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THE HOLLYWOOD GARMONBOZIA MACHINE

An Examination of Black Lodge Spirits in "Mulholland Drive"



First off, picture in your head a big old title card, the silent film era kind with the filigreed corners, or else a slate clapping down to get your attention. Either way, the words "An Opinion Piece!" prominently displayed before the movie gets going.

Now, with that disclaimer out of the way: every David Lynch fan has one. You know what I mean. The one movie, the one episode in his obtuse oeuvre where they're sure they've punched through the thick walls of surrealism and dream-logic and glimpsed, unimpeded, Exactly What is Going On.

The title of this article is a little sensationalist, but it is also too small in scale to be truly accurate. The Black Lodge of *Twin Peaks* refers to the dark spiritual world adjacent to the physical one, a place of spirits who feed on "gar-mon-bo-zee-uh", the creamed corn of human pain and sorrow. *Twin Peaks: The Return* suggests that the scale of the Lodge may in fact be very small and localized, a single tendril of the vast spiritual realm known as Nonexistent or the Mauve Zone. In the Lodge, the evil spirit Killer BOB (God, isn't it fun to write about Lynch pieces?) has torn up the spiritual walls of the town to form a nest where he and a handful of minor spirits feed. Even Judy or Jowday, the 'extreme negative force' that birthed BOB, may not be the fully apocalyptic being that *Fire Walk With Me* and *The Return* make her out to be, but only one evil of many. But to avoid having to state this throughout, we will, for simplicity's sake, refer to evil spirits and Black Lodge spirits interchangeably, without concern for their precise origin within the spirit world.

This small-town scale prompts a question, then: if the vortex of pain and sorrow that is *Twin Peaks* is the result of BOB, a single one of these spirits and a canonically minor one ('my familiar', as Mike says), what would it look like if there was somewhere where these same evil beings congregated in greater numbers? Somewhere where they'd embedded themselves, become part of the power structure?



Exactly What is Going On, then:

Mulholland Drive is not just a movie about one woman's guilty conscience driving her into a dream-life and her eventual suicide upon being forced to wake from that dream-life. Much of the film is contained within the walls of Diane's dream of Betty, yes. But when the Cowboy informs Diane that it is time to wake up, there is still another half an hour left in the film. If we look at what happens in that span, which characters emerge from the dreamscape still intact, and step outside of the narrative to look at the film's origin, there is the shape of a much greater darkness than Diane's singular ruin. The darkness of the film is the pain and sorrow of an entire industry.

In short, *Mulholland Drive* is about the evil spirits, akin to those of the Black Lodge, who have built a city up into an engine of failed dreams and despair, a factory for their food. It is about the Hollywood Garmonbozia Machine.



Point the First: The Origin of the Story

Before examining the events or characters of the film itself, there is one important piece of information to lay out. This is the bedrock from which all else in the theory can be built.

Both Mark Frost and Sherilyn Fenn have stated that the original plan for *Mulholland Drive* was not a film, but a television show. Specifically, the idea was to follow *Twin Peaks*' Audrey Horne to Los Angeles. As Frost said:

"I lived on Mulholland Drive at the time and I thought it was a great title. We had considered spinning off the Audrey character and setting her loose in Hollywood, in a modern noir." This point's straightforwardness requires its presentation before any of the others, but it also means that it needs the smallest amount of expounding upon. *Mulholland Drive* began its gestation in David Lynch's mind as an offshoot of *Twin Peaks*. They were originally intended to be set in the same world.

But this base, sturdy as it is, doesn't mean anything if Lynch hasn't put anything on it. Let's see what other connections we can find.



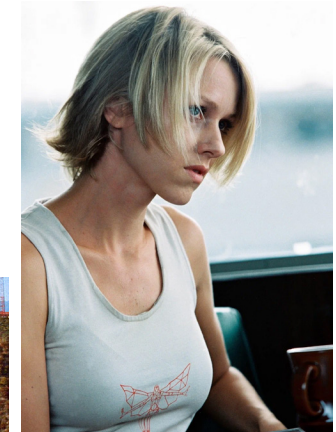
Point the Second: Where the Dream Ends

The most common interpretation I see of *Mulholland Drive* is that everything is a dream within Betty/Diane's guilt-ridden mind. I don't think this is necessarily an incorrect interpretation- for a significant portion of the film, she is inarguably fantasizing, or dreaming, or both, and these portions of the movie have the same heft and importance as the final act of the film. Lynch ascribed meaning to capital-d Dream in nearly everything he did, and there are few of his works where it is a more central conceit than this.

But as mentioned above, there is a lot that happens after the dream is shattered, and much of it is presented in such a way that it is hard to refute its separate existence from Diane's fantasy world.

Her dreamscape is not lessened by an expansion of interpretation- the idea that her final fate is a suicide designed to release her harvest of garmonbozia by the film's spirits. If anything, the idea that her delusions have been orchestrated to cause her all the more suffering in their shattering only adds to the tragedy.

But who are these spirits, the ones doing the shaping and the shattering?



by Shane Robinson
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Point the Third: The Spirits

If we examine the other characters of the film, a few major contenders arise as possible evil spirits. There are two major branches that give us starting points to question our lineup—characters who have a direct hand in Diane's suffering, and characters who exhibit supernatural traits that cannot be waved away.

Perhaps first and most centrally, we have Camilla Rhodes, Diane's movie-star lover and the real world seed from which Rita is born in the dreamworld. It is Camilla's rejection of Diane, her engagement to director Adam Keshner, that the whole movie hinges on. Diane's seething anger at the way she is used and discarded sets everything off—Diane enlists a hitman to kill Camilla, but her guilt when the job is done sends her retreating into her fantasy.

Within the framework of our spirit theory, there is one scene that is much more starkly horrific than it otherwise would be: when Diane, invited to Camilla and Adam's dinner party, is informed, with apparent cruel glee on the couple's part, that her lover is marrying the director. Then she is forced to watch as Camilla kisses another girl, slowly, in a way that indicates a deep intimacy.

This scene is awful enough without our spirit theory tacked onto it. There is real horror in the icy Hollywood

spite with which Camilla shows Diane *it's not even that I'm done being with women, or done being with people other than my fiance. It's just that I'm done with you.*

But if our theory about the Hollywood Garmonbozia machine proves likely, then this scene becomes doubly sickening. Not only are we watching Camilla pluck Diane like a ripened fruit and toss her aside for underlings (whom we will examine in a moment) to box up, but we are seeing that before this harvest is even finished, she's already starting to work on the next one.

