

What is it about a schoolgirl that gives her that special innocence, gentlemen?

"Family" Communication and Rituals on a City's Margins

EXOTICA

Outline

- ▶ Exotica: Discussion Questions
- ▶ Margins and Minorities
 - ▶ Three Kinds of Margins
 - ▶ The Myth of Marginality
 - ▶ Margins from Different Points of View
- ▶ Exotica
 - ▶ Postmodern Urban Spaces
 - ▶ Technologies (video-camera; electric piano, photos)
 - ▶ Rituals



Exotica: Discussion Questions

0. **Explained:** Meanings of the film title; roles of each characters, their desires & Repetition in the Plot
 1. What happens at the end? What does it reveal about the relations between **Christina and Francis**?
 2. How do you characterize **Thomas**? Is he a schizoid, or just simply shy?
 3. What are the symbolic functions of the three kinds of spaces (home, non-places and exotic spaces) in the film?
 4. What does the space of green meadow mean?
 5. Meanings of "**Everybody Knows**"? And the lines "**what is it about the school girl...**"?
 6. Different modes of communication: touch vs. touch; betrayal vs. communication; disorder/violence vs. contract
 7. How does the use of photos and videos make the film "postmodern" or aesthetically self-reflexive?



Margins and Minorities

1. Social Margins –

1) gender, behavioral minorities,

2) racial, lower classes;

2. Geographical/Spatial Margins:

1) beyond the central control, out of order

([heterotopia 異質空間], striptease bar, sauna, speakeasy, etc.)

2) with fewer resources and in poorer materialist conditions (e.g. illegal constructions, ghettos)



Three Kinds of Margins

Social, Geographic and Emotional, --overlapping categories

Center vs. Margin – Relative Terms

- ▶ Emotional Margins – **Enemy; What Time is it There?**
- ▶ Emotional + Social – *Incendies (racial), When Yesterday Comes (age)*
- ▶ Social Margins vs. Center – **Super Citizen Ko (political + age), Pinoy Sunday (race + class)**
- ▶ Emotional + Geographic Margins -- **Exotica**
- ▶ Issues: Their Perception/Use of the City, its Space and Signs, Survival & Communication



Our Focus — how marginal desires are expressed thru' revision of marginal spaces & human relations

What Time Is It There?

- ▶ Anonymous, rootless and drifting
- ▶ Lower-Middle class
- ▶ Desire for Love (Homo/Hetero)
- ▶ Empty apartment
- ▶ Desire and Gaze, and re-invention of clocks' meanings
- ▶ Comforted by transient relationships which seems like a new kind of "family"

Exotica

- ▶ Betrayed, Obsessed, from broken families
- ▶ Middle class
- ▶ Desire (Homo/Hetero) and a need for self-healing
- ▶ Empty home
- ▶ Desire and Gaze, and other rituals
- ▶ Comforted by 'family' rituals (repetition and breakthroughs)



Setting: Toronto

Public non-places

Airport
Customs

Theatre

Homes

Exotica
Strip club

Pet shop

Margins of the city=
exotica



Repetition in the Plot

► Surrogates: daughter, babysitter, client

| | Deviating from Norms | | Relationship broken |
|---------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Francis | Exotica (3 times) | Talks w/ Chris Talks w/ Tracey | Touches her --kicked out Not understood |
| Thomas | Goes to Concert (3 times) | Dates w/ Guys | Takes one home; eggs taken away |
| | Rules & Contracts | | Deviating from Norms |
| Francis | to Thomas's | Tax-audit | Asked T. to go to Exotica (2 times) |
| Eric | Exotica | Introduce girls | Contract w/ Zoe Trick F/T into touching C |
| Chris | | Dance girl | Kisses Zoe, Quarrels w/ E Dance for F |
| meadow | 4 times | Increasing closeness | Discovering the corpse |



Marginal Spaces: Site and Sights

► Exotica --

(1) **Voyeurism** – of the clients, (with the rule of 'no touching')

(2) Routine dances → Christina
fetishized/fixed as a school girl.



