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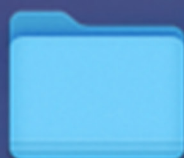
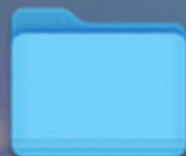
wasteland :: april 2021 :: the anniversary issue



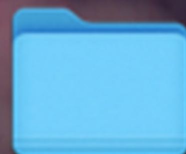
Persona

The Texas Chain Saw Massacre



Paris, Texas

Naked Lunch



The Skin I Live In

An Evening With Beverly Luff Linn

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Persona
Ingmar Bergman, 1966
Words by Emma Olsson

Since April 2020, Wasteland's monthly newsletter has come to reflect our personal navigations of film, suturing our intuitive responses to analytical thought. In this time, we have encountered a broad scope of cinema; we have revelled in costume design, grappled with the concision of shorts, indulged in alternative animation, and championed women-led work—establishing a pattern of our curiosities therein. To celebrate our first anniversary, this issue turns back to some of our most resonating features of the past year, particularly those we deem characteristic of our identity as a journal of film.

Your readership has propelled us into uncharted spaces of cinema, and our appreciation of your interest is truly unbounded. We hope that you continue alongside us on our course of discovery.

— Jessica Moore,
founder-editor

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Images:
Persona **(AB Svensk Filmindustri, 1966)**

In 1966, engaging with your internal life might have appeared frivolous, like a juvenile dalliance in the presence of more pressing matters. There were wars to protest, revolutions to engage in, power to account for, justice to be fought for, rules to be broken and rewritten. This omniscient mood of world-changing energised some, but what became of those who rejected the vitality, not out of righteousness but of fatigue? Surely there were those who wanted to opt out of it all, retreat into something decidedly interior, far from the madness and excitement that coloured modern life. Today, it wouldn't surprise me. In a time of saying yes—yes to a job, yes to political engagement, yes to "staying informed"—the word "no" carries a seductive lure. It materialises as a healing balm, thick and nourishing, packaged in the form of reduction, self-ejection and opting out when the world feels as chaotic as it does right now; perhaps as it always has felt, but it can be easier to conceptualise this turmoil as a modern affliction.

There are limited ways to fulfil such a desire. The goal is not to give in, but to simply press pause. Drugs can help for a while but ultimately fail to address the point, and suicide is too decisive. How else does one opt out? How else can a person say no? In Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*, Elisabet Vogler (Liv Ullman) provides one alternative. That by becoming mute, she can renounce her life. The conditions that propel a person to this conclusion are mysterious. In contemporary parlance, we might call it burn out.

The premise is iconic. After freezing during a stage performance of "Electra", Elisabet has been unable to speak, either by choice or by medical mystery. A doctor eventually deduces that her patient has made a vow of silence with herself. Her advice: to play this role out till the end, just as she would with one of her stage roles. She enlists a young nurse, Alma (Bibi Andersson) with her care, sending the two women to a remote island cottage to see out the end of Elisabet's treatment. Upon arriving on the island, it doesn't take long for the women's personas to start to crumble.

Woman in the Mirror

During a time when much of cinema and popular culture was looking outwards to politics, war and social upheaval, *Persona* looked in. As such, I've been returning to the film this year for comfort. The ceremony of lockdowns and self-isolation might have encouraged us to look inwards, yet this introspection has constantly been challenged by larger external events that took precedence in the collective psyche: the global pandemic (inevitably), racial justice protests that spread from country to country, one country's drama-fuelled presidential election. In the presence of more acute matters, the act of shutting down and remaining silent is often accompanied by shame, even guilt. Persona played with this desire for self-ejection in a way that shirked negative judgement.

The doctor in *Persona* embodies a role typically reserved for men in Bergman's universe: the cold, one-note character whose job it is to cut a main character down. Who reduces her (and it's almost always a her; the most fascinating characters in Bergman's world are often women) to her most base self, one that is overcome with shame, abject and suffering like a naked animal. She recounts Elisabet's wrongs to the audience: "Kill yourself? No, that's too horrid. You don't do that. But you can become untouchable and silent. Then at least you aren't lying. You can shut yourself in and put up a screen. Then you don't have to play any roles, show any false faces or gestures."

With Alma by her side, Elisabet picks late summer mushrooms by the sea, reads a book, drinks coffee, writes letters, lies in the sun. She looks at herself standing beside Alma in the mirror. Weaves strands of hair through her fingers, interrogates the face of the woman beside her. Her world, once cavernous, has suddenly shrunk. As time passes at the cottage, Alma grows weaker, more fragile and anxious. She begins to question her surroundings and find uncertainty in her relationship with her patient. But Elisabet beams. She finds strength in the security of her environment, in a sort of gentle introspection that occurs naturally

when one is shut out of normal life. No more speaking, no more acting, no more pretending.

"Don't you think I understand?" the doctor asks her patient. "The hopeless dream of being. Not pretending, but being."