Are Camilla and Adam Black Lodge spirits, then? I don't think so. I think they are in league with the spirits' goals, but there is insufficient evidence to point to them as even direct co-conspirators with our otherworldly beings (who I will enumerate more clearly in a moment, after eliminating our other possibilities.) It is more likely that they themselves are only further can openers in the garmonbozia machine, conditioned to their cruelty for the spirits' benefit.

A better argument of spirithood could be made for the Cowboy, whose air of authority and mysterious knowledge certainly ring as supernatural. But I believe the Cowboy is mortal, although a Magician, in the "longs to see" sense. A successful one, too, in a way the fiery-crowned Windom

Earle was not. Though a person, the Cowboy is more than a cog in the machine; he is a player, and a major one. This is his buggy, and he's driving. Admittedly, the logic behind my belief is flimsy, centered on a distinctly human flair to the Cowboy's appearances: his use of a dramatic Hollywood Hills setting to drive his point home to Justin Theroux's director, and the "his buggy" speech, which seems like a distinctly human moment of pride. There are certainly indicators that could lean us the other way, most notably the lights suddenly turning on in his presence, mirroring other spirits' control over *ee-lec-tri-ci-ty*. His weaving in and out of Diane's dream sequence and initiating her return to wakefulness so that the garmonbozia-harvesting process can begin could be the work of a magician or of a spirit with equal ease.



If we see the Cowboy as a mortal magician, though, then it can provide us with an idea of how the machine came to be. The workings of magicians and spirits in concert could explain how the spirits of Hollywood have moved past the purposeless mayhem and violence of familiars like BOB, and enmeshed themselves with the human world enough to become power brokers like Mr. Roque. (Mentioning Roque here is getting ahead of ourselves a bit. We'll quickly catch up.)

If not the Cowboy, then who? I believe we directly see four evil spirits in the film. Two of them are greater beings, string-pullers, factory heads for the machine. Two of them are lesser creatures, mayhem-bent familiars like BOB. Undoubtedly here even the most skeptical readers are saying *okay, the Man Behind the Dumpster*, fair, and yes, he is absolutely one of the four. Because of his obviousness we will wait a moment to talk about him.

First: Mr. Roque. The seemingly chairbound head of a mysterious Hollywood shadow organization, perched atop the studio system, which seems to bend to his every mysterious decree. It is true that Mr. Roque displays no overtly supernatural traits during his time onscreen. We have only a sense of his otherworldly power, his command over everyone in his presence.

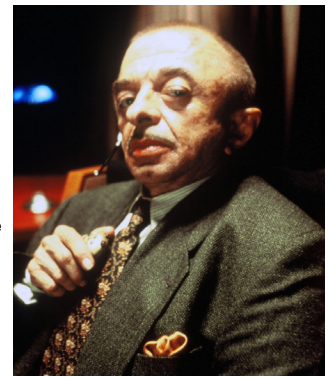
It is true that Mr. Roque is contained entirely within the section of the movie where Diane is dreaming. But I don't believe that this means he is entirely fictional, only that we are not necessarily seeing him as he actually is.

The transition to Mr. Roque's domain is distinct. There is a room, set apart, with a deliberately arrayed, nearly empty layout and figures within who occupy very static, repeated placements. The parallels to scenes within *Twin Peaks'* Waiting Room are strong. (On that note: I do not believe that Mr. Roque sharing an actor with The Arm/The Man from Another Place is intended as a tell of his nature, but it's a possibility.)

There is a prominently-placed blue lampshade in the room with Mr. Roque, right at the level of his head. Color placements are not a coincidence in Lynch's work, and as we progress we will see other telling moments that suggest blue is the color of spirits. (And here is as good a place as any to recall the Blue Rose in *Peaks*, symbol of the tulpa, an intersection of spiritual being and artificial construct. There may be no more perfect metaphor for Hollywood entire.)

Mr. Roque is not overtly supernatural in his actions. And yet there is something obviously inhuman happening here. He makes enigmatic pronouncements into a spiderweb of phone lines that seem able to reach into anywhere in the city. His whims seem almost telepathically conveyed to his underlings. Whenever he is done speaking, the room retreats back into darkness, as though he has no human needs, but only waits in the shadows until the time of his next proclamation.

In the soundtrack to *Mulholland Drive*, Angelo Badalamenti has tellingly named one track "Mr. Roque/Betty's Theme." Speculation based



on this leans largely in the direction of Roque being a complete figment, a monstrous underworld dream figure that Betty can pin her guilt to over ordering the hit on Camilla Rhodes. This is a very reasonable read, but I posit a different theory. What if the combined track is meant to demonstrate that Mr. Roque's presence encapsulates Diane Betty completely? What if Mr. Roque is, from his sealed room in the tower, orchestrating every piece of her downfall, even as he begins the work fresh with the new girl he has designated as 'the one'? If there is a force of spiritual decay at work here, then Mr. Roque is the boss in the office that overlooks the factory floor of the garmonbozia machine.

And if Mr. Roque is the factory head, then the floor manager must certainly be The Man Behind the Dumpster. This character is also frequently referred to as the Bum or The Man Behind Winkie's, but given the prominence he assumes within this framework, we will continue to give him the more respectful title.





The man behind the dumpster first appears in the dream, and we are only given a moment's glance at him before.

To call the Man filthy is an inadequate descriptor. He is coated in a deep layer of oily grime, sufficient to obscure the true outlines of his face entirely. His appearance bears a strong parallel to the Woodsmen of *The Return*, but I think he is a more singular, more powerful sort of spirit than those myriad familiars. As Dan says, moments before he is struck dead by an instant of the man's attention:

There's a man... in back of this place, he's the one who's doing it! I can see him through the wall. I can see his face. I hope that I never see that face, ever, outside of a dream.

The Man's gaze alone is enough to kill. He is a street spirit, the terror of absolute failure in Hollywood, the kind of failure one can never climb back up from. His mere presence strikes dreams dead.

And yet, he is idle, calm, even beatific. There is an expression on his face that does not change, one that suggests an absolute contentment in his place. Perhaps this is because he is on the street, behind the dumpster, and this is his realm.

I believe that if we examine The Man and Mr. Roque together, we begin to form a distinct "as above, so below" picture of the City of Dreams. At the top of the silver tower of success, ensconced within the dream, Roque sits in an impregnable room and casts his whims over the entire city. Moving out of the dream, the Man Behind the Dumpster holds court over everything too lowly to be part of Mr. Roque's dominion. Mr. Roque lords over every success; the Man Behind the Dumpster owns every failure.

