

To my professors who made my college experience, Jeremy Blatter, Sandra Jamieson, Erik  
Anderson and to my mom, Elizabeth Borba.

Aesthetic Directors Creating Space for Complex Female Characters

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By

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## Abstract

In an exploration of shot variety and film aesthetic, I seek to show how the alternative directors Wes Anderson and Sofia Coppola create space for complex female characters. I will be doing a close shot analysis of Anderson's *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) and *Moonrise Kingdom* (2015) as well as Coppola's *Lost In Translation* (2003) and *The Virgin Suicides* (1999). I will be looking the feminist theorists Betty Friedan's "*The Problem That Has No Name from The Feminine Mystique*" and Valerie Solanas' "*From SCUM Manifesto*," to show there is no definition of woman. Though the issues of women are important, I am looking in these films to see women as people. I am looking for representation of the imperfect and the equity of representation that should be used for all characters. I will look at women and gender expression in film through Jack Halberstam's "*The Transgender Look*," and Laura Mulvey's "*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*." These films take steps away from reality and cinematic risks that change how we can perceive the characters they bring to life. The shot variety brings the audience to new perspectives that allow for the female characters not be any more fetishized than any other character.

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## I. INTRODUCTION:

The women in films that I remember growing up with were conventionally beautiful, in a relationship and good compromisers. It did not matter whether a film was a “chick flick” or a “guy movie,” or even a kid’s movie, women were objects to be objectified, two dimensional characters. Watching films is engrained in American culture, it is more than just an action to pass the time. Films are a part of life and culture, childhood and storytelling. The way that we see ourselves in film affects us deeply. It can have a positive effect and equally a negative one. The negative can stay with us even if we can acknowledge it is a misrepresentation, may that be misrepresentations due to race, economic status, gender, sexuality or age. This is part of the risk of films which are riddled with simple female characters. This is not to say that every film shows women in a terrible light, but the majority and the all-consuming impression one leaves a Hollywood film with is one of a shallow and simple female character. Women are not to be too interesting or too strong or too anything. A strong woman cannot go uncommented on. If a film happens to have a strong woman everyone simply knows her as that. She is not able to also be emotional or to have other versions of depth in her. This led me to ask, does Hollywood hate women? Or does Hollywood not see women as people? People are complicated, messy, multifaceted. Women, however, are rarely given the chance to simply exist as people in films.

There is a romantic and safe quality to the predictability of Hollywood films. The relationship between drama and storyline become all too well known. It becomes a case of “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” I think though there is clearly something broken in the representation, there is a clear lucrative success for Hollywood films. As long as there is not a demand for complex representation of women it will not be made in the mainstream.

Instead of the Hollywood tropes of women, I am seeking to understand the “complex woman,” seen in complex female characters. The “complex woman” is a term I am utilizing to define a woman as a person. A person with layers, thoughts, feelings, desires, disappointments, mistakes and successes, but also a woman. The complex woman is not defined in any one sense because the idea is to stop putting women in a box. There is no perfect woman as defined by anyone. Women do not have to be the damsel, nor do they have to be the villain. They should be allotted the respect and space to exist, breathe, make mistakes, have sex, get jobs, or anything else they may want, anything anyone may want. There are many tropes against women in films, but I will be focusing here on pushing past the following ones: smart/strong but emotionally stunted, pretty but stupid, sexy but mean/shallow. Each of these shows a different version the two-dimensional female character trap. Women are hindered and humbled by a more negative quality to dilute something good about themselves.

It is through an exploration of work from feminist theorists that the lack of true definition of woman can emerge. While looking at Betty Friedan’s *“The Problem That Has No Name from The Feminine Mystique”*, Laura Mulvey’s *“Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”* and Valerie Solanas *“From SCUM Manifesto,”* will be unpacking not only their perceptions of femineity and its representation in film, but also showing that there is no definition of woman. An attempt to define still produces a box for women to exist in and it is the absence of a box that allows a complex women and a woman as a person to exist. When we can shift the focus from what it is to sell a film based on societal expectation to the aesthetic of the film the box can be broken down.

I have selected two films each from the directors Wes Anderson and Sofia Coppola. Both of these directors are known for their aesthetic approach to film. They push conventional

boundaries to enhance not only their story telling, but also the viewers experience. In an article published in *Vanity Fair* by Cassie Da Costa, she explores misinterpretations of Anderson's aesthetic. She points out that Anderson's films are, "... not adorable, but symmetrical and severe—adhering to strict dictates in color, pattern, camera movement, pacing, props, animation, costume, and performance" (Da Costa). The attention to detail in his films is not simply for frills. There is an intent and purpose that makes the films carry an unique impact. In the article, Da Costa even compares Anderson's work to that of Coppola's. Da Costa notes how Coppola is also, "... maligned-for-her-tastes," (Da Costa). Both of the directors I have selected may be under scrutiny for their dedication to the aesthetic of their films, but I argue that this dedication is what creates one of their greatest strengths. Aesthetic opens up so many opportunities for the other, such as complex female characters.

