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Dear Readers

I am proud to present the third issue of CRASH/CUT, the University of Calgary Undergraduate Film Journal. CRASH/CUT harnesses the energy and passion of undergraduate film studies students to promote and renew discussions about cinema and media arts. Just as the crash (or smash) cut draws its power from a juxtaposition of great difference, CRASH/CUT benefits from the exciting diversity of topics within the field of film studies, and, just as importantly, from the exciting diversity of perspectives present within the undergraduate student body. The papers comprising this, and all, issues of CRASH/CUT were written for undergraduate film classes taught at the University of Calgary. By providing a platform for undergraduate film writers, CRASH/CUT hopes to awaken readers to new and different discourses within the field of film studies, and, to highlight the excellent scholarship conducted by students in the field at the University of Calgary.

This issue of CRASH/CUT features six essays. In the first, “Makeup, YouTube, and Amateur Media in the Twenty-First Century”, Tianna Fischer explores the intersection of amateur media, commerce, and art by focusing on the genre of web video known as beauty vlogs.

In the second essay, “It’s Even Better This Way”: Why a Male Reviewer of the 1940s would Find His Girl Friday’s Hildy a Problematic Portrayal of a Working Woman”, Melanie Radford deconstructs the text of Frank Nugent’s harsh 1940 review of Howard Hawks’s film His Girl Friday, revealing problematic assumptions about the status of women implicit in the review.

In the third essay (my own), “No More Va-Va-Voom: The Automobile in Kiss Me Deadly”, I examine the portrayal of automobiles in Robert Aldrich’s film Kiss Me Deadly, paying particular attention to how these portrayals fit within the bizarre thematic impulses of the film.

In the fourth essay, “Drawing Audiences for Gold Diggers of 1933”, Zoe Sherman conducts a concise analysis of newspaper reviews of Gold Diggers of 1933, identifying several characteristics which may have helped contribute to the film’s success.

In the fifth essay, “The Contrast of Tim Burton: The Success of a Stylist”, Jennifer Caswell uses an auteurist approach to examine the films of Tim Burton,
identifying his narrative and stylistic pre-occupations as symptomatic of his success as a stylist, but not as an auteur.

Finally, in the sixth essay, ““Two Things at Once”: *Sherlock, Jr.* as Typical and Atypical within 1920s Hollywood”, Jet McCullough draws from local newspaper articles to argue that *Sherlock, Jr.*’s rapturous critical reception, which largely hinged upon the film’s uniqueness, masked the ways in which the film fit within the burgeoning Hollywood industrial system.

The release of this issue could not have been accomplished without the help of my colleagues at the University of Calgary Film Society, as well as the support of the Film Studies Program. Of course, the issue would also not be possible without the authors. If you would like to submit a paper for consideration for the next issue of CRASH/CUT, or if you would like to help out in its production, please send an inquiry to ucfilmjournal@gmail.com or visit the offices of the University of Calgary Film Society in room SS200. And finally, the journal would not be possible without you, the reader. I hope that you will find within these pages something valuable and exciting, and continue to support the development of this wonderful field of film studies.

Sincerely,

Kevin Dong,
Editorial Board Chair,
CRASH/CUT
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YouTube is an incredibly rich, diverse, and popular site of amateur media practice. Roughly one hundred hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute, featuring a wide variety of content. One popular type of video on YouTube is what I shall refer to in this essay as a “beauty vlog.” In these videos, vloggers (typically young women and girls), sometimes referred to as “beauty gurus” (especially the more prominent ones), give makeup tutorials, review cosmetic products, share their skincare routines, and so on. These videos give us an interesting perspective on the position of amateurs in light of the contemporary changing media landscape, what Lev Manovich refers to as “Web 2.0”\(^1\). They also constitute a unique type of amateur media production, where a kind of “how-to” functionality intersects with aesthetics and entertainment. However, they are also strongly tied to a commodity culture, and this has been recognized by the fashion and beauty industries, which have increasingly co-opted this practice for their own ends. These videos are thus a noteworthy example of the position of media produced by amateurs in light of the changing media landscape of the twenty-first century.

Four of the top one hundred most subscribed-to channels on YouTube are beauty vlogs from around the world, including those of Michelle Phan (username “MichellePhan”) and Bethany Mota (“Macbarbie07”) from the United States, Zoe Sugg (“Zoella”) from the U.K., and Mariand Castrejon (“Yuya”) from Mexico. Castrejon’s channel has the second highest number of subscribers in her country. This suggests that this type of channel has a significant presence on YouTube. Scanning through the comment sections on any of these users’ videos, one sees a number of commenters advertising their own channels and videos, evidence that this practice is not limited to the select few popular “beauty gurus”, but that it is widespread.

The vlog style of video typically features a person seated in front of the camera and speaking directly to the viewer. The medium thus does not require much in the way of costly equipment or technological proficiency. The most basic videos require only a computer with a webcam, an Internet connection, and perhaps some basic editing software (such as iMovie). The accessibility of the means to produce a vlog has no doubt contributed the popularity and widespread produc-

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tion of videos in this format. Furthermore, Lev Manovich observes that, due to the “long-tail phenomenon” of cultural consumption, “most of the content available online – including content produced by amateurs – finds an audience. These audiences can be tiny, but they are not zero”2. That there is an audience for these videos likely encourages their production.

It is also important to understand these videos as being representative of the shift from “media” to “social media”. The vlog style is communicative, with the people onscreen interacting directly with their viewers. Vloggers will often end their videos with a question for others to answer in the comments, or take requests for video content from audiences. Vloggers also interact with each other through their videos. Occasionally, beauty vloggers will circulate “tags”, where they produce video content based on a certain shared premise, or a set of questions, that everyone participating in the tag will follow. Examples include the “My Boyfriend Does My Makeup” tag (where vloggers must make a video with their boyfriend applying their makeup), or the “Colours of the Rainbow” tag (where the vlogger shares a favourite product for each colour of the rainbow). The phenomenon of “tags” indicates that these vloggers are not just producing content in a closed system, with a standard kind of relationship between producers and consumers of the media, but are producing these videos as part of an interactive community. Beauty vlog channels are also often a part of the vloggers broader social media brand, including written blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts.

Many of these videos are instructive, teaching viewers how to create a certain makeup look or master a certain technique. They serve a clear practical purpose, but can we also regard them as aesthetic objects? We might look at these videos in terms of the task that John Dewey proposes in “Art as Experience”, to “restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience”3. According to Dewey, the “intelligent mechanic engaged in his job, interested in doing well and finding satisfaction in his handiwork, caring for his materials and tools with genuine affection, is artistically engaged”4. A young girl taking care to applying her makeup, blending her foundation seamlessly into her skin, painstakingly perfecting the lines on her eyes and lips, is similarly engaged. Dewey writes of “the zest of the spectator in poking the wood burning on the hearth and in watching the darting flames”, who “would say he did it to make the fire burn better; but he is none the less fascinated by the colourful drama of change enacted before his eyes and imaginatively partakes in it”5. Beauty videos hold a similar fascination. Though the intention behind such videos may be instruction, there is still something aesthetically fascinating about simply observing the process. The application of makeup is its own “colourful drama of change”. These videos present these everyday activities and experiences for our observation, thus focusing our attention on their aesthetically interesting qualities, whether or not this was their original intent.

2  Ibid., 320.
4  Ibid., 4.
5  Ibid., 3.
Promise Phan (or “dope2111”, sister-in-law of YouTube’s most popular beauty guru, Michelle Phan) creates unusual make-up tutorial videos that showcase this “drama of change”. Phan uses her considerable make-up skills to transform her face entirely so that she resembles celebrities or characters from movies, video games, or cartoons (see fig. 1). In her videos, she demonstrates the process she uses to achieve these looks step-by-step. She demonstrates how she uses makeup to change her skin tone, reshape her lips, contour her nose, and so on, gradually achieving dramatic transformations. These videos are extreme examples of the aesthetic and entertainment value of make-up tutorial videos extending beyond their practical purposes. These tutorials would be of little use to most people, except perhaps for a Halloween costume, but they are still extremely popular (her channel has nearly two million subscribers, and her most popular video has over twenty million views). This suggests that their appeal is not just as instructional videos, but also as spectacle. It is fascinating to watch Phan’s clever manipulation of her facial features, and to see her drastic transformations take shape, one step at a time.

Michael Owen Jones’s writing on “The Aesthetics of Everyday Life” may also prove useful for discussing beauty vlogs. Jones argues that much of our everyday behaviour is aesthetic “in that we strive to perfect form in some of the endeavours in which we engage because of the sensory pleasure and intellectual satisfaction of doing so, the compliments received, the self-image generated and reinforced, the enhancement of utility, the transformation of the quotidian; in a word, the creation of something ‘special’”6. Such everyday activities as applying make-up, getting dressed, or styling one’s hair all have certain aesthetic qualities. Even when they are not as unusual as Promise Phan’s videos, by filming their beauty rituals, beauty vloggers turn their everyday aesthetic activities into aesthetic objects.

A popular type of tutorial video on beauty vlogs is “Get Ready With Me” videos. These videos show the vloggers’ routines as they get ready in the morning, get ready for an event (such as “Date Night” or “New Year’s Eve”), or get ready for bed. These videos are interesting demonstrations of everyday aesthetics, showcasing the vlogger’s daily rituals. One example of such a video is “Get Ready With Me!

