

## **“We’re filming on the way”: filmmaking as a cinéfille on the road in L.A. Tea Time**

*“We’re filming on the way”:  
Filmando na estrada enquanto  
cinéfille em L.A. Tea Time*

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**Abstract:**

Driving from their natal Quebec into the warm western landscape of U.S.A. roads, Sophie Bédard Marcotte and her cinematographer, Isabelle Stachtchenko, make their way toward Los Angeles with the goal of meeting film director Miranda July and ask for her advice on how to make a living as filmmakers. The motels, rednecks, Route 66, cowboys, music and conversations with strangers feature as if providing a checklist for compliance with the road movie's conventional semantics while, at the same time, the film offers non-adherence to the genre codes, especially for women filmmakers on the road. Referring to Corrigan's "genre hysteria," Boczkowska's proposal of experimental road movies and Lauretis' "space-off," by analyzing the documentary *L.A. Tea Time* (2019), by Marcotte, the aim of this essay is to explore the potential of the film, as an experimental road movie, at the intersection of genre, gender, and space, showcasing filmmaking by a *cinéfil*.

**Keywords:**

Road movie

*Cinéfil*

Miranda July

Chantal Akerman

**Resumo:**

Partindo do Quebec, a sua terra natal, em direção às paisagens quentes do oeste dos E.U.A., Sophie Bédard Marcotte e a diretora de fotografia, Isabelle Stachtchenko, rumam a Los Angeles com o objetivo de encontrarem a realizadora Miranda July e pedir-lhe conselhos sobre como ganhar a vida a filmar. Motéis, *rednecks*, a *Route 66*, *cowboys*, música e conversas com estranhos, surgem como elementos de uma lista de verificação da semântica convencional do *road movie*. Ao mesmo tempo, o filme afasta-se dos códigos do gênero, especialmente ao apresentar duas cineastas na estrada. Convocando a "histeria do gênero" de Corrigan, a proposta de Boczkowska de *road movies* experimentais e o "space-off" de Lauretis, através da análise do documentário *L.A. Tea Time* (2019), de Marcotte, este ensaio explora o potencial do filme, enquanto *road movie* experimental, na intersecção entre gênero fílmico, gênero social e espaço, destacando a contribuição fílmica de uma *cinéfil*.

**Palavras-chave:**

Road movie

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## **“We’re filming on the way”: filmmaking as a cinéfille on the road in *L.A. Tea Time***

### **Introduction**

Images of U.S.A.’s roads seep deep into the western imagination as enduring symbols of rebellion, freedom, and escape. Taking the wheel equates to taking control of one’s life narrative and escaping society’s prescriptive way of living. But on closer inspection of the figure driving the car, a figure etched into our shared cultural memory, there’s a high probability we find a man-like silhouette winking back and racing forward, leaving others behind wondering if escaping is not for everyone.

Narratives of mobility are often characterized as masculinist<sup>1</sup>. In literature, Jack Kerouac’s *On The Road* is traditionally the starting point of reference, but many other men have classically been portrayed venturing driving down the road since Odysseus’ long walk back home. On the big screen, those stories are generally called road movies. A more developed definition will be attempted later on, for now, it’s important to highlight that the assimilation of the cultural idea of the automobile as man’s instrument and area of interest it’s not far from the idea of cinema as a Trojan horse for the male gaze. In narrative terms, but also historically, despite exceptions, Penelope-like characters stay at home waiting, dedicated to tasks considered more fitted to their enforced social condition. And this oppositional experience is an enduring tale also within the film industry.

The moving image and the automobile share more than their exclusionary history. The emergence of cars and cameras was an achievement made by the same generation. Motion is an obvious axis: the car aims to move, and cinema does too. Behind the camera, the manufacture of automobiles also influenced the structure of film production, particularly in Hollywood, the factory of movie dreams. Making films, similarly to cars, is a product of rigid schedules, tight budgets, high profit expectations and, more often than not, a male dominant field of work hard to break into.

