

**A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Alfred University**

“The ABCs of Cinematic Beauty”

by

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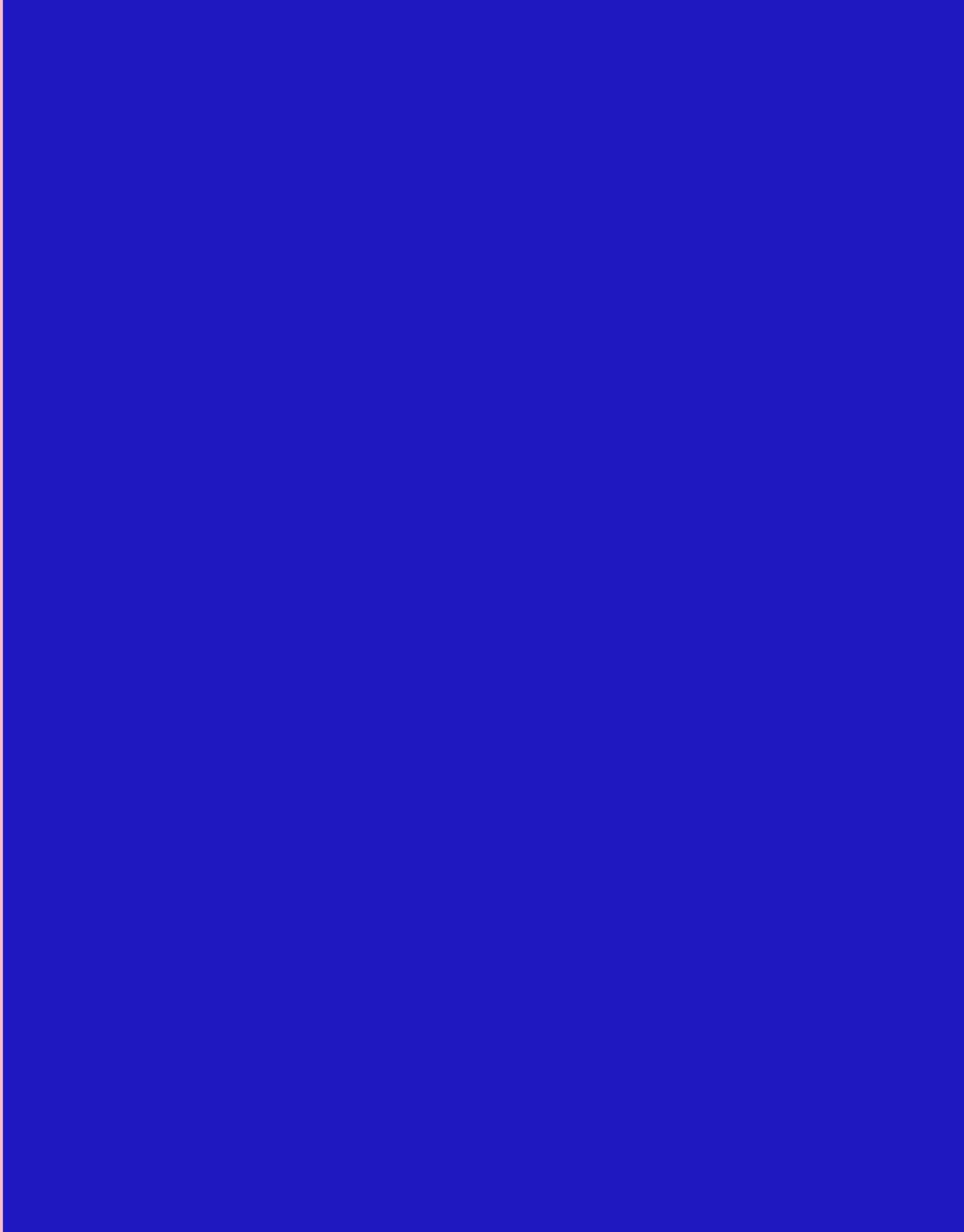


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Some films have a special allure, a spark that evokes a deep feeling of pleasure in the viewer. It is my objective, through *The ABCs of Cinematic Beauty*, to put into writing what gives some films that spark—what make these films, in my opinion, undeniably beautiful.

In high-school, I was continuously getting in trouble by my parents and teachers for slacking, because I was spending all my time after school watching movies. Those solitary nights I spent locking myself away in my room watching movies, being the poster child for angsty, unmotivated teenager, I was unknowingly getting acquainted with films and directors that would later form this thesis and the lens through which I watch movies.

I define cinematic beauty as an aesthetic experience evoked in the human observer, due to the aesthetic properties of the film, these being properties such as composition, color, use of camera, lenses, mise-en-scène, filters, editing, effects, and music.

When I was watching all those movies late at night in high-school, slowly falling in love with film, it was not any particular property of the film that I was falling in love with. Instead, I was mesmerized by staggering moments in movies, those moments so beautiful that a deep feeling of pleasure was evoked in me.

In realizing that the characteristic that these movies had in common was beauty, I asked myself: what exactly is beauty? In the view of objectivists, like Plato and Aristotle, beauty exists independently of the perceiver. According to Plato, beauty lies in his domain of the forms—a non-physical idea.¹ Beauty, for Plato, is objective in that it is not a feature of the observer's experience. According to Aristotle, beauty resides in what is being observed and is defined by characteristics of the art object, such as symmetry, order, balance, and proportion.² While they hold differing conceptions of what "beauty" is, Plato and Aristotle do agree that beauty is not in the mind of the beholder.





On the other hand, philosophers of taste, namely David Hume and Immanuel Kant, argued that beauty does not lie in the object itself but rather in the relationship between the object and the subject. That is, beauty depends on the feeling of an aesthetic pleasure we experience when in contact with the beautiful object.

As Hume writes,

“Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty. One person may even perceive deformity, where another is sensible of beauty.”³

Accordingly, cinematic beauty is not in the object. That is, it is not the property of an object, rather it is in the subject and its feeling of pleasure alone. One must feel pleasure in order to judge the object as beautiful. This ability to judge objects as beautiful and to discern its aesthetic properties is called taste. If judgement of taste depends on the viewer’s feeling of pleasure, and the viewer’s feelings are always right, then taste is always right, and there is an equality of taste.

Something similar is suggested by Béla Balász in his *Theory of the Film*,

“Although objective reality is independent of the subject and his subjective consciousness, beauty is not merely objective reality, not an attribute of the object entirely independent of the spectator, not something that would be there objectively even without a corresponding subject even if there were no human beings on earth.”⁴

However, if beauty is in the subject—that is, if tastes depends on the feelings of pleasure and displeasure alone, and given that feelings are subjective, since “sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, wherever a man is conscious of it,”⁵—then it follows that experience of beauty is irrelative to the perceiver, that everyone has their own feeling of beauty, and that each judgement of taste is correct.



Yet, this view appears to oppose our everyday discussions about art forms like film. Namely, we often argue in the matters of taste. We discount many people's opinions about artworks as ridiculous, and we do not accept that all feelings are right. This observation suggests that there is an implicit expectation within us that others ought to agree with us and that some universal agreement can be established.

According to David Hume, while judgement of taste depends on the viewer's feeling of pleasure, there are some qualities in the object (the film) that are disposed to always please humans due to the structure of our universal minds. We find these qualities in the object through general observations, concerning what has been universally found to please in all countries and in all ages. These universally pleasing qualities can serve as a principle of taste on the basis of which we can make a correct judgement of taste.

In film, for example, this universally pleasing aesthetic quality refers to cinematography. Exposure, lighting, and camera positioning and composition all play a major role in the final aesthetics of the film. Of course, not everyone can detect these qualities that serve as principles of taste, and thus not everyone is qualified to give a correct judgement beauty. To detect these qualities, as Hume writes, delicacy of taste is required.

“Though the principles of taste be universal, and, nearly, if not entirely the same in all men; yet few are qualified to give judgment on any work of art, or establish their own sentiment as the standard of beauty.”⁶

A different solution to the problem of subjectivity and universality of taste and beauty is given by Immanuel Kant. According to Kant, feeling of pleasure is the result of a free-harmonious relationship between imagination and understanding—that is, between our imaginative ability to combine different perceptual and ideational properties of the object together and the need of our understanding to display unity and organization in the combination of various properties of the object.⁷ This harmony between imagination and understanding, according to Kant, is experienced universally by all of us.

In light of Kant's theory, we could say that cinematic beauty is the combination of creative properties that gives expression to the narrative features of the film, resulting in an enhanced aesthetic experience. Accordingly, cinematic beauty is not just a beautiful picture, rather it is an imaginative and holistic representation of thematic aspects of the film, through its visual attributes.

Cinematic beauty is not an attribute of the subject entirely independent of the spectator—it can't be. In Jacques Aumont's *The Image*, he is categorical: "there is no image that is not the perception of an image."⁸ Without visual perception, the psychological and cognitive functioning of spectatorship, the social, ideological, and institutional contexts of viewing an image, representation, and signification, there cannot be cinematic beauty. As he puts it in *The Image*,

"The image presents mental processes which, without it, would not have a form. It transports elements of symbolization or elements already symbolized, and does so while rearranging them, which transforms them. It is, in sum, on this double postulate that rests [...] the possibility of analyzing every film as the site of meaning."⁹

It is my hope that, through *The ABCs of Cinematic Beauty*, I am able to expand the field of experience of the reader, by emphasizing what makes films subjectively beautiful to me, so that they can watch these films wearing the lens through which I saw those sparks of cinematic beauty.



AKIRA

(1988)

Ever since 1957, when the Totsuko company unveiled its 30-foot neon billboard revealing its new name, Sony, neon has had a special significance for Tokyo as the bitter but beautiful light that signifies both the colorful radiance and the violent consumerism of modernity. Since then, the neon signs have become a signature of Tokyo's night scape, even inspiring films like *Blade Runner* (1982).

The tradition lives on in *Akira* (1988) but here the neon infuses all the light sources of the film; from the lights that adorn buildings and the neon bright screens that light up the characters faces, to the machinegun fire of neon streaks and the bluish sunlight that shines through windows.

Light is a vital element of *Akira*'s genius, there's no denying it. Every frame is invaded by a quality and texture of light so true to the film, it's as if light was created purely for its purpose. *Akira* takes the building-block of classic live-action cinema and revolutionizes it.

What is so groundbreakingly beautiful about *Akira*, is the absolute mastery of light, which is flaunted again and again throughout the film, in a bleak, tech-saturated Neo-Tokyo. Otomo has said that he wanted Tokyo itself to be a major character in the movie, which is clear-as-day in the labor-of-love and precision that was *Akira*'s chaotic and alive world, a dystopia of a city.

Akira, like a lot of animation coming out of Japan around that time, had resurfacing motifs and symbols of World War II, and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and often portrayed disenfranchised societies and post-apocalyptic settings.

Otomo did this with such artistry and strong world-building imagery that almost every shot was a perfect painting of a Tokyo that was falling apart, a harsh futuristic glow tinting the screen. In many ways, *Akira*'s success lies in that futuristic glow, in the way in which the film carried, honored and transformed the significance of neon in Japan.



