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Slackers, Slashers and Sticklers:
Hollywood Films and Audience Reception

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Abstract

This thesis examines the processes through which identity is acquired and the processes that Hollywood films employ to facilitate audience identification in order to determine the extent to which individuality is possible within postmodern society. Opposing views of identity formation are considered: on the one hand, that of the Frankfurt School which envisions the mass audience controlled by the culture industry and on the other, that of John Fiske which places control in the hands of the individual. The thesis takes a mediating approach, conceding that while the mass media do provide and influence identity formation, individuals can and do decode a variety of meanings from the material made available to them in accordance with the text's use-value in relation to the individual's circumstances. The analysis conducted in this thesis operates on the assumption that audiences acquire identity components in exchange for paying to see a particular film.

Reality Bites (Ben Stiller 1994) and *Scream* (Wes Craven 1996) are analyzed as examples of mainstream 1990s films whose material circumstances encourage audience identification and whose popularity suggest that audiences did indeed identify with them. *The Royal Tenenbaums* (Wes Anderson 2001) is considered for its art film sensibilities and is examined in order to determine to what extent this film can be considered a counter example. The analysis consists of a combination of textual analysis and reception study in an attempt to avoid the problems associated with each approach when employed alone. My interpretation of the filmmakers' and marketers' messages will be compared with online reviews posted by film viewers to determine how audiences received and made use of the material available to them. Viewer-posted reviews, both unsolicited and unrestricted, as found online, will be consulted and will represent a segment of the popular audience for the three films to be analyzed.

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Introduction

Is individuality possible in postmodern society? Some would argue that the very ability to ask the question is proof that individuality is possible. However, might it not be the case that the concept of individuality and the ability to examine the issue is possible simply because the belief in individuality works in favour of our mass-mediated consumer culture. Is individuality merely a myth, the circulation of which encourages consumerism in a material society? This thesis proposes to examine the processes through which identity is acquired and the processes that Hollywood films employ to facilitate audience identification in order to determine the extent to which individuality is possible within postmodern society. Reality Bites (Ben Stiller 1994) and Scream (Wes Craven 1996) will be analyzed as examples of mainstream 1990s films whose material circumstances encourage audience identification and whose popularity suggest that audiences did indeed identify with them. The Royal Tenenbaums (Wes Anderson 2001) will be examined in order to determine to what extent this film can be considered a counter example. How do films that make claims to art film sensibilities encourage audience identification? Are the techniques the same or different and which method is more successful?

This project will involve navigating a position between two extreme versions of identity and identity formation: Norman K. Denzin's approach which sees identity as predetermined and limited by the culture industry and John Fiske's approach which places control in the hands of the individual. This thesis will allow for the fact that, while the media do influence identity formation, individuals can decode a variety of meanings from the material the media make available. The analysis will begin with a contemporary

consideration of identity drawing upon Stuart Hall's discussion in his article "Minimal Selves." Hall characterizes the modern experience of identity as that of the fragmented self such that people feel marginalized, fragmented, disenfranchised, disadvantaged and dispersed (Hall "Minimal" 134). The postmodern identity is not a new one; it is simply a recognition of what has always been. Identity is context specific; for the purposes of this analysis, each film will be examined as a context for identity formation. Timothy Shary shares Hall's position on the fragmented self. He states that 'we are fragmented subjects, our subjectivities have been reified because cultural production has been severed from personal reception under capitalism; this in turn has caused an identity crisis because our existence and our identity are composed of products . . . that seem to have no origins' (Shary 76).

Shary's view of the fragmented self draws upon Denzin's discussion of the cyclical nature of postmodern subjectivity. He poses questions such as: How is youth culture generated and re-generated? How do the cultural logics of the postmodern get passed down from one generation to the next? How does this diverse system of meanings and practices constitute, over and over again, new versions of the postmodern subject (14)? Denzin's answers to these questions will serve as the basis for the view of youth as being constructed in part by and construed as the target of Hollywood films. Denzin explains that current cultural politics stress consumption through a system of taken-for-granted beliefs that embody traditional patriarchal myths of western culture involving love, beauty, youth, sexuality, intimacy, romance, marriage and family (15). This system focuses on two classes of subject: youth and women (15). To become a member of the postmodern world, one must pass through childhood and youth. In order to motivate people to move

into the postmodern, needs and desires specific to children and youth, males and females, are created. Children must become desiring subjects who desire the gratifications that the culture holds out for them. They are seduced into this system of needs through a youth-consumer-oriented culture and all media have these needs inscribed within them (15).

The media valorize youth and align themselves with the argument that presents young people as misunderstood by their parents. Thus, the media are presented as a revolutionary form of discourse but underneath is a conservative system of meanings which reproduces the cultural meanings of youth, sexuality, love and beauty which are part of the larger patriarchal myths that circulate in the adult world. Children are the object of advertising strategies and advertising subjects who become living display units of the postmodern person (15). Young women and men are encouraged to appropriate existing symbols of happiness, eroticism, taste and power in order to express their individuality through the control they exercise over their appearance, their environments, and the way they spend their leisure time. Youth is the measure of joy and freedom and the permanent projection of this is the ultimate goal for adults.

As Denzin explains it, the cultural logic of the postmodern is an unbreakable cycle, continually involved in reproducing itself and its subjects. Identity is predetermined, each stage of life is plotted out with no alternatives available. When I began considering this project, Denzin's model of the cyclical order of the world typified my own feelings on the subject of identity and the lack of options available for one's identity. However, my subsequent goal has been to mediate this position, to place some of the power and ability to choose one's identity within the hands of consumers (viewers) themselves, in other words to imagine an escape from the cycle.

According to Hall, the "self" is a fiction created by arbitrary closures such as nation, ethnic group, families, sexualities, etc ("Minimal" 136). Thus, we have multiple identities; a fact which goes some way to suggesting variable identities are possible. Identity is predicated on similarities and differences. By way of explanation, Hall states that discourse is endless but, in order to say anything in particular, one has to stop talking. The next sentence can refute the previous one; thus the ending is a stake that says, "I need to say something, . . . just now.' It's not forever, not universally true . . . But just now, this is what I mean; this is who I am." (Hall "Minimal" 136-7) In light of Hall's theories, identity is a fluid creation of one's own making based upon what one chooses for oneself within a specific context. Media elements can be picked up and discarded accordingly as individuals see fit, just as the meaning of any one sentence can be affirmed or erased by the next.

My theoretical basis turns to Anne Friedberg's discussion of the commodity experience in Window Shopping. She situates her work within an examination of Marx's ideas. In contemporary society, an object with use-value is transformed into a "commodity" with an exchange-value. This commodity has a "fetish character" based on the market value of the desires it offers to satisfy (53). Services have replaced goods as commodities and because an aesthetic service can be rendered mechanically, the commodity returns to the status of a good, the product of an absent service. The "fetish-character" of commodities satisfies the imagination, not the stomach (55). Individuals crave experiences, be it the buying of a shirt or the buying of a ticket to see a particular film; both are pleasurable experiences conveyed through the "fetish character" of the commodity. The identification between individual and commodity serves to affirm the

individual's sense of belonging to the desired group associated with that shirt or film because, as Baudrillard affirms, "individuals . . . actualize themselves in consumption" (Friedberg 115).

Friedberg's key point, for the purposes of this thesis, concerns the connection she draws between the mall and the multiplex. Shopping activates the power of the consumer gaze and purchasing asserts power over the consumer's chosen objects. If one considers these objects as identity components, which Denzin, Hall and Friedberg do, the relation between shopping and consuming becomes one of controlling identity. This buying of identity occurs within the mall and extends to the multiplex: "to get to the screens of a shopping mall multiplex one must pass through a cornucopia of framed images -- shop windows are designed to perform a muted and static form of consumer address. When one reaches the stillness of the cinema screen, the stillness of the shop mannequin is transformed into the live action of the film performance" (141). Actors and actresses become live mannequins modelling clothing and enticing viewers to buy, thus making the commodification of the film image explicit.

Of course it is not only clothing that can be used to perform the identification function. All images and elements within a film, as within the mall, are "for sale." For much of contemporary North American society, life is a movie. As Neal Gabler asserts, "an ever-growing segment of the American economy is devoted to designing, building and then dressing the sets in which we live, work , shop, and play; to creating our costumes; to making our hair shine and our faces glow; to slenderizing our bodies; to supplying our props -- all so we can appropriate the trappings of celebrity" (8). Friedberg states that the shopping mall and the cinema offer safe transit into other spaces, other times and other

imaginaries: "These 'elsewheres' are available to the consumer in a theatrical space where psychic transubstantiation is possible through purchase . . . The spectator-shopper tries on different identities with limited risk and a policy of easy return. The cinema spectator can engage in a kind of identity bulimia. Leaving the theatre, one abandons the garment, and takes only the memory of having worn it for a few hours -- or having been worn by it" (Friedberg 121-122). Thus, shopping mall cinemas provide the pleasure of purchasing a good without yielding a tangible product and therefore supply a commodity experience.

This thesis proposes to combine Friedberg's conception of the relationship between malls and multiplexes and identity bulimia with Denzin's discussion of the cyclical appropriation of commodities that allows for the cultural logic of postmodernism to be passed on from generation to generation. The cinematic experience is formatted so as to enhance the individualization of the experience and therefore heighten the commodity experience. Evidence of the individualization of experience can be found in the ways in which time can be controlled: "public time" is dissolved into private time with some cinemas opening for extended hours or all hours; the home viewer can shift time by taping televised films and thus controlling viewing time; DVDs allow for further control of viewing time with the added control of presentation format, language and knowledge in the form of "behind the scenes" information.

In order to answer the question outlined at the beginning of this introduction, it is necessary to expand the theoretical basis to a less limited view of the audience. Looking at identity in terms of its creation by the media, is there room for individuality if we are all exposed to the same media influences? In the theories presented thus far, identity can be determined from a wide array of media texts, yet the production of meaning and thus the

identity construed is limited to that intended by the creator of the text. The answer to the question posed depends on which view of the audience one adopts. Certainly Denzin is more closely aligned with The Frankfurt School's "culture industry" approach which sees the mass media playing "a highly manipulative role in advanced capitalist societies, serving to contain and subvert forms of oppositional or critical consciousness on behalf of the dominant capitalist class" (O'Sullivan et al 124). This view leaves mass audiences and, more specifically for the purposes of this thesis, youth as "cultural dopes" (Hall "Notes" 232), as strictly the products of mass media manipulation, coercion and marketing strategies. Rather than adopt this limited view, this work will be positioned within the tradition that envisions youth using the media for their own valid purposes to at least the same degree as the media use the youth market. This thesis proposes to refute blanket statements such as that of C. Wright Mills who claims that the media "give us identity; they tell us what we want to be -- they give us aspirations; they tell us how to feel that we are that way even when we are not" (Lewis 100).

In order to mediate the culture industry approach to popular culture and audiences, John Fiske's argument will be employed to examine the ways in which texts become popular. According to Fiske, people discriminate among the culture industry's products. This decision-making process is driven by the social conditions of the individuals involved and by the characteristics of the text. Popular discrimination is concerned with functionality, that is, the potential use of the text in everyday life, rather than with the quality of the text.

Fiske examines several factors that underlie the discrimination process. The first concerns the relevance of the text. He claims that "popular culture is made at the interface

between the cultural resources provided by capitalism and everyday life" (129). Thus, if the cultural resource does not resonate with the experience of everyday life, it will not be popular. Relevance is located solely in the social situation of the reader and it is time and place bound (130). Any one text can have multiple meanings at any given time and throughout time and these meanings are often different from the intended meaning (130). Thus art that is relevant today can easily and likely will be irrelevant tomorrow because popular readers are free to enter the represented world of the text and select the meanings and pleasures they choose because of their importance at that time and place.

Popular productivity constitutes Fiske's next consideration in the discrimination process. The important question is not what are people reading but how are they using the texts they read. According to Fiske, "the nature of the resource may limit its use but it cannot limit the creativity of those who use it" (142). Viewers are free to construct their own meanings and to use media resources for their own purposes. Whereas textual and ideological analyses presume the respectful, disciplined bourgeois reader who reads the entire text with equal attentiveness throughout, Fiske's approach allows for various reader models. For example, film viewers who pick and choose their own meanings might choose to ignore the end of a seemingly subversive film that re-inscribes the dominant order in its ending; by doing so, the viewer can resist the intended ideological meaning. In this way popular texts become menus from which viewers select certain meanings and pleasures to comprise the "meal" they "consume" (143). The choosing of popular texts is synonymous with choosing social identity, and fandom spurs productivity on the part of the individual. Fans create their own texts in dialogue with their chosen texts. These fan-produced texts may include personal websites devoted to the objects of their interest, their

bedroom walls, their style of dress, their hairstyle, their use of cosmetics -- all evidence of youth making of themselves walking indices of their cultural allegiances and their active and productive participation in the social circulation of meaning. Popular discrimination involves a productive use of chosen meanings. It is less concerned with the text than with what the text can be made to do because the relevance of the text to the everyday allows its textuality to be participated in; thus, readers can be cultural producers, not simply cultural consumers.

While this thesis will draw heavily upon Fiske's work, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of Fiske's methodology. My thesis proposes to determine and navigate a middle ground between the opposing views that see audience identity completely controlled by the media and that of the audience completely controlling its own identity. The middle ground will be a mix of the two theories: identity is certainly constructed from media products but individuals are using these products in inventive and perhaps unexpected ways for their own purposes.

The final theoretical consideration to be offered here is that of postmodern marketing techniques. Marketing will be considered from a mediating standpoint, in keeping with the goal of forging a position in the theoretical middle ground. While the culture industry approach sees marketing as a villainous practice, this thesis will entail a more sympathetic approach closer to that offered by Stephen Brown in Postmodern Marketing. According to Brown, marketing is all-pervasive. It is used to sell everything from politicians to universities to charities to toothpaste to soap and steel, with the reality being that "no organisation can avoid marketing" (Brown 35). The choice is not whether to market or not but whether to do it well or poorly (35); viewing marketing in this

manner goes some way to exonerating the practice, of absolving it. This thesis will not be concerned with villainizing marketing but rather with examining the ways in which marketing techniques can be moulded to both producers' and consumers' needs. Above all, the core concept of marketing is exchange. Thus, the analysis conducted in this thesis will operate on the assumption that audiences acquire identity components in exchange for paying to see a particular film. The success of each film will depend on how effectively the filmmakers and marketers convey the identification points audiences desire.

As discussed, this thesis is attempting to operate within the theoretical middle-ground, examining the ways in which audiences use popular products for their own purposes; this theoretical basis informs the methodology of the thesis as well. The thesis will involve a combination of textual analysis and reception study in such a way as to attempt to avoid the problems associated with each and formulate a methodology that exists in the middle ground between the two approaches. Traditional textual analyses involve a scholarly analysis of the text with an implied audience and can lead to unsubstantiated claims about how audiences use texts (Staiger Media 8); traditional reception studies can employ a variety of ethnographic techniques including focus groups, exit polls and personal statements about memory in an attempt to determine audience response (Media 13). Reception studies are often criticized on several counts. Respondents who are aware of themselves as the objects of study may modify their behaviour and the possibility exists for interviewers to lead respondents to answer as the interviewer desires (Media 14). The analysis in this thesis does not constitute a "truth-finding of the meaning of the text" (Media 2); instead, my interpretation of the filmmakers' and marketers' messages will be compared with reviews posted by film viewers to

determine how audiences received and made use of the material available to them. Viewer-posted reviews, both unsolicited and unrestricted, as found online, will be consulted and will comprise the popular audience for the three films to be analyzed. In order to "study meaning-making, scholars have to interpret" (Media 13); this fact is unavoidable. The thesis will attempt to use the textual analyses as a starting point from which to move on to a reception study of three film audiences comprised of individuals entirely unaware of themselves as the objects of study.

The thesis will undertake an examination of the issues surrounding the processes of identification as well as audience reception and production of meaning in light of the marketing techniques employed in the campaigns around three Hollywood films of the 1990s. The subject matters of these films, Reality Bites, Scream and The Royal Tenenbaums, deal with young people and the films' marketing campaigns are both directed at young audiences and playing upon older audiences' desire for youth as discussed. This introduction will conclude with a brief discussion of each film to be analyzed.

Chapter One will deal with the film Reality Bites. The premise of Reality Bites relates directly to the issues raised in this thesis: the film features a group of friends in their early twenties struggling with their identities. The film's characters both celebrate and criticize the media's involvement in their lives. While received poorly by critics, the film's notoriety was aided in large part by the popularity of its soundtrack. As the film itself is about finding one's identity within the corporate machine, Reality Bites will be examined for the ways in which it deals with issues of individuality. The film's marketing material will be analyzed in order to determine the preferred reading encoded within these

publicity texts; this information will be compared with critical reception and, wherever possible, fan reception materials.

The second chapter will deal with the film Scream. Of the three films to be examined, Scream is the most popular. The film spawned a rebirth in the horror film genre in the mid 1990s including two sequels of its own as well as the numerous other teen slasher films that followed its release. To date, Scream is also the most financially successful of the three films. Like Reality Bites, Scream features a group of young characters who are highly aware of themselves as being cast by the media's influence, in this case horror film conventions. The film will be analyzed for its stance on identification, its calculated visual appeal, the circumstances surrounding its theatrical release, the marketing techniques used to sell the film and the audience's reception of the film.

The final chapter of this thesis will examine the film The Royal Tenenbaums. The final film appears to stand outside mainstream Hollywood cinema to a greater extent than either Reality Bites or Scream. Nevertheless the film deals with similar subject matter: the identity crisis the three grown Tenenbaum children experience as a result of family turmoil. The characters within this film are figured as eccentric individuals and this, along with the tone of the film, encourages audience identification with those individuals who see themselves as resisting mainstream images. While the film does exhibit qualities more closely associated with art films, the film was produced within the Hollywood system. Comparisons will be drawn between audience reception of this type of art-house film and those of the two mainstream film examples.

Thus, my work will attempt to undercover new ground in the areas of audience identification and reception through an examination of contemporary film marketing

practices in postmodern society. It should be noted that all viewer-posted comments quoted within the body of this work are taken from the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) website and are reproduced as they appear online without corrections in order to preserve the integrity of the authors' message.

Chapter One: Reality Bites: The Myth of Generation X

This chapter will begin with an analysis of the techniques employed by the makers of Reality Bites to attract viewers to the film and to encourage viewers to identify with its themes and characters. Released in 1994, three years after the publication of Douglas Coupland's Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture, Reality Bites is situated firmly within the "Generation X" phenomenon that swept the media's imagination, a phenomenon that saw the media push aside any further consideration of said generation beyond definition by a single term. Considering the social context within which the film was released, a prospective viewer might only need hear the title of the film in order to get an idea of the direction the film's creators were headed; this technique is in keeping with established Hollywood practices. The point is to make the film's themes immediately identifiable to as wide an audience as possible and thereby insure that as many people as possible see the film.

From the opening sequence it is clear that Reality Bites features "Gen-X" characters. Lelaina Pierce's (Winona Ryder) valedictory address plainly references the thoughts and feelings typically ascribed to the post-baby boomer generation. Before the first shot appears on screen, the viewer hears Pierce's voice describing her age bracket's predicament:

And they wonder why those of us in our twenties refuse to work an 80 hour week just so we can afford to buy their BMWs, why we aren't interested in the counterculture that they invented, as if we did not see them disembowel their revolution for a pair of running shoes . . . But the

question remains: What are we going to do now? How can we repair all the damage we inherited? Fellow graduates, the answer is simple. The answer is . . . the answer is . . . I don't know.

The production team behind Reality Bites sought to capitalize on the notoriety and cachet of the term Generation X that was available at the time of the film's release. The term was adopted and used indiscriminately by the media to describe educated young men and women born in the 1960s and 1970s who missed out on the post war prosperity and economic growth experienced by their parents, the post war, baby boomer generation. Boomers purportedly saw post-boomers as lazy, apolitical and lacking commitment while post-boomers allegedly saw boomers as greedy, hypocritical sell-outs (Sconce 355).