If we accept the Man Behind the Dumpster as a spirit, then it is the shortest of steps to our two remaining Black Lodge fiends: The Old Couple.

This pair arrive initially at the beginning of the movie, sharing a car ride with Betty at the onset of her dream. At this point, their sense of menace is only vague, held in their leering smiles from the backseat. But they are not mere dream omens.

After Diane has woken from her fantasy, we watch the Man Behind the Dumpster engage in a moment of street-garbage ritual, examining the film's mysterious blue box like a derelict haruspex. He places the blue box from earlier in the movie in a crumpled paper bag with what appears to be a piece of raw meat and a discarded soda tab. He drops this ersatz gris-gris bag to the ground, where the Old Couple emerge, barely an inch tall and flailing with impish glee to their task: Diane's doom, and the collection of her garmonbozia.



The parallels between Diane's death scene and the murder of Laura Palmer in *Fire Walk With Me* are not insignificant. There is the same flashing, startling light, the same expression of savage glee on the faces of the attackers. On Diane's death we see the same kind of electricity-ridden smoke that accompanies the arrival of the Woodsmen, beings we have already marked as akin to the Man Behind the Dumpster.

I hope that I never see that face, ever, outside of a dream, Dan says. But of course, we do. The Man Behind the Dumpster and his minions appear after Betty has awoken, returned to being Diane. Their supernatural powers are only fully revealed after the dream has ended. This may be the most telling sign of all that we are witnessing more than the simple firings of a nightmare-ridden brain.

On to one final place, then, that requires a bit of backtrack in the film's timeline.



Point the Fourth: Silencio

It would be easy to dismiss the entire Club Silencio sequence as part of Diane's dream of being Betty, a stuttering fall into Diane's grieving realization of what she's done that begins her waking process. Except, just as with the Winkie's scene, Lynch will not let us have such an easy line of delineation. Like the Man Behind the Dumpster, Club Silencio and its occupants extend beyond the borders of the dream. In the final shot of the film, the Blue-Haired Lady sits in her silent theater box. For a long stretch, she looks at us with something very much like lamentation on her face, before uttering the film's closing word.

I believe that the scene within Club Silencio is one of the clearest showcases we get that Lynch is visiting the same subconscious spaces in *Mulholland* that he does in *The Return*. The Blue-Haired Lady's dress, her elaborate styling, her placement in an otherworldly theater, and the questionable linking of the Spanish language to the mystical are all paralleled in the figure of Señorita Dido from the infamous Part 8 of *The Return*. It is this episode that gives us perhaps the broadest image of Lynch's spirit world, and the one with the closest things to answers about it and its denizens.

But while we can almost certainly see her as a spirit being of some sort, I have not included the Blue-Haired Lady among the ranks of the Black Lodge spirits. Something in her apart-ness from the rest of things, the gentle sorrow of her final proclamation, are suggestive of something more akin to an observing spirit, removed from White or Black Lodge battle lines. Perhaps we can think of Club Silencio as a sort of Blue Lodge.

Here, also, we have a magician longing to see: a character whose title is in fact a capitalized "The

Magician". This one speaks for itself. (Club Silencio's theatrical parallel to the Fireman's home in *The Return* also provides a hilarious, although reaching, possibility: that the Magician is in fact not a magician at all, but another spirit, serving under the Blue-Haired Lady, mirroring the relationship between Dido and the Fireman. A fun idea, but not one with a lot of heft behind it.)

Exact speculation about the nature of Club Silencio in relation to the rest of the Hollywood Garmonbozia Machine is difficult. There are arguments to be made that they are in league with all the rest of it, another piece of the creamed corn cannery. But there is something in the visual style of the space, its parallels to the theater within the Fireman's fortress in *The Return*. Something in the expression of the Magician during his *there is no band speech*, a look not of threat but of warning. And, most of all, something in the pure flood of lamentation from "La Llorona de Los Angeles" Rebekah Del Rio and the resigned sadness of the Blue-Haired Lady. Club Silencio feels like an Elsewhere, a dream purgatory populated by spirits striving to help humanity, trying to help them escape their suffering, or at least to bear witness to that suffering.

We can dovetail our argument here at the end to our first one about *Mulholland's* original conception as a *Twin Peaks* offshoot by pointing out one last thing: our Weeping Woman is introduced as Rebekah Del Rio in Club Silencio, and then, decades later, comes to the Roadhouse, still under her own name, unlike several of the other artists throughout *The Return*, who are under pseudonyms or have humorous changes made to their names. And as if to hammer to point home just a tiny bit harder, La Llorona de Los Angeles sings while wearing a dress patterned like a certain very familiar floor.

Point the Final

Given the deliberately vague nature of Lynch's work and his frequently expressed desire that everything be open to multiple interpretations, any individual point here could be waved away with three or four equally valid meanings. But taken collectively, I think there is a compelling amount of evidence to suggest that *Mulholland Drive* is exploring another facet of the spirit world that we only glimpsed blurrily in *Twin Peaks*. He seems to be showcasing a greater facet of the machinery of human suffering. Looking between the two works, there is a question being asked, and it seems to be something like: Which is the worse evil, the mayhem that comes with unexpected and unannounced tragedy, or the deliberate suffering needed to oil the machine of dreams?

(A final stapled-on bit here, just to further prod at anyone who's read through this and gone no no no no to themselves the entire time: This is only a third of the puzzle, a focusing down of the topic to fit in the room allotted. The other two-thirds of the pieces come from *Lost Highway* and *Inland Empire*, two films that I completely believe inhabit the same physical and spiritual universe as *Mulholland Drive*, and by extension, *Twin Peaks*. Collectively, these three movies in the "L.A. Trilogy" showcase three permutations of Black Lodge spirits or similar entities, and their hands in the traversal of three human souls to their afterlives: two hells of self-entrapment and one heaven or Nirvana of escape. Maybe a future piece expanding the theory to the other two films will come about and prompt additional teeth-gnashing.)





HEAT AND COLLATERAL

Inside Michael Mann's Los Angeles

by Riley H.

The setting in which a film takes place is often incorporated into the story, playing a prominent role. In some cases a particular city can even gain a correlation with a specific filmmaker. Despite only two of his films taking place there, a city commonly associated with Michael Mann's work as a writer and director is Los Angeles, thanks to his two iconic crime films set there, *Heat* and *Collateral*. Throughout these two features, some of the most well-known portrayals of Los Angeles in cinema can be found, often occurring at landmark locations where some of the most crucial moments of both films transpire. The setting of Los Angeles is instrumental to each narrative of *Heat* and *Collateral*.

