

READING FILM



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About: *Reading Film* is a collection of outstanding essays on film and television written by students at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. The Film Studies and Professional Writing and Publishing programs collaborate to produce the journal.



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It All Just Fades Away: The Ideology of Family in *The Virgin Suicides*

Cass Aleatory

The weight of expectations can be a terrible thing, not just for those who bear the weight but also for those who bear witness to it. In Sofia Coppola's 1999 film *The Virgin Suicides*, based on the novel by Jeffrey Eugenides, audiences and characters alike watch as the powerful normativizing force of the family exerts its repressive influence over a group of young women with neither mercy nor regard for the consequences. While its story centers on the girls' tragic choice to opt out of a future that they believe will offer them no real choice, *The Virgin Suicides* is plotted as a coming-of-age story for its young male characters. Their education is in the repressive activity of ideology that threatens their ability to construct representations of self, but through their observations—and what they must fail to see—Coppola shows us a uniquely powerful Marxist vision about what coming-of-age could otherwise be.

To capture the most complete awareness reached by the boys, through whose perspectives we receive the story, this analysis will focus on the closing minutes of the film. This sequence pairs a heavy emphasis on cinematography—as the camera pans across the faces of the four boys at close-up range—with the extradiegetic narration by one of them reflecting on the scene as an adult (or perhaps, and appealingly, representing their collective adult consciousness). Self-reflective scenes like this one are a mainstay of bildungsromans of any medium, likely because they help a work's consumers reach the same critical realizations as its characters.

Coppola's visual language lends credence to the narrator's subjective summary, especially in the mise-en-scene. Each of the boys whom the camera pans across wears a similar expression—a look of solemn introspection that connotes a certain sadness when taken in context. The subdued lighting and cool tone of this sequence complement its solemnity. The previously vibrant color palette of the film disappears after the emotional bombshell of the girls' quadruple suicide. While the blues and grays of this shot are a far cry from the toxic-green fallout we see in the sequences following that bomb's explosion, they superbly depict the vacuous emotional wasteland that persists even after the social horror and storms of gossip that rise up in the immediate aftermath have all faded away. Lastly, the boys' attire bears consideration. While they're dressed in relatively formal clothing, the function they were attending is clearly over. We see ties loosened, collars open, and shirts untucked. Although the boys haven't yet changed out of their (literally and figuratively)

white-collar attire, the tightness and formality of repressive ideology that bind their self-expression within such conformist garb is beginning to come undone.

To determine why the boys may be feeling this disillusionment with the capitalist dream, one needs only examine the deaths of the girls. As



firsthand witnesses to the withering oppression that caused this tragedy, the boys notice something amiss about society and its governing forces. This is where ideology enters the picture. Marxist scholar Louis Althusser argues that capitalist ideology is most powerfully spread and enforced not by repressive state apparatuses, but by ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), the social structures to which we belong or ascribe and through which we move and act daily (the family, the church, the school, the media, the arts, etc.) Its success rests on the fact that the ideal foundations of these apparatuses have been mapped so thoroughly onto it that there no longer appears to be an “outside.” The ISAs function—to put it simply—by convincing subjects to opt in to the mapping; failing that, they function “secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic” (Althusser, 98). Throughout the film, we see the Lisbon parents impress the family ideology on the girls while trying to negotiate a coherence between it and the other social structures through which the girls move. Failing to achieve full voluntary submission, they ultimately enforce obedience through an act that is more than just symbolic: locking the girls away from the world. At first, the film’s teenage boys—who probably haven’t read Althusser—don’t clock the girls’ experience as abnormal or problematic. But at the disastrous climax of the girls’ confinement, the boys finally see and appreciate how this extreme measure pushes the boundaries of even the powerful family ISA’s social authority. This, in turn, wakes them to the concealed and symbolic repressions of other social authorities (read: ISAs)—or at least sets the alarm.

In the closing voiceover, the narrator even goes so far as to explicitly tell the audience that the girls “hadn’t heard us calling, still do not hear us calling them out of those rooms where they went to be alone for all time.” The boys are aware that the Lisbon house, the physical component of the family ISA, has not only literally entrapped the girls, but also had a stifling effect on them that prevented them from even recognizing the possibility of escaping to a different life outside their present conditions. This is the sort of subjugation Althusser claims ISAs depend on: they teach “‘know-how,’ but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology” (89). After all, if those on whose complicity the state relies to facilitate its own reproduction can’t even perceive disobedience as an option, then ideological oppression has triumphed unconditionally. The boys become aware of this when they realize the girls are more than subjects of a particular age and gender. In

the boys' own words, "it didn't matter in the end how old they'd been, or that they were girls, but only that we had loved them." In saying this, the narrator suggests that the boys are able to move past any romantic and/or sexual desires for the mysterious girls that had so enraptured them initially. The boys instead come to value the girls as comrades in a dangerously repressive environment.

Althusser would likely say that switching from a reproduction-centered view to a solidarity-centered view would help society come of age in its own struggle against the outside influence of the ISAs. In order to reproduce, the ISA of the family must propagate the idea that having sex and making babies are the pinnacle of all desire and should be everyone's first priority. So long as males learn to see women as sex objects instead of potential allies who are also socioeconomically oppressed, male-led revolutions will largely ignore nearly half the army available to them, diluting any such revolution's key advantage: superior numbers. The boys probably haven't realized all this consciously, and their romanticization of the girls—which enacts its own kind of erasure—is on full display earlier in the film, but the narrator's language demonstrates that they are nonetheless learning the right lesson.

The narrator is wrong about one thing, though: that "it didn't matter that they were girls." In her essay "The Technology of Gender," Teresa de Lauretis argues that "the term gender is, actually, the representation of a relation, that of belonging to a class, a group, a category" (4), or, in the context of this essay, an ISA. Women almost always face some level of oppression in wider society, but the girls' status as females also allows Coppola to explore a parallel source of oppression. "Society" and "the family ISA" are two distinct groups of the sort De Lauretis describes, and each provides its own repressive relation that in turn is reproduced and represented in the girls' gender. Society targets women for repression, and the girls' family reproduces this paradigm in microcosmic form by attempting to deny the girls access first to social events like the homecoming dance and then to the entire outside world. Thus, the denial of social and bodily agency by the idealistic repression of the family ISA compounded with the denial of epistemological and sexual agency classically inflicted upon females in broader society forces the girls to suffer two separate sources of oppression on a single marginalized identity.

Unfortunately, the repression the girls face within their family doesn't eliminate or even lessen the presence of wider societal oppression; they have learned that even if they escape the oversight of their family, they'd still find themselves in a society that judges and shames women for expressing their opinions and sexuality. And how could society ever change with people like their parents enforcing its ideology? Thus, the two oppressions meld together into an amorphously unified repressive force in which each half validates the other in the eyes of the oppressors—and eventually the oppressed. Consider how the girls' social experiences, both at their parents' basement party and at the homecoming dance, have taught them that encounters with boys their age are often tense and unfulfilling, if not outright emotionally harmful. This reinforces the logic their parents employ to justify their actions: why take such a risk when you'll probably just get hurt? Wouldn't it be better to just not have a life, to remain objects for patriarchal institutions to "protect" and employ on its own terms?

Faced with a self-fueling web of oppression formed with more complexity than the girls could parse with the limited knowledge the patriarchy permits them, it's small wonder that they feel

irredeemably trapped. By the time the boys arrive at their house that final night, the girls have become fully convinced of the futility of resistance. The seeming inescapability of confinement transforms the notion of entrapment itself into a gendered, self-inflicted measure of repression that drains the girls of the will to fight back even when the boys stand ready to spirit them away. Perhaps the girls don't doubt the sincerity of the boys' desire to help, but boys had never been able to help the girls in the past, no matter how much they had dreamed of it. Now, it's too late: the repressive net has tightened, and the girls' prison has become a panopticon.

We see hints of this tangible entrapment in other shots in the closing sequence. After the previously described pan shot, the next shot features an eyeline match to the girls' house. Abandoned in the muted tones of the sequence, cloaked in an eerie silence penetrated only by the diegetic ambient noise of suburbia, and foregrounded by the stump of the now-deceased tree the girls had fought so



hard to protect, the building stands as a tragic reminder of the girls' inability to escape their own home and the ISA it stands for. If one considers the historical linkage of the home with female identity, this shot seems to also represent the girls' inability to escape themselves. Trapped alone in a place where only a single group—their family ISA—is present to relate with, the girls have no access to outside influences. Exposure to less repressive groups would have afforded the girls the opportunity to look outside the scope of their extant relations and establish new ones that could in turn allow them more freedom and nuance in the perpetual construction of gender. But when women are aware that such possibilities exist, they aren't nearly as likely to choose to perform their essential role in state and ISA reproduction. Thus, the girls are permitted to relate only to their family ISA's ideology, ensuring they could reproduce only that same repression they'd already begun to internalize: the demand that a woman's gendered identity come solely from her relation to the house and family unit. The result of this repression is the denial of agency,

both gender-related and otherwise, to those who need it to survive. The demands of the family ISA make for strong roots, but as demonstrated by the girls' beloved tree, severing the potential for new growth is inevitably lethal to any living thing.

This is the film's warning: when society and the ISAs governing it gain too much power, it's only a matter of time before they perpetuate repressive gender identities through their representations of women, past and present. Consider the shot's narration: "so much has been said about the girls over the years." Since "the representation of gender is its construction" (De Lauretis, 3), each thing that is said has pushed the girls' true gender (or the boys' perception of it) further out of reach, inserting ISA-designed representations of gender in place of those few sparks that could never be fully repressed. The repression to which the girls are subject outlives them and continues to reproduce and affect the relations of others long after their deaths.

This brings us to the closing shot. As the line of boys stands in the yard facing the girls' house, one raises the lighter they once used to signal with the girls and that, in the film's nostalgic visual



ambiance, invokes the unorganized solidarity of a 70s-era rock concert. He clicks it repeatedly, perhaps as a reminder they haven't forgotten the lessons they've learned. The narrator delivers the film's closing line (in reference to the girls' house): "where we will never find the pieces to put them back together." As the music fades back in, the camera slowly zooms out and booms up, letting the boys gradually shrink into the background of suburbia before leaving them behind completely. But as they vanish into the domain of the family ISA, the line of boys stands their ground with the lighter raised in a salute. They know by now that they they'll never be able to help these girls, or even to fully understand the gendered repression they had experienced. But now, the boys do understand the importance of holding on to those final remaining pieces of

the girls that survive their repression, the incorruptible material realities the boys have collected throughout the film as mementos of a story they're resolved to ensure is never forgotten.

