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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I have prepared my Master's Thesis Dissertation independently on the following topic:

Themes and Techniques in the Work of Joanna Hogg

under the expert guidance of my thesis advisor and with the use of the cited literature and sources.

Prague, date: 07.06.22 Signature of the candidate

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to provide an analysis of Joanna Hogg's *Souvenir* films in an effort to understand the creative themes and underpinnings of her artistic process. The films will be analyzed in the context of her formative influences and earlier films. Inferences will be drawn about her working principles.

ABSTRAKT

Účelem této práce je poskytnout analýzu *Souvenir* filmů Joanny Hoggové ve snaze porozumět tvůrčím tématům a základům jejího uměleckého procesu. Filmy budou analyzovány v kontextu jejích formativních vlivů a dřívějších filmů. Budou vyvozeny závěry o jejích pracovních principech.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2019, I became aware of British auteur director, Joanna Hogg, when her autobiographical film, *The Souvenir* (2019), first gained notoriety and high praise from critics, leading all films in nominations for London Critics' Circle film awards (Pulver, 2019). I knew I had to see the film after reading a review and learning that it was about an aspiring filmmaker seeking to find herself as an artist while in a toxic relationship with her first love, a mysterious older man, addicted to heroin (Bradshaw, 2019). First love, addiction, and the filmmaking process have been subjects that have fascinated me and have found their way into my own work as a filmmaker. So, for very personal reasons, I was predisposed to like *The Souvenir*. However, I could not have predicted just how moved I would be by the film. For weeks after my initial viewing, the characters haunted me. After reading interviews with Hogg, I became increasingly fascinated by the filmmaking process and the filmmaker behind the film. Ultimately, I decided to write my Master's thesis about the themes and techniques of Joanna Hogg.

Beyond my personal affinity for Hogg's work, I deemed her worthy of an academic investigation because despite the fact that she is now receiving critical acclaim (both *Souvenir* films were named among the *RogerEbert.Com* top ten movies of the year) (O'Malley, 2019; Aguilar, 2021), no academic books have been published about Hogg; only a handful of academic articles have studied her work and, to date, one e-book about her remains the most thorough study of Hogg. While I suspect this will change in the next few years as Hogg continues to gain notoriety, at the time of writing I am one of the first to engage in academic research and analysis of Joanna Hogg and her filmmaking approach.

Because of the lack of existing academic research, this paper will rely primarily on my own analysis of Hogg's films. In addition to my own analysis, I will take into consideration interviews with Hogg and her collaborators, as well as reviews of her films by noteworthy critics. I will also rely on analysis from the few existing studies of Hogg, most notably the first ever e-book about her, *Tour of Memories: The Creative Process Behind Joanna Hogg's The Souvenir* (Heeney et al., 2019).

I will begin my analysis by briefly indicating Joanna Hogg's formative influences in Chapter 1. I will highlight emerging themes in her early works in Chapter 2, and more general characteristics of her *Souvenir* films in Chapter 3. I will examine Hogg's unique work process in Chapter 4. I will give a closer analysis of her themes of dishonesty in Chapter 5, and her depictions of class and privilege in Chapter 6. I will then provide my conclusions about how Hogg's themes and techniques inform each other, and draw inferences about her working principles.

Chapter 1

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

Joanna Hogg was born March 20, 1960, and grew up in a British upper class family. As a girl, Hogg attended the expensive West Heath Boarding School, where she was classmates with Tilda Swinton and a class above Diana Spencer, future Princess of Wales (Mead, 2019). After graduation at age seventeen, Hogg moved to Florence, Italy, for a year to study photography where, “It was a really amazing thing to be taught how to look, how to observe” - Joanna Hogg (Mead, 2019).

When Hogg returned from Italy, she found work as an assistant to a photographer, and spent much of her free time taking and developing her own photographs. She started recording things with a Super 8 camera. Hogg began a serious and life altering romantic relationship during this same time. In the early 1980s, Hogg developed her interests and talents as a student at London’s National Film and Television School. After that schooling, Hogg worked in music videos and television for many years. Aside from school and work experiences, Hogg focused on understanding herself better through taking part in psychotherapy sessions (Perez, 2021).

At the age of 47, she released her feature film debut, *Unrelated* (2008). In the fifteen years since, Hogg has released four more films: *Archipelago* (2010); *Exhibition* (2013); *The Souvenir* (2019); and, *The Souvenir Part II* (2021) (Heeney et al., 2019). A *Guardian* film critic describes Hogg’s work as being, “about the upper classes as they actually are, in the dull day-to-day; a social realist movie about posh people, even herself among them. She has created a social realism of the upper-class, which is disturbing and petty, but honest” (Bradshaw, 2019).

Hogg is not able to divorce her filmmaking from her formative experiences. Besides all of her films being about privileged British people, they exhibit other similar themes and techniques. Hogg's recurring themes include the artistic process, how dishonesty manifests within toxic relationships, and wealthy people's guilt or discomfort about their privilege.

Hogg's visual style is influenced by European directors such as Eric Rohmer and Jean Renoir, and Asian directors such as Yasujiro Ozu and Tsai Ming-Liang (Pasolini, 2008). Hogg's films feature the use of long takes, minimal character movement, focusing on how the surrounding space and architecture affects the characters, and using non-actors along with actors. Furthermore, Hogg does not work with a traditional screenplay and gives her actors agency to improvise their dialogues (Heeney, et al., 2019).

Chapter 2

HOGG'S EARLY FILMS AND GROWING NOTORIETY

Hogg's debut, *Unrelated* (2007), is a character study of a menopausal and childless woman, Anna, on an island vacation with the family of her life-long friend, which includes her friend's teenage son. Rather than spending time with her same aged friend, Anna tries to work her way through a mid-life crisis by buddying up with the group of teenagers.

Unrelated introduces several themes found throughout Hogg's body of work, including her interest in toxic relationships and wealthy, but unhappy and unfulfilled female protagonists. In terms of techniques, *Unrelated* shows Hogg's affinity towards long takes, on-location shooting and sound design which allows scenes to play out through off-screen dialogue.

One particularly memorable scene where all of these themes and techniques are on display is during a long-take, wide-shot of Anna and several family members sitting by the pool and listening to an excruciating off-screen shouting match happening between the teenage boy and his father, presumably inside the house.

Hogg's second film, *Archipelago* (2010), is another straightforward character study about a wealthy, dysfunctional family on vacation, this time on an isolated island. The occasion for the family vacation is the mother's planned send off for her young adult son, Edward, as he is about to embark on a trip to Africa where he will work as a volunteer for a non-profit organization. Edward is unhappy because his older sister, Cynthia, has forbidden Edward's girlfriend from coming to the island. Cynthia is unhappy because she doesn't want Edward to go to Africa. Edward's

mother is unhappy because her husband has decided not to show up. A local painter is hired to give the family art lessons, and a local cook is hired to prepare them food.

Through the family's interactions with the painter and the cook, *Archipelago* introduces two important themes found throughout Hogg's body of work; wealthy people's guilt or discomfort about their class privilege, and the struggles inherent to the artistic process. In terms of techniques, *Archipelago* continues to demonstrate Hogg's affinity for long takes and off-screen dialogue.

Archipelago also introduces one of Hogg's more peculiar motifs; the communication struggles of her characters leading them to interact through performative modes of expression. For example, Edward puts on a hand puppet and pretends to be a badger in order to apologize to his sister.

Hogg's third film, *Exhibition* (2013), focuses on the dynamics of a dysfunctional middle-aged married couple, independent artists named D and H, who share a home which doubles as their artistic workspace. *Exhibition* marks the first time Hogg's theme of the artistic process is made a primary focal point of the story, as both D and H are struggling with their creative processes.

Stylistically, *Exhibition* is a departure from Hogg's first two films in that it is not strictly naturalistic. In *Exhibition*, Hogg uses a fantasy sequence and amplifies and distorts diegetic sounds from the house to create psychological effects aligned with the character's emotions. In terms of her creative process, *Exhibition* solidifies staples of Hogg's technique: not using a traditional screenplay; using non-actors playing versions of themselves; and, having her cast live on location together throughout the shooting process (Leigh, 2014).

While Hogg's first three films were enough to earn her attention and acclaim among film critics, her notoriety was mostly limited to Britain. It was not until Hogg

won the World Dramatic Grand Jury Prize at Sundance for her fourth film, *The Souvenir* (2019), that she became an “almost overnight International art house sensation” (Heeney, et al., 2019). Her follow up film, *The Souvenir Part II* (2021) has received equally rave reviews and was voted the Best Film of 2021 in *Sight & Sound*, the magazine published by The British Film Institute (Hutchinson, 2021). While the success of Hogg’s *Souvenir* films makes them noteworthy, what makes them the ideal focus for a study of Hogg’s work is their subject matter; the personal and artistic coming of age of a young woman.