The anime boom of the 1980s is considered, by many, to be the golden age of anime. Japan in the 1980s was, for the first time since World War II, starting to see a major economic upturn. This surged Japan's economy to heights it had never seen. This excess in disposable income meant that there was now a massive influx of money to consume and create film. *Akira* was born out of this boom and put a chokehold on pop culture's psyche like it had never been done before.

Director: Katsuhiro Otomo
Cinematography: Katsuji Misawa
Editor: Takeshi Seyama
Music: Shoji Yamashiro
Running time: 124 min.

The film was made using traditional hand drawn cell animation, which involves drawing and painting onto transparent slides and layering them over a background. Frames composed like this were photographed and strung together to create the animation. *Akira* moves beautifully, with seamless elegance unprecedented in animation, because its budget allowed for 12 drawings per second—and in the case of action scenes, 24 drawings per second.



“The drawings of Neo-Tokyo by night are so intricately detailed that all the individual windows of huge skyscrapers appear distinct.” Janet Maslin

The movie is 124 minutes of back-to-back picturesque drawings, capturing the essence of Tokyo with impeccable style. Those drawings alone are enough to evoke great pleasure in most viewers.



Buffalo '66

(1998)

Directed by Vincent Gallo, *Buffalo '66* (1998) encapsulates the desolate feel of a crumbling industrial Buffalo and does so with unequivocal beauty and style. While Vincent Gallo likes to think of himself as the auteur of *Buffalo '66*, it's hard to deny that a big part of the film's genius lies in Lance Acord's cinematography and the lens through which Buffalo is portrayed.



The movie was shot mainly in the suburban districts of New York State, and Acord, with Gallo's guidance, captures the raw feeling of hopelessness with stunning accuracy. The windswept scenes in *Buffalo '66* is a testament to what happens when American dreams run dry, or when the Buffalo Bills lose one too many games.

The look of the film is almost a character of its own, and that was due to Gallo. "My background was as a painter, and as an artist, so composition was very important to me," says the filmmaker who produced paintings throughout the 1980s



"I obsessed on camera position...I didn't want to make a film that was influenced by contemporary rock videos or contemporary commercial directing or even contemporary cinema, which is very self-conscious and quick-paced."

Its color palette, a lovely array of muted earth tones, provides a lovely vessel for Vincent Gallo and Christina Ricci's outstanding performances. That, along with the composition and lighting, lays out a glorious world of paranoia, Stockholm-syndrome, and Bills Mafia.

Director: Vincent Gallo
Cinematography: Lance Accord
Editor: Curtis Clayton
Music: Vincent Gallo
Running time: 110 min.

Scattered throughout the movie are magical, dream-like scenes, interwoven with the stark banality of Western New York. This paints a fever-dream reality that feels altered, and the film leaves you feeling not unlike a short trip to Buffalo, NY in March. As bleak as the subject of the film may be, *Buffalo '66* is mesmerizing in its beauty.



“As anyone who has ever spent time in Buffalo will attest, it is a town uniquely out of sync with the rest of the country. Gallo beautifully captures that otherworldly quality with his mixture of modern and 30-year-old decor and a cast of characters who behave as if they were living in another era.”

Michael O’Sullivan



CARNIVAL OF SOULS

(1962)



Carnival of Souls (1962) is a feast for the eyes, and the leisurely pace of it just adds to the dream-like atmosphere of the film. Every single shot is wonderfully composed, and the mise-en-scene is a thing of beauty. The abandoned pavilion is just as creepy as it was dreamy, much like the score. *Carnival of Souls* has an undeniable *Twilight Zone* feel to it, which makes total sense because the story was inspired by the *Twilight Zone* episode *The Hitch-Hiker* (1960). *Carnival of Souls* transports its audience to another dimension, and sticks with them for a very long time.

Directed by Herk Harvey, the film's budget was only \$30,000 and its original release in 1962 was a box office failure. Late-night television airings, however, helped *Carnival of Souls* to gain a cult following and paved the way for the purgatorial horror subgenre. The otherworldly, dream-like atmosphere created by the film's gorgeous black-and-white visuals went on to be incredibly inspirational to filmmakers such as David Lynch.

“Carnival of Souls is another case for the preservation of the black-and-white movie. In black and white, even this odd little \$30,000 sleeper looks like Art now and again.” Joe Brown

Director: Herk Harvey
Cinematography: Maurice Prather
Editor: Dan Palmquist,
Herbert Strock,
Bill de Jarnette
Running time: 78 min.

Harvey's inspiration for the film came when he drove past Saltair amusement park on the shore of the Great Salt Lake. Remembering the first time he saw the old amusement pavilion, Harvey said,

"It was sunset, and I was driving to Kansas from California when I first saw Saltair. It's an amusement park located at the end of a half-mile causeway out into the Great Salt Lake. The lake had receded and the pavilion with its Moorish towers stood silhouetted against the red sky. I felt I had been transported into a different time and dimension. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I stopped the car and walked out to the pavilion. The hair stood up on the back of my neck. The stark white of the salt beach and the strange dark quiet of the deserted buildings made it the spookiest location I had ever seen."

Carnival of Souls is a beautiful example of a cult horror film that falls into a category that not many cult horror films fall into: it's really good, low budget and all. There's no doubt that *Carnival of Souls* owes its success and cult status to its gorgeous shots, and unique macabre setting. Some directors just have the ability to see an ordinary scenario, a scene, and make it beautiful, despite the budget or the plot. Herk Harvey, there's no doubt, has mastered that ability.



DIVA (1982)

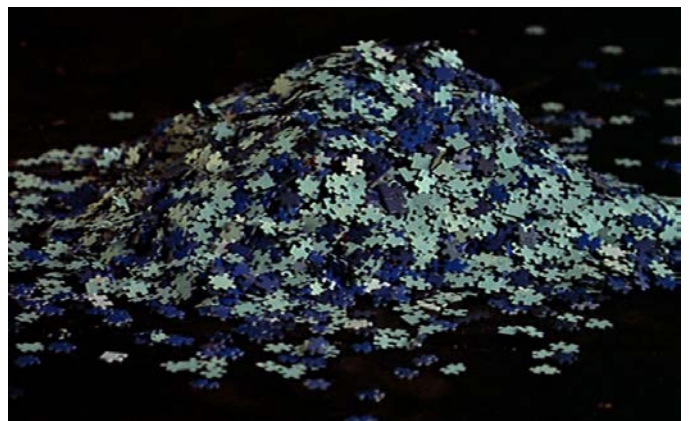


Cinematic beauty is embodied in the 1982 film, *Diva*. The shots are gorgeous, the colors are electric, and the overall aesthetic is to die for. The film is drenched in French class and groove.

Diva initiated a movement where mise-en-scène was valued over plot: Cinema du Look. In this movement, the plots of the films become vehicles for cinematic beauty, carriers of magnificence. In the 1980s, French filmmakers perfected the too-cool cinematic aesthetic of elegant, mid-century-modern design, paired with muted colors and French nonchalance. It was Jean-Jacques Beineix who had paved the way for this movement, with *Diva*.



The directors who were prominent during the Cinema du Look movement—Luc Besson, Jean-Jacques Beineix and Leos Carax—were said to focus more on style, as opposed to substance. What this movement gets criticized for in hard-to-follow, or two-dimensional plots, it makes up for in gorgeous visual style.



Director: Jean-Jacques Beineix
Cinematography: Philippe Rousselot
Editor: Monique Prim,
Marie-Joséphine Yoyotte
Music: Vladimir Cosma
Running time: 117 min.

Diva follows the story of a young postman, Jules, with a passion for classical music, and an obsession for opera singer Cynthia Hawkins. Jules soon finds himself in the midst of a messy police investigation revolving around drug trafficking and prostitution. With the help of his new found friends—a mysterious man named Serge and his muse Alba—he evades the impending doom that follows him throughout the movie.

The movie is thrilling, it is romantic, and it is beautiful in both cinematography, and musical score. Every shot is pleasure inducing, composed to excellence.

“The opening shots inform us with authority that ‘DIVA’ is the work of a director with an enormous gift for creating visual images.”
Roger Ebert

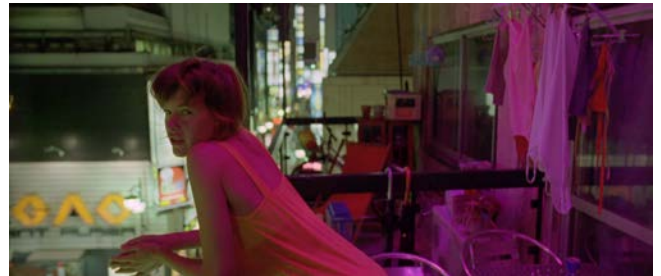
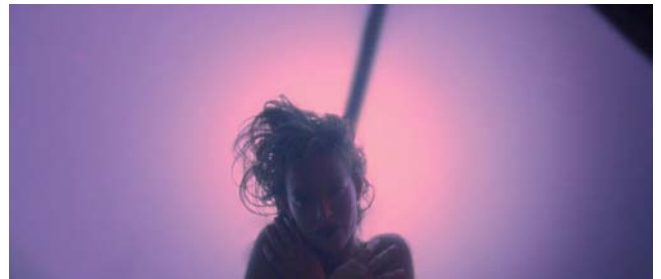


ENTER THE VOID (2009)

Enter the Void (2009) is a visual experiment. An experience more than a narration, cooked to perfection for those spectators willing to let themselves be hypnotized by the films entrancing visuals. From the moment *Enter the Void* dives into its opening title sequence, director Gaspar No   has his audience wrapped around his finger. Flashing words and techno music devour the screen, and an onslaught of typographic designs ensue, setting the stage for what is both an entrancing and unique film... a video game with no rules.

The film is about life after death seen entirely through the point of view of the protagonist, a drug-dealer called Oscar. *Enter the Void* reaches an exceptionally early climax when, about just twenty-minutes in, a drug bust goes awry and Oscar is shot and killed. Oscar's spirit hovers over Tokyo, watching his sister and his friends navigate their lives and deal with trauma.

No  's mesmerizing picture explores shooting techniques and ambitious special effects to capture the protagonist's journey through death, creating a trance-like experience, no doubt intensified by the backdrop of the neon-lit nightclub areas of Tokyo.



Director: Gaspar Noé
Cinematography: Benoît Debie
Editor: Marc Boucrot
Jerome Pesnel
Running time: 161 min.

While the film feels contemporary and experimental because of its unconventional shots, and while Noé's efforts to bend the roles of narrator and audience are undoubtably remarkable, *Enter the Void* falls right by traditional drug-exploiting midnight features, like *El Topo*, although Noé is one of the only directors who is actually trying to do something new with film.