Most likely, Elisabet's lassitude has a root. But maybe we're not interested in finding it; maybe it isn't important. There's a scene wherein she watches the famous footage of a Buddhist monk burning himself alive in Vietnam, in protest of the war. Elisabet stares terrified at the screen, eyes widened, pulling a hand to her mouth in disbelief. In that moment, she is directly confronted with another human being's capacity for caring so much about something that he is willing to self-immolate for it. This notion is an affront. She is petrified by her own apathy, of her inability to feel for the things in life she's meant to feel something for: family, children, a successful career, politics, even art. Love. In the doctor's eyes, Elisabet shuts down from a lack of authenticity and fear of this fact.

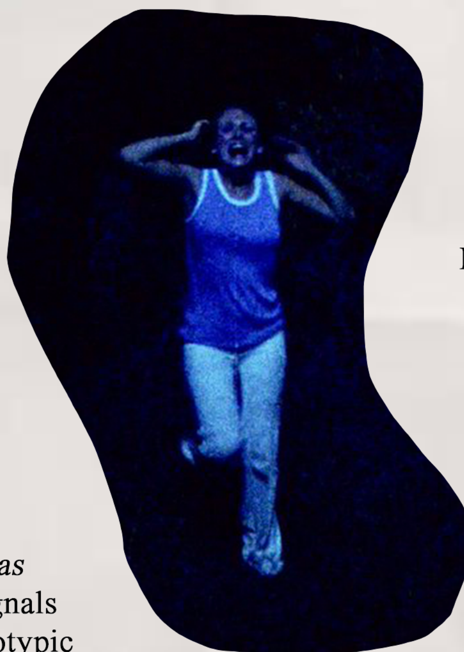
Through her silence, she's found a way to opt out of pretending, which might just be what life is. At some point, the voluntary is destined to become involuntary. Do we choose to participate in life, don our masks and carry out our practicalities? For Elisabet the answer has become clear. For most of us, we will continue to look in the mirror for reassurance.

Words by
Jessica Moore

Images:
The Texas Chain Saw Massacre **(Bryanston Distributing Company, 1974)**

In a landscape void of women, masculinity begins to fracture—its definitions loosen. Emasculation is central to the slasher genre's motivation to chart the abnormal; monsters are constructed as socially deviant, untethered from the status quo. Barbara Creed elaborates on this idea: 'in the process of being constructed as monstrous the male is 'feminized.' This process is not simply a consequence of placing the male in a masochistic position, but rather it stems from the very nature of horror as an encounter with the feminine.' While this proximal femininity is true of the horror genre as a whole, the slasher sub-genre is, in itself, gender deviant. It would therefore be false to suggest that slasher villains are emasculated simply by way of feminisation; though their emasculation certainly begins with feminisation, the slasher film's process of emasculation does not stop there—it thwarts the boundaries of gender entirely.

Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* signals the nascence of the prototypic 1970s slasher villain. Their arrested development and fervent performativity, teemed with a desire to slaughter multiple victims, signal a shift from the undetectable villainy of their predecessors. By the 1970s, monstrosity became far more legible. Villains were characterised by indeterminate masculinity and transgression, their humanity concealed beneath masks and shapeless physiques. *Texas'* Leatherface is emasculated by semiotics, covered in baby fat and donning an apron and mask, but equally, he is not feminised. Slasher villains do not retreat from one pole of gender to the other; they transmute into that which ruptures gender binaries altogether (hence the significance of *Halloween's* Michael amorphously credited 'The Shape'). Leatherface 'may be recognisably human, but only marginally so' summarises peerless horror analyst Carol Clover. Indeed, it would be far more suitable to describe Leatherface as unsexed or unable to fit into either category of masculine or feminine. As the film progresses,



\it becomes increasingly clear that the 'final girl' (the lone survivor) is not grappling with sexually violent masculinity, but instead repressed inarticulate fury. Even the chainsaw which overtly symbolises phallic violence does not masculinise Leatherface. As the phallic weapon is dismembered, it instead rather strikingly illuminates his sexlessness.

Bending towards orientalist theories of the Other, Leatherface conjures a thoroughly Western impulse; he embodies the dangers of unknowability. Satiated by this opacity, and spurred by a fury against intruders, Leatherface becomes a digressive vehicle through which the horror can manifest, and more importantly, a constant against which the final girl can be constructed.