Chapter 3

A PRIMER ON *THE SOUVENIR* FILMS

The Souvenir films are autobiographical portraits of Hogg as a young artist, struggling to find her voice as a filmmaker. As such, they provide a unique window into understanding how Hogg feels about her themes and techniques. The remainder of this paper, while occasionally referring back to her early work, will primarily focus on deciphering what can be learned about Hogg and her filmmaking process through an in depth analysis of her own work in her latest films, *The Souvenir* and *The Souvenir Part II*. After an analysis of Hogg's films and her filmmaking, I will conclude by inferring Joanna Hogg's filmmaking credo.

Stylistically, *The Souvenir* and *The Souvenir Part II* are an expansion of Hogg's first films in four main ways. First, *The Souvenir* films expand Hogg's experiments with sound design, featuring out of sync sound and voice over and including more music. Second, the editing style in *The Souvenir* films is fragmented and not entirely linear. Third, Hogg and cinematographer David Raedeker combine multiple different image formats: 16mm-Bolex; Super 16mm; 35mm digital formats; and, scans of black and white photographs (Prince, 2019). Fourth and lastly, while Hogg's early films are shot almost entirely in static wide shots, *The Souvenir* films do utilize close-ups and camera movement at times.

Hogg claims she shot her first films in static wide shots as a reaction to her prior fifteen years working as a television director,

At that early point, I sort of refused to move the camera, because I had been made to so many times on television, because you're always told, 'you have to keep things moving, keep things interesting for the audience, and keep your camera close to your characters.' I think (with *The Souvenir* films) I'm finally recovering from that reaction, in that I'm

less, sort of, angry about that television I did, and stylistically moving the camera more. - Joanna Hogg (Di Rosso, 2022)

The Souvenir is set in 1980's London, where we follow Julie (Honor Swinton Byrne)— a fictional depiction of a younger Hogg – a rich girl beginning film school. Complicating her story, Julie is simultaneously experiencing an all encompassing first love with a slightly older, mysterious man, Anthony (Tom Burke), who alleges that he works for the British government at The Foreign Office. Things spin out of control as Julie's and Anthony's relationship becomes increasingly co-dependent, and are further complicated when Julie discovers Anthony is a heroin addict. Julie begins propping Anthony up with more and more of her money, which is actually money her parents believe they are giving her for film school.

Over the course of the film, Anthony's influence is double-edged. On one hand, Anthony is shown to be a positive influence for Julie as an artist. He listens intently to her and offers smart, candid feedback on her film ideas. But on the other hand, his influence becomes extremely toxic. Anthony's addiction saps her attention and Julie withdraws from her film school classmates, focusing almost all of her time and attention on him. Eventually Anthony dies of an overdose, and a grieving Julie returns her focus to filmmaking.

In *The Souvenir Part II*, we pick up Julie where we left her: isolated from her peers and grieving the heartbreak of her tragic loss. Throughout this film, Julie tries to get over Anthony in many ways including talking with his parents, having sex with his friends, going to therapy, and eventually making her graduation film about her relationship with him (i.e., the events we saw in *The Souvenir*). Ultimately, Julie is able to complete her graduation film, pay back her debt to her mother, and find a sense of acceptance of her loss of Anthony.

While there are many themes and small moments which lead to various readings of *The Souvenir* films, above all, the films are about two things: first, Julie's artistic journey, finding her voice and gaining confidence in herself as a filmmaker; and secondly, Julie's interpersonal journey, experiencing first love, and then grieving the loss of her lover. In *The Souvenir*, the primary focus is Julie's experience of first love, while the secondary focus is Julie's artist journey. The opposite is true in *The Souvenir Part II*, where the primary focus is on Julie finding her voice as an artist, with the secondary focus being her recovery from the loss of her first love.

By the end of *The Souvenir Part II*, Julie has given up her originally proposed film project about a working class boy in Sunderland and pivoted instead to making a memoir about her interpersonal journey while dating Anthony. She is able to complete her artistic journey because of Anthony, and simultaneously she is able to get over Anthony because of her artistic journey.

Chapter 4

THE SOUVENIR FILMS AND HOGG'S "CURIOUS" WORKING PROCESS

All four of Hogg's new stylistic techniques, experimental sound design, non-linear storytelling, multiple combined image formats, and use of close-ups, are on display in the opening two scenes of *The Souvenir*, which begins with a montage of black and white photographs, depicting an industrial town, Sunderland, England. Overtop of the photographs, we hear sounds of a shipyard and then, as if from an old tape recorder, the voice of a young woman as she responds to an inquisitive professor. The woman, who we will learn to be Julie, details the plot of a proposed film: "It's about a 16-year-old boy called Tony, and he's very insecure and he's shy, and he's lived in Sunderland his whole life, and he has this overwhelming affection and love for his mother" (Hogg, 2019, 00:01:13). From there, Hogg cuts to a party scene in a small but fancy flat— a sharp juxtaposition to the shipyard imagery— where a handheld camera shows a very 1980's hipster looking young man in close-up. He is shown with a harmonica, singing an improvised song: "Right now, I'm in Knightsbridge, In a really nice flat" (Hogg, 2019, 00:01:50). Still at the party, we meet our protagonist, Julie, and learn that the "really nice flat," is in fact hers.

Julie's flat, called Flat L, is a recreation of the actual flat where Hogg lived while she was in film school. Flat L is furnished with Hogg's own furniture from the 1980's. As Hogg explains, "using her personal items was very much the key to accessing my memories and feelings from that time" (Lawrence, 2019). Herein lies the key to understanding why Hogg has updated her stylistic choices for *The Souvenir* films; she relied on prompts from physical objects to tell her loosely autobiographical story with authenticity. Besides the exact replica recreation of Flat L

(of which Hogg insists, “When I see a photograph, a still from the film, there’s a moment where I doubt whether or not that is the flat itself [where I actually lived]”) (Di Rosso, 2022), Hogg incorporates her old journal entries; love letters; clothing; videos and photos into the film. For example, the photographs from the opening montage were Hogg’s actual photographs from the 1980’s, which she used for her grad school application. In order to incorporate her real life artifacts, Hogg had to create a film language which could include them.

Working from her actual artifacts was part of Hogg’s artistic process which helped her feel her way through the creation of these films. What makes the films so mesmerizing is the small accumulation of personal, lived in details. They set the film in time and place and help to show the lifestyle that Julie was privileged to expect.

In addition to the physical memory prompts that Hogg used to help herself authentically tell her story, she also relied on insights gained from therapy sessions. The intensity of her love and loss were processed for almost thirty years before she felt comfortable to tell her personal story.

At one point in my life I was doing Transactional Analysis in a group where we’d act out not only our own story but other people’s too, helping them bring back feelings and memories from something that happened in the past. That process was actually very much part of my thinking before making *The Souvenir*. - Joanna Hogg (Shreir, 2019).

Hogg also admits that the filmmaking process was a grieving process, “The process of looking back brought up a lot of things—not necessarily nice things. So one has a kind of grieving in the process as well” (Perez, 2021).

In *The Souvenir Part II*, Julie follows herself as she seeks to complete her graduation film, often harkening back to life lessons and filmmaking advice provided to her by now deceased Anthony. Julie’s graduation film— for us, the film within a film— is a recreation of her relationship with Anthony as depicted in *The Souvenir*.

Because *The Souvenir* films are mainly autobiographical, Julie is a stand-in for a younger version of Hogg herself, meaning there are inherent meta elements. As such, the films can be viewed as Metacinema: “The cinematic exercise that allows filmmakers to reflect on their medium of expression through the practice of filmmaking, whereby cinema looks at itself in the mirror in an effort to get to know itself better” (Canet, F., 2014). Following the meta elements of *The Souvenir Part II* reveals how Hogg wishes to depict her own filmmaking process.

In one memorable scene from *The Souvenir Part II*, Julie sits in front of her film school professors, presenting them with the story document for her graduation film, which is tied together with a red ribbon. The professors scoff at her document and one mentor tells her, “I look at this and I don't see anything that resembles what I think of as a professional script.” Julie replies, “Can I ask what you consider to be a professional script?” The professor answers, “Well, I'll leave aside the red bow, but at this stage, a title, although you then rather archly have a subtitle, *Art Is Life*” (Hogg, 2021, 00:30:06).

