

**teen reviewers and critics*

Fall/Winter 2024

FILM TRaC*



REVIEWS

Flow

(2024, dir. Gints Zilbalodis)

A cat is living on an island in an abandoned house. Suddenly, everything floods and they have to try their best to get to the highest point on the island to survive. In the movie *Flow*, the main character—the cat—and a few other animals gather on a sailboat and help each other get to safety.

The plot moved forward with no real villain, just different groups of animals trying their best to protect themselves, with different conflicts with other animals such as lemurs or dogs. It felt more natural this way.

There were no humans and no talking. All communication was through body language and animal noises. This is a really cool concept, as it leaves a lot up to interpretation, with time for the mind to wander.

Because of the lack of language, a couple of scenes were hard to follow. Personality is hard to get across without talking, but the introduction of characters were really effective and easy to understand.

A scene near the beginning, where the cat gets chased by a pack of dogs, felt reminiscent of the video game *Stray*, with the camera closely following the cat as they run from the dogs. The whole film had a little bit of a “videogame” feel to it: the animation was intricate, but simultaneously somewhat messy and inconsistent.

The visuals had real potential, with amazing contrasts, but this wasn’t used as much as I had hoped.

At the beginning, there is a clear sense of peace and normalcy, with lots of warm tones, bright colors, intricate backgrounds, and fast pacing. After the flood, the scenery could have darkened and cooled, the pacing slowed, a shift in camera angles, but not much changed visually. When the cat falls into the water and finds themselves surrounded by a huge school of fish, there

were visually interesting wide angles, bright colors, intense emotion, and lots of detail, but I wanted that to be more evenly distributed or more intentionally placed throughout the movie.

I think the idea was to convey the natural beauty and the ability to grow after a natural disaster, but, in doing so, lost some of the sense of tragedy.

I really enjoyed *Flow* and would happily watch it again. I recommend watching it in theaters or at least on a large screen, as the visuals are really what matter most. It’s



a unique movie that feels like the type to become someone’s comfort film or to be shown in a city park over the summer. It’s cute, creative and sweet.

Saskia W.

■

This beautiful and well-crafted animated movie kicks off with a cat staring at his reflection in a pool of water. This pool of water does not just take up one small space, however. Mass flooding has wiped out the human race: this cat has to find ways to survive in this dystopian world.

After the floods rise, the cat stumbles

upon a boat with a capybara in it. They come across a variety of animals merely striving to survive—a Labrador retriever, a secretary bird, and a ring-tailed lemur—that join their journey on the boat. Each animal has a distinct personality that contributes to the group’s survival, but hinders the cohesiveness and viability of the group.

With such a diverse cluster of animals with different interests at heart, obtaining food, steering the boat, and determining boat necessities spark moments where

conflict arise. However, the animals do anything to keep the group alive.

I absolutely adored this movie. So many things that I have not seen executed well in other animated films stood out to me.

When the cat first climbs onto the boat and spots the capybara, he pauses and his pupils shrink, indicating he is shocked. In a scene where the retriever copies the cat’s stretching, the cat looks back, narrows his eyes in annoyance, meows, and walks away.

When I first heard that this film would have no dialogue, I was very curious and quite skeptical on how I would be able to interpret and enjoy the experience of this film. However, when watching this film, I

forgot there was no dialogue!

The body language, the sounds animals made, and background music completely made up for the lack of dialogue. I was able to understand what each animal was feeling at any particular moment and I never caught myself being confused by what was going on.

The cinematography was another thing that made this movie one-of-a-kind. The vibrant colors and painterly look of the film were just so beautiful to look at. The glistening of the sun on different surfaces, the reflections of the animals and their vibrant surroundings on the water, and the submerged structures and articles of nature are so captivating. The shaky camera movements—not something you typically would see in an animated film—added to the intensity and urgency that the animals faced during moments of uncertainty and risk. It went so well with the idea that the Earth was encompassed by water, highlighting the unstableness of the world.

In general, *Flow* is a spectacular movie that I would definitely recommend. Its cinematography, animal body language, and unique storyline where different animals unite in order to survive makes it stand out unmatched amongst other animated films.

Rachel N.

■

Flow, a fantastical animated feature film that explores a surreal world of animal companions who sail across a submerged landscape, is ideal for children and pet-loving audiences comforted by adventurous storytelling with cute animals. Not involving a single line of dialogue, *Flow* is unique in its approach to animal protagonists, relying on plot and scope to convey complex emotions.

The story follows a black cat who roams a forest bare of human presence and encounters a band of dogs, a capybara with

a boat, a hoarding lemur, and a glorified secretary bird. This unlikely group of creatures voyage through a forest recently devastated by a large flood. They seek high ground and explore the mysteriously abandoned cities. The story is engaging and easy to follow while also providing emotional impact with the dynamics of animals that wouldn't normally depend on each other. In times of survival, their unity is what helps them overcome great obstacles.

The animation medium feels intentionally choppy, like a sequence of cut scenes from a PlayStation game. Some may say the look of the film could be a budget-cut version of a Studio Ghibli production, but *Flow* adopts surrealist and realist aspects of nature that differ from our world.

Overall, *Flow*'s great pacing and fluidity make it very approachable for most viewers.

Erlinda Z.

■

Wicked

(2024, dir. Jon M. Chu)

Social media promotion for *Wicked* hit me as suddenly as tornadoes hit gingham-

clad girls in rural Kansas.

One day, I couldn't care less about the film, taking note of it only as background noise—posters simply filling the transitory ad space on taxicabs and bus stops. The next, my phone was mysteriously awash with bombasts of pink and green; every image and video proffered by my ominously powerful social media algorithm was plucked straight from the film's press tour.

Rather than rejecting this unsettling sign of digital encroachment, I embraced *Wicked*'s aggressive marketing tactics: I suspended my cynicism about high-production blockbusters and pushed away my concerns about how digital privacy and marketing interact. Who has the energy to think about how short-form content might be manipulating them when there's press interviews to chuckle at, and Jonathan Bailey to ogle?

After a few minutes (or was it hours?) of scrolling, the marketing had done its job—I found I couldn't wait to experience the so-called magic of *Wicked*. I leaned in, getting excited about each punchline and viral dance.

And that's the best—and perhaps only—way to enjoy *Wicked*, a movie where characters say the words "Shiz University" with a straight face and kindly CGI goats wear half-moon glasses, smiling, eyes

glazed, Slushie in hand.

