



Fido

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I will never forget the meeting in February where we workshopped Maya's piece, On Sensitivity. It was one of her first meetings as a part of Journal (I had been wanting her to join for ages) and it became the meeting that reminded me exactly why I created 1891 in the first place.

When someone shares a piece in Journal, they offer a part of themselves to everyone gathered around the tight wooden table in the even tighter Library Annex. Words have the power to connect, and in the almost sacred silence that occurs as everyone listens to the piece being read out, everyone can see each other. No one is hiding.

In 1891, we discuss, and we laugh, and we even cry. In On Sensitivity, you want to hold onto every single one of Maya's words. She was writing about herself, yet we all felt closer to one another, and to ourselves, by the end of her reading.

You are sensitivity, and I am you.

The Identity issue – the third issue of 1891 – is intimate and reflective and bold. The cultural criticisms, poems, and personal essays in this issue bring you face-to-face with each writer of 1891. The art that narrates this issue is inventive and colourful, and the cover by Sasha Beauregard depicts a self-portrait with butterflies surrounding her: a message of remembering the bigger, natural forces around you – the power in shifting perspective.

We want *The Identity issue* to ask you about yourself – who you are in this wild and confusing world. The most uncertain answer is best.

Gioia Duenas-Dahms



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'm standing in my bathroom, wiping make-up from my face and thinking about how spaces can hold memories and how we exist in these spaces (corridors, bedrooms, classrooms, kitchens, bathrooms), and we give meaning to them simply by existing inside them. I walk into my bedroom and I'm reminded of all the people who have existed within that space with me, a space which is my own and that I have named my own by existing in it, writing in it, sleeping in it, and loving in it. My room holds many memories, and although it is not the room of my childhood, it no longer reeks of unfamiliarity or fresh white paint. I have plastered my walls with parts of myself that existed before this room, with music and literature – a thick coating of my love. The people who have entered this space I have created have also entered a part of me that is most vulnerable, most unfiltered and true. My room exists as a passageway to my heart and a reflection of utter tranquility; the most peaceful part of my mind that refuses unrest. I sit cross-legged on the floor of my room and think of all the girls who have touched my heart with their laughter, and how this laughter has also touched every square inch of my bedroom, their vowels bouncing off the walls and reverberating within my chest as if the moment only continues to replay within me. I feel the vibrations fill the room and let the tape rewind.

On my way to my English class on a Wednesday morning, I pass many doors that belong to my past. They open the form rooms that I used to exist in, each time with a different girls' laughter within me. In passing, I see the oval shaped tarnish on the handle that is slightly gold rather than brown, as if the many years of service has not tainted it but instead polished it with a fondness that only makes it shine. I remember that once I existed in those doorways for brief seconds every day, my entrances and exits to my form room at the time seeming insignificant, but now occupying a large section of my heart titled 'belonging'. I had not given thought to how we create these spaces, how, amongst our closest lovers that we like to call best friends, we have small intimacies such as 'our spot', because we have given meaning to a space where we exist together, unashamedly bright (like unfiltered sunlight). We are scattered across every place we have ever existed, everyone we have ever loved, even just briefly. By existing in these spaces, we are simultaneously changing them and changed by them.

It's all giving you away. Everything you do shows your hand. Everything is a self-portrait.

Everything is a diary.





A LOST LANGUAGE LAKA BU MA RERAI

Ina Benzo

Much have we loved you. But speechless was our love, and with veils has it been veiled. Yet now it cries aloud unto you, and would stand revealed before you. And ever has it been that love knows not its own depth until the hour of separation.

Kahlil Gibran

he sounds of callous late afternoon conversation entrapped mine and an acquaintance's stomps through London streets. In-between casual murmers, the occasional gesture of amusement I face flashes on realization of the lack of depth in this interaction. She does not understand my idiosyncrasies, nor do I care to learn hers. We carry on through the ecstatic figures, feigning the importance of what we must say to each other. My instinctive responses: previously prepared, packaged and placed in the category of my mind entitled 'small talk'. Travelling through the wind is a sound that trips the systematic motions of my feet, breath, heart. The gratitude I should give to these automatic systems escapes my mind, until a pebble is thrown into the stream, and the disruption makes way for the earth lying beneath. My heart quickens; my ears tingle to grasp the sounds that slipped from their clutch. The fading melodies of a song in a language I

had long believed to have forget haunt my every motion. I submit, and leap into the sea of my memories.

I am met with my forgotten home: in it I see love carrying the powerful currents of my mother tongue, Wolof. I witness the incessant way in which she carries rage of my Ancestors, yet their tongue has been pacified by a foreign land and they have been reduced by a language from distant seas into a stump I place hidden in the depths of my conscience; I choose to dig her an unmarked grave and lay her with no dignity. Therein lies one who travelled centuries, carrying the winds of the ancient songs, to become effaced in the walls of a child's mind. I recall how the strength of this language, rumbling vowels hard to ignore, hugged my

thoughts and were once the essence of the rivers in my mind. She was the vessel in which my spirit could lay; aware of the sanctuary crafted by my ancestors, a creation I often acquainted with the divine.

I remember the cluttered sounds of kitchens. me and my kin, sitting in the dim evening light, preparing a dish to feed a comfortably starved family. The dialogue is sparse; every word leaves an imprint on the new grown grass. She speaks and I listen. As a warden of her words, I must not let a single one pass me by, lest I risk losing myself, for who is a captor if the captive does not entertain this silly game?

Jelalal sobleh bi nga dogal ma ko. The breeze gently stirs the conversation like mercury. Sor pareh nga dugal ko si pan bi, no! Haral ma taalal la safarah bi. Thank you, I nod in acknowledgement. She chops at the onions. I watch in agony, she spins to place the items in a motar adjacent to me. I reach to hand it to her. She is too quick. I sit back down, in silent contemplation. Darling, sa Wolof bi is going. Does she know my tongue did not exit, but, that I murdered her in cold blood?

The way I interact with the world is informed by the language that voiced my childhood. Stored deeply in my subconscious, an understanding of my surroundings from the cultural viewpoint of my Mother Tongue. I feel as though deviation from this context is synonymous with a loss of self. But what if the assimilation that ensued did not tear down my foundations, but rather built up a fresh perspective? What if my love for my language could never die, no matter how many oceans lie between me and her land of origin? What if the integral parts of ourselves cannot not simply be erased by time, distance and disconnect, or sheer force of will - what if we can only be remodelled, morphed to coincide with our current realities? What if we learn to co-operate and collaborate with the change?

Sitting at the mercy of a moon-lit night, my thoughts are gently stirred. The clouds part to reveal the moon, which holds a humming brightness against the darkened landscape. Sounds of concealed life envelope my space; chirps, scuttles, hoots. Room in my head is opened to lingering words.

Too many fragments of the spirit have I scattered in these streets, and too many are the children of my longing that walk naked among these hills, and I cannot withdraw from them without a burden and ache. It is not a garment I cast off this day, but a skin that I tear with my own hands. Nor is it a thought I leave behind me, but a heart made sweet with hunger and thirst.