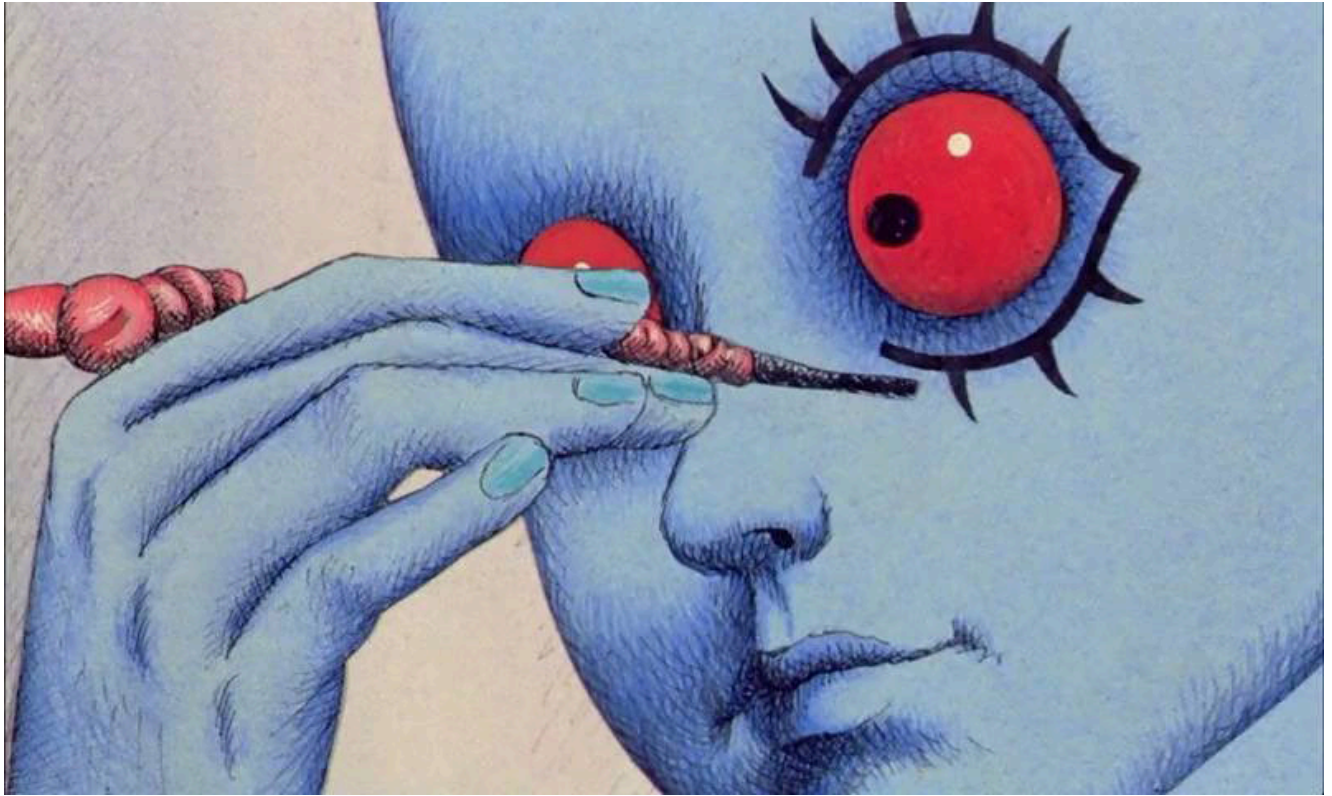
The decision to use English-speaking actors was made early. The prioritization of aesthetics and visual coherence and composition throughout *Enter the Void* is clear, and shines through in the entrancing shots, which linger long after the film ends.



Enter the Void, however, isn't just an old-school heady hallucinogenic journey. The movie is futuristic and intense; with a throbbing soundtrack, lights constantly glaring or flickering, and often red. It was, after-all, created with a priority on visuals in mind. In fact, Since the film would be very visual, Noé wanted audiences to be able to focus on the images, and not have to rely on subtitles.

“In 2010, no other filmmaker than Gaspar Noé can shoot with such mastery, nor draw us into a vortex of sensations as vertiginous.” Laurent Djian

FANTASTIC PLANET (1973)



Fantastic Planet (1973) offers the perfect combination of beautiful, fever-dream illustrations and a groovy but ominous score that will make you question your very existence. The experimental, animated, adult, sci-fi project was directed by René Laloux, was an international co-production between French and Czechoslovakian companies.

The film was awarded the Grand Prix special jury prize at the 1973 Cannes Film Festival and in 2016, Rolling Stone magazine ranked it the 36th greatest animated movie ever. The film has become a major “counterculture” text, developing serious cult status. In fact, it was legendary cult king Roger Corman who originally brought the film to American theaters.

The style of animation and illustration itself is enough of a reason for the film to have cult status. The genius behind these mind-blowing illustrations is French illustrator Roland Topor, who used an unconventional animation technique: sketching on cut-out and hinged paper.

Upon its release, Howard Thompson of The New York Times wrote,

“This comparative stiffness of movement, instead of the usual animated flash, gives a dignity and eerie depth to an adaptation by directors Rene Laloux and Roland Topor of Stefan Wul’s novel, ‘Ome En Serie.’”

Director:
Cinematography:
Editor:

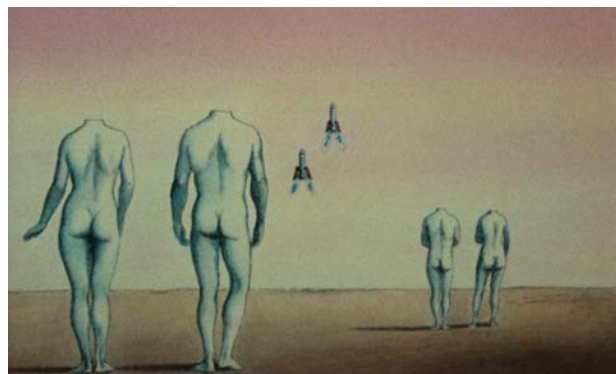
Rene Leloux
Lubomir Rejthar
Helene Arnal,
Rich Harrison
Alain Gorgaguer
72 min.



“Eerie, surreal and a welcome respite from Disney-style animation.” Maitland McDonagh

The psychedelic funky jazz score adds an additional layer of existential dread and hypnosis to an already trippy film. Reminiscent of Pink Floyd, the score by French cult composer Alain Gorgaguer transports the audience straight to the planet of Ygam, where we meet the blue humanoid Draags. *Fantastic Planet* has generally received positive views, Kevin Thomas of the *Los Angeles Times* calling it “disquieting, eerie and vastly imaginative,” and Howard Thompson of *The New York Times* calling it “original, thoughtful, often strong (but tasteful) animation.”

There were, of course, some negative reviews. Gene Siskel of the *Chicago Tribune*, for example, gave the film one and a half stars out of four, calling it “an animated piece of science-fiction pretending to be a Meaningful Statement,” and saying that, “According to publicists for the film, the visuals and story begin to make sense if your mind is chemically altered. I doubt it.” Boy, is Siskel wrong. *Fantastic Planet* has everything it needs to take your mind—and your eyes—on a trip of cinematic beauty.



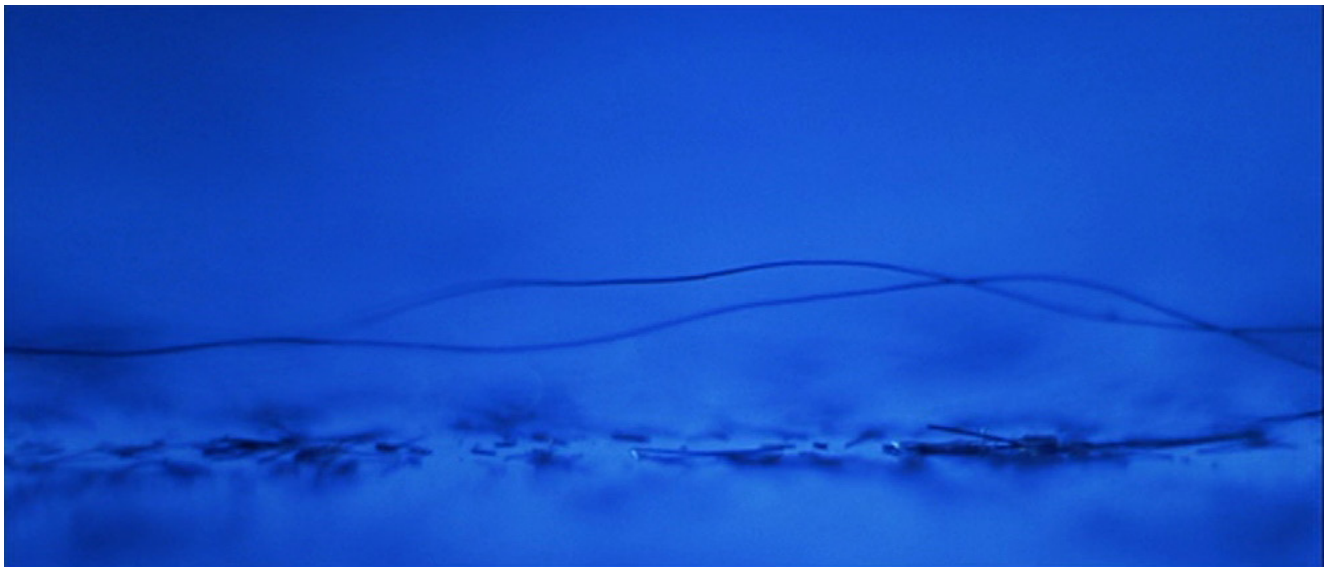
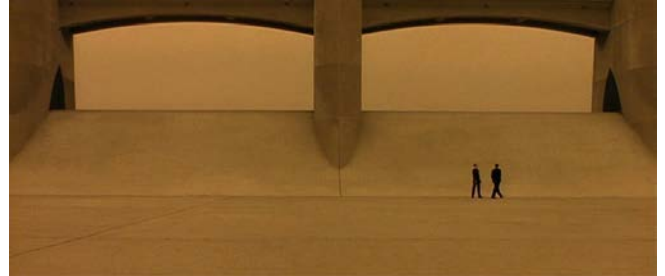
GATTACA (1997)

“This is one of the smartest and most provocative of science fiction films, a thriller with ideas.” Roger Ebert

