

# CINEPHILE

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA'S FILM JOURNAL





## **UBC Theatre and Film Celebrates 60 Wonderful Years!**

It all started with an argument over poetry.

In the fifties, Dorothy Somerset was a professor in the English Department. She made a request to her department to allow her to run a poetry speaking course and the request was denied. Clearly, she believed in the importance of this venture, so the enterprising Professor Somerset applied to the senate to create a separate Theatre Department and, in 1958, her request was granted. Four years later, UBC built a brand new four hundred seat iteration of the Frederic Wood Theatre, and three years after that, the department offered its first film course.

The UBC Department of Theatre and Film was born.

# CINEPHILE

The University of British  
Columbia's Film Journal

Vol. 13 No. 1  
Spring 2019  
"Low Culture and Mass Media"

ISSN: 1712-9265

## Copyright and Publisher

The University of British  
Columbia Film Program

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CINEPHILE is published by the Graduate  
Program in Film Studies at the Depart-  
ment of Theatre and Film, University of  
British Columbia, with the support of the

**Centre for Cinema Studies**  
centreforcinemastudies.com

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# Contributors

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**Scott MacKenzie** is Associate Professor of Film and Media, at Queen's University, Canada. His books include: *Cinema and Nation* (w/Mette Hjort, Routledge, 2000); *Purity and Provocation: Dogma '95* (w/Mette Hjort, BFI, 2003); *Screening Québec: Québécois Moving Images, National Identity and the Public Sphere* (Manchester UP, 2004); *The Perils of Pedagogy: The Works of John Greyson* (w/Brenda Longfellow and Thomas Waugh, McGill-Queen's UP, 2013); *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures* (U California P, 2014); *Films on Ice: Cinemas of the Arctic* (w/Anna Westerståhl Stenport, Edinburgh UP, 2015); *Arctic Environmental Modernities* (w/Lill-Ann Körber and Anna Westerståhl Stenport, Palgrave, 2016); *Arctic Cinemas and the Documentary Ethos* (w/ Lilya Kaganovsky and Anna Westerståhl Stenport, Indiana UP, 2019); *Process Cinema: Handmade Films in the Digital Age* (w/Janine Marchessault, McGill-Queen's UP, 2019), and *Guy Debord: The Cinema, too, Must be Destroyed* (Manchester UP, 2019).

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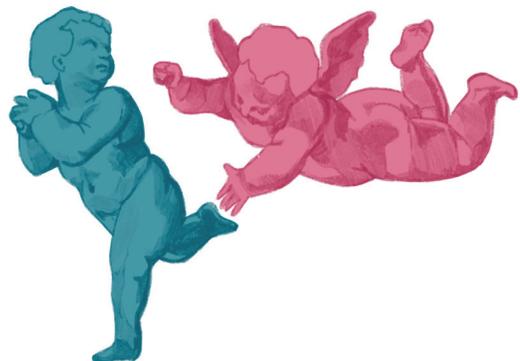
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# Letter from the Editors

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Dear readers,

As the field of film studies has developed, scholars have considered the influence of popular culture on the masses in a variety of ways, with particular attention paid to the role of popular media in perpetuating power structures. Pioneers of this subject discovered a rich space for academic debate, highlighting the important theoretical, philosophical, and sociological issues raised by widely recognized cultural texts. Cinema has long occupied a strange and variable place in culture apropos of the 'popular': it has been dismissed as mere entertainment, elevated as a legitimate art form, and derided as archaic in the face of new media and technologies. Despite and perhaps because of this variability, cinema has remained an object of fascination for those scholars seeking to determine its place in (popular) culture.

*Cinephile 13.1* aims to examine low culture in order to challenge the instinct to privilege critical engagement with texts deemed academically and culturally respectable. The concept of 'low culture' is often used to refer to popular texts consumed by the masses rather than by an elite few; similarly, it is used to strike a contrast with texts recognized as 'high art'. With this issue of *Cinephile*, we hope to enter existing conversations on low culture and provide a platform for scholars focusing on areas previously overlooked or continuing to develop in academic discourse.

*Cinephile 13.1* opens with an article by Scott MacKenzie on the late chef and television personality Anthony Bourdain, and his critically acclaimed television series *A Cook's Tour* (2002-2003), *No Reservations* (2005-2012), and *Parts Unknown* (2013-2018). MacKenzie argues that Bourdain's important use of dialogism functions so well within his shows specifically because he was working within the 'low culture' media form of reality television. Next, focusing on the British Film Institute's specialist home media label, Flipside, Kate Egan examines continuously shifting understandings and valuations of low culture as part of national film culture and Flipside's aim to rediscover, remaster and re-evaluate obscure, forgotten or low-budget British genre, exploitation and experimental films from the past. Following this, Michael Crandol examines the influence of British Hammer horror films on the Japanese filmic category of *kaiki eiga*. In the process he emphasizes the significance of considering foreign films in discussions of national genres. Eileen Totter's article discusses children's television shows *DuckTales* (2017-), *Voltron: Legendary Defender* (2016-2018), and the ani-

ated film *The Lego Batman Movie* (2017). She argues that current animation programs such as these reflect a possible shift in how Western writers present male characters, straying from past representations which have stuck to a narrow formula for masculinity and reinforced its hegemonic qualities. Devlin Grimm discusses cult classic *Robocop* (1987) and its reboot, *Robocop* (2014), through the lens of disability studies. Using the work of Donna Haraway and Vivian Sobchack, Grimm argues that *Robocop* as a film could be considered a cyborg in itself, functioning as an allegory for the identity of the atypical body and brain. The issue concludes with an article by Caroline N. Bayne that traces the role and representation of female wrestlers employed by World Wrestling Entertainment from the 1990s to present day. Bayne uses female wrestlers of the WWE as a case study to interrogate the interplay of feminism, wrestling, and pop culture.

We would like to express our most sincere gratitude to the faculty and staff of the University of British Columbia's Department of Theatre and Film who have provided their advice and support throughout the editorial process. For guiding us through our tenure as *Cinephile's* Editors-in-Chief, we would especially like to thank our faculty advisor, Dr. Christine Evans. Additional thanks is due to our editorial board for their hard work and expertise. To each of our contributors, we are deeply grateful for your original and insightful work. Thanks to you, *Cinephile 13.1* explores an extremely diverse and at times surprising range of media texts. For that, we cannot be more excited and appreciative.

To our readers, we hope that this issue of *Cinephile* implores you to consider the significance of cultural objects that have been overlooked in this academic discipline. The process of compiling our articles has reminded us that contemporary scholars are continuing to discover several unexplored margins of cinema and media studies, and we are delighted to publish a selection of these engaging ideas.

Sincerely,

**Zoë S. Sherman, Jared Aronoff, and Gabrielle Berry**  
Co-Editors-in-Chief, 2018-2019



## Anthony Bourdain's MacGuffin: Dialogical Politics, the Middle East, and Cooking Shows

In 1965, Robin Wood began his study of Alfred Hitchcock by stating: “Why should we take Hitchcock seriously?” (Wood 55). This opening gambit served as a call to arms as to why popular or “low” culture was as worthy of study as high culture. Wood argued that while a majority of Hitchcock’s works were derisively labelled “thrillers,” much more was actually going on. One such subtext was what Hitchcock called the MacGuffin, a device which functioned as a means to propel his plots forward, although the MacGuffin was ultimately unimportant to the film overall – for example, the uranium in the wine bottles in *Notorious* (Hitchcock 1946) which merely serve as a narrative excuse to drive the action. In this article, I contend that over time, “cooking” and “travel” began to play the role of the MacGuffin in Anthony Bourdain’s supposedly low-culture reality television shows, allowing him to produce dialogical works outside the ideological coherence of mainstream American cable television. Because of the profound ideological imaginary that the U.S. media has created about the region and its inhabitants, I concentrate on Bourdain’s shows set in the Middle East.

With Bourdain’s death in 2018, there was significant press coverage surrounding his importance as a travel writer and television host. Yet this hagiographical writing paid scant attention to the platform in which he worked: reality television, one of the most maligned forms of mass and popular culture. Eric Hoyt notes that:

Cultural critics and highbrow couch surfers routinely deride reality (or unscripted) television. Reality TV is, the argument goes, shallow trash – a guilty pleasure at best. While shows like ‘Mad Men’ or ‘The Wire’ are lauded for their depth, they reinforce the

notion that reality TV should be viewed shallowly, or not at all. When it comes to the club of artistic, canonical works, reality television doesn’t make it past the erudite bouncers at the door. (Hoyt 47)

Yet being under the radar allowed Bourdain’s reality television, especially his later shows, to address political issues elided by more “respectable” forms of television. To this end, little attention was directed to the ways in which Bourdain transformed his shows *A Cook’s Tour* (2002-2003), *Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations* (2005-2012), and *Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown* (2013-2018) from cooking show travel journalism into works that challenged and offered potentially radical – in the context of American popular culture – political accounts of parts of the world that are almost always Othered as antithetical to supposed “American” values. Therefore, I offer not simply an account of the politics in a selection of his episodes, but a consideration of the fact that his examinations of places such as Lebanon, Gaza, the West Bank, Kurdistan, Libya, and Iran were all the more salient because they were either framed around profoundly apolitical networks, such as Food Network and Travel Channel, or, for the later part of his career, on CNN, which rarely offered to its audiences accounts of the Middle East that were not framed by Pax Americana, the “War on Terror,” “Muslim Extremism,” or the promotion of the policies of Netanyahu-era Israel. Because these counter-hegemonic interventions were framed within the genres of travel and cooking shows – and because Bourdain’s textual and televisual persona was that of the post-punk iconoclast with a self-conscious soupçon of Hunter S. Thompson – his shows were able to bring debates into popular culture and cultural con-

sciousness that would be censored, if not condemned, in more “respectable” forms, breaking the “flow” of these networks’ ideological cohesion. In the case of Bourdain’s CNN series *Parts Unknown*, the show provided a feedback loop, whereby American-produced images of these areas of the world were seen by their citizens for the first time in a positive, if complex, light, through the prism of global American television.

Bourdain engaged in oppositional documentary practices in *No Reservations* and *Parts Unknown*. Specifically, he made shows in the Middle East that presented images of countries with which the U.S. had a great deal of political and cultural antagonism, and he presented cultural – and geo-politics – through the dual MacGuffins of ‘food’ and ‘travel’ – in ways that other mainstream US news outlets rarely did, bringing an oppositional politics into popular mass media. As Lebanese journalist Kim Ghattas noted about Bourdain’s shows in Iran, Cuba, and her hometown of Beirut: “Americans probably learned more about the world watching his shows than any news programs” (2018).

It’s worth noting that this subversive intervention into political debate and the public sphere through low culture programming was not predetermined nor pre-ordained. Bourdain was a forty-four-year-old Journeyman chef in New York when his memoir *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly* was published in 2000. In his mid-forties before the book became a surprise literary cause célèbre, he thought he would never see the rest of the world outside New York (Bourdain *Kitchen Confidential*, 6; *The Nasty Bits*, 132; *A Cook’s Tour*, 307). After being given an advance for his second book to tour the world in search of “the perfect meal” (Bourdain *A Cook’s Tour*, 5), the Food Network contacted him, asking if a film crew could come along. Dubious at first, Bourdain realized he could travel further afield and agreed. He noted: “I got the impression, I’m sure a highly subjective one, that they were really sick of their own programming. And they were looking for something a little subversive” (Salkin 345).

By his own admission, many early episodes consisted of visiting locales, eating strange food, getting drunk on camera, and leaving. However, in time he grew frustrated with Food Network, as they pressured him to set more shows in the U.S.:

Suddenly they weren’t so interested in “foreign”-based shows anymore [...] When we told them about what [Ferran] Adrià

[the head chef of elBulli, the famous Spanish molecular gastronomy restaurant] had agreed to do, they were indifferent. “Does he talk English?” and “It’s too smart for us” were both mentioned as factors in their eventual refusal to pony up for such an episode—or any episodes outside the United States, it now seemed. (Bourdain, “Selling Out” 7)

For the third season, the network wanted the show to focus far more on the US: “[Bourdain’s] barbeque episode of *A Cook’s Tour* had outrated his international shows. Texas ribs were better for the bottom line than cobra hearts, and the network wanted him to do more shows in America. [...] the network wanted less foreign content, fewer foreign accents” (Salkin 353-354). However, Bourdain wanted his next show to explore the creative process of influential Spanish chef Ferran Adrià, so he and his crew set up Zero Point Zero Productions (which would go on to produce all of Bourdain’s subsequent series), which self-financed *Decoding Ferran Adrià* (2006), then sold worldwide and becoming the pilot for *No Reservations* on Travel Network.

At first, this shift did not lead to a substantial change in the show’s ethos. That change began with “Lebanon” (2006), the second season finale of *No Reservations*, which originally set out to explore the culinary and party culture of Beirut. Until this point, Bourdain, by his own admission, was making “television about eating and drinking” (“Bourdain’s Field Notes: Beirut”), and the episode’s first ten minutes are very much in this vein. But as the bombing of Beirut airport and surrounding environs by the Israeli army begins (after Hezbollah killed three Israeli soldiers in a cross-border raid, leading to the 2006 Lebanon War), the mood changes dramatically. The reason for this shift is apparent in both the episode and Bourdain’s later written reflections, which do not sound like a “making of” account of a typical cooking and travel show:



I'm sitting, poolside, watching the airport burning [...]. There's a large black plume of smoke coming from the south of the city—just over the rise, where the most recent airstrikes have been targeting the Shiite neighborhoods and what are, presumably, Hezbollah-associated structures. [...] Woke up in our snug hotel sheets to the news we wouldn't be making television in Beirut (not the show we came to do, anyway), and that we wouldn't be getting out of here anytime soon ("Beirut" 116).

Trapped in a hotel with relative privilege, waiting to be taken out of the country by US Marines on boats, Bourdain reflects on the perhaps superficial nature of what his show originally set out to do. In post-production he and his team created an episode unlike the previous ones: it told the story of the war, the reactions of Lebanese and Lebanese-American citizens trying to get out of harm's way, and the eventual exit of Bourdain and the crew. This encounter with politics and war drastically changed the nature of his shows going forward, where food,



drink, and travel became pretexts for deeper explorations of foreign cultures so often Othered as enemies in US media, and Bourdain's leftist critique of the U.S. began to take a more central role. As Bourdain wrote in his field notes:

I came away from the experience deeply embittered, confused—and determined to make television differently than I had before. I didn't know how I was going to do it or whether my network at the time was going to allow me, but the days of happy horseshit—the uplifting sum-up at the end of every show, the reflex inclusion of a food scene in every

act—that ended right there." ("Bourdain's Field Notes: Beirut")

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*...the show provided a feedback loop, whereby American-produced images of these areas of the world were seen by their citizens for the first time in a positive, if complex, light, through the prism of global American television.*

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In season seven, Bourdain made an episode of *No Reservations* in Kurdistan (Season 7, episode 15, 2011). Significantly, the borders he drew of Kurdistan were strikingly different than those of the US and its allies. As Ari Khalidi, a Kurdistan journalist, noted in Kurdistan24 news: "Bourdain did not show only the 'Iraqi' Kurdistan. He also dared to include the 'Turkish' Kurdistan in his show." Khalidi notes:

[...] the exhilarating happiness [my] mother expressed, less for the display of the local dish [...] and more upon seeing Mardin as Kurdistan on international TV [...] was testimony that there were people, strangers with an understanding voice from faraway lands, that cared about her people's plight. It was a validation of the sacrifices she painfully witnessed most of her life, in the form of Turkish state's harsh suppression of the Kurdish right to self-rule, identity, language, and culture. (Khalidi 2018)

The new ethos of the show explored parts of the world and geo-politics that were left outside the remit of not only travel shows, but American cable news itself. Moreover, seeing a culture represented in the global news public sphere validated 'Turkish' Kurdistan as a place that existed beyond its own locality.