Kahlil Gibran

ARTISTIC IDENTITY AS A FORM OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Tiana Wadhawan

hat's Life. It's all change: a dialogue said by America Ferrera in Barbie (2023), reflecting on everything from age, personal growth and social development. What stuck out to me was that Ferrera's character, Gloria, seemed like the only person more than anyone in that moment of the film to know that life is far from perfect and much more chaotic, messier and scarier than anyone from Barbie Land could understand. Barbie Land may be fictional, but much of the film is a silent nod to the societal taboos and common stereotypes that are faced in our own land: that is, before Gloria came in to yield her powerful voice and cut them down. Lucky for us, we happen to have our own 'Gloria's' within every aspect of our daily lives - people, more specifically artists, who use their identity to bring about social change. I have always resorted to writing on Art and culture, not only because I feel most confident and comfortable in doing so, but also because there is so much to say about the media and those who put their life's effort and emotion into making powerful images. Artistic identity is a key aspect of every work we see as it determines what the artist wants to convey and the impact they wish to have on the wider world. Kusama, Kahlo and Kruger stand as towering

figures in the art industry, each with their own unique brushstroke that confronts taboos and challenges stereotypes in order to make change. They are our Gloria's – each of them showcasing a different facet of female power.

YAYOI KUSAMA, the enigmatic Japanese artist who has successfully used her creative identity to confront the never-ending stigma surrounding mental health. Kusama has openly shared her personal struggles with mental illness, using her art as a medium for advocacy and a form of healing. Her desire to to do this originated from her childhood, being born into a conservative Japanese society where her hallucinations and anxiety were explained for being a 'phase'. Kusama's immersive installations using mirrored surfaces and a hypnotic repetition of polka dots serve as metaphors for the complex corridors of the mind. Through her works, she creates invitations for viewers to embark on a passage of self-refection, and by sharing her own experiences, she shatters the myth of the 'tortured artist', challenging viewers to embrace a more empathetic understanding of mental health. More recently, Kusama's



target audience has been for fashion fanatics a collaboration with designer brand Louis Vuitton where her multi-coloured polka dots swarmed clothing and accessories. This branch into the fashion world allowed Kusama to gain appreciation and share her message with a younger audience. One of her most iconic works, the 'Infinity Mirror Rooms', reflects on the same message of the infinite complexities of the human mind. Visitors step into the kaleidoscopic chambers, enveloped by wonder and introspection, and are almost forced to confront the vast expanse of their own consciousness. Kusama's methods of embracing her own vulnerabilities aims to illuminate the paths of others, reclaiming self narratives and act as beacon of support for those struggling:

MENTAL HEALTH AMBASSADOR GLORIA.

FRIDA KAHLO, the iconic Mexican

artist we all know and love. Her paintings are all self-portraits, showing off vibrancy and emotion whilst expressing her own unwavering resilience and unapologetic feminism. Kahlo faced multiple immense physical and emotional challenges throughout her life, one being a near-fatal bus accident leaving her with lifelong injuries. However, Kahlo found herself at peace when she channeled her experiences into her art – transforming pain into a source of strength. The epitome of her work is a powerful exploration of her identity as a woman, defying

When we think of Frida Kahlo, we think of aspects that symbolise her identity: Tehuana dresses, her unibrow, her Mexican heritage and her bold, stern gaze. In a world that often seeks to silence and objectify women, Kahlo serves as a powerful assertion of female autonomy, challenging patriarchal norms as she discovers her own femininity - which is what I admire most about her work. She is aware she is incorporating elements into her paintings that would seem unappealing to the majority – but the more she does it, the more it gets normalised. 'Feet, what do I need you for when I have wings to fly?' Kahlo said this, encapsulating her unshakable spirit and a refusal to be denied by her limitations; she only wants to reach higher. A legacy has been created by Kahlo: a true feminist idol inviting viewers to embrace their own vulnerabilities and imperfections whilst inspiring generations to challenge societal norms and fight for gender equality:

> FEMINIST ICON GLORIA.

BARBRA KRUGER;

the master of visual rhetoric images. Her artistic identity serves as an influential weapon

beauty and feminin-

ity with raw honesty.

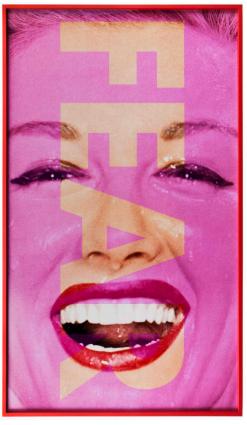
against power and consumer culture; bold red text against striking black and white imagery. Kruger's works serve as mirror reflecting the insidious nature of consumerism and ways it shapes our identities and desires.

She uses iconic slogans such as 'Your Body is a Battleground' and 'I Shop Therefore I Am' which break the noise of advertising and demand the attention of the viewers. These powerful phrases are juxtaposed with images sourced from mass media - a way of exposing the contradictions and hypocrisies that we experience daily. In her own words, Kruger says, 'I work with pictures and words because they have the ability to determine who we are and who we aren't.' Kruger is one of my favourite artists: not only do I appreciate her use of media and eye-catching imagery, I personally enjoy how she is able to communicate such strong and moving political and emotional ideologies in a quick-witted manner. One of Kruger's most powerful works is 'Untitled (I shop therefore I am)', confronting the ways in which consumer culture shapes our sense of identity and selfworth. By equating shopping with existence, Kruger exposes the emptiness of materialism and value systems that our society follows. Her aim is to serve as a reminder that wealth and status does not equate to worth - we must look beyond the surface, permits viewers to reconsider a relationship with the world based on character rather than authority and capitalism:

POLITICALLY ACCURATE GLORIA.

These three women, all morally aligned with Gloria, have used their personal identity and forms of expression as means of bringing about change; personal, political and even

social. The kaleidoscopic lens of Kusama, unyielding brushstrokes of Kahlo and incisive wit of Kruger are only small glimpses of the millions of other powerful figures that use their work as a superpower to encourage others. According to me, it's this authenticity that is used by each artist that resonates with audiences and inspires action as it encourages confidence and empowerment within individuals. I often find that when I visit a gallery or an exhibition, I not only come out with greater artistic knowledge about the pieces displayed, but also a sense of liberation that the works were shown for a particular reason. This hopefulness mirrors when Barbie learns from Gloria that her curiosity, and challenges that she faced, were all for a reason: to bring about change in Barbie Land, a change that was initiated by Gloria and executed by Barbie and her friends. Like this, Kusama, Kahlo and Kruger initiate forms of change through their artistic identity, and the hope that they inspire their viewers to fulfil them.



Untitled (Fear), 2001 Barbara Kruger



Tapestry of Existence

Valentine Matussiere

In the tapestry of existence am I free?
In the depths of silent thought, I ponder,
Who am I in this vast universe I wonder?
Am I merely a vessel, a vessel of flesh and bone,
or a soul with mysteries, yet to be known?

Am I the sum of my experiences, the tales I weave, or am I defined by the choices I conceive? In the maze of existence, I seek to find The essence of my being, the truth enshrined.

Am I the seeker of knowledge? In the silence of solitude, I seek the key To unlock the mysteries that do lie within me.

Am I the master of fate, forging my path, or a puppet of destiny, in its aftermath?

Do I dwell in the past, or embrace the now,

As I journey through life, at what time should I recite my vows?

Am I the observer, watching life unfold, or the actor on stage, playing roles untold? In the dance of existence, I find my stride. Am I the question, seeking answers profound, or the answer itself, waiting to be found? In the tapestry of existence, I am but a thread, yet within me, the universe is silently spread.

So who am I, in this grand design, A cosmic wonder, or simply divine? In the journey of self, I have fixed my youth.

I am the ocean vast and deep, Where dreams and desires silently sleep.

In the writings of the wind I hear my name In the depths of my soul, I find my flame. In the tapestry of existence I am free.





LOVE AND ATTENTION

Gioia Duenas-Dahms

SISTER SARAH-JOAN

(she considers Lady Bird)
I read your college essay. You
clearly love Sacramento.

LADY BIRD

I do?