The complexity in the sense of layers to the character is also paired with a complexity of shots used to show them. Due to the auteur cinema perspective and alternative style of these films the directors are free to make more unique shot selections. These selections challenge us as viewers and place us at a new perspective point. Where more mainstream directors would not risk an extended shot on a pair of shoes or the sunlight through trees, Coppola and Anderson bask in those moments. These intimate moments and reimagining of visual story telling makes not only the space but also the means for complex female characters to exist.

## II. TROPES - POPCULTURE EXAMPLES

There are many examples of basic dichotomous female characters in Hollywood. A female character that is smart/strong, but emotionally stunted can be seen in *The Heat* (2013) directed by Paul Fieg. Sandra Bullock's character, Special Agent Sarah Ashburn, is well accomplished in her work with the FBI. She is smart and follows the rules. However, she is made to be awkward, uncomfortable with her body and to lack real romantic interest (Fieg). She is allowed to excel in her profession, but she cannot be more than that. She has to learn, and be forced down any other path in life such as close personal connections. This is a common trope for female characters that present as "the brain" in films. They always must be taught to feel or tricked into relationships, instead of being able to make the choice for themselves or being allowed to follow their own interests. Female characters with certain skills or strength must not be able to pair that with healthy emotional connections. One may argue that it is there struggle that makes the character more complex, but I disagree. I do not think a strength must be so symmetrically matched with a struggle. Complex is more nuanced and layer than you're strong so you must also be weak.

In the 2001 film *Legally Blonde* directed by Robert Luketic, the main character is Elle Woods played by Reese Witherspoon. Elle is blonde, beautiful and waiting to be married. She is in college to get married and when she is broken up with, she and all of her friends act as if her life is over. Her ex-boyfriend's search for a more intellectual partner leads her to attend Harvard Law. Though, Elle proves her intelligence and her law abilities, she is only able to do this in relation to her more superficial qualities or because of them. She wins the case with her knowledge of perms (Luketic). This is knowledge and is a success, but it is still buying into the pretty, but stupid trope. Elle is constantly boxed by her looks and underrated for her mind. It



makes a fun story for Elle to win cause there is special knowledge in the world that she subscribes to, but the mark this film misses I think is that the big shock of the film is that Elle is capable. Elle is not ever seen simply existing in this film. She is always compared, judged and undermined due to a physical perception of her. She is the focus of the film, but she is not allotted with the same respect as her male or other counterparts.

The sexy but mean/shallow trope can be seen in *Mean Girls* (2004) directed by Mark Waters. Though this film is riddled with tropes against women, Regina George played by Rachel McAdams, displays what it is to be sexy but mean/shallow. This concept is similar to pretty, but stupid however, it accounts for the female character that knowingly abuses her power gained from beauty. Regina's social status was dependent on her looks and her attitude. She could not be just a sexy or attractive character who is nice and exists. This quality had to be matched with something to worsen her. She was unkind to everyone in her life and even herself with a shallow obsession with her looks. Her gossip and name calling motivated so much of the hate in the film. Victory in the film then became destroying her. She was attractive and thus mean and thus taking her beauty away from her was the way she was overcome. The approach to body image in this film is unhealthy to the point where not only weight gain is villainized, it also completely destroys Regina's social and mental status.

These films for many are a classic. They star some very talented female actors and are directed by notable men and can be thought of as relatively common household movie titles. Nonetheless, these films aren't taking risks. The characters feel comfortable and the presentations of them familiar. I think that the films serve a purpose and speak to a certain desire in film, but I do not think that these films are showing their female characters and all the complexities of them as people. A complex woman could love to be a stay-at-home mother or to

be a pageant queen or to be a Harvard Law student, but a complex woman should be able to do these things without the constant comparison to other aspects of herself. She may enjoy a certain kind of life and she should be allowed to without judgement. However, she should be able to not enjoy every day, to have hobbies, to have feelings and thoughts and to change her mind, simply because she has a mind to change. If the films themselves had given these characters more space I think that they could be complex. It may not even be the fault of the character at all. It is an issue of presentation and opportunity. These women are not able to exist without filling these specific roles. The goal and the aesthetics of the films was to have characters to serve a purpose. The female characters propelled plotlines, motivated other characters.