Bourdain's show moved to CNN in 2013. Perhaps the episode of *Parts Unknown* that was the most contentious on CNN – and for American viewers quite unused to hearing anything from a Palestinian perspective – was the second episode of season two on Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. In his opening narration, Bourdain makes it clear that he was aware of the controversy the episode might create:

It's easily the most contentious piece of real estate in the world, and there's no hope—none—of ever talking about it without pissing somebody, if not everybody, off. By the end of this hour, I'll be seen by many as a terrorist sympathizer, a Zionist tool, a self-hating Jew, an apologist for American imperialism, an Orientalist, socialist, a fascist, CIA agent, and worse. So here goes nothing.

What is most striking about this episode is that Palestinians are placed in a better light than the settler Jews on the West Bank. This amounts to a dialogical role-reversal of how CNN continuously framed the Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. The episode starts with Bourdain visiting the Western Wall. Half-Jewish, secular, and an atheist, he feels he is masquerading as a Jew. The episode then foregrounds how closely various groups live together in Jerusalem, touring the city with Israeli-born chef and author Yotam Ottolenghi, who points out that falafel is as much a Palestinian dish as it is an Israeli one. This becomes a metaphor for the episode, as food appropriation becomes cultural and geopolitical appropriation. Bourdain then heads to the West Bank where one of his drivers translates some graffiti, or “price-tagging,” on a house near the settlements which states: “death to the Arabs.” Bourdain then meets with a settler living in Ma’ale Levona, to have dinner with a winemaker and amateur cook. Food is the MacGuffin here, as little is said about the homemade cuisine (other than pointing out the pomegranate on the salmon). Discussion turns toward the tagging, and one settler says “Bad people did it ... apparently kids.” Bourdain asks them if they could find out who did it, and they admit they probably could. He then asks why the tag has not been painted over. Uncomfortably, the cook’s friend answers: “I don’t know. Good question. Maybe we should. You’re right.” The visit and the sequence end with a cut at the end of quote. Bourdain moves on to Ramallah and interviews West Bank Palestinian women racers called the Speed Sisters, undercutting the image of Arab women as screaming martyrs to violence and religious patriarchy. Significant-

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*This becomes a metaphor for the episode, as food appropriation becomes cultural and geopolitical appropriation... Food is the MacGuffin here.*

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ly, when Bourdain interviews Palestinian activist Laila El-Haddad, author of *The Gaza Kitchen: A Palestinian Culinary Journey* (2016), she notes when some men raise their voices over dinner: “they’re not angry; it’s just the way we talk,” again undercutting the image perpetuated in the West – and by CNN – that Palestinians are always angry and irrational.

Bourdain noted in an interview a year after the episode was shot: “Palestinians in particular seemed delighted that someone – anyone – would care to depict them eating and cooking and doing normal, everyday things



– you know, like people do. They are so used to camera crews coming in to just get the usual shots of rock throwing kids and crying women” (Little 2014). The episode ends with an interview with Natan Galkowicz, a Brazilian-Jewish restaurateur and owner of Mides, a Brazilian Restaurant in Western Negev, whose business is seven miles from the wall between Israel and Gaza. His daughter was killed by a Hamas mortar. He betrays no anger, lamenting the deaths on both sides, and expresses his hope for good people to come together. He argues that everyday Palestinians and Israelis are “fed up” with the quagmire, and that Jews and Palestinians, the rich and the poor, must talk. He describes both the settlers that Bourdain met and the Palestinians in Gaza as “nice people.” However, unlike the settlers earlier in the episode, Galkowicz can put himself, despite his loss, in the position of the other, a recurring theme in Bourdain’s works after Lebanon.

Both during the episode and after, Bourdain offers no answers to the problems facing the Palestinians and the Israelis, but does offer the critique: “It’s impossible to see Gaza, for instance, the camps, the West Bank and not find yourself reeling with the ugliness of it all” (Little 2014). He goes on to note the reception his work had in Palestine:



The reaction from the Arab and Palestinian community was overwhelmingly positive—which I found both flattering and dismaying. I say dismaying because I did so little. I showed so little. It seems innocuous. But it was apparently a hell of a lot more than what they are used to seeing on Western television. For some, unfortunately, depicting Palestinians as anything other than terrorists is proof positive that you have an agenda, that you have bought in to some sinister propaganda guidelines issuing from some evil central command in charge of interfacing with Western com/symp dupes. (Little 2014)

He went on to develop this media critique further in his acceptance speech for a “Voices of Courage and Conscience” award from the US Muslim Public Affairs Council in 2014: “It is a measure I guess of how twisted and shallow our depiction of a people is that these images come as a shock to so many. The world has visited many terrible things on the Palestinian people, none more shameful than robbing them of their basic humanity. People are not statistics” (Muslim Public Affairs Council, 2014).

This show’s shift in focus not only often downplayed food, but also engaged in political discourse very much outside the dominant travel paradigm of reducing geopolitical conflict to human drama. In season four of *Parts Unknown*, Bourdain went to Iran and did not simply show the country as misunderstood by the West (indeed, as he notes at the end of the show, two of his interviewees, Washington Post reporter Jason Rezaian and his wife Yeganeh Salehi were detained on July 22, 2014, six weeks after he and the crew left); instead his voice-over states the conflicting and polyvocal messages he received while in Tehran:

Total strangers thrilled to encounter Americans, just underneath the inevitable “Death to America” mural. The gulf between perception and reality, between government policy and what you see on the street and encounter in people’s homes, in restaurants – everywhere—it’s just incredible. It’s easier to think of Iran as a monolith – in an uncomplicated, ideological way. More comfortable, too. Life ain’t that simple. It IS complicated. And filled with nuance worth exploring. (“Iran” *Parts Unknown*)

Bourdain’s approach, then, evolved from cooking, travelling, and drinking into something more complex. *Parts Unknown* not only engaged in a form of coalitional politics, it also broke what Raymond Williams has described as television’s “flow:”

In all developed broadcasting systems the characteristic organization, and therefore the characteristic experience, is one of sequence or flow. This phenomenon, of planned flow, is then perhaps the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and as a cultural form. (86)

Bourdain’s shows ruptured the overall ideological and narrative coherence of CNN in particular. He did so by not adopting the position of an all-knowing, Western patriarch to the Other; indeed his shows in the Middle East undercut this trope repeatedly. Moreover, the series recognized the possibility of what Mikhail Bakhtin called “dialogism” and what, in a similar manner, John Fiske has described as a function of meaning-making in television: “The reader produces meanings that derive from the intersection of his/her social history with the social forces structured into the text. The moment of reading is when the discourses of the reader meet the discourses of the text. When these discourses bear different interests reading becomes a reconciliation of this conflict” (Fiske 82-83). The ruse of dialogism allowed Bourdain’s shows to avoid the ethnographic and orientaling gaze so often at the heart of travel documentaries by asking viewers to begin to reconcile the conflict, with Bourdain as a questioning narrator and avatar. This dialogism stretched beyond Bourdain’s episodes in the Middle East. As Jacqui Kong notes on Bourdain’s *No Reservation* episodes in Vietnam and Laos:

[...] Bourdain's self-reflexivity and honesty presents to viewers a reality which is much more accurate than a performance of authenticity praised and exoticized by the food colonizer for its purity and frozenness in an anachronistic display of staged difference and 'Otherness'. [...] Neither does Bourdain treat his role as that of the traveler who elucidates the Other to his viewers, speaking for the Other as though he is a figure of authority. (Kong 48)

These politics allowed for not only counter-hegemonic accounts of political systems that ran counter to Pax Americana, but for local accounts to challenge dominant media and mediated representations of the Other.

Bourdain's dialogism functioned in part because he was working in a supposedly "low culture" form. Like others who are not traditional journalists but are championed as trusted sources of news – such as Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show* (1999-2015) – Bourdain continuously disavowed the journalistic label, seeking to keep himself and his work contextualized within low culture, allowing him a much greater degree of freedom in covering issues that he thought mattered. This raises salient issues about the important function low culture can play as a dialogical act of subverting the flow of television, the role of reportage, and the need to produce interstitial televisual texts that break the narrative coherence of dominant ideologies. Moreover, it demonstrates that Bourdain's MacGuffin-riddled travel shows were about something much more political than eating and drinking.

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# The Overlooked, the Side-Lined and the Undervalued: BFI Flipside, Cult DVD Labels and the Lost Continents of British Cinema

In *Cult Cinema: An Introduction*, Ernest Mathijs and Jamie Sexton consider the contemporary processes through which films are being framed as cult. As they note, “‘cult’ is now being used by the industry as a term by which to promote and/or to categorize films,” including by DVD and home media companies (Mathijs and Sexton 238-239). One of the key examples they provide of the latter is the Flipside series of DVDs and Blu-rays produced by the British Film Institute. Over the last ten years, Flipside has released thirty-seven titles, all British and all produced between the late 1950s and the late 1970s, stretching from Richard Lester’s 1969 satire *The Bed Sitting Room* to their latest title, Pierre Rouve’s *Stranger in the House* (1967), starring James Mason. In line with Mathijs and Sexton’s arguments, the existence and longevity of the Flipside series illustrates the broad usefulness of ‘cult’ in order to categorise a group of (in this case) quite obscure films and foreground their potential commercial appeal to a range of niche audiences. However, there are also other factors at play here, which relate to the label’s link to the British Film Institute, a body which (among its many functions) oversees the BFI National Archive, whose central remit is to preserve and restore British films in order to ‘ensure Britain’s “film heritage is widely accessible in cinemas and in the home” (BFI National Archive).

In a 2017 piece on British cult cinema, published in *The Routledge Companion to British Cinema History*, I related Flipside’s activities to a broader project within British film culture - a new focus, by DVD companies and British writers and academics, on expanding the canon of British cult cinema beyond long-established titles such as *Performance* (1970), *The Wicker Man* (1973), *Quadrophenia* (1979) and *Withnail and I* (1987)

to encompass forgotten titles within British cinema. In turn, I argued that this process extends conceptions of what constitutes British cinema and British film heritage more broadly, in what I. Q. Hunter has called “a new wave of revisionism” in British film studies and film culture (10). These processes clearly relate to the long-term impact of a canonical piece of academic writing with British film studies – Julian Petley’s 1986 piece “The Lost Continent”. In this essay, Petley critiques dominant cultural institutions in British cinema – most prominently institutions of British film criticism which he terms “the writing machine” – for their privileging and celebrating of the canon of British realist films at the expense of a “lost continent” of films which foreground fantasy or which possess “an allegorical or poetic dimension” (Barr qtd. in Petley 98), from the work of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, Ken Russell and Peter Greenaway to Gainsborough melodrama and Hammer horror. For Petley, these films constitute the “repressed side of British cinema, a dark, disdained thread weaving the length and breadth of that cinema, crossing authorial and generic boundaries” (Petley 98).

It is arguable that, since 1986, many of the films Petley cites in this piece have received more attention and appreciation, through a range of academic studies and high-end DVD releases, not least, in the case of Powell and Pressburger, through their championing by Martin Scorsese and the restoration and release of their work by the high-end DVD label, The Criterion Collection. However, what is striking, when surveying and analysing promotional material and DVD booklets accompanying Flipside’s releases, is the extent to which this DVD label draws on similar discourses as employed and foregrounded in “The Lost Continent” piece. As with Petley’s “dark disdained thread” of cinema, Flipside

is presented, on its website, as a label dedicated to releasing a broad and diverse range of films:

Taken as a whole, the collection covers many types of film. There are a number of ‘genre films’, such as Pete Walker’s *Man of Violence* (action-adventure), Gerry O’Hara’s *That Kind of Girl* (exploitation), Richard Lester’s *The Bed Sitting Room* and Clive Donner’s *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush* (both comedies). There are more ‘difficult’ or personal films, including Don Levy’s *Herostratus* and Chris Monger’s *Voice Over*, which show signs of having been influenced by a European sensibility. (Dunn)

However, what is evident within this promotional material is that what unites these diverse British films is their shared status as lost or marginalised cinema. Flipside, as indicated on their website, “favours the overlooked, the sidelined and the undervalued” (‘Flipside – Cult British Cinema’); so *Stranger in the House* is presented as ‘ripe for rediscovery’, and it is noted that (as with many of the Flipside titles) *Red White and Zero* (1967) was “previously unavailable on DVD or Blu-ray”, meaning that the film “is a major rediscovery” (“BFI Flipside”). As foregrounded in this material, the Flipside’s aim, through the restoration and release of these titles, is not just their retrospective appreciation and rehabilitation as cult, but to ensure that “with each new release, a fuller, alternative history of British cinema emerges” (Dunn). Indeed, in an interview included as part of a standalone DVD which functions as a guide and introduction to the Flipside label, influential British film writer Kim Newman not only refers to the applicability of Petley’s “The Lost Continent” to Flipside and its ethos but once again equates the label and its cultification activities with discourses associated with the process of archiving, preserving, digging out and recovering British film titles. As he notes,

the point of the Flipside is to dig up those British movies that not even I am familiar with. They’re not famous, and don’t have an inbuilt audience that Hammer Horror or even *Carry On* might have. They’re so far into what my colleague Julian Petley has called the lost continent of British cinema that even Julian hasn’t seen them. (Newman)

In this sense, the BFI and its agenda to promote

and foreground British film heritage has expanded substantially since the publication of Petley’s piece, which, notably, criticised the BFI’s Film Archive for rejecting, at that point, Michael Reeves’ landmark British horror film, *Witchfinder General* (1969). Indeed, the dovetailing of the BFI’s National Archive’s activities with Flipside’s project to build “an alternative history of British cinema” was particularly evident in their release of the Spanish director José Ramón Larraz’s British horror film *Symptoms* (1974). As outlined in the accompanying DVD booklet, *Symptoms* had been included in the BFI National Archive’s 2010 list of ‘Most Wanted’ films, which were deemed lost and, in the case of *Symptoms*, had been solely “circulating among enthusiasts on poor VHS copies” (Weir 15). In 2014, an original negative of the film had been found in Belgium, leading to the film’s eventual restoration by the Belgian Cinematek, and the housing of a digital copy at the BFI Film Archives and subsequent DVD release by Flipside in 2016. As noted in the accompanying DVD booklet, Larraz’s status as a filmmaker “is marginal at best, his filmography a side note in the history of European horror”, but the DVD booklet mounts a case for the – previously unappreciated – artistic and cultural value of *Symptoms* as part of the tradition of horror and gothic cinema in Britain, noting that, with this film, Larraz “willingly traded sleaze for a more stylish approach to Gothic suspense” and that the film “stands comparison to Roman Polanski’s *Repulsion* (1965)” (Celis 1). Indeed this focus on “a great British film by an outsider” is also echoed in the promotional material accompanying Flipside’s 2011 release of Polish director Jerzy Skolimowski’s coming of age film, *Deep End* (1970), which is presented as joining “that illustrious list of classic titles made by foreign directors, which includes Joseph Losey’s *The Servant* (1963) and Roman Polanski’s *Repulsion* (1965)” (Thompson 1) – directors and films which had been prominently championed in Petley’s “The Lost Continent” essay.