SISTER SARAH-JOAN

Well, you write about Sacramento so affectionately, and with such care.

LADY BIRD

I was just describing it.

SISTER SARAH-JOAN

It comes across as love.

LADY BIRD

Sure, I guess I pay attention.

SISTER SARAH-JOAN

Don't you think maybe they are the same thing? Love and attention?

fter an eight-hour long haul flight, I would rest my head against the taxi's window and fight the exhaustion by trying to guess each car's destination on the highway. Despite doing this every time, my eyes would still shut before I could realise – only up until two bends, a smooth path and a sharp turn though, because this meant I had arrived at Stratford Road; a quiet little street in a sheltered town called Bethesda, just outside of DC. This arrival was muscle memory to me, and yet for so much of my life I would dread coming here and sigh at the suburban sounds which I felt so quieted by.

My life is in London – it is where my friends and family are, where I go to school and where I ultimately feel happiest. But for a few months each year since I was about two, I adopt an alternate persona as this all-American suburban girl - except, with the ribbons in my hair or the days I don't spend wearing Lululemon leggings, I still stick out like a sore thumb. We ended up in Bethesda because of Stanley Greenspan, an American psychiatrist who guided my parents through creating a special program for my older brother, Max, who has autism. That's the day job though, because by night my brother and I are giggling down the little corridor where our bedroom doors stand side by side, making iMovie trailers together or intensely watching our neighbors, Don and Mary, through the screen windows wondering how long into the night they'll sit chatting together on their porch, lit only by a few candles. From Floor time therapy to movement therapy to speech and music therapy, my brother knows exactly why he's in Bethesda. But for me, I sometimes felt like a supporting act.

Nothing changes in Bethesda – I think that is what I love most about it. Both the land-scape and our routine are nothing new, yet continue to be just as refreshing each trip. On the first day, once our sleep had soaked up a little bit of the jetlag, we go to the supermarket. This drive

is perhaps my most and least favorite of them all. It's a drive that has become almost symbolic to me

"Just putting so much weight on the make-believe."

over the years – it is the perfect 30-minute break between studying for exams, and also makes for the ideal excursion to trick me into thinking I did more than just spend time in my bedroom all day. The familiarity of the route is calming to me: it starts with a couple of bends through residential streets before arriving onto the main road where the sleek Suburban Hospital is, accompanied by a little parking lot with a Jewish Deli that serves bagels out of a turquoise caravan, and then followed by three different churches all on the same street - Catholic, Pentecostal, Anglican, you name it - and this was all the melodramatic leadup to Balducci's. A drive just enough to fit four, maybe five songs and a few little exchanges between my mother and me.

When I was younger, especially, I went to Bethesda enough to experience all three seasons. Fall, where I would experiment each year being a different dog breed for Halloween. Spring, where I would stand on the wobbly stone steps leading up to our house and beg my mother to let me wear just my cardigan instead of a boring jacket. And Summer, where I would go to camp and have a lot of people question what exactly I was doing here in Bethesda. The Girls Day Camp that I went to in the summer is what I think about often. I am now

and I can't find myself being able to understand how old they looked to me then, and how young I look to myself now. I remember how much I adored the seventeen-year-old girls who would take us to activities throughout the day — wanting to emulate their neon sports shorts or collect all the Loom Bands they wore on their wrist. Just putting so much weight on the make-believe. I made friends at camp, but never kept in touch enough to see them each time I returned

to Bethesda from London. I wonder how conscious of a decision this may have been, to

spend this time alone to become more in tune with myself. That with every new route I tried to learn to get to town, I would find my footing in myself or the world or my dreams even more.

"Don't you think maybe they are the same thing? Love and attention?". This is perhaps one of my favorite lines from Greta Gerwig's Lady Bird, and Lady Bird's affectionate hostility for Sacramento feels much like a mirror to what I think of Bethesda. Thinking back to how I used to spend most afternoons walking downtown to the Barnes & Noble just to spend hours reading on their colorful bean bags, to how I would run around the little playground which would bleed onto the High School's football pitch, to how much I craved coming home from a hot day at summer camp just to feel the draft of the air conditioner breathe away my sweat - this was all love. The girl that grew up in Bethesda will always be a little part of me, and it is my attention to the details - the little cracks on the pavement that M&Ms dropped into on Halloween rest or the new striped awning on the Tastee Diner - that grow old with my memories of this place. And so, I will age with the details of the places I have decided to call home – however unfamiliar, however short-lived. ■



THE METAMORPHOSIS OF IDENTITY

Octavia Koropouli-Higgins

The Discovery of Identity

ne of the many questions in this world, other than why we are here, is 'what is my place in this world?' 'What is my identity?' In this life, it is a constant battle within us to discover who we are. Many of us are defined and placed in categories. We define ourselves by labels, and it seems, so do others.

Childhood. A major time of discovery. Pressurised into labels. I think an example from what I have experienced of people labelling me, is if I'm a 'girly-girl' or a 'tomboy'. 'She is a tomboy because she plays Minecraft,' or, 'She's a girly-girl because she watches My Little Pony.'

Evidently, there is always that someone who creates an identity for us. We fall into that identity as we do not have choice. It is the struggle later on, of finding who we actually are, rather than becoming self-fulfilling prophecies.

In my life journey thus far, with my own attempts of figuring out who I am, and in my own questioning of the world, I always go back to one of my favourite quotations from Franz Kafka.

I never wish to be easily defined. I'd rather float around people's minds as something fluid and non-perceivable; more like a transparent, paradoxically iridescent creature rather than an actual person.

Franz Kafka

In the world of battling personalities, we are always led to wanting to be defined as 'something.' In our present time of social media, there has never been more of a thirst or a hunger to be identified as something. In social media your identity is formed for you, despite one's own attempts of trying to create a unique identity online. You are praised one minute, and judged another. You could feel on top of the world with one click, and then your world can fall a part with a second.

It seems like today's identity is not a unique expression of yourself, but a desperate attempt to free yourself from rejection and gain validation. The identity is formed in a black-and-white way, and feeds on immediate gratification.

Could the question of identity be an ancient one? We have always wanted to find people like us, to find our tribe, to have a sense of belonging and security.

Ironically, Kafka goes against this apparent human need of wanting to be defined. However, despite this, he is, in fact, defined by us. In fact, Kafka did not want an identity. He did not want to be known. Perhaps he wanted to remain as what he always saw himself as: a quiet boy.

It was his friend, Max Brod, that allowed us to know the world of Kafka. Kafka instructed Brod to burn all his books after he had died. Brod decided not to, and instead published them.

Previously, I said how perhaps Kafka wanted to remain as the quiet boy. The reason I said as based on Kafka's childhood. Kafka is one of the first known writers, who, if you like, journaled, about how his childhood experience formed his present reality. In his *Letters to my Father*, he explains to his father, how the consequences of his mistreatment towards him caused him to suffer throughout his life. Kafka describes in his letters how his father pressurised him to be a masculine figure, to carry on the traditions of the household. Yet, Kafka describes how he never fulfilled this identity, and therefore was punished. Kafka describes his father as a man of *health*, *appetite*, *loud*-

ness of voice, eloquence, self-satisfaction, worldly dominance,
endurance, presence of mind,
knowledge of human nature, a
certain way of doing things on a
grand scale, whilst he was just
a 'timid child.' According to
The Marginalian, Kafka's letters reveal what psychologists
have been researching for dec-

"No end, no beginning, no definition."

with our parents profoundly shapes our character.' So, is Freud's theory of how our identity is formed because of our upbringing, true?