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My Morning Routine” by popular beauty guru Elle Fowler7. The video begins with Fowler making coffee in an owl-shaped mug, followed by a shot of the toiletries on her bathroom counter, captioned “Shower Time…” The next shot is of Fowler seated in front of the camera, her hair wrapped in a towel. She applies a number of skincare and hair products, blow-dries and curls her hair, and applies her make-up. A shot of each product she is using with its name captioned at the bottom is inserted between each action. Once her hair and make-up is finished, she selects a sweater, a pair of boots, and an assortment of jewelry. Throughout Fowler’s morning routine, her activities reflect the kind of everyday aesthetics that Jones is discussing. Her choices demonstrate “style”, “creativity”, and “taste”. When putting on her jewelry, for example, she selects a number of bracelets from an immaculately organized storage case, all in a matching rose-gold tone. When she is finished with her make-up and hair, she checks her reflection in her phone, then looks at the camera and smiles, indicating a “positive aesthetic response” (which involves “an absorption with the object” and produces “pleasure [and] satisfaction”8). Having followed her through the “getting ready” process, the video provokes a similar “positive aesthetic response” in the viewer once we see her finished look at the end of the video. The video is also well-lit, with nicely composed shots, and filmed with a high definition camera, making it even more aesthetically pleasing.

While beauty vlogs may have some aesthetic value, they are also entrenched in a culture of consumerism. Vloggers specify the brand and product names of everything they use in their tutorials. Some of the video content on these vlogs is centred entirely on the products themselves. Examples include product reviews, where vloggers give their opinions on a product and sometimes show what it looks like when they are wearing it, and “Favourites” videos (often done periodically –

8 Jones, “Aesthetics of Everyday Life”, 49.
these videos have titles like “October Favourites” and “Spring Favourites”), where the vlogger lists their favourite beauty products. Most beauty vloggers, especially the higher profile ones, have huge collections of cosmetics, and are constantly buying more (their videos depend on it). Some vloggers make “Empties” videos, where they talk about products they have used up and show off the empty bottles, tubes, and jars (the premise of these videos is that it is unusual to use up a product in its entirety, especially if one has a large collection, therefore the “empties” must be especially good products). It is also extremely common for vloggers to make “Haul” videos, where they show off their recent purchases, usually consisting of a large number of items.

There are practical reasons for these vloggers to put so much emphasis on the products they are using. For one, it allows viewers who wish to follow the tutorials to do so accurately. The vlogs also serve the function of helping their viewers make informed choices when buying products. It is practically unavoidable for the vloggers, for whom beauty is a hobby, to become frequent consumers of cosmetic products, and, perhaps inadvertently, to encourage their viewers to do the same.

Some of the content on these vlogs can be described in terms of Michel de Certeau’s categories of “strategies used by institutions and power structures” and “tactics used by modern subjects in their everyday lives… [to] negotiate strategies that were set for them”.9 Lev Manovich explains,

As de Certeau points out, in modern societies most of the objects that people use in their everyday lives are mass-produced goods; these goods are the expressions of designers, producers, and marketers. People build their worlds and identities out of these readily available objects by using different tactics: bricolage, assembly, customization, and … remix.10

The practice of making these videos, and some of the practices that the videos show, might be considered “tactics”. By participating in this community of amateur videos, these young women (whether they are producing these videos, just watching them, or both) are, in a way, taking their consumption and use of these products into their own hands. These videos present a kind of alternative to the strategies presented by magazines and advertisements. Rather than relying on these sources to tell them which products to buy and how to use them, these young women are consulting and informing each other. The videos often also feature uses of the products in ways that are tactical – mixing together two different shades of foundation to create a colour closer to the user’s skin tone, suggesting cheap, drugstore “dupes” (a term that describes products that are nearly the same as each other, short for “duplicates”) for high-end, department store brands, or sometimes adapting products that aren’t intended for cosmetic purposes at all (using the edge of a spoon as a guide for applying eyeliner, making a scrub to smooth chapped lips out of sugar and oils).

But, as Manovich points out, in recent years, “companies have developed...

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9  Manovich, “Practice of Everyday (Media) Life”, 322.
10  Ibid.
strategies that mimic people's tactics”\textsuperscript{11}. The beauty and fashion industries have taken notice of these vloggers, and have co-opted their tactics to serve their own ends. Companies have started sending products to beauty vloggers to feature in their videos. Zoe Sugg’s blog features the following disclaimer:

As of March 16th 2012, any items that have been gifted, sent or given to me at a press event from a PR company in consideration for a product review, will be marked with an asterix [sic]. (*) Before now, I have always informed you which products I did not pay for, but this method is a lot easier. I will always give my 100% honest opinion on any product that I feature. Subsequently, if I believe a product is no good, I won’t feature it or I will tell you why it has disappointed me. My opinion will never be biased or swayed by any PR relationship.\textsuperscript{12}

In 2009, \textit{Seventeen} magazine began recruiting a number of beauty gurus from YouTube (including Michelle Phan, Elle Fowler, and a number of others) to create video tutorials for the magazine’s website and be featured in the print version. In \textit{Seventeen}, the beauty gurus featured are called “Beauty Smarties”. The magazine’s website advertises their “Beauty Smartie” videos with the tagline “They teach millions how to create cool looks on YouTube, but they’re saving their best tricks just for you!\textsuperscript{13}”, and describes the videos as featuring advice from “real girls”. The videos resemble the amateur videos that appear on YouTube, employing a vlog-style aesthetic and shot in the girls’ homes.

In 2010, Lancôme approached Michelle Phan to become their “first-ever video makeup artist”, to create “special videos, among other responsibilities”. Phan’s profile on the brand’s website includes this description:

Michelle is a self-taught makeup artist who transformed her favorite hobby into something that has inspired people around the world. She made her very first video, “Natural Looking Makeup Tutorial,” in Spring 2007 and uploaded it to YouTube that May. Since then, she has created and posted more than 80 videos, each filmed and edited by Michelle alone, using her JVC camcorder and the iMovie software on her MacBook Pro.\textsuperscript{14}

The way these companies advertise these vloggers emphasizes their amateur status. By employing popular beauty vloggers, the companies to advertise to young women in a format they have come to understand as presenting honest advice from their peers, lending a certain degree of credibility. The vloggers also come with their own built-in audiences. The cultural tactics of the young women who

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 324.
engage with these videos have been “turned into strategies now sold to them”15.

Beauty vloggers are a unique example of the kind of issues surrounding am-
ateur media production in the twenty-first century. They reflect the different styles
and implications of new technology, and the changing media landscape of Web
2.0, YouTube, and “social media”. Their videos are also aesthetic objects, displaying
common experience and the everyday (as well as, occasionally, the unusual) as
a kind of art. However, these videos are also incredibly commodity driven. The
fashion and beauty industries have recognized this, and have co-opted the unique
authority and tactics of these amateurs and turned them into strategies. Thus,
the position of amateur media producers in the twenty-first century is one that is
fraught with issues, of which the videos of beauty vloggers are a prime example.

15 Manovich, “Practice of Everyday (Media) Life”, 324.
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Image References:


“It's Even Better This Way”?: Why a Male Reviewer of the 1940s would Find *His Girl Friday* a Problematic Portrayal of a Working Woman

Melanie Radford

Director Howard Hawks … didn’t have two men to read a scene between editor Walter Burns and ace reporter Hildy Johnson. He gave Hildy’s lines to his secretary, then announced, ‘It’s even better this way.’ He got Hecht’s blessing on the altered version, and the two started working on the script in 1939.1

*His Girl Friday*, one of four film adaptations of the hit stage play *The Front Page*, was the first adaptation to make the role of Hildy into a female lead. An initial review of the film in the January 12, 1940 edition of the *New York Times* was not very engaged or enthusiastic about this new twist2. Reviewer Frank Nugent’s statements seem to stem more from issues of gender surrounding the film than its overall quality. I argue that this is because the reviewer was a man who found the film problematic for its portrayal of a strong working woman. The film obviously struggles with balancing the submissive and subversive character of Hildy Johnson in the story. It is understandable that reviewer might struggle with a threateningly feminized version of the newspaper world of which he was a part.

Although women had entered the work force during WWI, they did not find a lasting place there until several decades after WWII. At the end of WWI most women were sent back to their pre-war jobs or domestic life. Information from the National Archives shows that:

> There were a variety of attitudes towards women in the work force. Some thought they should only have jobs that men didn’t want while others felt women should give up their jobs so unemployed men could have a job, especially during the Great Depression.3

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The result of these attitudes was that women did not have a comfortable place in the workforce when *His Girl Friday* was released in 1940. According to Thompson and Bordwell, early screwball comedies examined “contemporary social problems”. This film in particular seems to be engaging in a discourse about the place of women in the workforce.

*His Girl Friday* enters this discourse through its portrayal of spunky newspaperwoman Hildy Johnson, who is at a crossroads in her life professionally and personally. Miller suggests that “the working woman’s battle to balance career and marriage was a staple of Hollywood filmmaking at the time”. Hildy expresses a desire to give up her career, to settle down and to have children, and initially it seems like her future may be in the domestic sphere. In her book *The American Success Myth on Film* Julie Levinson notes “the repressive, conservative strain in these movies, most of which remind women that their true career is romantic and maternal love”. Levinson claims the movies are reaffirming a male-dominated workplace by “providing [female] viewers with escape, freedom, release and then telling them they shouldn’t want such things; they won’t work; they’re all wrong”. Hildy is lured by a juicy story; by the end of the film we know that she will not sacrifice her career for domesticity. On the surface this seems to reject Levinson’s theory and encourage a feminist understanding of the film.

