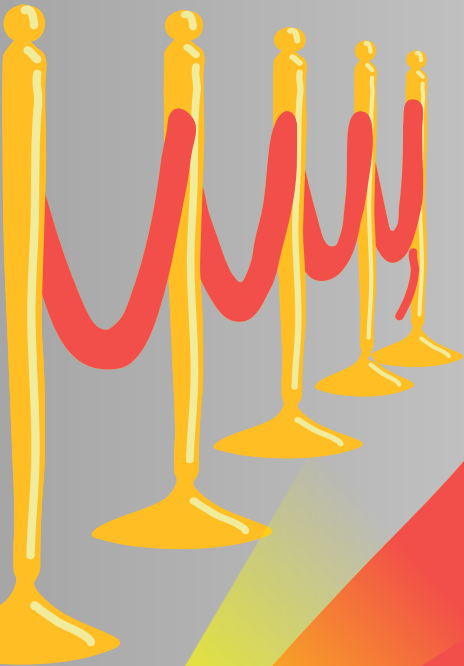




GRAPHICS BY JORJA DENTON

CUT TO FILM JOURNAL



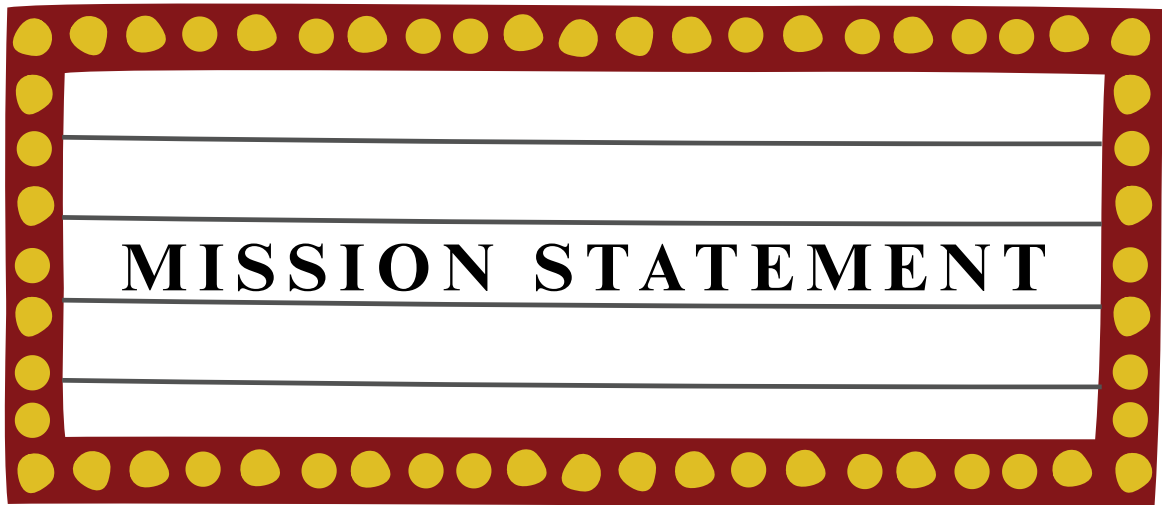
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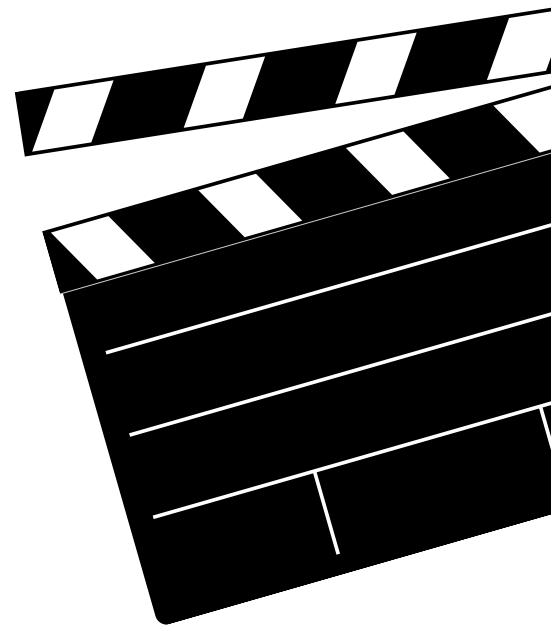
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Here at Cut/To, our mission is to marry low-status criticism with high-status analysis in a stigma-free publication of pure cinematic tribute. Our articles aim to be thought-provoking, inciteful, and damn fun reading. Our unique approach will cater to every level of cinephile, with no film unworthy of our attention. Read at your leisure, or (if needs be) your work desk.