Just as the term Generation X was used to label an entire cross-section of individuals in an obvious case of oversimplification, Reality Bites attempts to capture the sentiment of the terminology to secure viewers' allegiances in an overly simplified reworking of the ideology ascribed to Generation X. Thus, the viewer is presented with a range of characters all of whom fit neatly into the iconography of Generation X. The synopsis on the DVD case instructs the reader as to where to place each character within that paradigm: Lelaina Pierce "should be destined for greatness [but in] reality she is a lowly production assistant for an obnoxious TV morning show host." Pierce is highly educated yet failing at life due to the corrupt, or at the very least non-navigable, system established by her parents' generation. Troy Dyer (Ethan Hawke) is "a brilliant but unmotivated rebel." Again, the film presents a character who is highly intelligent yet suffering from the Gen X malaise. Lelaina's two friends, rather than fulfilling the Gen X pattern, function as walking issues, very much of their time. For example, Vickie Miner

(Janeane Garofalo) is described as Lelaina's "promiscuous, '70s crazed roommate" while Sammy Gray (Steve Zahn) is positioned as a "sexually repressed" gay man. The sub-plot left to Miner and Gray touches upon issues surrounding sexuality and AIDS; this coming at a time when the media and educators were urging safe sex and condoms upon young people and the AIDS scare had turned the promised possibility of the sexual revolution into an improbability. So, while not so much the stereotypical Gen Xers, Miner and Gray are included because they offer popular points of identification for the audience; even if the viewer was not experiencing something similar in his or her own life, he or she could likely identify with the characters' situations due to the attention these issues garnered in the popular discourse of the media at the time of the film's release.

Seemingly self-aware, the Reality Bites script pokes fun at the predictability of popular texts in the 1990s. For example, during the closing credits sequence, the viewer witnesses what is supposed to be former suitor Michael Grates' (Ben Stiller) treatment of Lelaina's and Troy's love story; the work, which is introduced only as "A Michael Grates Production," is a glossy, televisual version of the film itself. The sequence begins with clips of actual television commercials with abrupt breaks in between as though the television channel is being changed. The filmmakers directly link Lelaina's television viewing habits with those of the film's audience, a generation of individuals with short attention spans and poor taste who flip through channels restlessly and settle on programs similar to Michael's bastardized version of Lelaina's and Troy's love story. First, the viewer sees an infomercial featuring self-help guru Tony Robbins. Then a "spray-on hair in a can" infomercial is followed by the end of Grates' program. All of which serves as a wink to the knowing viewer. Coming at the end of a series of inane television

commercials the viewer is encouraged to laugh at the treatment a "substandard" medium such as television would afford a "serious" subject such as the story of Lelaina Pierce and her friends. Some critical viewers would be aware that they are being impugned by this treatment of the visual media of film and television simply by watching the film. Viewers are supposed to believe that they are seeing characters like themselves on screen and thus, as the film encourages these viewers to laugh at their own viewing practices, the film encourages the attitude of distancing oneself that is ascribed to members of generation X.

The film's attitude toward Grates' work and television in general, implies that the actual film itself is better than the average television program; however, many similarities exist between the two formats in this case. First off, Grates' version which sees Lelaina replaced by "Elaina" and Troy by "Roy," mimics actual shots from the film itself; for instance, in the opening shot, Lelaina's face figures prominently onscreen with the camera filming her from behind a fish tank; this shot is a repeat of an earlier scene in the film. In this earlier instance, which occurs at the start of Grates's and Pierce's first date, the camera is focused on both individuals but with a large aquarium between the camera and the actors. Elsewhere, key items are re-placed within Grates' narrative. A large poster advertising the "Big Gulp" figures notably beside "Roy" as he and "Elaina" argue about the future of their relationship; this treatment recalls an earlier scene where Lelaina claims that the Big Gulp is the most profound invention of her lifetime. Likewise, the viewer sees a figurine of Dr. Zaius from *Planet of the Apes* (1968), identical to the one Lelaina breaks in Michael's office, placed on a tall shelf beside "Elaina." In Grates' production, these items fulfill no meaningful function within the diegesis of the mini-film. Instead their presence relies on the viewer's larger knowledge of the entire film and further emphasizes and

criticizes the simplified ways in which television deals with "the facts" of the story. The "Big Gulp" and Dr. Zaius do figure in both filmic representations but to imply that Reality Bites' treatment of these items is somehow more substantial is absurd; the film uses products as a means to an end, namely to sell the film Reality Bites, as will be discussed subsequently.

Grates' version of the love story creates the impression that the audience is supposed to view the "In Your Face" production as superficial and as an off-hand version of a text dealing with serious subject matter. In Reality Bites proper, Troy leaves Lelaina's bed because he claims to have an early morning band practice. In Grates' version, 'Roy' tosses 'Elaina' aside because she does not appreciate his music. In comparison to 'Roy,' Troy is supposed to be seen to be using his music as an excuse to avoid or deny his very real and intense feelings for Lelaina; while 'Roy' is depicted as a mere dunderhead thanks to the purposely simplistic dialogue and wooden portrayal provided by 'Roy' actor Evan Dando. In fact, while the television version is admittedly over-the-top and patterned after a soap opera, ultimately the difference between the two versions of the story, is not as great as the film would have viewers believe.

Reality Bites touches upon some prominent issues of its day; however, it is far from a profound exposition on the early 1990s socio-political climate. The filmmakers juxtapose the film with an example of the most inane television fodder in an attempt to make the film appear more sophisticated and intelligent. Like Grates' "In Your Face Production", the film simplifies the issues it deals with in an attempt to satisfy all of its viewers' needs: with the result being entertainment with a nod to prominent issues of the day. For example, in the restaurant scene with Vickie and Lelaina, Vickie confides her

fear that she has contracted AIDS but she relates her concerns in terms of a "Melrose Place" episode. Vickie explains: "I'm the new character. The HIV-AIDS character and I live in the building. I teach everybody it's okay to be near me, it's okay to talk to me. And then I die. And there's everybody at my funeral wearing halter tops and chokers." Despite her protestations, Vickie performs that very function within and for the film: she is the HIV-AIDS character that teaches viewers it is okay to have AIDS. Instead of halter tops and chokers, the filmmakers opt for the retro look for Vickie. Her preference for 70s clothing styles is evidence of the ironic position-taking credited to members of Generation X: 70s fashions representing the tastes of boomer parents, became popular again as disaffected post-boomers created their own camp space (Sconce 356). The selling of re-appropriated 70s fashions is tantamount to the selling of halter tops and chokers; although the film would have its viewers believe that one style is better than the other, both are commodities used to sell more commodities.

The final words in Grates' production take the form of a laughable admonishment. As 'Roy' leaves, presumably to be with his music and not 'Elaina,' she begs: "Please don't let him get drunk and drive." This instance is one further example of the makers of Reality Bites trying to poke fun at the manner in which television and other popular forms of entertainment handle "serious" subject matter. Yet, the treatment afforded drinking and driving is very much akin to that afforded AIDS and sexual promiscuity by the larger film. As Vickie indicates, she is merely a plot point, a distraction from the main story wrapped in a neat moral lesson.

The Reality Bites characters' fascination with popular culture constitutes not a flat-out acceptance of its forms but an ironic disengagement from these forms (Sconce 355).

This attitude is clearly defined in Troy's character. Habitually shown reading, quoting from, or at the very least toting around, heavy philosophical tomes, Troy remains entranced yet distanced from the television commercials and programs he quotes from and the music he and his band cover. For example, set against the back drop of a beach scene and describing the effect his father's advice had on him, Troy explains his philosophy of life. He claims that:

there's no point to any of this. It's all just a random lottery of meaningless tragedy in a series of near-escapes. So I take pleasure in the details. You know, uh, a quarter pounder with cheese. Those are good [. . .] And I sit back, and I -- I smoke my Camel straights. And I ride my own melt.

Rather than risk "selling-out" as their parents did, these characters use their disengagement from items such as Quarter-Pounders and Camel Straights to define their identities as separate from individuals who consume these products unknowingly, that is without the greater awareness that they are caught up in a consumer world. Paradoxically, their disengagement from popular commodities becomes one of their primary engagements.

Coupland's description of 'black holes' can be equated to the film's characters (and later to its viewers as well). Sconce explains the act of dressing in black clothing in the 1980s as a "refusal to signify, to strip one's sartorial markers so as not to be associated with (and later embarrassed by) the vicissitudes of countercultural distinction" (355). The "black holes" uniform of all-black clothing comprised a complex statement: "1) I am smarter than you; 2) I identify with all that is dark, deathly and serious in the world; 3) I am uninterested in, and thus do not keep up with, the frivolous trends of popular fashion; 4) I am desperate not to be confused with a typically idiotic and tasteless American"

(Sconce 356). The message sent by the film's characters is similar although not quite as austere. The act of quoting popular texts signifies their awareness that they have had their identities sold to them by the media in collusion with the boomer generation; yet, their re-appropriation of said texts signifies that they are somehow above the concerns of the previous generation while still struggling to get out from underneath it. In that sense, they may be seen to be saying: 'Yes, we are smarter than our parents. We are smart and serious because we know we are mired in the mess our parents' generation created. Yet this mess is all that we have so we will use it and make the most of it.'

The very fact that a mainstream Hollywood film production takes up issues of Generation X culture and the practice of ironic positioning signifies that this practice (the act of performing as a member of Generation X) has become mainstream and therefore no longer culturally acceptable from the Gen Xer's perspective. Reality Bites, as a film, is positioned as though it is on the side of individuals who identify with characters such as Lelaina, Troy, Vickie and Sammy, individuals who feel that their identities are comprised entirely of fragments of consumer culture whether it be television programs, popular music, films, or even slogans and commercials. The film encourages the viewer to laugh at the conventions of popular entertainment and to be suspicious of the materialistic drives of others all the while peddling the very things it seems to be reacting against.

Despite the characters' lamentations over the effects products have had on their lives, the film is rife with product placements. Placing real products within Hollywood films has been a longstanding practice within the industry. The custom is mutually beneficial for all parties concerned; it enables Hollywood to create realistic backdrops for their filmic creations and allows for the accruelement of additional revenue thanks to

corporate sponsors willing to pay large sums of money for the effective advertising of their products (Wasko et al. 273). The number of products and companies that are visually and or vocally prominent are numerous in Reality Bites. This fact is noteworthy in a film that, at first glance, appears to be reacting against materialism and product peddling; and for this reason a complete list of products and companies will be outlined now:

BMW
Coca Cola
Columbia Record Company
Infinity Automobiles
Ford Motors
Snickers
Cinn-a-Burst
The Gap
MTV
Maxipads
Memorex
Dominos Pizza
Rolling Rock
7-11
McDonald's Quarter Pounder with Cheese
Camel Straights
Barbie
The Whole Foods
Radio Shack
The Big Gulp
Garfield
Polo by Ralph Lauren
Pizza Hut
Cocoa Puffs
Continental Airlines
Yellow Cab
Three's Company
One Day at a Time
Goodtimes
Peter Frampton's "Frampton Comes Alive"
Melrose Place
Cool Hand Luke
Planet of the Apes
The Brady Bunch
Who's The Boss

Marky Mark.

Of those listed, several stand out. These include BMW, Diet Coke and Coke products, the Gap, Rolling Rock, Snickers, Big Gulp, Pringles and Continental Airlines. These and the numerous other product placements figure in varying degrees of prominence but perhaps the most interesting product in terms of the concerns of this thesis is the treatment afforded to the BMW automobile.

From the very start of the film, BMWs are established as a major part of the boomer generation and that generation's fixation upon luxury and the accumulation of wealth. In Lelaina's valedictory address, she names the BMW as the item for which, she and those of her generation like her, refuse to sell their souls. From this point on the BMW appears repeatedly throughout the film but not as the figure of derision one might expect it to be from the introduction it receives. Vocally, the automobile is rejected but visually and through product placements the automobile is inserted as a desirable icon of luxury, stability and style. The shift begins with Lelaina agreeing to drive her stepmother's BMW until she can afford to buy her own car; this eases the viewer into the idea of having the BMW present throughout the film and makes it easier to insert later in more "devious" ways. The make of automobile then re-appears in the form of a close up shot of the BMW insignia on Lelaina's car. This shot is followed by a slow pan of the camera over the car's hood up to Lelaina and Vickie driving and singing along to a song inside the BMW; this is a potentially seductive image for the viewer. The viewer sees two young people, with the freedom and security a luxury automobile affords, cruising carefree along the streets of Houston, Texas. Next, one sees Michael in his BMW, a newer model and one which is

even more luxurious than Lelaina's. His car features a convertible top, leather interiors and a cellular phone. Then the viewer sees the two autos driving side by side allowing him or her to compare the merits of Michael's newer model to Lelaina's older one. Naturally, in terms of prestige, Michael's auto is more desirable and the viewer is invited to come to this conclusion. Given the fact that many products now have agents whose sole concern is securing desirable placements within Hollywood films, it is extremely likely that BMW paid a large sum of money to appear in Reality Bites. Companies such as BMW:

are aware of the fact [that], placement does something quite distinct from their more-usual methods of advertising. The cinema tends to attract a younger audience than that which, say, BMW perceives as its target market. This is important, as product placement depends upon an element of subtlety if it is to work as a brand-building exercise. The idea is that consumers are sold without necessarily knowing why they want the brand. It is on this principle that product placement treads a fine line. Using this tactic, BMW achieved brand recognition among an audience not necessarily able to buy a Z3 now, but knowing that to have one, years down the line, is a matter of prestige (Stewart-Allen 8).

Product agents have also been granted the right to influence scripts, in some cases, due to the large sums of money the parent corporation pays to have their products placed within the given film (Wasko et al., 274).

Despite the initial treatment the car receives, the entire love story is predicated on the car linking Lelaina and Michael together and the viewer is encouraged to identify repeatedly with Lelaina and her excitement as she embarks on a new relationship: in

Michael's office as the two discuss the accident; later, as Lelaina informs Vicki of her upcoming date with Michael; during Lelaina's nervous and hurried preparations for her date with Michael; and, of course, the culmination of the date in the back seat of Michael's luxury BMW. The car accident, which sees Michael's BMW slam into Lelaina's BMW, serves as the lynchpin of the film. Rather than see the matter go through lawyers and the court system, the two BMW drivers arrange to handle it themselves and a new romance is born. For an automobile that at the start of the film is introduced as a social scourge, it plays a very important and positive role in the film as a whole.

It is possible to suggest that, because Michael opts to fix his car himself rather than sue Lelaina for damages, the film is trying to show that its characters are more concerned with human relationships than with financial gains, in keeping with the Generation X philosophy. However, this is not the case. If the film was truly free of material concerns the BMW story line would have ended with the accident. Yet, it reappears.

During Lelaina's and Michael's date sequence, the BMW makes another appearance; this time after their dinner, parked outside of Lelaina's apartment. Once again, the camera pans slowly up and over the front hood of the BMW automobile. The lighting is highly seductive, reflecting a golden hue off the hood of the car and emphasizing its sleek body and flawless paint job. The camera moves up to reveal Lelaina and Michael perched on the back headrests of the convertible, their feet resting on the back seat as they discuss the most meaningful and profound *things* in their lives. This scene is highly romanticized thanks to the lighting and the positioning of the characters within the setting and the BMW, as part of the *mise-en-scène*, adds to the romantic quality of the scene. In terms of this film, this scene is particularly intense and the fact that the

soul-searching occurs in the back seat of a BMW is telling. The overall feeling created in this scene is one of security and stability thanks to the car and the emotions revealed by the two characters.

The dialogue in this scene begins with Michael expressing disbelief because Lelaina does not recall Peter Frampton's "Frampton Comes Alive," an album which Michael claims "totally changed [his] life." Lelaina reciprocates with a confession of her own but one which comes with a degree of irony. Lelaina praises the forty-four ounce Big Gulp ostensibly because it provides all of the "essential vitamins and nutrients for the entire day" and then admits that it does not take much to make her happy. Tellingly, against the backdrop of Michael's expensive luxury automobile, both characters decide that the littlest things make them happy. Michael claims that he is not "into cars and stuff;" yet he sits in an extremely fine one as he expresses this thought; importantly, Lelaina calls him on this contradiction. However, this confession remains doubly ironic within the film because the script and the filmmakers are attempting to convey the idea that material goods are not necessary for happiness, that once again, one should be above financial concerns; all the while accepting lucrative product placements to sell a generation out.

Michael and Lelaina decide that all they want is to have a comfortable, "nice" house, not a "big" house, just one where they can watch the stars from the rooftop. The dialogue in this scene indicates to the viewer that the simple things in life are what can make one happy; however, the visual cues in combination with subtle verbal cues, tell a different story. These characters are in the process of selling themselves out. They want freedom; freedom from the complexities of everyday life; freedom from the 'math of astronomy class', freedom from their metaphoric cages (of the "caged bird" variety),

freedom from unhappiness. They seek the kind of happiness that comes from simplicity and stability, from possessing “nice” things, and none are nicer than the BMW. So while Lelaina may not want to own a BMW at this stage of her life, the fact that she drives one makes her a commercial role model to viewers who identify with her character. If we do not own a BMW now, at least we know what we should be aiming for and saving up to buy in our later years.

In reality, the entire film is an advertisement . In principle, the idea of selling commercial goods within a film such as Reality Bites is a bold one but also ideally packaged. Placing products in a film such as Reality Bites allows corporations to assuage viewers'/consumers' potentially guilty consuming consciences or at the very least, their worries about being overly concerned with material wealth and accumulation of said wealth because the film features young, attractive men and women struggling with but ultimately accepting and celebrating their dependency upon material goods. The film presents the image of consuming youth designed to encourage identification in the audience and then suggests that because these characters accept their commercialism, the viewing public can and should do the same.

Evidence of this technique lies in the inevitable comparison between the two versions of Lelaina's footage that the viewer is encouraged to make. On the one hand, Lelaina's rendering is extremely rough and unpolished. Almost all we see of it consists of unsteady camera shots that lack a clear focus both visually and thematically; this is not to be mistaken for avant-garde filmmaking. Clearly Lelaina is a poor filmmaker and whether the viewer realizes this fact or not, it is safe to assume that most viewers will actually prefer the "In Your Face" version of the documentary if only for the fact that it is easier to

watch. This second version features a clearly defined sense of linearity. With title cards, a snappy soundtrack, a concrete introduction to each character, and an easily comprehended plot, this version more closely approximates Hollywood films than Lelaina's. Historically, film viewers have been reluctant to tolerate films that fall outside the norm of classical Hollywood filmmaking. Even though Reality Bites instructs viewers to deride this version of Lelaina's work, as she herself does, viewers are more likely to prefer the "In Your Face" arrangement because it is what they know. So, by spurning anything outside the norm, viewers are encouraged to accept the status quo. Once again, Reality Bites says one thing but indicates the opposite through subtle posturing via its misleading attitude toward commercialism.

An analysis of the production pack distributed to radio stations and newspaper reviewers yields findings very similar to those of the textual analysis of the film itself. The production pack is extremely interesting because it contains an express detailing of the ways in which the filmmakers want the film to be received; it includes explicit instructions on what to think of the film and this information, provided it was used as intended by the filmmakers, was to be disseminated to the listening and viewing public at the time of the film's release. The pack features a set of glossy, black and white studio prints from the film as well as two typed booklets: one entitled "Production Information: Reality Bites: A Comedy About Love in the '90s" and the other entitled "Cast and Credits: Reality Bites: A Comedy About Love in the '90s."