The first of Mann's films to be set in Los Angeles was *Heat*, in 1995. *Heat* follows a group of thieves led by Neil McCauley (Robert De Niro) and Vincent Hanna's (Al Pacino) team of LAPD Detectives who are trying to apprehend them. One of the most memorable scenes in *Heat* is the bank robbery led by McCauley and Chris Shiherlis (Val Kilmer) that takes place in Downtown Los Angeles, and the shootout that follows after Hanna is in pursuit of them. As shots are fired, the streets are teeming with fleeing Angelenos while the LAPD and the robbery culprits use abandoned cars that are scattered throughout the roads of downtown as shields from the implacable bullets. This significant moment takes place in the heart of Los Angeles, highlighting the role the city plays in the narrative. After viewing

the city and its illuminating skyline from a helicopter, Hanna hops into a car and speeds down the 105 freeway, eventually catching up to the car of Neil McCauley. "What do you say I buy you a cup of coffee?" Hanna asks after he pulls over and approaches Neil's window, marking the first time Robert De Niro and Al Pacino have shared a scene together. The meeting of these two actors and their exemplary performances they brought to the moment cemented the diner scene that follows as one of the most notable moments in L.A. film history. The resolution to *Heat* occurs at LAX, where a running McCauley tries to escape Hanna onto the runway, but is ultimately fatally shot in the chest by Hanna. The location of Los Angeles is so essential to the film *Heat*, with key moments happening all over the city throughout its entire runtime.

Nearly ten years after *Heat*, Michael Mann returned to Los Angeles for *Collateral* (2004). After the brief opening at LAX where Vincent (Tom Cruise) is shown, Max (Jamie Foxx), an L.A. cab driver, and the passengers he deals with over one night are introduced. Max traverses around the city while driving his first customer, Annie Farrell (Jada Pinkett Smith). After Annie, he picks up Vincent and is employed to drive him around for the night so he can get to his "meetings" that consist of a series of targets he has to kill. Max's master knowledge of the city, accrued over his time as a cab driver, is put on display when Vincent directs

him to several addresses as they are driving around. "Two minutes to get onto the 101. Transition to the 110 to the 10 and exit on Normandie is five minutes. Two minutes to South Union 'cause there's roadwork," he replies to Vincent's question of how long it'll take until they reach 452 South Union Street, showcasing the importance of Los Angeles locations to the narrative. As they are driving, gorgeous sights of a Los Angeles night are visible, with the lights of the cityscape shot by cinematographers Paul Cameron and Dion Beebe being a fixture of the film. After filling the streets of L.A. with blood all night, Vincent only has one target left: Max's previous customer Annie, who Max embarks on saving after making this discovery. During the final, most thrilling scene, Max and Annie flee onto a Los Angeles Metro train with Vincent right behind them. Max shoots Vincent, leaving him dead on the Metro train, while Max and Annie walk off of the platform, ending the film. From the opening shot at LAX to the closing one of the Metro, *Collateral* consists of many Los Angeles locations, contributing to the significance of the city to its narrative.

While Los Angeles will always be a place of importance for film in general, it is especially significant when examining Michael Mann and his two works set in the city, *Heat* and *Collateral*. Mann has left an indelible mark on the catalog of films that use Los Angeles as not only a setting, but as an essential character in a story as well.



tunnelsnakecooper

CINERAMA

Musso & Frank Grill
Since 1919
OLDEST IN HOLLYWOOD

Vine



The SUPPLY SERGEANT



CASA VEGA

Vine



El Coyote
MEXICAN Food

CINERAMA

Musso & Frank Grill
Since 1919
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CASA VEGA

The SUPPLY SERGEANT

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Johnnie's - Miracle Mile (1988)

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MELON FARMERS

Repo Man and the Strange Existence of TV Edits

by Dana Ziebarth

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One of the few films that me and my dad both enjoy watching together is 1984's *Repo Man*. It took me a while to finally watch it, having given it as a birthday present to my dad, and quickly discovered where many of his "catch-phrases" originated from. Little did I know that the "bad area" that my dad was always suggesting we abscond from was supposed to be downtown LA and that he was imitating the immortal (in terms of legacy and his character in the movie) Harry Dean Stanton.

Another such case, "Flip you, Fletcher," is actually not featured in the film proper (as well as partially misquoted on the part of my dad. The character's name is Pletschner). It exists in the infamous TV edit of the film. I was delighted to discover that the edit was included on the Criterion release of the film (a big tip of the proverbial hat to Criterion for another epic film preservation win).

The edit isn't too drastically different: a few extra/elongated scenes thrown in, 4:3 aspect ratio, lower quality film scan. However, the biggest most memorable change is the replacement of any and all swearing with completely absurd new expletives that no human being has ever uttered in the history of our planet.

I have done my due diligence as someone who loves weird/funny phrasing and strange insults and compiled a list of my favorite utterances in the edit, compiled now for your pleasure:

- "I was killing people while you were swimming around in your fathers guts (balls)"
- "Egad! (god!)"
- "John Wayne was a freak (f*g)"
- "A lot of straight guys like to watch their buddies play (fuck)"
- "Dang blamed (god damned) dumb suck (dipshit) Rodriguez gypsy devil (dildo) punks! I'll get your can! (ass!)"
- motherfucker → melon farmer

My point being, many of these replacements are almost ten times funnier than the original (at least in my opinion) and the film that would be neutered by the censorship of its dialogue is now enhanced by the sheer absurdity of the tame TV edit. Melon farmer? What?

The two men to blame for the dialogue in the edit are the film's director Alex Cox and actor Dick Rude. Cox was asked by the studio to figure out a way to clean up the film for television audiences, who would presumably be driven mad by the vulgar dialogue and simulated drug use that pervades the entire film. Working for free, Cox edited the new cut and Rude served as voice director for all the new dubbed in lines.

Repo Man is an important work of art that mirrors our world in many ways. Otto's (the main character) parents are entranced by a republican christian on the television that asks them to reject communism abroad and liberal humanism at home, a proto-Charlie Kirk denouncing the "sin of empathy". According to news broadcasts heard in the background of scenes, the president is mobilizing forces into South America. As Otto's friend Kevin says, "If the Government decides there's got to be a war, well, then, there's go to be a war, right? I mean, if you can't trust your leaders, who you gonna trust? The RUSSIANS?"