ARGYLLE AND THE ANNOYANCE OF A DECEIVED VIEWER

BY JORJA DENTON

My annoyance at my least favourite film stems from feelings of deception by the media, who advertised it as an “action-packed” phenomenon with a “star-studded cast”. The so-called “blockbuster” in question is none other than Argylle. Have you heard any good reviews? Or should I ask, have you heard of it at all?

I class myself as an action movie connoisseur, watching everything from My Little Pony to Die Hard, always open to a new film suggestion. Buying the film for a whopping £4.99 on Amazon, I had the boost of serotonin that one experiences before devouring a highly anticipated movie. It starred Henry Cavill (a.k.a. Superman, Sherlock Holmes, and the Witcher); I thought, “what could go wrong”?

However, upon watching this action-flick, I was disappointed at the lack of dynamism... and Henry Cavill screen time. Some experienced film critics could argue that the failure of this film was down to the screenplay and dull plot, with an “everything-was-a-dream” trope and an annoying main character – but was its downfall simply due to the lack of Henry? Mr. Cavill was in the two-and-a-quarter-hour movie for a full ten minutes, despite being the focal point of the film's poster. Deceiving the Cavillry, his fan base, would inevitably render the film a flop. All I'm trying to say is, if you cast a cinematic great, such as the dashing Cavill, you should use him!

The impotent use of Henry aside - despite being a self-proclaimed “film fanatic”, I couldn't wrap my head around the plot of Argylle. The director, Matthew Vaughan, also directed the Kingsman trilogy, with Kingsman: The Secret Service being a fan favourite, so imagine my disappointment upon pressing play and witnessing a cinematic atrocity.

It could be argued that I am being incredibly harsh towards this film, one that could be seen as an “easy watch” - but with a budget of \$200 million USD, a skilled director, and the talented thespian Henry Cavill, you expect brilliance. Some readers may think, “this writer isn't professional or competent, and is slightly aggressive” - all of which are true. But my rage arises from the casting failure...

So, to summarise: when hiring someone known for heroic personas, superhuman abilities, immersive characters, and a large fandom to lure in the crowds, you give them a bigger role! Don't cast Henry Cavill in a movie not worthy of distinction.

