

MAY 2023

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GIRLS. ON FILM

MAY 2023



GIRLS, ON FILM



ISSUE TWENTY



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Welcome to *Girls, on Film*, the zine that's hopelessly devoted to 80s movies. Typically, in this zine, we discuss eight movies related to a particular theme. But guess what?! We're not doing that this time. Instead, we commemorate two big milestones -- five years and twenty issues -- with essays about our favorite girls on film.

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE:

Joan Cusack made a career playing funny, supporting roles while showing off her impeccable physical comedy skills.

Sally Field spends the 80s trying to distance herself from her dopey sitcom beginnings.

Jami Gertz is an entertainment powerhouse that we can toast and look up to and not even feel a vague sense of shame for adoring her.

Annabeth Gish made a splash in Hollywood

in a movie about government nuclear testing. Twenty years later, she made a splash in Stephanie's heart playing an FBI agent investigating sketchy government activity.

Edie McClurg turned polyester, Aqua Net, and a Midwestern accent into comedy gold.

Molly Ringwald wasn't just a Brat Pack member and all around 80s icon. Her lesser known movies were just as captivating as her John Hughes roles.

Winona Ryder -- from *Beetlejuice* to *Stranger Things*, she's a Gen-X darling with an extensive career that began with quirky roles in quirky movies.

Susan Sidelman spent the 80s directing tales of no-nonsense hip chick heroines in funky little wonderlands.

BEHIND THE ZINES

Girls, on Film was founded in 2017 by DC-area friends Stephanie McDevitt and Janene Scelza. We do all production work in-house with the exception of color prints.

The zine is published quarterly. Digital issues are free on our website at girlsonfilmzine.com. Full-color prints are available for purchase. Contact info@girlsonfilmzine.com for more info.

FOUNDERS & EDITORS

Stephanie McDevitt

Stephanie's one big disappointment in life is that she wasn't old enough to fully appreciate popular clothing styles in the 1980s, as she was mostly attired in paisley sweatsuits. A full-time editor and occasional freelancer, Stephanie looks nostalgically back on 80s films such as *Ernest Goes to Camp*, *Adventures in Babysitting*, and *Can't Buy Me Love* and wishes she could pull off the hairdos of Cindy Mancini and her friends.

Janene Scelza

Janene has made loads of zines over the years. She spent her teen years combing musty video stores and public libraries for all the 80s movies she could find. She's got plenty of favorites from the decade, but it's stylish indie films like *Desperately Seeking Susan*, *Repo Man*, and *The Terminator* that she loves best.

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Dr. Rhonda Baughman

Rhonda, a teacher and freelance writer, raised adolescent hell in the 80s and the hor-

ror films of that era were her BFFs! She loves all of 80s pop culture, but nothing spoke to her quite like *Sorority Babes in the Slimeball Bowl-O-Rama*, *Nightmare Sisters*, and *Reform School Girls*. She had a pink laminated Video Time Video rental card at 9 years old and she never looked back. Or forward, really; she still loves her VHS and sweet, sweet VCR. And let it be known: the scrunchie never died for Rhonda: she STILL wears one proudly!

Matt Scelza

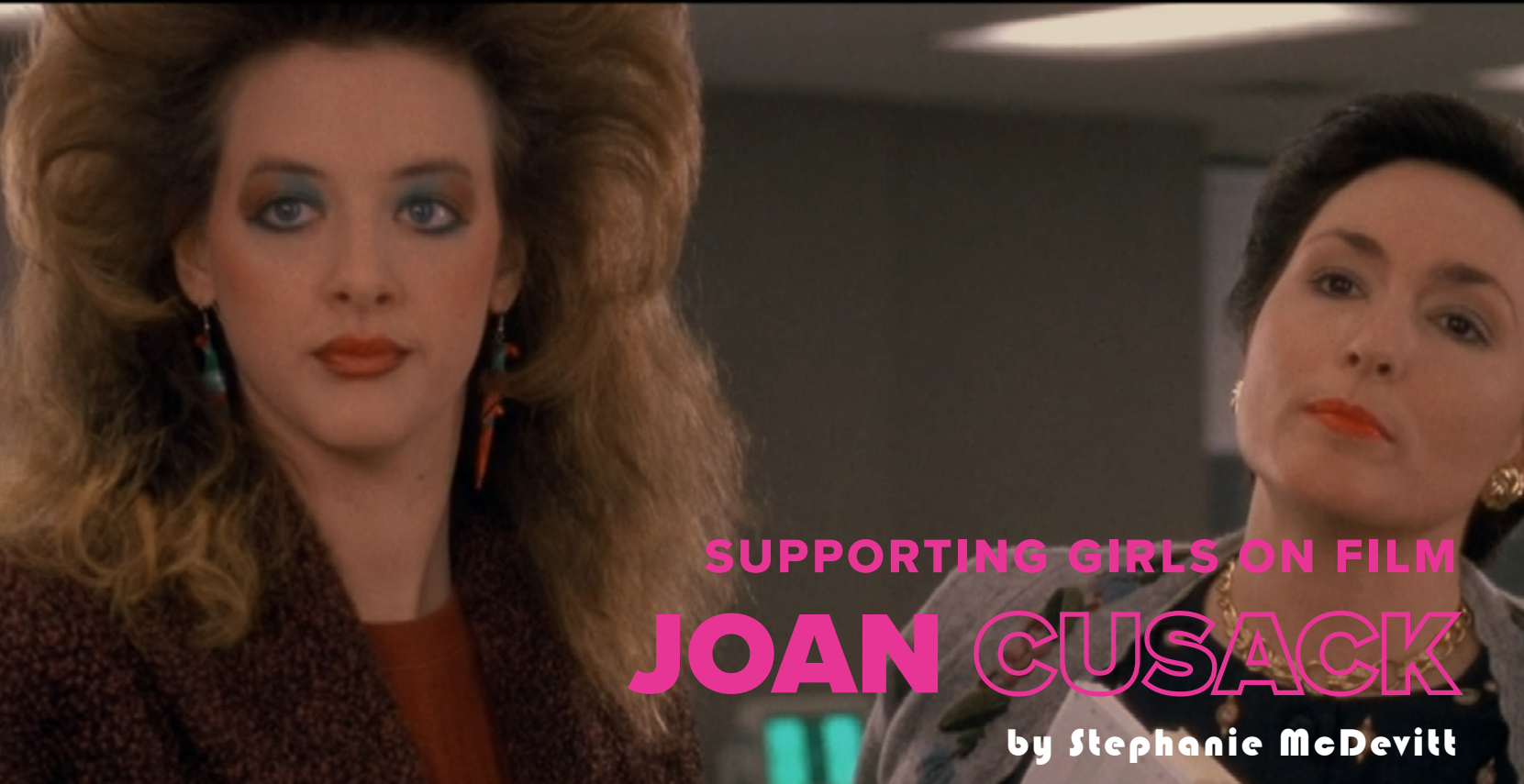
Matt loves to dissect and analyze everything. He co-writes essays for the zine with his sister, Janene. He has also logged a lot of hours at the same video stores and public library film collections with Janene in search of odd and unusual titles. However, he's got too many favorites to name.

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Guest Submissions

If you enjoy 80s movies and would like to guest write for the zine, please send a bio and writing sample to info@girlsonfilmzine.com.



SUPPORTING GIRLS ON FILM

JOAN CUSACK

by Stephanie McDevitt

Joan Cusack is one of my favorite actresses. She is delightful in every role she plays, and she brings on-point physicality (usually with hilarious results) to her characters. Cusack made a name for herself playing supporting roles like the best friend, the mother figure, or the girlfriend, but she's always a stand out in these parts. She made a slew of movies in the 80s. However, I do not have space to write about all of them, so I will focus on what I think are her most important roles, and maybe I'll be able to cover her other movies in future *Girls, on Film* issues.

Cusack made her film debut in 1980 (when she was 18) in *My Bodyguard*, which is about Cliff (Chris Makepeace), the new kid at school who is the target for the school bully, Moody (Matt Dillon). When Cliff meets Linderman (Adam Baldwin also in his film debut), who is way bigger than any other kid in school, he offers to pay him to be his bodyguard to protect him from Moody. It's a pretty heavy movie, as we soon find out that Linderman has some demons, however, Cusack is charming in her role as Cliff's friend Shelley. She doesn't have a ton of screen time, but she is genuine and sincere and looks like a regular high school student.

In 1983, Cusack made a brief appearance in a movie called *Class*, starring Rob Lowe and Andrew McCarthy. She is only in one scene that I noticed, but this movie is notable because it was the first onscreen appearance for her brother, John. *Class* is a bad movie (Rob Lowe made a lot of bad movies in the 80s). Basically, Lowe and McCarthy are boarding school roommates, and McCarthy, in a quest to lose his virginity, unknowingly sleeps with Lowe's mom. It's pretty gross, and while John Cusack has some good moments, the rest of the movie isn't funny.

Joan and John would go on to appear in ten movies together, including 1984's *Sixteen Candles*. I know Joan Cusack has a large filmography, however, her role in *Sixteen Candles* is one of my favorites. She plays Geek Girl #1, and throughout the movie she wears a big back brace. She doesn't have any lines, but she has several amazing bits of physical comedy, like trying to drink a beer without moving her neck. I realize today these scenes (and this movie in general) would be deemed insensitive (to put it lightly), however, Cusack's comedy chops are on display, and her ability to command the moment, without speaking, is impressive for only her fourth movie.



My Bodyguard (1980)



Sixteen Candles (1984)



Broadcast News (1987)

In 1985, Cusack joined the cast of the 11th season of *Saturday Night Live*. Other cast members that season included Anthony Michael Hall, Robert Downey, Jr., Randy Quaid, Jon Lovitz, and Nora Dunn. Cusack only did 17 episodes of SNL, but most of the cast from that season didn't return [1] (I'm pretty sure Dunn and Lovitz were the only ones that continued on the show). You can watch her SNL skits on YouTube. I watched a few, and they're mostly okay.