Of the photographs, four are shots of the group of friends, five are head shots of the individual actors, one is a shot of director Ben Stiller at work, and two are shots of Lelaina with a prospective lover. The types of photographs included are important

because these are the shots that readers will see and the pictures must be interesting enough to entice viewers to the theatre. The nature of head shots is to show the actor or actress at their physical best and these photographs do just that. More interestingly, however, the captions beneath each head shot confirm the intended reading of the given character. For example, Ben Stiller's character Michael is described as "a charming but materialistic video executive, in the irreverent comedy 'REALITY BITES.'" Ethan Hawke's Troy is described as "a poetic but too cool musician with an ironic view of life in the irreverent comedy 'REALITY BITES.'" The caption beneath Ryder's photograph reads, "In the irreverent comedy 'REALITY BITES,' Winona Ryder plays Lelaina, a recent college graduate who has to choose between her career ambitions and her personal loyalties." These captions on their own are accurate descriptions of the characters and their basic functions within the film and fall directly in line with the generation X quality the film tries to exude in order to pull viewers into the theatre.

What stands out in the descriptions is the repeated use of the term "irreverent" to describe the film; and this, of course, begs the question why? Are the filmmakers trying to counteract the mistaken perception that Reality Bites is a reverent comedy? And who or what is the film refusing to revere? It certainly does not abuse the traditions of the comedic genre because it features the requisite wacky characters and the arc of the comedic storyline complete with happy ending. Perhaps, realising the shortcomings of the film and the hypocritical approach it takes to commercialism, the filmmakers wanted to emphasize the fact that this is just a film, complicated, complex, often doubling back on itself like life. Or perhaps the use of this term was another attempt to tap into the Generation X zeitgeist. Knowing (or at least hoping) that reviewers would simply adopt

the terminology supplied for them by the production pack, filmmakers wanted to send the message to potential viewers that this film was for all those who felt disabused by the corporate system, that this film would hold no punches when it came to criticizing the materialistic impulses of the boomer generation, that it would show no respect to any tradition, in fact, and thus mirror the disaffected, disconnection many people were supposed to be feeling in the early '90s. In total there are nine still photographs included in the promotional package and of these, all nine include a description of the film as an "irreverent comedy."

The first contact prospective viewers had with Reality Bites likely came either in the form of a newspaper or magazine review or through the film's theatrical trailer. As the photographs and their captions have already been discussed, the thesis will turn to a consideration of the Reality Bites trailer. With little time in which to operate, the trailer must instantly convey the film as intended by the filmmakers. The overall intention of the trailer is to make viewers identify with the film's characters and themes immediately; thus, it presents Reality Bites as a series of bites both oral and visual. It begins with the sound of a phone ringing off-screen, and then the viewer sees Troy lounging in a shabby, candle-lit apartment answering the telephone with the following line: "Hello, you've reached the winter of our discontent." This shot is followed by a title card reading "Life." Thus, right from the start, the type of character that many young people like to identify with is introduced using his trademark wit and cynicism. His physical setting is depicted as that most commonly ascribed to young people starting out in their first apartment: it is attractive because it is that person's first space on their own, free from parental constraints. This is the conception of "Life" the filmmakers are attempting to appeal to,

the young person's life, the person who is just figuring out his or her place within the larger world and those people who recall their own youth with fondness.

The trailer then continues with a series of shots of the four friends with Lelaina explaining the premise of her documentary overheard throughout. Lelaina states that she is making a documentary about her friends but that it is "really about people who are trying to find their own identity without having any real role models or heroes or anything." In keeping with the theme of "Life," the filmmakers choose to emphasize the light and fun moments. Using grainy footage, we see Troy lifting his guitar over his head on top of a high rise building, various shots of Troy and Lelaina throwing microwave brownies at each other, a shot of Lelaina using her video camera and Vickie promising to find a woman for Sammy. Thus, despite Lelaina's serious claims about her concerns for her generation's ability to find identities for themselves without role models, visually, the trailer keeps the "Life" theme light and upbeat.

Next, we see a title card reading "Jobs." The trailer then shows Lelaina relating her difficulties in finding a job to her mother and stepfather; this particular sequence emphasizes the gulf of misunderstanding between Lelaina and her parents. While she feels that she is owed a job because of her skills and academic abilities, her parents suggest she downplay her academic success and apply for jobs which she considers beneath her. And then as if to highlight the disparity and the desolation of the job situation created for generation X by the boomers before them, we next see Lelaina applying for work at Weiner Schnitzel, a fictional fast food restaurant. Although it is brief, the Weiner dude interlude provides several options for identification. First, it appeals to viewers who feel dissatisfied with their employment situations. Second, it can be seen to appeal to

individuals who are searching for meaningful employment. When her prospective employer asks her impatiently and incredulously if she has "any idea what it means to be a cashier at Weiner Schnitzel," the film's creators are attempting to appeal to individuals who feel that they are caught in the bureaucratic systematization of capitalism. Weiner dude's inflated sense of self-importance is meant to be laughed at. We next see Weiner dude passing take-out food to a waiting driver followed by the company's inane catch phrase: "And have a 'tude, Weiner dude." Middle class viewers or college and university educated viewers would be expected to respond to this short sequence because this is exactly the type of work that this type of viewer would feel beneath them.

The section of the trailer identified as pertaining to "Friends" is relatively simple as it contains only two shots. First, the viewer sees Troy spouting his philosophy about the nature of his and Lelaina's friendship. Second, one sees Vicki and Lelaina walking, engaged in witty banter about their mutual friend Troy. Both of these elements are short and based on Troy's simplistic view of friendship: "you and me and five bucks." Rather than complicate the matter, identification is simple in this case because most viewers can likely relate to enjoying a good conversation with a cherished friend. Visually, all the elements are there. Each shot either contains two characters on screen talking or is comprised of a two shot with one character clearly focusing on the other and either the requisite cup of coffee in hand or the coffee shop sign shining in the background.

The next bite featured is "Love" once again made easily palatable. The romantic triangle between Lelaina, Troy and Michael is introduced immediately and importantly, economic concerns are revisited. Thus, while the film is basically a love story and can be relied upon to attract viewers who favour such films, the filmmakers take the opportunity

to inject an additional avenue of identification into the traditional generic terrain. This occurs when Troy maligns (within the context of this film) Michael's character by labelling him a "yuppie." Lelaina vehemently denies Michael's status as a yuppie but it is visually apparent that Michael differs from Troy and Lelaina financially. Throughout the trailer, Michael always appears in a suit with closely-cropped hair and a clean shaven face. Conversely, Troy sports second-hand or vintage clothing including blue jeans and faded shirts, with long, greasy hair as well as scruffy facial hair. Michael appears most comfortable in settings such as the fancy restaurant, and the back seat of his luxury automobile; while Troy is introduced to viewers at his most comfortable, lounging around Lelaina's and Vicki's shabby apartment.

Even in the trailer, the ease with which Troy communicates contrasts sharply with Michael's unease. It is Troy who is afforded all of the sarcastic and biting comments about Michael, such as when he asks Lelaina if Michael dazzled her with "his extensive knowledge of mineral water," while Michael is hard pressed to utter a complete sentence. He can barely ask Troy what his "glitch" is. The positioning of the two male characters primes the viewer to identify with Troy. Faced with this choice, how many people would decline the opportunity to be the eloquent speaker, capable of witty repartee, the person who speaks from a place of social conscience? Michael is depicted as wooden, stupid and as a sell-out -- everything that generation X is supposed to be rebelling against. The social climate at the time this film was released is crucial. The filmmakers were hoping and assuming that viewers with any concern for appearances and trends would likely identify with Troy over Michael and thus would be satisfied with the film's ending bringing Troy and Lelaina together as a romantic couple; the success of this approach, favouring Troy

over Michael, will be examined in the viewer comments section of the analysis.

The final selection of bites comes in the form of a series of title cards featuring the names of the film's stars followed by attractive shots of them within the film. The first actor featured is Winona Ryder. We see her smiling, luminous face in a tight close-up shot. Then we see her hugging a friend and finally we see her walking and talking with Troy, coffee and cigarette in hand. Overall Winona's character is made to appear friendly and approachable, like someone potential viewers would like to know or perhaps be.

Next we see Ethan Hawke's name on a title card. Then we see a close-up of his face back-lit in an attractive lighting pattern with a soulful look upon his face. Then we see him with his arms spread wide behind him, beer bottle in hand. He appears happy as though he is really living his life according to his own design. And finally, we see Ben Stiller's name on a black title card followed by two comic shots of him. He is first shown trying to operate a remote control device at the "In Your Face" premiere of Lelaina's documentary. Then we see him struggling with a deployed air bag in his BMW. Once again, a clear distinction is made between the two love interests. Troy is suave and cool while Michael plays the bumbling idiot. Despite the fact that Michael is a successful executive, the choice is made clear to the theatrical trailer viewers: this film is about distancing oneself from the un-cool. Ironic disengagement and positioning wins out over mainstream commercialism.

Finally, we see a group shot of the four friends. Lelaina, Vicki and Sammy dance in a gas station store while Troy looks on in bemusement. The purpose of the close-up shots and the group shots in the trailer is to encourage viewer consumption. At the core of the film, lie the actors who portray the characters that viewers either identify with or

dislike and the purpose of the trailer (and the entire film) is to make the actors easily consumable. Again, who would not want to be (like) Winona and Ethan with their physical beauty, their sex appeal and their pleasing personalities? Viewers are meant to consume them, to want to watch them onscreen, to want to buy the clothing they wear, to style their hair the way they do, to wear the shoes they do, to profess the same opinions they do, to want to listen to the same music they do, ad infinitum. This motivation is at play in every aspect of the film and in all of its marketing techniques.

Even the actors themselves identify with the types of characters they portray within the film as indicated by their quotations in the "Production Information" portion of the film's promotional package. Ethan Hawke claims that "I literally left the studio and just praised the god of acting for taking me to such a place. I think most of us secretly want to be a rock star and it was great to indulge that fantasy for a brief moment." Winona identified with her character as well. She states that, "It was very true to life. I understood the character Lelaina and my impression of her was that she said the things I could only wish I would think of -- on the spot, instead of later in the car on the way home."

Music plays a crucial role in Reality Bites. Not only is Troy a wannabe rock star but the film's sound track functions as an important selling point for the viewer. In terms of driving home the intended themes and messages of the film, the trailer's subtle use of music conveys the idea that what viewers see on screen is how young people are supposed to be. If you are not dealing with the same sorts of issues, if you do not have a close group of friends, if you do not share a shabby apartment, and have a substandard job at the age of 23, then there is something wrong with you. The trailer begins with David Bowie's

song "Young Americans" playing in the background. The song is about the American dream and the false expectations that dream entails. Interestingly, the song lyrics are mostly obscured throughout the trailer so that the message the song tries to convey is lost. All that is audible is the chorus of the song which is used to emphasize the picture of young Americans the film wants to portray. For instance, we first hear the chorus during the portion of the trailer when Troy and Lelaina agree that all they need is "you, me and five bucks." The next time the lyrics become discernible is during Vicki's appraisal of Troy. As she says "he's strange, he's sloppy, he's a nightmare for women. I can't believe I haven't slept with him yet," one hears the chorus again: "All night / You want the young American / Young American, young American, you want the young American / All right / You want the young American." Rather than highlight the social comment inherent in the song, the filmmakers chose to ignore it and focus on using the song to sell the image of the ideal American: young, physically attractive, superficially socially conscious and moderately intelligent.

An overview of Reality Bites' critical reception will now be offered followed by an examination of viewer responses. In total eleven popular reviews were consulted for this thesis. These include reviews from the Christian Science Monitor, Los Angeles Times, New Statesman & Society, New York, New York Post, Newsday, Newsweek, Sight and Sound, Time, Village Voice and Chicago Sun-Times. The film's reception was not overwhelmingly negative but rather more reservedly tepid. Popular reviewers appear to be simply noting the film's release without any great measure of fan fare. The reviewer for Village Voice describes the film as a "cute but toothless romantic comedy" (FRA 1213). Michael Medved of New York Post writes, "The billboards advertise Reality Bites as an

epochal event -- nothing less than a potentially definitive 'Comedy About Love in the '90s' . . . [while] the actual film is hardly as grand and sweeping as all that" (1209). Jack Mathews of Newsday writes that "beneath all the MTV and camcorder images, the pop references to 7-Eleven Big Gulps and Peter Frampton, the anxious dialogue about dead-end jobs and AIDS, and the obsession with '70s TV sitcoms, Ben Stiller's romantic comedy Reality Bites is a very old-fashioned and very predictable love story" (1210). Marilynne S. Mason of Christian Science Monitor writes, "the filmmakers grasp the horror of materialism, but in the end, they have nothing significant to say about it" (1205) and the reviewer for Sight and Sound echoes this criticism claiming that the film exhibits "most of the confusions it wants to nail" but then concedes that "every now and then the film is genuinely smart and funny" (1212). Many reviewers enjoyed aspects of the film; few praised it wholeheartedly. One distinguishing characteristic is that many of the reviewers distanced themselves from the film and its characters, as if they cannot understand the generation the film attempts to portray.

Nine of the eleven reviews include the mention of the word "generation" or more specifically "generation X." Clearly, reviewers immediately saw the film as attempting to encapsulate the image of generation X; this fact is noteworthy because the film never explicitly aligns itself with this nomenclature, thus further proving the point that the social climate constructed by the media at the time of the film's release had primed all viewers, including paid journalists, to see this film as one speaking of and for generation X.

All viewer comments were taken from the "Reality Bites" portion of the Internet Movie Database website and in total, fifty seven viewer comments were analyzed. Of these fifty seven reviews, a total of twenty five associated Reality Bites with the term

generation X. Furthermore, an additional ten viewers characterized the film as "realistic." For the purposes of this thesis, the descriptor "realistic" will be interpreted to mean true to life, as being something that the commentator can relate to in his or her own life; for example, several viewers commented that they could see themselves and their friends' situations in the film. 'triple8' from Connecticut says that the film "deals with relevant issues many kids do deal with. I liked that the movie took real issues and dealt with them in a realistic manner and I guess alot of people could relate to this movie." In a similar vein, 'TxMike' states that "'Reality Bites' are snippets of reality, without judging whether they are good or bad." And finally, 'danish99' exclaims: "Wow, this movie defines my whole life."

Of those who enjoyed the film, the often repeated reason behind their approval is that Reality Bites both captures the sentiment of a generation and relates to viewers in a way that they can identify with. In the summary line, Rudiger Kipferl states that, "This is how they will remember Generation X in years to come" and 'Mari-36' states that the film is a "Pretty good Generation X portrait." Rudiger continues:

Working for a psychology reading about 'Generation X' at the university, I met 'Reality Bites' again, this time with a totally different approach. This time, the movie did not change my life, but gave me a perfect example what 'Generation X', if it ever really existed, was all about.

A generation 'over-educated and under-employed' was fighting for their right to exist, and the older Generations perceived it as a cunning way of escaping responsibilities while in fact the young people only wanted to

give their life some direction and meaning.

Clearly, as the responses noted thus far indicate, some viewers did respond to the film in positive ways. The angle the filmmakers adopted was a successful one with some viewers. Of the positive reviews, thirty-four in total, nine individuals describe themselves as personally affected by Reality Bites. These viewers report the touching of their emotions in conjunction with them being able to relate to the characters and the situations they find themselves in on screen. For example, the summary line of ‘blue26’'s comment reads: “why this is the best movie ever made.” ‘blue26’ explains, “this film is my very favourite because it is the only movie i have ever seen that has left me touched and satisfied with my own life.” Likewise, ‘Lejla_83’ exclaims, “...This movie is great and everybody who disagrees must be crazy!!! ‘Reality Bites’ has been one of my favourite movies for years and I will never get tired of it. I’ve seen it so much times and everytime after seeing it I for some reason feel great.”

Other viewers, while not expressing their opinions quite as explicitly as ‘blue26’ and ‘Lejla_83,’ do exhibit a certain exuberance in their comments and the sense that just writing about the film brings them happiness; this sentiment is evident in the following viewer comments. ‘pakorodriguez’ writes that “Yeah, I was born in 1971, a true genXer and I watched this movie in 94 and I liked it, then some years ago I found it pretty depressing and dull, but then when I was 30 I watched it again and I remembered why I had loved this film, funny and poignant. There are some flaws[,] but these guys are my youth, how I felt in some moment of my 20s. Maybe my kids tell me in 2015 that is an old movie, but I love this film.” ‘KW_118’ comments that:

I’ll admit that I’m not really a member of the generation this movie

was intended to “speak to” but oddly enough I find it amazingly easy to relate to. A friend of mine was the one who initially suggested I see it, claiming that I’d love it since it’s a lot like the other movies that my group of friends love like “Empire Records” and such. So one day I was browsing through the videos at Blockbuster when I remembered that she’d recommended it. I rented it right there and hurried home to pop it into the VCR. And it was amazing. It was, at times, oddly close to the way my friends and I act (without the drugs part). We’ve been known to sit around and sing strange songs like ‘Conjunction Junction’ and ‘Bad Boys (The Theme from Cops)’ while in restaurants just because we felt like it. And the movie really captures the whole point of doing things like that, the freedom of just having fun with your friends ... So, what I’m getting at is, yeah, it has flaws, all movies do. But it also maintains a clear and wonderful message without having to force it down your throat. I most defiantly recommend it.

‘KW_118’'s comment demonstrates a certain amount of creativity in terms of its structure and tone. Rather than simply providing a critique of the film, this viewer turns his or her review into a personal story. The interested reader learns something about the reviewer and his or her group of friends in the process and the use of the term “defiantly” comes across as endearing. It is clear that ‘KW_118’ was affected personally by Reality Bites. A similar level of creativity can be found in ‘Jan Krzysztof Pelczar’'s response. He or she writes that:

It’s an extraordinary movie about love and relationships in 90’s. I

don't believe you if you say you don't see our everyday choices in this film. Lelaina Pierce is simply one of us, a person trapped in 'The Mc World' ... I know you also want to record your voice on an answering machine in the way Ethan Hawke did it in the final scene. It's as obvious as enjoying a moment, a few seconds before the rain...

Not only does 'Jan' profess his or her love of the film but he or she does so in a way that positions the act of watching the film as an experience. And 'Jan' describes this experience in poetic terms that once again have the effect of personalizing the act. Responses such as those discussed and presented thus far demonstrate the fact that viewers find themselves in the films they watch; this is to say that these viewers both accept that a part of their identity comes from and is recognized by the film, Reality Bites.

Rather than judge viewers who recognize themselves in the film for being corporate shills or mindless consumers, the creative act of posting a film review is evidence that viewers are using Hollywood products in ways that bring meaning to their lives in ways that are not necessarily governed by corporations; and the value of this process cannot be underestimated on the personal level. This benefit is by no means limited to those commentators who write positive reviews; the same value can be ascribed to viewers who disliked the film.

The makers and marketers of Reality Bites took a gamble, as any publicity team does, when deciding which tack to take in order to draw audiences to their film. For those reviewers who disliked Reality Bites, in some cases even their appreciation for a given actor could not overcome their distaste for the film's themes and characters. Like the positive reviews, those who offered negative reviews often demonstrated a large amount

of personal involvement in terms of their responses to the film. For example, one strong characteristic of the negative reviews is a high degree of sarcasm. 'matthew wilder' describes the film as a "suicide-inducing warehouse of gen-x mannerisms" while 'atlanta' claims that the film is "about as deep and insightful as an episode of Dawson's Creek." In some cases the sarcasm crosses over into what appears to be genuine anger. 'Suave' reports that "The correct title of the film should have been, 'Being a loser is cool.' I, as a part of the age group portrayed in this movie, am totally offended by the characters portrayed in this 'film.'" 'SelfFate's' response reads as more of a tirade than a mere film review. He or she writes:

Reality Bites, is a film in my life that I reserve for comments of complete falsity, and absurdity that I find HIGHLY offensive. I don't mean offensive in the moral sense where you might have some zealot wanting to censor art...

Oh no, that's not what I am talking about. I saw this film in the theatre paying as a University student with my sister. Here is a film that was suppose to be about us, about our so called generation (no I am not even going to use that BULL***T label that's been used). Crap. What an UNREALISTIC portrayal of people who are supposed to be me?? Educated people who can't find work and are depressed cause they feel life is not fair, and they never got a job after they graduated. GET OVER IT! and then you have some villain type character who is successful and is portrayed as the anti-thesis of whta you should be. GIVE ME A BREAK!!!!!!