What these examples illustrate is what James Kendrick has called the “legitimizing function” of high-



*Red White and Zero* (1967)

end DVD companies like the British Film Institute's Flipside label or, to cite a US equivalent, The Criterion Collection (126). Distinct from specialist cult labels like Arrow Video or Tartan's Asia Extreme, these home media labels can be seen to function in an equivalent way to "legitimate forums like film festivals, museum archives" and "repertory theaters" (Andrews 108) and, through their status as key cultural arbiters of film art, to, arguably, culturally elevate these lost, underappreciated or marginalised titles to the status of what David Andrews has termed "cult-art cinema". For Andrews, "a cult-art movie seems to have, or to aspire to, two kinds of distinction: cult value and high-art value. It is thus found in the overlap of cult cinema and art cinema" (102). Beyond the automatic legitimisation bestowed on their titles through their selection, preservation and restoration by the BFI, the paratextual material produced by the BFI Flipside seems to work to foreground cultural overlaps and present their titles as examples of "cult-art".

Indeed, Flipside's paratextual material seems concerned, in a number of cases, with elevating the cultural status of films and directors that are putatively associated with exploitation filmmaking. The 1959 youth film *Beat Girl*, for instance, is presented as "a bizarre British exploitation piece of the highest order" (Pratt "Beat" 5) but the film's director, Edmond T. Greville is described as a "little-known figure" who deserves reappraisal, with the accompanying DVD booklet noting that *Beat Girl's* release "may at least go some way to encouraging a reconsideration of his career" (Botting 13). Equally, the material accompanying the 2009 release of the 1965 Mondo-inspired film, *Primitive London*, features an article on the film's producer, Stanley A. Long, which foregrounds his career as a producer of striptease and nudist films but also his collaborations on the lighting and cinematography for Polanski's *Repulsion* and Michael Reeves' *The Sorcerers* (1967). Indeed, the article notes that "Reeves considered Long's lighting of a scene as akin to 'a painting by Reubens'"



*Beat Girl* (1959)

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*Beyond the automatic legitimisation bestowed on their titles through their selection, preservation and restoration by the BFI, the paratextual material produced by the BFI Flipside seems to work to foreground cultural overlaps and present their titles as examples of "cult-art".*

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(Pratt "Stanley" 18), and, consequently, that it's not a stretch to claim that Long and his director Arnold L. Miller "feed on traces" of "European art cinema" in their shaping of *Primitive London* "as a film about voyeurism, for voyeurs" (Sinclair 4). In line with David Andrews' arguments on "cult-art cinema", then, the rehabilitation of directors as cult-art auteurs is key to the establishment of these films as possessing artistic credentials, and such auteurist discourses are prevalent throughout the promotional discourses employed by Flipside to frame and contextualise their releases. In turn, the connections made between these titles and more culturally established filmmakers and films work to slot these titles into a web of alternative British film history exemplified, for Petley in 1986, by the work of Polanski and Reeves, the directors here employed by Flipside, in their promotional materials, as key legitimising figures.

As illustrated in the example of *Beat Girl* and Greville, Flipside's broad project of rehabilitation seems, in many cases, particularly focused on the rediscovery and appreciation not just of particular film titles but on their directors' entire oeuvre. Other existing markers of quality and art status are emphasised where relevant, particularly when films, whilst since falling into obscurity, had featured at major film festivals on initial release – as was the case, for instance, with Barney Platts-Mills' *Private Road* (Locarno International Film Festival), *Deep End* (Venice Film Festival) and *Symptoms* (Cannes International Film Festival) – or featured legendary British actors in early or lesser-known roles (for instance, Oliver Reed, Helen Mirren, James Mason, Vanessa Redgrave and John Hurt). However, Flipside material frequently emphasises the label's aim to offer the consumer "rare films from directors who merit attention" ("Flipside – Cult British Cinema") by including other short or feature-length films by the same filmmaker as extras on the relevant DVD release. So, for instance, the DVD release of David Gladwell's folk horror film, *Requiem for a Village* (1975), is accompanied by three

short Gladwell-directed films and Gerry O’Hara’s relationship drama, *All the Right Noises* (1969), features his *The Spy’s Wife* (1972), a “rare and little-seen short film” (“BFI Flipside”). While the inclusion of such rare short films is clearly related to the BFI Archive’s aim to preserve and circulate British film heritage in all its forms, it also, interestingly, works to potentially expand conceptions of British cult film culture by incorporating – through discourses of auteurism – a range of short films, including experimental and documentary shorts, into such terrain.

However, as noted earlier, these cultivation processes are concentrated and focused, in the case of all thirty-seven Flipside releases and their accompanying extras, on films and filmmakers from the late 1950s to the late 1970s. While the reasons for this are not explicitly stated in Flipside’s paratextual material, discourses employed on their website and in their DVD booklets point to and draw upon the cult appeals of this period. In his influential book on British cult cinema, *Withnail and I*, Justin Smith focuses primarily on the more established and canonical examples of British cult film (from *Performance* to *Withnail and I*) and identifies the 1960s as a key moment in the commencement of the “production of a new kind of [British] film which is later considered cult” (214). This was a time of “the rise of a predominantly youth-orientated counter-culture” associated with sexual experimentation and liberation, subcultural grouping and movements (Smith 87), and “the associated tension between hedonism and conformity” (Egan 287). Flipside’s paratextual material consistently foregrounds the ways in which their titles offer previously underappreciated films which are imbued with value (regardless of their genre or cultural status) because of the ways in which they tap into this tension, and document and reflect the cultural and social uncertainty underpinning this much-mythologised period of British cultural history. Thus, *Primitive London* is presented as “a potent reminder of a curious time and place in the British consciousness” in 1965 when “jackets were cautiously unbuttoned, ties were loosened”, “hair began to creep dangerously towards the collar” but Britain was “still struggling to emerge from austerity” (Pratt “Welcome” 6-9). While – even more explicitly emphasising tension, transition and ambiguity – *Deep End* is presented as a film appearing “at a time of transition in British gender culture”, an era of uncertainty encapsulated by the character of Susan (played by Jane Asher) who is sexually free, energetic and liberated but also a manipulative, cynical character who is frequently exploited, objectified and eroticised by those around her. The articles on the film in the



*The Spy’s Wife* (1972)

accompanying DVD booklet present the film as an ambiguous portrait of “public sexual culture”, gender relations and sexual freedom in London at the turn of the decade, as disorientating as it is fascinating for Mike, the film’s protagonist (Tasker 8-10). In both these cases, the key discourse around which these films are seen to pivot is the mythology of the Swinging Sixties and Swinging London, with both films being presented, in many ways, as a “seedy counterpoint” (or, indeed, a flipside) to the “frothy fixed grin joviality” of other, predominant conceptions of Swinging London and its associated appeals (Pratt “Welcome” 8).

Indeed, Flipside titles are frequently presented as not only offering no-holds barred portraits of the transitional sexual and gender cultures of the period but, in many cases, as offering records of the subcultural movements inextricably associated with the era. Depicting cultures associated with mods, rockers, beatniks or suedeheads, films such as *Beat Girl*, *Bronco Bullfrog* (1969) and *The Party’s Over* (1963) are presented as “countercultural curios” whose narratives are, in the case of *Beat Girl*, for instance, “set against an intoxicating Beatnik backdrop” (“BFI Flipside”) and which therefore gain additional cult value as objects that capture the energy of the wider cultural scenes and locations within which the individual film narratives play out. As Kim Newman notes, in a way which dovetails with discourses of a “lost continent” of cinema, “you uncover a kind of hidden social history of Britain in these movies” (Newman), and, in a number of Flipside releases, this appeal is further foregrounded and contextualised by the inclusion of short documentary features on juvenile delinquency, nude modelling or the towns and cities that serve as backdrops to the dramatic action in these films – for instance, the Flipside release of the coming of age comedy, *Here we Go Round the Mulberry Bush* (1967) features a documentary on Britain’s first New Town, Stevenage, where the film’s narrative is set. Further to this, many of the releases foreground the importance of the central employment of pop music in many of these films, highlighting the ways in which a range of British films capitalised

on the distinct role and appeal (both nationally and internationally) of music culture in Britain during the period, from the John-Barry composed soundtrack to *Beat Girl*, to *Deep End's* employment of a specifically commissioned song and score by Cat Stevens.

### Conclusion

At the close of his “The Lost Continent” essay, Julian Petley notes that “if the institution of the British cinema could be radically reconceptualised”, the range of titles identified in his essay “would look less like isolated islands revealing themselves, and more like the peaks of a long submerged lost continent” (118). Over thirty years later, the legitimate forums associated with British film culture have expanded and diversified, and the currency of ‘cult’ as a cultural and commercial category has not only increased exponentially but also become heterogenous in its meanings and uses, imbuing value and recognition on a much wider variety of types and forms of British cinema. The role of the British Film Institute in this process, through its archival and preservation strategies and its home media releases, has, I would argue, been crucial. As outlined in this article, the discourses employed to foreground and promote the titles on the BFI’s Flipside label provide an illuminating case study of the continued relevance and uses of the term and concept of cult to national film industries, their followers and audiences, with cult being increasingly employed as an umbrella through which understandings of national film cinemas, their traditions and their personnel are continuing to be productively explored, interrogated and expanded.

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*Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush* (1967)

## Godzilla vs. Dracula: Hammer Horror Films in Japan

Transnational studies of popular film genres too often impose a Hollywood-derived understanding of generic categories on another culture's cinema, or else conceive of national genres as essentially separate from Hollywood's hegemony. In practice, however, any given culture's popular film genres consist of a commingling of native traditions and international influences, with the generic corpus composed of foreign as well as domestic specimens. For example, the Japanese filmic category of frightening and monstrous material known as *kaiki eiga* – a phrase often translated as “horror movies” but more literally meaning “strange” or “bizarre” films – encompasses both domestically made adaptations of traditional Japanese ghost stories as well as foreign horror film series like *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, contextualizing the genre within transnational pop culture.

In light of this, it is tempting to think of the *kaiki* genre as merely the Japanese analogue to the Anglophone “horror movie.” To date there has been little if any attempt in either English or Japanese scholarship to theorize a difference between *kaiki* and horror film, despite conspicuous cases in which the definitions diverge. Most notably, Western academics, critics, and fans continue to ascribe a privileged place to *Godzilla* (*Gojira*, 1954) as a seminal work of Japanese horror film despite the fact that the Godzilla franchise has historically not been understood to be part of the *kaiki* genre in Japan. To demonstrate how *kaiki* both aligns with and deviates from the Anglophone category of horror film – as well as the importance of examining the presence of foreign film in any discussion of “national genres” – I will consider the Japanese critical reception of *Godzilla* during the late 1950s in light of the concurrent and immense popularity in Japan of the United Kingdom's Hammer horror films – notably *Horror of Dracula* (1958). Peter Cushing's Dr. Frankenstein and Christopher Lee's Count Dracula took Japan by storm

at a time when the *kaiki* genre was going through an identity crisis brought on by atomic age science fiction horrors like *Godzilla*. The mass popularity of the Hammer films in Japan – with their period settings and shocking acts of personal, bodily violence – played a pivotal role in re-asserting the traditional gothic, suspenseful markers of *kaiki*, effectively banishing the more conspicuously postmodern *Godzilla* from the genre.

In 1957 a small British studio by the name of Hammer Films released *The Curse of Frankenstein*, a watershed (or perhaps we should say bloodshed) moment in the history of horror cinema and screen violence. The first of Hammer's innumerable Technicolor updates of classic Universal Studios monster movies, the international commercial success of *The Curse of Frankenstein* and its follow-up, 1958's *Horror of Dracula*, made global horror icons of stars Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee and ignited a worldwide revival of B-grade gothic horror during the ensuing decade, inspiring everything from Roger Corman's Edgar Allan Poe adaptations starring Vincent Price to the Technicolor fever dreams of Italian horror master Mario Bava. In the case of Japanese *kaiki* cinema, the Hammer films appeared simultaneously with the Shintoho studio's own lurid, colour updates of 19<sup>th</sup>-century ghost stories such as director Nakagawa Nobuo's *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (*Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*, 1959), widely considered the pinnacle of domestic *kaiki* filmmaking.

Horror movie fans often reflect on this period as the dawn of “modern horror”, when films like *Psycho* (1960) and *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) drove a stake through the heart of the classic, gothic mode of horror first embodied by Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff. As previous horror scholars have pointed out, however, such a teleological conception ignores the fact that such films appeared almost simultaneously with what was actually the zenith of popularity for the gothic horror movie

in terms of international production (Hutchings, *The Horror Film* 27-29). At a time when the definitions of the horror genre were being challenged, Hammer horror asserted the traditional gothic markers of period settings, creepy cobwebbed castle corridors, and monsters from a folkloric past stalking unwitting victims blinded by the rationality of the Enlightenment. But Hammer brought something new to cinema screens as well: splashes of bright-red Technicolor blood and a more overtly sexual Count Dracula in the persona of Christopher Lee – all of which seems rather tame today, but which at the time drew no small amount of critical outrage. Nina Hibbon's 1958 review of *Horror of Dracula* in *The Daily Worker* typifies the critical response of the time:

I went to see *Dracula*, a Hammer film, prepared to enjoy a nervous giggle. I was even ready to poke gentle fun at it. I came away revolted and outraged... Laughable nonsense? Not when it is filmed like this, with realism and with the modern conveniences of colour and wide screen... This film disgusts the mind and repels the senses. (qtd. in Hutchings, *Hammer and Beyond* 9)

The British censors routinely gave the Hammer pictures an 'X' rating, and even then the gorier scenes had to be excised before granted a release. The American releases were similarly censored.

In Japan, however, Hammer films played uncut, and the critical reaction to their bloody displays was far more accepting than the cries of outrage heard elsewhere around the globe. *Kinema Junpō*, Japan's longest-running and most prestigious film magazine, said of *Dracula*,

Scenes that will likely cause weak-willed women and children to spontaneously scream and throw both hands over their eyes appear one on the heels of another. The reasons for this are exceedingly simple – Technicolor, and special effects... The script, the performances, the cinematography, every aim and effort is put entirely toward the single focus of creating a sense of gloom and instilling terror, and on this account, we can say the film is a total success. (Sugiyama 120)

Critic Sugiyama Shizuo zeroes in on the same elements Hibbon found so deplorable (the "realism" of violent special effects photographed in colour) but praises the film for just that reason, and neither Japanese critics nor censors expressed any objection to their presence.



Although there appears to be no truth to the rumor that Hammer routinely prepared a "Japanese cut" of each film that included extra bits of gore, the filmmakers were likely aware that scenes which would not make it past the UK censors would be able to be retained in the Japanese release. Indeed, the original, uncut version of their landmark Dracula film was thought lost until 2011 when a print was discovered in the Tokyo National Film Center archive, Japan being one of the few places in the world where the film had screened in its complete form.