However, the structure of the relationship between Walter Burns and Hildy Johnson (Carey Grant and Rosalind Russell respectively) prevents this film from becoming subversive. We know that Walter and Hildy had been married and divorced previously. Thus the backstory that Hildy was a working woman at a newspaper is immediately subdued by the consideration that her boss was her husband. Working under him means that any work Hildy did fell directly under her husband’s control. He decided to let her work by giving her a story. This is a reassuring idea for men who are threatened by the presence of women in the workplace. Although Walter and Hildy are divorced by the time the film starts, they are getting remarried by the end. Hildy is unable to break away and become independent of a man, to either form her own decisions or find her own way in life. Essentially the film is about her choosing between two men. The truth is revealed that regardless of whether she is going to be seditious by working, she should be married when she does it. Levinson comments on the tendency that we see with Hildy, that “the professional woman comports herself with confidence and competence. Nonetheless (or perhaps as a result) she gets put in her place by film’s end”. Is Hildy going to work on the Albany Strike story during the honeymoon, or is Walter? It is unclear. What is clear is that Hildy’s defiance throughout the film is reversed by her final submission to Walter’s domination.

New York Times reviewer Frank Nugent was dismissive of *His Girl Friday*

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5 Miller, “Why *His Girl Friday*”.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
in his review published January 12, 1940. The title of the article called it “A Distaff Edition of “The Front Page””. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “distaff” relates to ancient spinning, thus a “type of women’s work or occupation” which then “symbolically” stands in “for the female sex”9. It is borderline derogatory to use this term, outdated even in the twentieth century, to refer to the fact that this movie is either for or about women. Nugent’s opening to the review asserts “they’ve replated “The Front Page” again, have slapped “His Girl Friday” on the masthead and are running it off at the Music Hall as a special woman’s edition of the frenzied newspaper comedy”10. His comments classifying it as “a special woman’s edition” are trivializing. The review encourages male readers to devalue His Girl Friday and assume that it is not worth their time.

This movie was extremely popular in its day despite its potentially controversial depiction of a woman in the newspaper world. It is likely that “female audiences of the time engaged in at least a fleeting thrill of identification with professionally capable women” seen in the film11. Levinson claims that the end provides a “false sense of closure” because the “tacked on ending … attempt[s] to contradict what has come before” in order to make it less threatening for a mainstream audience. She argues that it “cannot and do[es] not erase the libratory behaviour of the spirited heroines of screwball comedies”12. If there is libratory behaviour that cannot be dismissed by the “abrupt restoration of social order” it may explain why a male reviewer of the time would have difficulty reviewing a film with a character like Hildy at its heart.

Nugent does not praise His Girl Friday for Russell’s portrayal of Hildy – a role that made her a star – or the innovative female Hildy character as a whole. It is unusual that he would not comment on them in this review because by his own admission what makes this adaptation of “The Front Page” so different is the creation of a female lead. Russell’s only mention in this article is actually a compliment to the screenwriter. Nugent writes “Charles Lederer … has transposed [the play] so brilliantly it is hard to believe that Hecht and MacArthur were not thinking of Rosalind Russell, or someone equally high-heeled, when they wrote about … Hildy Johnson”13. This says nothing of Russell’s contribution to the role, only the male writer’s adaptation of the work of other male writers. Elsewhere in the article the roles played by Cary Grant and Ralph Bellamy are specifically commented upon, and five other male characters are called “faces that stand out”14. Yet Russell is treated as a stand-in for the character that could be played by anyone “equally high-heeled”. Incidentally, Hecht was the first writer to work on the script that made Hildy Johnson a woman. Nugent simply assumes that the original play writers would not want a woman in their story. There seems to be an obvious division along gender lines in his review of this film’s characters and the actors that

11 Levinson, American Success Myth, 116.
12 Ibid., 115.
14 Ibid.
Melanie Radford

Nugent’s comments about the dialogue also seem to be related to the portrayal of gender. He describes the film’s changes to the original dialogue as “cute”. It is patronizing to the film because he is suggesting that the play was more intelligent or serious than what the film is now with a female lead. This may have gender connotations since “cute” is certainly not a masculine word. Nugent says “you can’t hear many” of these “cute” lines “because everyone is making too much noise” including “the players themselves”\(^{15}\). Obviously Nugent can hear the lines if he can tell they are “cute”. In the scenes of the unofficial newsroom at the courthouse, Russell is easily heard above the newspapermen who often speak simultaneously and become a cacophony of voices. They are also the source of most of the other noise. Nugent may be reacting to the fact that the only clear voice is that of a woman, heard over the indistinct noise of the men. Hildy calls them a “bunch of old ladies” because they gossip about her when she leaves the room. This feminizes the newspaper men and is also an aspersion of their character. When Molly Malloy complains of her treatment by this same group, she says “they ain’t human” and Hildy responds “I know, they’re newspapermen” (emphasis added) and leaves with her. Hildy is portrayed as morally superior to the unethical newspapermen. The dialogue seems to privilege hearing newspaperwoman Hildy over the words of the newspapermen, and specific lines cast the newspapermen in an unflattering way. This interpretation leads to the idea that Nugent objects to the dialogue because of an unappealing and threateningly feminized portrayal of the newspapermen, rather than his inability to hear “cute” lines.

One of Nugent’s main comments about the film utilizes gendered language. He complains that “Hysteria is one of the communicable diseases and “His Girl Friday” is a more pernicious carrier than Typhoid Mary”\(^ {16}\). “Hysteria” is known as an emotional, and therefore primarily female, ailment. Formerly known as “vapours”, it was impossible for men to suffer from it because “it was originally thought to be due to a disturbance of the uterus and its functions”\(^ {17}\). The history of this term is a patriarchal marginalization of women’s emotion and the labelling of it as an illness. It is generally “attended with … enfeeblement or perversion of the moral and intellectual faculties”\(^ {18}\), and thus contributes to the construction of women as the weaker sex as well. This is used in conjunction with the term “Typhoid Mary”, another gendered term where one woman from history stands in for any “person who … is the source of the spread of any infectious disease or infestation”\(^ {19}\). The use of this highly gendered language is very significant in the overall context of Nugent’s review. This is just one example among many of how his review expresses opinions of gender issues brought up by the film.

It was easy for a reviewer like Nugent to write off this film as women’s en-

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
\(^{16}\) Ibid.
\(^{18}\) Ibid.
ertainment, but its enduring popularity suggests that he missed the significance of *His Girl Friday*. He was not alone in this dismissive assessment, as the film did not get any Academy Award nominations from the male-dominated Academy. I think a male newspaper man like Nugent, possibly unconsciously, found the idea of an independent newspaperwoman like Hildy Johnson problematic. It shows a newspaperwoman as superior to the newspapermen around her, and those men are also slightly feminized by the dialogue of the film. The film is working through issues about the place of women that were very significant in the social context. It came in the inter-war period: between the two eras where women necessarily dominated the workplace, at a time when men wanted women to go back to domestic life. The social context, combined with the specific comments from Nugent and the fact that he is unable to review this film without using terms that are loaded with gender implications, suggests a bias in his view. It is likely that this film's portrayal of gender and a feminized newspaper world was very threatening to a newspaperman viewing the film and this seems evident throughout Nugent's review of January 1940.
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Filmography

*His Girl Friday*. Directed by Howard Hawks. Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1940.
No More Va-Va-Voom: The Automobile in *Kiss Me Deadly*

Kevin Dong

In their definition of film noir, Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton position the film noir cycle as being constructed as a response to “a certain mood at large in this particular time and place”\(^1\). The time and place which Borde and Chaumeton were referring to were the years between 1945-55, immediately after the end of the Second World War, and the greater Western capitalist world, respectively. The critical mood which they state that filmmakers are responding to is the post-war mood of optimism, both in the dominant bourgeois institutions and in the future. Robert Aldrich’s film *Kiss Me Deadly* (USA), released in 1955, around the time when Borde and Chaumeton were writing, was perhaps the most scathing and vicious indictment of the excesses of 1950s American optimism and industrial-materialist-consumer culture. *Kiss Me Deadly*, according to James Naremore, was what Borde and Chaumeton describe as one of the swan songs of the film noir cycle, due to its use of incomprehensibility and disavowal of generic conventions\(^2\). The film is adapted from the pulpy Mickey Spillane novel of the same name, which concerns the rather incoherent investigation conducted by “bedroom dick” Mike Hammer into the torture and death of Christina Bailey, whose last words to Mike were “Remember me”. The film, however, takes a turn towards the surreal by introducing the plot device of the “Great Whatsit”, a small box containing apocalyptically explosive (atomic) power. By directly invoking the Cold War paranoia about the Bomb, director Robert Aldrich elevates the film beyond pulp art and infuses the film with a (perhaps slightly murky) political and cultural relevance. The politicization of the source material crystallizes around a critique of industrial-capitalistic modernity. The film not only questions the brutally masculine consumerism of Mike Hammer, but also the mechanical society in which Hammer lives: its phones, wall-mounted answering machines, radios, and most importantly, cars. Taken together, the sights, sounds, and experiences of the automobile, perhaps the most prominent and idealized symbol of American industrial modernity, are appropriated by Robert Aldrich in *Kiss Me Deadly* in order

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to emphasize the fragility and meaninglessness of post-war American life.

The immediate post-World War II economic boom in the United States was fueled, in large part, by the rapidly expanding automobile industry. As a group of some the most important firms involved in the manufacture of wartime machinery, the automobile industry was well-positioned for economic success at war’s end as the government’s risky but profitable contracts forced the country’s industrial base to become more efficient and productive. Thus, in the transition from wartime manufacturing to peace-time manufacturing, the automobile industry had the benefit of already having in place a capacity to mass produce its products on a greater scale than before the war. At the same time, returning soldiers, having relinquished their freedoms (to act independently, to buy, to consume) for the sake of war, were eager to return to America and return to their old way of life. Those who stayed at home were also denied the ability to spend, as goods were rationed as part of the war effort. Thus, part of the post-war optimism derived from the fact that Americans could once again buy things, or consume. These two factors, an increased capacity to manufacture, and an increased willingness to consume, resulted in an economic recovery in America based not on reconstruction, as in Europe or Japan, but on mass consumption. This consumption is rooted in the idea that material things, especially those which one possesses, could be used as determinants of one’s social identity. Thus, consumption revolves around the desire of “more”, as possessing “more” meant that one had money, influence, and secure self-identity; the automobile was a product which was able to provide these “mores”. The automobile provided more freedom, as it enabled people to travel whenever and wherever they pleased. The automobile also provided more space, as it enabled consumers to live in the expanding suburbs, where more space was available at a cheaper price. Because of the increased capacity to produce automobiles, the price of automobiles was lowered, and these same “mores”, which were available only to the well off before the war, was now available to a much greater segment of the population. The automobile became the consummate symbol of the new American modernity and consumerism.

