have its senses immersed in the horrors of novelty, as the toll for women in horror film currently stands at “kill or be killed.”

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Throughout my life I have noticed that my dreams are heavily influenced by films and film culture. My earliest example would have to be the recurring nightmares I had about the Wicked Witch of the West when I was probably about five years old. I also have recurring zombie apocalypse dreams that both look and feel like 28 Days Later, my all-time favorite zombie movie, and I must admit it's a bittersweet experience. A new introduction to my repertoire is the natural disaster dream. One in particular involved a massive earthquake that caused me and fellow film students to have to retreat to a refugee camp, à la 2012, The Day After Tomorrow or Deep Impact. My subconscious writes the screenplay while my friends, family, peers, enemies, and the occasional celebrity get the star roles.

Earlier this year I had a dream where Martin Sheen led me through a house infested with gun toting bad guys, all of whom began shooting at us on arrival. Sheen chastised me for not staying in character because I was reluctant to shoot back at the anonymouse thugs. I was scared shitless but Mr. Sheen seemed completely aware that he and I were merely actors in a fictitious world. Suddenly the dream was no longer frightening. My psychological projection of Martin Sheen reminded me that we were in an impossible situation. Who are these guys and why are they shooting at us? Why don't these bullets hurt us? Where did I get this gun? What the hell is Martin Sheen doing here?

Lucid dreaming, the state of being aware that you are in a dream, usually comes on abruptly and is triggered by something inaccurate or illogical in the scenery or events of a dream. The dreamer becomes conscious of the dream state and at times even has agency within the dream. Somewhere in between getting shot at by faceless thugs and being scolded by Martin Sheen I realized, "Hey... Something's strange here. This must not be real."

Watching dream films can be a similar experience. We recognize the same kinds of illogical elements that pull us out of the fantasy of our own dreams, such as spatial or temporal discontinuity, the spontaneous appearance of objects or characters, or the inexplicable defiance of laws of physics. Lucid dreaming is in many ways similar to watching dream films because our mode of spectatorship completely changes once we become aware that we are bearing witness to a dream. Dream films require active participation on the part of the spec-
tator because we first have to differentiate dream from reality and then consider the ramifications of that dream to the film and its characters.

Maya Deren, an avant-garde filmmaker and film theorist from the mid 20th century, is an early example of a filmmaker interested in representing the surreal. Deren believed that while the medium of film is effective for representing the world as it is in reality, true cinematic expression should also aspire to represent human perception in psychological and emotional terms. Through careful manipulation the camera can just as effectively represent the surreal. She describes the role of the camera as "...the artist, with distorting lenses, multiple superpositions, etc., used to simulate the creative action of the eye, the memory, etc." or in the case of her experimental short film Meshes of the Afternoon, the subconscious.

Meshes is an early example of an experimental film taking place predominantly in a dream state. She takes ordinary objects - a knife in a loaf of bread, a key, a phone left off the hook, a flower, a record player, a shattered mirror - and repeats these images in a dream sequence to convey the protagonist's psychological turmoil. The intended meaning of these symbols is somewhat vague given the lack of narrative content or dialogue, as is often the case in real dreams, but Deren nonetheless does a commendable job of making her film true to the surrealism and symbolic ambiguity we find in dreams. Although Meshes was an important film because of Deren's creative use of cinematography to infuse mundane objects with symbolic imagery, this is keeping in mind that it was an experimental work that did not necessarily reach a commercial audience. Nevertheless, the film is important because Deren seemed to be pointing to the ways in which the cinematic language is relevant to our experience of dreams. A film has the ability to inspire, horrify, confuse, and enlighten an audience by creating stories relevant to human experience, inventing characters whom we can identify with, and by capturing sounds and images that make the mundane seem profound. Dreams have always done the same thing except they don't require any conscious effort on the part of the creator. Considering these similarities, it would seem to me that there is more to be done in terms of representing the unconscious mind on screen.