As mentioned, Hammer horror invaded Japan at a particularly pivotal moment in the history of the discourse of *kaiki eiga*, a phrase most often rendered in English as "horror movies", although quite a bit of nuance is lost in translation. Nowadays *kaiki eiga* means something more like "gothic horror" and is reserved for classic B-pictures based on traditional Japanese ghost stories as well as imported period horror pictures like *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. Since the 1980s, more recent, contemporarily-set films like American slasher movies or the homegrown but globally successful and influential "J-horror" pictures like *Ring* (1998) have been referred to as *horā eiga*, using the English transliteration of the word "horror." But in 1957, the year Hammer unleashed *The Curse of Frankenstein* on an unsuspecting world, *kaiki eiga* was experiencing an identity crisis in Japan, even as the notion of the "horror movie" itself was in flux globally during the 1950s. Films such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), *Them!* (1954), *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* (1956), and arguably the most well-known example, Japan's own *Godzilla*, were immensely popular, and their distinctly of-the-moment fears of nuclear Armageddon blurred the boundaries of horror and science fiction. Universal Studios even tried re-branding their classic 1930s and 40s horror cycles as "science fiction films" (Altman 78-79), but although a case might be made for *Frankenstein's Monster*, it was difficult to see the sci-fi in

Count Dracula, The Mummy, or the Wolf Man.

While Hollywood publicity departments toyed with dropping the horror label altogether, Japanese critics debated whether the meaning of *kaiki* allowed for the inclusion of science fiction. In the summer of 1957 *Kinema Junpō* ran a feature series of articles collectively titled “The World of *Kaiki eiga*,” and authored by leading film critics of the day including Izawa Jun and the world-renowned Japanese film historian Satō Tadao. Leading off the feature is Izawa’s “What is *Kaiki*?” which is largely an elegy for traditional Japanese ghost story movies. Izawa performs a bit of self-orientalism when he argues that the Buddhist cosmologies of these tales of karmic retribution – which usually involve the ghost of a murder victim seeking vengeance on their tormentors – are the only variety of *kaiki* film that truly resonate with Japanese audiences. Of the science fiction films that were threatening to supplant the ghost story adaptations in popularity, Izawa finds the Hollywood product admirable enough, arguing that *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* works not because it plays on contemporary fears of atomic radiation, but conveys the conviction of its culture’s Judeo-Christian “Wrath of God” motif. Domestic films in the same vein as *Godzilla* supposedly lack this dimension and can never rise above the level of pale imitation, making them unfit heirs to the *kaiki* label in Izawa’s eyes (44-46).

In the same feature Satō Tadao takes the opposite stance, arguing that science fiction is the future of the *kaiki* genre. In “The Appeal of *Kaiki*” Satō decries the same ghost story adaptations Izawa found admirable as outdated relics, unable to speak to (or frighten) a young, postwar Japanese audience. Children of the day were not scared by Buddhist karmic retribution, but instead the threat of nuclear holocaust which Japan had uniquely and unfortunately had a firsthand taste. This threat was embodied most obviously in the radioactive form of *Godzilla*. In stark contrast to Izawa, Satō boldly declares “what must be considered the modern-day ghost story is the science fiction film” (46-48).

Twelve years later *Kinema Junpō* revisited the world of *kaiki*, this time devoting an entire special issue to the genre in 1969. A glance at the cover reveals the extent that the transnational nature of popular commercial cinema must be considered in defining any particular culture’s film genres. While science fiction had loomed large over the *kaiki* debate in 1957, this time *Godzilla* and his radioactive ilk were completely absent from the discussion. The cover of the issue features a full-size illustration of Christopher Lee as Dracula, and the pages within are devoted exclusively to gothic pictures in the Hammer mode and their Japanese ghost story

counterparts. No sense of the generic identity crisis from 1957 lingers; the entire issue assumes an implicitly understood definition of *kaiki* that excludes Japan’s most famous monster. Clearly Satō Tadao’s prediction that science fiction was the future of the genre had not come to pass. Yet *Godzilla* and other Japanese sci-fi horrors had continued to flourish throughout the 1960s. What had happened to make *Kinema Junpō* rethink their inclusion in the *kaiki* club?

It turns out the magazine’s 1957 feature had unwittingly predicted the real future of the genre when it placed a publicity photo of Peter Cushing in Hammer’s just-released *Curse of Frankenstein* directly above the title “What is *Kaiki*?” The film was apparently too new to allow much discussion of it in the articles that made up the feature, apart from a mention that the film’s emphasis on the doctor over his monstrous creation hews closer to Mary Shelly’s original novel than previous Hollywood versions (Shimizu 48-49). However, *Frankenstein*’s imminent success in Japan – as well as the subsequent slew of Hammer horrors – demanded a place of prominence in the discourse of *kaiki*. Appearing concurrently with a grand revival of traditional Japanese ghost story adaptations helmed by director Nakagawa Nobuo – widely considered the greatest domestic *kaiki* filmmaker – Hammer played an instrumental role in reasserting the gothic definition of the genre, whose hallmarks were far removed from the everyday world, period settings where ghosts or vampires stalked their victims through shadowy moonlit corridors. Science fiction horrors like *Godzilla* would no longer be considered as potentially part of the *kaiki* genre, instead given their own category to inhabit, the *kaijū* or “strange beast” movie, although in the West *Godzilla* continues to be considered as a prime example of Japanese horror cinema (Balmain). When asked about the difference between the Japanese conception of *kaiki* and the Anglophone concept of horror film, famed “J-horror”



director Kurosawa Kiyoshi specifically invokes Hammer as an example of the former, saying, “*Kaiki’s* nuance might be termed ‘gothic horror’ in English. It’s things like Hammer movies and *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, period pieces in which ghosts or mysterious figures like Dracula appear, and the whole movie has a sense of taking place ‘not now,’ but ‘long long ago’” (Kurosawa).

It was not only the surface trappings of Hammer horror that distinguished them so utterly from something like *Godzilla*. Their infamous acts of violence, which incensed British and American censors but thrilled the Japanese critics, were also instrumental in redrawing the boundaries of the *kaiki* genre in a post-sci-fi world. The central act of violence in *Godzilla* is the creature’s rather one-sided rampage through the streets of Tokyo, which leaves the metropolis in utter ruin, while the combined might of the Japanese self-defense forces leave nary a scratch on the monster. In Hammer’s *Dracula* the violence is peppered throughout the picture’s runtime, and is comparatively tit-for-tat. For the first time in cinema history Count Dracula’s feasting on his victims actually draws onscreen blood, but the most transgressive acts of violence are the multiple stakes driven through the hearts of the vampires by their human hunters with spurts of bright red blood, screaming, and writhing. In fact, it was the violence directed against the vampires, not their victims, that drew the most critical outrage in the UK and America. In the case of Dracula’s female minions this could take on an uncomfortably sexual subtext, as in an infamous scene from 1966’s *Dracula: Prince of Darkness* in which nightgown-clad actress Barbara Shelly is pinned down spread-eagle by a group of monks while their leader drives the phallic stake through her body. But whether it was Dracula draining the blood of a victim or Professor Van Helsing driving a stake through his heart, the violence in Hammer horror was bodily and personal, depicting attacks on the flesh of the films’ central characters. *Godzilla’s* rampage, on the other hand, is rather impersonal, and his victims are the anonymous masses: the film’s four main characters all observe the destruction of Tokyo from a safe distance. While the body count presumably numbers in the thousands, apart from one fleeting shot of a group of people caught in *Godzilla’s* radioactive fire breath, there are no onscreen depictions of *Godzilla* physically harming anyone. We never see him step on anyone; we never see him picking up and devouring a person (compare this to 1933’s *King Kong*, which includes both trampling and devouring shots). The onscreen acts of violence in *Godzilla* are almost entirely collateral, and their depicted victim is the architecture of Tokyo more so than its denizens.

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*...whether it was Dracula draining the blood of a victim or Professor Van Helsing driving a stake through his heart, the violence in Hammer horror was bodily and personal...Godzilla’s rampage, on the other hand, is rather impersonal, and his victims are the anonymous masses...*

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Perhaps the most important role these differing aesthetics of violence play in banishing science fiction from the definition of the *kaiki* genre lay in the contrast between two distinct expressive modes of fear: panic versus dread. *Godzilla* and other 1950s science-fiction horror hybrids like *Them!* (1954) and *Earth vs the Flying Saucers* (1956) juxtapose their depictions of impersonal and unfocused carnage with shots of crowds fleeing as buildings collapse behind them. There is rarely a suspenseful build-up to these shots, no tense moments of people huddled together praying the monster passes them over before they are forced to flee for their lives. The emotional tenor of these sequences is sudden, mass panic. Indeed, panic replaces dread as the main expressive mode of fear in the apocalyptic sci-fi/horror hybrid. While playing on timely fears of a surprise nuclear holocaust, this also had the unintended consequence of demarcating dread and suspense as an older, “classic” mode of horror – and *kaiki* – filmic expression.

Dread, which relies foremost on suspense, returned to cinema screens with a Technicolor vengeance in the Hammer films. Compare the mass panic of *Godzilla* to a typical moment in a Hammer *Dracula* film: the young heroine, alone in her bedroom, stares frozen in wide-eyed terror as Christopher Lee appears at the window, the vampire slowly slinking toward his prey before sinking his fangs into her throat. The sense of horror relies on a careful, protracted development of suspense in anticipation of Dracula’s violent attack. Suspense is not exclusive to horror (or *kaiki*), of course, but as Noël Carroll notes in his work on the horror genre it has proven to be an effective and venerable tool in the horror filmmaker’s repertoire. Carroll identifies suspense as “an emotional state that accompanies such a scene *up to the point when* one of the competing alternative outcomes is actualized” and goes on to argue that, in the horror genre, the “alternative outcomes” are weighted towards a likely evil resolution (137-138, emphasis added). The

sense of dread in *Dracula*, then, lies not in the actual act of the vampire's bloody attack but in the protracted anticipation of it. In fact, as the scene just described plays out in *Horror of Dracula*, the camera abruptly fades out the moment *before* Dracula bites his victim's throat, a quintessential example of what Stephen Prince

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*Compare the mass panic of Godzilla to a typical moment in a Hammer Dracula film: the young heroine, alone in her bedroom, stares frozen in wide-eyed terror...the vampire slowly slinking toward his prey before sinking his fangs into her throat.*

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notes as the “spatial displacement” of violent acts in classical Hollywood style filmmaking (208). In contrast, the effectiveness of *Godzilla* in evoking sudden panic is such that it reframes fear as a reaction to a violent event rather than an anticipation of it. Compared to the Hammer films we find far less suspense in *Godzilla*; in its place we witness the protracted destruction of Tokyo. The sequence is horrific, but stylistically enough of a departure from the classic mode of *kaiki* depictions of dread and suspense embodied in Hammer's gothic revival that Japanese film critics, publicity departments, and mass audiences eventually came to perceive *Godzilla* and *Dracula* as two completely different generic species.

As mentioned earlier, Japan's own *kaiki* film production reached a peak of excellence concurrently with the appearance of the Hammer films. In 1959, one year after Hammer's *Dracula*, director Nakagawa Nobuo created the most acclaimed of many film versions of Japan's most famous *kaiki* tale, *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*. It was the first widescreen, colour version of the legend – just as Hammer's *Horror of Dracula* was the first widescreen, colour adaptation of Bram Stoker's novel – and like its English counterpart, the film introduced a shocking amount of onscreen bloody violence. In their 1969 special issue devoted entirely to *kaiki* film, *Kinema Junpō* named Nakagawa's *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* one of the two supreme masterpieces of the *kaiki* genre. The other was *Horror of Dracula*, highlighting the crucial role a minor British film studio and its bloody acts of violence played in defining a genre of Japanese popular film, and reminding us that any discussion of national cinema must account for the transnational nature of the medium.

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*The Ghost Story of Yotsuya (1959)*

大東宝が放つ空想映画の巨篇

水爆大怪獣映画

ゴジラ

東宝  
原作・香山滋  
監督・本多猪四郎

津絶敵異、死の放射能を  
奈する吾紀の怪獣ゴジラ!!

宝田 明  
河内 桃子  
平田 昭彦  
志村 喬

堀 雄二  
山村 聰  
上原 謙  
木下 敬  
鈴木 明子

脚本・村松武雄  
撮影・玉川正夫



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21日1時30分上映 大70 小40



## "I Don't Feel Anything Emotionally But Rage": Masculinity in 21st Century Children's Media

Formulaic writing for children's programming is a common complaint. However, formulizing applies to more than the plot. What we assume is masculine behavior can be traced to a specific formula created in the nineteenth century. Tami Bereska's "The Changing Boys' World in the 20th Century: Reality and 'Fiction'" notes that the "classic" narrative of a boy besting his peers and winning a heterosexual love interest has been repeated since the 1890s (168), creating a narrative that seems immutable rather than a social construct. This trend has become crueler over time, spreading to newer mediums available to boys. Kristen Myers's "'Cowboy Up!': Non-Hegemonic Representations of Masculinity in Children's Television Programming" outlines how twenty-first century programs present male characters who are sensitive, non-aggressive, or not popular with women, as jokes (Myers 140). Late twentieth/ twenty-first century programming for boys furthered masculinity's toxicity. Jeffrey A. Brown's "The Superhero Film Parody and Hegemonic Masculinity" also analyzes twenty-first century masculinity in pop culture, noting that after 9/11 the masculinized superhero fantasy gained popularity, even though its formula is a social construction (132-3). Even as time progresses, pop culture has mostly stuck to a narrow formula for masculinity.

However, a survey of current animation programs – the oldest example is from 2016 – reflect a possible shift in how Western writers present male characters. This survey includes varied examples of animation in the twenty-first century: traditional broadcast animation (*DuckTales* [2017- ]), animation on streaming services (*Voltron: Legendary Defender* [2016-2018]), and film animation (*The Lego Batman Movie* [2017]). While these examples differ in format and style, they are all established Western children's animation franchises. Each franchise initially

showcased men defined by their anger (Donald Duck, Batman), or by their power/heterosexual romances (Commander Keith). But in their newest incarnations, these men are now reimagined through care ethics. Maureen Sander-Staudt outlines care ethics as emphasizing nurturing of others to promote social behavior (*IEP*) and subvert patriarchal norms. Of course, nurturing men have appeared in previous animated programs. Examples include Steven in *Steven Universe* (2013-) and Aang in *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2003-2008). Amy M. Davis also notes in *Handsome Heroes and Vile Villains: Masculinity in Disney's Feature Films* that many Disney films showcase gentle-hearted men, like *Johnny Appleseed* (1948) and *The Rescuer's* (1977) Bernard (87). In "Post-Princess Models of Gender: the New Man in Disney/Pixar," Ken Gillam and Shannon R. Wooden highlight the trend in recent Disney/Pixar animation to feature male protagonists that unlearn toxic masculinity (2). Gillam and Wooden are correct that the influx of male characters learning empathy reflects a trend to accepting nurturing men (3), but the nature of animation franchises that have been rebooted must be considered as well.

While Steven and Aang are original characters, Johnny Appleseed and Aladdin's stories reside in the realms of folk and fairy tales (Davis 90, 110), vague enough that a writer who wants to create a gentler male protagonist can do so without worrying too much about the character's past baggage. Donald Duck, however, has a pre-set personality due to his commercial legacy, as opposed to a legacy in folklore or a fairy tale: audiences have seen his temper before in past films and/or comics, so they expect to see it in sequels and reboots as well (Blitz 6). Thus, when Donald is revised to become caring, it demonstrates "innate" masculinity's artificiality. These men are not the first animated characters to subvert Bereska's

outline for traditionally masculine characters, but revising the masculine hallmarks of animation into nurturing characters represents a significant trend in how audiences are reinterpreting masculinity.

