

# 180°

tiff. | Bell Lightbox

Programme Guide April–June 2011

Films | Exhibitions | Special Events | Education

#### New Releases

- Meek's Cutoff
- The Strange Case of Angelica
- Kaboom

#### TIFF Cinematheque

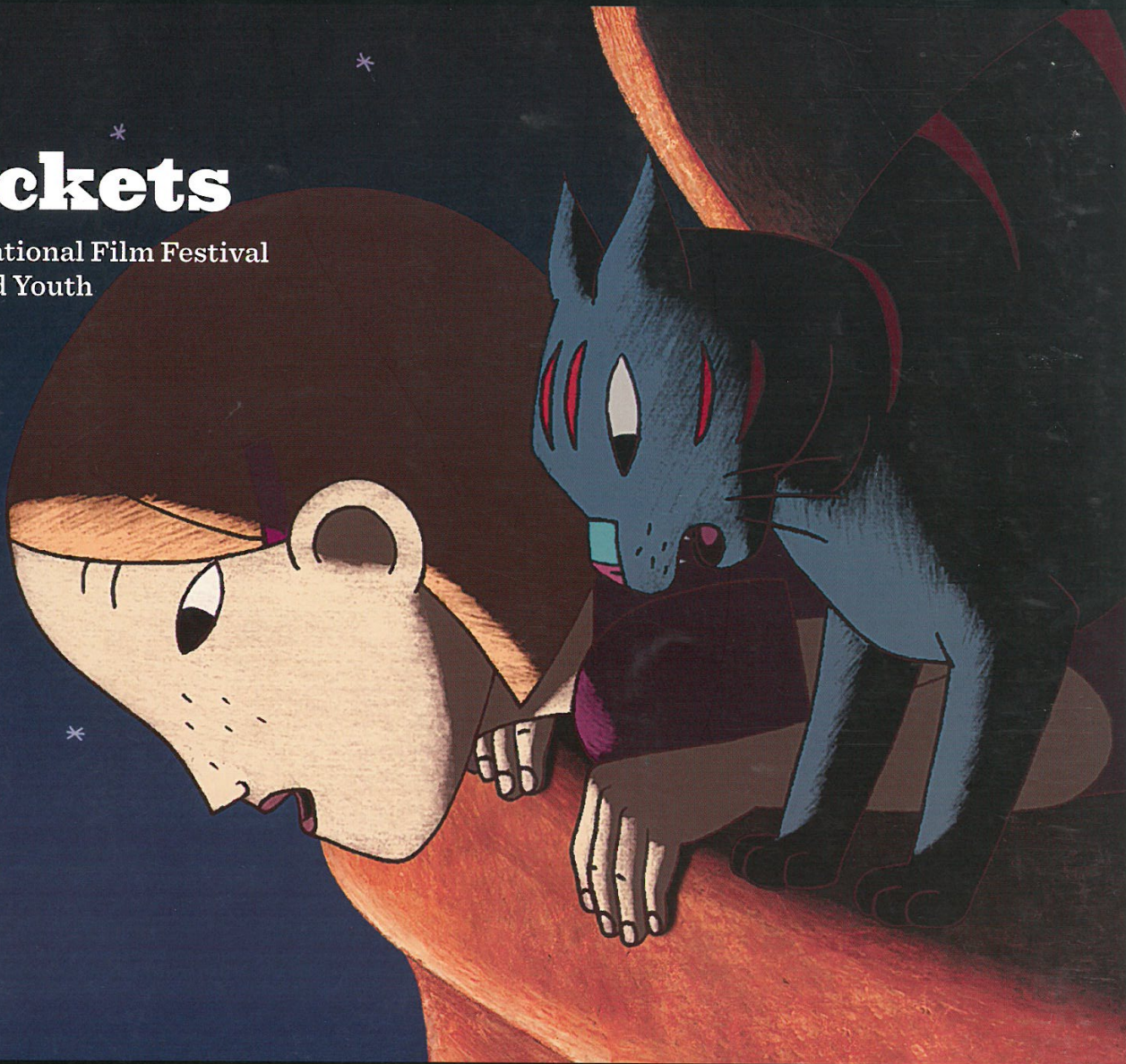
- Gregg Araki
- The New Auteurs: Kelly Reichardt
- The Free Screen
- Hollywood Classics