Later, during the production of her film, the cinematographer is frustrated by Julie's creative process and has a tantrum, exclaiming, “Having a shot list would be nice. Like, having and following a script would be nice” (Hogg, 2021, 00:56:03). This mysterious and unconventional screenplay/non-screenplay/story document which causes Julia so much trouble in *Souvenir Part II* has become a staple of Joanna Hogg's filmmaking process.

Hogg works with a rather unconventional script, often referred to by her collaborators as the “story document” — one that not everyone gets to see — which can take her years to develop. The purpose of the story document is to precisely outline the structure of the film and provide a strong blueprint for the film's story, the characters' psychology, and the visual ideas for the film. The document is always evolving and will contain all kinds of references that have inspired Hogg, including

photographs, paintings, and poems. Hogg also makes liberal use of footnotes, which can include ideas for anything from an idea for the film stock to use for the scene or a specific reference to a film she has in mind. Although the story document will sometimes contain bits of dialogue, most dialogue is improvised on the day, in front of the camera, during the shoot (Heeney, et al., 2019).

Hogg has described her story document as a map of thoughts and emotions to guide her actors' understanding of their characters. She says that she gives examples of dialog, but not actual dialog. Actors improvise but, "Of course, there's an editing process, we don't just do one take and it can be a matter of finding it" (Blessing, 2019).

Another signature element of Hogg's working process is using non-actors who play versions of themselves. In the *Souvenir Part II* Julie engages in the final stages of preparing her graduation film. On one of the final stressful days of pre production, Julie is greeted in the studio by fellow directing student, Garance, who is serving as Julie's casting director for her graduation film. As Garance flips through a book of actors' headshots, Julie stops paying attention to what Garance is saying and eyes her up and down, seemingly getting an idea. Julie then asks Garance if she will play the lead character herself, rather than casting an actor. Later, Julie must tell her actor friend, Alice, who we know as the star of Julie's first student film, *The Souvenir*. Julie explains to a disappointed and offended Alice, "It's nothing to do with your abilities, or... It's just... You know, the girl who I have in mind, she... She's not an actress. You know, she's a filmmaker and... I kind of wanted that, so she can bring a little bit of her own experience to it" (Hogg, 2021, 00:41:30). Not surprisingly, this was also Hogg's philosophy when casting Honor Swinton Byrne to play Julie. As Hogg told the LA Times:

I was looking for someone who didn't inhabit the space in front of the camera, someone who was much more comfortable behind the camera

because she's a filmmaker. So I wasn't looking for a performer, I was looking for an artist and I found that incredibly difficult because I would meet a lot of actresses and they felt like actors. And with Honor, although she's not a filmmaker, she writes and she's very creative, so there was something I saw in her that connected with myself, with my younger self. - Joanna Hogg (Olsen, 2019).

As we see in both *The Souvenir* and *The Souvenir Part II*, while Julie does not use a traditional screenplay, it does not mean that she has not meticulously planned out her film. In *The Souvenir*, she sits at her desk with Anthony, pouring over ample pages of detailed storyboards. The storyboards are so detailed that Anthony can tell exactly what is going to happen in a complicated shot where Julie's character is tied in ribbon. He gives her advice, "I think get her to do that for real. I mean, tangle her up if necessary. You don't want it to look stagey..." (Hogg, 2019, 01:05:50). Later, we see Julie following Anthony's advice, tangling her actor up in a ribbon, as she tries to make the situation real for her actor.

There are many ways in which Hogg tries to simulate real situations for her actors. Hogg believes in allowing her actors the freedom to improvise, but also in giving them constraints. In an interview, Hogg explained how her process leads to her films looking so precise, even though they are largely improvised:

Maybe one of the clues is in the length of time it takes me to write the story document. It happens over a couple of years. I think there's something very clear in the plan, but then it becomes open again when we're shooting. There's an atmosphere that's created. Maybe it's shooting in story order, and the actors who have seen the document channel it somehow. I'm always surprised that, after finishing a film, if ever I go back and look at the document for that film, they are not so far apart. How can that be if I'm opening up the process so much along the way? That's the curious thing. - Joanna Hogg (Heeney et al., 2019).

In *The Souvenir Part II*, we see Honor Swinton Byrne channeling Hogg's directing style, as Julie works with her actor, Garance. Their collaboration begins when Julie gives Garance her actual slippers to wear. From there, Garance dances

with Pete (Harris Dickinson), the character playing Anthony. The scene that Julie is directing is an exact remake of a scene which we witnessed Julie living out in *The Souvenir*. After Julie calls cut, Garance comes back to discuss her performance with Julie. Garance says, “I feel like my energy was too high, or too lively. Do you know what I mean?” (Hogg, 2021, 00:44:36). Julie reassures Garance that her performance is fine, because, when she herself was going through the scene in real life, “I was really happy. So it is quite accurate. It's really good” (Hogg, 2021, 00:44:41). Then Julie pauses and we can see that she is reflecting on how she herself felt in the actual moment with Anthony. Julie continues, “But you're much more... No, you're perfect. You're perfect. You have nothing to worry about” (Hogg, 2021, 00:44:48). Although subtle, we are able to gauge here a key component of Hogg’s working process. While she is filtering her direction through her own lived experience, she is also open to actors interpreting things as they make sense to them. While Julie admits that Garance is playing the character based on her with “much more” something (which she does not define), it is not a problem for Julie. Hogg’s collaborators have commented on how open she is to interpretation. As her cinematographer, David Raedeker, explained after shooting *The Souvenir*:

Joanna’s project was really rewarding. I was thinking it was going to be, ‘Oh, I guess I’m just here to capture the performance. But it was far from that. There was so much more for me to do and to learn. Her films are a real collaboration, where the different voices of everyone on set collide to create something greater than the sum of its parts.
- David Raedeker (Heeney et al., 2019).

The meta nature of Hogg’s films also allows Hogg to demonstrate her filmmaking practices in direct conversation with her character’s filmmaking journey. For example, because we are watching a movie about a film school student solidifying her views on her filmmaking techniques, the dialogue sometimes features

film school students discussing filmmaking techniques. After watching the characters discuss certain techniques, a meta level of analysis becomes possible for film nerds, as we watch to see if Hogg herself is implementing the discussed techniques. In *The Souvenir*, Julie's film school class discusses how to direct a scene, which one of Julie's classmates is tasked with directing. Julie offers her fellow directing student an idea for how she might handle a scene,

This scene could be related to that scene in *Psycho*. So you don't see the stab wounds. So you don't see the pain. You just hear it. You know, you hear the scream of the woman. Yeah. You hear the conflict... And in this case, possibly, the conflict, the noise of the argument, is the weapon. Yes. You see the end result, which could be, in *Psycho*, her dead body, and then, in this case, the two broken siblings at the end (Hogg, 2019, 00:53:39).

After Julie finishes giving her advice, Hogg cuts to the next scene where Julie opens her apartment door and discovers her things thrown all over the room, the end result of a staged robbery, Julie looks around in shock, then sees Anthony who eventually leaves the room, saying that he is going to call the police. The camera stays on Julie but we hear the sounds of Anthony slamming the phone against the wall. Julie then leaves the room to join Anthony. The shot does not cut and the camera stays on the empty room as we hear distraught Anthony saying, "I shouldn't have fucking done it" (Hogg, 2019, 00:55:30). Just as Julie recommended to her fellow film student in the previous scene, we don't see the pain, we just hear it. Furthermore, following the same philosophy Julie recommended in the previous scene, we don't see Anthony stealing the items, we only see the result.

A less literal and more obvious example of how this level of meta reflexivity is at play in Hogg's artistic process can be found towards the end of *The Souvenir Part II*. Julie has recently completed her graduation film, when she encounters her filmmaking mentor who asks her, "Did you avoid the temptation to be obvious?"

(Hogg, 2021, 01:18:42). Julie pauses, thinking about the question. While Julie thinks about her answer in relation to her own graduation film, the inherent level of meta encourages the audience to wonder whether Hogg avoids the temptation to be obvious in the making of *The Souvenir Part II*. On this meta reflexive level, *The Souvenir* films function as a sort of Joanna Hogg film school.