Thank you for reading <3



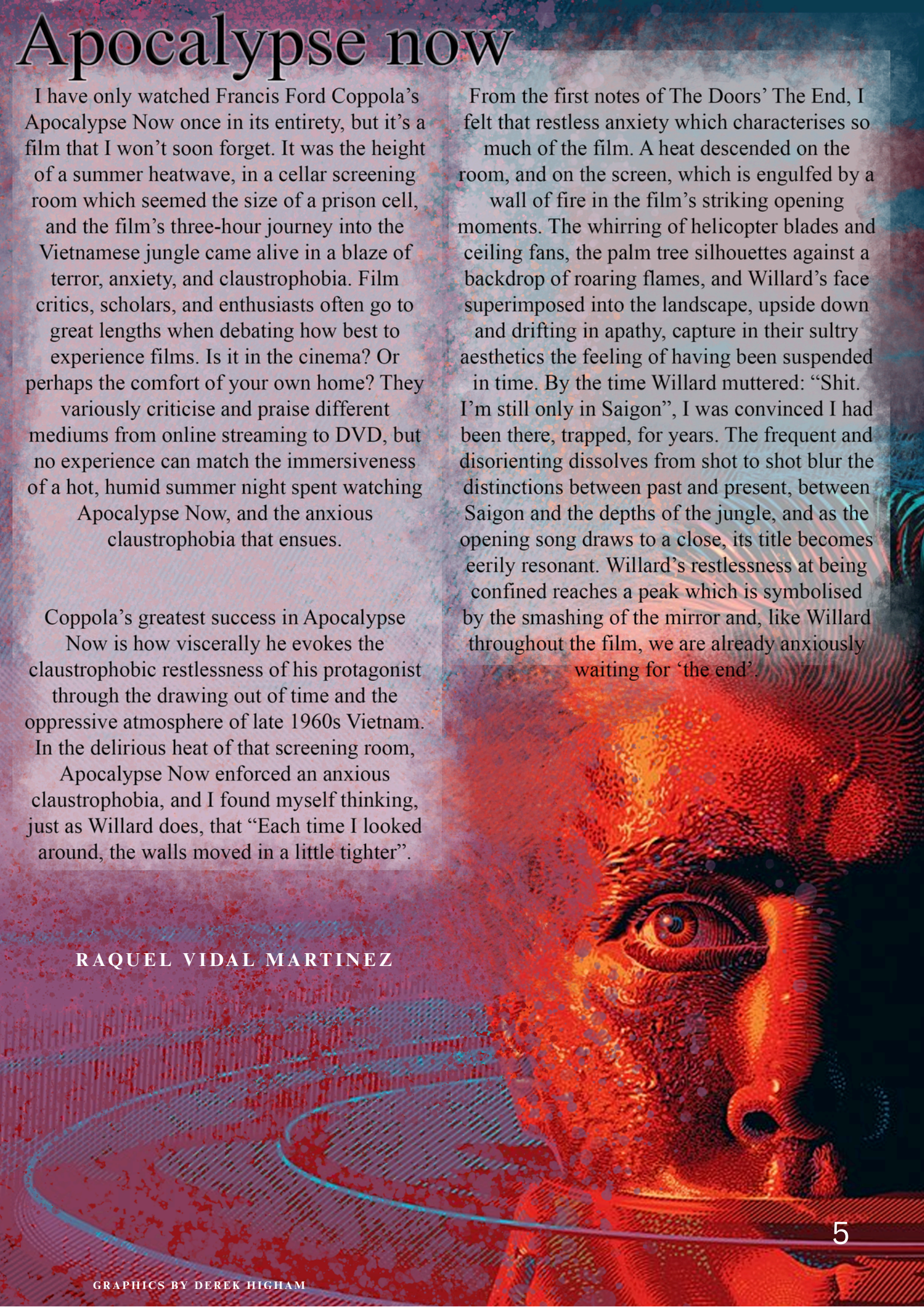
Apocalypse now

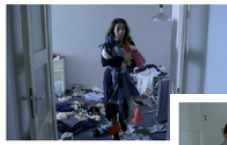
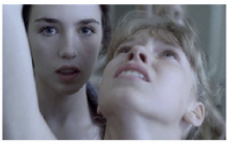
I have only watched Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* once in its entirety, but it's a film that I won't soon forget. It was the height of a summer heatwave, in a cellar screening room which seemed the size of a prison cell, and the film's three-hour journey into the Vietnamese jungle came alive in a blaze of terror, anxiety, and claustrophobia. Film critics, scholars, and enthusiasts often go to great lengths when debating how best to experience films. Is it in the cinema? Or perhaps the comfort of your own home? They variously criticise and praise different mediums from online streaming to DVD, but no experience can match the immersiveness of a hot, humid summer night spent watching *Apocalypse Now*, and the anxious claustrophobia that ensues.

Coppola's greatest success in *Apocalypse Now* is how viscerally he evokes the claustrophobic restlessness of his protagonist through the drawing out of time and the oppressive atmosphere of late 1960s Vietnam. In the delirious heat of that screening room, *Apocalypse Now* enforced an anxious claustrophobia, and I found myself thinking, just as Willard does, that "Each time I looked around, the walls moved in a little tighter".

From the first notes of The Doors' *The End*, I felt that restless anxiety which characterises so much of the film. A heat descended on the room, and on the screen, which is engulfed by a wall of fire in the film's striking opening moments. The whirring of helicopter blades and ceiling fans, the palm tree silhouettes against a backdrop of roaring flames, and Willard's face superimposed into the landscape, upside down and drifting in apathy, capture in their sultry aesthetics the feeling of having been suspended in time. By the time Willard muttered: "Shit. I'm still only in Saigon", I was convinced I had been there, trapped, for years. The frequent and disorienting dissolves from shot to shot blur the distinctions between past and present, between Saigon and the depths of the jungle, and as the opening song draws to a close, its title becomes eerily resonant. Willard's restlessness at being confined reaches a peak which is symbolised by the smashing of the mirror and, like Willard throughout the film, we are already anxiously waiting for 'the end'.

