

OUT OF ORDER



The Unknown

Matthew Barney David LaChapelle Larry Clark Scott Rothkopf Henry Leutwyler David Hallberg Maureen Chiquet
Servane Mary Mac DeMarco Josh Kline Ryan McNamara Prabal Gurung Tierney Gearon & Hollywood's Rising Stars

Trans

Production Stills Julian Goldberger Words Samuel Morgan

Usually when it comes to writing this section of the magazine, I'll just raid The Criterion Collection, pick a movie I'm particularly fond of, and spell out why I think it's great in about 1,000 words. This issue, however, I dug a little deeper to bring you (what I consider) a truly independent '90s classic: *Trans*. Made on a micro-budget with a crew of as little as six people, director Julian Goldberger admits the film was somewhat of a "backyard experiment" (albeit a highly crafted one).

Inspired partly by collaborations between director James Herbert and R.E.M., *Trans* is an experimental coming-of-age story about a troubled teenager, Ryan Kazinski (Daugherty), who escapes juvenile detention and attempts to reconnect with his family. *Trans* is more so an illusion of real life than it is a depiction. Narrated by Daugherty, the film flows as a stream of consciousness, coupling super-stylized visuals with a killer soundtrack.

Ryan is a 16-year-old boy who has presumably grown up within the U.S. correctional system. When the audience is first introduced to the character, he's hanging by his legs from a pull-up bar in the prison yard. His point of view, the way he sees the world, is upside down, different, perhaps, than yours and mine. This simple metaphor is what informs the rest of Kazinski's seemingly erratic behavior for the duration of the film.

After being stranded by his fellow escapees at a backwoods mini-mart, Ryan is left to survive without any means whatsoever. What follows is 48 hours of wandering through Fort Myers, a dead-end town laced with nostalgia yet lacking any real foundation for him. In Ryan's mind, he's an alien, an extraterrestrial being trapped in the unassuming body of a teenage boy (essentially, someone who's unable to connect with the world around him). He actually mentions this briefly to his parole officer as a sort of fleeting thought, but it's more than that. No, this isn't the latest Jonathan Glazer sci-fi drama. What it is is a story about a person who's felt so out of place for so long that they no longer know how to rationally explain their existential dilemma.

Ryan is a forgotten member of Generation X, left at the wayside, and what makes this character portrait fascinating is the way he consistently proves himself to be a creature of impulse. A fugitive overwhelmed by the thought of freedom, Ryan finally makes it to "civilization," which basically means Wal-Mart and a laundromat, and rather than hitching a ride and getting out of the state, he decides to get high on nitrous oxide and people-watch in the local grocery store.

We're never made fully aware of why Ryan went to juvie in the first place, but it probably had something to do with his generally offhanded attitude towards life. That being said, the character isn't really a drifter. It would be too easy to call him that. Ryan is on a quest for peace of mind. Prior to his escape, when he and some other inmates are on trash detail, Ryan narrates, "I want to live quietly." And his arc throughout the film is a mission to achieve just that: those rare moments of complete stillness, where your mind stops and you're allowed complete freedom.