Harry Dean Stanton was a god damn national treasure. Every single one of his lines is hilarious and memorable. "Life of a repo man is always intense" is certainly the most quoted of all of the lines, but he's got so many good ones its hard to pick a favorite. He also (spoilers!) gets gunned down multiple times in the film, only to pop right back up, slightly annoyed. The man takes a helicopter mounted machine gun to the chest only AFTER he was shot point blank with a shotgun and ten seconds later he's cracking open a beer with his pals.

The TV edit foreshadows a certain quirk of internet communication

that has appeared recently, that being the self censorship of swears on places like TikTok and Instagram. No longer can you speak with dignity or be taken seriously while discussing serious matters on a platform which 80% of the planet uses without using substitutions such as "mass grape" or "unaliving on a massive scale".

What's the point? Why bother censoring something when we already know what the characters are saying anyway? The FCC sees Americans as sheltered babies at a time when babies pop out of the womb slinging expletives. The only difference between the censorship of *Repo Man* and the numerous new phrases invented by the good people of TikTok is that at least the *Repo Man* ones are funny.

Repo Man is all about rejecting the culture of the right wing in America and forging your own path of resistance. It's also about a car that turns you into a skeleton and legally stealing cars from poor people that can't pay their bills to the capitalist machine that you serve. It's a perfect movie that can be enjoyed by (mostly) all ages, and if your dad grew up in the 80s there's a good chance you're able to watch it with him without issue.



Okay, I'll knock it off. I don't want this to turn into a listicle.

SHOWTIME

THE LOS ANGELES LAKERS AND LA BASKETBALL IN FILM

BY BRIAN LY



The purple and gold have become just as synonymous with Los Angeles as the big, bright letters of the Hollywood sign, a continued symbol of LA excellence and dreams, whether fulfilled or dashed. Though an import from Minneapolis, the Lakers became an instant success with the drafts of Jerry West and Elgin Baylor alongside the later acquisition of Wilt Chamberlain, key pieces in building a winning dynasty for the first chapter of what would become a storied legacy in Los Angeles. While they had several brushes with the championship with this core, it's not until after a tragic loss to the Milwaukee Bucks in the 1971 Western Conference Finals led by Lew Alcindor and the early retirement of Elgin Baylor that they were finally able to make basketball history the following year in 1972 by bringing their first Los Angeles title to the now-

iconic Great Western Forum. As the Lakers grew into a winning organization with Hollywood right around the corner, this was the birth of "Showtime," defined not only by the team success but also by the transformation of basketball from mere sport into primetime entertainment as the Lakers themselves, and later athletes as a whole, became a part of celebrity culture. The first piece of this new era was the acquisition of their previous rival from the Bucks, Lew Alcindor, now known as Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Where "Showtime" truly begins is with the draft of Magic Johnson, who, in tandem with Abdul-Jabbar, brought them their second LA championship in his rookie year. The rest is history.

With Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's arrival in LA, we see perhaps the first athlete to

propel directly into stardom. While he was no stranger to the silver screen, with a prior role fighting against his Jeet Kune Do master Bruce Lee in *Game of Death*, the entire idea of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar as a star presence is immediately brought into the discourse with his role as First Officer Roger Murdock in the classic spoof film *Airplane!* during a scene when his character is called out by his real name by a kid who insults his on-court play; he responds by breaking the fourth wall and addressing the criticisms as his real-world self. Though obviously operating within the film for comedic effect, it is a demonstration of how he has become a household name, by association with being a part of the Los Angeles Lakers, that such a reference would resonate with a casual moviegoing audience. What was previously just a cameo appearance, more of a largely silent imposing physical presence, evolved into one of universal recognition, a seismic shift for a sport that was just at the time emerging on the national stage to become one of the premier forms of sports entertainment.

It's interesting to contrast this with the parallel Magic Johnson, the homegrown rookie from Michigan, who himself



dazzled fans with the way he played on the court, and though he had less of a silver-screen presence than his co-lead on the Lakers, he very much elevated the Lakers to must-see television with his storied rivalry against the Boston Celtics' Larry Bird in the "Showtime" era. Jack Nicholson became synonymous with the Lakers with his impeccable record of attendance courtside despite his busy filming schedule, virtually never missing a home game until the COVID-19 pandemic, further cementing this relationship between the basketball team and Hollywood royalty. While bringing Hollywood to the Lakers wasn't uniquely a "Showtime" invention, as Doris Day, Dean Martin, and Jack Lemmon, among other Hollywood legends, were also courtside regulars during the earlier West-Baylor era, Magic Johnson as a representative figure managed to bridge together the glitz of Hollywood with the everyman, with his folksy small-town charm and his frequent appearances on the small screen, such as on *The Arsenio Hall Show* and *The Simpsons*.

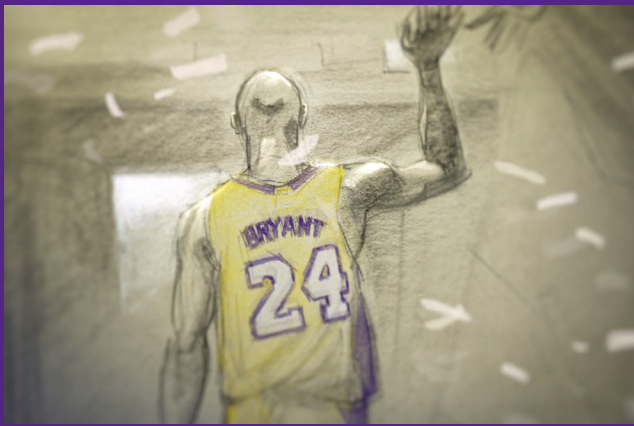
and destigmatizing it on a national level, the storied franchise wouldn't have a long fallow period with the union of Shaquille O'Neal, a promising rising star from the Orlando Magic, and Kobe Bryant, a scrappy rookie drafted right out of high school. There were certainly growing pains between the odd couple, and they would continue to clash throughout their career, but their on-court success resulted in two subsequent dynasties that contributed to a further five championships for the purple and gold, with a three-peat from 2000 to 2002 between the duo and two additional chips when Kobe teamed up with the Memphis Grizzlies, Pau Gasol. Similar to their clashing personalities, their presence on film couldn't be any more different.

