



COM #352

Whit Perschke

Spring 2025



"I Saw the TV Glow"

2024

1hr 40min

Dir. Jane Schoenbrun

A young woman with brown hair and bangs, wearing a grey tank top and a dark skirt, sits on a wooden bench. To her right, a young man with dark hair, wearing a pink long-sleeved shirt and brown pants, sits on the same bench. They are both looking towards the camera. In front of them is a chain-link fence. Behind them is another chain-link fence, and further back are green trees. The scene is outdoors during the day.

MAIN CAST:

Justice Smith as "Owen"

Jack Haven as "Maddy"

Helena Howard as "Isabel"

Lindsey Jordan as "Tara"

Ian Foreman as "Young Owen"

Danielle Deadwyer as "Brenda"

Fred Durst as "Frank"

CREW:

Written and Directed by Jane Schoenbrun

Director of Photography Eric Yue

Composer Alex G

Edited by Sofi Marshall

Production Design by Brandon Taylor Connolly

Dir. Jane Schoenbrun *(they/them)*

"Non-binary American filmmaker, writer, and curator committed to making and supporting personal, art-driven cinema." - Schoenbrun's Website

- Born and raised in New York
- Graduated from Boston University's film program in 2009
- Wrote Articles for *Filmmaker Magazine*, worked as a producer, and staffer at *Independent Filmmaker Project*
- Self-identifies as a "big nerd" – was present in online spaces as a kid. Buffy the Vampire Slayer fan.



Wikipedia

<https://en.wikipedia.org>

You visit often

Jane Schoenbrun





Dir. Jane Schoenbrun *(they/them)*

- Directorial debut – "A Self Induced Hallucination" (2018)

"Why I Spent Months Making an Archival Documentary about The Slenderman"

"-is a film about the topic most personal to me in this world: art. Or, more specifically, our relationship with fiction." -Schoenbrun

"There's a sadness and a darkness to this. But does that render life a tragedy? A horror movie? Or can there be something beautiful found in this — our appetite for delusion? I don't just mean in the allure and the comfort of the delusion itself, but in our longing for it." -Schoenbrun

- "We're All Going to the World's Fair" (2021)

"Reality and fantasy begin to blur when a teenager, alone in her attic bedroom, immerses herself in a role-playing horror game online." -Variety

- Found-footage style horror film

- Deals with the internet, loneliness, dysphoria and more

"-wrote the film during a dark period in their life, before they began physically transitioning, reflecting on their experiences on the internet as a young queer kid in the early 2000s." -Variety

- "I Saw the TV Glow" (2024) – [interview](#)

"A ONE-OF-A-KIND
MASTERPIECE."
-THE PLAYLIST

"A PROFOUND MUST-SEE.
JANE SCHOENBRUN IS
A FILMMAKER FOR OUR ERA."
-VANITY FAIR

"WILL DRAW YOU IN
AND DARE YOU TO LET GO."
-COLLIDER

A person is seen from behind, sitting at a dark wooden table in a dimly lit room. They are looking at a glowing television screen that is the source of light in the scene. The screen displays a bright, pixelated image. The person's shadow is cast on the wall behind them. The overall mood is mysterious and contemplative.
sundance

I SAW THE TV GLOW

COMING SOON
A24

[Trailer](#)

"I Saw the TV Glow" uses Owen's story to explore what really happens when one doesn't accept or explore what's inside of themselves. With an expressive 90's aesthetic and horror elements, the surrealness of the film supports an introspective look back on the faults of memory in identity, and to express the visceral sense of wrongness a queer person can feel before (or never) becoming themselves.

2:34



A photograph of three children inside a large tent with rainbow-colored stripes. A young boy stands in the center, looking up and pointing his right index finger. To his left, a young girl sits on the floor, smiling at the camera. To his right, another young boy sits on the floor, looking down. The tent's interior is made of fabric with broad stripes of purple, white, pink, and blue.

Owen is transgender.

What happens if you don't acknowledge and accept what's inside of you?

A young Owen in the 1990's is watching the TV, 'The Pink Opaque' on the screen - he is transfixed.



Older Owen stands near a fire - he has started watching his favorite TV show again.



Owen and his mother attend election night at the local high school. Owen and Maddy meet, they talk about 'The Pink Opaque'



Owen plots to sleep over at Maddy's so he can stay up late enough to watch. He asks his mother to 'stay at another friends' - tensions with father are present.



Owen enacts his plan. Awkward interactions with Maddy and her friend. We are introduced to the characters of the show. Maddy and Owen begin to really bond.

Two years later. Owen's mother is sicker, he is distant. In the car, head in her lap, he asks to stay up late to watch the show. "isn't that a show for girls?"



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Owen joins Maddy on the bleachers, she comes out to him. He says he likes TV shows- he feels empty about that stuff.