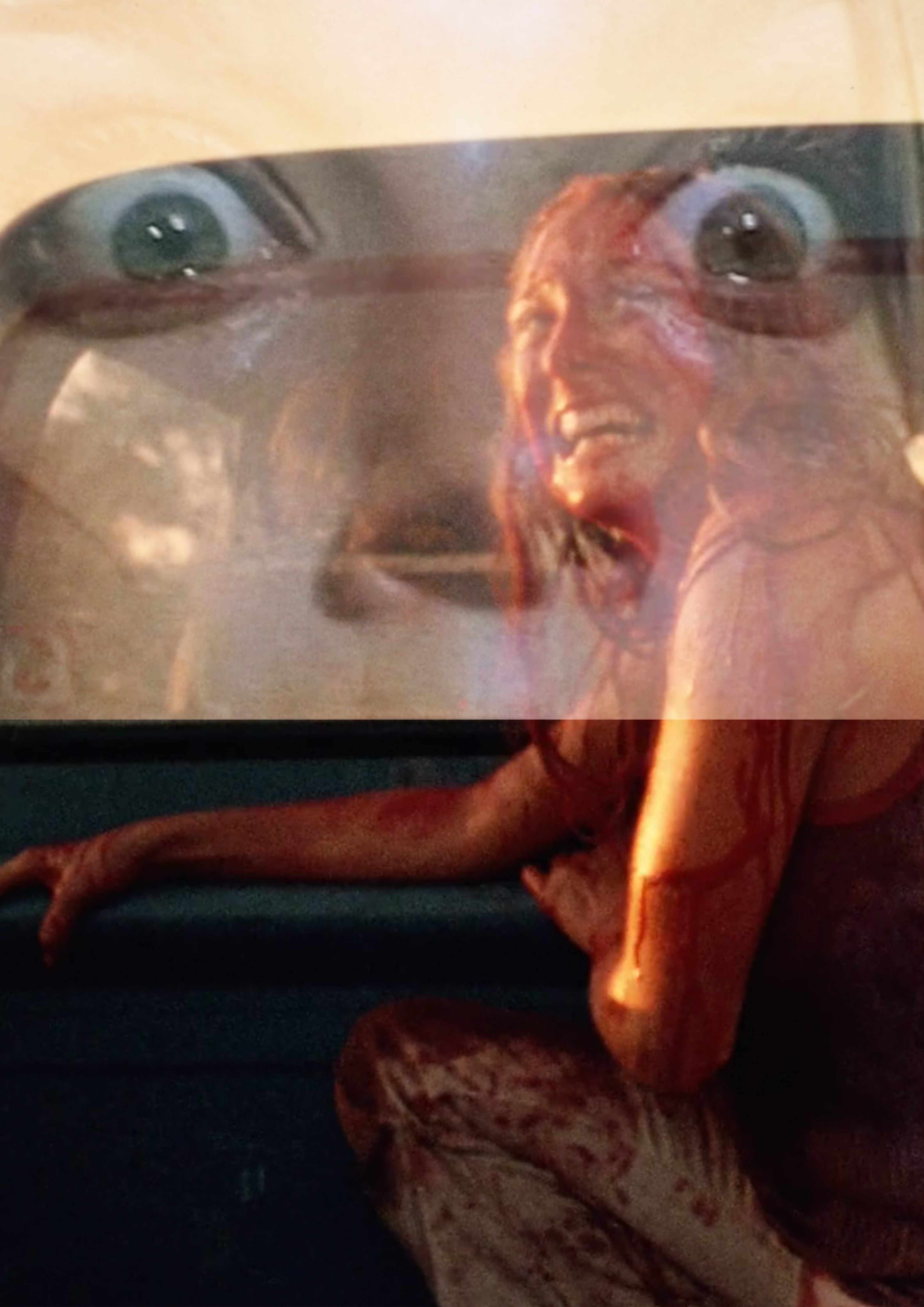
Within the world of slasher violence, gender is clearly dichotomised. Here, it is worth briefly digressing to state that this essay demands exercising terminology which are now stereotypical, specifically that which constitutes 'feminine' and 'masculine', because within the framework of the 1970s, and more specifically in the B-movies of the 1970s, gender is conceptualised through archaic definitions. Bizarrely, and rather progressively, the slasher genre sees these gender categories as distinctly unstable. Perhaps this flimsiness is due to the messiness of the genre as low-budget; with a preoccupation to frighten, slashers are reluctant to prioritise any deliberate gender commentary—they are ripe in misogyny, no less. Be that as it may, the instability of their gender categories can yield rather modern interpretations. Indeed, gender is recognised by characters and reified to the advantage of those afforded mobility: the most mobile of all, the final girl.

Coded feminine in a masculine genre, the final girl is located within a space where gender is constantly affirmed. However, because she is not the monstrous villain but the recognisable victim,

she does not reject these binaries, she plays with gender to her advantage. As the victim with whom the audience identifies, she is crafted to embody a multitude of recognisable characteristics; she is vehemently maternal, heroic; she is a figure of pragmatism, perceptivity and caution, all of which the villain is entirely void.

Tempted by her fluid crafting, audiences delight in calling the 'boyish' final girl a feminist triumph, yet their (justified) veneration begins to simulate the very misogyny they condemn. *Of course she out-survived the half-naked girls; her focus was not on boys; she was rational, not frivolous; attuned to the warning signs* etc etc. Chiefly, it is a mistake to claim the final girl is not conventionally feminine, because she certainly is. Carol Clover observes 'where once [the victim] was female, now she is both girl and boy, though most often and most conspicuously girl.' She is not a 'shape', deviated from gender like her villain. She is the normal to the antithetical abnormal; the embodied to the illegible. Thus to celebrate the final girl's departure from the 'other girls' should not suggest she is all that different—but rather that her femininity is more cavernous. Barbara Creed writes 'one of the more popular medieval ideas of the difference between the sexes was that women were men turned inside out.' Perhaps this 'turning inside out' is an appropriate way to assess the construction of the final girl. She does not simply slip in and out of frameworks of masculinity or femininity, rather, she is nourished by the identification of both—she is, at once, the mobile outsider and a possessor of far richer psychology than her maniacal killer.