Towards the end of the decade, Cusack made several more good movies, which I will talk about in a bit, but first I need to discuss the super low-budget movie *The Allnighter*. I did not watch the whole thing because it was unwatchable, but the circumstances around this movie are kind of weird. It stars Susanna Hoffs (lead singer of the Bangles) as Molly, a graduating college senior who is looking for love.

Cusack played Molly's friend, Gina, who constantly films everyone on her giant 80s camcorder. They attend a party before graduation, but according to Wikipedia "things do not go exactly as planned" [2]. Sounds intriguing, but it has a 0% rating on Rotten Tomatoes, and everyone panned it. Hoffs mother, Tamar Hoffs, wrote and directed it. I'd love to know what Cusack thinks of this movie. I'm sure it was fun to film since a lot of it takes place on the beach, but it was a rough watch (well, at least the first 20 minutes were really bad).

Moving on, let's talk about some good movies. In 1987, Cusack was in *Broadcast News*. She played a supporting role as Jane's (Holly Hunter) co-worker and friend, Blair. Overall *Broadcast News* was a hit movie (and you can read my full write up in GOF issue #12). Cusack's role is once again rather small, but she is able to show her physical comedy ability again when her character makes a mad dash through the studio to deliver a video tape of a news clip that's supposed to air in under a minute. She also has one of my favorite lines of the movie when she says to well-known workaholic Jane, "Except for socially, you're my role model."

In 1988, Cusack was once again in a supporting role when she played Cyn in *Working Girl*. Cyn is Tess's (Melanie Griffith) best friend and supports Tess as she climbs the corporate ladder on Wall Street (and falls in love with Harrison Ford). Cusack is so funny in this movie, and she was so good that she was nominated for the Best Supporting Actress Oscar. She won both the American Comedy Award and the Boston Society of Film Critics Award for Best Supporting Actress. I highly recommend watching this movie. It's a classic 80s movie and was nominated for and won a host of awards (see my full write up in GOF Issue #5).

While her *Working Girl* performance was excellent, Cusack's hair was a scene stealer. Apparently, she rode the Staten Island Ferry and did her hair like the other la-



Grandview USA (1984)



Say Anything (1989)



The Allnighter (1987)

dies on the boat. She said, “I brought my makeup and applied it on the boat—all the secretaries do—and I made my hair very big. I made it stand straight up, aerodynamically correct, and then shoot straight backward and down. And I carried plenty of hairspray with me – that’s very ferry” [3].

At the end of the decade, Cusack tamed her hair to appear in *Say Anything*, another movie she made with her brother. John Cusack stars in this movie as Lloyd Dobler, a recent high school graduate who tries to win over high-achieving Diane (Lone Skye). John Cusack is really good as love-struck Lloyd, and Joan Cusack plays his older sister Constance. While Joan Cusack doesn’t have a huge part in this movie, it was hugely successful and is now considered to be a classic 80s flick (I wrote about it in GOF Issue #13).

Cusack went on to have a long and varied career. In 1997 she starred opposite Kevin Kline in *In & Out*. She was once again nominated for the Best Supporting Actress Oscar, and was nominated for and won a bunch of other awards for that movie. She’s the voice of Jessie in the *Toy Story* movies, and she appeared in *Addams Family Values*, *School of Rock*, *Arlington Road*, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, and *High Fidelity*. She has many more acting credits to her name, and more recently she’s made several television appearances, including an episode of *Law and Order: SVU*, *The Office*, and *Shameless*. She was nominated for several Emmys for *Shameless*,

and eventually won in 2016 for Outstanding Guest Actress in a Comedy Series [4].

These days, Cusack lives in Chicago and tries to take jobs close to home (*Shameless* films in Chicago). She also runs a tchotchke shop called Judy Maxwell Home, which is my most favorite bit of information about her. In an interview with *The New Yorker*, she said, “Virginia Woolf says you have to have a room of your own. I also think, if you’re a woman now, it’s so fun to have a shop of your own. You hone your instincts in the world, versus at home. This is a little lab of my own instincts about being in the world” [5]. According to that same interview, “Cusack admires the Japanese concept of wabi-sabi—a reverence for the imperfect. It is the shop’s unifying principle, and perhaps Cusack’s as well. (Hollywood, she said, can be ‘everything not wabi-sabi’)” [6].

Joan Cusack just seems so grounded and cool. One of the reasons she likes to find work in Chicago is to be there for her kids and her family. She doesn’t want the glitz and glam of L.A. life. When talking about her shop, she said, “Being a celebrity actress isn’t that fun, over and over. It’s just not that great of a world, except for being exposed to cool sets and talented, interesting people. But this is so fun” [7]. I bet her shop is so fun, and I’m sure she is so fun. If you haven’t watched any of her movies, you should really get on it. You won’t be disappointed.



PLUCKY GIRLS ON FILM

SALLY FIELD

by Janene and Matt Seelza

Sally Field got a lot of shit for her Oscars acceptance speech when she won for Best Actress in 1985 for the Depression-era drama *Places in the Heart*. It was a meme-worthy moment before there was such a thing. But, “You like me! You really like me!” is said to be a misquote. However, her actual phrasing, “I can't deny the fact that you like me—right now, you like me!” pretty much echoed the same sentiment: at last, Hollywood took Sally Field seriously.

By the time Sally Field made that 1985 Oscar speech, she had already played an abuse victim with multiple personalities in *Sybil* (1976), snagged the Oscar for Best Actress as an unlikely union organizer in a Southern textile mill in *Norma Rae* (1979), and played a reckless newspaper reporter who essentially accuses an innocent man (Paul Newman) of murder in Sydney Pollack's *Absence of Malice* (1981). They were all lightyears beyond the wholesome, silly sitcoms where she started her career in the mid-1960s. It seems to us that Hollywood already had plenty of reason to take Sally Field seriously.

As we said before in our discussions of her

films, *Punchline* (1988) (see the GOF #7: the Entertainers Issue), in which she was a middle-aged mom and housewife trying to become a stand-up comic; the aforementioned *Absence of Malice* (1982) (The News Issue, #12), and the terrific ensemble comedy, *Steel Magnolias* (1989) (Based on a True Story, #15), Sally Field is like our cinematic comfort food. If she is in it, we're going to watch it. Well, unless that movie is *80 For Brady* (2023), but that doesn't have anything to do with Sally Field.

Sally Field often plays a certain type. Roger Ebert probably described best it in his *Murphy's Romance* (1985) review: “plucky, quietly sensible in the face of calamity” [1]. The petite, doe-eyed actress is already a terminally endearing presence. Her pluckiness isn't aggressive, and it often leaves her male counterparts amusingly confounded. She also often tends to go for understated films where, even in strange situations, the characters feel like genuine people.

In *Murphy's Romance* (her third time working with *Norma Rae* director Martin Ritt) Sally Field is Emma, an utterly broke divorcee



Gidget (TV) (1965 - 1966)



Absence of Malice (1982)



Murphy's Romance (1985)

who moves into a dilapidated ranch house in rural Arizona. She is surprisingly resilient and able to squeak by despite all the odds, including the return of her deadbeat ex-husband (Brian Kerwin). The titular Murphy refers to the older gentleman in town, a widower, played by James Garner. It starts platonic, and then becomes a subtle kind of attraction. Nothing really happens; it's just a simple, sweet little film (we will talk more about this one in our upcoming winter issue).

After a long career, Sally Field did what most celebrities do and published a memoir. It's not much of a salacious tell-all, save some revelations about her *Smokey & the Bandit* co-star and troublesome beau, Burt Reynolds. It's not even the standard rehash of her acting career. In fact, she skips over much of her work from the late 80s onward. Writing the book was meant to be a therapeutic exercise, in particular to make sense of the fraught relationship she had with her late mother, actress Margaret Field.

She talks a lot about her ever-nagging worry for professional legitimacy. She worried about being typecast as the girl-next-door type and being relegated to a lifetime of mediocre and embarrassing sitcoms. A sympathetic co-star and acting classes offered a way out. "The only way that I could ... be energized and compelled was to feel that it lay in my hands — that I had to work harder, that I had to get better. ... I had to be so much better than anyone else who came in the room" [2].

The chronic imposter syndrome makes perfect sense. She started her career in 1966, playing Don Porter's teenage boy-crazy surfer daughter Gidget on the short-lived sitcom of the same name. In the following year, Sally Field donned a harness and habit for role of the aerodynamic Sister Bertrille in *The Flying Nun*. And in 1973, Sally Field and co-star John Davidson were TV newlyweds Sally and John in the *Woman With Something Extra*. (Spoilers: her something extra was ESP).

Gidget was Gidget, she was only 17 when she took the part, but *The Flying Nun* was a constant source of mockery (Writer/producer Harry Ackerman opted for the show's title over the name of the book on which it was based, *The Fifteenth Pelican*, precisely for the laughs [3]). And while the show only lasted three years, Sally Field was desperate to bugger off from the TV nunnery.

Perhaps the last straw was her Golden Globes appearance, presenting, in harness, alongside John Wayne (who, at one point, had to help reposition the poor lass). Or, perhaps it was insults from *The Monkees* when she visited her studio backlot neighbors in costume. But, finally, she broke down on the set one day while shooting the *The Flying Nun*, leading to co-star Madeline Sherwood's insistence that she begin taking acting classes with the original Method Man: Lee Stroudsburg. When the next Screen Gems/NBC sitcom, *The Woman With Something Extra*, came around (and



Places in the Heart (1984)



Back Roads (1981)



Steel Magnolias (1989)

only lasted a season) Sally Field was already going after theater and movie roles.