Maddy breaks down as they watch an episode. She draws the ghost tattoo on his neck, and urges him to run away with her. Owen, distraught, does not go.



Owen's mother passes away, Maddy runs away (the only thing left a burning TV) and 'The Pink Opaque' is cancelled on a cliffhanger.

Eight years pass. Owen, older, works at a movie theater and lives with his father. He has uncomfortable encounters with his coworkers.



Owen encounters the collapsed power line and newspaper with Mr. Melancholy.



He runs into Maddy in the grocery store. She takes him to a bar that's "safe" - she tries to convince him that the show is real.



The final episode of 'The Pink Opaque'



Owen sticks his head inside the TV- his father brutally pulls him out and he coughs up the static.

Owen goes to meet Maddy at the planetarium- her final explanation of being Tara. She takes him to the football field to become Isabel. He runs away.



Owen never sees Maddy again- he experiences regret. His life slogs on, and his father passes away.



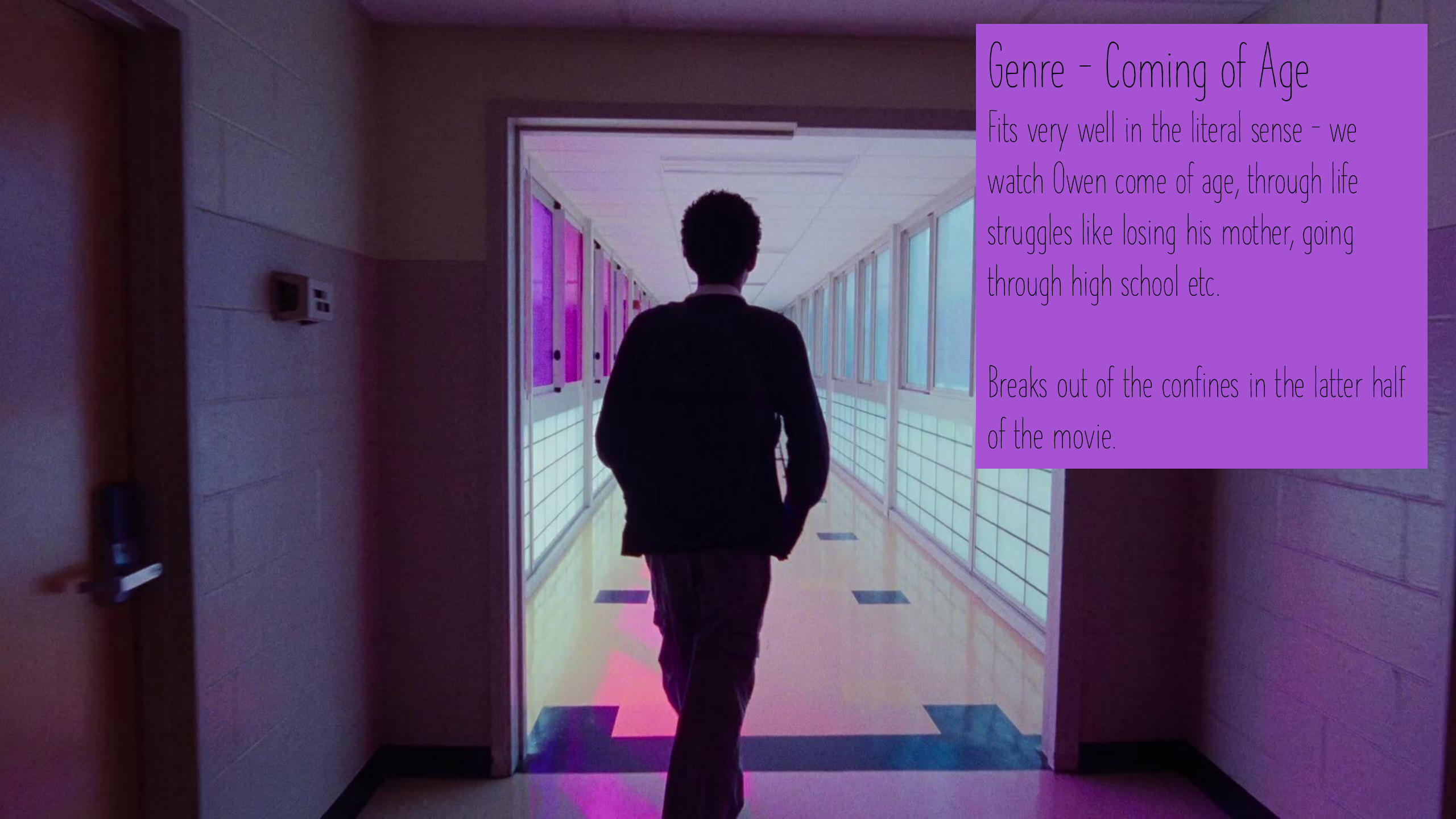
Owen rewatches 'The Pink Opaque' years later. It's nothing like how he remembers.