#### In Conversation with...

- Woody Harrelson
- Christopher Doyle on *Chungking Express*
- Laurent Cantet on *The Class*

## Sprockets

Toronto International Film Festival  
for Children and Youth



Lead Sponsor

Bell

Major Sponsors



BlackBerry

Major Supporters



Canada

TORONTO

**AS SIGNAL**

*The New York Times* unrepentantly iconoclast into a more respectable career. His ten unquestionable hits in theatres glowing with Araki, whose twenty many of his key contributions as a part of the New continued to engage violence and the "queer" they are simply too close their expectation of thumbing their noses. He also enjoys championing same-sex exceptionalism community based stories straw likely came with *Beverly Hills 90210* s

If the gay community Araki, critics have been mainstream journalism (rather tame) sex scenes *End*. More than this, by the unique dialectic Araki's films are driven romantic love at its core set against the background time, they delight in often culminating in and acts, revel in kooky panoply of B-list-and highly analytical, intelligent films of Araki's New York critics often couldn't be reviewing—overlooking weaving of these elements

Aesthetically, Araki low-budget (his first combined), his early glance, but this lack of has digested and reinvented editing tropes or War

**KABOOM!****THE FILMS OF GREGG ARAKI**

**AS SIGNALLED** by a recent, lengthy feature article in *The New York Times* penned by influential critic Dennis Lim, unrepentantly iconoclastic filmmaker Gregg Araki has passed into a more respectable stage in his fascinating, often misunderstood career. His tenth theatrical feature, *Kaboom* (one of the unquestionable hits of last year's Cannes Film Festival) arrived in theatres glowing with near-universal praise—a rarity for Araki, whose twenty-year career has seen him in combat with many of his key constituencies. Although he was labelled early on as a part of the New Queer Cinema movement and has continued to engage in radical explorations of sex, gender, sexual violence and the “queer underground,” his films have never really been embraced by the majority of the gay and lesbian community: they are simply too dark a vision of gay life, too extreme in their expectation of violence around sexuality and too gleeful in thumbing their nose at the community's bourgeois aspirations. He also enjoys championing a fluid sexuality that neatly denies same-sex exceptionalism and questions the very idea of a community based strictly around sexual preference. (The last straw likely came when Araki quite publicly shacked up with *Beverly Hills 90210* star Kathleen Robertson.)

If the gay community has been habitually unsupportive of Araki, critics have been little better, if not worse: many (male) mainstream journalists found it difficult to even watch the (now rather tame) sex scenes in Araki's breakthrough film *The Living End*. More than this, though, critics have often been baffled by the unique dialectic that makes Araki's films so tough to read. Araki's films are driven by great passion, often concerning romantic love at its most tragic and populated by alienated youth set against the background of post-punk anthems. At the same time, they delight in coining hyper-stylized Valley Girl vocabulary, often culminating in infantile contests to name various sex organs and acts, revel in kooky outfits and visual design and include a panoply of B-list-and-below celebrities acting dumb. Unlike the highly analytical, intellectually precise (and largely unfunny) films of Araki's New Queer Cinema compatriot Todd Haynes, critics often couldn't figure out which side of Araki they should be reviewing—overlooking the fact that it is precisely the interweaving of these elements that defines Araki's approach.