In *Kiss Me Deadly*, one major thematic concern is the vapidity and meaninglessness of consumer culture. This concern is primarily framed through the film’s status as an adaptation of a Mickey Spillane novel. As Peter Stanfield notes, to many observers, a Mickey Spillane novel was the epitome of meaningless consumption and the tastelessness of popular culture. As a Hollywood adaptation of a Mickey Spillane novel, the film seems to be the very product it purportedly criticizes. However, unlike the Spillane novel, the film, importantly has a critical

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self-awareness. The book’s main draw of righteous violence and tantalizing sexuality, when translated by Aldrich to the screen, result in an amplified sense of incoherence. However, because the film is still dominated by the economic imperatives of Hollywood, it could only be as subversive within the bounds of the generic expectation. The draws of Spillane’s work – the violence, the misogyny, the lowbrow content – were still essential to the film’s function, and could not be explicitly examined. Thus, the film’s critique of the hollowness of consumer culture had to be negotiated indirectly through the use and appropriation of the symbols of American modernity, of which the most potent and appropriate symbol is the automobile.

What the imagery of the car represented to consumers was a material manifestation of American-style individualism. Brands, as Celia Lury describes, are a way for marketers to differentiate between similar products, and to ascribe meanings to the product apart from its material, functional utility. The extent to which cars were seen to signify different expressions of individuality is apparent in the creation and propagation of different brands and models. The most apparent example is General Motors, which owned different brands targeted at specific and generally non-competing segments of the market. A Cadillac, for example, evoked a certain type of high-class sophistication which was different from the more populist and utilitarian tones of a Buick; both brands were owned by the General Motors company. Because the automobile was positioned by advertising as an extension of self, the semiotic distinctions between the brands and makes of cars were reapplied to expressions of individuality. Each model and brand of car thus was expressive of different values and images. In the optimistic and highly consumptive post-war era, the automobile, thus, became a fetishized object. This is apparent in the way enthusiastic discourse about automobiles began to use terms like “curves”, “wheels”, or “engines”; these were the “unique” parts of the automobile which could distinguish it from other automobiles. However, while the symbolic and mythicized image of the automobile was presented as the culmination of capitalist individuality, the reality was that every individual vehicle was but one of many identical others, mass-manufactured in hyper-efficient assembly lines.

In Kiss Me Deadly, the cars which Mike Hammer drives and owns are visually differentiated from (almost) every other car in the film. Hammer drives exclusively two-seater convertibles; at various points in the film, Hammer drives his own Jaguar convertible, Nick’s MG convertible, and Dr. Soberin’s “gifted” Corvette convertible. Significantly, nobody else in the film (except for Friday, Carl Evello’s sister) drives a convertible, not even the flashy gangsters, nor even in the background of any of the shots. This decision was most likely utilitarian in nature: A convertible is flashy and easily distinguishable from other cars, and thus, is a convenient visual shorthand for Hammer’s character (not to mention it is probably easier to mount a camera on the back of a convertible than on the back of a hard-
However, while this decision was probably made more on utilitarian grounds than on stylistic grounds, the choice to use convertibles as Hammer's automotive avatar fits into the film's thematic impulse to examine the meanings and assumptions inherent to consumer objects. Convertibles, particularly the Corvette model convertible which Hammer is “gifted” by Soberin, are perhaps the purest automotive signifiers of the values of independence, freedom, and adventure\(^{11}\)

The lack of a top portion allowed the driver to “experience” the speed, feeling the wind through one's hair (or mustache, in Nick's case). However, the convertible car, as re-contextualized in Kiss Me Deadly, becomes both a material and metaphorical extension of Hammer, reflecting his crude, materialistic, and obnoxiously loud character. The image of Hammer's crassly expensive Corvette cruising around the slightly run-down, obviously lower-class Bunker Hill neighbourhood in Los Angeles seems, at best, insensitive, and at worst, a meanly narcissistic projection of Hammer's material prosperity. The original “meanings” of convertibles, thus, are revealed to be merely transitory and are replaced by the film's own constructed meaning.

The visual irony of commodified individualism is present in the seemingly minor insert shots of Los Angeles streets. When Mike looks out of the window of his apartment out to the street to see if anybody is watching him, the film cuts to a long, high angle shot over his shoulder looking at the street below. There is considerable traffic, moving along at a constant pace. The motion of the cars traveling neatly in their lanes, framed from a high angle at an extreme distance from the street, evokes the pattern in which ants, that least individualistic of animals, travels. By equating the automobiles, and the people inside, to insects, the film implicitly attributes a sense of insignificance to them. The fact that each car is supposedly a representation of individual identity is lost at such a distance. Additionally, when Hammer parks in front of the Hollywood Athletic Club during midday, the shot is recorded on location on a real street, looking down the street. As Hammer parks, the lane of traffic beside him continues to flow with a series of typical commuter cars, never ceasing. Hammer's car is set apart from the other cars, as they continue driving at a constant rate, monotonously and anonymously passing by. The cars here, set against the backdrop of a commercial street, beset by commercial signs for Standard Oil and Goodyear Tire, are presented not as individual mechanized objects, but as a part of a fluid stream of traffic, depersonalizing the individuals inside and revealing the extent to which they have bought into the bland, homogenous American “society”. This is the heart of Hollywood, the imagined ideal to which Americans are to aspire towards.

The fetishization of the car extends to more than its visual appearance. Another alluring aspect of the unified automotive body derives from the fetishization of the sounds: doors, keys, tires, but above all, engines. Engine noises, if they are powerful enough, become a physical manifestation of power; the low grumble of the engine rattles the car, giving the impression of an animate “soul” within the machine. The sound of the engine is romanticized because it is a reminder of the

ingenuity of the engine itself; somehow, innovators have found a way to create and harness violent explosions into a propulsive force, safely. The extent to which engine sound is fetishized in the modern day is apparent in the existence of engine sound simulators, a slightly surreal product which exists solely to make quieter cars’ engine noises sound like one’s exotic car engine of choice. Again, though, the fetishized consumer conception of the car exists in a different, idealized realm of consumerism apart from the realm of the everyday. What the noise of the car is, in actuality, is an inefficiency: a by-product of that engine which does not efficiently convert the chemical energy of gasoline into the kinetic energy of propulsion. In fact, to many people, car noises are, obviously, noisy; most would not appreciate the finer acoustic subtleties of a Corvette if it roared through the neighbourhood in the early hours of the morning. Those still inclined to enjoy engine noise, in modern city traffic, cannot even do so, as individual car sounds are drowned out in a massed motorized cacophony. Thus, the only situations in which the noise of the car can be taken in as desirable are in specialized exhibitions of cars, such as auto races or auto conventions, where the idealized realm is re-instituted.

In *Kiss Me Deadly*, the sounds contribute to the characterization of Hammer as a loud, unrefined brute. The Corvette’s noise, at once seductively growling and repulsively grating, comes to be a sonic extension of Hammer’s corporeal body. Whenever Hammer drives off-screen, the engine noise of his Corvette is the last sound that is heard before the film cuts to a new shot. Far from only being an extension of characterization though, car sounds also fit within the greater sound regime of the film. The filmic “ear” (for lack of a better term) in *Kiss Me Deadly* is hypersensitive, recording sounds which are not quite natural, but not quite fake. The sea of weird, unsettling sonic experiences gives the soundtrack a sort of incomprehensible quality. Primal human sounds, such as Christina’s panting and screams in the beginning of the film, the corrupt doctor’s screams, and Lily/Gabrielle’s screams, are all eerily inauthentic. The effect is exacerbated by the film’s editing strategies; almost never are the sources of these sounds, the mouth, shown: when Christina screams, for example, the camera is trained on a shot of her legs; when Mike crushes the doctor’s hand in the cabinet, the film cuts between shots of his hand being crushed, Lily/Gabrielle covering her ears, Mike smiling insidiously, and only briefly to a close-up of the doctor’s face contorted by pain, his screams out of sync with the imagery. These human noises are contrasted with mechanical noises: telephones and the voice recorder, car engines and radios. Where cars are present, there is the familiar hum of traffic, present in the soundtrack but not foregrounded. By constantly evoking car noises, the film relates the noise of automobiles to the metaphoric “noise” of modernity, noise to be treated the same way as sirens, gunshots, and advertisements, that is, with indifference. Car sounds become indistinguishable from one another past a certain point, and even the distinct rumble of Hammer’s Corvette loses its edge by the end of the film. The uncanny human sounds and the meaningless mechanical noise of modernity culminate in the sound of the Great Whatsit, whose noise, at once human and mechanical, represents the final, incomprehensible end of humanity. The values which Hammer ascribes to the objects in his life, his suits, cars, and fancy apart-
ment, become meaningless in the cacophony of the apocalypse.