Jon M. Chu's musical extravaganza, an adaptation of one of Broadway's longest-running shows, tells the story of bubbly, ambitious Glinda (Ariana Grande) and bookish, green-skinned loner Elphaba (Cynthia Erivo), two women who would go on to become imprinted in pop-culture memory as the Good and Wicked Witches, respectively, in the *Wizard of Oz* story.

Glinda and Elphaba's friendship is the backbone of the film. Grande, who began her career as a child star on Broadway, sheds the breathy, oft-auto-tuned vocal stylings of her studio pop work and embraces her inner thespian, showing off clear musical-theater bona fides. Her funny, confident line deliveries and effortless soprano register are enough to disprove any cynic claiming she was cast for her star power alone. But "perky high-school-cheerleader" makes an odd match for Erivo's gloomy Elphaba, whose malaise seeps frustratingly into every relationship, rendering their friendship difficult to believe or invest in.

This disconnect is perhaps widened by a few bizarre divergences from the original musical.

We see flashbacks to Elphaba's childhood, where caricatures of bullies literally point and laugh at her green skin, a trait that is, for some reason, considered weird in a world of talking animals and emerald palaces. (Erivo might just as reasonably break into a moody rendition of Radiohead's "Creep" as any song from the actual score.)

Elphaba's gloominess makes her choices seem absurd—she jumps suddenly from scoffing at Glinda and love interest Fiyero (Jonathan Bailey) to moonily staring into their eyes in awkward, wordless scenes. Her loose characterization is particularly disappointing coming from screenwriter Winnie Holzman, who was able to uniquely capture angst and alienation in one of my favorite TV shows, *My So-Called Life*.

Though Erivo's talent as a singer is

undeniable, her performance sometimes feels bogged down in odd production choices.

"Defying Gravity," the musical's catchiest and most interesting number, never quite manages to take off. It's a defining moment in the stage production, where Elphaba physically floats off the stage to thunderous applause—admittedly, a feat difficult to transcend onscreen, where the standard for showstopping stunts is exponentially higher. But that's not for a lack of trying: Chu hits viewers over the head with special effects. The song is interspersed with heavy action sequences, effectively killing any momentum that Erivo manages to build.

For the most part, though, Chu's all-out approach is effective. His eye for large-scale spectacle, notable in past projects *In the Heights* and *Crazy Rich Asians*, imbues the film with energy. For example, "What Is This Feeling?" (a relatively forgettable, plot-building song in the stage musical) transforms into a fun ensemble number. As I watched Grande twirl, her mean-girl friends (including a hilarious Bowen Yang) in tow, I couldn't help but smile, thinking that this choreography went viral for a reason.

Largely, the moments that are meant to be exciting—Elphaba and Glinda's big-city adventure, the opening number, even the obligatory, overly earnest "I Want" song—are exciting. But for a film that approaches three hours, *Wicked* does little more than provide surface-level fun—which becomes somewhat tiresome around hour two. As the credits finally rolled, revealing that *Wicked: Part II* would be released at some point in 2025, a sense of dread and fatigue settled upon me. I wondered in horror how Chu managed to stretch a musical to twice its original length, when film adaptations famously leave piles of material on cutting room floors.

Initially, the prospect of a sequel took *Wicked* from a passably entertaining cash grab to a post-creative harbinger of doom. *Wicked* is a Russian nesting doll



of adaptations—a movie of a musical of a novel of a movie of a novel—borne primarily of two industries plagued by unoriginality.

Following the pandemic, cinema and live theater struggled to return to their former popularity. Broadway revivals and Hollywood sequels are now a dime a dozen—safe bets to bring in audience members. In 20 minutes of trailers preceding *Wicked*, not a single one told an original story. Highlights included *How To Train Your Dragon* (a live action adaptation of the first in a series of animated films—foreshadowing two more sequel adaptations contingent on its success); *Sonic the Hedgehog 3* (both a sequel and an adaptation); *The Last Breath* (a survival film seemingly based on the Titan submarine accident); and *The Bad Guys 2* (a simple sequel—so vintage!).

Of course, these trailers were curated to pair with *Wicked*; in any case, though, millions of dollars are being poured into these productions, while spaces like my local cinema, once the home of biweekly *Rocky Horror* performances, close their shutters.

It's tempting to baldly malign *Wicked* (and its promotional methods and upcoming sequel) as symptoms of the death of art, or creativity, or any media that can't be compressed into addictive 15-second content—a kind of reverse atomization where one or two unoriginal blockbusters become a monolith, consuming creative outliers. However, think of what attracted me to the film in the first place: yes, it was the all-powerful lords of the algorithm, but the tool they wielded to get my interest was the simple fact that musicals and movies are easy and fun.

Increasingly, each conversation feels overshadowed by prospects of doom—for the country, the world, the planet. In times of political uncertainty and strife, art and entertainment are ever-important—not only the challenging, sophisticated works which subvert convention and galvanize

political action, but the ones that are simple and entertaining, acting as a balm and reminding us of our own humanity.

Wicked wasn't perfect, but this was one of the only times I've seen a packed audience buzz with energy at a movie theater. Its exciting musical numbers and entertaining performances are enough to set it apart from the likes of the *Sonic* franchise, even if they are borne of similar, alarming, profit-focused impulses.

I won't be seeing *Wicked: Part II*, though—unless the algorithm compels me.

Olive E.

■

Elphaba is considered wicked due to her green, brown, and black appearance.

Her green skin—a symbol of otherness—causes people to fear her, alienating her from those around her, and forcing her to grapple with intense feelings of isolation and rejection, which contrasts with her kind and caring personality.

In a world where color defines identity, Elphaba's struggles underscore the absurdity and injustice of prejudice.

Glinda—bubbly, friendly, pink, gold, and silver—is recognized as good. People are misguided by her kindness and can be easily manipulated by her.

Their experiences highlight the arbitrary lines drawn by society based on differences. The inclusion of talking animals—who are treated as second-class citizens—further amplifies this theme. By giving them a voice, Chu allows marginalized communities to express their pain and resilience, offering a deeper commentary on the nature of oppression, whether physical, cultural, or even species-related.