### III. FEMINIST THEORISTS

Betty Friedan (1921-2006), feminist theorist and activist, outlined a woman's lack of freedom in "*The Problem That Has No Name* from *The Feminine Mystique*." In 1969, Friedan is defining a woman's issue that is still not resolved and that still rests in woman's lives today. She noticed the unrest of women. The fact that for some women it is not enough to be at home with children, a housekeeper and wife as their occupation. A complex woman may want more or have other passions in addition or simply should be able to choose this life from personal interest, not having society shove it down their throats. Friedan highlighted the invalidation of woman's desires reflecting on how the unrest was categorized as illness, issue or simply not real. I think that here Friedan is getting at the pretty, but stupid trope for women that can act as a standard. Women were meant to manage everything, but to complain or to have desires or have unrest was "unfeminine," simply not acceptable. Friedan concludes saying, "We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: 'I want something more than my husband and my children and my home'" (Friedan 177). I think that Friedan gets close to a complex woman. A woman who is constrained is what how these tropes trap character and real women alike. However, the only aspect I think she may miss on is acceptance. Not women accepting some preset role in life, but accepting that there can be genuine joy in the domestic. Though, there is not in a trap.

Valerie Solanas (1936-1988), a radical feminist, wrote the "SCUM Manifesto" in 1967. She rejects the male gender as a whole. She is an extremist and though her ideas are controversial and violent they fight for a woman outside of the male gaze. They fight for a woman who is in charge and powerful. This is not to say other feminists, nonviolent feminists, cannot fight for a powerful woman, but "SCUM" brings a new intensity. Solanas writes, "Life in this society being, at best, an utter bore and no aspect of society being at all relevant to women,

there remains to civic-minded, responsible, thrill-seeking females only to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation, and destroy the male sex” (Solanas 188). This perspective is very woman centered, but weighed down with many expectations. There is so much responsibility applied to a woman to be a SCUM woman. To be a SCUM woman means that you must be unhappy with the state of everything and to be ready to do anything to help the cause. The hierarchy of women creates inequality. Women who love men or who seek support are considered less than as well as the enemy. Though a manifesto is not necessarily a set of instructions it is a perspective. I think Solanas represents the idea of rejection that can happen between women. Solanas states, “The conflict, therefore, is not between females and males, but between SCUM ... and ... Daddy’s Girls...” (Solanas 188). I do not think it should be the model of being a woman to hate other women who enjoy men. I think that this makes a complicated character not a complex one. The motivation, goal and strategy still box in a character that might try and represent this in a film.

Every female trope as well as every woman lives under the male gaze. The pretty but stupid woman lives deeply in the male mind however. Laura Mulvey, a British feminist film theorist and director, is very well known for “The Male Gaze” in concept and explanation. In her essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1989), Mulvey writes, “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy on the female figure is styled accordingly” (Mulvey 255). Focusing on the male the male is this active force, a decider. The view that does the judging as well as the creating. In the films I have selected that fall under the male audience, there is male gaze by design. There is an implicit imbalance as Mulvey says. Women become the pawn, the play thing, the object. I think this idea of “a world ordered” is really interesting. The

binary system has become the construct that many find order in. At its simplest level one or the other, male or female, becomes the comfortable trap. I think that this comfortable trap so encapsulates the films I selected for the male gaze. both use women as this thing to view. They are surface level and an object. The main characters are men and the women are not developed being, they serve a purpose, and move the plot. Mulvey writes, “Women, whose image whose form has continually been stolen and used for this end, cannot view the decline of the traditional film form with any much more than sentimental regret” (Mulvey 259). It has become so much the common practice that women are not in their own ownership of their person or their image. In the aesthetics and shots of the films I discuss I think there is a perspective in which the female characters still own their own image. As an audience we are not placed in a position for sexualization, but instead invited to share in intimacy that I argue is more owned by the female characters themselves.

Taking the danger of gendered gaze even further, Jack Halberstam, explores these ideas in, “The Transgender Look.” He writes about how visual representation can contribute and create ideas of gender ambiguity. By playing with perception and the presentation of ideas Halberstam analyzes queer cinema’s ability to capture genderfluidity. He writes, “Gender ambiguity, in some sense, results from and contests the dominance of the visual within postmodernism. The potentiality of the body to morph, shift, change, and become fluid is a powerful fantasy in transmodern cinema” (Halberstam 76). The transgender look creates a unique perspective on person in film. In the way that I am searching for the more ungendered representation of women, transgender cinema is already doing it. By breaking down gendered norms and expectations the shots, angles and representations of all characters is open to reinventing. Though this is not to say gender is erased, but that there is no one way to present it or one answer that must be

concreate. Coppola and Anderson's films are not doing the same work as transgender cinema, but I do think that when we look closely at their shot palettes there is an ungended presentation of characters. We see characters doing the same actions regardless of their gender. The creative approach is not hindering them in the same way it might more mainstream directors.