Though a standout player and an absolute physical specimen in his own right, Shaq is perhaps just as well-known for his off-court exploits as for being one of the most dominant centers the game had ever seen. From his attempt in music

While the era of Magic ended when he stepped away from the game amidst his very public battle against HIV in 1991, something that has since become historic in terms of bringing attention to the disease

with his mixed rap career and a surprisingly successful run on the electronic music circuit as DJ Diesel to his iconic presence as an analyst on *Inside the NBA*, perhaps what stands as the most curious hallmark of his career is *Kazaam*, a film that arguably doesn't exist, where he, and not comedian Sinbad, plays a genie that comes out of a boombox who helps out a down-on-his-luck kid against his bullies. While there is absolutely nothing worthwhile to say about the film from a pure cinematic standpoint, it's as representative of the very ethos that would define the public persona of Shaq, where in spite of his constant on-air spats with Charles Barkley and his relatively thin skin when it comes to public criticism, he has always been a man of the people, shying away from endorsements from luxury brands in favor of inexpensive sneakers that kids could actually afford and his work with the Boys & Girls Clubs, bringing about the same sort of relatability from the Magic era despite his rather imposing appearance.





In stark contrast, Kobe Bryant became known for his Mamba Mentality, constantly locked into the game as a true scholar of the sport, famous both for his dedication to watching game film to perfect his own game as well as his concentration on the court, with a sort of winning spirit that would define his persona beyond his actual skill and athleticism. Where he wasn't as much of a genetic freak, he more than compensated with how dominant he was with a killer winning attitude. Compared to Shaq, who could be seen virtually everywhere as a fairly ubiquitous presence during his stint on the Lakers and even beyond, Kobe was more of a private person who preferred to have his words spoken on the court. That isn't to say he wasn't a star by virtue of becoming synonymous with the franchise as perhaps their most storied athlete ever, but he was a basketball player first, and he kept that ethos all throughout his career, playing through injury until his body physically couldn't keep up with his mind. His career was capstoned by the Oscar-winning short *Dear Basketball*, an admittedly saccharine yet emotionally

effective ode to his love for the sport and the mark he wanted to leave on the world, cementing his lasting legacy despite his untimely death.

Perhaps the most representative of the end state of Hollywood ambition would be *Space Jam: A New Legacy*, starring the latest Lakers star, LeBron James, the anointed one from the very start who was meant to succeed Michael Jordan, yet he himself has had mixed success despite outsized expectations, and for the most part, has managed to always shut down his naysayers, and even if he had to leave to form a Big 3 in Miami before he won his first ring, he brought glory back to his hometown team, the Cleveland Cavaliers, before chasing the glory of the Lakers in the latest chapter of his career. Whereas the first film would catapult Jordan into the stuff of legends with his naturalistic performance playing off of Bugs Bunny in a way that hasn't been done since Bob Hoskins with *Roger Rabbit*, LeBron, though he is arguably an objectively better actor with some prior Hollywood credits, approached the

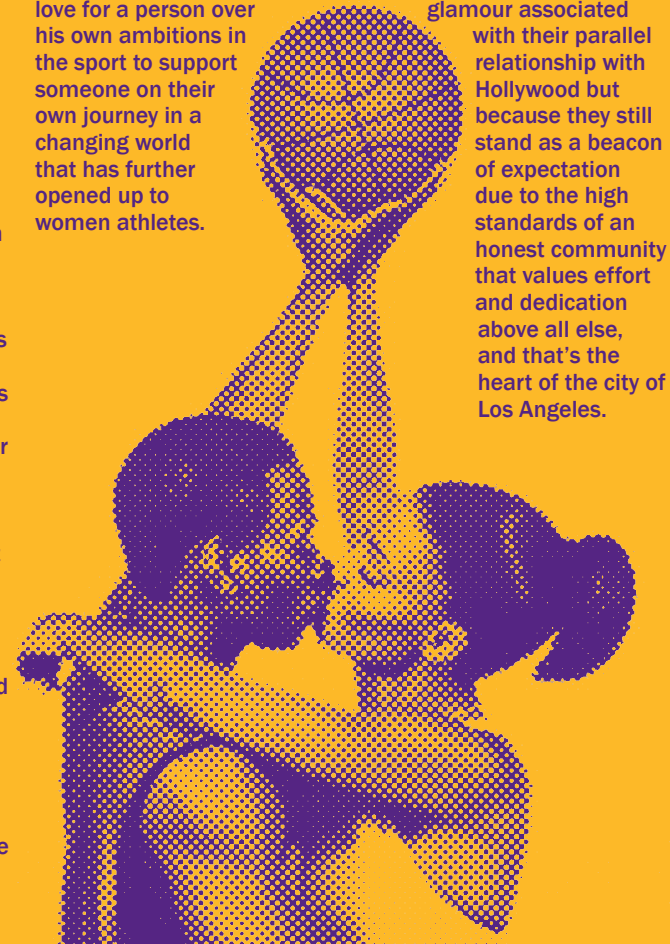
franchise with a certain self-consciousness of the persona he was crafting, which ultimately made both his performance and the film fall flat, more demonstrative of the modern Warner Bros. that was losing sight of the unique charm of the Looney Tunes in favor of just pure IP overload in the twilight days before the acquisition of the company by Discovery in the David Zaslav era. There's just a certain baggage that came with LeBron that was bundled with the film itself, an intentional attempt to quite literally establish a new legacy, losing the earnestness that came with the serendipity and sheer absurdity of the original collaboration that would lead the legacy sequel to ultimately come across as corporate slop.

The story of Los Angeles basketball on film may be defined by the Los Angeles Lakers, but the cultural phenomenon of LA ball doesn't hinge solely on both its on-screen and real-world affiliations with the team. In *Like Mike*, a children's film starring child rapper Lil' Bow Wow with many appearances from real-world NBA players at the time, Calvin Cambridge would forever change the basketball world after finding a pair of old sneakers worn by Michael Jordan and suddenly developing virtuosic basketball skills, which he demonstrates during a halftime contest while attending a game of the Los Angeles Knights, leading to him initially being signed as a symbolic gesture that later evolves into an actual contributing role to

bring success to the team. It wouldn't be surprising for some to mistake this as a documentary, but perhaps the one thing that makes it clear that it's not is the fact that the Knights parallel the real-world Los Angeles Clippers, a team whose entire legacy is defined by its presence in the shadows of the Los Angeles Lakers, which makes the heroic arc of Calvin Cambridge unfortunately not believable as much as his story would be an absolute triumph, because as much as the Lakers are defined by their star presences, the core of LA basketball is overcoming hardship, opportunity, and hard work.