AND WHAT a false ending... I had no sympathy for ANY of these characters (except Stiller) who are nothing more than some MARKETING person's idea of what THEY think late 90's young adults should be. Great message to send to people, be an educated slacker, SHUN work, do some occasional drug use, fret about your parents divorce, and go nowhere... and somewhere you are happy in all this (DON'T ask me how that works).

Yeah that's a great message.

I don't know anyone of 'my generation' who is like this, but it seems this movie paints everyone of my era with this horrid brush. Everyone I knew who was truddging through the early 90's and the recession WANTED a job and had an idea for the future, unlike these fakes.

Here's a better message for this film

Try this one...

Get a life.

Rating "undeserved" out of 10"

Once again, clearly reviewers were deeply affected by the film and in the case of 'SelfFate,' on several, very personal levels.

The issue of misrepresentation is a major one to these viewers. Numerous commentators report displeasure because they feel that Reality Bites maligns their generation; this idea is key to this thesis because it confirms the notion that viewers appreciate and expect to see themselves reflected on the movie screen. If the filmic representation does not meet their expectations, they are often deeply dissatisfied. In

some cases, the act of writing and posting the review is an attempt to strike back at the false representation as in the case of 'atlanta' who claims that "if you 'see yourself' in [Reality Bites], look a little deeper--'cause there's a moron staring back at you...!"

Other viewers rejected the film because they felt that its treatment of early 1990s issues was too perfunctory. This comment was often raised in relation to the characters of Michael and Troy: the yuppie versus the slacker, in generation X terminology. Reviewers often preferred Michael over Troy and were disappointed that Lelaina chose Troy in the end. 'chrishallam_' is clearly aware of the posturing the filmmakers engage in to make audiences identify more strongly with Troy. He or she states that "For some reason we are clearly supposed to sympathise more with Troy than Michael. Yet Troy never comes across as anything other than a deeply pretentious bore, while Michael, whom we are presumably supposed to think is a malevolent yuppie, in fact comes across as a nice enough, perfectly decent chap . . . The only thing that would stop the audience rooting for Stiller over Hawke in the film is the fact that she and all the other characters are such shallow unlikeable characters."

Viewers dislike of the anti-commercialism bias personified in the choice between Michael and Troy suggests a failure on the part of the film's marketing team. No one story line can be expected to draw in every conceivable viewer; however, the tepid response the film drew from reviewers, both professional and amateur alike, signifies a failure on the part of the film's marketing team. It is clear that the over-utilisation of the term generation X and all its themes and stock characters contributed to the film's poor reception among viewers. The term acted as a lightning rod and split viewers down the middle; thus ensuring its relative failure at the box-office.

Chapter Two: Scream: A Question of Genre

"The movies lie at the nexus of popular, mass, middlebrow, and highbrow; because they can be appropriated by each taste group against the other, they remained for years the prime focus of taste distinctions within our culture." (Taylor 18) The veracity of this statement is not limited to the distant past or even the near past; for many viewers today, film continues to be an arbiter of taste and this is particularly evident in the viewer-posted reviews of the 1996 release Scream on the website, Internet Movie Database (IMDb). The reviews range from positive to negative, from glowing affirmations to heated rants but throughout, one constant remains: for the viewer, his or her opinion of the film constitutes a defining element of who he or she is as a person. If the truth of this last statement is doubted, one need only examine some individuals' reluctance to admit to liking certain films or film genres, to ascertain that film taste is indeed equivalent to overall discernment in the minds of many people. Somewhat akin to a "coming out," viewers will often only reluctantly and sometimes guiltily admit to appreciating certain film genres, for example horror films or women's prison films, because they "fear" what their penchant for these films says about them as individuals. (Altman 161). This chapter examines the popular film Scream. The film is ostensibly a member of the horror genre; although, importantly, horror is not the only genre in which it can be grouped comfortably. The production and marketing teams responsible for Scream's success sought to ensure audience satisfaction and identification at all times; thus the techniques employed within the film and its marketing material will be examined in order to determine the ways in which the filmmakers sought to frame the film for maximum audience satisfaction.

Following that discussion, the analysis will then turn to the ways in which popular reviewers received the film and look to see whether Internet Movie Database viewers accepted or rejected the framing of the film both by the production team and by critics.

In his text Film/Genre, Rick Altman defines generic fandom as consisting of groups of fans he terms "constellated communities" (161). Films and other forms of non-live entertainment deal in separate or private audiences, that is with absent yet implied audiences (160). According to Altman, "[n]ot only industry discourse, but critical language, passing comments and chance encounters provide the reference points that permit genre fans to imagine - perhaps unconsciously - the absent community with which they share a particular taste" (161). Although there may actually be limited contact between fans or rather members of the given community, they "cohere only through repeated acts of imagination" (161). Altman continues the analogy, explaining that in the sky, "constellations don't always have the same appearance; nor do they appear the same way to all viewers. One viewer's Big Dipper is another's Big Bear. Some stars that I think of as constituting a single constellation may be split by another star gazer into two or more separate constellations" (161). In the same way, film fans are free to belong to as many fan groups as they desire; the groups and their members are heterogeneous and no two members of a particular group are likely to view the group in the same way. Thus, film viewers are free to imagine themselves and their identities according to their own needs. In any given genre film there exist a number of generic elements; no one genre film adheres strictly to a given set of genre conventions. Genre mixing is part of Hollywood film production and has proven useful for viewers because it allows them to pick and choose their preferred elements, to conceptualize their "community" as they see fit. The

more avenues of identification available, the more ways in which multiple sets of viewers can identify with the film and therefore the higher the profit margin for the production company. This technique was not so successfully manipulated in the case of Reality Bites but is played to maximum effect and financial success in the case of Scream.

As previously mentioned, Scream can be placed within the horror genre and it has been by many critics seeking to distinguish their view of genre theory. This thesis is not concerned with positioning Scream within any one genre. Rather, it will at all times seek to avoid labelling the film as distinctly generic; in this sense, the analysis will be adopting the same practice long held by major Hollywood studios; however, the two motivations, studio and thesis, do differ. According to Altman, generic claims are always discursive (102). He states that "genres are not inert categories shared by all . . . , but discursive claims made by real speakers for particular purposes in specific situations . . . The history of genre theory may thus conveniently be retold as the history of user attempts to conceal their own activity and purpose" (101). Hollywood's practicality is illustrated by its treatment of genre. A major film can never hope to make a profit on the basis of genre alone because strong genre identification can only be sure to attract one group of fans while potentially chasing away legions of viewers who dislike the particular genre emphasized. Likewise, a genre can never be the sole property of one studio (115) and is thus, wholly unattractive from a marketing and monetary standpoint (112). If one studio has a box office hit with a musical film, every other studio is free to co-opt the genre for themselves and run the cycle into the ground. There is no money to be made from genres; there is, however, a much greater chance for financial gain when studios emphasize proprietary items such as specific contract actors, house directors, proprietary characters

and patented processes (115).

To whom are the makers of Scream addressing their marketing campaign? What treatment does genre receive? What non-generic components do they choose to emphasize in their marketing campaign and in the film? These questions and others will be answered subsequently. Suffice it to say, the makers and marketers of Scream were highly successful in their aims and discursive claims as evidenced by the film's strong box office numbers. As for this thesis, generic claims are avoided in order to allow the viewer-posted comments about genre to speak for themselves without imposing too heavy an academic shadow on what viewers wish to make of the film for themselves.

Director Wes Craven's description of the film hints at his reluctance to label the film as any one genre in particular:

The style and the humour and the scares are the best of what I've done over the years. It's about kids who are fascinated by horror films, and somebody is killing them off and using clichés from those kinds of movies. There are scenes in it straight out of that genre, and in that sense it looks like a slasher film, if you want to use that term. But around that there is this kind of sophisticated murder mystery dealing with kids in real life. It's much more naturalistic, about lives that are being invaded by this world that they have only looked to for amusement. It's also darkly funny.

(Robb 178)

Craven identifies five types of film genres in this statement: horror, slasher, murder mystery, dark comedy and teen films. The fact that he envisions several different generic elements in his film illustrates an overall reluctance to categorically limit the film. Just as

the director, whether he is thinking artistically, financially or both, refuses to define the film's generic limits, the studio does so as well. On the one hand, Craven admits that Scream shares elements of the horror genre and his reticence about any relation the film has to the slasher category is obvious in the fact that his mention of the "genre" is done in a back-handed fashion; he is quick to emphasize the more culturally acceptable, more easily palatable, middlebrow elements of which the film is comprised: murder mystery and dark comedy; the latter is thrown in almost as an after-thought lest the other four prove distasteful. In addition, should all five genres prove unpalatable to perspective viewers, Craven focuses on his own personal achievements, acknowledging that Scream is the "best" of the work he has done; therefore, any viewer who considers him or herself a fan should want to see the film the respected director considers his own best work.

As expected generic elements are downplayed within the trailer. Studios engage in a balancing act when attempting to market a film. Altman's explanation of studio practice is illustrative. He states that for a studio, "naming a genre is tantamount to taking a political stand, and always risks alienating potential spectators who systematically avoid that genre, Hollywood studios instead prefer to imply generic affiliation rather than actually to name any specific genre ... The goal is of course to attract those who recognize and appreciate the signs of a particular genre, while avoiding repulsion of those who dislike the genre" (128). One might imagine that in the case of Scream, given the title alone, it would be difficult to hide the fact that the film is meant to be a scary one, part of any number of genres from horror to stalker and slasher, to murder mystery and suspense, etc. Nonetheless, the trailer makes virtually no mention of a specific genre and instead uses the term "scary movie" not once but a total of five times in two minutes; thereby

permitting the viewer to substitute his or her preferred genre for the adjective "scary." So, while the overall generic quality of fear and the goal of fear inducement can hardly be hidden in this type of film, because it is a central element of the narrative and filmic styles, the makers of the trailer work to de-emphasize any specific genre and to prevent precise generic terminology being associated with Scream. It is also worth noting that during production the film's working title was "Scary Movie."

It is not until the end of the trailer that the one and only mention of a specific genre occurs; and importantly, this acknowledgment takes place in conjunction with a proprietary property. A series of title cards listing the rules that the characters within the film and those who are watching the film need to follow in order to survive a scary movie appear on screen. These instructional cards are followed by three additional cards that read: "From the First Name in Suspense," "Director Wes Craven," "Comes the Last Word in Fear." Here the producers of the trailer are seeking to establish a superior standing for director Craven by claiming the title "First Name in Suspense" for him. The mention of his name also affords a brand name status to the film. Fans of Craven's work would likely want to see the film because of their appreciation for the director. Also, the attempt to hype the director's name brings clout to the project, due to the prestige afforded certain directors via the auteur theory some fans and critics follow; Craven's name has been used in conjunction with several films in an attempt to add prestige to the various productions. Two examples are Wes Craven's New Nightmare (1994) and Wes Craven's Wishmaster (1997). In the case of Scream, the logic behind this naming ploy is that, should the film be a financial success, the studio would have first rights to subsequent Scream films. Prior to the film's release, in fact prior to even selling the screenplay, treatments for the second and

third Scream films had already been penned by screenwriter Kevin Williamson (Robb 176). Thus, the studio had a vested interest in establishing the film's director as a marketable commodity. By playing on the conventions and expectations that fans of the genre have, the makers of the trailer turn to a recognized name within the genre, in order to suggest that Craven, the director who helped create those generic expectations in the 1970s and the 1980s, is the best person to turn those conventions inside out in proper postmodern fashion. The phrasing also has the air of a major event. Scream is not just another film; its release is touted as a defining moment in movie history, the "Last Word in Fear."

The way that the generic conventions of horror/stalker/slasher/murder mystery films are introduced within the trailer also illustrates an appeal to specific segments of the potential viewing audience. The trailer instructs viewers as to the rules of scary movies; thus, fans of those genres and now even those previously unfamiliar with the rules can appreciate the film. It begins with the narrator telling viewers that "someone is playing a deadly game." This same someone has "taken his love of fear one step too far . . . He didn't make the rules. He just kills by them." The viewer is presented with a shot of Sidney Prescott, played by Neve Campbell, talking to the killer on the phone. He asks her if she likes scary movies and she replies, "What's the point? They're all the same -- some stupid killer stalking some big-breasted girl who can't act, who's always running up the stairs when she should be going out the front door. It's insulting." When she mentions the "big-breasted girl," a shot of Rose McGowan's bosom is shown in order to indicate that her character Tatum is the big-breasted girl in Scream; check that requirement off the list. Likewise, when Sidney describes the girl running up the stairs, instead of out the front door, the viewer is presented with a shot of Sidney being chased by Ghost Face and

running up the stairs instead of out the front door as she herself insists must be done. Next the viewer sees Randy Meeks, played by Jamie Kennedy, describing the rules one must abide by in order to survive a scary movie. He says "Number one, you can never have sex"; this interdiction is contradicted by shots of Sidney removing her shirt with her boyfriend looking on, followed by an obscured shot of her removing her bra. Randy is then heard to continue: "Never, ever, ever, under any circumstances say 'I'll be right back' 'cause you won't be back." This statement is then compared to shots of Stu Macher, played by Matthew Lillard, telling a crowd of teenagers and Randy that he will be "right back." The instructions continue via title cards. Viewers are told "Don't Answer the Phone"; we see Casey Becker (Drew Barrymore) crying and shrieking in terror as her telephone rings. The next card reads "Don't Open the Door;" we see a shot of Sidney opening her door, screaming in abject terror at what ever or who ever is on the other side. The next title card advises "Don't Try to Hide"; then shots of Casey hiding and Sidney hurriedly locking a door are shown. Finally, Randy informs viewers that "Everyone is a suspect."

Now, not only fans of the these genres can appreciate the film but all viewers. In fact, the enjoyment for both is potentially heightened because first the rules are explained; potentially every viewer can feel that he or she is a member of the fan group and keepers of insider knowledge. Then the viewer witnesses each of the rules or forms of advice being ignored by the characters within the film, as expected. However, the trailer and characters also display high levels of self-reflexivity and self-referentiality (Schneider 83); they both refer to actors in other films and now realize that they are actually characters in a film. Thus, the breaking of the rules constitutes a point of pleasure for viewers because

on the one hand, the characters in the film will be committing the mistakes that viewers expect, as seen in the trailer, but at the same time the viewer can expect that, being aware that they are in a scary movie, some of the clichés and conventions will be broken by characters within the film. Viewers, like Sidney, who dislike films of this type because they are "insulting," may find Scream a refreshing change. Now viewers can watch characters who have seen the same scary films as themselves and who will react according to the advice that audiences have been yelling at movie and television screens for years.

Thus, there are actually two kinds of rule breakage occurring within the trailer and the film. First, there is the kind of rule breaking that can be termed standard for this genre of film and constitutes an ignoring of the rules or simply a character who is oblivious to the rules. For example, instead of running out the front door, the victim runs up the stairs, usually to her death. Then there is the other kind of rule breaking; one which can be termed a deconstruction of generic conventions where either a character knows that he or she is living out the plot of a scary movie or where a generic rule is ignored yet the character survives. In the trailer, the clearest example of this second form is that of Randy instructing his young friends as to how to survive a scary movie. The very fact that the characters are aware that they are in a scary movie constitutes an exception to the rules. In the film, numerous examples of this second kind of rule breaking occur. For example, just after Randy advises his friends and film viewers to never say "I'll be right back," Gale Weathers, played by Courtney Cox, tells her cameraman that she will be "right back." If this were any other film prior to Scream, Gale's character would have been murdered promptly and would, in fact, never have been "right back." In this case however, Gale successfully survives the killers' attempts to murder her and lives to the end of the film and

on into the sequels.

Genre is treated in a similar fashion on both the theatrical poster (<http://www.impawards.com/1996/scream.html>) and the packaging on the DVD case. The poster features a close-up of a woman's face. There are two striking features about this image. First, set against the black and white tones of the poster, the woman's piercing blue eyes, open wide in fright stand out visually. The other most noticeable aspect is the hand covering the woman's partially open mouth. The title of the film appears across the back of the hand, as if to illustrate that the hand is stifling the woman's scream. Once again, there is little point in trying to hide the fact that Scream is a scary movie and the poster does not try to do so. Viewers of the poster know almost instantly that the face on the poster is reacting in terror; yet, the actual and precise nature of the film's generic category is still largely obscured. The topmost caption on the poster reads, "Someone has taken their love of scary movies one step too far. Solving this mystery is going to be murder." The bottommost caption on the poster reads, "The highly acclaimed new thriller from Wes Craven." Here again, as in the trailer, multiple genres are mentioned: murder mystery and thriller, as well as the catch-all "scary movie". Refusing to pin the generic terrain of the film down to any one category allows the viewer to insert his or her desired genre. And importantly, the poster also advises potential viewers that Scream has been well received by critics and credits the film's director at the same time, encouraging viewers to hurry to the theatre to watch the film.

Genre is further downplayed on the DVD box. The producers of the DVD synopsis chose to highlight the critical response to Scream and it is only through the acknowledgment of the critical reception the film garnered that the film's genre is touched

upon at all. At the very top of the back of the box, and in large red letters, the film is declared "'A Clever Thriller!'" by The Washington Post. Then in the first line of the synopsis, the author acknowledges that "critics are calling SCREAM the hippest thriller of the year!" And of course, in keeping with established practice, the front of the DVD box utilizes the key phrase "scary movie." Rather than allowing the film to be hyped as a horror film or as a stalker film, the producers allow it to be named with the gentlest of the genres available to them; so as viewers who are familiar with Craven's past work and individuals who have seen the trailer might suspect, Scream encompasses far more generic terrain than just the thriller; however, the most gruesome of its generic elements is de-emphasized on the DVD box.

Instead the synopsis shifts attention to the style and "hip-ness" of the film and its cast. Elements of this type of promotion are of course evident in every form of marketing material released for the film and in the actual film itself as well; but the analysis will begin with the DVD case. The front of the box provides a description by WBAI Radio, New York, calling the film "'Clever, Hip And Scary!'" The popularity of the cast is highlighted immediately with a description of the actors as "sizzling" printed in the very first line of the synopsis. They are subsequently described as "all-star talent" and special attention is given to the names of Drew Barrymore, Courtney Cox, Neve Campbell, Skeet Ulrich and David Arquette. Drew Barrymore had appeared in a number of films prior to Scream and could easily be described as a well-known actress, probably the most well known of the group. Courteney Cox had also appeared in several films before her work in Scream; however, she was most well known for her work as Monica Geller on the popular television program Friends. Neve Campbell's most noteworthy success and popularity had come

from her role on television's Party of Five. All five actors were well known, popular figures who would bring their own fans to the film thanks to the work they had done previously. Here the prime concern for the creators of the DVD case is to emphasize the cool factor of the cast and of the film as a result. Scream is not meant to be sober and overtly mature. It is meant to be exciting and breath-taking, featuring cool, young actors with whom audiences will want to identify. Thus, every opportunity is taken to showcase the actors as attractive individuals yet not so attractive that they be too far removed from the average North American teenager. The front of the DVD case features most of the same elements as the poster described already, but this time the five actors named in the synopsis appear in a row below the hand covering the woman's mouth and above the title "SCREAM." As expected the five actors and actresses appear at their physical best, each staring out at the imagined observer with wary looks, suggesting, according to Randy's admonition that "everybody's a suspect," perhaps even the absent viewer; this look is actually an inviting technique that draws the viewer in. All five actors are shown from the shoulders up, wearing black clothing that permits the rest of their bodies to blend into the black background of the cover image. This blending quality is important because once again it hints at the production's attempts to present a strong image but one which can easily blend into the ways in which the audience wants/needs to see it. While some might term the image stylish, it is clear that the marketing department considers the stars of the film a strong enough selling point that the cast can constitute a large portion of the cover package and thus avoid further artistic considerations in their attempt to grab buyers' attention.