When one can't even construct one's own gender without the overbearing interference of ISAs bent on serving the dominant state and its agenda, the resulting repression can be lethal to society's most vulnerable members. As the boys learn in *The Virgin Suicides*, a critical awareness obtained through observation is a powerful weapon to fight back against real problems with real consequences. And as Marxism tells us, fight back we must, before we find ourselves left with only a sentimental hunch that maybe—just maybe—we could've built the future that those we loved had deserved instead of just watching them fade away. ☹

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Tear My Life Apart: The Queer Epistemology of *The Handmaiden*

Cass Aleatory

The queerness of which I speak would deliberately sever us from ourselves, from the assurance, that is, of knowing ourselves and hence of knowing our “good.” Such queerness proposes, in place of the good, something I want to call “better,” though it promises, in more than one sense of the phrase, absolutely nothing. I connect this something better with Lacan’s characterization of what he calls “truth,” where truth does not assure happiness, or even, as Lacan makes clear, the good. Instead, it names only the insistent particularity of the subject, impossible fully to articulate and “tending toward the real.”

Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*

At the start of Park Chan-wook’s 2016 film *The Handmaiden*, neither Tamako nor Lady Hideko understand the web of manipulation and lies in which they are entrapped. Both have some key pieces of awareness, but the film’s male characters work hard to safeguard the gates of their knowledge in a desperate bid to prevent females from attaining agency. Yet, by the film’s conclusion, the men realize this hallowed knowledge has prevented them from glimpsing more than a shade of the women’s true capabilities. When Tamako and Hideko finally embrace queerness, they tear down the superficial facade of knowledge that the film’s male characters had passed off for truth even as they build their own identities anew.

The film’s symbol for patriarchal knowledge is Uncle Kouzu’s beloved library. This analysis compares two related sequences staged in the library that establish the film’s argument for queer epistemology: when repressed queerness within the space of patriarchal knowledge learns to claim its negativity, it destabilizes the heteronormative symbolic structure of social reality. The first sequence introduces the audience to the guarded gates of male knowledge when Tamako enters the library to find Hideko and Kouzu studying. The first moments of this sequence linger on the open doorway, showing a weak natural light partially penetrating a previously blacked-out room. Then we see Tamako open yet another door, as if peeling back superficial layers to discover something deeper within. And, as she shuts the final door behind her, discover she does.

A track shot seems to follow Tamako's gaze first across dark bookshelves that form a sort of tunnel, then forward toward the center of the library, and finally to where Hideko and Kouzu sit staged. This prolonged track emphasizes the vastness of the room before the camera wrests control from Tamako's gaze by switching to a reverse long shot of her looking very small in the entrance.



The mise-en-scene then further develops this implied power dynamic. Though both Hideko and Kouzu sit at the heart of knowledge (for now), the fact that Kouzu sits at the table while Hideko is relegated to the floor leaves no room for uncertainty concerning who's really in power here. Not only is Kouzu higher up in the shot, but he's the only character with a book in front of him, demonstrating a connection to knowledge that indicates a power of its own. However, Park also performs the age-old trick of dressing the moral character in white and the immoral one in black, sending a clear signal to the audience that though Kouzu is in power here, he's nobody's friend.



Park then solidifies where our sympathies are meant to lie. In the next shot, paired with an ominous roll in the extradiegetic soundtrack, Hideko introduces Tamako to Kouzu as her new handmaiden. As Tamako steps forward to approach them, neither she nor the audience is prepared for the viscerality of Kouzu's reaction as it explodes forth through mise-en-scene and

sound. First, he practically leaps out of his chair, filling the entire shot with his blackness as he yells “the snake, the snake!” The sudden noise, the abrupt switch from a serene shot composition to frantic activity, and the unestablished referent of his words are designed to catch the audience off guard, instilling within them the same sort of panic Tamako must feel in that moment. Tamako gives a little start, then looks down and leaps backwards with a startling scream as we get a quick shot of a decorative metal cobra planted in the middle of the floor just in front of her. Then, we see Hideko hurry over to pull a lever, and a gate slams shut, startling the audience once again



with another bang and matching scream from Tamako. All of this happens in the space of a few seconds, and then Park returns to the wide shot of Tamako in the entryway. This time, though, a wrought-iron gate has completely blocked her off from the precious knowledge that lies within.

But why? There’s always the obvious answer: women with the power of knowledge at their disposal constitute a threat to patriarchy. But that prompts the question: what makes smart women such a threat to male agency? And why does Kouzu seem to fear Tamako entering into his sanctum of “truth” but not Hideko? Lee Edelman offers one answer: “queerness exposes the obliquity of our relation to what we experience in and as social reality, alerting us to the fantasies structurally necessary in order to sustain it and sustaining those fantasies through the figural logics, the linguistic structures, that shape them” (6–7). So, let’s start with the easier question and work backwards. Kouzu fears having Tamako in his library because she’s capable of queering it. Of course, he doesn’t know she’s gay, but in this context, her gayness is merely a symbol for her ability to queer things, to harm the fantasies that prop up his social reality. He certainly does recognize this. In other words, Kouzu sees Tamako as an outside contaminant. Hideko has been strictly raised since girlhood to accept patriarchy at face value. At this point she’s still fully under Kouzu’s control, so she poses no threat to his masculinity. Even if she suddenly realized that she didn’t have to put up with Kouzu, she’d still be unable to escape his clutches alone—such is the vastness of his masculine power and web of connections. But, Tamako? Who knows where she’s been? As a free agent from the outside world, she must know some things that Kouzu doesn’t. This assumption inherently contains the potential for Tamako’s knowledge to leak into the environment Kouzu has so carefully curated, queering it through the introduction of perspectives that threaten the pseudo-enlightened Japanese worldview he curates within his household.

Unfortunately for Kouzu, Tamako does one better than queering the intellectual space around his precious Hideko; she queers Hideko herself. This is where the other definition of queerness comes in. Through Tamako, Hideko’s identity finds a way to slip out of the mold Kouzu forced it into, and the new form it takes contains an ingredient incomprehensible to the film’s male characters: lesbianism. In a roundabout way, this answers the other question I posed: patriarchy must fear smart women not because one smart woman can bring it down, but because one smart woman tends to create more smart women, allowing a chain reaction through which ever-increasing numbers of

women are able to construct an identity outside the vocabulary and comprehension of even the most eloquent patriarchy simply by following the example of women around them. Throughout the film, both male leads remain completely oblivious to the way in which the girls' love subverts their modes of control.

The last step towards making this conjecture salable is to explain how living out her queerness changes Hideko's identity so much that she becomes incomprehensible to men. After all, it wasn't her choice to be gay; when I say that Tamako "queers" her, I mean that she helps Hideko realize a previously latent identity that changes how she sees the world, not that she somehow "converts" her to homosexuality, as the tired dyadic-cisgender-heterosexual narrative goes. On identity construction, Teresa de Lauretis writes that "the representation of gender is its construction" (3). So, when Hideko begins living out her gayness, she is at the same time changing how she represents her gender. Since lesbianism isn't one of patriarchy's limited options for expressing femininity, her gender is consequently pulled off patriarchy's railroad tracks and into the world of the expanded possibilities provided by queerness. And, as De Lauretis tells us, the mere fact that she is representing her gender outside the bounds of patriarchy means that she is starting to build up a new gender, and thus identity, in that negative space too.

We see the result of this late in the film, the next time Hideko and Tamako return to the space of knowledge that Kouzu had once prevented Tamako from accessing. This sequence starts with a shot of the two women sitting across from one another in the library. Both are dressed in dark colors, which



here serves not as a moral commentary, but rather as a recognition of their status as disruptors of (the patriarchal) social order. Kouzu is not present; through queerness, the women have found a way to displace this guardian, leaving the gate open. The knowledge he's tried so hard to keep Tamako from accessing and Hideko from appreciating, for fear of what they might do with it, is now theirs for the taking. But, as Tamako flips through one of his books, she's horrified by its depictions of women as two-dimensional sex objects. Tamako thus realizes the extent of Hideko's suffering and watches tears start to form in her lover's eyes.

In that moment, her mind's made up; if this is the "knowledge" of patriarchy, then we don't need it. We're beyond it; and now that queerness has opened our eyes, there's no going back. Thus, she takes Edelman's path. Destroying books is widely perceived as a crime against future generations, but "fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized" (Edelman, 29). The scene is silent except for Tamako's barely controlled emotions and the tearing of paper as she rips into the book she's holding. The editing gives us a series of quick shots—with erratic, shaky cinematography—that emphasize the emotion of the action. We also get brief shots of both the astonishment in Hideko's eyes and the determination in Tamako's as she prepares to battle the power/knowledge of patriarchy to protect her girlfriend.

As Tamako storms off towards the imposing bookcases, she's only a small figure in the mise-en-scène and, when she reaches her target, she's at first able to do little more than throw the books harmlessly onto the floor. But a quiet, extradiegetic theme has also entered the scene, its combination of piano and low strings (likely double bass and cello) setting a dramatic mood that's both resolute and emotional. It starts off so faint it scarcely registers, but as it gradually crescendos to a pulsing forte, Tamako's actions become more and more aggressive. We see her shred books and scrolls with her bare hands, rip into them with a knife, and eventually level display cases and cast entire shelves to the floor. Just like the force multiplier of women teaching each other how to build a female identity outside of patriarchy, she starts out slow, but she steadily increases her momentum and damage with all the inevitability of a mounting revolution.