I genuinely loved this movie. The use of color was well cultivated. I initially watched this for Ariana Grande, but seeing the emotion and effort put into this film changed my entire experience. The creative use of fantasy elements allows for

a vivid exploration of racism; it not only engages the audience on an emotional level but also prompts critical reflections on acceptance, equality, and the importance of championing diversity in our own society.

Ultimately, Chu invites the audience to confront their own biases and consider the impact of their actions, encouraging empathy through the narrative.

Khloe S.



No Fear, No Die
(1990, dir. Claire Denis)

Two immigrants, Dah and Jocelyn, are living on the edge, doing illegal underground work in France in order to make a living. They help to operate a cock-fighting business. Of course, this operation is not going to move smoothly for them.

Throughout the story, many tensions arise. When it comes to handling and training the roosters, Pierre, a shady restaurant owner, exploits Dah and Jocelyn along with his right hand man, Michel. The development of romantic relationships, racism, violence, and exploitation within their operation all contribute to both the aggravation that follows Dah and the decline of Jocelyn's mental health.

For most of the film, the camera remains relatively stagnant, capturing the actions taking place in small rooms. The lack of background music in the film makes

moments when music/sounds appear even more interesting: when moments of suspense arise with the cocks, the sound of their wings flapping aggressively almost serves as suspenseful music; as Dah and Jocelyn are training their cocks, the song "Buffalo Soldier" plays, a metaphor for their situation.

No Fear, No Die highlights some of the struggles immigrants can face. The intimate feel that Claire Denis gave to the movie grounds the viewer and makes the situation of Dah and Jocelyn feel very natural and honest—so much more real—encompassing two immigrants living on the edge in order to make a living. It shines light on a taboo topic and does a great job providing the viewer with a unique perspective.

Rachel N.

■

A Real Pain
(2024, dir. Jesse Eisenberg)

Two cousins reconnect after a family tragedy and embark on a heritage trip to Poland to explore their shared Jewish roots. What begins as a journey of cultural exploration quickly becomes a wild adventure between laugh-out-loud moments and deeply poignant reflections on their family's past.

Both hilarious and heartbreaking, actor, writer, and director Jesse Eisenberg's brilliant and unconventional comedy-drama *A Real Pain* explores historical damage, legacy, and self-discovery through a deep and authentic lens, blending film genres in new way.

The script is excellent, balancing absurd humor with moments of genuine

reflection. Few films capture grief and comedy in such harmony, but *A Real Pain* accomplishes it easily.

The casting is perfect. Played by Jesse Eisenberg and Kieran Culkin, the main characters' on-screen chemistry feels natural, and their contrasting personalities amplify the film's comedic and emotional moments, giving viewers a new sense of how to view the world and how one can perceive their emotional past. Supporting performances from the ensemble cast are excellent, grounding the film even in its most surreal moments. Through the awkward, but often meaningful, conversations Culkin sparks up with these characters, we better understand the reason behind why each character decided to come on this somber and heartfelt ride.

Visually, the film's use of muted colors and careful framing emphasizes the weight of its themes, while the absurdist comedic sequences are enhanced by clever editing and unexpected visual twists. Using real Polish locations lends authenticity to the story, immersing the audience in the character's journey. Many scenes are quite beautifully shot.

A Real Pain was slow initially and took a while to jump into the action. Certain scenes feel drawn out, disrupting the film's decent pacing. It. I found myself checking the time at some points out of boredom because of how long some parts of the movie were. Despite this, waiting through slow scenes is worth it, as the film moves towards a memorable conclusion that has stuck with me since viewing.

Ultimately, *A Real Pain* is a wildly unconventional and emotional movie that balances comedy and drama in ways I have never seen. Viewers go from laughing, crying and reflecting on how we process

pain, and develop a new perspective on the world. *A Real Pain* showcases how one can honor the legacies of those who came before us and find ways to combine grief with laughter in a truly beautiful way.

Zack L.



How To Have Sex

(2023, dir. Molly Manning Walker)

Molly Manning Walker's directorial debut offers a fresh, incisive take on adolescence and female friendship, told through the Crete vacation of Tara and her best friends Skye and Em. As the 16-year-old British schoolgirls—awaiting the results of their GCSE exams—drink, smoke, and party their way across the Greek island, Manning Walker spins a nuanced, heart-wrenching tale regarding consent, sexuality, and coming of age.

At the outset of the film, the girls declare their mission: by the end of the trip, Tara will no longer be the last remaining virgin in their group. (Viewers have little faith in this endeavor going well.) As we watch Tara, swamped by social pressures and crushed by Boschian nightclub crowds, there's an ominous undertone as the girls chant "Best! Holiday! Ever!"

Packed with intoxicated British teens on "holiday," the island is grisly, but the girls' fear of not having fun, or looking like they aren't having fun, is equally as intense.

Acknowledgment of a problem could not coexist with the hedonistic illusion

they will do anything to uphold: the girls constantly downplay clear moments of hurt in an act of self-preservation. Ultimately, a sexual assault forces a confrontation: what are the girls willing to overlook to make sure the trip lives up to expectations?

The party-island setting works brilliantly, magnifying existing social dynamics to caricatured levels while retaining an incredibly realistic feel. In this locale where sex acts are performed on nightclub stages and taboos are absent, the girls' insecurities are augmented and risk-taking is fast-tracked ("Chug! Chug! Chug!").

Subtle direction creates tragicomic contrast between Tara's shy unease and the gung-ho bacchanalia of her surroundings: Tara fidgets, pulling down the neon-green mesh minidress her friends assured her looked amazing. It's the little details that most glossy coming-of-age movies fail to capture that lend the film a pervasive and familiar discomfort, and sets *How to Have Sex* apart.

Sophie G.



Gladiator II

(2024, dir. Ridley Scott)

You will be entertained by *Gladiator II*, but not well: the overly anticipated sequel to Ridley Scott's 2000 historical epic *Gladiator*, is not a necessary watch in the cinema this fall.

The story follows the long lost son of Lucilla (Connie Nielsen), Lucius (Paul Mescal). Lucius lives in the Northern African kingdom of Numidia in secrecy with his wife Arishat. In a siege led by Roman general Acacius (Pedro Pascal), the general kills his wife and Lucius becomes a common slave-turned-gladiator, who learns of the corruption overridden in Rome.

Much like the original, after an honorable man has lost the one he loves and is stripped of his military powers, he is tasked with fighting for his life in the Colosseum pit.