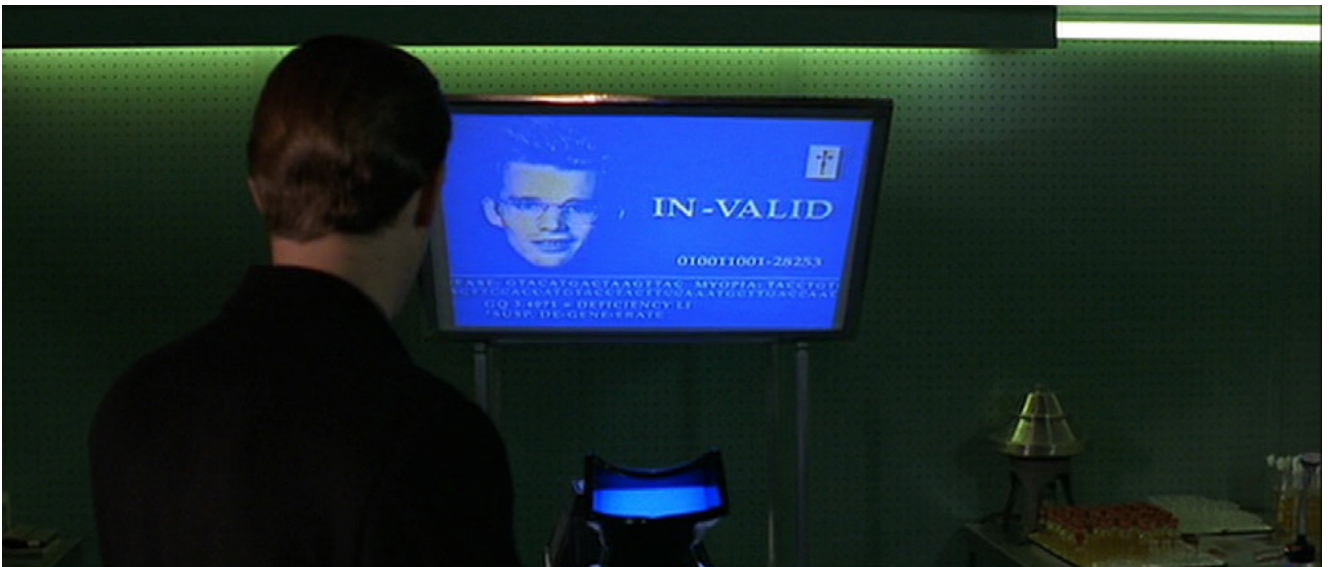
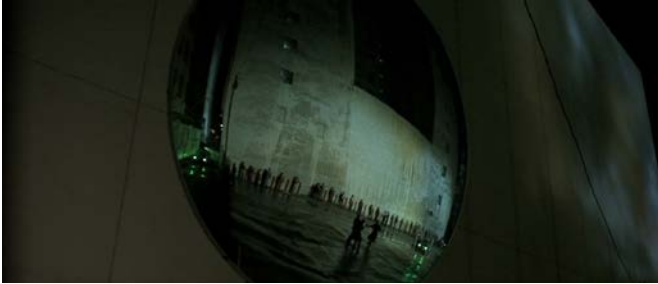
If you want a sci-fi movie drenched in cinematic beauty, then *Gattaca* (1997) is for you. An emotional story about discrimination, *Gattaca* sucks you into the sterile yet elegant future that shows the constraints of American individualism in the late-90s. With sleek color choices and a design palette of past futurism, the film makes a visual masterpiece out of the message that futurism consistently fails and seeks only to maintain a ruling order lacking any essence of life.

Everything in *Gattaca* is clean and aspires to perfection, but director Andrew Niccol still manages to serve the world on a dystopian platter. Instead of resorting to ‘hi-tech’ gimmicks, the film combines design elements inspired from 1950s mid-century modern, as well as 1990s design: sleek, modern, and minimal.

Gattaca’s world is incredibly thought-out—every detail was considered in production, even whether cars of the future would need license plates (no, microchips). The *Gattaca* headquarters are set in Frank Lloyd Wright’s Marin County Civic Center, a perfect space to encapsulate the sterility and sleekness of *Gattaca*.



Director: Andrew Niccol
Cinematography: Sławomir Idziak
Editor: Lisa Zeno Churgin
Music: Michael Nyman
Running time: 106 min.



Throughout the film, Niccol uses color like a master, with three main colors used to define the three acts and stages of the protagonist's life—blue, yellow, and green. Yellow illustrates his past, blue illustrates his future, and green is used as a bridge for the two. The result is a depiction of a clinical future void of personality, brought to life through the vivid colors of the protagonist's identity.

The colors of the film, combined with its sleek architecture and unusual story makes for pure cinematic beauty.

HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE

(2004)

In the world of animation, Hayao Miyazaki is an unrivaled icon known for his creation of compelling characters, engaging stories and breathtaking animation. *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) is yet another display of Miyazaki's genius, and his unparalleled mastery of animation and emotion.

Every single frame in the film is dedicated to the utmost attention to detail, and every shot is steeped in beauty so precise and calculated that it's almost impossible to not find the animation beautiful.

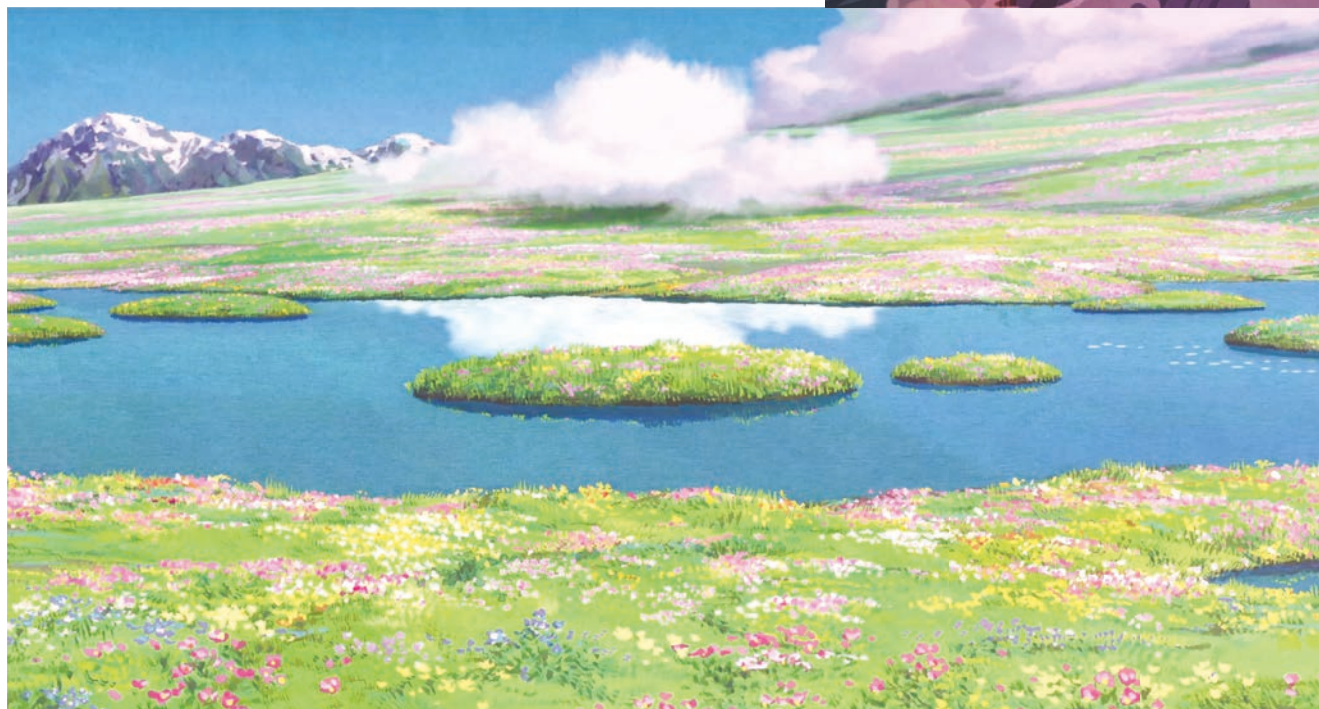
Miyazaki is generally the only anime filmmaker that the general public is familiar with and has been called the "auteur of anime." His style of animation is easily recognizable. You know when you're watching a Miyazaki film—both from the visually aesthetic properties of the film and from the feelings that the films evoke.

Howl's Moving Castle manages to combine childlike wonder, adolescent excitement, and unparalleled animated visuals. Each frame is a stunning painting, and the film sports illusion after illusion, creating a gorgeous and whimsical world that viewers can only visit through Miyazaki's eyes.

"Palaces and shimmering lakes, warplanes and fire sprites all come to life at the breath of Miyazaki's graphic genius." Richard Corliss



Director: Mayao Miyazaki
Cinematography: Atsushi Okui
Editor: Takeshi Seyama
Music: Joe Hisaishi
Running time: 119 min.



Miyazaki's animation is always marinated in both nostalgia and nature, a sort of yearning for the past. His films often feature strong female characters and protagonists. The rigidly defined 'good' and 'evil' don't really exist in his films. Unlike Western cinema, conflict is now always the heart of a story for Miyazaki. In fact, Miyazaki says about good versus evil:

"The concept of portraying evil and then destroying it—I know this is considered mainstream, but I think it is rotten. This idea that whenever something evil happens someone particular can be blamed and punished for it, in life and in politics is hopeless."

In many ways, Miyazaki's poetic take on his work is what makes it so beautiful. The gorgeous visual aesthetics are so intertwined with his unconventional plots and characters that it's impossible to separate them. The result is a hearty, soul-warming story that is as beautiful as it is comforting. *Howl's Moving Castle* is no less than a warm bowl of soup on a gloomy day.

IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE

(2001)



“The movie is physically lush. The deep colors of film noir saturate the scenes: Reds, yellows, browns, deep shadows.”
Roger Ebert

Through breathtakingly stunning visuals and aesthetics, *In the Mood for Love* (2000) tells the story of marriage and infidelity. The film relies heavily on aesthetics to create a raw atmosphere and mood, and it is beyond successful in doing so. Elvis Mitchell, writing for *The New York Times*, referred to it as “probably the most breathtakingly gorgeous film of the year.”

Set in the 1960s, Wong looks at *In the Mood for Love* as a period piece, which did not simplify matters when it came to the shoot. Drawing from his own personal experiences, Wong’s nostalgia for 1960s Hong Kong added to his desire for historical accuracy. This made things difficult, because by 2000, the city’s appearance has changed dramatically since the 1960s. Additionally, Wong had little taste for working in studio settings, let alone special effects.

Cinematographer Christopher Doyle later discussed the necessity of filming where the streets and the buildings could emulate an authentic atmosphere to the actors and the story. Details like the sight of clothes hanging on lines were considered to achieve this level of authenticity. From the jade-green office wall and the strikingly red curtains to the lush potted planters and fluorescent light-fixtures: every single visual in *In the Mood for Love* is a vision to behold.

Director: Wong Kar-wai
Cinematography: Christopher Doyle,
Mark Lee Ping-bing
Editor: William Chang
Running time: 98 min.



The beauty of the film, however, doesn't stop at the cinematography or the set design. William Chang's work on *In the Mood for Love* earned him Hong Kong Film Awards for Editing, Art Direction and Costume and Make-Up Design. His efforts in the Costume and Make-Up Design categories especially are obvious throughout the film.

The undeniable beauty of Maggie Cheung, with her endless rotation of traditional heongsam dresses, makes *In the Mood for Love* such a pleasure to watch. "It becomes like a fashion show," said Wong Kar-wai in a 2009 interview with IndieWire. According to Dazed Magazine, In the opening six minutes alone, Maggie Cheung changes her dress six times.

In Wong's creation of the world that *In the Mood for Love* lives in, Wong thought about everything—color included. In a film when emotions must be depicted as vividly as they are felt by their characters, Wong understands that color is his strongest weapon.

The film, drenched in deep reds and oranges, paints a heart wrenching story of love. With the use of vivid colors and aesthetically beautiful compositions, the melodrama and rising tension throughout the movie is heightened, resulting in an emotional yet glorious rollercoaster.