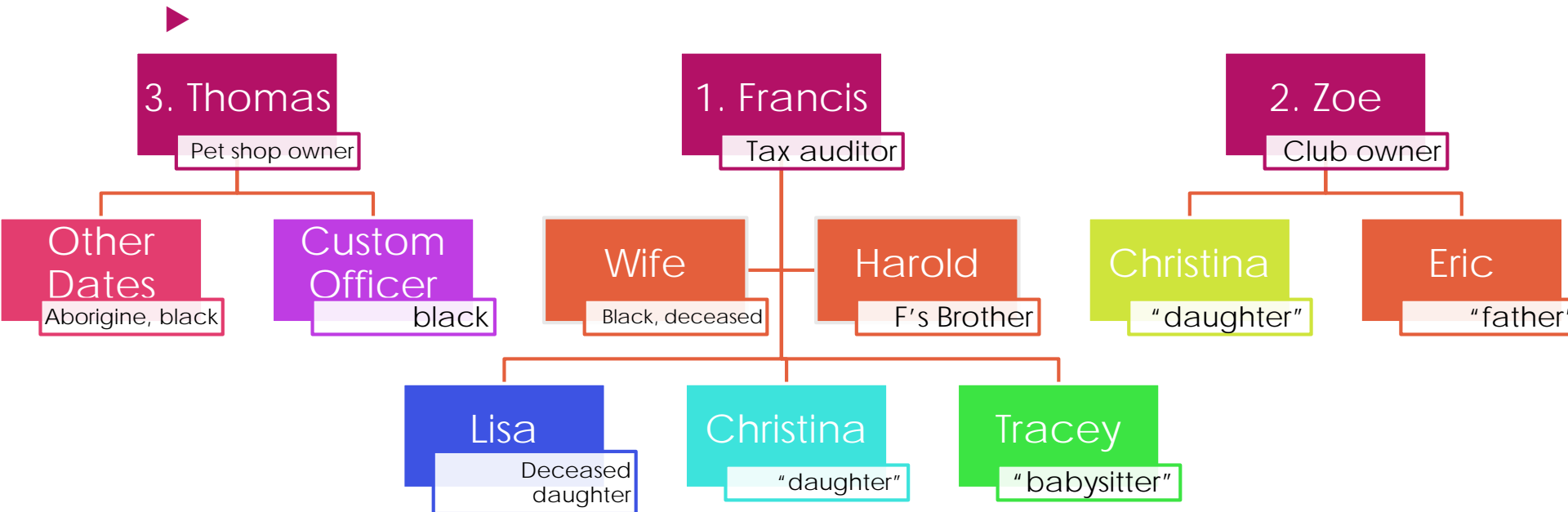
Marginal Spaces vs. Public Spaces (2)



- ▶ **Concert, Airport Customs Office:** Utopia? a place for ppl to steal glances at each other or to impose surveillance.
- ▶ **Pet shop & Exotica:** Just because they are exotic, doesn't mean that they cannot endure extremes. It is a jungle out there, isn't it?
- ▶ **Homes**– Utopia? empty or spare



Character List



Family ①

Francis Brown

- ▶ A tax auditor*.
- ▶ goes to Exotica frequently asking for dancer **Christina** (as surrogate daughter).
- ▶ suffers through the loss of his daughter(Lisa) and then his wife, who had an affair with his brother (Harold).



Family ②: Zoe, Christina & Eric

► Zoe

- Owner of Exotica.
- Baby contract with Eric.

► Christina

- Dancer at Exotica.
- **[past]** hired by Francis's as a babysitter before the death of the wife and daughter.
- **[past]** lover of Eric
- **[present]** in a "relationship" with Zoe, the owner of Exotica.

► Eric

- DJ working in Exotica
- Past lover of Christian



Thomas Pinto

- ▶ Owns a pet shop selling exotic pets.
- ▶ “produces” babies with smuggled eggs
- ▶ Shy & Homosexual.
- ▶ Search for companion through sharing tickets for concerts



Tracey Brown

- ▶ Niece of Francis.
- ▶ [present] Hired as a **babysitter** by Francis when there is no baby to sit.



Plot



The Characters' Breakthrough of their Rituals (Repetition)

- ▶ **Zoe** – repeating her mother's career as a challenge (to overcome her shyness); making a new option for herself
- ▶ **Zoe and Christina** – Employer/Employee, Lovers, or mother and daughter; [ending] autonomy and self-protection
- ▶ **Tracey** – refuses to babysit anymore, rejecting pretense



The Characters' Breakthrough of their Rituals (Repetition)

- ▶ **Thomas** –refused to be paid just to be obliged, found out by the officer, who still wants to see him later (1:01) , genuine concern for Francis and Christina
 - ▶ **Francis, Eric & Christina** – (0:54; 1:20--), the meaning of 'touch'?
- full experience;
- wanted to make sure; Christina: a gesture of rejection and gift
- ▶ Francis and Thomas –Thomas refuses to help him kill to clean the slate; "**But to help me, then?**"
 - ▶ Final resolution among the four – (1:35)



The ending

1. Mutual understanding between Eric and Francis -- Hug with Francis; facing reality – “I found her” → “; I lost her”; leave the job as a DJ—at least temporarily
2. Christine dances by herself and is able to protect herself –changes the meaning of the touching hand to a receiving hand.
3. ‘Families’ outside the traditional nuclear families.

Eric and Zoe--- a. Lovers and Friends; Zoe and Christina; Thomas and Francis; Thomas and his lovers



Symbolic Meanings

Revised

- ▶ **Mirrors:** Betrayal & Appearance vs. reality; double identity
- ▶ **The Pet Shop:** Exotica
- ▶ **The Green Field:** conflicts in color, music, gain and loss at the same time, with inherent dangers;
- ▶ **Photos & Video:** Irony, Imply the failure of keeping memory
- ▶ Eggs, & Zoe's pregnancy: "You didn't ask to be brought here..." (Francis)
- ▶ **Home in postmodern city:** Tracey's, Christina's Francis's---Which one is the real home?



Are we voyeuristic?