Owen, now old and frail, collapses into a panic attack during a child's birthday party at work.



He opens himself up- the TV is still inside. He apologizes to everyone in the arcade, but no one listens to him.



Genre - Coming of Age

Fits very well in the literal sense - we watch Owen come of age, through life struggles like losing his mother, going through high school etc.

Breaks out of the confines in the latter half of the movie.

Genre – Horror

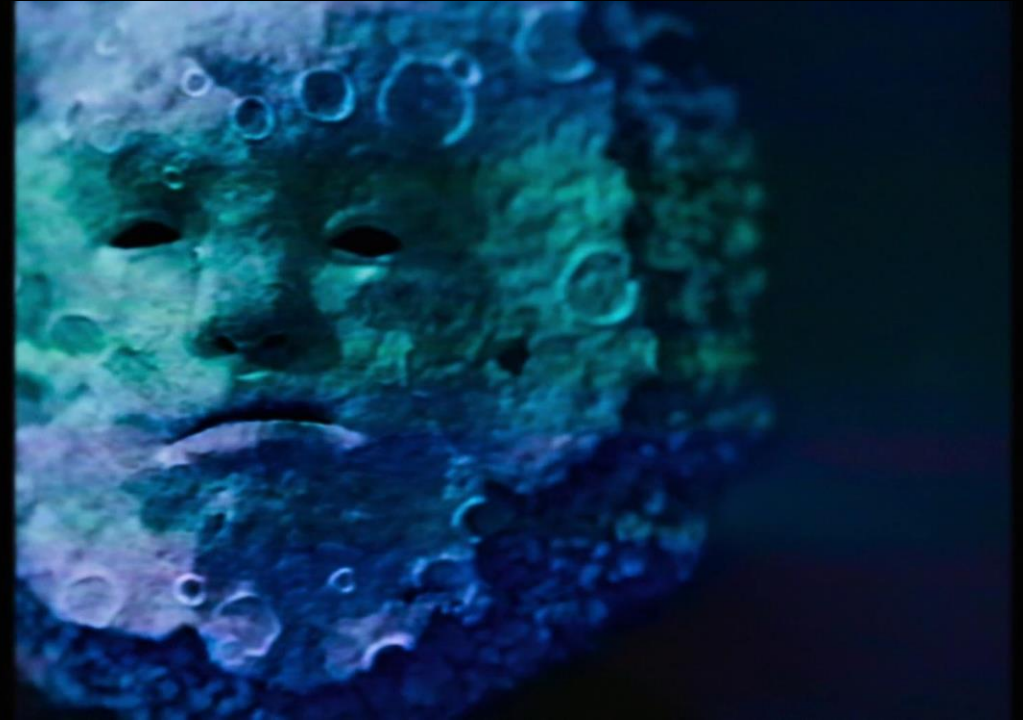
Doesn't *really* fit in the conventions of the genre- but how does its language support the film's message?

"-the horror of perception is something that trans people understand uniquely." -Schoenbrun

The 'uncanny valley', liminality, and horror as a means for visceral understanding of being trapped in a body (or life) that isn't yours.