#### IV. AESTHETIC IMPACT

Directors often establish a style of films for themselves. This allows a viewer to know they are watching so and so's film many from as early as the first shot. Aesthetic is often what draws someone to a film. You can like how a film makes you feel, how the characters make sense to you, how you can live in the world the director creates. Hollywood films come in a variety of aesthetics as well as genres, but a blockbuster film feel different to a more obscure film. Even Hollywood films feel different as time passes and trends evolve. Films that are made to follow a trend often are the films that rely on tropes. The female characters as we have explored live in dichotomous boxes. The directors focus feels as if it is on other aspects of the film and not the feeling the film produces.

Removing the main draw from sex, violence, humor or exposition and replacing that with aesthetic is the refocus that makes the directors I have selected so special. Their work not only feels like their work, but the interpretation of their intent is more about a creation of art than it is about some blockbuster quality. The hyper fixation on how the film feels and looks to each director respectively also removes the film from reality.

## V. WES ANDERSON

Wes Anderson is a director likely most known for his aesthetic. He has recognizable color palettes and editing across all of his films regardless of the medium, may it be live action or Claymation. As much as his stories are odd and out there, his films, shots, and sets are consistent and beautiful. The plots do not always move linearly and the characters are often larger than life, living lives that are hard for many of us to imagine. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Anderson described his films as, “Five degrees removed from reality” (Lamont). It is exactly this that I think opens the cinematic opportunity for the complex woman. Complex women, though very real, simply are not allowed to exist in the reality we live in so when we stand five degrees removed there is a much greater chance for change.

The aesthetic of Anderson’s films are consistent. In this aesthetic we are not only given visual pleasure, but also fantasy. We are presented with unrealistic ideas that are simply accepted by the audience through the relationship Anderson builds between the film and the viewer. “No matter the story he tells or the location he tells it in, his recognizable visionary aesthetic remains consistently rooted within all his films, just as much as his own brand of quirky characters almost too comical to exist within the world we know” (Herzog). Anderson uses visuals to capture that unbelievable and fantastical quality of life. The moments of emotion and love and loss that don’t make sense. We do not watch an Anderson film to see reality, but to feel real emotions.

Anderson grew up in Houston, TX. He attended University of Texas at Austin and graduated with a B.A. in Philosophy in 1991. It is in college that Anderson started writing film. His first film was *Bottle Rocket* which he cowrote with Owen Wilson. Anderson often cowrites or collaborates in the creation of his films. If you google, “How many movies has Wes Anderson



made?” the answer is, “At least 22” (Google). Each film can be found entirely unique, yet his aesthetic creates a continuity in viewer experience. I would say you know when you are watching a Wes Anderson film. You will see compositional symmetry. Even when it seems to not always make sense there is the commitment to the shot. I think that this extenuates the “aesthetic over other aspects” quality of Anderson films. There are decisions made in his films that though add to the oddity of the film, do compliment the shot itself.

*The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001)

*The Royal Tenenbaums* is no exception to Anderson's aesthetic. The film follows the Tenenbaum family, mother, father, two sons and one daughter. We follow two timelines: one when the Tenenbaum children are young, and another in their adulthood. The father is Royal Tenenbaum played by Gene Hackman. He leaves the family while the kids are still young, around age 12. The mother is Etheline Tenenbaum played by Anjelica Huston. She is a matriarch. The elder son is Chaz Tenenbaum played by Ben Stiller. Chaz excels at business as a child and later in life he is overly anxious and precautious of emergency situations due to his wife's plane crash death. He has two sons Ari, and Uzi. The middle child, an adopted daughter (made important in the film), Margot Tenenbaum played by Gwyneth Paltrow. She was an accomplished playwright as a child and as an adult secretly smokes in the tub and watches tv. Margot is married to an older man who is deeply in love with her. She is depressed and suppressed. The youngest is Richie Tenenbaum played by Luke Wilson. He excels at tennis in his youth, and into adulthood, but chokes at the peak of his game. This leads him to travel the world alone on a boat. The children are pushed to be "geniuses". After seeing the family when the children are younger, we flash forward to adulthood. I think that though far from any standard of perfect, Etheline and Margot do represent complex women who in this film are simply able to exist.

The color palette of this film is richer than some of Anderson's other films. There is a focus on the color red throughout the film. *The Royal Tenenbaums* is told by a narrator as are most Anderson films and thus the story unfolds in a series of details. Little moments of constructed still life that establish aspects of the story. It might show the interests of a character or the layout of a room. In Anderson's work each item is curated to the story and its characters.

There are no thoughtless books on a shelf or mice in shoes. This attention to details in the physical world I think pulls a viewer's attention away from the over focalization on preconceived expectations of characters.