The overall picture created in the trailer and the film is that the cast members, as

attractive teenagers, are facing a horrific problem. As individuals they are not average looking; however, their individual appearances are not so far removed from reality that they are unbelievable; rather the fact that so many attractive individuals should belong to the same group of friends is what is less believable. But that is Hollywood and mainstream viewers are likely accustomed to this fact. The clothing worn by the teenagers in the trailer is not obviously brand-name; instead, the majority of them wear basic articles of clothing. For example, Casey Becker is shown in a simple off-white sweater and light blue chino-style pants; Stu Macher wears an oversized beige sweater; Sidney Prescott appears in an oversized grey sweatshirt and a plain jean jacket over a purple T-shirt. The only obvious brand name article of clothing in the film is the "Fresh Jive" T-shirt that Randy wears at Stu's party. All in all their attire is far from that of obvious designer labels; this fact is important because it indicates an attempt on the part of the production team to make the characters appear normal and not too far removed from the actual reality of high school life. Although they are physically beautiful, these characters are perhaps easier to identify with, physically speaking, than the characters in other films of this type, because, even though their attire is pleasing, it matches the type of clothing that many teens can afford to wear. Also, the absence of identifiable brand names means that viewers who dislike certain brands will not be turned off by the Scream characters on the basis of negative brand association. In this respect, Scream is unlike many other teen films; brand-names and brand-name products are downplayed here. Very few brand-name products appear on screen, unlike in Reality Bites.

Within the film itself, there are several characters with whom audience allegiances are most likely to lie. These would include Sidney Prescott, Gale Weathers, Deputy

Dewey Riley (David Arquette) and Randy Meeks. However, this is not to suggest that some members of the audience will not identify with other characters at various points throughout the film; that is the nature of the murder mystery: "everybody's a suspect" and therefore no one character can be trusted completely throughout the entire film. It is precisely the nature of this combination of teen film and murder mystery that provides fertile ground for audience identification in Scream. Audience/character allegiances are meant to shift throughout and thus more opportunities exist for individual viewers to find a character they like and identify with particularly because, as a suspenseful "whodunit," the film is supposed to be continually trying to manipulate viewer allegiances. Great emphasis is placed on the fact that these teenagers are average American teens; the target demographic market is supposed to feel that they are watching characters like themselves on screen; this effect is achieved in a variety of ways. First, as previously mentioned, the characters are played by actors who appear very normal, neither extremely high class nor obviously low class but happily middleclass. Here the filmmakers once again tread a fine line. The clothing worn by the characters in the film provides direct evidence of the production's attempt to depict realistic teens. Yet, at the same time the filmmakers fall back on a normative but not necessarily realistic representation of teenage life using the middle class experience; this theme is carried throughout by the material circumstances surrounding the teenaged characters within the film. Each of the teenagers is shown in possession of numerous attractive personal items such as Billy's and Stu's cellular phones, the red Volkswagen beetle that Tatum drives, and the numerous personal items featured in Sidney's and Tatum's fully-decorated bedrooms: a stereo and CDs, a computer, posters and stuffed toys, a matching arm chair and ottoman and a fireplace; all personal items that

the average teen would be happy to own. The girls' rooms are attractive and indicate that they are not wanting material possessions. An examination of the three family homes, Casey's, Sidney's and Stu's, that act as settings during the film further demonstrates evidence of great material wealth and comfortable middle class lifestyles.

The film begins with Casey answering the telephone in her family's spacious kitchen, a kitchen that is well-appointed with the finest stainless steel appliances and a professional oven range. As the narrative progresses the viewer observes Casey moving through the house, passing antique furniture and numerous pieces of artwork adorning the walls and table tops. Overall, the house is large and spacious, and this effect is amplified by the white walls and glass doors and windows abounding throughout. Exterior shots reveal that it is a large country home complete with pool, pool house and the picture-perfect swing hanging from a large tree at the side of the house. Finally, near the end of the scene, the idea that the Becker home is located within a generally idyllic, family setting gone awry is driven home when Casey's father urges her mother to drive to the McKenzie's house to get help; not only does the family know their neighbours' names but they can rely on them, perhaps unlike many urban situations where neighbours keep to themselves, rarely to be seen let alone called upon for help.

Later in the film, the narrative shifts to Sidney's home. She is shown stepping off of a yellow school bus in front of her family's home; this is clearly not an urban or impoverished setting but rather the prosperous and idyllic California countryside. The Prescott family home is perfectly appointed, from the white picket fence surrounding the property to the manicured lawn and the grand gazebo overhanging the entranceway to the front yard. The house itself is large and white, perched high atop one of many rolling

Californian hills; several long shots play up the magnificent vantage point the house enjoys overlooking a lush green valley and the hills beyond. The interior is equally attractive; yet, decorated in a style that differs from the Becker house. The Prescott's home is less shiny and more countrified and classic; it is, however, still spacious and beautifully appointed.

The other family home that is featured prominently within the film is Stu Macher's house which provides the background for the final scenes of the film. Once again, the Macher home is a large, attractive one set in the countryside as opposed to the town of Woodsboro itself. The exterior is not as impressive as the Becker and Prescott homes, but it is still a sizeable dwelling complete with a double garage and a multi-floor stained-glass bay window. The interior is more impressive than the exterior and certainly rivals either the Becker or Prescott homes in terms of beauty. The house features hard-wood floors and rich dark wood trim throughout. Art work and assorted knick-knacks adorn the walls and table surfaces while the second floor of the home features a grand staircase and multi-levels (allowing for a dramatic chase scene between Sidney and Ghost Face). These homes are, in fact, less realistic than the teenage characters themselves; it is unlikely that the majority of viewers live in homes and settings like those featured in the film, but the ideal has been established and the trappings of a middle class existence are used in the film as a representation of the normative existence. Even though viewers may not live in homes like the Becker's, Prescott's or Macher's, they can recognize that what they see on screen in Scream is supposed to represent the American ideal. Working on the premise that viewers are supposed to see themselves on screen, the fact that a scary movie can actually come to life in such an idyllic setting can perhaps be interpreted as indicating that it can happen anywhere. The emphasis on the ideal middle class existence works because

it can appeal to viewers who actually live that ideal (even though they may be few and far between) as well as to viewers who accept that what they see on screen is the way they would like to live, if they had high-paying jobs and nuclear families.

This ideal setting is carried out further by the depiction of Woodsboro itself. The viewer is treated to multiple shots of tree-lined streets. Woodsboro features a large town square complete with water fountain and gazebo; this square is literally the centre of much of the action within the town proper. The high school, a large classical building featuring dramatic columns, is located across from it; the main street complete with police headquarters and large family homes continues on either side of it. There is not a shopping mall in sight. Instead the town is comprised of small and locally-owned shops where customers can park along the street rather than in vast parking lots. The idyllic quality of the setting is further highlighted by a shot of the American flag being raised and by the sight of a mother and child packing up the remains of a picnic in the park. The fact that an ideal middle class existence can be ripped apart horrifically on screen may undermine the viewers' own sense of safety in their less-than-perfect realities. The important question to be answered remains whether viewers accepted the middle class perfection shown in Scream. Were viewers able to identify with this vision?

Aside from their material circumstances, the characters in Scream often exhibit characteristics that differ from those of the typical horror/slasher/stalker genres; this fact only adds to the likeability of the characters and of the film as a whole. The ultimate survivor of these types of films has been termed the "Final Girl" (Clover 143). She is defined as:

[The] one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and

perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again. She is abject terror personified. If her friends knew they were about to die only seconds before the event, the Final Girl lives with the knowledge for long minutes or hours. She alone looks death in the face; but she alone also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued (ending A) or to kill him herself (ending B) . . . [she] often shows more courage and level headedness than [her] cringing male counterparts' . . . [and] . . . Her scene occupies the last ten to twenty minutes . . . and constitutes the film's emphatic climax (143).

For Scream, Sidney Prescott is, at first glance, the standard Final Girl. She is the first to recognize the threat posed by Ghost Face; this fact is clear from her very first reaction to the news that Casey Becker and Steve Orth have been brutally murdered. The scene begins with an overhead shot of the street in front of the high school, a street lined with police cars and news vans. The lawn in front of the school is equally covered with news reporters, police officers and teenagers milling about. Sidney appears on screen, visibly surprised and concerned by the commotion. As she stands listening to Gale Weathers deliver her news report, she lets out a small scream of surprise when Tatum enters quickly from off screen and asks, "Can you believe this shit?" As Tatum relates the horrific details of the murders Sidney becomes increasingly concerned. In response, Sidney asks, "What is going on?" and Tatum replies, "You don't know? Casey Becker and Steve Orth were killed last night." Shocked, Sidney exclaims, "What? No way!" Tatum continues, "And we're not just talking killed -- we're talking splatter movie killed. Ripped open from end

to end." Sidney is affected personally: "Casey Becker? She sits next to me in English." While Tatum remains more distant: "Not any more. It's so sad, her mom and dad? They found her hanging from a tree, her insides on the outside." Sidney reacts to this news in disgust while Tatum remains largely detached; to compound the sense that the majority of the town's inhabitants are oblivious to the danger, large numbers of students are shown blithely entering the school as though nothing has happened in their town. Clearly, Sidney is the only figure who reacts humanely and realizes the danger.

Sidney also meets the standard physical requirements of the Final Girl. She is athletic and not too womanly, a fact compounded by her ambiguous sounding first name. She is capable of fighting off her attackers and does so on more than one occasion. Yet, there are several key ways in which Sidney defies the Final Girl requirements. The Final Girl must be intelligent and perceptive and part of this quality is her demureness; her virginity helps her to resist her would-be killers. Throughout the majority of the film, the issue of Sidney's virginity, and of what Billy terms her "underwear rule," is dealt with as a sideline to the main story. The first time we see Sidney and Billy on screen together is in a scene in which the two discuss the sexual nature of their relationship. Billy compares the relationship to the film rating system. He describes their current status as "edited for TV." He continues, "two years ago, we started off hot and heavy. Nice solid R rating on our way to an NC-17. And now, things have changed." Sidney maintains her self-composure saying, "Oh so, you thought you would climb in my window and we'd have a little raw footage?" At this point, Sidney is virginal but she is not above engaging in what Billy calls "a little on top of the clothes stuff." From the start, the Final Girl requirements are tested because Sidney is flirtatious and these expectations are finally foiled when, in the end,

despite her many reservations, Sidney and Billy retire to Stu's parent's bedroom to have sex. As noted earlier, in any other film of this type, any character who engages in sexual activity is guaranteed a gruesome death scene, and it is virtually unheard of for a Final Girl to do so and still remain the Final Girl; however, in Scream, Sidney has sex and survives.

The ending of the film plays with Final Girl conventions further. Sidney is able to successfully negotiate an escape for her father and herself during the climactic kitchen scene. She turns the tables on Billy and Stu, stealing the voice regulator which the two killers had previously used to torment their victims. Here Sidney tries on the role of tormentor and telephones Billy and Stu. The phone call consists of the following exchange:

Billy: Hello?

Sidney (voice disguised): Are you alone in the house?

Billy: Bitch! You bitch! Where the fuck are you?

Sidney: Not so fast. We're gonna play a little game. It's called (normal voice)

"Guess Who Just Called the Police and Reported Your Sorry

Motherfucking Ass."

. . .

Billy: I'm gonna rip you up, you bitch, just like your fucking mother!

Sidney: You gotta find me first, you pansy-assed mama's boy!

No longer is Sidney a victim. She has taken control and although she is tested, she never fully relinquishes her control for the remainder of the film. To complete the switch, Sidney successfully hides from Billy's frantic search efforts and surprises him by jumping out of the closet and stabbing him twice with an umbrella. She disposes of Stu with

relative ease, knocking a television screen onto his head, and returns to the hallway to ensure that Billy is truly dead (further evidence that Sidney is aware of genre conventions). As expected Billy rises from his seeming death and pins Sidney to the floor. As Billy stands poised to strike the killing blow, Gale, another character presumed out of the action, suddenly returns, shoots Billy in the chest and proudly declares, "I guess I remembered the safety that time, you bastard!", referring to an earlier moment in the final sequence when she seemed to prove her character's conventional ineffectiveness by forgetting to release the safety on the gun when trying to shoot Billy and Stu. The final evidence of the characters' resourcefulness and self-referentiality and of Sidney's departure from Final Girl status comes when Randy advises Sidney to be cautious, saying, "This is the moment where the supposedly dead killer comes back to life . . . for one last scare." As expected, Billy delivers one final grunt and without hesitation, Sidney shoots him in the centre of his forehead, finally dead. She finishes, saying, "Not in my movie." Sidney rewrites the standard generic film ending according to her needs -- very un-Final Girl-like.

But in the final analysis, there is more than one Final Girl in this film. Gale Weathers exhibits many of the same characteristics as Sidney and successfully survives the film, despite her lack of virginal qualities, her lack of a masculine name and her sometime ineffective physical prowess. Furthermore, Dewey and Randy both survive the film as well. At times, both characters do fit the "cringing male" mould described by Clover but, they are not the standard ineffective male figures. As an authority figure, Dewey actually gets close to the action and resists the standard authoritative role, for example, allowing the teens to continue their underage drinking at the party. And Randy realizes to a greater extent than any other character, save Sidney, the extent of the danger posed by the killers

and advocates a cautious approach very early in the film. In any other film, characters such as Gale, Dewey and Randy could easily be expected to die but here, they survive, providing further avenues of identification for the film audience. This approach is in keeping with Williamson's intentions. He meant the film to appeal to as many viewers as possible, saying, "I didn't want [Scream] to be a horror movie which appealed just to teenage boys. I wanted it to appeal to everybody, across the board, the way Halloween did. (Robb 176)" The characters fulfill this function throughout the film.

Now, turning to the popular critiques of Scream published in The Los Angeles Times, The New York Post, Sight and Sound, Time, Village Voice and The Chicago-Sun-Times, the ways in which the film is framed will be analyzed. In general Scream was very well received by critics; of the six examined here, only one reviewer comes close to disliking the film. The critic for Time describes Scream as having "won some unaccountably indulgent reviews" and claims that the film is "knowing but not smart"; however, the piece stops well short of refusing to recommend it and instead goes so far as to admit that it is a film to be enjoyed by "scholars of the slasher genre." Time's commentator stands alone in this respect for all others take obvious delight in the film's twists and turns. The LA Times calls Scream "sensational" and "subversive"; the reviewer for The New York Post asks "how can Craven entertain us" who have "seen it all before and know all the rules . . . He succeeds, scaring and amusing in equal measure." Sight and Sound lauds its "undoubted assets", "likeable characters" and deft juggling of "jokes, thoughts and jumps"; while Roger Ebert of The Chicago-Sun-Times declares simply that for him, as a critic, the film works.

For viewers who wait to read popular reviews of Hollywood films, the message is

overwhelmingly clear: Wes Craven and Kevin Williamson, a "dynamic duo" (*FRA* 1242), have turned out a great film. According to Altman, the ways in which popular reviewers receive films, is key to how audiences receive films. He advises that "our terms and concepts of cinema derive not so much from cinema itself but from those who represent cinema to us" (Altman 124); thus it follows, since viewers learn how to talk about films from critics, their opinions and feelings about films are also influenced by film critics. Generic affiliation figures prominently in the popular reviews of Scream; in fact, every one of the pieces consulted for this thesis mentions genre and more specifically discusses the film in terms of its relation to the horror genre as well as to other genres such as slashers and suspense all the while using generic terminology to analyse the film. Some reviews clearly identify it as a horror film; others are less precise, preferring a mix of one or more genres while still others list Scream as a slasher film.

Why do critics repeatedly try to assign genres to the films they review? Altman answers this question with the following explanation:

Generic attribution raises the stakes of reviewing, connecting cinema to well-established, deeply rooted categories. Not by chance have so many reviewers written strong general pieces designed in part to enhance the reputation of a particular genre: Andre Bazin on the Western, Arlene Croce on the musical, Molly Haskell on the women's film, Pauline Kael on epic films, Andrew Sarris on screwball comedy, Richard Schickel on animation, Paul Schrader on film noir, David Thomson on the gangster film, Parker Tyler on underground film, Robert Warshow on the Western and the gangster film and Robin Wood on the horror film. The critical

enterprise is immeasurably boosted by strong genres and clear generic affiliation (127).

If reviewers simply offered a list of films to see according to priority, there would be little to distinguish or recommend one review from another (127). Clearly stating a film's generic affiliation helps to connect the cinema, in general, to its narrative and mythical roots and makes an art-form of reviewing; it also succeeds in making brand names out of individual reviewers, and most importantly, in individualizing the review and the reviewer (127). Thus, it follows that viewers, taking after the critics they look to, to sanctify their filmic opinions, can be seen, ironically, as trying to individualize themselves by demonstrating their own superior knowledge of the film and film history according to the ways in which they are accustomed to reading in popular film reviews.

A total of 551 viewer responses are posted on the IMDb for Scream; the difference in number of respondents for Scream as opposed to Reality Bites is likely due to a combination of factors. First, the popularity of the internet increased between 1994 and 1997; and secondly, the film was more popular and inspired more people to post responses. Of those posted, 471 or 85% of viewers make reference to genre, whether it be a simple stating of the generic status of Scream or an in-depth analysis of said terrain in the viewer's opinion. Clearly genre figures prominently in the minds of film viewers. Often the viewer uses genre in an attempt to expound upon or sell the various desirable qualities he or she attributes to the film. For example, "ILuvSwimFan" sums up Scream with the following recommendation: "Suspense, Comedy, Action, Drama. Everything. I give it 10 stars and 2 thumbs up." Like "ILuvSwimFan," "Op_Prime" seeks to endorse the film and declares that "Scream is a wonderful slasher film that is a non stop ride of action,

suspense, thrills and even a little comedy. A must see." Speculating on the cause for the film's great success, "Brandon Potts" decides that "the ... reason why the movie was so great was because the movie(s) had some comedy, action, drama, and romance and not just horror." "Raven-35" terms Scream "the ultimate slasher/comedy/thriller" while "loomis-12" calls "the mixture of horror, suspense ... and humour ... brilliant." And "urban_legend" exclaims that the film "has everything a person could want from a movie; laughs, scares, drama, action, etc." For these viewers, there is no doubt that genre mixing works and that it helps to fulfill their expectations of what a good film should be -- the more genres touched upon, the better. Time and time again, viewers refer to genre and like popular critics, genre is used to legitimize personal filmic opinions. This is not to suggest that genre is only used as a positive referent by IMDb viewers though.

On the contrary, many viewers object, in some cases quite vehemently, to the generic status awarded to Scream. Importantly, this thesis has already proven that the makers of the film strove to avoid blatant generic affiliation; thus, it follows that viewers who feel that Scream is being sold to them as a particular genre, horror for example, are reacting to the ways in which the film is framed by popular reviewers or by other individual viewers who see films in terms of their generic content. Numerous respondents object to Scream being described in any way as a horror film. "HAL-2001" begins his or her review by professing his or her love of the film but, this feeling is qualified by the viewer's generic concerns. He or she says, "What I don't love is how this [film] was said to rejuvenate the horror genre. This is more of a suspense/thriller/comedy than a horror movie. Its many references just go to show that a true horror film is still a thing of the past (hopefully not forever.)" "Jake", a self-described "purist horror fan", likes the film

but dislikes the fans, the media hype surrounding the film and its designation as a member of the horror genre. He or she explains:

[A lot] of fans hated *Scream* as being a lame teen oriented wannabe horror movie. Well I saw *Scream* when it came out more as a parody on horror clichés, not so much as a horror film itself. It is loaded with horror buff in jokes and references to old horror classics, but it also has a teen idol kind of vibe which turned a lot of fans off, and gained a lot of boppers. *Scream* is actually a good movie .. the sequels weren't all that great, and it isn't quite Wes Craven's shining moment but it is a nice take on the horror scene. It wasn't really that *Scream* sucked so much .. it was the aftermath of its success. Before *Scream*'s success, there wasn't a single theatrically released horror/slasher movie in years, the aftermath of *Scream*'s success created this bubblegum teen star type of horror movie ... it would be very tame and lack any horror elements that made films of the past so great ... I myself like [*Scream*] .. I think it's a good movie and I will defend it as a parody thriller, not a horror movie.