Casting director Diane Crittendon took notice and recommended her for a part alongside Jeff Bridges and a very young Arnold Schwarzenegger in the 1976 comedy, *Stay Hungry*, about a shady businessman who wants to take over a gym so he can build some snazzy commercial property in its place. Director Bob Rafelson took some convincing, and though the movie wasn't much of a critical hit, it (and *Sybil*, released the same year) showed off her acting chops to bigger audiences [4].

She came from an acting family. Margaret Field was mostly a B-movie actress, but her creeper stepfather Jock Mahoney was an actor and stuntman, mostly in westerns, for close to thirty years or so. (Sally's brother Richard is a physicist). Chronic asshole though Jocko might be (she details the emotional and sexual abuse in her book), he did help her to get her foot in the door. Before the mob gets riled up about nepo babies, it's safe to say Sally Field put in serious work for her acting achievements.

Following high school, she enrolled in acting classes with Columbia Pictures, which in turn led to work on the aforementioned Screen Gems/NBC sitcoms. Jocko also offered some pretty humbling advice when she was wondering whether to do *The Flying Nun*, and later, *The Woman With Something Extra*: the

projects paid (obviously) and could lead to other things. Sometimes you do the work you hate to do the work you love. (Or, something like that). Two of those sitcoms were written specifically with her in mind, and at the time, she didn't really have many other offers [5].

Her film career, of course, would span decades, including the *Smokey & the Bandit* films, the TV movie *Not Without My Daughter* (1991) (which lately seems like a popular thrift store acquisition), *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1994), *Forrest Gump* (1994), *Legally Blonde 2* (2003), some *Spider-Man* movies, and Spielberg's *Lincoln* biopic (2012), which she discusses briefly in the memoir (it took some convincing to get the part of Mary Todd). She also returned to TV in the Emmy-winning role of the Walker family matriarch on the ABC drama *Brothers & Sisters*. And speaking of Fields's film and television credits, we highly recommend the 1991 comedy, *Soap Dish*, a film about TV. Sally Field plays an aging soap star who is sabotaged by her co-stars (Cathy Moriarity and Kevin Kline) and producer (Robert Downey, Jr.).

NPR recently asked Sally Field whether she is proud of her accomplishments: "Do I still have that gnawing, you know, hair-on-fire feeling of needing more and wanting to reach out for something that's just outside of my grasp? Yes, totally. Yes. But can I now look back and feel the length that I've traveled? Yes" [6]. Check out her early films!



ETHEREAL GIRLS ON FILM

JAMI GERTZ

by Dr. Rhonda Baughman

If you'd asked me in the 80s who I thought the most beautiful woman in the world was, I'd have answered without hesitation: Jami Gertz. Even now, in the 21st century, if you ask me my thoughts on beauty, my standards are a far cry from modern expectations, and Gertz's foothold in my psyche remains strong.

My obsession with Gertz was not merely superficial (her flawless, radiant complexion and wild jungle tangle of perfect locks, or those deep, dark almond eyes that —I'll stop there) nor was the obsession as specific as author Bret Easton Ellis's [1], but I found her onscreen performances carried a combination of confidence, poise, and privacy few could match—even now, and especially in many of my all-time favorite 80s films [2] I still own on VHS: *The Lost Boys* (1987), *Solarbabies* (1986), *Less Than Zero* (1987), and *Silence Like Glass* (1989).

80s nostalgia wears many faces, but memory is never far from Jami Gertz's earth child glide character Star in *The Lost Boys* (featured in our Summer Issue, #3) Gertz's comely bohemian chic elegance hides the paradox buried within: half human, al-

most vampire, part predator, dash of earth mother (caring for the small vamp moppet Laddie (Chance Michael Corbett)). She's given just enough screen time to intrigue the viewer, but not enough to satiate those who found themselves wishing for a prequel with vampire origins, Star's included.

Her character is clearly one of the most complex: she has yet to completely give in to her bloodlust. Additionally, she's canoodling around with Kiefer Sutherland's David character and all his hot lost boy gang buds in tow: this woman must have some otherworldly ability to resist temptation! Jason Patric's Michael character does not count—he's all convenience and macho swagger, and frankly, kinda boring.

Jason Patric [3] and Gertz would take the romantic leads in both *Solarbabies* and *The Lost Boys*, yet I don't know that I ever believed their onscreen romance in either film. Their chemistry lacking, *Babies* instead had me more focused on the alignment of worlds, real and cinematic, and the slate of ecological crises, so the rewatch hit closer to home than expected. Both films stood the



Square Pegs (TV) (1982 - 1983)



Alphabet City (1984)



Crossroads (1986)

test of time; I found myself still easily engrossed in plot and nothing made me cringe!

Watching Gertz's two characters back to back, the ethereal Star in *Lost Boys* and her tomboy turned momentarily ethereal Terra in *Solarbabies* planted words like carriage, mien, and presence into my brain's vocabulary vault. The type of words that you can learn and practice and eventually feel like you may possess little bits of them yourself, but in Gertz's case, it's almost as if she had been born for such words to simply apply to her.

As an actress, she clearly had range and her absence from major films has been noticed. If I were to pass her on the street one day, I know what I would want my first thought, my first words to be: It's so lovely to meet you, Jami. I'm a big fan. Direct. Pithy. Professional. However, I suspect excitement would get the better of me and my words at seeing her (post-giggle) would be closer to Oh my God, it's Blair! (her character from *Less Than Zero*).

As a long-time reader and fan of Bret Easton Ellis, I occasionally wonder how he feels about the slick, music-video quality film adaptation of his debut novel—and specifically, the movie tie-in novelization with Gertz on the cover (along with her male co-stars). This is one of the first books I blame for turning me on to that wayward path one must take to become a writer. My "official" journey would begin with a perfect Gertz with perfect hair and in her perfect outfit (of course, I owned

one similar—it was the 80s) and begging my grandmother to purchase the book in a now long-defunct Gold Circle/Ames.

Next I would read the book itself, carrying it around for at least a year; then eventually discovering the Bangles' music video for "Hazy Shade of Winter" featuring clips from the film; and finally, I would land that first VHS home video rental of *Less Than Zero* [4] before purchasing my very own VHS copy from the long-gone Camelot Music that I, naturally, still possess. So, technically, I find hilarious my passion for the book *Less Than Zero* and eventually Ellis's work overall began not with Ellis himself, nor his work, but with Gertz.

Moreover, a recent Zero viewing party with author Douglas E. Winter proved my love of Gertz remains firm, and her fashionable outfits are still worthy of adopting. Her portrayal of Blair is subdued but nuanced compared to McCarthy's Clay (who's given little to do), Robert Downey, Jr.'s Julian (I was never certain if he was just acting), and James Spader's Rip (menacingly attractive and the only character in the film I actually believe).

But, *Less Than Zero* itself does not hold up to scrutiny, and in fact, half the run time is simply everyone asking, "Where's Julian?" then repeating the cycle of questioning, finding and leaving Julian again until his inexplicable death (by heart failure?) in Clay's car in the middle of a desert [5]. Overall, Zero proved way too pretty onscreen to successfully sell



The Lost Boys (1987)



Solarbabies (1986)



Quicksilver (1986)

the seedy underbelly of fatal drug addiction, and it was a long run time for this latest viewing and I found it hard to take seriously. (I discussed *Zero* in our Adaptations Issue, #11).

Harder to find, yet slightly less well-known, and no less critical to my VHS collection is *Silence Like Glass*, a powerful little movie based on a true story, whose impact took me by complete surprise. In addition to Gertz, the film also featured additional entertainers I admired then and now: Martha Plimpton, Bruce Payne [6], and James Remar. *Glass* is an inspirational film, brutal yet hopeful, and a film I couldn't forget even if I wanted to—nope, because Gertz's portrayal of dancer and cancer patient Eva Martin makes forgetting impossible.

Once you see the film, it's seared into your soul, enough so you try not to take anyone or anything for granted, for a little while at least. Both *Glass* and *Babies* reminded me to find the magic in the mundane, to be a little more grateful, so eventually, working this diligently, everything in my life could be super charged and imbued with meaning, with a faint aura of secrecy and sortilege, and I could just learn to be content in the moment.

Say what you want about the lesser mentioned entries of Gertz's oeuvre, from director Amos Poe's hilariously goofy *Alphabet City* (1984) to her film debut (also Tom Cruise's!) in *Endless Love* (1981), from the classic status of TV shows *Square Pegs* (1982-83), *The*

Facts of Life (1983-84), *Dreams* (1984), and *Ally McBeal* (2000-2002), among others, all the way to big budget *Twister* (1996) and cult classic *Crossroads* (1986) and current Prime Original rom-com *I Want You Back* (2022), I suspect she really wouldn't sweat the critique—whatever it is. Gertz is one of the wealthiest women in the US: the internet allows no such thing as discretion from prying eyes anymore and a quick search yields the current net worth of Gertz and husband of 30+ years Tony Ressler (a co-founder of Ares Investment) at \$6.5 billion dollars [7].

Gertz is another icon (like Molly Ringwald, for example) that's just out there doing her thing, doing it all, doing precisely what she wants to do and while raising a family—and doing it like the classy, sassy boss I imagine. I doubt she spends much time at all, if any, doom scrolling and internet trolling, and she's another celebrity who's managed to avoid overexposure and tabloid fodder through gross public displays and regrettable hijinks.

I yearn for more entertainment industry powerhouses like Gertz—celebs we can toast and look up to and not even feel a vague sense of shame for adoring; celebs I really do still hope to see in passing one day and let them know how much their work has meant to me.