Dreams lack structure by their very nature and I believe this is part of the challenge of producing a dream film that is comprehensible without being too abstract or experimental. A handful of widely circulated films explicitly about dreams have succeeded in entering the mainstream, ranging from lukewarm successes to Hollywood blockbusters. Their existence in mainstream popular culture demonstrates that something about their form and content designates them as being more than avant-garde or experimental works. How does one structure a film about a psychological phenomenon that does not necessarily have any structure or causal logic? How can these films appeal to a diverse audience of dreamers in a way that is universally comprehensible? I believe the answer lies in the dream film's relation to genre as a form of cinematic structure.

Michel Gondry has directed two films whose themes are centered around romantic relationships, memory, and dreams. Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind takes place in the unconscious mind of Joel Barish, who struggles to hold his fleeting memories of his ex-love Clementine. Clementine had Joel erased from her memory and a grief-stricken Joel undergoes the same process. The dream-like elements in the film are most evident at the moment just before a particular memory
of Clementine disappears. In one scene Clementine holds a mug with her picture on it. The mug momentarily leaves the frame and when it returns the mug is blank. Other times she moves through rooms in impossible ways, exiting through one door and immediately entering on the opposite side of the room. These subtle visual cues in Joel's memories have an intentional dream-like aesthetic and the loss of these memories speaks to the ways in which our recollection of dreams can often be fleeting and transitory.

Speaking about such moments, screenwriter Charlie Kaufman asked, "You know, when you have a dream that you remember when you first wake up, and then you can't remember it five minutes later, unless you write it down or talk about it. That's the sort of thing that we were thinking would make it work," and I would have to agree that it does work. The film effectively relates to my experience of dreams but it also relates to my experience of Hollywood romance plots. Lonely guy meets quirky girl. Lonely guy loses quirky girl. Guy attempts to win girl back, or in this case, guy attempts to win memories of girl back. The conventional love story narrative certainly benefits from the surreal depictions of memory, love, and loss in the film.

The Science of Sleep is another Gondry film that uses dreams as a means of complicating a love story. The film is about Stéphane, played by Gael Garcia Bernal, and his inability to fully differentiate dream from reality. This proves to be an issue in his pursuit of love interest Stéphanie, played by Charlotte Gainsbourg, as is the case when he dreams that she didn't meet him at a café as promised, when in reality she did. Other than this particular sequence, it's not difficult to realize when the film has entered a dream state because, unlike in Eternal Sunshine, his dreams do not resemble anything close to reality. A New York Times review describes the dream sequences as having "...a wide-eyed, picture-book quality, an air of almost aggressive innocence," using stop motion and child-like set constructions as a means of conveying the surreal. The same review goes on to say that Gondry "...makes a plausible case that a love story (which is what The Science of Sleep is) cannot really be told any other way. Love is too bound up with memories, fantasies, projections and misperceptions to conform to a conventional, linear structure." This film succeeds as a dream film because it effectively conveys the way that our dreams are made up of our hopes and expectations, particularly as they relate to a romantic interest, and the ways in which these expectations can often fall short in the real world.

Dreamscape and Inception are both films emerging from a distinct sci-fi genre and they utilize dreams as a setting where the impossible becomes infinitely possible. Dreamscape is essentially Inception without a budget. It's about entering dreams for the purpose of helping the dreamer...
The film, *Inception* (2010, dir. Christopher Nolan), was made in 1984 and the production value attests to this. The dream states are rather unconvincing, particularly when Alex Gardner, played by Dennis Quaid, enters a little boy's dream to fight a half-man, half-snake monster that looks more like someone in a rubber mask parading around a dark house scaring a little boy. The driving conflict in the film is that another dream invader is being contracted to assassinate the president in his dreams (unlike *Inception*, if you die in the dream you die in real life). In his review Roger Ebert says "The whole business about the plot against the president is recycled from countless other thrillers. Two things redeem it: The gimmick of the dream invasions and the quality of the acting." So why wasn't this film a mega blockbuster like *Inception* if the concept was essentially the same? I would have to say that it was due to its lack of CGI technology to represent the capabilities of our minds to create impossible situations in a visually convincing manner.