"Carleton Hendrix" takes a similar approach in his or her review yet this posting constitutes an attempt at an even more detailed analysis of the exact nature of various genres ranging from horror to thriller. The summary line for "Carleton's" review reads "Great Suspense, not a Horror!!"; it is followed by a meticulous, quasi-stream of consciousness explanation:

There is not a fine line between Horror and Suspense or thriller, the line is big, and fat.. And *Scream* is by no means a horror.. A slasher, is a

type of horror, the most extreme of horror, (lots of killings good to great death scenes, so on ..) But a slasher is not a Suspense.. There are many types of Suspense, the average late 90's to 2000's movies are in this category, Suspense/Thriller, a thriller is not a horror either, it is like, but simply is not.. How to tell the difference? Well here it is, When you know exactly who the killer is, if he has a mask or not, you know his name and who he is, and why he is killing, not so much the people in the movie all the time, but the viewer knows who he is and doesn't have to spend the entire movie guessing, than you have a horror, possibly a slasher.. When you do have to guess, and you have no idea who the killer is, when the movie as they would say "leaves you on the end of your seat" ..""What's going to happen next!!"" a mystery, where in the end everything comes undone and you find out who was doing the killings "and I would have gotten away with it if it weren't for those meddling kids!!"" Than you have a Suspense/Thriller.. There wasn't enough blood to be a slasher anyways though, well maybe random blood, but not enough skin penetration.. Some say it brought the LONG DEAD teen slasher movies back.. Not true at all!! Horror movies are like Rock music "you can't kill rock n' roll". (ozzy Osbourne) they have never, nor will they ever die ... What *Scream* did for Horror is what *Curt Cobain* did for hairbands, it crushed them.. Horror will never be the same, music will never be the same.. Yet still they will both go on ... I would say it was the best and king of Suspense/Thriller!!

Reviews like "*Carleton Hendrix's*," while not technically correct, evince a large degree of

creativity in terms of analyses and indicates the importance that films play in his or her life.

"uffe-5-2" launches his or her incredulous address at the many viewers who see the film as a horror. He or she begins by asking viewers who dislike the film to stop seeing it as a horror film. The viewer continues by explaining that "I can agree at some points, some of the people who loved [Scream] has probably not laid an eye on the classic ones, and the scary stuff is scary for those peoples. But are you aware about that SCREAM IS A SPOOF AT THOSE MOVIES? It's a SPOOF! So why, oh why keep on comparing it to HALLOWEEN and THE EXORCIST. HELLO???? IS THERE ANYBODY HOME???? ... SCREAM is the movie-trivia-heaven and THE ULTIMATE HORROR-SPOOF. It is a comedy!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

"Trevor" laments the release of Scream. He or she states that as "a die hard horror fanatic, it's almost impossible for me to watch this movie today knowing what it has done to (as opposed to for) the horror genre." While "stava69" believes that "people who say this film has somehow 'saved' the horror genre don't actually watch horror films. Horror films [never] have and never should be about box office receipts or pleasing the general movie going public. Horror at its best is subvertive, dark, demanding and disturbing. True horror can create an intensity of atmosphere and emotion that no other genre can touch." Numerous viewers, including both those who liked and disliked the film, use their reviews to distinguish their opinions and to set themselves up as knowledgeable, distinctive and distinguished individuals. Some go so far as to resort to making disparaging remarks about the intelligence of viewers who either like or dislike the film, depending upon the commentator's own views of the film; for example, "RHPSvegas" terms fans of the film "braindead teeny-boppers" and "Brendan" supposes that Wes

Craven and Kevin Williamson are "laughing all the way to the bank" because "there's always a fresh crop of eager young people who are ready to pay money to see [their] latest piece of mind-candy hokum." As previously mentioned, film taste directly correlates with personal worth in many viewers' minds.

Several examples of negative reviews have been listed; however, of the 551 IMDb reviews examined, approximately 450 viewers posted positive reviews of the film; the film's popularity is further attested to by its unusually long run in theatres and strong box office receipts. Viewer response can be termed overwhelmingly positive and this is in keeping with the framing Scream received by popular reviewers. The average viewer posting considers the film in glowing terms. "ice-15" and "sjr59" see the film as a "stunning masterpiece" and as a "horror masterpiece" respectively. Similarly, "Graham Straughair" calls Scream a "truly brilliant film, a masterpiece of horror in its own right." Further evidence of viewer satisfaction can be found in reviews such as "fiendish dramaturgy"'s, part of which reads: "A most excellent movie; totally awe-inspiring soundtrack that works with the movie SO WELL. It is endearing to see a director take so much care with every little detail of a work; so much so that this is a true work of art." Positive reviews alone are not enough to prove the claims made by this thesis however. The ways in which viewers use the film to satisfy their own needs must be considered as well.

Once again, viewers see and find themselves onscreen. "badgirl9" calls "*Scream ... the film of my teenage years.*" In the opening line of "Samuel Levy"'s review, he states "this sexy, funny, scary slasher movie spoof is a representation of my generation." "Dan Grant" also likes the film because it references the films he grew up watching. He

introduces the idea of belonging to a particular film community, writing:

I grew up loving horror movies. Everything from the great ones like Halloween, Nightmare 1 and the early Fridays, to even the stupid quicky flicks like The Prey or Sleepaway Camp. There is just something sinister yet fun about an unseen force that tries to kill you for no apparent reason except that you are on his turf. I think Kevin Williamson watched the same films as I did and similarly appreciated them. Because what he has done here is write a film that is an homage to all the great horror films of the last 25 years. He treats all of us fans to great memories of films of years past and he assumes that he has an intelligent audience ... I admire a film like this. It is not afraid to take chances and it tries to give all of us former teens that made the genre so popular in the 80s, something to enjoy. I'm not saying that if you are under the age of 25 you cannot enjoy this, but believe me you can enjoy it a whole lot more if you are about 25 - 30. Because it is us who rented those films way back when. And to understand the references and the homages to films like Halloween (1978) the original Nightmare (84), the Friday's (80 - 84) you have to appreciate the films for what they are. And what they were and what they did was entertain and scare the hell out of 15 and 16 year olds. And to remember that feeling by watching this film is reward enough to me. But then to have the film be so well done is an added bonus.

In this review "Dan" identifies with Williamson and a vast group of viewers who, he imagines, watched and loved the same films as he did as a teenager; he establishes an

entire community of fans according to his own reckonings.

Other viewers take the film and seemingly incorporate aspects of it into themselves. An example of this type of viewer is "dhyen" who writes, "Scream has been my favorite movie for well over a year. I have probably seen it hundreds of times and analysed it beyond belief. I have made my friends sick to death of it. If there is anyone out there who hasn't seen it, buy it now. If you're one of my friends for whom I've ruined this wonderful movie, get over it. :)" To "dhyen's" friends, the film and "dhyen" have become an indivisible whole simply because the film has had such an impact on "dhyen's" life. Likewise "nixscriptbank" credits Scream as the film that made him want to go to film school. He or she writes: "I was just [a] casual 16 year old movie goer when I stepped into the theater to see Scream for the first time. I would see it four more times. Kevin Williamson's love of movies is infectious. Sure, it started with just horror films, but after a while I began to watch whatever I could get my hands on. That, of course, would lead to my decision to go to film school. When I watch the film today, I see a few imperfections, and by no means would I call it the best film of all time, but it is the film that made me want to make films ... and that's saying something."

"jester-45" acknowledges that "In order to have a scary movie, you have to have characters that you can identify with." IMDb reviewers repeatedly refer to specific characters or actors with whom they feel a particular bond, whose inclusion in the cast "made the film" for them. Perhaps the actor and character most often cited in positive terms is that of Jamie Kennedy and Randy Meeks, followed by Neve Campbell's Sidney Prescott. One reviewer (#127) admits that "everyone was cool in their roles but my favourite actor is Jamie Kennedy as Randy Meeks "The horror movie buff" maybe because

I also used to work on a big video store, the big "BBV" if you know what I mean and I really felt identified with him cause he's [such] a snappy and sarcastic guy just like me."

"Gen S2rt" also finds a strange bond between himself and Randy: "My personal favorite is teenage film expert Randy Meeks (Jamie Kennedy), probably because he was so much like me it's freaky." Viewers often report that the characters are very realistic, that they could almost feel the pain of the onscreen victims; all of which points to a strong viewer identification.

Scream owes its critical and commercial success to the treatment the production team afforded the entire film project. The right elements were emphasized so that the film captured the interest of audiences and critics alike: from the script to the cast and the director right down to the types of clothing the characters wore on screen, everything was calculated for success; and the effort paid off, producing a film that critics could respect and viewers could identify with. The effect of the framing provided by popular reviewers is likewise, undeniable. Viewers often employ popular phrases such as "two thumbs up" in their reviews and one viewer simply pasted a verbatim copy of Roger Ebert's review of Scream as his own. Aside from these instances, genre theory and the popular reviewers' penchant for its use, has clearly influenced the individual film viewer. But this does not mean that viewers are blindly following published opinions. Clearly, they are using the film for their own purposes, for enjoyment, for inspiration, and as a reason to post their opinions on an online forum. The very act of writing a review is concrete evidence that viewers are making something out of the act of watching a film; in this case, it is inspiring them to write and in some cases, very creatively. An excellent example of this is "Jack Smith," who while not a fan of the film, still feels moved to write in the most descriptive

of terms calling Scream "a cancer, a cancer that has spread and infected nearly all those who have watched it, a cancer that has killed the Horror Genre." Viewers like "mrghstfacenc17" take the act of reviewing and make it a personal and narrative art form quite separate from generic concerns; this viewer's posting reads as more of a story:

we went in and the lights dimmed. we saw drew barrymore pick up the phone. how stupid of drew to jeopardise her career in some horror movie. the movie picked up the pace and in less than 15 minutes i was terrified. drew was dead and my heart was racing. i was in shock of the death and i just felt raw terror bcuz i felt so sorry for drew. it was very sad and scary. then the movie started getting better and scarier. it was quite the ride. the movie was taking you on this horrifying ride filled [with] scares and lots of laughs. it was also a great mystery. by the end i was so sure that billy was the killer. but then i saw him die. i didn't know what to think this movie was so great! the ending chase is my favorite part. when they revealed the killers i couldnt believe my eyes. no movie has ever been like this. this is my absolute favorite movie.

The retelling of the film viewing experience takes on a new status. The reader can feel and appreciate the effect this film has had on this viewer.

The act of writing a review is tantamount to a form of communication between members of the various "constellated communities." Internet Movie Database posters regularly refer to each other's opinions in their own writing and sometimes go so far as to address each other by name. All of this is evidence of individual viewers taking a film and making of it what they want, using it, whether they liked Scream or not, to fulfill their

needs beyond the simple act of sitting down to watch a film.

Chapter Three: The Royal Tenenbaums: Feigning Independence

Throughout the 1990s, every major Hollywood film studio or media conglomerate bought at least one specialty film division (Perren 30). The majors' move from making strictly mainstream films to producing riskier fare more commonly associated with that of the American independent film industry marked a shift in Hollywood. But it was not only the majors moving into the realm of independent studios; independent films were becoming increasingly more mainstream in terms of their content, their means of production and the ways in which they were marketed. While the 'major studios are willing to invest in "edgy little films," allowing creative control to the filmmaker, . . . indies are becoming more concerned with "each and every detail." The reason for this is monetary. The typical indie-type film costs the equivalent of "pocket change" to Warners, Disney or Paramount, but as independent outfits start producing movies that cost several million dollars, their executives become more frugal' (Levy 504). The current climate in Hollywood reflects this unification of the mainstream and independent film worlds and this is where the 2001 major theatrical release The Royal Tenenbaums can be found. Not unlike the films analyzed in the two preceding chapters, the resulting mixture of techniques and styles that is The Royal Tenenbaums is arrived at in a conscious attempt to appeal to its targeted audience. It is a major Hollywood production dressed up as an independent film.

The Royal Tenenbaums is the product of a media giant: the Walt Disney Company. At the time of the film's release, Disney was the second largest media conglomerate in the world behind only AOL Time Warner. The Walt Disney Company's

film-related assets are considerable. They include: Walt Disney Pictures, Touchstone Pictures, Hollywood Pictures, Caravan Pictures, Miramax Films, Buena Vista Pictures Distribution, Buena Vista International and Walt Disney Feature Animation among others ("Meet"). The Royal Tenenbaums was produced by Touchstone Pictures; thus, despite its aesthetic style and quirky narrative, this film is in actuality the product of a major Hollywood studio, with all the benefits and drawbacks associated with mainstream filmmaking. The film itself, however, goes some way in disguising its mainstream roots; focusing instead upon director Wes Anderson and the film's pseudo-independent narrative quirks. Anderson's previous films include Bottle Rocket (1996) and Rushmore (1998). Like The Royal Tenenbaums, both of Anderson's earlier films have an independent feel to them, particularly Bottle Rocket; however, neither film was independently financed nor produced. Bottle Rocket is the product of Columbia Pictures Corporation and Gracie Films, while Rushmore was produced by Touchstone Pictures and American Empirical Pictures. This cultivated air of independence is an important part of the allure of Anderson's films; it provides the sense that his work is unique and outside mainstream Hollywood film fare and strengthens the appeal to the film's target demographic.

The Royal Tenenbaums represents a fusion of several different modes of filmmaking: the art film, the new Hollywood film, the independent film and the indie blockbuster. Each of the modes listed above, save perhaps the indie blockbuster, convey the film and its makers' high-minded sensibilities. The ways in which The Royal Tenenbaums employs the narrative and visual effects of the art film and the indie blockbuster will be detailed and examined. Finally, the ways in which audiences received the film and its messages will be analyzed in order to determine the success with which the

techniques employed were met.

In his seminal article "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice," David Bordwell outlines the art film aesthetic as one which is generally working in opposition to the norms of classical cinema. In the art film mode, classical cause and effect narrative linkages are loosened (Bordwell 57); instead the narrative drifts and its passive characters lack clearly defined goals (58). The art filmmaker strives for realism with complex characters whose emotions are plumbed and dissected (57-58). Real locations are favoured (57) and the use of identifiable stars is frowned upon (59). The art cinema prefers to foreground techniques such as jump cuts, the use of deep focus and the long take while using editing to manipulate the plot through flashbacks and flash forwards (59). Finally, art films foreground the director's role in the filmmaking process (59). He or she is not merely a member of the production team but the guiding hand, the vision behind the art.

The Royal Tenenbaums pays tribute to the art cinema as described by Bordwell through its use of the techniques commonly attributed to the art film aesthetic; however, the usage is not merely a wholesale recycling but a nuanced and varied one. The starkest example of a loosening of the cause and effect relationship in the film's narrative occurs during the scene in which Pagoda played by Kumar Pallana, Royal's personal valet, stabs him. As the title of the film suggests, the narrative centres around the Tenenbaum family, an interesting mix of oddball characters. All-round scoundrel and previously absentee father, Royal, played by Gene Hackman, finds himself penniless and evicted from the hotel he has called home for the past twenty-two years and as a result, he attempts to reclaim his fatherly role within the Tenenbaum household using his characteristic cheats and ploys.

He feigns a life-threatening case of stomach cancer so that estranged wife Etheline Tenenbaum, played by Anjelica Huston, will allow him to resume residency within the family home. Prior to the stabbing, Etheline's suitor, Henry Sherman, played by Danny Glover, uncovers Royal's lies and advises the Tenenbaum family that Royal is not dying of stomach cancer as he has led them to believe. When Etheline asks him why he has behaved in such a devious manner, Royal responds, "I thought I could win you back. And then I thought I could get rid of Henry . . . and at least keep the status quo." In quiet disbelief Etheline responds, "But we hadn't spoken in seven years." Royal continues, "I know. Plus, uh . . . I was broke. And I got kicked out of my hotel." After saying goodbye to son Richie and watching Henry re-enter the Tenenbaum home, Royal exits the house and waits at the curb for Pagoda to join him. Pagoda drops Royal's bags and the viewer sees a close-up of Pagoda's hands slowly opening the blade of his tiny pen knife. The camera moves up to his face and he exclaims, "You son of a bitch!" as he drives the blade into Royal's stomach. Grasping his side, Royal stumbles and falls onto his luggage vowing, "God ... damn ... That's the last time you put a knife in me, hear me?" Even as Royal falls, Pagoda rapidly switches back from attacker to assistant as he holds Royal's arm, helps him to regain his balance and then leaves in a cab with his victim. In the very next scene, viewers may be further surprised to see Pagoda dressing the wound that he inflicted.

The pacing of this sequence and the editing of the scene hint at the intended incomprehensibility and the comic tone. Royal stands and watches Pagoda opening the ridiculously tiny knife and simply waits for him to plunge it into him. No explicit explanation for Pagoda's actions is offered. One might suppose that because Royal's lies

have cost him his job, Pagoda is moved to violence, but this does not explain why Royal would continue to associate with a man who has stabbed him not once, but twice. When asked about this first stabbing by his grandsons, Royal explains the event in positive terms saying, "He saved my life, you know. Thirty years ago I was knifed in a bazaar in Calcutta. He carried me to the hospital on his back." Then Ari (Grant Rosenmeyer) asks, "Who stabbed you?" And Royal responds, "He did. There was a price on my head and he was a hired assassin. Stuck me right in the gut with a shiv." Royal's and Pagoda's response to each other is wholly unexpected. The narrative link in this relationship is weakened yet even as the scenes outlined above play out, the film adheres to classical expectations through its use of emotional clichés and generic images.

Despite the odd relationship between Royal and Pagoda, overall, the narrative adheres to the classical Hollywood model; its characters, however, follow the art film pattern very closely. According to Bordwell, the art cinema features passive characters lacking clearly defined goals. In addition, one of the prime preoccupations of the art film is the examination of its characters' emotional states in an attempt to offer a realistic portrayal of the human condition (58); The Royal Tenenbaums shares this central focus. The film's narrative concentrates on a family of failed geniuses, two young men and one young woman who reached their respective moments of greatness at a very young age and from there fell into decline, succumbing to various emotional and intellectual problems. Attention is also paid to the emotional states of the supporting characters whose own lives have been touched by the melancholy eccentricities of the Tenenbaum clan.

The opening sequence of the film, consisting of a flashback montage, acquaints the viewer with each of the Tenenbaum children's early successes and the circumstances of

their unusual upbringing. First the audience is informed that although they have lived apart for many years, Royal and Etheline Tenenbaum were never legally divorced. The narrator continues on, explaining, "Etheline Tenenbaum kept the house and raised the children and their education was her highest priority." The narration then pauses allowing the viewer to concentrate on the short scene playing out on screen which is intended to provide a snapshot of their unique childhood. Etheline is pictured on the phone in the hallway of her home surrounded by her three young children. Richie perches on his mother's lap and looks at a world atlas, Margot sits in the foreground reading a book by Chekhov, and Chas stands in the doorway asking his mother for money to fund a business venture. Etheline converses in Italian on the telephone and in the background, a chalk board with the title "Schedule of Activities" is plainly visible. A close-up shot of the chalk board follows to provide the viewer with a sense of a day in the life of the young Tenenbaums. One sees that between the three of them, they are involved in an array of activities including Karate, Italian and Ballet on a weekly and in some cases bi-weekly basis.