In my own reading of Kafka's books and his letters, I believe that he actually evolves from this identity that has been formed for him, from the one he has had as a child. In his books, he explores his feelings and his subconscious mind in each of his characters. The majority of his characters are named 'K,' and all have a similar experience of things not being what they appear to be. This is what shapes the phrase, 'Kafkaesque,' meaning; 'extremely unpleasant, frightening, and confusing, and similar to situations described in the novels of Franz Kafka.' Although these are the emotions we feel when reading his novels, what was Kafka really trying to explore? Or possibly heal? Kafka wasn't writing for an audience. He was writing for himself. Using the theory of displacement, he has detached himself, and channelled his pain onto his protagonists. Perhaps he was trying to gain back control of his own perceived identity.

In his notorious short story, *The Metamorphosis*, the protagonist, George Samosa, was a traveling salesman, well-known and celebrated for the prosperity and status he had given to his family. However, one day he was mysteriously transformed into a beetle. Al-

though he remained the same man internally, the change of his physicality changed people's perception of him. His family discarded him. As a result, Samosa eventually dies out of hopelessness and neglect.

Perhaps to some, the reading of his novels can be translated

to how Kafka felt about himself. The

ades to discover, that 'our early limbic contact



The Two Fridas, 1939 Frida Kahlo

short story, *The Metamorphosis*, allows us to question what actually is an identity, and how much do we have control over it? Despite having his stories mostly being grim, and not necessarily the nicest endings, they contribute to healing the part of him that wasn't heard.

Acceptance of being 'Identity-less'

I am constantly trying to communicate something incommunicable, to explain something inexplicable, to tell about something that I feel in my bones and which can only be experienced in those bones.

Franz Kafka

But if Kafka's writing wasn't for the eyes of the people, why did he write? I believe that Kafka and other artists explore a different sense of themselves. Not their identity, but the art within themselves. An identity is the ego. In yogic philosophy, 'the ego is essentially everything that blinds us from seeing our True Self.' This is written in 'The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali.' The belief that our ego, our personal identity, is 'blinding us from seeing our True Self' is displayed across multiple religions and philosophies, including Buddhism, where the Buddha shares the belief of anatta, having no sense of self. Similarly, Stoicism teaches how the identity of self is an obstacle to a 'calm and peaceful life.'

So, why are we obsessed with the idea of an identity when it is actually our essence that counts? Why can't we just be comfortable within ourselves?

What if, the medium to healing could be found in art? What if art is just the product of healing?

Any form of art, whether it is a Picasso masterpiece, or the decisive cut of a flower stalk, is an expression of healing taking place. For centuries, our art has been an imprint of our lives. It reveals who we have been, and who we are now. From street graffiti to cave paintings, an essence of ourselves is left. The identity of these artists may never be revealed, but their essence is conveyed.

Kahlo said, 'I don't give a shit what the world thinks. I was born a bitch, I was born a painter, I was born fucked. But I was happy in my way. You did not understand what I am. I am love. I am pleasure, I am essence, I am an idiot, I am an alcoholic, I am tenacious. I am; simply I am.' Kahlo, an artist who embodies self-discovery, continues to have labels thrown on her and her art. The irony is, so many of her paintings challenge the labels put on her. Perhaps Kahlo's way of protecting her inner-self is by remaining ambiguous and having viewers constantly question who she is and what the meaning of her paintings are. She creates her own sense of self, and we will never truly know the true meaning to all her paintings, like every single artist.

Artists can offer us a way to heal ourselves through their own healing.

We carry with us parts of our past, but we also are creating our present. This is what makes all the difference.

Therefore, now that we know that there is no need to battle for an identity, if we truly care about ourselves and our well-being, we will only be focused on conveying our authenticity.

Isn't that the essence of true art?

No end, no beginning, no definition.
'A slit between some broken skin gets healed. A
bridge desolate has no use.

Each side of the same skin, each side of the same land. A different name is used. It was joined once. quickly departed. It was time to go. The persistent naming of what the same earth is, erodes it. The earth becomes what it is told. But, a river is formed by itself, a completely different self, made out of the same land.

I am not what is given to me. A river always grows.'

Anonymous ■





HE'S THE MAN

A look into Shakespeare's legacy in contemporary film

Cecily Morrissey

hroughout history, film has progressed to produce enthralling, innovative plots, inviting its audience to deeply admire the filmmaker's craft. What some fail to appreciate, however, is that several of our most beloved films derive from arguably the greatest writer known to man: William Shakespeare. What I find most compelling about the adaptation of Shakespeare's plays into film is that it affirms that his writing, despite being viewed as "outdated" by some, is still very much relevant today. In support of my thesis, I will discuss specifically how Jerry Zucker's Ghost is successful in portraying the importance of Shakespeare's identity in modern film. However, despite entertaining films such as She's the Man, it is evident that these adaptations have declined in portraying Shakespeare's perceptive and ingenious work – a view that is encompassed in the 2023 film Anyone but You.

A couple of months ago, I rewatched one of my favourite films: *Ghost*. Directed by Jerry Zucker, and starring Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore, the film follows the death of a young man called Sam, whose ghost needs to save his girlfriend from his best friend, Carl, who ordered his killing. When watching the film, I was sure that it was based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, with Carl as Macbeth, and

Sam as Banquo. However, when researching to certify my theory, I found that the film did not claim to be an interpretation of the infamous play. Nevertheless, this did not stop me from seeing numerous parallels between the two. Before the conundrum of Sam's death, he and Molly leave the theatre after watching *Macbeth*. Ironically, Sam is not impressed when watching the play – it is noted in the stage directions that 'Sam begins to snore. Molly grabs his nose. He jerks awake. Molly grins.' (perhaps Sam's view of Shakespeare changes by the end of the film!). Once the two leave the theatre, the death of Sam occurs, and the tragedy of Macbeth commences. Most ostensibly, I found that the relationship between Sam and Carl and Banquo and Macbeth, was almost identical. Of course, both Carl, and Macbeth have their best friends killed, one by a hitman, and the other, three assassins. The more nuanced comparison between these two characters, though, is their similarity of having a tragic downfall. Between the fear of others finding out that he killed Sam, and not retrieving the money for his drug dealers, Carl's deterioration is rapid and violent. Due

to his obsession with this money, perhaps Carl obtains the fatal flaw of greed, which coincides with the conventions of an Aristotelian tragedy. It is arguable that Macbeth's fatal flaw is also

greed, as his rapacity leads him to kill all those who threaten his king-

"Writing is forever evolving."

ship. Interestingly, Carl's decline is threatening, like Macbeth's, as he too loses his sense of reason, developing a new-found taste for murder. One of my favourite scenes from the film is when Carl is confronted by Sam's ghost, a clear parallel to Macbeth's vision of Banquo's ghost. Carl's insanity culminates here, as his encounter with a supernatural phenomenon heightens his loss of reason; in defense, he draws a dagger. Of course, we all know the infamous scene of Macbeth's abandonment of sanity: 'Is this a dagger which I see before me'. Interestingly, though, neither Carl nor Macbeth have outward remorse when seeing the ghost of their best friends, despite their deaths resting on their culpability. Despite this, it is plausible that Macbeth's guilt is manifested into his vision of Banquo, which is not the case for Carl. A crucial difference between Carl and Macbeth is that Shakespeare intentionally made his protagonist turn into the antagonist, unlike Zucker who undoubtedly introduced Carl as the film's antagonist. It is a typical formulation of Shakespeare's tragedies that his protagonist has a pivotal downfall, leaving the audience in two minds. In truth, I find them endearing partly because of this, as I can almost share and even sympathise with their distress, showing that Shakespeare's characters are accessible to a modern audience. That is the utter nuance of his work, as his tragic heroes are arguably

relatable to us. I think that this relatability is significantly what makes them pitiful, as truthfully, we are not wholly different to them.

