



CAMP

WASTELAND ISSUE #2
MAY 2020

FEATURING

WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO
BABY JANE? (1964)
FEMALE TROUBLE (1974)
GREY GARDENS (1975)
SLEEPAWAY CAMP (1983)
SHOWGIRLS (1995)
DROP DEAD GORGEOUS (1999)

WHAT IS CAMP?

Extracts from Notes on Camp by Susan Sontag

“Camp is a visual of the world in terms of style - but a particular kind of style. It is the love of the *exaggerated*, the “off”, of **things-being-what-they-are-not.**”

“Camp sees everything in **quotation marks**. It’s not a lamp, but a **“LAMP”**; not a woman, but a “*woman*”. To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand **Being-as-Playing-a-Role**. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of **LIFE AS THEATRE**”

“In naive, or pure, Camp, the essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails.”

“Of course, not all seriousness that fails can be redeemed as Camp. Only that which has the proper mixture of the *exaggerated*, the fantastic, the *passionate* and the **NAIVE**”

“*Camp: the sensibility of failed seriousness, of the theatricalisation of experience*”

WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO BABY JANE? (1962)

“Everytime I think about something nice, you remind me of bad things. I only want to talk about the nice things.”

“The whole point of Camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playful, anti-serious. More precisely, Camp involves a new, more complex relation to “the serious”. One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious”
- Susan Sontag



Bette Davis and Joan Crawford are matriarchs of the camp canon. In *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*, camp is clear in the narrative: an embittered former child actor Baby Jane (Davis) who holds her disabled sister Blanche (Crawford) captive in their decaying Hollywood mansion. What is so alluring is the film's duplicity of surface and depth. That is, the on-screen rivalry between Baby Jane and Blanche comes to represent the actual, career-spanning feud between Davis and Crawford. In this way, *Baby Jane* is a film which is entirely self-aware of the industry from which it emerges, an industry which treats women as objects of the spectacular. *Baby Jane* toys with the doubleness of what occurs on and off screen with abundant exaggeration. Unintentionally or not, it is a masterclass in camp cinema.

FEMALE TROUBLE (1974)

“GIVE US SOMETHING TWISTED!”



I wouldn't suck your lousy dick if I was suffocating and there was oxygen in your balls!

To translate the effects of John Waters' films is to commit a grave disservice to their impact. *Female Trouble* is like no other film on this list, or any other film past and present. It takes extreme moral bankruptcy and edginess to their politicised, queer edges. Although it does possess a traceable narrative, of runaway schoolgirl Dawn Davenport (Divine) and her criminality, it seems superfluous to analyse anything about *Female Trouble* through conventional frameworks of plot and its meaning. It is hardcore art stripped bare. It is boldly political, both silly and vanguard. It stands as the repulsive, or, subversive, side of camp, and it is because of its commitment to visual extremity and its knife-edge politics that it is a must-see for any aficionado of the visual arts.



“I am strongly drawn to Camp, and almost as strongly offended by it”
- Susan Sontag

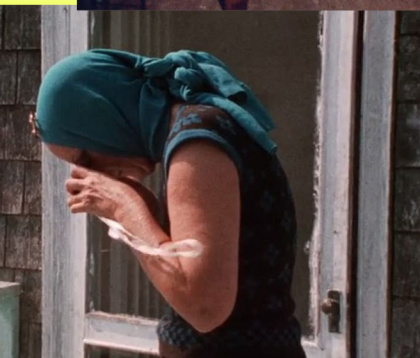


"I HAD MY CAKE, LOVED IT, MASTICATED IT, CHEWED IT AND HAD EVERYTHING I WANTED."



"Camp taste is a kind of love, love for human nature. It relishes, rather than judges, the little triumphs and awkward intensities of "character". Camp taste identifies with what is it is enjoying"
- Susan Sontag