JESS + MOSS **(2011)**

Jess + Moss (2011) is a refreshingly experimental film that derails from a conventional narrative. It's more a compilation of the protagonists' memories rather than a linear story. While the film may be unpleasant to watch for the expecting viewer, the beauty of so many of the shots is hard to deny, as vividly immersive sounds instantly transport you to a hot, sticky, Western Kentucky summer.

The movie is set in the tobacco fields of rural Western Kentucky, and depicts Jess (18) and Moss (12) over the course of a summer. With no one else to rely on the two spend their summer together, in a disorderly cluster of significant and insignificant moments.

During the making of the film, director Clay Jeter was interested in the exploration of memories and how people relate to them. In doing so, Jeter magnificently captures how the characters' ideas and emotions run through their heads, sometimes in incoherent ways.

While the film's story and message may be open to interpretation, one thing is not: the cinematography is gorgeous. It evokes in the viewers the same bittersweet nostalgic feelings that Jess and Moss are experiencing.

Shot through a variety of super 16 film and over 30 different kinds of film stock, the images are a beautiful and eclectic variation of sharpness, grain, saturation, and color. Cinematographer Will Basanta takes a story that is nothing more than everyday boredom and transforms it into a vivid portrait of that summer in Kentucky.

Director: Clay Jeter
Cinematography: Will Basanta
Editor: Isaac Hagy
Music: Lindsay Fellows
Running time: 83 min.

What really separates and distinguishes this beautiful movie from other beautiful movies is not, however, the beautiful cinematography.

What truly transports the audience into Jess and Moss's humid, nostalgic, fever-dream summer is the film's sound. It's almost as though the film's sound department found a way to transport the audience's ears to Western Kentucky for a summer, and it's incredible.

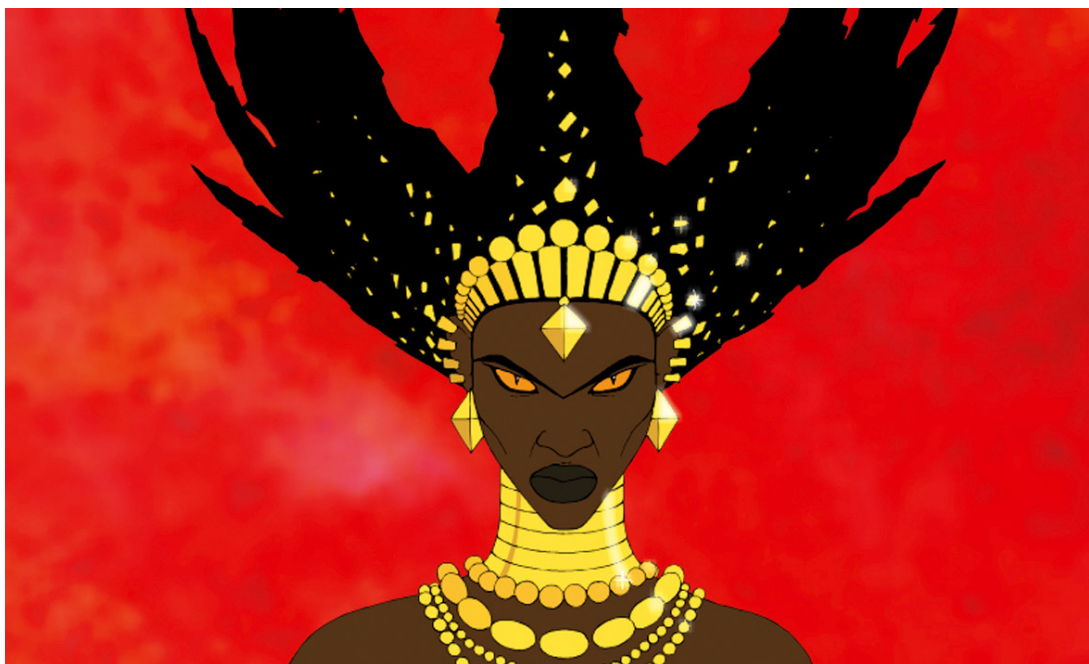
This movie is a refreshing break from the traditional film experience. While it may not be for everyone, if you let yourself be entranced by Jess and Moss's worldview, the movie will stick with you like Jess's cigarette smoke sticks to the air.



“Jess + Moss represents a bracing jolt from the usual film experience while at the same time lacking the pretension that accompanies so many experimental films.”
Kirk Honeycutt

KIRIKOU

ET LA SORCIERE (1998)



Michele Ocelot's Kirikou *et la Sorcière* (1998) follows a newborn boy, Kirikou, and his adventures to save his village from the evil witch Karaba. The film is an animation set in a West African village, and depicts Kirikou, who unconventionally crawls right out of his mother's womb, pulls out his own umbilical cord, and declares, "My name is Kirikou."

The film is bright and cheerful, and paints a beautiful setting of Kirikou's surroundings with gorgeous backdrops of African sceneries, which often feature animals in their natural habitats.

Kirikou is a visit back to many people's childhood, but it's also so much more than just a children's animation. The film helped revitalize the French animation industry, and caused some controversy due to Ocelot's insistence on properly portraying pre-colonial indigenous nudity. In the animation, the women are all topless and prepubescent children go naked, including Kirikou.

The film is a visual masterpiece, like all of Ocelot's other works. The shots are vibrant, and reject traditional animation, in favor of profile and straight-on shots. Beautiful African landscapes decorate the background of every shot and paints a gorgeous portrait of Africa in all its splendor.

Director: Michele Ocelot
Cinematography: Raymond Burlet
Editor: Dominique Lefevre
Music: Youssou N'Dour
Running time: 71 min.

Many critics speak about the colonial nature of a French, white director appropriating an African story.

“But even if Kirikou and the Sorceress is the counterfeit of a counterfeit, Ocelot still fought tooth-and-nail to depict the indigenous characters without censoring their designs for Western morals... The bottom line then comes to this: if Europeans must tell African stories, they can’t do much better than the methods used by Ocelot.”

Kirikou et la Sorcière was so successful that it was followed by *Kirikou et les Bêtes Sauvages* in 2005, and then by *Kirikou et les Hommes et les Femmes* in 2012. The sequel, *Kirikou et les Bêtes Sauvages*, did not disappoint. It carries the same dynamic visuals as its predecessor, and tells another beautiful, heartwarming story of the adventures of Kirikou in his village. The villagers breakout in song whenever Kirikou successfully saves the village of Karaba’s wrath, a song that has become part of the soundtrack of a generation’s childhood.

It’s difficult to dislike the movie, because if the charming and witty story of Kirikou doesn’t appeal to you, you can just let yourself relish in the splendor of that animated savannah.



“It’s equally unlikely that they will ever match this film in quality ever again.” Nathanael Hood

LAWRENCE OF ARABIA

(1962)

Lawrence of Arabia (1962) is an aesthetic epic with a desert backdrop so dazzling the screen is almost always ablaze. The film is widely regarded as one of the greatest and most influential films ever made, and it radiates a greatness to this day. *Lawrence of Arabia* is a gentle reminder that adventure, a genre so often overshadowed by intense action shots, can be beautiful.

The film has maintained its epic status because it doesn't fall victim to genre stereotypes. Instead, the film relies on the beauty of small moments on screen, like a speck appearing on the horizon of the desert, growing slowly into Sherif Ali on camelback.

Set during the First World War, *Lawrence of Arabia* depicts the adventures of Lawrence, a misfit British Army lieutenant, who is tasked with assessing the prospects of Prince Faisal in his revolt against the Turks.

Lawrence's romance with the desert allows us to see Arabia through his eyes: enamored by humongous skies, bright blue in contrast to the never-ending, unforgiving spans of bare desert.

It's no surprise that this film is one of the greats, forever mentioned, referenced, and praised. This film is shot after shot of glorious scenery, combined with incredibly strong cinematography. The entire film is one epic fluid painting.



Director David Lean and Cinematographer Freddie Young shot the film using Panavision 70mm (Super Panavision 70), offering an extraordinary richness and depth, and a final aspect ratio of 2.20:1. Shooting using Panavision 70mm allowed Lean and Young to capture the beauty of the desert, and do it justice.

The story is based on the exploits of T. E. Lawrence and the work that he had done on the Arab peninsula. Like most great period pieces from the 20th century, *Lawrence of Arabia's* weakness lies in its historical accuracy.

Director: David Lean
Cinematography: Freddie Young
Editor: Anne V. Coates
Music: Maurice Jarre
Running time: 227 min.



“The whole movie is a vast object d’art, full of grand tableaux, sweeping action, and polished, epigrammatic speeches.” Peter Bradshaw

While this much-praised classic is often scrutinized for its historical accuracy and dramatization, the visuals are never questioned. It’s impossible to deny how splendid and grandiose the shots are throughout *Lawrence of Arabia*.

The film may be lengthy, but it’s a classic for a reason. *Lawrence of Arabia* is shot after shot of stunning compositions and incredible colors dancing together, resulting in pure cinematic beauty.

MOONLIGHT (2016)

Moonlight (2016) is a story that is told with such eloquence and heartbreaking beauty that it manages to explore identity in a way that is personal to every audience member. It's lyrical, honest, and so well executed that it seems to be flawless. Every color, every angle, every lived-in setting, and every performance seems to be thought out to perfection, but effortlessly so.

Widely considered to be one of the 21st century's best films, *Moonlight* tells a coming-of-age story in the sun-drenched and impoverished Miami suburb of Liberty City.

Vibrant pastel colors, neon darkness and lush greenery paint the scenery for a Miami that protagonist Chiron is trying to navigate in.

The contrast in the film's bright color scheme and its darker themes feel very authentic and true to Miami, while also breaking the norms of typical coming-of-age films. The endlessly colorful backdrop makes for an unrelentingly beautiful story.

**"It's fluid and seductive, deceptively mellow, and shot through with searing compassion."
David Rooney**



Director:
Cinematography:
Editor:

Barry Jenkins
James Laxton
Joi McMillon,
Nat Sanders
Music:
Nicholas Britell
Running time:
111 min.

The film is based on a play written by Tarell Alvin McCraney titled *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue*. Director Barry Jenkins and cinematographer James Laxton tried to bring that visual to life by contrasting the character's skin tones with vibrant colors throughout the film. What makes *Moonlight* so aesthetically unique is this contrast between the rich complexities of skin and the depth of bright colors that paint Miami.

To capture Miami, Laxton wanted the actors' skin to have a big shine, so that the audience would really feel the sun beating down on the characters. Building off of this idea, Laxton decided that he would really push this contrast of light in almost every scene, using a single source lighting setup with no fill light, so that the light would fall off into the shadows and sculpt the characters' faces.

All aspects of filmmaking come together so beautifully in *Moonlight* that it's difficult to ignore the mesmerizing qualities of the film. *Moonlight* truly epitomizes what cinematic beauty is, in all its pastel colored, neon tinted glory.



l a f e m m e

NIKITA

(1990)

Nikita (1990) is a psychological action thriller that feels far too stylish and cool to be called a psychological action thriller. The film has an effortless beauty—one that director Luc Besson has come to master—which makes the story so much more potent. *Nikita* spins the action genre on its head with French flair.