For most of the history of road narratives, a binary gender division was reinforced by focusing on one type of driving experience. On the road, traditionally,

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1 See Enevold (2003) for an argument of how road mobility and gender mobility produces narratives of mobility with political and aesthetic consequences.

men took the wheel, as buddies or enemies, and women took on servicing roles, be it as sex workers, waitresses or flings. As a genre, the road movie presents narratives of driving on the road “focus[ing], almost exclusively, on men and the absence of women” (Corrigan, 1991, p. 143). This dimension of a *male hysteria*, as Timothy Corrigan puts it, is showcased in road movies as a crisis of gender and selfhood that, despite the persistence of the man-like silhouette, exposes the lack of dimension and subjectivity that fully supports the idea of masculinity.

Road movies are an ambiguous and, as a consequence, prolific cinematic genre where mobility is tangled up in historic, social, and cultural preoccupations that make it possible to locate the fractures of its contemporary experience. Once women-like characters step on the gas pedal, as we will see, and despite the male hysteria of road movies throughout, gender became a central theme of discussion – up until this moment, road movies were thought of as narratives about the human experience, meaning men’s lived experience. By analyzing the documentary *L.A. Tea Time* (2019), by Sophie Bédard Marcotte, the aim of this essay is to explore the potential of the film, as an experimental road movie, at the intersection of genre, gender, and space, showcasing filmmaking by a *cinéfille*, a concept next expanded on our way to the west.

## Going west

I tie on red shoes. // They are not mine. / They are my mother’s. / Her mother’s before. /  
Handed down like an heirloom.

Anne Sexton, “The red shoes” in *The Book of Folly*

*Cinéfille*, the concept proposed to enunciate this essay’s argument, calls to mind the francophone origins of the kin concept of the cinephile. Contrasting both ideas, Mary Harrod builds on Thomas Elsaesser’ historic theorization on cinephilia as, at first, a project of “masculinist *politique des auteurs moment*” (Harrod, 2021, p. 41), and later on a “postmodern, contemporary variant” (Harrod, 2021, p. 41) of fandom implications. Offering the term of “heightened genericity”, Harrod thinks on genre filmmaking, by “cineliterate wom[e]n” (Harrod, 2021, p. 40), as an authorial poetics that is consciously and purposefully using topical and thematic

genre allusions while, at the same time, eschewing the traditional understanding of a film *auteur*: “the term *cine-fille* indicates, finally, an attitude of wanton ‘upstart’ impertinence towards the old idea of the cinephile auteur as a venerable (White) patriarch” (Harrod, 2021, p. 42). Therefore, we can understand *cinéfilles* as filmmakers of “allusive movies” (Harrod, 2021, p. 40), an idea that draws the cinematic road map of the road movie *L.A. Tea Time* (Marcotte, 2019).

Driving from their natal Quebec into the warm landscape of U.S.A. roads, Canadian director Sophie Bédard Marcotte and her cinematographer, Isabelle Stachtchenko, make their way toward Los Angeles with the goal of meeting film director Miranda July and asking for her advice on how to make a living doing movies. The film’s premise is stated directly at the beginning of the film by Marcotte herself in a scene shot as a video letter addressed to July: “obviously I love your films and your work in general and I was wondering if it would be possible to meet you in Los Angeles, and if you have one hour, maybe we could have tea, or something else” (Marcotte, 2019).