ENDURING GIRLS ON FILM

ANNABETH GISH

by Stephanie McDevitt

Back in 2001, at the height of my obsession with *The X-Files*, a new FBI agent character named Monica Reyes joined the show. Reyes studied ritualistic crimes and satanic rituals. She had a degree in folklore and mythology, enjoyed numerology, and loved whale sounds. Reyes appeared on the last two seasons of *The X-Files*' original run, and her belief in the supernatural and mysticism was played beautifully by Annabeth Gish. I was not familiar with Gish when I first saw her on *The X-Files*, but I soon became a big fan.

Gish has been a Hollywood mainstay since she was a child. She started acting in her home town of Cedar Falls, Iowa. Her father was an English professor at the University of Northern Iowa, and while he was at a conference in Minneapolis, there was an open casting call for *Desert Bloom*. Gish auditioned with 800 other girls and it came down to her and Winona Ryder [1]. Gish won the role of Rose, and *Desert Bloom* came out in 1986.

Desert Bloom follows Rose as she grows up in 1950s Las Vegas. At the time, Vegas was a small town living with the tension of government atomic testing, and the movie revolves

around the fear that an A-bomb can go off at any time. At home, her stepfather Jack (Jon Voigt), a WWII vet, is suffering from PTSD and gets violent when he drinks. *Desert Bloom* was filmed in 1984 when Gish was just 13, and she puts in a great performance. The Los Angeles Times called her portrayal of Rose "luminous" [2]. Roger Ebert said, "Gish gives a fine performance as the teenager, a bundle of sensitivity, awkwardness, idealism, and feelings that are quickly hurt" [3].

Gish followed up *Desert Bloom* with the 1987 Jon Cryer movie *Hiding Out* (it's not my favorite, although there are some funny moments). Cryer plays Andrew, a stockbroker who got caught working for the mob. The feds want him to testify against the mob boss, but instead he runs away, shaves his beard, and pretends to be a new student at his cousin's high school. Gish plays Ryan, a high school senior who is Cryer's love interest. While Gish is good in this role, and she showcases her killer roller skating ability, the whole love story with Cryer is a bit cringy because his character is supposed to be 29 years old. At one point Andrew's cousin, Patrick (Keith Coogan), mentions statutory rape, so the movie doesn't ignore the issue, but it just feels creepy.



Desert Bloom (1986)



Mystic Pizza (1988)



Hiding Out (1987)

Anyway, Gish's next release was *Mystic Pizza* (1988), which went on to become a seminal 80s movie and one of the few coming of age stories about young women to come out of that era. In *Mystic Pizza*, Kat (Gish), Daisy (Julia Roberts), and Jojo (Lily Taylor) are all trying to navigate life post high school, including dealing with their families, their love lives, and, for Kat, trying to save money for college. Kat's storyline is intense. She falls for and has an affair with a married man, and she is crushed when he stays with his wife (you can read my entire take on *Mystic Pizza* in Issue #4 of GOF). *Mystic Pizza* is a great movie, and Roger Ebert said, "One of the reasons the film is wonderful is Annabeth Gish, who...might possibly become a great American movie actress" [4].

Gish's final release of the 80s is also my favorite of the bunch. *Shag* (1989) is another post-high school, coming of age story, but it's much more fun than *Mystic Pizza*. Carson (Phoebe Cates) is about to get married, and her friends Melaina (Bridget Fonda), Pudge (Gish), and Luanne (Paige Hannah) whisk her away for a girls weekend before the wedding. Carson thinks they're going to Fort Sumter for an educational trip, but once they're all in the car, the girls surprise Carson with a trip to Myrtle Beach. What follows is a delightful story about female friendship, growing up, love, and, of course, dancing (see GOF Issue #1 for my full writeup).

Annabeth Gish is great in all of these roles.

There is such an ease and an openness to her acting that makes all of her characters feel like real people. And, she was so young when she made these movies. As I mentioned, she was only 13 when she made *Desert Bloom*, and *Mystic Pizza*, which was the last movie she filmed in the 80s, came out before she graduated from high school. One reason why she's so believable and so vulnerable is because she was a teenager playing a teenager (her *Shag* co-stars were all eight or nine years older). I'm not pointing this out to discount her performances, but rather to say that she tackled some heavy material (especially in *Mystic Pizza*) in a way that I'm not so sure most teenagers could handle.

In a 1988 interview with Roger Ebert, Gish said, "My parents called me their wise little baby, I was mature when I was 4 or 5. My brother and sister were older, so I was raised by four adults" [5]. In addition to naturally being mature, Gish also credits her decision not to move to L.A. or N.Y. with keeping her grounded. She finished high school in Cedar Falls and then went on to get a degree in English from Duke University.

Staying out of Hollywood not only helped her avoid the pitfalls of child stardom, but it also allowed her to stay humble, grounded, and totally relatable, which I think is reflected in all of her performances. All of her characters that I am familiar with seem like real people, and I find myself always wanting to befriend them (especially Pudge and Moni-



Shag (1989)



When He's Not a Stranger (1989)



X-Files (TV) 1993 - 2018)

ca Reyes). In 2016, Gish said, “‘It was never about needing to be a star or in the spotlight.’ Instead, Annabeth was drawn to acting because of her empathetic instincts and the opportunity to ‘be able, as an artist, to cull out performances that affect people’” [6].

In a 2021 podcast interview (during a discussion about K.D. Lang) Gish said, “I love endurance, as I am an example of that in any industry, just remaining, just endurance, right? Forget relevance or whatever, but endurance is kind of an underrated mark of success.” Later on, she points out that some of her old co-stars don’t even act anymore. She said, “Phoebe [Cates] doesn’t act any more. Bridget [Fonda] doesn’t act anymore. It’s interesting, you know, back to that word of endurance, maybe everyone else decided not to be a glutton for punishment like I am still [7].

Despite the difficulties that come with a career in Hollywood, especially for women, Gish has endured exceptionally well. She has over 100 acting credits and has made many movies, including *Wyatt Earp*, *Beautiful Girls*, *SLC Punk*, and *Double Jeopardy*. She also has tons of TV credits to her name, including *The X-Files*, *The West Wing*, *Brotherhood*, *Halt and Catch Fire*, and *Sons of Anarchy* (she even had a small role as Ben Wyatt’s sister in *Parks and Recreation*). She achieved this level of success without experiencing any public issues like so many 80s child stars. While her career is still booming, Gish says she focuses on her family, raising her two

sons with her stunt-man husband, Wade Allen (who she met on the set of *The X-Files*).

One final note that, to me, makes Annabeth Gish even more endearing (and perhaps enduring), is that she seems to really like her fans. She interacts with fan groups on social media and she still does fests and events centered around *The X-Files* (even though creator Chris Carter did Monica Reyes so dirty in the most recent reboot).

She also has no problem talking about the movies she did in the 80s, and she seems to understand how important movies like *Mystic Pizza* and *Shag* were to women who watched them while growing up. In the podcast interview I quoted above, she mentioned that she does Cameos, and people often ask her to say a quote from *Shag*. The girls are talking about boners, and Pudge says, “It isn’t a bone at all, it’s a muscle.” Hilarious. Imagine having to say that over and over for your fans?

So, I guess all of this is to say that I am a huge fan of Annabeth Gish both as an actor and as a person. She just seems smart, funny, and grateful for her career and the wide-ranging amount of roles she’s played. I recommend checking out all four of her 80s movies. If you do watch her in *The X-Files*, please disregard what happens to her character in the reboot.



MIDWESTERN GIRLS ON FILM

EDIE MCCLURG

by Janene Scelza and Matt Scelza

The Internet schools of acting define character actors as "a character actor is a film or television performer who specializes in portraying unique, offbeat, colorful characters in supporting roles." [1] Generally, they are typically cast in supporting roles, with less name recognition than the stars (hence the name of the 2012 documentary about some iconic character actors: *That Guy... Who Was in That Thing*), and they either play the cinematic chameleon, like Gary Oldman or Natasha Richardson, for example, or they play one specific persona, like Edie McClurg as the quintessential Midwesterner.

You might not recognize her by name, but she was a familiar face in comedy, particularly in 80s and 90s film and television. She was the perky, plump middle-aged woman in gaudy polyester and red Aqua Net bouffant who squeaked out a Midwestern accent. She was like Hot Dish, personified.

McClurg's iconic persona was years in the making, an amalgam of people who she knew from her own life that took the form of Mrs. Marv Mendenhall, a character that McClurg used to perform on David Letterman's morn-

ing show, *The David Letterman Show*, in 1980. Archive footage of Miss McClurg's performance is unfortunately hard to come by, but for the morbidly interested, she and Dave do have a very awkward encounter with professional wrestler Dick the Bruiser.

While her outward appearance rarely changed, the beauty of Mrs. Marv Mendenhall was that she was a versatile character. There's an inherent, hilarious volatility a such a saccharine individual. It makes you wonder, is this person for real? (For TV, she was). Is she bottling up all her feelings and is one day going to explode? (She did). And, because she was so bubbly and so polite, she usually had someone raging, quietly or otherwise.

McClurg could be a safe bet for 80s network TV sitcoms, when you needed a faithful neighbor, like Mrs. Poole on the long-running *Hogan Family* sitcom, or harmlessly nosy Bonnie Brindell on the cult favorite *Small Wonder*. She was the fish-out-of-water society woman cruising with the stoners in *Cheech & Chong's Next Movie* (1979). She was perfectly at home as in the earliest incarnation of *Pee Wee's Playhouse*. She was the cool



Carrie (1976)



Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1986)



Elvira: Mistress of the Dark (1988)

kids' totally square mom in the so very 90s rollerblade comedy, *Airborne* (1993), and the matriarch in an unsettling parody of sitcom families in *Natural Born Killers* (1994). And she was even the comically sanctimonious morality police in *Elvira: Mistress of the Dark* (1988).