RAQUEL VIDAL MARTINEZ





Possession

& THE EMOTION OF BURNOUT



ARTICLE
BY
OLIVER GANLEY
GEORGIA MATHER

Let me begin my article by defining what I mean by “burnout”. According to Smith and Reid (no date) burnout is the name for any form of emotional exhaustion; when you’ve been in such a prolonged state of high emotion that you begin to feel fatigued due to said emotion’s taxation on your mind and body.

The emotion that caused the burnout I experienced at the end of my first viewing of *Possession* (1981) was a hysterical combination of anger and sadness. The kind you feel at the end of an explosive row with a partner, when you’ve both slammed doors on each other and retreated into your thoughts of mutual hatred. This was because the film (unlike almost any other) was successfully able to envelop me completely into its distorted, aggressive, and totally unique story world to such an extent that I bought into each of its increasingly strange and melodramatic revelations and moments (that I won’t spoil), moments that you’d never expect to see in a film with such a serious, human, subject matter.

Like Mark and Anna, the film’s married protagonists whose separation drives its narrative, I was never able to detach myself emotionally from the presented story, never able to realise the ludicrousness of it all. Initially, I was shocked and perplexed at how *Possession* was able to leave me with a type of burnout I hadn’t felt since I first heard my parents arguing nine years ago.

Two subsequent events helped me to understand why. The first was my viewing of another film that had an unusually powerful impact on me: Alfred Sole’s *Alice Sweet Alice* (1976). Like *Possession*, *Alice Sweet Alice* depicts the abnormally murderous breakdown of a suburban family, yet the feelings the film brought out of me seemed to come from an entirely different perspective.

Unlike the logic-blinding hysteria I suffered as a result of *Possession*, *Alice Sweet Alice* left in me a form of depression that stemmed from my clear understanding of the characters and their actions. Instead of being emotionally wrapped up in the events onscreen, I was almost clinically detached from them, watching with a form of all-knowing misery.

Whilst I immediately noticed my contrasting responses to *Alice Sweet Alice* and *Possession*, I didn’t contextualise them until I boldly decided to rewatch the latter (following the month of recuperation necessary after my initial viewing). While watching *Possession* for the second time, I was surprised to find myself gaining a completely different viewpoint, I now became the uninvolved observer I’d been while watching *Alice Sweet Alice*. This was because I could anticipate the film’s bizarre moments, and judge them with a greater objectivity, rather than being surprised by them.

I deduced from this that my first experience of *Possession* was upsetting in the same way that falling and grazing your knee as a child is upsetting. It’s not so much the event itself that affects you, but the shock that it even occurred in the first place.

Such a shocked reaction didn’t occur for me during *Alice Sweet Alice* because its content was far less surprising. Though the film is far from predictable, it should strike familiar chords for anyone who’s had even the vaguest experience with slasher horror films, religious horror films, soap opera-esque dramas, or dysfunctional siblings.

In contrast to this, there can be no preparation for a film like *Possession*, it offers images that you’ve never seen in any family drama, and never once follows the structure of any of the horror sub-genres those images could be associated with.

I apologise for my muddled and indulgent article not being the serious analysis that this cinematic masterpiece warrants and deserves. My achieving of such a goal is a rather lofty example of the imaginative musings I’ve become so prone to since graduating from senior school film fan to university film student. For now, you’ll have to be satisfied with my attempts to connect *Possession* to the deeper workings of my psyche. *There*. That sounded pretentious enough, didn’t it?

BY OLIVER GANLEY

The embarrassment of Happiness

The strongest emotional response I remember a film getting out of me was watching *Happiness*, Todd Solondz' 1998 black dramedy, which is bizarre, because I've seen a hundred thousand more happy and sad and romantic and evil and revolting films and felt a lot less. The way *Happiness* blindsided me was with an extreme malaise of the much more familiar and treacherous emotion of embarrassment. Embarrassment has a freshness in film; too subtle and tricky to be easily produced and reproduced, and so free from the total cultural saturation and desensitisation of archetypical emotion. Besides, there is absolutely nothing romantic or sexy and thereby unreal to embarrassment as there is to love, suffering, grief or violence; its entrance into a movie is almost always an unwelcome injection of the real into our sacred make-believe. An even dryer well than film emotion is film provocation, Solondz' own lineage, which has run out of envelope to push: sex and guts have lost their novelty; Waters took revulsion to its extreme long ago; the current generation of attempted provocateurs either ape after him, like *Korine* or *Noé*, or use extremity as a mode towards a more interesting end, like von Trier or, indeed, Solondz. That is not to say that *Happiness* is not provocative to the moviegoer - it is, unavoidably, a big nasty sweaty corpse of a movie - but that the very sharp, brilliant, edge of the film is how the weight of all its vileness is piled onto the painfully familiar failure of its characters to negotiate the social contract, in the viscerally embarrassing pursuit of their awful, stupid happiness.