Although the story sounds enticing, the redundancy in the film prevents it from becoming a standalone film from *Gladiator*.

Gladiator, which reinvented the historical epic genre with stirring battles, followed the esteemed general Maximus Meridius, reduced to slavery by the corrupt Roman emperor Commodus, fight to avenge his lost wife, son, and emperor. In *Gladiator II*, once the audience is reintroduced to the Colosseum, events and battles are predictable, lacking real thrill.

The fight choreography is engaging, but does not convey the emotional impact one should feel when unsure if the beloved hero will win a climactic fight. Developments in the story do not serve the narrative as a cohesive stand-alone film.

Lucius' character arc, when he unites the gladiators to revolt in the arena, doesn't grant the same satisfaction because the same thing happened 24 years ago.

The only new installation in the story are the characters of Denzel Washington and Pedro Pascal.

Washington steals most of the scenes he's

in, effortlessly bringing dramatic/comedic relief that in some ways feels overbearing. Pascal's presence is thoroughly subdued through his affair with Lucilla, reducing his character to a scandalous side piece that serves no other purpose. In terms of Mescal's performance, a brute will be a brute, and adding emotional layers to that makes the archetype he's portraying confusing to the viewer. Other than cry at the sight of his dead wife, Mescal makes it a point to be deeply masculine in angst, anger, and revenge.

The theatrical battle scenes, using CGI sharks and rhinos to recreate the scale and risk found in older historical epics, are absurd, even if that's what the film tries to do. The lack of emotional impact throughout the film creates a hollow that is only filled with hyper-masculine violence. There is a reason people don't watch these specific types of movies anymore; they cater only to male audiences who find ancient times to be the most important subject in the modern age.

Erlinda Z.

■

Kids

(1995, dir. Larry Clark)

New York.

How does the hottest summer of all time foster drugs, sex, and other misdemeanors?

How do libidinous teenagers run wild in a megalopolis of mischievous opportunity?

And how does 13-year old Jennie (Chloë Sevigny) manage the sobering reality of an AIDS diagnosis amidst the height of one of the largest epidemics in all of America?

Kids tells the story of rambunctious

teen Telly (Leo Fitzpatrick), his best friend Casper (Justin Pierce), and the summer they both turned horny.

Telly has found his sexual interest in deflowering virgins; Casper seems to care more about finding someone's house to party at.

Casper and Telly's stories are paralleled to Jennie's, one of the young girls preyed on by Telly. After going just to comfort her friend, Jennie finds herself being tested for STDs and comes back positive for AIDS. The narrative unfolds as Jennie throws herself around Manhattan in order to stop Telly from sexually initiating his next



victim.

Kids' standout features begin with its dialogue. *Kids'* syntax is a challenge in itself to decipher. Harmony Korine's accurate portrayal of the vocabulary and tone of a 17-year old boy in New York City shows vernacular flair through impressively colloquial slang and distinctive pubescent mumbling. Outside of this impressive feat, Korine's writing falls a little flat, providing little depth to the teen leads besides an abrupt immaturity and an ability to go far beyond what is considered socially acceptable.

Part of *Kids'* charm comes from the realist development of the setting. The main cast of characters are adaptive and acclimated to the harsh reality of NYC, never wasting a moment to wallow in the sometimes sad reality of living in a city

full of drugs, violence, and cruelty.

Kids shines brightest in its ability to visually interpret the emotion being portrayed by characters on screen. Chloe Sevigny's nervous and introspective performance is aided by muted, quiet sound and visuals while Justin Pierce's rowdy and uncontrollable performance is accompanied by chaotic and bumping sound and visuals.

In part due to the bumping, exclusive view into the city in the 90s, but also thanks to the writing of 19-year-old Harmony Korine who creates nothing if not an authentic view of the (sometimes aspirational grit) of New York City in the 20th century, *Kids* remains a New York City classic.

All in all, *Kids* is an honest movie with perennial significance. Larry Clark and Korine provide a look into an unwashed New York that is extremely rare to find. As time progresses, we move farther and farther away from the New York portrayed in *Kids*. Whether or not this is a good or bad thing, *Kids* documents a time in history that will continue to become more elusive. Or despised, depending on the person.

Gus P. Z.



Incapable of losing six of his grandchildren, the grandfather sets up a structure: they are allowed into the real world on the day they are named after.

They are each named after a day of the week, and Monday, the firstborn, puts on her black updo wig and pencil dress. She walks into the crowded street and makes her way to work. Her identification bracelet is scanned by a Bureau employee, her love interest. As Monday walks into the elevator, a man tells her that he "knows her secret". He wants Monday to give up a promotion in exchange for her secret not getting out.

Monday is visibly taken aback by this. As the end of the day approaches, the other sisters are worried as Monday did not return home. The next day, the sisters decide to send Tuesday to work in order to gain more information about Monday's whereabouts, a huge risk: if both sisters are seen outside at the same time, they risk their lives and those of their siblings.

As the days go on, strange things continue to happen. The sisters are struggling to grasp and understand what the Bureau knows about their family and what they don't. Will the sisters get away with their grand ploy of merely living? Will their operation fall apart? Will Monday ever be found again?

The concept of this movie—the idea of these sisters participating in resistance just by existing—was very interesting. However, there are some things I wish could be better executed.

What Happened to Monday?

(2017, dir. Tommy Wirkola)

In a dystopian future world where overpopulation is a major issue, a woman gives birth to septuplets. As though this wasn't hard enough, the Bureau of Child Allocation has implemented a system called the Cryosleep Program where, if a family has more than one child, the extra children get put into cryosleep until the overpopulation issue ceases to exist.

■

First, the plot of the children's birth was fairly vague. We learn that a woman gives birth to seven children and presumably dies in the process—that's pretty much it. We do not know who this woman is besides the fact that her name was Karen Settman—the alias her children use. The story of their father is never revealed. Even the grandfather is a mystery. When the septuplets grow up, the grandfather disappears. They refer to him in the past tense, but I feel like a bit of context as to how he died would be interesting.

Each sister has their own attributes and personalities that help contribute to solving the problem in the story. However, many of the characters are cliché, making the story a lot more predictable, and feeding into negative tropes already attributed to women.