Aesthetically, Araki presents the same challenges. Ridiculously low-budget (his first four features cost less than \$50,000 combined), his early work often looks chaotic and murky at first glance, but this lack of surface sheen belies how astutely Araki has digested and reinterpreted Godard's framing strategies and editing tropes or Warhol's ability to make the throwaway moment

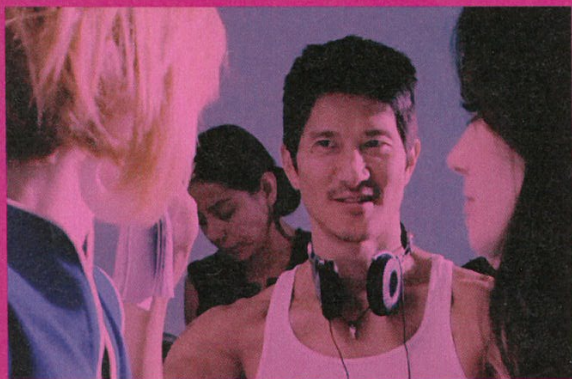
utterly profound. And even those (and there are more recently) who do see Araki as a crucial connection between contemporary American and 1960s European art cinema find his other major influence—the Hollywood screwball comedies of the 1930s—tough to integrate into his genealogy. Araki's loving dedication to Los Angeles also bucks the unofficial cross-media consensus that the city should only be represented as a kind of dystopian metaphor: resisting the urge to universalize his characters and stories, Araki revels in local idiosyncracies and the highly specific urban landscapes of southern California.

Apart from *Splendor*, his wild, one-off riff on Preston Sturges, Araki's films are best understood as matched, symbiotic pairs. The first two films, *Three Bewildered People in the Night* and *The Long Weekend (o' Despair)* privilege art-school pansexual angst and a hyper-grainy 16mm aesthetic, tropes which have become such a cliché of American independent cinema that one forgets how radical the films were at the time in their updating of Warholian disaffection to the alienated eighties. Next comes the early masterpieces *The Living End* and *Totally F\*\*\*ed Up*, angry, prescient films about how American society marginalizes and destroys its most vulnerable outsiders. Although Araki eschews any political agenda in interviews, these are still among the strongest statements about how homophobia insidiously destroys lives, and not just gay ones. *The Doom Generation* and *Nowhere* are candy-coloured explosions that deepen his exploration of how America functions around sex and violence; largely dismissed (with palpable disgust) upon release, their gore-laced, go-for-broke aesthetics have had a huge impact on an emerging generation of filmmakers and musicians. (Araki himself connects *Totally F\*\*\*ed Up* with these two films as a “Teen Apocalypse Trilogy,” but the earlier film's touching melancholy and pseudo-documentary aesthetic feels at odds with the hyper-stylized garishness of the later duo.) After an unhappy detour into television, Araki re-emerged with the yin-yang duo of *Mysterious Skin* (a discomfiting sexual abuse drama that was Araki's first unqualified critical success) and the slap-happy stoner comedy *Smiley Face*, cleaving the contradictory elements of his earlier films into neatly coherent halves. With its alternately raunchy and affecting portrait of freshman sexual experimentation coupled with whispers of conspiracy and apocalypse, *Kaboom* now sews those halves back together, attesting once again to the invaluable unpredictability of Araki's urgent and indispensable cinema.

—Noah Cowan

Thanks to Marcus Hu and Brandon Peters, Strand Releasing.

"Kaboom is a garish billboard for id unbridled...  
Scooby-Doo with sex, drugs, and tattooed hotties."  
—J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*



IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## GREGG ARAKI

The man himself joins TIFF Bell Lightbox Artistic Director Noah Cowan for this look back at his eventful career.

Saturday, April 9 7:00 pm

*In Conversation with...*, an initiative of TIFF, is presented in association with the Brian Linehan Endowment Fund to honour one of Canada's great journalists and on-air interviewers.