Happiness conjures up a pile of characters and ruthlessly collides their lives together like barbie dolls, collapsing into the dominoed punchlines of the finale, a great burst of released tension and stale air, and a bitter acceptance that each character will not change. The film's character work is among the very best of the 90s indies; every performance so riddled with the gaping sores of insecurity, longing and miscommunication: Jane Adam's rattling optimism, Philip Seymour Hoffman's slack-jawed obscenity, Dylan Baker's latent suburban psychopathy. Like *Always Sunny*, every character plays the straight man and the clown at the same time, their inner clownery leaking out of shell of respectability like the ooze from Hoffman's collar. The embarrassment of the film, furthermore, is not just the general comedy of error, but of the supreme error of revealing your deepest and most fundamental desire to another person – not just the sexual incompatibility of Allen and Helen, but, moreover, that they have exposed the perversion that they revile in themselves to someone else they revile even more (strangely, while the Hoffman-Lara Flynn Boyle coupling is played as absurd, she would, a year later, have a very public real-life affair with the 62-year-old greaseball Jack Nicholson). Though there is a voyeuristic schadenfreude in the characters' private desires being splayed all over the screen, what is really quite brilliant about the film is that our response is much less schadenfreude than the disturbing empathy of second-hand embarrassment. Solondz stages his character drama on a sparse, deadpan formal plane; the film's only stylistic indulgence - and vestige of camp - is the sickly green colour gradation levied over its New Jersey tableaux. Ironically, this complete aversion to character alignment - the equal ambivalence towards Joy, the sad romantic, and Bill, the child molester - allows every character to be read with clarity and so be read as entirely human and recognisable in ourselves, with our profound desires and sadnesses and neuroses smoking under the hood of social interaction. Our discomfort, then, is not just rejection of evil but rejection of the awkward admission that evil people are normal and normal people are evil. Really, we are embarrassed of ourselves

BY GILBERT ARNOLD



Kes and homesickness

Anyone who has ever watched Kes would likely agree that the film does not exactly elicit feelings of comfort. Kes is a film that does not console but rather elicits shock and horror through its narrative, which is a meticulously crafted attack on the flawed education system that existed at the time. Yet, upon rewatching Kes I felt no sense of dread as I did on my first watch, but rather a new emotion blossomed within- similar but distinct in the most minute way -homesickness.

You see, whilst Ken Loach has been endlessly praised (and rightfully so) for his representation of the oppression faced by the Yorkshire working-class and the failing education system that existed at the time, there has not been such admiration expressed for how Loach directs the camera and captures the true majesty of Yorkshire's landscape. For although Loach is a revolutionary socialist filmmaker, he also has an acute awareness of the beauty in his subject.

Vast expanses of green fields and forests framed by the sloping smoke from nearby factories billowing up to the hazy horizon are the backdrop of the quiet narrative in Kes, and represent the Yorkshire I grew up in, the place I call home. A land and place of natural wonder that bears the skeleton of failed industrialisation, where pipework and smog are as much part of the landscape as towering oak trees and wildflowers. This oxymoronic nature of the Yorkshire countryside is etched into my bones, rooted in sweet nostalgia, and in the months I have been apart from it, I miss it more than ever.

Homesickness now taints my experience of Kes. I constantly see my own life reflected upon the screen – endlessly echoing. Watching a film is an act of art in itself, interweaving one's own personal experience into the mise-en-scène. Therefore, it is really misleading for me to link Kes to the feeling of homesickness, because ultimately the ache in my stomach that Kes inflicts within me cannot be attributed to merely being homesick, but it is rather an expression of a complex framework of emotions.