Wrote fellow Groundlings alumni, Cassandra Peters (aka, Elvira): "I showed up to the shows wearing a short skirt or low-cut top and had to sneak past Edie McClurg, a former teacher from Kansas City. If she happened to catch a glimpse of me in her makeup mirror, she would scold me," Peters said in her memoir. 'You're not going out in THAT, are you?' or 'I hope you're going to wear a bra!' When it came to casting Chastity Pariah, the overbearing, self-righteous moral compass of Falwell... Edie was our first choice" [2].

To us, McClurg's best performances were in the John Hughes comedies *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986) and *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles* (1987) (both films are featured in our Road Trip Issue, #10). Hughes had a knack for crafting memorable secondary characters, insisting on actors who could deliver offbeat performances. McClurg had the looks, and her improv background made it easy to add those little touches that made her scenes unforgettable.

Janet Hirshenson, who cast Hughes's films with Jane Jenkins, explained: "I'd realized right away that with John, I'd need plenty of backups for every role — he likes to see

a lot of people— but in Edie's case, I knew it wasn't necessary. [... She] made even the tiniest role sing, and from then on, whenever we were casting a movie, John would say, "Okay, here's the Edie part!" or "Wait a minute, how are we going to use Edie?" [3]. She worked on six films written and/or directed by Hughes in the 80s and 90s, including *Mr. Mom* (featured in our Work Issue, #5) and *She's Having a Baby* (1989).

In *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, the titular teen (Matthew Broderick) concocts a whole plan to ditch school with his friends. Principal Rooney (Jeffrey Jones), defender of school law and order, doesn't plan to Ferris get away with it. But, Ferris always gets away with it. As Rooney's dim, yet strangely wise secretary, Grace, Edie McClurg succinctly explains: "The sportos, the motorheads, geeks, sluts, bloods, wastoids, dweebies, dickheads - they all adore him. They think he's a righteous doood." That last part was all McClurg, punctuated with a chipper smile that irks Rooney. It's such a brief scene, but packs such a punch. (McClurg recently reprised the role for an episode of *Family Guy*, but Grace is more wise and less dumb in that spoof).

She did it again, in the road trip disaster comedy, *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*. Steve Martin is an ad executive who is trying to get home to his family in time for Thanksgiving. He attempts to rent a car, and after a long excursion through the parking lot, finds it missing. Steve Martin is supremely



Planes, Trains, and Automobiles (1987)



Little Mermaid (1989)



The Hogan Family (TV) (1986 - 1991)

pissed and blows up on the overly polite car rental clerk, played by McClurg. The scene reportedly clocks 18 f-bombs in a single minute, earning the film its (profitable) R-rating. McClurg has such wonderful comedic timing, the way she is practically blown over by the shouted expletives, and the devilish grin that appears when she realizes Steve Martin doesn't have his rental car agreement. He knows what's coming as she matter-of-factly concludes: "Oh, boy. ... You're fucked."

Though Edie McClurg was a popular character actress, she didn't make her onscreen debut until her 30s, and ironically it wasn't in comedy, or even as an adult. She was Helen Shyres, one of Sissy Spacek's teenage tormentors in Brian DePalma's wild adaptation of Steven King's *Carrie* (1976).

The Missouri native got her start in radio as a DJ, newswoman, and producer at the Kansas City-based NPR affiliate, KCUR-FM. Most notably, she performed as the dastardly John Erlichman and Richard Kleindienst in a live broadcast of the Nixon Tapes two days before the President resigned. (She also got her *Masters at Syracuse* in this time). Her lengthy resume includes a decades-long tenure with the Groundlings (brother Bob was one, too), sketch comedy, film, television, commercials, loads of cartoon voicework (including the excellent *Tiny Toons* movie and the semi-autobiographical Louie Anderson cartoon, *Life with Louie*), theater, and even the occasional video game, including the

fourth installment of the ab fab *Monkey Island* series from Lucasfilm ("We're not worthy!").

Recent news on Edie McClurg's whereabouts are heartbreaking. Now in her 70s, she suffers from dementia and may have also been the victim of elder abuse. She was at least able to bring everything full circle with a one-woman show, *It's Edie in Here*, that ran for several weeks at the Groundlings Theater in late 2019. She performed 15 different characters, including relatives, friends, neighbors, and "countless 'strong Midwestern women'" *Backstage Magazine* reported [3].

McClurg told the publication: "I think I was being pigeonholed in the business, and while it's good to be known as a woman who can do that kind of housewife/neighbor stuff, and I enjoy playing those parts, I was only being asked to do comedic roles," she noted. "I realized with this show there's an opportunity to show a really wide range of people and emotions. It's very funny, but there are poignant points and shocking points" [4].

In their essay on what makes character actors truly stand out, Dee Cannon and Lyn Gardner write: "You can teach people timing, you can teach them how to stand; you can give them the infrastructure that allows them to take risks, but you can't teach them to be in touch with their own spirit" [5]. Edie McClurg definitely fits the bill.



FASHIONABLE GIRLS ON FILM

MOLLY RINGWALD

by Dr. Rhonda Baughman

Clearest among the hazy images that flutter through the film projector of my mind when someone says, “favorite actresses of the 80s”? The pouty lips of Molly Ringwald, of course, and additional flashbulb-type pictures include any of the sassy hairdos she’s rocked. One of those ‘dos I call the “dassy” (dirty + sassy) and it’ll always be the cut that got away from me, the one I was too chicken to try. Ringwald sported this specific haircut (coupled with an “I dare you” stare) on a VHS copy of *Spacehunter Adventures in the Forbidden Zone* (1983), which I only found due to my hours of wandering through the media section of K-Mart as a kid (circa 1985).

Along with *Spacehunter*, Ringwald’s obsession films for me strayed far beyond the most familiar (*Sixteen Candles* (1984); *The Breakfast Club* (1985); and *Pretty in Pink* (1986))—although I appreciate the classic trio. Instead, favorite and repeated viewings fell upon another trio: the melancholy TV movie *Surviving* (1985), cautionary tale *For Keeps* (1988), and the bombastic *Fresh Horses* (1988) and yet, I would have to re-watch all those films as an adult to figure out their importance, their synchronicity, and why they struck my young, developing psyche at all.

My adoration of *Spacehunter* required little deep exploration: besides desperately wanting that chic cut Ringwald’s character Niki rocked (see “dassy” above: aka armageddon unwashed on the cover, shocking red crop for her role)—the film simply was cool. Epic adventures across a dusty apocalyptic landscape, accompanied by gritty cinematography made me believe the *Spacehunter* cast really dwelled within a wasteland hellscape and they were able to drive their choice of those handmade, all-terrain *Mad Max* (1979) and *Road Warrior* (1981) inspired vehicles; although, the overall feel of *Spacehunter* was less of a permanent ‘everything sucks’ at the world’s end and more of an optimism-exists-at-the-end-of-this-dirty-rainbow after all.

That extreme vibe difference has an obvious reason: Mel Gibson’s films were R-rated with little hope, while the PG *Spacehunter* had less gloom, more lampoon, and spoke more to the kind of person I wanted to be when I grew up (intergalactic warrior scrapper without the realistic violence but still victorious against all outrageous obstacles). Moreover, the *Space* cast included two of my favorite male actors (Michael Ironside and Ernie Hudson) [1], but let’s be real—Molly’s scrappy



Spacehunter (1983)



PK & the Kid (1987)



Sixteen Candles (1985)

charisma kept me engaged: I wanted her to win. I want her to win in her movies and in real life, too; that's the power of Molly Ringwald—I find myself rooting for her onscreen and off.

Lonnie, however, her *Surviving* character, was a tough one to root for—and not because of Ringwald's acting ability. No, no as a current viewer (who remembered how the film ended) I was tense and exasperated. I just wanted to shake the Lonnie character and yell that she had options! Sit down and I will tell you about those options! *Surviving* may be difficult to watch, not only knowing the ending, but it's a tearjerker now for both the early losses in real life of co-stars River Phoenix and Heather O'Rourke, as well as personal knowledge of the film's delicate subject matter. Ringwald handles the role deftly, and with compassion, intrigue, hopeful innocence, and heartbreaking doom, and damned if her coiffure in this role didn't also make my top ten list of cuts I'd love to try but don't have the nerve.

Hairstyles only controlled some of my attention for both *For Keeps* and *Fresh Horses*, and the two film posters adorned my walls for years. The re-watch showed me that, for these films, much of the thrall belonged to a bizarre array of reasons that as a kid had probably been decided on much more instinctive and subconscious levels than anything logical or sensical. Ringwald's ability to portray two extremely different and unique characters, and still each far beyond the Hughes muse personas, showed my unwav-

ering loyalty in this celeb's performances and abilities had not been misplaced. I simply believed all of the roles she inhabited [2].

The independent, French-speaking [3], smart-girl journalist Darcy that Ringwald brought to life in *Keeps vs.* the mysterious, erratic, tormented, literally on the wrong side of the tracks Jewel in *Horses*, I can now see, had me rooting for her in both roles simply because the thought of one mistake defining an entire lifetime seemed painfully cruel. Moreover, I had forgotten two specific moments that resurfaced from the *Keeps* rewatch: 1. blink-and-you'll-miss-it roles for both Darcy DeMoss and Renee Estevez [4], and 2. Ringwald's believable howling during the birth scene kept me from waffling in my initial decision to remain childless. I found, even years later, I had no regrets. And yet still, somehow, both the Darcy character and I would careen down the path toward a career in journalism and then choose the boy we loved no matter the consequences. Neither is a coincidence, I'm sure, and yet, I have no regrets, and I would like to believe the Darcy character wouldn't have had any either.