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*Anger and adventure are still components of Donald's personality, but this shift to care ethics subverts the idea that a male character can only feel anger, creating a more positive role model for children's media.*

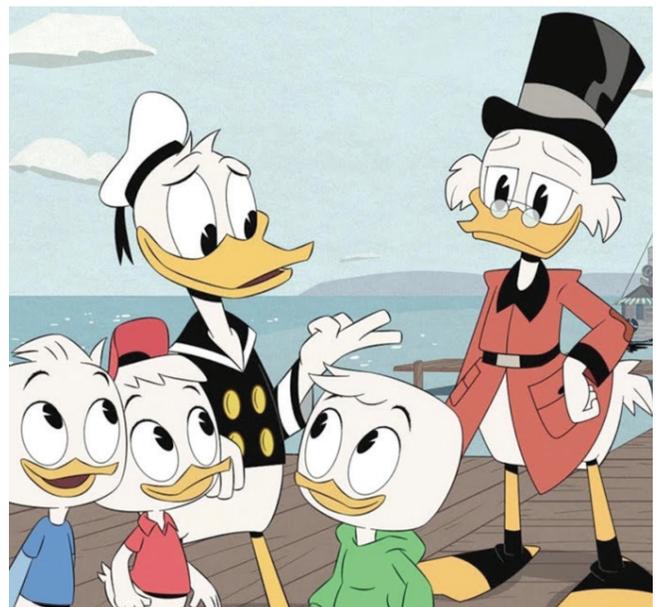
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Donald Duck is famous in Disney media as Mickey's aggressive foil, with his more adventurous streak delegated to comics. While the 1987 *DuckTales* is one of the few Duck-related Disney programs where Donald was not a major character, he is re-introduced in the 2017 reboot series. He is also reinterpreted as a nurturer, rather than a negative counterpart to the kinder characters in the Disney canon. Marcia Blitz notes in the *Donald Duck* biography that Donald's anger was his first defining trait to set him apart from the gentle Mickey (Blitz 6, 7). Mickey Mouse cannot get angry – but that is the one of the few accepted emotions male characters are allowed to express (Bereska 165), creating a dull protagonist in need of an angry counterpart. There have been attempts to expand Donald's character in the past. The most famous example is Carl Barks's *Donald Duck* comic books. In interviews, Barks explains how he gave Donald Duck an adventurous streak, often aiding his wealthy Uncle Scrooge, but kept the negative aspects as well, since he believed children wanted to see the adult figure get his comeuppance (Barks 100). In some ways, Barks's Donald is even more hegemonic: his action-packed adventures compound his masculinized temper. While Donald Duck changed as a character through the various media appearances, he still embodied a form of masculinity defined by anger.

The first major change in Donald's personality comes in the 2017 *DuckTales* reboot. After Huey, Dewey and Louie's mother Della Duck disappears, Donald assumes responsibility as their uncle/surrogate father figure. "Uncle Donald" is a fixture of Duck canon, but showrunners Francisco Angones and Matthew Youngberg ground their reimagining of Donald as a stressed father figure in the character's

adventurous background, wanting to shield his nephews from the horrors of the outside world (Hill). Angones and Youngberg articulate their ethos in the series premiere, *Woo-oo*. Said premiere involves Donald not getting in fights, but warning Huey not to touch a hot stove, and telling the triplets the importance of sacrifice ("Woo-oo!"). This revision in Donald's ethos reflects care ethics: he sees taking care of his boys as more important than his own pride (Sander-Staudt). This is not a rewrite of the character – Donald will still fight when necessary – but the impetus always involves protecting his children. When the Beagle Boys kidnap the triplets, Donald flies into a fit, but his last line before he is overwhelmed by emotion is "Give me back my boys!" ("Daytrip of Doom!"). His tantrum comes from a place of caring, rather than anger or cruelty. Anger is not removed from Donald's psyche, but the nurturing streak creates a more positive ethical system.

Indeed, Donald's love for his nephews helps them to unlearn toxic masculinity as well. In "House of the Lucky Gander!" his nephews, especially Louie, prefer the company of the witty, wealthy Gladstone Gander, unlike the frumpier Donald and his insistence that "family helps family" ("House of the Lucky Gander!"). Gladstone bests Donald in wit and charm, establishing a powerful dynamic over Donald. His perceived power leads to Louie preferring Gladstone – at least until Gladstone brushes Louie aside when he is no longer useful in trying to manipulate Donald. When Louie experiences Gladstone's lack of familial care, he realizes that Donald loves him unconditionally. Louie realizes that Gladstone's hierarchal ethos has no place for children/family, which allows him to understand



the importance of Donald's care ethics. This is later manifested when Louie cheers Donald on when he has to fight for his family. Thanks to Louie's caring encouragement, rather than a focus on competition, Donald saves his family. Donald's caring ethos is presented as preferred, creating a broader spectrum of emotions for boys.

The first season finale for *DuckTales* concludes with Donald's love for his family becoming the driving force in saving his estranged Uncle Scrooge's life. Donald blames Scrooge for his sister Della's disappearance. While he allows his boys to adventure with Scrooge, he metaphorically exiles himself to his houseboat in Scrooge's pool. Readers may expect him to rejoice when his nephews find out Scrooge's role in their mother Della's disappearance. The nephews become disillusioned, wanting to move away from the mansion. Instead, Donald reminds his boys that Scrooge is family, and they cannot forsake that bond in a misplaced attempt at emotional revenge ("The Shadow War!"). After remembering how Scrooge nearly lost his fortune while trying to find Della, Donald understands that despite his flaws, Scrooge cared for Della. This leads to him not only forgiving Scrooge, but caring for him in return. Anger and adventure are still components of Donald's personality, but this shift to care ethics subverts the idea that a male character can only feel anger, creating a more positive role model for children's media.

Hegemonic masculinity is found in older action adventure shows as well. The *Voltron* franchise offers a classic example in its protagonist, Commander Keith from the 1984 Americanized anime, *Voltron: Defender of the Universe*. Level-headed, Keith exemplified hierarchical and heterosexual values, rescuing Princess Allura from various dangerous scenarios while reprimanding rebellious subordinates – especially novice pilot Allura. One example involves Allura explaining why she stole the Black Lion in "Give Me Your Princess": if the team leaves her planet, only she will remain to protect her people. Thus, she must learn to pilot the lead lion as well. While unwise, her choice is rooted in care ethics (she sees her people's safety/care as valuable). However, Keith reinforces the importance of hierarchy when he berates Allura for acting independently, emphasizing that the team structure must remain static and hierarchal ("Give Me Your Princess"). While not as overtly negative as Donald Duck and his temper, 1984 Keith embodies a static/narrow masculine concept.

Initially in the 2016 reboot, *Voltron: Legendary Defender*, leader Takashi "Shiro" Shirogane seemingly

embodies traditional masculinity. Shiro is tall and muscular, and the team refers to him as leader or mentor throughout the series. His mysterious past as an alien captive involves winning several gladiatorial matches. For the first six seasons, he possesses a weaponized prosthetic arm, incorporating symbolic violence in his character design. Everything about Shiro's premise suggests that he is the new hegemonic leader of Voltron. And perhaps he would be, if there were not countless scenes of Shiro in overdramatized distress. The series opens with Shiro fleeing danger, and then attempting moral suasion (unsuccessfully) with his captors. This scene alerts audiences that Shiro, despite his masculine design/status, is not a traditionally masculine hero.

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*Of course, a hero experiencing violence is hardly new in a masculinized narrative. However, Shiro's misadventures are never romanticized or ridiculed. The violent moments in Shiro's arc are presented as horrific, not heroic.*

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This subversion is furthered as Shiro is bound to a bed by his superiors at the Galaxy Garrison to examine him after he flees his captors. Again, most heroes in action-adventure animation do not spend a large portion of the series premiere needing rescue. This trend has continued throughout the series as Shiro has been murdered, kidnapped, brainwashed, attacked by needles and tentacles – with all the phallic implications those images suggest. Additionally, he was told by Coran to shut up and put on a tight shirt in order to win supporters through his sex appeal for the sake of intergalactic peace rather than give the speech he had prepared ("The Voltron Show!"). Of course, a hero experiencing violence is hardly new in a masculinized narrative. However, Shiro's misadventures are never romanticized or ridiculed (Myers 140). The violent moments in Shiro's arc are presented as horrific, not heroic. In "Some Assembly Required," the violent trauma from his past affects Shiro so severely that he freezes up in a training exercise, leaving Keith to save him from an attack bot ("Some Assembly Required").

Shiro also subverts hierarchal masculinity through demonstrating the sympathy 1984's Commander

Keith lacks. 1984 Keith, in contrast, refused to look at Princess Allura after she makes a mistake, even though he knew she regretted her actions. Shiro, despite his status, reminds his team that they are just that, a team (“The Rise of Voltron”). Showrunner Lauren Montgomery has referred to Shiro as the



ultimate team player, prioritizing the team over his previous status as Black Paladin (Agard), and offering hugs to characters needing support, including Keith (reimagined as Shiro’s second-in-command). He also defers his hierarchal authority to other characters, remaining in the background after encouraging Pidge to discover her own greatness by finding her Lion unassisted (“The Rise of Voltron”). His desire to care for and help Pidge negates the constructed masculinity needed to be the most powerful character in every episode. This emphasis on care over hierarchy is framed by the series as a fault in Shiro: when Pidge wants to leave the team to look for her family, Shiro allows her, placing her needs over the team’s mission (“Fall of the Castle of Lions”). This newfound emphasis on feminized distress and teamwork disrupts the hierarchal component of hegemonic masculinity.

The most obvious subversion of hegemonic masculinity in *Voltron: Legendary Defender* is that Shiro is gay, revealed in the series’ seventh season premiere (“A Little Adventure”). His existence becomes a rejection of the assumed heterosexuality of male protagonists that is common in children’s media (Myers 134). However, the subversion goes further than that. “A Little Adventure” reveals that Shiro is also chronically ill, which leads to his superiors and even his boyfriend, Adam (who breaks up with him in the same episode) to see him as incapable of piloting anymore. His disease creates a limitation in their minds – or a vulnerability that traditional masculinity will not permit. Since he no longer fits their idea of

a masculine pilot, they wish to remove him from that sphere. When Shiro tells Keith that he will go on the mission regardless, he becomes a character that is vulnerable, but still heroic.

*Voltron: Legendry Defender* also subverts heterosexuality through focusing on Shiro and Keith’s friendship instead of giving either character a female love interest. The 1984 cartoon framed Keith and Allura’s mutual attraction through the knight/princess dynamic. This emphasis presented Keith as a powerful, heterosexual symbol of traditional masculinity. In the 2016 reboot, however, Keith’s first moments involve rescuing Shiro. He rescues Shiro roughly seven times over the course of the series, to the point where Shiro comments on it in the show, asking how many times Keith will have to save him. Keith responds, “As many times as it takes” (“Trailing a Comet”). Humour aside, Keith’s devotion to Shiro over a heterosexual romance parallels Sander-Staudt’s definition of care ethics. Shiro supports Keith in his pilot training, even intervening when Keith is nearly expelled for fighting. He promises Keith that he will never “give up on [Keith]” (“A Little Adventure”), which founds Keith’s devotion to Shiro. Instead of reverting to hierarchal masculinity and assuming leadership when Shiro is presumed dead like a traditional masculine protagonist, Keith values the care/positive emotions Shiro provides him, and does his best to reciprocate. After Shiro’s disappearance, Keith initially refuses replacing Shiro, swearing he will find the one man who never abandoned him (“Changing of the Guard”). Keith not only appreciates Shiro’s care, but also sees the values in caring for Shiro, reflecting his own caring ethos. His actions are rooted in wanting to return the care Shiro gave him in the past (Sander-Staudt).

Season six appears to force Keith into leadership in a masculinized way: Shiro is brainwashed by the villain Haggar, and Keith must fight Shiro in order to stop her schemes. However, the episode ends not with Keith defeating Shiro, but remaining with Shiro in his final moments rather than abandoning Shiro to save himself (“The Black Paladins”). A moment that should have affirmed Keith as Voltron’s new leader in an appropriately masculine way after Shiro fails, instead reinforces that for Keith, Shiro always comes first. This climax affirms Sander-Staudt, and also Daryl Koehn’s survey of care ethics in *Rethinking Feminist Ethics: Care, Trust and Empathy* as Keith sacrifices himself, linking his destiny with Shiro’s (27). Koehn sees this risk factor as problematic (39), but Keith’s care for Shiro leads to Shiro’s spirit helping Keith



rescue his friends, and later, the universe. He provides the solution to Koehn's concern that care ethics may not provide strategies to combat danger in a disruptive, caring way. His care for clone Shiro leads to Shiro's spirit (trapped in the Black Lion) rescuing Keith, guiding him to his imperiled teammates ("All Good Things"). *Voltron: Legendary Defender* is imperfect in its implementation of their friendship in its concluding seasons: while Shiro's onscreen marriage obviously subverts heterosexuality ("The End is the Beginning"), his relationship with Keith cools – aside from one scene in the final season, they spend little time together. Nevertheless, Shiro and Keith's arcs demonstrate how the hierarchal aspects of masculinity can be combatted through valuing each other over status.

While all of these selected works demonstrate revised masculinity through care ethics, *The Lego Batman Movie* is the most transparent in its mission. This emphasis is partly because of its parodic genre, even as the film reimagines what Batman is and is not. Brown argues that the superhero parody genre stresses the masculine hero's artificiality (132), and Batman's early gleeful destruction confirms this. However, *The Lego Batman Movie* provides a fuller subversion of Batman's masculinity than audiences may expect. The film incorporates Batman's multiple predecessors in their mocking, taking advantage of how Batman has saturated the cinematic scene to implement their revisions. Thus, viewers realize that Batman's violent, anger-fueled quest for revenge has been repeated for decades. While Batman declares rage is part of his identity, in response Alfred outlines Batmans in reverse chronology from 2016 to the 1960s, noting that Batman's refusal to deviate from expressing only negative emotions has led to a stagnant character.

Alfred serves two purposes in the film. He becomes a parental figure to Batman – an idea that the film confirms with Alfred learning to curtail Batman's bad behavior from reading a book about disciplining unruly children. Also, his reference to

Batman experiencing cycles of anger/vengeance over the decades emphasizes how boys' media repeats Bereska's narrow formula for masculinity – and lets the audience know that this formula is a construction through its repetition in both Alfred's speech and the imagery of past Batmans (invoking movie posters and/or iconic moments in past films, reinforcing Batman's artificial ethos). Alfred also reflects care ethics, noting that Batman's anger is not innate, but because he does not want to feel the pain of familial loss again. As a father figure, Alfred suggests that Batman create a new family – and makes him raise his adopted son, Robin. Alfred's insistence that Batman should show the orphaned Robin the warmth Alfred showed the orphaned Bruce Wayne in his youth presents a way for care ethics to be inherited through the generations.

Batman's stagnation is contrasted to Gotham police commissioner Barbara Gordon, who infuses her own ethical system with compassion, and notes that Batman's ethos of dressing up and hitting poor people has not stopped any criminals. She does not want to stop Batman, but rather incorporate him into her compassionate ethical system. Batman, who will not allow himself to feel anything but anger, cannot tolerate this idea. His inability to understand care ethics leads to his breaking the law, and his own arrest. But Batman learns the value of care ethics through his surrogate son, Robin. Unlike the majority of other *Batman* adaptations, Bruce Wayne (accidentally) adopts Robin, making him Batman's legal son. This father-son link is furthered as Robin calls him "Dad," providing Batman the familial care and positive emotions that he was denied when his parents were murdered.