After providing the viewer with a visual sense of Etheline's approach to child-rearing, the narrator continues on in a dead-pan fashion: "She wrote a book on the subject." The narration is accompanied by a close-up view of Etheline's hand correcting the time of Richie's Italian lesson and then to one of Etheline's book cover: Family of Geniuses. The viewer sees ten copies of the book arranged to appear as though the covers are wallpaper and not merely books; the inclusion of which can be seen to represent the young Tenenbaum's total immersion in their particular and peculiar surroundings and lifestyle. They are not merely living their lives; they are setting an

example for others who might wish to lead a unique and distinguished existence and they have each written instructional books on the subject. The covers of several of Etheline's books are dog-eared to suggest that success and genius extends to the older Tenenbaum generation and not just her offspring and that these volumes have been much-read and by extension, closely studied by others. After a shot of the three children presiding over a press conference held in their honour, the narration moves on to look more closely at the success of each child individually, beginning with Chas (Ben Stiller).

The audience is introduced to Chas' brilliance through his room first. The title "Chas' Room (2nd Floor)" is superimposed over the image of his room. Various pieces of office equipment and stationery are visible through his open door bedecked with UPS signs and delivery instructions. This shot is followed by one of Chas behind his desk as the narrator continues: "Chas Tenenbaum had, since elementary school, taken most of his meals in his room standing up at his desk with a cup of coffee to save time. In the sixth grade, he went into business breeding Dalmatian mice which he sold to a pet shop in Little Tokyo. He started buying real estate in his early teens and seemed to have an almost preternatural understanding of international finance." Throughout the narration, the viewer sees various shots pertaining to Chas' idiosyncrasies including a look at his volumes of financial magazines, his motorized tie rack and his Dalmatian mice. The flashback sequence concludes with an incident that occurred between father and son in which Royal shoots Chas with a BB gun intentionally; the insertion of this plot element at the end of the Chas sequence suggests that this was a contributing factor in Chas' subsequent decline from his heights of greatness.

Like Chas', Margot's (Gwyneth Paltrow) brilliance is first introduced to the

viewing audience via her bedroom door in a tableau-like shot over which is superimposed the words “Margot’s Room (3rd Floor)”. The viewer sees a mid-level shot of her door, decorated with a tribal mask as well as a number of signs, each a variation on a phrase prohibiting the entering of her sanctuary. Also of note is the presence of three dead bolt locks and one padlock to emphasize Margot’s extreme secrecy and her desire for privacy. The narrator then continues “Margot Tenenbaum was adopted at age two. Her father had always noted this fact when introducing her. She was a playwright, and won the Braverman Grant of \$50,000.00 in the ninth grade. She and her brother Richie ran away from home one winter and camped out in the African wing of the public archives. They shared a sleeping bag and survived on crackers and root beer. Four years later, Margot disappeared alone for two weeks and came back with half a finger missing.” Throughout this portion of the narration various shots of Margot are offered. The viewer sees her listening to her records, writing one of her plays on her typewriter, reading Eugene O’Neill’s The Iceman Cometh, and practising her ballet steps. The narration is designed to suggest her brilliance, her cultured tastes in both the literary and art worlds and the reasons for her subsequent downfall, namely her father’s awkward acceptance of his adopted daughter, while laying the groundwork for her questionable relationship with her brother Richie (Luke Wilson).

The sequence then moves on to Richie and begins the introduction once again with a look at the child’s bedroom with the words “Richie’s Room (Attic)” superimposed over the shot. Anderson never misses the opportunity to examine the Tenenbaum children as though they are insects skewered under glass and each of the shots of their bedroom doors is labelled as if a specimen and part of the investigation of their brilliance. This time the

door, decorated with a poster depicting a collection of dead insects, ranging from a monarch butterfly to various beetles, is open and once again provides a view into Richie's room. From this angle, Richie's unusual zigzag carpet and self-decorated walls are on view. At first glance, Richie's genius is not visible but the narrator picks up the introductory thread: "Richie Tenenbaum had been a champion tennis player since the third grade. He turned pro at 17 and won the U.S. Nationals three years in a row. He kept a studio in the corner of the ballroom but had failed to develop as a painter." The viewer is presented with a shot of the ballroom wall decorated with a series of Richie's paintings. At this point Richie's sole source of inspiration becomes apparent. Painting after painting depicts his sister Margot simply reading or peering at the viewer over the top of a book.

Compared to the other Tenenbaum children, Richie is at once more normal and yet more strange than either his sister or his brother. His introductory sequence reveals that, unlike Chas or Margot, Richie has friendships outside the family unit and he also spends a good deal of time in his father's company; as a result, he does not bear the same ill will towards Royal that Chas and Margot do. Despite the fatherly attention that Richie enjoys and his friendships outside the family, he maintains an unusual interest in his sister; this fascination in combination with his unequal share of Royal's attention ultimately leads to Richie's downfall. On the basis of this plot element, the questionable relationship between brother and adopted sister, the filmmakers approach a key component of the Hollywood independent film. Such films often employ a gritty look or edgy content (Perren 37). In the case of The Royal Tenenbaums, the emphasis is on the quasi-incestuous relationship between Richie and Margot. Speaking on this subject, Anderson admits that originally, Richie and Margot were related by blood; however, he decided to alter the story making

Margot adopted because this "[fills] out the character and makes the situation more plausible." Reported reasons aside, the toning down of this risqué aspect of the film also makes it more acceptable to mainstream audiences. So the filmmakers get the best of both worlds in this case: a film with an independent feel that is still palatable to the larger audience.

In describing Richie's relationship with his father, the narrator says that, "On weekends, Royal took him on outings around the city. These invitations were never extended to anyone else." The viewer then sees a shot of father and young son squatting on their hind quarters and throwing money down to bet on a dog fight. This shot is followed later by one of Chas and Margot looking forlornly down at their father and Richie returning from one of their outings. The message is clear: Royal is to blame for his children's misfortunes. In case there is any doubt of this fact, the narrator concludes the introductory sequence with the following statement: "In fact, virtually all memory of the brilliance of the young Tenenbaums had been erased by two decades of betrayal, failure and disaster."

The film's concern with the dissecting of emotions is not confined to those of the three Tenenbaum children. Immediately following the narrator's pronouncement about Royal's parental influence, the film switches to a series of tableau-like shots of each character introduced by the title screen "Cast of Characters (22 Years Later)." Each individual is centred directly in front of the camera and seen participating in an activity that is common to their daily experience. Each character's facial expression is similar. No one smiles outright. No one appears to be enjoying him or herself particularly. Instead they appear resolute and resigned to their daily existence; this is particularly true of Margot and

Richie. Margot is seen, hair in foil, hands stretched out for a manicure, defiantly puffing on her cigarette, and Richie, with camera in hand, poses blankly in front of a mirror for a self-portrait on the ship *Cote D'Ivoire*. Likewise, Eli (Owen Wilson), Raleigh (Bill Murray) and Henry appear less than happy. The viewer is left with the sense that something is not quite right with these characters; they are frozen in time, never having moved past their respective moments of greatness.

The idea that very few of the characters are actually happy is evident in the film's promotional posters and on The Criterion Collection DVD cover as well; the image is virtually the same in each case. The main cast members are shown as though they are posing for a family portrait. The viewer sees Margot scowling with her arms tightly crossed over her chest. Henry Sherman, Etheline, Chas, Ari, Uzi (Jonah Meyerson), Richie and Raleigh St. Clair are likewise posed with frowns on their faces. The only diverging facial expressions are those of Royal and Eli Cash, presumably because these are the only members happy to be a part of the photograph and the family circle by extension. The position of each in the grouping is important and indicative of the person's status within the family. Henry and Royal are seen from the shoulders up, Henry visible between Margot and Etheline in the foreground and Royal visible between Etheline and Chas. Both men appear in the second row as though they are trying to force or ensure their tenuous place within the Tenenbaum family. Only Royal seems assured and confident of his position, and his efforts to regain his glory within the family are symbolized by his hand upon Etheline's arm, as if to guide and remind her of his rightful place. The only other figure of note, for the purposes of this analysis, is that of Eli Cash. Eli is fittingly shown lying at the feet of the Tenenbaums, the family that he has admired and longed to be a

member of since childhood. He appears satisfied in this family portrait, although a hint of uncertainty lingers about his face as though his need to match the Tenenbaum's genius still plagues him. The poster conveys most of the prominent sales techniques the makers of the film favour: the emphasis on the cast, the family and the style of the film. The viewer sees a curious family photo comprised of famous and well-respected actors and actresses clothed in somewhat bizarre outfits, scowling at the viewer, all designed to draw audiences into the theatre.

Unlike his previous films, Anderson diverges from the practice of using mainly non-professional actors and actresses in The Royal Tenenbaums; this fact is highlighted in the "Cast of Characters" sequence. The sequence differs from traditional Hollywood films which generally avoid its use altogether. Here Anderson mixes art film and Hollywood aesthetics. According to Bordwell, the art film tends to avoid the use of recognizable stars; Anderson does not. Instead, he makes a deliberate introduction to each of the famous actors and actresses in his film and does so in a way that is atypical of Hollywood films today. Each actor or actress is given a distinct inauguration; below each individual's close-up their name is superimposed. Whereas in his two previous films, Anderson used non-professional and unknown actors by necessity, The Royal Tenenbaum's film budget was larger and thus provided him with the funds needed to employ higher-profile actors. The actors he chose were not merely celebrities. They were some of the more respected individuals working in Hollywood at the time the film was made; thus, providing a measure of cachet to the film. So, while, Anderson appears to have moved on from his humble "independent" roots, he can be seen to be trying to retain some of the credibility those roots afforded him through the continued use of his stock, non-professional actors

such as Kumar Pallana, Dipak Pallana, Andrew Wilson and Brian Tenenbaum among others. The overall intent is one of maintaining the independent aesthetic, and the message is that The Royal Tenenbaums is a quirky quasi-independent production that favours individuality and draws admiring audiences of intellectuals and individuals.

The second DVD included in the Criterion Collection DVD set, features a myriad of supplements, the wealth of which would seem to be directed at film buffs and the nature and content of which would seem directed at intellectuals. The menu screen of this DVD features art work by Eric Anderson as does the film and lists a number of features from which the viewer can select. These are: "Scrapbook," "The Peter Bradley Show," "Trailers," "With the Filmmaker," "Cut Scenes," and "Interviews." The Scrapbook includes another menu where viewers can watch behind the scenes clips, browse through Anderson's storyboards, learn about the artist Miguel Calderon and view his work (some of which is featured in the film) and listen to Anderson being interviewed on Public Radio International, among other things. Of note is the mock television program "The Peter Bradley Show" which is modelled after PBS' The Charlie Rose Show. The inclusion of this supplement serves as an inside joke to a select portion of the population. The Charlie Rose Show is not one which would necessarily be familiar to mainstream viewing audiences. The show's website describes the program as "the nightly PBS program that engages America's best thinkers, writers, politicians, athletes, entertainers, business leaders, scientists and other newsmakers" while New York Newsday writes, "Charlie's show is the place to get engaging, literate conversation" and Morley Safer of CBS' 60 Minutes terms the program "the last refuge of intelligent conversation on television." The average North American viewer is not the primary target of this type of supplemental

material. Viewers who appreciate the film and the DVD contents can rest assured of their intellectual status because they are capable of catching the inside jokes and the high brow references scattered throughout.

The film's DVD release as part of The Criterion Collection serves as an important indicator of its status as art cinema. Not only did the film earn a place within the highly-esteemed collection, but The Royal Tenenbaums DVD was also issued quite rapidly after its theatrical release as though its categorization as art was unquestionable and inevitable. The website for the Criterion Collection offers a high-minded description of its aims and the films it presents:

The Criterion Collection, a continuing series of important classic and contemporary films, is dedicated to gathering the greatest films from around the world and publishing them in editions that offer the highest technical quality and award-winning, original supplements. Criterion began with a mission to pull the treasures of world cinema out of the film vaults and put them in the hands of collectors. All of the films published under the Criterion banner represent cinema at its finest. In our seventeen years, we've seen a lot of things change, but one thing has remained constant: our commitment to publishing the defining moments of cinema in the world's best digital editions ("About").

As part of The Criterion Collection, The Royal Tenenbaums instantly becomes one of the "treasures of world cinema." Taking its place alongside works by currently undisputed film greats such as Renoir, Godard, Kurosawa, Cocteau, Fellini, Bergman, Tarkovsky, Hitchcock, Fuller, Lean, Kubrick, Lang, Sturges, Dreyer, Eisenstein, Ozu, Sirk, Buñuel,

Powell and Pressburger affords the film the respectability the filmmakers desired.

The final aspect of the art film aesthetic that The Royal Tenenbaums makes full use of is the foregrounding of the director as auteur. This film bears all the marks and distinguishing characteristics that audiences have come to expect of a Wes Anderson film. The marketing and film itself strive to emphasize the fact that The Royal Tenenbaums is a Wes Anderson film.

The audience is continually reminded that Anderson is "the organizing intelligence for our comprehension" (Bordwell 59). As director, Anderson prides himself on breaking the standard rules of filmmaking and making his own rules instead. Upon describing the opening sequences of the film, Anderson confides that he does not think that filmmakers are allowed to go so far into their film without starting the story, "but we did."

Anderson's guiding hand is also evident visually in instances such as the scene in which Richie attempts suicide. The film features warm, rosy pink tones up until this point; however, when Richie learns of Margot's secret life and locks himself in the washroom, the film's tone changes dramatically to a cool blue. The viewer sees a close-up of Richie's face as he stands in front of the bathroom mirror, hacking off his long hair and full beard with a pair of scissors. As the scene progresses and the viewer sees Richie lather his face with shaving cream, he mysteriously whispers, "I'm going to kill myself tomorrow." At this point, Anderson employs a number of jump cuts; this is particularly noteworthy as the jump cut is commonly associated with French New Wave cinema and with a director making a personal statement to his or her audience. The jump cut represents a violation of the rules of classical Hollywood filmmaking, and Anderson's use of this film technique speaks to his own style of filmmaking; not that Anderson works within the French New

Wave style but that he is familiar with its aesthetics and can use it freely as homage and proof of his own auteur sensibilities. The jump cuts suggest that time has passed and yet it is actually the same day. This is followed by a number of flashbacks from Richie's childhood and shots of his bird Mordecai and sister Margot. Confusingly, Richie proceeds to slice his wrists with a razor blade and then slumps to the floor in a mess of blood and hair.

In the accompanying Director's Commentary to the Criterion Collection DVD, Anderson attributes Richie's enigmatic words to the Louis Malle film Le Feu Follet (1963), a film which he acknowledges as the inspiration for much of The Royal Tenenbaums. Anderson explains that there is no real explanation for Richie's whispered words. They merely "seemed right" to him; thus suggesting that the viewer needs to be open to experiencing a Wes Anderson film on his terms and not necessarily on his or her own.

Anderson is known, by fans and detractors alike, for his extreme level of attention to detail. The Royal Tenenbaums is no different; in fact, the peripheral materials on the DVD provide great insight into Anderson's obsessive concern for details. In an interview given for the DVD extras, Gwyneth Paltrow describes Anderson in the following way: "He's so unique because he's so prepared. Nobody ever knows what song's going in a montage until way into post-production and it just so happens that we're so lucky to be blessed with Wes who does all this incredible pre-planning and knows what the music is going to be . . . it just makes it seem so visceral." Anderson's passion for details is seen in the "With the Filmmaker" section of the DVD. During this sequence, he is shown discussing the way Chas' hair is depicted in a drawing for Richie's bedroom wall. This

image of Chas is never the focus of any particular shot within the film, yet Anderson is determined that the hair, as it is, is wrong. The viewer sees him discussing the drawing with several different people and finally, he gets down on his hands and knees and fixes the hair himself. In the next shot, the viewer sees a close-up of his face as he explains, "I tried to be a little relentless about getting all the details exactly, exactly as we planned them." Anderson's relentlessness extends to every aspect of the film. The Royal Tenenbaums production involved the construction of over three hundred different sets. In some cases, entire sets were built for scenes with one or no lines in them. Anderson prides himself on this construction, confiding to Robert Yeoman, his Director of Photography, that "I like it, the amount of stuff that had to be made. Because the more stuff that's made, means, the more like, the more it is stuff that's never, nobody else has done it."

Anderson's admitted and unabashed intention is to create something that is singular to his own vision. The film and its attendant publicity materials emphasize this fact. Another key element of the Hollywood independent film sees the excessive use of either style, sex or violence (Perren 37). In the case of The Royal Tenenbaums Anderson's obsessive attention to detail ensures his excessive emphasis on style, that is, on the look of the film. The Royal Tenenbaums employs quirk after quirk whether it be the costumes, the Tenenbaum family home or the rickety cabs that transport various family members about the town. Anderson creates a complete universe for viewers.

The young director goes so far as to create fictionalized New York locations out of actual New York locations. During the Director's Commentary Anderson admits that The Royal Tenenbaums is meant to be a New York story but one that has been adapted to a fairytale treatment. This is Anderson's own version of New York city. He recollects, for

the viewer's edification, that during filming Gene Hackman never quite understood why Pagoda was positioned so as to block the Statue of Liberty in his and Royal's scene on the waterfront. The film does indeed take place in New York city but only on Wes Anderson's terms.

Throughout the Director's Commentary, interested viewers hear Anderson discussing various scenes from the film. Anderson offers insight into his decision making process and perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this thesis, he makes note of the ways in which The Royal Tenenbaums is influenced by his own personal experiences. The main plot elements centre around the children and the effects their parentage had on them; in fact, aside from Anderson's own reputation as a director and the popular actors and actresses in the film, the family dynamic is the major selling point for the film. Anderson admits that The Royal Tenenbaums was inspired by his parent's divorce and how he and his siblings reacted to it. Along with his cast of stock players, Anderson also makes use of his own family members in his film work. In this film, brother Eric was responsible for all of the murals in the film. Element after element is based on something in Anderson's own life or in one of his friend's. For example, viewers learn that Anderson's mother was an archaeologist like Etheline; Henry Sherman is named after Anderson's own landlord; the scene in which Margot joins Richie in the tent is inspired by Melville's Les Enfants Terribles (1950) but also by Anderson's and his brother's affection for building forts and tents as children; the Tenenbaums' game closet is inspired by his family's and is something that he recalls most families he knew had; the taboo love affair between Margot and Richie is modelled on the situation of a boy he knew as a child, who Anderson reports was in love with his own sister.

The film's trailers share some prominent characteristics; namely their emphasis on The Royal Tenenbaums as part of the Rushmore and therefore, Wes Anderson tradition and their emphasis on the film as a comedy. In comparison to the trailers for Reality Bites and Scream, The Royal Tenenbaums trailers approach their sales pitch in a less direct fashion; this is in keeping with its self-portrayal as part of the art film tradition. The first trailer (as found on the Criterion Collection DVD) mirrors the film closely. It begins with an introduction to the three Tenenbaum children, their genius and subsequent decline and then proceeds to the present day with the quick insertion of shots of Margot and Richie reuniting as adults; this begins the inclusion of the film's big name stars and then follows with a shot of each of the actors in character as the film does, beginning with Gene Hackman and ending with Bill Murray. As a plot guiding principle, the trailer includes several title cards featuring the same characteristic pink background and white type reading "They come together." "They fall apart." "Family isn't a word." "It's a sentence." The cards are interspersed between a montage of action shots of the characters reacting to and interacting with each other and suggests to the viewer that this film is a fast-paced, quirky comedy.

The second trailer begins with a scene that sees Royal approaching Etheline for permission to reunite with the family; this would presumably catch the attention of fans of both Gene Hackman and Anjelica Huston, well-respected, Oscar-winning actors. The second trailer then continues on with a similar introduction to the three Tenenbaum children and their woes. Here the film is presented as though set up along the lines of a situation comedy with the narrator informing viewers that, for the first time in twenty-two years, each member of the Tenenbaum family is reunited and living under the same roof.

The viewer is then treated to a fast-paced sequence of various family members dealing with Royal's re-immersion into the family. The audience is treated to a quick view of Ari's and Uzi's confusion upon their grandfather's appearance as they phone their father complaining "you told us he was already dead," Royal "mixing it up" with his estranged wife's suitor Henry Sherman, his exploits with his grandsons, throwing water bombs at passing taxis and jumping off a school desk into the 375th Street Y's swimming pool and his adopted daughter's husband Raleigh St. Clair exclaiming "how interesting, how bizarre" in a way that suggests to the viewer that the film itself is what is truly interesting and bizarre. Then, like the first trailer and the film, the viewer sees a tableau-like introduction of each of the big name actors and actresses in the film beginning again with Gene Hackman and ending with Bill Murray.