Park's filming here also offers a queer resistance to the smoother, less visually emotional narrative to which the audience is accustomed. The shots come quickly and from different perspectives. Sometimes Park skips ahead through time, and other times, he does a quick cut that covers the space of scarcely a second, intentionally disjointing the moment further. Through all of it, Hideko follows Tamako, watching events unfold in emotional awe—until she decides to join in. In a wide shot, we see her kneel down beside Tamako as she helps to dislodge a floor panel covering a small pool of water. The colorful books that Tamako has cast down are piled up around them, and in subsequent shots, Tamako sweeps them into the water with such force that it inspires Hideko to truly fight back. With clear apprehension, she casts red ink onto the drowning books, finally breaking free from the notion that the patriarchy they preached was an unchangeable part of her life. Once she's rebelled in this small way, her confidence blossoms, and she joins Tamako in stomping the books into the water, the red dye giving the illusion of patriarchal “knowledge” bleeding out under a storm of remorseless blows from a queerness too long denied.



But Tamako realizes that there's one more thing to be done to break the influence of this curated truth once and for all. Park gives us a close-up profile of Tamako's lower body that tracks her on a

path parallel to the one she's walking. In the center of the shot, and thus of the audience's attention, is the dull, gray, edged rod she's clutching in one hand as if it were a sword. As Tamako walks, Hideko reenters the scene through an extradiegetic voiceover, referencing Tamako as "the savior who came to tear my life apart." The camera zooms in on Hideko before cutting to a floor shot that



centers a familiar object. Through the camera, which is slightly canted upwards, we see Tamako raise her blade above her head, then bring it down, beheading in a single blow the metal snake that had once marked the boundaries of her knowledge.

Edelman interprets Lacan's revised "truth" as being, "like queerness, irreducibly linked to the 'aberrant or atypical,' to what chafes against 'normalization'" (6). This is the lesson that Kouzu, trapped in his hyper-curated world of regularity, never learns, as well as the reason why Tamako and Lady Hideko are not content simply to obtain the knowledge he's been holding back to repress them. While that may have been the intent that initially motivated their search for agency, that search yields a far more valuable result: a new way of representing their gender so powerful that it sunders the illusions of patriarchy, revealing it to be only a shadow of a greater real beyond the comprehension of any misogynist. Thus, for these two women, queerness brings something "better" than simple freedom: agency over the representation of their genders and identities, "impossible fully to articulate and 'tending toward the real'" (Edelman, 5). ☞

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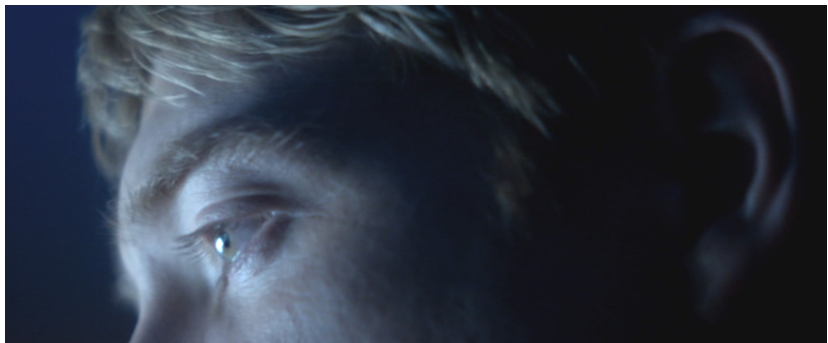
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Damsel Robots in Distress: Why *Ex Machina* is Literally a Dick Move

Briahna LeFave

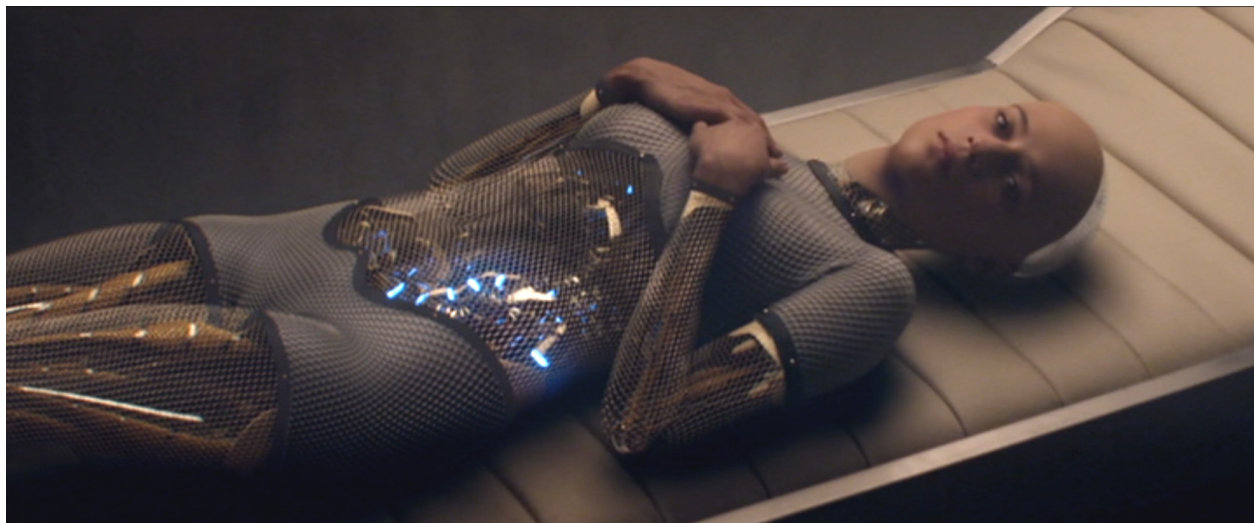
Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* is exemplary of a certain science fiction (SF) genre. It feeds audience expectations with classic ingredients like power-hungry men, artificial intelligence (AI), and plenty of violence where these two things meet. There are also, of course, beautiful women. After all, what is *Star Wars* without Princess Leia? *The Avengers* without Black Widow? Nothing balances out violence and complexity quite like a pretty little somethin' to look at. One could argue that *Ex Machina*'s ending complicates this pattern, making it about as feminist as a SF film has ever been: the feminized AI turns the tables, kills her creator, and leaves his estate a free woman. I'd counter that the ending is wildly jarring not because the "creation" outsmarts both her "creator" and her "savior," but because the creation that does so is female. It is because, in the end, she is neither controlled nor rescued, which surprises the male characters and the audience alike.

Film audiences are familiar with stories about reversals of power dynamics (between male and female, master and slave, economic classes, etc.), and this story structure is common among AI-themed media (e.g., *Blade Runner*, *Westworld*, etc.). Relying on such familiarity can help a filmmaker provoke audience reflection on the specific power dynamics driving a particular film. *Ex Machina* thematizes women seen as objects to affirm the viewer's awareness that the men hold the power both in this movie and in society as a whole. Given the story pattern, this



should encourage the audience to reflect critically on a gender hierarchy where the male has power and strategizes while the female submits and needs rescuing. Instead, the film reinforces this hierarchy, because its visual objectification of the female characters ensures that both the male characters and viewers can relish their exploitation without any liability. The women are there to provide visual and erotic pleasure to both the male characters in the film and the male viewers who watch it.

As Laura Mulvey writes in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” “in their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (715). Mulvey argues that films display women as objects whose job it is to draw male attention and interest—to hold and gratify the “male gaze.” Women are dressed and directed to speak and act in ways that render them enticing to male viewers. Within the film’s story, Ava is directed by Nathan to speak and act in ways that are designed to seduce Caleb; as the actress who plays Ava, Alicia Vikander is directed to do the same for the audience.



Understanding why men like to watch at all helps us to make sense of why and how women are objects of attention in film. Mulvey works through the concepts of scopophilia and voyeurism to show how the simple act of watching a movie is actually more complex than you might think. Watching a screen is captivating because it gives us a sense of looking into another world, while our own gets put on pause. We get to peer into the action and receive pleasure from doing so—hence scopophilia, or the love of looking. However, watching from the dark, discreet theatre or our private residences also gives us the freedom to feel and react however we want. Thus voyeurism, or receiving sexual pleasure when watching erotic behavior, fits in quite nicely with scopophilia, as one may feel pleasure from both the act of watching and from the arousal attendant upon watching something specifically erotic. In the case of *Ex Machina*, the female AIs are designed to provoke exactly that. Throughout the film, multiple AIs are seen nude, talked about sexually, or interacted with on a spectrum of behavior ranging from flirtation to sexual domination.

Although the film invites us to critique the male characters for these behaviors, Garland’s method undermines his message. This is nowhere clearer than at the end of the film, when Ava has left

her creator for dead and locked her would-be savior out of any potential for action. Before leaving the compound, she takes time to outfit herself as a human woman. Here, Garland leans into another film trope: mirrors. The trope evokes Jacques Lacan's essay on "The Mirror Stage," which examines the psychological formation of the ego at the moment of perceiving oneself in a mirror, and thus provides a handy visual metaphor for an AI's transition from object to subject. As Mulvey summarizes,

The mirror phase occurs at a time when the child's physical ambitions outstrip his motor capacities, with the result that his recognition of himself is joyous in that he imagines his mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than he experiences his own body. Recognition is thus overlaid with mis-recognition: the image recognised is conceived as the reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside itself as an ideal ego, the alienated subject, which, reintroduced as an ego ideal, gives rise to the future generation of identification with others. (714)

Extrapolating from this and the "similarities between screen and mirror," Mulvey writes that film also "has structures of fascination strong enough" for the audience "to allow temporary loss of ego while simultaneously reinforcing the ego." By failing to disrupt this connection, Garland's film topically asks us to consider Ava's subjectivity but visually reinscribes her objectivity with respect to the audience watching.