Batman's ethos shifts from anger to nurturing when he realizes that his masculine ethical system has placed Robin in mortal danger, after Batman is imprisoned in the Phantom Zone, leaving his allies to defend Gotham. After internalizing Batman's destructive ethos, Robin decides the best way to save the city/his father is to "not listen to anyone else. Be mean to people. Destroy as much property as possible. Talk in a really low, gravelly voice, and go it alone" (*The Lego Batman Movie*). Batman is horrified as he watches his son embody masculinized ethos, and the dangers that Dick's choice involves. His plea with Dick to not emulate his behavior is a far cry from the movie's beginning, when Batman sings about his violent adventures. Batman's paternal concern for Robin leads him to sacrifice himself physically – agreeing to enter the Phantom Zone, an interdimensional jail – and emotionally, admitting

his hate for the Joker, and saving Gotham. Batman's embracing of care ethos leads to his own freedom at the film's end, and prevents Robin from internalizing the narrow/violent masculinity of the franchise's past.

The formula for masculinity in children's entertainment has remained stagnant for over a century, reinforcing the notion that male characters are supposed to be angry, heterosexual, and obsessed with gaining power over others. But recent developments in societal and cultural values of masculinity have emerged in children's animations. Reboots and sequels have become a way to reinterpret formulaic writing to reimagine gender roles for twenty-first century audiences. Characters that once represented traditional masculinity now show boys and men that expressing vulnerability and love is permissible. This reversal of gender roles is not exclusive to men – as male characters are reimagined as gentler, female characters have gained more agency. As Keith, Batman, and Donald Duck have accepted roles beyond anger and violence, their female counterparts (Allura, Barbara Gordon, Webby Vanderquack) can now assume more assertive roles in their respective programs. While the implementation is sometimes imperfect, reimagining male characters as nurturers creates a more inclusive sphere for the characters and their audiences.

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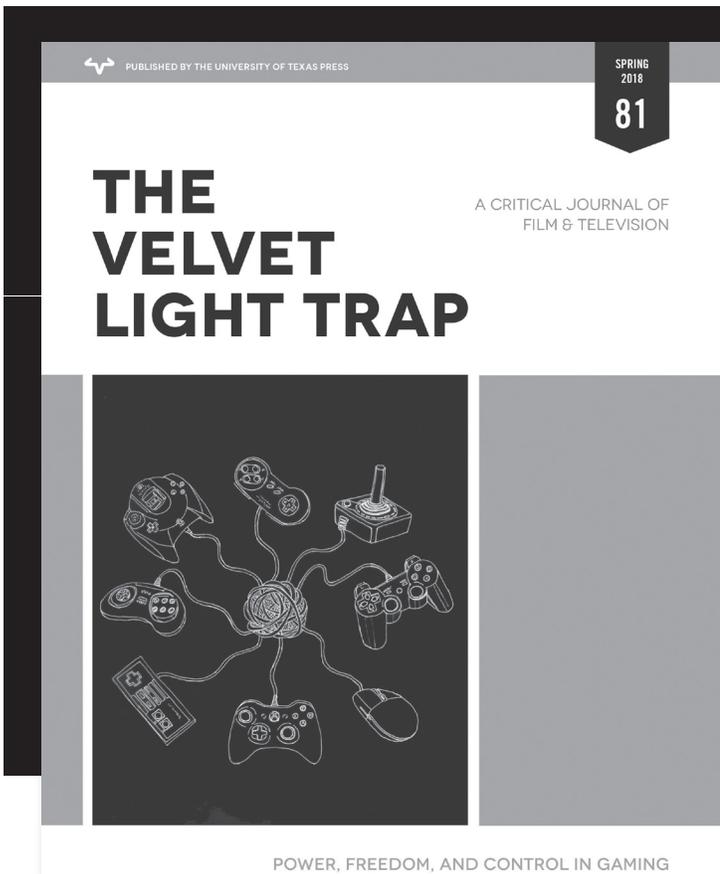
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SEMIANNUAL  
ISSN 0149-1830  
Individuals \$43/yr  
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## The Resurrected Cyborg

1. *“The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins.”*

-Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto”

Paul Verhoeven’s 1987 sci-fi action film *Robocop*, featuring killer robots, explosive blood baths, and face melting toxic waste, can be used as a surprisingly thoughtful object in studying Otherness. The ludicrous premise – a cop who is killed and then resurrected as a cyborg only to seek vengeance on those who wronged him – is indicative of the excessive entertainment typical of the 1980s. Despite associations with 80s machismo and hegemonic masculinity, *Robocop* asserts its value as a cultural product in two seemingly contradictory ways. The first is its cheeky, satirical tone, which embraces the silly aspects of the film’s universe. The acts of the movie are divided by cheery local news reports about the dystopian future and ads for outlandish Cold War inspired products such as “Nuke ‘Em,” a family board game about mutually assured destruction. These elements seem to convey that this cheesy action flick does not take itself too seriously and, with the metatextual commercials, contextualizes itself within low culture objects such as a TV movie of the week. Despite these connotations, the film provides rich areas of analysis in its plotting and character development. Robocop (Peter Weller) is a human-like character. He struggles against his own body, mind, and the system that both created and failed him in order to reclaim his identity. In fact, Murphy (Robocop’s original human name, used throughout this paper to accentuate his character arc) embodies the disabled experience of re-articulating a post-diagnosis identity outside of medical codification and negotiating a system designed for the masses through support and accessibility

accommodations. In the character of Murphy, *Robocop* offers representations of physical disability and invisible passing neurodivergent conditions (such as dementia, cognitive and processing disabilities, and mental illness). Both as a blockbuster loaded with a pastiche of goofy, gory violence, and as an allegory concerning the personhood and identity of the atypical body and brain, *Robocop* as a film could be considered a cyborg in itself.

Since Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto” was published in 1984, the image of the cyborg has become a widely accessible metaphor for shifting boundaries in critical theory throughout the humanities. The metaphorical cyborg appears in works concerning projections of gender and race, where the cyborg is either an androgynous boogeyman, sapping masculinity from our heroes (Fuchs), or an analogy for contamination, representing defiance against racial expectations and identity (Nishime). The cyborg, which was first introduced to criticism as a space in-between ideas and disciplines, has now been exhausted by all of them. As technology has become more entangled in our lives, the cyborg has seen a resurgence in representation of something closer to its literal form, as society is now more of a cybernetic-enhanced organism. Today’s rhetoric has shifted to discount the “cyborg” while applying the term “prosthetic” in the same way, creating an imaginary space for conceptualizing abstracted and romanticized possibilities in merging the mechanical with the organic (Sobchack 207). The prosthetic lacks the totality of the cyborg, it can be discarded when the notion of post-humanity fails to align with the fantastic imaginary of science fiction. The irony is that unlike the totally constructed image of the cyborg, the prosthetic techno-body is a day-to-day reality for many of the disabled community.

Theorist Vivian Sobchack incorporates her experiences as an amputee into her writings concerning the lived-body, and the relationship between the body and the self (173). On the subject of the fetishization of the techno-body, she keeps both her prosthetic and organic feet on the ground. Following a litany

of her prostheses (in varying degree of technological complexity, from crutches to fiberglass and titanium tibia and fibula), their various components, their history, and their place in her everyday life and in her house, she writes:

I hope, by now, that you—the reader—have been technologized and quantified into a stupor by what is a very narrow and “objective” register of meaning, the bland (or at least straight-faced) enumeration, detailing, and pricing of my prosthetic parts (whether on my body or in the closet) intended to ground and lend some “unsexy” material weight to a contemporary prosthetic imagination that privileges... is too often thrilled by—the exotic (indeed, perhaps erotic) *idea* rather than the mundane *reality* of my intimate relations with “high” technology. (219)

While Sobchack is quick to discount her autobiographical position as lending her total authority on the subject (206), she writes from a unique perspective among other body theorists. Her focus here is that unlike the fanciful cyborg, the techno-body is not a metaphorical space for the able-bodied to ruminate on aesthetics and culture with cyber-punk inspired delight. The prosthetic and techno-body have been grafted onto the metaphorical cyborg for no reason but to affect the reinvention of the cyborg. The idea of the prosthetic, and by extension, the techno-body, must be reclaimed by the individuals and community in need of accommodation. Only in the context of disability studies does the concept of the techno-body become a new conceptual cyborg, both metaphor of post-modern humanities theories and literal in its representation of function.

The heroic cyborg Robocop embodies the techno-body and acts as a symbol for the experience of the



atypical body and brain. After extraordinary trauma to his organic body (in fact, he is legally dead, meaning that his lived-body is also a resurrected body), evil corporation Omni Consumer Products surgically alters and integrates Murphy’s “wet ware” with mechanical and cybernetic prosthetics. Murphy’s death on the operating table is shot from the point of view of the doctors, there is no doubt of the location and severity of his injuries.

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*Murphy has consolidated his identity as a techno-body and brain; Murphy and Robocop are one.*

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The audience tracks his resurrection as he is rebuilt into Robocop through the perspective of his new, robotically enhanced vision. Indicative of his disabled status, the orientation of his point of view is lower than the other people in the scene, as though he is wheelchair bound. Omni middle manager Bob Morton (Miguel Ferrer) remarks during Robocop’s construction “We agreed on total body prosthesis” and then directs the engineers to “lose the arm.” Otherwise, there is no indication as to how Robocop is constructed. As the mechanical components of his new body are built to emulate in form and function human extremities, his body can now be considered a single, massive prosthesis.

Murphy’s disabled body is regulated as if by a medical professional through prosthetics. But as with all cyborgs, particularly those in cinema, he retains outward indicators of his organics. Murphy and Robocop are inextricable. The self is the lived-body, and the lived-body is a techno-body. The ambiguity of the anatomy of Robocop further serves to solidify him as a complete entity rather than a dissectible specimen. In contrast to the spectacle of seeing Murphy blown apart, Robocop is presented as a fully formed being. This shifts how he is conceptualized and identified by external systems (the spectator and the paratext) from the realm of science and medicine into a cultural context.

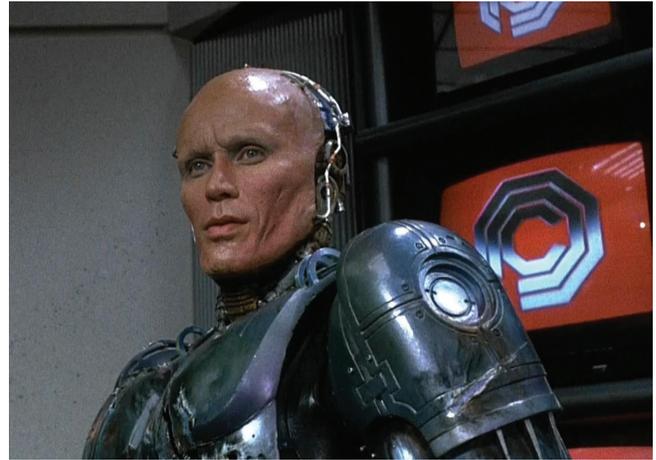
When Robocop is first revealed as a fully integrated techno-body, with organics relating seamlessly to prostheses, he is still under the total control of Omni. Murphy’s humanity bleeds through his physical change only in affectations, such as how he spins and holsters his weapon and what he says to criminals: “Dead or alive, you are coming with me.” As the story progresses, Robocop remembers more from his “organic life,” learns more about his murder, and goes to seek justice. He is injured in a massive firefight and must repair himself. He retreats to an industrial park with his ally Lewis

(Nancy Allen). He is seen testing his joints, removing his mask for the first time, being called by name, lamenting his lost life, and reintegrating his body and brain by relearning to aim a weapon. Just as he is rebuilding his body and learning its limitations, he is rebuilding his identity and how to thrive within those limitations.

Throughout the film, Robocop's point of view is displayed to the spectator as a patchwork of executive orders and residual habits and memories. He struggles to make sense of his memories and how he now relates to them without guidance or support. Included among the various invisible disabilities presented in this film is memory loss. This representation is crucial as our cultural imagination seats personhood in the mind as well as the body; when one's memory, personality, and sense of self wanes, their personhood is dismissed (Price 334). Robocop's access to these memory fragments, dreams, and hallucinations are a glitch, as they were unanticipated by his programmers and handlers. As he reconfigures his sense of self in an industrial park, he says of his family: "I can feel them, but I can't remember them." He moves on from his inability to access his old life in order to consolidate his new identity. This is a subtle turn of events, but necessary to the arc of the character.

Along with his "super-human" physical abilities, Robocop's cognitive capacities are shown as beyond human. He is able to record events, both operating as a form of total recall and (it is implied) providing him with the ability to give privileged testimony in court. He can also interface directly with a computer. In a twisted version of Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics (Asimov), his "Fourth Directive" prohibits Robocop from acting against Omnicorp executives, or he will shut down. The dreaded Fourth Directive is among his most overt mental limitations, as it limits his autonomy. Ultimately, for all of Robocop's "superpowers", it is this inherent construction that limits his ability to exist as a full political agent of the justice system and of society.

At the film's climax, Murphy is able to work around the Fourth Directive to enact his vengeance on Dick Jones (Ronny Cox), the man who facilitated his murder. He walks into the room and states his case against Jones to the board of directors. When Jones takes his boss, "The Old Man" (Daniel O'Herlihy) hostage, Murphy calmly explains that he is incapable of acting against an officer of Omni. The Old Man fires Jones, Robocop shoots him, and Jones crashes out the window of the skyscraper. The Old Man asks for Robocop's name, who replies with a grin: "Murphy." The movie ends immediately with a black title card: ROBOCOP. Murphy has consolidated his identity as a techno-body



and brain; Murphy and Robocop are one. The identity of Robocop is resolved in parallel to the resolution of his struggle to articulate his place as an Other within society. His success in avenging himself is contingent on The Old Man recognizing that his request will create a condition for Robocop to act as though he were unencumbered by the Fourth Directive. The limitation is removed, not from the person of Robocop, but from the system in which he operates. The importance of the disability narrative is woven into the climax of the film; in essence, Robocop requests accommodations for his disability. While The Old Man provides Murphy the means to succeed, there is again no doubt among the board of directors, Murphy, or the audience, that it is Murphy who pulls the trigger and saves the day.

## 2. "Role models are important..."

- Officer Alex Murphy, *Robocop*

In a century's worth of cinema, representations of the disabled community have been problematic. The body of the disabled other has been fetishized, their mind has been dismissed, and the narrative has been built to favor the feelings and perspective of the abled-bodied audience (Norden, *Cinema* 1-3).

The reboot of *Robocop* (José Padilha, 2014) – hereafter referred to as *Robocop* 2014 – is a significant example of this. *Robocop* 2014 also features a police officer named Alex Murphy, who is brutally murdered and resurrected as a cyborg. Here the two films diverge in plotting and tone. In *Robocop* 2014, Alex Murphy is confronted with his new body in a large, sterile lab, with his "creator" and prosthetist Dr. Dennett Norton (Gary Oldman). He faces a mirror, and his prosthetics are mechanically removed with lavishly deliberate pacing to underline Alex's growing horror: the legs, the groin, torso and arms, and finally the chest plate. Alex watches

this controlled vivisection in the mirror, as does the audience. In this way, his body is only ever framed as image and spectacle, separate from our understanding of Alex. The focus is racked from Alex to Norton, accentuating the authority of the medical professional over the specimen of the disabled body; it does not matter what Alex sees, it matters what Norton says. This is followed with a lingering pan from the top of Alex's exposed brain to his face. "You're in control," explains Norton. "If I'm in control," responds Alex, "I want to die."