### ★ Kaboom

dir. Gregg Araki | USA/France 2010 | 86 min. | R

Although to all appearances a return to the tropes of his earlier films—absurdly scatological Valley-inflected dialogue, campy gore and the expected troupe of arrestingly sexy guys and gals—Araki's latest also feels like a synthesis of his experiments with tone and style. With a plot that defies synopsis—suffice it to say that it concerns a sex-crazed bisexual college boy plunging headlong into a supernatural world of demons, cults, human sacrifice and potential Armageddon—*Kaboom* exists in a borderline psychotic, psychosexually-hyperactive imaginary universe. Yet Araki also creates a wistful portrait of childhood's end against his manic tableau, a deeply felt depiction of the confusion and pain that comes with the onset of adulthood. All this, and it's freakin' funny too—convulsively so. And sexy, in an about-to-get-busted kind of way. In fact, *Kaboom* just might be the first great paranoid-dystopian sex comedy in the history of cinema. "It's definitely an old school Gregg Araki cult movie. For those people who think all of Gregg Araki's movies suck except *Mysterious Skin*, they're probably not going to be thrilled. But it was super-fun to make" (Gregg Araki).

Friday, April 8 7:00 pm

Gregg Araki in person!

*Kaboom* plays daily beginning Friday, April 8.  
See [tiff.net](http://tiff.net) for screening times.

### ★ The Living End

dir. Gregg Araki | USA 1992 | 92 min.

#### Digital Restoration!

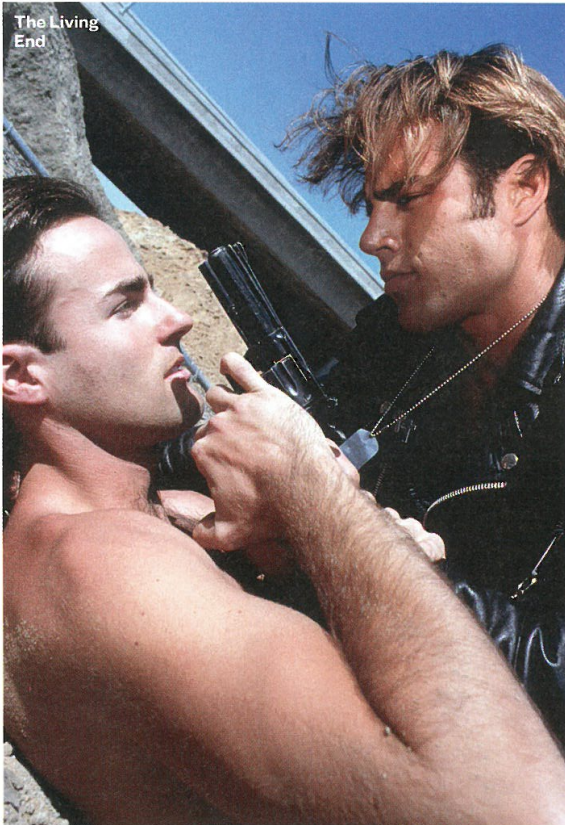
A signal film of the New Queer Cinema and a milestone of American independent cinema, *The Living End* is a bracingly angry road movie that divided audiences and set off protests at theatres in gay communities around the United States. Jon (Craig Gilmore) is an adrift film critic who has just learned that he is HIV-positive; meanwhile, hot hustler Luke (Mike Dytri), also HIV-positive, steals a car from serial killer lesbians and murders three gay bashers before jumping into Jon's car and changing his life. The duo's steamy, kinky and brazenly unprotected sex spirals into a criminal rampage as they embark on a hedonistic, cross-country death trip. Infused with the radical politics of ACT-UP and frustration with government inaction around the AIDS crisis, *The Living End* troublingly and provocatively marries activism to nihilism within its indescribable genre mash-up, transitioning from "a curious mix of *Dr. Strangelove* humour and [the] campy horror of a giant insect movie" (Roy Grundmann) to a heartbreaking reimagining of Antonioni and Camus on a desolate California beach.