For instance, Saturday is portrayed as a woman whose seemingly only asset to the group was her promiscuity. Thursday is the typical badass woman many movies include in their plots in an effort to be more progressive. While this isn't necessarily a bad thing, it would have been interesting to see something different when incorporating a strong female character.

All the sisters had personalities that foreshadowed their ending in the movies, which would've been a fun and interesting concept. However, there was not much behind each character to make this concept successfully come to life. This could have been because one actress (Noomi Rapace) played all seven siblings.

Watching *What Happened to Monday?* was certainly an interesting experience. I liked being introduced to a concept of a dystopian world that could possibly be real in the future. However, due to lack of character development and complexity, the

plot twists in this movie were not shocking.

Rachel N.



Eno

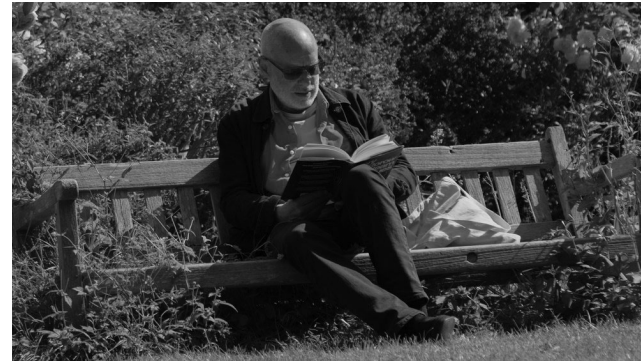
(2024, dir. Gary Hustwit)

Best known for his collaborations with acclaimed artists like David Bowie and Talking Heads, Brian Eno has an idiosyncratic approach to music that makes him a naturally intriguing documentary subject. He thinks of audiences as agentive and art as dynamic and alive, almost like a microorganism—"the audience's brain does the cooking and keeps seeing relationships," he muses.

This innovative documentary uses generative technology to shine a light on the enigmatic producer, a titan of 20th century music. An algorithm engineered by Hustwit shapes the experience, drawing on over 500 hours of footage to create a feature-length film. The program scrambles interviews and scenes with Eno into discrete sequences, rendering each screening completely unique and unpredictable (the filmmaker estimated 52 quintillion possible versions).

Eno, in its varied permutations, is cohesive and fascinating, with different screenings tackling questions about everything from climate change to the history of rock music.

Between old concert clips, natural scenes, and engaging interviews, the film manages to push beyond the intellectual,



just as Eno does in his music, and touch uniquely on the emotional and cerebral potentialities of the human race.

In the face of limitless live-action remakes and sequels, and AI an ever-looming threat over creative industries, *Eno* provides an example of how digital tools can be used to push artistic boundaries.

Olive E.

■

The Great Gatsby

(2013, dir. Baz Luhrmann)

Leonardo DiCaprio plays Jay Gatsby, a millionaire with a soft man's personality, destined to find his lover Daisy, whom he disconnected from when joining the military.

His plan was to become good friends with Daisy's cousin Nick Carraway so he can help connect them. He throws huge parties across the sea from her house, in hope that she will somehow come back to him, but, parties after parties, Daisy never showed up.

With the help of Nick, they sit down and converse over a cup of tea, about why he left, and why they didn't get each other's letter in the

mail: Daisy assumed he was dead. He finds out she is about to get married to a wealthy man similar to him, but Gatsby notices Daisy's unhappiness with her fiancé, and guarantees her a better life with him.

Daisy is left to decide who she wants to be with for the rest of her life

The Great Gatsby is one of my favorite films because it is romance with a twist. It takes me way back in time, around the late 20s when jazz was alive and old money was everything to anyone.

Donnie P.

■

Anora

(2024, dir. Sean Baker)

Anora, a young stripper working in Brighton Beach, is met with a life-changing opportunity when she catches the eye of Ivan, the son of a Russian oligarch.

He offers Anora \$10,000 to be his girlfriend for the week. Equally skeptical and thrilled, she agrees to a spontaneous Vegas marriage. Just a few private jet and casino-spree montages later, word reaches Russia, and Ivan's parents are furious, substantiating Anora's disbelief.



The pair then has to evade not only the outrage of Ivan's family, but the goon squad they've sent after them to try and force an annulment—an endeavor which is quickly revealed to be much harder than anticipated, yielding excellent physical comedy. Mikey Madison's standout performance in the titular role allows the film to transcend its tropes; the supporting cast is also great.

Sean Baker doesn't lose the magic of his breakout indie hit *The Florida Project* in *Anora*'s chaos. In both films, he excels in a delicate balance of comedy and tragedy, deftly capturing the precious hopes and crushing shortcomings that together are the reality of the American Dream.

Sophie G.

■

A Complete Unknown (2024, dir. James Mangold)

Near the beginning of *A Complete Unknown*, a biopic of the musician Bob Dylan in the early 60s, there is a beautiful scene where Bob visits Woody Guthrie, a folk singer that is a legend and hero to him, who is dying of Huntington's disease. As Woody and Pete Seeger listen, he sings a song he had written for him. A great opening, it really shows his young



innocence as a 19-year-old meeting his hero.

It's difficult to make a real person's life have a plot and narrative to it. A common problem with movies based on real people is the risk of losing the story aspect of it. This was handled really well as the story was easy to follow with a clear timeline of events. But it wasn't all realistic.

The rest of the plot felt underdeveloped. The film touched on some important parts of his life, such as his involvement in the civil rights movement, but really didn't go into detail.

There were loose plot lines that needed to be mentioned because they were important to Bob Dylan's life, but, in the context of a movie simply became plot holes. It's near impossible to fit five years of someone's life into two hours, but it left the story feeling unfinished: the movie could have benefited from being longer or being split into two parts, to explore some aspects of his life more fully.

The movie did a good job of portraying his relationships—the movie focuses on the love triangle with Sylvie (loosely based on Suze Rotolo) and Joan Baez—but we see some of the rougher sides of Bob, such as him cheating on them, his lack of empathy and his habit of lying. The women, outside of being love interests, felt lacking

in personality.

The camera always felt very purposefully placed, who was in the background and foreground of shots always felt quite intentional. There was a lot of focus on characters' faces, and glances between people, with some scenes feeling as though you were in the characters' point of view. It felt personal, like you as the audience are being included in something subtle and private. This was especially prevalent with Dylan and Joan when they were performing together.