Marcotte and Stachtchenko drag their camera’s equipment cases under a snowy Montreal and enter the car. They are making a road movie, as Marcotte explains later on to an anonymous passerby cowboy who questions the buddy-filmmakers behind the camera: “We’re filming on the road. We’re from Montreal, in Canada, and we are going to Los Angeles. And we’re filming on the way” (Marcotte, 2019). In the frame, pickups and tow trucks and the price board of a gas station, a common place among road movies’ locations, and the message “Thanks for Trump” denouncing the film’s era. The camera moves erratically to get out of the way of a moving pickup truck, turning the axis one eighty. Now, the cowboy turns on the truck’s motor that crosses the frame with a trailer behind. The framing is out of balance, with the road’s pavement occupying too much of the frame. There’s a parked pickup at a distance, some pale green vegetation almost hiding a couple of small sheds, arid small hills, a distant blue mail can, an electricity pole and, to Marcotte’s amazement, a U.S.A. “flag waving in the wind” (Marcotte, 2019). One could say, inversely to the seminal road movie *Easy Rider*’s tagline<sup>2</sup>, these filmmakers do find America, at least in a Baudrillardian manner, as they meet its images in an experimental road trip.

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2 Dennis Hopper’s *Easy Rider* (1969), considered the seminal road movie, was advertised with the tagline: “A man went looking for America. And couldn’t find it anywhere...”

To characterize the experimental road movie as a genre, Kornelia Boczkowska pulls from the ambiguity of the mainstream road movie's categorization<sup>3</sup>, and its many genre conjunctions, recognizing that "many experimental filmmakers still adhere to the genre's traditional reliance on cultural critique as well as the representation of landscape and travel" (Boczkowska, 2023, p. 3). The "artisanal and personal mode" (Boczkowska, 2023, p. 4) of experimental road movies is one of the reasons its characterization is hard to solidify, but Boczkowska research allows the identification of framing qualities, narrative approaches and points of interests that can help analyze experimental cinematic road narratives, providing undecidability as the main guiding line: "the experimental road movie can be defined as a film, which draws on and/or challenges the [road movie] genre's conventions" (Boczkowska, 2023, p. 20).

Consciously using some of the road movie's common locations and motifs, in addition to the previously mentioned gas station and anonymous cowboy, *L.A. Tea Time* showcases crop fields and other wild or empty vast landscapes; fluorescent-lit motels; a side-of-the-road booth diner; cows and horse-riding cowboys; interstate highways, field paths and some unpaved roads. But unlike the usual genre's format, these elements are presented as inconsequential to the progress of the narrative or the journey. The film provides a starting point (Montreal) and an ending point (Los Angeles), but the pathway for this trip follows creatively through a *mise-en-scène* that is not preoccupied with fixed or ordered references of time or space. Boczkowska finds this non-linear portrayal a common recurrence in experimental road movies that are "likely to affect viewers' *spatio-temporal* orientation and embodied experience of virtual environments through their reliance on haptic visuality and sensational experience of movement" (Boczkowska, 2023, p. 25). Once again, what is essential is the backdrop of an "inherent Americanness" (Orgeron, 2008, as cited in Boczkowska, 2023, p. 61), a common underlying characteristic of road movies, even international ones. In *L.A. Tea Time*, as it will be expanded further on this essay, this Americanness comes at odds with its own billboard slender thickness. What brings dimension and texture to this journey it's the filmmakers' concern with their cinematic expression, exchanging the car for the camera as the central icon of the road.

Throughout the film, two extreme wide shots showcase the car. The first one, in the beginning of the road trip, is a heavily manipulated establishing shot with oneiric special effects that presents symbolically the crossing of the frontier

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3 See the chapter "The Road Movie and the Corporeal Turn in Experimental Film" (Buczkowska, 2023).

between Canada and the U.S.A. The second extreme wide shot, by the end of the movie, shows the car crossing an arid landscape with no clear road path. In both shots, it would be hard to identify the car's model or brand. Apart from the dark color (either blue or black), the car has no identity. Not only the driving car, but also any surrounding cars are of no interest to the frame, they just appear in the background or as unexpected framed elements. Filming and "talk[ing] to the people like in real documentaries"<sup>4</sup> (Marcotte, 2019) is Marcotte's intention. Chance encounters with different people and activities are paced out throughout the film, showcasing the road trip's route, while the road is also framed frequently as an empty space or as occupied by the people and their political protests.