Horses' Jewel (and the film itself), on the other hand, elicited an unexpected reaction. I changed sides. I initially rooted for Jewel to choose McCarthy's rich (but deep!) Cincinnati, Ohio-based Larkin character. Destiny called, after all! Upon re-watch, I realized I'd evolved slightly and was grateful the Jewel/Larkin match was not to be. Based upon the



Pretty in Pink (1986)



Fresh Horses (1988)



For Keeps (1988)

off-Broadway Larry Ketron play [5], *Horses* instead now feels mostly full of unlikeable characters (and from all social classes represented) and Jewel's sultry allure feels less intentional, more survival tactic. Additionally, Larkin is rich but not that deep (more controlling and jerkier, actually) and Jewel deserved so much better. It took the adult re-watch to realize what Ketron's title referred to, so then instead of feeling sad for Ringwald at *Horses'* denouement, I felt a renewed sense of confidence in karmic justice; McCarthy's tears swayed me no more, and Ringwald's dismissive smile was everything.

As it turns out, recent analyses of Molly's characters in *Spacehunter*, *Surviving*, and *For Keeps*, makes me think that the younger me was simply subconsciously preparing for adulthood. Molly's characters seemed to possess the mysteries of knowledge that simply interested me when young, but that somehow, somewhere, I thought I might need to know as an adult. Or hindsight could be 20/20. Then again, perhaps I'm just reading too much into, identifying too much with fictional characters. Any of those familial and social class issues prepared older me when confronted with not surprisingly: misogyny, self-esteem, suicide, familial issues, and social class. Early teachers come in all guises, so I will forever be grateful.

Our beloved Molly still teaches, so to speak, and she has never really gone away—similar to Jami Gertz. Although Gertz disappeared from the obvious big screen after 1996's

Twister, she kept a toe in the acting pond with a few indie films and TV roles. Ringwald was much the same. Both actresses possess a selection of film and TV roles that would have been difficult to locate without direct knowledge during the era they were released. Neither Gertz nor Ringwald repeatedly graced gossip rags and, unless I hung with the crowd that actively followed their careers, there's no way I could stumble into a lesser-known film from each. I started thinking about the reach of these actresses—across generations and genres, eras and my own ennui—and I wished I'd thought to revisit all of their work I had missed over the last two decades during the height of the pandemic: I had plenty of time.

Ringwald is one of those celebrities who I'd love to catch live—either singing in a dark, Parisian cabaret [6] or at a convention signing autographs. She was the Hughes' muse for a long time, for many reasons—some surface level flawless beauty attributes I suspect we'd have agreed on, while other reasons not so much. And yet, other reasons are more difficult to articulate. I suspect my reasons though may be easier to formulate after reading both Ringwald's books: *Getting the Pretty Back: Friendship, Family, and Finding the Perfect Lipstick* (2010) and *When it Happens to You: A Novel in Stories* (2013). Ringwald's fascinating and diverse talents accompany her status as a revered celebrity who I cannot recall ever outrageously or grossly headlining tabloids—a combination which I find beautiful, refreshing, and painfully rare.



QUIRKY GIRLS ON FILM

WINONA RYDER

by Stephanie McDevitt

Winona Ryder first appeared on movie screens when she was 13. Her career flourished as she became known for playing quirky, angst-y teens in movies that often didn't have mainstream success. In a 2022 interview with Ryder in *Harper's Bazaar*, Heather Havrilesky said, "Many of us haven't forgotten that in the late 80s and early 90s, Winona Ryder was the conversation" [1]. She totally was. Ryder has had a long and diverse career, but her early roles set the stage for her to become a Gen-X staple, portraying her generation's disillusionment with, well, everything.

Winona Ryder was born in Minnesota in 1971. In 1978, her family moved to a commune in Mendocino, CA. They had no electricity, so Ryder became a voracious reader [2]. While they didn't have a TV, Ryder says her mother used to set up a sheet on the side of a barn and show old movies. She said, "I was in heaven" [3]. Three years later, her family moved to the San Francisco Bay Area. Ryder said she would try to view the world through a camera lens. "I created this whole kind of fantasy world," she explains. "There was an old theater I loved, and I used to fantasize about living there. Like, ripping out the seats and having a bed and

a bathtub and a bike and watching movies all the time" [4]. Same, Winona. Same.

Ryder enrolled in the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco where she took her first acting classes [5]. In 1985, she auditioned for the role of Rose in *Desert Bloom*, which went to Annabeth Gish. However, her monologue from JD Salinger's novel *Franny and Zooey* landed her a small part in the movie *Lucas* (1986) [6], which stars Corey Haim as a super smart 14-year old who falls for the new girl in town, Maggie (Kerri Green). *Lucas* is bullied at school, has a rough home life, and just wants Maggie to be his girlfriend. Ryder plays Rina, Lucas's friend, and while she doesn't have a ton of screen time in this movie, she puts in a good performance and is totally believable as a part of Lucas's group of nerdy friends.

Lucas led Ryder to her first starring role in *Square Dance* (1987). Ryder's character Gemma grew up in the very small, very Christian town of Twilight, TX with her grandfather (Jason Robards). When her mother (Jane Alexander) comes to visit, she offers Gemma a place to stay with her in Fort Worth. At first,



Square Dance (1987)



Lucas (1986)



Heathers (1988)

Gemma experiences culture shock, but eventually she settles in and befriends Rory (Rob Lowe), a developmentally disabled, but very sweet, local boy. Reviews for this movie were mixed, but Ryder got some good press. The L.A. Times said, “High schooler Ryder—who was lovely and touching in that underrated gem *Lucas*—is lovely and touching here. It’s a complex role, with many demands, and, most of the time, she’s fully up to it” [7].

Following *Square Dance*, Ryder hit it big with her role as Lydia in Tim Burton’s *Beetlejuice*. She beat out many well-known actresses for this part including Molly Ringwald, Jennifer Connelly, Sarah Jessica Parker, and Alyssa Milano. Burton cast Ryder after seeing her in *Lucas*, and frankly, she’s great. I mean, this is a great movie overall, and it was an excellent decision for Ryder to take the part. *Beetlejuice* was a huge financial success, and it became the 10th highest grossing film of 1988 [8]. Ryder fits perfectly into the movie as the sullen, teenaged Lydia, dressed all in black, proclaiming things like, “My whole life is a dark room. One big dark room” [9]. Reviews for the movie were good, and Ryder credits Burton with kick starting her career.

Ryder made two other movies in the 80s that I’m not going to talk about here. In 1988, she was in *1699* with Keifer Sutherland and Robert Downey, Jr. I could not find it streaming anywhere. In 1989, she was in *Great Balls of Fire!* I tried to watch this movie for Girls, on Film Issue #15 but I couldn’t finish

it. I just don’t want to watch a movie about a guy marrying his 13-year-old cousin.

So, moving on...in 1989 Ryder appeared in *Heathers*, which is my favorite Winona Ryder movie (you can read my full write up in GOF Issue #13: The High School Issue). Ryder plays Veronica Sawyer, a member of a popular clique of girls who are mostly named Heather. When she meets JD (Christian Slater), a new, mysterious student with a wild streak, they attempt to subvert the social order at school by killing the popular kids and staging their deaths as suicides. It’s a crazy movie but also a great story for Gen-Xers who were coming of age with a cynicism that came to define the generation. *Heathers* was not a critical success, however it started Ryder on a path of becoming the Gen-X movie darling. As Heather Havrilesky said, “Her porcelain-doll features and half-innocent, half-disenchanted demeanor seemed to embody the essential spirit of Generation X, an unruly mob of idealistic slackers and secretly starry-eyed cynics” [10].

To further solidify her status as a Gen-X icon, in the 90s Ryder went on to make *Edward Scissorhands*, *Mermaids*, and *Reality Bites*. Havrilesky notes, “No one captured the troubled-but-hopeful vibe of the child of the ’70s like Ryder. Her most memorable roles back then...share the same tensions between disillusionment and exuberance, eye-rolling and open longing, fierce independence and raw emotional need. Ryder’s extra-large



Beetlejuice (1988)



Great Balls of Fire (1989)



1969 (1988)

eyes and expressive, silent-film-star face telegraphed one part lost girl, two parts blasé teenager. She managed to appear at once vulnerable and completely over it" [11].