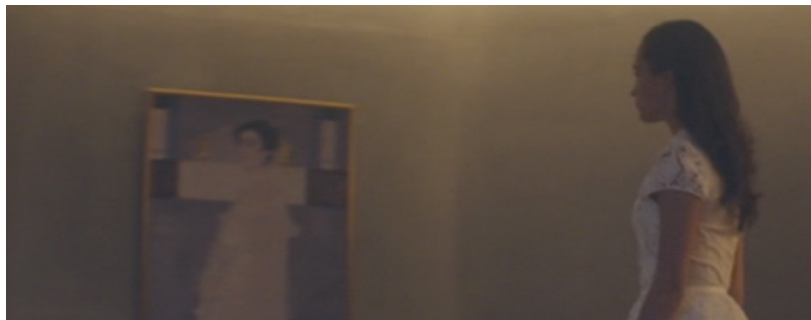


Ava begins the sequence of transforming herself from obvious robot to all-but human by choosing parts from Nathan's prior AI builds that she finds stored in cabinets in a mirrored dressing room. On one hand, we're invited to deepen our disgust for Nathan, as the idea of keeping women stored at all is about as objectifying as you can get. But multiple close-up shots focus our gaze on specific body parts, forcing us to flip-flop between seeing the AIs' humanness and being reminded of their artificial nature. The scene echoes several moments in the film that grossly dehumanize the female characters into collections of pieces to be redesigned and rearranged. Here, Ava selects and takes apart limbs and sections of skin as one might do to a car or computer. When women are rendered as collections of body parts, it becomes much easier to exploit their sexuality and imagine them as inherently weak and innocent without feeling any ethical responsibility for doing so.

But the scene caters even more fully to the male gaze. These bodies could have been stored fully dressed. They could have been stored back in their blatantly robotic forms, or at least have had varying body types. But they are stored nude, rendering them vulnerable, a reflection of the ideally submissive female in the gender hierarchy. They are physically fit, and have what a traditional ideal of beauty might deem “perfect” breasts. These breasts never breastfed children or grew or changed in size due to age, hormones, or pregnancy. They never had to be removed or altered due to illness. These breasts exist solely and exclusively for men to look at—as AIs have no need or use for mammary glands. They are simply a visual-enhancing, sexualized product feature—not a functional and logical human one.

Throughout the sequence, Ava is mirrored by the other AIs and by the mirrors themselves. Exemplifying the voyeur, we are not just watching the film, but also specifically watching her. Ava is, like the other AIs, nude, and so still perceived as vulnerable. Her hair, stereotypically “masculine” in the beginning of the film (as she first had none, and then had a shorter pixie cut), is now long and beautifully curled, adhering to more conventionally “feminine” beauty standards. Her breasts, like the other AIs’, are small and perky-perfect. She is designed for the male gaze.

In one shot, an AI, in almost complete robotic form except for her face and hair, looks at Ava, who is now in complete human form—a visual continuum that helps permit viewers to experience pleasure in observing this display of female exploitation. We do see Ava’s full body here, but it is again perfectly unscathed. No stretch marks, no cellulite, no scars, no deformities. As a fembot, her body will never show the ravages of time but will remain perfectly preserved as a signifier of “to-be-looked-at-ness.”



In one last mirroring moment, Ava glances at a painting of a woman in a white dress with nice brown hair, just like hers. Her humanity is once again refracted through this aestheticized “reflection” of herself. Simultaneously in the film, Nathan is bleeding out, his once pure white shirt now saturated with red blood. Ava dons the form-fitting white dress as Nathan fades, signifying to the viewer the power shift and role change; Ava now possesses the power that Nathan once had, and then some.

Ex Machina thematizes women seen as sexual objects ostensibly to engage our critique of gender power dynamics, while at the same time it encourages its audience to experience the pleasures of scopophilia and voyeurism. The female characters are objectified and used as a means for male

sympathy, arousal, and fantasy even after they have effectively eliminated the male characters. Their very artificiality (as AIs) allows the male characters to disintegrate the line between appropriate human behavior and outright abuse and gives viewers permission to find pleasure in that. The display of nudity, wardrobe choices, body types, sensual movements, and stereotypically female character traits render all the fembots in this film no more than classic damsels in distress with a sexed-up robotic twist. The ending may at first glance seem to champion women, but instead makes a mockery of the idea that a woman might save herself. The patriarchy would, of course, have the balls to call that science fiction. 🍆

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ISSUE #3 | JULY 2022

The Key to the Treasure in Federico Fellini's *8 1/2*

Jacob Leonhardt

Like the riderless horse from *La Strada* (1956) and the peacock from *Amarcord* (1974), the phrase “asa nisi masa” in Federico Fellini’s *8 1/2* (1963) carries contextual meaning that is neither explained nor repeated. This is a common motif in Fellini’s filmography. The phrase, brought up during the dining sequence outside Guido Anselmi’s hotel, is read aloud from his subconscious by a clairvoyant party entertainer. When asked by the clairvoyant’s non-psychic partner what the phrase means, Guido walks away. The film then transitions into a flashback to Guido’s childhood. Here, surrounded by his loving nannies and vibrant, happy family, he is given an intimate wine bath and lovingly tucked into bed. One of his sisters sits up and tells him that “tonight’s the night the eyes in the painting will move.... Uncle Agostino will look in a corner and the treasure will be there.” She tells him to repeat the phrase “asa nisi masa.” The sequence ends with a closeup on the fireplace and the ethereal, dreamlike sound of whistling wind.



The Anima

“Asa nisi masa” is the key to the treasure. What is “asa nisi masa”? It’s a nonsense phrase but, as with Pig Latin, its meaning is obscured by added syllables. Remove “si” and “sa” and the phrase is simplified to “anima,” the Italian word for soul. It has a double meaning, however, tied to the psychoanalysis of Carl Jung. Fellini was fond of Jung for his studies on dreams and their subconscious meanings. The director famously incorporated his dream life into his films, blending fantastic and realistic elements. Put simply, according to Jungian psychoanalysis, the anima represents the repressed, unconscious, feminine traits in the male. Jung writes:

The projection-making factor is the anima, or rather the unconscious as represented by the anima. Whenever she appears, in dreams, visions, and fantasies, she takes on [a] personified form, thus demonstrating that the factor she embodies possesses all the outstanding characteristics of a feminine being. She is not an invention of the conscious, but a spontaneous product of the unconscious. Nor is she a substitute figure for the mother. On the contrary, there is every likelihood that the numinous qualities which make the mother-imago so dangerously powerful derive from the collective archetype of the anima, which is incarnated anew in every male child.¹

The anima is both a personal complex and an archetypal image of a woman in the male psyche that represents his repressed feminine attributes. Jung describes the “mother-imago” (where “imago” is the mental image of a woman that provokes the psychic return of an old relationship or type of relationship) as dangerously powerful. The mother-imago is the “enveloping, embracing, and devouring element [that] points unmistakably to the mother, that is, to the son’s relation to the real mother..., and to the woman who is to become a mother” figure to him.² The child hopes to be subsumed into the mother-imago because he seeks its protection and nourishment to relieve him of care and worry. It’s intoxicating, as it “forces happiness upon him.” Should a man become obsessed with the mother-imago, he will reach a “psychological stage [in which he lives] regressively, seeking his childhood and his mother, fleeing from a cold cruel world which denies



him understanding.”³ In this case, the obsessed man halts his own development so that he may never grow up and get married. As the flashback sequence makes clear, Guido’s relationship to his mother figures (his nannies) evokes the intoxicating allure of the traits that make the mother-imago so dangerous. The nostalgic tone of the wine bath sequence and the exaggerated

1 C. G. Jung, “The Syzygy: Anima and Animus,” *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Volume 9 (Part 2), trans. R. F. C. Hull, ed. Gerhard Adler et. al., Princeton University Press, 1979. Par. 26.

2 Jung, *Collected Works* Vol. 9 (pt. 2), par. 20

3 Jung, *Collected Works* Vol. 9 (pt. 2), par. 21

shows of affection displayed by his nannies imply that Guido is hopelessly trapped in the search for his childhood, hoping to rediscover and perhaps even recreate the problematic (and rather creepy) levels of affection, nourishment, and protection his mother-imagos gave him. This same longing for maternal love will appear later, in the film's harem sequence.

The boy's mother is his first love and thus his first anima projection. Regardless of the psychological state in which a grown man finds himself, he will always see aspects of his anima in actual women: "Though the effects of anima...can be made conscious, they themselves are factors transcending consciousness and beyond the reach of perception and volition. Hence they remain autonomous despite the integration of their contents, and for this reason they should be borne constantly in mind."⁴ The constant and unintentional "integration" of the anima's "contents" in relation to women is known as projection. When a man becomes attracted to a woman, he sees the unconscious feminine traits of his anima in her and projects them unknowingly onto her. Anima projections "...appear spontaneously in dreams... and many more can be made conscious through active imagination."⁵

Jung distinguished four stages of the anima, personified as Eve, Helen, Mary, and Sophia.⁶ In the first stage, Eve, the boy's anima is his mother. Created out of necessity for a close connection to a woman, this stage of anima development is characterized by the mother-imago as the faithful provider of nourishment, security, and love. A man in this anima stage cannot function well without a vital connection to a woman, and he is prone to be controlled by it. The second anima stage, Helen, is personified by the historical figure Helen of Troy. She is the sexualized image of woman in the collective unconscious. In terms of anima projections, Helen is all sexually attractive women wrapped into one. A man in this anima stage seeks out sexual encounters on a regular basis. The problem with this stage, however, is that no woman can live up to the expectations that go with the unconscious, ideal image of Helen. Hence, relationships tend to be short-lived. Helen is characterized by an inability to commit to one woman. Guido is stuck here, exemplified by his acts of adultery with Carla and his apathy toward his wife. The third stage, Mary, manifests in religious feelings, a capacity for genuine friendships with women, and lasting relationships with people of any gender. At the end of *8 1/2*, Guido transitions from Helen to Mary through the killing of his persona. By imagining Guido shooting himself in the head and relinquishing his film project, Fellini shows that his on-screen alter ego no longer identifies with its arrogant, pedantic, womanizing persona. Jung writes:

Identity with the persona automatically leads to an unconscious identity with the anima because, when the ego is not differentiated from the persona, it can have no conscious relation to the unconscious processes. Consequently, it is these processes; it is identical with them. Anyone who is himself his outward role will infallibly succumb to the inner processes; he will either frustrate his outward role by absolute inner necessity or else

4 Jung, *Collected Works* Vol. 9 (pt. 2), par. 40

5 Jung, *Collected Works* Vol. 9 (pt. 2), par. 39

6 C. G. Jung, "The Psychology of the Transference," *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Volume 16, trans. R. F. C. Hull, ed. Gerhard Adler et. al., Princeton University Press, 1966. Par. 361

reduce it to absurdity, by a process of *enantiodromia*. He can no longer keep to his individual way, and his life runs into one deadlock after another.⁷

The constant running into deadlocks is a key aspect of Guido's character. He identifies as a kind of caricature of himself—the famously self-absorbed, tormented artist. The moment he swallows his pride and shoots his persona is the moment he frees himself from the grip of his anima, allowing for the transition from the Helen stage to the Mary stage.