Chapter 5

THE SOUVENIR AND THE THEME OF DISHONESTY IN FOUR STAGES

Considering that *The Souvenir* is a film primarily about Julie's first love, it is surprising that critics rarely label it as a coming-of-age film. This is because Julie is in her mid-twenties, 10 years older than the genre's typical teenage protagonist's. However, Julie's character arc follows the genre requirement in that it depicts "a period of transition between 'childhood' and 'adulthood' which is characterized by the need to make decisions about the future— to do with family, friends, education, work, sexuality, etc." (Benyahia & Gaffney, 2014 pg. 279). Even though Julie is in her mid-twenties, she comes from a sheltered upbringing and acts much younger than her chronological age. Evidence of Julie's childlike innocence is demonstrated by the fact that she sleeps with multiple stuffed animals, and when her mother visits, they share a bed.

Perhaps the most blatant example of Julie's naivety occurs when, for the first time, she notices bruises on the veins of Anthony's arm. The bruises are clearly from needle drug use, but Julie stares at them blankly and asks with genuine obliviousness what has happened. Anthony half heartedly lies that he does not know what the bruises are from. He asks, "what do you think I should do?" Julie tells him, "I think you should just leave it and let it go away" (Hogg, 2019, 00:33:10). In this instance Julie chooses, whether consciously or subconsciously, to remain ignorant.

Throughout the course of *The Souvenir*, Julie loses the option of remaining ignorant as she is forced to confront Anthony's dishonesty surrounding his drug use. However, confronting Anthony's dishonesty is a long and non-linear process, which sees Julie herself becoming dishonest at times as well. By following the theme of

dishonesty as it relates to Julie's and Anthony's interpersonal journeys, we see that there are four distinct stages of Julie's disillusionment. By using the theme of dishonesty as a filter for tracking how Hogg shows the stages of Julie's and Anthony's interpersonal journey, it becomes apparent that in each of the four stages of dishonesty, Hogg uses varying, distinct, techniques to support the theme.

5. 1

STAGE 1: LOVE IS BLIND

During the first stage of Julie's interpersonal journey, she is completely ignorant to the fact that Anthony is a heroin addict. She also believes his lie that he works for The Foreign Office. Joanna Hogg's film language leads the audience to feel mistrustful of Anthony, even though Julie herself is not.

The first time Julie, and the audience, are introduced to Anthony is at Julie's party, where she curiously observes him from afar. After Julie's close-up shot, we cut to her POV, a medium shot, which shows Anthony and another party goer having a conversation **[Image 1]**. The shot is odd in that, even though we hear Anthony's conversation (he is asking the party goer about renting an apartment from her), we don't see Anthony's face, as his back is to the camera. Because of how Hogg has placed Anthony, facing away from the camera, intrigue about who he is and what he looks like builds. Next, there is a time ellipse and now Julie sits on the couch next to Anthony as he sits on the arm of the couch, towering above her. In this shot Anthony is slightly more turned towards the camera, but still we only see a sliver of his profile. It is also hard to see him because the lighting is very dim. Anthony listens intently as Julie gives him the elevator pitch for her proposed Sunderland student film (the same pitch we heard in the opening montage). These are the only two shots where we see Anthony in his introductory scene. Both shots are medium wide shots, and in neither shot do we see his face. While typical film language gives close-ups to characters with whom the filmmaker wants the audience to empathize. Hogg does the opposite here. She gives close-ups to the random, unimportant party guests, shown in montage, and, by contrast, the fact that Anthony is not given a close-up makes him

significant. The only two clues we have to understand that he is going to be an important character are: first, the fact that both shots of him are long takes, lingering on him longer than the shots of the other party guests; and secondly, the sound design focus allows us to hear what he is saying, amidst the partygoers.

A few scenes later, Julie finds a letter underneath her door, which makes her smile. We cut to the next scene where a wide shot reveals Julie and Anthony sitting in an extremely elegant cafe that resembles a museum **[Image 2]**. During the scene Anthony and Julie pick up their conversation where they left it off at the party, discussing Julie's film idea. Anthony philosophizes:

We don't know what the inner mechanisms of their mind are, or their heart. We don't know. But that's what we want to know when we go and see a film. We don't wanna just see life played out as is. We wanna see life as it is experienced, within this soft machine (Hogg, 2019, 00:08:53).

Throughout the scene, Anthony is attentive and respectful towards Julie, and at the end of the scene he even pays for the meal. From Anthony's behavior within the scene, there is nothing for Julie to infer that he is untrustworthy. However, Hogg's shot selection combined with the way in which she positions the actors creates a tangible feeling of uneasiness and makes Anthony seem alarmingly untrustworthy, for us, the audience. The specific way in which Hogg does this is by using a medium wide shot where Julie and Anthony are positioned across the table from one another and, again, Anthony's is shown in extreme profile, to the point where his back is fully to the camera at times. Hogg allows the shot to play out in a long take, amplifying the audience's feeling of frustration by not allowing us to see who Anthony is for an uninterrupted (by editing) amount of time.

Throughout the first stage of Julie's interpersonal journey dating Anthony, Hogg continues to use her film language to keep the audience feeling distanced and

uneasy about Anthony. The techniques she employs are: first, keeping the audience distanced from Anthony by showing him in wide shots and rarely giving him close-ups; secondly, positioning Anthony facing away from the camera; and thirdly, lingering on shots of Anthony longer than other shots, creating a feeling of tension. By using these techniques, Hogg allows for the possibility of showing Julie as woefully ignorant, without having to show Anthony behaving in untrustworthy ways. This allows us to also understand how Julie could fall for him.



[Image 1: Hogg, 2019, 00:02:51]



[Image 2: Hogg, 2019, 00:09:50]

5.2

STAGE 2: HOUSE OF MIRRORS

In his monumental work, *Being and Nothingness* (1964), philosopher Jean Paul Sartre presents the idea of living in bad faith as, “any moment in our life when we deny our own complicity in a situation, or when we ignore the choices available to us all the time” (Sartre, 1964). The second stage of Julie’s interpersonal journey while dating Anthony is characterized by her living in bad faith. The second stage begins when Julie learns of Anthony’s heroin addiction but chooses not to confront him about it. In this section, Julie is not only being dishonest with Anthony about her knowledge of his addiction. She is also being dishonest with her mother, from whom she is borrowing money, telling her it is for film school, but then giving it to Anthony to enable his drug addiction. In this section of the film, Hogg’s film language supports Julie’s psychological state by using a bold and effective technique; mirrors.

By the second act of the film, Anthony’s and Julie’s relationship has progressed. He has brought her lingerie back from Paris and as she performs oral sex he calls her a “Dark horse” (Hogg, 2019, 00:31:57). She visited his parents’ house and he visited her parents’ house. They have become an established couple. She enjoys going out in public on fancy dates with him. Julie appreciated Anthony’s feedback on her film ideas. Julie allows Anthony to expand her taste in art and music, symbolized by the gallery visit to view Fragonard’s eighteenth century painting, *The Souvenir*, or listening to opera. He has started to ask her to borrow money, but she doesn’t seem to mind, as she is blindly in love with him. However, Julie’s idea about who Anthony is begins to change one night when he invites his friend and his friend’s girlfriend over for dinner.

Anthony's friend, Patrick (Richard Ayoade), an older film director, is further along in his career than Julie. She takes a liking to him right away, as he gives her advice about how to utilize her time at film school:

"It's the cheapest camera-hire place in the world. I mean, they don't lock the store cupboard. You go in there, get the camera, and, you know, I made two features while I was there for, I mean, no money. They don't check the stock, really. Couple of trims. I mean, it's great. You have to listen to a lot of people who think they know about film telling you how to make a film. It's like telling someone how to breathe or how to think" (Hogg, 2019, 00:42:25).

As Julie listens intently to Patrick, Anthony excuses himself from the table to go get a bottle of wine. The moment Anthony leaves, Hogg chooses to begin showing the scene in mirror shots, placing Julie on the very edge of the frame, and focusing on Patrick and his girlfriend in the mirror's reflection **[Image 3]**.

Once Anthony is out of the room, Patrick asks Julie, "So, I'm trying to work out where you two tessellate here? I'm not good with euphemism, so... habitual heroin user, trainee Rotarian— which is a good look. I mean it nicely— How? What? Why? When? You don't even dabble?" Julie looks genuinely confused by what she is hearing and replies simply, "No" (Hogg, 2019, 00:44:09).

Anthony returns to the table and Julie avoids eye contact with him, but does not confront him. From there we cut to later that night, with Julie lying in bed, troubled, staring out of her window. A question is posed for the audience, how long will it be until Julie confronts Anthony?