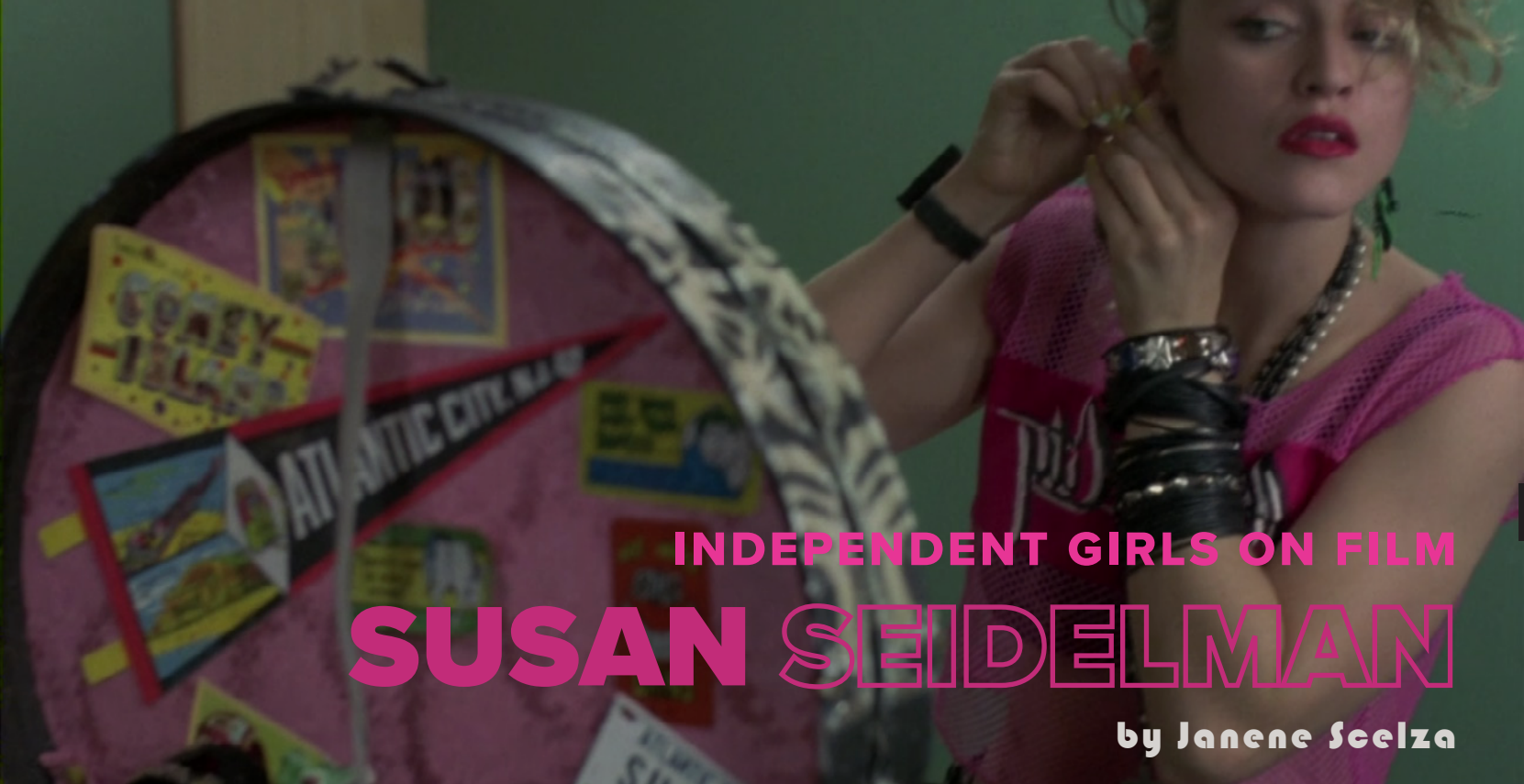
For a group of kids who are often referred to as the forgotten generation, it was super exciting to have someone so smart and funny represent us so well. The 90s brought a lot of movies and actors that helped to shape the slacker Gen-X image. Cameron Crowe, John Cusack, and Kevin Smith (to name a few) all made movies that helped define the generation, but to have a woman play great roles in clever, weird movies that seemed to understand us was so very.

Ryder didn't only take roles as dark, brooding teenagers. She has an extensive body of work that includes many period pieces, for example *The Age of Innocence*, *Little Women*, and *The Crucible*. She also has a tendency to make movies that are based on books, like *Girl*, *Interrupted*, *A Scanner Darkly*, and *The Private Lives of Pippa Lee*. Ryder has also done considerable work in TV, most recently starring in *Stranger Things* and *The Plot Against America* (based on the Philip Roth novel).

Throughout her career, Ryder has struggled with her fame. She said, "Being talked about, being reviewed ... realizing that someone could pause you, could rewind you? It was so overwhelming," [12]. She started out so young and worked constantly, so as she

became a Hollywood fixture, she also became fodder for the tabloids. And, Ryder has said in the past that she was never in it to get famous. In an early 2000s interview with Cinema.com, she said "It's strange the way people throw themselves into stardom—and that world is not reality...People who are obsessed with making it and salaries and box office, they have nothing to draw on when they do their work. It's very apparent on-screen [13]. So, despite not chasing fame, Ryder was thrown to the wolves in the celebrity press, and it was kind of brutal.

After going through some tough times, including a relationship and breakup with Johnny Depp and a 2001 arrest for shoplifting, Ryder took a 4-year hiatus. However, in 2006, she started acting again and has continued working steadily ever since. Now, in her 50s, Ryder's career is going strong. Havrilesky said, "It's almost as if Gen X's favorite gloomy teen has grown into a secure adult, finally comfortable enough in her own skin to share her wisdom and sense of humor with the world" [15]. Amen to that. I'm excited to see what she does next. And, we here at Girls, on Film owe Ryder a debt of gratitude because *Stranger Things* has brought us a younger audience who is very into 80s nostalgia despite not being familiar with most of the movies we write about. I cannot wait to tell them about *Heathers*.



INDEPENDENT GIRLS ON FILM

SUSAN SEIDELMAN

by Janene Scelza

My love for Susan Seidelman movies is on full display in previous essays I wrote for the zine about the fabulous *Desperately Seeking Susan* (see GOF #6: The Role-Reversal Issue) and the South Florida sci-fi rom com (what a mouthful!), *Making Mr. Right* (#9, The Robots Issue). I adore her early films, as a preservation of a paradoxically vibrant and seedy New York City when the rent was cheap enough for the weirdos to thrive. I also adore those films as unique feminist narratives about hip chicks bucking tradition.

Seidelman got her start in the No Wave period going on in New York City from about the late 1970s to the mid-80s. (Fellow NYU film school classmate, Jim Jarmusch, was another one in that gang) [1]. The Eastside was a mess, with large swaths of the city covered in rubble (you see it a lot in *Smithereens*), but it was also this fertile playground for a collective of creatives to make films, music, art, whatever. It was infectious and experimental, and best of all, it could be done for very little money (like making zines... wee!)

For its young filmmakers, that meant grabbing friends and cheap Super 8 cameras to

shoot movies in each others' apartments and guerrilla style, without permits, down on the streets. It was also a scene that allowed women filmmakers in particular, who were almost nowhere to be found in Big Hollywood studios at the time, a voice. Susan Seidelman gave us these strangely wonderful tales about women trying to reinvent themselves.

The No Wave movement was, by most accounts, brief, and really, so was Seidelman's time in it. *Smithereens* was a huge critical success, becoming the first American independent film to compete for the highly coveted Palm d'Or prize at Cannes. Immediately afterwards, she went on to make upbeat, studio projects, starting with my all-time favorite 80s movie, *Desperately Seeking Susan*, in 1985. Nonetheless, the punk/DIY approach was ideal for *Smithereens*, which follows Wren (Susan Berman), a dopey young runaway who is desperate to be famous, without any discernible talent, in a fleeting punk scene that was waning in NYC and booming in L.A. (For regional comparisons check out Leggs McNeil and Gillian McCain's *Please Kill Me*, an oral history of the New York scene, and Marc Spitz and Brendan Mullen's *We Got the Neutron Bomb*, about the West Coast incarnation).



Smithereens (1982)



Desperately Seeking Susan (1985)



Making Mr. Right (1987)

In preparation for the role of Wren, Susan Berman studied Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria*, a 1957 film about a wayward prostitute who only seems to find heartbreak [2]. Similarly, the young characters in *Smithereens* all seem to be searching for something better (some, for greatness), only to encounter sleaze and despair at every turn. Wren gravitates between an asshole punk rocker (Voidoids frontman Richard Hell) who happily takes advantage, a nice guy (Brad Rijn) living in a van who stupidly bets on Wren's desire for domestication, and anyone who will let her crash at their place rent-free.

Smithereens is very clearly a life-long labor of love. Susan Seidelman always seems to beam in interviews and screening Q&As when she talks about making the film and living in New York at that time. It reminds me a lot of the way Fran Rubel Kuzui discusses her film, *Tokyo Pop* (1988) to young audiences (featured in our debut issue).

Remarkably, *Smithereens*, made for a few thousand dollars and with a cast of nobodies, made lots of noise and established Seidelman's M.O. As Shane O'Reilly observed: "*Smithereens*' spunky, never-take-no-for-an-answer heroine is in many ways a precursor to Madonna's famous role as Susan Thomas [in *Desperately Seeking Susan*], with certain character traits filtering through to Ann Magnuson's Frankie Stone in Seidelman's 1987 film *Making Mr. Right* and later Emily Lloyd's Cookie Volt-

ecki in 1989's *Cookie*" [3]. (In a way, it also describes Rosanne Barr's character in *She-Devil* (1989) after she went off the rails).

Seidelman's next picture, the caper comedy *Desperately Seeking Susan*, is a funky East Village take on the 1974 French film, *Celine and Julie Go Boating*, which itself is a kind of *Alice in Wonderland*. Roberta (Rosanna Arquette), a bored New Jersey housewife, finds vicarious romance in reading personal ads. When occasional contributor, Jim (Robert Joy), posts a message for his nomadic girlfriend, Susan (Madonna), to meet him in Battery Park, Roberta decides to spy from afar.

Roberta strays from her status-obsessed yuppie universe, completely enamored, as anyone would be, with the positively cool and mysterious Susan (but not in a *Single White Female* kind of way). Only, Alice doesn't just follow the White Rabbit to Wonderland, she becomes the White Rabbit. A scuffle with a jewel thief (Will Patton) who mistakes Roberta for Susan leads to Roberta getting amnesia and not knowing if she's actually Susan.

"It kind of exemplifies a fantasy version of New York that a lot of people, myself included, kind of imagine 'this is the magical New York I want to go to,'" Seidelman told IndieWire [4]. There's still an element of seediness lurking on the East Side, but the city and the people are so much more vibrant compared to *Smithereens*. It was definitely magical to teenage me. Years



She-Devil (1989)



Cookie (1989)



Smithereens (1982)

later, I even made the pilgrimage to the now-defunct Love Saves the Day in the Village, hoping to find the little consignment shop just as it was in the movie (it wasn't).

