

Liverpool Film Seminar

2017 – 2018 series

Every year, Liverpool Film Seminar invites experts to deliver a series of talks. Topics vary greatly and the series does not focus on a specific aspect of film. Instead, a range of genres and approaches are celebrated, from historical reach to the internet's impact on cinematic material.

Professor Justin Wyatt (University of Rhode Island)

Sofia Coppola's Commercial Aesthetic: Understanding the Role of Advertising in The Virgin Suicides

Sexuality and sexual difference are crucial to the narrative and thematic development of *The Virgin Suicides*. This presentation considers the issue through a very particular lens, tying mass market advertising, print and television commercial, to the visual representations and style within the film. Director Sofia Coppola develops these very striking and memorable visual 'bursts' of the sisters. The most powerful way to understand these reveries is not as elements of the narrative or as dreams, but rather as filtered experiences soaked in the world of mass media advertising of the 1970s. Coppola is channelling these fantasy images from an array of cosmetics, fashion and health ads of the decade.

Coppola furthers the link between advertising and her story by having the girls and boys also interact through reading mail-order catalogues and flyers. Coppola is emphasising the role through which mass media advertising fuelled the fantasies of these characters and, as a by-product, reinforced a series of stereotypes about men, women and family in that era. Coppola shows the dangers of these stereotypes and of building communication around the beliefs and precepts of this advertising. Interestingly, Coppola has continued these reveries in her own marketing and advertising work: her 2014 commercial for the perfume *Daisy* by Marc Jacobs is shot in just the same style as these moments in *The Virgin Suicides*. My analysis will link these aesthetic strategies of the film to the print/TV ads of the period, showing a very similar ideology related to the family, female teens, and sexuality.

Biography:

Justin Wyatt is Assistant Professor of Communication Studies and Film/Media in the Harrington School of Communication and Media at the University of Rhode Island. From 2000 to 2015, Wyatt worked in quantitative and qualitative market research on both the client and supplier sides of the media industries. He is the author of *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* and co-editor of *Contemporary American Independent Film: From the Margins to the Mainstream*. His new book, *The Virgin Suicides: Reverie, Sorrow & Young Love*, will be published in the Cinema and Youth Cultures series at Routledge in 2018.