As an extension of the film’s fascination with the meanings (or lack thereof) of post-war America’s sounds, perhaps the most memorable line of dialogue in the film is Nick’s three not-quite-word mantra: “Va-va-voom!” What seems, at first, to be another meaningless catchphrase, uttered through the comic inflection of an ethnic Other, is revealed to be a phrase used to evoke the vapidity and sad reality of consumer culture. Nick, a mechanic, a respectably working-class profession, is the archetypal image of the American Dream, having achieved (partial) social mobility through hard work. Nick also genuinely buys into the consumerism associated with the American Dream; he fixes cars, and also fantasizes that “someday [he’s] a-gonna get a car just like [Mike’s Corvette]”. “Va-va-voom”, thus, is Nick’s way of evoking all of the dreams and aspirations of lower-middle class Americans. However, by using such a meaningless, vapid phrase as an embodiment of consumerist ideology, the film essentially equates consumerism to just one other meaningless word of the many meaningless sounds of the film. The etymology of the phrase makes it seem even more pitiful; Nick just wants to engage with the commodified symbols of the “upper-class”, but since he is financially unable to, all he can do create a gravelly approximation of the car’s engine sounds. However, even though Nick’s “Va-va-voom” is somewhat pathetic, his dialogue is perhaps the most genuinely meaningful dialogue in the film. For all of the seemingly important and meaningful names and terms Hammer is given (names which are always full names) – names such as Ray Diker, Nicholas Raymondo, Lee Kowalski, G.E. Soberin, words such as Manhattan Project, Los Alamos, Trinity – the words which have the most resonance after the film is over are va-va-voom and whatsit. The world of Kiss Me Deadly has become so saturated with apparent meaning, yet so hollow, that the only words we can grasp onto are the meaningless words, those invented whatsits.

If the sights and sounds of automobiles are used by Kiss Me Deadly as a way to express the meaninglessness of post-war American life, then the experience of automobiles is used to show the fragility of that life. When a consumer bought a car, they did not just buy the idealized visual and sonic aesthetic object. What was being bought and consumed, rather, was the experience: of having freedom, mobility, and, most importantly, ultimate control over one’s own fate. Driving an automobile, unlike other forms of mechanized transportation such as riding a train, ship, or bus, is a fundamentally active action. Pressing the gas pedal, shifting the gear, and turning the steering wheel all have immediate effects. Thus, the automobile experience is so appealing because it feels natural, like an extension to one’s body. As the automobile on the road is not constrained by rails like a train, there is a direct interface between the four tires and the very earth itself. This opens up the perception of total freedom, as anywhere a foot can walk, the auto can drive. Thus, embracing the experience of the automobile is akin to that of embracing free will; whoever owned an automobile had the ability to travel whenever, wherever they wanted, as quickly or as slowly as they pleased. However, the wholesale adoption of the automobile experience in America did not come without unintended consequences. The most significant consequence was that increased mo-
No More Va-Va-Voom

bility came at the price of safety. Once driving feels so natural that it feels like an extension of the body, the same sense of mastery which one applies to one's own body is extended to the automobile. However, this sense of mastery is an illusion; the physical properties of the car are quite different from that of the human body. As stated by Peden et al. in the WHO report on road traffic injuries, the majority of injuries and fatalities caused in and by automobiles are caused because “loads and accelerations, exceeding those the body can tolerate, are applied by some part of the car”\textsuperscript{12}. After a while, the perception of danger associated with traveling in an automobile disappears due to this sense of mastery, but in actuality, the risk of danger remains. The sense of security offered by the cage of metal surrounding the driver contributes to this false sense of security, but obscures the fact that the driver's body is much weaker than the metal. The fatal concern is that the driver forgets that they are operating a two ton machine traveling at speeds far exceeding the speeds the human body is capable of. Another consequence is that increased speed comes at the cost of control. No matter how experienced a driver is, the faster one travels in a car, the less control one has over one's fate as minor dangers become magnified at greater speed. However, the sense of mastery also applies to speed, as the suspension system and comfortable seats cushion the bumps which warn of possible danger. Thus, the experience of the automobile highlights the potentially liberating aspects while dangerously hiding potentially devastating associations.

The experience of a car ride, particularly the contrasting values of mobility/speed with safety/control is built into \textit{Kiss Me Deadly}'s stylistic and narrative structures. Perhaps the most apparent evidence of this is the film's opening scene. The scene is set in a rural highway at night. The use of this location, sparse and empty, combined with the lack of lighting, creates an abstracted atmosphere for the film to unfold in. The film's opening shot is of Christina's feet, running on the road. A woman is heard, panting, and we attach the sound to the feet. Already, the film has evoked imagery of the road, and the semiotic associations thereof: roads are the paths between destinations, the medium by which journeys are traveled, but also, in 1955 especially, the realm of the car. Thus, having feet, bare, no less, treading upon the sphere of the automobile is a slightly disorienting violation of the social stratification of space. After another unsuccessful attempt to wave down a car, the camera lingers on a medium shot of Christina. Behind Christina, nothing is visible, save the road, and the abstracted quality of the scene is further emphasized, as it is unclear where Christina could have come from. In the next shot, looking down the road in the opposite direction, the dual orbs of a car's headlights speeds toward the camera. In this shot, the tension between the stratification of space is heightened, as the viewer is now placed in the position of the pedestrian, occupying the automotive space. This tension reaches a critical point in the quick sequence of shots wherein Mike's car swerves sharply and narrowly avoids hitting Christina. The reason this tension becomes so intense is because the shots foreground the inherent violence of the automotive experience, which is usually not highlighted. One of the shots is even from the point of view of the

Kevin Dong

car, physically tracking towards Christina as if running into her, reversing the sit-
uation so that now, the viewer is in the position of aggressor, implicated in the
violence. When the barrage of cuts ends, Christina is still standing, the car is in
the ditch, and the man who averted the crisis, Mike Hammer, is introduced with
a close-up. This close-up serves to introduce Mike Hammer in the position of
control; he is the man who was in control enough to avoid Christina, and will be
the character whose “experience” the audience will share for the rest of the film.
Finally, the framing of the film’s narrative through the experience of an automo-
bile, specifically, as a “car ride” in the front seat, is accomplished through the title
sequence. Mike restarts his car, and drives off, Christina in the passenger seat.
Immediately, the film cuts to a shot from behind, mounted on the car, of Hammer
driving (the car’s convertibility makes visible Hammer and Christina). Because the
camera is mounted on the car, the shot is shaky, giving it an “authentic” quality.
The shakiness of the camera, combined with the apparent speed at which Hammer
is traveling, also reminds the viewer how little control one has when traveling at
such high speeds. The credits, read from bottom to top, recalls the way in which
signs painted on highways are positioned and read. The forward momentum of the
car’s motion, combined with the backwards-rolling credits, combines to create an
uncannily familiar simulation of the experience of driving on a highway. Thus, the
viewer is encouraged to associate the film with a car ride, sharing the seat with the
driver (seemingly) in control: Mike Hammer.

On a more abstract level, the narrative pacing of the film approximates
Hammer’s experience at the driver’s wheel. The narrative is characterized by great
speed, the pace which Hammer likes to drive; Hammer gets a name from Velda,
and then immediately we are shown Hammer’s investigation of that name. How-
ever, just as speeding up a car makes it harder to control, Hammer acceleration of
the narrative leaves him barely in control of his fate. The narrative veers sharply,
often threatening to careen off the road. However, again and again, Hammer is
able to stay his course, apparently skillful (or lucky) enough to keep on the road.
Throughout the film, thus, we get that (false) sense of Hammer’s mastery over his
fate. However, just as being accustomed to the experience of driving numbs us to
the very real danger of the car, Hammer, too fails to realize the destructive poten-
tial of his mechanized body, of the speeding narrative. Hammer’s reckless disre-
gard of safety, even of those dear to him, culminates in the death of Nick, the vio-
 lent murder of the film’s personification of the American Dream. Narrative-wise,
Nick’s death demonstrates the consequences of reckless “speed”; Hammer fails to
consider the potential consequences to Nick’s safety in asking him to sniff around
Culver City. However, Nick’s death also literally foregrounds the inherent violence
of cars; they are not only machines of mobility but also potentially tools for mur-
der. One shot in particular stands out: after Soberin releases the auto jack, the car
falls on Nick and crushes him. Between the two shots of the front end of the car
crashing to the ground is a shot of Nick screaming, shot from the car’s point of
view, like the shot in the beginning of the film of Christina. The camera moves
in a fluid motion, moving closer to Nick, as if to crush him. Again, the camera’s
framing implicates the viewer in the shot, but this time, Mike is not around to save
the day. Given the framing of the film through the experience of the car, the point of view shot of the car crushing Nick violently is akin to the act of using the car to run somebody over.

Thus, throughout the film, the formal details are used to heighten the viewer’s awareness of the dangers of the automotive experience. However, the benefits and dangers of cars had already been ingrained into the American experience prior to the post-war era. The relevance of the car experience to *Kiss Me Deadly*, thus, was not in relation to the inherent violence of the car, but as a conduit for the expression of post-war insecurities surrounding modernity. The dual nature of the automobile – on one hand, the positive agent of mobility, physical and socioeconomical; on the other, a negative agent of mechanized death, accidental or, in the case of Nick, deliberate – reflects the film’s thesis about the ambivalence, or even the inevitable malice, of technological modernity as a whole. As industrial America drives along the metaphorical road of modernity, apparently in total control, the going is smooth; Americans stand to gain mobility, affluence, wealth, a sense of individuality, and happiness. However, the illusion that there is only one destination – the end of the road, the utopian capitalist society – fails to account for the innumerable number of destinations which could end in a violent crash into the ditch. The culmination of the inherent danger of the road of modernity is The Bomb, the mysterious, unstoppable, apocalyptic whatsit which threatens all. The explosive ending of Aldrich’s film, tapping into the latent paranoia and cynicism bubbling beneath the surface of post-war optimism, thus makes the film a cautionary tale, of conspicuous consumption, consumerized hedonism, and unquestioned technologization. It is significant that the film’s ending, the end of the car ride initiated in the opening scene, takes place in the same abstracted darkness as the opening scene. The difference now is that we are in the ocean, having careened off the sunny Malibu cliffs, illuminated only by the fire of the machine which brought us here.
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Drawing Audiences for *Gold Diggers of 1933*

Zoe Sherman

Released in 1933, *Gold Diggers of 1933* did extremely well in box offices across America. The Motion Picture Herald lists it as the top box-office champion for July 19331. Newspaper reviews from that year strongly praised it, and talked about a number of the film’s positive traits. These reviews can help provide insight into what strategies the film used to perform so well at the box office. Based off reviews from the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, the success of *Gold Diggers of 1933* can largely be attributed to its cast, the content of its story, its relationship to past successes, its music, and the large spectacle of its dance numbers.