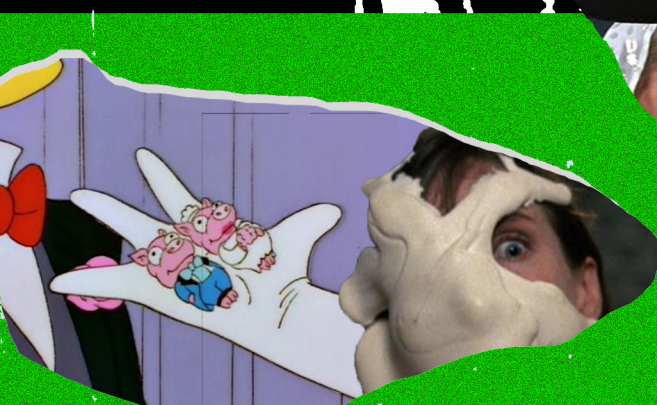
Grey Gardens is a quietly beautiful documentary that holds tenderness at its centre. It spotlights Jackie O's relatives Little Edie, now a fashion icon, and her mother Big Edie, as they sing, bicker, reminisce, and play dress up in an overgrown mansion in the Hamptons. Their distance from their former social mobility is captured wonderfully by directors Albert and David Maysles. There is no voyeurism in their filmmaking, the women's seclusion and eccentricities are represented with a softness for human nature. Its campiness isn't rooted in artifice, but rather, in vulnerability and nostalgia. It represents a moment of fashion history and celebrity culture; it is an example of camp at its most tender.



GREY GARDENS (1975)



WASTELAND



IF SHE WERE
ANY QUIETER,
SHE'D BE
DEAD!

"The pure examples of Camp are
unintentional; they are deadly serious."
- Susan Sontag



Sleepaway Camp has a reputation for being one of the best 'worst' movies ever produced. On the surface, it is everything one would expect from a 1980s slasher set at a summer camp, except it is affected by outrageous, improvisational plot beats and an ending that has been divisive since its release. Quietly disturbed Angela (Felissa Rose) joins her cousin Ricky (Jonathon Tiersten) at Camp Arawak, where she is targeted by various archetypal villains. Cartoonishly mean girl Judy (Karen Fields) is perhaps one of the most campy aspects of the film, along with *Twin Peaks*' Desiree Gould as Aunt Martha. While *Sleepaway Camp* is certainly a must-see for fans of campy cinema and B-movie horror, it also raises important questions regarding gender, trauma, violence and their place in the horror genre. It is perfectly atrocious. It is an accidental masterpiece.

SLEEPAWAY CAMP (1983)



THERE'S ALWAYS SOMEONE YOUNGER AND HUNGRIER COMING DOWN THE STAIRS AFTER YOU

"Considered a little less strictly, Camp
is either completely naive or wholly
conscious"
- Susan Sontag

"IT'S A VER-SAYCE"



Paul Verhoeven (Robocop, Basic Instinct) is behind this genius cult-classic. On paper, *Showgirls* should be a camp masterpiece simply by virtue of its content: a Vegas showgirl (Elizabeth Berkley) clawing her way to the top. In actuality, its campiness is down to its execution and reception. Cast member Kyle MacLachlan declared it a terrible film, laden with bad acting and bad writing. We think it is something quite genius. On technical merit, it has been described as a failed seriousness of the erotic, but, in accordance to its cultural gravity, it is an unadulterated masterclass in how to create extremely entertaining, naked, hungry cinema. It envisions a world where sex is silly, affectation is exaggerated, and camp is at the heart of performance.

SHOWGIRLS (1995)

THE BATTLE BETWEEN THE GOOD AND THE BAD IS ABOUT TO GET UGLY.



“Camp taste is, above all, a mode of enjoyment, of appreciation - not judgement. Camp is generous. It wants to enjoy. It only seems like malice or cynicism.”
- Susan Sontag



Drop Dead Gorgeous is not a straightforward example of camp cinema, though it certainly inhabits its peripheries. It follows a beauty pageant mockumentary in middle-of-nowhere Minnesota, and while its absurdity is shown through visual comedy, its wit is far more deceptive. Lona William's screenplay pokes fun at its immersion in camp environments, and although certain scenes are perhaps closer to parodying evangelical, small-town U.S. stereotypes than camp sensibilities, its dry-humoured vision of teen beauty pageantry is unavoidably camp through its charm and critique. Upheld by a treasured cast of actors (Brittany Murphy, Kirstie Alley, Allison Janney, Mindy Sterling), *Drop Dead Gorgeous* is brilliantly entertaining and devastatingly underrated. It is entirely self-aware of old Hollywood camp classics; it elevates femininity to that of an unstable comedy.

you're
next

DROP DEAD GORGEOUS (1999)



WASTELAND

WASTELAND

WASTELAND



WASTELAND

WASTELAND

WASTELAND

WASTELAND

WASTELAND

WASTELAND

WASTELAND

WRITTEN BY
JESSICA MOORE

COVER EMBROIDERY BY
IZZY WISE

DESIGNED BY
CHARLOTTE MANSFIELD