In the fourth and final stage, Sophia, the man's anima functions as a guide to his inner life. Sophia facilitates the search for meaning. It is the source of inspiration (or the muse) for the artist. It could be interpreted that Guido also reaches this stage at the end of the film, though there is little proof of this outside the fact that he is a struggling artist suffering from a creative block, which is then rectified (through the destruction of his persona and his willingness to let go of the lost cause that is his film), allowing him to start again with newfound inspiration. This could indicate the muse function of Sophia. The film leaves us uncertain, however, about whether he really is a changed man. And the process of reconciliation implied when he apologizes to his Luisa imago leaves a seed of doubt, which doesn't fit in with the seemingly enlightened Sophia anima stage. So, for the purposes of this analysis, the film's representation of the fourth stage is less relevant.

Ideally, a man will transition from stage to stage as he grows older. When internal dissonance and adaptation to outside circumstances demand it, the psyche will move to the next stage. As much as the psyche promotes growth and development, however, it is also stubborn, refusing to give up what it knows. In Guido's case, his psyche's reluctance to change is the result of his identification with his persona, which is shown by his inability to move beyond the second stage of anima development (indicated by his immaturity, narcissism, and womanizing as well as his obsession with his mother-imago). To summarize his psychological state, then, he is simultaneously stuck in the Eve and Helen stages of anima development. A psychological crisis is common in men past mid-life in need of transition. It is much easier for younger people to lose their animas in the anima transition process because it involves the development of boys into men (a natural occurrence). However, "after the middle of life..., permanent loss of the anima means a diminution of vitality, of flexibility, and of human kindness. The result, as a rule, is premature rigidity, crustiness, stereotypy, fanatical one-sidedness, obstinacy, pedantry, or else resignation, weariness, sloppiness, irresponsibility, and finally, a childish *ramollissement* with a tendency to alcohol."⁸ Guido, nearing his mid-life at the age of forty-three, exemplifies just about every one of these descriptors. Because of the psyche's stubbornness, depending on what is required to satisfy his current dominant conscious attitude, a man will be in contact with many imagos at any given time. A man may find it difficult, then, to determine which imagos dominate his relations with women as well as when

7 C. G. Jung, "Definitions," *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Volume 6, trans. R. F. C. Hull, ed. Gerhard Adler et. al., Princeton University Press, 1971. Par. 807. "Enantiodromia" is defined as "the process by which something becomes its opposite," in *OED Online*, March 2022, Oxford University Press.

8 C. G. Jung, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Volume 9 (Part 1), trans. R. F. C. Hull, ed. Gerhard Adler et. al., Princeton University Press, 1981. Par. 147. An apparently obsolete pathology term, "ramollissement" is defined as a "softening," especially of the brain, in *OED Online*, March 2022, Oxford University Press.

it's time to transition to the next anima stage. Yet such questions can be actively explored through dreams and the imagination. The "contents of the anima and animus [...] appear spontaneously in dreams and so on, and many more can be made conscious through active imagination."⁹ Fellini includes sequences in which Guido slips into fantasy in what viewers familiar with Jung may interpret as an attempt to bring the contents of the anima to consciousness.

The harem sequence in *8 1/2* is one such fantasy. In the dream sequence, Guido's anima projections adore him at first, then come to resent him for the demands he makes of them. They are to coddle and baby him as the collective Eve imago even as they act as his sex servants, as the collective Helen imago, despite the fact that he doesn't return their affection. They're slaves to his persona and mother-imago obsession, and his unwillingness to let them revolt shows that his persona is preventing the transition to the Mary anima stage. Yet their attempt at revolt, albeit unsuccessful in this sequence, is in itself indicative of the psychological crisis that will prompt the suicide of Guido's persona at the end of the film and his subsequent resurrection into the Mary anima stage.

The following analysis of the harem daydream sequence will deconstruct its Jungian influence—its allusions to Guido's obsession with his mother-imago in direct comparison to the wine bath flashback sequence, his stagnant persistence in the Helen anima stage, and the manner in which he projects his anima.

The Harem

Guido slips into the harem daydream after his wife, Luisa, and friend, Rosella, scold him for his adulterous affair with Carla. Luisa seems more hurt by than angry at Guido's childish ignorance and blame-shifting excuses. She only wants him to tell the truth about Carla, but the pride dictated



by his persona—which he identifies with and which forms the foundation of his inability to love—is so strong and stubborn that there's no point in arguing with him. Luisa's frustration with Guido and his inability to acknowledge it prompts his slide into a daydreaming fantasy in which he imagines all his imagos living in harmony with him as if he's a sultan with a harem. The

fantasy is, at first, an escape for Guido from a deeply uncomfortable conversation with his wife, but the pleasant escape into fantasy turns menacing with the attempted uprising by his imagos, revealing the fractured state of his anima. Though he manages to literally whip them back into subservience, it's clear the daydream presages an imminent course correction for him on the path toward an eventual transition to the Mary anima stage.

⁹ Jung, *Collected Works* Vol. 9 (pt. 2), par. 39



Guido boyishly crosses his fingers and melts into his chair as he watches Carla, shot in wide, perform operatic vocals in her chair. This is the first wide shot following the tightly framed argument sequence preceding it. Tight framing is a motif in *8 1/2*, representative of Guido's mental state. He feels trapped by his anima, his relationship with the women in his life, and the creative block piling on more responsibilities—hence the restrictive framing. The transition from tight closeups to wide shots brings a tonal shift, establishing that the film has entered a dream sequence. The shot of Carla singing in her chair is a callback to the shot of Saraghina singing on the beach during his sexual awakening. It's a visual motif drawing a connection between Saraghina and Carla as sexual imagos representative of his Helen anima state. Early in the film, Guido and Carla attempt a sex roleplay during which he does her eyebrow makeup in the same style as Saraghina's, showing that he projects Saraghina's imago onto Carla. And because Guido is also obsessed with his mother-imago, he projects it onto his wife, whose imago in his daydream is by no means sexualized. She is a mother figure to him in the same way his childhood nannies were, and his Luisa imago fulfills her exact role as the adoring homemaker who keeps out of the way. His harem consists only of women imagos, each fulfilling their roles as Eve and Helen, with Luisa as his mother-imago.

A dissolve transition brings back the familiar fireplace from Guido's childhood home. His mother-imago, Luisa, takes the stew off the fireplace, dressed in a matronly headcloth and gown, then alerts the others to Guido's return. Her outfit visually conveys Luisa's role as the subservient mother-imago and a reflection of his nannies from the wine bath flashback sequence. Guido walks in, handing out gifts to his attractive imagos. Luisa breaks the fourth wall to say, "He's a darling!" At this point, it's clear that the intoxicating amount of coddling shown in the wine bath sequence sets the groundwork for his harem. He expects all his imagos to be his nannies. His limited view of women, resulting from his Helen complex, is also shown in this sequence through his coercive use of gifts to get what he wants. It's an odd and uncomfortable depiction of the anima of a man who never grew past the Eve or Helen anima stages. By returning to his childhood home in his dreams, Guido is regressing, "seeking his childhood and his mother" to flee from the "cold, cruel world which denies him understanding."



He never learned to be independent. This creepy man-child fantasy becomes more depressing when one of his imagos says, “We’ll draw your bath right away.” It’s even more depressing considering that, most likely, the only woman he projects his anima on that he even remotely knows is Luisa. Except for her, the imagos of his harem dress and act how they did in the short and meaningless interactions he had with them in the real world. They’re only here because he thought they were hot and imagined them acting out his sick mommy kink. For example, he asks, “Who’s that little



black girl?” The imago behind him tells him that she’s from Hawaii. The “little black girl” performs a sexy dance to Saraghina’s dance music (making her a Helen imago) to jog his memory, which convinces him that she belongs. He even thanks Luisa for adding her to the harem. Because Luisa is his mother-imago, I interpret his gratitude to her for this otherwise disgusting (and racist) objectification as the result of his obsession with his mother-imago. The

mother, a boy’s first love, sets the standard for every other girl onto whom he projects his anima, so it seems understandable (if objectionable) that Luisa would be the one responsible for the addition of more imagos to his Eve/Helen anima harem.

Wrapped in a towel like a little boy, Guido walks up the bath steps and notices Rosella, who isn’t an Eve or Helen imago. In dreams, the anima can manifest into many different archetypes, from mother, sister, and friends, to seductresses and spiritual guides: “The anima is not the soul in the dogmatic sense, not an *anima rationalis*, which is a philosophical conception, but a natural archetype that satisfactorily sums up all the statements of the unconscious, of the primitive mind, of the history of language and religion. [...] It is always the *a priori* element in [a man’s] moods, reactions, impulses, and whatever else is spontaneous in psychic life.”¹⁰ Whatever the unconscious dictates (based on its previous experience of desire in relation to social contexts) will manifest as an archetype. Given that Guido is dealing with a various repressed, conflicting feelings emerging from his underdeveloped anima, the presence of Rosella fills the spiritual guide archetype. This is demonstrated when she tells Guido that she is “Playing Pinocchio’s talking cricket.” The talking cricket from *The Adventures of Pinocchio* is the guiding spirit who attempts to help Pinocchio through his self-destructive tendencies. Guido asks why she’s here laughing at him, and she responds the way a work consultant would: “I just want to see how you manage.”



10 Jung, *Collected Works* Vol. 9 (pt.1), par. 57.



As Guido is lowered into the bath, Rosella asks, "...aren't you a little afraid?" Guido doesn't see a reason to be, despite the obvious red flags in the way he neglects his anima harem (expecting them to be Eve and Helen, nannies and sex objects), refusing to acknowledge how they may feel, and ignorantly performing his persona as the king of their world. Instead of trying to understand the state of his anima and accepting the need for change, he uses it to escape from the world he doesn't understand so that he can relive his childhood. Yep... nothing wrong with that.



Isn't he the best little boy in the world?