The reviews of *Gold Diggers of 1933*, from the year of its release, mention the film’s “superlative cast”2. Just as reviews would for films with an all-star cast today, the reviews list all of the major actors in the film and praise them for their acting abilities. Mordaunt Hall, reviewer for the *New York Times*, spends a whole paragraph praising Guy Kibbee’s acting in the scene in which he looks in the mirror with the dog3. Including this paragraph, over half of Hall’s review discusses different actors and their merits. The last quarter of a *Washington Post* review is taken up with an impromptu interview with Ruby Keeler, despite her not saying much of anything. All that really gets said is that Keeler is tired and scared, but the couple of paragraphs seem to get dragged out longer than necessary. Furthermore, the reviewers point out that something she said was unnecessary, but decided to put it in their review anyway4. The reason for this protracted interview was likely either because they needed to reach their word count or because of the draw of having a star in the review. It is clear that, as it is today, big name actors were a big deal and helped to draw audiences to their movies. Around the time of *Gold Diggers of 1933*’s release the *Calgary Herald* regularly featured a section highlighting an actor like Cary Grant or Ginger Rogers5. Rogers, who had recently been in the hit musical *42nd Street*, had a somewhat minor role in *Gold Diggers of 1933*. This type of article demonstrates that she likely had enough draw as a star to draw audiences, though it was still early in her career. Seeing recognizable names on the poster for a movie has always helped to draw in audiences. The attention put on the actors

4  "Big, New Musical", 56.
5  Harrison Carroll, "Behind the Scenes in Hollywood", *Calgary Herald*, June 14, 1933.
in these reviews confirms that they were an important factor in Gold Diggers of 1933’s success.

The subject matter of a film is always very important to its reception, and with Gold Diggers of 1933, several important factors aided its success. Hall’s review calls it “decidedly up to date, even for such shows”\(^6\). The review goes on to say that this is “not a film for prudes”, finding its more risqué scenes to be modern and edgy. That Hall mentions this quality of the film indicates that it was something that set it apart from other contemporary films, helping keep the film fresh and viewers engaged. However, there was some negative feedback about the script. In his review, Hall criticises Gold Diggers of 1933 for having a story “so similar to that of other pictures”. “The discovery of unexpected talent” is a common trope in musicals of a time, and his claim that the film uses major plot points from 42nd Street is not an unfounded one\(^8\). This is a common complaint in films today, and, clearly, was also relevant in 1933. Although Hall speaks of this negatively, it likely aided in the success of the film. Reusing the same stories helps studios to guarantee an audience. This story was something that people were already familiar with and had enjoyed. It is likely they knew what they were getting into before they went into the theatre. As mentioned earlier, Gold Diggers of 1933 also was more “up to date” than other films of the genre, which would help to keep this story from falling flat. Despite this one complaint however, Hall’s feedback about this film was mainly positive. Hall enjoyed especially the scene, mentioned above, in which Faneuil H. Peabody, played by Guy Kibbee, notices his similarities to Trixie Lorraine’s dog. His description of this scene goes on for much longer than his criticisms of the lack of originality, suggesting that the comedy made up for it in his eyes. Gold Diggers of 1933 was both fresh and unoriginal in different aspects, and these contradictory characteristics worked in its favour, to help it stand out from the crowd without making any real waves.

Reviews of Gold Diggers of 1933 often compared it to the musical 42nd Street, which came out earlier that year. It was also produced by Warner Bros., and it was a major success with a similar basic storyline as Gold Diggers of 1933, that is, producing a new show with money from a rich man in love with one of the actresses. According to Kristen Thompson and David Bordwell, 42nd Street “establish[ed] many conventions” of the backstage musical\(^9\). Many of these conventions would be used in Gold Diggers of 1933. 42nd Street, therefore, helped to establish the norm in backstage musicals, which would give moviegoers a better idea of what to expect in this film, which would provide another draw for audiences. This comparison to last year’s hit would encourage people to see the film for the same reasons it would today: they would expect the same level of quality of entertainment they had gotten or heard about previously. 42nd Street had been “sensationally popular”\(^10\), so it was likely that even moviegoers who had not seen the film had heard of

\(^7\) Ibid.
\(^8\) Ibid.
\(^10\) “Big, New Musical”, 56.
it. Thus, a review claiming that *Gold Diggers of 1933* was “hailed as the superior of *42nd Street*” could conceivably convince a viewer to go see the film. Warner Bros. played it safe in the making of this film, by keeping it similar to a past success, and it certainly paid off.

Like any musical, the music was essential to the success of *Gold Diggers of 1933*. At this point in time, the musical was a popular genre. This was aided by several recent developments in technology. Recorded sound in films was not new, but the technology for it was still developing. As the technology advanced, and recording and sound mixing became easier, it became easier to make musicals on the scale of *Gold Diggers of 1933*, allowing the musical to become a prominent genre. This also meant that these large-scale musical numbers were still somewhat novel to audiences, which would make these scenes even more appealing for moviegoers. It helped that Harry Warren and Al Dubin, the men behind *42nd Street*’s music, wrote a number of songs for this film. Mentioning this in the *New York Times* review would encourage people to see it since, as has been previously mentioned, the audience would go to this film expecting the same level of quality as this past success. The “catchy tunes” in this movie are something that reviewers were sure to point out and clearly played an important role in the films popularity.

These articles suggest that the large spectacle of the film was something else that attracted audiences. 1932 saw important improvements in technology, like multiple-track recording and an improved dolly. These were both utilized in *Gold Diggers of 1933*, especially in creating the elaborate dance scenes. As these technologies were still new when the film was released in 1933, the extravagant scenes at the climax of the film were uncommon and a spectacle in themselves. Unsurprisingly then, the *Washington Post* lists “magnitude of production” as one of the reasons it did so well in the box office, and, in another article, it raves about the film’s “lavishly displayed… dance numbers” and how they are “unequalled in the history of stage or screen”. The large scale, elaborate dance numbers clearly helped in drawing people to the film.

The cast members, storyline, previous successes, music, and the spectacle all propel *Gold Diggers of 1933* to success in the year of its release. While these historical reviews often acted as ads for the films by encouraging their readers to see them, they can also help us understand what aspects of the film itself appealed to its Depression-era audience. With Hollywood turning out so many films around this time it could be hard for a film to stand out but *Gold Diggers of 1933* did it with undeniable success.

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11 Ibid.
12 Thompson and Bordwell, *Film History*, 210.
14 “Big, New Musical”, 56.
15 Thompson and Bordwell, *Film History*, 201-202.
16 “Gold Diggers”, 18.
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The Contrast of Tim Burton: The Success of a Stylist

Jennifer Caswell

Long before an awkward, teenaged Tim Burton faced his own struggle to make sense of life in suburban Burbank, California, people around the world turned to myth and storytelling to help define and understand their place in the world. Simply put, myths are stories that have been told for hundreds of years to explain phenomenon encountered in daily life, experiences of both the natural and social world. These universal tales have evolved in many incarnations to become traditions that help to articulate and understand the human condition. As identified by renowned scholar Joseph Campbell in his expansive body of work on myth, a foundational convention in traditional stories is the notion of duality. At the heart of Campbell's work is the idea that myth concerns itself with the experience, not necessarily the understanding, of life. Further, myth relies on using symbols and feeling over language, a philosophy that is resonant in Tim Burton's work. Through myth, people are able to orient their minds and experiences in the middle of the field of opposites, such as good and evil, light and dark, etc. to live in the realization of both terms and know the midpoint between a binary pair.

Applying this framework to an analysis of Tim Burton's fairytale films, Edward Scissorhands (1990), The Nightmare Before Christmas (1993) and Big Fish (2003), allows an examination of a unity of opposites and reveals whether Burton's films successfully express an auteur's interiority which connects with contemporary audiences.

In order to determine if reconciling dichotomous elements in his films can elevate Burton as an auteur, it is helpful to review the notion of auteur policy. With its roots in French film criticism of the 1950s, Francois Truaffaut's infamous 1954 essay A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema is considered the to be the origin of la politique des Auteurs as he places critical importance on the role and influence of the director in creating great films. Maybe more important is Sarris's further discussion in his Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962 as he attempts to provide a detailed framework to employ auteur theory in film criticism. Working with the understanding that “the director is the author of a film, the person who gives it any distinctive quality”, Sarris builds a structure that places the auteur at

the centre of three distinct yet concentric circles; the distinction of being an auteur is preceded by a director being both a technician and a stylist. It can be accepted, given his ongoing commercial and at times critical success spanning over 25 years, that Tim Burton's technical capability allows for a discussion specific to authorship to begin in the second sphere of Sarris's auteur framework. An evaluation of Burton's cinema through exploring his use of contrast will demonstrate that, while an accomplished filmmaker, Burton is not able to transcend his “distinguishable personality” to achieve “the ultimate glory of cinema as an art”3.

Like the generations of storytellers before him, Burton’s use of contrast as a unifying element is central to his work; it informs the patterns that have become the hallmarks of his films. Viewed through the lens of traditional storytelling, what may be dismissed as deceptively simple opposing elements belies a narrative technique with a meaningful lineage. Through reconciling a series of dichotomies, including a narrative distinction between the individual and society, an aesthetic contrast of colour and its absence, and a thematic division between what is normal and what it not, these binary opposites represent how Burton engages consistently, particularly in what can be called his fairytale films, to create a compelling collection of work that embodies the characteristics of an accomplished stylist but not that of an auteur.