As it turns out, Julie does not confront Anthony, even when he seems to invite her to do so. They sit at a table in the same fancy cafe as their first date, making small talk about a couple of their friends who are getting married. Anthony asks about the woman, "Does she have secrets?" Julie replies, "Of course she does." Anthony presses, "Does he?" Julie nervously laughs and replies simply, "No" (Hogg,

2019, 00:47:37). Anthony and Julie share a knowing glance, then Anthony changes the subject, inviting Julie to go on a trip to Venice, which Julie delightedly accepts. Julie has chosen not to face the truth. By accepting the invitation to Venice, she is doubling down on living in an illusion of a fairy tale relationship with Anthony.

From the beginning of the film, the Venice trip is ominously foreshadowed with out-of-context shots of Julie walking through the streets of Venice. Because Venice has been set up this way, by the time we learn of the trip, we are primed to understand it is going to be a significant event. From the first scene after the invitation, until the end of the trip, every single scene featuring Julie and Anthony somehow incorporates mirrors or reflections. First, in a mirror, we observe Julie being fitted for a dress, throughout the process glancing at Anthony for his approval. After a brief scene where Julie sits alone at her typewriter, making a list of items to bring to Venice, we hear a bell ringing from a tower and cut to the last of the foreshadowing shots of the Venice City buildings. The shot is disorienting. The buildings seem to be upside down. At first we don't understand what we are looking at, but then we see two bodies, Anthony and Julie, in a long sweeping dress, walk through the shot. As the bodies ripple and distort, we realize that we are looking at the City street as reflected in the river. The reflective imagery puts us in the same psychological headspace as Julie, unsure what we are really looking at.

Next comes the pivotal scene where Julie returns from a film school class and discovers Anthony has stolen her things. While this scene doesn't use mirroring as strongly as the others, a mirror is still present, pointed down to reveal that Julie's drawer now has nothing in it. The stakes are raised now, as Julie must know that Anthony stole her things. Still She does not confront him, but instead consoles him. However, her attitude has changed. From there, we cut to the train ride to Venice,

where Anthony and Julie are doubled by reflection as they enter their car on the Venice Express.

Once in Venice, Julie and Anthony get situated in a giant, extravagant hotel room with two large vanity mirrors. Anthony and Julie are each positioned to be seen in the mirrors. As a bell-hop waits to be paid, Anthony gestures for Julie to pay him, which she does. After paying the bell-hop, Julie stares blankly ahead, then she begins crying. In a static wide-shot of the room, we see Julie only in the mirror, Anthony notices her crying and approaches her slowly, walking past the camera and then exiting frame left, so that he is off screen, too. Now we see both of them only in the reflection of the mirror, at the far end of the room. It is as if we are sitting in an empty room, yet there they are in the mirror **[Image 4]**.

Anthony takes Julie's hands and begs her, "Please, tell me what I've done. Please. Because this is punishing. Seeing you like this and then not knowing why" (Hogg, 2019, 00:58:27). Julie does not respond. The shot lasts 40 seconds, one of the longest takes of the film. Being in the empty room, hearing Julie and Anthony while only seen in the far mirror creates a feeling of extremely uncomfortable voyeurism.

Next Anthony acts coldly towards Julie. As they walk to the opera, he walks ahead of her as she struggles behind in her long gown. After they enter the opera house there is a time ellipse, cut back to the hotel room. We hear the opera singer but we watch a sex scene, shot in a montage of disjointed close-ups, which ends with Julie laying listlessly and staring blankly at Anthony as they have sex. This is arguably Julie's lowest moment in the film, and also the last scene before she finally confronts Anthony.



[Image 3: Hogg, 2019, 00:44:13]



[Image 4: Hogg, 2019, 00:58:26]

5.3

STAGE 3: A NEW LIE FOR JULIE; A NEW SUBVERTED LANGUAGE FOR HOGG

In the next phase of Julie's interpersonal journey, she confronts Anthony about his drug use, and it is no longer treated as a secret between them. However, instead of fully coming clean and being honest with Julie, Anthony makes a justification for his drug use, vaguely suggesting that because he works for The Foreign Office he needs to score drugs. It is never explicitly said, but it seems to be implied that he is somehow claiming he is an undercover agent and must score heroin in order to stay in good graces with the people he is going undercover to watch.

Julie decides not only to accept the lie that Anthony is an undercover agent, but what is worse, she becomes a willing enabler. Julie begins driving Anthony to get drugs, and sitting in the car waiting for him outside the drug house. In addition, it is usually her money which he is using to buy the drugs, which means that now Julie needs to ask her mother for more money. Julie's dishonesty puts her at odds with her mother, with whom she had an extremely close relationship at the beginning of the film.

As she begins to feel the pressure of being in over her head, Anthony's now super enabled drug addiction is getting out of control. Everything reaches a breaking point when a high Anthony smashes one of the mirrors in Julie's flat and she tries finally to kick him out of her flat and life. During the course of this stage of dishonesty, Hogg's film language is not as boldly suggestive as the reflective mirror imagery of the previous stage, however it is distinct in subtle ways. In the same way that Hogg used visual language to support a feeling of distancing and mystery

around Anthony in the beginning of the film, she now subverts her techniques and applies them to Julie.

In a scene not long after Julie has confronted Anthony, the couple sits at her desk, as she prepares for a film shoot, looking over her storyboards. After giving Julie some useful advice for her filmmaking, Julie looks at him and asks, “Did you score today?” Upset, he turns to her and says, “No, don’t ask me that. No.” Julie continues, “Because I think you’re on something right now.” Anthony replies, “Well, I’m not.” Julie, “Well, I think you are.” Anthony, “Well, I’m not.” Julie, “because you’re not yourself” (Hogg, 2019, 01:06:23).

Up until this point, the entire extended conversation plays out over a one minute and twelve seconds long take of a static medium shot (interrupted briefly for an insert shot to see the storyboards). Here Julie’s back is to the camera the entire time, and we only see Anthony’s face **[Image 5]**. By positioning Julie with her back to the camera, a subtle comparison is made through a visual call back to how Anthony was positioned earlier in the film. What’s more, we are kept from the greatest tool for empathizing with Julie— her eyes— which leads us to a more objective experience of her, as we connect less with her emotions.

Hogg also subverts how she is using the mirror imagery. When Hogg first started using mirrors, she was showing that something was really off with the relationship, which Julie was struggling to confront. Earlier, Julie was trying to resolve what was real in her relationship, and mirror imagery was used to represent her struggle. Now, Julie has given up trying to resolve what is real with Anthony, and decided to enable him rather than ask him to change.

In this section, Hogg uses mirrors in two new ways. The first way is that Julie is seen alone looking, troubled, stressed out, and distorted by the refraction of a

mirror, which causes it to look like her eyes are far apart and that she has two noses. This scene takes place immediately after Julie gives Anthony money and he leaves the house. The moment suggests that Julie knows what she is doing is a problem and she is troubled by it.

The second way that mirror imagery is used differently in this stage of the film is that now the moments where Anthony and Julie are closest to each other emotionally are also shown doubled in a mirror. Julie attempts to understand Anthony's addiction, attending a Narcotics Anonymous Meeting. Immediately after, she is seen dancing with Anthony in the apartment. It is one of the loveliest scenes between the couple in the whole film, where we see the fun they are having together and sense their chemistry. The entire scene is shown in a static, long take which uses a split screen where the wall mirror is causing us to see everything twice **[Image 6]**. Earlier in the film mirror imagery was introduced to pinpoint moments where something was off in Julie's and Anthony's relationship, but now the doubling effect is used in the moment where they are most aligned.



[Image 5: Hogg, 2019, 01:06:04]



[Image 6: Hogg, 2019, 01:13:00]

5.4

STAGE 4: COMING CLEAN

After Julie and Anthony separate, she begins immersing herself with her film school friends, sleeping with another boy, and seemingly getting over Anthony. However, this changes when she receives a phone call from Anthony's mother, asking if Julie knows where he is. Not long after, a letter appears under Julie's door and she accepts Anthony's invitation to meet up at their usual cafe. During the meeting Anthony breaks down crying and Julie accepts him back into her life. They have one harmonious night together, before Anthony begins suffering extreme withdrawal symptoms. When this occurs, he checks in for a short stay at a rehab center. When he gets out, Julie and he speak earnestly with one another. Anthony is kinder, more romantic and loving than he has been in the past. This stage of Julie's interpersonal journey is about honesty, rather than dishonesty. Hogg shows the sincerity of the relationship during this stage is by centering the characters in the frame and having them face each other.