If *Texas* proposes any methodology of surviving the slasher, it is that of adaptation. Sally survives Leatherface and the sweaty, inhospitable landscape because she is privy to the destabilisation of sociality. She is not ambiguously gendered by way of passivity, nor of a vehement rejection of femininity, but rather by a fiercely instinctive and necessary adaptation to a world of transgression. Deviant by design, the slasher horror film splits upheld categories of gender, and only the final girl, the most adaptive of all, is able to gather strength from its detritus.



Words by
Kirby Moore

Images:
Paris, Texas **(20th Century Fox, 1984)**

1984 saw the release of Wim Wenders' *Paris, Texas*, a film whose saturated colours sustain the narrative's sense of familial reconstruction, while capturing the quintessential nostalgia of 80's cinema.

Considered a road movie in genre, *Paris, Texas* is set against a myriad of backdrops: the vast Mojave Desert, a highway, a middle-of-nowhere motel, a gas station, diner, airport, a parking lot, the unsettling atmosphere of American suburbia, another parking lot, hotels, winding overpasses, and one final parking lot.

maintained by one of the film's most prominent aesthetic features: colour. Cinematically, *Paris, Texas* is beautiful. Lighting, costume and set, by Robby Müller, Birgitta Bjerke and Anne Kuljian respectively, employ the use of, most discernibly, red and green. Their coexistence supports and accompanies the poignant journey captured in the film. A consistent accent present throughout the film, the colour red links the various places Travis passes through: a diner booth, a pair of shoes, a cigarette box, a radio.

Green is also omnipresent. Green lighting appears frequently: the doctor's clinic, the gas station, a phone booth, and finally the parking lot from which Travis observes the reunion of his wife and son. This sees both Jane and Hunter wearing deep green shirts, illuminated by the green hued city lights of Houston. Coupled with the green-lit parking lot where Travis stands, this scene provides a disjointed family reunion.

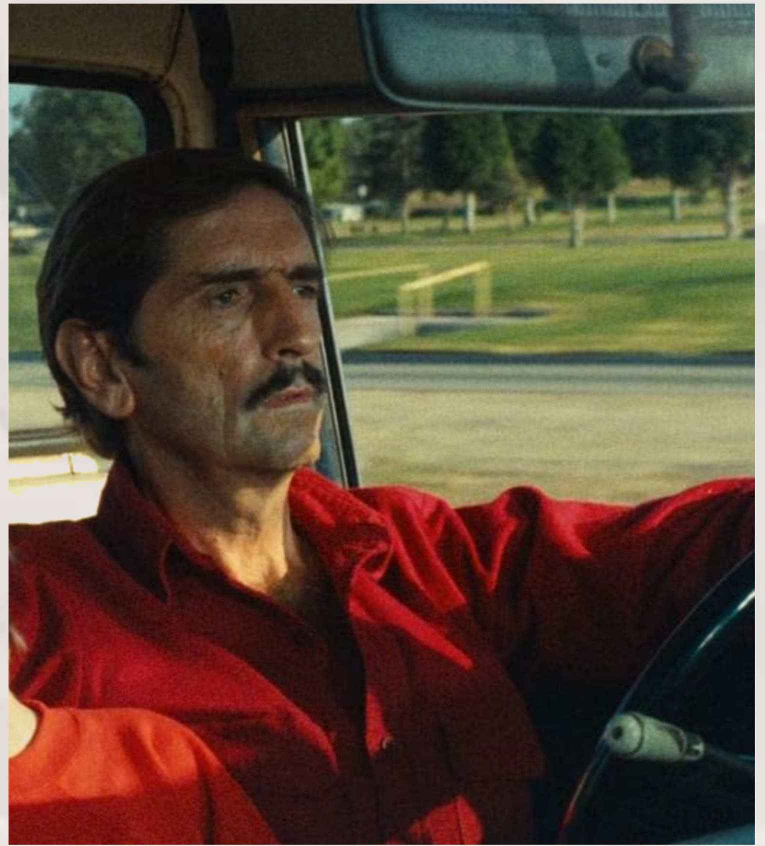
Throughout the film, the principal character, Travis (Harry Dean Stanton), never stops travelling; the narrative carries with it an existential air—one of vague recollection laced with a kind of uncertainty that is perpetuated by constant movement. The spaces he inhabits are never destinations, but places of transit, places encountered only because of a necessity to move through them; liminal places that carry a fascinating sense of trapped time. The film's only glimpse of a place of terminus for Travis is an old photograph of some land he bought in Paris, Texas.