Inside the car, contrary to the usual framing of the windshield on mainstream road movies, on *L.A. Tea Time* the side window views and back seat shots frame the travel. To Boczkowska, the side window shots "trigger physical memories of the actual journey, [activating] the senses" (Boczkowska, 2023, p. 200). At the same time, the images from the backseat "[replicate] a childlike experience of aimless drifting and increases one's physical proximity to fellow passengers(...) [activating] 'the backstage'" (Boczkowska, 2023, p. 212). There's only one windshield scene in this film, when the filmmakers find themselves in a dead end on a dirt road at night, struggling to get out of the place where they are stuck after following instructions from a cowboy. In *L.A. Tea Time* the errors and the off roads are part of the road, and conventional road instructions don't apply. The planning, the gear, the change of lenses during filming; all these backstage's elements are part of the road.

As a *cinéfile* on the road, Marcotte uses the road movie's codes to "reframe[s] the automotive experience in an embodied manner through [the] creative use of mise-en-scène, editing and montage" (Boczkowska, 2023, p. 12), presenting driving and cinema as practice, not an event, and the road as a process and not a path toward liberation. Taking from its title, *L.A. Tea Time* alludes to a highly performative manner of putting this idea of meeting your idols: meeting them in L.A. to have tea. And, although the form of the film is the documentary, its consciously use of performative innuendos and fictive moments exposes and counters the traditional big ideas, at the basis of the genre of the road movie, for freedom and ultimate truth. On *L.A. Tea Time*'s route, there's no (true)west, and self-discovering is nearing expression rather than revelation.

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4 For accuracy and space economy, all the originally French dialogue cited from the film, in this essay, was transcribed from the official English subtitles.

## Whose history?

From now on you'll be history / You'll be history / You'll be history / And we will glorify your  
name / You'll be a bust / Be a bust / Be a bust / In the hall of fame.

Victor Fleming, Munchkins praise Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*

The first shot of *L.A. Tea Time* presents a western like establishing shot with two small figures walking against the wind traversing a landscape that could either be a sand or a snow desert. The confusion of the type of landscape can be later understood as a possible metaphor for the kind of defamiliarizing buddy road trip Marcotte and Stachtchenko embark on. The following shot frames the previous described moving image now paused on a TV display about to be hung on as part of an exhibition both artists are in the process of setting up. The film kicks off then with a visual commentary on the journey it is about to portray: although in a documentary form, we are in the terrain of performance, and the perspective of the filmmaking process as performative, but also, of filmmaking as an effort made for screening. The medium is aware of its purpose, yet also conscious of its own production. The horizon-focused landscape suggests also the *cinéfilles'* awareness of the influences the road movie inherits from the western.

Laying out the lineal relationship of the road movie genre with the western, Shari Roberts notes the western's reflection of "Americans who desire to re-create a revitalized, and particularly masculinist, national identity through popular culture" (Roberts, 1997, p. 47) and how the genre frames the west as synonymous with "the masculine – nature, open spaces, heroism, vitality, and justice" (Roberts, 1997, p. 48). Roberts considers that "[t]he road genre further emphasizes this [masculinist] cultural function" (Roberts, 1997, p. 47) and productively highlights the metamorphosis of the western's frontier ethos onto the space of the road: "The road stands in for the frontier, but, instead of symbolizing a romanticized America in which the American Dream will come true, it simply asks over and over, as each mile marker is passed, what does America mean today?" (Roberts, 1997, p. 52) In *L.A. Tea Time*, a buddy road movie with two women as protagonists, the frontier is called upon for its highly constructed dimension.

When Ridley Scott's *Thelma & Louise* was released in 1991, regarded as the first road movie with two women as the outlaw couple, two distinctive critical

perspectives emerged<sup>5</sup>. On one hand, the film made waves as a liberation ally representation of empowered women. On the other hand, the film is pointed out as a submissive artistic proposal that perpetuates a complicit patriarchal view of women. For Roberts, the film's journey offers the absolute enclosure of its protagonists, especially because they take the road. The author considers that while men protagonists "successfully flee the limitations of 'feminine' civilization by creating a revitalized, masculine world on the road" (Roberts, 1997, p. 66), in road movies with women as protagonists, such as *Thelma & Louise*, "these female characters attempt to flee not just men, but patriarchy, which is omnipresent and which in part defines the road and the genre, and so are ultimately unsuccessful" (Roberts, 1997, p. 66).