"I think that genre feels like none of my business." -Schoenbrun

46:02
1:00:00

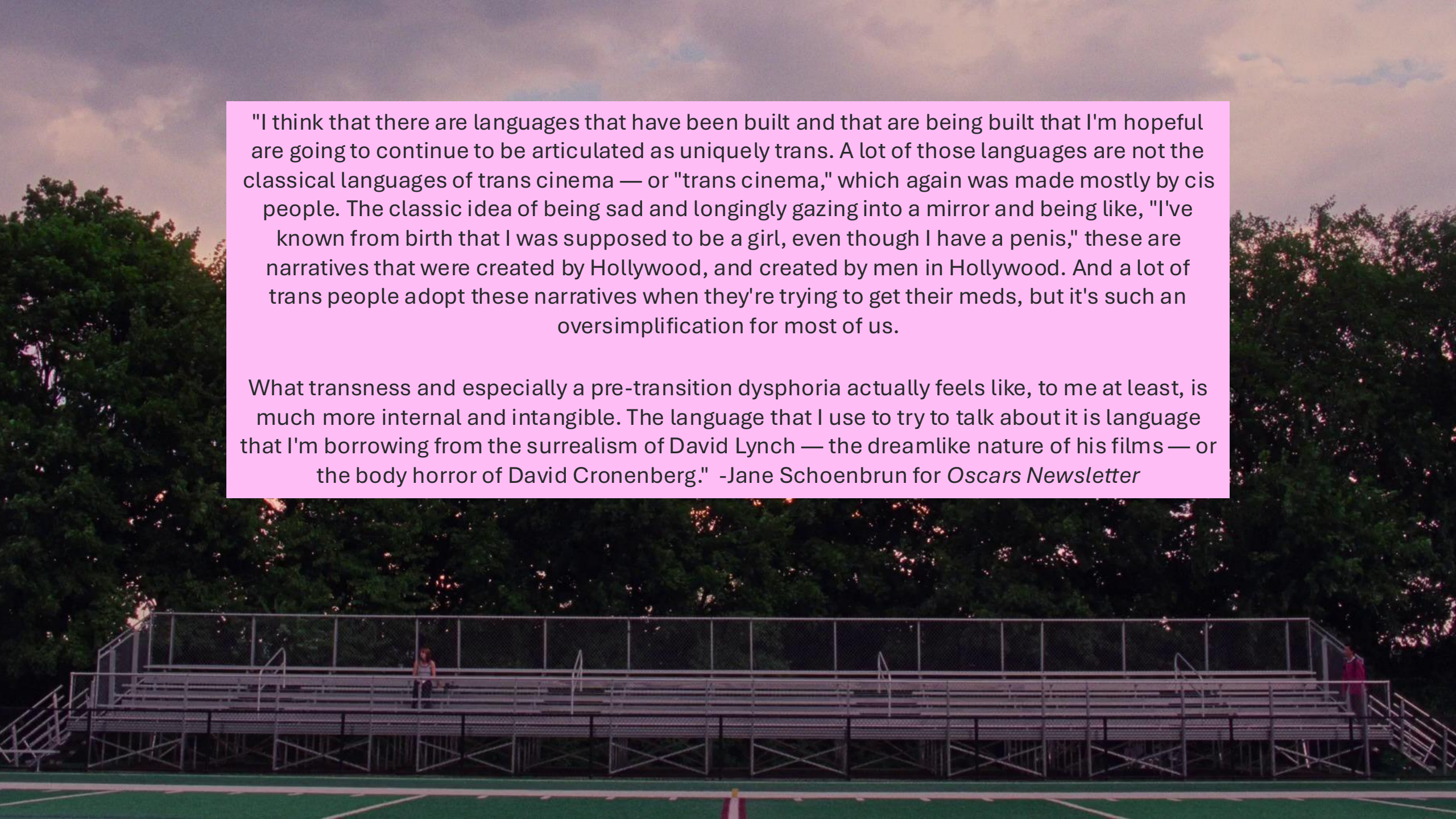


Genre - Queer

Existing in the context of films like...

Schoenbrun breaks conventions in hidden and implicit meaning.



A photograph of a person sitting on a set of metal bleachers in an outdoor setting at dusk. The person is wearing a light-colored tank top and dark pants. The bleachers are situated in front of a dense line of trees. The sky is a mix of dark blue and orange, suggesting the time is either sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is quiet and contemplative.

"I think that there are languages that have been built and that are being built that I'm hopeful are going to continue to be articulated as uniquely trans. A lot of those languages are not the classical languages of trans cinema — or "trans cinema," which again was made mostly by cis people. The classic idea of being sad and longingly gazing into a mirror and being like, "I've known from birth that I was supposed to be a girl, even though I have a penis," these are narratives that were created by Hollywood, and created by men in Hollywood. And a lot of trans people adopt these narratives when they're trying to get their meds, but it's such an oversimplification for most of us.

What transness and especially a pre-transition dysphoria actually feels like, to me at least, is much more internal and intangible. The language that I use to try to talk about it is language that I'm borrowing from the surrealism of David Lynch — the dreamlike nature of his films — or the body horror of David Cronenberg." -Jane Schoenbrun for *Oscars Newsletter*

Cultural Analysis - The 90's

Not simply a 'cool aesthetic'.

Using the kitschy shows that were memorable - love of fiction defining one's childhood and identity.