The beauty of *Nikita* lies in the subtle perfection of its mise-en-scene. The lived-in sets, while not particularly elaborate, are drenched in sophistication. The shots are all, to a certain extent, visually and aesthetically pleasing. In *Nikita*, Besson shows off his well cultivated eye for making things look beautiful.

The film follows the story of a woman who ends up becoming a killer for the state when she is given the chance to redeem herself in the eyes of French 1990s society.



Director: Luc Besson
Cinematography: Thierry Arbogast
Editor: Olivier Mauffroy
Music: Eric Serra
Running time: 117 min.



Primary colors are almost always incorporated in shots throughout the film, from things as small as insignificant props in the background, to monochrome scenes drenched in light. Everything is perfectly executed and thought out, and it makes for incredible compositions in even the most ordinary scenes.



“A slick, calculating mixture of French contemplativeness and American flying glass.” Janet Maslin

Nikita contains many wide angled shots, which both highlights the glorious mise-en-scene throughout this film, but also immerses viewers into the characters' emotions. This is done by the unconventional use of a wide lens to capture close-ups and intense conversations.

The cinematography in *Nikita* is aesthetically appealing, while at the same time managing to capture the intensity of the film and its emotions. The film is as beautiful as it is riveting.

Only Lovers Left Alive

(2013)

As we follow a short snippet in the lives of a pair of century-old lovers—vampires—the air in *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013) is thick with existential angst and exhaustion. While the vampire genre seems to have been stretched and squeezed and juiced in every possible way, director Jim Jarmusch manages to bring something new to the screen: an end-of-an-era melancholy, as though he was telling cinema's last ever love story.

Tilda Swinton (Eve) and Tom Hiddleston (Adam) play an oddly endearing couple, still deeply in love. Adam, a reclusive rock musician and composer, lives in a louche Detroit mansion and collects rare electric guitars and analog amps. He's beyond exasperated by the follies of the 21st century. Eve, on the other hand, still sees life through playful eyes. Living in Tangier, she's a prodigious reader, devouring books with a flick of the eye over each page. They lounge in their respective corners of the world, each savoring a glass of blood, and converse via Facetime.

“A visually poetic love story with a wry, jaded sense of humor about finding reasons to wake up every night.” Scott A. Gray



Director: Jim Jarmusch
Cinematography: Yorick Le Saux
Editor: Affonso Gonçalves
Music: Yasmine Hamdan,
Jozef van Wissem
Running time: 123 min.

Visually, the film is as otherworldly and cool as its characters. Neither twee nor camp, the film settles for a happy medium of eclectic aesthetics, fitting for its 2013 hipster audience. The sensuous cinematography by Yorick Le Saux, with its long tracking shots and overhead 360-degree revolves, is bewitching. The production design, done by Marco Bittner Rosser, is curated with the cultivated, eclectically historical taste that only century-old vampires would have.

While we only hear small snippets of Adam and Eve's past lives, their respective homes are filled with keepsakes from all sorts of countries and decades that offer a window into their other lives: gorgeous Persian rugs, velvet couches, canopy beds, enchanting fixtures and appliances, and portraits of their dear mortal friends.

Through Jim Jarmusch's eyes, they come off as immortally cool. Their scenes together are intensely romantic. They share knowing looks and you really believe that they have spent centuries together. When they touch each other, it's with the eagerness of familiarity.

Only Lovers Left Alive is vibrantly lush, heartwrenchingly romantic, and always a pleasure to watch. This film leaves you longing for immortality, for the sole purpose of leading lives as well curated and aesthetically pleasing as Adam and Eve's.



PLAYTIME

(1967)

“The sight of the sky inspires ‘oohs’ and ‘ahs’ of joy from the tourists, as if they are prisoners and a window has been opened in their cell.” Roger Ebert

Playtime (1967) is a visual masterpiece, directed by aesthetic and comedic king of cinema Jacques Tati. The film is a picture-perfect interpretation of a utopian modernist Paris gone awry. In *Playtime*, we enter a world of plate glass and steel, endless corridors, perfect symmetry and balance, elevators, and air-conditioning. The film is a social commentary on the dehumanization of modernism, and Jacques Tati does not hold back. Tati has said about *Playtime*, “I want to proclaim the survival of the individual in a world that is more and more dehumanized.”

Tati is a true auteur and, while his comedic genius is clear in his films, one cannot ignore his aesthetic perfectionism. *Playtime* is porn to those with any slight interest in design and architecture, never mind its set design. In *Playtime*’s depiction of a modern Paris, the film is more concerned with the architecture of the spaces rather than an actual narrative. Jacques Tati has claimed that the only real star of *Playtime* is the set itself. The film’s architecture dictates how people behave, comedically narrating the problematic impact that modernism has on the city and the way in which people interact within it.



Director: Jacques Tati
Cinematography: Jean Badal,
Andréas Winding
Editor: Gérard Pollicand
Music: Francis Lemarque
Running time: 115 min.



Playtime, at the time of its making, was the most expensive film in French history. In preparation for the production of the film, Tati visited many factories and airports throughout Europe before coming to the conclusion that he needed to build his own. Which is exactly what he did. He came up with a fake city that depicted the utopian modernist Paris that he wanted to portray—Tativille—and set designer Eugene Roman got to work designing it.

In his portrayal of a modern Paris, Tati suggests that the citizens of the modern world, along with architecture, commercial products and even cities, have become standardized. We see this especially when Barabara, one of the American tourists, sees an advertisement to travel to the city of London. In the advertisement, we see the exact same building that Barbara is standing right next to in Paris. It's so sad that it's funny, a sentiment that is repeated in Tati's classic slapstick gags that comment on the loss on individuality and humanity in society.

Not only is *Playtime* a feast for the eyes, it is also a genius commentary on the dark side of modernism.

Les Quatre Cents Coups

The 400 Blows

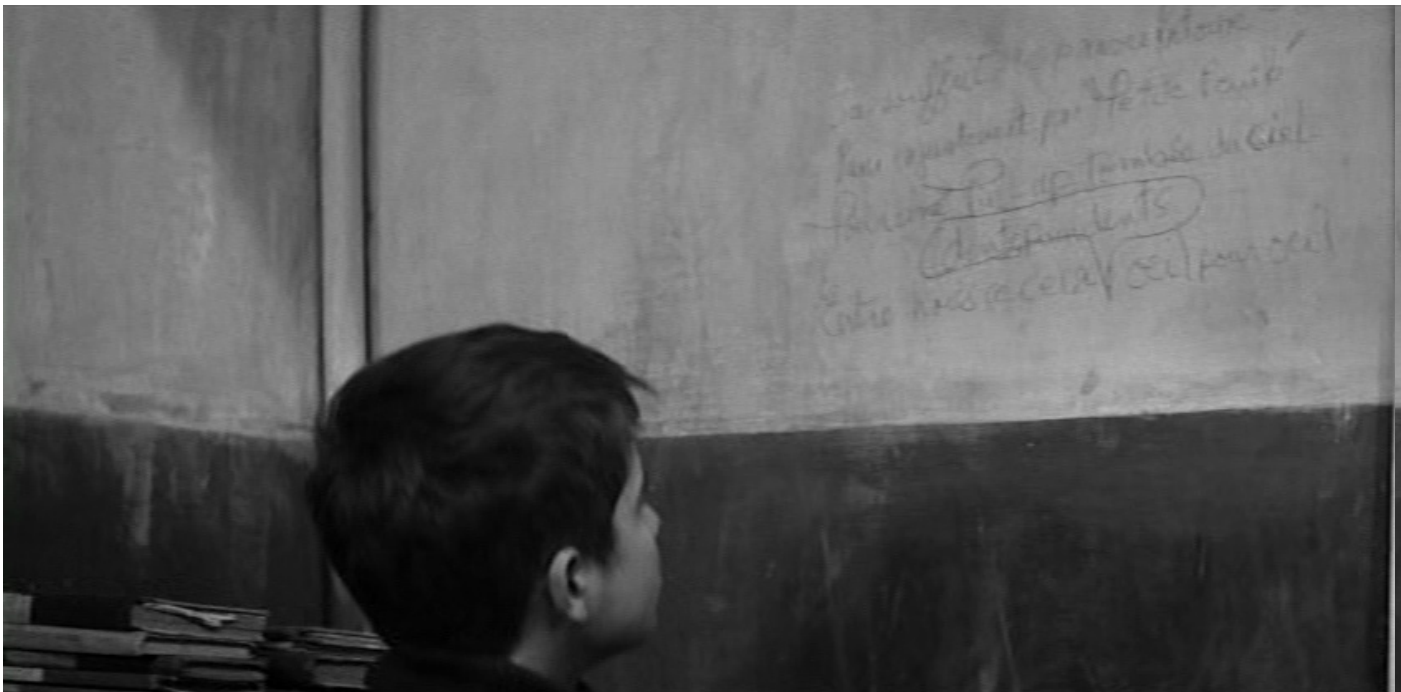
(1959)

François Truffaut's *Les Quatre Cents Coups* was one of the films to ignite the French New Wave cinematic revolution. *Les Quatre Cents Coups* was one of the first movies to include deliberate cuts and changes in frame. Before, editing was used for continuity and to keep real time. In Europe at the time, editing was supposed to be invisible, not a cinematic tool to enhance the story.

In the first scenes of *Les Quatre Cents Coups*, a schoolmaster is trying to control a class of rowdy boys. Fed up with the harassment, the graffiti on the walls, and the passing of pornographic photos from desk to desk, he explodes at his students: "What will France be like 10 years from now?" On that tone, the film begins.

In a documentary style, the camera follows the life of Antoine Doinel (Jean-Pierre L  aud), a 13-year-old Parisian boy, who keeps finding himself in trouble. The film is somewhat autobiographical, inspired by Truffaut's own early life, portraying a resourceful boy apparently dashing headlong into a life of crime.

Adults see Antoine as a troublemaker. His teachers hate his insolence. Truffaut, however, doesn't judge Antoine. He doesn't psychoanalyze him. He merely captures the intensity of adolescence. Through the eyes of both Antoine and Truffaut, we can, for a moment, remember and understand how unfair it is for a child to feel the burden of childhood.

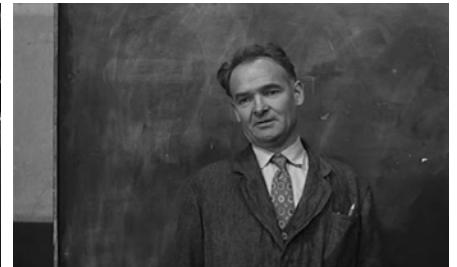


Director: François Truffaut
Cinematography: Henri Decaë
Editor: Marie-Josèphe Yoyotte
Music: Jean Constantin
Running time: 99 min.

We are allowed to share some of his private, intimate moments, like when he lights a candle on a little shrine to Balzac in his bedroom. Antoine loves Balzac. When he is assigned to write an essay on an important event in his life, he describes “the death of my grandfather” in a close paraphrase of Balzac. Instead of seeing this as an homage to Balzac, the adults around him see it as plagiarism, and he is punished.