That's perhaps what makes *Love and Basketball* one of the most enduring films not only about Black romance and the sport of basketball, as you may imagine from the title, but also about achieving the dream through the sport. The film predates many modern stars who have since been born and raised within the Los Angeles basketball machine, where kids from rough backgrounds are able to provide better lives for themselves and their families through success in the sport. While the film isn't primarily concerned with explicit class struggle, it chronicles the parallel paths of two young athletes, who each approach their careers in different ways due to the realities of the systems faced by their respective genders. In some regards, true parity still hasn't been achieved in the WNBA, where there's a significant gender wage gap, while also acknowledging the economic realities in terms

of the profitability of each league, which admittedly has been improving as of late. At a time when the sport for women was certainly far from the status that it was for men, it's a classical representation of the gap in the labor market as represented in the sport, where the subsequent gap in opportunities naturally creates a rift between two highly competitive individuals. The sport of basketball is fickle, however, as with any other occupation that relies on one's physicality and athleticism, and a career-ending injury shifts the dynamic between the two, and it becomes a battle of overcoming ego where a man is able to put love for a person over his own ambitions in the sport to support someone on their own journey in a changing world that has further opened up to women athletes.

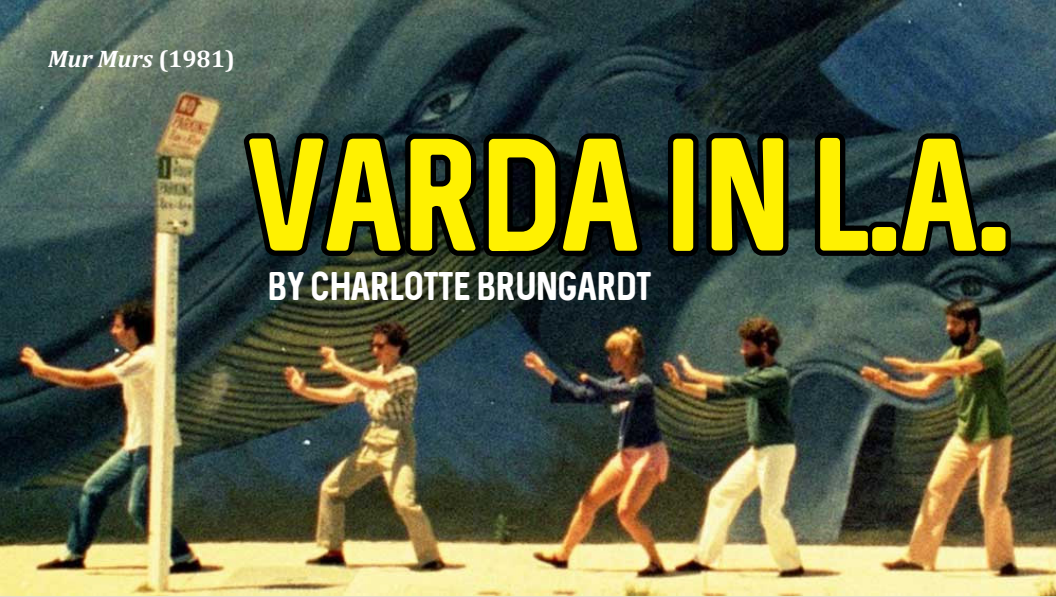


This is really what Los Angeles basketball is all about, and as much as the legacy of the Los Angeles Lakers will always be the defining cultural image of the sport, Los Angeles is a working-class city that thrives on honest hard work, social mobility, and the fulfillment of dreams. Even the mantle of the Lakers isn't just a brand that you can ride to success, although there certainly are plenty of attempts of lesser players trying to gain clout during their usually brief tenure on the team, as the pressure tends to overpower generally weaker spirits. The bright lights of the Lakers are certainly a very real thing, not because of the prestige and glamour associated with their parallel relationship with Hollywood but because they still stand as a beacon of expectation due to the high standards of an honest community that values effort and dedication above all else, and that's the heart of the city of Los Angeles.

Mur Murs (1981)

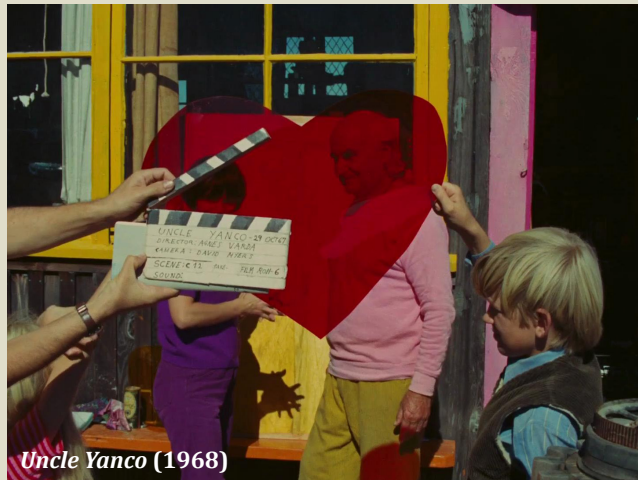
VARDA IN L.A.

BY CHARLOTTE BRUNGARDT



Though perhaps best known as the lone female figure in the French New Wave, Agnes Varda created some of her most formally daring and visually engaging works while briefly living in California with her husband, fellow filmmaker Jacques Demy, while he worked on his sole English language feature, *Model Shop*. These “California films” span length, tone, genre, and subject matter, and serve as an instructive encapsulation of Varda’s artistic ethos; perpetual experimentation and boundless curiosity.

The first, *Uncle Yanco* (1968), a bright and playful documentary short in which Varda inserts herself into the narrative, both of the film and her own family history, as she tracks down her distant Greek uncle Jean “Yanco” Varda, living as an artist in Sausalito. In contrast, *Lions Love (...and Lies)* explores the ennui and contradictions of American counterculture, while also expressing its director’s disillusionment with Hollywood in a metafictional drama that is at turns whimsical and tense.



Uncle Yanco (1968)

Black Panthers is, by all indicators, the most popular of Varda’s California films, a clear-eyed document of an Oakland demonstration against the imprisonment of Huey P. Newton without cause or due process. Its effectiveness is in its restraint, eschewing narrativization and stylization to do what so little media coverage cares to—allow the oppressed and aggrieved to speak for themselves. Despite attempted censorship, pulled from broadcast on French television at the last minute due

to fear it would incite student protests, it feels timelier than ever.

Though Varda and Demy departed to France soon after the completion of *Black Panthers*, Agnes would return to Los Angeles in 1979, during which she produced her final two California films: *Mur Murs* and *Documenteur*. While the latter is highly underrated in its own right, an intimate contemplation of urban isolation which is closer to the metafiction of *Lions Love*, it is *Mur Murs* which feels like

Varda’s definitive LA film, an exploration of the city’s many subcultures, communities and niches through its then vibrant mural art movement. It is cinema as space, rather than merely images of space, just as it portrays the urban spaces within it as art, beyond their physical limitations and intended functions.