In the first scene after Anthony gets out of rehab, they talk back and forth in medium close-up shots where they are perfectly centered [**Images 7 & 8**]. The shots bring to mind standard TV news interview framing. The rhythm of editing is consistent and conventional as well, cutting back and forth to each character as they speak. Anthony asks, "Are you worried about me now?" Julie replies, "No. No, I'm not, for once" (Hogg, 2019, 01:35:32). This sudden use of standard film language, after a film filled with experimental shots and unconventional framing and positioning of the actors, creates a sense of ease. We feel that maybe Anthony really is healed, and maybe their relationship really will remain an honest one.

The night of Julie's twenty-fifth birthday party, Anthony has prepared food for her and her parents and, after singing happy birthday to Julie, they sit at the table and talk. Julie's mother suggests that she wants a favor from Anthony, to be put in touch with someone who can teach her ceramics. But before she reveals what the favor is, she turns to her husband and says, "And you're not to tease me about this. You're going to pretend you don't know anything about it" (Hogg, 2019, 01:36:44). This seems to be the way that Julie was taught to love by observing her parents.

A similar sentiment arises in *The Souvenir Part II*, when Julie sees her mother smoking and questions her, "Mummy, why are you still smoking? It's so horrible." Her mother replies, "I know." Julie asks, "What does Daddy feel about it?" Her mother says, "Daddy pretends he doesn't know anything about it. That's one of my favorite qualities about him." Julie smiles and chips in, "Yes, like a truly loving person. He must really love you." "I think he must" (Hogg, 2021, 01:34:17). The lesson Julie has inherited from watching her parents' relationship is not that love is blind, but that love looks away.

For Julie, the events depicted in *The Souvenir* show her process of unlearning this lesson of turning a blind eye or looking away, and learning instead that, if she wants to be an artist, she is going to have to look closer, and look within. For as manipulative as Anthony has been to Julie, she has him to thank for learning this message. The message would not be felt by the audience so clearly without Hogg's attention to changing her film language to match Julie's state of mind, in relation to the theme of dishonesty.



[Image 7: Hogg, 2019, 01:34:45]



[Image 8: Hogg, 2019,01:35:25]

Chapter 6

TELLING STORIES SHE KNOWS; DEPICTIONS OF CLASS AND PRIVILEGE

Since the early days of Hogg's filmmaking career, her films have focused on upper or upper-middle class British people. After her first three films, *Unrelated*, *Archipelago*, and *Exhibition*, critics were quick to focus on the demographic of Hogg's subjects. About *Unrelated*: "The coolly intelligent British film from first-time director Joanna Hogg investigates a class of people that may get on your nerves" (Quinn, 2008). About *Archipelago*: "(Hogg) offers her audience some uncompromisingly upper-middle class scenarios" (Bradshaw, 2011). About *Exhibition*: "...all and all, an exquisite, chilly film about an exquisite, chilly couple with acute first world problems" (Felperin, 2013). Furthermore, the first, and one of the only, academic articles written about her is titled, *The Films of Joanna Hogg: New British Realism and Class* (Forrest, 2014). The article focuses on Hogg's depiction of upper class British people, arguing that, even though her characters are not working class, her films should be viewed within the tradition of British realism. However, in spite of all the attention Hogg's early films drew for their depiction of class, she herself rejected the notion that her films were about class.

In a Q & A session in 2014, Hogg became uncomfortable when asked about the depiction of upper class people's problems in her film.

I'm not interested in making films about class. I'm just interested in making films about, sort of, very honestly talking about something that I've, that I might know, that I might not even know. I mean, I also think that, you know, how relevant is class now? It's a very old-fashioned idea. I think we're so mixed up now. I don't think, yes, I don't think we can make those definitions that we could 50 years ago, or whatever, so it's, it's a weird kind of obsession that we have with it, but I really think

it's boring and we should just shake it off because it's not, I don't think it's relevant anymore. - Joanna Hogg (SoHo Create talkback, 2014).

It is strange that Hogg rejected the notion that her films were about class, because the characters in her early films were keenly aware of class dynamics at play. For example, in a memorable table scene in *Archipelago*, Edward leaves the family dinner to go talk with the family cook and makes a show out of his awareness of class, as he tries to prove that he is a better person than his sister, who is treating the cook as a mere worker. Edward tries to equalize the social dynamic with the cook by offering to help her do the dishes. The cook just wants to do her job and tries to politely decline Edwards' help. Meanwhile, Edward's sister and mother observe his performance and tell him to leave her alone.

Eight years later, and after the production of both *Souvenir* films, Hogg has gotten more comfortable answering questions regarding the theme of class and privilege in her films. When recently asked about depicting upper class characters in *Souvenir Part II*, she admitted:

It would be untruthful of me to say I don't care. I do want to look at those characters with an almost documentary-like reality... I think there's a shame around it— which I'm infected by too— and I get a lot of criticism for it, in a way— I'm just interested in showing things as they are, in whatever sphere of society. But that is something I noted, even while I was at film school, actually, just the way that those (upper class) characters were taken seriously. It's not like I'm flying a flag for them, by any means, but it's just about nuance. I'm so interested in nuance. Growing up— before I ever made films— I was always watching people and how they behave, and so it fascinates me in an almost anthropological kind of way. - Joanna Hogg (Di Rosso, 2022).

While Hogg still clearly does not want to be labeled as a filmmaker of upper class reality, her *Souvenir* films are based on her life and lived experience, so she cannot, and has not, been able to shy away from issues of class privilege. Julie is

Hogg, which means she too is confronting issues of privilege. The best way to gauge Hogg's relationship with class privilege then, may be through Julie. In the *Souvenir* films, confronting her privilege is one of Julie's primary concerns as she grapples with finding her voice as a filmmaker.

From the very beginning of *The Souvenir*, the theme of privilege is introduced. During a party scene, we see Julie's fellow students sitting on a couch, discussing the party host, Julie, and how she is unaware of her privilege. The conversation, goes as follows:

PHIL: "She's got the dosh, so why not?"

JACK: "Exactly, exactly. I think if you can get hold of a camera like that, fair enough. Do your thing..."

TRACY: "I think you're doing all right, aren't you?"

FRANKIE: "Yeah, she's having a go, ain't she? Just like the rest of us."

JACK: "Yeah, she's having a go, but there's other people who can't get that camera, you know what I mean, so..."

FRANKIE: "Yeah, but, listen, you can't..."

JACK: "I think you should probably, um..."

FRANKIE: "You gotta play to your advantages."

JACK: "Yeah, absolutely, fair play."

PHIL: "Mate, if you was in the same position, you'd do the same thing."

JACK: "Don't get me wrong, fair play to her, but when you're in a position of privilege, dare I say, then you've gotta accept it."

PHIL: "If you was successful and you had your kids, yeah, all right, you want 'em to make the most out of every situation."

JACK: "Exactly, but I'd want 'em to be aware of it. Be aware of it!"

(Hogg, 2019, 00:05:07).

Ironically, unbeknownst to her fellow film students, Julie is filming this entire exchange on the expensive camera which is the cause of the group's discussion. Hogg shows the majority of the scene in a close-up shot of Julie, as she films and listens to the dialogue being spoken off camera. By keeping up with Julie during this exchange, Hogg asks us to think about how Julie may be affected by her fellow students' conversation.

The next day, Julie is sitting at her flat with a friend, discussing the fact that Julie has a flatmate, Frankie, whose girlfriend lives with them, and yet she does not pay rent. Julie's friend jokingly tells Julie, "You're too nice. You need to properly sit them down and be, like, 'There's three people living in this flat. Pay me rent.' Get aggressive, get a baseball bat" (Hogg, 2019, 00:07:59). Just then, Frankie comes down the stairs and sweetly says good morning to Julie, asks her if she slept well, and then she greets him warmly. Frank asks Julie if she wants a cup of tea. She smiles and says yes. She tells him "no sugar," as if placing an order. Frank leaves and off screen we hear his girlfriend asking him for a cup of tea, to which he replies, coldly, "so lazy" (Hogg, 2019, 00:08:27). From this scene we clearly understand the power dynamic between Julie and her roommate. She is paying more and so he treats her as privileged. Julie seems to enjoy this difference and so she lets him allow his girlfriend to live in their flat without paying rent. There are two other possible readings: Julie is either so self conscious about her privilege and is over generous as a result, allowing herself to be taken advantage of; or, Julie is oblivious and takes her privilege for granted.