The film ends on one, famous, final freeze-frame: the first time Antoine sees the sea. When you make it to that final freeze-frame, it’s as though every moment in the movie has led up to that point: one short instance of cinematic perfection.

“The striking distinctions of it are the clarity and honesty with which it presents a moving story of the troubles of a 12-year-old boy.” Bosley Crowther



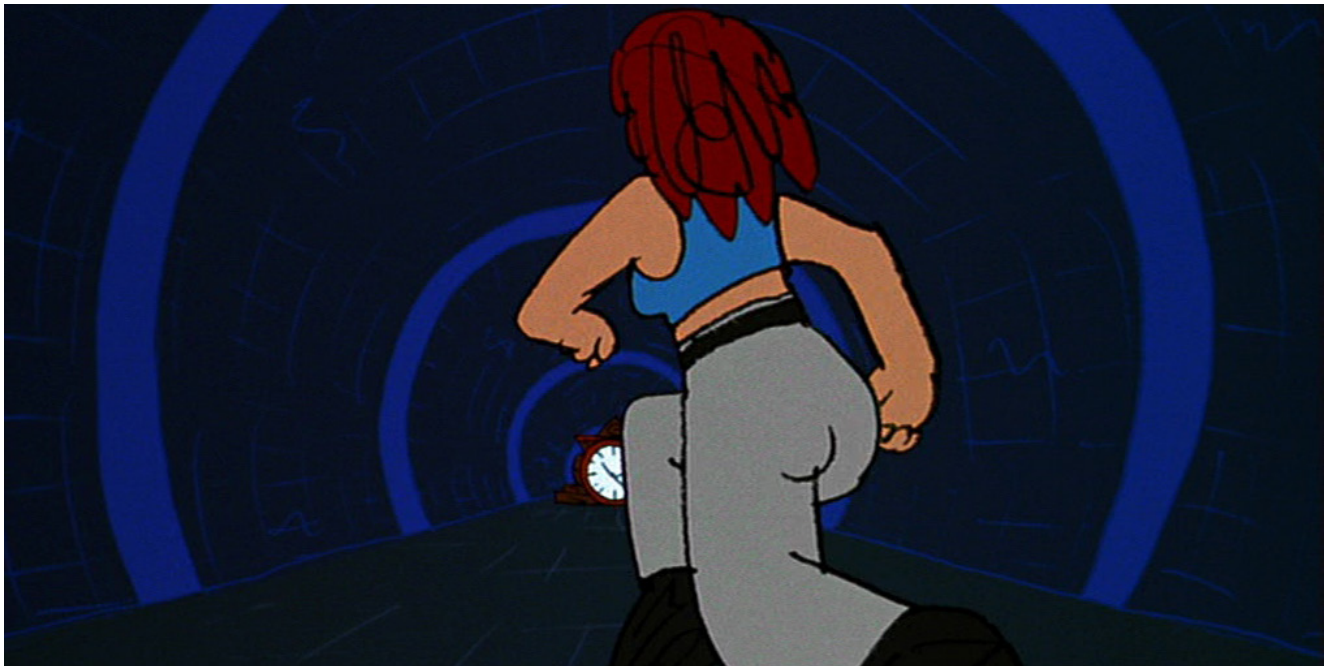
RUN LOLA RUN

(1998)

From the moment this German thriller begins, Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* (1998) is a trip. The unusual opening sequence alone is an experiment, allowing gritty and bold editing and style. First, we're met with a ticking sound.

Then, a pendulum appears from the dark sweeping credits in and out of sight, introducing the prominent theme of time. Then, the techno begins. Mercilessly, we are swallowed by a gargoyle adorning a clock, and projected into a crowd. The chaos of the crowd is amplified by a shaky point of view shot, oversaturated faces, blurry overexposed visuals, and the intensifying thump of techno music (composed by Tykwer).

The people in the crowd are introduced to the audience as part of a game that is about to begin. Herr Schuster, looking straight at the camera, says, "The ball is round, the game lasts 90 minutes, everything else is pure theory." He kicks the soccer ball into the air, and we are thrown into Lola's world: a reoccurring animated scene where Lola, bright haired and upbeat, is running.



Director: Tom Tykwer
Cinematography: Frank Griebe
Editor: Mathilde Bonnefoy
Music: Tom Tykwer,
Johnny Klimek,
Reinhold Heil
Running time: 81 min.

Tykwer displays a furiously kinetic box of visual tricks, tirelessly shifting styles to visually match his frantic plot. Tykwer makes use of bricolage throughout the film, a trip into the future of cinema. Bricolage refers to the creation of a work which uses mixed media—in this case a medley of live action and animation. As Barbara Kosta writes in her essay *Tom Tykwer's Run Lola Run and the Usual Suspects: The Avant-Garde, Popular Culture, and History*,

“The film’s visual playfulness and its copious allusions to game (roulette and video games) and risk taking emphasize a wild and reckless pleasure in experimenting with cinema’s recently discovered possibilities.”

“The director, a young German named Tom Tykwer, throws every trick in the book at us, and then the book, and then himself.” Roger Ebert

Tykwer’s use of bricolage gives the film the contemporary air that was booming in New German cinema.

The film breaks boundaries—it plays with time and fate—and with the addition of the animations, a fantasy is created and everything and anything becomes possible. *Run Lola Run* is a gorgeous thrill, from start to finish, from plot to visuals.



Suspiria

(1977)

Universally regarded as one of Argento's greatest accomplishments, *Suspiria* is a hyper-stylized masterpiece—a gory, visual and colorful one at that. The film is a visual assault, from the moment Suzy reaches the exterior of the Tanz Dance Academy. The lighting and the film sets paint the screen with beautiful, vivid colors that are captivating and unsettling. The vast majority of the shots in the film are painted with a singular color that dominates the screen, a chromatic journey.



Suspiria is the first in a trilogy (*Le Tre madri*) of supernatural horror films by Italian film director Dario Argento. When seeking a new creative direction, Argento decided to draw inspiration from the macabre lore of Old Europe. The other two films in the trilogy are *Inferno* (1980) and *Mother of Tears* (2007). Simply put, each film deals with one of the titular “Mothers”, a trio of ancient witches. *Suspiria* deals with the Mother of Sighs, hence the latin title “breathlessness.”



Suspiria is a “giallo” film, which is essentially an Italian horror or thriller exploitation film. Italian for mystery fiction, a giallo is a hyper-stylized that often includes gory murders and erotic themes. Giallo is defined by “outrageous design, bold close-ups, intense color, memorable scores filled with sighs and shards of sound, and strange, gruesome murders performed by a very particular type of villain.” They’re often lush, colorful and make for great midnight movies.

Director: Dario Argento
Cinematography: Luciano Tovoli
Editor: Franco Fraticelli
Music: Goblin
Running time: 98 min.

Every scene in the film offers gorgeous architecture and decor. Designer Giuseppe Bassan was instructed, by Argento, to recreate some pieces of furniture based on the German Art Deco and Art Nouveau styles, which shines through throughout the entire film. The academy is adorned with features of Art Nouveau, most noticeably the feminine arches of the doors and windows. Other rooms in the academy are as Art Deco as can be, which is extremely noticeable during Patricia's death.



The score of the film is something of wonders, a synth masterpiece. Argento wanted Goblin's score to set *Suspiria* apart from his other films. Not only has *Suspiria* gained a huge, unwavering cult following, the soundtrack also helped Goblin pick up a cult following. In the '70s, it was still pretty rare to hear a synth in film scores.



Suspiria may be a horror, but it's beautiful visuals are far from it. Every sequence in the film is drenched in a different color, painting the screen a glorious rainbow of technicolor terror. It's hard to not enjoy *Suspiria*. At the very least, it's hard to not find some sort of pleasure in *Suspiria*'s over-the-top, grandiose visuals.

“Above all, Argento’s *Suspiria* is deeply, powerfully loony, a triumph of execution over narrative, of mesmerizing image and sound.”
Maitland McDonagh

THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE

(1974)

Tobe Hooper's 1974 horror cult classic *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is a polarizing film. Those who make it through the entire thing successfully either love it or they despise it. Upon its initial release, audience members were known to run from the theater in disgust and fear, describing the film as “sick,” “vile,” and “perverse.” Yet, in 1981, a copy of the film was placed in the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection.

The Texas Chain Saw Massacre takes place in an isolated area of Texas and revolves around five young friends driving through in their van.

They stumble upon the house of a group of men—the Sawyer family—who are former slaughterhouse workers who have embraced murder and cannibalism. The house, charming from the outside, is anything but, with human bones, chicken feathers, charms and weird relics adorning the rooms. At the hands of Leatherface and his chainsaw, the group of friends is picked off one by one, in the thick Texan heat.



Director: Tobe Hooper
Cinematography: Daniel Pearl
Editor: J. Larry Carroll,
Sallye Richardson
Music: Tobe Hooper,
Wayne Bell
Running time: 124 min.

The film uses its environment—and the color yellow—to build tension and horror. This pallid, putrid color seems to rot in front of the viewer, its potency so real you can almost smell the decay through the screen.

The most striking use of the color yellow is found in the final moments of the film, when Sally (Marilyn Burns) screams from the back of the truck that has rescued her. We are treated to a shot of Leatherface, his movements dance-like, spinning and waving his chainsaw in the air against the backdrop of a yellow rising sun.

Hailed by many as the perfect horror film, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is an endlessly referenced cult horror. Its notoriety lies in its realism, and its ability to transport the audience into the film. This snuff quality makes it painfully easy for the viewer to forget that they're watching a fictional story.

The Texas Chain Saw Massacre is not your conventional example of cinematic beauty, but that does not make it any less of.

“It achieves the force of authentic art, profoundly disturbing, intensely personal, yet at the same time far more than personal.” Bill Nichols



the umbrellas of cherbourg

(1964)

The Umbrellas of *Cherbourg* (1964) is a brightly colored story about young love. Each shot is an explosion of color that exaggerates the storybook quality of this romantic musical. The film opens with an overhead crane shot of big round umbrellas moving about a street in the rain. They're brightly colored umbrellas and introduce us to the whimsical narrative is about to unfold. It's from these opening colors that rest of the film takes its cues.

While the film is visually undeniably pleasing to the eye, it's not necessarily happy. When asked about his inspiration for the film, director Jacques Demy said, "I want to make people cry," and more specifically, "about that first love." It's easy for directors to make people cry. What Demy did was more than that. In his depiction of first love that could have been but wasn't, Demy takes his audience on a journey of self-discovery. *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* is eye-candy, but it's also heart wrenching.

"'Umbrellas' is unexpectedly sad and wise, a bittersweet reflection on the way true love sometimes does not conquer all." Roger Ebert



Director: Jacques Demy
Cinematography: Jean Rabier
Editor: Anne-Marie Cotret Monique
Music: Michel Legrand
Running time: 91 min.



Set in northwest France in the late '50s, Catherine Deneuve plays Geneviève, a lovesick 17-year-old whose boyfriend is drafted to the Algerian War. The separation forces the pair to move on from each other, resulting in a bittersweet reunion years later.