It's worth noting that, initially, Thelma and Louise are both portrayed as certain types of women – or better, as two types of women<sup>6</sup>. What escapes the binary outlook is that when both of them take "on roles coded as masculine" (Roberts, 1997, p. 63) the film might be unknowingly proposing exactly something different and beyond prescriptive ways of being a woman. In the characters' ability to perform masculinity, they're not exactly assimilating masculinity but exposing the performative dimension of the cinematic gender coding on the road. The characters are not pulling away from themselves, in fact, they express their belief that *they were always like that. This was really the first time they had the chance to express themselves*.

Karine Bertrand and Claire Gray situate *L.A. Tea Time* in a movement "of French-Canadian/Québécois women [who take the road] to be part of the American Dream" (2024, p. 81). Analyzing the stylistic choices of Marcotte and the film's cinematic references – the Belgian director Chantal Akerman, the film *Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939), and the general allusion to Miranda July –, Bertrand and Gray establish that the filmmakers "position themselves as being capable of self-creation through their physical mobility" (Bertrand & Gray, 2024, p. 86) at the same time as their embodiment of the film's protagonism "challenge and question stereotypical images of femininity in road movies" (Bertrand & Gray, 2024, p. 86). In *L.A. Tea Time*, reflexivity expresses not only the backstage, but also the film's intertextuality with the road movie genre and the notion of a *cinéfil* following

5 For a comprehensive look at the film's reception, see the article "Gender, Genre, and Myth in *Thelma and Louise*" (Man, 1993).

6 The film presents its protagonists in a contrasted manner, as two extremes of a spectrum, a usual binary trope for the representation of characters of women: between the angel of the house and the monster; the virgin Mother Mary and Mary Magdalene; the fragile damsel in distress and the independent spinster.

their filmic lineages, “as a modern-day Dorothy *en route* towards the enchanted kingdom of Oz (L.A.)” (Bertrand & Gray, 2024, p. 85).

Throughout the film, characters and elements of the proto-road movie *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939) appear as cinematic citations with noticeable animation intervention<sup>7</sup>. A special recurrence appears in the sky – as did the Good Witch of the North, Glinda, in Dorothy’s path – a round shape of magenta with the voice of Chantal Akerman providing guidance, on filmmaking and cinema, that counters the semantics of mobility, toward two attentive *cinéfilles*: “two actors, standing, completely still... Reading a text while facing the camera. And...The simple fact that they are not moving and facing the camera, with a plain text, could have as much impact as having them dance a ballet” (Marcotte, 2019), or driving a car.

If Glinda makes her appearance through Akerman, Dorothy and her symbolic inherited red shoes permeate the film in more than one instance as symbolic statements of a journey but also of a conscious lineage path. The semiotic relevance of the red shoes is a topic in literature since “[i]n *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar introduce the notion of women’s ‘inheritance’ of the red shoes in such popular fairy tales as Snow White” (Paige, 1996, p. 147). Conceiving *The Wizard of Oz* as a film that reinforces patriarchal prescribed gender roles when the return to the familiar (Kansas) is preferred to girlhood rebellion, Linda Rohrer Paige further argues that Dorothy’s red shoes accomplishes the same semiotic function as “evidence of Dorothy’s symbolic kinship to the wicked witches” (Paige, 1996, p. 151) and its inherent magic power “a sign of the female imagination – capable of signaling life (imagination) or death (repressed imagination) for those who walk in them” (Paige, 1996, p. 147). A similar summary could be made about women’s transit through the road movie, in front of or behind the cameras.