These feelings of liminality and restorative purpose are

It is also adopted into the characters' wardrobes, acting as a visual cue that indicates Travis' intent to rebuild his fractured family. In the opening scenes, Travis wears a red baseball cap. This is later mirrored by his son, Hunter (Hunter Carson), and his wife, Jane (Nastassja Kinski), who are both seen in variations of red. Travis and Hunter wear bright red shirts on their journey to find Jane, whose introduction sees her in a room with red décor and lighting, wearing a vibrant pink angora jumper-dress—a fresh and feminine take on this familial colour, but perhaps incompatible.

For a moment, despite all three never being physically together throughout the duration of the film, they are finally—in a strange way—reunited.

Cutting from the final scenes, with red light filtering back into frame, the viridescent lights of the Houston cityscape recede into the horizon while the red flare of Travis' headlights come into focus— he leaves his son, his wife, and Houston for, presumably, Paris, Texas.



Words by
Nick Davie

Images:
Naked Lunch **(20th Century Fox, 1991)**

Canadian body horror master David Cronenberg amalgamates the 1959 novel *Naked Lunch*, other fiction from William S. Burroughs, and the life of the beatnik icon into an explicitly physical tale of abuse and deviancy. Whilst Cronenberg is a key member of body-horror's insurgency in cinema, Burroughs, a pivotal figure in American literature, wrote about the human condition and the consequential perversities and horrors of life. A lifetime spent writing about man's struggles on the outer rims of existential nihilism and moral destitution, Burroughs' canon of work has its influences entrenched throughout lit major Cronenberg's filmography. With Burroughs' blessing, Cronenberg approached *Naked Lunch*, a novel deemed 'unfilmable', at a stage in his career when his work evoked shudders in audiences globally.

The novel, a controversial and bizarre non-linear account of substance abuse that caused an uproar in the United States upon release for its obscene language and exhibitions of sexual violence, offered itself to the outlandish filmography of Cronenberg. In return Cronenberg's distinct aesthetic style no doubt appealed to the mind of Burroughs. The writer described the aesthetics of photography and the moving image with much intrigue: 'to compete with television and photo magazines writers will have to develop more precise techniques producing the same effect on the reader as a lurid action photo'. The term 'lurid action photo' can be accessed through the lens of Susan Sontag's seminal text *On Photography*, that 'photographs may be more memorable than moving images because they are a neat slice of time, not a flow'. Sontag highlights the image's ability to amply shock; whilst strings of images denote the flow of action, the former image is replaced in succession. Indeed, the novel *Naked Lunch* is not a photograph and the film is a succession of images, therefore the sensibilities of a 'lurid action' are replicated through intent.

Thirty years on from its release, *Naked Lunch* heralds the stark brilliance of both Cronenberg and Burroughs, notably their ability to elicit perverse visuals, surreal existent discomfort, and body-horror. It follows Burroughs' literary alter ego William Lee, played by Peter Weller (*RoboCop, The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai*), on a spiralling descent to the depths of drug-induced depravity. Lee, a bug exterminator, who along with his wife Joan Lee (Judy Davis) gets hooked on injecting bug powder. Joan describes the bug powder as a 'literary high' and references Kafka, how the sensation makes you feel like an insect. Following a surreal recount of hallucinations induced by the bug powder, believing he is a secret agent, Lee encounters various unfamiliar life forms, from the alien-like mugwump to the talking beetle typewriters. All the while, recurring Burroughs' character, Dr. Benway (Roy Scheider), appears to have a hidden agenda when diagnosing bug powder addictions.

In true Cronenberg fashion, the mugwump is a towering creature with an oily flesh texture covering its large exoskeleton figure; the head is somewhat reptilian as it sits in a cafe waiting for Lee. Where *Naked Lunch* begins to blur fact and fiction is with Lee's 'accidental' murder of his wife Joan—a stray bullet intended for a glass cup on her head kills her in a misguided party trick reimagining of William Tell. This particular scene is based on an incident that took place in 1951, Burroughs shot his then-wife Joan Vollmer accidentally in a party game of William Tell, Vollmer died and Burroughs received a two year suspended sentence in Mexico City. Joan doesn't feature in the novel at all, her presence is a filmic representation of Cronenberg merging the novel with various other Burroughs' texts, and several incidents from Terry Morgan's autobiography of Burroughs, the apt title *Literary Outlaw*. The portrayal of Lee's William Tell shooting is used to move the plot forward, the mugwump advises him to leave town for the seedy shores of Interzone to spy on Interzone Incorporated.

Lee's peculiar mission to Interzone is littered with typewriters with talking anuses, all able to communicate as insect-like creatures that serve as metaphors for Burroughs' homosexuality and the perceived reception of his sexuality to a homophobic Ameri-

ca of the 40s and 50s. The literary work of Burroughs often depicts the deepest and darkest areas of the American psyche, a presence of total and abject violence, and often the lack of. A swelling of gutter-wading experiences, collections of slang obscenities, and a sense of bitterly grasping at nothingness, the works of Burroughs are as potent as they are vital in their reverence for free speech. Originally a series of letters from Burroughs to Allen Ginsburg from his time in Tangier, *Naked Lunch* is iconic as a fictional work but importantly as a textual commentary on society—literature critic Douglas G. Baldwin wrote '[*Naked Lunch* is] a vision [of] early prose protest against society's controlling definitions of sexuality, narrative and visual perception'. The author's work elicited consistent contention from the cultural establishment, *Naked Lunch*, in particular, threatening the censorious powers of its time—a consideration that Cronenberg takes on board when reshaping the dialogue into a more linear series of semi-autobiographical events that offer a somewhat relatable portrait of William Lee.