Saturday Night!
10:30pm / 9:30pm Central



Acting

Justice Smith's performance

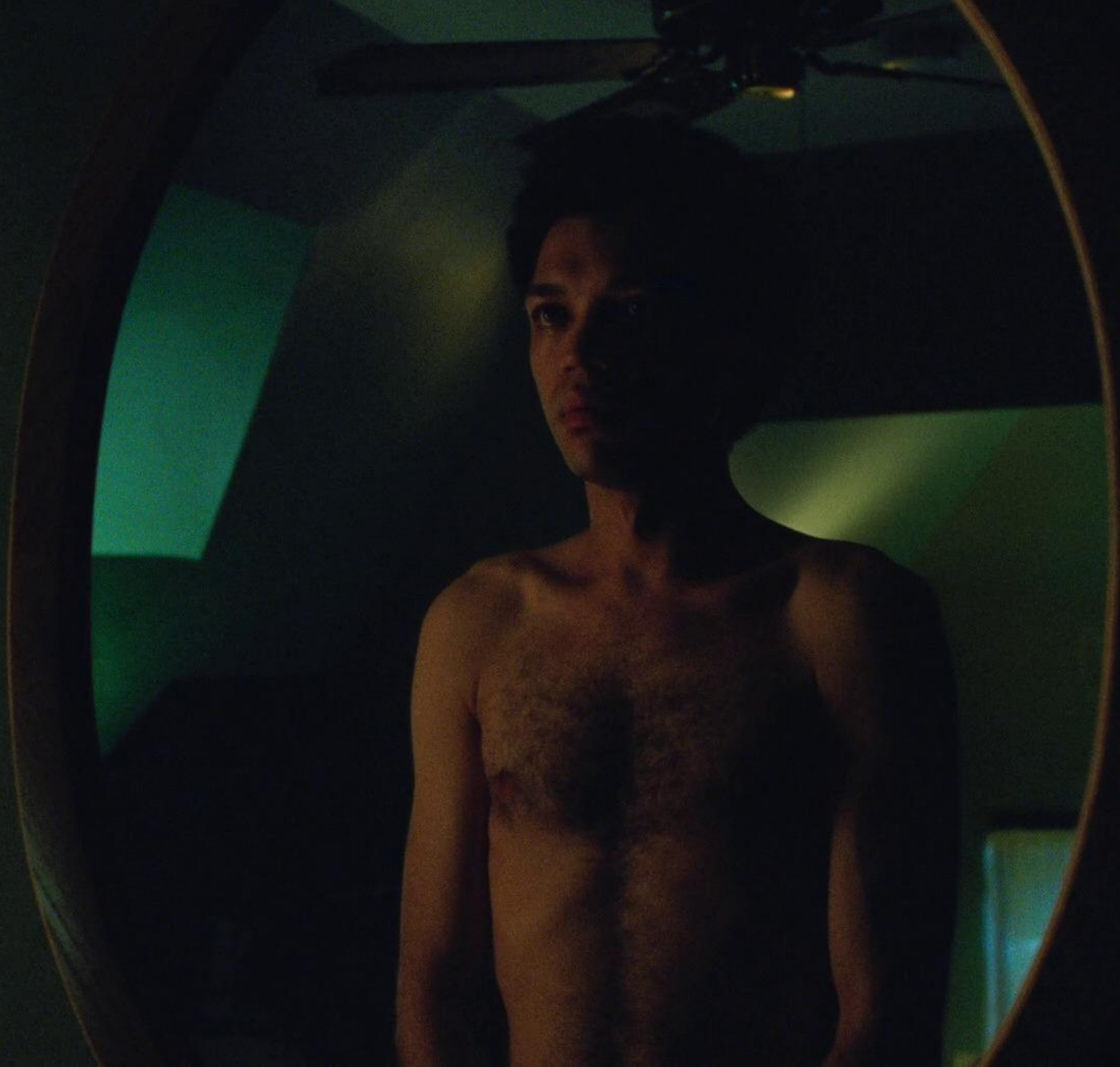
"Specifically with his voice – because he's so detached from his body, because his body is not real. I wanted to make it feel like everything he said was getting stuck in his throat." -Justice Smith for *GQ*

Voice is stuck, just like Owen is stuck.

Supports the idea that Owen is trapped in the wrong body.

Interview

1:19:44



Cinematography

The film's colorful and sometimes odd imagery supports the concept of Owen's nostalgia.

"and how that realization [that they were trans] colored all of the ways in which I understood my identity growing up." -Schoenbrun in *Los Angeles Times* Interview

The stylized shots of "The Pink Opaque" in the beginning and the juxtaposition of how it looks at the end of the movie help push the concept of childhood memory affected by identity.