While Julie rarely discusses money, besides when she is asking her mother for more, Hogg shows us that money is something of which Julie is hyper aware. For

example, the first, and one of the only, close-up insert shots in *The Souvenir* is a detail of Anthony's hands as he uses a fancy pen to write a check. This shot occurs after Julie and Anthony's first date. The following shot is a close-up of Julie as she watches intently as Anthony writes the check. Hogg very rarely uses detail shots, so it really stands out when she does. The next time she uses a detailed shot is in a later scene, also at the cafe, this time Julie is paying for the meal. We see an extreme close-up of her writing the check this time. Julie acts nonchalantly, as though she does not care that she is paying.

Julie begins giving money to Anthony every time he leaves the apartment. She acts happy to do so, never questioning him or asking him to pay her back. Her nonchalant attitude about money may be read as guilt about her privilege. She has not come to terms with the fact that she has much more money than most people around her, and so she overshares and allows herself to be taken advantage of. However, eventually Julie's relationship to money/property is what causes one of her major turning points in relationship with Anthony. After he has stolen her things, Julie and Anthony travel to Venice, a trip for which she is paying. Anthony asking Julie to tip the hotel Bellhop is the final straw for her. After taking out her purse and giving the Bellhop money, Julie loses control of her emotions and breaks down crying. For the first time in the film we see that she is aware of the fact that she is being used by Anthony. Is it her discomfort around her privilege that has allowed her to be taken advantage of? Or, has she misjudged Anthony's means and status?

While Julie is unable to directly confront her privileged status in her actual life— as evidenced by how she allows herself to be taken advantage of by Anthony and her roommate— she does attempt to confront her feelings about her privilege when it comes to her filmmaking endeavors. The first time we see Julie pitching her

Sunderland film to her film school professors, they drill her on why she wants to make a film about working class people.

PROFESSOR: "You're wanting to make a film about an experience that's very different from yours. I mean, you could argue that really it would be much better for you to work from your own experience, particularly at an early stage. I mean, what makes you want to leave your own experience so radically and enter into this very different world? I mean, it's suggested that you almost have a kind of moral, sort of political aim?"

JULIE: "Very moral, to me."

PROFESSOR: "...talk about that, perhaps, for a moment?"

JULIE: "Yes, uh... I feel as though I want to not live my whole life in this very privileged part of the world I come from, uh, part of the country. And I want to be really aware about what's going on around me, with people, and community, and politically as well. Um, I don't want to be in that bubble my entire life."

(Hogg, 2019, 00:29:25).

However, as the *Souvenir* continues, Julie's conviction in making films about working class people wanes. The catalyst for Julie doubting her subject matter is Anthony challenging her on it. On Julie's and Anthony's very first date, they discuss Julie's proposed *Sunderland* film, and Julie defends her choice of characters:

JULIE: "They're the lives of real people. I'm not making that up."

ANTHONY: "Why are they more real than me?"

JULIE: "They're not more real than you."

ANTHONY: "Am I more real than you?"

JULIE: "No. I think we're all equal in that. I think we're all as real as each other. There's no competition"

(Hogg, 2019, 00:09:51).

As *The Souvenir* continues, Julie repeats the same pitch about the Sutherland characters several times, but each time we can hear that she herself believes it less and less. It is as though she is pitching something she has memorized, but does not truly stand behind. By the time we get to *The Souvenir Part II*, Julie has fully given up her *Sunderland* film project. She again sits in front of the same group of professors, who now, ironically, challenge her on why she is not making the *Sunderland* film.

PROFESSOR: "This is, uh, going to be probably the most important thing you do at film school. This is your graduation film. And of course you came with a great deal of powerful images and images of Sunderland, that idea for a story in *Sunderland*. And there was an engagement with... With life, with... With people's lives. And although it was unformed, it was early as a filmmaker and although we could sense that there were other things in you at that time that needed to develop, uh, I can't connect it with this script that I have in front of me now. These images... These characters don't seem to relate to you. I mean, what... What has changed? Where... What is going on? What has happened to produce this new... Where's, where has that other world gone, that *Sunderland* world?"

JULIE: "I don't wanna show life as it plays out in real time. I wanna show life as I imagine it. That's what cinema's all about"

(Hogg, 2021, 00:29:28).

This scene marks a triumphant moment for Julie, as it not only demonstrates her confidence and bravery to go against the grain, but also represents her taking control over her grief. Deciding to make the memoir about Anthony will be Julie's way of coming to terms with his death. The reason she chooses to make the film in a stylistic manner, is also a nod to Anthony and his filmmaking philosophy, which she had previously rejected. In *The Souvenir*, on their very first date, Anthony spoke out against British realism, stating: "I'm a big fan of Powell and Pressburger. I think they... I think they're very truthful without necessarily being real" (Hogg, 2019,

00:11:01). Just as Powell and Pressburger's films "mix together aspects of documentary, 'realism,' romanticism, expressionism and melodrama," (Danks, 2002) Julie too seeks to do so with her graduation film. Because her graduation film will be, in part, a fantasy, it will include elaborate set pieces and intense construction. In real life, Hogg's graduation film was a fantasy film, *Caprice* (1986) starring Honor Swinton Byrne's mother, Tilda Swinton. Unlike Julie's graduation film depicted in *The Souvenir Part II*, *Caprice* was not about her relationship with her recently deceased ex-boyfriend. So, the subject of Julie's graduation film is in fact the film which Hogg herself made in 2019, *The Souvenir*, but in the style of her actual graduation film she made in 1986.

Julie's fantastic graduation film is no longer being funded by the school since her professors have told her they cannot, and will not support her. Julie needs to borrow £10,000 for her mother (their equivalent of £46,000 in 2022). As she leaves her parents' house, she waits until her father isn't around and then casually asks her mom for the money. After her mother questions her to make sure the money really is for her film school (she's less trusting now after learning of Anthony's drug habit), she nods in agreement. Julie promises to pay her back. We then cut to a montage of construction workers and set decorators carrying boards of wood and assembling a massive set inside a film studio. These set construction workers are not fellow students, they are grown men, working class people, working for Julie. It appears to be a professional film set they are constructing. We then cut to Julie, in the midst of a chaotic scene, surrounded by her classmates in the middle of preparations for her film. The underlying message is that Julie's access to money is allowing her to make the exact extravagant film she wants, regardless of having lost the approval from her professors.

For Julie, her transformation is positive in that she no longer feels guilty about her class privilege, and so now she is willing and able to wield the power of her access to money. Julie is not going to be taken advantage of anymore. While these are positive changes for Julie, it is nevertheless still problematic that, at this point, Julie seems to have abandoned her social consciousness and empathy for working class people. However, Hogg shows that this is not entirely the case by showing that Julie is still curious and compassionate about what is happening in the world outside of her privileged bubble. For example, in a flash forward at the end of *The Souvenir Part II*, Julie watches TV, and weeps, as the TV analysts report on the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Hogg is not trying to save the world with her films, and she is not trying to be politically correct, she is simply trying to show her life, and her world, as realistically as possible. By depicting upper class people as flawed and unhappy, Hogg's films challenge the notion that entering the upper class is something lower class people should aspire to. Films, and drama in general, have long held a tradition of depicting upper-class life as ideal, and noble. This tradition was observed as long ago as the fifth century when Aristotle wrote in *Poetics*, the hero should be "of those people who are held in great esteem and enjoy great good fortune, like Oedipus, Thyestes, and distinguished men from that kind of family" (Aristotle, c. 335 B.C.). As such, those upper class characters should be depicted as better than they actually are:

Since tragedy is an imitation of people better than we are, one should imitate good portrait-painters. In rendering the individual form, they paint people as they are, but make them better-looking. In the same way the poet who is imitating people who are irascible or lazy or who have other traits of character of that sort should portray them as having these characteristics, but also as decent people. For example, Homer portrayed Achilles as both a good man and a paradigm of obstinacy (Aristotle, c. 335 B.C.).

Hogg decidedly breaks with the tradition of making privileged people look nobler than they are. Instead, Hogg shows upper class people as repressed, confused, arrogant, and insecure. Hogg shows the ugliness and humanness of the people who she knows best, including herself. For that, she could be considered tremendously brave.

CONCLUSION

LESSONS LEARNED FROM JOANNA HOGG FILM SCHOOL

After many careful viewings and analysis of Hogg's work, especially her latest autobiographical films, *The Souvenir* and *The Souvenir Part II*, I have concluded that the director's unique filmmaking techniques are fundamental to, and largely inseparable from, her chosen themes. Hogg's themes – the artistic process; how dishonesty manifests within toxic relationships; and wealthy people's guilt or discomfort about their privilege – are masterfully brought to the surface of her films by means of her very personal and distinctive filmmaking techniques. In *The Souvenir* films, the separation between Hogg and her films is nearly non-existent. As such, studying Hogg's films has been a study of a filmmaker's approach to and philosophy of filmmaking. The following are my takeaways from the Joanna Hogg Film School.