The Umbrellas of Cherbourg is renowned for its arresting production design, and most specifically, its wallpapers. Sweet pink and green stripes paint the walls in the umbrella shop, radiant blue florals appear in Geneviève's bedroom, bright orange flowers swirl around the kitchen. The film's costume designer (Jacqueline Moreau), set designer (Bernard Evein) and cinematographer (Jean Rabier) would work together to co-ordinate the color palettes, with Moreau often creating clothes to match the decor's shades.

"The film used colour like a singing Matisse," said Demy about his Palme d'Or-winning masterpiece.

In *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, Demy tells a heartbreaking story in such a visually stunning way that, for a second, you may forget the morose feeling tugging at your heart. Demy manages to make even heartbreak look beautiful and enjoyable to watch.

The Virgin Suicides

(1999)

Adapted by Sofia Coppola from the homonymous novel by Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Virgin Suicides* (1999) is narrated by a man who was part of a group of boys that mythicized the Lisbon girls when they were young.

Now, in adulthood, still pining fruitlessly for an explanation, they relay the story of the Lisbons back to us. What we see is a crystallization of the Lisbon sisters—not how they were, but how the men immortalized them to be. The removed approach of narration gives the film—which tackles the somber theme of suicide—an unexpected lightness of being, which is intensified through Coppola’s mesmerizing use of color. The cinematography of the film isn’t dour either. The colors of the film, while muted, are expressive—a collage of varying ethereal palettes to correspond the mood at hand.

The opening sequence of the film sets the tone: people walking their dog, someone watering their lawn, the sound of birds chirping. A gentle reminder to the audience that all the glitz of suburbia—the overly tended and overly watered lawns, the nosy neighbors, the newest appliances, and the most practical cars—can’t keep the danger away.

We settle, for a moment, on a cluttered bathroom shelf littered with perfume bottles and nail polish and jewelry. The silence is interrupted by sirens creeping into the soundscape of the manicured neighborhood. The faucet lets out its last few drops slowly. The image of the adolescent clutter holds the frame like a still life as the ambulance grows louder. The narrator enters, and we cut to an overhead shot of Cecilia, wrists slit in the tub: “Cecilia was the first to go.”

The Virgin Suicides feels like teleporting straight into the brains of teenage girls, and somehow manages to capture the essence and feel of what it’s like being a teenage girl, and what it’s like hating the world around you.

“The narrator speaks of youth as if it existed and still exists in a near-fugue state.” Ed Gonzalez

Director:
Cinematography:
Editor:

Sofia Coppola
Ed Lachman
Melissa Kent,
James Lyons

Music:
Running time:

Air
97 min.

The film doesn't tell a story. Instead, it, leaves a foggy impression, like a fever-dream of suburban 1970s Michigan, laced with the romantic lens of a teenager's worldview.

"I had a look in my mind of how it should feel while reading it, of that hazy, backlit style of '70s Playboy photography,"

Coppola told Vogue in an interview this spring for the film's 20th anniversary.

The Virgin Suicides accomplishes the rare feat of capturing the essence of a teenage girl's mind, in the midst of adolescent angst. The film is startlingly accurate, oddly familiar, and heartwrenchingly real, all while retaining an ethereal, fever-dream look.



The Wages of Fear

(1953)

Set in South America, *The Wages of Fear* (1953) tells the story of four desperate locals who are lured by the promise of \$2,000 per man to make the almost-suicidal delivery of nitroglycerin across the hazardous terrain. Any slight shake or rattle could detonate the nitroglycerin and kill everyone in sight. The audience knows this, and so do the drivers transporting the nitroglycerin. The result is one of the most nerve-racking (but aesthetically beautiful) thrillers ever made. Clouzot and cinematographer Armand Thirard assume utter control of the audience, mounting scene after scene of nail-biting danger in a series of beautifully choreographed and filmed shots.

Sweltering village scenes tango with the stench of the awareness of nitroglycerine, all in a gritty monochrome that serves as a great accompaniment to the ever rising tension. *The Wages of Fear* was the second most popular film in France in 1953, with nearly 7 million spectators. To this day, *The Wages of Fear* remains among the top thirty most popular films in France. Additionally, it won awards for best film and best actor at Cannes.



Director: Henri-Georges Clouzot
Cinematography: Armand Thirard
Editor: Madeleine Gug,
Henri Rust,
Etiennette Muse
Music: Georges Auric
Running time: 156 min.



Clouzot was a classicist, whose shooting style was meticulous. His cynical outlook on life bled through his films, a beautiful marriage of deeply thought-out shots and morose themes. Unfortunately, Clouzot's career saw an ugly ending. His health dwindled and, after the death of his first wife in 1960, his films became infrequent. Clouzot also had somewhat of a bad reputation on set and was known as a tyrant perfectionist who wanted complete control.

Regardless of what he was like on set, *The Wages of Fear* is the perfect example of how Clouzot's pedantisms paid off. The film is beautiful in every sense of the word.



“The excitement derives entirely from the awareness of nitroglycerine and the gingerly, breathless handling of it. You sit there waiting for the theatre to explode.” Bosley Crowther

“**X**”

THE MAN WITH THE X RAY EYES

Directed by Roger Corman in 1963, *X* (the subtitle “The Man with the X-Ray Eyes” does not appear in the film) was one of the most original and mind-bending pieces of 1960s American cinema. As Stephen King famously wrote in his 1981 book *Danse Macabre*, there’s a strong element of Lovecraft horror at work in *X*—a sense of chaos existing just outside the unknowable and incomprehensible. As *X* follows Dr. James Xavier’s experiments on his own eyesight, the film’s intensifying visuals reflect the snowballing consequences of his actions. Early scenes look completely normal—shots of everyday, banal life. When Dr. Xavier attends a dance party, the visuals even get close to a comedic, exploitative nudie film.

As Dr. Xavier’s eyesight intensifies, he can see backgrounds so clearly that foregrounds appear blurry. He sees cities are hellish red and black landscapes, and the world as apocalyptic prisms of color. Later in the film, when the point of view shifts to what Dr. Xavier is seeing in result of his self-experimentation, the film turns into something of a psychedelic light show. The everyday, banal life that is depicted at the beginning of the film descends into a multi-saturated, skeletal nightmare. Eventually, the film turns abstract and existential as the light at the center of the universe consumes Dr. Xavier’s perceptions.



Director: Roger Corman
Cinematography: Floyd Crosby
Editor: Anthony Carras
Music: Les Baxter
Running time: 80 min.



The effects of the film lean heavily on the visuals that soon became cliché during the psychedelic, heady exploitation film wave that Corman played an important part in. Dissolves, color filters, and splashes of ink, are all effects that are plentiful in *X* and in the psychedelic films that followed. While *X* is not your typical LSD flick, Dr. Xavier's visions increasingly resemble a fantasy of a bad acid trip, tapping into a fear of drugs not uncommon at the time.

Because the film's plot revolves around eyesight, and the ambition to improve humankind's eyesight, the visuals of the film are nothing short of spectacular. Great, bold colors take over the screen, with vibrant blacks and reds. Background clarity is striking, and textures pop out. The film honors the importance of visuals in its storytelling, and the result is a rollercoaster of experimental cinematic beauty.

“One of Roger Corman’s leanest, meanest, most disturbing, and ambitious films.” Chuck Bowen

the YOUNG GIRLS of ROCHEFORT (1967)

Jacques Demy's 1967 musical *The Young Girls of Rochefort* orchestrates a brightly colored story about missed connections and second chances. In Rochefort, there are no black dresses, drab suits, colorless buildings, or lackluster shoes. Instead, *The Young Girls of Rochefort* seems to be set in an idyllic town where vibrant pastels dominate the color palette, and the townspeople's outfits provide a bright spectrum of oranges, blues, yellows, and pinks.

Demy's tribute to Hollywood's Golden Age of Musicals has a palette that has repeatedly been described over the years as "candy-colored." More than 1,000 shutters in the town of shooting were repainted for the film, all in pastels. The pleasure of *The Young Girls of Rochefort* doesn't just lie in the fact that the town looks like an explosion in a paint factory. Rather, Demy leaves room for magic to be discovered in the shadows of the film: the delicately painted doorways, the never-stationary townspeople, the details of worn hats that coincidentally seem to match their surroundings.



Director: Jacques Demy
Cinematography: Ghislain Cloquet
Editor: Jean Hamon
Music: Michel Legrand
Running time: 126 min.

Demy said that he wanted to create a film that, despite being an homage to Hollywood's Golden Age of Musicals, was unmistakably French. Indeed, there's far more cigarette smoking in *The Young Girls of Rochefort* than in most other Hollywood musicals, but that's not where the French flair lies. In *The Young Girls of Rochefort*, a film that is highly stylized, there remains a visual aesthetic of effortlessness. Demy, along with cinematographer Ghislain Cloquet, manages to make the meticulous color-cordination in the film look coincidental, and the seamless composition look fortuitous.

The Young Girls of Rochefort truly is a pleasure to watch, because every shot is a delight. The film looks like what young love feels like; juvenile, joyful, and happy. It's almost impossible to not enjoy *The Young Girls of Rochefort*.

“There are always those soldiers and that sadistic killer, of course, which give the whole movie a fine, eccentric, pastel and dreamlike irony.” Renata Adler



ZABRISKIE POINT (1970)

A notorious box office flop, *Zabriskie Point* (1970) took its cue from a newspaper story that director Antonioni read about a young man who stole an airplane and was shot by police when he tried to return it. Destroyed by the critics, the film was described as a “pathetic mess” and more by critics such as Pauline Kael and Roger Ebert.

Manny Farber was one of the few critics to recognize at the time the “photographic lyricism” of this film, which was never meant to be taken as a realistic portrait of America, but rather a poem about the flower-power generation. These past few years have made *Zabriskie Point* gain momentum again, for its expressive portrayal of anger and disgust towards aspects of modern life and institutional power.

In the months following the success of *Easy Rider* (1969), a restless Hollywood desperately wanted to recreate that triumph with the countercultural youth audience. In the desolate and depopulated space of natural and untouched desert, *Zabriskie Point* attempts to do so. The barren Mojave acts like a canvas, rendering sandy beiges and grey hues, contrasted occasionally by electric bursts of reds and greens. Like many Michaelangelo Antonioni films, *Zabriskie Point* is an exploration of landscape.



Director: Michelangelo Antonioni
Cinematography: Alfio Contini
Editor: Franco Arcalli
Music: Pink Floyd,
Rolling Stones,
Grateful Dead
Running time: 112 min.

Antonioni beautifully juxtaposes the open and free spaces of the empty desert with that of the constricting space of an urban, somewhat brutalist Los Angeles. The shots are photographed from oblique angles that form gorgeous but confusing compositions, and the locations are either absurdly picturesque.

The plot and narrative of *Zabriskie Point* is the least important and interesting aspect of the film, because the film is in itself a visually splendid moody verse on America through the eyes of a foreigner.

“But the literally explosive finale, scored to Pink Floyd’s Careful with that Axe, Eugene, featuring consumer items blasted into the cobalt sky, still properly blows the mind.” Donald Clarke



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