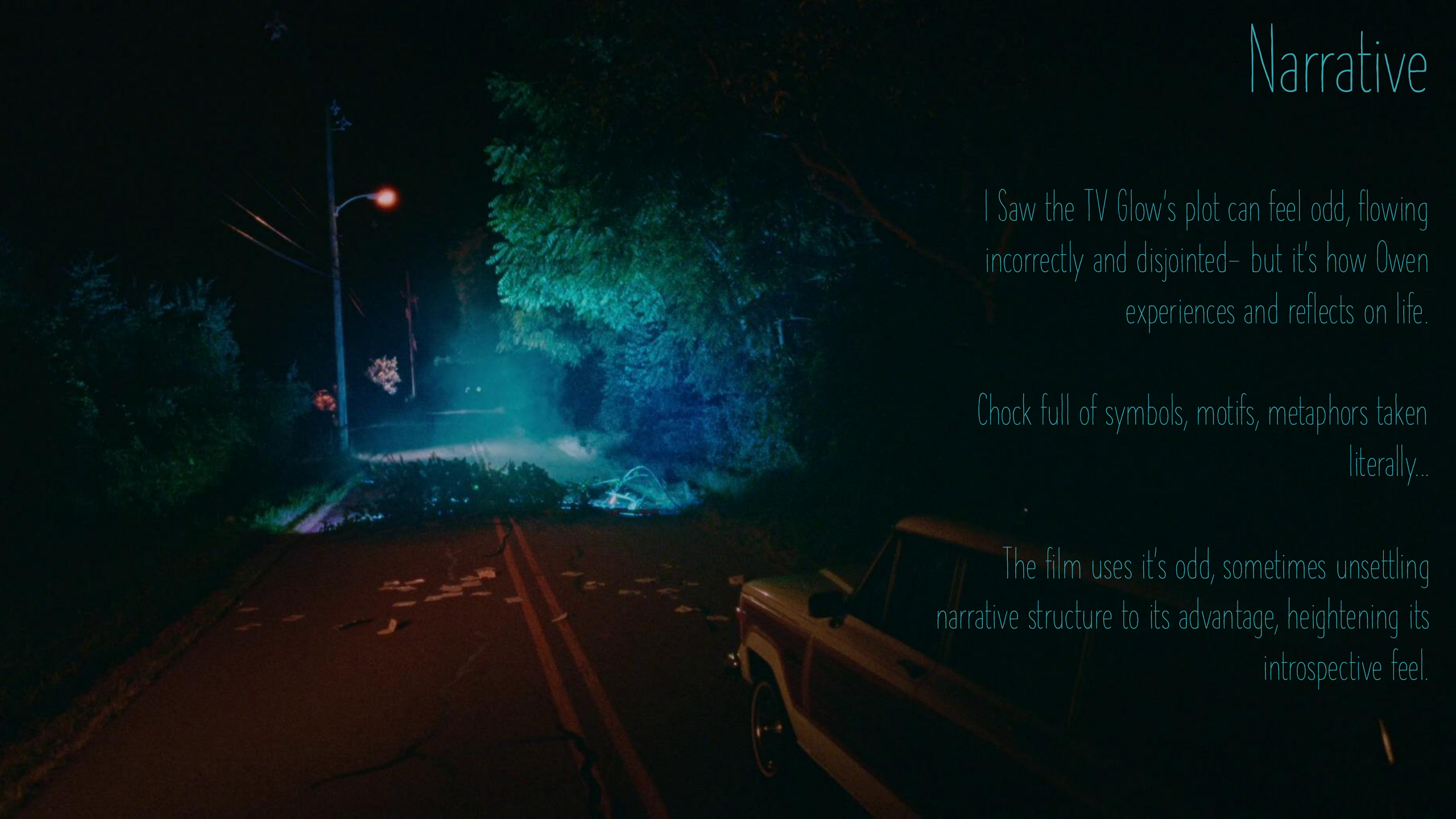


Narrative

I Saw the TV Glow's plot can feel odd, flowing incorrectly and disjointed– but it's how Owen experiences and reflects on life.

Chock full of symbols, motifs, metaphors taken literally...

The film uses it's odd, sometimes unsettling narrative structure to its advantage, heightening its introspective feel.



Memory and Nostalgia

The Pink Opaque's extreme difference in how Owen remembers it is signifying of the internal experience.



What does it mean that after Owen decides to leave Maddy and that experience behind, the show is no longer the same?

15:07

1:24:05





Time passes strangely when you're not really yourself.