*Inception* works within the same genre of science-fiction thriller and effectively incorporates dreams in a way that is meant to enhance the conventions of the genre. Christopher Nolan takes full advantage of the capabilities of modern day CGI in a way that does justice to the potential of the human mind to create surreal impossible situations in our dreams, such as when Ellen Page folds a cityscape upon itself as a test of her abilities as a dream "architect." I can't help but also think of this moment in the film as a test of the special effects team's abilities as film "architects." Although the film makes sure to flex its CGI capabilities to give us a little piece of eyecandy, most of the film depicts dream states in a more discretely so as to not alert the target that they are in a dream. I will admit that when I watched the film for the first time, I was a bit confused once they started doing the whole dream within a dream within a dream thing, but I think this contributed to the film's ability to make us reconsider our relationship to reality as we enter or exit dream states. A *Los Angeles Times* review said that "while literal understanding can remain tantalizingly out of reach, you always intuitively understand what is going on and why."

"Dreams by their very nature are confusing, illogical, absurd, and void of clear spatial/temporal relations..."

Helping in that understanding, and one of the film's most satisfying aspects, are its roots in old-fashioned genre entertainment, albeit genre amped up to warp speed." This review again attests to the ability of genre as a structure for guiding the au-
dience's understanding of a film, which becomes particularly important when representing complex dream states in mainstream films.

Dreams by their very nature are confusing, illogical, absurd, and devoid of clear spatial/temporal relations, but are nonetheless meaningful in what they have to say about the human condition. Everybody can relate to the experience of dreaming but no one has had the exact same dream. Our dreams can only go so far as containing relatable themes and aspects of human experience, such as fear, anxiety, happiness, sadness, love, jealousy, and so on. Similarly, genres contain relatable themes that are central to our cultural experience of films and the inclusion of dreams into these conventional structures helps make sense of dreams in all their irrationality. If the aforementioned films demonstrate the role of genre as a means of structuring dreams in mainstream cinema, I wonder, has genre entered my dreams to serve a similar purpose?

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BY FEATURED ARTIST SABRINA HABEL

Based on stills from the film The Legend of Suram Fortress (1984, dir. Sergei Parajanov).

Suram // Acrylic, 2001

Holy Nino // Metallic Acrylic, 2003
Walter White (Bryan Cranston) and Jesse Pinkman (Aaron Paul) in *Breaking Bad*. 
RAISING THE BAR FOR TELEVISION
From the Big Screen into the Living Room
by eric gillespie

Ever since it became a household fixture, television has been looked down upon in comparison to cinema. It's all business. It's exploitative. It's full of dialogue. It's microwavable entertainment; easily consumed and just as easily forgotten. If Hollywood has an artistic side, this is certainly not it.

However, this is changing. Basic cable station AMC is challenging the norm of low-brow entertainment that has come to define TV as a medium by producing original dramas worthy of the cinema. AMC has chosen to emulate the programming structure of pay-cable networks HBO and Showtime, which, in a world of converging media, must now compete with movies for viewership. By applying cinematic production value to their programs, these TV networks and their respective original dramas shed the "low-art" signifiers (poor cinematography, weak performances, shallow characters, etc.) that define TV as a medium of little artistic value.

Because of the ongoing media convergence between film, TV, and the growing prominence of the internet, cinema as we know it is transitioning out of the theater and into the home. Largely due to the widespread availability of movies on television, TV programs are becoming more cinematic in order to compete for viewers. Pay-cable giants HBO and Showtime, and now the basic cable channel AMC, have been leading a charge in the world of television to produce more cinematic programming. In a sense, AMC is acting as catalyst in basic cable's transformation to a more sophisticated, artistic medium. Its new slogan "Story Matters Here", says it all.

While AMC airs a wide selection of already-famous feature films, it is now best known for its original dramas: Mad Men, Breaking Bad, and Walking Dead. Mad Men depicts the sexist work environment of 1960s ad agencies and calls to attention modern sexist behavior. Breaking Bad follows a high school chemistry teacher with terminal cancer who cooks methamphetamine to support his family. Walking Dead deals with concepts of survival and inhumanity in the midst of an apocalyptic scenario. These are not superficial stories. These are hard-hitting dramas that force viewers to question what it means to be a "good" hu-
man being living in a mixed up world of prescribed morals. Usually, these types of complex, controversial scenarios would be played out on the silver screen rather than in the living room. However, the critical success, rave reviews and cult followings of these shows have supported AMC’s hypothesis that these types of stories belong on television.