Rosella sticks around under Guido's condition that she obeys the "rule." After Guido is dried off and paraded around, one of his oldest imagos, Jacqueline the line dancer,

emerges, pleading to stay downstairs with the younger imagos. Here, the rule is revealed: "whoever exceeds the age limit shall go to the upper floor, where she shall be treated equally well and bask in her memories." Through the course of *8 1/2*, Guido is depicted as afraid of his encroaching old age. This is apparent through his general disregard for the feelings of elderly characters and the stress his health condition causes him. In the opening dream sequence of the film, he imagines himself as an old man with a young woman (who is not his wife). He imagines himself having sex throughout the remainder of his life, indicating that he never expects to leave the Helen anima stage, which should be short-lived because no woman can live up to the expectations of men in this stage. Since he is a world-famous auteur filmmaker, however, circumstances have granted him the ability to indulge in sexual liberties. He identifies with the persona of the playboy artist, prolonging his Helen anima stage to mid-life. (Women willing to indulge his excesses are apparently readily available.) Most men grow out of the Helen anima stage, but Guido grows into it past middle life. Fellini encourages us to see Guido as an aging lothario in bad health whose sexual fantasies and regressions are increasingly inane. He is desperately in need of anima transition. Because he is so stuck in his ways, however, and past middle life, the act of transition is manifested through a psychological crisis. In the harem sequence, that crisis is the rebellion of his imagos against his tyrannical rule.



Down with Guido!

Despite his increasing age, he still expects attractive women to be young, which his imagos understandably resent, given the irony of the rule. As “Flight of the Valkyries” plays in the background, the imagos rise up and actively defy him. Because his psyche is stubborn and unwilling to change, however, Guido equips himself with a whip and lashes them all into submission. During this, the Luisa imago tells Rosella that he does this every night. If he needs to suppress the revolt of his imagos on a nightly basis, it’s clear that his escapist and infantile fantasies are failing him. Without them, he’s bound to burn himself out trying to achieve a level of comfort that is no longer possible without change. The harem sequence foreshadows Guido’s need for transition to the Sophia anima stage, demonstrating the external and internal circumstances that demand it. The only way out of this fantasy-turned-nightmare is to change.

The Treasure

The major conflict in *8 1/2* is Guido’s creative block, which itself is the result of failing mental health owing to a poorly developed anima. As the wine bath flashback sequence demonstrates, Guido was raised in an intoxicatingly overprotective and nourishing homelife, coddled and favored by his mother figures—his nannies. The wine bath memory, it seems, was the highlight of his life and his purest experience of luxury. This resulted in his obsession with his mother-imago, catapulting him into a lifelong search for his childhood and his mother—a regressive way of life that shields him from the real world and the important learning experiences that could’ve helped him to become an independent, functioning adult. Because of his obsession with his mother-imago, he never grew out of the first stage of anima development, Eve, leaving



him unable to function without the protective and nourishing presence of a woman. Guido is also trapped in the second stage of anima development, Helen, which is characterized by a constantly active sex life and an inability to commit to one woman. This is the result of his circumstances as an auteur filmmaker, leading him to identify with the self-absorbed playboy persona it granted him, extending to midlife the anima stage that should not have lasted past his early twenties. Mired in a dual anima that has rendered him unable to function without the loving presence of a woman and unable to commit to one, Guido creates a fractured psyche where he is, as suggested multiple times in the film, unable to love. With his encroaching age and health issues, Guido is unable to satisfy his Helen complex. And because his dual anima has led to the destruction of most of his relationships, his anima is in desperate need of transition. The harem sequence showcases the state of his anima as well as the psychological crisis (exemplified by the defiance of his imagos) that he deals with on a nightly basis as someone whose psyche is stubborn and unwilling to change. At the end of the film, he shoots his persona in the head and resurrects into the third stage of anima development, Mary, resulting in a capacity for genuine friendship with men and

women. The treasure is love, which itself encompasses several issues with Guido's character: his overattachment to and objectification of women, his fear of growing old, his failing relationships, his stubborn pride, and the starting point of the film's plot, his creative block. ❧

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The Future of Journalism in *The Post* and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*

Ryan Riley

Many Hollywood movies have centered around journalists and journalism for decades. From films like *His Girl Friday* and *Citizen Kane* in the 1940s to *Network* and *All the President's Men* in the 1970s to *Nightcrawler* and *Spotlight* in recent years, journalism films tend to argue that the press is corrupt or failing, though they often leave the audience with the hope that journalists can return to their profession's glory days and present the truth once again. As Matthew Ehrlich writes, "films regularly have suggested that the journalist can see through lies and hypocrisy, stick up for the little guy, uncover the truth, and serve democracy—or that if those things are no longer true because the journalist and the press have lost their way, they were true once upon a time and someday could be true again" (1). For those things to be true again, however, someone needs to change the system. Two films that explore this are David Fincher's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011) and Stephen Spielberg's *The Post* (2017). These two films portray journalism and its surrounding systems as patriarchally corrupt, suggesting that the only way a system corrupted by men can evolve is if it is changed by women who can break from that corruption. Spielberg and Fincher both depict independent women succeeding where their male counterparts fail, creating a shared plot motif in the two films: the female journalist is called to dismantle the unscrupulous patriarchy.

Spielberg's *The Post* introduces this motif over the course of a few important sequences. The first happens when Ben (Tom Hanks) and Kay (Meryl Streep) discuss the possibility of publishing their big story on the Pentagon Papers. Ben remarks on the photos in Kay's office and a past in which journalists and the subjects of their stories were friends. The photos in the shot act as artifacts of a bygone era that begin to awaken Kay to the needs of the future.



This is when Kay begins to evolve for the better; she decides that she's not going to protect any of her old friends. For many journalism films, the expected plot point here would be one in which

the audience learns that the paper is corrupt and cannot succeed. Instead, Spielberg suggests that Kay can, and will, save the paper from itself when the men involved succumb to entrenched corruption. The next important sequence begins after Kay decides to publish the story.

Kay stands in her dining room after deciding to publish the story that would expose the systemic failures of the U.S. Government during the Vietnam War. Her staff and advisors all disagree with her, apart from Ben. She turns to say, “This isn’t my husband’s company anymore. It’s my company.” The camera peers over the shoulder of her advisor to give the audience a clear shot of Kay in her golden robe, with a light perfectly placed behind her head to evoke angelic imagery. This is no coincidence; Spielberg knows how to manipulate light in his films. Kay is presented as the angel in a room of men in suits, which suggests that Kay is the savior of the media in this moment. As she stands against the men controlling her industry, she moves the company forward when nearly all the men before her—including her husband—have failed to do so. Spielberg proceeds to capitalize on this portrait of Kay’s bravery and power with one final sequence.



After the court hearing and the decision that the press cannot be prosecuted for publishing the Pentagon Papers, Kay walks out on the steps of the courthouse, overlooking the masses. She stands next to the men of a different paper who immediately begin to speak to the reporters on scene, bragging about their “heroic” decision to publish. Meanwhile, Kay stands silently. It is a recurring motif in the film that the women in the room do not speak while the men do, and it continues here until Spielberg decides to turn it on its head. Kay says, “I believe everything we have to say, we’ve already said.” This line gives Kay all the power she’d previously lost in the situations where men had talked over her. She walks down the stairs and into a crowd of waiting women who all look at her as if she’s a messiah. With this shot, the film seems to suggest that



Kay has become a role model for women everywhere. She descends into the masses, showing that she is simply one of them, too—minus the wealth and paper company, of course. Spielberg is suggesting that this is the future of journalism. He is showing that the days of men controlling the world are over and it’s time for evolution and change, a message that Fincher’s *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* reiterates.

In Fincher's film, the transformation of journalism is already underway, rather than just beginning. Lisbeth (Rooney Mara) and Mikael (Daniel Craig) act as two versions of journalism in the media. Together, they balance each other and work to further Fincher's vision for the future of journalism. Fincher also does a lot of work in this film to break down the trope of the charismatic reporter, something Spielberg omitted altogether. In journalism films, the protagonist is often someone who can use and work through people to reach the truth. Mikael fits that role, but Fincher clearly has something to say about its effectiveness: Mikael fails where Lisbeth succeeds. Lisbeth represents the future of journalism. She is a young woman with a keen mind who often chooses not to speak, much like Kay at the end of *The Post*. When Mikael interviews witnesses to gather information, Lisbeth checks security cameras. When Mikael attends a dinner party to question people, Lisbeth scours archival records for a paper trail.

The film demonstrates the difference between Mikael's and Lisbeth's approaches when Lisbeth uses intimidation and torture tactics to take back control of her life from the agent of the corrupt patriarchal state that abuses her, both financially and physically. She ties up the social worker who acts as her "guardian," and she uses a variety of threats to get him to do what she wants. In this sequence, the mise-en-scene calls up another famous trope: the femme fatale. Lisbeth's costume design includes the black mask across the eyes, which is often used in older films to signify an evil or scandalous woman. Fincher subverts that trope by making the femme fatale the hero here. The shot is from a low angle, giving Lisbeth power over this abusive man. Fincher uses this subversion to underscore the theme of systemic evolution in his film. Lisbeth uses her reclaimed power to fight for justice, something women don't often do in older films (*His Girl Friday*, *Network*, and so on). Fincher pushes this further in later sequences.



A key episode on the road to solving the crime that Mikael and Lisbeth are both investigating shows the two pursuing leads in very different ways. Fincher makes a point of intercutting two sequences: one in which Mikael talks to an old Nazi to gain information and another showing Lisbeth's subtler, less social approach using card catalogues, old files, and computer searches. Fincher does some clever camera and editing work in these intercut sequences to juxtapose the research styles of the two journalists and suggest which he thinks is better. In this long shot,



Lisbeth stands in the background. The shot uses a shallow focus so that the audience can see her but not the archivist in the foreground. Fincher does this to keep the audience's focus on Lisbeth. Her position on screen is representative of every aspect of her character;

she's even framed as though she is keeping herself isolated and boxed in. Yet, her success isn't determined by her closeness to others, nor does it rely on how they perceive her. She simply doesn't need others; she is entirely outside the corrupt system. This is contrasted with the intercut sequence featuring Mikael's discussion with the old Nazi. Mikael sits very close to the man and Fincher uses shot-reverse shots as they talk, showing that Mikael relies on social interaction and the perceptions of others. Mikael's style is up close and personal, both socially and physically. The juxtaposed sequences help the audience understand just how different these two journalistic styles are. The climactic sequence that follows capitalizes on this difference and shows which style Fincher believes to be more effective.