Friday, April 8 9:15 pm

Gregg Araki in person!

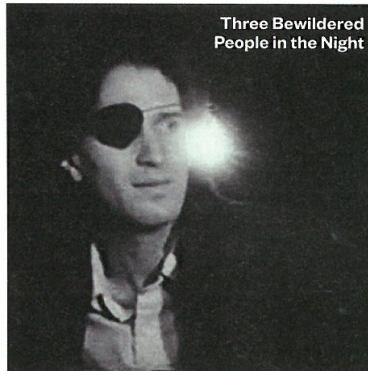
Saturday, April 16 9:15 pm  
Monday, April 18 7:00 pm

The Living End



"*The Living End* is set resolutely in the present. Or is it? Cinematically, it restages the celluloid of the '60s and '70s: early Godard, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Badlands*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. The queer present negotiates with the past, knowing full well that the future is at stake."  
—B. Ruby Rich

Three Bewildered People in the Night



**Three Bewildered People in the Night**

dir. Gregg Araki | USA 1987 | 92 min. | 14A

**New Print!**

Made for pennies, Araki's auspicious debut feature began his assimilation of the hip, urban disaffectedness and circular psychosexual discourse of Andy Warhol's sixties films to the sun-bleached flatlands of southern California. Leaning heavily on *Permanent Vacation*-era Jim Jarmusch in its underlit, coffee-shop milieu, *Three Bewildered People* are Alicia (Darcy Marta), who is obsessed with making confessional video tapes; her best friend and fellow struggling artist David (Mark Howell), who is considerably confused about sex and love; and Alicia's alienated, live-in boyfriend Craig (John Lacques), who develops an affection for David that he finds difficult to define. As the three debate the relative importance of sex, love and affection in various combinations, subtle emotional realignments start coming to the surface and threaten to split the happy trio apart. Winner of several prizes at the Locarno Film Festival, *Three Bewildered People* instantly established Araki as a filmmaker to watch.

Saturday, April 9 9:15 pm

**Mysterious Skin**

dir. Gregg Araki | USA/Netherlands 2004 | 99 min. | 18A

Based on Scott Heim's heartbreaking novel, *Mysterious Skin* sees Araki trading his visual pyrotechnics and caustic humour for open-wound honesty, resulting in his first film to receive across-the-board acclaim. A decade after they were both molested by their Little League coach, two long-ago friends have taken very different paths. Brian (Brady Corbet) is a shy introvert obsessed by his own possible UFO abduction who has blocked out the abuse from his memories; Neil (a revelatory Joseph Gordon-Levitt), his perception of sex cruelly warped, has become a highly sexualized hustler headed for the big-city gay underworld. As their personal journeys hit ugly dead ends, they find each other once more and try to understand the painful past that unites them. "*[Mysterious Skin]* is at once the most harrowing and, strangely, the most touching film I have seen about child abuse. . . . It is not a message picture, doesn't push its agenda; [it's] about discovery, not accusation" (Roger Ebert).

Sunday, April 10 7:00 pm



Mysterious Skin

Kaboom

and a  
nema, *The*  
vie that  
at theatres  
States.  
tic who has  
anwhile,  
positive,  
nd murders  
Jon's car  
, kinky and  
criminal  
tic, cross-  
tical politics  
ment  
*ving End*  
activism to  
mash-up,  
*Strangelove*  
ant insect  
eaking rei-  
a desolate

**Splendor**

dir. Gregg Araki | USA/UK 1999 | 93 min. | 14A

After the grinding nihilism of *The Doom Generation* and *Nowhere*, Araki made an abrupt detour into screwball comedy with this sunny and improbable combination of Preston Sturges and Godard. Araki's then-muse and girlfriend Kathleen Robertson plays Veronica, whose previously fallow love life takes a turn for the better when she starts seeing two guys (Johnathon Schaech and Matt Keeslar) at once. Unwilling to give either of them up, Veronica convinces them that they should all live together, which pushes the sexual tension between the trio to the breaking point—until some inventive variations on the old Sturgesian banana peel shuttle us towards a reasonably (and unexpectedly) happy ending. "Think of it as *Jules and Jim* reimagined as an *Archie* comic book with the sexual roles reversed, and photographed by Bruce Weber for a photo spread in *Seventeen* magazine" (Stephen Holden, *The New York Times*).