Since Mad Men debuted in 2007, AMC’s original dramas have racked up nineteen Emmys, most of which for Outstanding Drama Series. After greenlighting Breaking Bad for a fourth season and hiring Frank Darabont (the Academy Award-winning director of The Shawshank Redemption) to take on their new project Walking Dead, this train of critical success shows no sign of slowing down.

Still, AMC does not deserve all the credit for this artistic shift in the nature of television. AMC structures its programming to emulate pay-cable networks HBO and Showtime, who pioneered the format of the hour-long, character-driven original drama. This should come as no surprise to those who recognize that Charles Dolan, the man responsible for AMC’s direction since 2002, founded HBO. HBO could be credited with being the first to employ big-name film stars in its original programming, with Stephen Spielberg and Tom Hanks producing the miniseries Band of Brothers (2001). But who did what first and “broke ground” is moot. The point is that all three of these networks have looked to cinematic production quality (big names, big spending, and quality stories) as a means of branding their product and encouraging repeat viewership. Remember the slogan, “It’s not TV, it’s HBO”? All three have made important steps towards raising TV’s standards, and now HBO’s series Boardwalk Empire effectively bridges the gap between cinema and TV. This hour-long drama stars Steve Buscemi, is directed by Martin Scorsese, and was recorded as having been the most expensive pilot ever produced. The New York Post quoted it as having cost “a cool $50 million”.

In terms of critical success, the show has already won the Best Writing award from the WGA (Writer’s Guild of America), Best Lead Actor from the SAG (Screen Actors Guild) and tallied Golden Globes for Best Acting in a Dramatic Series. In terms of budget, stars, and storyline, Boardwalk Empire is about as close to cinema as TV gets.

AMC’s new flagship program Breaking Bad, while opting for lesser-known actors, is nothing short of art in all its primary facets; brilliant writing, dynamic characters, striking cinematography and award-winning performances. In the case of Breaking Bad, the character arcs of all four major characters (Walt, the meth chemist; Skyler, his wife; Jesse, the drug-dealing student; Hank the DEA brother-in-law) develop in linear, yet unpredictable progression over multiple seasons (approximately 40 episodes thus far). Typically, television narratives utilize minor characters to serve a single, complimentary purpose within the storyline of the protagonist. This technique renders them flat, story-writing tools rather than dynamic people. However in the case of Breaking Bad, each minor character lives a distinct life following a progressive emotional arc. Each character is fully-formed, complex and conflicted, and each character’s struggle is seamlessly woven into a single overarching narrative. It’s so well-done that Frank Darabont himself ventured to call it “my favorite show on TV.”

Essentially, Breaking Bad has raised the bar on what basic cable can do in regards to both presenting controversial material and doing so in such an eloquent, honest, and still prodigiously entertaining fashion.

The cinema is certainly transitioning but
away from the big screen and into the living room, why? It all hinges on the factors of convenience, censorship, and cost.

Theorist Linda Williams believes this affinity for home-viewing to be linked to size relationships and the issue of privacy. In her book Screening Sex, she indicates that people are more likely to embrace controversial and potentially agitating material if they can do so within the comfort and privacy of their own home. For one, they do not have to concern themselves with how they appear to others whilst viewing. Nobody is sitting behind them while they watch, making for a much more voyeuristic experience than big-screen viewing. She writes, "Private screening takes us out of public scrutiny and gives us control over what, when, and where we screen." Williams also maintains that there is a fundamental disconnect between viewers and actors in the big-screen environment, "...we remain aware, as I have been arguing, of our bodies here and those larger-than-life virtual bodies there, and of the unbridgeable gulf between their oversized grandeur and our relative smallness."