In *L.A. Tea Time*, Marcotte’s kinship with July and Akerman lies in the camera – and its *red* recording button. Being a woman filmmaker can be both a practice of imagination and impossibility. In the initial video letters scenes where Marcotte introduces the film’s premise, while presenting herself to the Wizard of Oz (July doubles on both witchy wicked and wizardly elusive roles), the novice

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7 The film showcases: a scarecrow in a rundown crop field oozes purple stars; a tin structure, an allusion to the Tin Man, moves its eyes breaking the fourth wall with a purple star wink; a lion cleaning its paws inside a zoo’s cage also has a winking purple star glistening from its right eye; a hidden yellow brick road appears under an uneven and dusty paved road; an identical fluorescent green animated representation of the city of Oz on the horizon of a landscape shot.

filmmaker is upfront about her current situation: “I just finished a first fiction that was screened here in Montreal and other places, and it was great. But, right now (...) I started translating reviews, hotel reviews, for online travel websites, so that’s what I do for a living” (Marcotte, 2019). Her intention for meeting July is not only moved by an artistic kinship, but also by a sense of historic hardship on the path of women filmmakers (on the road to cinematic accomplishment).

Other histories, as Lis Rhodes suggests, run parallel to cinema’s history, mainly validated by the insistence of *cinéfilles* from the past that left a trail, many times a frail one. The road movie’s male hysteria is a gendered history that, as Corrigan puts it, frames the absence of women. Rhodes’ proposal to focus on women’s filmmaking, to map other histories, “[i]t is neither a question of defining a feminine mode of filmmaking, nor of persuading any woman to a feminist point of view” (1979, 120) it’s a critical practice to understand that absence or presence, in the hall of fame, does not concern historic factuality or some notion of essentialist capability, but rather (non)compliance with patriarchal criteria. Women were active since the beginning of cinema’s, but their participation is often withdrawn from the historical record. This is why Rhodes argues that “seeing difference is more important than accepting ‘sameness’; realising [women’s] histories and understanding their many, possibly divergent, forms” (Rhodes, 1979, p. 120).

Paradoxically, Rhodes’ argument to quit *sameness* as a research lens does not align with the second-wave feminist notion of sexual difference. Key theoretical work<sup>8</sup> refutes difference as it conceptualizes it as a political project that reinforces a regime of control and compliance with a binary perspective of sexual categorization (i.e. male and female categories). What Rhodes suggests, and Teresa de Lauretis will also argue a decade later as approached next, is the need to counter the shaping of gender by the categorical production and historicization of cinema, be it by its mischaracterization in presence or by its utter erasure in absence.

In *L.A. Tea Time*, the gendered aspects of the road movie, and its ancestors, are reworked in a similar way to Rhode’s proposal. Marcotte recognizes the genre’s codes and still manages to produce a reflexive cinematic space of non-adherence to the genre and its binary gender criteria or categorization. Thus, evading the motion to provide a cinematic sameness or to try to justify the value of difference, to uphold to certain genre conventions, in this case the road movie’s masculinist conventions, Marcotte forges a film that exercises the oblivion of gender hysteria.

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8 Queer theory provides many examples such as proposed in Judith Butler’s and Paul B. Preciado’s work.

What it's offered, it's not a refusal of the political dimension of cinema<sup>9</sup>, but an attempt to embody an alterity lens on its repetitive rhetoric, and question the oppositional stance, especially road movies' insistence of a culture/counter-culture loop.

## Searching for Miranda July

Well, we're not in the middle of nowhere, but we can see it from here.

Ridley Scott, Louise in *Thelma & Louise*

Chantal Akerman's disembodied voice, off-screen but inside the film world, over a travelling side window shot framing vast blurry fields and an empty road, expresses her belief that "cinema is a space that lies in front of us. There are no laws, or anything like that. All of a sudden, either it exists, or it doesn't. 'It's there,' we tell ourselves, all of a sudden, 'yes, the shot is there.' And more often than not, it is a mystery whether it is there or not" (Marcotte, 2019). The inquire of the mystery of cinema by Marcotte, as a *cinéfil*le, develops *L.A. Tea Time* as a cinematographic space that establishes the young director's work on Miranda July's and Akerman's lineage.