- ▶ Voyeurism → emotional involvement and catharsis?
- ▶ “At *Exotica* (as in, one supposes, an erotic film), **voyeurism is a frustrated alias for emotional intercourse**, . . . Egoyan's achievement in *Exotica* is singularly fitting, as he yokes the experience of the movie audience to that of the audience in his film, acknowledging erotic needs without condemning them, and stripping down the obsessions that color a life. ” <http://www.deep-focus.com/flicker/exotica.html>



Are we voyeuristic?

- ▶ There are different types of **gazes**;
 - ▶ Gazes of control to fix the others as objects (customers in Exotica).
 - ▶ gazes to express one's desire, love and concern (or "look," e.g. Zoe's at the end; A-Sheng's in Love Go Go),
 - ▶ Self-gaze (at the mirror) for self-understanding.
- ▶ **Gazes can be obsessive**, but they can also be turned into birds-eye view, aspiring looks, glances, or **flâneurial looks**.



Contract and Ritual

Of Zoe's with Eric, of Exotica's, of Francis with Christina and Tracey

- ▶ Ways to maintain social stability and produce meanings
- ▶ Can become rigid power play (e.g. what Zoe's mother allowed in the past), or merely "transactional" (without human contact; customers in Exotica)



Margins to Flow

- ▶ **Flâneurs**, minorities and urban nomads moving
- ▶ From home to spaces of flow, such as street, hotel, bus/train station, airport, commercialized spaces such as department stores
- ▶ Disembedded from traditional (family) structure, **can they communicate and find comfort in those spaces of flows?**
- ▶ More in Amelie, God Man Dog and other films



Exotica: Time Marks

| | |
|------------|--|
| 100:07:41 | 1st DJ |
| 200:07:43 | What is it about a school girl (1) |
| 300:08:34 | Everybody knows |
| 400:10:34 | 1st concert |
| 500:11:31 | Exotica/2nd DJ |
| 600:14:24 | What is it about a schoolgirl--green grass (1) |
| 700:15:37 | 1st concert-after |
| 800:16:36 | [in the car with Tracey] 1 |
| 900:18:02 | Zoe w/ Eric |
| 1000:19:29 | Do you feel like touching it? -1 |
| 1100:20:30 | Thomas at his shop |
| 1200:23:26 | Exotic animals |
| 1300:24:35 | 2nd grass scene |
| 1400:26:19 | Don't you want to touch it? -2 |
| 1500:27:33 | Francis at Thomas's |
| 1600:30:38 | Frances & Harold |
| 1700:31:56 | Home (1) |
| 1800:33:25 | 2nd concert, aborigine |
| 1900:34:01 | Francis in Exotica (2) |
| 2000:34:10 | [DJ]He comes in here every other night. |

| | |
|------------|---|
| 2100:35:20 | Home (2): piano |
| 2200:36:19 | Francis: mirror |
| 2300:36:49 | Francis—Christina (1) |
| 2400:39:24 | Home (3): video |
| 2500:39:59 | 2nd concert, an aborigine-after |
| 2600:40:38 | in the car with Tracey (2)- baggage |
| 2700:43:12 | 3rd grass scene: Eric talks to C |
| 2800:44:07 | (Home?) Eric in his empty room |
| 2900:46:19 | Zoe about her mother/Christina |
| 3000:47:37 | your contract for the baby with Eric |



Exotica: Time Marks

| | |
|------------|---|
| 3100:49:11 | 3rd concert-w. officer |
| 3200:49:55 | Francis with Christina (2) |
| 3300:50:51 | Home (2): Thomas & the customs officer |
| 3400:52:15 | Eric—Francis: check her out |
| 3500:54:41 | Francis & daughters |
| 3600:57:19 | in the car with Tracey (2) |
| 3700:59:32 | Zoe, Eric & Christina |
| 3801:01:53 | coffee with cream or milk |
| 3901:03:05 | 4th grass scene/Francis at the shop |
| 4001:03:28 | [DJ]--Eric alone |

| | |
|------------|-------------------------------------|
| 4101:06:00 | Tracey & her father-end (1) |
| 4201:07:48 | Francis & Thomas: rehearsal |
| 4301:10:06 | Thomas & Christina (1) |
| 4401:12:09 | Thomas & Christina (1)--talking |
| 4501:12:58 | Christina about F |
| 4601:15:31 | [DJ interrupting] |
| 4701:16:59 | Eric--Thomas |
| 4801:18:54 | Because I used to be her lover. |
| 4901:19:41 | Francis-Zoe |
| 5001:20:25 | Why did you touch her? |
| 5101:21:17 | WE all know |
| 5201:22:19 | Christina-Thomas (2) |
| 5301:23:52 | FRancis & Tracey (3) |
| 5401:25:13 | Christina-Zoe-Eric (2) |
| 5501:27:16 | FRancis-Thomas: the past |
| 5601:30:36 | Exotica (4): Christina |
| 5701:32:36 | Thomas & Francis in their positions |
| 5801:34:07 | final confrontation; green grass |
| 5901:35:57 | ending: video in context |
| 6001:38:22 | Christina as piano teacher |



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