Although Williams makes a valid point, I believe that the American public's desire for small-screen media access stems more from laziness and the promise of convenience. Rapidly converging technology makes media access more convenient each day. Instead of physically going to a video store and renting a movie, I can do it from my computer with a few clicks. With a simple attachment, I can then broadcast the movie from my computer to my TV and surround-sound system. In effect, I can rent and watch a movie without even getting dressed and still have the ability to pause it when I want a snack. Even better, I can download and watch it on my cell phone without ever leaving my bed.

"Private screening takes us out of public scrutiny and gives us control over what, when, and where we screen."

Compare this to the theater environment where I have to put on clothes, catch a bus downtown, wait in line to buy a twelve dollar ticket, drop an additional eight bucks on popcorn, then fight for a good seat only to find out it's been "saved" for some poor little girl's grandmother. Staying home is more practical on the basis of convenience alone. Factor in the difference in cost and any fool will know the cinema is overrated.

Because of this, filmmakers have sought
distribution through alternative platforms including Netflix, iTunes, and TV syndication—all of which are ultimately mediated through the viewer’s home television set, computer, or phone. This has made skipping the theater a more practical choice for distributors as well as consumers. HBO films like You Don’t Know Jack (2010) have chosen to forego theatrical releases for a couple of sensible reasons. Firstly, it means they can avoid the MPAA ratings board, which is notorious for demanding censorship. This means that graphic violence, sex, and drug references (the go-to attention grabbers of the industry) are all fair game. Secondly, distribution via the internet and DVD release have proven more lucrative for studios than box-office revenues. There is no economic reason to take the risk financing print distribution when digital delivery is statistically guaranteed to make more money.

Television shows were developed to sell ad space, not DVD box sets. They are meant to keep you glued to the ad material in-between. The shows have to be entertaining enough to keep viewers watching the ads, but not necessarily good enough to make you watch it over and over. In terms of content, it's all about finding a balance between being edgy enough to attract new viewers and not being so abrasive as to push more conservative viewers away. Television producers have understood this for a long time now. In its over-simplified form, the business of television works like this: executives receive revenue from advertisers that wish to purchase airtime. Executives then finance shows through Producers. The shows that receive higher Nielsen ratings (which gage the number of viewers watching a particular program) can subsequently charge more for the price of their airtime since, in theory, more consumers are watching their ads. Hence, the goal of the Television executive has always been a quest for ratings. Ratings are what earn them money, and after all, it is a business.

But here is where it gets tricky. AMC—unlike HBO and Showtime—is on basic cable. This means that it relies on advertising revenue, unlike the others, which collect a service fee in order to operate. This makes AMC subject to censorship, commercial interruptions, and all the other things that signify TV as low-art. Kate Forte, president of Harpo Films, explains that "there are natural limitations to being on network television," which is dependent on ratings and commercial sponsorship—HBO is not concerned with that.... The measure of success for them is quality.4

For some reason, AMC is aiming its original dramas towards a mark of quality as opposed to ratings, producing controversial material more likely to receive critical recognition than commercial success. Typically, network executives will forego financing shows that seem risky in favor of producing a "sure thing." Though one can never tell how well a show will do until it actually airs, there are surefire ways to limit your audience.
One such way is the involvement of swearing, sex, drugs, and violence, which automatically limit viewership to an adult age bracket. AMC’s Breaking Bad chooses to incorporate all of the above. Eliminating half of a show’s potential viewership before it even begins is not the most efficient business model. However, the cast and crew of Breaking Bad feel as though they are making something “different” as Bryan Cranston (Walt) put it in an interview. When asked if they had any problems with censorship, he responded with a smile and said that the executives at AMC told them to “just keep doing what you’re doing”.

He went on to call the show a “labor of love”, pointing out that although the ratings were far from record breaking, the show had a special quality that simply does not exist in contemporary television. Aaron Paul (Jesse) attributed this to the fact that the cast functions “like a family”.

Because of this underlying incentive to have a large audience base, TV shows have often been geared towards attracting the largest possible audience without turning anyone away. Overall, this has made for bland, oversimplified, cliché material with little artistic value which has left adult TV audiences craving more.