The underlying aim of disability studies is to present the disabled outside of the alienating and categorizing framework of medicine (Mitchell 222). Disability often becomes the superior political identity of a person, and that identity is always packaged by the medical profession (Davis 10). In our introduction to Alex, he is presented not only as a discorded body but framed as a specimen to be gawked at by the cinema's "abled-bodied" audience. This is a stark contrast to Murphy's *Robocop* awakening, which is only his point of view, demanding that the audience empathize with him as an autonomous subject rather than object. Alex is framed as a less-than-human object, in literal terms of anatomical subtraction. The disabled body is not presented as human, but rather an inhuman figuration to serve as the object of horror and pity. This scene arguably also recalls the freak show, one of the earliest modern era examples of reducing disabled bodies to objects of spectacle and commodification (Garland Thomson 58).

The plot of *Robocop 2014* revolves around Alex's lack of agency. Like Murphy, Alex is subject to a litany of programming functions which limit his autonomy and serve as allegory for the neurodivergent disabilities. He is controlled by a team of specialists, who short-circuit his personality to send him on mindless murder missions. His lack of control is never framed in terms of his own existence, but only as a torment to his wife and child. He must bear the burden of placating them. Most indicative of this is the climax of the movie. In stark contrast to the accessibility affirming climax of *Robocop*, the climax of *Robocop 2014* is an exercise in sentiment, that again leans on the damaging tropes of disability portrayal throughout the history of cinema (Norden *Changing* 137). Alex must kill the modern incarnation of the evil executive, Raymond Sellers (Michael Keaton) to save his wife and child. Although Alex is programmed not to harm anyone wearing a certain electronic bracelet, he is able to shoot Sellers. Alex is able to overcome his programming, and in effect, his disability. His limitations within the system and society are not reconciled by his character growth, but dismissed by his overpowering

desire to be able bodied. This privileges the "power of love" over the pre-established narrative rules in relation to his cyborg nature. He is able to extend his limitations just by trying hard enough, and only in service to the able-bodied characters around him. In a sequence clearly created to evoke an emotional response from the viewer, he lies on the rooftop, his wife holding his human hand. An inversion of the long held and problematic trope of internal evil being visually conveyed by external deformity (Norden, *Changing* 128), Alex's humanity and identity are represented by his body's last organic affectation. His personhood is still tied not to his actions or self-actualization, but to his flesh.

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*In stark contrast to the accessibility affirming climax of Robocop, the climax of Robocop 2014 is an exercise in sentiment, that again leans on the damaging tropes of disability portrayal throughout the history of cinema.*

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Whether articulated through medicine, culture, or film, the aesthetics of disability have yet to be fully extracted from the concept of disempowerment. Although the representation of historically disenfranchised identities is being evaluated in the current mass media market, the legacy of the use of identity as symbol, such as disability signifying disempowerment, persist as a mythological inherence in our cultural memory. Murphy's journey in *Robocop* demonstrates the existential value of demanding accessibility in working and thriving in abled spaces. There is also a demand for accessible representation from film texts. So long as textual representation of disabled characters is used to signify the pitiable or "inspiring" other, the task of appropriating representation of disabled experiences in popular media becomes an exercise in the autonomy of the audience.

Opening abled spaces to the disabled is contingent on the use of literal prosthetics and accommodations. Opening narratives of self-discovery and triumph against a sometimes dehumanizing system requires the political imaginary articulated by Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto". "This is a struggle over life and death," she wrote a handful of years before the campy, ultra-macho *Robocop* was first in theaters, "but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (149). The film is the cyborg; and the shifting boundary is between text and audience.

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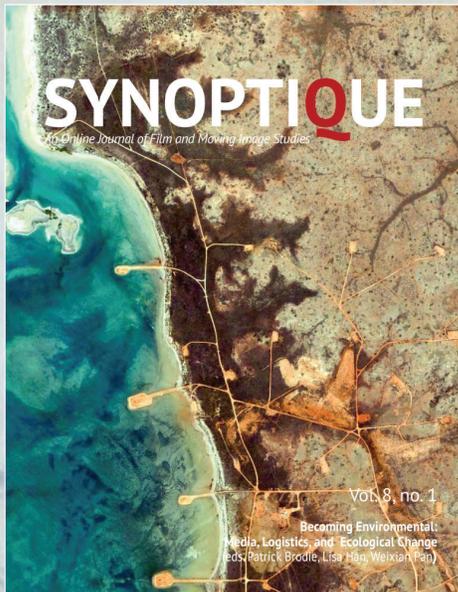
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# Feminist, Yet Not: Professional Wrestling and the Irreconcilability of the Feminine and the Feminist

## Introduction

Women's professional wrestling remains an understudied subset of popular media, particularly in feminist media circles, despite its similarities to other forms of traditional women's media such as weepies, soap operas, and reality television. Catherine Salmon and Susan Clerc note, "the current metaphor for professional wrestling is 'a soap opera for men,' a phrase that denies space for female fans while co-opting a traditionally female-centered genre" (167). Each era of professional wrestling offers commentary on trends in feminism through the visibility and iconography of women wrestlers employed by World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE). As Sharon Mazer writes, "the microcosm of the squared circle reflects first the largely unseen conditions of the game and then the world outside" (71). In analyzing prominent women wrestlers during three distinct time periods within the WWE as case studies – Chyna, Trish and Lita, and the Total Divas – this paper explores the roles of women, past and present, within the company. The role of women in WWE has transformed considerably over the years, from the 90s "Attitude Era" which prominently featured women as ringside entertainment in bras and underwear to the current Women's (R)Evolution<sup>1</sup> in which women have longer and more frequent matches that focus on athleticism rather than sexuality. Regardless of manifestation, women in professional wrestling serve as signifiers of the tension, overlap, and the acceptably irreconcilable relationship between modes of feminism, the feminine, and popular culture.

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1. The WWE use the words "evolution" and "revolution" interchangeably to describe the modifications made to the Women's Division after 2016. The stylized "(R)Evolution" combines both words used by the company.

## Postfeminism, Popular Feminism, and In Between

I employ postfeminist discourse, as a contradictory "entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist themes," as well as popular feminism to analyze women's professional wrestling and its subsequent proliferation of reality television programs as a triad of stigmatization: women, wrestling, and reality television (Gill 149). While the precise definition of postfeminism remains debated amongst feminist scholars, several have identified stable characteristics that constitute what Rosalind Gill terms a "postfeminist sensibility" (148). Characteristics include a preoccupation with women's bodies and a prioritization of obtaining and maintaining a "heterosexy" body (Dobson 59), as well as a hyper-focus on individualism, choice, and agency (often pertaining to material consumption). In addition, "postfeminist sensibility" describes the active depoliticization and disavowal of structural forces that contribute to social, economic, and cultural disparities on the part of race, gender, class, ability, and sexuality (Gill 149). Popular feminism depends on visibility to circulate, and this visibility requires an accommodating, palatable, and non-disruptive form of feminism at the expense of calling for structural change beyond the individual (Banet-Weiser 11). In addition to being undistruptive, popular feminism actively maintains, promotes, and targets dominant social groups – "white, middle-class, cisgender, and heterosexual" (Banet-Weiser 13). Post and popular feminism also encompass various strands of feminist ideology, including but not limited to girlie feminism and neoliberal feminism, each of which I employ and define in the following sections.

While the WWE offers insight into complex, overlapping, and contradictory feminisms and sentiments towards women, it is not a progressive

company despite the recent changes it has made to several facets of its operation, namely its Women's Division. It can be argued that the WWE, valued at \$1.5 billion in 2016, is capitalizing on feminist trends seen across popular culture. In her reading of *Hustler Magazine*, Laura Kipnis writes,

there is no guarantee that counter-hegemonic or even specifically anti-bourgeois cultural forms are necessarily going to be progressive ... *Hustler* is against government, against authority, against the bourgeoisie, diffident on male power – but its anti-liberalism, anti-feminism, anti-communism, and anti-progressivism leave little space for envisioning any alternative kind of political organization. (388-89)

Popular feminist sentiments within the WWE remain vague and palatable; feminist-evoking expressions read like social platitudes, careful not to alienate or disrupt its highly masculinist tradition and long-assumed audience. The lore of the WWE and its treatment and rules for women wrestlers remain largely unwritten but have been confirmed by past and present affiliates of the company. Women of the WWE endure(d) public abuse both in and out of the ring from the company over personal matters such as weight gain, marriage, pregnancy, and any other behavior deemed unacceptable by the company. Such punishments included on-air slut-shaming, in-ring sex acts, and other forms of sexual humiliation. While the WWE no longer appears proudly anti-feminist, the brand of feminism it evokes is just that; a brand, based on the tired and now rendered meaningless notion of empowerment. Below I discuss three eras of women's wrestling to further demonstrate the shifting dynamics of feminism within the WWE and its relation to cultural trends at large.

### Chyna: "Ninth Wonder of the World"

Joanie Laurer, known by her ring name, Chyna, first appeared in the WWE (then WWF – World Wrestling Federation) universe during a 1997 episode of WWF *Raw*. She quickly rose to prominence within the company and was billed as "The Ninth Wonder of the World" due to her physical stature and muscle mass. Chyna competed in matches from her debut until she was released by the WWE in 2001. Chyna is a particularly interesting figure because she occupied a space not often seen in WWE; a woman whose main occupation was not cheerleader or manager but

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a veritable opponent for the male Superstars (whom she often defeated). She is crudely characterized – alongside other women in the company – by Nicholas Sammond as "a delightful counterpoint to the powder-puff managers who parade T and A as they accompany their boys to the ring" (9). Throughout her time with the WWE, the character of Chyna operated in stark distinction to the hyper-feminine managers representative of women's roles in the company at the time. Dawn Heinecken writes,

Four of the most visible women in recent years – Sunny, Sable, Marlena, and Debra – are petite, large-breasted women with long flowing blonde hair who dress in extremely provocative clothing. Frequently designated as 'managers' or wives, these women take a subservient role to the men and often have a clearly sexual relationship with them. Female managers function as damsels in distress; for example, rivals attack each other's female managers in order to distract their opponents. In the world of the WWF, women have historically functioned as sexual spectacle. (185)

Chyna's presence and popularity in the WWF created parallel opportunities for progress and punishment. The departure she represented from the passive and sexualized women characters predominantly featured by the company prompted the need for the WWF to control and conform Chyna's body for her transgressions and disruption to the hyper-masculine WWF universe.

Chyna's recurring opponent, Jeff Jarret, whose character was well-known as a southern misogynist prone to verbally and physically abusing women wrestlers, audience members, and elderly women, challenged Chyna to the *Good Housekeeping Match* (1999) in which the wrestlers were given a series of props – all of which were household items such as a broom, an ironing board, and kitchen utensils. Jarrett taunted Chyna in promotional materials that aired preceding the match: "Chyna, you're going to get your rematch,

alright, but it's going to be the good housekeeping way. You will understand the role of a woman because I'm going to beat you with every household appliance known to woman" (WWE No Mercy). While Jarrett's violent misogyny went far beyond his confrontations with Chyna, the *Good Housekeeping Match* offers a visual culmination of this misogyny. The match featured Jarrett gleefully smacking Chyna in the head with a fish before throwing her into an ironing board, a physical commentary on the attempts made by the WWF to manage her unruly body, behavior, and power. Chyna is subject to sexualization, humiliation, and literal beatings with domestic objects while the announcers of the *Good Housekeeping Match* mock her apparent lack of domestic, motherly, and feminine characteristics and Jeff Jarrett attempts to subdue her body by breaking her strength with objects assigned to women and their social occupancy.



While the metaphor of the *Good Housekeeping Match* is ham-handed, its relevance in the greater lineage of women's tenure in the WWE suggests patterns of backlash, hatred, and heightened misogyny in tandem with the progress of women in the company. Sarah Banet-Weiser argues that as feminism increases in visibility and popularity, so does misogyny. She writes, "the relationship between popular feminism and popular misogyny is deeply entwined: popular feminism and popular misogyny battle it out on the contemporary cultural landscape, living side by side as warring, constantly moving contexts in an economy of visibility"

(2). Heinecken suggests that Chyna's time in the WWF can be marked through a series of attempts at softening her body and "implanting" her with traditional markers of femininity. After her incredibly successful appearance in *Playboy* and several cosmetic procedures, Chyna's body and by association, power, shrank within the WWE. Chyna, "once threatening the social hierarchy with her large and androgynous appearance," was incrementally standardized so that she no longer represented a threat to male wrestlers or the overall masculinity of the company, but instead became recuperated as properly feminized through the "overt sexualization and bodily normalization, particularly the shrinking of her muscular body" (Heinecken 198).

### Trish and Lita: Attitude Era

As Chyna's time with the WWE ended, the "Attitude Era" ushered in more women competitors and more opportunities for complex negotiations of progress and regression within the company. Trish Stratus and Lita, now WWE hall-of-famers, debuted with the company in 2000 – Trish as a hyper-feminine manager and Lita as a thong-bearing tough girl. Trish and Lita, both eroticized during their tenure as Divas, fulfilled differing versions of femininity, sexuality, and power influenced by the postfeminist culture of the 2000s. Postfeminist sentiments are highly visible in the WWE during this time, particularly through the iconography and dichotomy provided by Trish and Lita and emphasized by the WWE's decision to position them as opposites and by extension, enemies.

The postfeminist figure of the New Woman, premised upon the contradictions between traditional performances and iconography of femininity and masculinity, captures the tensions of in-ring personas such as those of Trish and Lita during the "Attitude Era". Elena Levine uses Buffy Summers, the protagonist of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) to explore the figure of the New Woman and notes the "seeming contradiction between Buffy's petite, pretty body and her conventionally feminine interests in boys, clothes, and cheerleading and her conventionally masculine work as a physically powerful slayer of vampires, demons, and other hellish monsters" (169). Buffy, part of a lineage of strong women both fictional and real, is precariously balanced along the lines of power and feminine desirability. This same precarity is visible within the WWE as the women of the company, while recently given more opportunities to display their athleticism, are often tempered by the storylines of their wrestling counterparts, as well as by shorter matches than the men

and a hyper-feminine presentation in the ring, including long, flowing hair and full makeup. Trish, like Buffy, is a “pretty, petite blonde” with a “moniker that signifies feminine frivolity and an obsession with popularity” (Levine 178). Her career with the WWE began in 2000 not as an in-ring wrestler but as the on-screen love interest and manager to several male wrestlers. While Trish performs femininity in more traditional ways – such as blonde hair and high heels – Lita’s femininity is less traditional, but still intact. Levine notes that Buffy’s visible bra strap served as dichotomous play between embrace and eschewal of feminine conventions, “at once modest and immodest, conforming to patriarchal edicts and defying them, Buffy’s exposed bra straps can be read as emblematic of the third wave’s contradictory understanding of girlie style” (179). This contradiction can be similarly read in Lita’s presentation in the WWE. Though less overtly feminine than Trish and often dressed in baggy pants and boots, Lita displayed her femininity and eroticism through an exposed thong, similar to Buffy’s bra strap. The iconography during the “Attitude Era,” including the women’s division championship belt, bedazzled in pink and white, the cursive DIVA title emblazoned over a large pink butterfly, was representative of a postfeminist embrace of the traditionally feminine tempered by the masculine.