Whilst featuring a fraction of the source material, the film opens up avenues of accessibility to the world of Burroughs and his pivotal texts that were key to sixties counterculture. The jaundiced world view of Burroughs exceeds the work of other beat literary figures as he dissects the America of his day from an exiled tour of Europe, Africa, and South America. These varied viewpoints are congealed by Burroughs' and Cronenberg's translation of Interzone, a mix of cultures coming together outside of America: an America that is embodied through a suspicious and obtuse Dr. Benway (Scheider), probing his patients and exploiting opportunity at his will. Much of the film follows Lee and his overwhelmingly hallucinogenic task of spying on corporations he can't comprehend in unfamiliar lands, even in these new lands, Dr. Benway waits, eventually revealing himself in a moment of pure Cronenberg absurdity.

Cronenberg's pre-*Naked Lunch* filmography addressed the idea of identity in a variety of forms. In *Videodrome,* he offers sentiment on the identity of man merging with the mechanical. In *The Fly,* identity again is explored through man and technology, though the result is man merging with insect. *Dead Ringers* eerily studies identical twins who swap identities as it suits and shares lovers. The director's work prior to his Burroughs adaptation serves as a precursor for a fitting collaboration with the beatnik auteur, the typewriter and the writer serving as a reference to a fusing of identity in director and author. The bug powder drug itself that features in the film is also indicative of a metaphoric form of control, an internal investigation of junky identity rather than the external social problems that are consequential in substance abuse. The use of corporate bodies and entities is a further examination of identity, in *Naked Lunch*, it is Interzone Incorporated, in Rabid it is the aptly named Keloid clinic, in *The Brood*, there is

the Somafree Institute of Psychoplasmics, and in *Videodrome* there is CIVIC-TV. These corporations are metaphors for bodies, as if a company is a living organism that requires humans as organs to function, and are often named in a play-on-words fashion—with keloid scars as the inspiration for the Keloid clinic.

Through Burroughs' exploration of identity, employing alter ego William Lee in a variety of drug-fuelled bouts of existentialism, *Naked Lunch* (film) takes on a metatextual quality. Construction within a construction, playing out a world of hallucinations and nightmarish contexts, *Naked Lunch* represents a perfect symbiosis of an auteur, author, and adaptation.

Words by
Isobel Wise

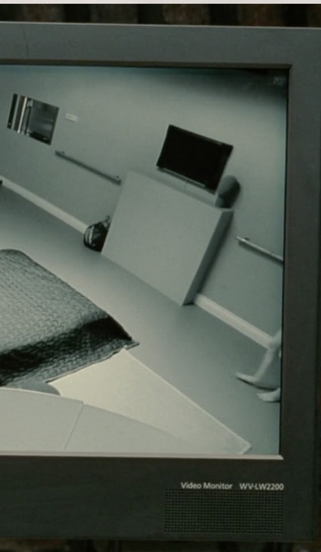
Images:
The Skin I Live In **(Warner Bros. Spain, 2011)**

Revelling in a space that conflates horror with the surreal and sensual, Pedro Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In* is a film that seduces its audience just as much as it provokes them. Set within the sprawling and secluded estate of plastic surgeon Robert (Antonio Banderas), the audience is introduced to Vera (Elena Anaya): his patient, prisoner and obsession. Driven by heartache and seeking vengeance, Robert imprisons Vera in a room, devoting his time to the creation of an artificial skin that will leave her fireproof and free of imperfection. Banderas is formidable in the role, balancing malevolence with elegant, debonair charm. Anaya is equally captivating. In their interactions, desire is met fiercely with rage, philanthropy twisted by masochism, and their respective brilliance is forever threatened by a propensity for domination. The result of this pairing is a work that, when peppered with distinctly Almodóvarian eccentricities, oozes with zeal.

To write of *Skin* without spoiling its plot is a difficult task. Rejecting any linearity, the filmic structure is almost ophidian in nature. Events and explanations unfurl as Almodóvar invites the audience to slither through dream immersions, flashbacks and clever expositional dialogue. It is a narrative that demands and rewards attentive minds. As titillation is enveloped by nausea, scenes oscillate between the abhorrent and the seductive; hypnotic in content and delivery, *Skin* entrances its viewers and marks them victims unable to predict its bite. The film is saturated with scenes as voluptuous as they are affronting, the storyline laced with perversions, assaults, obsessions, desires, deviations, vendettas, sexuality and death. This macabre melodrama is confirmed as nothing short of thrilling.