Tuesday, April 12 7:00 pm

**The Long Weekend (o' Despair)**

dir. Gregg Araki | USA 1989 | 87 min. | 14A

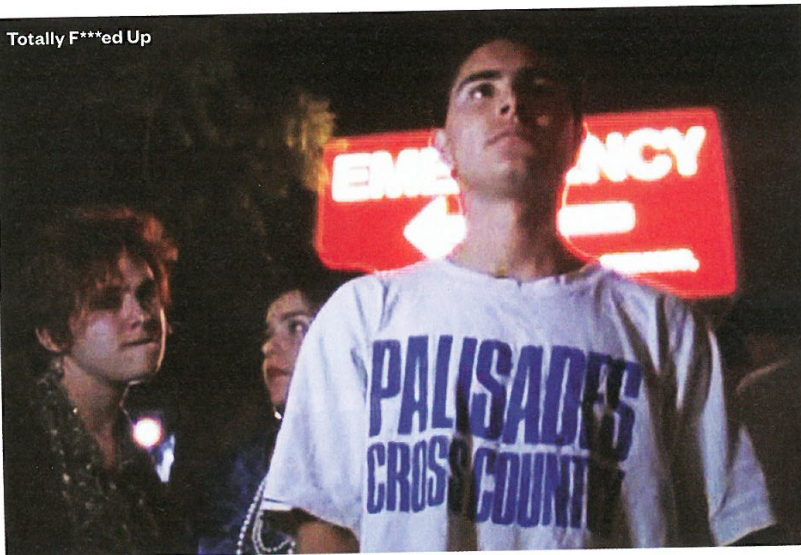
Building on the intricate triangular relationship of *Three Bewildered People in the Night*, Araki's second feature tackles a considerably more complex politico-psychodynamic situation. Six people—gay, straight, in relationships or bitterly out of them—come together for an impromptu college reunion in Los Angeles, where their facades of bored aimlessness gradually erode as boiling infidelities and the emotional bruising they have suffered at each other's hands come to the surface. Made on an astonishing budget of \$5,000, Araki's *Weekend* is not only a marvel of lo-fi ingenuity but a powerful, troubling statement about the anxiety and alienation produced by a feeling of collective political impotence, aligning the film both thematically and tonally with the great masterpieces of Antonioni. Though Araki wasn't (yet) working at that lofty level, "the depictions of the warmth, confusions, and conflicts between's Araki's half-dozen burned-out cases command interest and respect" (Jonathan Rosenbaum).