*The Royal Tenenbaums [FILMGRAB] 1*

*The Royal Tenenbaums [FILMGRAB] 2*

In the two intimate moments above we see the selection of included items building the story as well as carrying the viewer from moment to moment. On the left is the one of the mice that Chaz engineered crawling into a slipper with a red inside. This is not only a call back to the mice which live throughout the story, but is also a contribution to the consistent red in the film. On the right is Margot's hand starting a record. There again is strong notes of red as well as moments of the story shown like the family portrait. These still also contribute to the unique shot varieties we get in Anderson's work. On the left we are under the bed and on the right we act as Margot's eyes. We are never left to watch and judge a character from a certain position.

Etheline Tenenbaum is not only a caregiver for her children, but for her husband. In the film, we see the children when they are younger and their relationship with their mother is that of an educator. She has a clear focus on the betterment of her children. They are given opportunities and resources to excel at their talents. This level of care and compassion is something Etheline has throughout the entire film. She is able to defy tropes by not having a weakness. She is not

perfect, but she is presented with different layers to her not with a negative quality that needed to be solved throughout the storyline.



*The Royal Tenenbaums [FILMGRAB] 3*

In the above still, we see Margot to the left reading a play and Richie on Etheline's lap studying a book of maps. The shot is balanced with one figure on either side of the two central figures who are framed by pink wall framing. The soft pastels and dusty warmth match that of the whole film. Behind Etheline and Richie is the children's chalkboard schedule. This schedule includes activities such as karate, Italian and ballet. I think that this still really embodies the balance that Etheline creates and lives. She has her children around her, while managing their home and their lives. Etheline is a capable educated woman who never pushed for divorce or even expressed a need for a man. Royal Tenenbaum is a difficult man, self-absorbed and scheming. When he leaves the family, Etheline becomes a single parent, not that Royal did a lot for the family before his departure. Etheline has compassion and emotions; however, she is not shown to need a man to have a full or happy life. When she is seen later in life after her kids are grown, she has become an archeologist. She is accomplished and she has denied multiple proposals. It is not common to see women in films who are unmarried and not chasing love, but are happy.



*The Royal Tenenbaums [FILMGRAB] 4*



*The Royal Tenenbaums [FILMGRAB] 5*

In both of these stills Etheline is expressing emotions. On the left, she is having a moment with Margot, Etheline is supporting her and talking through Margot's situation with her. On the right, Etheline is on an emotional rollercoaster as Royal says he is dying and then says he is lying. Her emotion up and down from sadness and fear to anger and frustration is not shown in the way of a frantic woman or overly emotional. The moments are shot and presented like her reactions are reasonable and expected. She gets to emote like is expected from anyone in such a position.

Margot is private and is in many relationships without being considered inherently promiscuous. She is independent. In her childhood, she ran away twice, once with her brother and once on her own. She is conventionally beautiful, but she is missing half of her right ring finger. This does not make her less beautiful, but I think that this small detail pushes past the inherent perfection standard that women are held to. Every character in this film is displayed in a complex way. We see them all from different angles, with successes and failures and feelings. Anderson is hyper fixated on every detail in his films so when we are hyper fixating on a female character in one of his films it is the same treatment of every other character. I think in particular the presentation of Margot shows how she is treated the same as her brothers by the story and the shots we view her through.



*The Royal Tenenbaums [FILMGRAB] 6*



*The Royal Tenenbaums [FILMGRAB] 7*

Above we see two examples of the positions we see Margot in in relation to male characters. There is no consistent presentation of importance due to position. We see her sitting lower than her father and also higher than her brother. She is not constantly put in one position so we are not forced to code her in any specific relation to the other characters.



*The Royal Tenenbaums [FILMGRAB] 8*



*The Royal Tenenbaums [FILMGRAB] 9*

Above on the left, Margot is seen as a child taking a photo before running away to live in the African Wildlife Wing with Richie. She stands in a powerful commanding stance and is dressed with a sense of luxury. On the right, Margot is dressed almost identically. She keeps a consistent style in the film and I think that this creates less of a sexualization of her character. She is coded rather the same visually as she grows up. These are also two scenes in which we see Margot from two very different shot angles. One is shot looking up to her and the other looking down on her. There is no angle we expect to see her from which we would visually internalize as a commentary of where she stands in relation to any other character.





*The Royal Tenenbaums [FILMGRAB] 10*

*The Royal Tenenbaums [FILMGRAB] 11*

In addition to writing and directing plays as a child, Margot also built models of sets. As the narrator tells us information about each of the children we get the still on the left for Margot. The caption denotes what the image is of and the still holds a very storybook quality. We are simply being presented with information. This style of presentation is also used on the right when we are getting a montage of Margot's relationships. Like a childhood project, her relationships are simply presented as fact and interest not as something scandalous. There is not the level of judgment that is often present when women are shown having many relationships of many varieties.