Flash forward to 2006, when Shake-

speare's *Twelfth Night* was adapted into the romcom *She's the Man*. This film was adored by teens everywhere, with its quirky and loveable lead Amanda Bynes and

the teenage heartthrob, Channing Tatum. Both Twelfth Night and She's the Man share many similarities, and interestingly explore gender inequality. Shakespeare's Twelfth Night generally explores this issue through Viola disguising herself as a man to secure her future of freedom. In the 16th century, women were not allowed to act professionally, and so, the actor playing Viola would have been played by a man. I believe that Twelfth Night is such a pivotal production of Shakespeare's, as his willingness to comment on a topic that was considered a taboo shows his progressive thought; indeed, the critic Williams states that it is "A feminist play...at heart, asserting the equality of men and women". In She's the Man, gender disparity is laced throughout the entirety of the film, as Viola dresses up as her brother, Sebastian, so that she can play football as the women's team was cut in her last school. The reason behind this, according to her previous coach, is that "It's a scientific fact. Girls can't beat boys! It's as simple as that." Interestingly, I found the ending of She's the Man more satisfying than Twelfth Night regarding gender inequality, as Viola is able to play in the boy's football team at Illyria Prep and fulfill her dream. Perhaps, though, it is wishful thinking to suggest that Shakespeare's play would have ended in a similar way, with Viola gaining her right to freedom rather than a marriage

to Orsino, yet I would argue that although implicit, Shakespeare does criticise the societal restraint on women within his society, as the decision to have Viola disguise herself as a man could have been a threat to his future in playwrighting. Ultimately, given that Twelfth Night was able to be manifested into She's the Man which celebrates and encourages women, Shakespeare's craft was momentous, and his willingness to explore such a controversial topic in his time is admirable.

Most recently, I went to watch Anyone but You, an adaptation of Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing, starring Sydney Sweeney and Glen Powell. While the Elizabethan play revolves around Claudio and Hero, a young couple who fall in love and plan to marry, Anyone but You is based on the secondary plot involving Beatrice and Benedick. Although I found Anyone but You not the most thought-provoking, its homage to Shakespeare's play was not too conspicuous to someone who would be unfamiliar with his work, which made me think about how Shakespeare is a trajectory for many of our favourite film genres and tropes. An increasingly popular trope in romantic films today is 'enemies to lovers'; given that Much Ado About Nothing was written in the 16th century and involved this trope, I am confident to call Shakespeare a visionary writer, as his use of this trope is widely popular today, evidenced by Anyone but You. Despite this, however, I found this film emblematic of how the adaptations of Shakespeare's plays have declined in quality and style. For me, Anyone but You felt like another unnecessary, forgettable rom com, particularly due to its lack of a strong narrative, making it hard to believe that it was based on a Shakespeare play. Perhaps this is to show that only a few films can serve his plays justice, and that as we

are descending further into a modern world and thus moving away from his time, it is possible that despite his plays being progressive enough to be adapted into modern film, interpretations like Anyone but You unfortunately fail to showcase his multifaceted and nuanced plays.

When watching films like Ghost, I am reminded of the beauty of Shakespeare's work. I take care to remember that although writing is forever evolving, one must appreciate the art of our most influential former writers, as it is figures like Shakespeare who have helped shape film today.



Photo - Neil Packer





WHAT WE WEAR IS WHAT WE SEE

Ophelia Mayhew

dentity is heavily immersed in the art of fashion. Fashion is the way we represent ourselves through the appearance of style, and individuals wear how they want to feel or who they want to become. People's persona is often shown through their clothing, and is used as a blank canvas to express their identity through interests, morals and how they want to be portrayed to the outside world. However, this form of public expression can often be prompted by the media or people of influence, such as celebrities. This is not always a bad thing, but is so largely an impact that is very interesting to dive into.

Through social media, websites, magazines and much more, people continue to idolise celebrities, arguably with acceleration. Celebrities now have a large influence on a lot of people's fashion identities. Paris Hilton, a socialite, actress, model, and businesswoman all in one, created a signature style of a spray tan, Louis Vuitton and the famous velour tracksuit, became one of the main fashion trends of the 2000s, where Hilton would emphasise this style when being captured by paparazzi in airports, nightclubs and even paid events. The socialite helped turn the Juicy Couture tracksuit into a musthave item for everyone's closet during the 2000s, and she said in a video interview with Vogue, "it became my uniform". This highlights how it shaped her public identity, but also influenced people around her due to her platform.

Going back a decade or two, the Princess of Wales created a new era of style for the late 20th century, but if Princess Diana lived in the 21st century she would most likely be one of the most followed people on social media, with fashion collaborations and Vogue covers. That shows how significant Diana's influence on fashion is. She wore the most classic and ground-breaking dresses that caught headlines, such as the infamous "revenge dress" in 1994, a short off-the-shoulder dress that embodied her confidence and elegance. "Diana knew that all eyes were going to be on her"; she didn't have to say a word, but the fashion choice was a clear message, and spoke volumes to Charles and the public. The night that she wore this dress was the night that an interview with the now-King Charles aired, in which he confirmed his unfaithfulness to the Princess. But she made buzzing around the hectic streets of London, running errands, look chic, inspiring a whole new approach to the "elevated, casual". Diana remarkably inspired trends today that are used daily, such as a red statement coat she sported in 1994, which started a worldwide adoration for puffer coats. Another example is the Lady Dior bag that is now a classic piece of their collection that Diana made famous in September 1995, almost three decades ago. This bag has now had multiple pop culture appearances with Blair Waldorf from *Gossip Girl* and Charlotte from *Sex and the City*, again creating a whole new buzz and demand for the fashion accessory.

Kate Moss, debatably the most famous British supermodels, became the symbol of a generation that embodied a grunge style. Due to her iconic style, she became a muse to multiple designers, such as Chanel, Versace, and Dior. The influence her fashion identity had on people started in 2007; due to her influence, she had the chance to design her first collection with the British highstreet brand, Topshop. This collection reportedly sold out in one day and this was just the first of several lines, which she followed with jewellery, perfume, and makeup. Moss' influence is made clear recently at the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022, when she wore the iconic John Galliano jacket which she formerly wore for his 1993 spring collection. An iconic photo, snapped by Condé Nast, resurfaced the media, still showing her contribution to British fashion history. This look was one of the many that formed her public fashion identity of a grunge, chic style. However, Kate Moss is a great example of how social standing denotes that she must be a role model. Her inability to escape the status of 'role model' across both her public and private identity led her to become a very controversial figure for influence, especially with the start of the trend, 'heroin chic'. Another remarkable statement for fashion influence is Audrey Hepburn's 1962 "little black

dress" designed for the film Breakfast at Tiffany's by Hubert De Givenchy. This became a staple for "carefree elegance" (Juan A Ramirez). The cocktail-style dress is considered one of the most influential dresses: over the years, the "little black dress" has been revamped and re-styled by some of the most instrumental designers, such as Alexander McQueen and John Galliano. Overall, this dress has created an identity for people, with even pop culture referencing the original style, with Ariana Grande for Givenchy's Fall/ Winter campaign in 2019, and Natalie Portman's cover photograph for Harper's Bazaar in November of 2006 referencing this style. In December of that year, Portman's dress was auctioned at Christie's London and sold for £467,200, again, showing the influence created by a single black dress. Personally, I think this fashion moment has an incredible impact to this day, with girls wearing it as not just a basic but a statement to a party, event or even just a day out.