As his lens snakes its way between the past and present—through spaces tinged with eroticism, violence, sophistication—Almodóvar conjures a world that is sublimely glossy and outrageously voyeuristic. Robert basks within a sea of modernist furnishings and accessories, striding along hallways caressed by the Old Masters and Surrealists. CCTV broadcasts the movements of his muse, Vera, onto screens around the house. Conflating her beauty with her scientific potential, Robert consumes these images hungrily, compulsively. Just as Vera struggles to escape such omniscience, *Skin* works to detain its audience through the incessant tangibility of its aesthetic. The colours, fabrics and lighting are intoxicating, art director Carlos Bodelón and cinematographer José Luis Alcaine working to present the prison-*cum*-palatial-home as one rich in both style and reference. In this context, each painting becomes a penitentiary of canvas for the bodies illustrated within. Books that tender titles of Art, Science and Philosophy, are shelved, made compliant. Docility is not just sustained *within* these interiors, but *by* them also. Ripped away from the depths of cobwebs and candlelit castles, here tropes of horror take residence in a realm that is palpably sleek and controlling; one that is an extension of Robert himself.

Reaching deep into the psyche of both villain and victim, one scene notes Robert dazed by the spectacle he has created. Vera stares back through the screen. Despite its ferocity, perhaps the most violent action within *Skin* is the look; that of the surgeon, the art collector, the lover, and arguably most Almodóvarian of all, the inmate. Within this reciprocity of gaze, the film delivers its provocative punch—an idiosyncrasy Almodóvar is celebrated for, one that makes *Skin* so fantastically entertaining.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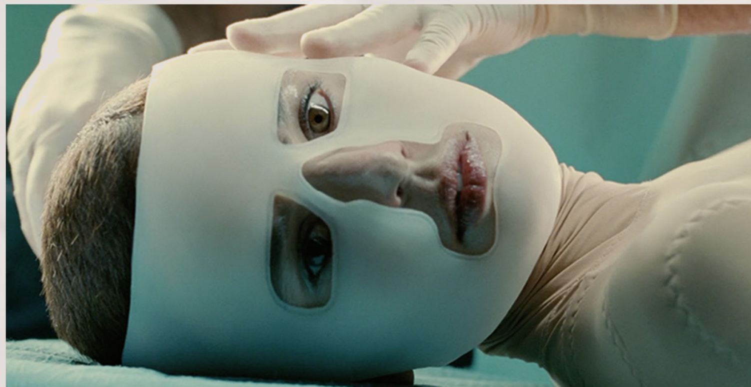


Words by
Charlotte Mansfield

Images:
An Evening with Beverly Luff Linn **(Universal Pictures, 2018)**

An Evening With Beverly Luff Linn centres around unhappy wife Lulu Danger and her pursuit of a mysterious former lover by unusual means. Composed of an eclectic cast, saturated mise-en-scéne and blasts of mundane synths, this dreamlike world floats in ambiguity of time and place. The clothing and music is suggestive of the mid-1980s to early 90s while the setting is somewhere in washed out suburbia, yet these unknown factors make the film all the more enthralling, as do the events which are simultaneously bizarre and banal.