*Moonrise Kingdom* (2012)

*Moonrise Kingdom* (2012) not only focuses on Anderson's aesthetic but also on location and weather. The film takes place in a four-day period in September of 1965. I think that the focus on location opens up even more space for the human characters. The development of the story moves in this natural and chaotic way just like the changing of land or the turning of a storm. The majority of the film is set on a fictitious New England Island called New Penzance. The island is very small and is accessible by a twice daily ferry and by sea plane. On the island are people who simply live there as well as the Khaki Scout Camp called Camp Ivanhoe. A year prior to the timeline of the film our two main characters, Sam Shaukauskys and Suzy Bishop meet at a Church performance of *Noye's Fludde*. The two twelve-year-olds are pen pals from their first meeting until the film takes place.



*Moonrise Kingdom* [FILMGRAB] 1

The presentation of the Island is very much like a fantasy. The consistent dialogue and shots of the island begin to almost make it feel like another character. Because this level of detail to the land changes our perception of character it opens up our perception of the human



characters as well. The above still is of Suzy's family's home. The home is coded in the consistent red of Anderson films. The color scheme of it also matches that of Suzy. She continuously is seen interacting with the home as many characters interact regularly with the environment of this island.



*Moonrise Kingdom [FILMGRAB] 2*

Above is Suzy interacting with the home. She is seen in her regular outfit in the film that matched the home. We see Suzy, like Margot, from a large variety of different angles as shots. These again keep us and a viewer unable to pass certain visual judgments that are more easily made in a classically shot film. Suzy has violent tendencies. She is the eldest of her siblings with three younger brothers. She is consistently seen in both red and pink. She always wears dresses and white knee-high socks. She wears a heavy coat of blue teal eyeshadow. Her main accessories are her binoculars and her books.



*Moonrise Kingdom [FILMGRAB] 3*



*Moonrise Kingdom [FILMGRAB] 4*

Her books and binoculars are not only accessories, but parts of the stories. Throughout the film we see her read from six different books. We see her use her binoculars at many moments as well as shoot through them. I think that these approaches to the displaying of Suzy makes her viewed as more complex than other presentations of female characters because she is shown doing and feeling and interacting with so many things.



*Moonrise Kingdom [FILMGRAB] 5*



*Moonrise Kingdom [FILMGRAB] 6*

On the left we see a painting Sam does of the alcove that he and Suzy run to. They affectionately name it Moonrise Kingdom, the title of the film. This location and camp sight even further establishes the variety of things that hold importance. It is also a moment when we see more than one medium used for representation. The left is a painting of the right.



*Moonrise Kingdom [FILMGRAB] 7*



*Moonrise Kingdom [FILMGRAB] 8*

Above are two more examples of unique shots used in this story's telling. Both are from a fight scene between Sam and Suzy, and the other Khaki Scouts. Her violence is never shown as a judgmental sense of mania through the shots. There are these creative removals from reality that I think change the acts into something more interesting than just her stabbing someone with scissors. This is also Anderson using another medium for storytelling much like captions in *The Royal Tenenbaums*.



*Moonrise Kingdom [FILMGRAB] 9*



*Moonrise Kingdom [FILMGRAB] 10*

Also similar to the presentation of Margot, we see Suzy in these intimate stills. On the left, in the bathtub with her sitting next to her. This scene is intimate, but by being shot at Suzy's eye level it is like we are with her. We are not looking down at her. On the right is Suzy posing while Sam paints her. Like when we later see Sam paint Moonrise Kingdom, I think here Suzy begins to melt into the landscape. We are again at her eye level and her coloring and the lighting puts the shot together like a painting. I do not think there is the sexualized pressure on the audience in these scenes that might be forced with other shots.

## VI. SOFIA COPPOLA

Coppola was born in 1971 in New York City, NY. She is the daughter of Francis Coppola and Eleanor Coppola, a film director and an artist and documentarian respectively. She attended school for painting, but not for filmmaking. I think that her painting background is very present in the style of her films. Coppola's aesthetic approach is drastically different than Anderson's. She focuses on building an experience and moment through intimate establishing shots. The fantasy and improbability of her films is built through this intimacy. We see perspectives that are not as common such as long shots of lights, streets, the sky, the passage of time on the lawn, edits of conversations to perceive content that is not even on the screen. The films feel like a dream of soft and wild energy. The focus is on relationships of varying kinds and the experience of a feeling. It feels like crawling into a new moment to watch a word outside your own that still somehow hides in plain sight.