The film was once again composed of a cast of mostly unknowns and up-and-comers, including Aiden Quinn, the late Mark Blum, the comic Steven Wright, the excellent Laurie Metcalf, and even Giancarlo Esposito and John Turturro in bit parts. It was also Madonna's first starring role in a film. She wasn't yet a mega-pop star when filming began, just someone Seidelman knew from the block. No offense to Rosanna Arquette, who I absolutely adore in this movie, but Madonna really is the whole movie. She's such a cool presence. She even makes scarfing down Cheetos look totally fab. Everyone in the film gravitates to Susan who is like the manic pixie pop star as both the (inadvertent) source of chaos and the key to solving the mystery.

"Like a Virgin" dropped before *Desperately Seeking Susan* hit theaters, which proved to be a game-changer for both Madonna and the film. "It was the best of both worlds. I could film with her before she was famous and then her fame helped the release of the movie," said Seidelman [5]. *Desperately Seeking Susan* became the sleeper hit of the year.

Susan Seidelman's third film was a big departure from the first two, both in terms of story and setting. *Making Mr. Right* takes place in Miami and has this kind of art deco

fever dream aesthetic kind of like the later seasons of *Miami Vice* (check out the show's courtroom scenes to see what I mean). Ann Magnuson plays a PR guru who is hired by a tech company to sort of humanize the image of an android so they can appeal to potential funders to give them money so they can send the android to space for a lengthy mission. It's a dopey little movie, with John Malkovich in a dual role as the robot who discovers love and also his crabby anti-social inventor. It's also one of my favorite Glenn Headley performances. (Laurie Metcalf and Susan Berman are back, too!).

Susan Seidelman did return to her roots (hip chicks in NYC) at the end of the 80s for the middling mafia comedy, *Cookie* (1989), co-written by Nora Ephron. I wasn't too crazy about it (because it's a mafia comedy), but I definitely recommend watching it for Diane Weist's (always). Beyond that, I still get a kick out of Seidelman's adaptation of Fay Weldon's *She Devil* (1989), and the 2005 comedy, *Boynton Beach Club* (2005), a sweet little film about widowed retirees in Florida that she co-wrote with her mother, Florence.

I can't vouch for the rest of Seidelman's work. However: for youngsters who have caught the 80s nostalgia bug: give *Smithereens* (currently available on Criterion's excellent streaming service) and *Desperately Seeking Susan* (available through a couple of other streaming services) a try. They truly are magical.

ENDNOTES

SUPPORTING GIRLS ON FILM: JOAN CUSACK

Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

[1] "This 2-Time Oscar Nominee Was Fired Off 'SNL' After 1 Season" (Showbiz CheatSheet, 2022) <https://tinyurl.com/2hr5bj3u>

[2] "The Allnighter (film)" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/yckk2tpx>

[3] "Working Girl Immortalized the Staten Island Ferry Look" (Flickery Flicks, 2021) <https://tinyurl.com/2p8a98b3>

[4] "Joan Cusack" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/3jxfbkvw>

[5] "Joan Cusack Has a Tchochke Shop of Her Own" (The New Yorker, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/yzhx82j4>

[6] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

PLUCKY GIRLS ON FILM: SALLY FIELD

Essay by: Janene and Matt Scelza

[1] "Murphy's Romance" (Roger Ebert, 1986) <https://tinyurl.com/4huaz7zc>

[2] "Sally Field Wasn't Sure She'd Have The Guts To Publish Her New Memoir" (NPR, 2018) <https://tinyurl.com/44f5p85c>

[3] "Sally Field" (Academy of Achievement) <https://tinyurl.com/bdh69z4s>

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] "Sally Field Wasn't Sure She'd Have The Guts To Publish Her New Memoir" (NPR, 2018) <https://tinyurl.com/44f5p85c>

ETHEREAL GIRLS ON FILM: JAMI GERTZ

Essay by: Dr. Rhonda Baughman

[1] American Psycho (1991) although Gertz would also appear in the 1987 film adaptation of Ellis's first novel *Less than Zero* (1985).

[2] Look closely and you can see her in the cast with Ringwald in *Sixteen Candles* (1984).

[3] I've noticed Patric attending a convention or two for photo ops and autographs, though I don't suppose Gertz needs to attend for the funds, but maybe she'd attend just for the fans? A girl can have dreams. Ahem. Dreams – see what I did there.

[4] Obsessively covered in *Girls, On Film Issue #11*.

[5] Additionally, in *Zero* there are several beautiful scenes of McCarthy and Blair just driving around LA as well as surrounding cities and finding little to no traffic. I've driven those streets many times and they're always jam-packed, bumper to bumper, honk fests.

[6] Payne also has a blink-you'll-

miss-it role in Solarbabies!

[7] The couple have numerous investments, including but not limited to part-ownership of the Atlanta Hawks (NBA) and a minority stake in the Milwaukee Brewers (MLB). They are generous and charitable, as well – feel free to hit the Googs for their Ressler/Gertz Family Foundation.

ENDURING GIRLS ON FILM: ANNABETH GISH

Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

[1] “The Annabeth Gish Interview” (Two Dollar Late Fee Podcast, 2021) <https://tinyurl.com/2xk2d45v>

[2] “Movie Review : A ‘Desert Bloom’ In The Ominous ‘50s” (LA Times, 1986) <https://tinyurl.com/3rua2c65>

[3] “Desert Bloom” ([RogerEbert.com](https://www.rogerebert.com), 1986) <https://tinyurl.com/2s3h6v3a>

[4] “Annabeth Gish plays it smart with 'Mystic' role” ([RogerEbert.com](https://www.rogerebert.com), 1986) <https://tinyurl.com/54hpmkzx>

[5] Ibid.

[6] “In the Balance” (The Key Magazine, 2016) <https://tinyurl.com/ys4vps74>

[7] “The Annabeth Gish Interview” (Two Dollar Late Fee Podcast, 2021) <https://tinyurl.com/2xk2d45v>

MIDWESTERN GIRLS ON FILM: EDIE MCCLURG

Essay by: Janene and Matt Scelza

[1] "What is a Character Actor — The Art of the Supporting Role" (Studiobinder, 2021) <https://tinyurl.com/2s4eckez>

[2] "5 Memorable Characters of Edie McClurg" (Yesteryear Retro, 2022) <https://tinyurl.com/ah3rphm5>

[3] "Edie McClurg in John Hughes Movies from the '80s" (The Retro Network) <https://tinyurl.com/yc5f8vrw>

[4] "Catching Up With... Edie McClurg" (Backstage Magazine, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/2d7yr3c4>

FASHIONABLE GIRLS ON FILM: MOLLY RINGWALD

Essay by: Dr. Rhonda Baughman

[1] I'd also include the actual lead, Peter Strauss, but honestly? I recall him more as a voice actor from animated faves of mine like Biker Mice From Mars (1995-1996, 2006); The Secret of Nimh (1982); and Aaahhh!!! Real Monsters (1996).

[2] Yes. Even as Melissa Nelson in Malicious (1995).

[3] Fluent in real life, Ringwald has a previous marriage to French writer Valéry Lameignère, and translated into English Philippe Besson's French novel Lie With Me (2017) (from the French Arrête Avec Tes Mesonges)

[4] DeMoss had roles in films that I watched even more obsessively than Ringwald in Keeps, such as Friday the 13th Part VI: Jason Lives (1986), Night Life (1989), and Reform School Girls (1986), while Estevez (of the Sheen/Estevez family) starred as Betty Finn in Heathers (1988) as the final girl Molly – how's that for synchronicity – in Sleepaway Camp II: Unhappy Campers (1988).

[5] Ketron appears as the character Roy in Horses as well.

[6] Ringwald is a longtime musician, coming from a musical family, and I'd have her autograph her 2013 jazz album Except Sometimes—<https://iammollyringwald.com/music/> However, she is NOT a member of the cover band using her name, The Molly Ringwalds.

QUIRKY GIRLS ON FILM: WINONA RYDER

Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

[1] "Winona Ryder Is Still Processing" (Harper's Bazaar, 2022) <https://tinyurl.com/2p827n4b>

[2] "Winona Ryder" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/57ycapfx>

[3] "Winona Ryder Is Still Processing" (Harper's Bazaar, 2022) <https://tinyurl.com/2p827n4b>

[4] Ibid.

[5] Winona Ryder. Wikipedia. <https://tinyurl.com/57ycapfx>

[6] Ibid.

[7] "Movie Review : 'Square Dance': A Well-Rounded Film" (LA Times, 1987) <https://tinyurl.com/mv3mtvpp>

[8] "Beetlejuice" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/4ytn3r94>

[9] "Beetlejuice Quotes" (IMDB) <https://tinyurl.com/5t4j94ys>

[10] "Winona Ryder Is Still Processing"

(Harper's Bazaar, 2022) <https://tinyurl.com/2p827n4b>

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] "Autumn in New York : Interview With Winona Ryder" (Cinema.com) <https://tinyurl.com/2uep6evx>

[14] "Winona Ryder Is Still Processing" (Harper's Bazaar, 2022) <https://tinyurl.com/2p827n4b>

Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

INDEPENDENT GIRLS ON FILM: SUSAN SEIDELMAN

Essay by: Janene Scelza

[1] "Sets and the City: On the History of Smithereens" (Filmmaker Magazine, 2009) <https://tinyurl.com/2p8954fu>

[2] "Watch This: Smithereens Q&A with Director Susan Seidelman" (Austin Film Society, 2020) <https://tinyurl.com/ye2an4wp>

[3] "How Smithereens captured the scuzzy charm of post-punk New York" (Little White Lies, 2018) <https://tinyurl.com/33pxbe43>

[4] "Susan Seidelman Looks Back: How 'Smithereens' Defined Her Career – Girl Talk" (IndieWire, 2016) <https://tinyurl.com/4tnc7crb>

[5] Ibid.



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