Wednesday, April 13 7:00 pm

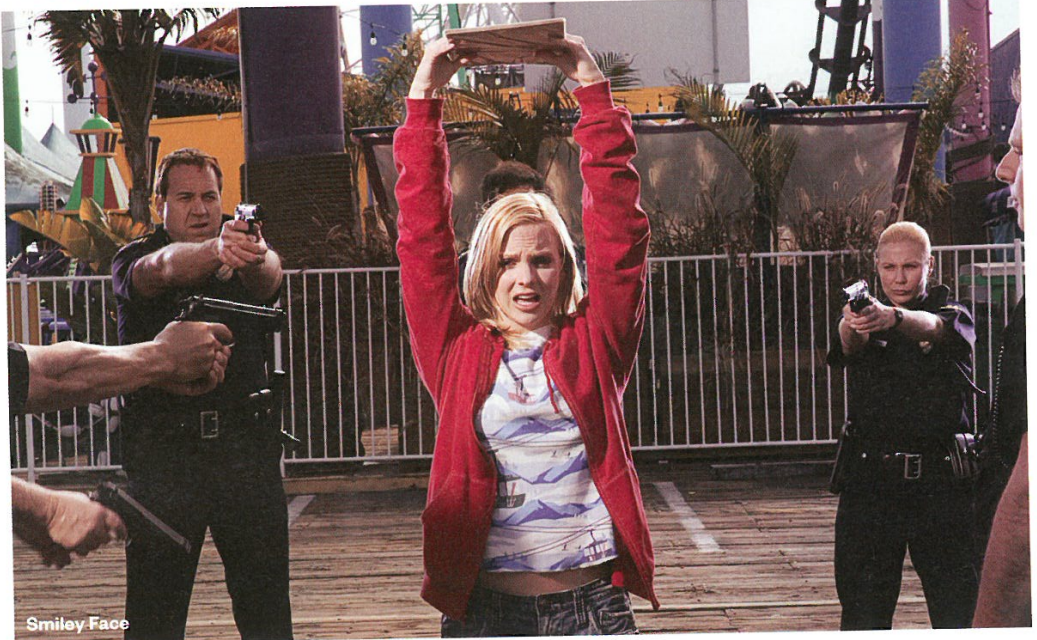


Splendor

**Totally F\*\*\*ed Up**



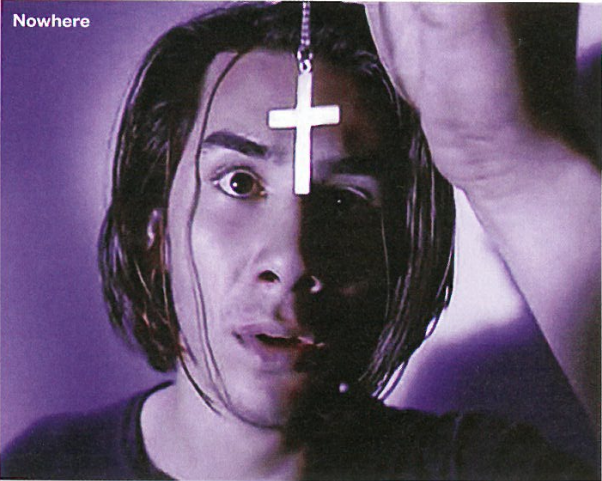
"I felt a need to respond to the unrelenting barrage of institutionalized homophobia—from the media, from ignorant politicians, from rabid cultural 'watchdogs.' And of course there is my intense admiration for Godard—most especially *Masculin féminin*, which is paid homage to and clearly the primary influence here. [*Totally F\*\*\*ed Up* is] a kinda twisted cross between avant-garde experimental cinema and a queer John Hughes flick." —Gregg Araki



Smiley Face



The Doom Generation



Nowhere

**Totally F\*\*\*ed Up**

dir. Gregg Araki | USA 1993 | 78 min. | 14A

**Digital Restoration!**

Considered by many to be Araki's finest film, *Totally F\*\*\*ed Up* utilizes a free-form narrative and direct-to-camera address to explore the teenage wasteland of the early nineties. Following the intertwining lives of six young gay and lesbian characters through a Godardian structure of fifteen separately titled sections, Araki creates a vivid portrait of everyday teenage pressures compounded by a host of extraordinary burdens: AIDS, homophobia, gay-bashing, parental rejection and escalating gay teen suicide rates. Fearful of sex and disdainful of the mainstream gay community, the protagonists cling to their makeshift adoptive family even as those same pressures start to pull them apart. Mixing often hilarious dialogue and vignettes (most notably a group sperm donation session) with an overwhelming sense of dread and helplessness, *Totally F\*\*\*ed Up* is a synthesis of Araki's obsessions with the Californian vernacular and landscape; it also marks the introduction of his frequent muse James Duval as the melancholy, suicidal leader of the pack. "[While the film's conclusion] may seem utterly desolating, [it moves] toward a rejection of negativism in favour of the harsh but inescapable complexities of the world. Life is fucked up, Araki is saying, but it is worth living" (Fernando F. Croce, *Slant Magazine*).