From Akerman, besides making her a character in the film, Marcotte takes the documentary as the privileged form and the exploration of the theme of motherly-daughter proximity<sup>10</sup>. On the *vernissage* of the exhibition that opens the film's narrative, while Stachtchenko is uncertain about her mother's visit, Marcotte states that, among everyone, "[her] mother is the only person [she is] certain will be there" (Marcotte, 2019). Effectively, Marcotte's mother is the only person who enters the small and empty gallery, carrying a red balloon bouquet – another *red* motif. The daughter-mother relationship will also be showcased as filmic citation. Alluding to a frequent sequence on Akerman's travel log documentaries while far from her birthplace of Brussels, Marcotte also films herself while video calling

9 Cf. Karine Bertrand and Claire Gray (2024), and the authors' perspective on the film's lack of political engagement: "[the] work suggests that the road can be more than just a political realization" (p. 87).

10 See the article Chantal Akerman and the *Cinéfil*le where the author further connects the figure of the *cinéfil*le and the daughter-mother relationship in Akerman's cinema (Mitchell, 2023).

her mother, sharing the journey's ups and downs: the late news is that they are wandering around and are not yet sure if July will be available for a meeting.

As is the case with most road movies, *L.A. Tea Time* has no happy ending. On either a real or fictional phone call, Miranda July's assistant informs Marcotte that the director is currently in pre-production for her next movie and will not be able to meet for tea. More than an inspiration, July is the pretext for the production of *L.A. Tea Time* and the *cinéfilles*'s artistic expression. Her unavailability as a character makes the undertones of the filmic approach the central allusion of her presence. Marcotte uses July's reflexive stance and queer defamiliarization style to conceive of the filmmakers' *alien* condition. This alienation stems not only due to their migrant status as Canadians but, more significantly, from a consistent curiosity and non-oppositional detachment from the proverbial Americanness discourse of the road movie.

From the magical magenta patch in the sky above Marcotte, who is roaming lost in a deserted landscape, Akerman encourages the director to question categories: "I don't know how to define what's real, because does it really exist? Do we ever find the real? It's very difficult to really meet someone. Others will always be others. There's nothing you can do about it" (Marcotte, 2019). Such perspective on the impossibility of *meeting* the other is equally persistent in July's work, as the artist shares:

I feel like humans are not very good at connecting, and that's interesting. I think we're each bad at it in our own unique way, and each of us does really complex and belabored things in an effort to have intimacy and connect with people. If I end up making a lot of work about alone people trying to connect, it's not out of some utopic vision of connection, it's out of an interest in clumsiness (...) even [if] an interaction is going horribly, I'm a little bit excited, like, *Oh wow, this conversation isn't working at all! Everything we're saying is getting us farther and farther away from anything we care about!* It's like a ready-made work of art. (July & Baumgardner, 2014)

Not meeting Miranda July is precisely a narrative development in line with July's type of narrative work. In *L.A. Tea Time*, two aliens roam the roads of the U.S.A. searching for Miranda July, meeting the road motifs as ready-mades waiting for their titles. In a particular sequence, the filmmakers wander once again in a desert landscape. The camera's framing moves around, up and down, searching, as

if shooting an unknown planet for the first time. Marcott asks her cinematographer: “What are you looking for?” (Marcotte, 2019), and Isabelle Stachtchenko answers, as if providing a title to the framed ready-made scene: “A frame. A purpose for my life” (Marcotte, 2019). Next, on the frame, sparse green vegetation, while we hear the young filmmakers’ dialogue comparing themselves to the greenery, “Like us. But soon...Bam” (Marcotte, 2019), the camera now frames dried shrub, “Just like that” (Marcotte, 2019), while they now agree that other good qualities will come with ageing. As the sequence progresses, the filmmakers lose themselves trying to look for their way back to the car: “[Marcotte:] It looks like there’s no predetermined path” (Marcotte, 2019). After this, the shots become more and more erratic, embodying the lostness with random and uncharacteristic framing but, even without a clear path, the camera stays on recording the bumpy ride of the backstage, which usually would be off-screen.