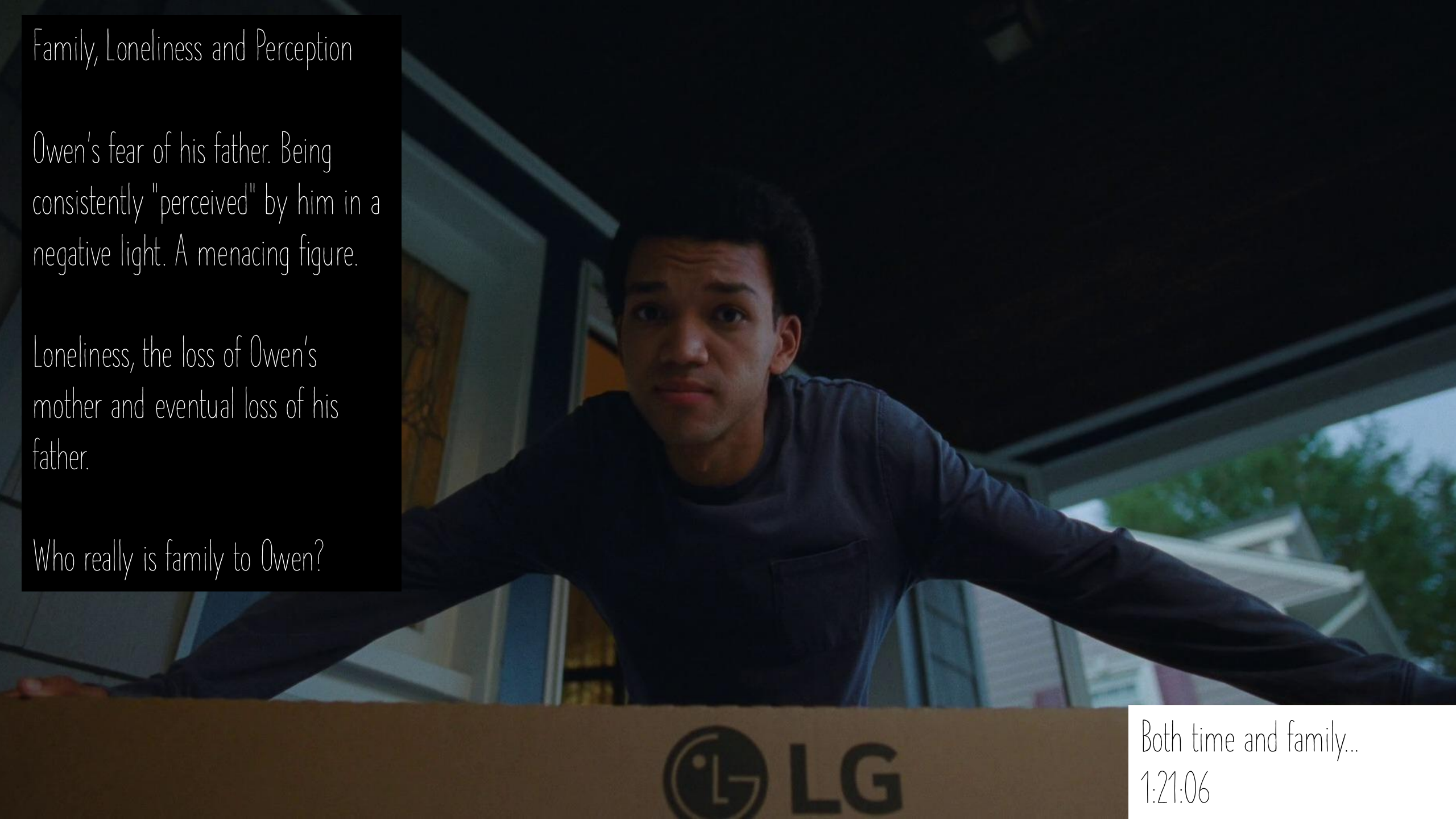
Stills - 21:42, 42:08
1:07:19

Family, Loneliness and Perception

Owen's fear of his father. Being consistently "perceived" by him in a negative light. A menacing figure.

Loneliness, the loss of Owen's mother and eventual loss of his father.

Who really is family to Owen?



Both time and family...
1:21:06

Owen and Maddy *are* Tara and Isabel

Starts off more as a metaphor, a way for them both to cope with their difficult family lives.

Becomes literal - the burning TV's, Mr. Melancholy

19:44

1:17:41



32:27

1:04:36

Death and rebirth

Maddy describes to us her being buried alive—
then a rebirth.

What's inside of Owen? And does opening
himself to find out mean death? Or is there
something really waiting for him inside the TV?

Represents the fear people experience when
discovering their true selves, and how they're
held back into the real world.





Scene Breakdown

Owen opens himself up and finally checks. He isn't empty.

1:26:32

"I think of Owen at the end of the film as both
an ending and at a beginning of something."

–Schoenbrun

A chalkboard with the phrase "there is still time" written in cursive. The text is surrounded by colorful scribbles in shades of blue, green, and yellow. The chalkboard is set against a background of a suburban street with houses and trees.

there is
still time

Audience Reception



Adam Graham
Detroit News
★ TOP CRITIC



But as mood and vibe overtake plot and story, the feeling "I Saw the TV Glow" evokes is often stiff and expressionless, even as its visuals are drenched in intoxicating neon blues and greens.

[Full Review](#) | Original Score: C+ | May 17, 2024



Jake Wilson
The Age (Australia)
★ TOP CRITIC



The power of I Saw the TV Glow lies precisely in its ambiguity, which may go deeper than was intended.

[Full Review](#) | Original Score: 3.5/5 | Aug 29, 2024



Wendy Ide
Observer (UK)
★ TOP CRITIC



With its shapeshifting disquiet, I Saw the TV Glow is too languidly weird, too unmoored from genre conventions to be neatly categorised. But there's not a frame in Jane Schoenbrun's suffocating second feature that isn't drenched in dread and unease.