Ultimately, people wear what they see, and fashion is an important way of exploring people's personal tastes and ideas that they take and mould from others into the most comfortable version of themselves. It is a powerful way for someone to express one's identity, and so leaves room for influences through film and social media – whether it be good or bad. These two things are so idolised in our society today that the effect can impact and change someone's own personal individuality.



'Beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit and tenderness of the heart...aren't taken away, but grow!...I have all these treasures locked in my heart.'

Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire

have a hole in my chest that is the shape of my friend's grandmother, who would prepare fresh fruit for him to eat at school every day, and we would giggle while sharing segments of a clementine, or shovelling spoonfuls of pomegranate into our mouths. I slice watermelon and think of her. I am 'too sensitive'. I cry on public transport and let my mascara run in thick black streaks down my face. I feel my throat become sore at small acts of kindness, at strangers kissing; my eyes sting when I hear the joyous giggling of my baby cousin. You are 'too sensitive'. Your chest swells with tenderness for the man who eats dinner alone in the corner of your family's favourite restaurant, and your heart still aches and thuds beneath your ribs for friendships you lost when you were ten. You and I grew up being called 'very sensitive', and, without us realising, our sensitivity and our tendency to 'cry about everything' has become impossible to conceal. After years of forcing it down, it has only grown with us, refusing to be silenced. Under what conditions does the uncontainable stay contained? Things unsaid don't often remain so. Caleb Azumah Nelson, Open Water. You are sensitivity, and it is you. I am sensitivity, and it is me.

In a world that is too often harsh and too quick to be cruel, the subtle extinction of sensitivity is so concealed that it is easily overlooked. Today, sensitivity can be misinterpreted as this undesirable, whiny feminine trait that young girls will (hopefully) eventually grow out of. We are criticised for showing too much emotion and condemned for having too many feelings;

instead of being met with gentleness, the world is often cold. It appears to be even further condemned if a person of the male sex exhibits this dreaded feminine trait of sensitivity - they are immediately emasculated, often mocked or shamed by their male peers for revealing this inner weakness. While subtle, the punishment and progressive silencing of these sensitive people is not only easily seen in everyday life - a father who tells his son that he's 'crying like a girl', a mother who tells her daughter that she's 'too sensitive' - but is also reflected in many works of literature and art. Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire does exactly this: the tender-hearted, overly sensitive Blanche Dubois is destroyed and ruined by the harshness and masculinity of post-civil war New Orleans, embodied by the character of Stanley Kowalski, who is the main brutal force of her destruction. Williams himself, in a letter, wrote that the meaning of the play is the ravishment of the tender, the sensitive, the delicate, by the savage and brutal forces in modern society.' All the characters in the play seem to operate around Blanche's sensitivity and fragility, and is why Stella, her sister, often patronises her sensitivity as if scolding a young child for misbehaving. Blanche's sporadic breakdowns and her expressive nature are far too much for

society to manage, and ultimately, Williams achieves the destruction of the defenceless, deranged Blanche Dubois, institutionalised by a

harsh ideology that could not understand her simple need for gentleness and kindness. Blanche's character and the way she interprets the world of *Streetcar* is shaped by her

"I continue to see sensitivity, vulnerability and tenderness as this glowing light that leaks from each of our fingertips."

sensitivity, much like how my perception of identity is shaped by my sensitivity. I see parts of myself in Blanche Dubois, and I mourn for the soft parts of myself that I have already lost to the harshness of others. Despite this, I continue to see sensitivity, vulnerability and tenderness as this glowing light that leaks from each of our fingertips and is marked on everything we have ever touched. I look back on my childhood and see the imprints of my sensitivity: my stuffed animals glowing like the sun from my love.

After a hard day last week, my mother told me that I had to build emotional endurance, that I must make my skin thick and impenetrable. But to have a lot of feeling is to be thinskinned, to let everything pass through, and to feel it all. However, through society, our parents, and the world, harshness is learnt - since I was a child I have been squashing my softness - but sensitivity, gentleness, is a choice. I think that sensitivity is sacrificing the outer layer of protection, knowing that hurt and betrayal lie just outside, and opening your arms, nonetheless. This is not to say that it is easy – sometimes my feelings can be so overwhelming that caring so deeply feels like a weakness, a fatal flaw to be healed and worked on, something inside

side myself that I should change. I think back to Blanche Dubois, destroyed, and to Sylvia Plath, who said that 'it is so much safer not to feel,

not to let the world touch me', and I cower at this vulnerability I have. Then, like most days, I think back to *Open Water* by Caleb Azumah Nelson, who said that 'it's easier for you to hide in your own darkness than to emerge cloaked in your own vulnerability'. I know that I would choose sensitivity over and over again, and em-

brace being known for my tears and tenderness because I would much rather that, and I would much rather risk hurt and betrayal, than close myself off and be known for callousness. It is easier to give in to cruelty, to shed the softness and harden your outer shell, but I think that lack of kindness and empathy is like an illness that spreads, a mold that consumes and eats away at the sensitive people, turning them cold. Letting the sensitivity grow feels like stepping into the sunlight and being filled with warmth.

To be known as a sensitive person is also to be known as extremely loving, to let everything touch you. To have so much love is also to be endlessly brave. I think that loving indefinitely, especially in the face of brutality and hardness, is infinitely braver than denying your sensitivity. To be abrasive would be to deny who I am. Sensitivity is me, and I am her. It is such a gift to be so sensitive because I look at the people around me and I feel like I am glowing with this light that my sensitivity gives me. James Baldwin said, 'everyone you're looking at is also you'; I see the soft parts of myself in everyone I meet.

You are sensitivity, and I am you. ■





I grow up in a city of diversity

Where some citizen's opinions are full of absurdity

Where people make your day harder personally

To the point you're nervous like a doctor performing surgery

I grow up in a city where I'm scared to walk past a police officer

Where some people treat me like a foreigner

Why do they treat us differently

We are the same internally

We just have more melanin

It's not a disease, I don't need medicine

Lately racism has been normalised

To the point that I feel demoralised

It's as if it's been formalised

Quite frankly I am traumatised

Most people don't realise when they're being racist

But accusing them of it leads to me getting slapped on the wrist

"Have you ever tried brushing your hair?"

The way we are treated is unfair

I was asked this at the age of four

Why does security follow me when I walk into a store?

Why do women clutch their purses when I'm near them?

Would that happen to a white woman?

How do I know if a teacher hates my work or my skin?