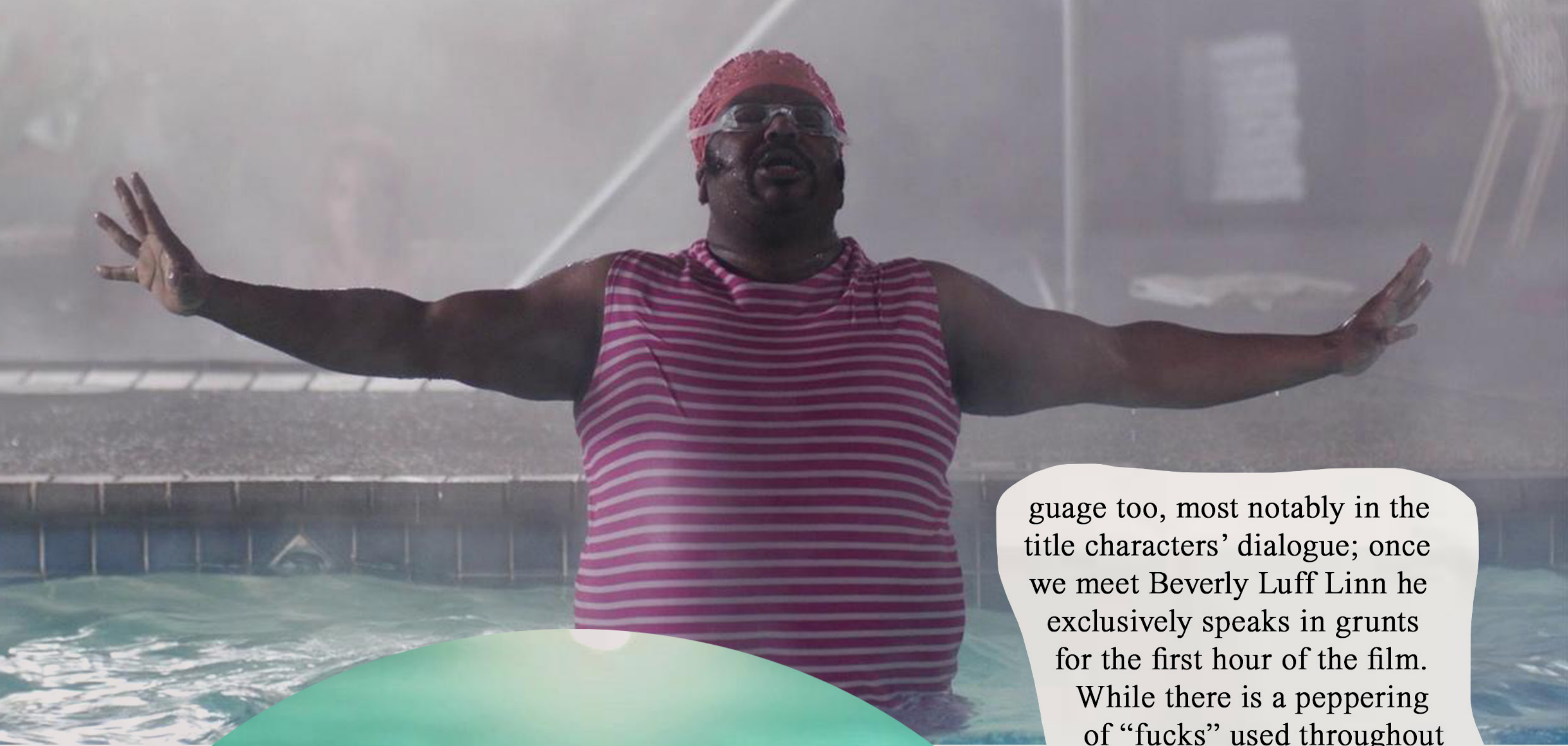
Chain-smoking Lulu–played by the inimitable Aubrey Plaza–is enchanting despite her cold assertiveness, hiding her emotional side from the men in her life and instead revealing herself through her iconic wardrobe. After being fired by her husband, she sheds her diner uniform of a red shirt, khaki trousers and wellington style boots for loungewear. Even in her depressed state, characterised by blankets and cushions, Lulu is chic in her lacy bodysuit, plush pink and green quilted jacket, floor length raincoat, and tight ring-curls. Once she begins her adventure with new acquaintance, Colin (Jermaine Clement), she is reborn, entering a scene clutching shopping bags with her red nails. While staying at the hotel where she finds Beverly, her style consists of colourful chunky knits, striped swimsuits, flounced shoulders and mini skirts. She later reveals a pale pink and brown fur coat draped over her hot pink party dress, her hues progressively brightening throughout the film.

Costume designer Christina Blackaller not only made the heroine an icon, but ensured the men in Lulu's life appeared just as extravagant in their attire, shaping the characters as well as acting as comedic building blocks. Beverly (Craig Robinson) mostly appears in Scottish-style pink tartan suits and hats, complete with a pom pom to match his powder-blue socks. Colin starts out bland in neutral jackets and turtlenecks, but is transformed by the finale, sporting a leopard print shirt and blue linen jacket along with his signature yellow-tinted aviators. Even Lulu's crazed husband Shane Danger (Emile Hirsch) dons electric blue speedo-fit briefs, which feel suitably grotesque next to his silver chain-adorned hairy chest. He and his rag-tag friends attempt to disguise themselves in stylish yet humorously out of place wigs, which is an ongoing gag throughout the movie.

Upon arriving at the hotel, no one blinks at Beverly and his "platonic life partner" Rodney Von Donkensteiger (Matt Berry) which further adds to the utopia-like timeless feel for the universe, free of society's ideas of nuclear relationships. Rodney too is incredibly stylish in pale coloured suits, and at one point startles Lulu wearing Beverly's red and white striped bathing suit, flowery swimming cap and, randomly, makeup, giving him brightly-flushed cheeks, dreamy blue eyelids, high brows and a red lip, reasserting the film's camp attitude.

The way these men intersect around Lulu highlights their weaknesses–jealousy, rage, violence, greed, while simultaneously failing at these things and therefore at their idea of masculinity. This is dismantled by the end of the film, after some high-drama sequences as well as scenes that are so deliberately dull they end up hilarious; it feels like watching a prom drama for grown-ups, with eyeliner-streaked faces and alcohol in place of diner milkshakes.

Each thread of the film from set design to timing is not only awkward and offbeat but just plain weird. Certain scenarios play out as if from the imagination of a child and how they perceive the adult world from an innocent point of view, while others are more vulgar. Despite this, every moment retains a softness through its visuals, and the sensitivity of the characters. This is reflected in the lan-



guage too, most notably in the title characters' dialogue; once we meet Beverly Luff Linn he exclusively speaks in grunts for the first hour of the film. While there is a peppering of "fucks" used throughout by most characters, there is also an overuse of the word "poo", playing on childlike speech and scatological humour, further supported by a littering of fart jokes and thrusting gestures. Visually, the film appears drab and dreary-toned but punctuated with pops of garish colour, again providing it with an unreal quality to support the prolonged anticipation for climaxes and gross sexual tension exhibited. *Beverly Luff Linn* is a delightful exploration of the absurdity of relationships and idiosyncrasies in suburbia.

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