While Trish and Lita are among the most popular WWE Superstars, their time with the company in the early 2000s mirrors postfeminist and at times, anti-feminist cultural trends insofar as their opportunities, fame, and prestige within the company, as well as their achievements in the ring, were undermined by constant on-air sexual humiliation. During their time with the company, Trish and Lita competed in a “bra and panty” match in which each woman was tasked with removing the clothing of her opponent while wrestling (2000), Lita and then-husband Edge had simulated sex in-ring (2006), and Trish was ordered to strip to her underwear and bark like a dog by CEO Vince McMahon as the

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crowd and announcers cheered in excitement and anticipation of her increasingly exposed body (2000). Trish and Lita continue to participate in special events with the company and serve as cornerstones of women’s progress in the division. In 2018, they both partook in the first-ever Women’s Royal Rumble match, which featured 30 past and present Superstars. Lita entered the match wearing the #TimesUp logo on her gear with Chyna’s name written on her forearm. Lita’s homage to Chyna, who passed away in 2016, (and who has yet to be inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame) along with her representation of a highly popular feminist campaign, demonstrate a rare moment of collectivity and historicity as it pertains to feminism and its place within the WWE.

### Women’s (R)Evolution: From Total Divas to Superstars

Several core events within different strata of WWE launched the women’s (R)Evolution in 2015. First was a 30-second Diva’s Division tag team match which prompted fans to create and circulate the hashtag #GiveDivasAChance. The hashtag was taken up by then-Divas Paige and AJ Lee on their respective social media pages; Lee also sent tweets to Stephanie McMahon, the Chief Brand Officer of the WWE and daughter of CEO Vince McMahon, stating “Your female wrestlers have record selling merchandise & have starred in the highest rated segment of the show several times, and yet they receive a fraction of the wages & screen time of the majority of the male roster” (@TheAJMendez). A subsequent match between Bayley and Sasha Banks, two high-profile women wrestlers in WWE’s NXT division,<sup>2</sup> lasted 30 minutes (compared to 30 seconds on the main

2. The NXT Division is a lower-tier, non main roster division of the WWE where upcoming talent wrestle on the path to the televised, main roster division. Several women of the WWE grew to prominence in NXT, given opportunities to demonstrate their athleticism rather than their sexuality, and are now main-roster talent.

roster). This, along with the corresponding hashtag, led to several other significant changes for the women talent of the WWE. As of 2018, women wrestlers have competed in several previously off-limits matches, in addition to dropping the Divas title in 2016 for the more equalizing title of Superstars, the name given to male wrestlers of the WWE. Additionally, on October 28, 2018, the WWE aired its first all-women pay-per-view match titled *Evolution*.

In addition to slow but seemingly progressive moves in the ring, the reality shows based on women of the WWE, *Total Divas* (2013-), *Total Bellas* (2016-) and *Miz & Mrs.* (2018-) have all been renewed for additional seasons on the E! Network and USA Network, respectively. While the programs privilege the traditionally feminine in their casting, they provide members of the women's division the opportunity to present themselves as complex and incoherent selves, something the WWE has always withheld. Professional wrestling organizations like the WWE operate as spectacle, relying on soap operatic conventions and melodramatic storylines rife with betrayal, villains, and sex. *Total Divas*, while certainly remaining in the tradition of spectacle in contemporary reality television, features women struggling with work, friendships, motherhood, relationships, injury, and body image simultaneously. As Stéphanie Genz notes in her analysis of *Bridget Jones' Diary*, the "diary format and a confessional tone ... provide the fiction an authentic female voice, bewildered by the contradictory demands and mixed messages of heterosexual romance and feminist emancipation" (101). This same confessional tone is adopted throughout *Total Divas* as the cast constantly oscillates between the progression of their careers, their romances, and themselves as wrestlers, wives, and women. The third episode of season one of *Total Divas*, titled "Planet Funk is Funked Up," features storylines that centre on the tension between relationships and career, as both established WWE Superstar, Trinity, and newcomer JoJo, fight with their significant others due to choices made to advance their careers rather than their relationships. While I hesitate to use Genz's (or, perhaps, Bridget Jones') characterization of the "postfeminist singleton" to describe the cast of *Total Divas*, due in large part to the high numbers of marriages and births shown across *Total Divas*, *Total Bellas*, and *Miz & Mrs.*, it is important to note that while many Superstars are married with children, the "effortless realization of a postfeminist nirvana where women can 'have it all,'" is not framed as utopic or effortless to achieve and maintain (Genz 103-104). Instead, as Genz's notes about *Bridget Jones*, "the postfeminist

singleton expresses the pains and pleasures of her problematic quest for balance in a world where personal and professional, feminist and feminine positions are mutually pervasive" (104). Reality television highlights this problematic quest and constant "[vacillation] between anxiety and determination" through its centric focus and intimate, confessional address to the domestic and its frequent incongruence with public careerism (Genz 103). Combined with professional wrestling, an arena where women have so long remained two-dimensional for the sake of heterosexual fantasy, WWE's women Superstars are warned against making known

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*Women of the WWE, past and present, and the stars of its reality programing, utilize popular feminism buzzwords while never explicitly aligning themselves with feminism or even using the word.*

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the very "conflicts between ... feminist values and [the] feminine body, between individual and collective achievement, between professional career and personal relationship," that the parallel reality programs give prominence and voice (Genz 98). However, it is equally important to note that while the pains and pleasures of successfully occupying both the domestic and public spheres feature prominently in the reality programs and related social media, the presentation of success and mastery of what Catherine Rottenberg describes as a "felicitous work-life balance" ultimately reigns despite hardships, missteps, and cultural forces (420).

It is clear that these reality programs, much like WWE, attempt to evolve in reflection of changing social and political climates. The programs are decidedly apolitical insofar as they, as noted by Rachel Wood and Benjamin Litherland, avoid aligning themselves explicitly



with feminism and instead opt for euphemistic, veiled language to discuss gender equity and “revolution/ evolution” among wrestlers. The early seasons of *Total Divas* feature stereotypical competition between girls, framed as catfights and interpersonal drama, which subsides as the seasons progress, evolving into a more supportive, collective atmosphere. Promotional materials for season eight, which debuted on the E! Network in September 2018, focus on sisterhood and empowerment and feature voice-over soundbites such as “The Women’s Division has broken so many barriers;” “This is just the beginning; the sky’s the limit;” “Here’s to finding myself; I’m ready to be this new empowered Nicole;” and “It’s a sisterhood, everyone roots each other on” (“The Total Divas Are All In”).

Women of the WWE, past and present, and the stars of its reality programming, utilize popular feminism buzzwords while never explicitly aligning themselves with feminism or even using the word. Two prominent figures in the women’s (R)Evolution and the stars of both *Total Divas* and *Total Bellas*, twins Bree and Nikki Bella, were interviewed by *Cosmopolitan Magazine* in October 2018 for a piece titled “How the Bella Twins Turned Your Fave Guilty-Pleasure Sport into a Feminist Empire”, yet the word “feminism” never appears in the article outside its use in the title, nor is it used by the women to describe their work within company. Theories of neoliberal feminism and girlie/girl power feminism allow for feminism to occupy mainstream spaces safely and to be performed through consumption and its relation to agency. Eva Chen uses the Spice Girls and the women of *Charlie’s Angels* as examples of girl power feminism, women who “[emphasize] ultra-feminine looks and a sexualized image as a means of empowerment” (441). Catherine Rottenberg describes neoliberal feminism as a disarticulation of liberal feminism in which the neoliberal feminist subject “disavows the social, cultural, and economic forces producing [gender] inequality” but who also “accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care”



(420). The women of *Total Divas* espouse girl power, slogan feminism but also hold themselves, instead of a global corporation like the WWE, accountable for their success within the company and maintaining balance in all aspects of their lives. Additionally, they often express fears of losing opportunities for the Women’s Division based on individual performances, personal decisions, and not living up to the new expectations of women in the company.

## Conclusion

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The WWE serves as a useful case study for tracking trends of feminism across decades of popular media as the company acts as a gauge for the social perceptions of women. The company’s motives for promoting gender equity at the present moment, particularly following the historical, highly visible, at times giddy misogyny of the company, are likely an attempt at monetizing the current uptake of popular feminism. While the feminism of the WWE remains flattened, decontextualized, and dehistoricized, it also remains visible and perhaps most importantly, salable. The popular feminism utilized by the WWE can be described as existing within what Banet-Weiser describes as an “economy of visibility,” in which “visibility becomes *the end* rather than a means to an end” (23, emphasis original). For the WWE and its players, the promotion of feminist-adjacent sentiments and expressions are, in and of themselves, enough. Postfeminist and popular feminist thought and media representations remain in need of constant critical attention as these representations reign across media platforms, including professional wrestling.

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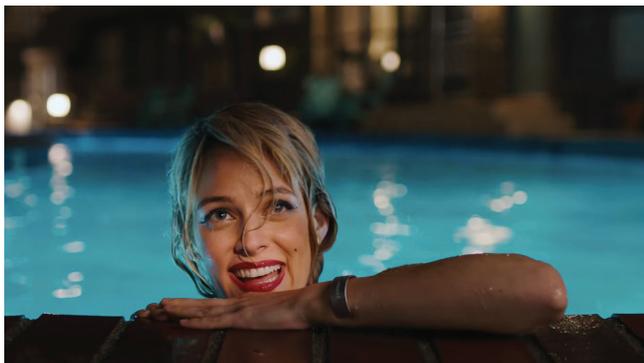
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Cast of *Total Divas*



*Under The Silver Lake*

Proceeding his 2014 horror success *It Follows*, David Robert Mitchell presents a Lynchian-Hitchcockian hybrid with a myriad of loose ends. *Under The Silver Lake* follows Sam, a young and utterly unmotivated Los Angeles resident (Andrew Garfield), as he discovers the dark underbelly of Hollywood in a series of surreal twists and turns.

With strong allusions to *Mulholland Drive* (2001), Mitchell certainly attempts a quintessential “LA movie”. Mike Gioulakis’s cinematography gives the film a shiny, polished look, and Mitchell’s writing includes some genuinely funny moments. Unfortunately, the film cannot seem to support itself under the weight of its own absurdity. *Under The Silver Lake* starts off strong and gradually becomes unfocused and gratuitous, reveling in its own obscurity. By the film’s end, *Silver Lake* offers up so much weirdness and so many ‘quirks’ that it eventually exhausts itself.

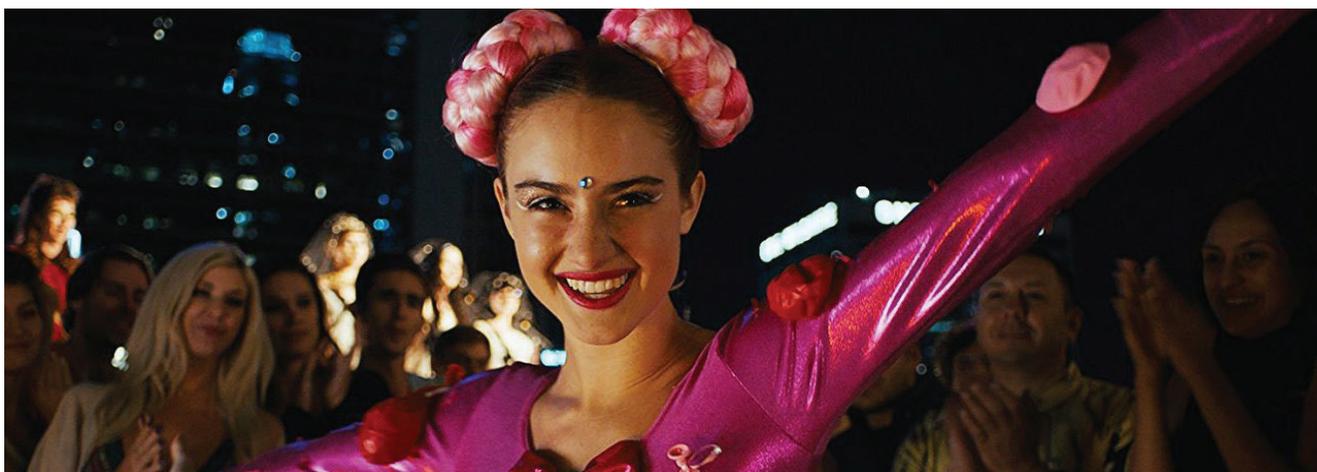
Review by Zoë S. Sherman



*Keep an Eye Out*

Promoted by VIFF as a kind of spiritual successor to Quentin Dupieux’s previous film *Rubber* (2010), this feature maintains the director’s propensity for surreal dark comedy, though is unable to live up to the legacy held by the aforementioned sentient tire. By largely confining the narrative to a single location where relatively little happens, *Keep an Eye Out* produces a sense of near-constant claustrophobia from which the only relief is the unusual sense of humour that feels right at home with Dupieux’s style. Only in its final moments, breaking from the confines of narrative to destabilize the very framework of cinematic fictionality, is *Keep an Eye Out* able to solidify its connection to *Rubber*, marking a clear interest on the part of Dupieux to watch cinema watch itself.

Review By Jared Aronoff





### *Happy as Lazzaro*

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Shot on Super 16mm film, *Happy as Lazzaro* feels like a memory, footage gently faded by the harsh Italian sun. Like the titular character, the soft edges of the frame offer a blurring of the present and past, even as the narrative moves from the countryside to the modern city. Directed by Alice Rohrwacher, the film tells the story of Lazzaro, an infallibly generous young man. He and the other families labouring in the tobacco fields live a life removed from modern society, on a pastoral farm caught in the past. Brutally exploited by the tobacco Marchesa, the workers in turn exploit the innocent Lazzaro. Life for Lazzaro dramatically changes when he is caught up in the life and exploits of the young Marquis, Tancredi.

*Happy as Lazzaro* is full of stories and fables. We the audience listen as female voices recount tales of wolves, lions, and saints to small children. With its moments of magical realism – a boy who survives an impossible fall only to awake years later unchanged, music that leaves a church to follow a family as they push their truck home in the dark – the film comes to feel like a fable itself. At the centre of this fable is Lazzaro, saint-like with his innocent eyes and his miraculous voyage through time.

Review by Gabrielle Berry



### *Shock Waves: Diary of My Mind*

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Directed by Ursula Meier for Swiss television, *Diary of My Mind* presents a unique character dynamic. Esther is a high school teacher, and throughout the film her relationship towards a student is explored after he claims Esther inspired the double murder of his parents. Not quite maternal, not quite mentor, not quite romantic, this unsettling relationship is one that a viewer becomes simultaneously invested in yet also apprehensive towards. Throughout the film our instinct as an audience to place this relationship inside a box is undermined by the refusal of the narrative to codify it through familiar tropes. It is a tense experience to identify with the position of Esther – as she feels simultaneously responsible for, yet fearful towards, this student. The film responds to this by foregrounding compassion from Esther. As a narrative choice this is both optimistic in Esther's selflessness, yet also reflects a fundamental cynicism. Esther takes responsibility for her role in this crime, but is still narratively punished for it, losing her job and maintaining ties to this student well after the film is over. *Diary of My Mind* thus destabilizes our expectations towards the narrative presentation of 'goodness' in fictional characters, displaying a character who at every turn makes the most virtuous possible decision and leaving the viewer wishing for her to act out of self-preservation.

Review by Jared Aronoff





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