Don't judge based on skin but based on what's within

I'm born and raised in England, I speak English

When will racism end

It won't

It's never finished

Just because I'm black doesn't make me Nigerian

But you assume I'm African or Caribbean

I'm black

I'm not a rapper

I'm black

I don't own a dagger

I'm black

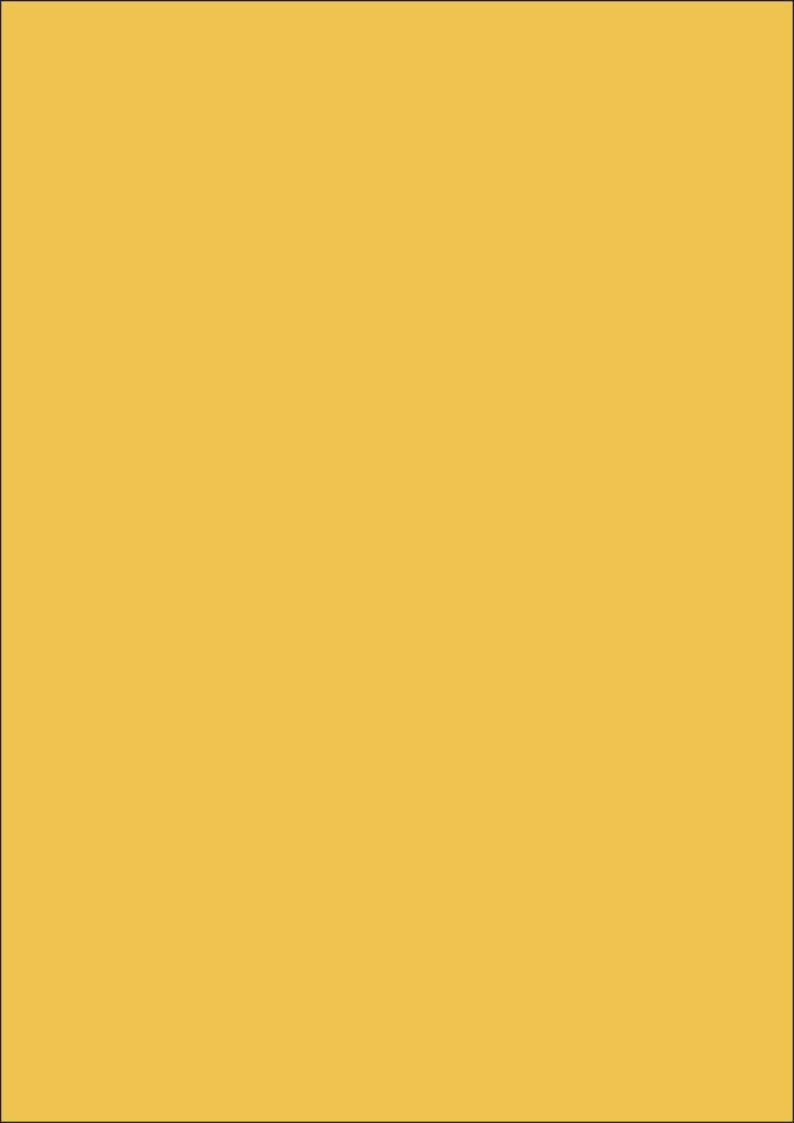
I don't smoke or do things that are illegal

When all the lights are off

We

Are

Equal.





SALT

Beatrice Fox

Our city is built around the pillar. We did not rest our drooping roofs on it, nor did we lean against it our tired beams, even as they sagged and groaned. We set aside a place. for it, like a child who puts her doll down carefully so that it is not crushed. Yes, we have become fond of it. Children break off handfuls, thinking that it is made of snow and will melt gently in their palms. Haven't we all learned at one time or another that, although cold, it burns the cuts on young hands? Now some of you have kept this fixation in adulthood. Honestly, it's a tad much. Almost worship. Isn't that the problem with humanity? When we see something greater than us, we assume it's a God.

The flames look as soft as feathers. When I was a child, I used to stroke the elderly cactus my mother kept in a pot; I had thought the white spines would feel like fur. I ended up with needles embedded in my fingers every time. But I tried again, again, and again regardless. The flames must be soft. They were incubated in mattresses, reared on splintering wood, and they embrace those too weak to escape. Yes, the

At first, we needed a doll. We were so young, left alone in the sand and the sky. We held onto the pillar. Then, we grew – our roads broadened and mingled with each other, they birthed buildings, and the buildings had people. The people were so enchanted with their design that they

OF.

created more. Such is our way, and such it will be.

Do you know why dolls console children? It is because, like children, they are empty. Children like to know that they are not alone. The day they realise the doll is fake is the day they no longer need it. Childhood is not sacred. Would you kneel before your nanny, would you hold your blankets as if they were precious, would you drink milk as if it were holy wine? Just because something is breakable does not mean it is valuable. This is what the children learn, when they hold parts of the pillar in their hands and understand it is not snow.

They're grotesque in the way children are grotesque. So hungry, crying, reaching out as if hoping for a great hand would save them. Red and shining, skin like new, as if it had not been thickened by dirt and frowns and wrinkles. Skin solidifies with age, with layer upon layer, though that can melt so easily. Children can be cruel, and crass, and they break off parts of you to suck on. Still, I would rather even that than leave them hungry.

Citizens, keep anything and it becomes dirty. You may remember I made the same argument against my opposition, recently. A few of you came to me then, no, no, don't deny it, you did, and asked me why we should bother with change when they were so fond of the old leader. I'll tell you what I told them. Love does not protect anything. Quite the opposite. Hatred is safe – you are much less likely to touch what you hate. It's why good people die

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young and unpleasant ones stay for so very long.

Think about the first time you saw your father.

Wasn't he large, and strong, so solid and real? See
now how he grows smaller and smaller because your
love wore him down.

Men and women hold each other. I see women and women and women with men and men with men, but I cannot tell which is which, obscured as they are by the smoke. All lay under the same fabric in the end, in the bed which someone else has made for them. It is touch that condemned them; touch is the only thing that the fire left.

Rip out the pillar by the root and burn the ground it stood in, to ensure it is fertile. The pillar is barren and makes what it touches barren too because of its jealousy. Why is it jealous, you ask? It is jealous in the way our fathers are jealous of us, when they see us do what they once did. Why do you think that they try to keep us with them? Never forget your duty to progress. Dithering is of no use to anyone.

We must move forward.

He grasps my arm, and I know that if he attempts to take it with him, it will not stretch and follow him but splinter. I know my flesh is no longer flesh, and that what remains is no longer warm for him. Could he love this symbol of his wife, a false idol? No, that is not like him. The children still don't

want to follow their father, they hold on, even though I am so, so fragile. He speaks, gradually convincing them. He believes he is being kind. My skin is now saltier than the blood which used to run beneath it. Men will say that we did this for pleasure, Eve and me. We are the part of Adam that wanted to break free, that yearned for a life of its own. I did not want to see what Sodom and Gomorrah look like as they burn. I want to be with my children. I want to run with him. I want to go to sleep this evening and wake up tomorrow. But I stand here and look so that these people are seen, people who were intended to be hidden in smoke and flames. I stand as a statue. We made sacrifices. Eve and me. We forsook pleasure, and for that, we shall be remembered as selfish. Yet as long as we are remembered, so too is the choice we made.

If we are all agreed then, gentlemen, it will be removed, at the earliest convenience. There are already plans in place for a public footpath, so it is vital that we move quickly. All those in favour? Jolly good. If I may conclude on a personal note- I'm aware that a few of you are still reluctant, particularly some of the ladies among us. In my opinion, it's much ado about nothing. We can't expand our city with a great big pillar in the way. Please remember that the next time you come whining to me. Remember I am being kind.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.



The Beauty of Loving Someone

Lily Mellis-Apted

What is it to love? I know that sounds like a straightforward answer but what does it mean to genuinely love someone? To love their flaws as if they were their strengths? To be miles away from home. But still feel at home. For them to feel so familiar to your heart, you have concluded that you have loved them before, in another time and a different place. Is to love knowing falling for them was not falling at all. It was walking into a house and immediately knowing you were home. Is to love someone being so intimate you let them see all the raw and fractured parts of yourself you try so hard to hide, but them loving you for it anyway. To love: is it to let them become parts of all the people you have lost, your father's charity, your brother's wittiness, your mother's kindness, and your sisters' gentleness? To be loved is to let them heal you, heal every damaged, unlovable part of your soul you crave to fix. To be loved is allowing them to see through you, see through to the child within you begging to be saved. What does it mean to love? To love and to be loved is to be changed. To the person I used to love, thank you. Thank you for making me be more delicate to my soul, and treat my mind with kindness. And thank you for teaching me loving someone is never a waste. You unraveled the parts of me that stood in darkness, that now shine in the light.