In *Technologies of Gender* Teresa de Lauretis uses the term “space-off,” referring to that which is out of the frame and off-screen, to talk about a non-oppositional “elsewhere,” a place both as a result and inside of text and discourse: “I do not mean a movement from one space to another beyond it, or outside: (...) What I mean, instead, is a movement from the space represented by/in a representation, by/in a discourse, by/in a sex gender discourse, by/in a sex-gender system, to the space not represented yet implied in them” (p. 25-26). As she predicted sexual difference would be an outdated concept for contemporary subjects, Lauretis takes the cinematic vocabulary to propose a way out of the binary.

Road movies’ male hysteria is the framework by/in which women’s driving experience gets represented to cinephiles. Conscious of this movie-audience coded knowledge, *L.A. Tea Time* offers no contrasting experience; again, as Shari Roberts argues, the gendered discourse of the road contains in itself all the possibilities it allows. This is why this film might appear displaced on the road movie’s map. The cinematic space Marcotte offers does not render the road as a place of oppression nor subversion. The road is by/in a product of its time, and if the road movie is *asking what America means today*, in *L.A. Tea Time* the answer is a ready-made cinematic scenario that provides the space of a film set, while mobility offers a performative opportunity for filmmaking and the production of reflexive and referential films.

## Conclusion

My art is sort of like my car. It's the way I get to the next place.

Miranda July, *Some Kind of Grace: An Interview with Miranda July* Julia Bryan-Wilson

Reflecting on a change in the road movie's drivers, Timothy Corrigan believes in "other roads that might be pursued in the futuristic space of the present" (1991, p. 159) through which the historically and culturally charging of the road "might be released through the ascension of the vehicle into an outer space free of their historical burden" (Corrigan, 1991, p. 159). In a way, Corrigan speaks of an elsewhere, an off-screen, "[i]n this other space, the debris of generic history now has the potential of becoming the generic cure" (Corrigan, 1991, p. 160).

Although the road could not be conceived in an ahistoric vacuum, the notion of *cinéfile* operates similarly to Corrigan's formulation, in which the explosion of the debris of the road movie becomes the genre's cure for both its gendered hysteria and mere repetition of images: "Heightened genericity includes but goes beyond pastiche, as a quality that revels in its own constructedness, but without only referencing particular, highly recognisable other texts or styles" (Harrod, 2021, p. 38).

Marcotte recognizes road movie's codes, history and even its gender hysteria – on the road, the filmmakers frequently cross paths with the cowboy and its social and political landmarks – but makes a key exchange, taking the camera, like Miranda July takes her artistic practice and Dorothy the red shoes, as the privileged mobility artifact that opens up the road ahead. Infatuation with the car has no place in this journey. Marcotte and Stachtchenko drive west as most of the road movie buddy couples before them, it's through performance and expression that they defamiliarize the road movie conventions without rejecting the genre or making a statement for a different path. In the *elsewhere*, there is no predetermined path but there is a lineage before that can be creatively brought up in favor of expression.

In *L.A. Tea Time*, Sophie Bédard Marcotte establishes a documentary style experimental road movie that conceives an elsewhere, where the off-screen, the backstage, the references and wandering are constitutive of filmmaking. The

road and the cinematic space conceived by the film speaks to this elsewhere undetermined quality coined by Lauretis, and roams between referentiality and lack thereof among ready-mades, the debris of the road movie. Driving as a *cinéfille*, or filmmaking as a *cinéfille* in *L.A. Tea Time*, is a consciously performative and ongoing practice between established roads and an elsewhere.

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