Varda’s background as a photographer comes to the forefront in *Mur Murs*, as she constructs layered compositions, showcasing the featured artwork, the artist, and the Angelenos who inhabit their space, often within the same frame. Just as often, though, the film is content to let any of these elements stand on their own, as it mines the interrelationships between the city, its people, their art, and its eccentricities for its textural depth.

Perhaps *Mur Murs*’ most noteworthy aspect is its serendipitous intersection with Los Angeles’ vibrant Chicano movement, which frequently utilized murals and other public art as a means of expression, communication, and disruption, not only claiming a distinctive artistic identity, but also reclaiming public spaces for the public, rejecting sterilized consumerism, surveillance, and regulation. In addition to featuring murals by several Chicano artists, including Willie Herrón, the film also features the music of Los Illegals, the influential punk band of which Herrón was a founding member. Interspersed with urban exploration is footage of a live performance by the band, which creates a kaleidoscopic interplay of sound, image, color, and movement in the film’s brisk but meandering pace.



Documenteur (1981)

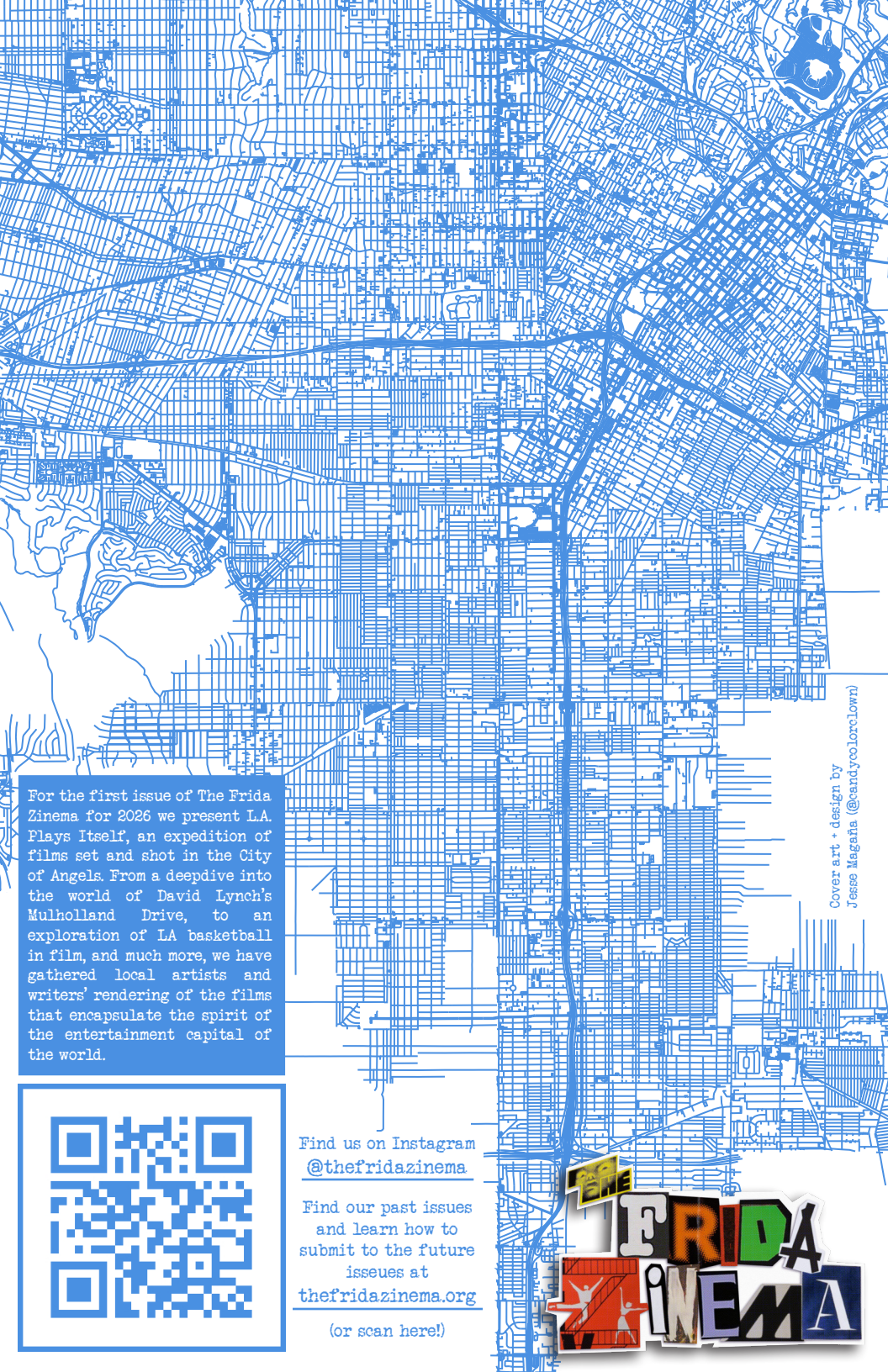
Its playful visuals are not above kitsch, and this is supported by the undisrupted earnestness which runs throughout. Like *Black Panthers*, Varda’s documentary style is attentive but non-invasive, rarely inserting her own commentary or any sort of value assessment. The film’s French title *Mur Murs*, works as a pun: “whispering walls.” Likewise, Varda often lets the art and artists speak for themselves. The murals of born-again evangelicals which deploy coded transcendental Christian imagery, and the farmland idyll of frolicking pigs that graces the tall exterior of a factory which processes hot dogs and bacon are equally legitimized.

In service of this end, Varda makes little distinction

between art created by hobbyists, renowned professional artists, unpaid workers in other fields (ranging from factory floors to school teachers), and even, sometimes, the oft-maligned graffiti. In an era where the mural art movement seems to be slumbering, or at least diluted, *Mur Murs* stands as an essential record of a moment in time, trapping a feeling of boundless creative potential within the undying medium of cinema. Murals can be more than just colorful and eye-catching advertisements for the businesses they are painted on the side of, or shallow appeals to the nostalgia of tourists, and a modern mural art movement can venture far beyond its roots in Los Angeles.



Black Panthers (1968)



For the first issue of The Frida Zinema for 2026 we present L.A. Plays Itself, an expedition of films set and shot in the City of Angels. From a deepdive into the world of David Lynch's Mulholland Drive, to an exploration of LA basketball in film, and much more, we have gathered local artists and writers' rendering of the films that encapsulate the spirit of the entertainment capital of the world.



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