To be loved is to be understood.





IDENTITY IN FILM

Alessa Lindblad-Hill

Identity is a multilateral concept – it is perhaps most commonly accepted as the set of characteristics which determines what something is, or who someone is. However, one should also consider the etymology; the word derives from the latin *idem* meaning 'the same'. Therefore identity is also the quality of being identical. Being such a topical subject for discussion, both in a political and personal sense, identity has now transcended into film. Some films deal with the theme of identity more ostensibly than others, however there are few films which I can think of where it would be impossible to not detect at least an undertone of the theme of identity.

FIGHT CLUB

A film which immediately springs to mind when contemplating identity is David Fincher's Fight Club (1999). The narrator is played by Edward Norton – an insomniac, very discontented with his lifestyle. His lack of a name expresses his lack of a sense of identity. The viewer forgets we don't know his name. On a return flight from work, he meets Brad Pitt's character, introduced as Tyler Durden. Durden is a suave, confident, swanky character, who embodies everything the narrator wishes he could be. The choice to cast Brad Pitt in this role, an actor universally known as a heartthrob, indicates that Fincher wanted to present Durden as having characteristics which are unattainable to most. Both the narrator and Durden become closer (but not necessarily more amicable), and they start their 'fight club'. The formation of the club itself represents a struggle in identity as the men are essentially coming

together in order to claim one. The film goes on, and as Durden's behaviour becomes more and more radical, stringing the narrator along with him, the viewer starts to become mildly confused by the reactions of others to the narrator's seemingly clear dialogue. We then discover through Helena Bonham Carter's character Marla Singer that the narrator's name is also Tyler Durden. The film takes a rather fantastical turn through giving Brad Pitt's character supernatural powers. At this point in the film it is made clear that Pitt and Norton's character are the same person. Pitt's embodiment of Tyler Durden represents the version of the narrator that he strives to be like - thus the film as a whole is symbolic of the internal conflict and longing that many individuals face.

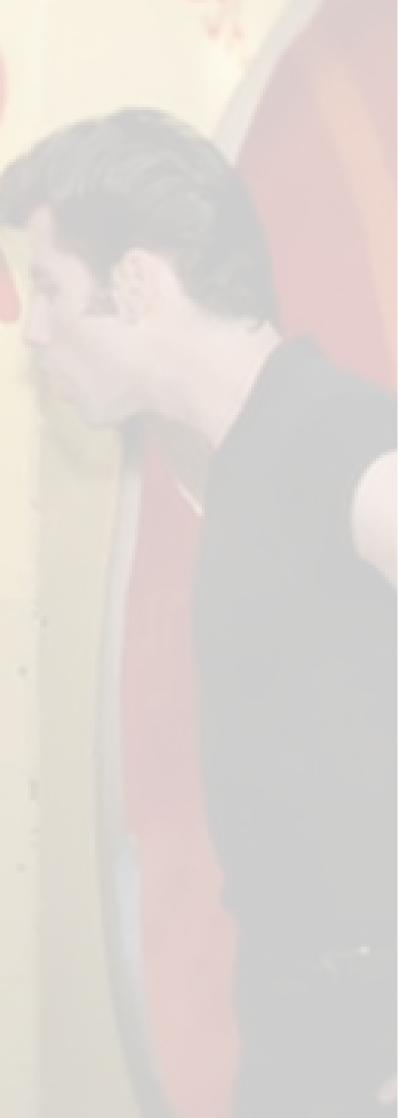
THE BREAKFAST CLUB

Consider The Breakfast Club (1985), and its five identities: the Criminal, the Princess, the Brain, the Athlete, and the Basketcase. This film mainly deals with the significance of labels, and how what is underneath can be very different to its exterior. For example, the Criminal, played by Judd Nelson, has a very tough and self-assertive demeanour, but throughout the film the characters engage in deep conversations which strip away their social masks. His pleasure derives from making others feel inadequate by pointing out their weaknesses; we later learn that this behaviour is only a consequence of his broken home. His father physically abuses him and he vents his frustration in the form of malice. The Princess, played by Molly Ringwald, is a privileged, confident and popular young girl, but admits that she hates going along with what her friends say, and that she actually feels pressured by them to uphold a false image. The Brain, played by Anthony Michael Hall, excels academically, but this drive is rooted in a deep fear of failure and parental pressure, so strong that he contemplates taking his own life. The Athlete, played by Emilio Estevez, is seen as the archetypal "jock" character, and is detained for physically assaulting another boy in the locker room. But through a painful confession, we discover that he feels compelled to suit the toxic masculinity imposed by his father, and is actually consumed with self-loathing for manifesting this in the form of an assault. He is morally troubled even thinking about the shame and embarrassment his victim will face when telling his father what had happened to him. Finally the Basketcase, played by

Ally Sheedy, earns her name through her peculiarities and unusual tendencies such as sprinkling her dandruff on a drawing to give it a snowy effect or pouring packets of sugar onto her bread. She is presented as quiet and reclusive, and it is later revealed that this strange behaviour is due to her feelings of profound neglect and the lack of attention she receives from her parents. Identity is the overarching theme in this film, and nearly every viewer can find at least some part in each character that they can relate to.

GREASE

When one thinks of *Grease* (1978), a pivotal film in the shaping of cinema as we know it today, one does not think of it as a film trying to send a profound message about teenage identity. One thinks of the famed catchy songs, and the amusing juvenile activities the characters engage in. But upon further deliberation it is also a film very much about identity in the sense that the principal characters are trying to uphold an image and as a consequence lose things they once held dear. Think of Danny Zuko, leader of the T-Birds greaser gang, in love with Sandy, an innocent and demure blonde. However he completely dismisses and humiliates her as his desired image forbids him to partake in "effeminate" romance and submit himself to tender feeling; he can, under no circumstances, appear as anything but a cool player to his friends. Sandy on the other hand, had a very easy way in. She had a clear opportunity to conform to the more rebellious nature of teenage life offered to her by her peers. At the end of the film she completely changes her appearance, her hair in tight curls and dressed in leather. What she does not seem to realise is that Danny himself was prepared to change his beloved image to please her - he dons a cream-coloured long cardigan and believes this is what will finally win Sandy over. Her perception of how he wanted her to be was different to the truth.



In conclusion, the portrayal of identity in these films explores and reflects the complexities of human experience. Through various characters and narratives, films like Fight Club, The Breakfast Club, and Grease examine how individuals struggle with, embrace, or reject their identities, often under the pressures of societal and parental expectations, in conflict with personal desires. Fight Club delves into the internal conflict and fragmentation of self, illustrating the extremes of identity crisis through the duality of its protagonist. The Breakfast Club dissects the superficial labels that an institutionalised society assigns, revealing the deeper, often hidden truths behind each character's façade. Meanwhile, Grease subtly critiques the performative aspects of identity, showing how characters grapple with conformity and authenticity in their pursuit of acceptance and love.





They See You

You perch on a gilded throne, at the height of Your power.
Yet you shy away, a mask hiding the weakness within.
You are a verdict of justice, but you cannot be true to yourself.

Don't look at me,
you beg
yet all eyes remain fixed on You.
Don't think of me,
you weep
yet all seeks Your guidance.

There are two of you.

When the spotlight hits,
You are pure, divine.

When the judging gazes disperse,
the smile you hold fractures, then fades.

Year after year,
You turn and run from the truth.
Day turns to dusk,
your smile is shattered and remade.

The water ripples. You see her in the water.

The one forsaken by You.