In these three specific films, Burton successfully employs the hero’s journey, a well-established convention of myth, to demonstrate how unifying contrasting elements, the individual and society, is an effective stylistic tool in storytelling. The protagonists in Burton’s films are frequently alienated man-boys seeking to understand their place in the world. While Edward Scissorhands, Jack Skellington, and Ed Bloom are in many ways individuals who function outside of their societal norms, they are also archetypical heroes. Each of these characters experiences a sequence of action, a going and a returning, which ends in a personal and societal transformation. Burton’s heroes leave on a journey that provides a set of experiences resulting in more than personal growth. Edward’s, Jack’s, and Ed’s journeys are what Campbell refers to as a duality of discovery4; they each find a place in and contribute to society while also discovering a greater sense of self-awareness. A key to the significance of the hero is how their character and their quest are contextualized by the presence of a society that struggles to reconcile their individuality. While the personal transformation experienced by Edward, Jack, and Ed represents meaningful personal character development, it is when their journey is held in contrast to the world they live in that an audience can understand the character’s experience as a universal; it is then that they can see themselves in the character and the story begins to evoke myth.

In Burton’s films, the outsider’s journey sees them achieve a maturity that creates a balance between maintaining their individuality while contributing to and accepting a place in society. In Edward Scissorhands, the titular character provides insight into how an individual’s innocence can mature into compassion that impacts beyond oneself, while Jack Skellington’s journey embodies how accept-

3 Ibid., 43.
4 The Power of Myth.
ing and employing one’s personal strengths can make a meaningful difference to
society. Finally, Ed Bloom’s odyssey is a striking example of how, even when an
individual refuses to embrace the conventional norms of society, they evolve and
mature through being woven into the lives of those they encounter along their
adventures.

In considering the dichotomy between the individual and society presented
in Burton’s fairytale films, the hero’s journey successfully unifies the two contrast-
ing elements. As in traditional myth, from religious texts to folk tales, Burton’s
heroes reinforce how society operates as a collection of individuals and that both
the individual and the collective take meaning and value from the other. While
this example of a binary opposite supports the notion that Burton’s authorial sig-
nature is representative of a “distinguishable personality of the director” that has
“some relationship to the way a director thinks and feels”5, it does not produce a
definitive moment of cinematic art. The theme in all three films resonates with
an audience through its familiar mythic theme but does not extend to articulate
a particular insight or societal commentary that can be specifically prescribed to
Burton’s worldview.

Film is a powerful visual medium that often capitalizes on the fluid flexibility
and emotive power able to be conveyed through colour. Beginning with his earliest
films, Tim Burton has consistently employed an aesthetic contrast of colour and
its absence. Whether it is the omnipresent black and white stripes or checkerboard
motifs – emblematic and the very definition of contrast – or a more robust juxta-
position between colour palettes and black and white, Burton uses these opposing
pairs to accentuate and enhance the emotional tone and characteristics of setting.

In Edward Scissorhands, “Edward’s home is dark and dingy, and this is
placed in juxtaposition with a stylized view of suburbia. Both are accentuated by
their close proximity and obvious difference”6, and this lends to how Burton en-
hances his characters and then uses setting as an agent in the narrative. In specific
support of this point, Page states:

In Edward Scissorhands the hilltop mansion-suburbia divide shows
a use of both light and dark. The mansion is dark and gloomy, the
only colour apparent in Edward’s topiary creations … [and] the
suburban environment, which stands in purposefully stark con-
trast, is a mix of soft, pastel colours.7

The darkness of Edward’s home stresses the character’s isolation, while the
colour palette of the town reinforces both society’s unity and acceptance, but also
its homogeneity and conformity. Burton employs this same tactic in representing
Big Fish’s Spectre as “both of these places are rather bland and passionless”8.

This theme is also clearly evident in both The Nightmare Before Christmas
and Big Fish. The use of colour to ascribe an emotional undercurrent to setting is

5 Sarris, “Auteur Theory”, 43
6 Edwin Page, Gothic Fantasy: The Films of Tim Burton, (London: Marian Boyar Publishers,
2007), 81.
7 Ibid., 81-82.
8 Ibid., 202.
displayed through the representation of Halloween Town’s somberness through gothic darkness and absence of colour, in contrast with Christmas Town’s vivid brightness. While there is subtlety to how colour is employed in Big Fish, Page also identifies that the present day narrative “stands in a stark contrast to the bright vibrancy of the tales of Ed’s past.” Page goes on to argue that the juxtaposition “serves to bring home the harsh reality that Ed is nearing the end of his life [and] at the same time the stories stand out more because of their brightness.

Burton’s technical and stylistic choices with regards to how colour (or its absence) is used make a case that “his use of visual expression rather than verbal echoes the same traits evident in Burton himself.” While reflective of his style, this pattern in his films does not offer enough substance to elevate him beyond the status of stylist as its impact in his narrative is somewhat conventional and not uniquely expressive.

Finally, a foundational trademark of Burton’s oeuvre is his thematic exploration of the schism between what is normal and what is not. This dichotomy can be viewed as an extension of his preoccupations with the individual and society but with an added value judgment, while also as a narrative parallel to what he attempts to visually display with the aesthetic of colour. It may be within this binary pair – normality and abnormality – that Burton is continuously presented an opportunity to transcend the classification of a stylist and enter the realm of the auteur. However, in the three films explored, Tim Burton’s ability to effectively employ and unify the idea of normality and abnormality, in conjunction with his technical prowess and consistent style, does not operate as a device to successfully combine to propel him to the centre of Sarris’ auteur framework.

In each of the films, Burton’s lead characters struggle with feeling abnormal in what is offered as a normal world; the qualities which make these characters outcasts range from Edward’s physical difference, to Jack’s internal struggle and self-awareness, to Ed’s panache for the exaggerated life. Considered from a psychoanalytical perspective, it is plausible to read Burton’s representation of abnormality as “creative investigations of the limits to human freedom in a world that claims to be constantly pushing the boundaries, to be freer than ever.” However, Burton does not let his work expand beyond his own experience to provide a profound expression about the positive and adverse effects of either being considered normal or abnormal. In fact, Burton acknowledges he does not consider the wider societal experience; he states that he relates everything in his films to his own life “because that’s your only reference of how to get something done and achieve something.” It is this shortcoming, an inability to connect to a personal experience to a universal understanding that limits Burton’s work preventing what Sarris

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9 Ibid., 115.
10 Ibid., 205.
11 Ibid., 81.
calls “élan of the soul”\textsuperscript{14}.

It is not to say that Tim Burton is not an accomplished and compelling filmmaker. As a sample of his body of work, these three fairytales films, \textit{Edward Scissorhands}, \textit{The Nightmare Before Christmas} and \textit{Big Fish}, provide abundant opportunities to analyze duality and explore Burton’s ability to unify contrast that grounds him in a long history of storytelling.

In his own words in an interview with David Breskin, Burton commented that fairytales place “everything under the umbrella of life and death and the unknown, and a mixture of good and bad, and funny and sad, and everything at once”\textsuperscript{15}. He goes on to state that fairytales are “taking something real and heightening it. So what you have is an inherent balancing problem between the real and the unreal” and that as a filmmaker he often encounters difficulty managing the “unwieldy nature” of such situations\textsuperscript{16}. It is this inability to manage awkward human situations into a universal, thoughtful poignancy that limits Burton status to being a stylist and not an auteur.

\textsuperscript{14} Sarris, “Auteur Theory”, 43.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 69.
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“Two Things at Once”: *Sherlock, Jr.* as Typical and Atypical within 1920s Hollywood

Jet McCullough

The review of Buster Keaton’s *Sherlock, Jr.* published in the amusement section of the June 3, 1924 *Calgary Herald*, the day of the film’s Calgary release, frames the film as part of a new trend of “Delicate slapstick”, a trend that “give[s] space to more intelligent and subtle ideas” than were found in “the old pies throwing comedies”\(^\text{1}\). In its first sentence the review not only historically contextualizes the film as part of a departure from an earlier era of screen comedy, but also begins to give the film a privileged status. Starting on May 26, 1924, for a week leading up to the film’s Calgary release, the *Herald* ran a piece about the film each day, and, it is by looking through such contextual material, together with the film itself, that we can see how it both fits into and resists broader trends in screen culture. *Sherlock, Jr.* was distinguished from its contemporary films, i.e. commercial American cinema, as a privileged and exceptional film, a film reflecting an individual vision, and a film with an irreverent and sometimes self-referential nature; however, it still corresponded to broader trends, remaining faithful to the Classical Hollywood style and method of production. What allowed for *Sherlock, Jr.*’s privileged status is as specific to its time as to its authorship.

Looking at *Sherlock, Jr.* today, there is the temptation to see it simply as part of the body of work of Buster Keaton. Having been inducted into the “Pantheon” of Andrew Sarris’s *American Cinema*\(^\text{2}\), and championed by many other critics, Keaton is established as a singular ‘auteur.’ But at the time of the film’s release as well there was much attention paid to Keaton’s privileged or superior status, and to his level of control over the film. This awareness is displayed in the June 3, 1924 *Herald* review; the second column of the article falls under the subtitle “Keaton, a Master of ‘Gags’”\(^\text{3}\). That Keaton has the starring role in his films doubtlessly influences the writer of the article to focus on Keaton. Keaton’s popularity even spills out of the entertainment section onto the next page, where a large advertisement consisting only of Keaton’s face appears at the top. Even taking into account Keaton’s star persona, within the text of the article, there is still a display of acknowl-

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edgment about Keaton's directorial “responsibility” for the film.