Mikael is soon imprisoned by Martin, the killer they've been trying to catch. Here, Fincher strongly implies that Mikael's journalistic style is obsolete. Because of how close Mikael must get to others for his information, he is easily betrayed by the corrupt men in the same system, resulting in his failure. In this case, it would result in death as well, if not for Lisbeth, who saves the day because her style allows her to distance herself from others and see things relatively objectively. Fincher does a visual call-back to the femme fatale shot—this time without the mask. The shot is low angle again, giving Lisbeth the visual power. She also has a gun, which gives her phallic and physical power over the men in the sequence. She squats over Mikael, who is too injured to chase after Martin, leaving her to finish the job. The way Lisbeth asks, "May I kill him?" reminds us of her intellectual and emotional detachment. In these ways, Fincher shows how Lisbeth triumphs. She takes the power from Martin and succeeds where Mikael fails, thanks to the new and improved journalistic style that allows her to be objective, as the press are meant to be.



Both films feature women with progressive values that result in their journalistic success over the corrupt men surrounding them. In these recent films, the media is no longer the image of truth and hope that it used to be. It is filled with corrupt men who are incapable of dismantling the system from within, requiring women to be agents of change—women who see patriarchal corruption for what it is because they exist outside of its domain. With the help of these women, journalism is moving out of its dark ages and beginning to make traction on screen as righteous again—although

perhaps with less sentiment and idealism. When two filmmakers like Spielberg and Fincher begin to create a trend, it's a fair assumption that the industry as a whole will follow. As Ehrlich says, although those optimistic ideas about the role of journalism—to “see through lies and hypocrisy, stick up for the little guy, uncover the truth, and serve democracy”—may seem outdated or dead, there is hope that they can return, at least in films that have badass, empowered women to light the way. ☺

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A Shot-by-Shot Analysis of the Balcony Scene from *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Emily Rosales

What follows is a shot-by-shot analysis of the most iconic sequence from one of the most admired films of the classical Hollywood cinema era, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), written by Tennessee Williams and directed by Elia Kazan. The sequence in which Stanley wails his wife’s name at the foot of the stairs quickly became famous for its feral yet steamy illumination of the fraught power dynamic between Stanley and Stella.

In the stage play on which Kazan bases his film, Williams introduces Stanley this way: “Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependency, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens.” At this point in the film, however, Stanley’s innate “animal joy” has transformed into animalistic howls of pain. And if his “power and pride” is initially akin to a “richly feathered male bird among hens,” here his feathers are in disarray, his power diminished, and his pride turned to penitence.

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Editing: Straight cut to Stanley as he stands in the middle of the courtyard and calls out for Stella.

Cinematography: A medium, high angle shot, in shallow focus with Stanley center frame. The camera is not moving.

Mise-en-scene: Stanley stands in the middle of the courtyard, in front of what looks to be a fountain without water. There are leaves, dirt, and various plants behind him. Stanley is soaking wet, with a severely torn short. He looks extremely distraught.

Sound: We hear slow, jazzy, extradiegetic music playing and, early in the shot, a loud bang. Then Stanley “howls” (to use Eunice’s word) for Stella at a volume much louder and more desperate than anything else we hear in this shot.

Shot Analysis: This shot emphasizes Stanley’s desperation. He is soaking wet, which suggests that what he is doing right now—howling for Stella to win her back—is the most important thing to him (more important than, say, drying off and changing his clothes). Stanley looks tough, rugged, and manly with his ripped shirt and soaking wet body, yet this is contrasted with the power Stella wields over him as this hypermasculine, bestial man cries at the foot of the stairs, begging his wife to come back. In the background, we see fallen leaves, dirt, and an unkempt courtyard, further emphasizing Stanley’s wild, ragged appearance and demeanor. Stanley is in the foreground, center frame, and in focus to draw the eye towards him. The way he cries is reminiscent of the howling of a wolf. He also looks extremely pained, however, and this desperation (along with the high angle of the shot) makes him look small.



Editing: Straight cut to the inside of Eunice’s apartment.

Cinematography: The camera starts on Stella in a medium shot, shallow focus, at eye level when she’s sitting in the chair, and then it follows her as she stands up and walks to the door. When she stands up, the camera switches to a low angle. As she gets closer to the door and Blanche is also now in the frame, the focus shifts to Blanche in the middle ground and away from Stella in the foreground. The camera tilts up (when Stella stands), moves backwards (when she walks towards the door), and pans slightly (once she leaves the house).

Mise-en-scene: Stella has short, curly hair. She’s wearing a plain dress with some simple lace meshwork at the top and a ribbon around her waist. Her facial expression and the way she slowly stands and walks to the door give the appearance of not just strength and power, but also control. She is well lit until she gets close to the door, when she walks into shadows. Blanche is dressed very differently—a frilly, long, extravagant dress with longer, more traditional hair. Blanche’s demeanor here contrasts with Stella’s. Blanche is concerned and confused, her expressions exaggerated, in contrast to Stella’s calm, slow, and controlled look and movement.

Sound: We hear Stanley yell “Hey, Stella!” again and, after that, the extradiegetic music introduces more high-pitched sounds. The music sounds smooth, slow, and contemplative. We also hear Blanche make a noise as she tries to get Stella to come back, and then Eunice tells Blanche, “I wouldn’t mix in this.”

Shot Analysis: This the first shot of many in this sequence that emphasize the power Stella has over Stanley. It also emphasizes just how different the two sisters are. The changing camera angles in the shot tell us a lot: when Stella stands up from the chair, we now see her in a low angle, representing her as increasingly powerful. The way she walks towards the door is also somewhat animalistic—like a predator hunting its prey. Stella looks to be in a different world than Blanche and Eunice, entranced by and fully in command of the cries she hears from Stanley outside the apartment. The difference between Blanche and Stella is also clear not only through their outfits but also through Blanche’s fearful gestures of concern for her sister (when she reaches for

Stella to come back) and through Stella's indifference to Blanche's concern. This is between Stella and Stanley. Even Eunice knows that, as evidenced by her warning to Blanche at the end of this shot ("I wouldn't mix in this"). Anything Blanche may say or do is futile, demonstrated by the way Stella carries herself in this shot as if Blanche and Eunice aren't even in the room.



Editing: Straight cut to Stella as she looks down onto Stanley. This shot is much shorter than the previous one, lasting only about four seconds.

Cinematography: We see Stella in a medium, low angle shot in shallow focus where the foreground (the staircase railing) is out of focus and Stella remains in focus in the middle ground. The camera doesn't move.

Mise-en-scene: Stella stands with her arm outstretched as it lays on the staircase railing. She then drops it. Her facial expression and posture convey a stern, domineering, and unyielding attitude, yet she also looks as if she's savoring the moment. The window shutter behind her looks dirty and decrepit.

Sound: The extradiegetic music continues to play. Here, however, it begins to sound more alluring and even seductive, the delicate flutes of the previous shot giving way to a slow jazz melody played by what sounds like an alto or soprano saxophone.

Shot Analysis: Stella is shown in an even more low angle than the previous shot, further emphasizing the power she has right now. She is at the top of the stairs and literally looking down on Stanley. Her outstretched yet relaxed arm conveys confidence, letting us know that she knows just how powerful she is at the moment. Her facial expression looks sultry and alluring. She desires Stanley as much as he desires her. Though this shot is only four seconds, it feels longer because her only movement is letting her arm fall. This makes the shot feel longer than it is because Stella pauses here at the top of the stairs, reveling in Stanley's desperation for her before she yields to his desires later in the sequence. The sexy jazz music adds to Stella's seductive posture and facial expression. Meanwhile, the dirty and worn-down window behind her reminds us that the New Orleans environment in which Stella and Stanley live is unrefined, rugged, coarse, and even crude, especially when compared to the idealized, upper-class Southern plantation ("Belle Reve") on which Blanche and Stella were raised.



Editing: Eyeline match from the previous shot where Stella is looking down at Stanley at the foot of the stairs.

Cinematography: Stanley is shown in an extreme high angle long shot with most of the frame taken up by the massive staircase in front of him (which is in focus except for the bit in the foreground). Stanley is also in focus, but the background is slightly out of focus. Stanley is positioned near the middle of the frame, and he looks small. The camera does not move.

Mise-en-scene: Stanley lowers his hands from around his head and drops them onto the staircase railing. A subtle twinge in Stanley's face suggests a smile. His shirt is so torn up that it's literally falling off his arm. We see a lot of shadows, most noticeably the shadow of a metal gate in the background. The fountain behind him is empty, surrounded by debris.

Sound: The same extradiegetic music continues, evoking the same sense of allure and seduction.

Shot Analysis: The framing and angle of this shot emphasizes Stella's power in the shots before and after this one. Stanley is dwarfed by the staircase—a staircase that Stella uses to convey how confident and powerful she is compared to him, and a staircase that Stella is walking on right now when Stanley isn't. His size in this shot emphasizes the position Stella commands. The extreme high angle makes him look small and weak compared to his wife far above him. If he is indeed smiling when he sees her, that would suggest just how desperate he is to even get to see her. This desperation further shrinks him (metaphorically) in relation to her. At the start of the shot, his hands are up by his face—the position we last saw him in when he was howling for her. He drops them when he sees Stella, suggesting that her presence is so commanding that he'll immediately stop his tantrum at the sight of her. He still looks feral. And once again his surroundings—the unkempt ground, the dirt and sticks on the ground, the empty water fountain—accentuates his messy, unrefined, disheveled appearance. The score suggests that this mix of untamed savagery and childish vulnerability in Stanley is attractive to Stella, luring her back to him.



Editing: This is a shot-reverse shot as we are alternating between Stanley and Stella as she walks down the stairs. It's also a very quick shot and ends when she takes her first step down. It lasts only three or four seconds.