The inclusion of nondiegetic conversations and imagery contributes to the step from reality necessary to take to create the space for the complex woman. When it might be expected for a shot to end or a wider angle to be taken Coppola instead holds on and develops the moment. Her films have tonal color continuity *The Virgin Suicides* (1999) with warmer tones and *Lost In Translation* (2003) with cooler tones. The palettes are different for each film but the way in which they contribute to the experience of the film is consistent. No moment ever feels wasted or shot unimpactful. However, as a female director some of her complexities can be overlooked. In a piece discussing her work and auteur approach, Todd Kennedy writes, "Choosing to develop her own, feminine film form, she causes critics (and often audiences) not to know what to do with her films other than to pat Coppola on the head for having made a 'pretty' film that, to quote Wesley Morris, 'skims with style' even if it is 'mostly surface'" (Kennedy 38). I think that

potential reading of Coppola's work is so far removed from the work she does in her films.

Though she has had many advantages in life she has still made work entirely her own. It takes risk to make these types of films that are removed from reality and that rely on unique visuals to express larger ideas. Coppola as had many advantages in her life to give her the opportunity to make risky films, but it is also not easy to take risks as a female director. Even with her safety net, I argue Coppola was doing so much more than just making pretty films, she is showing a complex view of woman on the big screen.



### *Lost in Translation (2003)*

This film follows two main characters, Charlotte and Bob Harris, who are struggling with their place in the world and in the lives of those around them. The film is set in Tokyo, Japan, where both are visiting. Charlotte, played by Scarlett Johansson, is a recent college graduate and who has been married for two year, is visiting with her photographer husband. Bob Harris, played by Bill Murray, is a declining American movie star, visiting for a brand deal with a Japanese whisky company. Both of them are unhappy in their relationships and with their situations and are able to recognize this in each other. The pair are both staying in the same hotel and meet in the hotel bar. As Charlotte's husband goes off to work and acts dismissively, she begins to invite Bob along to parties and adventures. The relationship builds very naturally and feels innocent. The chemistry between them is effortless. They act as though they may be the only two people in the world when they are together. I think that this quality of their story creates a portion of the dream like quality of the film.



*Lost In Translation [FILMGRAB] 1*



*Lost In Translation [FILMGRAB] 2*

In the above still Charlotte is on the phone with someone from home and is crying. She wants to express that she is unhappy and unsatisfied, but no one seems to have the time to listen to her. She is struggling to find her purpose and her joy. In school, she studied philosophy and her husband accuses her of being pretentious. Her husband, represents a very stereotypical man that I think is attempting to dichotomously trap Charlotte, however I think that the film does not

present his opinions in a way that make them feel significant. He is not so much an obstacle that creates motivation, but simply and annoying buzz of society. On the right, we have Bob also on an emotional phone call. He is calling his wife at home who doesn't really seem to hear him or understand. He gets sad and emotional on the call just like Charlotte. The mirroring of behavior that Coppola creates between Bob and Charlotte breaks down the idea of the gendered shots. There is not a certain action or perspective that only used for one of them.



*Lost In Translation [FILMGRAB] 3*



*Lost In Translation [FILMGRAB] 4*

On one of their first nights out together, Bob and Charlotte sing karaoke. Even in this potentially venerable moment we see both characters in the same way. There is a shakiness in their voice that humanizes a moment that could be gendered. The long personal shots enhance the intimate quality of the film and showcase something special about Coppola's risk taking.



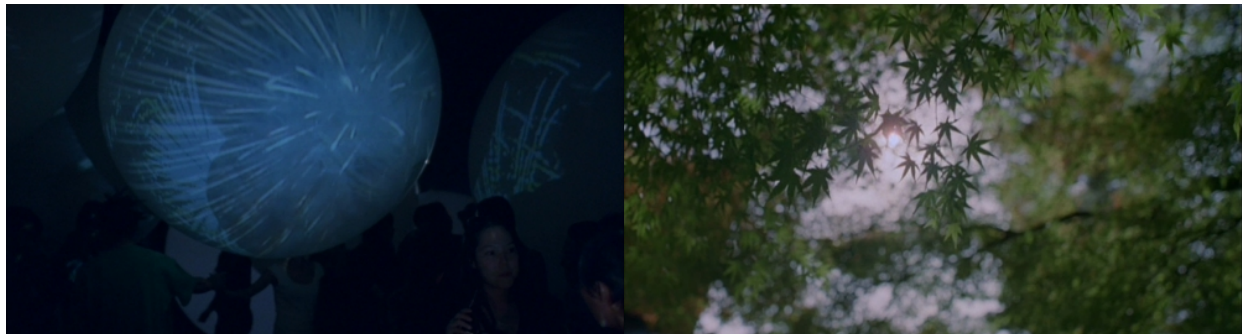
*Lost In Translation [FILMGRAB] 5*



*Lost In Translation [FILMGRAB] 6*

Above are two more moments where Charlotte is thinking and reflecting out the window. I think that though she is not wearing pants in the left still and is in the bathtub in the right one the images are not presented sexually. There is something just distant enough from where we