[Full Review](#) | Original Score: 4/5 | Jul 29, 2024

Audience Reception



brett

Review by **bb** ★★★★★ ❤️ 94

Donnie Darko for they/thems

❤️ 22,502 likes



OffTheCover · 1y ago

This movie was by far the absolute worst piece of trash I've ever seen. No plot, no character development. It had slow and very boring dialogue. Zero explanation of anything and the story didn't go anywhere. Scratch that, there really wasn't a story. Just a bunch of scenes strung together. God did this movie suck.



71



Reply



Award



Share



Review by **Jamie Lauren Keiles** ❤️ 32

horror movie about how if u don't transition ur lips will eventually become soooo chapped

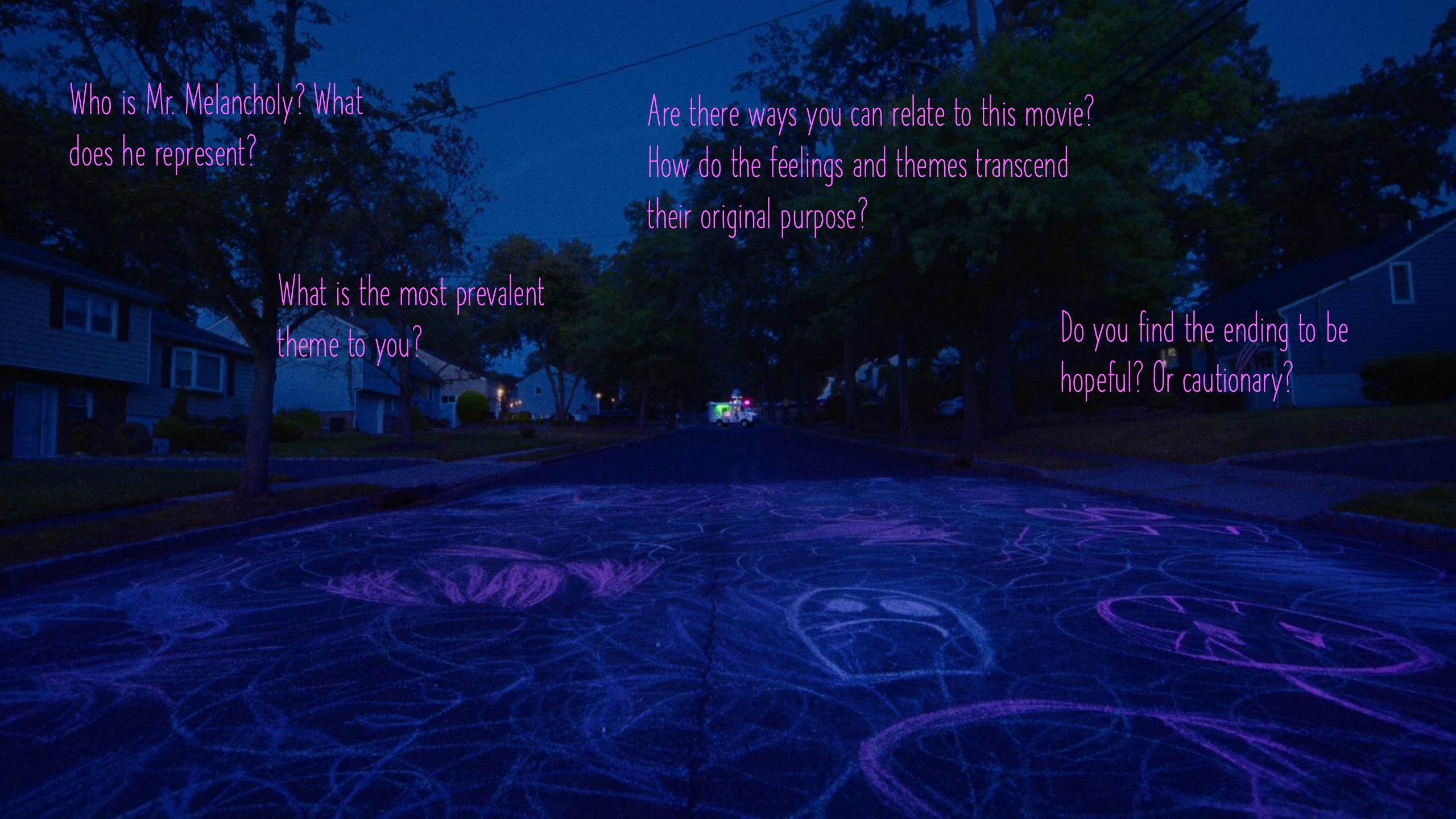
❤️ 21,693 likes

Who is Mr. Melancholy? What does he represent?

Are there ways you can relate to this movie?
How do the feelings and themes transcend their original purpose?

What is the most prevalent theme to you?

Do you find the ending to be hopeful? Or cautionary?



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