Film as a medium is truly unique in its ability to capture and trap the very sentimental undercurrent of its setting; more than a novel, song, or theatre production ever could. Film holds this power to transcend its own content and evoke such visceral and deep emotions from every individual viewer. Every experience of a film is exclusive and always deeply personal, evident through the numerous fantastic essays written in this issue, and for me Kes speaks so loudly for my home and heritage, and for that I shall always adore it.

BY BEA GASH

OPENING NIGHT

& THE WONDER
OF
CHARACTER

Opening Night (1977), written and directed by John Cassavetes, doesn't necessarily inspire great wonderment at first glance. It follows fictional actress Myrtle Gordon, played by Gena Rowlands - who was also married to Cassavetes - as she tries to get to grips with an off-Broadway role she doesn't connect with, feeling that her character is one-dimensionally reduced to her advancing age. After witnessing a teenage fan being struck by a car and killed, she falls into a sharp mental decline, with rehearsals for the play only compounding the emotional pressure she faces.

There are no obvious attempts to impress the audience through visual spectacle or stylistic excess; Cassavetes was concerned primarily with how the actors brought out their characters on a personal scale. Nevertheless, I felt more wonder at the precision with which human emotion is depicted and captured than I have at any scenes of action, sweeping landscapes, or thematic grandeur in other films. It's not just a case of how much I like the film. Although I do love it, there are plenty of others I admire in the same way - but none have made me feel such a sense of wonder just through the experience of watching other humans dealing, or failing to deal, with their problems.

Throughout most of *Opening Night*, Myrtle is in rather a bad place. Her fellow creatives, lacking sensitivity, see her as highly strung and stubborn. They don't particularly want to understand her trials, preferring to sidestep or utilise her trouble for their own professional convenience. Myrtle's own feelings, showing the "inability of people to communicate" in true Cassavetes fashion, are never explicitly identified or straightened out, yet the nuance in Rowlands' performance makes it clear that she is heartbreakingly misunderstood.

Worlds of feeling cross her face, conveying more humanity through confusion and uncertainty than any neatly defined sentiments could achieve. I watch in wonder, not because Rowlands and Cassavetes magnify or heighten her emotions, but because of how deeply they are able to look inwards without naming - and thereby oversimplifying - the maze of psychological forces at work. An improvised scene between Myrtle and her co-star Maurice - played by John Cassavetes - breaks through the oppressive tone of the rest of the film, creating a moment of tremendous relief. Frequent cuts back to the play's disgruntled producers remind us that this isn't

a triumph for everyone, but this concern quickly fades. Yes, the actors' behaviour is completely outlandish and frantic, but at least they're having fun for once. In one shot, Maurice is showing off, jumping around, and shouting - before cutting to his antics, the camera lingers on Myrtle's exasperation.

What blows me away throughout this scene is the translation of the couple's artistic and personal relationship onto the screen, which came across to me more tangibly here than in their previous collaborations. The theatrical setting and straightforward cinematography, moving subtly around the stage without significantly changing angles, places the focus of the scene purely on the two of them. Their closely attuned creative sensibilities and mutual admiration are visible as they let each other shine.

The depth of character, the rawness of the emotional experience, and the craftsmanship on display create a highly impressive viewing experience. The sense of wonder I feel emerges from a mix of affection and admiration, felt towards both the characters on screen and the people who put them there.



WIM WENDER'S PARIS, TEXAS

I think about *Paris, Texas* (1984) and all I have to say is it made me feel alive. *Paris, Texas* made me feel alive. Such a momentous feat for a film, achieving something so often reserved for moments in extraordinary nature, for intuited dancing in a crowd, for laughing with my best friend.

I regrettably had to disrupt my viewing and watch this film in two sessions. This appears insignificant to me now; wherever I had to be it left

no lasting impression, unlike Paris, Texas, which felt
♪ dreamlike · ° · ::
to watch and has remained so ever after. I reflect upon the film now, that I watched for the first and only time a month ago, and it appears to my mind a haze; abstracted, warm, I can see visions and symbols (I mean this to be only the highest of compliments).

It appears the film has skipped my first internal program, my mind, and stored itself somewhere beyond, my imagination perhaps.

I WATCHED WIM WENDERS *PARIS, TEXAS* AND ALL I COULD FEEL WAS ALIVE.

BY GEORGIA MATHER

*i watched Wim Wender's
Paris, Texas*

and all i could feel

was alive



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