watch as viewers that it does not make it our business that she is undressed. However, the fact that she is creates an intimacy with her. It is a strategy of Coppola's that I think contributes to the view of Charlotte as a person. As a viewer, we do not struggle to connect with Charlotte in these moments. We can see her be fun and happy or contemplative and sad without there being a question of "If it makes sense for her?" She simply can be a person and the viewer is presented with the right information to not question that. In these stills, we can also see the cool tone color palette of the film very present.



*Lost In Translation [FILMGRAB] 7*

*Lost In Translation [FILMGRAB] 8*

Above are two of those long held still moments in which the environment and feeling of the scene are established. On the left, is a light fixture at a party Charlotte brings Bob to. The whole party feels removed from reality, the slow paced relaxed air of the film carries the audience through moments. We see Charlotte and Bob engaged in conversation, together and separately. Their spark and journey of their relationship I think can be reflected in the light itself moments departing and coming back together. Both the lights and the sun through the leaves of the Japanese maple, a dream like state is created. This trait of the film is what takes away from the demand for characters we expect. We may know women are people, but that is not an idea often shown in film. We do not come to expect it, but in a dream like state of intimate moments who is to say what Charlotte should be? I think that it is answered in the film that there is no answer. There is no person or version of herself she should be. As a viewer we follow her



through this time as we follow Bob. Both, are lost and this film holds us in these moments of humanity with them.

*The Virgin Suicides* (1999)

*The Virgin Suicides* (1999) takes place in a suburban neighborhood outside Detroit in the mid 1970s. The story is narrated by one of the boys in a neighborhood friend group who are infatuated with the five daughters of the Lisbon family. The daughters are: Therese (17), Mary (16), Bonnie (15), Lux (14), and Cecelia (13). The parents of the family are both religious and strict which leads to the girls living in a world of their own at times. In this film all five sisters end up committing suicide and the mystery and impact of this haunts the neighborhood boys well into their adulthood. Though the film carries that dark weight the way that it is shot is not.



*The Virgin Suicides* [FILMGRAB] 1



*The Virgin Suicides* [FILMGRAB] 2

The above moments are a combination of both Anderson's curated still-lives and Coppola's lengthy establishing shots. Throughout this film we are given these moments inside of the girls' lives. Their belongings are rooms become clues to who they are. We are not given a full understanding of any character in the film. It is not a gendered allusiveness just to the girls, but instead a snippet of time for every character that we are invited into as a viewer. Though we see more about the girls they are not shown with the aesthetic of a fun sleepover, or rambunctious sisters. The film carries a memorial, dream like quality.



*The Virgin Suicides* [FILMGRAB] 3



*The Virgin Suicides* [FILMGRAB] 4

Coppola utilizes more unique editing styles in this film than in *Lost In Translation*. I think that the above moments create the unrealistic quality of the film. Though unrealistic, these moments establish the aesthetic of the film that makes it a story that feels like it's about a teenage experience. There are thoughts and images that might only live in one's mind that Coppola brings to life. We get to connect with this relatable quality in not only the girls, but also with the boys in the films.



*The Virgin Suicides* [FILMGRAB] 5



*The Virgin Suicides* [FILMGRAB] 6

Above are both moments when we get images imagined by the boys. Though we know the moments are not real there is a youthful connection to the characters in the way that they do not understand everything and have daydreams. On the left is the boys imagining that they are traveling the world with the sisters. On the right is one of the boys imagining that he is seeing Cecelia's ghost in a tree, she was the first to commit suicide. Though neither image is real they

do not make the film not real. We are able to see real emotion and complexity shown to us through untraditional shots that we might not see presented in this way in another film style.



*The Virgin Suicides* [FILMGRAB] 7

*The Virgin Suicides* [FILMGRAB] 8

As Coppola is showing this teenage experience she does not focus too heavily on a gendered representation of emotion. The boys narrating the story talk at length about how this story has impacted their lives. For the sisters we watch as each of them chooses to die. Above we see two moments where two different characters are upset. The emotional human reaction is not something that Coppola attempts to apply some sort of gendered binary to. We get to see all characters in this way; the good and the bad.

The girls in this film though young, are complex. They are also shown in a complex manner. Their ungendered presentation throughout the film allows them to be seen as people. We are connect to them through the many different angles we get to see them from literally and figuratively. The risk in not divulging every secret or wrapping things up in a nice bow makes the characters feel more human. In this way we can see the girls as people, as we also can see their male counterparts.

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