Nothing felt out of place: the buildings looked old, the cars were all antique, and everyone's clothing and fashion reflected the time. As someone who has lived and spent a lot of time in NYC and N.J. it was really fun to see them refer to places I recognized, such as the East Village, The Hotel Chelsea, and East Orange, as well as to see them recreate how it looked in the 60s.

The soundtrack was put together with a good choice of Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and Johnny Cash songs. All of the actors sang their own songs, and they did a beautiful job doing so, especially Monica Barbaro's performance of Joan. The characters were all very expressive and the acting was great. Timothée Chalamet did an amazing job conveying the instability and conflicting emotions of Bob Dylan, and certainly did his songs justice. I would recommend listening to the soundtrack after watching it, as well as the original versions of the songs.

A Complete Unknown is interesting, entertaining and funny. You really don't need to know anything about Bob Dylan or folk music to enjoy this it. (I'd say it's a *little* more fun if you know at least a little about Bob Dylan and his music before watching it, but it's not necessary.) It's a very approachable movie.

Saskia W.

■

Casablanca (1942, dir. Michael Curtiz)

Michael Curtiz's 1942 *Casablanca* continues to resonate with many, its intriguing storyline a timeless representation of the dichotomy between love and war; a tale of sacrifice, loyalty, and transitions between personal desire and moral duty.

With the war, Morocco played an interesting key role in the fight as a French colony outside the battle zone. Rick Blaine, mysterious and derisive owner of Rick's Café Américain, is a man carrying the weight of his past. In Rick's Café, war figures enter and converse, many German and French, yet the story of Rick—his complicated past and his love life—remains central on the screen. When Ilsa, his former lover, walks into his café doors with her new husband, Victor Laszlo, an emotional explosion of feelings sparks choices good and bad.

I didn't expect, as a teenager, to fall in love with an 80+ year-old black-and-white movie.

Visually, *Casablanca* is astounding. Shadows and lighting illustrate the mood of each scene perfectly, adding much to the story's themes. Scenes showcasing the dynamic between Rick and Ilsa utilize shadows to convey the uncertainty and mysterious elements of their relationship.

Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman are excellent casting choices. Bogart's deeply emotional performance unravels



the story of a man torn between love and duty, trying to move on from the past; Bergman portrays a girl with a complicated and vulnerable life, bringing to the screen a multidimensional and intriguing character.

The way this movie interplays personal struggles among the characters with the broader tensions associated with the onset of World War II is nothing short of incredible.

While for some, no other film may be greater than this, the bittersweet ending might appear unsatisfying. It is, in fact, just this ambiguity that cements its greatness: it is a story that lingers with you, makes you wonder about the sacrifices we make in life for the greater good. *Casablanca* is a timeless testament about finding a balance between love and responsibility.

Zack L.

■

Blue Velvet

(1986, dir. David Lynch)

Belle de Jour

(1967, dir. Luis Buñuel)

Belle de Jour and *Blue Velvet* both question what it means to crave something that society criminalizes, utilizing literal objects in a story with semi-surrealistic elements to tell an overarching message on the hidden perversions of people who seemingly have all that they could ever want or need.

Belle de Jour follows Séverine (Catherine Deneuve), a seemingly content housewife, who finds herself through becoming a prostitute.

Blue Velvet, on the other hand, follows college student Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan) as he gets wrapped up in a mystery that forces him to choose between conventional girl-next-door Sandy Williams (Laura Dern) or abused



and alluring performer Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini).

Both of these films employ specific objects that signify a greater meaning to the film, relating to the choices made by the main characters. In the case of *Belle de Jour*, Séverine encounters a mysterious box while helping a strange client. While Séverine's co-workers are disgusted by the contents of the box—contents not revealed to the audience—and run out of the room, Séverine seems fascinated, and, with intrigue, takes on the mysterious client.

In *Blue Velvet*, Jeffrey comes across a severed ear in the middle of a grassy field. Presented with a red-pill/blue-pill situation, Jeffrey could continue living normally, or fall deeper and deeper into the ear's enigma, leading him to the perverse



underbelly of his town.

Both of these films use surrealist imagery: In *Belle de Jour*, Séverine is plagued with sublime nightmares that often depict her being shamed for her actions as a sex worker. The impression that these nightmares have on her are difficult to decipher: somewhere between haunting and pleasurable. In *Blue Velvet*, Jeffrey

faces similar nightmares: he sees flashes of his Dorothy, his black swan love interest, beg him to hit her. It's unclear whether he is accepting or rejecting his sadomasochism.

These films achieve deep and nuanced messaging; both left me in deep thought for days. Still, *Belle de Jour* and *Blue Velvet* are films with very open-ended interpretations, leaving much to be analyzed still.

When the door to dark opportunity is opened, it cannot be closed. When people are exposed to something that caters to their depravities, curiosity becomes a gateway to macabre experiences.

Gus P. Z.

■

Mufasa: The Lion King

(2024, dir. Barry Jenkins)

Some consider *The Lion King* Disney's greatest animated children's film. Barry Jenkins' *Mufasa: The Lion King*, an ambitious prequel, dives into the origins of lion cub Mufasa and his brother Taka (later known as Scar). While the film has moments of extreme emotional storytelling and extraordinary visuals, it ultimately struggles to capture the magic and fame of its predecessor.

The story explores Mufasa's journey from a humble cub to the wise and noble king we meet in the original film. This narrative offers insights into his character and showcases his complex relationship with Taka.

Before this film was released, Scar was known to be a notorious Disney villain, but this movie offers a whole new perspective on the emotional trauma that made him a villain. This was a major positive of the writing and scripting of this film. I enjoyed seeing both characters' backgrounds and watching childish and silly Taka become Scar.

Musically, the film is all over the place. The highly forgettable original songs by Lin-Manuel Miranda fall short of

expectations. This isn't to say they are bad, but this is nowhere close to *Moana*, *Mary Poppins Returns*, and *Encanto*. Unlike the original's incredible tracks from Elton John, these songs fail to leave a lasting impression.