The article states that “Keaton has been able to graduate from the field of old-time slapstick into the more ennobling realm of suggestion”\(^4\), suggesting an intellectual superiority in Keaton's brand of comedy. This suggestion is already made in the *Herald*’s article on the film released the day before, in which a scene where the film mocks “Hick town” censor boards is recounted\(^5\), and in a *Herald* review on the following day, where Keaton's earlier *Our Hospitality* is referred to as “one of the cleverest satires on American life in the early eighties that has ever been made”\(^6\). Under the subtitle “Custard Pies Gone,” the June 3 article states that “[t]hings are different today,” and that “attention to detail” and “logical coherence” are what are now important, with a clear condescension toward an earlier time in film comedy, the time of “pies throwing” and “broad humor,” present in the article\(^7\). The article implies this is the consensus among cultured viewers, and assumes the *Herald* reader will share this superiority. Furthermore, the article says that Keaton “gets the most out of any part he essays” by “suggest[ing] emotions] by the way he disports himself in scene”\(^8\), rather than conveying them crudely, suggesting again that Keaton's technique is sophisticated.

The articles also make mention of Keaton’s individual personality colouring his films, giving a hint of what today would be called Keaton's ‘authorship.’ The June 3 article says that it is a “distinct individuality” which distinguishes Keaton and the other great screen comedians\(^9\). It goes on to list some of the traits that define Keaton’s “languid screen personality,” which is characterized by “dejection,” an “evident singularity and sincerity of purpose,” and “never smil[ing]”\(^10\). In the following day's article, Keaton is described as possessing “a face as long as an 8 day clock”\(^11\). Despite clearly focusing on his acting, the articles are, in these passages, giving examples of the distinct personality of Keaton's films. In the June 3 review, Keaton is granted further responsibility; despite having already been noted in the paragraph it is appended to, the concluding sentence of the review significantly states: “Keaton directed it”\(^12\).

The June 4 article boldly says of *Sherlock, Jr.*: “Never has such a delightful combination … been put together in any theatrical medium,” proclaiming the film’s excellence, but also combining the “stage” and “screen” into one category\(^13\).

\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^5\) “Keaton Censors Censor Boards: Star of *Sherlock, Jr.* Pokes Gentle Fun at the Reformers”, *Calgary Daily Herald*, June 2, 1924, 20. I did not find other accounts of this scene (which is not present in the film today), but a Google search has led me to a message board post mentioning the same article syndicated in a Florida newspaper: “Censor Board Scene in *Sherlock, Jr.*?”, silentcomedians.com, last modified August 24, 2009, accessed November 30, 2013, <http://www.silentcomedians.com/forum/viewtopic.php?p=13751>. This establishes at least some pervasiveness of the view of Keaton as an intelligent comedian.
\(^6\) “Buster Keaton Makes a Hit at the Palace”, *Calgary Daily Herald*, June 4, 1924, 6.
\(^7\) “Comedy”, 6.
\(^8\) Ibid.
\(^9\) Ibid.
\(^10\) Ibid.
\(^12\) “Comedy”, 6.
\(^13\) “Buster Keaton”, 6.
The *Herald* itself does this, putting both film and play reviews under the banner of ‘amusement’. The paper’s characterization of the film is fitting, because it is in the distinction between cinema and stage where *Sherlock, Jr.*’s most distinguishing characteristics are found. The article is most enthralled with “[the protagonist’s] transition from a movie operator to a movie actor,” wherein he “climbs right into the frame of the picture” in a “brand new camera trick”\(^4\). This is a self-referential sequence in which the film calls attention to its status as a film, counter to the Hollywood norm. The article then mentions the sequence where “the scene suddenly shift[s] without warning” around Keaton\(^5\). The sequence it is describing is also reflexive in a similar manner as the above, calling attention to film editing by self-consciously replacing the setting of the scene through cuts. Using both of the above examples, the article expresses much of what makes the film exceptional, in the circumstances of its production, its style, and its popular and critical reception. Many of these qualities also establish the film as irreverent or satirical, qualities somewhat common to comedy but amplified by the film’s experiments and individual voice; it is because of this that the film resists assimilation into its contemporary, popular, and industrial cinema.

But *Sherlock, Jr.*’s status as an outlier must not be exaggerated. The above-mentioned sequence is distinguished from the ‘real’ world within the film, allowing for a fantasy that continues until nearly the end of the film in which Keaton’s character becomes “Sherlock, Jr.” In the dream sequence, logic is abandoned: mirrors become hallways, safes become doors, and Sherlock gets out of several death traps implausibly or outright nonsensically. However, the break from reality is clearly established when Keaton’s character falls asleep and a duplicate of him gets up to walk into the screen in a double-exposure effect. In this way, the unusual qualities of these scenes are motivated within the diegesis of the film, and considering this, the experiments of the film do not seem as radical.

Furthermore, with the exception of the above-mentioned dream sequence in which the cuts displace Keaton, the majority of the film, including the fantasy portion, remains faithful to the Classical Hollywood continuity editing principles that Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell argue arose in the early silent era, and which reached another level of sophistication in the 1920s\(^6\). The film frequently uses ‘analytical editing,’ using long shots to establish settings and gags, but also inserts, cutting in to close-ups when appropriate, such as when we are shown the thief stealing the watch and Keaton’s character adjusting the price on the box of candy. It is through continuity of action from one shot to the next that such sequences as the bicycle chase and Sherlock’s ‘shadowing’ of the culprit are possible. The film also uses crosscutting, telling us that Sherlock’s love interest is being threatened as he rushes to save her, and that in ‘reality’ the protagonist’s love interest is on her way to apologize as he is falling asleep. These techniques give the film a flow and continuity that allows the scenes to “whiz by in rapid succession,” as the

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\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^5\) Ibid.
*Herald* puts it\(^{17}\). The film concludes with a sequence structured around the shot/reverse-shot technique, in which the characters look at the movie screen and what they see is shown to us. Though in drawing attention to the relationship between film and ‘life,’ the sequence is suggestive of Eisenstein in its dialectical nature, this juxtaposition is diegetic and clearly established as such, and is in line with the previous paragraph’s argument that the film’s expression of unique or individual ideas is within a conventional or typical framework: in this case, continuity editing. The scene where Keaton’s surroundings change through cuts is an exception to the continuity trend, but it is mocking the justification of cuts by their temporal necessity over the course of a film, confirmed by the dream ‘film’ continuing to be edited in a conventional manner.

To argue the film’s normalcy even further, the self-referential and experimental aspects, which I have established as qualities which distinguish *Sherlock, Jr.* from its contemporaries, can also be loosely linked to trends that existed at the time. The self-referential quality of the film, referencing the cinema, or having a ‘film within a film,’ is mirrored in the far more radically experimental, intentionally self-reflexive qualities that arose in art cinema at this period (e.g. the references to Charles Chaplin in the experimental *Ballet mécanique*)\(^{18}\), and are a progression from less radical experiments dating back to earlier cinema (e.g. the ‘film within a film’ of Edwin Porter’s *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show*).

*Sherlock, Jr.* also corresponds to trends in cinema through its genre: comedy. There are aspects of the film and its reception that reflect the lineage of that genre: the June 3 *Herald* article frames the film as part of the lineage of slapstick comedy, and while it argues that the film’s style developed out of the public tiring of “pies throwing comedies,” it still acknowledges the history of the genre, saying that Keaton has “graduate[d] from” the previous style\(^{19}\). This history is acknowledged in the film, where Keaton slips on his own banana peel, a variation on a typical slapstick gag he earlier inverted in his short *The High Sign*, wherein the peel is set up but Keaton walks on it undisturbed. The status of the genre at the time is also important in establishing the ways in which *Sherlock* corresponds to its time period, as Keaton was a member of a privileged group of screen comedians of the 1920s, of which, the article states, “are only three”: Keaton, Chaplin, and Lloyd\(^{20}\). An article advertising *Sherlock, Jr.*’s debut in the May 28 *Herald* and an advertisement for Harold Lloyd’s eight-reel *Girl Shy* are given as much attention on the page as an advertisement for the rerelease of Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*, showing the comedians’ shared prestige\(^{21}\). Bordwell and Thompson also associate these three with the rise of slapstick comedy in Hollywood, the genre being afforded feature length efforts rather than its previous status confined to shorts accompanying “more prestigious features”\(^{22}\). The near-“surrealism” that distinguished Keaton was far from rejected.

\(^{17}\) “Buster Keaton”, 6.
\(^{18}\) Thompson and Bordwell, *Film History*, 164.
\(^{19}\) “Comedy”, 6.
\(^{20}\) Ibid.
\(^{21}\) *Calgary Daily Herald*, May 28, 1924, 6.
\(^{22}\) Thompson and Bordwell, *Film History*, 139-10.
by the public and the establishment\textsuperscript{23}, and just as the dream sequence in \textit{Sherlock, Jr.} allows for a departure from normality, comedy allowed Keaton license for creative expression within Hollywood.

Despite the dual structure of this essay, the intention of it is not to establish one viewpoint of \textit{Sherlock, Jr.} through the \textit{Herald} articles only to rebuke it. Rather, as I have argued, while the exuberant praise from the articles gives some testimony to what made the film exceptional in its time, in their positivity and acceptance they hint at some of the ways the film yields to convention. Seeing \textit{Sherlock, Jr.} as a unique film, but one that nonetheless abided by certain conventions and was produced in an industrial system, might point to a view of Hollywood cinema, according to Thomas Schatz in “The Whole Equation of Pictures”, as a system where “varied and contradictory forces [are] held in equilibrium”\textsuperscript{24}. A film’s reception, circumstances of production, and generic content are some things to consider when examining this viewpoint.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 140.

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