So, you probably want to know how AMC’s series’ are able to maintain quality and $3mil/episode budgets in spite of the fact that it is governed by ad-money. I have no idea. Neither do the producers of these shows. This is the big mystery. The general question echoed between Breaking Bad creator Vince Gilligan and Walking Dead creator Frank Darabont is “how are they letting us get away with showing this?” Nobody seems to know. My best guess is that the advertisers working with AMC understand the power of niche marketing to fan-bases; their umbrella corporation, Cablevision, now owns IFC, the Sundance Channel, WE, and more niche channels. Because AMC’s series tend to draw enormous cult followings (Rubicon and Walking Dead in-particular) the viewing audience is already tuned to a specific set of desires. The more specific the desires of the consumer, the more simple it becomes to market to them. And the more like-minded a group of consumers is, the more accurate a given ad campaign will be. One could also argue that AMC is losing money on these shows, but that the brand credibility they are establishing via positive reviews, happy fans, Emmys, Golden Globes, and other awards outweighs their temporary monetary losses. I want to believe that the people at AMC keep writing checks because they just can’t turn down a good story, but then I remind myself that TV is a business, and that brand recognition is one of the most powerful tools in American marketing. Like Howard Shultz of Starbucks once said, “Customers must recognize that you stand for something.”

Regardless of the reasoning behind it, what is important is that AMC continues to compete with HBO and Showtime, producing material that raises the bar for quality in television and subsequently demonstrates to the TV industry that a basic cable network can succeed monetarily while airing controversial content.

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2. Walking Dead promotional video. AMCTV.com.
6. Ibid.
FAVORITE LONG TAKE
by amanda kimball

Violence done unto films just breaks my heart. A slash here, a cut there — all for fast-pace editing that holds our deteriorating attention span just a second longer, forcing us to look. Long takes, however, seduce us to stare. Evoking the deepest sense of uninterrupted voyeurism, a long take allows us to traverse the space in a careful, tedious manner. There have been a lot of great long takes — the Goodfellas backdoor wandering, the Touch of Evil border-crossing... hell, the entire Russian Ark film, but only one makes me swoon. Bela Tarr and his six-minute long take in the Titanik Bar of Damnation makes my knees buckle, eyes glaze over and body fall limp in the sheer beauty of it all. As we travel through the crowded bar in a patient, tried manner that mirrors the slouched bodies of the quiet bar-goers, a scratchy-voiced woman slowly sings the Hungarian song “Kesz az egész,” or “Over and Done.” This wearily heart-wrenching song seems to haunt those watching her, seduced by the pain and the sorrow.

Moving from the patrons to the voice, we finally see the unnamed singer, this object of unknown desire. The take is patient, allowing an intimate journey from surroundings to inner turmoil. When the focus on the sax player behind the singer ultimately cuts to the action beyond the song, the feeling of waking from a dream follows. You forgot you were following a plot. Now you wish that plotless reverie could have lasted forever. Then you fall into another dream as the next long take begins. ■

FAVORITE CLINT EASTWOOD MOMENT
by travis waddell

Clint Eastwood knows what you’re thinking, punk. Regardless of whether he’s fired six shots or only five, his cache of veridical one-liners and infamous death sentences is extensive to say the least. Although in present day he yearns to be acknowledged as the curmudgeon he believes he is, his perpetual ability to kick ass and take names extends to even recent cinema history. He’s tall, blonde, smokes a cigar, so to choose only one “favorite bad-ass moment” is a seemingly unfeasible task. Nevertheless, put your drawers on and take your gun off, because my personal favorite comes from a moment of respite for the man with no name in The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (1966).

Director Sergio Leone frames The Good resting in a seedy shop somewhere in the American West with hat in hand, turned upside down to facilitate holding a grey and white kitten. That’s right, a kitten, for Blondie can cradle such an innocent creature and retain his rugged persona with the same intensity as he does a nine-minute standoff invigorated by the sonic ferocity of Ennio Morricone. Why is it my favorite moment? Probably because I love cats. Regardless, in this world there are two kinds of people: those who take a moment to pet a stray feline, and those left standing in awe as Clint Eastwood does so. So do you feel lucky, punk? Do you? ■
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