Both trailers employ the title card "From the Creators of Rushmore." No explicit mention of Wes Anderson's name is made; however, this omission is in keeping with the filmmaker's approach thus far. The creators of the trailer are not trying to minimize Anderson's role. Instead they are advertising discreetly to those in the know and at the same time avoiding any of the traps of crass commercialism or sensationalism of which their target audience would be critical. Fans of Anderson's work will recognize immediately that Rushmore and The Royal Tenenbaums share the same writers and director. And for those members of the viewing audience that are not familiar with Anderson's other films, the trailers offer the comedic elements as a lure.

Anderson's and Owen Wilson's focus while writing the script was on the family and its effects on the individuals within it. As mentioned previously, Anderson admits that the separation between Etheline and Royal is inspired by his own parents and thus the film is

not only his personal vision but a part of his personal experience. Anderson confides that he wants his characters to be "accessible -- eccentric, but familiar." He believes that anyone can identify with the familial elements but he admits that, "it's exaggerated in some ways. And it's from different people's experience in most ways. But I felt like I wanted it to be about families and that it would be about how you can be confused and maybe sort of damaged by things you go through with your family." Most importantly, Anderson says that he hoped the film would "register with people."

The analysis will now focus on the degree to which the film "registered" with audiences, beginning with popular reviewers and then finishing with members of the film-viewing audience who posted reviews on the Internet Movie Database website. A total of eight reviews were consulted in order to determine the overall rating The Royal Tenenbaums earned from professional critics. Reviews from the following publications were examined: The Village Voice, USA Today, The Washington Post, Rolling Stone, Chicago Sun Times, The New York Times, Variety and Sight and Sound. In general, the reviews were mixed; however, three of the eight reviewers offered more outright praise of the film. Examples of this positive response ranged from the most effusive, Peter Travers of Rolling Stone, who reports that the film "looks very good indeed" and will be a "prime contender when it comes to choosing the crown jewel among the films of 2001" to J. Hoberman of The Village Voice who states that "The Royal Tenenbaums may not be the movie of the year, but it is a seasonal gift to us all." Travers and Hoberman are joined by Roger Ebert of the Chicago Sun Times in their praise of the film.

Even the reviewers who were less enthusiastic, often enthused about various aspects of the film, yet were unable to praise it unreservedly. Claudia Puig of USA Today

advises readers that she had "high hopes" for this film but that it "tries too hard to be dotty." She comes around in the end though, as she acknowledges that "the film grows on you."

Without fail, each one of the critiques, both positive and mixed, positions The Royal Tenenbaums as a Wes Anderson film, as though the film's success is entirely dependent upon his involvement. Peter Travers opines, "that [the film] works is due to director Wes Anderson, who has made something eccentric and hilarious that can suddenly - or maybe not for hours or even days later - choke you up with emotion." Desson Howe of The Washington Post, although perhaps the most expressive about his love of Anderson's work, was disappointed by the film. He writes:

This is a review telling you to see The Royal Tenenbaums because director Wes Anderson's films are always good. But the recommendation comes carefully measured. I can't muster a royal rave.

I wanted to love it. Really I did, because Anderson, who made the fabulous Bottle Rocket and Rushmore, is my main man. My auteur. My filmmaking squeeze. But The Royal Tenenbaums ground to a halt a few feet short of my Great Expectations finish line.

The film's enjoyable. It's clearly the work of an inventive mind, of course . . . [but] . . . The Royal Tenenbaums feels like a dress rehearsal, not a play. It's a rewrite away from knowing what the heck it's about. It's a B+, not an A. This would be enough for most filmmakers. But Anderson must contend with a higher standard. It's his fault for being original. Hey, we equivocate because we love.

Howe goes so far as to apply the term "auteur" to Anderson; likewise, many of the other reviewers position The Royal Tenenbaums as part of the Anderson oeuvre.

Reviewers from Sight and Sound and Chicago Sun Times trace out common themes between Anderson's latest film and his other works. Ebert reports that "Anderson's previous movies were Bottle Rocket (1996) and Rushmore (1998), both offbeat comedies, both about young people trying to outwit institutions" while Charlotte O'Sullivan of Sight and Sound notes that "Wes Anderson's The Royal Tenenbaums, like his dazzling last effort Rushmore, is about the desire to belong" (60).

While reviewers such as Ebert praise Anderson's "cockeyed genius", others such as A.O. Scott of The New York Times remain critical of Anderson and his reputation as a junior auteur. He describes the film as "at once endearing and unbearably show-offy" (E31). He continues, "whimsy - and Mr. Anderson's inability to refrain from admiring his own handiwork - triumphs in the end. For every moment that hits a delicate note of pathos and surprise . . . there is another that suffocates in cuteness . . . Mr. Anderson has talents that don't entirely serve his ambitions and The Royal Tenenbaums finally elicits an exasperated admiration. Yes, yes, you're charming, you're brilliant. Now say goodnight and go to bed."

Todd McCarthy of Variety concurs with Scott's appreciation of Anderson and his film, writing that "Wes Anderson somewhat overreaches his considerable talents in The Royal Tenenbaums." The consensus among the popular reviewers is that Anderson is in fact, something of an auteur, a gifted and talented filmmaker, whose latest film, while good, has failed to match the high marks his previous films earned.

In keeping with Anderson's reported auteur status, several reviewers note

Anderson's ambition to move beyond the cult status his previous films enjoyed. Writing critically, the reviewer from Sight and Sound suggests that Anderson's attempt to broaden his canvas has failed (60). Likewise the reviewer for Variety claims that "everything about the new pic announces more lofty aims - the larger canvas, the distinguished cast, the family-saga format and literary ambitions that can most immediately be traced to J.D. Salinger." Many of the reviewers comment on Anderson's apparent lofty ambitions as they remark on the similarity of the film to other films such as The Magnificent Ambersons (Welles 1942) and the film's recollection of Salinger's Glass Family; all of which point to the film being positioned as entertainment for a distinct portion of the film-viewing population yet with more mainstream elements thrown in for the masses. The reviewer from Variety concurs: "Expect eager curiosity among upscale and serious audiences in Christmas release following its world [premiere] October 5 . . . and possible general crossover based on its accessible dramatic and humorous content."

Reviewers are critical of Anderson's fascination with details and claim that this obsession, which The New York Times reviewer likens to "the fastidious care of a collector arranging prize specimens on a shelf" (E31), prohibits character development and inhibits the film in general. Anderson's "nerdy magic realism" (Hoberman) and quirky style "supersede his characters' development" (Puig) and the narrative as a whole. For the most part though, even the critics who gave less than warm reviews recognized, accepted and praised the comedic elements of the film. For example, the Washington Post praised the film's "moment-to-moment comedy gems."

Finally, this analysis turns to an examination of the viewer comments posted on the Internet Movie Database. A total of eighty seven viewer-posted comments were

consulted. Of the eighty seven, exactly fifty of the responses can be termed positive; twenty eight responses were decidedly negative and a total of nine were neither positive nor negative but somewhere in between. The overall impression of the film's reception seems to be that the film was praised by audiences, and this sample of Internet Movie Database respondents supports this perception; thus, it appears that the makers of The Royal Tenenbaums were successful in both their marketing and their overall story-telling aims.

Unlike the popular reviewers, viewer after viewer praises The Royal Tenenbaums unreservedly. The following responses illustrate this ardour: "wilderwitch" describes the film as "Subtle perfection" and "simply breathtaking;" "fake_plastic_wings" calls the film a "Masterpiece" and writes "I loved this movie from start to finish;" "Joe Badshaw" declares that "This stroke of cinematic brilliance" is a "sadly endearing and brilliant saga, quite simply the finest film I've ever watched;" "spcoltrain@hotmail.com" describes the film as "Genius!" and "Completely delightful" while "gabe vodicka" advises, "Everyone should see this movie, with no exception."

IMDb commentators base their praise on a number of factors. These include the film's characters, the costumes, the script, the casting, the soundtrack and the overall style of the film amongst other things. Each of these elements, working on its own and in conjunction with the others, has earned the film and its makers the praise of numerous film viewers; however, it is the intention of this thesis to illustrate the ways in which the specific techniques and overarching themes offered by the filmmakers reached and were received by audiences. A portion of the response provided by "kitkatkelly64" is offered as evidence of the type of strong response elicited from viewers and the numerous ways in

which audience members identified with the film. "kitkatkelly64" writes:

Royal Tenenbaums is on my top 5 list of favorite movies of all time. I actually went through a period of time when i watched it everyday. I'm not really sure why i love this film so much. It might be the silly characters and the way they dress and talk . . . sigh. I want to be a Tenenbaum. Margot is by far the most amazing character. My roommate and I want to be her. The silly hair and the super dark eye make up. The wooden finger. She's oozing with sex! Speaking of "oozing" Arie and Uzi . . . the BEST! My favorite part of the movie is when they meet Royal for the first time . . . at the Y. The music . . . and camera . . . the wit. It's great . . . very vintage-like. I quote this movie like it's cool. You can't miss a single minute of this movie . . . you have to let it seep in and take a hold of you. It's very detailed. The way they say things and the little things that they do is what makes it funny.

The SOUNDTRACK is another thing I love about the film. I don't think that the suicide scene would have been as powerful if it wasn't for that perfect song. It's incredible.

"kitkatkelly64's" response embodies a number of the elements designed to appeal to audiences that the analysis of the film outlined. This individual was personally affected by the film and reports watching it on a daily basis for an extended period of time. She particularly identifies with the character of Margot and reports a desire to emulate her. The respondent lists the elements of the film that make it "cool." These include the characters, their clothing, the camera work, the unexpectedness of the characters and plot,

the “wit,” the soundtrack and the calculated style. And in an attempt to convince the reader that “kitkatkelly64’s” opinion of the film is true of others’ like her, she insists that her friend feels the same way. Finally, the heading for this response sums up the respondent's esteem for Anderson: “This movie was made by god himself.” “kitkatkelly64” is not alone in her fascination with these aspects of the film.

The filmmakers' attempt to position the film as an art film and Anderson as an auteur was a success. Numerous reviews, both favourable and unfavourable, locate The Royal Tenenbaums as an Anderson film and within the Anderson tradition. The film is repeatedly mentioned in the context of Anderson's previous two films. For example, "the unemployed critic" reports that The Royal Tenenbaums:

composition is more complete than Rushmore and infinitely more lavish than Bottle Rocket. That's not to say it's a better film than those two - it isn't, though not by much - but to see Anderson get saddled with more and more artistic roadblocks and baggage, yet still retain his vision 100 percent? That is an achievement that normally take 25 films and a heart-attack to get people to appreciate this kind of talent . . . Even if he keeps making these bittersweet comedies, he will have accomplished what other directors can only dream about: he is making his classics now.

Writers such as "Richard Cosgrove" attempt to delineate Anderson's authorial style saying: "As usual, The Royal Tenenbaums is rife with Anderson's distinctive directorial touches - 90 degree overhead shots, dialogue-free sequences played to classic rock anthems, and memorably, towards the end, a one-take canvas shot, as beautiful as it is inspired." "Joe Badshaw's" remarks are reminiscent of New York Times reviewer A.O.

Scott's likening of Anderson to the precocious junior auteur. Badshaw writes, "The film is a coming of age symphony for director/writer Wes Anderson, who gives us his third masterpiece in The Royal Tenenbaums."

Likewise, many reviewers were unfazed by Anderson's insistence on delivering the film on his own precise and exacting terms; this in fact, provided yet another instance of an Anderson quality to be praised and upheld as admirable rather than as oppressive. Viewer "Karen Divorty's" commentary illustrates this eagerness to position his or herself within the Anderson frame of mind. Karen writes:

I think if someone tries to watch a Wes Anderson film, they have to have a certain kind of mind to understand the real meaning of them. After being awed by *The Royal Tenenbaums*, I left with a certain kind of joy that only a great film can give me. It's like flying an electric kite, it's that hard of a buzz. As I began my travel down the stairs of the theater, I heard this couple talking about how stupid the movie was, and how they are going to ask for a refund. I suddenly smiled, because I hoped that they would get one. I think that I got something out of the film that they didn't. What is so good about *The Royal Tenenbaums*? The great detail in every frame, from the costumes (and they really are costumes) to the design of Chas, Margot and Richie rooms and the house. This is a brilliant film on every level, a delight for the senses and for the mind . . . So if you have a complicated mind and you enjoy watching a challenging film, then *The Royal Tenenbaums* is for you. As for me, I plan on watching it again so I find more things to love about it. Thank you Wes Anderson, so much.

You made me laugh, you made me smile and I cried. A thousand times,
thank you!

Viewers often made note of the film's high brow tendencies. "deathfrank2000" describes the film as "literate, clever, and often too smart for it's own good" while "jimmiewing" concludes that the film's "humor is usually very intellectual." Appreciating the film on its own intellectual terms appears to elevate the intelligence level of the respondent in the minds of many of the commentators; this fact is proven by the respondents who disliked the film and in so doing, sought to assure readers that they do, in fact, appreciate clever, intelligent films. They simply did not find The Royal Tenenbaums either interesting or entertaining enough for their tastes.

By and large, viewers were willing to accept the film on its own terms. They appreciated Anderson's reported auteur talents, his distinctive style, his obsessive attention to detail and loved his pathos-ridden characters. Despite the trailer's and poster's suggestion that the film is a straightforward comedy, viewers overlooked this misleading intimation and praised the comedic elements along side the decidedly more dramatic ones. The film sells itself on the basis of the idealized intellectual lifestyle. Since leading this exact lifestyle is impossible, at the very least, viewers can say that they liked the film and therefore associate themselves with it in that way. Popular reviewers resisted the lure; however, the fact remains that a large segment of the movie-going public appreciates the intellectual appeal and the glory it bestows on its associates and hence ensured the film's commercial success.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine the possibility of individuality in postmodern society. Looking specifically at three Hollywood films of the 1990s and early 2000s, Reality Bites, Scream, and The Royal Tenenbaums, each enjoying varying degrees of popular success, the analysis focused on the methods and techniques that the filmmakers used to supply audiences with the identity components the public has come to expect from mainstream films. Viewer-posted comments for each of the three films confirm the fact that film audiences select the films they watch for specific purposes and with specific expectations in terms of the films' use-value. When filmmakers fail to meet these expectations for large numbers of people, the resulting product is sure to fail at the box office. In some key instances, the ways in which the films were framed by popular reviewers seemed to influence the ways in which audience members who posted comments online thought about the film in question. This thesis has shown that the ways in which viewers discuss the films analyzed points to the identity-enhancing and identity-confirming aspects of the films themselves and what viewing the films says about the people who watch them.

In the case of Reality Bites, the filmmakers used a standard love story packaged along the lines of the catch-all term Generation X to capture the viewing public's attention. The producers relied upon popular young actors to portray attractive characters conveying the appropriate slacker mentality. The viewer is presented with a mainstream Hollywood film that deals with young people navigating their way along the periphery of consumer and counter culture. The film criticizes consumer culture even while it is a part of that culture. There is an inherent contradiction in this set-up. Online posters were left without

a clear sense of the film's position and by refusing to take a stand on consumerism the film suffered both artistically and financially as a result.

Notwithstanding the confusion surrounding the film's overall message, viewers found aspects of the film to which they could relate. As expected, the notion of the use-value of watching a film comes into play with reviewers. The examination of the posted comments confirms that audiences acquired identity components from the film. Viewers expected to find themselves reflected on screen and were either pleased when they did or angry when they did not. Others stated that the film and their regard or lack thereof for it helped to define them as a person and reinforced their desired identities. The final proof that viewers are not simply watching Reality Bites and absorbing the producer's messages is evidenced by the fact that viewing spurred audiences to take action and post a comment, in some cases very creatively.

Of the three films analyzed, the techniques employed by the production team behind Scream proved the most successful in terms of financial success. Every aspect of the film's marketing was calculated to succeed from the thematic approach and mixing of generic terminology down to the characters and overall aesthetic of the film; audiences and critics alike loved Scream. Whereas the confusion inherent in Reality Bites translated directly to confusion and tepid reception amongst popular critics and viewers, Scream was able to use its non-specific generic terminology to pull in fans of the various genres hinted at by the film's marketing and ignited fierce debate amongst online posters as to the true generic nature of the film.

The analysis revealed that Scream viewers found numerous uses for the film beyond simple entertainment. Online posters expressed their views about the film ardently

and used their knowledge and understanding of film genre to legitimize their filmic opinions and themselves as individuals. The extreme level of concern for the film's generic classification indicates the importance the film has in viewers' lives and what their opinions about Scream say about them as people. As was the case with Reality Bites, viewers expected to see themselves reflected on screen and were very pleased when this expectation was met. Likewise, many viewers moved beyond simply watching and were inspired to take action. Posting a review online links the poster automatically to any number of communities of film viewers who feel the same way and provides an avenue of communication between individuals who would otherwise never communicate.

The third and final film examined was The Royal Tenenbaums, a film that managed to meld the cinematic modes of the art film, the mainstream Hollywood film and the independent blockbuster into one film that appealed to a large segment of the viewing audience. Although not a breakaway success like Scream, The Royal Tenenbaums stands out when compared with other films of its type; it enjoyed a wide release throughout North America and stayed in theatres for an uncharacteristically long period of time.

The Royal Tenenbaums relied upon the use of the art film aesthetic, the independent film's penchant for excesses of style and risky content, its well known and well respected actors, and its young director's reputation as auteur to capture audiences' attention. The makers of The Royal Tenenbaums sold the film with an air of exclusivity but one which they opened up to wider audiences. The curtain on the high-brow, culturally acceptable world of intellectual entertainment was lifted in this case and audiences appreciated this access to normally privileged entertainment. Like Scream, the makers of The Royal Tenenbaums were mostly successful in their critical and financial

aims. While popular reviewers refrained from praising the film wholeheartedly, their reception of The Royal Tenenbaums was warmer than that of Reality Bites. In spite of the popular critics' reviews, online posters accepted the film and Anderson's vision on his own terms.

Once again audiences expected to see themselves reflected onscreen and they were not disappointed by The Royal Tenenbaums in this respect. Posting reviews of the film provided individuals with the opportunity to display their film expertise and their overall discernment. It is clear that the film's intellectual and high-brow appeals touched viewers and figured as a major determining factor for viewers either praising or condemning the film. As was the case with all of the films, viewers assumed that their opinion of the film makes a clear statement about who they are as individuals and the ways in which their comments are phrased confirms this fact.

This thesis has engaged in the exploration of new audience reception territory: viewer responses as posted online, unsolicited and unrestricted. Although it is impossible to determine the specific demographic information for the respondents consulted, that anonymity proved a benefit as viewers were free to express their opinions unreservedly in a forum designed for that purpose. This thesis does not assume audience response. Instead, the analysis examined the response of a segment of the actual audience and avoided any undue influencing of the responses polled. The urge to study what people are looking at and how they are using the objects of their attention is an important one, key to understanding our individual, social and political lives (Staiger Media 4); and as such, future research remains to be done in the methodological middle ground that this thesis works within, between the traditional forms of textual analysis and reception studies in

order to determine the effects and affects, as well as the uses, audiences make of the mass mediated products made available to them.

This thesis sought to determine the extent to which individuality is possible in postmodern society. By approaching the analysis from the theoretical middle ground, this thesis suggests that individuality is possible and demonstrates the complex processes involved in the interplay of individual and ideological responses. Examining the question in terms of the mainstream film industry, the viewing public routinely uses Hollywood films according to their own needs, picking and choosing, and filtering the components on offer to fit their own self-images. Despite the film studios' messages and machinations calculated to encourage consumerism, film producers and film viewers are thriving side by side, each giving and taking from the other as they see fit.

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