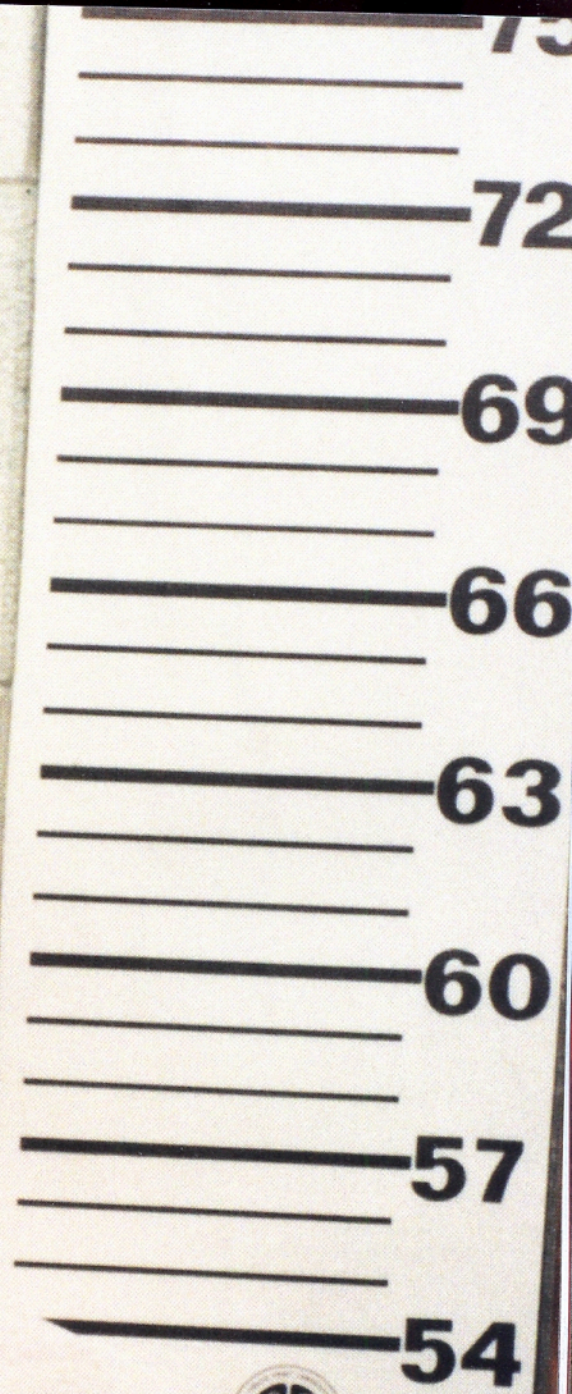
During its highly successful festival run, *The Village Voice* called *Trans* "a still-warm slice of American heart meat." This sense of "American heart" comes from a perfect blend of visual style and the culture Goldberger chose to explore.

Part of why this film is so unique is its specificity to the environment. Goldberger's entire cast was composed of non-actors native to the touristic Floridian town, and as anyone who's acted or worked with actors knows, getting the average person to a point of real emotional connection can be extremely difficult. I find this to be a true testament to Goldberger's ability to keep his actors present and alive in every single moment. You probably won't recognize any of the names in this film, but that's OK. It's all part of the world established by the director.

Watching *Trans*, it's hard not to think of the early work of Richard Linklater (*Slacker*, *Dazed and Confused*), the most obvious reason being the budget (Linklater's first feature cost only \$3,000). Beyond that, Goldberger's lo-fi aesthetic and his use of improvisation to craft a scene prove to be very much in the same vein as Linklater's directing style.

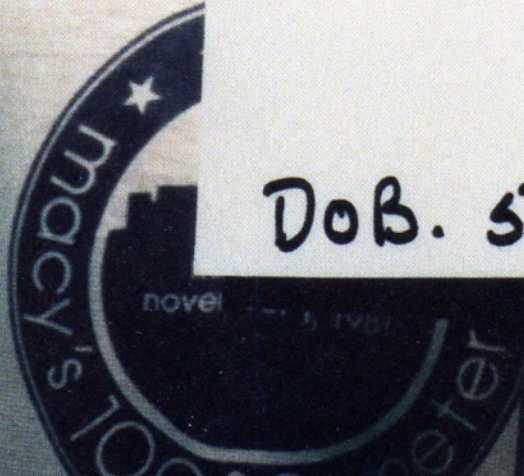
Interestingly enough, despite screening (and sometimes winning) at major festivals like Berlin, Toronto, Sundance, and South by Southwest and receiving an array of critical acclaim, *Trans* had more than its fair share of problems when it came time to securing distribution for the film. In an interview with *Indiewire*, Goldberger made light of the situation stating, "If the movie doesn't sell, we can always sell the soundtrack."

Trans is the epitome of a minimal narrative, walking the fine line of poetic storytelling and pure abstraction. Despite the tonal balancing act, Goldberger maintains the feeling of the film from beginning to end. And really, that's what *Trans* is all about: a feeling. o



Kazinski, Ryan

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Daugherty poses for a mug shot on the first day of production.

Left

Goldberger (right) treks with actors Justin Lakes and Michael Gulnac through the heart of the Everglades.

Right

Actor Elijah Smith lets loose during a staged block party in downtown Fort Myers.