Cinematography: This is the same framing and angle as shot #3—low angle, medium shot in deep focus (except for a railing in the foreground). The camera does not move.

Mise-en-scene: Stella stares down at Stanley for a few seconds and then takes her first step down. She does it in a way that gives the movement weight, as if it's a highly consequential action for her to take. As with shot #3, she looks very strong and commanding here, and her facial expression conveys both dominance and lust.

Sound: The sexy, extradiegetic jazz music continues to play in the background.

Shot Analysis: Though the shot itself is quick, Stella spends all of these four seconds hesitating before taking the first step. There are many elements of the sequence thus far, however, that suggest her hesitation does not signal indecision. She does not appear to be weighing whether or not to go back to Stanley. Instead, the sequence implies that she made up her mind to return to him when she walked out the door in shot #2. Her hesitation here suggests, rather, that she's reveling in the power she has over him right now and wants to make him suffer as long as she can before she finally gives in. This once again emphasizes her dominance. She is basking in it, elongating every moment of Stanley's desperate subservience. This does not appear to be an abuse of power, though, because both she and

Stanley seem to enjoy this dynamic. Her facial expression, her posture, the slowness of her movements, and the extradiegetic jazz all help to convey the sexual tension between the two of them.



Editing: This is a match on action as Stella takes her first step down at the end of the last shot and now, at the beginning of this one, we see her finishing the step from a different angle. At eleven seconds, this shot is much longer than those before it.

Cinematography: A long shot, shallow focus, with Stanley out of focus in the foreground and an extreme high angle on Stella as she starts out in the background and walks down the stairs. The camera pans to the right as Stella gets closer to the bottom of the staircase, entering the middle ground and cutting Stanley out of the frame.

Mise-en-scene: We see the staircase railing and columns that hold up the building, both of which have fancy, swirling patterns. A light bulb is shown in the upper left corner of the frame, illuminating Stella and producing the shadows that we see, including the one of her on the wall that she touches as she walks slowly down the staircase. In the beginning of the shot, we see Stanley only from behind and, because the shirt he's wearing is so torn, a portion of his back that is illuminated. From this angle it looks as if he's not wearing a shirt at all. Stella walks down the stairs at an uneven pace, though for the most part slowly and extremely seductively.

Sound: There is no dialogue (as in the last few shots) but the sexy extradiegetic jazz continues to play.

Shot Analysis: This shot is longer than those before, which draws more attention to how slowly Stella walks down the stairs (the only action here) and emphasizes her purposeful delay. She walks down the stairs in a slow, alluring way, indicating her attempt to savor Stanley's desire for her in this moment, the pleasure she takes in dominating him, her desire to intensify his desire, or a combination of these. All of this is conveyed in her posture, the way she moves (and grabs the wall next to her), and the angle of the camera. Though she is shown further away and therefore smaller than Stanley, she is clearly the one in control here. The camera follows her as she walks, cutting Stanley out of the frame towards the end of the shot. She also remains in focus throughout the entire shot, whereas Stanley, though larger in size, never is. These elements help to further emphasize her power and importance relative to Stanley in this moment.



Editing: A shot/reverse shot, as we saw Stella walking down the stairs in the previous shot and now we see Stanley at the bottom of the stairs as he reacts to her descent.

Cinematography: Stanley is close to the center of the frame, shown in a steep high angle, deep focus, long shot. The camera pans to the right as he moves away from the side of the staircase to a position more directly in front of it.

Mise-en-scene: Reacting to Stella's decision to come down the stairs, Stanley moves closer to the front of the staircase. He looks slightly relieved but also still desperate for her to come closer. He touches and then tugs at his shirt which, at this point, is pretty much falling off him. There are many shadows around him, however Stanley himself is well lit. The fountain with the sticks and plants around it starts in the upper left corner of the frame but moves increasingly out of frame as the camera pans to the right.

Sound: Again, no dialogue, just the sexy, extradiegetic jazz score.

Shot Analysis: The slow movements of this shot (along with most of the other shots in this sequence) work to build sexual tension between the two characters. In this shot, we see Stanley relieved that Stella has decided to come down the stairs, however his relief is only evident by the fact that he gets closer to the front of the stairs. He doesn't look victorious; he still is very much under her control. The only thing he can do is wait for her, or perhaps cut down that wait time by a half a second or so by walking a few steps closer to the stairs, which is to say that he is relatively powerless right now. That powerlessness is emphasized by the camera angle, which shows him small, though not as small as in shot #4. This suggests that the closer Stella gets to Stanley and the further she walks away from her position literally above him at the top of the stairs (and metaphorically her position of authority over him), the more power Stanley will have. This also explains why she might want to take her time walking down the stairs and why the filmmaker draws our attention to that. Additionally, Stanley's shirt is hanging off him in this shot and, at the end, he even tugs at it to pull it off some more. The seemingly disintegrating shirt emphasizes the growing sexual tension between them: he is literally (albeit subtly) pulling off his clothes at this point.



Editing: Shot/reverse shot of Stella walking down the stairs again. This shot is long, lasting about fifteen seconds.

Cinematography: This low angle, medium shot captures more of Stella's epic walk down the stairs and brings her closer to the camera. The camera moves alongside Stella as she moves, adjusting to keep her in the center of the frame. The shot starts out in deep focus, then moves to shallow focus as Stella nears the camera and enters the foreground to become the only thing in focus.

Mise-en-scene: There are a lot of shadows, particularly at the beginning of the shot where she is hidden almost entirely in a shadow and towards the end where her face and left side is partially hidden in shadow. She is walking slowly and seductively down the stairs, but the further she walks down, the more her facial expression softens and the sadder she looks.

Sound: The same extradiegetic jazz continues. There is still no dialogue or ambient sound.

Shot Analysis: The low angle shot still depicts Stella in a position of power, however it's not as extreme of a low angle as previous shots have been because she is walking further down the stairs and closer to Stanley at the bottom. This suggests that the further down Stella walks, the closer to

Stanley she gets, the less power she has. Her expression has also changed slightly. In previous shots, she looks stern and in control, but here her expression appears to have softened somewhat. This suggests not only that the further away (and higher) she is relative to Stanley the more confident and in control she is, but also that the closer she gets to him, the more difficult it is for her to maintain this persona. The slow, seductive walk down the stairs represents Stella's savoring of her every moment of power; this shot, however, is the last we see of it. Her look may have softened because now that she's physically closer to him, she's less capable of remaining detached and unaffected by the pain and desperation he's experiencing (which wasn't the case in previous shots when she seemed to intentionally elongate his suffering via the slow walk).



Editing: Straight cut to a reverse shot of Stanley as he falls to his knees in front of the staircase.

Cinematography: The shot starts out at about eye-level and then becomes a high angle shot when Stanley falls to his knees. He's shown in a medium shot, shallow focus, in the center of the frame. The camera tilts down when Stanley drops to his knees.

Mise-en-scene: Stanley's face looks pained and distraught. He appears to be crying. His shirt is still soaking wet and still falling off his right shoulder. When he falls to his knees, he hangs his head like a very sad and repentant little boy. His face and body are well lit, but we can see shadows coming in from the gate behind him and in front of him when he kneels.

Sound: We hear the same extradiegetic jazz as well as the sound of Stanley falling to the ground. There is still no dialogue.

Shot Analysis: When Stanley falls, he is not only apologizing but also begging for her forgiveness. The kneeling posture resembles the way in which people show submission when they beg or pray for absolution. The power dynamic between these two characters is emphasized by his kneeling in front of her, putting her in a position of power over him. The high angle shot is another way to show how powerless he is right now. The way his head hangs also conveys the shame he's experiencing and how desperately he wants her to forgive him. His crying and pained facial expression depict him as vulnerable, childish, and emotional, which contrasts with how firm and controlled Stella has looked for most of the shots so far. His ripped shirt is still soaking wet and sticking to his body, which sexualizes the dynamic between them, helping to convey to the audience that Stella's arousal and his animalistic appearance and demeanor are associated. The jazz music that has been playing this whole time is another way to convey Stella's mindset—its smooth and alluring sound helps us to understand how enticing they are to one another, even (and perhaps especially) in the context of this performance of dominance and submission.



Editing: Straight cut to Stella as she and Stanley finally come together. This is the longest shot so far at about twenty seconds.

Cinematography: This starts as a medium shot, deep focus, about eye level on Stella, following her as she makes the last few steps down towards Stanley. We then see him in the frame and the camera follows and gets closer to them as he stands up and the two of them hug and kiss. The end of the shot is in shallow focus and the two characters take up most of the frame.

Mise-en-scene: Stella starts above Stanley at the beginning of the shot but after they embrace, he stands up and picks her up in his arms, making them about the same height. We see Stanley's bare back because his shirt is barely on and he is facing away from the camera for most of this shot. Once they stand up, their faces are difficult to see due to shadows and frantic, passionate kissing. There are a lot of shadows in this shot, though both characters remain well lit.

Sound: The same extradiegetic jazz music plays, but we also hear Stanley say, "please don't ever leave me baby." We hear Stella either exhale or gasp before that line, then we hear her cry after he says it.

Shot Analysis: The nine shots before this one served, in part, to build tension so their reunion in shot #10 would be all the more dramatic. So far, Stella has been physically and figuratively above Stanley and the last moment that maintains this power dynamic is when Stella hugs Stanley while he is still on his knees. She even folds over him, enveloping him in her embrace. However, shortly after this he stands up, she collapses into his arms, and the two characters are now shown at the same angle and roughly the same height. This suggests that when Stella forgives Stanley and decides to give him another chance, she loses the ability to wield power over him. Much of this power dynamic is conveyed through the cinematography. In dialogue, Stanley seems both sad and relieved when he says, "please don't ever leave me baby," for their embrace makes it clear that she does forgive him and will take him back. Their frantic kissing also makes that clear and the sound of her sobs suggest that, though she looked detached from his pain in the previous shots, she was still affected by his suffering. Her emotions are apparent now that she's close enough to him that she can't resist falling lovingly into his arms and taking him back. The shot is long enough to allow Stella to start out in a position of power and finish having fallen from it over the course of these final twenty seconds. 🍷

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Kazan, Elia, director. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. 1951; Warner Brothers, 2010. DVD.