Saturday, April 16 7:00 pm

**Smiley Face**

dir. Gregg Araki | USA/Germany 2007 | 88 min. | 14A

After the muted, elegiac *Mysterious Skin*, Araki shifts gears to full-on slapstick with this endearingly and unapologetically goofy stoner comedy. With madcap charm and what appears to be a body made entirely of rubber, Anna Faris stars as lazy, out-of-work actress Jane F., who one eventful morning unwittingly scarfs down her spacey roommate's super-charged pot cupcakes and then sets out to try and replace them before he finds out. As complications—involving a past-due pot bill from Jane's dealer (Adam Brody), a last-minute audition, the romantic attentions of Jane's nerdy, smitten friend Brevin (John Krasinski) and the original manuscript of Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*—inevitably ensue, Jane's simple errand snowballs into a loopy, cross-town odyssey through Araki's beloved Los Angeles. Taking wing on Faris' spastic, bubble-headed charisma, *Smiley Face* is "the smartest kind of dumb comedy... [Araki] keeps his screwball rolling with a freewheeling touch, bouncing with ease from goofball monologue to manic slapstick to dusted interludes of unconsciousness and hallucination" (Nathan Lee, *The Village Voice*).

Tuesday, April 19 7:00 pm

**The Doom Generation**

dir. Gregg Araki | USA 1995 | 85 min. | R

Araki's follow-up to the melancholic alienation of *Totally F\*\*\*ed Up* was this scorchingly sexy hell-raiser of a three-way road movie, roundly and virulently condemned by critics who were clearly not expecting to see a supposed art film slathered with gory violence ripped straight from the bloody maw of the splatter-gore eighties. Nor, one suspects, were they prepared for a New Queer Cinema alum to place a subversive, highly sexualized female character at the centre of his film. Amy Blue (Rose McGowan, establishing for all time her potty-mouthed, hot-Goth-slut persona) is wallowing in a boring relationship with her high school sweetheart Jordan White (a charmingly scruffy and perpetually Valiumed-out James Duval) when white-hot drifter Xavier Red (the unspeakably handsome Johnathon Schaech) literally lands on their car and climbs aboard. Convenience store mayhem, raunchy motel sex and vindictive ex-boyfriends soon follow, en route to an appropriately apocalyptic conclusion. Riffing on *Anna Karenina* and Godard's *Bande à part*, *The Doom Generation* has become a key influence to a new generation of young filmmakers.

Wednesday, April 20 7:00 pm

**Nowhere**

dir. Gregg Araki | USA/France 1997 | 85 min. | R

Aptly described by Araki as "*Beverly Hills 90210* on acid," *Nowhere* features a sterling cast of has-beens and yet-to-bes—including Shannen Doherty, Traci Lords, Rose McGowan, Ryan Phillippe, Heather Graham, Mena Suvari, Christina Applegate, John Ritter and Beverly D'Angelo—tooling around Los Angeles in a drug- and sex-fuelled haze set to a soundtrack featuring Radiohead, Elastica, Hole and Massive Attack. Araki muse James Duval anchors this bizarre constellation as Dark, a sexually fluid aspiring filmmaker whose seemingly ordinary day takes a turn for the seriously weird as he makes his way to a friend's party. As S&M, mutilation, murder, suicide and alien abduction complicate matters, Dark discovers that it's not easy having a good time. "A live-action cartoon that might be described as a surreal *American Graffiti* crossed with a kinky *Beverly Hills 90210*, as imagined by a punked-out acolyte of John Waters or Andy Warhol" (Stephen Holden, *The New York Times*).

Wednesday, April 20 9:00 pm