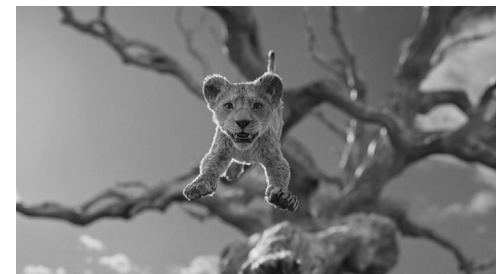
Visually, the film is stunning, but suffers from the limitations of its hyper-realistic style, massively hated during the 2019 adaptation of *The Lion King*. While technically impressive, the CGI lacks the expressiveness of traditional animation. Witnessing lions and other animals speaking with unnatural mouth movements is weird; emotions don't always translate well, creating a disconnect that dampens the film's emotional resonance.

It's hard not to imagine how much better the film could have been if it had embraced a more stylized animated approach, whether the same style of animation used in the original, or similar to recent Disney movies.

Still, despite flaws, *Mufasa: The Lion King* delivers many moments of beautiful storytelling. While *Mufasa* doesn't quite reach the heights of the original, it remains a worthy addition to Disney's legacy. It offers fans a deeper understanding of one of the most notable characters in animation history and reminds us why *The Lion King* endures.

Zack L.

■



ESSAY

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me

(1992, dir. David Lynch)

Yes, I have emphysema from my many years of smoking. I have to say that I enjoyed smoking very much, and I do love tobacco—the smell of it, lighting cigarettes on fire, smoking them—but there is a price to pay for this enjoyment, and the price for me is emphysema. I have now quit smoking for over two years. Recently I had many tests and the good news is that I am in excellent shape except for emphysema. I am filled with happiness, and I will never retire. I want you all to know that I really appreciate your concern.

Love, David

Director David Lynch's August 5th announcement on *X* reads like one of his films: tender, vaguely haunting, and not without his signature wry touch in its near-apology.

For his fans, it was a sobering reminder that the man who gave us *Twin Peaks*—a universe as enthralling as it is inscrutable—might not be here forever. A recent interview with *People*, that has Lynch reporting his reliance on an oxygen tank and inability to walk across a room, is cause for further concern. What does it mean if we lose Lynch before we ever understand *Twin Peaks*?

Because I don't think anyone understands *Twin Peaks*. Film critics reach for terms like "cerebral" and "dreamlike," which are not wrong, but fail to convey the full viewing experience of confusion, awe, discomfort, and dread. The narrative arcs only become more impenetrable with each addition to the *Twin Peaks* multiverse: the original two-season run from 1990-1991; the prequel film *Fire Walk With Me*; *The Return*, a third season released 25 years after the original; and *The Missing Pieces*, a 90-minute compilation of deleted footage.

With each addition, reality and chronology get murkier, about as comprehensible as the reversed speech of characters in the Black Lodge, a parallel-universe *Twin Peaks* location. Yet *Twin Peaks* manages to remain magnetic. Maybe it's the show's Pacific Northwest setting, its cozy appeal and stoic pine tree silhouettes.

Lynch made the region look like a dream I wished to inhabit, enough that I impulsively decided to apply to colleges in Washington state, sacrificing more of my time to supplemental essays I never had to write.

In what I deem the current hellscape of endless, mindless *Netflix* originals displaying the same hyper-stylized, aggressively modernized aesthetic of a *Target* ad, there's real appeal in nostalgia. I resent the high-res cameras which yield an uncanny sharpness in the faces on my screens, the forced edginess of high-school dramas, the tech-fetishism when text messages appear as huge, glowing overlays across the entire frame.

I'm not alone in this rejection.

In clothing, there's an observable shift in popularity from the tech-forward aesthetics pre-2016 (my best estimate) to a faux-vintage. Emoji and galaxy-print

leggings have given way to a curated grunginess: frayed hems, oversized clothes, jeans from thrift stores (or bought in 90's inspired cuts, pre-distressed from Urban Outfitters), and resurgence of "Y2K" styles.

A pre-2016 vision of neon futurism, as embodied by high-school boys decked in slime-green Nike shorts and t-shirts, faces extinction. Nineties styles are popular, but the sentimentality isn't era-specific: on the internet, I've observed middle-schoolers praising the 1950's housewife aesthetics of "trad-wife" social media influencers, whose videos of airbrushed-but-traditional-to-an-extreme homemaker lifestyles (think churning butter in frilly pastel aprons and a full face of makeup) attract millions of followers.

Film and Polaroid photography are mainstream, no longer reserved for the pretentious.

This wider cultural craving for nostalgia could explain a small part of why *Twin Peaks* resonates so deeply. The show's hazy, vintage ambience—its old-school diner, cherry pie motif, dimly lit roads—offers a tactile, analog refuge in a digital age plagued by sterile perfection. It feels lived-in, human, and familiar, comforting in spite of the show's dark themes. Small-town America, as shot on 35mm film, feels like an antidote to the soulless churn of a lot of modern TV.

It's also why I fear a comeback. Though it retains a cult-following of cinephiles on platforms like *Letterboxd*, most of my friends have never heard of it. I'd prefer it stayed this way, my sense of individuality intact.

Regardless of how much draw it has, Lynch doesn't rely upon sentimentality. He lets viewers sink into the idyllic facade of the town, then undermines it with a shockwave of violence and surrealism. This disjunct is central to the murder of *Twin Peaks* resident Laura Palmer, around which the entire series is based.

I was initially skeptical of how Laura's narrative plays into the cultural obsession with dead women—particularly the young and beautiful. The deaths of Marilyn Monroe and Princess Diana have been mined for TV content and endless voyeuristic speculation. In true-crime and fiction, cameras linger on the brutalized bodies of young women, extracting the attention of desensitized audiences by showing increasingly graphic violence. And 17-year old Laura is the archetypal victim: blonde homecoming queen who is viciously killed at the hands of a man. While her story could easily be reduced to a lurid trope, Lynch deserves credit for refusing to let her rest in that role with the complexity in *Fire Walk With Me*. Beneath the All-American veneer perceived by her neighbors and peers, Laura is revealed as messy, dark, and deeply flawed. She is not "good" in the traditional saintly sense, a virginal martyr; she is human, and her suffering, revealed in excruciating layers, feels agonizingly real.

Fire Walk With Me obliterates any romanticized notions of Laura from the TV series. While the show opens with the discovery of Laura's dead body, *Fire Walk With Me* is a prequel depicting her final days. It's my favorite work in Lynch's catalog. I most recently saw the film on Father's Day, at The Paris Theater. The Paris has brief guest introductions: directors, actors, critics, professors. I can't remember who spoke, but he joked about what depraved perverts we the audience were, seeing such a depressing film defined by familial abuse on this holiday. Used to being called perverts for enjoying art, we cinephiles laughed.