By exploring her own journey as a filmmaker, Hogg is investigating her own filmmaking process and putting it on full display. We learn from Julie that the most important principle for Hogg herself as a filmmaker is to be authentic. We see from Julie that this means choosing a subject matter which you can relate to personally and have deep connections and feelings about. When making her graduation film, Julie is able to have authority and confidence in directing her story, because she is using herself and her own experience as the filter for deciding what should be included in her film. For example, when the actor playing her asks for notes about her performance, Julie is able to reassure the actor that she is playing the scene correctly, because that is also how she felt when she was living the scene. Julie is also about to answer her actor's challenging questions with authority because she

knows how things actually happened. Another example, when the actor playing Julie in her graduation film is confused as to why her character is not questioning her boyfriend about his drug use, she challenges Julie saying, “You cannot just see that and not talk about it.” Julie fires back, “Well, that's how I did it. That's how it happened. So don't say it. You didn't say anything” (Hogg, 2021, 00:47:46). By centering her own experience as the subject for her film, Julie is able to make clear and decisive decisions about what should and should not be included in her film.

The theme of artistic process is supported in *The Souvenir* films thanks to Hogg's technique of using her own artifacts from the 1980's such as clothing, set decoration, photographs, music and videos. For Hogg, she is revisiting her own tastes and influences and jogging her memory. But for the audience, we are witnessing the transformation of an artist. For example, by including her actual photographs, journal entries and videos, we are able to gauge how Julie's artistic process is changing. Furthermore, the meta layer of the film also allows audiences to gauge how Hogg's own artistic process has evolved. We see Julie's interest shift from a set of black and white photos of working class people on the ship docks of Sunderland, to colorful fantastic images of fantasy recreations of her own life. Yet the film we are actually watching is very much based in realism, so we also wonder about what led Hogg back to realism, after her graduate film's departure from it.

Hogg's theme of how dishonesty manifests within toxic relationships was greatly supported by her techniques for working with non-actors and non-traditional screenplays. Hogg did not have a traditional screenplay for *The Souvenir* films, but rather her infamous, story document. Hogg cast Honor Swinton Byrne only weeks before shooting *The Souvenir*, and did not show her the story document. “With *The Souvenir*, Hogg helped Swinton Byrne immerse herself in the diaries, music, and

images of Hogg's own youth, but did not show her the story document; meanwhile, Tom Burke, who plays Anthony, saw the story document and had deep discussions about it with Hogg prior to the shoot" (Heeney, et al., 2019). Hogg's technique led to a real life power dynamic imbalance where Burke knew where the story was going, but Swinton Byrne did not. Swinton Byrne was at a disadvantage and had to follow Tom Burke's lead because he knew more than she did about what was going to be happening. Hogg used this creation of imbalance as a tool to elicit authentic reactions from Swinton Byrne as her story unfolded. Hogg states that she told Swinton Byrne, "...nothing to do with the story of the Anthony character. I wanted that to be very much happening as we were shooting" (Winkelman, 2019). It is likely that this power imbalance would have reflected the actual power imbalance between the less experienced Julie and the more worldly Anthony, especially since he was practiced in keeping secrets from Julie. Since by the time *The Souvenir Part II* was made the actress knew Anthony's story, Hogg no longer felt it necessary to withhold the second story document from Swinton Byrne.

On a related point, while Hogg's storyline is not told in a linear way, her scenes were filmed in chronological order. In talking about the way she set up Swinton Byrne to tackle the role of Julie in *The Souvenir*, Hogg states: "She didn't even know how the story was going to unfold. I shoot in story order, so she was literally discovering where the story was going moment to moment" (Winkelman, 2019). The combination of not providing her actress with the story arc in the form of her story document and following story order for the shoot allowed Swinton Byrne to grow with the story.

As I explored in this paper, Hogg's theme of dishonesty was masterfully supported by how she used mirror imagery. As Hogg confesses, this was quite by accident.

[Using mirrors] is not something I necessarily thought about. That wall of mirrors [in Julie's apartment] was in my original flat, so that was something that wasn't contrived for the film. That wall of mirrors was really a gift. It was based on how my flat was, but it was quite exciting to use it. And given the confines of that room, it really helped to expand it. It gave so many more shooting opportunities.

- Joanna Hogg (Heeney et al., 2019).

This is an example of Hogg's technique leading to a style. Her technique, which she insisted on, demanded a recreation of her actual 1980s apartment. Because Hogg's actual apartment had mirrors on the walls, so did Julie's apartment. Because the mirrors were there, and because the apartment was rather small, it was necessary to use them in shots. Because they had to be used, they were explored in a way which led to the style that supports Julie's mental state and interpersonal journey, as it aligns with her relationship with Anthony. It may seem like an accident that Hogg's technique led to how she transmitted her theme, but it is not. Built into Hogg's technique is a sort of leap of faith; when she puts herself in a box of her own recreated past reality, she trusts that because she is the keyholder of that box, she will find her way out.

By allowing scenes to play out in long takes and wide shots, Hogg deprives the audience of close-ups, which would influence them to attach closely with a character's emotions and to empathize fully with them. By keeping her audience at a literal visual distance from her characters, Hogg creates a film language where we really have to spend more time with her characters before we can make up our minds about how we feel about them. For example, a close-up shot of Julie as she

is insulted by Anthony, may make us quickly empathize with her, registering her pain. But if the same scene is played in a wide shot, we are less likely to synchronize with Julie's feelings. This leads to an overall objectivity from the audience, where we view all the characters with a similar disposition. With this film language at play, it makes it possible for Hogg to present the melodrama of rich people's problems in a way that does not put off a general audience who might otherwise be unsympathetic.

While Hogg's film language may be created with this intention in mind, it also may be a fortuitous result of her techniques. Hogg's technique of welcoming improvisation from a combination of actors and non-actors brings about a rich authenticity. Hogg shows Julie learning this philosophy during a visit to the set of her director friend, Patrick, who yells to his actors, "Each shot we can use. Even if it's not the same. As long as you have the same emotion" (Hogg, 2021, 00:13:13). However, implementing this philosophy is not without its limitations. Because there is less shot-to-shot continuity naturally inherent to Hogg's approach, it creates a situation during the edit where there are fewer options for connecting shots. It becomes necessary for Hogg to show scenes in fewer takes, which means longer takes, and usually wide shots. So, while I argue that Hogg's style is conducive to helping audiences contextualize her theme of wealthy people's ambivalence about their privilege, I do not think that it is necessarily the filmmaker's intention.

Hogg builds her techniques around trying to create authenticity. She then follows her techniques to their logical conclusions. Even in Hogg's films that are not directly autobiographical, she uses the same approaches and creates similar stylistic results. If I had to boil down Hogg's general filmmaking advice to one set of guiding principles, it would be to make films tethered by what you know, trusting in yourself

as the filter for what belongs in the film without being afraid of accepting unorthodox results.

Studying Hogg's films and filmmaking style and gleaning her personal views from interviews shows that her filmmaking credo is based on several habits that she uses. She is observant, likening herself to an anthropologist in her interest in how people behave. Her skills as an observer have undoubtedly been made stronger by her training as a photographer. She is meticulous in her preparations, which allows her a clear vision of what her storytelling will look, feel and sound like. She is secure enough in her vision to be flexible and to be open to collaboration. She is a risk taker, which allows her to experiment with techniques, but also to tackle complicated storylines.

But, because of the more autobiographical nature of Joanna Hogg's *Souvenir* films, an additional set of guiding principles emerge: be patient; be honest with yourself; and trust yourself to know how to tell your story. Joanna Hogg finished her graduation project film in 1986. She began envisioning the making of *The Souvenir* films back in 1988, but this dual project was not completed until 2019 and 2021. "I knew it would be an interesting story to tell, but I wasn't ready to make it; I was still too much under the shadow of the experience, and I didn't yet have the ability to put it into film" - Joanna Hogg (Shreir, 2019). The patience to wait and live with her story for about thirty years demanded a certain level of emotional maturity and distance. By holding a mirror up to herself, Hogg bravely provides an example of how to present a vulnerable self in a way that is both honest and forgiving. By trusting that she knew how and when to tell her story, Joanna Hogg created a set of films which earned her respect and notoriety as a filmmaker.

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