It was my third time watching the movie, but my first time seeing it in a theater.

Given how much the film means to me, this event carried a religious gravity. The 35mm restoration bathed the screen in the kind of warm fuzz that makes the Pacific Northwest look otherworldly. Watching Sheryl Lee's Laura unravel under the weight of abuse was devastating, her staggering performance capturing hurt, paranoia, and heartbreaking naivete. Angelo Badalamenti's score—the dreamy (nightmarish?) piano of "Laura's Theme," with its emotional swells—tore through me.

Fire Walk With Me reveals the details of Laura's murder, an event which is an effective abstraction throughout the show. While the show centers the investigation of her death and scrutinizes its details, we are given only the crime scene and aftermath. The actual event isn't shown until *Fire Walk With Me*. As she is killed, Laura lets out a scream so guttural and animalistic that I'll remember it forever. It's not just a scream; it's a purging of everything she's endured. Her death feels almost relieving, an end to her suffering.

Lynch substantiates this morbid peace in the film's final scene. Laura sits in the Red Room: an extradimensional location which recurs throughout the series, inhabited by various nonhuman entities and the occasional human character who becomes entangled with these forces. Special Agent Dale Cooper, the FBI agent who investigated Laura's death, stands beside her, his hand on her shoulder. The pair does not speak; he knows Laura but she does not know him. Gradually, Laura's face becomes illuminated by a glowing blue light; the camera pans to a glowing angel, suspended in the air. Laura begins to cry, and then laugh. The synths of Badalamenti's "The Voice of Love" crescendo; it's what I can only hope heaven sounds like. As Laura weeps, smiling, the camera pans out and the screen fades to black. In the series, her death is the central tragedy; in the film, her life. After *Fire Walk With Me*, audiences realize the farce they were sold by Laura's friends, family, and the Twin Peaks police department: her death may have been their tragedy, but for her it was release.

Where the show gently cracks at the town's collective ideal of her, the movie demolishes it entirely. Through photographs and friends' recollections, the TV series shows viewers how Laura's community remembered her—her beautiful smile and bubbly demeanor, her volunteer service for *Meals on Wheels*. In *Fire Walk With Me*, Laura is all that: dynamic, charismatic, but in need of help. The audience feels guilty with their knowledge that it won't arrive in time. The postmortem mythology her town constructs of her virtues is too little, too late— it serves only to salve their conscience and to divert their fascination, continuing involvement with her in the only way possible.

During her life, so many people laid claim to Laura— as a friend or sex object or otherwise. She was an enigma who everyone wanted proximity to. Laura's consumption continues and is exacerbated during the show, in her new appraisal as subject of obsession: police investigation evidence and martyr. In life and in death, Laura cannot escape from all those who seek to understand her and have a piece of her in their own lives— us viewers included.

Sophie G.

David Lynch
1946-2025



MOVIE SUMMARIES

La Chimera

(2024, dir. Alice Rohrwacher)

The mythical meets the visceral as an archaeologist falls in with a crowd of tomb raiders in a labyrinthine tale of love, loss, history, and memory. Against the breathtaking backdrop of Tuscany, Josh O'Connor's nuanced, emotionally resonant performance of heartbreak blends brilliantly with subtle surrealist elements; a love story without being saccharine, a rumination on historicization and capitalism without being overly intellectual. -oe

Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga

(2024, dir. George Miller)

Furiosa, a young girl taken away from her family, wants revenge as she goes through a bunch a mayhem. A sci-fi action movie you start to get more into it as it goes on. -la

The Substance

(2024, dir. Coralie Fargeat)

Aging fitness video star discovers shocking side effects of using a supernatural bright-green injection to maintain her beauty and relevance in Hollywood. A deliberately provocative grotesquerie of double-sided eyeballs and squelches of goo, never shying away from campiness and gross-outs, *The Substance* leans into the absurdity that makes body horror great to skewer ever-intensifying beauty standards. -oe

Smile 2

(2024, dir. Parker Finn)

A girl named Skye Riley encounters an entity. An outstanding movie with some amazing acting, great practical effects, great twists, and spectacular horror elements. The creepy feeling while watching really gets you deep in the film. -la

Scott Pilgrim vs. The World

(2010, dir. Edgar Wright)

Scott Pilgrim, living an average life in Canada, starts having a dream of a girl with pink hair. Scott finally meets the girl, but, in order for them to date, he has to defeat her 7 evil exes. Based on a comic book by Bryan Lee O'Malley in a videogame art style with great music and visuals. -la

Home Alone 2: Lost in New York

(1992, dir. Chris Columbus)

When Kevin loses track of his dad in the airport, he finds himself following a stranger, and gets on the wrong plane. While his whole family gets on a plane to Las Vegas, he gets on the one to New York. Because he got his father's credit card and is living lavishly in one of the best hotels in NYC, Kevin seems chill about everything. Later, Kevin notices two familiar faces and immediately knows what he has to do. -dp

Get Out

(2017, dir. Jordan Peele)

Sometimes it's best to listen to that gut feeling. Chris and Rose, an interracial couple, reach the stage in their relationship where they are ready to meet one another's parents. Chris is skeptical about meeting her white family. Surrounded by a lot of white people in upstate N.Y. gives him an uneasy feeling, and leads him to discovering things. -dp

Hot Tub Time Machine

(2010, dir. Steve Pink)

4 friends take a trip to the ski lodge 3 of them went to as teenagers but discover, after a wild and fun night, that the hot tub they were partying in is actually a time machine. Now the 4 of them need to find out how to fix the time machine in order to get back to the future. This sci-fi comedy is a funny movie with a good adventure. -la

	Erlinda	Gus	Dionne	Sophie	Olive	Zack	Khloe	Saskia	Ledy	Rachel	Avg.
No Fear, No Die Claire Denis	★★	★★★	★	★★★	★★★	-	★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★★
The Fisher King Terry Gilliam	★★★	-	★★★	-	-	★★★	★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★★
Flow Gints Zilbalodis	★★★	★★	★★	-	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★
Emilia Perez Jacques Audiard	★	-	★★	★	-	-	★★	★★	★★	★★	★★
High School Frederick Wiseman	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★	★★	-	★★	★★★

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